

“Shakespeare and the Histories of Sustainability”

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Shared Readings

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ABSTRACTS

Joseph Campana, Rice University
“Off the Grid with *Timon of Athens*”

Is tragedy sustainable? Tragedy wastes. We might say it is the feeling of the painful necessity of a salubrious form of waste that reigns in excess. At least so A.C. Bradley held in his thoroughly Hegelian *Shakespearean Tragedy*. Definitive of the genre would be the waste of the good, as when catastrophe spares not even those for whom some intimation of nobility or courage or greatness peeks out from the ever-darkening shroud of disaster. Tragedy wastes but also renews or at least it offers the opportunity, perhaps even the spur, to re-establish a civic norm rooted in a ground zero of constitutional health. In his

recent declaration of the end of sustainability, Steve Mentz describes it as “a fantasy about stasis, an imaginary world in which we can trust that whatever happened yesterday will keep happening tomorrow. It’s been pretty to think so, but it’s never been so. In literary studies, we name this kind of fantasy pastoral. Such a narrative imagines a happy, stable relation between human beings and the nonhuman environment.” But while pastoral captures Mentz attention, tragedy and sustainability, as energetic systems that that must enforce homeostasis, might prove mutually illuminating. While tragedy’s obituary was written some time ago, recent approaches to sustainability find it equally endangered. And yet, both prove durable fantasies. Is it, then, ever possible to exit the energetic loop statement we might call tragic sustainability? With reference not only to theories of tragedy and sustainability but also recent work in the energy humanities, I argue that *King Lear* and *Timon of Athens* present two unsettled responses to tragic sustainability. *King Lear* ends on exhaustion: “we that are young / Shall never see so much, nor live so long.” The price of tragic sustainability is enervation, a diminishment that overwhelms. More radically, *Timon of Athens* goes off the grid, compassing annihilation as a solution. In his exquisite curses, Timon assails not only money and humanity but the earth itself which is imagined as the ecosystemic lynchpin of tragic sustainability. *Timon of Athens* is, then, a poem designed to destroy the earth.

Sarah Crover, Corpus Christi College

“‘This Same Progeny of Evils Comes from Our Debate’: Modelling Sustainability in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*”

When Titania claims that she and Oberon are the “parents and original” of all the droughts, floods, crop failures, and diseases that have afflicted their natural environs, she refers to their dispute over the Indian Boy. On the surface, it would be easy to simply read her words as participating in a well-established tradition where the actions of the great impact not only those they rule but also the environment they inhabit – a just ruler produces good harvests and good weather, and when that state of balance is disrupted, or the ruler is not just, the environment mirrors that instability. However, when one pauses to consider that, by their own descriptions, one of the primary tasks of the fairies in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* is the careful cultivation of local flora – to “dew orbs [] upon the green ... and hang a pearl in every cowslip’s ear (2.1.9-15) – the source of the trouble appears to be as much a failure of husbandry as a failure to maintain proper balance within established hierarchies. Titania and Oberon’s clashes over the Indian Boy have resulted in the inability to complete their appointed tasks and cultivate the natural world appropriately. Titania’s court’s “ringlets to the whistling wind” have been repeatedly destroyed, she claims, by Oberon’s “brawls,” which have in turn resulted in unstable weather that have caused the ploughman [to lose] his sweat” (2.1.81-94) as the crops fail. In other words, their preoccupation with their own dispute has prevented them carrying out their necessary tasks of cultivating the natural world so that humans may farm successfully. Titania and Oberon’s quarrel is quite literally unsustainable – if it continues the environment around them will collapse.

In a period where the Little Ice Age and irresponsible agriculture and silviculture practices were resulting in crop failure and general resource shortages, it is not difficult to see echoes of these Elizabethan crises in the results of Titania and Oberon’s dispute, and the connection between the two has been argued by several scholars. However, I would go one step further and suggest that in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* Shakespeare is staging his own version of what we might now call an environmental crisis, and a potential solution – sustainable management through balance, care, restraint, order – using Titania and Oberon as the irresponsible farmers and stewards whose behaviour must be corrected. As Jeremy Caradonna points out, there is ample attestation that the problem of what we would now call sustainable forest and agricultural land management was on the minds of the Western Europeans of the early modern era, so it is not a stretch to suggest that Shakespeare would be aware of and responding to these concerns. Moreover, Shakespeare is not simply drawing upon elements of early modern land management and *oeconomia* discourse; he is also, I contend, tapping into an older tradition of fairy story as veiled protest to critique the environmental degradation of his time. Ultimately, I argue, Shakespeare

holds up the fairy dereliction of appropriate environmental husbandry as a mirror for the playgoers of London, suggesting that they must remember their own duties of careful cultivation of the natural world, so that it may sustain them with pleasant weather and bountiful harvests rather than destroy them with “contagious fogs” and “rotted” corn.

Claire Duncan, University of Toronto

“Sylvan Hewing in Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus*”

Near the beginning of his influential translation of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, Arthur Golding nostalgically characterizes the long-lost Golden Age by what had not yet happened:

The loftie Pyntree was not hewen from mountaines where it stood,
In seeking straunge and forren lands, to rove upon the flood.

Men knew none other countries yet, than where themselves did keepe. (1.109-111)

Yet as Ovid – writing from the heights of the Augustan Roman Empire – and Golding – on the precipice of English colonial expansion – both knew, massive numbers of trees would eventually be hewn to supply the fuel and the timber needed to try to sustain their growing societies. However, it was not only a problem with the sustainability of timber resources that early modern England borrowed from Classical Rome: English authors used the figurative trees that made up the *silvae* of Classical literature, like Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, for the material out of which to build their own texts. This paper examines the confluence of England’s Elizabethan timber crisis and the tradition of understanding intertextuality using sylvan language in Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus* – a play so thoroughly built from Ovid’s material, that it includes a stage prop of the *Metamorphoses* to help Lavinia tell her story.

Indeed, perhaps more than any other character in *Titus Andronicus*, Lavinia is ripped from the pages of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. Aaron imagines Lavinia’s narrative to be predetermined by Ovid’s text, explaining that “Philomel must lose her tongue today” (2.3.43). Chiron and Demetrius then force Lavinia into a reenactment of that story, with the Shakespearean addition of dismemberment. When Lavinia’s uncle Marcus stumbles upon her mutilated, but living body, he struggles to understand what he sees before him: in what has been referred to as the most stylistically Ovidian passage of the play, Marcus draws on sylvan language to ask the bloodied and silenced Lavinia “what stern ungentle hands / Hath lopped and hewed and made thy body bare / Of her two branches” (2.4.16-18). By using this arboreal rhetoric to understand Lavinia’s raped and mutilated body, the play points towards questions of sustainability in English forestry practices in the early 1590s. This rhetoric in the context of Shakespeare’s most intertextually obsessed play, however, also gestures to the early modern use of silvicultural language to understand Classical texts as forests or *silvae* of material to be harvested. This paper examines whether Shakespeare’s use of Ovid is a sustainable literary practice of recycling or an unsustainable violent act of literary hewing. Ultimately, I contend that understanding Lavinia as not only an arboreal body unsustainably hewn for timber from the forests of early modern England, but also as a tree hewn from Ovid’s *silva*, counterintuitively allows the play to sustain Lavinia’s voice, and to perhaps also allow the hewn wood of England’s forests an opportunity to speak.

David B. Goldstein, York University

“Reduce, Refuse, Recycle: Desire and Sustainability in *Venus and Adonis*”

If, as historian Timothy Reiss has argued, early modern humans were “passible” creatures, infused with the environment of which they were a part, then any discussion of early modern sustainability must address not only issues of human stewardship over the nonhuman world, but also the environmentality of humans themselves. For early modern people—with their unstable humoral psycho-physiologies, their co-permeation with climate and weather, their acute physical vulnerability to food and drink, their violent accession to emotions, passions, and all manner of spirits—sustainability includes the question of how humans could balance their unruly material selves in relation to all the environmental forces at work within them. I read Shakespeare’s *Venus and Adonis* as a response to this question. The poem imagines

sexual love as an ecological problem that both threatens the human quest for sustainability and provides a key to attaining it. Venus performs herself in the poem as a kind of resource extractor, bent upon exhausting the natural energies of an unwilling Adonis by reducing his autonomy, rejecting his own refusal of her, and finally by recycling his dead body in floral form for her own ends. Framed in the context both of numerous natural metaphors, most of them relating to environmental excess and catastrophe, and of several animal characters (horses, hounds, and the wild boar), Venus's desire is considered as a site of both human and non-human ecological crisis. If love is the fundamental engine of species continuity (the primary argument Venus offers Adonis for having sex with her is the production of offspring), but is experienced as a wildly disruptive and unsustainable set of emotions and actions, how can it productively be imagined as a force for ecological balance? Does human love suggest models for sustainability that extend into the poem's nonhuman terrain? Jeremy Davies suggests that "Sustainability might even become a way of reckoning with and welcoming the perpetual openness of complex chaotic systems to unexpected new judgments and configurations." In *Venus and Adonis*, Shakespeare imagines love as an ecological operation that can accomplish precisely that.

Jennifer Munroe, UNC Charlotte

"Recipes As Alternative Histories of Sustainability"

Histories of sustainability have typically situated the origins of our current environmental crises at the advent of industrialism—the dawn of the Anthropocene. In such histories, as today, the notion of sustaining something—of some version of ecological equilibrium—is itself arguably the luxury of the (relatively) privileged members of developed nations for whom sustaining is at least perceived as a choice if not also a necessity, even if the impulse to do so comes from a sense of impending ecological catastrophe. Such histories, located as far back as perhaps the seventeenth century in England (as Cardonna does, for instance, with John Evelyn's *Sylva*) seek to identify a moment when things were otherwise, as if their very articulation might help to remediate our current ecological crises derived from human-induced forms of destruction: air pollution, deforestation, and others.

All of these histories, that is, and for obvious and very good reasons, take as their concern *large-scale practices* especially rooted in the advent of industrialism.

This paper, however, proposes that we take a step back, to move from the global to the local, as they say, and focus instead on *smaller-scale practices* that yield alternative narratives and examples of human-nonhuman relations relevant to constructing alternative histories of sustainability. Women's household medicine and cookery, and its traces in manuscript receipt books, provides an avenue for exploring such alternative histories. To assert that "early moderns" had particular attitudes about sustainable practices demonstrated by, say, deforestation or air pollution—in particular, how such attitudes manifested a view of the nonhuman world as a commodity at the service of (early) capitalist exchange—is quite different, that is, than how the everyday work in the household suggested human-nonhuman relations dependent on utilitarian, subsistence economies.

In this paper, I focus on particular recipes from a manuscript book by Lady Grace Catchmay as a way of reorienting assumptions we might have about what constitutes "sustainability," what we include as its history. In these recipes, we see the interplay between human hand, cloth, cooking pot, herb, dirt, and water contingent not on interaction with and consumption of nonhuman things not for the purposes of capitalist accumulation but household (and bodily) equilibrium. They express and enact, that is, the very principles of sustainability that our histories attempt to recuperate; their details recount an intra-action between human and nonhuman things that renders inscrutable the line between one and the other. These recipes and their particulars demonstrate how at the same moment in time that we may see numerous instances in the print record that suggest a move toward (over)consumption of "natural resources" and a further developing sense that the nonhuman world was subject to the human, women's household work shows us something quite different. As such, manuscript receipt books provide not only a rich, but also a necessary alternative history of sustainability that requires that we rethink not only the narrative arc that history follows but also the subjects (human and nonhuman alike) whose stories are included in it.

McKenna Rose, Emory University

“Betting on the Future: *Cymbeline* and the History of Sustainability”

This paper argues that the wager, which precipitates the entire plot of Shakespeare’s *Cymbeline*, is the consequence of a perceived resource scarcity. When Posthumus Leonatus joins the banquet at Florio’s house in Rome, he exchanges apologies with a Frenchman who, some years earlier, restored the peace between Posthumus and another lord before they fought a duel. Iachimo asks the two men to elaborate on the cause of the prior disagreement, and the Frenchman explains, “It was much like an argument that fell out last night, where each of us fell in praise of our country mistresses, this gentleman vouching...his to be more fair, virtuous, wise, chaste, constant, qualified, and less attemptable” (1.4.48-52) than all the other women in the world. Not persuaded by Posthumus’s claims about Imogen’s perfection, Iachimo scoffs, “That lady is not now living, or this gentleman’s opinion by this worn out” (1.4.53-4). Iachimo’s response suggests that the resources that sustain the lives of the characters have become increasingly scarce. As they experience exile from their homes, they “look to the future, because it is in the future that the present will be inhabited as...home” (Jeremy Davies 264). In its forward-looking formulation, sustainability in *Cymbeline* denotes a willingness on the part of its adherents to hazard a loss in the present in anticipation of future gain.

As is well known, the contest that aims to prove Imogen is the most “constant” (1.4.52) woman alive signifies within the ubiquitous misogynistic trope in which women are objectified and valued in the same terms nonhuman objects. As Georgiana Ziegler explains, during the wager sequence Posthumus figures his “wife as a possession, whose greatest worth is the jewel of her chastity within the setting of her beauty” (78). And yet, the urgency with which the contest is renewed, as well as the fact that the debate seems to be ongoing, betrays certain anxieties over the sustainability of objectification. After all, if the “country mistresses” (1.4.49) were as vital and productive as each man claims, then they would be living flourishing lives in their home countries, instead of waxing nostalgic for their losses while in exile. That Iachimo insists that only a dead woman can be as “constant” (1.4.52) as Posthumus claims provides further evidence of an anxiety over scarcity. As he explains in his theory of conservation to Posthumus: “If you buy ladies’ flesh at a million a dram, you cannot preserve it from tainting” (1.4.118-119). It is as if the very act of preservation, that is the transformation of people into objects, has the opposite effect of what was intended. As I will show, despite the anxiety over scarcity that motivates the wager, *Cymbeline* is preoccupied with dense tableaux; diffuse agency of human and nonhuman things; the becoming object of the human; and a dislodging the nature/culture divide.

Haylie Swenson, George Washington University

“‘Rome and her rats’: Parasitism and the City in *Coriolanus*”

The turbulent fourth act of *Coriolanus* initially finds its titular character at his most reduced: driven from Rome, but not yet taken in by the Volsces, a homeless Coriolanus, excluded from human society, stands outside Aufidius’ home in Antium. “A goodly city is this Antium,” Coriolanus muses, before reminding himself of his unwelcomeness to it. “City,” he says,

’Tis I that made thy widows. Many an heir
Of these fair edifices fore my wars
Have I heard groan and drop. Then know me not,
Lest that thy wives with spits and boys with stones
In puny battles slay me. (4.4.1-6)

At once a far cry from the martial death at the hands of men that many productions stage for Coriolanus and foreshadowing of the Volscian people’s presence at his death in the text, the end Coriolanus here imagines is domesticated and abject. It is an death befitting a pest—a mouse or a rat—not a soldier. This identification is not arbitrary: rather, throughout the text Coriolanus comes to increasingly resemble rodents even as he outsources animality to the plebians that he so despises.

In this paper I argue that *Coriolanus* stages abjectified animality as an interlocking set of tropes, and that parasitism, particularly in the mammalian sense in which it is used by Michel Serres, emerges in the play as both a symptom of abject animality and as an inherent part of urban systems—indeed, as Coriolanus discovers to his horror, of all systems. An ostensible outsider that is inextricably part of the metaphorical and literal city, the parasite must be disavowed but never can be. This paradox is dramatized through Coriolanus himself, who is slowly revealed as inhabiting a parasitical, abject and animalized position both within and without Rome. In this observation I echo Simon Estok, who compares Coriolanus to weeds, which “often express a parasitical relationship to other plants or their food, making the ‘weed’ stronger and killing the other plants or making them weaker” (Estok *Ecocriticism and Shakespeare: Reading Ecophobia* 37). However, in this paper I argue that the urban rat is a better metaphor for Coriolanus. Explicitly named twice in the text, heavily associated with grain-stealing and urban space, and—most importantly—comprising both abjection and resourcefulness, the figure of the rat pervades *Coriolanus*. While the plebians are directly *compared* to rats, in Act Four Coriolanus is explicitly *treated* like one. I argue that this under-acknowledged association of rodent and protagonist reveals the plays’ attention to the sometimes horrifying, always violent co-constitutive nature of parasitical recycling and sustainable urban space.

Jeff Theis, Salem State University

“Houses, Homes, and Dwelling from a Sustainability Perspective”

The material and cultural transformation of houses into homes, especially how it develops the concept of privacy and social interactions, has been a strong interest in early modern studies during the past decade. The topic of sustainability, however, has not been applied to analysis of early modern homes and the broader concept of dwelling, but sustainability raises useful questions that extend our understanding of early modern homes to examine how the social informs and relates to the environment. In our own time, the concept of sustainability is shaping building practices to minimize a house’s ecological footprint while being built and for the life of the house. Jeremy Caradonna’s history of sustainability locates early articulations of sustainability concepts in the mid-seventeenth century, but the great rebuilding that begins in the sixteenth century creates a moment where the English become self-aware of the natural materials used for housing, architecture, and the ways in which different styles of houses reflect and shape social relationships and humanity’s relationship to the natural world. Some of these processes touch on sustainable practices (esp. finite material resources), but they also address the larger question that sustainability points to: How does our use of the environment reflect our relationship to nature? This question is partially addressed temporally as how we situate ourselves in relation to time affects our actions. While Jeremy Davies argues that the concept of sustainability is decidedly future-focused, I believe that the earliest glimmering of sustainability as a concept has only a mild focus on the future but is much more concerned by a vexed relationship between past and present, hence why many early modern writers focus on caves and other primitive shelters from humanity’s past.

Thus, early modern writing about homes and the environment begin the sustainability conversation by marking possible problems with new buildings. Creating more rooms and dividing up their functions diminishes the place of multi-functional rooms and increases privacy. The change in spatial arrangement may create the new concept of home (as opposed to house), but it presents a problematic and paradoxical relationship to the concept of dwelling. One of my interests for this paper is to explore the ways in which sustainability and architecture complicate the definition of dwelling. In one sense, early modern changes in housing begin a centuries-long process of turning houses into homes—places prioritizing the nuclear family and defining the house against public spaces and interactions. This process increases the sense of dwelling as people develop a stronger attachment to their living space and those who they share that space with. On the other hand, the privatization of the house separates people from other people and from the surrounding environment. Houses protect people from the excesses of the natural world (rain, cold, wind, etc.); homes create social identities by imposing and clarifying boundaries. Through an analysis of several Shakespeare plays and a few other literary texts—possibly

Spenser's *Faerie Queene* and Milton's *Paradise Lost*—I believe that fictional works become thought experiments to explore the concepts of home and dwelling that our current time might identify as either sustainable or unsustainable and how various structures affect culture and nature.

Rob Wakeman, University of Maryland

“Shakespeare's Cavemen and the Paleo Diet”

Shakespeare depicts convivial hunting as a recuperation of the species hierarchy of predator and prey that naturalizes the noble privileges of the early modern class structure. The successful hunt accomplishes a *translatio imperii* that celebrates the intertwining of the laws of nature with the laws of civilization. The verse of Shakespeare's woodsmen seals the alliance of forest and court alongside the refined simplicity of the hunter's meal, an aspirational fusion of high culture with rustic nature. These scenes resonate with the long history of hunters and hunting association portrayed as conservationists dedicated to controlling invasive species and safeguarding open spaces and ancient landscapes traditionally used for recreational sport. The hunters' meals in Shakespeare also anticipate the ethico-nutritional logic of the recent trend of “Paleo eating,” a diet which espouses a protein-rich regimen of pasture-raised and hunted meat and claims to support “ancestral health” and sustainable farming practices. My paper for this explores the entangled history of sustainable meat and conservationist hunting through a study of the meals of Duke Senior in *As You Like It* and Belarius in *Cymbeline* (with a contrasting look at *Timon of Athens*). In these plays, life in the wilderness leads to the adoption of a diet that the exiles see as more fitting and more natural than the corrupted foods of court and city. I use these plays as case studies for examining the current debates over the Paleo Diet and what Lorraine Daston and Fernando Vidal have described as “the moral authority of nature.” I seek to explain how eating wild, raw, or Paleo foods exemplifies “how humans use nature to think about standards of the good, the beautiful, the just, and the valuable” (Daston and Vidal *Moral Authority of Nature* 1).

My paper will seek to complicate the zoological rankings that lionize predators and cow prey. Because hunting was so intensely regulated practice reserve and the high price of venison meant it was reserved for noble privilege, the study of sustainable meat in early modern literature allows us to ask a series of related questions: Who can afford to eat healthy? Whom do environmental regulations serve and benefit? How do the histories of gender and class inform our ideas of “ancestral health” and which recreational practices need to be sustained by environmental protections, agricultural policy, and dietary habits?

Leslie Wexler, University of Toronto

“Unsettling Resilience: Insects in Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*”

Second-wave ecocriticism, most notably in the work of Timothy Morton, questions the notion of a bellicose natural world where self and the environment coalesce organically and peacefully. Morton claims that textual conceptions of the environment require more readings of tragedy and disruption as we encounter radical disruption in all natural systems. This paper attempts to answer the call for disruptive and dynamic readings, which may create new understandings of environmental interrelations.

In ecology, resilience is the capacity of an ecosystem to respond to a perturbation or disturbance by resisting damage and responding and recovering to a prior state. I begin my argument by discussing resilience as an ecological term that rests upon disruption, yet includes a pastorally inflected desire to return to a past condition that is unchanged in essence if not details. My paper then offers a compact analysis of insect metaphors in Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* so as to investigate and rethink the ideological complexities and ecological implications found in the term resilience.

As a number of critics have pointed out, the opening of *Coriolanus* and its politicization of desperate hunger is informed by both the Midlands Revolt of 1607 and insufferable dearth in England the following year. The initial uprisings were sparked by the meteoric price of grain as well as enclosure acts that truncated arable land for pasture. A paucity of available corn is also part of the classical *Coriolanus*

narrative, yet a possible source has been overlooked in explicating the famine with which the play begins. In the figure of the caterpillar one finds a voraciously consuming image of disturbance and destruction that is directly associated with the life and body of Coriolanus. At the same time as Coriolanus enacts the equivalent of an insect plague upon the Volscian landscape, the lifecycle and vulnerability of butterflies in metamorphic transformation suggests more acceptable notions of cycle, mutability, the conquered Volscians and returned Roman land as a naturalized concept. The insect world is crucially addressed most often in the play as a martial condition where the many outnumber one or the organic collective faces threats of invasion, destruction, or disruptions causing aggression or evacuation. The text establishes a discourse in which insects are feared for their fierce mortality, their consuming appetite, and their mobbing numbers. When Menenius paints Coriolanus late in the play as a metamorphic creature, one whose transformations mimics but also supersedes the lepidopteron cycle, it is this discourse he evokes: “There is a differency between a grub and a butterfly, yet your butterfly was a grub. This Martius is grown from man to dragon: he has wings, he’s more than a creeping thing.” (5.4.11-14) Coriolanus is situated as a destructive grub, consuming and violently destroying all in his path, but also as the transformation into a wholly new creation. The opposing desire amongst the citizens of Rome, however, is for things to return to a stable condition, for restoration of both land and food security for the plebeians and political stability and repatriated land rights amongst the senate. In order to “rebound,” so to speak, to a previous condition requires a dramatic justification for the application of power against a destructive, rather than sustaining, Other. The blatant insect metaphors associated with character Coriolanus throughout the text exert a discrete and compelling cognitive presence that is inseparable from a correspondingly disturbing aggressive emotional appeal: the desire for cyclical, and by extension, pastoral return.

I make the case that within *Coriolanus* one might find early modern notions of return and destruction that allow us to rethink our understanding of resilience as a term that violently weds pastoral fantasies with ecological disturbance so as to suggest a potentially new creative groundwork for a historically-situated notion of resilience as it emerges in later periods into a theoretically, ideologically and ecologically loaded term.

Charles Whitney, University of Nevada, Las Vegas

“*Oikonomia* and Recycling with Hugh Platt and *Hamlet*”

Climate scientist Kevin Anderson, alarmed at the lack of progress on the mitigation of global warming, calls for a new economics that replaces modern “chrematistics” with its predecessor, “*oikonomia*,” declaring that the profit motive has proven itself an ineffective tool. Only a carefully managed economy can prevent the unspeakable. David Hawkes, another admirer of the economic and ethical orientations of *oikonomia*, sees early modern England as a battleground between it and the emergent chrematistics. Together, Anderson and Hawkes provide the basis for relating fundamental early modern cultural and social transitions directly to the present need for making decisions that will determine the prospects for the survival of humans and millions of other species.

Here I explore one of the many aspects of England’s first agricultural revolution begun in the late sixteenth century that seems to align more with the traditional mindset of *oikonomia*: soil improvement through a range of old and new labor-intensive manuring practices. Ayesha Mukherjee reads Hugh Platt’s observations and experiments with soil fertilization in the 1590s as genuine research into recycling, a need spurred by the period’s widespread dearth as well as the general interest in improving yields. Platt’s cornucopia of soil fertility recommendations in his *Diverse sortes of Soyle* (1594) and *Sundrie new and artificiall remedies against famine* (1596) extended to a wide range of unsavory recycling sources such as human excrement and animal remains, making him a butt of satire in John Harrington’s call for urban sanitation, *A New Discourse of a Stale Subject, Called the Metamorphosis of Ajax* (1596), to which Platt replied with gravity. Yet his acute sense of cyclical processes of growth and decay finds expression several years later in *Hamlet*’s carnivalesque discourse on the decay of corpses that fertilize the soil in useful ways, discourse that emphasizes human creatureliness, the relation of

“human and humus” (as Margreta de Grazia puts it), and that becomes an ethical reference point concerning human well-being.

By contrast, chrematistics, in the sense of neoclassical economics, drove the second English agricultural revolution in the eighteenth century centered on large, capital-intensive estates, hired labor, and the rack-renting that reduced tenants to subsistence levels (Todd Lawry). The burdens these innovations placed on soil fertility were unsustainable, resulting in the later development of the chemical fertilizers that farmers in the developed world have come to depend on and which have now caused the breach of the third and fourth of the ten planetary boundaries identified by scientists. The character and implications of the second revolution bear comparison to today’s neoliberal, globalized, profoundly unequal, race-to-the-bottom, chrematistically fixated economy that has failed to confront climate change and other catastrophic environmental problems. The kinds of weak environmental solutions that would logically emerge from such a system undergoing the terminal crisis many fear would focus on securing the wellbeing of elites. We must find alternatives, such as those elaborated by Anderson and his associate Alice Bows-Larkin.

Myra E. Wright, Queens College, CUNY

“Killing and Conservation in *The Secrets of Angling*”

This paper explores the troubled relationship between sportfishing and conservation through a close reading of the inaugural angling poem in English literature. Published posthumously in 1613, John Dennys’s *The Secrets of Angling* is a verse treatise composed in ottava rima and steeped in literary tradition. As he delivers precise instructions on how to make a rod, fasten a line, and catch particular species of fish, Dennys invites readers to think of angling as an activity that is inherently morally sound and spiritually productive. Long before Izaak Walton’s formulation of the angler as “the contemplative man” (1653), Dennys defines and defends the sportfisher’s recreation in opposition to various indoor sports: sex, gambling, and drinking. Unlike these ungentlemanly pursuits, angling brings its practitioners out into the world, where they can gaze up at the sky and down into the water in a quiet performance of devotion. The stillness, the waiting, and the silence of the angler are all elements of successful hunting; they also happen to correspond with the pose of religious contemplation.

For Dennys, and for anglers writing about their sport well into the twenty-first century, there is seemingly easy compatibility between killing fish and caring about the environment. The artist and writer James Prosek talks about the angler’s place in a bigger picture: “It is not, . . . nor has it ever been, simply about the predation itself, but the whole assemblage of steps before and after, about engaging our senses with a larger interconnected whole” (*NYT* 18 April 2015). But anglers’ contributions to efforts of conservation have recently been reconsidered—in a series of essays in *Environmental Ethics*, biologist Dionys de Leeuw argued that sportfishing does more harm than good, and that “the justification of angling on the basis of nature conservation is dubious at best” (*EE* 34 [2012], 159). Rereading *The Secrets of Angling* in light of current conversations about sustainability, sport, and cruelty, this essay identifies a central paradox in Dennys’s project: the poet reflects on the lives and minds—and suffering—of fish, but he does so in the interest of teaching his readers how to capture and kill these animals in their own habitat.