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READING FOR THE WATERY WORLD

Amy L. Tigner

For All Waters: Finding Ourselves in the Early Modern Wetscape by Lowell Duckert. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017. Pp. 305. \$29.85 paperback.

During the time of my reading Lowell Duckert's *For All Waters: Finding Ourselves in the Early Modern Wetscape* in September 2017, two massive hurricanes struck the United States with what newscasters and scientists alike were calling "unprecedented" force. In my home state of Texas, the most striking images of Hurricane Harvey were Houston highways that had become rivers and boat rescues of residents whose houses were up to the roofs in water. Fast on its heels, Hurricane Irma hit Florida, and fear from the destruction of Harvey sent many coastal Floridians to leave their homes for overcrowded and undersupplied shelters or out onto the freeways, where gas, food, and hotels were in short supply. The Caribbean, also struck by Irma, was then hit by Maria, which caused massive destruction in its wake, leaving islands without electricity, food, or water. Meanwhile on the other side of the United States, fires continued to rage in California, Oregon, Idaho, and Montana, such that only the cooler weather of winter and the accompanying rains or snow put the blazes out.

I begin this review with this description because such extreme weather illustrates the very timeliness of *For All Waters*. While Duckert's monograph is a well-researched historical investigation into the workings of water in the early modern period, it does not

let the reader forget contemporary ecological watery crises. Each chapter begins with a tale of flood or drought or of the significant destruction of wetlands, and indeed the book itself could be categorized as a late descendant of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*. Drawing on a vast knowledge of theoretical studies, Duckert's writing is presentism at its best, for not only does he constantly make us aware of our current situation as we discover the watery past through his skilled writing, but in the end the book shows us that our attitudes toward the environment are rooted in the past.

From the very beginning of this book, I had an inkling that the act of reading *For All Waters* would deeply affect me and the way that I view the world, and that impression turned out to be true. Opening with Colleen Ludwig's art installation *Shiver*, in which viewers are invited to participate in the water works of the sculpture, Duckert illustrates how the human body is made up of water, emphasizing the permeability of bodies—both human and nonhuman—with the land/water-scapes of the blue planet that we call home. For as much as we like to think of ourselves as separate and unconnected, we are indeed inextricably bound to and within the “more-than-human-world” (xv). Espousing Stacy Alaimo's notions of “trans-corporeal landscapes” as a foundational concept, Duckert

submerges us into slippery, liquid architectures that will shape the book. Duckert adroitly navigates readers through a vast array of theoretical concepts and the multivalent textual voyages that he has laid before us.

A great deal of the joy in reading Duckert's book comes from his own delight in language, evinced by his poetic voice, his frequent archaeological etymologies, and his interest in the underlying and sometimes contradictory language of the early modern narratives. Each chapter is organized around various early modern relationships with particular watery states, commencing with Sir Walter Raleigh's encounter with the massive unpredictable Amazon, the riverscape that dominates the narrative of his voyage to Guiana and his quest to find El Dorado. Duckert argues that Raleigh's failure to discover the promised land of gold is in essence replaced by the ecological hydrography of the labyrinthine river and its mysteries. Hinting at the trans-corporeal permeability between the beleaguered courtier/poet/privateer/explorer and his riverine subject, Duckert's chapter name “Becoming Wa/l/ter” illustrates how we are to see the connection between Raleigh and his subject. While Raleigh's aim in essence is one of colonial subjugation and imperial enrichment, he becomes enamored with the very water that stymies his objectives and in which

he loses himself and his ship. “To deliquesce is to delight,” Duckert writes, demonstrating how Raleigh as a person and as a narrator takes on the aleatory serpentine characteristics of the river itself (60).

Duckert turns to the glacial in chapter 2, juxtaposing the current crisis of the melting ice cap with early modern records of the frozen and deadly icescapes of the Arctic. Attempting to discover the Northwest Passage as a shortcut to the global trade routes, George Best, John Davis, and Thomas Ellis reflect the fluctuating yet “co-constitutive” relationship between humans and the ice, unveiling a process that Duckert terms as “going glacial” (107). In this chapter, my personal favorite, Duckert lyrically reveals a gleamingly beautiful but also unerringly perilous ontological vision of the encounter between humans and this hyperborean environment—both then and now. Duckert explains, “Both solid and liquid at once, glaciers are interstitial places” (112).

The central tenant of chapter 3 is rain—its overabundance or lack thereof. Feste’s song “Hey, Ho, the Wind and the Rain,” which the melancholic clown sings in Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*, becomes the barometer by which Duckert reads the human/weather correlation at the turn of the seventeenth century in England. The author does not let us forget our current conditions of floods

and droughts and encourages us to “develop alternatives to technoscientific mastery,” that is, controls over weather and waterways. Here, as throughout the book, Duckert argues for a change of our overall perspective of water from that of dominance to that of cooperative, interactive respect.

In the final chapter, the author investigates the muddy, mucky world of swamps, which at first glance may seem like an unappealing landscape. However, the reader will become convinced of the swamps’ biological and topographical significance, even as Duckert chronicles their loss from the seventeenth century onward. Investigating the puritan religious tracts that record European and Native American land disputes that come to a head with King Philip’s War, Duckert passionately takes us into the brackish swampscape, a haven for the Narragansett, Nashaway, Nipmuck, and Podunk peoples but a horror for the English colonizers. Duckert points out the bewildering quality of the swamps, not only in their difficulty to navigate but also in their “ontological scrambling between human, animal and vegetable” (228). The swamp is the ultimate space of trans-corporeality. Duckert here makes his most overt wish that his investigation might spur us from our complacent and our anthropocentric perspectives and actions. Much of our wetlands—and their

species—are disappearing year by year.

Returning to talk of hurricanes, the city of Houston over the past few decades has paved over many of its bayous that could have absorbed a great deal of excess water, but instead the flooding from Harvey was unparalleled. City officials are now rethinking the importance of their wetlands. With the rising of sea temperatures (four degrees in the Gulf of Mexico), such storms are not likely to abate, and perhaps we will all be inspired to restore these swampy habitats and consider how our actions and habits

have affected the environment. In the end, Duckert does not let us forget our watery heritage nor our responsibility to revise our relationships to water. This grand monograph follows Sidney's tenets to teach and to delight, but even more significantly it goes the next step, to call to action.

Amy L. Tigner is an associate professor of English at the University of Texas, Arlington. She is the coeditor with David B. Goldstein of Culinary Shakespeare: Staging Food and Drink in Early Modern England (Duchesne University Press, 2017) and coauthor with Allison Carruth of Literature and Food Studies (Routledge, 2018).