

QUEER ECOLOGICAL MARVELL

by

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Abstract

Within the works of Andrew Marvell, there exists a fascination with relationship between humans and nature. Such a relationship results, in many cases, in the modification of nature, but through an application of queer ecological theory to several poems by Marvell, notions of anthropocentrism and heteronormative sexual are elucidated as negatives in the garden-states Marvell imagines. In interrogating such themes, it becomes clear that Marvell appears to be grappling with our complex and often confusing notions of sexuality, and the potential manifestations such sexuality, and subsequent desire, has on nature.

Queer Ecological Marvell

Interpretations of Andrew Marvell's poetry diverge in many directions, with two common threads being the effects of human influence upon nature and explicit discussions of the ways sexuality and love find expression within the poems. Often lacking in both discussions is the potential overlap between these two threads, such overlap evident in verses such as the following from Marvell's "The Garden":

Fond lovers, cruel as their flame,
Cut in these trees their mistress' name.
Little, alas, they know, or heed,
How far these beauties hers exceed!
Fair trees! Wheres'e'er your barks I wound,
No name shall but your own be found. (19-24)

For Andrew McCrae, "[E]ven the process of giving a name, is acknowledged as a product of human culture," which, he argues, "is acknowledged as essentially violent in its engagement with nature" (129). In this analysis, Marvell calls attention to gardens as modifications of nature, returning repeatedly to human culture as violent when enacted upon it. Additionally, McCrae seeks to unpack the term "ecology" in light of seventeenth-century understandings of nature, denoting the impact property rights and social standing have upon human-land relations. It is through these means that McCrae seeks to discuss the relationship between society and nature in Marvell's verse, positioning Marvell as a kind of early modern environmentalist.

On the same lines quoted above, George Klawitter argues "each creature begins to love with self-love, and if that love never develops into shared love, it is still preferred to one's being a mere chronicle of other people's love" (164). Unlike McCrae, whose focus is rooted in ecological conflict, Klawitter attests to Marvell as being engaged in discussion of sexual discourse, where the garden the speaker finds himself in can be read as a location away from

society for fulfillment “even to the point of autoerotic stimulation” (166). Klawitter, as such, posits the garden as a location for sexual fulfillment, but only as a direct result of the solitude the speaker finds there, rather than the plants and nature unique to such an environment.

Though McRae and Klawitter offer differing interpretations, they both discuss, to varying degrees, the connections between sexuality and nature, with McRae using an analysis of grafting as sexual to further his argument of human culture as violent and acquisitory(128-129) and Klawitter pondering sexual fulfillment of oneself within a solitary setting(162). What each misses is the possibility their claims are connected, made most evident by the prominence of sexual language in their discussions. Put simply, I believe there has been continued oversight in associating the ecological conflict often noted within Marvell’s work with his repeated sexualization of nature and gardens. McRae’s notion of gardens being artifice or modifications of nature ties in well with this overlap, and as a result, I will analyze “modification” in the sense that nature is altered to make it pleasurable for human consumption and experience. Through such an analysis of consumption and modification, I seek to fill in this gap in Marvell criticism, demonstrating some ways in which nature is sexually, and often idealistically, conveyed to signify both ecological concern, and possibilities for anti-heteronormative, anti-anthropocentric sexual diversity.

Theorizing Queer Ecologies

This gap exists squarely within the realm of queer ecologies, which 1) shows the ways “nature” and “natural” have been used historically to oppress those outside of the heteronormative, 2) facilitates an interest in human sexual behavior in relation to plant and

animal reproduction, and 3) questions sex as biological need vs. the view of it in society. As Catriona Sandilands states, “queer ecology currently highlights the complexities of contemporary biopolitics, draw[ing] important connections between the material and cultural dimensions of environmental issues, and insists on an articulatory practice in which sex and nature are understood in light of multiple trajectories of power and matter”(Sandilands 1). Through this framework, lines such as “How far these beauties hers exceed! / Fair trees! Wheres’e’er your barks I wound, / No name shall but your own be found.” come under scrutiny for the ways in which they comment upon human relation to nature and human sexual behavior with an emphasis on trees (23-24). More specifically, Greta Gaard articulates “By attempting to ‘naturalize’ sexuality, the dominant discourse of Western culture constructs queer sexualities as ‘unnatural’ and hence subordinate,” showing part of the lineation of my argument, in that heteronormative sexuality as dominant subordinates any other sexuality, and as a direct result, dictates plant-human relations (28). Additionally, queer ecology “calls into question human exceptionalism and destabilizes our understanding of identity, authenticity, and technology on which modern categories of human sexual orientation rest” leaving room for interpretation of nature as sexual and commenting upon heteronormative discourse of human sexuality and desire (Sandilands 3). As I intend to show, Marvell’s poetic compositions, and in particular his Mower poems, call into question human exceptionality in regards to nature. This is shown above through his example of humans carving their names into trees in an act of supposed affection, a gesture that lends itself towards both the aspects of sexual discourse impacting nature and human modification of nature.

With this framework in mind, I hope to analyze how Marvell's Mower poems queer nature, setting up as an alternative for heteronormative anthropocentric sexual discourse through the modification of nature for the purposes of human pleasure, and through the allusions to Eden and a pre-Eve Adam, which suggests a sexuality that predates the heterosexual couple, this sexuality rooted in the pleasures of nature and, specifically, the garden itself. This depiction of paradisaical sexuality invites us to rethink "nature" and "sexuality" as conceptual categories and, hence, the very idea of natural or normative sex. As "The Garden" works towards pondering this broader discussion of sexuality and its implications, "The Mower against Gardens" interrogates the potential underside of this fantasy of nature's solitary sexual pleasures and by looking at the harm arising from altering, or what I call perverting, nature in the act of consumption and in fulfillment of anthropocentric desires and pleasures (broadly defined). Consideration of these poems lays the queer ecological groundwork for fuller discussion of a third Marvell poem, "Damon the Mower," which, on the surface, appears to be a conventional heterosexual love poem with the beloved Juliana at the center. However, implementation of a queer ecocritical lens enables us to see how the poem pushes back against heteronormative discourse through the stark difference between Damon's scorn-filled love for Juliana and the solace that always follows as a direct result of nature. As a result, we can begin to glimpse not just in "Damon the Mower," but in Marvell's poetic corpus a tension between ecological preservation and anti-heteronormative erotic possibility that the verse is at pains to reconcile.

Debates about the Mower's identity in and across the cluster of Mower poems inform my investigation of Marvell's queer ecologies. In his reading of "The Mower against Gardens," for instance, Peter Berek unpacks ways in which the speaker is conflicted in his discussion of

ecological purity. Berek most specifically looks at the relationship the speaker has with gardens as a mower and how he can be inquisitive about nature's purity in a position specifically created to modify nature for human experience. Berek states that the poem "articulat[es] a way of looking at the costs of civilization while at the same time asking the reader to perceive the necessity of adapting, not merely inhabiting, one's environment" (149). Building upon this idea, Lisa Anderson interprets the methods through which Marvell's speaker idealizes nature, stating "[the speaker]'s inner life is excessively complicated by his need to maintain an impossible unity between his desires and nature, even after that unity has been contradicted by experience" (142). Anderson's discussion of the speaker informs my argument by bringing to attention the speaker's affinity for nature, and his, in many ways fantastical and conflicted relationship to nature due to his profession as a mower. More recently, Laura Seymour comments upon sexuality in the poems, stating that "the speaker interleaves his desire for humans with his desire for plants" and that "[the speaker] accesses human, or at least anthropomorphic, bodies and minds through plants, and enables them to access him in return," (par 8). Taken together, this work on the identity of Marvell's speaker demonstrates ongoing interest in imbrications of sexuality and ecology in the Mower poems. Advancing this discussion with explicit focus on the constellation of terms, images, metaphors, and allusions spoken by and about the Mower in the Mower poems, I aim to elucidate the speaker's at-once allied and contradictory desires to draw pleasure from, while at the same time preserving, nature in the form of the garden. Although complicated due to his desire for human separation from nature while he wishes to be immersed in it, the struggle of the speaker stands against human exceptionalism as an oppressive force in favor of unmodified nature. Additionally, the sexualizing of plants can be interpreted not only as Seymour posits, but

can also extend past anthropocentric views of sexuality, and comment upon the ways we interact with and alter nature. It is this gap in scholarship, a gap consisting of the speaker within the poems desiring nature yet understanding the negativity potentially associated in sexualizing it in anthropocentric terms, that my paper seeks to fill in.

In addition to analyzing the speaker specifically in Marvell's poems, scholars have closely examined the relationship between the environment and society, a relation most often discussed in terms lamenting human interaction with nature. Along with McRae, Dan Jaeckle, in his piece entitled, "Marvell's 'Mower against Gardens,'" analyzes how "The Mower against Gardens" functions both separate from and integrated into the ideological issues of its time. Jaeckle's article brings to attention the sexual nature of Marvell's language and puts said rhetoric into dialogue with issues such as horticulturists seeking exoticism and humankind's domination over nature. Although he discusses how Marvell's speaker seems concerned about the disasters of the Anthropocene, Jaeckle misses the potential connection between such an anthropocentric view of nature, and our understanding of sexuality and desire in regards to plants. Diane Kelsey McColley argues a similar point, in that through close reading and analysis of the works of Marvell and his contemporaries in their historical and political period, we may better understand the roots of modern ecocriticism. McColley states, "I hope to show the importance of this dimension of early modern studies and to persuade those that think that pre-Romantic and pre-Darwinian poetry, especially if it is monotheistic religious, is intrinsically unecological, or that 'ecocriticism' of it is intrinsically anachronistic, to reconsider"(McColley 1). In what follows, I will be drawing from McColley's trenchant analysis to consider more fully

intersections of sexual and ecological longing in Marvell's Mower poems. My project likewise benefits from Matthew Gandy's exploration of queer space:

“conceptual synergy between queer space and urban heterotopias that furthers our understanding of how material spaces are experienced and of how different kinds of cultural or political alliances might emerge in relation to the protection of specific sites. The intersection between queer theory and urban ecology also raises questions in relation to conventional categorizations of urban nature so that distinctions between design and ‘nondesign’ become unclear, the connection between ‘wild nature’ and landscape authenticity is radically attenuated, and the idea of pleasure in nature is extended” (740).

Building on this theorization of queer space and urban heterotopias, I intend to show how the Mower's, and through him Marvell's imagined “public space,” may inform ecological and sexual discourse as an area that is simultaneously shaped to the will of humans and deemed close to natural.

Of course, foundational work on gender and sexuality, even if not ecocritically focused, also informs my study of queer ecological Marvell. Derek Hirst and Steven Zwicker, for example, discuss Marvell's critique of patriarchal dominance and heteronormative coupling. In addition to attesting to the masculinity perpetuated by patriarchy as potentially violent, Hirst and Zwicker argue that “To embrace ‘delicious Solitude,’ to conjure ‘vegetable Love . . . Vaster than Empires,’ to figure ‘the green Seraglio,’ to meddle ‘between the Bark and Tree,’ to ‘procreate without a Sex,’ is to confront, perhaps even to deconstruct, the entire frame of heterosexuality” (635). Though they contrast heteronormativity, Hirst and Zwicke miss other implications for sexuality in Marvell, most specifically the possibility for the speaker to sexually desire the plants themselves, and what such a non-heteronormative relationship implies in Marvell's poems. According to Michael John Disanto, adult sexuality seems patently undesirable to Marvell's speakers. Infact, any location devoid of adult sexuality, such as solitary nature depicted within

“The Garden,” is to be sought after precisely for its supposed break with sexualized spaces. Like Hirst and Zwicker, Disanto leaves unexamined the potential for plants to be sexual, instead stating that “there is no threat of sexuality [within the garden of Eden],” thus reinforcing the garden the speaker finds himself in to be idyllic, but only if we are to believe the speaker is completely devoid of sexuality (180). As I will discuss below, while there might be no threat of human-human sexuality within the speaker’s imagined garden, sexuality is everywhere apparent, as the speaker remains a sexual figure, especially in descriptions of the plants he encounters in the eponymous garden.

If the above literature review demonstrates the importance of queer and ecocritical theories to developments in Marvell criticism, recent work by Stephen Guy-Bray represents the contribution that interweaves the queer and ecocritical into queer ecocritical Marvell studies. About “The Garden,” Guy-Bray writes, “Human desire . . . is directed toward real plants rather than toward human beings, who could be said to resemble those plants in one way or another” (205). If, as Guy-Bray proposes, we are to stop assuming that human encounters with nature can only exist as non-sexual, then my wager is that we may not only work through the methods through which queer ecology informs human sexuality, but also interrogate heteronormative discourse in light of ecological preservation in Marvell’s Mower poems and beyond. In doing so, Marvell’s attempts at unpacking and working through anthropocentric notions of sexuality and the ways in which nature is modified, potential as a result, become clearer.

“To live in Paradise alone:” “The Garden” as Queer Space

Marvell's "The Garden" challenges heteronormative discursive formations of human sexuality through imagining the moment when Adam is alone in Eden. Through the linking of human satisfaction to nature, we are able to ponder over wide-ranging human-plant encounters, with both the costs and benefits of such anthropocentric pleasure implicated throughout the poem. Although the title itself conjures Eden, subsequently made both a sexual and ecological paradise, Marvell makes explicit the connection in the following verse:

Such was that happy garden-state,
 While man there walk'd without a mate;
 After a place so pure and sweet,
 What other help could yet be meet!
 But 'twas beyond a mortal's share
 To wander solitary there:
 Two Paradises 'twere in one
 To live in Paradise alone. (57-64)

Reference to a garden incomparable in its purity can only be Eden, especially with the addition of naming it Paradise twice in two lines. For the purposes of my discussion, it is particularly notable that Paradise is envisioned at an interstitial moment: Adam, but not Eve, has been created. This, I want to suggest, opens up possibilities for queer ecology in Marvell's verse. Before moving forward, though, it is crucial to note that though this particular moment features Adam as the central, solitary figure, this passage need not be interpreted as yet another instance where misogynist discourse figures Eve as Adam's weaker, fallen counterpart. In this specific moment, gender seems incidental rather than essential to the speaker's fulfillment from nature, made notable from the lack of gendered language in this description of Eden ("man" here might plausibly stand for "humanity") and the enjoyment of plants. In other words, the emphasis might reasonably be understood as on solitude rather than on the gender of that solitary individual. The fact that "Two Paradises 'twere in one, / To live in Paradise alone" goes to show that not only is

the Garden of Eden an ideal state for humankind, but that somehow it is doubly “Paradis[al]” when it is a “Paradise” of one (63-64). This garden is also “beyond a mortal’s share,” perhaps meaning too good for anything aside from God, while the garden itself appears to be responding positively to the singular Adam (61). The speaker’s rendition of “that happy garden-state” prompts the following question: What are we to make of the fact that nature seems most content when there is no human-human interaction including copulation? Further, what kind of “sexuality” predates the creation of Eve, and with her, the heterosexual couple?

On the topic of sexual relation with plants, this moment of Adam alone is not free from sexuality and desire, as Guy-Bray and others have argued, as the speaker, in his desire to recreate such a moment, pushes his sexual desire onto the garden he presently ventures through, and as a result, his image of Eden. This is most evident in the fifth stanza:

What wond’rous life in this I lead!
 Ripe apples drop about my head;
 The luscious clusters of the vine
 Upon my mouth do crush their wine;
 The nectarine and curious peach
 Into my hands themselves do reach;
 Stumbling on melons as I pass,
 Ensnar’d with flow’rs, I fall on grass. (33-40)

Although one can certainly read this as associated with the fall of man, most notably in the specific use of “fall” in line 40 and “apples” in line 34, nothing about this stanza connotes any negativity within the garden-state the speaker finds himself in in this specific instance. Though the speaker does “fall,” it is upon grass, rather than from grace, which, in conjunction with the apples depicted as “ripe,” the speaker’s life as “won’drous,” and the other plants enveloping the speaker that subsequently bring him satisfaction, seems to repurpose an otherwise loaded negative term into a positive act in this instance. The “luscious clusters” of grapes quite literally

burst into wine after pushing themselves into the speaker's mouth, the speaker envelopes peaches and nectarines with his hands, the vines and flowers embracing and wrapping around the speaker before pulling him onto the ground (35). The scene is teeming with sensuous descriptions of fruit of all forms, especially when considering fruit and flowers as the simultaneous offspring and procreators of plants, signifying both fertility and reproduction through their carrying of seeds to allow further reproduction. Rather than reading these sexually voluptuous fruits and flowers as placeholders of heteronormative love, Guy-Bray states, “the apples, grapes, melons, and grass of the garden do not stand for human flesh or human attitudes toward sexual experience but should rather be understood as the real objects of the poet’s desire” (207). In imagining this garden state as heavily sexualized, with the speaker’s desire being the actual plants themselves, the poem undermines the idea that sex between humans is the only kind of sex that exists for humans, or at least the only kind of importance. What then, are we to make of sexual discourse in this poem, if not that other forms of sexuality not only exist, but are also to be understood and respected?

This desire for plants extends past the speaker, and similarly to the ways in which Eden is deemed too perfect for a single mortal, Marvell introduces pagan gods as another instance of plant-human relations being expressly divine. Marvell, in doing so, is simultaneously laying the foundation for discussion of plant-human relations, and denoting older explorations of human-plant sexuality than the Judeo-Christian Eden:

The gods, that mortal beauty chase,
 Still in a tree did end their race:
 Apollo hunted Daphne so,
 Only that she might laurel grow;
 And Pan did after Syrinx speed,
 Not as a nymph, but for a reed. (27-32)

Both Apollo and Pan, though initially seeking female companionship, end up with laurel and reeds, respectively, with no mention of beauty having left the women transformed, but rather that “in a tree did end their race,” as if relations with said plants was the ends to be attained all along (28). As seems to be the case for the speaker, Marvell again nods towards the idea that human-plant sexuality is elevated above heteronormative sexuality, here equating it to the preference of gods. Additionally, in choosing Pan, Marvell further challenges conventional, hetero-reproductive sexuality with the phallic reed turning into a set of pipes Pan blows upon. This moment of human-plant oral pleasure invites us to ponder not just sexual norms, but the sources of authority from which they are extrapolated. In giving explicit examples of pagan deities interacting with plants, and thus outside of the sexual normative, Marvell shows that his speaker’s construction of Eden intermingles biblical and pagan ideas about sexuality and the pleasures that one may receive from nature. In removing any sole authorial authority from this conceptual garden of pleasure, Marvell creates a speaker whose fantasy expands past Judeo-Christian discourse, further interrogating human-plant relations as divine across culture.

In addition to gods and deities desiring plant relations, “The Garden” articulates how common man also benefits from nature. More often than not, human fulfillment from nature comes from some form of modification, notable examples being selling particular leaves and branches or carving trees as they see fit. The speaker throughout notes the many trees and plants found within a garden-state that the other humans seek satisfaction from:

How vainly men themselves amaze
To win the palm, the oak, or bays,
And their uncessant labours see
Crown’d from some single herb or tree. (1-4)

The phrase “winning” trees here seems to be in terms of “Wreathes signifying the following virtues: military (made from palm leaves), civic (oak leaves), poetic (laurel (‘bay) leaves)” (Smith 155). In addition to being signifiers of human values, the exact word choice of “win” carries with it not only the connotation of attaining honor, but also, following the OED definition, to “[g]ain (a person's attention, support, or love), typically gradually or by effort” (“win”). This definition yet again shows a linking of plants, or more specifically trees, within “The Garden” to satisfaction from a relationship with nature. The usage of trees as signifier allows further interrogation from a queer ecocritical perspective. Simon Estok states this eloquently in attesting that “[q]ueer ecocriticism situates us theoretically to understand that the commodification of nature and of sexual minorities are similar, each depending on a large consumer base that seeks a vicarious experience, rather than the thing itself” encapsulating the notion of trees, and gardens in general, being commodified for human usage and satisfaction (214). Human-plant sexuality within “The Garden” is obviously outside of the normative, as there is not a large base of people openly seeking sexual relations with nature, but in speaking of human-plant relations as pleasurable for the speaker, the poem further explores sexual diversity beyond human-human. Estok’s point on consumers seeking an experience as opposed to nature itself is further informed through an analysis of the plants grown at the time of Marvell’s writing. As Robert Watson writes, “[F]ew of these fruits would grow in England without considerable human intervention” (111). Watson’s insight reinforces the fact that the gardens are more than just upheld by human intervention, but also ultimately shaped by the whims of said humans. Put simply, the commodification Estok speaks about is evidenced in “The Garden” through reference to trees as signifier for honors, which allows them to be more meaningful to an anthropocentric world, and through gardens

having a myriad of more pleasant fruits and plants within, resulting in more bountiful gardens seen as full and otherwise “better” to humans through their modification.

The speaker within Marvell’s “The Garden” not only notes the fact that other humans seek pleasure or gain from nature, but that he also seeks something similar himself, his taking the form of sexual satisfaction. The poem seems to suggest queer ecological possibility, analyzing human-plant sexuality in terms of biblical and pagan ideas, in many ways extolling the speaker’s fantasy as the paradigm to strive for. Ultimately, however, the focus is shifted to the Anthropocentric, which, rather than mutually beneficial plants and nature, modifies it, subtly nodding to the consequences that lurk in the poem’s margins of a human-plant sexuality unavailable to the speaker.

“While the sweet fields do lie forgot:” Anthropocentric Pleasure within “The Mower against Gardens”

What remains at best latent in “The Garden” comes to the fore within “The Mower against Gardens,” as the speaker here chides humans for their modification of nature in the form of gardens, speaking about such modifications in sexual terms and how nature is harmed as a direct result. I read “The Mower against Gardens” as being in direct conversation with “The Garden,” forming a sort of antithesis, wherein the speaker, rather than focusing upon the possibility of being in an idyllic and Edenic garden, examines the potential unseen underside of desiring such a relation with nature, setting stakes and consequences upon the sexualization of nature. If “The Garden” is a garden of queer ecological possibility, then “The Mower against Garden” shows us the costs of human engagement with nature, which here manifest in gardens

that are altered to become experiences humans may enjoy. Of note is that the speaker does not seem to cast blame on plants or flowers for their status as would-be sexual partners, only bringing judgement upon humans for initiating such erotic encounters. A queer ecological reading of “The Mower against Gardens” must therefore bring under scrutiny commodification of nature for human-centered pleasure, even as a more expansive understanding of the sexual and sensuous emerges through Marvell’s verse.

In reading “The Mower against Gardens” as the potential antithesis of “The Garden,” two clear directions for analysis appear: In what ways does the sexual language inform this poem in comparison, and how is the relationship between human and nature discussed or desired? Starting with the first, it is made apparent through Marvell’s word choice that the sexuality of plants raises a whole host of questions about Anthropocentric pleasures:

Luxurious man, to bring his vice in use,
 Did after him the world seduce:
 And from the fields the flowers and plants allure,
 Where Nature was most plain and pure (1-4)

Within these four lines, the speaker denotes “Luxurious man,” which immediately resonates with the way queer ecologies seeks to discuss human exceptionality in light of using nature however they see fit when understood along the term’s definition of “[g]iving self-indulgent or sensual pleasure” (“luxurious”). This self-indulgence can then be understood as man’s vice, which culminates in his acquisition and modification of the natural world, made most apparent by the potential in reading a negative connotation in “seduce” in line 2. My point here is not that plants themselves are not sexual, but rather, that their sexuality is often understood in terms of human desire and pleasure, making their sexuality appear purely anthropocentric.

Whereas within “The Garden” the speaker goes into great detail about pleasures derived from gardens, extolling the human-plant relationship as only positive sexually, “The Mower against Gardens” brings to attention the stakes in making nature completely anthropocentrically sexual and the modification wrought upon nature through its domination and modification into gardens. Marvell’s speaker brings the negativity caused by gardens and alteration of nature to a culmination, noting the ways in which nature essential dies once it becomes a modification of humanity: “He first enclosed within the gardens square / A dead and standing pool of air” (5-6). This notion of the garden as essentially dead once altered reveals harsh consequences for the “happy garden-state” imagined in “The Garden,” as even the nature the speaker walks through and has his sexual encounter with is a modification of nature, illustrated by the various non-indigenous fruits grown in such a garden, as Robert Watson notes when he states “but few of these fruits would grow in England without considerable human intervention”(111). Here I return to Guy-Bray’s assertion that “the best human sexuality but also the best human is one that makes no difference to the natural world at all,” which, though he speaks on “The Garden,” I believe can also take root in a discussion of “The Mower against Gardens” (210). The extension of Guy-Bray’s argument onto “The Mower against Gardens” may seem a bit paradoxical, as such negativity in regards to human sexual desire for nature was, as mentioned in my analysis of the “The Garden,” completely absent, but that is due in large part to “The Garden” positing a paradisaal state, whereas “The Mower against Gardens” appears rooted primarily in concerns about humanity’s impact on the environment. As such, “The Mower against Gardens” remains more interested in wrestling with the consequences of all anthropocentric desire, no matter how

seemingly anti-heteronormative. Indeed, one might argue that anthropocentric sexuality is itself normative, raising further questions about the possibility for queer ecology in practice.

Such subjugation of plant sexuality can be seen in every example of a plant Marvell's speaker conjures in "The Mower against Gardens." While the speaker is quick to hound humanity in the poem's first lines, he moves into more specific examples of modifications that harm nature, or change it to fit our desires:

With strange perfumes he did the roses taint,
And flowers themselves were taught to paint.
The tulip, white, did for complexion seek;
And learned to interline its cheek. (11-14)

Marvell again evokes the idea of nature's allure, prompting human spraying of perfumes upon roses. These lines scrutinize man's hybridization of nature, with the perfumes sprayed and the attesting to human grafting, here brought out as a negative through usage of the word taint. The following lines create a similar situation, in which the flowers in the garden, most specifically the tulip, have their colors changed to please humans. This is not to say that flowers changing in color is unnatural or impure, but denoting it in anthropocentric terms of being "taught to paint ... for complexion," makes such an action an impact of humans rather than a natural occurrence by the tulips (12-13). Critics such as Dan Jaeckle have reached similar conclusions, stating, "Men become duplicitous seducers, while the plants, forced to live in a world ruled by dominating males and to conform to their expectations, transform their natural beauty into the false attractiveness of women whose sole purpose is to please the opposite sex" (65). I believe his discussion of plants transformed from naturally to artificially (read human) beautiful is an insight worth discussing in light of queer ecology, made especially paramount by Jaeckle's urge in situating the humans and plants in stereotypically heteronormative roles of nature as feminine.

This return to humans altering nature, once again in terms associated with romance and sexuality, in an effort to achieve satisfaction from it again informs our understanding of the poem, calling to attention the fact that nature is being harmed in this heteronormative society much in the same way women are, forced to don perfumes and “interline [their] cheek[s],” conjuring images of blush or other makeups, in order to conform to beauty standards set by man, in this case gendered (14). In making the flowers recipients of human desire in some capacity, the question is again raised, what difference is there in attraction to plants and attraction to other humans, as the notions of seducing and perfuming just as easily fit another human as a plant, and by making the plants female in such a scheme, the negatives otherwise glanced past by those in power, in this case “man” in both senses of the word.

The modifications of nature within the poem continue to have the capacity to alter all future plants, as well. This modification and the side effects are made clear in the following lines:

Had he not dealt between the bark and tree,
Forbidden mixtures there to see.
No plant now knew the stock from which it came;
He grafts upon the wild the tame;
That the uncertain and adult’rate fruit
Might put the palate in dispute. (21-26)

Any interference by humans working through their vice of seducing and altering nature comes with negatives that only enact themselves upon the natural: in this case the trees and fruits become unrecognizable. Denoting the alterations by human as forbidden, the speaker claims that each plant is essentially without clear lineage, having become a quite literal bastardization of human influence and nature. With the emphasis heteronormative sexuality places upon procreation, human alterations of nature as “uncertain” and “adult’rate” conflicts with the very

idea of lineal reproduction, rendering such fruits and benefits of this garden as whole irrelevant within a heteronormative framework. Marvell's wording of "He grafts upon the wild the tame" conjures images human domination over nature in terms of changing its lineage and reproduction (24). These lines draw connections between human domination over nature and human attempts at receiving pleasure from plants, and in putting it into explicitly sexual terms such as adultery, the reader is made to see the effects such domination and how desire for nature may cause it. Extending past the idea of grafting, a continuation of reproductive concerns in light of heteronormativity is questioned immediately after the previous lines:

His green *seraglio* has its eunuchs too,
Lest any tyrant him outdo.
And in the cherry he does Nature vex,
To procreate without a sex. (27-30)

Marvell's speaker calls attention to a "green *seraglio*," a seraglio being "women's apartments (harem) in an Ottoman palace" ("seraglio"). In the context of these lines, the phrase implies that all of man's gardens are a form of harem or other location for immense pleasure from a multitude of sexual beings, here plants. More importantly, however, in equating gardens with institutional, indentured, sexual servitude, Marvell is lamenting the exploitation of gardens as used only for the purpose of anthropocentric pleasure. Additionally, the inclusion of "eunuchs" within such a harem space further questions the sexual space of such a garden, creating a liminal space inside heteronormative sexuality. As eunuchs were castrated, reproduction is nonexistent, rendering them outside a heteronormative hegemony focused upon procreation, but as eunuchs were perpetuated within a heteronormative structure, as here, they still remain within the heterosexual household. Harems certainly elicit similar feelings, as though they generally fit into the heteronormative, it is still a modification of the reproductive couple hegemony, focused upon

male pleasure. The queer ecological framework in “The Mower against Gardens” is most apparent here, as such attention to the exploitation of plants, described in terms of sexual servitude, invites us to reconsider the ways in which anthropocentric desire affects nature for the negative. Equating gardens to such a modification of heteronormative hegemony reduces them to being an institutional altering of nature that is similarly indifferent to the oppressed party, and created in an attempt to elicit pleasure.

In his discussion of gardens here, Marvell’s speaker makes it clear that the idealized garden fantasy in “The Garden” has several drawbacks, this connection appearing most clearly in line 27 within “The Mower against Garden” calling to attention the “green *seraglio*” that the speaker within “The Garden” might as well imagine himself stumbling through. Such an environment, similar to a harem, serves to bring pleasure to the oppressor without much care to the marginalized bodies of plants or women, which “The Mower against Gardens” seems to understand and push back against. “The Mower against Gardens” allows us to rethink anthropocentric desires gleaned, but not expanded upon, in “The Garden,” and its sexual rhetoric creates interpretations of the poem as concerned with heteronormative discourse of sexuality, and the way in which the environment is marginalized in light of such a discourse. If “The Garden” is about a solitary human desiring nature rather than a fellow human, then “The Mower against Gardens” is an acknowledgement of the power imbalance created by this anthropocentric desire.

“But scorching like his am’rous care:” Queer ecologies in “Damon the Mower”

Whereas the previous two poems look at specific instances of humans seeking pleasure from nature, at first glance “Damon the Mower” seems to focus on the character of Juliana and the titular mower’s heterosexual courtship of her. As Lisa Anderson puts it, “Damon the Mower” seems to be about “rejected love in a pastoral setting”(132). However, through the framework I have established, one can further elucidate the ways in which heteronormative sexuality is coded in the poem, showing nature as a victim to the scorns and strifes of humans (132). Anthony Funari observes, “Juliana’s entrance into Damon’s world, which becomes the catalyst for his entrance into sexuality, provokes his loss of the harmonious relationship that he once enjoyed with Nature”(8). One can extend Funari’s discussion of Damon, however, showing that his introduction to his own sexuality through Juliana is not only the way Damon loses his harmonious relation to nature, but also the introduction of human-human sexuality causes harm to nature and himself. Similarly, George Klawitter states, “As readers, we are not being convinced with . . . Marvell’s Damon that embracing heteronormativity is an envied lifestyle” (59). Klawitter is correct in his assessment that we are not to envy the heteronormative lifestyle Damon attempts to fit himself into, but the poem does not seem to think so either, as Damon is repeatedly scorned for seeking comfort or shelter from his affections. Though the poem appears an otherwise ordinary courtship poem situated in a pastoral setting, queer ecology alters the way we perceive nature and Damon’s relationship, providing a conduit for the scorned Damon’s pleasure. Queer ecology also allows us to glean insight into Damon’s relationship with Juliana, which consists of Damon attempting to woo Juliana in conventional and heteronormative ways, these ways represented as detrimental to nature. As such, the poem works through an impasse between ecological crisis and heteronormative desire, articulating the two as being at odds.

In addition, the relationship between the unnamed speaker recounting Damon and Damon himself is of note. Scholars such as Joan Faust have pointed out the appearance of a speaker other than Damon, stating: “The first and tenth stanzas, in effect, ‘frame’ Damon’s narration as does a picture frame, a method of formal display” (545). I believe the speaker does more than just exhibit Damon; rather the speaker is invested in representing Damon’s heteronormative relationship as harmful to both him and nature, this harm reflected in the ways he suffers due to Juliana, and nature suffers due to him. Always discussing Damon in the past, the speaker begins the poem with an exposition on Damon and Juliana:

Hark how the Mower Damon sung,
 With love of Juliana stung!
 While everything did seem to paint
 The scene more fit for his complaint.
 Like her fair eyes the day was fair,
 But scorching like his am’rous care.
 Sharp like his scythe his sorrow was,
 And withered like his hopes the grass.(1-8)

From the outset Damon’s infatuation is set up as unrequited love, as it speaks of Damon smitten with no mention of Juliana’s intentions, and due to the speaker denoting it in the past tense the love is always-already over. Phrasing his love as a “sting,” though a common word choice, both equates the love to the natural sting of a bee and deems it negative, a sting necessarily painful. Juxtaposed against Damon’s desire is his job as a mower, through which he “paints” nature to be exactly as he desires it, resulting in nature being anthropocentrically modified in such a way that Damon has no complaints about it. In the first four lines of the poem, the stakes are already established: Damon is a mower, content to shape the nature as he sees most fit until Juliana arrives and brings with her painful heteronormativity. Although she is put in terms of “fair,” spoken once to describe her eyes and the second time to connote a pleasant temperature about the

day, Damon's desire is shown to be too hot, "scorching" or otherwise inflaming him. As with the first four lines, the connoting of his love for Juliana as harmful is juxtaposed against an image the speaker repeatedly returns to of Damon being confounded for his scythe, emphasizing again the ways heterosexual courtship, here and in notions of Petrarchism as male-centered, causes disaster to befall nature. Such a confounding presents Damon's relation to nature as mower, and the stakes, clearly, made even more clearer by the way in which Damon, in his relation to Juliana, is presented as being withered like the grass. Additionally, despite Juliana not being present beforehand, Damon's mowing is as institutional as heteronormative sexuality, and in reconciling Damon's anthropocentric job as a mower, the speaker attributes nearly all modification of nature done by Damon as being a direct result of Juliana. In discussing Damon's desire in such terms, while juxtaposing it against his job of shaping nature, the heteronormative can be seen as a similarly destructive force upon Damon, as Damon's job as a mower is upon nature.

Heteronormative sexual desire is further seen as destructive upon Damon in every instance Juliana or his desire for her is mentioned. This destructive heteronormativity is made most visible in the fifth stanza:

'How long wilt thou, fair shepherdess,
 Esteem me, and my presents less?
 To thee the harmless snake I bring,
 Disarmèd of its teeth and sting;
 To thee chameleons, changing hue,
 And oak leaves tipped with honey dew.
 Yet thou, ungrateful, hast not sought
 Nor what they are, nor who them brought. (33-40)

At the surface level, Juliana is shown to be the object of unrequited love, uninterested in the many presents Damon gives her, many of them from nature. The chameleon able to change its

hue shows the fickleness of such a relationship and reflects upon Damon's rapid shifts from sorrow to anger and back again at the hands of such a relationship, as hue may come to mean both color or "[c]haracter or aspect" ("hue"). Such images as the snake and chameleon make us reimagine conventional courtship, as it not only causes one to alter one's character in the pursuit of relations, but is also discussed as emasculating and potentially outside of the heteronormative and reproductive norm. The imagery of Damon giving her a snake also conjures a myriad of different thoughts and discourses worth investigating.

Worth noting first, especially in light of my previous discussion of Eden, is the notion of a snake appearing in such a garden. Here, rather than sowing dissent resulting in a fall from grace, the snake becomes symbolic of Damon's attempts to woo Juliana, equating to a fall into heteronormative sexuality. Such a snake, dangerous or not, is certainly meant to elicit deceit and misfortune, attributing such negatives to the heteronormative wooing of Damon. Additionally, it is "the harmless snake" that has been "disarmed of its teeth and sting" that Damon gives, standing in for his emasculation at being repeatedly scorned and ignored by Juliana, as the snake, similarly to Damon, cannot penetrate Juliana in any way, nor excrete venom or semen. Such heteronormativity as Juliana and Damon practice equates to an otherwise useless snake, unable to hunt and live, or in Damon's case, procreate. In making this heteronormative relationship non-procreative and unpleasurable for Damon, it becomes completely unbeneficial, furthering the idea that heterosexual sex, and by extension the heteronormative hegemonic structure it serves to perpetuate, is disastrous to humans and, in turn through Damon, nature.

With the negativity of such a heteronormative coupling examined, non-heteronormative sexuality as a viable alternative in providing pleasure is presented. Marvell sets up such an alternative as being in direct relation to Damon's love of Juliana:

'Which mads the dog, and makes the sun
Hotter than his own Phaëton.
Not July causeth these extremes,
But Juliana's scorching beams.
'Tell me where I may pass the fires
Of the hot day, or hot desires.
To what cool cave shall I descend,
Or to what gelid fountain bend?' (21-28)

Damon attributes the scorching heat, a metaphor for desire, to Juliana, but depicts it as something to be avoided by making it a fire he wishes to pass by in comfort. Such scorching beams would otherwise be harmful to nature as well, both in terms of heat that may scorch plants, and as a continuation of Damon causing grass to wither in conjunction with his sorrows. Heteronormative discourse is thus ecologically disastrous, resulting throughout the poem in Damon modifying nature to receive comfort. Conversely, comfort throughout the poem exists in nature, particularly in the image of caves and fountains filled with cool water. Though Damon himself does not postulate on his relationship with nature as in any way an alternative to a relationship with Juliana, when placing this poem in dialogue with "The Garden" and "The Mower against Gardens," it lends to such an examination, especially when the human-human desire Damon feels is discussed as hurting him with no pleasure resulting from it.

Damon's pleasurable relationship with nature is further described by him in both romantic and erotic terms, offering an even clearer distinction between this relationship, and his desire for Juliana. Damon explicitly codes his relationship with nature in the sixth stanza VI, again quoted in full:

‘I am the Mower Damon, known
 Through all the meadows I have mown.
 On me the morn her dew distills
 Before her darling daffodils.
 And, if at noon my toil me heat,
 The sun himself licks off my sweat.
 While, going home, the evening sweet
 In cowslip-water bathes my feet.’ (41-48)

Damon asserts that nature accepts and seems to be affectionate towards him, equating himself with the flowers of the garden, making him an otherwise accepted part of the garden. Moreover, the poem discusses such an acceptance erotically, imagining the sun licking the body of the mower to cleanse him, before meticulously washing his feet as he leaves. Such acceptance and affection is completely devoid within the relationship he has with Juliana, and though Damon himself does not view nature as sexually desirable, he seems to consider nature as pleasurable to him. Marvell’s queering of nature here, in conjunction with my earlier readings of “The Garden” and “The Mower against Gardens” gestures towards another figure with a pleasurable relationship with nature. In doing so, Marvell explores the benefits of a sexually charged relationship with nature, providing it as a positive alternative for the heteronormative through the comforts and relief Damon receives to quell his harmful human-human love. Additionally, such relations as shown here do not place the sun, daffodils, or the water in anthropocentric terms, besides personifying their actions to understand what is happening. Putting this relation in harsh contrast with the heteronormative relationship Damon finds himself in seems to extoll human-plant sexuality, as it offers Damon and nature mutual benefit (or at the very least does not harm nature), whereas the heteronormative is always accompanied with direct negatives upon Damon and nature. As such, we can ascertain from “Damon the Mower” that

non-heteronormative discourse is closer to the non-anthropocentric, and as such, the model to strive for if preservation of nature is concerned at all.

Though the speaker only returns once, during which he discusses how Damon's injury is reminiscent of his occupation, it is of importance that said speaker is recounting everything Damon says, evidenced by "'Alas!' said he," in line 81. In having the speaker recount everything Damon speaks, we may explore the idea that it is his desire to express heteronormativity as destructive, rather than Damon's. This is made evident in Stanza X, quoted in full here:

While thus he threw his elbow round,
 Depopulating all the ground,
 And, with his whistling scythe, does cut
 Each stroke between the earth and root,
 The edgèd steel by careless chance
 Did into his own ankle glance;
 And there among the grass fell down,
 By his own scythe, the mower mown. (73-80)

The speaker notes how Damon seems to throw himself into his work in an effort to relieve himself of his scorching desire, thus continuing the trend of heteronormativity causing strife, here in the form of Damon's frenzy of modification upon nature. Damon's cutting is connoted as "Depopulating" the ground, ironically making the grass Damon slices closer to human, thus garnering further sympathy for the real victim of Damon's heteronormative desire, the grass. Such a frenzy eventually results in him slicing his own foot, and ending with him in an embrace with the grass he has just sliced up, both hurting as a result of Damon's occupation and heteronormative desire. In having Damon's heteronormative desire result in his physical injury, it firmly equates such desire with destruction, finally moving past the nature Damon oppresses as a Mower to harm him physically as well. In response to everything Damon has done to himself and the garden, it still continues to offer him relief, elevating the relationship he has with

nature one final time to being above his heteronormative desires. Damon, once again speaking states:

‘Alas!’ said he, ‘these hurts are slight
To those that die by love’s despite.
With shepherd’s-purse, and clown’s-all-heal,
The blood I staunch, and wound I seal. (81-84)

Nature provides a cure for Damon’s wounds in the form of “shepherd’s-purse, and clown’s-all-heal,” both of which, Nigel Smith writes, “were supposed to stop bleeding and cure wounds,” though Juliana’s emotional wounds against him cannot be cured (139). Once again drawing a harsh contrast to these two relationships the mower finds himself in, it becomes plainly visible that the heteronormative is strictly negative, made so through its comparison to the ways nature soothes and heals Damon, even as it is altered by him. As such, one may infer that the non-heteronormative is less destructive, and otherwise sought after in a world where heteronormative discourse is so harmful.

In doing a queer ecological reading of “Damon the Mower,” we are given few answers, and instead must explore any potential for human-plant relations to be positive, and how we may understand this in terms of heteronormativity. It becomes evident quickly that the unrequited heteronormative love within the poem weighs heavily upon Damon, causing him in turn to exert this strife upon nature. The viable alternative that avoids harming nature is simultaneously explored, as even though he is a Mower, institutionally mandated to modify nature, Damon is also able to find comfort in unmodified aspects of nature, such as the cool cave and the plants that tend to his cuts. I return to Sandilands’ discussion that queer ecology “calls into question human exceptionalism and destabilizes our understanding of identity, authenticity, and technology on which modern categories of human sexual orientation rest” (3). Such a reading of

“Damon the Mower” makes us see our relation to nature as inherently negative through heterosexual and institutional hegemony creating a sense of human exceptionalism, as relations with plants are deemed inferior in such a scheme. We must then in turn understand that any relation with nature, while rooted in the heteronormative, which inherently places human above nature, is doomed as destructive. In doing so, the opportunity for non-heteronormative sexuality (which may provide a non-anthropocentric view on nature in terms of the pleasure we may elicit from it) to come forward as a viable alternative is created and explored.

“What I do to the grass, does to my thoughts and me:” Beyond “The Garden,” “The Mower against Gardens,” and “Damon the Mower”

We have seen in “The Mower against Gardens” and “Damon the Mower” the ways in which anthropocentric sexuality, such as the heteronormative, is disastrous for nature, resulting in it becoming a commodity and exceedingly modified in an attempt to elicit pleasure. More than just anthropocentric sexuality, any anthropocentric view placed upon nature inherently reduces it to an object for human use or domination, which Marvell notes in “The Mower to the Glow-worms.” The Mower denotes them as objects of human use, even calling attention to the way Juliana continuously wracks his mind:

Ye glow-worms, whose officious flame
To wand'ring mowers shows the way,
That in the night have lost their aim,
And after foolish fires do stray;
Your courteous lights in vain you waste,
Since Juliana here is come,
For she my mind hath so displac'd
That I shall never find my home. (9-16)

Robert Ray articulates that “[the glowworms] are part of harmonious, interdependent natural order within innocent nature itself” (114). In contrast to Ray’s assertion, however, stands the Mower, whose anthropocentric view reduces the living animals to mere signifiers of the way to get home in response to heteronormative despair, similarly to the trees within “The Mower against Gardens” that become medals for human characteristics. It is evident in Marvell’s works that an anthropocentric view of nature, or any discourse such as heteronormative sexuality that establishes human exceptionalism, is doomed to be destructive towards nature.

In contrast, relationships with nature such as that exhibited in “The Garden” seem to nod towards potential relationships with nature as being acceptable, or otherwise non-destructive. Though the idyllic experience the speaker of “The Garden” experiences contains elements of human modification, the plants forced to grow there, the pleasure the speaker finds does not seem to be a direct result of said modification. Instead, the speaker seems to enjoy fruits and plants as an equal, sexual partner, not dwelling on the fact that it is a human-altered experience, and instead thinking about the first instance of a human being alone with nature, wishing that were he. Other examples of non-anthropocentric relationships with nature appear in Marvell’s poems such as “The Mower’s Song” which, though the speaker is a mower and thus already dominant over nature, speak to an equal, unmodified relation with nature in part:

And thus, ye meadows, which have been
 Companions of my thoughts more green,
 Shall now the heraldry become
 With which I shall adorn my tomb. (25-28)

Though the mower discusses his domination over nature and the garden in terms of his occupation early on, by the end he is resigned to nature outliving him, speaking of the meadows as friends that he hopes will surround his tomb upon his death. Such a discussion gives a sense of

equality to nature, making it a relationship that allows human interaction upon nature that does not destroy it, and thus, becomes another potential queer ecological relation between and human and nature.

Following David Kalstone, I believe that Marvell is distinctly interested in “what we try to *make* of nature” and further that Marvell is acutely calling attention to our seeking pleasure from nature through twisting it away from its original form (187). With all of this in mind, the question begs to be asked whether or not it is possible to love nature without destroying it. “The Garden” seems to associate an idyllic garden state and lack of human-human sexuality as the paradigm, but “The Mower against Gardens” complicates such a reading, showing the ecological stakes of still having an anthropocentric viewpoint upon nature and its purpose. “Damon the Mower” offers one possible answer, in that anti-heteronormative sex is anti-anthropocentric sex and thus not harmful. Other poems, such as “The Mower to the Glow-worms” seem to glean as much, with the heteronormative coupling figured there as reductive to the nature presented. In all these poems, however, one thing remains certain: if we are to love nature, similarly or not to the way one may love a human partner, it cannot be done through an anthropocentric lens, as to do so is only to invite the destruction of nature through our modification and commodification of it.

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