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“I would give you some violets but they withered all”: Renaissance Collections, Shakespeare and the Troubled Act of Gathering

Дерой Еліс. «Дала б я вам фіалок, та всі вони пов’яли»: колекції доби Відродження, Шекспір і проблемний процес збирання.

У статті досліджується небезпечне ставлення людини до світу природи, що криється у прагненні збирати та колекціонувати природні ресурси та цікавинки. Авторка статті розглядає суперечливі прояви збирання в культурі колекціонування Англії доби Відродження як симптоми проблемного процесу, за яким стоять конкуруючі ідеології. Ставиться питання, чи н'еси Шекспіра можуть пролити світло не лише на фрагментарний процес збирання, але й запропонувати потенційні рішення, які можуть об'єднати їх з методологічним підходом “more-than-human”. Застосовуючи презентистську, екокритичну та біокультурну оптику, авторка статті висловлює міркування щодо того, чи можуть текстові репрезентації низки образів як окреслені, відокремлені та категоризовані приклади, що уособлюють ідею збирання, уможливити нове екокритичне прочитання Шекспірового слова. Таким чином, в статті досліджується, чи може біокультурний екокритичний погляд на текстовий ландшафт Шекспіровий творів виявити потенційні рішення щодо людських стосунків із природою у світлі нинішньої екологічної кризи.

Ключові слова: Шекспір, довкілля, Ренесанс, збирання, колекція, ботаніка, екокритика, біокультура, екологія.

Introduction: The Unifying Act of *Gædrian*?

Prior to the sixteenth-century, the word ‘gather’ was pronounced unpalatised and thus more faithfully to its Old

Germanic and Old English origins of *gad* and *gædrian* respectively, meaning "union"¹. By the sixteenth-century, several meanings circulated: firstly, "that part of a dress which is gathered or drawn in"; secondly, the "pluck (heart, liver and lights) of an animal, esp. a sheep or calf"; thirdly, to "bring (persons, or occasionally animals) together; to cause to assemble in one place or company; to collect (an army, a flock, etc.)" and fourthly, "to break (new) ground". We may see an association with landscape from gathering sheep to 'breaking ground', namely planting². We may further note a dual sense of coming together (through fabric, human and animal bodies) and violent separation; "pluck" referring to an animal's parts following its slaughter³. The word is inherently contradictory—it pushes while it pulls; draws together as it tears apart. This hints at the fractured nature of the act of gathering itself, one that may be considered as stemming from a 'hunter-gatherer' legacy and possibly offering a glimpse of our complex relationship to the more-than-human world.

The early modern period is one in which gathering and collecting botanical resources and curiosities flourished into what has been termed the humanist-driven Botanical Renaissance⁴. A swirling current of competing drives to celebrate and possess nature may be seen to run through this "culture of collecting"⁵. This article explores Renaissance England's historical context of gathering and development of the botanic herbal, garden and collection through examining critical narratives concerned with embedded ideological complexities. Moving to Shakespeare's

¹ "Gather, v.". OED Online. Oxford University Press, 2021.

URL: https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/77077?rskey=LmIyPG&result=3_

² URL: <https://www.etymonline.com/word/ground-breaking>

³ R. Surflet's 1600 *Maison Rustique* (translated by C. Estienne and J. Liébal) use the term in the sense of "You must apply vpon the head of the patient, the lungs of a sheepe newly killed, or the whole gather", while J. Phillips *Persian Travels* (translated by J. B. Tavernier) states "three old men take a Sheep or a Goat..cut the throat of it..boil it whole, all but the Gathers". Both cited in "gather, v." Op. cit.

⁴ Knight L. *Of Books and Botany in Early Modern England: Seventeenth Century Plants and Print Culture*. London : Routledge, 2009.

⁵ Marjorie Swann coins the phrase in: Swann M. *Curiosities and Texts: The Culture of Collecting in Early Modern England*. Philadelphia : University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001. P. 6.

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references to gathering within the plays⁶, it then considers how ecological thinking might help to inform new perspectives on both historical legacies and our present relationship to the more-than-human world. Tabitha Carless-Frost suggests that we can “[d]isplace the human through subtle perspectival shifts” and explore the “urgent need for environmental preservation through the age-old act of gathering”⁷. With this in mind, I ask: how might examining the troubled nature of the “age-old act of gathering” through firstly, early modern collector culture⁸ and secondly, Shakespeare’s references offer such “subtle perspectival shifts” in this age of environmental crisis?

Previous Exploration

There exists a substantial ecocritical body of work examining what may be considered to be the effects of gathering plants *en masse* in terms of deforestation in Renaissance England⁹, including concerns of biodiversity loss¹⁰. This forms part of a greater discussion of the period’s proto-ecological undercurrent. Randall Martin, Steve Mentz and Dan Brayton, for example, note conceptual shifts towards global climates and currents¹¹; Todd Borlik considers the Great Chain of Being as “tangled” with vertical and horizontal hierarchies and correspondence, analogy and metaphor rather than pre-Enlightenment taxonomies of difference¹²; while Tom McFaul

⁶ Including co-authored works.

⁷ URL: <https://tabithacarlessfrost.cargo.site/Article-Material-Stories>.

⁸ Swann. Op. cit.

⁹ Borlik T. *Literature and Nature in the English Renaissance: An Ecocritical Anthology*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2019. P. 16; Nardizzi V. *Wooden Os: Shakespeare’s Theatres and England’s Trees*. Toronto : University of Toronto, 2013; Barton A. *The Shakespearean Forest*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2017; Watson R. N. *Back to Nature: The Green and the Real in the Late Renaissance*. Philadelphia : University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006.

¹⁰ Hiltner K. *Early Modern Ecology. A New Companion to English Renaissance Literature and Culture* / ed. Michael Hattaway, Chichester : Wiley Blackwell, 2010. P. 563–564.

¹¹ Martin R. *Shakespeare, Ecology and Ecocriticism. The Shakespearean World* / edited by J. L. Levenson and R. Ormsby. London : Routledge, 2017. P. 609; Brayton D. *Shakespeare’s Ocean: An Ecocritical Exploration*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012. P. 1–2; Mentz S. *At the Bottom of Shakespeare’s Ocean*. London : Continuum, 2009. P. 3–4.

¹² Borlik T. Op. cit. P. 16.

conceives of the Renaissance world as organic and alive¹³. These authoritative works are, however, concerned with the wider historical context rather than the act of gathering in itself. This discussion therefore has more in common with critical analyses of collecting, including Marjorie Swann's examination of Renaissance self-fashioning through consumptive mercantilism¹⁴; Brian Ogilvie's investigation of cognition and collections¹⁵, Leah Knight's exploration of books and plants' shared materiality¹⁶ and Rebecca Bushnell's study of the Renaissance penchant for gardens outside of the academy¹⁷. Whilst excellent resources, these texts are not, however, expressly ecocritical nor focussed on gathering *per se*.

Definitions and Interpretations.

This article is thus itself an act of gathering. Whether in the literal or literary field, gathering is a selective process and any claims of exhaustiveness are to be treated with caution. In the spirit of discovery, this discussion takes an exploratory journey through the landscapes of gathering and collecting in the early modern period. *Gathering* and *collecting* may be used synonymously to describe the process of amassing disparate material items together. There are, of course, other related terms—foraging, amassing, accumulating. In this paper, *gathering* refers to the accumulation of organic living and non-living things and/or beings (namely 'natural'), while *collecting* implies an intent to keep and display (either privately or publically) those gathered items. Both are examined as driven by human action rather than as individually-mediated processes (such as the gathering of snowflakes on an eyelash or the collection of raindrops on a sill). A more-than-human context is later explored as part of an ecological reading Shakespeare's use

¹³ MacFaul T. Shakespeare and the Natural World. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. P. 16.

¹⁴ Swann M. Op. cit. P. 6.

¹⁵ Ogilvie B.W. The Science of Describing: Natural History in Renaissance Europe. Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 2008.

¹⁶ Knight. Op. cit.

¹⁷ Bushnell R. W. Green Desire: Imagining Early Modern English Gardens. Ithaca : Cornell University Press, 2003.

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of *gather*. The constructs of *nature* and the *natural world* are used as short-hand for the union, rather than division, of nature/culture. *Early modern* and *Renaissance* are referenced interchangeably to recognise privileged narratives embedded the latter whilst simultaneously drawing attention to their driving impact within the age.

The Early Modern Troubled Act of Collecting

The word *gather*'s entymological roots are in fact wound around those of *botany*. The same period first records the use in English of *botan-* (1600) from the Greek *βοτάνο* and Latin *botano* for plant via the French *botanique*, namely, “to **gather** herbs of *βοτάνη* plant”¹⁸ [my emphasis]. Renaissance England also witnessed a shift in the meaning of *collect* that too is linked to *gather*. A collection or “a gathering together”¹⁹ congregated around the church in the early middle ages, with meanings including a liturgical short prayer (c. 1225), religious assembly (1382) and “gaderingis of moneye” (c. 1384)²⁰. First documentation of the term *collector* appears in Elizabethan England and in fact begins with literature. Thomas Bentley's *Monument of Matrones* (1582) names a collector as a compiler of literary compositions in his phrase “To plaie the part of a faithfull collector by following my copies trulie”²¹. Margaret Swann argues that this shift in meaning is a direct product of Renaissance England's early modern collector culture²². How have critical narratives read the act of gathering and collecting and in what ways, if any, might they destabilise or inform a deeper understanding of the impulse to gather?

Assisted by the translation of classical texts²³, Renaissance humanist enquiry, the rise of the printing press and global

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ "Collect, n.". OED Online. June 2021. Oxford University Press. URL: <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/36261?rskey=olIos4&result=1>

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Swann M. Op. cit. P. 1.

²³ Including: Theophrastus' *Historia Plantarum* and *Causae Plantae* (c. 300 BCE). URL: http://www.artandpopularculture.com/Historia_Plantarum_%28Theophrastus%29;

exploration, the period witnessed a surge of interest in the botanical²⁴. Thus, in England, we may observe the expansion of the herbal. Richard Bancke’s first unillustrated *Herball* (1525)²⁵ was hence succeeded by Peter Treveris’ encyclopaedic *Great Herball* (1526)²⁶, followed by William Turner’s. Turner advanced the medium through incorporating his own empirical research rather than derivative “unlearned cacographees and falsely naming of herbs”²⁷. These ‘literary gardens’ developed in tandem with their organic counterparts within the university (see, for example, the coevolution of botanical garden and the *hortus hyema* ‘winter garden’ or *hortus siccus* ‘dried garden’ of pressed flower specimens²⁸) and private garden. In the latter half of the sixteenth-century and early seventeenth, authoritative collections continued to expand the genre, such as John Gerard’s *Catalogus* (1596) of 1033 plants purportedly growing in his own Holborn garden²⁹, Nicholas Culpeper’s later *Complete Herbal* (1653)³⁰

Pliny the Elder’s *Naturalis historia* (77 CE), available in *Pliny’s Natural History in Thirty-Seven Books: A Translation on the Basis of That by Dr. Philemon Holland, ed. 1601*. London: George Barclay, 1847–1848; Dioscorides’s *De materia medica* (c. 50–70 CE).

URL: https://archive.org/details/Dioscorides_Materia_Medica and Galen’s *De simplicibus* (c. 131–201 CE). URL: https://medieval.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/catalog/person_44299175.

²⁴ In mainland Europe, the literary botanical developed through seminal works such as Otto Brunfels’ *Herbarium* (1530). Selections available at

URL: <https://botany.edwardworthlibrary.ie/herbals/sixteenth-century/otto-brunfels/> Leonhard Fuchs’s *Herbal* (1542). Meyer, Frederick G., Emily Emmart Trueblood and John L. Heller. *The Great Herbal of Leonhard Fuch*. Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1999 and Rembert Dodoens’ authoritative *Cruydeboeck* (1554, 1563) Antwerp: J. van Der Loe, 1554.

²⁵ Banckes R. A Boke of the properties of herbes called an herball. London : William Copland for Richard Kele, 1552.

²⁶ Treveris’ *Great Herball* was the first to be illustrated, featuring over 450 botanical woodcuts. Treveris P. The grete herball whiche geueth perfy knowledge and understanding of all manner of herbes... Southwark : Peter Treveris, 1526.

²⁷ Turner W. *The first and seconde partes of the herbal of William Turner Doctor in Phisick...* Collen : Arnold Birchman, 1568. P. 3.

²⁸ Early botanic gardens swelled throughout Europe, including those of the University of Pisa (1544); Padua (1545); Florence (1545); Leipzig (possibly as early as 1542); Valencia (1567); Jena (1586); Leiden (1590); Montpellier (1593) and Copenhagen (1600). Like the accompanying herbal catalogues that documented their contents, these garden ‘pharmacopoeias’ were primarily concerned with supporting education and medical research.

²⁹ Reprinted in: *Catalogue of Plants Cultivated in the Garden of John Gerard, in the Years 1596–1599.* / Ed. Daydon Jackson, Benjamin. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1876.

³⁰ Reprinted in: Culpeper N. *Culpeper’s Herbal: Over 400 Herbs and Their Uses*. London : Arcturus Publishing, 2012.

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and John Parkinson's *Paradisi in Sole Paradisus Terrestris* (1629) and *Theatricum Botanicum* (1640)³¹.

As Leah Knight argues, “[p]lants and texts were both collectible objects, susceptible to encyclopaedic or selective gathering, while gardens and books were sites in which to store and display these objects”³². These literary and living botanical collections depended on: a) natural resources (from wood, metal, plant gums and ink to (upcycled) cotton and animal hides) and b) a process of gathering both plants and plant knowledge locally and abroad. There followed ideological implications and material impacts on both people and environment. Lynn White Jr.'s seminal article famously locates the roots of the ecological crisis within Judeo-Christian ideas of dominion resulting in anthropocentric privileging of human interest³³. Edward Herbert, 1st Baron Herbert of Cherbury, for example, reveals this assumption when he writes that “it is a fine study and worthy a gentleman to be a good botanic, that so he may know the nature of all herbs and plants, being our fellow creatures and *made for the use of man*” [my emphasis]³⁴. As may be expected in an age in which “natural philosophy was seen as a support to theology”³⁵, the church bells’ peal may be heard ringing throughout Renaissance collector culture. Various critics have, for instance, aligned the botanic garden as an attempt to recreate the biblical Garden of Eden³⁶. John Prest goes so far as to argue

³¹ Parkinson J. *Paradisi in sole paradisus terrestris, or, a garden of all sorts of pleasant flowers which our English ayre will permit ...* London : Humphrey Lownes and Robert Young, 1629.

³² Knight. Op. cit. P. 4.

³³ See Genesis 1:26–28: “...fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground”. URL: <https://biblia.com/bible/esv/genesis/1/28>.

³⁴ quoted in Knight. Op. cit. P. 37. Interestingly, Herbert also recognises kinship. It is also worth noting that Herbert was both devoutly religious and an avid naturalist. Despite the fact that his major work *De Veritate* (1624) was placed on the Catholic Church’s index of forbidden books for denying the Revelation in favour of deism, standard anthropocentric ideas of dominion over the Earth pervade his statement.

³⁵ Henry J. Early Modern Theology and Science. *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern Theology, 1600–1800* / Ed. I. L. Lehner, R. A. Muller and A. G. Roeber. Oxford : Oxford UP, 2016.

³⁶ Tigner A. L. *Literature and the Renaissance Garden from Elizabeth I to Charles II*. Farnham : Ashgate, 2021; Lees-Jeffries H. *Literary Gardens from More to Marvell. A New Companion to English Renaissance Literature and Culture* / ed. by Michael Hattaway. Malden : Wiley-

that rather than a pre-Enlightenment and Industrial Revolution push for 'progress', the early modern garden was a backward glance to the past, with the Age of Discovery and Exploration characterised by a search for the "scattered pieces of creation"³⁷. Leah Knight similarly notes an undercurrent of Ademic nomenclature in the period's collections that mirrors God's instruction to Adam to name "every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air"³⁸.

Alongside notions of dominion are, however, counter perspectives of religious veneration. A brief archival search reveals titles of disparate natural elements displayed horizontally as a literary treasure chest through which the reader might rummage: from "secrets and wonders of the world. A booke right rare and straunge, containing many excellent properties, giuen to man, beastes, foules, fishes and serpents, trees, plants &c."³⁹ to "wo[n]derful and strange things, as well of humaine creatures, as beastes, fishes, foules, and serpents, trees, plants, mines of golde and siluer"⁴⁰. Richard Robinson's *Vineyard of Virtue* considers nature as "true elect church of God vpon earth" (1579)⁴¹ while Levinus Leminus' reads the Bible as concordance, detailing its herbs, plants, trees and fruits⁴². Like the herbal and botanic garden, these gathered literary collections evade simple answers, fluctuating between nature as situated within and without religious experience, straddling scientific enquiry, spiritual reflection and a desire to explore 'God's garden'. Like the sixteenth-century rise of the *kunstkabinett* or *wunderkammer* 'cabinet of curiosities' displaying the strange, rare or beautiful,

Blackwell, 2010. P. 379–395; Prest J. *The Garden of Eden: The Botanic Garden and the Re-Creation of Paradise*. New Haven : Yale University Press, 1981.

³⁷ Prest. Op. cit. P. 1.

³⁸ Genesis 2:19 quoted in Knight. Op. cit. P. 58.

³⁹ Pliny the Elder. *Naturalis historia...* London : Thomas Hacket, 1585.

⁴⁰ Thevet A. *Singularitez de la France antarctique autrement nommée Amérique...* London : Thomas Hacket, 1567–68.

⁴¹ Robinson R. *The vineyard of vertue collected, composed, and digested into a tripartite order...* London : Thomas Dawson, 1579.

⁴² Leminus' *Herbarum* details the herbs, plants, trees and fruits present in the Bible for sacred and "better beautifying". Leminus, Levinus. *Herbarum atque arborum quae in Bibliis passim obviae sunt...* Drawn into English by Thomas Newton. London : Edmund Bollifant, 1587.

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these collections also reveal “a marked predilection for the exotic”⁴³, one which further troubles acts of gathering in the age.

“Indeed, in the seventeenth century, the exotic had become the object of desire” commanding prestige⁴⁴. Katie Whitaker calls the age a “culture of curiosity”⁴⁵ with what Knight terms a “category of bewilderment”⁴⁶. Shakespeare’s contemporary, royal gardener John Tradescant the Elder (1570–1638), for instance, not only travelled extensively collecting all manner of seeds, bulbs and plants. The list to which English gardens remain heir (perhaps at the expense of indigenous ecologies) includes tulips; irises; poppies; clematis vines; the larch tree; gladioli; wild pomegranate and lilac. Tradescant also gathered a mixture of the obscure and mythological, snaffling up shells, animals (both parts and whole), religious relics, a supposed dragon’s egg and a mermaid’s hand⁴⁷. These were displayed near his Lambeth botanic garden in a house collection echoing Noah’s known as ‘the Ark’, with public admittance for sixpence. Robert Hubert’s later literary and physical collection *Catalogue of many natural rarities* (1664)⁴⁸ including vegetables, sea plants, animals and minerals could also be visited for a fee⁴⁹. We know from the surviving catalogue that it included such novel botanical items as:

“A *Stick* like a *Serpent*”; “A *Blossome* of a *Suggar Cane*”; “An *Eare* of *Corne* or *Mace* of *Virginia* whereof one graine produces hundreds”; “A *Limon*, that represents both the secret parts of an *Hermapherodite*” and “A *Rose* of *Jerico*, that is an hundreds years old, and yet can open so wide, that it cannot well be put in ones hat, and the next day will be closed lesse then ones fist”⁵⁰.

⁴³ The Origins of Museums: The Cabinet of Curiosities in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Europe / eds. Oliver Impey, Arthur MacGregor. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2018. P. 737.

⁴⁴ Tigner. Op. cit. P. 170.

⁴⁵ Whitaker. Op. cit. P. 1.

⁴⁶ Knight. Op. cit. P. 19.

⁴⁷ URL: <https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/502056/retrobituaries-john-tradescant-forefather-natural-history-museum>.

⁴⁸ Reprinted in: Hubert R. A catalogue of many natural rarities ... collected by Robert Hubert... Early English Books Online. EEBO Editions, ProQuest. 2011.

⁴⁹ Hubert. Op. cit. P. 1.

⁵⁰ Hubert. Op. cit. P. 36–37.

Suffused as they with a mix of the imaginative and empirical, superstitious and mundane, Tradescant's and Hubert's collections paved the way for the present-day museum. Tradescant's Ark was expanded by his son John Tradescant the Younger then lost in a bitter court dispute to his former friend Elias Ashmole, who subsequently donated the collection to the University of Oxford. The former collection became the Ashmolean Museum, while from the later, sold to the then fledgling Royal Society, arose the collections of the British Museum⁵¹.

An optimistic spirit of discovery and its continued legacy obscures a rancorous underbelly of what Tigner terms the "horti-colonial endeavour"⁵². This may be viewed as one in which trade and market may be seen to be "emblematic of the English conception of possessing the expanding world"⁵³ and entwined with imperialism⁵⁴.

New World discovery was predicated on the pursuit of new routes for the spice trade; the slave trade facilitated and sustained the viability of colonialism. Along with general commerce, the spice trade and slave trade enabled the acquisition, transportation, and dissemination of the plants that began to populate the English garden."⁵⁵

Swann defines collection as a "form of consumption characterized by the selection, gathering together, and setting aside of a group of objects"⁵⁶. Consumption here extends to global mercantilism and colonial atrocities as part of a thirst for new lands and their inhabitants, as plants, animals and human beings were gathered into the engine of Western imperial expansionism. Gathering and collecting may here be seen to not only feed into the "Edenic fantasy" of botanical golden age, but also stimulate hunger for desirable botanical and natural world

⁵¹ Swann. Op. cit. P. 5.

⁵² Tigner. Op. cit. P. 159.

⁵³ Ibid. P. 160.

⁵⁴ Mackenzie J. M. *Imperialism and the Natural World*. Manchester Manchester University Press, 1990. P. 8.

⁵⁵ Tigner. Op. cit. P. 159.

⁵⁶ Swann. Op. cit. P. 6.

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commodities to feed a “growing population of horticultural consumers”⁵⁷. As Susan Stewart observes, “In acquiring objects, the collector replaces production with consumption: objects are naturalized into the landscape of the collection itself”⁵⁸. Absorption into the cultivated botanical landscape of early modern England allowed a stamp of ownership to be placed upon their contents. “By bringing all the plants ... into one place one could name them”⁵⁹ assisted by “colonial ‘experts’” to re-name indigenous flora and fauna as separated from indigenous knowledge systems⁶⁰. Viewed ecologically, this consumption is one in which nature is considered as human resource rather than as agential and questions of environmental justice intersect with racial and social inequalities. At the same time, these acts of gathering may simultaneously express celebration of the natural world and provide a foundation for herbal and scientific research from which we continue to benefit, revealing troubling seeming incompatibilities.

Counter Perspectives.

Brian Ogilvie goes so far as to label the classification and the catalogue of nature a “humanist invention”⁶¹. Against a cultural backdrop of renewed interest in Western classical natural history, global exploration and expansionist policy and conquest, Renaissance natural science has hence been characterised as, like a rat to its nest, feverishly gathering useful and the obscure. While early modern gathered collections reveal the various ideological tensions in line with their historical context, the human impulse to gather may be traced far further back in time. Cultural predilections for the ‘age old act’ of botanical gathering include Pleistocene rock art that “fits neither into the simplistic

⁵⁷ Tigner. Op. cit. P. 169.

⁵⁸ Stewart S. On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection. Durham : Duke University Press, 1993. P. 156.

⁵⁹ Prest. Op. cit. P. 54.

⁶⁰ Mackenzie. Op. cit. P. 3.

⁶¹ Olgivie. Op. cit.

categories of ‘foraging’ [n]or of ‘agriculture’”⁶² through to Ancient Chinese, Egyptian, Aztec, Indian, Sumerian and Assyrian, later Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman compilations and both Islamic and Christian monastic herbals (as concerned with plants’ utility) and *florilegia* (ornamental features) of the Middle Ages⁶³. Furthermore, it may not be considered to be a uniquely human endeavour. Shared behaviours with certain rodents, squirrels, birds and insects as well as indicate our neurological similarities⁶⁴. While this discussion lacks the scope to adequately discuss such biological factors in depth, I suggest that the human urges to explore, gather, understand and display is linked to biocultural evolutionary perspectives on wayfinding, curiosity, survival as well as domination⁶⁵. It is with this biological and ecological perspective in mind that I consider Shakespeare’s references to gathering. How might Shakespeare’s plays comment on gathering’s multifarious tensions or offer ecologically-situated counter narratives?

“Like to a summer’s corn by tempest lodged”: Gathering Shakespeare’s References

Shakespeare ecocritic Simon Estok argues that:

[...] scholarly work that looks at themes and counts image clusters is certainly useful concordance work, but it is unlikely to do very much actually to make the world a better place. Similarly, scholarly work that observes matters of metaphor, while very likely

⁶² Veth P., Celie M., Heaney P., Ouzman S. Plants before farming: The Deep History of Plant-use and Representation in the Rock Art of Australia’s Kimberley Region. *Quaternary International*. 2018. V. 489 (30), P. 26–45.

⁶³ Prescott W. H. History of the Conquest of Mexico. New York : Harper and Brothers, 1843. P. 185–240.

⁶⁴ Recent neuroimaging of the human brain, for example, suggests that human aesthetic appreciation centres on a mesolimbic reward circuit assessing sensory objects’ hedonic value, something we may share with other species. Skov M. Aesthetic Appreciation: The View From Neuroimaging. *Empirical Studies of the Arts*. 2019. V. 37 (2), P. 222.

⁶⁵ See, for example, biophilic analyses in Kellert S. R. Nature by Design: The Practice of Biophilic Design. London: Yale University Press, 2018; Wilson E. O. Biophilia. Cambridge, M.A. : Yale University Press, 1984.

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to offer interesting takes on a given author's artistic dexterity, seems very unlikely to do much in the real world⁶⁶.

Estok is referring to the urgent environmental crisis and the need to take immediate and radical action, including through revised, impactful critical perspectives. At the time of writing, it is estimated that 1.7 Earths are required in order to sustain the growing human population. Over thirteen million hectares of forests have been cut down or burned in the past *six months* and one in four species is at critical risk of extinction, primarily due to deforestation and habitat loss⁶⁷. Now hardly seems the time to take a leisurely amble through the textual fields of image clusters and metaphor, especially not if we purport to call that frolic ecocritical. I wonder, however, if we might be somewhat 'hoisting ourselves with our own petard' when discounting the potential ecocritical value of examining such literary gathered bouquets. Offering her gathered flowers Ophelia states: "I would give you some violets, but they withered all when my father died"⁶⁸. The symbolic meaning of Ophelia's plants in light of Renaissance convention has of course been extensively discussed: rosemary for remembrance, violets for faithfulness and so forth⁶⁹. Rather than analysing authorial intent or historicist debate as to plants themselves, discussion now takes a presentist ecocritical look at Shakespeare's references to gathering

One of the major limitations of concordance work is that word searches yield only exact results, superficially raking the textual topsoil and failing to reveal deeper layers of bedrock. It is impossible for any index or table to possibly contain the full extent of what may be present within, around, in-between and throughout the text's complex mental landscape as it blurs between the printed word and the mind's eye. So it is with

⁶⁶ Estok S. C. *Theory from the Fringes: Animals, Ecocriticism, Shakespeare*. Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal. 2007. V. 40 (1). P. 70.

⁶⁷ URL: <https://www.theworldcounts.com/>.

⁶⁸ Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet* in: *The Arden Shakespeare Complete Works* / A. Thompson, D. S. Kastan and H. R. Woudhuysen eds. London : Bloomsbury, 2011. 4.5. 181–183

⁶⁹ From flowers to trees to poisonous herbs, Shakespeare's plant symbolism is detailed in relation to both Elizabethan and classical beliefs in numerous works from the nineteenth-century onwards. For a recent comprehensive source, see: Thomas V., Faircloth N. *Shakespeare's Plants and Gardens: A Dictionary*. London : Bloomsbury, 2014.

gathering. The word appears in various iterations of its root form forty-one times in the Arden *Complete Works*, but conceptually far more. Botanically speaking, Perdita's gathered bouquet of "middle summer"⁷⁰, Marina's "yellows, / The purple violets, and marigolds"⁷¹ and Ophelia's "fantastic garlands"⁷² all *imply* rather than *state* the action of gathering. If we are to include garlands as an end-product of the gathering process or herbs, then the list would become significantly longer. What of fruit? To "shake down mellow fruit"⁷³ surely implies the subsequent action of gathering them back up. The Bishop of Ely's strawberries in *Richard III* have been gathered from his garden; both figs and asp together in *Antony and Cleopatra*. Similarly, in an agricultural context, there are the "bushels of chaff"⁷⁴, the reaped corn⁷⁵ the "peck of Provender"⁷⁶. Moving to the more-than-human, animal gathering activities are visible in the "swan's nest"⁷⁷, "jay's nest"⁷⁸, "puttock's nest"⁷⁹ and the bee "tolling from every flower"⁸⁰. Like a lose thread once unstitched, the list continues to unravel.

Where Shakespeare directly uses the word 'gather' it is therefore both in an array of contexts in keeping with the aforementioned early modern usage as well as in a manner suggesting complex ecological entanglements. Take, for example, Warwick's gruesome description of murdered Gloucester's beard that "Like to a summer's corn by tempest lodged" is gathered together, matted against his strangled face⁸¹. The further juxtaposition here between the sublime and darkly beautiful image of corn tossed aside by a violent summer's storm also combines the human and landscape. This complexity is

⁷⁰ Arden. Op. cit. *The Winter's Tale*, 4.4.107.

⁷¹ Arden. Op. cit. *Pericles*, 4.1.15.

⁷² Arden. Op. cit. *Hamlet*, 4.7.168.

⁷³ Arden. Op. cit. *Coriolanus*, 4.6.1010.

⁷⁴ Arden. Op. cit. *Merchant of Venice*, 1.1.116.

⁷⁵ Arden. Op. cit. *Measure for Measure*, 4.1.76.

⁷⁶ Arden. Op. cit. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 4.1.31.

⁷⁷ Arden. Op. cit. *Cymbeline*, 3.4.139.

⁷⁸ Arden. Op. cit. *The Tempest*, 2.2.167.

⁷⁹ Arden. Op. cit. *Henry VI Part II*, 3.2.191.

⁸⁰ Arden. Op. cit. *Henry VI Part II*, 4.5.74.

⁸¹ Arden. Op. cit. *Henry IV Part II* 3.2.176.

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typical of the way in which Shakespeare's plays approach gathering in general. Like in the above example of Cleopatra's deadly asp hidden within the basket of sweet figs, things are seldom simply good or bad: "Thus may we gather honey from the weed / And make a moral of the devil himself"⁸².

Returning to the evolutionary link of language's development with landscape⁸³, the image of gathering is like to that of an impending storm, gathering clouds over the horizon. There is something ominous in gathering, a brooding threat that builds tension within the dialogue. The echoed prophesy of "foul sin gathering head"⁸⁴ in "The time will come, that foul sin, gathering head, / Shall break into corruption"⁸⁵ rumbles with an internal thunder. The image is frequently employed in the storm of war: "gather head"⁸⁶; "The Goths have gathered head"⁸⁷; "gather our soldiers, scattered and dispersed"⁸⁸; "gather we our forces"⁸⁹; "an army gathered"⁹⁰; "gather more"⁹¹. The dramatic build of the overhead storm may also be expressed conceptually. In the same manner that Prospero "called forth the mutinous winds"⁹², he expresses the play's climactic final in terms of "Now does my project gather to a head"⁹³. In a more subtly dangerous fashion veiled in innocence, the King instructs Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to draw Hamlet "on to pleasures and to gather / So much as from occasion you may glean"⁹⁴.

Taking an ecofeminist perspective, the storm may be viewed as a sign of feminised nature's hostility. Like the physical storm

⁸² Arden. Op. cit. *Henry V*, 4.1.12.

⁸³ There is not sufficient scope here to explore biocultural approaches to language but for a helpful summary see: Boyd B. *Why Lyrics Last: Evolution, Cognition, and Shakespeare's Sonnets*. Cambridge, MA : Harvard University Press, 2012.

⁸⁴ Arden. Op. cit. *Richard II*, 4.1.58.

⁸⁵ Arden. Op. cit. *Henry IV Part II*, 3.2.76–77.

⁸⁶ Arden. Op. cit. *Henry VI Part II*, 4.5.9.

⁸⁷ Arden. Op. cit. *Titus Andronicus*, 4.4.63.

⁸⁸ Arden. Op. cit. *Henry VI Part I*, 1.5.76.

⁸⁹ Arden. Op. cit. *Henry VI Part I*, 3.2.100.

⁹⁰ Arden. Op. cit. *Henry VI Part II*, 4.6.11.

⁹¹ Arden. Op. cit. *King Lear*, 4.4.34.

⁹² Arden. Op. cit. *The Tempest*, 5.1.142.

⁹³ Arden. Op. cit. *The Tempest*, 5.1.1.

⁹⁴ Arden. Op. cit. *Hamlet*, 2.2.15–16.

that frequently foreshadows catastrophic events in the plays, a messenger reports that "the French have gathered head / The Dolphin, with one Joan de Puzel joined – / A holy prophetess, new risen up"⁹⁵. The gathered army precedes the greater danger—Joan rising up as in from hell's depths. Joan as woman/nature is untamed, unpredictable, to be feared, mistrusted and brought under control. Returning to gathering in a botanical sense, this fear of the feminine may also be viewed in the depiction of *Cymbeline's* Queen act of gathering noxious plants. She instructs: "Whiles yet the dew's on ground, gather those flowers"⁹⁶. She then shortly reveals (and lies) to Cornelius: "I will try the forces / Of these thy compounds on such creatures as / We count not worth the hanging (but none human) / To try the vigour of them, / And apply allayments to their act, / And by them gather their several virtues, and effects"⁹⁷. The Queen's animal testing (and murderous intent) counter notions of feminised nature as nurturing and healing. Similarly, in *A Merchant of Venice*, Jessica refers to the herbs' healing qualities, expressing romantically to Lorenzo that "In such a night, / Medea gathered the enchanted herbs / That did renew old Aeson"⁹⁸. As critics such as Elizabeth Hutchinson have noted, "there is an obvious dark undertone to Jessica's speech here – the magic Medea uses to rejuvenate Aeson will be withheld to kill Pelias"⁹⁹.

Straying briefly from the plays, rapacious female sexual appetite is personified in Venus' seduction of Adonis as an act of gathering: "Fair flowers that are not gather'd in their prime / Rot, and consume themselves in little time"¹⁰⁰. This is a reversal of the uncomfortable early modern conceit depicting virginity as a flower to be plucked, as visible in the *Two Noble Kinsmen*. While Emilia prays to chaste Diana, a rose tree grows with a single bloom on it. "Emilia takes this to mean she will be able to remain

⁹⁵ Arden. Op. cit. *Henry VI Part I*, 1.4.99–101.

⁹⁶ Arden. Op. cit. *Cymbeline*, 1.6.1.

⁹⁷ Arden. Op. cit. *Cymbeline*, 1.6.18–23.

⁹⁸ Arden. Op. cit. *Merchant of Venice*, 5.1.12–14.

⁹⁹ Hutchinson E. Medea and "The Merchant of Venice". *Studies in English Literature 1500–1900*. 2020. V. 60 (2). P. 326.

¹⁰⁰ Arden. Op. cit. *Venus and Adonis*, 131–132.

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a virgin, “unpluck’d”¹⁰¹. The rose then falls. Returning to *Pericles’ Marina* as she gathers flowers before her capture, we may be reminded of Persephone, daughter of Demeter, goddess of the harvest and by extension, perhaps, gathering. Abducted by Hades as she gathers flowers and imprisoned in the underworld, Persephone is forced to spend one-third of the year beneath the Earth’s depths after eating one seed of the pomegranate. Like similar ‘fallen woman’ narratives following the taste of forbidden fruit, feminised nature may be viewed as ‘pure’ whilst ‘untilled’, sullied once sexually active. Remembering Cleopatra’s asp hidden in the basket of figs, dangerous femininity is here perceived as a hidden terror. Is female sexuality, like the Earth’s fecundity, both desired and feared? Will Emilia, once ‘pluck’d’, lose her innocence and become like Tamora and the Queen in *Cymbeline*, dangerous? Has the land, once tilled, felled, mined and become barren, lost its usefulness and beauty and is to be abandoned in favour of the next ‘virgin’ pasture?

Gathering is also an act of survival and source of sustenance mingled with danger. To “gather strength”¹⁰² or have “gather’d flocks of friends”¹⁰³ may sound friendly and inviting, but here relates to war. Joan mixes the two with an additional reference to agricultural bounty when she instructs soldiers to disguise themselves as corn-sellers: “Talk like the vulgar sort of market men / That come to gather money for their corn”¹⁰⁴. A perverse inversion of Demeter may here intermingle with Joan’s appropriation of nourishing corn for bloody war. From the Earth we gather food and resources—both are risky. Half way down the cliff, describes Edgar, “Hangs one that gathers samphire, dreadful trade”¹⁰⁵. It is unsurprising that by extension of the process of natural resource accumulation, the word is also associated with money. Hence, we “gather wealth”¹⁰⁶ or “gather in some

¹⁰¹ URL: <https://public.wsu.edu/~delahoyd/shakespeare/tnkingsmen5.html>

¹⁰² Arden. Op. cit. *Henry Sixth Part I*, 5.4.73.

¹⁰³ Arden. Op. cit. *Henry Sixth Part II*, 2.1.112.

¹⁰⁴ Arden. Op. cit. *Henry Sixth Part I*, 3.2.5.

¹⁰⁵ Arden. Op. cit. *King Lear*, 4.6.14–15.

¹⁰⁶ Arden. Op. cit. *Henry Sixth Part II* 4.10.21.

debts”¹⁰⁷ and taxes: “Among the people gather up a tenth”¹⁰⁸. Where the term is used in a straight-forward sense, it often invites ideological and ecological complications. Characters may have “gather’d honour”¹⁰⁹ or “gathered a wise council to them”¹¹⁰ like sheep to a shepherd. Whether these honours or council are revealed to be honourable or just is a matter of perspective, one which Shakespeare’s text frequently leaves open-ended.

Perhaps the most powerful way in which Shakespeare’s plays can be read ecologically through the act of gathering is through dissolution of human identity into the more-than-human. In *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, for example, the Gaoler’s Daughter’s wooer reports that fearing his execution, “she must gather flowers to bury you”¹¹¹. While gathering flowers as a mourning ritual, her descent to madness mirrors that of Ophelia’s. As the Gaoler’s Daughter collects rushes:

The place

Was knee-deep where she sat; her careless tresses
A wreath of bullrush rounded; about her stuck
 Thousand fresh-water flowers of several colours,
That methought she appeared like the fair nymph
That feeds the lake with waters, or as Iris
Newly dropped down from heaven. Rings she made
Of rushes that grew by and to ‘em spoke
The prettiest posies ...¹¹²

In the interrupted, intermediary spaces between sanity and madness, she blends with the natural world as well as the heavenly. Her hair is wreathed around bulrushes, which, together with rushes, coloured flowers and water combine like impressionist dabs on a canvass—individual but melding into one form. She is almost transfigured into Iris; perhaps Goddess of the Rainbow, perhaps the ‘material’ rainbow, more likely both. As she braids the plants into rings she speaks to them, in ‘posies’ no

¹⁰⁷ Arden. Op. cit. *The Taming of the Shrew* 4.4.25.

¹⁰⁸ Arden. Op. cit. *Henry Sixth Part I* 5.4.93.

¹⁰⁹ Arden. Op. cit. *Cymbeline* 3.1.71.

¹¹⁰ Arden. Op. cit. *Henry VIII*, 2.4.49.

¹¹¹ Arden. Op. cit. *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, 4.1.78.

¹¹² Arden. Op. cit. *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, 4.1.83–90.

less. Word and bouquet are one, just as her identity and physical form dissolve into the more-than-human.

Conclusion: “Staying with the Trouble” of Gathering

Ecologically speaking, all forms of life modify their contexts¹¹³. Like Palamon “gone to th’wood to gather mulberries”¹¹⁴, the human impulse (and indeed need) to forage may be considered to be deeply embedded. Ecological imbalance, becomes a concern however, if one particular species’ population swells to the point of domination where gathering outstrips supply, or if the *method* (such as by impactful fossil-fuelled industrialised processes) *razes* or *clears*, altogether destroying delicate ecological balance¹¹⁵. To quote Donna Haraway on the complexities underpinning the ecological crisis, “staying with the trouble”¹¹⁶ of gathering enables us to view contradictions and multiplicities without erasing them in favour of a tidier, streamlined but simplistic conclusion failing to account for a network of influences. Haraway advocates for applying *tentacular thinking* to what she terms our current *Chthulucene* age; a form of ecological systems thinking whereby we think *post* posthumously about human impact upon the environment.

Thinking ‘tentacularly’, we may thus consider apparently contradictory attitudes to nature in the early modern collection—veneration, excitement, celebration of unusual and distinct forms of life and the desire to possess, contain, control. We may view the onset of what have been labelled (prior to Haraway’s *Chthulucene*) the *Plantationocene* – colonial plantation ecologies’ inauguration of large-scale environmental destruction¹¹⁷ and *Capitalocene* – natural resource collection and trade for financial gain¹¹⁸ and their impact upon today’s climate

¹¹³ White L. Jr. The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis. *Science*. 1967. V. 155 (3767), P. 1203–1207.

¹¹⁴ Arden. Op. cit. *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, 4.1.68.

¹¹⁵ Zeunert J. Landscape Architecture and Environmental Sustainability: Creating Positive Change through Design. London : Bloomsbury, 2017.

¹¹⁶ Haraway D. J. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham and London : Duke University Press, 2016.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism / ed. Malm J. W. Oakland : PM Press, 2016.

and biodiversity urgencies. We may similarly consider the legacy of Renaissance plant study, evident in the herbal, the botanic garden and even the development of ecology itself. The later 'father of ecology' Ernst Haeckel's fascination with plants, herbals and natural history collections¹¹⁹ contributed to his seminal definition of ecology as the "whole science of the relations of the organism to the environment"¹²⁰. We may further consider how these relations and legacies continue to benefit or oppress both human and more-than-human communities today and the contributing sticky, knotty entanglements of interests, ideologies and impulses. We may locate the urge to gather not only as culturally-affected but potentially biologically-mediated, reaching back far into our evolution within non-urban environments in which the motif of gathering in relation to landscape, whether for sustenance, resources, or aesthetic motives, continues to be visible within our cultural products such as texts. Staying with the trouble of gathering when reading Shakespeare's plays reveals similar complexities: emblems of innocent virginal femininity gathering flowers versus rapacious female sexual desire; gathering resources for trade or commerce; landscape images of gathering applied to both landscape and human forms.

I suggest that reading Shakespeare's plays not only through an ecocritical lens but specifically as a *collection* of image clusters offers a way by which to unsettle categorical distinctions, reveal contradictory factors of 'push and pull' whilst serving as a potential model for unity with the more-than-human world. Like a "drop of water / That in the ocean seeks another drop"¹²¹, our kinship with the more-than-human may be glimpsed through shared materiality. Rather than posthumanism and humanities, Haraway advocates for compost and *humusities* to enable the

¹¹⁹ Egerton F. N. History of Ecological Sciences, Part 47: Ernst Haeckel's Ecology *Bulletin of the Ecological Society of America*. 2013, V. 94 (3). P. 222–244.

¹²⁰ Haeckel E. *Generelle Morphologie der Organismen: Allgemeine Grundzüge der Organischen Formen; Wissenschaft, Mechanisch Begründet durch die von Charles Darwin Reformierte Deszendenz-Theorie*. Berlin : G. Reimer, 1866.

¹²¹ Arden. Op. cit. *Comedy of Errors*, 1.1.35–36.

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detumescing project of self-making and planet-destroying¹²². Shakespeare's identification of characters with landscape in a closed loop cycle returning to earth whereby "we fat all creatures else to fat us, and we fat ourselves for maggots"¹²³ accords with Haraway's "wormy pile"¹²⁴ of ecological systems thinking. Instead of viewing Renaissance acts of gathering as separating us further from nature, Shakespeare's references to gathering also situate human/nature together through material connectedness and shared fate. The image of dew drops on a lily and tears on Lavinia's face, for example, are one and the same as she like the lily almost withers back into the earth: "fresh tears / Stood on her cheeks, as doth the honey-dew / Upon a gathered lily almost withered"¹²⁵.

It should be acknowledged, however, that ecological thinking is not an instant 'cure-all'. There remain ethical complications such as incompatibilities with the animal liberation movement's considerations of animal suffering¹²⁶. Furthermore, much work needs to be done with respect to reconciling disciplinary tensions such as literary criticism and the sciences, including within ecocriticism¹²⁷. Nevertheless, the application of an ecocentric *ethic* may assist in decentering anthropocentric human interest to recognise the rights, requirements and agency of the ecosphere and its multiple inhabitants, as well as our dependence upon them. There are already positive movements in this direction. The botanical garden, once imbued with colonial exploitation, now also has an important role in plant propagation and sustainability research. Collections like Tradescant's and Hubert's with their interest in displaying the exotic gave rise to

¹²² Haraway. Op. cit. P. 32.

¹²³ Arden. Op. cit. *Hamlet*, 4.3.21–23.

¹²⁴ Haraway. Op. cit. P. 32.

¹²⁵ Arden. Op. cit. *Titus Andronicus*, 3.1.103–105.

¹²⁶ For a detailed discussion of deep ecological ethics as well as the suggestion that they be viewed through an aesthetic framework, see: Lynch T. *Deep Ecology as an Aesthetic Movement*. *Environmental Values*. 1996. V. 5 (2), P. 147–160.

¹²⁷ Glen A. Love's early ecocritical argument for evolutionary biology's integration within ecocriticism is compelling but has arguably failed to gain ecocritical traction. I am currently exploring biological ecocritical possibilities within my doctorate. For Love's argument, see: Love G. A. *Science, Anti-Science, and Ecocriticism. Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*. 1999. V. 6 (1), P. 65–81.

zoos and museums that now also undertake vitally important education and conservation work. The Renaissance herbal's legacy may be witnessed in perhaps the greatest 'textual' species collection of our time, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature's Red List of Threatened Species. From Renaissance seed collections and gardens, seed banks provide hope for biodiversity protection.

Gathering, however, remains a troubled act. At the time of writing, species extinction is estimated to be about 1000 and 10,000 higher than the natural 'background' rate, with 16,928 plant and animal species threatened¹²⁸. Now more than ever is the time to think more deeply about our fraught relationship to gathering: "Think we must. We must think", to quote Haraway¹²⁹. Shakespeare's references to gathering suggests such a model of thinking – one of detached from self while simultaneous attached to the fabric of landscape. Like puffs and wisps of cloud, thoughts gather then disperse: "I gather he is made"¹³⁰; "now gather and surmise"¹³¹; "from this I gather how"¹³²; "more than may be gathered by thy shape"¹³³, and with relation to emotions, to "gather patience"¹³⁴. Stripped of any individual interest or ideological overlay, this meditative state allows us to view ecological agency and process where "there is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so"¹³⁵.

If gathering is an action of drawing together and uniting, then perhaps its opposite is scattering. Reading ecocritically scatters meaning, unpicking narratives to turn the literary collection inside out as a process of dispersal. Ecologically speaking, gathering and dispersing are linked. One of the colloquial names for the dandelion in Renaissance England was 'chimney-sweeper'. When Guiderius sings in *Cymbeline* that

¹²⁸ The exact number is likely to be far higher, as less than three per cent of the world's described species have been assessed. URL: <https://www.iucnredlist.org/>.

¹²⁹ Strengers and Despret in Haraway. Op. cit. P. 30.

¹³⁰ Arden. Op. cit. *Comedy of Errors*, 4.3.84.

¹³¹ Arden. Op. cit. *Hamlet*, 2.2.108.

¹³² Arden. Op. cit. *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, 4.3.24.

¹³³ Arden. Op. cit. *Henry Sixth Part I*, 2.3.68.

¹³⁴ Arden. Op. cit. *Much Ado About Nothing*, 4.2.19.

¹³⁵ Arden. Op. cit. *Hamlet*, 2.2.250–251.

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“Golden lads and girls all must, / As chimney-sweepers, come to dust”¹³⁶, Shakespeare provides us with an evocative double-entendre. Life, as delicate as a dandelion spore blown in the wind, will eventually end and we, too, will return to earth. Similarly, the image of golden youth juxtaposed against the soot-encrusted chimney-sweeper may also harken to loss of innocence in an increasingly industrial age utilising exploitative practices such as child labour. The image therefore nests various constructs – human and resource exploitation; human and more-than-human fragility; the shared materiality of body and flower. As a seed containing the possibility for new life, however, the spore may still germinate offering hope.

Acknowledging gathering as a troubled act both historically and textually bursts open any sense of cohesive meaning revealing just how fraught and unstable our relationship to and understanding of the natural world may be. Through Shakespeare’s references to gathering we may glimpse this trouble but also opportunities to reassess our place upon earth and the earth within us. The act of *gædrian* may therefore be one in which we aspire to union with the more-than-human before, like Ophelia’s violets or Guiderius’ chimney-sweepers, our biodiverse world further withers and come to dust.

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¹³⁶ Arden. Op. cit. *Cybeline* 4.2.262–263.

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