


Lecture 37
Horticulture and Literature: Shakespeare



William Shakespeare (1560–1616)

Elizabethan playwright and poet
Considered greatest writer in English, if not in any language
Writes historical plays, romances, and comedies; still performed
Sonnets still read by lovers (although many addressed to a man)
Writes on the human condition

Amazing knowledge of horticulture, agriculture, seamanship, law, fishing, hunting, history, classics, etc.
On this basis some claim Shakespeare's work actually written by Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford (1550–1604)
Greatest vocabulary of any writer
Many English words have first usage in works
Many expressions have become clichés
Something is rotten in the state of Denmark
Hamlet
There's small choice in rotten apples
Taming of the Shrew

Shakespeare uses the world of imagery:
simile, metaphor, analogy to paint verbal
pictures
May be key to understanding Shakespeare
(Caroline Spurgeon 1931)

Sources:

Bookish facts: classics, bible
Real world: nature, sports, everyday life,
horticulture

Horticultural Information

Richer in horticulture than general farming
Plant growth and plan, seeding
Pruning and training
Manuring and weeding
Ripeness and decay
Gardens and gardening

Premise

A study of horticultural imagery in
Shakespeare leads us to both an appreciate
of his works as literature and an
understanding of horticulture in the
Elizabethan period as well as today

Plant References

O, had the monster seen those lily hands
Tremble, like aspen leaves upon a lute

Titus Andronicus, II(4)44

Mine eyes smell Onions, I shall weep anon:

All's Well that Ends Well, V(3) 321

And most dear actors, eat no onions nor
garlic, for we are to utter sweet breath

Midsummer Night's Dream, IV(2) 42

So we grew together,
Like to a double cherry, seeming parted,
But yet a union in partition;
Two lovely berries moulded on one stem

Midsummer Night's Dream, III(2)139

Medicinals

**Not Poppy, nor mandragora,
Nor all the drowsy syrups of the world,
Shall ever medicine thee to that sweet sleep
Which thou owdest yesterday**

Othello, III,(3)330

Root of hemlock digg'd I' the dark

Macbeth, IV(1)25

**I have convey'd aboard; and I have brought
The oil, the balsamum and aqua-vitae**

Comedy of Errors, IV(1)187

Flowers and Flowering

**When I have pluck'd the rose,
I cannot give it vital growth again.
It must needs wither: I'll smell it on the tree**

Othello, V(2)86.

**Though other things grow fair against the sun,
Yet fruits that blossom first will first be ripe**

Othello, II(3) 382

**The summer's flower is to the summer sweet,
Though to itself it only live and die;
But if that flower with base infection meet,
The basest weed outbraves his dignity:
For sweetest things turn sourest by their deeds;
Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds.**

Venus and Adonis, (1079)

Gardens and Gardeners

'Tis in ourselves that we are thus or thus. Our bodies are our gardens, to the which our wills are gardeners: so that if we will plant nettles, or sow lettuce, set hyssop and weed up thyme, supply it with one gender of herbs, or distract it with many, either to have it sterile with idleness, or manured with industry, why, the power and corrigible authority of this lies in our wills
Othello, I(3)322

Come, my spade. There is no ancient gentlemen but gardeners, ditchers, and grave-makers: they hold up Adam's profession
Hamlet, V(1)34.

Pruning

**But, poor old man, thou prunest a rotten tree,
That cannot so much as a blossom yield
In lieu of all thy pains and husbandry**
As You Like It, II(3)63

**Her vine, the merry cheerer of the heart,
Unpruned dies; her hedges even-pleach'd,
Like prisoners wildly overgrown with hair,
Put forth disorder'd twigs...
And as our vineyards, fallows, meads, and hedges,
Defective in their natures, grow to wildness,
Even so our houses and ourselves and children
Have lost, or do not learn for want of time,
The sciences that should become our country...**
Henry V, V(2)

Manuring

**As gardeners do with ordure (dung) hide those roots
That shall first spring and be most delicate**
Henry V, II(2), 4

Grafting

Her royal stock graft with ignoble plants

Richard III, III(7) 127

Noble stock

Was graft with Crab-tree slip

2nd Henry VI, III(2)213

**Nay, you shall see my orchard, where, in an arbour,
we will eat a last year's pippin of my own graffing,
with a dish of caraways, and so forth.**

2nd Henry IV, V(3).

**You see, sweet maid, we marry
A gentle scion to the wildest stock,
And make conceive a bark of baser kind
By bud of nobler race: this is an art
Which does mend nature, change it rather, but
The art itself is nature.**

Winter's Tale. IV(4)81.

Weeds and Insects

**How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable,
Seem to me all the uses of this world!
Fie on't! ah fie! 'tis an unweeded garden,
That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature
Possess it merely**

Hamlet, I(2)133

**Now 'tis the spring, and weeds are shallow-rooted;
Suffer them now, and they'll o'ergrow the garden
And choke the herbs for want of husbandry**

2nd Henry VI, III(1)31

Thus are my blossoms blasted in the bud
And caterpillars eat my leaves away

2nd Henry VI, III(1)89

She never told her love,
But let concealment, like a worm i' the bud,
Feed on her damask cheek

Twelfth Night, II (4)113

Frost

Death lies on her like an untimely frost
Upon the sweetest flower of the field

Romeo and Juliet, IV(5)58

This is the state of man: to-day he puts forth
The tender leaves of hopes, to-morrow blossoms,
And bears his blushing honours thick upon him;
And third day comes a frost, a killing frost,
And, when he thinks, good easy man, full surely
His greatness is a-ripening, nips his root,
And then he falls, as I do

Henry VIII, III(2)70

Horticultural Seasons

For never-resting time leads summer on
To hideous winter, and confounds him there;
Sap check'd with frost and lusty leaves quite gone,
Beauty o'ersnow'd, and bareness everywhere;
Then, were not summer's distillation left,
A liquid prisoner pent in walls of glass,
Beauty's effect with beauty were bereft,
Nor it, nor no remembrance what it was;
But flowers distill'd, though they with winter meet,
Leese but their show; their substance still lives sweet.

Sonnet 5

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date;
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimm'd,
By chance or nature's changing course untrimm'd

Sonnet 18

Marketing

I cannot do't without counters. Let me see what am I to buy for our sheep-shearing feast? Three pound of sugar, five pound of currants, rice—what will this sister of mine do with rice? ... She hath made me four and twenty nose-gays for the shearers... I must have saffron to colour the warden pies; mace; dates? —none, that's out of my note; nutmegs, seven; a race or two of ginger, but that I may beg; four pound of prunes, and as many of raisins o' the sun.

The Winter's Tale, IV(3)

Garden Scene from Richard II [III(4)]

Gardener

Go, bind thou up yon dangling apricocks,
Which, like unruly children, make their sire
Stoop with oppression of their prodigal weight;
Give some suppurtance to the bending twigs.
Go thou, and like an executioner,
Cut off the heads of too fast growing sprays,
That look too lofty in our commonwealth:
All must be even in our government.
You thus employed, I will go root away
The noisome weeds, which without profit suck
The soil's fertility from wholesome flowers.

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Man

Why should we in the compass of a pale
Keep law and form and due proportion,
Showing, as in a model, our firm estate,
When our sea-walled garden, the whole land,
Is full of weeds, her fairest flowers chok'd up,
Her fruit-trees all unprun'd, her hedges ruin'd,
Her knots disordered and her wholesome herbs
Swarming with caterpillars?

Gardener

Hold thy peace.
He that hath suffered this disordered spring
Hath now himself met with the fall of leaf.
The weeds which his broad-spreading leaves did shelter,
That seem'd in eating him to hold him up,
Are pluck'd up root and all by Bullingbrook,
I mean the Earl of Wiltshire, Bushy, Green.

Man

What, are they dead?

Gardener

They are; and Bullingbrook
Hath seiz'd the wasteful king. O, what pity is it
That he had not so trimm'd and dress'd his land
As we this garden! We at time of year
Do wound the bark, the skin of our fruit-trees,
Lest, being over-proud in sap and blood,
With too much riches it confound itself;
Had he done so to great and growing men,
They might have lived to bear and he to taste
Their fruits of duty. Superfluous branches
We lop away, that bearing boughs may live;
Had he done so, himself had borne the crown,
Which waste of idle hours hath quite thrown down.

Sheep Shearing Party from A Winter's Tale

Perdita

Give me those flowers there, Dorcas. Reverend sirs,
For you there's rosemary and rue; these keep
Seeming and savor all the winter long.
Grace and remembrance be to you both,
And welcome to our shearing!

Polixenes

Shepherdess,

A fair one are you, well you fit our ages
With flow'rs of winter.

Perdita

Sir, the year growing ancient,
Not yet on summer's death, nor on the bir
Of trembling winter, the fairest flowers o' the season
Are our carnations and streak'd gillyvors
Which some call nature's bastards: of that kind
Our rustic garden's barren; and I care not
To get slips of them.

Polixenes

Wherefore, gentle maiden,
Do you neglect them?

Perdita

For I have heard it said
There is an art which in their piedness shares
With great creating nature.

History of Horticulture: Lecture 37

Polixenes

Say there be;

Yet nature is made better by no mean

But nature makes that mean: so, over that art

Which you say adds to nature, is an art

That nature makes. You see, sweet maid, we marry

A gentler scion to the wildest stock,

And make conceive a bark of baser kind

By bud of nobler race: this is an art

Which does mend nature, change it rather, but

The art itself is nature.

Perdita

So it is.

Polixenes

Then make your garden rich in gillyvors,

And do not call them bastards.

Perdita

I'll not put

The dibble in earth to set one slip of them;

No more than were I painted I would wish

This youth should say 'twere well and only therefore

Desire to breed by me. Here's flowers for you;

Hot lavender, mints, savory, marjoram;

The marigold, that goes to bed wi' the sun

And with him rises weeping: these are flowers

Of middle summer, and I think they are given

To men of middle age. You're very welcome.
