

LEAF SEMINAR 1

SR24, Wed. 19th., 5pm

SARAH UPTON

Title: 'The Lough a Field of Static': Stephen Sexton's Airborne Ecologies

Abstract: From Northern Irish poet Stephen Sexton's 2019 debut, *If All the World and Love Were Young*, an elegiac sequence in which the virtual landscapes of *Super Mario World* are enmeshed with Lough Neagh and its surrounds, to the more recent *Cheryl's Destinies* (2021), the air is a space of expressive and connective potential that also reverberates with ecological threat. Atmospheric conditions in Sexton's second collection are constituted by electrical storms, television waves, tarot-card frequencies, pathogens and pollution, while wind turbines, music and disembodied voices – including those of other poets – 'return the unvibrating air vibrating'. (2021, p. 82). The air is imagined as a matrix of potentially toxic matter in an 'economy of losses / and gains' (2019, p. 7):

the lough a field of static, the mountain
tumorous with gold [...]

(2021, p. 78)

This paper explores the ways in which the components of Sexton's airborne ecologies are gestured to and formalised in his work, as well as how considering air in this way affects questions of eco-poetics and influence.

WILLIAM LAMB

Title: 'the ghost of its dead self': Coastal Hauntings and the Uncanny Ecologies of Dunwich

Abstract: This paper explores the spectral legacy of Dunwich, a medieval port on the East Anglian coast largely claimed by centuries of coastal erosion. Close readings of *Whistle and I'll Come to You* show how visual and auditory elements magnify the ecological disquiet in M.R. James's original text, from massive forces like the coastline to minute examples of lichen on tombstones, using a case study by Anne Pringle. The film transforms the spectral into an embodied reflection of environmental precarity, making the eroding landscapes as haunting as the spirits themselves. Grounded in posthumanism, uncanny landscapes, and ghost stories, the paper interprets Dunwich's eroding coastlines as a liminal zone where time, nature, and history converge. It highlights how cultural texts mediate the emotional and existential impact of environmental disruption, offering a haunting allegory of human fragility amidst nature's inexorable forces.

JESS DUNMORE

Title: 'crystalline Talk': Cavendish, Browne, and the Poetics of Concretion in Early Modern Natural Philosophy

Abstract: This paper finds in Margaret Cavendish's materialist philosophy an incipient, early modern eco-poetics that recognises the creative vitality of matter. It argues that Cavendish's concept of corporeal figurative motion not only attests to the autonomous *poesis* of natural bodies, but also invites us to consider how these figurative motions might inflect human rhetorical figures as writers observe and experiment with these substances. Using Cavendish's philosophy as a framework, this paper elucidates an earthy case study of the eco-poetics of early modern natural philosophy, focussing in particular on Thomas Browne's *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* (1646). Here, the coalescing of physical, lithic material into concretions (stony calculi) through the contractive motion of earth solicits a parallel poetics of concretion in Browne's prose. By highlighting how writers such as Robert Boyle likewise adopt a poetics of concretion in their depiction of crystalline bodies, this paper re-evaluates the transparent plain style of the Royal Society as the product of an earthy eco-poetics that embraces the self-figuring patterns of natural bodies.