

MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM (*comedy*)

fairies as figures of zoe in its vegetable and insect / swarming forms. Sexual life of flowers involves exchanges between plant and insect kingdoms: a promiscuity of life forms.

Colors, shapes, and streaking of flowers designed to attract insects to their cups and bowls, like runways for airplanes. Zoe appearing to itself: throwing up images for other creatures; *not* language; *not* a symbolic system (Lacan associates this order of creaturely imaging with the imaginary) -- but, still a kind of art-within-nature, an iconicity that inheres in zoe, and is thus immediately appropriatable by human beings for their own art practices. In species life, but as its surplus.

Peaseblossom, Cobweb, Moth and Mustardseed.

“Steal honeybags from the humblebees.”

Ovidian metamorphoses as mythopoetic hybridizations between plant life and human desire.

muddy mazes = action emerging out of ritual, and being sucked back into it, reverting to dance, benediction, wedding ceremony.

maze as path of movement, dance; nested proximities. (Line dance vs. circle dances.)

RICHARD II & HAMLET (*tragedy & history*)

The unweeded garden: not simply nature, but rather *human forms of life*, abjected, fallen into rankness and disrepair, because of a crime or transgression.

“The rule of the king is conceived as a form of totemic fecundity. All orders of prosperity are founded on a sexual basis.” [VS] AThe biopolitical element inherent in primitive sovereignty: the king embodies the life of the kingdom. “Blood” is one figure of this biopolitical element (Eric on *RII*).

When the king's fecundity is challenged (by a widow's remarriage, for example, or by the queen's imagined adultery), the commonwealth becomes abjected, the tie between the political order and the natural one becomes monstrous or out of control. *Bad plants* and *bad planting* are available as emblems of *bios politikos* gone awry, in part because of the image-making capacities of floralalia, themselves tied to fecundity.

THE WINTER'S TALE (*romance*)

rural elements: Maypole, sheep shearing, Whitsun pastorals

classicizing elements: Flora, Persephone, Pygmalion; stories of metamorphosis that recall *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

courtly masking: pastoral as way for nobility to dress up as natural.

[*theatre*: masterless men dressing up as princesses and kings as well as clowns]

All of these elements are both *decorative* and *structural*, citational and mythic.

Just as the play both *participates in* and *cites* classical mythology and rural holiday structures, so Perdita both sets herself apart from (reserves herself from) the roles she is assigned, and manifests a pastoral liveliness, a country frankness. Best of both worlds, she both is and is not a shepherdess -- she lacks the artifice of a court-bred princess, but also the crudeness of a genuine country lass. The figure of the founding princess brings into symbolic alignment (in what amounts to a mystification) of class structures.

The realignment of all these different layers and structures is a “form of therapy” (bringing icons into relationship with each other as doubles after the metonymic disasters of contagion suffered in the first half of the play).

But, gaps maintained between these different orders: “ambivalent nostalgia” (Lowell Gallagher). A play of temporal differences (the Chorus of Time), spatial distances (Sicilia and Bohemia), emotional estrangements (divorce, abandonment, quarantine). Do these gaps heighten or attenuate the effect of mystification? (or is it the work of romance to accomplish both at once?)

Romance is characterized by an ache, an arc, a choking up in the throat. “Their joy waded in tears.”

The Language of Flowers

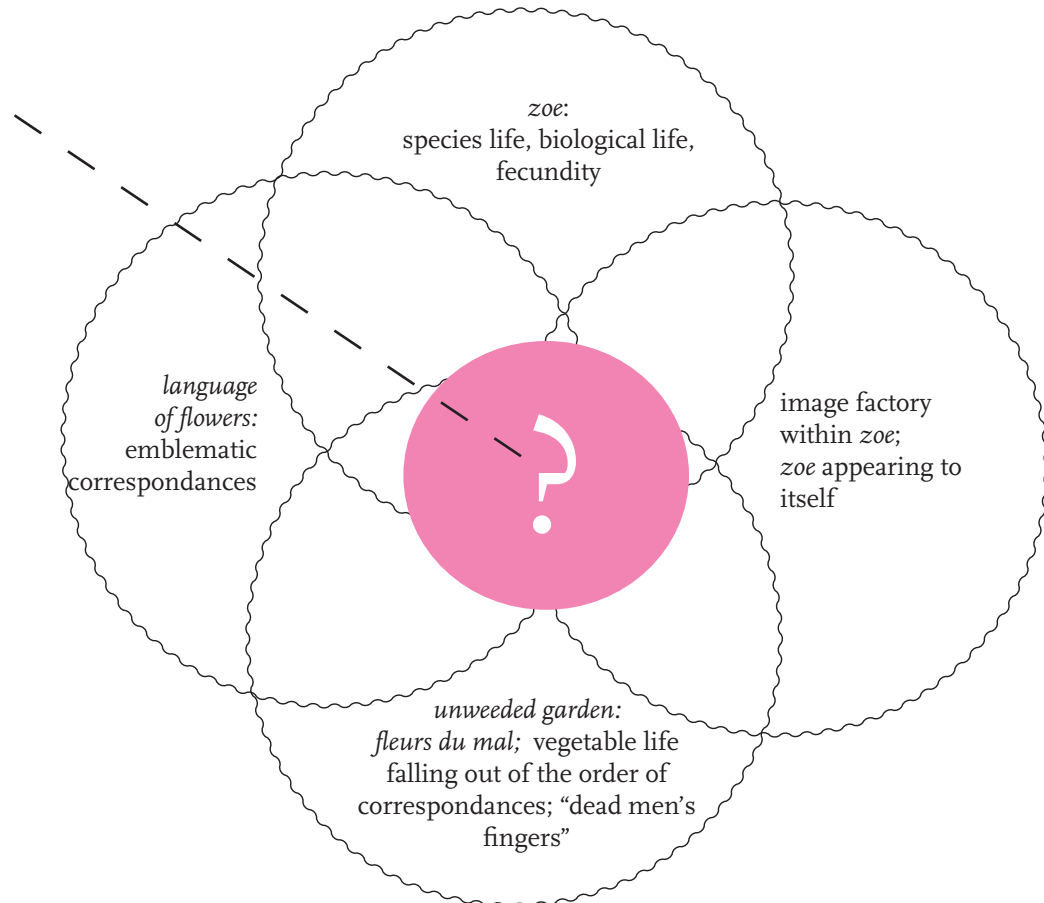
FINDING FIGURES FOR
SHAKESPEAREAN FORMS OF LIFE

Moments where flowers become figures for forms of life, moments of intersection between species life and political life; between creatures in general and the human creature:

Ophelia speaks in a language of correspondances, BUT as a form of madness.

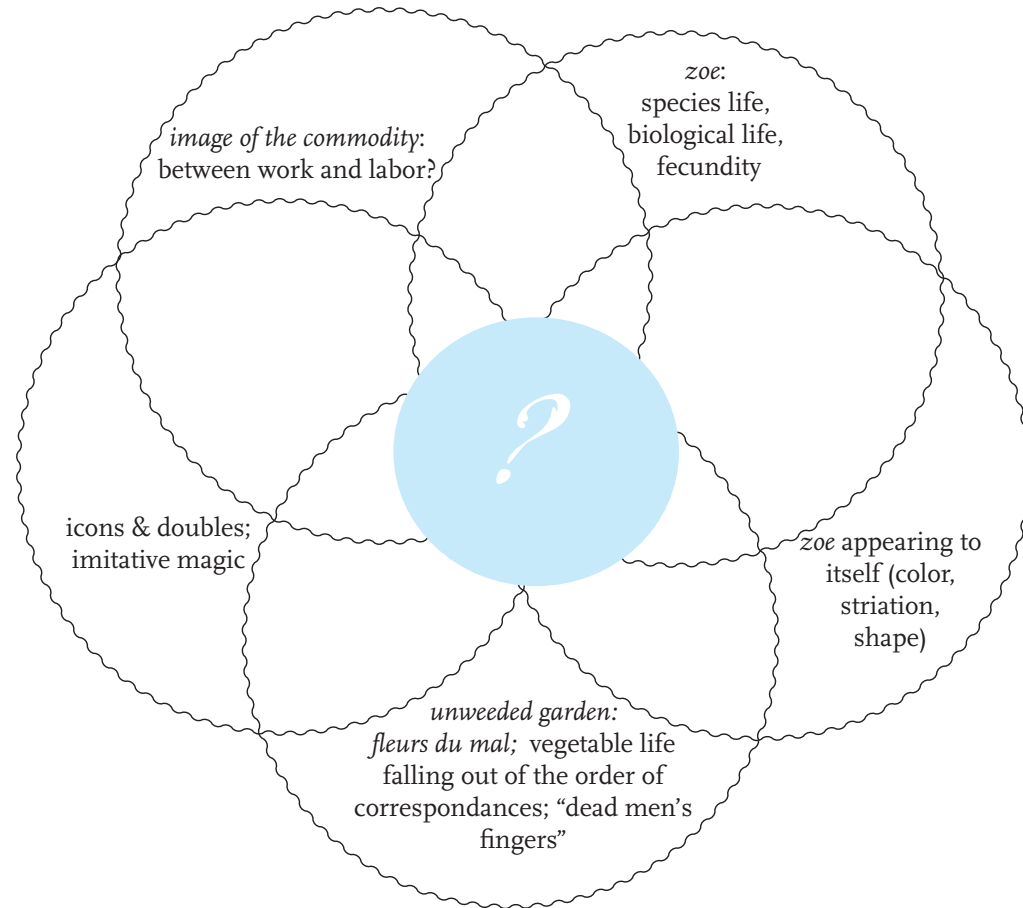
Shakespeare's garlanding of country crudeness and maidenly circumlocution in the pastoral death of Ophelia

Perdita's imagined bouquet (for Florizel) versus her real offerings (for Polixenes and Camillo)



The Language of Flowers

FINDING FIGURES FOR
SHAKESPEAREAN FORMS OF LIFE



Hospitality

THE POLITICAL LIFE
OF THE OIKOS

Rule of the king = totemic fecundity.
Fertility / succession.
Blood purity, blood line; the phallus.
Biopolitical element in primitive kingship.

Service of the hostess = basket fecundity.
Associated with fecundity of food, especially the plant kingdom (Fruits and flowers.).

“Lawful as eating”: restoration of the biopolitical order at the level of the *oikos*.

Hospitality is the political life of the *oikos* (*site of labor, fertility, consumption)
> characteristic of pre-political social organizations (Homeric households; the patriarchs of the Old Testament such as Abraham and Job)

> *xenia*, from *xenos*: stranger
> diplomacy, supplication, gift-exchange, marriage; management of local and international relationships
> *oikos*-bound, the woman has a role to play in the dispensation of hospitality. (Penelope; Calypso, Circe, Nausikaa, her mother Arete.)
> risks: the ultimate “hostess with the mostess” sleeps with her guests. Penelope and the suitors; Circe and Calypso.
> “guest or prisoner”: always the question of *xenia*
> Hermione’s reserve / Hermione’s forthrightness. With children; with guests.
> “entertainment”: “That is entertainment / That my bosom likes not.”

Political life (*bios politikos*): recall that Arendt associates politics with “speech and action,” that is, with public speech that makes a difference in an arena defined by human plurality. To speak in public is to take a risk -- and we see these risks in the forms of hostessing staged by Shakespeare. To speak in public is to “reveal” something of oneself, to have an image of the self appear to others, in excess of any rhetorical self-staging.

HOSTESS I: HERMIONE

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Hermione reveals her gracious reserve -- but to Leontes, she reveals sexual desire that leads elsewhere than him. The “horns” that he imagines sprouting from his head are a truly “dameonic” version of the Arendtian daemon (demon of the daemon?).

Hermione and the appearance of the self:

- > she is not “prone to weeping” (p. 50)
- > she must “appear in person” for her trial (p. 65)
- > as ghost/dream: “so filled and so becoming” (p. 73)
- > “flatness of my misery” (p. 69)

- > “How will this grieve you,
When you shall come to clearer knowledge, that
You thus have publish’d me!”

HOSTESS II: PERDITA

Here, too, a dialectic between reserve and forthrightness. She shrinks from her task of greeting the guests (just as Hermione tries to speak through Leontes rather than directly to Polixenes). She, too, is being tested: the flower exchange. She passes the test, but in allowing Florizel to transform the sheep-shearing festival into an engagement party, she ends up failing it after all.

Polixenes repeats error of Leontes -- misjudging Perdita as Leontes has misjudged Hermione.

Perdita repeats hostessing of Hermione -- overfrank, overwarm, with her guest Florizel.

Perdita reveals her natural nobility when she refuses to plant the hybrid flowers in her garden, despite all arguments by her guests to the contrary. Polixenes “sees” basebornness and ambition -- and witchcraft!

Hostessing does not belong to the nobility alone: we get an amazing portrait of Brueghel-like peasant hospitality in the image of the Shepherd’s Wife. Meant to contrast with the gracious reserve of Perdita (like mother, like daughter), but also gives us a glimpse of another “form of life.”

Labor and work in the sheep-shearing festival:

- > agricultural labor
- > but for industry
- > signs of the market: the basket of Autolycus
- > clothing: between the absolute consumable represented by food and the world-building represented by tables for Arendt.

HOSTESS III: PAULINA

“*my poor house to visit*”: Paulina as hostess

The niche of the chapel / gallery (at once a religious and a secular space?) is *the space of appearance*: the discovery space “behind the arras.” Hermione appears as pure image, as a statue or *eidolon*, within that space, thanks to the orchestrations of Paulina. This “publishing” of Hermione repeats and corrects the prior publishing of Hermione in the trial scene.

- “*If this be magic, let it be lawful as eating*”:
> imitative magic (magic of doubles, copies) corrects the contagious magic of the first movement of the play (Silver)
> but the doubles harbor a difference: the wrinkles of time, narrativity, “ambivalent nostalgia” that remind us of lost childhoods, lost children. (LG)
> *lawful* = not really magical; the miracle rationalized (but through romance absurdities)
> *lawful as eating*: the gallery is also a banquet hall; we find ourselves in a scene of hospitality; Leontes is Paulina’s guest (and prisoner), as is Hermione. Eating = regime of the *oikos*. Its procurement, its regulation, belongs to women. And at certain moments, to serve is to take risks, to publish oneself. Hospitality: to make food appear as something more than sustenance. “Reason not the need.”
> reinstitution of the political order must occur at the level of the *oikos*, hospitality, and the hostess, not just in relation to the phallus of the king.