Recent news stories observe that the Yoshino cherry trees gifted to the United States in 1912 and planted in Washington, D.C. bloomed "several days ahead of the thirty-year average," while in Kyoto, Japan, the blossoms peaked on the earliest date recorded in 1200 years (NPR).¹ The story struck me because I, too, mark the timing of the cherry blossoms annually. When my now eighteen-year-old daughter was born, we wondered whether peak bloom would arrive in time for her birth in early April. But for the past several years, it's an unexpected gift if any blooms remain on the tree by that date. In brief, our cherry-tree flowers about two weeks earlier now on average than it did eighteen years ago.

I'm suffering from what people have begun to call climate grief. I know I'm shielded from the worst of it so far – I don't live on an island that is sinking each month; I don't live in a mobile home battered by increasingly violent hurricanes; I don't have to drink water polluted by heavy metals, toxic algal blooms, or pesticide runoff; I don't see mountains I grew up with as friendly protective presences being beheaded by open-top mining – and yet even my protected, privileged world is changing irrevocably.² The flower I used to call a wild bluebell (it's actually a naturally occurring, fertile hybrid of wood hyacinth and Spanish bluebell) and that used sometimes to linger until June now blooms just as those (too-early) cherry blossoms fall.³ My tulips rot in the warm dirt that has remained unfrozen for a decade and that threatens the iconic peach harvest, too.⁴ The shallow banks of the small creek where neighborhood children played are subsiding and collapsing from years of drought followed by torrential, unseasonal rain.⁵ And when I visit my family in England, the blackberries seem to be fruiting earlier;⁶ one can gather a
harvest over the summer rather than skiving school and "prov[ing] the micher [to] eat blackberries" like Shakespeare's young Prince Hal (1 Henry IV, 2.4.420).7

It's a truism to say that your children die a thousand deaths each day – that each moment with them will never come again – but more than this immediately personal sentimentality or nostalgia is my sorrow for what we have done to our children's world. I can't stop reading the deaths of Shakespeare's young people and the words of the elders who mourn them as elegies of climate grief. In her 2015 dissertation, Katie Norman Grubbs identifies several characteristics of early modern child-elegy and poems mourning the deaths of young adults. One such feature is botanical imagery, a pattern that holds true in Shakespeare.8 Gertrude mourns Ophelia among the "weedy trophies" that she enumerates, "crowflowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples." Talbot mourns his dead son John as his "Icarus," and also his "blossom" in the same line (1 Henry VI, 4.7.16). The Princes in the Tower are Queen Elizabeth's "unblown flowers, new-appearing sweets" (Richard III 4.4.11). When the father and brothers of Innogen, who is disguised as the youth Fidele, believe their supposed adoptive brother to be dead, they praise him as the "lily," the "pale primrose; .../ The azured harebell;...The leaf of eglantine," and even the "furred moss" that emblematizes growing things in the winter (Cymbeline 4.2.283-90). This last example unites the unconscious Innogen with the non-human or "furred" animals and with both flowering and non-flowering plants that all return to the earth, a breakdown of boundaries among human self, living matter, and dead planetary dust that is both sublime and horrific.

The association of death and flowers, of children and springtime, isn't new, but new to me is my sense that not only have the violets "wither'd all," they also may "never come again" (Hamlet 4.5.217). Queen Constance famously imagines her son's ghostly presence inhabiting her grief, "fill[ing] the form of [her] absent child," walking beside her, filling out his empty clothes.
For me, the world as it was is superimposed upon the world as it is, filling out the empty spaces of missing insects, birds, bats, trees, plants as grief fills up the empty clothing of Prince Arthur in Constance's mind.9

And yet what Ashlee Cunsolo calls the "work of mourning" for nature must take us, she argues, beyond grief to action and to solidarity.10 Reading through climate grief must extend beyond flowers and beyond the aestheticized deaths of nobly born youth mourned by queens, princes, and lords in disguise. Reading through climate grief reveals a hidden elegy -- doubly hidden as grammatical parenthesis and concealed within the light discursive mode that several critics call vulgarity or "garrulousness." I'll just quote the beginning of the speech. Juliet's Nurse is confirming her charge's age:

Come Lammas Eve at night shall she be fourteen.
Susan and she (God rest all Christian souls!)
Were of an age. Well, Susan is with God;
She was too good for me. But, as I said,
On Lammas Eve at night shall she be fourteen.
That shall she. Marry, I remember it well.
'Tis since the earthquake now eleven years,
And she was weaned (I never shall forget it)
Of all the days of the year, upon that day.
For I had then laid wormwood to my dug,
Sitting in the sun under the dovehouse wall. (1.3.19-29)

The nurse then repeats a sexual innuendo made by her late husband about the toddler's future.

She reiterates the joke, which is not especially funny, three times, so I'm not going to. Typically,
Commentators note the Nurse's adherence to earthy and earthly natural processes measured by their effects on her own body rather than to clock time or to political events. But where an early generation of scholars dismissed the Nurse's reckoning in classist terms as a reflection of her presumably lower level of education, especially coupled with the vulgar joke, feminist critics in the later twentieth and early twenty-first century saw the Nurse's vignette as a poignant reminder of how women's bodies—women's time, to use the title of a famous essay by Julia Kristeva—\cite{Kristeva1980} are marked by childbirth and child-rearing and how girls' sexual destiny is set from birth regardless of class and circumstance (all must, in the words of the Nurse's husband, "fall backward" when they come of age \cite{1.3.46, 61}).

Barbara Everett complains of the Nurse's "dithering" and accuses her of being "muddled" (I don't think she's muddled at all and will be happy to talk in the Q&A about why!) and classifies the Nurse as a "natural" fool as opposed to Mercutio's witty fool.\footnote{But Everett does offer this important observation, although I might have phrased it somewhat differently (this is Everett in 1972):}

> If a fat middle-aged woman congenitally disposed to muddle is made, by function, into a fool licensed to speak profound nonsense, then she may undercut the rational and move into an area of more primitive and powerful (though more elusive and dangerous) utterance.\footnote{For Everett, this realm of "more…powerful…utterance" comprises the remainder of her essay, which beautifully unearths the play's subterranean poetry of Mother Earth, weaning and dying, love and death, the inevitability of both human sexuality and of the fortunate fall. At the turn of the twenty-first century, from a psychoanalytic feminist standpoint, Julia Kristeva suggests that}
the play implies that only in death can the couple recreate the imaginary "paradise lost" (her phrase, adapted from Milton) of unconditional and infinite parental love.¹³

Both readings depend upon the stability of the earth and its paradoxically hungry generosity to identify the Nurse (in Everett) and the play itself (in Kristeva) as chthonic or even mystical forces. The earthquake (in the Nurse's speech) and the sustained imagery of the earth as creator, preserver, and destroyer (notably in Friar Lawrence's so-called earth-monologue in 2.3.1-22, but also in speeches by Capulet, Benvolio, and, most often, the lovers themselves) confirm and rely upon this stability and contribute, argues Kristeva, to the power of the artwork to conquer the fear of death and reinforce the power of the romantic couple, even in our own century in which, Kristeva observes, the historical relationships between sex and reproduction, between men and women, between natural and artificial bodies, have become obsolete.

Let's reconsider that earthquake in light of climate grief and what has been called "cli-fi" or climate fiction. We are cracking the planet itself with human activities. The United States Geological Service concedes that "most" US earthquakes are NOT caused by fracking, but adds, carefully: "The recent increase in earthquakes in the central United States is primarily caused by disposal of waste fluids that are a byproduct of oil production" and that "there are still many earthquakes induced by hydraulic fracking."¹⁴ N.K. Jemisin's powerful, award-winning dystopian fantasy series The Broken Earth and, in very different ways, Cixin Liu's Remembrance of Earth's Past trilogy and Neal Stephenson's "hard" science-fiction epic SevenEves imagine what happens in worlds where earth, stars, and heavenly bodies are unpredictable. All three imagine the utter destruction of the world we know and the annihilation of what we now recognize as human. But all three also suggest (from very different political standpoints) the possibility of coalition among
different sentient beings and the universal forces they need to survive: and the persistence of hope.

When winters warm too much, cherries can no longer flower. Michael Braungart and William McDonough single out the cherry tree as an example of "eco-effectiveness" in their book *Cradle to Cradle*, which vividly imagines fully sustainable or "closed-loop" industrial and human practices that rely upon abundance rather than scarcity. The cherry tree, they write, makes "thousands of blossoms...in order that one pit might...grow...[,] copious blossoms[,] without depleting its environment" (72-3). Such foison, such copiousness, such plenitude, they suggest, can be ours if we can imagine and create "buildings...like trees [that] produce more energy than they consume and purify their own water," products that can be fully recycled or upcycled, "factories" whose "effluents are drinking water," waste that blossoms and then replenishes, rather than pollutes, the earth. For now my hopeful tree continues to bloom.

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12 Ibid., p. 131.