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“The art itself is nature”:
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Performing Horticultural Spaces: Shakespearean Gardens, Orchards, and Parks

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Theatrical arts have always staged, or have been staged in, gardens, orchards and parks. Such horticultural spaces are crucial meeting points of art and nature: some of the most profound philosophical debates have been staged in these spaces, not least in Shakespeare’s drama. Shakespearean horticultural spaces are sites for debates on ethics, aesthetics and politics, from the artistic imitation of nature to the relations between form and essence, public and private space, power and sovereignty. Our seminar proposes to explore these debates through textual sources, theory, performance and spaces, while also spotlighting multi-dimensional relationships among source, author, actor, and audience. This seminar asks participants to engage with the idea of Shakespearean outdoor spaces and their representation in the theatre and other media as well as with the relation of Shakespearean theatre to outdoor performance spaces. Particular attention should be given to the analysis of the private and public as well as the natural and artistic dimensions intertwining in the representation of and engagement with gardens, orchards, or parks. Participants may wish to consider such topics as the imitation of nature by art and the effect this has on the audience; how the garden image has reached Shakespeare and how it has been treated in coeval works; how the garden could represent ideologies of governance and sovereignty as well as a metaphor for a space between the public and the private.