

2017 SAA Seminar: Home Ecologies Abstracts
Leaders: Jennifer Munroe, University of North Carolina, Charlotte
and Mary Trull, St. Olaf College 1

Sallie Jean Anglin, Pennsylvania State University, Altoona

“Death and Domestic Discovery in *The Widow’s Tears*, *The Atheist’s Tragedy*, and *Romeo and Juliet*”

My paper argues that characters domesticate environments for the dead, such as tombs, graves, and charnel houses. I contend that figures such as the widow create household communities in burial spaces that replace the misplaced domestic ecologies with which they previously identified. Like Romeo and Juliet, the lovers in *The Atheist’s Tragedy*, and *The Widow’s Tears* discover marriage, family and sexual expression in the grave. The integration of these characters into dead spaces does not mean that they are not fully articulable in centralized domestic spheres. Instead, it validates and emphasizes previous claims that the distinction between the living and the nonliving was tenuous at the time. Characters like Cynthia embody the concept of the undead, and her identity, like others, is additionally articulated as a paradox within early modern English culture. Characters’ appropriations of spaces that are traditionally meant for corpses also expose the anxieties over desire and excess in domestic economies. Finally, the blurred boundary between the living and the dead reaffirms alternative, posthuman articulations of identity.

Benjamin Bertram, University of Southern Maine

“Machiavelli, Virtù, and the Ecology of Military Camps”

Examining the operation of the military camp as a home away from home, this essay focuses on the way Machiavelli and other military writers establish Oikonomia, “household management,” by eliding female labor, combating effeminacy, and manhandling Fortuna. In military husbandry, abjection may at first signal dehumanization, but in Machiavelli’s *Art of War* the concept of virtù normalizes abjection and allows men to evade the transcorporeal ecology of the camp by conflating manliness, the *vita activa*, and the human.

Claire Duncan, University of Toronto

“Collaborative Fermentation: Cider Making in the Cookbook of Jane Dawson”

Midway through the manuscript of the *Cookbook of Jane Dawson* (c. 1675), Jane Dawson includes a recipe “To Make Cider” (64). Though there is nothing particularly odd about including such a recipe, this paper will argue that it offers a useful case-study into the intimate relationship between early modern humans and the more-than-human world around and within them. This recipe encompasses almost two pages, making it one of the longest recipes in Dawson’s collection, and its written length mirrors the temporal lengths required to undertake this process of cider-making. From start to finish, the recipe would take at least two months to complete. Yet those two months do not require a particularly laborious amount of work from Dawson or anyone else who might undertake to make cider. In fact, I contend that this recipe foregrounds the role of the more-than-human entities that join with Dawson to create the cider:

most of time required by this recipe involves simply waiting on the part of its human participants. As a fermented beverage, the cider requires the workings of non-human actors to actually transform from fruit into cider. Alongside this recipe, I will read contemporary discourse on cider by such printed authors as John Worlidge and Ralph Austen in order to suggest how their instructions place more emphasis on the role of the human than does Dawson.

David B. Goldstein, York University

“Home-Schooling the Grrl Stomach in Shakespeare’s *Taming of the Shrew*”

From the perspective of humanist childhood education, food is one of the main instruments of discipline and learning. In More’s *Utopia*, children up to the age of five sit separately from their parents, while older children either act as waitstaff or “stand by in absolute silence” and wait for their elders to hand them whatever food they deem fitting (Norton, 2nd, 43). Erasmus’ *De civilitate morum puerilium*—which Norbert Elias famously made the cornerstone of his magnum opus, *The Civilizing Process*—counsels that “It is a good thing to wait a short while before eating, so that the boy grows accustomed to tempering his affects” (Elias 2000, 76). Rabelais’ Gargantua eats with wanton excess until Pantagruel reins him in by using the table as the first and most important stage (in all its meanings) of humanist learning. Vernacular pre-Reformation texts such as Caxton’s *Booke of Curtesye* also promulgate the idea that, along with the schoolhouse, the table is the chief scene of instruction for children, especially boys, in the arts of civility and self-governance.

In Shakespeare’s plays, by vivid contrast, the attempt to use food to discipline and civilize children often clashes with children’s use of food for far other means—in the service of erotic love and, more generally, as an entry into a wider and wilder ecology of experience. Most strikingly, Shakespeare takes up the question of how the humanist table looks from the perspective of girl children rather than the boys to which most of these treatises were addressed. In *The Taming of the Shrew*, the strategy of withholding food, which in Erasmus and More appears benevolently patriarchal, becomes a sadistic act of sexual control when directed at the unruly Kate. The domestic scene of the table, which the humanists imagine as a way of teaching civility to boys, becomes in Shakespeare’s plays a set of techniques for policing the sexuality of girls, as well as, more generally, a highly charged locus for both the transgressive and difficult entry into adulthood. I argue that Shakespeare’s revision of humanist table-pedagogy in *Taming of the Shrew* challenges standard understandings of the domestic ecology of girlhood.



Christine Hoffmann, West Virginia University

“Object lessons in Domestication and Defiance”



This essay, like its title, combines the textual and the pictorial. It begins by examining sixteenth-century engravings of crowded *wunderkammer* that assemble human and non-human actors in poses of both insecurity and ease. These spaces, I want to suggest, are the early modern versions of Smart Homes. Advertised in the twenty-first century as technological utopias that guarantee convenience and security, smart homes also conjure up images of vast networks linking autonomous devices and appliances. Here objects communicate with each other inside integrated systems; they are "always-on" (smarthomeusa.com). A smart house is a packed house in both the literal and theatrical sense of the term.

This essay reviews a selection of performances that play out in the early modern Smart Home. Confronted with “all the things,” how (effectively) do premodern subjects embolden themselves as assertive agents? I discuss several literary works whose characters negotiate spaces of collection that invite boldness but oblige domestication: the loaded words written on the walls of Busirane’s loaded castle encourage Spenser’s Britomart to be bold but “not too bold;” in the Belmont of Shakespeare’s *Merchant of Venice*, three caskets grant Portia occasion to play favorites among her suitors, even as they enclose her within the cramped and smiling posture of patriarchal subservience; “all the elements invite and prompt” Rabelais’s Panurge to marry, he claims in the *Tiers Livre*, but not before a series of object lessons invite a reckless disregard for both narrative and conjugal conformation. Object encounters within home ecologies inspire a curious overlap of defiance and domestication; insecurity and ease; a boldness scripted just enough to be, perhaps, not too bold after all.

Lalita Pandit Hogan, University of Wisconsin-La Crosse

“Distemperature and Domesticity: Un-homing the Home in Shakespeare”

In the proposed paper, I should like to focus on the phrases, “distemperature,” “distempered,” and “distemper,” drawing examples from various Shakespeare plays. In *Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Titania attributes “distemperature” in nature (weather, etc.) to marital discord between herself and Oberon. In *Cymbeline*, distemper refers to mood, affect and natural tendency, or basic nature of someone. Other variants in other plays, including *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet*, and so forth, configure various thought trends, and ambiguities revolving around the efficacy and infringement that home and homing entails. I would like, first, to trace etymology and usage history of the term, then, expand the concept, drawing on various Shakespeare plays, to establish a link to references to birds, animals, and household objects, parts

of a houses (such as the “temple-haunting martlet” in *Macbeth*; the figurative ‘raven’ over the ‘house of death’ in *Othello*, drinking and seeing of the spider in *Winter’s Tale*. The purpose would be to identify concerns/anxieties about trust and breaches of trust, drawing on insights from modern Trust Theory, and early modern notions of trust, what people put their trust in (such as property, social class, religious faith, and so forth). According to today’s trust theory, trust necessarily involves risk because whether someone, or some thing, or some venture, was trustworthy can be proven only after the risk is taken, and danger invoked. Without risking breach of trust, there can be no trust. Within these axes I propose to examine why felicity of the home is repeatedly threatened in many of Shakespeare’s plays. Space permitting, I will briefly bring in Webster’s *Duchess of Malfi*, to discuss the Duchess’s secret marriage, her nest, so to say, and its destruction by (figurative) predatory birds (her brothers). The Duchess does not trust them, nor does she wholly trust the permanence of her secret (home) life; yet she risks it, affirms it, to a point of poignancy, when her last instructions are about her child’s need for cough syrup!!

Shannon Kelley, Fairfield University

“Son of a Tree: Adonis and his Mother, Myrrha”

“Son of a Tree” recovers the Ovidian origins of myrrh, an aromatic gum widely known in religious contexts as one of three gifts of the Magi at Christ’s nativity. In medieval Passion plays, myrrh-bearers again brought this tree resin, an embalming agent, to the site of the crucifixion. Uniquely paired with sacrifice and preservation, childbirth and death, myrrh was also defined figuratively as anything that soothes, heals, or preserves. Imported from the east, myrrh was nonetheless part of early modern English domestic life, for we find countless references to this ointment in texts other than the passion plays: devotional literature associated with the Magdalene, three erotic epyllia published in the immediate aftermath of William Shakespeare’s *Venus and Adonis*, books on surgery, dictionaries, and travel accounts.

In Ovid, however, its origins are generally understood as perverse and tragic: a young girl named Myrrha seduces Cinyras, her unknowing father. When she becomes pregnant, she flees to the Arabian peninsula, where the gods pity her and turn her into the tree from which Adonis is born. As a tree-creature, she cannot speak but she expresses grief through tears, which “bring her honor.” Myrrha’s transformation protects Adonis, and produces an extraordinary, salutary agent, signaling her status as survivor of catastrophic experience.

Using the framework of this SAA seminar, “Home Ecologies,” this essay focuses on elements of myrrh’s etiology that connect to our conceptions of the home: endogamy, exogamy, and incest; the private experience of godly sorrow and the global commodities market for aromatics/tears; and the representation and significance of travel itself.

Rebecca Laroche, University of Colorado Colorado Springs

“The Flower of Ointments and Early Modern Transcorporeality”

The textual history of “Flos Unguentorum” or “The Flower of Ointments” found in numerous recipe collections from the 16th and 17th centuries, provides us with a fascinating locus of study in our discussion of Domestic Ecologies. Also called “The Yellow Salve,” throughout the medical literature, it has been labeled “The Angel Salve” or “The Jesus Christ

Salve,” due to the myth of its origins in which either an angel, or Christ himself, appears to monks to deliver the recipe. The remarkable number of reprints and manuscript copies of the recipe as a wound salve during the religious conflicts of the mid-seventeenth century may hearken to this hallowed history.

Mary Floyd-Wilson has already shown us how other wound salves confound our conceptions of early modern knowledge systems in the presence of ingredients calling on sympathetic magic. In this seminar discussion, moreover, I want to ask when an ointment stops being an ointment. If stored in a roll or plaster or put in a tin or box until needed, “for your use,” the ointment remains itself, but when applied, it dissolves into the skin, combining its oils and minerals with our own. In this way, the ointment enacts Stacy Alaimo’s theories of transcorporeality and “underlines the extent to which the substance of the human is ultimately inseparable from 'the environment.' It makes it difficult to pose nature as mere background, as Val Plumwood would put it, for the exploits of the human since 'nature' is always as close as one's own skin—perhaps even closer.”

Kent Lehnhof, Chapman University

“Regulating Sex in Wendell Berry, *Measure for Measure*, and *The Winter's Tale*”

In 1993, Wendell Berry published an essay titled "Sex, Economy, Freedom, and Community" in which he argued (in the wake of the prurient Clarence Thomas-Anita Hill hearings) that American society had lost its ability to regulate sex to any good effect because it had abandoned its home economies and local communities in favor of a placeless, faceless "public sphere." As Berry explains it, the interrelationships and interdependencies that characterize the home and local economies are sufficiently specific and substantial to stand against a range of self-centered behaviors, but the interests of the general public are too vague, disparate, and/or indeterminate to oppose any but the vilest of acts. Whereas local communities can resist prejudicial practices by weighing the benefits they bring to an individual against the damage they do to the places and people to whom that individual belongs, this does not work at the public level because no one "belongs" to the public. The public is neither a specific site nor a set of particular relations but merely an aggregation of anonymous and autonomous individuals, each of whom is entitled--even obligated--to seek self-fulfillment as he or she sees fit. According to Berry, our disregard for our home places is the direct and proximate cause of our current sexual predicament. We try to enforce decency through legislation, litigation, and coercion, but all we end up doing is equivocating between private lusts and public emergencies.

To my ear, this account of American society--afflicted by unhealthy attitudes toward sex and equivocating between private lusts and public emergencies--sounds an awful lot like the Viennese society we encounter in Shakespeare's dark comedy *Measure for Measure*. This overlap suggests that Berry's analysis of contemporary American culture might be of use in thinking about the state of affairs in Shakespeare's Vienna. Accordingly, I intend to draw on Berry's ideas about sex, economy, freedom, and community to discuss the meaning of *Measure for Measure* and a later play to which I believe it is allied, namely, *The Winter's Tale*. As I will demonstrate, Berry's perspective can clarify a lot of things in these two plays, bringing into better focus the problems Shakespeare is addressing in *Measure for Measure* as well as sharpening our sense of how he is revisiting and rectifying these problems in *The Winter's Tale*. By putting *Measure for Measure* in conversation with *The Winter's Tale* and by using Berry to moderate the

discussion, I plan to show how this pair of plays points to the relative inefficacy of the public sphere in the regulation of sexual behavior, indicating instead the comparative superiority of the *oikos*, the "community standard," and the powers of the imagination.

Sara Morrison, William Jewell College

“There is a world elsewhere’: Home, Exile, and Needlework”

In the tragedies *Coriolanus* and *Othello*, exile, whether enforced or voluntary, causes the plays’ titular characters to seek alternative domestic spaces, “world[s] elsewhere” (*Coriolanus* 3.3.139). Such separation causes disruptions in the genealogical systems particular to their home ecologies, and in the case of these tragedies, attempts to create new homes, new networks, fail. As soldiers, both men are intimately familiar with the moments when bodies transform into corpses, when the human becomes part of the environment in a newly transformed way, and both men are marked with battle scars that chart their own tanglings with mortality. Healing involves the knitting back together of flayed flesh, often leaving scar tissue that remakes the skin, creating a surface not unlike a texture map or a piece of needlework after a blank cloth has been transformed by needle, thread, and human hand. In both plays, needlework figures as markers of feminine domesticity and more-than-human figurations of synthesis. The textured, embroidered pieces created by women’s hands knit together non-human materials, and they also signify human, genealogical connections.

Home ecology studies seems invested in questions of genealogy, not only in human genealogical histories of a particular family or set of families but also in the material markers of those families. The nature of such material, extra-human markers could include images or objects that identify the family, but they also might include the home, not only its physical structure but also its particular inhabitants’ traditional practices. My paper explores the domestic ecologies of these plays, considering both the processes by which women’s domestic skilled labor invests the home as a space of human interconnections, of synthetic, healing creativity and the destabilization of those home ecologies in moments of exile. Identifying both *Coriolanus* and *Othello* with women skilled in needlework, the plays establish domestic ecological systems that chart genealogies through both human and more-than-human networks of creation and exchange.

Hillary Nunn, The University of Akron

“Household Water: Porous Pages and Early Modern Manuscript Recipe Books”

Renaissance recipe books in manuscript can contain startlingly exotic ingredients. But, while crabs' eyes, snails, and mummia might initially catch a readers' attention, the Early Modern Recipes Online Collective's searchable transcriptions of manuscript recipe books provide surprising new views of common ingredients in English domestic practice. Searching across EMROC's earliest texts reveals that the most commonly named item in Renaissance recipes is water – an initially unexpected finding that invites us to look at domestic procedures, and water, with new eyes.

My paper examines the particular varieties of water called for and produced by the era's recipes. Underscoring the labor associated with accessing water for domestic use, my work seeks to map developments in city and country water sources onto women's use of water inside the

home. Discussions of water systems, pipes, and cisterns cast new light on recipe ingredients like "spring water," "running water" and "pump water," suggesting new connections between recipe writers and their surroundings. The resulting water networks, I argue, suggest that early modern recipe books offer an unappreciated means of viewing connections between rural and urban households.

Debapriya Sarkar, Hendrix College

“Reminders of Plot: Futility and Material Excess in *The Alchemist*”

From its opening intimation of being set in a “house in town” (Argument, 2) to Lovewit’s declaration in the final scene that “The house is mine here, and the doors are open” (5.5.26), Ben Jonson’s *The Alchemist* is saturated with references to the domestic realm. Yet, this “house” is not merely a habitat that its “master quit” (Argument, 1). It is an experimental space that gathers together distinct intellectual discourses and social networks—in its fabrication of alchemical expertise, as well as in its parading of knights, clerks, gamesters, and priests—to dramatize an environment that thrives on extravagance and wastefulness. As Subtle, Face, and Doll manipulate visitors for financial gain, the play offers audiences a glimpse into a distinct kind of household ecology, where worthless and unproductive elements—from an alchemical apparatus that never produces results to the fate of Face, who is left behind by the narrative and left lacking the material wealth the plot continually promises him—determine relations between living and non-living entities in the home-theater.

In this paper, I attend to the fruitless objects and narratives that pervade this localized material environment, to ask how *The Alchemist*’s network of social interactions is dependent on concepts of futility, waste, and remainders. Examining characters like Doll (who, as one of the few female characters of the play, must abandon her own self repeatedly to don disguises) and practices like alchemy (whose apparatus lingers forever as an absent-presence), I inquire how the play produces a domestic ecology that, instead of privileging household management, looks beyond the valuable, useful, and productive. Saturating a “house” with objects that are, somehow, futile by definition, Jonson’s play ruminates on how the physical environment of the theater curates relations between the human and non-human to expand what the ecology of home might be.

Gitanjali Shahani, San Francisco State University

“‘So Sweet Was Ne’er So Fatal’: White Sugar, Black Bodies, & Racial Indigestion in the Early Modern Household”

This essay is part of a larger book project that examines the changing foodscapes and landscapes of the early modern home, the kitchen in particular, during a period of unprecedented access to new foodstuffs from across the globe. My focus here will be on sugar, which is unique in the way that it links the ecologies of the English home with plantations economies in the Atlantic world. As a material commodity that passes through these sites of production and consumption, sugar facilitates what we can think of as a culinary contact zone in which new appetites and aversions are forged. This paper focuses on two works as a case study, one of which turns to sugar consumption in the household, while the other turns to its production on the

plantation. In Hugh Plat and Thomas Tryon's treatises, respectively, we get a sense of sugar as an "attitude," to use Roland Barthes' term. What is for Plat a delight in sugar's sweetness is for Tryon a kind of bitterness that stems from the harsh conditions of its production on plantations and its ability to contaminate what we might call the domestic ecosystem. Tryon's unease with sugar stems from something akin to a form of racial indigestion, in which he imagines the consumption of the sugar as a kind of cannibalism that feeds off the slave's body. As my title suggests, sweetness itself comes to be imbued with the dangerous tastes of difference in the process.

Jeff Theis, Salem State University

"I must eat my dinner": Ambivalent Social and Environmental Economies in *The Tempest*"

When considering the *oikos* at the heart of a home ecology, it is tempting to focus on the operations and social labors within the household as if it were its own, contained, ecosystem. But that system depends upon social exchanges, the movement of materials, and labor that occur outside of the home. The distances travelled can be as short as bringing in plants from a kitchen garden to nearby sources of building supplies or foodstuffs to far flung sources for wine and spices. Thus, the house is not an insular space closed off to the outside world; rather, the well-functioning house is predicated on knowledge of and engagement with larger environments and places. In *The Tempest*, Caliban's labors and knowledge are vital to the functioning of Prospero's cell-sized household. Critics often focus on Caliban's gathering of firewood and Prospero's acknowledgment that he and Miranda depend upon him. But perhaps more important is Caliban's local knowledge of food sources. Yet, these exchanges of inside/outside through Caliban also present threats to the household when Miranda speaks of Caliban's attempted rape. My paper will explore some of the tensions and anxieties expressed in this play and others, such as *Merry Wives* or *Timon*, when the functioning of the household ecology is dependent upon a larger ecology and the movement and labors of characters between these sites. I will place special focus on foods and foodstuffs.

Amy L. Tigner, University of Texas, Arlington

"Closeted Ecologies"

The most famous closet in Shakespeare is undoubtedly Gertrude's, but what occurs in Gertrude's closet—the stabbing through the arras—is anomalous; the more frequent use of the closet appears in a less frequently performed play, *Cymbeline*, in which the Queen processes the natural materials she has gathered in the woods. In her closet, the Queen has made perfumes, distillations, preserves, confections and medicines, one of which she claims to have redeemed the king five times from death. In this case, however, the Queen is processing plants for a nefarious purpose: to concoct a poison to kill her stepdaughter, Innogen. Though murder marks the closets in both tragedies, the early modern closet was usually a much more benign room whose purpose was the welfare rather than the demise of the family.

As an architectural space, the closet had multiple uses from reading nook, to meditative prayer room, to bedchamber, but in this essay I am primarily concerned with the closet as a place of process and experimentation, a place of permeability between the outside "natural" world and

the interior of bodies. The closet witnessed the phenomenon of trans-corporeality, as nonhuman and human bodies were transformed and intermingled. But the closet also functioned as a storehouse in which these distillations of plants and animals were literally stilled both in the alembic and in time on the shelf. Likewise when manuscript receipt books were transformed and even distilled into print they were often called closets, such as John Partridge's 1573 *The treasurie of commodious conceits, & hidden secrets and may be called, the huswiues closet* or Hannah Woolley's 1670 *Queen-Like Closet*. Whether architectural or rhetorical, the closet is the site whereby home ecology—the metamorphosing of bodies—overlaps with home economy—the physical storehouse of valuable distillations or the written record of receipted knowledge.

Rob Wakeman, University of South Florida

“The Common Pot: Nourishing Indigestion in *Bartholomew Fair* and Early Modern Receipt Books”

It is common for critics to fret about the collapse of kitchen and privy in Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair*. When Win Littlewit needs to urinate her husband proposes one of the kitchen's “dripping pan[s], or an old kettle” (3.6.127). Other nominees for the “common pot” are a “bason” and an “old bottle” (4.4.211-18). A commercial kitchen, but also a space of queer kinships and interspecies motherhood, also a “wombe, and bedde” (2.2.106), Ursula's cooking space exemplifies fears of polluted food in the home as well as market. Food preparation – including household slaughter, cooking, and serving – is anything but a neat metamorphosis of one thing into another, and at each stage of the process excreta reenter the home ecosystem. The viscosity of the kitchen leads to worries over the cross-contamination of permeable, soluble flesh.

Melinda Gough argues that *Bartholomew Fair* illuminates “[o]ur inability, despite our better judgment, to reject Ursula and her world (an inability which seems to parallel Jonson's own).” But rejection seems to me the wrong term since the corrupt and fallen nature of the human body depends upon the corrupt and fallen nature of meat and the often discomfiting labor of others for the provision of food. We would do well to learn from Ursula and her litter of pigs, able as she is to accrue and make nourishment of waste. From here, I turn to two sources that promote the recycling of animal waste and challenge the boundary between edible and inedible: early modern recipe books and Donna Haraway's proposal for radical commensality premised on a notion of “nourishing indigestion.” As we confront questions of how to live together, how to eat together, and how to become a community, we find ourselves apprehensively gathered around the nauseating “common pot.” But coming to terms with the unsettled stomach proves the way through, toward a convocation of eaters whose diets do not agree. A willingness to break bread together might just help to build attachments and responsibility to human and nonhumans alike.