Wooden Os: Shakespeare's Theatres and England's Trees. Vin Nardizzi. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013. xii + 206 pp. $60.

Vin Nardizzi's *Wooden Os* traces the residue of anxiety about England's lumber supply in four very different plays: *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *The Spanish Tragedy*, and *The Tempest*. That Elizabethan and Jacobean playhouses were themselves a residue of trees, as the book's titular quotation from Shakespeare's *Henry V* reminds us, permits an extensive, ingenious, and often-vivid meditation that interweaves ecocritical and metatheatrical threads.

The chapter on *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* develops this association between England's trees and playhouses in fascinating ways. Nardizzi excavates a plausible if oblique allusion to the Rose theater, and builds a more extensive comparison between Friar Bacon's protection of a magical tree and the miraculous dispersal of the Spanish Armada (reinforced by the Continental overdeterminations of the name of the rival magician, Don Jacques Vandermast). That defensive spell echoes fears that Spain would extirpate the Forest of Dean to facilitate a Catholic takeover, but also fears of radical Protestant antitheatricalism.

Despite its illuminating links to political and economic history, the book's argument relies heavily on symbolism and synecdoche, as in the observation that "the entire eco-inflected playbook was shipped across the Thames from the Rose to the Fortune playhouse within years of a rival troupe ferrying its constitutive wood and timber in the other direction" (106). Sometimes Nardizzi seems to take those figurations literally: "the initial erection of the Theatre would have left a large imprint on English woodlands" (82) and "the emblem of a felled tree in the composite *Spanish Tragedy* opens for us a vista onto the devastation that was carried out in English woodlands so that timbers could be transported to a northern suburb of London for the construction of the new Fortune playhouse" (87). Could a few such buildings have required a very significant fraction of the timber used in rapidly growing London, or in the smelting of iron, or building of ships?

Nardizzi helpfully explicates the relationship between the forest and social class in *Merry Wives of Windsor*, and rightly observes that commentators have under-observed the way the play turns Falstaff into a felled oak (as his name might imply) before turning him into an Actaeon-like creature. The great insight of the chapter on the *Spanish Tragedy* additions is that the tree Horatio's father planted at his birth reflects a fatal level of social climbing in that family. Other ideas about this play arise through metaphors that are again multiple, shifting, and provocative, as in an extended discussion of the Privy Council's reluctance to allow more theaters in London: "the scene of destruction in Hieronimo's pleasure garden could tout the success of the playhouse against its adversaries. Isabella's assault against the 'unfortunate' emblem — the tree prop — of the theatre confirms the playhouse's good luck: although the scene pulls down the prop, its production in this playhouse requires that the trees of theatre not be cut down"; and in the next paragraph, "Isabella emerges, by this logic, as a shadow for the workmen who undertook this enormous labor" of building "theatrical 'trees' around London" (109).

The launch of the last full chapter, on *The Tempest*, is wonderfully compelling. Even the prose here seems to achieve a new crispness and drive. It connects back to the book's opening theme (quoting More's *Utopia*) of England's fantasies of arboreal plenitude by evoking the ways *The Tempest* effaces labor in its Ovidian vision of a golden age, while also hinting that the island of the "magical lumberjack" Prospero (122) — seemingly richer in logs than trees — may already have declined toward an Iron Age. Nardizzi offers much witty speculation about what might have been made out of wood on stage, if a bit perversely in suggesting that, by not mentioning a forest that isn't there, Prospero's

immaterial wedding masque was designed to draw attention to the fact that the playhouse containing it consumed lots of lumber (131). But — as when the book seems to attribute antitheatricalism to scarcity of wood, when the objections were probably more ideological than materialist — one can't blame a monograph for taking a special interest in its topic. The book closes rewardingly, with a neat narrative of the messy archaeological afterlives of the playhouses.

Both factually grounded and ambitiously speculative, with solid roots in established scholarship but offering new branches, *Wooden Os* proves itself a worthy contribution to ongoing efforts to recover the environmental history of early modern England through readings of literature — readings that are themselves enriched by engagement with rediscovered material details of the human relationship to the rest of nature.

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