

# FRIDAY FORUM PRESENTS

## “The Real Potatoes of Peru” in Shakespeare’s Windsor

A talk by Vin Nardizzi  
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Awaiting the arrival of the merry wives to Windsor Park, Shakespeare’s amorously minded Falstaff ejaculates, “Let the sky rain potatoes!” (5.5.16-17). Critics have long glossed the meaning of the line as Falstaff’s articulation of a desire for aphrodisiacs because the sweet potato was thought to be an erotic stimulant. Aslant this tradition, I identify these “potatoes” as ancestors of our common potatoes, “the real potatoes of Peru,” in the words of James Garret, Jr., a Dutch immigrant naturalist living in late-Elizabethan London. Based on Garret’s correspondence and social position in the European community of scientists, I put forward two revisionary arguments. One concerns the common potato in the history of English botany, especially the inclusion of its first visual and verbal descriptions in John Gerard’s monumental *Herball* (1597). The second, Shakespeare’s play, which, its parochialism notwithstanding, has a geographic imagination that is expansive, even circumnavigational. The link between them is “les vrayes papos de peru.”

Prof. Nardizzi is the author of *Wooden Os: Shakespeare’s Theatres and England’s Trees* (University of Toronto Press, 2013) and is writing a book called *Marvellous Vegetables in the Renaissance*.

**Thursday, October 5**

**4:00 - 6:00 PM**

**English Department Lounge (Room 4406)**