

**‘Bardwashing’ Shakespeare:  
Food Justice, Enclosure, and the Poaching Poet**

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William Shakespeare arguably represents the height of English intellectual creativity. His drama and poetry transcend his mortality, speaking to generation upon generation with an authoritative appeal that seems morally superior because of its durability over the centuries. In his play *As You Like It*, Shakespeare even appears to glorify the social bandit and proto food activist. Characters that survive in the Forest of Arden by poaching their usurping duke’s deer are likened to the mythical figure, Robin Hood. The allusion achieves greater significance when considered alongside near-contemporary pseudo-biographies that record Shakespeare’s early life as a poacher and youthful renegade. At face value, Shakespeare’s Robin Hood reference might suggest his subtle advocacy of food sovereignty and social justice. This romanticized image is supported by later historiographies that interpret medieval and early modern enclosure from a specifically partisan viewpoint. Early nineteenth century historians who referenced More’s *Utopia*, and whose influence is evident in enclosure analyses ranging from Marx to Polanyi and Bookchin, unwittingly assist in perpetuating the iconography of the social bandit Shakespeare, united with his rebellious rural contemporaries. Surprisingly, however, Shakespeare’s true personality – that of a shrewd and ruthless businessman, at ease with hoarding in time of famine as purchasing common-land rights and privileges at the expense of his impoverished neighbors – is less familiar. The opportunistic, land-grabbing, pro-enclosure Bard, while not erased from critical view, is certainly shielded by the bardolatrous hero-worship of later ages. This “Bardwashing” of Shakespeare’s agrarian capitalist identity, in favor of the morally irreproachable icon, owes much to gossip gleaned from the very people most impacted by his aggressive exurbanite dealings. This paper interrogates the populist iconography of Shakespeare, and questions his reinvention as a local celebrity and Robin Hood eco-champion, rather than aggressive capitalist willing to exploit for immediate profit the food justice rights of his hometown community. [Article copies available for a fee from *The Transformative Studies Institute*. E-mail address: [journal@transformativestudies.org](mailto:journal@transformativestudies.org) Website: <http://www.transformativestudies.org> ©2015 by *The Transformative Studies Institute*. All rights reserved.]

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AMIENS: Who doth ambition shun  
And loves to live i'th' sun,  
Seeking the food he eats  
And pleased with what he gets,  
Come hither, come hither, come hither!  
Here shall he see no enemy  
But winter and rough weather. (*As You Like It*, 2.5.33–9)<sup>2</sup>

COMBE: Me – and two other big land owners. We're going to enclose – stake out new fields the size of all our old pieces put together and shut them up behind hedges and ditches. Then we can farm our own way. Tenants with long leases will be reallocated land. Squatters and small tenants on short leases will have to go: we shan't renew. That leaves you, and some others, who own rents on the land.

SHAKESPEARE: The rents. I bought my share years ago out of money I made by writing. [...] I wanted security. Is it true that when you enclose you're going over from corn to sheep?

COMBE: Mostly. Sheep prices are lower than corn prices but they still give the best return. Low on labour costs! No ploughing, sowing, harvesting, threshing, carting – just a few old shepherds who can turn their hand to butchery. Sheep are pure profit.

SHAKESPEARE: But you know I could lose? I've got no labour costs, I just draw my rents. (Edward Bond, *Bingo*)<sup>3</sup>

When Shakespeare wrote *As You Like It*, most likely in 1598, he introduced his audience to a displaced group of outlaw aristocrats. To survive in the sylvan confines of the Forest of Arden, these outlaws poach the deer of the usurping Duke Frederick, younger brother of their leader, the old Duke Senior. The self-conscious referencing of Duke Senior's enforced forest sojourn, with "a many merry men with him," explicitly associates these poaching fugitives with "the old Robin Hood of England" (*AYL* 1.1.110–111).<sup>4</sup> The proto eco-warrior rebelliousness of this mythical figure, whose deeds are celebrated in medieval balladry and folk festival, guaranteed Robin Hood's status as an "ideological"

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<sup>2</sup> William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, ed. Juliet Dusinberre (London: Thomson Learning, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> Edward Bond, *Bingo*, in *Plays: Three* (London: Methuen, 1987), pp. 13–66 (p. 19).

<sup>4</sup> For discussion of the Robin Hood myth in Elizabethan drama, see Kevin A. Quarmby, *The Disguised Ruler in Shakespeare and His Contemporaries* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2012), p. 28.

signifier for popular resistance throughout the early modern period.<sup>5</sup> Shakespeare's overt allusion to Robin Hood could be read, therefore, as his implicit expression of sympathy for the victims of social injustice at the hands of aristocratic landowners and enclosers. Such a simplistic biographical reading, which accords with romantic images of Shakespeare fashioned after his death, selectively ignores the playwright's alternative identity, as a self-interested agrarian capitalist intent on maximizing his profit through land-banking, engrossing, and tithe-taking, and who benefits financially from his tacit support for common land enclosure. As this article argues, the creation of the populist iconic figure of Shakespeare, while owing much to the biographers who celebrated his life, relied ultimately on evidence gleaned after his death from those with surprisingly close geographical association to his rural moneymaking schemes.<sup>6</sup>

That Shakespeare was not alone in referencing the medieval resistance figure Robin Hood is evidenced by several playhouse dramas of the 1590s that likewise introduce the outlaw into their narratives, either as incidental or principal protagonist.<sup>7</sup> These plays were performed at a time when peasant dissent and protest were most active.<sup>8</sup> In *As You Like It*, however, the subversive outlaw and his band of "merry men" appear not in person, but as synonymous signifiers for the "young gentlemen [who] flock" with ovine predictability after Duke Senior, therewith to "fleet the time carelessly as they did in the golden world" (*AYL* 1.1.111–113). The ever-expanding band seeks escape from the perils of court, to an idyllic classical-inspired "golden world" pre-existence as described in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Ovid's utopianized description of humankind living in an innocent state of harmonious social justice, when the "truth and right of every thing [was] unforst and unconstrainde," there "was no feare of punishment," and "no threatning lawe / In brazen tables nayled up, to

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<sup>5</sup> Richard Wilson, "'Like the Old Robin Hood': *As You Like It* and the Enclosure Riots", *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 43:1 (1992): 1–19 (p. 11).

<sup>6</sup> My thanks to Deric Shannon for his invaluable support, encouragement, and advice. Likewise, to Jesse Cohn, whose incisive comments and suggestions are gratefully incorporated throughout.

<sup>7</sup> Robin Hood's adventures are associated with two lost plays, the anonymous *Robin Hood and Little John* (1594) and William Haughton's *Robin Hood's Penn'orths* (1600), as well as *Look About You* (1600), attributed to Anthony Wadson. Similarly, the outlaw is represented in Anthony Munday's *The Downfall of Robert Earl of Huntingdon* (c. 1598), and Munday and Henry Chettle's *The Death of Robert Earl of Huntingdon* (1601).

<sup>8</sup> Jeffrey L. Singman, "Munday's Unruly Earl", in Lois Potter (ed.), *Playing Robin Hood: The Legend as Performance in Five Centuries* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1998), pp. 63–76 (p. 63).

keepe the folke in awe,” appears, as we shall see, in stark contrast to the reality of rural life in the late sixteenth century.<sup>9</sup>

The “golden world” of *As You Like It*’s forest is not only populated with the requisite pastoral entities – shepherds and shepherdesses – but also an abundance of ducal deer. Though illegal, poaching certainly seems a feasible way to sustain the growing outlaw population. When, therefore, Duke Senior’s malcontented companion, the loquacious Jaques, asks his fugitive ex-courtier compatriots, “Which is he that killed the deer?”, his celebratory, “Let’s present him to the Duke, like a Roman conqueror,” evokes far more than the spoils of the hunt (*AYL* 4.2.1–4). Jaques relishes the freedom to poach from an aristocratic oppressor, the Duke Frederick. His bloody jubilation is in stark contrast to the earlier report of Jaques’ melancholic railing against his comrades, as “mere usurpers, tyrants,” content only “To fright the animals and to kill them up / In their assigned and native dwelling-place” (*AYL* 2.1.61–3). Now, triumphing over the hunt, Jaques seemingly epitomizes the “noble robber” and “social bandit,” whose role as the “champion, the righter of wrongs, the bringer of social justice and equity,” guarantees a relationship with the peasantry that extends to “total solidarity and identity” with their oppressed plight.<sup>10</sup> Only seemingly, of course, because, as Eric Hobsbawm wryly comments, when there is a “need” for such “heroes and champions,” but there are no “real” ones, “unsuitable candidates” such as Jaques “are pressed into service”: “In real life most Robin Hoods are far from noble” (*Bandits* 47). Duke Senior and his followers might consider themselves noble robbers, ignoring as they do the circumscribed hunting privileges bestowed on an aristocratic elite by the monarch her/himself, but their social banditry does little to benefit the few legitimate forest dwellers they encounter.<sup>11</sup> Social justice and equity are superseded by lordly zeal and conquering self-glorification.

Significant for our consideration of Jaques’ celebration of deer stealing, Duke Senior’s analogous connection to Robin Hood, and the allusion to an outlaw band living freely off the land, is Shakespeare’s own mythical status as a “social bandit” in accord with Hobsbawm’s “noble robber” soubriquet. The association of Shakespeare with Robin Hood resistance is evidenced by late seventeenth and early eighteenth century pseudo-biographical narratives, which reference the playwright’s youthful poaching exploits and subsequent escape to London to pursue

<sup>9</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Arthur Golding (London, 1567), Book 1, fol. B2<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *Bandits* (New York: The New Press, 2000; orig. 1969), p. 47.

<sup>11</sup> Paul Franssen, “The Adventures of William Hood: Fictions of Shakespeare the Deer Stealer”, *Critical Survey*, 25.1 (2013): 59–71 (p. 63).

his acting and playwriting career, rather than stand trial for misdeeds in Stratford.<sup>12</sup> In his 1709 collected works, for instance, Nicholas Rowe describes in surprising detail how Shakespeare “had, by a Misfortune common enough to young Fellows, fallen into ill Company”.<sup>13</sup> Among this “Company,” Rowe states, were “some that made a frequent practice of Deer-stealing,” miscreants who “engag’d [Shakespeare] with them more than once in robbing a Park that belong’d to Sir *Thomas Lucy* of *Cherlecot, near Stratford*” (Rowe a3<sup>r</sup>). Shakespeare was subsequently “prosecuted,” and responded to his “somewhat” severe punishment, Rowe states, with a “very bitter” satirical ballad attacking Sir Thomas (Rowe a3<sup>r</sup>). Because of this new insult, the poacher-poet was “oblig’d to leave his Business and Family in *Warwickshire*, for some time,” and seek “shelter in *London*,” where his new life on “the Stage” beckoned (Rowe a3<sup>r</sup>–a3<sup>v</sup>). Youthful indiscretion accorded Shakespeare his Robin Hood persona, while also facilitating his future theatrical career.

Twenty-first century studies that interrogate Shakespeare’s aspirational social climbing and legal dealings, such as Katherine Duncan-Jones’s *Ungentle Shakespeare*, appear to counter the “social bandit” myth, suggesting not someone willing to challenge the commoditizing of his hometown’s common land and food production, but an opportunistic, land-grabbing profiteer and pro-enclosure sympathizer.<sup>14</sup> Shakespeare’s iconic status seems (for some though not all) tarnished by such evidence. An inherent uncertainty thus surrounds Shakespeare’s true identity, made worse by several hundred years of cultural hijacking by those with a vested interest in perpetuating his good name. That the rebellious youth Shakespeare, at odds with the landowning aristocracy and naively engaging in petty food-based crime, should posthumously achieve local celebrity status suggests, as we shall later see, not only his reinvention as a “social bandit” signifier, but also the selective amnesia of those best placed to question the social justice credentials of this opportunistic agrarian capitalist – his long-suffering Stratford neighbors. In addition, the pervasive commentary of eighteenth and nineteenth century historians, whose partisan historiographies influenced subsequent analyses of the enclosure movement, has likewise aided, albeit unwittingly, the nuanced manipulation of Shakespeare’s populist image.

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<sup>12</sup> S. Schoenbaum, *Shakespeare’s Lives*, rev. edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), pp. 68–72.

<sup>13</sup> Nicholas Rowe (ed.), *The Works of William Shakespear, in Six Volumes* (London, 1709), vol. 1, fol. a3<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> Katherine Duncan-Jones, *Ungentle Shakespeare: Scenes from His Life* (London: Thomson Learning, 2001), pp. 121–2.

Before discussing Shakespeare's very specific role in Stratford's early-seventeenth-century enclosure narrative, therefore, it is necessary to interrogate the enclosure movement's wider significance as a vehicle for anti-monarchic disaffection, and its role in perpetuating the 'Bard's' romantically iconic status.

## IDENTITY, HISTORIOGRAPHY, AND ENCLOSURE DEBATE CONTROVERSY

Selectively romantic biographical narratives like Rowe's, rather than formalizing the youthful history of Shakespeare, have instead led to confusion about his true identity. Such uncertainty guarantees the perpetuation of an idealized, iconic 'Bard', whose misspent years involved poaching and escaping from irate aristocratic landowners. For Paul Franssen, the desire (and need) to create alternative idealized images for Shakespeare accounts for his "unstable [...] role in cultural discourse," with public opinion shaped by, and helping to shape, the playwright's iconographic persona to the present day (Franssen 63). The instability of Shakespeare's identity is not remedied, however, by the cultural discourse of literary critics. Instead, this instability is exacerbated, with close readings of Shakespeare's canon leading to spurious biographical detailing, which allows Shakespeare to emerge, as *As You Like It's* narrative suggests, as a champion of the poor and social commentator against the rich. Such benign detailing is most evident in the somewhat ironic title "Sweete Master Shakespeare" (referenced in a late-1590s Cambridge University *Parnassus* play that humorously invokes the names of many popular playwrights of the age), which has achieved near literalist status among Shakespeare lovers intent on celebrating the gentle genius of their 'Bard'.<sup>15</sup>

For the bardolatrous – those whose veneration of "Sweete Master Shakespeare" extends far beyond the realm of reality into romanticized fantasy – *As You Like It's* apparent idolization of a rural existence of common-land mutual benefit and hunting freedom could be viewed, therefore, as Shakespeare's implicit championing of food sovereignty as a fundamental human right. The hunter-gatherer, "Seeking the food he eats," covets no more than the land can sustain and is eternally "pleased with what he gets" (*AYL* 2.5.35–6). Shakespeare might, with such a reading, be considered sympathetic to the Robin Hood "rebel" bent on

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<sup>15</sup> See Brian Vickers, *Shakespeare, Co-Author* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 525–6.

resisting “the establishment” (Franssen 69). In effect, Shakespeare would thus be siding with the 1592 enclosure rioters who, as Karl Polanyi seminally argues, were opposing the “revolution of the rich against the poor”.<sup>16</sup> With bitter irony, Polanyi describes the antithesis of Robin Hood resistance, whereby the “lords and nobles” were “literally robbing the poor” of their common lands, homes, and livelihoods (*Transformation* 37). In this light, Shakespeare appears as prescient prophet of the food justice debate, which advocates for “the right of communities everywhere to produce, process, distribute, access, and eat good food regardless of race, class, gender, ethnicity, citizenship, ability, religion, or community,” with its concomitant freedom from “exploitation” and guaranteed “rights of workers to fair labor practices”.<sup>17</sup>

As we shall see, however, Shakespeare’s Stratford business dealings, and his embroilment in a well-documented enclosure dispute that led to local discord and violent opposition, seem counter to any food justice prophesying. Shakespeare the enclosure sympathizer adds a hint of metaphorical bitterness to the ‘Bard’s’ traditionally “Sweete” iconic flavor. A problem arises, however, when discussing the enclosure of land in an early modern context because of the emotive term’s catchall volatility. Described by William C. Carroll as an “unstable [...] all-purpose signifier for virtually every negative socioagricultural development” in the early modern period, the term “enclosure” remains tainted by the paradigmatic “nostalgic vision” of utopian “communal perfection”.<sup>18</sup> Polanyi’s appraisal of the enclosure movement – like the critical responses to Shakespeare’s “golden world” allusion in *As You Like It* – is influenced by centuries of political and social commentary about “enclosure,” the source of which can be traced to Sir Thomas More’s 1516 advice-book treatise, *Utopia*. Originally published in Latin, *Utopia* appeared in English translation in 1551.<sup>19</sup> Describing the traditionally “tame” behavior of the nation’s sheep, More ironically associates these “greate deuowerers,” now turned man-eating monsters, with the “couetous and vnsatiable” appetites of a few “noble men”

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<sup>16</sup> Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Boston MA: Beacon Press, 2001), p. 37.

<sup>17</sup> Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, “Draft Principles of Food Justice”, IATP (18 October 2012) <<http://www.iatp.org/documents/draft-principles-of-food-justice>> [accessed 2 June 2015].

<sup>18</sup> William C. Carroll, “‘The Nursery of Beggary’: Enclosure, Vagrancy, and Sedition in the Tudor-Stuart Period”, in *Enclosure Acts: Sexuality, Property, and Culture in Early Modern England*, ed. Richard Burt and John Michael Archer (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), pp. 34–47 (pp. 35–6).

<sup>19</sup> Sir Thomas More, *Utopia* [1516], trans. Ralph Robinson (London, 1551).

landowners, determined to “enclose all in pastures” (*Utopia* C6<sup>v</sup>–C7<sup>t</sup>). Not content with separating off their “forestes chases laundes and parkes” for private deer hunting and recreational pursuits, these landowners “compasse abowt and inclose many thousa[n]d acres” of common land “within one pale or hedge” as pasture for their sheep, thus forcing the dispossessed rural poor into criminality and vagabondage (C7<sup>t</sup>).

More’s emotive call for Henry VIII to “Suffer not thies ryche men to bye vp all, to ingrosse and forstalle, and with theyr monopolye to kepe the market alone as please them,” has, as Carroll suggests, been re-interpreted and misinterpreted by successive generations of political historians who fail to acknowledge the advice-book irony of its message (D1<sup>v</sup>). Bent on proving the preordained inevitability of liberal democracy and constitutional monarchy, and concerned with justifying the state-sanctioned beheading of Charles I in 1649, the earliest of these historians systematically highlighted More’s comments as proof of collective dissatisfaction with the Tudor and Stuart regimes. Reaching their apotheosis in the early nineteenth century, the histories written to propagate such anti-monarchical invective became associated with the non-landowning, mercantile, and industrialist wing of British party politics, known as the Whigs; hence the collective title, Whig historiography. The discernible bias of selectively partisan historians like Thomas Babington Macaulay, whose first *History of England* volume, published in 1848, describes how the “many thousands of square miles, now enclosed and cultivated” by the “progress of agriculture,” have offered a “long list of advantages” for “the rustic,” was not lost on a select few contemporaries.<sup>20</sup> Karl Marx, for instance, scathingly attacked Macaulay, describing him as a “systematic falsifier of history”.<sup>21</sup> When, therefore, Marx expresses how “the English working class was precipitated without any transition from its golden into its iron age” by the enclosure movement, his overt reference to More, as well as his denunciation of Macaulay, demonstrate both distaste for, and unwitting acceptance of, prevailing Whig interpretations of *Utopia*’s supposed anti-royalist enclosure warnings (*Capital* 504). Whiggish bias remained

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<sup>20</sup> Thomas Babington Macaulay, *History of England from the Accession of James II, 5 vols* (London, 1848–55), vol. 1 (1848), p. 388.

<sup>21</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production*, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, 2 vols (London: Swan Sonnenschein, Lowrey & Co., 1887), vol. 1, book 1, chapter 27, “Expropriation of the Agricultural Population from the Land”, p. 509 n.1 <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Capital-Volume-I.pdf>> [accessed 1 June 2015].



strong among historians until the 1930s, when Herbert Butterfield exposed it to critical view, and described the insidious way Whig historiography imposed its pro-Parliament “abridgement of history” on early modern studies.<sup>22</sup> Nonetheless, an unquestioning acceptance of Whiggish historical fiction as historical fact remains evident in literary studies, even in the twenty-first century.<sup>23</sup>

Given the continued influence of Whig historiography outside the revisionist historical arena, and the vehemence with which Marx had denounced the insidiousness of its fictionalized narratives, it is not surprising that Polanyi should likewise reference its nineteenth-century proponents, who were “unanimous in condemning Tudor and early Stuart policy as demagogic,” while accepting much of their *Utopia* analysis for his own enclosure studies (*Transformation* 38). Similarly, Murray Bookchin, when describing how the sixteenth century enclosure movement turned the “English nobility into mere agricultural entrepreneurs,” also implicitly utilizes Whiggish *Utopia* conjecture in his work.<sup>24</sup> Bookchin’s description of the resulting counter-measures of centralized Tudor monarchs like Henry VIII and Elizabeth I, whose vigorous attempts “to arrest this development” among their land-grabbing subjects led to these rulers becoming the “objects of sharp opprobrium by the landlord and merchant classes,” seems consciously to discount traditional Whig anti-monarchic invective by offering a more reasoned, revisionist appraisal (Bookchin 190 & 294). Nonetheless, as Damien F. White suggests, Bookchin’s perceived transitional “shift from anarchism to the incorporation of basic insights of liberal-constitutionalism,” culminating in his “libertarian socialism,” might be seen as final proof of Whig historiography’s pervasive influence on his socio-ecological philosophy.<sup>25</sup>

Whatever our opinion about the socio-ecological agenda of twenty-first century “Northern” hegemonies, keen to promote their own deterministically individualized reactions to environmental justice, the fact that Whig propaganda can still permeate the most radical social justice thinking is testament to its insidious influence and appeal (White

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<sup>22</sup> Herbert Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1965; orig. pub. 1931), p. 24.

<sup>23</sup> See Kevin A. Quarmby, “Narrative of Negativity: Whig Historiography and the Spectre of King James in *Measure for Measure*”, *Shakespeare Survey*, 64 (2011): 300–316.

<sup>24</sup> Murray Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom: The Emergence and Dissolution of Hierarchy* (Palo Alto, CA: Cheshire Books, 1982), p. 295.

<sup>25</sup> Damien F. White, *Bookchin: A Critical Appraisal* (London: Pluto Press, 2008), p. 186.

91–2). In an early modern literary context, an unwitting acceptance of Whig historiography effectively guarantees the elevation of Shakespeare as a voice of the poor and proto-advocate of food justice. As such, food justice’s core ethical values – its “opposition,” in Deric Shannon’s words, “to relations of domination and inequality,” and its support for “social relations of mutual aid, cooperation, and the commitment to social transformation” – seem paralleled in *As You Like It*’s idealized outlaw existence.<sup>26</sup> In view of this, it is perhaps understandable why Shakespeare the resistance rebel and/or food justice advocate would, for the devout bardolator, prove a biographically irresistible choice. As Edward Bond’s 1974 play *Bingo* suggests, however, Shakespeare’s ethically sound food justice credentials appear less convincing when considered alongside the capitalistic land-banking and engrossing enterprises that funded his later-life pretensions to join the moneyed Warwickshire elite. Shakespeare the youthful poacher, the iconic ‘Bard of Stratford’, and the universal “Sweete Master” dramatist, jostle uncomfortably with Shakespeare the ambitiously “selfish landowner” and “miserly” malt-hoarding householder, whose actions are more akin with the ‘couetous and vnsatiable’ engrossers of More’s *Utopia* than to socially aware food justice activists (*Ungentle* 262 & 121–2). It is to this alternative Shakespeare that our attention now turns.

## THE ENGROSSING, LAND-BANKING ‘BARD’, AND THE WELCOMBE ENCLOSURE DISPUTE

The inherent instability of Shakespeare’s iconic status, whose protean “role in cultural discourse” permits consideration of Shakespeare as food justice sympathizer, is compounded by the limited documentary evidence surrounding the playwright’s life (Franssen 63). Significant, sometimes circumstantial, but often highly condemnatory documents do remain, however, that hint at Shakespeare’s exurbanite exploitation of his rural Stratford home. In consequence, conjecture and controversy have dogged the analysis of such evidence by successive generations of literary critics. Those who wish to sanitize the Shakespeare’s reputation read the sparse historical records with a deterministic eye akin to hero worship. Others, less concerned with salvaging Shakespeare’s reputation, consider plays like *As You Like It* as instances of social commentary that respond to the prevailing unrest among the English populace to poor harvests,

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<sup>26</sup> See Deric Shannon, “Introduction: Operationalizing Food Justice and Sustainability”, *Theory in Action*, 7:4 (2014): 1–12 (p. 4).

starvation, deprivation, and enforced vagabondage, all culminating in a “vast cultural circulation of the anxieties of displacement which arose from the enclosure” of common land.<sup>27</sup> For either camp, contemporary legal documents offer only tantalizing glimpses into Shakespeare’s aspirational social ascent, and his return to Stratford as a “new made *Mushrom man*”.<sup>28</sup> The poet John Taylor’s description of one whose rise seemingly occurs, like a mushroom’s growth, overnight, has been applied to Shakespeare’s social climbing, which raised him “too far, too fast, and through [the] lightweight and morally dubious profession” of the theater (*Ungentle* 259).

The legal disputes that the surviving documents mention must, however, affect our appreciation of Shakespeare as an exemplar of the agrarian capitalist, whose aggressive social climbing accords with the “political nexus of mutual interests” that developed between landowning aristocrats and yeoman farmers in the late medieval/early modern period.<sup>29</sup> Such mutuality, Spencer Dimmock argues, sprang originally from the “demographic collapse and subsequent stagnation” of the medieval lord’s estates system (156). If Shakespeare does indeed represent the aggressive agrarian capitalist, willing to exploit his powerless shire-folk to maintain his financial interests in land and food production, why should his reputation as a Robin Hood-style poacher supersede that of malt-engrosser and enclosure sympathizer? What might the anecdotal elevation of a local land-banking capitalist and tithe-taker – into an oppressed youthful outlaw on the run, forced into a life of theatrical adventure in London – tell us about attitudes to success and celebrity in early modern England? How does this narrative of sanitized re-creation inform our understanding of early modern food justice activism versus the cult of personality? Any attempt to answer these questions must recognize the social climate of late-Elizabethan England and the food supply problems of its rural poor.

The regular stage appearances of the subversive Robin Hood in the 1590s, and this trope’s barely-disguised political association with rebellion and poverty, seem understandable in the context of a decade that brought particular hardship to England’s rural regions, especially

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<sup>27</sup> Lynda E. Boose, “*The Taming of the Shrew*, Good Husbandry, and Enclosure”, *Shakespeare Reread*, ed. Russ McDonald (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), pp. 193–225 (p. 203).

<sup>28</sup> John Taylor, *A Most Horrible, Terrible, Tollerable, Termagant Satyre* (London, 1639), fol. A4<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>29</sup> Spencer Dimmock, *The Origin of Capitalism in England, 1400–1600*, Historical Materialism, 74 (Leiden: Brill, 2014), p. 156.

West Midlands towns like Stratford upon Avon. Devastating fires, plague visitations, and famine, compounded by the wet summers and meager harvests of 1596, 1597 and 1598, resulted in life-threatening food shortages (*Ungentle* 121). Tempers understandably ran high, with the result that organized food riots – indicative, according to John Bohstedt, of the “emergence of provision politics” – became relatively commonplace.<sup>30</sup> In the same year that Amiens most likely first espoused the fictive pleasure of “Seeking the food he eats / And [being] pleased with what he gets,” his creator was forced to defend himself against accusations of unlawful stockpiling, brought by the Stratford civic authorities. In February 1598, Shakespeare was listed as hoarding ten quarters (280 lbs.) of malt in his expansive New Place home, the “second largest” haul of illegally engrossed foodstuff in the area (*Ungentle* 122).<sup>31</sup> If, as the late Eduardo Galeano claims, “[r]ichness in the world” really “is a result of other people’s poverty,” then Shakespeare’s malt engrossing crime during a period of extreme shortage offers a stark reminder of his apparent disregard for the near-starvation of Stratford’s destitute, especially when a handsome profit might arise.<sup>32</sup>

Profit remained significant for Shakespeare, as subsequent legal disputes confirm. Four years after the malt-engrossing incident, Shakespeare is recorded spending £320 in cash (comparable in 2015 commodity value to \$90,000) to purchase 107 acres of arable land in open fields around Stratford, “with grazing rights for sheep and cattle in the common pasture” (Schoenbaum *Lives* 15). The importance of this 1602 purchase of “nineteen scattered scraps of land, or furlongs, which were irregularly shaped,” from the wealthy William Combe of Warwick and his nephew John Combe of Stratford, will soon become evident.<sup>33</sup> In addition, three years after this common land acquisition, Shakespeare negotiated a half interest in the lease of Stratford Corporation’s local tithes – a ten percent tax on all food production and sales – applied historically to bolster local parish church coffers in aid of the poor. For this benefit, Shakespeare paid an additional £440 (approximately

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<sup>30</sup> John Bohstedt, *The Politics of Provisions: Food Riots, Moral Economy, and Market Transition in England, c. 1550–1850* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2010), pp. 21–90 (pp. 30–31).

<sup>31</sup> Katherine Duncan-Jones, *Shakespeare: Upstart Crow to Sweet Swan 1592–1623* (London: A&C Black Methuen Drama, 2011), p. 240.

<sup>32</sup> Susan Stamberg, “Eduardo Galeano Contemplates History’s Paradoxes”, NPR Books (24 August 2009) <<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=112064007>> [accessed 2 June 2015].

<sup>33</sup> Park Honan, *Shakespeare: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 291; see also Màiri Macdonald, “A New Discovery about Shakespeare’s Estate in Old Stratford”, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 45 (1994): 87–9.

\$125,000 in 2015), by far his largest known cash outlay, which earned him the rights to tithes on corn, grain, blade, and hay, as well as certain tithes on wool, lamb, and other “smalle and privie tythes” from the entire Stratford parish (Honan 293; Schoenbaum *Lives* 15).

Since the Middle Ages, with the difficulty pre- and post-Reformation church authorities experienced administering these unpopular taxes, it became traditional to lease tithe collection, and thus renounce the income generated, to self-interested individuals who might better enforce them.<sup>34</sup> Shakespeare obviously recognized the investment potential of his tithe income, and his ability to extract the tax from his neighbors. As Park Honan notes, land ownership “conveyed status, influence, or respectability with local political overtones,” with “heritable factors” often being “crucial” (Honan 291). Combined with his authority to collect and personally benefit from the tithes of his immediate community, Shakespeare’s status and influence might indeed be enhanced and/or elevated, but his politicized respectability still remained tainted by his parvenu heritage as a “yeoman-class” son “who married upward” and then “assuaged [his] apparent class insecurities by later purchasing [a] bogus coat of arms” (Boose 201). As the 1596 College of Arms reference to “Shakespeare ye Player” suggests, Shakespeare’s wealth, rather than social standing, guaranteed his purchase (ostensibly for his father John) of a heraldic coat of arms complete with spear-shaking falcon crest (Duncan-Jones *Upstart* 106–9). The pretentiously archaic Norman-French motto that accompanies Shakespeare’s purchase – “Non Sanz Droict,” which translates as “Not Without Right” – sounds suspiciously defensive in its forced historicization. The College of Arms acquisition, which accorded the Shakespeares of Stratford “armigerous status,” also elevated William from a “crestless yeoman” to a sword-bearing gentleman, a right supposedly justified by some spurious familial association with the founder of the Tudor dynasty, Henry VII (*Upstart* 106–9). Money spoke, for Shakespeare, far louder than noble birth or aristocratic title. Money offered “ye Player” land, private rental income, and the part monopoly of local food-production tax revenue.

Money also, as we have seen, guaranteed Shakespeare’s direct involvement in the enclosure movement as the 1602 owner of his “nineteen scattered scraps” of Stratford common land (Honan 291). Nevertheless, the violent socioagricultural impact of enclosure was only felt by the inhabitants of Stratford when, in the wake of the 1607

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<sup>34</sup> See Ben Dodds, “Managing Tithes in the Late Middle Ages”, *The Agricultural History Review*, 53.2 (2005): 125–40.

Midland Revolt and in response to the local landowner Sir Edward Greville's attempt to enclose the town commons, the bailiff (and friend of Shakespeare) Richard Quiney, suffered fatal head wounds trying to intervene in a riotous brawl.<sup>35</sup> In view of his personal experience of so violent a reaction against enclosure, it is perhaps surprising that Shakespeare should, in October 1614, enter into formal agreement with one William Replingham of nearby Great Harborough, a financial arrangement that prompted what was to become known as "The Welcombe Enclosure Dispute".<sup>36</sup> As suggested by Bond's 1974 dramatic representation of the Shakespeare's later years in *Bingo*, the playwright's personal involvement in this incident is relatively well documented, even though there remains no direct evidence of the dispute's outcome or its immediate effect on the Shakespeare family finances. Within eighteen months of signing the agreement, Shakespeare was dead. The Welcombe affair remained hidden in the nation's archives until bardolators, poring over early modern documents for hidden insights into Shakespeare's life, uncovered its unsavory narrative.

The Welcombe enclosure dispute arose when Arthur Mainwaring of Shropshire, and his agent Replingham (a likely front man for the land's original owner, William Combe), decided to enclose common land in Stratford's Welcombe district. J. A. Yelling's description of the relative "ease" with which such enclosure could be achieved, with the disappearance of common fields reflecting, "in large measure," the haphazard "manner in which they had been developed," goes some way to explaining this contentious decision.<sup>37</sup> Nonetheless, Welcombe formed part of Shakespeare's 1602 land purchase, as well as offering tax income from his 1605 tithe acquisition. Enclosure could, if unilaterally imposed, have a direct negative impact on Shakespeare's long-term investment. That Shakespeare's potential losses were recognized is evident from the "Articles of agreement," dated 28 October 1614, drawn up by Replingham in favor of "William Shackespeare, his heiress and assignes," and Shakespeare's cousin, Thomas Greene (*Records* 1). This formal indenture confirms Replingham's agreement, "uppon reasonable request, [to] satisfie, content and make recompence" to Shakespeare "for

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<sup>35</sup> Roger B. Manning, *Village Revolts: Social Protest and Popular Disturbance in England, 1509–1640* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 104.

<sup>36</sup> Donato Colucci, "The Welcombe Enclosure Dispute 1614", *The Shakespeare Records* (2104) <<http://www.theshakespearerecords.com/welcombe-enclosure-dispute/>> [accessed 2 June 2015].

<sup>37</sup> J.A. Yelling, *Common Field and Enclosure in England 1450–1850* (London: Macmillan, 1977), p. 93.

all such losse, detriment and hinderance” he might incur “in respecte of the increasinge of the yearlie value of the tythes [...] in the said fieldes, or anie of them, by reason of anie inclosure or decaye of tyllage there ment and intended” (*Records* 1). In effect, Shakespeare was being offered “sufficient securitie” to guarantee his compliance with, or tacit support of, the enclosure of common lands, to the detriment of Stratford’s rural poor (*Records* 1).

The subsequent dispute, recorded in the diary entries of Thomas Greene, was litigious and lengthy, and resulted in the destruction of enclosure ditches and some petty violence. Greene, it would seem, was less enamored with the scheme and regularly expressed his “mighty opposition agaynst the Inclosure” (*Records* 12, 22 Nov. 1614). Although an “agreement” beneficiary, Greene garners and gains the backing of George, The Lord Carew (a respected peer of the realm, military pacifier of Ireland, and noble in King James’s court), in his battle against the enclosers (*Records* 11, 22 Nov. 1614). Carew’s support for Greene’s anti-enclosure demands (Carew was, like Sir Edward Greville, a prominent Stratford landowner) accords with Bookchin’s appraisal of the Westminster aristocracy’s annoyance with localized enclosing landowners, while suggesting the peer’s implicit acceptance of More’s century-old *Utopia* warning (*Ecology* 294). Although William Combe subsequently offered Greene, and Stratford’s “overseers of the poore,” every assurance “that the enclosures would not be hurtfull to the Towne,” and that Combe “hadd not to doe with yt but to have some proffytt by yt,” fears were in no way allayed (*Records* 15, 9 Dec. 1614). In consequence, the aldermen and burgesses of Stratford decided to fight Combe’s enclosure plans, and to support Greene’s opposition, whereby it was “Agreed and entred in the booke at a hall [meeting of Stratford Corporation] that the enclosure should be made a Towne cause,” and the charges “defrayed out of the towne revenewes” (*Records* 22, 21 Feb. 1615).

The support of Stratford’s local authority was fortuitous, especially since, only a week after they accepted financial responsibility for the dispute, Greene chronicles an altercation at Welcombe when a certain Stephen Sly, accompanied by three others, “assalted” the Corporation’s representative, “soe as he could not proceede with throweing downe the [enclosure] ditches” (*Records* 23, 2 Mar. 1615). Sly’s recorded response, that “yf the best in Stratford came [...] there to throwe yt downe he wold bury his head in the bottom of the dytche,” seems indicative of the tactics employed by the enclosers to enforce local compliance (*Records* 23). So contentious was the Welcombe incident that, as Greene reports,

Stratford's aldermen and burgesses confronted the powerful and wealthy Combe, and advised him that "they would not have yt sayd in future tyme that they were the men which gave way to the undoeing of the towne" (*Records* 24, 2 Apr. 1615). To stress their further displeasure, these representatives added that "all the 3 fires" – a reference to the devastating fires of 1594–96, 1598, and 1614 that destroyed much of Stratford – "were not soe great a losse to the towne as the Inclosure would be" (*Records* 24). In a final act of defiance, the copyholder tenants "ploughed thereupon their own Land," thus circumventing the enclosure ditches and invoking their common land rights, actions that apparently made William Combe "very angry" (*Records* 26, 20 Apr. 1615).

Throughout this eighteen-month dispute, when tempers are frayed and accusations leveled, one voice remains noticeably muted: Shakespeare's. Three weeks after first signing the agreement in 1614, Greene describes intercepting his "cosen Shakspeare" on his "commyng yesterday" to London (*Records* 5, 17 Nov. 1614). Greene records Shakespeare's assurance to him that Combe "ment to inclose" only a small area of land, that this enclosure was deferred until "Aprill" of the following year and only after a full "servey [of] the Land" had been undertaken, and that Combe intended to give full satisfaction, although certainly "not before" all these requirements had been met (*Records* 5). Greene also noted his cousin's placatory private opinion that "there will be nothyng done at all" (*Records* 5). Shakespeare's reassurances seem suspiciously disingenuous given the speed with which the land was, within the month, fully surveyed, this action accompanied by the news from Combe that, as soon as the winter "frost broke," the "dychynge would goe presently forward" (*Records* 15, 9 Nov. 1614). This speedy execution led Greene to urge the Corporation to write to Shakespeare, which they collectively did, while Greene wrote his own personal letter to his cousin, adding "Coppyes of all [their] oathes made," and "a note of the Inconvenyences [that] would grow by the Inclosure" (*Records* 17, 23 Dec. 1614).

It would seem that no response was forthcoming. Apart from Greene's mention of having "supped" with Replingham, and having been "assured" that he "should be well dealt withal" according to the "former promisses," and most especially the "agreement" drawn up with Greene and his "cosen Shakspeare," Greene's meticulous journal keeping makes no further reference to his cousin (*Records* 21, 11 Jan. 1615). When, then, in September 2015 (nearly a year after they signed their agreement), Greene records "W Shakspeares tellyng J Greene [Thomas's brother John] that I was not able to beare the encloseinge of welcombe," this is the only subsequent (and last) time that Shakespeare is mentioned



(*Records* 27, [?] Sept. 2015). For literary historians like Schoenbaum, this “perplexing entry” sits uncomfortably with traditional images of the incomparable ‘Bard’.<sup>38</sup> In an act of bardolatrous damage limitation, Schoenbaum deconstructs the entry with deterministic glee:

Possibly “I” was a slip for “he”. Or possibly Greene meant to write “barre”, not “beare”. He began by writing “to he ...”; maybe he intended to say “to help”, then changed his mind because of a possible ambiguity – “to help” could mean either “to aid” or “to remedy”. For that matter, “beare” can be taken two ways also, as “endure” or “justify”. (Schoenbaum *Documentary* 233–4)

Rather than accept that Greene might have been hearing the uncomfortable truth from his brother, that he was indeed alone in “not [being] able to beare the encloseinge,” and that Shakespeare cared little for his socio-economic sensibilities, Schoenbaum offers his uncomfortably convoluted conjecture. In a parting remark, Schoenbaum admits that “[a]ny attempt to interpret the passage is guesswork and no more” (*Documentary* 234). Even so, Schoenbaum elsewhere expresses his bardolatrous concern that revelations about Shakespeare’s fascination with “money, real estate, and social position” – euphemistically described as “Shakespeare’s prosaic interests” – offer much to recommend him “to partisans of the Commercial Spirit, but would alienate those nurtured on the romantic idea of the Poet” (*Lives* 16).

Schoenbaum’s efforts to restore Shakespeare’s poetic rather than prosaic reputation receive short shrift from the legal historian, Andrew Zurcher. Citing how Schoenbaum’s bardolatrous “treatment of the enclosure episode is typical” of other twentieth-century Shakespeare apologists, Zurcher suggests instead that Shakespeare “compounded directly” with the enclosers, “to protect his financial interest in the land should the enclosure proceed,” and “thereafter [...] stayed out of the long-running and sometimes violent dispute between the Corporation and Combe”.<sup>39</sup> Rather than defend Shakespeare’s actions, Zurcher offers an alternative opinion that, given Shakespeare’s parents’ well-documented

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<sup>38</sup> S. Schoenbaum, *William Shakespeare: A Documentary Life* (New York: Oxford University Press in association with The Scolar Press, 1975), p. 233.

<sup>39</sup> Andrew Zurcher, *Shakespeare and Law* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), p. 286 (n. 29). For “typical” bardolatry, Zurcher references Mark Eccles, *Shakespeare in Warwickshire* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1961), pp. 136–78; E.K. Chambers, *William Shakespeare: A Study of Facts and Problems*, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930), vol. 2, pp. 141–52.

financial troubles, “it is not surprising to find” Shakespeare “shrewder, and more successful, in his legal dealings”: “In his other acquisitions, dealings, and speculations, both in Stratford and London, Shakespeare seems to have acted with the same judicious and sure-handed confidence” (Zurcher 38). Indeed, as Bookchin argues when discussing the “ecologically well-meaning” twenty-first-century entrepreneur, any attempt at moral concern places such people “at a striking and indeed fatal disadvantage” in the competitive marketplace, a factor of which Shakespeare seems judiciously aware.<sup>40</sup> “Judicious” and “sure-handed” seem a far cry, however, from the “Sweete Master Shakespeare” epithet repeated by writers such as Stanley Wells, whose admission that Shakespeare “was implicated” in the Welcombe incident, and “has been suspected of acting against the best interests of the poor,” is countered by the defensive statement, that “his exact attitude is difficult to determine”.<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, and despite this difficulty, the poaching narratives that developed after Shakespeare’s death do suggest an “exact attitude,” albeit one that seems strangely sanitized in its commercial appeal. The way this reinvention of the ‘Bard’ manifested, however, is worthy of interrogation, if only to highlight a collusive intent among Shakespeare’s Stratford contemporaries.

## SWEETENING THE “SWEETE MASTER’S” REPUTATION

Given our knowledge of the Welcombe Enclosure Dispute, and its impact on the Stratford community, Shakespeare’s “Sweete Master” reputation appears suspiciously unfounded as far as his food justice sympathies are concerned. Nonetheless, the title “Sweete Master Shakespeare” does accord with the image of the playwright not as an engrosser or supporter of enclosure, but as the youthful poacher forced from his home town by his antisocial, anti-aristocratic skullduggery. As we have seen, Rowe’s 1709 reference to Shakespeare’s “Deer-stealing” activities did much to invent a past more in keeping with the Robin Hood outlaw than the aggressive agrarian capitalist (Rowe a3<sup>f</sup>). Similar to Robert Gottlieb and Anupama Joshi’s description of “foodwashing” – the food version of “greenwashing” led by twenty-first century “global food industry players” such as PepsiCo and Wal-Mart – Rowe’s equally

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<sup>40</sup> Murray Bookchin, with Eirik Eigliad, *Social Ecology and Communalism* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2007), p. 43.

<sup>41</sup> See Stanley Wells, “‘Sweet Master Shakespeare’: 1564–1616”, *Searching for Shakespeare*, ed. Tarnya Cooper (London: National Portrait Gallery, 2006), pp. 13–21 (pp. 19–20).

spurious marketing strategy might, in light of the Welcombe incident, be considered ‘Bardwashing’.<sup>42</sup> By describing Shakespeare as a miscreant, Rowe’s ‘Bardwashing’ demonstrates, as Schoenbaum concedes, “the continued popularity of an ideal whereby the local populace should celebrate the mythic illegal activities of a local celebrity by associating his name with actions counter to the forced enclosure of land by a local wealthy family” (*Lives* 70). Significant for the ‘Bardwashing’ accusation is Schoenbaum’s acceptance that the deer-poaching anecdote “most likely is not biographical fact,” stemming as it does from “gossip in Stratford” (*Lives* 70). Anecdotal celebratory gossip, not miserly selfish-landowner invective, seems key to Shakespeare’s ‘Bardwashing’ by the Stratford community.

Most noticeable in this reinvention of the ‘Bard’ are the diverse bases for this anecdotal evidence. Schoenbaum notes no less than four “autonomous sources” for the deer-poaching anecdote (*Lives* 70). Rowe’s description aside, a seventeenth century manuscript written by the Reverend William Fulman, inherited at this Warwickshire resident’s death in 1680 by his friend the Reverend Richard Davies, recounts how Shakespeare was “much given to all unluckiness in stealing venison and rabbits, particularly from Sir — Lucy, who had him oft whipped and sometimes imprisoned and at last made him fly his native country to his great advancement” (*Lives* 69).<sup>43</sup> In his analysis of this anecdote, Jeffrey Theis notes how its “truth-value is clearly false, yet the narrative’s plausibility resonates from the local social customs in Shakespeare’s Warwickshire region”.<sup>44</sup> Almost by way of an apology, Theis draws on the social historian Roger Manning’s comment that close “proximity to the Forest of Arden and numerous aristocratic deer parks and rabbit warrens would have steeped Shakespeare’s early life in the practices of hunting and poaching whether he engaged in them or only heard stories about them” (Theis 46).<sup>45</sup> Christopher Hill references such customs when arguing that “game laws criminalized what most villagers regarded as traditional customary rights,” based on their understanding of the Bible

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<sup>42</sup> Robert Gottlieb and Anupama Joshi, *Food Justice* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010), p. xiv.

<sup>43</sup> William Fulman, Corpus Christi College Library, MS Fulman xv, 22, no. 7; also E.K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923), vol. 2, p. 257.

<sup>44</sup> Jeffrey Theis, “The ‘ill kill’d’ Deer: Poaching and Social Order in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*”, *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 43.1 (2001): 46-73 (p. 46).

<sup>45</sup> Roger Manning, *Hunters and Poachers: A Social and Cultural History of Unlawful Hunting in England, 1485–1640* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 182–83.

and the idea that animals were placed on earth by God for the benefit of all (Genesis, 1.26–8).<sup>46</sup>

Two other sources for the deer-poaching narrative are Joshua Barnes and Thomas Jones. Schoenbaum notes how Jones, who died in his nineties in 1703, “remembered hearing the deer-poaching story from several of the elders of Stratford,” while all four – Rowe, Davies, Barnes, Jones – seem to have “heard of Shakespeare’s transgression from several of the old people in the town” (*Lives* 70). Although Edward Berry questions the reliability of the Barnes and Jones stories, there are noticeable similarities, and differences, between them.<sup>47</sup> Rowe’s fanciful telling of the narrative offers a reason for Shakespeare travelling to London; Barnes and Jones confirm the localized source of the gossip from Stratford elders; Davies adds the mention of deer- and rabbit-stealing, and the fact that Shakespeare was often whipped and imprisoned. While none of the anecdotes reference Shakespeare’s swift social rise and return to Stratford as a landowner and tithe-taker, all reference Shakespeare as the “social bandit” who escapes to a better life on London’s playhouse stages. Franssen might argue that the “survey of fictional variations on the deer stealing myth suggests [...] that Shakespeare’s character changes in accordance with discourses of authority,” but it fails to acknowledge the importance of the local “gossip” voices in forging this revised identity (“Fictions” 69).

That the ‘Bardwashing’ of Shakespeare began, so it seems, soon after his death in Stratford in 1616 seems irrefutable. Unconvincing as the four local narratives about his poaching misdeeds might appear individually, collectively they confirm the power of homegrown gossip and obvious hero worship for the returned “local boy made good”. The respective, near-uniform character studies of the rebellious young Shakespeare, willing to poach illicit food from the rich and write satirical swipes against his accusers, suggest the creation of a local myth, made more powerful by the fame and fortune of its subject. Shakespeare might be considered a “new made *Mushrom man*” among the urbanites of London, but his exurbanite hometown reputation seems elevated, rather than tainted, by his dubiously gained riches and local land-banking acquisitions. The seductive power of Shakespeare’s celebrity status, and the cult of personality that already accompanied him back to Stratford on his retirement from the London playhouse scene, seem key. It might be

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<sup>46</sup> Christopher Hill, *Liberty Against the Law: Some Seventeenth Century Controversies* (London: Penguin, 1997), p. 97.

<sup>47</sup> Edward Berry, *Shakespeare and the Hunt: A Cultural and Social Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 20–21.

another 153 years before Stratford first began reaping its tourist attraction rewards, with the staging of David Garrick's 1769 'Shakespeare Jubilee' celebrations marking a renewed interest in the playwright's provincial birthplace, but in the immediate aftermath of his death, Shakespeare's local reputation not only remained surprisingly intact, but also enhanced.<sup>48</sup>

By the end of the seventeenth century, those eager to fill in the blank spaces of Shakespeare's biography could record the reminiscences of elderly Stratford residents as they seemingly chose to ignore their neighbor's suspect behavior in favor of a far more sanitized version of events. The image of Shakespeare the aggressive agrarian capitalist, whose "wealth," as Galeano judges, must indeed "be held in some suspicion," is subsumed beneath the 'Bardwashed' image of a Robin Hood-style champion of food justice, food sovereignty, and poacher's freedom to hunt wherever one pleases.<sup>49</sup> It is, however, not the thieving exploits of Shakespeare that appear most surprising about this appropriated narrative, but the cunning skill with which this powerful symbolic image was itself metaphorically stolen. The sly arrogation of Shakespeare's image, as a wayward youth whose actions invite comparison with contemporary food and social justice activism, was first perpetrated not by the bardolators of a later age, but by the very people most likely impacted by his land-banking, tithe-collecting, and malt-engrossing schemes. Shakespeare's Stratford contemporaries represent the real poachers, content to steal their celebrated townsman, and prepare him for future cultural consumption by later generations of bardolatrous fans.

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<sup>48</sup> See Vanessa Cunningham, *Shakespeare and Garrick* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 106.

<sup>49</sup> Eduardo Galeano, *Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent*, trans Cedric Belfrage, rev. edn (London: Latin America Bureau, 1997), p. 265.