Introduction
Theatre, Nostalgia and the Reformation of Plants

> I think there has always been in England an older England which was sweeter and purer, where the hay smelt better and the weather was always springtime . . . [an] age that never existed but that exists at the heart of all English poetry.[1]

The Elizabethan 'Botanical Renaissance'[2] was a movement that touched every sphere of life: the domestic and public; the theological, political and aesthetic; the literary and proto-scientific; and the mercantile, maritime and proto-colonialist. It was embraced by members of every social sphere and took place within changing definitions of the urban and the rural, thereby encompassing people who lived in each of these settings and those who – like Shakespeare himself – lived in both. That is a big claim to make for the role of the humble plant in social and literary history, but it is the claim I will be making in this book and other scholars have begun to offer similar observations.[3] However, I will be making an even larger claim for the complex role that plant cultures played in the (often ironic) nostalgias expressed by Elizabethan London's expanding population.

This is a book about Shakespeare, but it is also about a range of popular texts and cultural practices that are often overlooked by literary scholars: ballads, embroidery, the tales of child pedagogy, almanacs. Indeed, many of these texts and practices – common, popular, low – were engaged with questions usually deemed to be high, learned and elite: the theological and liturgical controversies of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the politics of state, England's role in the sea wars and institutional education (especially of those who serve the populace, such as physicians). Shakespeare's theatre – itself both low and high – was just one more early

[1] Orson Welles on Falstaff, BBC Interview, accessed at www.youtube.com/watch?v=zHyKbnw734Y.
[2] Leah Knight, *Of Books and Botany* (Routledge, 2019).
[3] Elaine Leong, *Recipes and Everyday Knowledge: Medicine, Science, and the Household in Early Modern England* (Chicago University Press, 2018).

modern cultural site in which plants played a central role in navigating the ironies of cultural nostalgia.

In early modern London, plants were available to everyone. Although they were cultivated and used with different degrees of sophistication, they nonetheless remained bountiful and fully populist: plants were a set of objects, ideas and practices that appeared in both low and high culture, by both the lettered and unlettered. Plants could signify social difference: Elizabeth I's famously expensive floral perfumes were unattainable for the average householder while women from middling to lower households perfumed their houses by strewing the floors with rosemary and lavender. But plants could also bring about social levelling: mourners of all classes bestowed posies on graves in equal custom; wildflowers signalled beauty and comfort to every degree of field walker. Although printed herbals frequently drew lines between the folk knowledge of herb women and the Latinate knowledge of compilers, the interdependence of these groups, and those who ranged between them, has been well established by scholars.[4] Shakespeare's theatre, with its aristocratic main plots and low subplots, its split seating plans, and its constant attentiveness to the social interests of all classes, was also a key site of early modern social mobility – at once capable of social division and social mixing.

Plants' widespread availability and superlative capacity for generating popular cultures that cross social categories also helped to determine their central role in the emerging early modern nationalisms. These nationalisms could take the form of William Harrison's 1587 celebration of English plants as superior to both those of early modern Europe and the ancient world, or the proliferation of plant and flower imagery in depictions of Elizabeth I, or the chorographic project of discovering England through its local plant names. Shakespeare's own plant nationalisms were subtle and varied. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, he affiliated the folk history and magical properties of love-in-idleness to the queen's body through symbolic associations at once complimentary and subversive. In *Cymbeline*, he gives the most nationalist speeches to the most dangerous cultivator of poisonous plants.

The 'belief' of this book's title encompasses emerging nationalist and anti-nationalist sentiments, found in so many of Shakespeare's plays in

[4] See, for example: Andrew Wear, *Knowledge and Practice in English Medicine, 1550–1680* (Cambridge University Press, 2000); Leah Knight, *Of Books and Botany in Early Modern England* (Routledge, 2009); Laroche Rebecca, *Medical Authority and Englishwomen's Herbal Texts, 1500–1650* (Routledge, 2009); Jennifer Munroe, *Gender and the Garden in Early Modern English Literature* (Ashgate, 2008).

speeches concerned with the allegorical, and often ideological, description of plants. Even more insistent, however, were theological (and sometimes specifically doctrinal) concerns over the changing meaning and function of plants as divine matter. David Lowenthal notes that, 'restoration has long been praised as divinely ordained. God created; repentant humans restore, not only repairing losses caused by the sinful corruption of nature, but improving on original nature'.[5] Indeed, 'the works of restoration are much worthier than the works of creation', argued the twelfth-century theologian Hugh of St Victor, for 'restoration heals and reveals, illuminates and demonstrates'. And yet for early moderns, the Reformation so shaped Edenic retrieval as to bring schism into the very processes of 'healing' described by Hugh. Confessional differences emerging in the sixteenth century would ensure that the process of defining how humans ought to interpret the divinity of matter would always contain within them the capacity for men and women to experience personal and spiritual alienation from the works of creation. In his study of early modern Edenic nostalgia, Robert Watson has observed that pastoralism was part of a broad primitivism characterised by 'the nostalgia that appears to concern a lost ecology' but also 'laments a lost epistemology'. In the theatre, Shakespeare was especially attuned to such ironies. He 'describes the chronic nostalgia for nature as a sentimental manifestation of Pyrrhonist anxieties, the suspicion that we can know things only as we liken them, never in or as themselves'.[6]

This book is also attentive to the unfolding of reformed theologies as they occurred in tandem with the development of natural science. For Peter Harrison, the growing assurance of the superiority of the new knowledge over that of the ancients' was

> accompanied by an acute sense of loss and a yearning for the certainties provided by the old world, now evacuated of meaning. This accounts for what is in many ways the most remarkable feature of seventeenth-century science – the unwillingness of its practitioners to abandon those things which, in their eyes, had given a deeper significance to the natural world. Theirs were not the activities and beliefs of men marching towards a brave new world of empirical science without a backward glance, but rather of individuals with an inchoate awareness of the full implications of their new readings of the world, and of the relative impoverishment of a view of

[5] David Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country: Revisited* (Cambridge University Press, 2015), 476.
[6] Robert N. Watson, *Back to Nature* (Philadelphia University Press, 2006), 77.

> nature in which legitimate knowledge was reduced to mathematical relations and systems of classification.[7]

Modernising empiricists were often the first to express nostalgia for the loss of a created world infused with mystical reality, a world made up of divinely ordained signs. George Herbert, both a poet and a country physician, observed that 'in the knowledge of simples, wherein the manifold wisdom of God is wonderfully to be seen, one thing would be carefully observed; which is, to know what herbs may be used instead of drugs of the same nature, and to make the garden the shop'. Like many of London's playgoers, the new generation of urban botanists demonstrated that efforts to 'recover simple experience out in the fields or the wilderness, to re-immerse oneself in the natural order, were partly fuelled by a craving for unmediated knowledge in any form'.[8] As is suggested by the period's persistent references (literary, proto-scientific, nationalist) to the Garden of Eden, 'the movement back to nature was partly a code for a drive back toward some posited original certainty – a drive baffled by paradox and by history, leaving the pastoralist merely posing with his back to nature'.[9]

For Mary Thomas Crane, the relinquishment of 'an intuitive relationship with the phenomenal world' was 'a catastrophic occurrence in late-sixteenth-century England'. She reads the period's great literary works as 'reacting directly to the loss of an intuitive connection with nature'.[10] The swift dissemination of proto-scientific models for perceiving the world was experienced by ordinary people – and learned writers too – as a shock that left them feeling distanced from the material reality they once perceived as mysterious. Literary works stepped in to heal this distance by reinfusing the created world with some of its former magic – but only ever partially and knowingly. Crane's reading of Shakespeare attends to this pattern of reclamation as it exists in the realms of mathematics and physics, not botany, and yet her study nonetheless finds that in Shakespeare's hands the experience of distance from matter, dislocation from past certainties, is one that is never fully healed by the artistic process. Crane follows Greenblatt in asserting that Shakespeare's stage remains 'emptied out' of the very certainties it seeks, recognising that the yearning for truth is itself the subject matter of drama; the thing looked for is never fully recovered but in registering such loss, the theatre makes of itself a cultural space 'within

[7] Peter Harrison, *The Bible, Protestantism and the Rise of Natural Science* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 27.
[8] Watson, *Back to Nature*, 3. [9] Watson, *Back to Nature*, 3.
[10] Mary Thomas Crane, *Losing Touch with Nature* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 8–9.

which it survives'.[11] My attempt to describe the breadth of this cultural instinct as it pertained to plants draws on a much longer historical practice that we would now associate with 'folk' strategies for interpreting the past.

Folk and Social Change

'Folk' is a term that belongs to modernity and there is little agreement over its definition among the scholars and artists concerned with modern revivalist movements.[12] Similar contentions exist among historians of the long nineteenth century over the extent to which the term 'Englishness' can be utilised in broader descriptions of modernity's various pastoralisms and primitivisms.[13] For this book, a study of late Elizabethan plant cultures, it would be more historically sensitive to utilise the cognate term 'popular', a word that has been used widely and, again, in highly contested ways, by early modernists for some decades already.[14] And yet modern definitions of folk and folk revivals offer significant opportunities for understanding a sprawling set of social impulses and artistic expressions emerging under Elizabeth I: instincts concentrated on plants and the shifting cultures around them; instincts to which all the writers of the period were attuned, Shakespeare most of all.

The two notable folk revivals of the early and mid-twentieth century were characterised by a middle-class turn away from urban, mechanised modernity and toward the local, rural and 'traditional'. These movements were in practice exercises in recording the musical and folkloric traditions that were deemed to be disappearing under the effects of those social and economic changes with which many revivalists took umbrage. But the ideological disagreements that emerged between different waves of modern

[11] Crane, *Losing Touch*, 145–7.

[12] Georgina Boyes, *The Imagined Village: Culture, Ideology and the English Folk Revival* (Manchester University Press, 1993).

[13] See, for instance: Jan Marsh, *Back to the Land: The Pastoral Impulse in England, from 1880 to 1914* (Faber, 1982); Robert Colls and Philip Dodd (eds.), *Englishness: Politics and Culture 1880–1920* (Bloomsbury, 1986); Christopher Shaw and Malcolm Chase (eds.), *The Imagined Past: History and Nostalgia* (Manchester University Press, 1989); Stephen Daniels, *Fields of Vision: Landscape Imagery and National Identity in England and the United States* (Cambridge University Press, 1993); Michael Bunce, *The Countryside Ideal: Anglo-American Image of Landscape* (Routledge, 1994); John Taylor, *A Dream of England: Landscape, Photography and the Tourist Imagination* (Manchester University Press, 1994); Judy Giles and Tim Middleton (eds.), *Writing Englishness 1900–1950* (Routledge, 1995).

[14] See, for example: Andrew Hadfield and Matthew Dimmock (eds.), *Literature and Popular Culture in Early Modern England* (Routledge, 2009) and Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (Scolar, 1978).

folk revivalists reveal much about the nature of these movements more generally. Mid-twentieth century revivalists accused their Edwardian predecessors of distorting the folk materials they accumulated because, it was claimed, they were themselves too conceptually limited by their own narrow social and political experience. Ideological arguments about class and political affiliation, about county boundaries and field methods, about taste and appropriation, about the ills of cultural atrophy and academic self-interest, all amounted to a discursive tension in which one or two key concerns were nonetheless shared by all: a valuing of 'traditional' cultural practices and a view that they were in rapid decline and needed to be rescued or at least recorded. How those traditions were to be understood and the best methods for their rescue were, and will continue to be, points of disagreement.

However else they differ, revival movements are interested in retrieving materials from history; materials deemed to be disappearing, even – and perhaps especially – while simultaneously recognising that the traditions never did belong to a distinct place or people or time. 'Popular' traditions are by their very nature evolving, subject to political, social and demographic change, open to influences from outside and from emerging technologies and techniques. They are anything but fixed – culturally, stylistically, demographically or politically. A comparable set of contradictory instincts is recognisable in late Elizabethan society: Shakespeare's plays appealed to playgoers' desire to retrieve popular practices that were perceived to be disappearing. But the plays also acknowledge that 'traditional' cultures in fact cannot be retrieved in any 'authentic' manner. In *The Past Is a Foreign Country*, David Lowenthal concludes that:

> All these efforts to save and salvage things past – to retain, preserve, reveal, reproduce, restore, and re-enact – exhibit two conflicting traits. The first couples ardent attachment to how things actually were with faith in resuming it. The second is that goal's utter hopelessness. It is impossible not only because the past is irretrievable and irreproducible, but because we are not past but present people, with experience, knowledge, feelings, and aims previously unknown.[15]

Lowenthal's magisterial overview of historical restoration practices explores the impossibility of bringing the past into the present in any authentic form. But his concentration on this project as flawed and 'hopeless' occludes the playfulness with which Elizabethans, and Shakespeare in

[15] Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign* Country, 494.

particular, mingled past and present cultural and literary materials with wilful – sometimes rueful – anachronism.

Human experience is in good measure constituted by an awareness of the self in time, of one's individual and collective place in relation to past events. This is as true for historians ('We bring what we know now to bear on what remains from the past to produce an intelligible history'[16]) as it is for the lived experience of all human beings (for whom 'representations of history' help to 'define social identity'[17]). The dual movements towards and away from various identifiable histories is one way in which we constitute and become aware of the present, defining our lives and our cultural identity in relation to what we do and do not want to retain from a rich and complex cultural heritage. My concern here is to trace some of the various threads of this dual movement of nostalgia and dismissal in the cultural life in which Shakespeare lived and worked and out of which he built his plays. In this sense, folk revivalism describes a collective gesture towards a set of beliefs and practices deemed to belong to the past.

And yet, these very backward gestures are themselves distinctly modern. They are the gestures of a young generation sufficiently affluent and literate to feel confident enough about their possession of present cultural norms and practices to dismiss them, and sufficiently able to search in the annals of cultural history for an alternative. They are the gestures of a generation that finds fault with what they perceive as the status quo but who, in the very act of retreating from modernity, reconstruct it through their assertion of a different set of cultural materials. In the very act of dismissing that which they define as the modern present, revivalists assert a separate possibility: one that, as the history of revivals has demonstrated, in time comes to be a defining feature of the very historical and cultural moment – the 'now' – that revivalists sought to deny. In the period with which this book is concerned, the documentary practices that would emerge under compliers such as Pepys and which became the basis of all modern revivalist practices had not yet emerged. Instead, we find nostalgic projects in the numerous tracts by Elizabethan travel writers, both local and far-flung. These works attest to the growing interest in documenting cultural practice – a form of writing made ever more possible by the technologies of print. Some of these tracts claim to record the discovery

[16] Catherine Belsey, *The Subject of Tragedy* (Routledge, 2014), 1.

[17] James H. Liu and Denis J. Hilton, 'How the Past Weighs on the Present: Social Representations of History and Their Role in Identity Politics', *The British Journal of Social Psychology* 44 (2005), 537–56: 1.

of new lands and new cultures (from the learned 'explorer' works by travel writers such as Richard Hakluyt to the humble European-tourist tracts of Thomas Coryat). Some instead seek to record local cultures for a future readership (William Harrison). But the observational and documentary work of travel writers does not reveal many of the more common practices from which early modern interest in plants emerged: these were often much closer to home.

Folk Plants

Building on the work of mid-century folklorists, Diane Purkiss, Wendy Wall, Marjorie Swann, Regina Buccola and Mary Ellen Lamb have in recent decades explored the growing Elizabethan interest in documenting tales and songs relating to fairies and the rural tales.[18] Tessa Watt's *Cheap Print and Popular Piety* has done much to advance our understanding of ballads and how oral cultures were affected by their use of cheap printing technology.[19] Phebe Jensen's work on revelry has confirmed the degree to which popular entertainment and pastimes often continued unchanged in rural areas even under the pressure of reform.[20] And Alison Shell's work on early modern oral culture has demonstrated the ways in which reformers took possession of the learned discourse and became increasingly suspicious of illiterate culture, defining it as backward and resistant to religious reform.[21]

We can say that modern folk revivals are broadly constructed along the following oppositions: low and high culture, plain and refined style, the local and international, the rural and urban, and the historical and modern. For modern folk revivalists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the music, art and culture in which they were interested as either practitioners, enthusiasts or scholars tended to gather quite neatly along the first of each of these opposing categories: 'folk' was in this sense

[18] Extensive information on early modern representations of fairies and Robin Goodfellow has been accumulated by Minor Latham in *The Elizabethan Fairies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1930); James Orchard Halliwell, *Illustrations of the Fairy Mythology of A Midsummer Night's Dream* (The Shakespeare Society, 1845); Katherine Briggs, *The Anatomy of Puck: An Examination of Fairy Beliefs among Shakespeare's Contemporaries and Successors* (Routledge, 1959), Briggs, *The Fairies in English Tradition and Literature* (Chicago University Press, 1967); Briggs, *The Vanishing People: Fairy Lore and Legends* (Pantheon, 1978).

[19] Tessa Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety, 1550–1640* (Cambridge University Press, 1993).

[20] Phebe Jensen, *Religion and Revelry in Shakespeare's Festive World* (Cambridge University Press, 2009).

[21] Alison Shell, *Oral Culture and Catholicism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge University Press, 2007).

low, plain, local, rural and traditional. But a number of the Elizabethan botanical texts and practices I will be examining position themselves across these categories in a far more complicated way. This is especially the case within the tension between Catholic and Protestant or un-reformed and reformed modes of representation. At the founding of the Royal Society, Thomas Sprat claimed that both the Society and the Church of England had reached back beyond 'corrupt copies and referred themselves to perfect originals': to the world and word of God himself.[22] In this axis of difference, the plain is not always historical: God's word might be the original source of truth but the word belongs outside of time; it is precisely the 'corruptions' of the recent past that reformers sought to purify in a decisively modern gesture. However, for numerous reformers who looked even further into the deeper past of the early Church, plainness could instead be a point of nostalgic return located behind the 'excessive' ornament and institutional complexity introduced by a relatively 'modern' medieval Church. Indeed, for many reformers, these two impulses – the retrieval of the pre-medieval past and its recuperation within the modern – constitute the kind of backward-looking gesture with which this book is concerned.

Early modern understanding of the emerging vernacular was crucially bound up with questions of origin, reform and plainness. As Robin Valenza has outlined, the 'vernacular' and 'plain' were often perceived as synonymous among writers and translators of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

> The first recorded uses of 'English' as a verb meaning 'to translate into English' were simultaneous with the first, fourteenth-century translations of the Bible into English. By the end of the sixteenth century, 'to English' had taken on the additional meaning of rendering into *plain* English. Thus the act of translation into the vernacular was represented as simultaneous with the act of stripping the text of its rhetorical flourishes and technical terminology and making it available in its purest, simplest form to the widest possible audience.[23]

It is to this assumption of an emerging 'Englished' literary canon as a plain, unornamented canon that Spenser refers in his apologetic proem of *The Fairie Queene*. There he defends his use of an allegorical model that was in

[22] Shell, *Oral Culture and Catholicism*, 74.

[23] Robin Valenza, *Literature, Language and the Rise of the Intellectual Disciplines in Britain 1680–1820* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 39. See also Ian Green, *Humanism and Protestantism in Early Modern English Education* (Ashgate, 2009).

the middle decades of the sixteenth century increasingly seen as anathema to writing in the vernacular.

Throughout the decades in which Shakespeare lived and worked, a particularly enhanced set of cultural negotiations was unfolding across a range of spheres and disciplines: negotiations that Shakespeare's skills as a writer and dramatist were especially able to contain and explore. Within the various 'folk' instincts that can be identified in the late sixteenth century, plant cultures were a unique category of cultural practice, belonging at once to art, ornament and symbol, and to the routine and messy aspects of daily life (medicine, food, industry, labour, building, gardening). Essential components of both material practice and representational form, plants were crucial to early modern men and women across all social strata and were increasingly bound up with various levels of broader social change. Following early twentieth century scholarship by Agnes Arber, plants are emerging as a point of interest for scholars in a number of disciplines. Andrew Wear and Margaret Pelling have described the central role of plant knowledge in early modern medical practice.[24] Emma Spary, Brian Ogilvie, Florike Egmond and Peter Harrison work at the intersection of plants and natural philosophy.[25] Londa Schiebinger, Deborah Harkness, Alix Cooper and Amy Tigner provide analysis of the role plants played in exploration, collecting and colonialism.[26] Highlighting the intersection of learned knowledge and the decorative arts, the work by Sachiko Kusukawa and Gill Saunders uses printed herbals to analyse the visual and decorative elements of proto-scientific discovery.[27]

[24] Wear, *Knowledge and Practice in English Medicine*; Margaret Pelling, *Medical Conflicts in Early Modern London: Patronage, Physicians, and Irregular Practitioners 1550–1640* (Oxford University Press, 2004).

[25] Florike Egmond, *Eye for Detail: Images of Plants and Animals in Art and Science, 1500–1630* (Reaktion, 2016); Emma Spary, Nicholas Jardine and James A. Secord (eds.), *Cultures of Natural History* (Cambridge University Press, 1996); Brian Ogilvie, *The Science of Describing: Natural History in Renaissance Europe* (Chicago University Press, 2006). Peter Harrison's corpus is extensive: this book is especially indebted to *The Bible, Protestantism and the Rise of Natural Science*.

[26] Alix Cooper, *Inventing the Indigenous: Local Knowledge and Natural History in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 2007); Deborah Harkness, *The Jewel House: Elizabethan London and the Scientific Revolution* (Yale University Press, 2007); Londa Schiebinger and Claudia Swan, *Colonial Botany: Science, Commerce, and Politics in the Early Modern World* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005); Amy Tigner, 'The Flowers of Paradise', in Barbara Sebek and Stephen Deng (eds.), *Global Traffic* (Palgrave, 2008), 137–56.

[27] Gill Saunders, *Picturing Plants: An Analytical History of Botanical Illustration* (Chicago University Press, 2009); Sachiko Kusukawa, *Picturing the Book of Nature: Image, Text and Argument in Sixteenth-Century Human Anatomy and Medical Botany* (Chicago University Press, 2012).

There also exists a growing body of scholarship on the relationship between plants and early modern literature and drama. Leah Knight's work describes the extraordinary degree to which plants and books were part of the same botanical culture and Rebecca Bushnell, Charlotte Scott, Roy Strong, Amy Tigner, Hester Lees-Jeffries, Terri Comito and Margaret Willes have examined the growth of gardening and husbandry manuals that were read both for information and pleasure.[28] Tanya Pollard and Mary-Floyd Wilson situate the Shakespearean theatre in early modern medical and proto-scientific discourses.[29] Elaine Leong, Rebecca Laroche, Jennifer Munroe have all demonstrated the ways in which communities of women developed learned plant knowledge as part of a literary, medical and domestic culture that was at once intellectual and pleasurable.[30] My own approach locates early modern plants within those sixteenth-century domestic and rural cultures and practices that were in Shakespeare's lifetime becoming part of urban culture through their reappropriation by newly arrived Londoners and through Shakespeare's use of them onstage. I seek to locate in Shakespeare's plays, and other popular texts, shifting beliefs about plants and their role in the social and religio-political life of Elizabethan and early Jacobean London.

Shakespeare's Plants

Unlike his fellow playwrights, Shakespeare remained a man of the countryside. He never wrote in the new London genre, the City Comedy, and, despite his regular presence in the capital, Shakespeare continued to invest his income and professional recognition in a civic reputation firmly grounded in Stratford-upon-Avon. More than any other dramatist,

[28] Terry Comito, *The Idea of the Garden in the Renaissance* (Rutgers University Press, 1978); Rebecca Bushnell, *Green Desire* (Cornell University Press, 2003); Hester Lees-Jeffries, 'Literary Gardens from More to Marvell', in Michael Hattaway (ed.), *A New Companion to English Renaissance Literature and Culture*, vol. 1 (Blackwell, 2010), 379–95; Amy Tigner, *Literature and the Renaissance Garden from Elizabeth I to Charles II: England's Paradise* (Routledge, 2012); Roy Strong, *The Renaissance Garden in England* (Thames and Hudson, 1979); Margaret Willes, *The Making of the English Gardener: Plants, Books and Inspiration 1560–1660* (Yale University Press, 2011); Charlotte Scott, *Shakespeare's Nature* (Oxford University Press, 2014).

[29] Tanya Pollard, *Drugs and Theater in Early Modern England* (Oxford University Press, 2005); Mary Floyd-Wilson, *Occult Knowledge, Science, and Gender on the Shakespearean Stage* (Cambridge University Press, 2013).

[30] Elaine Leong, 'Making Medicines in the Early Modern Household', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 82 (2008), 145–68 and '"Herbals She Peruseth": Reading Medicine in Early Modern England', *Renaissance Studies* 28 (2014), 556–78; Laroche, *Medical Authority and Englishwomen's Herbal Texts*; Munroe, *Gender and the Garden in Early Modern English Literature*.

Shakespeare's language was deeply invested in plants. As early as 1935, Caroline Spurgeon recognised that 'with Shakespeare, nature images are always the most frequent, especially those relating to growing things in a garden or orchard: trees, plants, flowers and fruits'.[31] Popular interest in Shakespeare has for centuries been attuned to the importance of plants in the dramatic corpus; in the last decade, scholars have also begun to take this fact seriously.

Ken Hiltner and Bruce Boehrer have both analysed the extent to which demographic change produced among Londoners a culture of nostalgia for unpolluted nature or, in Hiltner's construction, an un-metaphorised construction of nature.[32] Both scholars are ecocritical in their approach. My own work is more closely historicist, offering an account of the numerous popular practices, at once aesthetic and proto-scientific, religious and mercantile, through which early moderns used plants to structure their everyday lives. This book is concerned with recuperating some of the popular beliefs about plants and the ways in which Shakespeare's plays intersect with, absorb and explore such beliefs. In Shakespeare's plays, individual plant species held the capacity to signify experiences as numerous as child pedagogy and infant care, domestic decorative arts (embroidery, tapestries, engravings, cut flowers), plant tourism and trade, piracy, kitchen physic and household management. The plant cultures identified here can at first glance seem quite removed from actual plants. Embroidery practices, for instance, are rarely recognised as a form of botanical knowledge even though they required an excellent knowledge of plants' appearance, behaviour and symbolism. The cultural practices I will be examining all approached plants from a range of media: tapestries and painted cloths, religious iconography, personal adornment, literate and illiterate medical discourses, the printed herbal and the apothecary shop. In the same way, plants in Shakespeare's plays never exist in any purely material way but are framed by and communicated to early modern audiences through a set of cultural assumptions evident to them, though lost to us.

This book also perceives in Shakespeare's work a certain melancholy for the domestic realms of childhood and maternal pedagogy, where the popular cultures surrounding plants first emerged. Of course, plants were as much the cultural and semiotic territory of classical pastoralisms, of

[31] Caroline Spurgeon, *Shakespeare's Imagery and What It Tells Us* (Cambridge University Press, 1935), 16.

[32] Ken Hiltner, *What Else Is Pastoral?* (Cornell University Press, 2011); Bruce Boehrer, *Environmental Degradation in Jacobean Drama* (Cambridge University Press, 2013).

agricultural labour, of the civic world of commerce and the global world of mercantilist trade and privateering – and many of these feature in this book's account of Elizabethan botanical yearning and its anxieties. But even when they are evoked – such as the classicisms and mercantilisms evident in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* – they are curiously bound to maternal (or anti-maternal) figures such as Titania. And in the persistent concern with trees as a figure for kingship, Christhood and lineage in *Richard II*, the tree is frequently explored through a composite image of the ground or the English dirt as a mother that gives and takes life.

We do not need to evoke psychoanalytical discourses to appreciate that cultural practices and their deeply poeticised images are, when laid down in childhood, bound up with the personal – but necessarily mysterious – navigation of a developmental process governed by domains that will always be significantly gendered. For boys of Shakespeare's generation, the predominantly female world of Elizabethan early-childhood education – domestic, illiterate, concerned with folklore and household work – gave way quickly to the more masculine world of the grammar school, its rules and discipline, and its classical curriculum. This book's interest in the complex processes involved in the yearning for and rejection of the past, the simple, the rural, is always attentive to the means by which plants were used, imagined and constructed out of a past shaped by the experience of maturing out of a feminised childhood domain into a more masculine adult world.

Svetlana Boym's work on nostalgia notes that in fact the word is pseudo-Greek. The composite of *nostos* (home) and *algia* (longing) did not originate in ancient Greece. If we look back for a precise history of this term, we find, as Lowenthal also notes, that nostalgia was a medical disorder first diagnosed by seventeenth-century Swiss doctors and detected in mercenary soldiers.

> This contagious modern disease of homesickness – *la maladie du pays* – was treated in a seventeenth-century scientific manner with leeches, hypnotic emulsions, opium, and a trip to the Alps. Nostalgia was not regarded as permanent or inevitable, nor as part of the human condition, but only as a passing malaise. In the nineteenth century, the geographic longing was superseded by the historical one; *maladie du pays* turned into *mal du siècle*, but the two ailments shared many symptoms.[33]

[33] Svetlana Boym, 'Estrangement as Lifestyle', in Susan Rubin Suleiman (ed.), *Exile and Creativity: Signposts, Travelers, Outsiders, Backward Glances* (Duke University Press, 1998) 241–62: 241. And see also Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country*, 11.

Boym observes that both illnesses were 'reconstructive and collective'. The second type puts the emphasis on *algia* and does not pretend to rebuild the mythical place called home; it is 'enamoured of distance'. It is ironic. 'Estrangement, both as an artistic device and as a way of life, is part and parcel of ironic nostalgia. Its *nostos* could exist in the plural as geographical, political, and aesthetic homes'.[34]

This book explores some of the specific ways in which early modern interest in plants and the popular cultural practices that surround them were part of a gesture that might be described as similarly ironic. A longing for something already disappearing – the simple, the common, the local – enabled those in Shakespeare's theatre to enter into a communal experience of the now as a moment caught between generations, between shifting perceptions of cultural identity and personal integrity. This book begins by exploring the theological and nationalist impulses surrounding the image of the tree in *Richard II* and the extent to which the tree as a sign drew on popular cultural practices such as the ballad and the almanac. Shakespeare's history play is a meditation on the tree as an image for the fallen King, for Christ and for a fallen reality that forever separates men and women from the created world in which they wander, unable to read properly the mystical sign systems placed within matter by God. *Richard II*'s use of rustic, local and domestic texts (ballads, almanacs) as means of understanding the turmoil inherent in nature's cycles is a central part of the play's tragic vision. But the more illiterate or common texts on which the play draws often contained comic, even bawdy, ironies surrounding plants' capacity to signify.

In its own way, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* poses similar questions about the role of plants in nationalist myth-making. My second chapter addresses Elizabeth I's pansies as they appear in Shakespeare's work. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* especially, we see the queen's flowers emerge as sites for the interrogation of her expansionist policies and her efforts, via privateers such as Drake and Essex, to enter the global market in ways that, as Shakespeare's play suggests, are crucially embroiled in her own image-making as a monarch born from illegitimacy and reigning without issue. However, as much as this play constructs the pansy out of the competitive acquisitiveness that characterised the late-sixteenth-century sea wars, it also draws on emerging discourses of the local. Through herbals and flora, European states were all engaged in a reaction against the

[34] Boym, 'Estrangement as Lifestyle', 241.

surge of foreign and exotic plants, turning instead to an appreciation of local flowers and the women who collected them.

My third and fourth chapters approach the theatre as a space constructed out of other sites of communal identity in which plant cultures were becoming highly contested. *Romeo and Juliet* invokes a therapeutic and diagnostic community peopled by the familiar figures of the herb woman, the country friar, the apothecary and the learned physician. The Elizabethan medical marketplace was characterised by various tensions between an increasingly lettered and institutionally governed medical orthodoxy and the still widespread and much-trusted practices among common growers of plant remedies. As *Romeo and Juliet* suggests, the contradictory but often simultaneous instincts for nostalgia and reform could, in the realms of medicine, have deadly consequences. My final chapter examines the extent to which theological controversy shaped the use of household objects and *Cymbeline*'s debt to them. Domestic ornamentation (always profusely botanical) was in Elizabethan England a set of instincts and practices so bound up in the reformation of signs that the use and reuse of decorative objects such as tapestries and painted cloths must have frequently felt doctrinally challenging to householders. *Cymbeline*'s sophisticated interrogation of botanical sign-making as it appeared in decorative objects from households of all social strata opens up a way of understanding the theatre itself as a place in which the 'old' ways of reading plants could be experienced in an aestheticised gesture at once nostalgic and modernising.