

Landscape of Affordances:
Communal Customs and Environmental Justice in Early Modern England

(Lukas Arnold, University of Zurich)

Abstract

This paper is part of my dissertation thesis “Environmental Justice and Affective Communities in Early Modern English Literature,” where it lays the historical and methodological foundation for the project. As such, the goal of this essay is to postulate a new, scapes-based framework for understanding how early modern communities inhabited their environments. In particular, I posit that these landscapes consisted of a complex set of material, cognitive, and affective ecologies, which mutually overlapped and shaped one another. Herein, the word cluster ‘habit, inhabit, habitation, and habitat’ provides a productive critical vocabulary, as it alerts us to the fact that being and living in an environment is an ongoing and reciprocal process of interaction. Their common root (habit) shared considerable conceptual ground with the period’s notion of custom, a term that was central to how communities perceived and utilised their environments. Customary practices, such as foresting privileges or access to common pastures, were regarded as environmental rights not because they had been granted by royal decree but due to their long history of habitual usage. Moreover, the period’s dominant legal theories viewed the collective customs of the nation’s communities as the organic foundation of the law itself. As a result of existing in this intersection between practice and law, customs provided their communities with a potent set of affordances when environmental conflicts like enclosure, deforestation, or dearth threatened to change their traditional ways of inhabiting their landscapes.

Reading recommendations for the shared bibliography:

Lupton, Julia Reinhard. *Shakespeare Dwelling Designs for the Theatre of Life*. The University of Chicago Press, 2018. (The introduction, “Entries into Dwelling,” provides a great overview of ‘scapes’ as a concept).

Olwig, Kenneth. “Recovering the Substantive Nature of Landscape.” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 86.4, 1996, pp. 630-653.

Wood, Andy. *The Memory of the People: Custom and Popular Senses of the Past in Early Modern England*. Cambridge University Press, 2013.

Lowell Duckert

University of Delaware

“What is a game? . . . It’s the possibility of infinite rebirth, infinite redemption. The idea that if you keep playing, you could win. No loss is permanent, because nothing is permanent, ever.”

--Gabrielle Zevin, *Tomorrow, and Tomorrow, and Tomorrow* (2022)

Haven as Habitat

Keen players have noticed that The Game Bakers’ video game *Haven* (2020) is a nod to *Romeo and Juliet* (1594-6). Two lovers, Kay and Yu, literally cross the stars to escape the “Apiary” of their home planet and its “Matchmaker” who coerces couples into marriage. Arriving on the “uninhabited” planet of Source, they attempt to settle down in a stunning, islet-studded [landscape](#). Part survival game and part turn-based adventure, *Haven* has been praised for its nuanced portrayal of Kay and Yu’s relationship – they cook, make love, argue, and console one another in their spaceship, the “Nest” – and one may even play the game with their own significant other in co-op multiplayer mode. What intrigues me about the game, however, is Source’s very-much “[inhabited](#)” environment: one full of “flow springs,” edible seeds, symbiotic creatures, and an oily contagion called “Rust.” As the narrative progresses, the protagonists realize that the Apiary’s interstellar research branch, ExaNova, has already [colonized](#) their supposed sanctuary. *Haven* thus explores several hallmarks of environmental gaming, such as resourcism, extractivism, and multispecies companionship. For this seminar, I will pose two intertwining questions: what does the study of Shakespearean tragedy bring to the discourse of ecocritical game studies, and what does the discourse of ecocritical game studies bring to the study of Shakespearean tragedy? In my conclusion, I will sketch several takeaways that emerge from the conversation that *Haven* stages for us concerning matters of co-, in-, and dehabitation in worlds both real and virtual.

Kelly I. Aliano and Adam Crowley, eds., *Video Games and Environmental Humanities: Playing to Save the World* (Palgrave Macmillan: 2024)

Tom Bishop, Gina Blook, and Erika T. Lin, eds., *Games and Theatre in Shakespeare’s England* (Amsterdam University Press: 2021)

Alenda Y. Chang, *Playing Nature: Ecology in Video Games* (University of Minnesota Press: 2019)

Holly Dugan
SAA 2025
Keyword: *habit*

My focus for this seminar is on habits as part of training practices and what they reveal about human/simian relationships, both in terms of natural history and in terms of entertainment cultures. In my larger project, I argue that aping encapsulates a surprising array of habits, presented as inherent but in fact the result of training. These habits reveal a curious addendum to our understanding of aping as a natural reflection of human/simian similitude. The history of aping does not reveal simian capacities for mimicry; rather it points towards a weird and very long history of cultural investment in the mundane aspects of being human, defined via quotidian gestures linked to commodity culture. Skills such as horseback riding, smoking, roller skating, sucking eggs, applying lipstick, or driving are learned through repetition; when performed by animals, these “habits” reveal not only a persistent cultural investment in simian similitude but also the mundane history of everyday life, mapped through skills. In my book, I examine how these skills come at a high cost, shaping “habitats” for apes in captivity and training rituals that are rooted in violence, but for this seminar, I’m interested in exploring the habits themselves and what they might reveal about human/animal relationships (as my evidence is drawn from different time periods and cultural contexts).

Suggested Bibliography

Kaori Nagai, *Imperial Beast Fables* (Palgrave, 2020)

Leigh Claire Le Berge, *Marx for Cats* (Duke, 2023)

RC Collard, *Animal Traffic: Lively Capital in the Global Exotic Pet Trade* (Duke 2020)

Hello! Very much looking forward to meeting and talking with all seminar participants!

ABSTRACT

I am currently at work on a book-length project, *Early Modern Authors on the Art and Ethos of Escape*. Broadly, I want to speculate on the rise in availability and popularity of escapist fantasies and strategies in times of climate, health and/or labor anxiety. My goal is to develop a new conceptual framework for escape as a phenomenological category. “What is there in culture ... that is not a form of escape?” is the question cultural geographer Yi-fu Tuan asks in the opening pages of his book on the subject, before confidently arriving at his ironic thesis that escapism “is human—and inescapable.” I do not disagree, but I want to devote as much attention as possible to that word FORM in his initial question. How is escape formally realized? How/where/when do we *inhabit* it? Answering these questions means identifying and delimiting experiences in which the instrumentality and/or the infrastructure of escape/escapism is available for analysis.

To put it more simply, I want to find the early modern version(s) of the Escape Room. I see in these 21st-century games certain formal, narrative and indeed political aspects that recall the Stuart court masques – to name one early modern parallel I’m considering – that odd genre in which the commitment to escape the uglier realities of court life is experienced simultaneously with the (scripted) commitment to stay and mingle with its awkward extravagances. Besides noting the irony, my book will consider what lessons we might learn from reading and participating in escape scenes that look and feel like immersion scenes.

My plan is to share some snippet of the vast amount of writing I will surely do between now and our meeting next year. :/

SOURCES (one that I’m reading right now; three that I keep going back to)

Bachelard, Gaston, and Etienne Gilson. *The Poetics of Space*. Translated by M. Jolas, Beacon Press, 1964. ([Google preview](#))

Jette, Daniel. *The Strait Gate. Thresholds and Power in Western History*. Yale University Press, 2015.

Steiner, George. *In Bluebeard’s Castle: Some Notes towards the Redefinition of Culture*. Yale University Press, 1971. ([link](#))

Tolkien, J. R. R. *Tolkien on Fairy-Stories*. Edited by Verlyn Flieger and Douglas A. Anderson, Harper Collins Publishers, 2014. ([link](#))

“Cards and Calendars, Yeast and Bubbles: *Hamlet* and the ‘habit of encounter.’”

Gavin Hollis, Hunter College CUNY

The foamy, one hears from informed parties, exists only in empty self-reference, achieving no more than episodes and remaining eternally trapped in self-inflation and collapse.

—Peter Sloterdijk, *Spheres Volume 3: Foams: Plural Spherology*, 31.

Towards the end of the play that bears his name, Hamlet is approached by the courtly fashionista Osric with news. Hamlet is dismissive of Osric (“Dost know this water fly?” (5.2.69)), by turn gaslighting and mocking him. “He,” says Hamlet, meaning Osric, is one of many more of the same breed that I know the drossy age dotes on, [who] only got the tune of the time and, out of an habit of encounter, a kind of yeasty collection, which carries through and through the most profane and winnowed opinion; and do but blow them to their trial – the bubbles are out. (168-173).

What to make of Hamlet’s dismissal of Osric’s “breed” in terms of “an habit of encounter”? That this “habit” is associated with “encounter” suggests that for Hamlet at least this new generation’s social interactions are transforming Elsinore’s ecology (its habitat, if you will): their mutual “habits” produce a “yeasty collection” that can be easily burst through a simple challenge or “blow.” Whatever it was before (“rotten?”), Elsinore has become the stuff of foamy ephemera. By contrast, however, Osric characterizes Laertes as “an absolute gentleman, full of most excellent differences ... the card or calendar of gentry ... the continent of what part a gentleman would see” (92-7). For Osric, then, Laertes is a gentleman upon whom one should pattern one’s habits, someone around whom one might find one’s way in the world (a card—or map—or calendar), someone who is “absolute.” Are Osric’s habits all froth? Or are they, as it were, cartographic—carefully crafted, born of close observation, almost mathematical in their precision, scaled to the habits of those with whom he interacts? So what then is “an habit of encounter”—a habitat-altering set of practices, or behaviour that is abstracted from the world around it? Drawing on Peter Sloterdijk’s lengthy diagnosis of modernity (or postmetaphysics) in terms of bubbles, globes, and foam, this paper argues that the end of *Hamlet*, and the end of Hamlet, inhabit an inflection point in our understanding of the relationship between habit and habitat: that is, habit is either something enveloped within the ecology of its practices, or is something marshaled through practices removed from habitat. Does the “habit of encounter” index a foamy age; or is Osric right, that the habit of the new age (the soon-to-be-post-Hamlet age) (the modern age?) is something practiced, regularized, and mapped?

Suggested reading:

Stacey Alaimo, *Exposed: Environmental Politics and Pleasures in Posthuman Times* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2016).

Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, translated by Richard Nice (London: Routledge, 1984).

Peter Sloterdijk, *Spheres*, 3 volumes, translated by Wielan Hoban (South Pasadena, CA: Semiotext(s), 2016).

Julian Yates, *Of Sheep, Oranges, and Yeast: A Multispecies Impression* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2017).

For SAA 2025 seminar: HABIT-INHABIT-HABITATION-HABITAT
Katherine Hunt, University of East Anglia
katherine.hunt@uea.ac.uk

Habit, craft, and making (in) the world

ABSTRACT

How does habit relate to, or enfold, craft and skill? What Michael Polanyi called ‘tacit knowledge’ (1966)—the bodily understanding of learned skills that one does without thinking—is a kind of habituated practice. These actions are repeated, are internalised, are embodied. Aptitude becomes habit.

In this paper I examine moments in early modern poetic accounts of creation in which the divine making of the world gives way to the careful and skilled labour of the craftsman: the movement, we might say, from the exceptional to the quotidian; or from the world into the body. For example, in Hesiod’s *Works and Days* (especially emphasised in George Chapman’s 1618 translation), the men of the Age of Brass are the first to have tools (‘working Instruments’) and to be agents of making and forming, rather than simply being formed by ‘Father Jove’. They have a different relationship to their environment and dwelling places than do the men of earlier ages, too. Brass (or bronze) later becomes a key material through which to think about processes of making when Aristotle, in the *Physics*, uses it to understand the relationships between matter and form. Already in Hesiod, though, it indicates process and skill, and a particular way of inhabiting the world.

By reading across poems and translations (Chapman’s Hesiod; Du Bartas and translations by Sylvester and Scott; Bradstreet), I investigate how these early modern poetic accounts of creation connect habits and habitations to processes of making, skill, and craft. Putting pressure on moments like this in which capital-C Creation gives way to work, I suggest, sometimes also reveals ideas about the processes of making poetry.

SUGGESTIONS FOR SHARED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Sara Baume, *handiwork* (Dublin: Tramp Press, 2020)

Anders M. Greene-Crow, *Austerity Measures: The Poetics of Food Insecurity in Early Modern English Literature* (Penn, 2025) [not out until April—so, for future reading!]

Michael Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension* (1966; repr. Chicago, 2009)

Pamela H. Smith, *From lived experience to the written word: reconstructing practical knowledge in the early modern world* (Chicago, 2022)

Jennifer A. Low

With this seminar, I return to an interest in space and place that served for some years as the focus of my work and resulted in a couple of books and some articles. My work has moved into other directions in recent years, and as my current projects grow close to completion, I'd like to dip my toe into this stream again. What I share will be something new—more an exploration of possibilities than an emerging project.

Habitations of Thought

My tentative plan is to link memory-theatres and place in an examination of Theseus's expression "a local habitation and a name" in order to theorize more fully the spatialization and systematization of thought. This spatialization serves as a way of conceiving the development of imaginative thought from inchoate fancies to extended fantasy or fiction. The standard reading of Theseus's speech tends to focus more on the power of imagination to give life and form to written fictions. I plan to bring in memory as a form of "habitation" that builds an organized imaginative space to house imaginative thought, thereby—whether intentionally or not—shaping it.

Some of this investigation may bounce off recent work by Adam Rzepka on apprehension, but I want to keep my focus firmly on place and habitation in order to explore one aspect of how space was conceived in the early modern period. Rather than turning to questions about cognition, this work will more likely involve a certain kind of intellectual history, perhaps in a somewhat speculative way. Cartesian thinking characterizes thought as abstract; if thought was conceived spatially instead—as organized, as housed—could that affect how people developed their ideas? I don't want to go too deeply into Descartes or to move quickly towards generalizations, but I'd like to see what results from trying to map Theseus's habitations.

Lucy Munro

Hamlet at the Globe

My contribution to this seminar is part of a larger project to write a new history of the Globe and Blackfriars, one that seeks to put the people back into the history of early modern playhouses and to reveal the ways in which the stories of theatre buildings are intertwined with broader histories of gender, race and power. My paper will present some work-in-progress on experiencing *Hamlet* at the Globe playhouse, written from the perspective of playgoers, playhouse workers and players. I will think about the 'habit' of playgoing, well established by the turn of the seventeenth century; the act of 'inhabiting' a playhouse as gatherer, prompter, stage-keeper or player; the 'habitat' of the Globe itself, in terms of its physical characteristics and spatial dynamics; and the playhouse's local 'habitation' in Southwark. In doing so, I will revisit the story of the construction of the Globe from the timbers of the Theatre, reappraise the place of *Hamlet* in theatrical politics circa 1599-1600, and consider the gendered experience of playgoers and playhouse workers in the play's life on stage.

Suggested reading:

Andrew Bozio, *Thinking Through Place on the Early Modern English Stage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020)

Sarah Dustagheer, *Shakespeare's Two Playhouses: Repertory and Theatre Space at the Globe and Blackfriars, 1599-1613* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017)

Erika T. Lin, *Shakespeare and the Materiality of Performance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012)

Vin Nardizzi, *Wooden Os: Shakespeare's Theatres and England's Trees* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013)

Bernadette Myers
Washington University in St. Louis

Abstract for Habit – Inhabit – Habitation – Habitat

This seminar contribution will be drawn from a book chapter I am currently drafting about Shakespeare's Roman plays and concerns about London's rapid population growth. I am especially interested in thinking about how our cluster of keywords – habit, inhabit, habitation, habitat – might shift how we think about what defines the city in *Coriolanus*. Is it sustained through habit or “custom,” for instance, the practice of requesting approval from the plebeians before being appointed to the consulship? Or is it defined by physical structures, like the defensive walls of Rome and Corioles? I'm also interested in the play's conflicting characterizations Rome's inhabitants. On the one hand, they seem to be constitutive of the city, a sentiment famously asserted by the plebeians in Act 3, scene 2 (“the people are the city”). On the other hand, the people of Rome are consistently compared to nonhuman animals, including dogs, hares, and geese. While these comparisons are clearly meant as an insults, especially when wielded by Caius Martius, they also articulate an idea of the city, not as a human-dominated domain, but as a habitat occupied by both human and animal bodies. Failure to reckon with the ecological and political implications of co-habitation, I want to suggest, is one of the primary problems that grinds *Coriolanus*'s tragic plot.

Bibliography

Haraway, Donna. *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness*, Prickle Paradigm Press, 2003.

Ingold, Tim. “Building, dwelling, living: How animals and people make themselves at home in the world.” *The Perceptions of the Environment*, Routledge, 2000, pp.172-188.

Raber, Karen. “Animal Architecture: Urban Beast.” *Animal Bodies, Renaissance Culture*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013, pp. 127–150.

The Habits of Shakespearean Habitat

I am interested in examining the ways in which certain scenes in Shakespeare call attention to the nested linguistic and material/experiential qualities of habit and habitat. In particular, when we think of habits, we are aware of repeated actions that become a part of muscle (and perhaps cognitive) memory. These habits are ways that help one inhabit their habitats. But the habits are not always helpful, and, at times, blind characters to their habitats as well as to the social relationships built within those habitats. I plan to examine a few scenes where habits as repetition connect characters to their immediate habitats as well as scenes of defamiliarization where the habits are disrupted and characters are confronted with the dangers of habits. The princes' reactions to their Welsh cave in *Cymbeline* and Lear and Gloucester's experiences during and after the storm in *Lear* will probably be my starting points.

The starting point to this examination of habit, habitat, and repetition comes from *Walden* where Thoreau speaks of how he could find his way home in the darkest night due to his familiarity with the place, but he then pivots, in very Thoreau-vian style, to also critiquing that familiarity:

It is a surprising and memorable, as well as valuable experience, to be lost in the woods any time. . . .In our most trivial walks, we are constantly, though unconsciously, steering like pilots by certain well-known beacons and headlands, and if we go beyond our usual course we still carry in our minds the bearing of some neighboring cape; and not till we are completely lost, or turned round,--for a man needs only to be turned round once with his eyes shut in this world to be lost,--do we appreciate the vastness and strangeness of Nature. . . . Not till we are lost, in other words, not till we have lost the world, do we begin to find ourselves, and realize where we are and the infinite extent of our relations.

Possible bibliography:

Maybe that selection from *Walden*.

Rozzi, Ricardo. "Biocultural Ethics: Recovering the Vital Links between the Inhabitants, Their Habits, and Habitats," *Environmental Ethics* 34.2 (Spring, 2012): 27-50. [Note: I am a bit mixed on this article. It intriguingly argues that culture is a series of habits and sees it from an ecological perspective, but the concepts and terms, especially linking habit to culture seem more gestural than developed.]

Carolyn Sale
University of Alberta
For SAA 2025

Shakespeare and the Futures of the Sun

Within the capacious ideational matrix that Joe has created for this seminar, I aim to bring three propositions to bear upon the problem of the social imaginary of petromodernity as one that constrains “general intelligence.” One of our most urgent political concerns as humanities scholars should centre on the way that habits of thought, especially in the form of what prevails as “common sense,” constrain our imaginative capacities both individual and collective. How does our work with Shakespeare help us challenge habits of thought that do not operate to sustain just and equitable cultures, but rather operate perniciously to foreclose exactly the kind of ideational turns that would help us shape such cultures? I am thinking especially of the habits of thought that Jeff Diamanti and Imre Szeman write about in their “Nine Principles for a Critical Theory of Energy” (2020). Diamanti and Szeman contend that the infrastructures of oil and gas now “double social infrastructures—a veritable sublime that is both present to the subject it habituates and forever receding into spaces made deliberately invisible by private and state interest.” These infrastructures leave us living in “entangled habits and habitats calibrated to the expansive powers of petromodernity.” As Szeman has more recently argued, our habitats may change, but they won’t change for the better if our solutions to climate emergency depend on what the “meta-entrepreneurs” concoct. More hopefully, Cara New Daggett has argued for the massive transformation of our common sense that we might pursue in an orientation to the sun not merely as a source of energy, but as a sign presiding over the possibility of cultures of abundance. Resisting “calls for energy limits, for giving things up,” she would have us orient to a “glorious politics” of creative abundance in a vision that refers, amongst other things, to the “the building of sumptuous communal spaces.” (How about we start with the regeneration of our public universities in petrostates whose governments have explicitly punished these institutions for housing academics who dare to urge the necessity of energy transition?) I plan on taking Daggett’s “glorious politics” oriented to abundance to Ariel as a figure whose immense creative capacity is co-opted by Prospero as I ask how readings of *The Tempest* might help us mobilize Shakespeare for the reshaping of petromodernity’s common sense.

For the shared bibliography

Cara New Daggett, “A Politics of Solar Abundance,” pp. 93 to 103 in *Solarities: Elemental Encounters and Refractions*, eds. Cymene Howe, Jeff Diamanti, and Amelia Moore (Punctum Books, 2023).

Jeff Diamanti and Imre Szeman, “Nine Principles for a Critical Theory of Energy,” *Polygraph: An International Journal of Culture & Politics* 28 (2020): pp. 136–159.

Imre Szeman, *Futures of the Sun: The Struggles over Renewable Life*, University of Minnesota Press, 2024.

Richard Strier (U Chicago)

Abstract:

I am interested in the role that ideas about habit and related ideas about character formation play in *Hamlet*. The long meditation on nature and habit (as "second nature") appears only in Q2, the longest and probably the best early text of the play, but seems an irrelevance in its dramatic occasion. There is no doubt that we are supposed to hear the sound of reveling trumpets, so there is some point to Hamlet answering Horatio's question (though why Horatio should not know the answer is a small puzzle in itself), but there is no plot reason whatever for Hamlet to continue the thought into the matter of how individuals can have their reputations ruined by some particular fault that is out of their control. The fact of its immediate irrelevance lends it a particular interest in my mind. It means that Shakespeare wanted to give Hamlet this speech for thematic or characterological reasons. He wanted it in the play (at least at the time of writing Q2). But why? That is the question. Part of the answer will be Hamlet's humanism, strongly tinged by Aristotelian ethics. This raises the question of whether one's character -- formed by habit and nature -- can be changed. This is a major issue in Aristotelian ethical theory. The early speech suggests the deterministic view, which is close to Augustine's/But when the topic recurs in an actual dramatic situation, in Hamlet's confrontation of his mother, the picture is different. My paper will explore this tension, and will also consider how the matter of habit affects Hamlet's sense of his own character, and our sense of this.

Some Biblio:

Nancy Sherman, "The Habituation of Character" in *Aristotle's Ethics*, ed. N Sherman (1999), 231-60.

Jonathan Jacobs, *Choosing Character* (2001), ch.1.

John G. Prendiville, "The Development of the Idea of Habit in St. Augustine," *Traditio* 28 (1972): 29-99.

Paul Cefalu, "Damnèd Custom" in *Revisionist Shakespeare* (Palgrave, 2004), 145-172.

David Vaughan
Northwestern Oklahoma State University

John Walrond's Copy of *Catullus, Tibullus, Propertius*

In keeping with the seminar prompt, this paper explores John Walrond's marginalia in his copy of *Catullus, Tibullus, Propertius*. Details about Walrond are few: he matriculated at the University of Oxford in 1600 at the age of 18 and died on 25 June 1602; he is buried in the nave of the Christ Church cathedral; and his copy, a 1531 edition, survives with his marginal notations. The inscription above his burial plate identifies him as *literatura excultissimo*, which suggests he was a student renowned for his erudition. By examining Walrond's annotations, this paper will address two questions: how does Walrond inhabit his book? And, what might the habits in his inhabiting reveal about humanist education? For example, at line 34 of Catullus 64, the so-called *Argonautica*, Walrond writes *gaudia* in the margin next to the phrase *declarant gaudia vultu*. Is he merely repeating the word as an academic exercise? Or, because he also wrote *gaudia* next to the opening of Catullus 62, is this Walrond's exclamation of joy at a Catullan expression? By looking closely at such instances, I would like to consider how and where Walrond dwells in the margins alongside these poets. And, I would also like to consider what his dwelling there might reveal about the moral, poetical, and political habits of Renaissance humanism.

Project Bibliography

Grafton, Anthony. "The humanist as reader." *A History of Reading in the West*, eds. Guglielmo Cavallo and Roger Chartier, University of Massachusetts Press, 1999, 197-212.

Jackson, H. J. *Marginalia: Readers writing in books*. Yale University Press, 2001.

Jardine, Lisa, and Anthony Grafton. "'Studied for action': How Gabriel Harvey read his Livy." *Past & Present*, vol 129. no. 1, 1990, pp. 30-78.

Jensen, Freyja Cox. *Reading the Roman Republic in Early Modern England*, especially the chapter "Evidence of Reading: Commonplace books, Notebooks and Marginalia." Brill, 2012.

Miglietti, Sara. "What is an annotator?: Renaissance marginalia as a textual form." *Gabriel Harvey and the History of Reading: Essays by Lisa Jardine and others*, eds. Anthony Grafton, Nicholas Popper and William Sherman, UCL Press, 2024, 279-306.

Orgel, Stephen. *The Reader in the Book: A Study of Spaces and Traces*, especially the chapter "Learning Latin." Oxford UP, 2015.

[Daniel Vitkus](#) (UC San Diego)

“Uninhabiting the Land: Shakespeare, Property, Commodity”

With the wealth he accumulated as a sharer in the Globe Theater, Shakespeare purchased land in Stratford-upon-Avon, leased a right to collect local tithes there, and stockpiled large amounts of grain during times of scarcity. The archival record of these financial transactions provides a window into the early history of the commodification of the land and the exploitation of agrarian labor under early capitalism. The transition from feudal land tenure and ecclesiastical control over agricultural labor and tithes into the hands of private “investors” like Shakespeare meant that the land itself, as a place to dwell and work, was debilitated and understood in new ways: as private property, as an “income-generating” source, as a place where alienated agrarian laborers were employed, as an enclosed space or commodified thing rather than a life-sustaining habitat or “commons,” etc. The paper concludes by developing some fruitful connections between these transactions and the language used by Shakespeare (in *Richard II*, *As You Like It*, etc.) to describe the land and the ways it was controlled and commodified by the landowning capitalist class that Shakespeare joined.

Readings:

Frances Dolan, *Digging the Past: How and Why to Imagine Seventeenth-Century Agriculture*. U of Penn. Press, 2020.

Andrew McRae. *God Speed the Plough: The Representation of Agrarian England, 1500-1660*. Cambridge UP, 1996.

Charlotte Scott. *Shakespeare's Nature: From Cultivation to Culture*. Oxford University Press, 2014.

“*Hamlet* in the Waiting Room”

Late in 1926, in one of the first letters Antonio Gramsci writes from prison, he describes his journey to the penal colony on Ustica. The journey from Rome to Palermo to this island prison has taken just over a week. He writes that his health is fairly good and goes on to recount several episodes in the journey. The one that has made the most impression on him is the “nocturnal scene of our transit through Naples,” where we were “huddled together in the waiting room filled with phantasmagoric zoological specimens.” Searching for comparisons that might capture the humdrum mayhem, the best that Gramsci can come up with is that he has witnessed a re-enactment of the gravediggers’ scene from *Hamlet*. In the letters that follow, written from Ustica and then from the penitentiary at Milan, this impression of seeing a scene from *Hamlet* in the waiting room in Naples station ramifies. It grows into something like an informal set of strategies for transforming imprisonment into habitation (or at least doing so in letters—themselves a gesture of care towards his immediate family). To do so Gramsci cultivates what he describes as a certain “ironic spirit,” something analogous to Hamlet and Horatio watching the gravediggers, even as this is a perspective he takes not so much towards the world around him but with regard to his own habituation as he adapts to the realities of his imprisonment. Gramsci sets about a series of inquiries. He collects impressions / specimens, recounting his feeding a series of sparrows with highly individualized temperaments; growing plants from seeds that he individualizes by subjecting them to growing regimes attuned to the theories of different writers / philosophers he admires; meditating on the texture and color and fate of his skin as he is “bleached” by the bathypelagic ambience of his prison cell in Milan. I have a sympathetic fascination with these letters, written under duress, to and for his family, but also for himself, yet eager to be read as something like an experiential, practice / performance-based supplement to the more famous *Prison Notebooks*. I am interested also in how Gramsci’s recognition / use of *Hamlet* provides him with a *topos* or template for seeing patterns in things, a perspective that enables him to inhabit his “situation” (Despret), “milieu” (Serres), “mode of existence,” or habitat.

Bibliographical Items:

Vinciane Despret, *Our Grateful Dead: Stories of Those Left Behind*, trans. Stephen Muecke (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2021).

Bruno Latour, *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013)

Michel Serres, *Biogea*, trans. Randolph Burks (Minneapolis: Univocal, 2012)