

EARLY MODERN QUEER ECOLOGIES:
SEXUAL NATURE IN MARVELL, MILTON, AND SHAKESPEARE

A Thesis
by
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Abstract

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The aim of this thesis is to, through an in-depth look at the works of Andrew Marvell, John Milton, and William Shakespeare, suggest an alternative ethics of living informed by queer ecologies. Following a brief overview of the critical points regarding queer ecologies in the introduction, the first chapter works through Andrew Marvell's "Mower Poems," grappling with human modifications of nature and how said modifications are tied to sexual pleasure. The second chapter looks at John Milton's *Comus* and *Paradise Lost*, through which we see non-normative modes of sexuality and the connotations that follow in regards to gender and status. The third and final chapter looks at William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, specifically focusing upon the non-hegemonic desire exhibited throughout the play and how the contrast between urban and forest settings impact said desire's manifestation and exhibition. Through an application of queer ecologies on each

work, human relations with nature are codified and scrutinized to ultimately find better alternatives.

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Dedication

For my Papa, Rodney Day.

Table of Contents

Abstract	iv
Acknowledgments	vii
Dedication	ix
Introduction	1
Chapter One: Marvell's Gardens and Ecology	16
Chapter Two: Milton's Forests and Eden	39
Chapter Three: Shakespeare's Woodlands and Athens	61
Conclusion	79
Works Cited	82
Vita	89

Introduction

This thesis, in an attempt to work through the intersection of queer theory and ecocritical theory in works of the early modern period, seeks to advance questions of human exceptionality, and the modification of nature that oft follows it, to further elaborate on the interconnectedness of sexual discourse and ecological concerns. For my project specifically, I use a combination of three well-known early modern authors—Andrew Marvell, John Milton, and William Shakespeare, each of whom I feel grapple in some way with the aforementioned topics—in order to deeply interrogate the following question: What does the intersection of sexual imagery with flora and fauna mean for notions of sexuality and human relations with nature, in addition to our perceptions of works focused on them? Through exploration of such a question, I hope to contribute to the field of queer ecologies as said theory, which is based around questioning notions of human exceptionalism and destabilizing heteronormativity in relation to our understanding of nature and what is perceived as “natural,” remains a salient intersection of queer theory and ecocritical theory that comments upon both theories simultaneously and allows continued insight as we continue poring over early modern texts.

While going through the relevant scholarship, I have identified four tightly connected areas of concern: ecocritical theory, queer theory, queer ecologies, and the author-specific works that comment in some part on one or multiple of the previous sections. Although the emphasis of this project is on queer ecologies and the readings and information one can evoke by applying queer ecologies to works from the early modern period, it is first paramount to work through the different strands of both queer theory and ecocritical theory

to fully understand why they came together and why such an intersectional examination is of merit. Following this, a brief overview of the primary scholars and their interactions with queer ecologies will give insight as to how the debates waged by the field of queer ecologies are as relevant as ever.

Ecocritical Theory

My theoretical approach, as mentioned, relies on an understanding of queer ecologies and the relevant conversations being had in regards to each field intersectionally and separately. Specifically within the early modern period, ecocriticism has, broadly speaking, looked closely at nature and its representations from the period, commenting on subjects ranging from the embodiment via blazons to the implications specific flowers appearing repeatedly have on the text. The most relevant questions to my thesis hinge broadly on whether or not reading texts anachronistically encourages further understanding of current ecocritical concerns and to what degree were the altering of nature and the impacts of those actions considered during the period.

To get a historical basis in the ecological concerns and history of the period, I rely heavily upon Diane McColley's book *Poetry and Ecology in the Age of Milton and Marvell* (2007) in addition to Robert Watson's *Back to Nature: The Green and the Real in the Late Renaissance* (2006). These two works, at minimum in relation to my project, provide an overarching framework and understanding for the literal ecology of the period I seek to examine and, as a result, offer a wealth of information in regards to the meaning behind representations of certain plants and animals. Watson, for example, gestures toward fruit that appears in Marvell's "The Garden" that is incompatible with the area to show the amount of modification that must have been done to create and uphold these anthropocentric

idealizations of nature (7). In this and other examples, Watson demonstrates an emphasis on the aesthetic value of gardens during the period that are deceptive toward what “nature” really is. McColley and Watson’s works exhibit the underlying assumption that “natural” as a construct has always been unstable at best, as even the gardens of the period, meant as depictions of nature for human consumption, are altered and modified to fit human aesthetic values.

Although I plan to use the fraught definitions of what is natural in different depictions of environments as my primary emphasis from ecocritical theory, there exists a large body of scholarship seeking to place authors such as Milton and Marvell in the vein of “Green” authors, or rather, those seen as having strict concern with environmental protection broadly. In *Milton and Ecology* (2003), Ken Hiltner details this notion that Milton was eminently concerned with the ways in which humans warp nature to their own desires, a reading he achieves through cataloguing the language used in *Paradise Lost*. Hiltner attributes too much to authorial intent for it to feel relevant still, though his later work, *What Else Is Pastoral?: Renaissance Literature and the Environment* (2011), makes a conscious effort to avoid authorial intent while still showing a perhaps unintentional concern with the environment exhibited by Milton. Hiltner articulates that figures of the period can be argued to be expressing concern about the best way for humans to proceed in their commodification and association with the planet, with such a discussion undoubtedly involving shepherds and those that have occupations tied to nature. Whether or not the primary authors I seek to work through were truly “Green” or not is irrelevant. What is relevant is the capability to read their works as having environmental concerns exhibited through characters and their complex relationships with the environments they find themselves in.

Queer Theory

As is the case with ecocritical theory, to delineate the discourse of queer theory either in regards to the early modern period or outside of it would require a much larger project. As such, the primary focus here will be in showing how societal structures and norms have an organic trail through the scholarship of queer theory that cements queer ecologies as relevant to both fields and my work in this project specifically.

Two works foundational to the conceptualization of queer theory within this project are Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990) and Lee Edelman's *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004). Sedgwick's groundbreaking work on antihomophobic practice and behavior continues to influence our understanding of challenging heteronormativity and allows for continued grappling with those issues. In her work, Sedgwick writes about "the otherwise unarticulated assumptions and conclusions from a long-term project of antihomophobic analysis" to further our understanding of the impacts gender and sexuality have both broadly and specifically (3). Some fourteen years later, Edelman's critique of compulsory heteronormativity comes mainly in the form of the child, which he argues functions as a symbol of futurism and society's survival. As a result, Edelman calls attention to the notion that "valid sex" is sex that results in children, an idea that marginalizes queerness and alternative forms of sex and sexuality (113). These works form a large backbone to many of the recent pieces of scholarship on the topics of queer and queer ecocritical theory through their interest not only in questioning baseline assumptions for heteronormativity and the impact things like an emphasis on children means for alternative forms of sex, but also in their ability to allow us to continue questioning certain environmental trends important in queer ecologies.

Queer Ecologies

Although a difficult trajectory to map out fully, predominant discourse on queer ecologies seems to posit the 1994 edition of *UnderCurrents: Journal of Critical Environmental Study* entitled “Queer/Nature” as one of the earliest gestures toward what we now consider queer ecologies. Although a large portion of the issue focuses on environmental concerns as a whole, the gesture towards “queer” concerns and spatial and environmental impacts in relation to queer individuals seems to remain as one of the earliest pushes toward an interdisciplinary look at queer theory and ecocritical theory. Beyond this, the discourse of queer ecologies seems to branch off in three broad directions: a focus on queer individuals and their relation to their environments in what I will denote as tangible senses (such as the positive environmental work done in rural communities by queer individuals that Rachel Stein writes about); a focus on textual representations of queer individuals and how their relation with nature is depicted inside of culture norms and stereotypes; and lastly, a queering of the environment and concept of “natural” as a method to understand not only why nature is so often modified for human consumption, but also how this may in fact help us further expand on understandings of sexuality and intimacy. Although each branch of queer ecologies offers interesting insight, it is on this third point that my project grapples with most closely, as it is this distinction of “natural” and the queering of different descriptions of environments and human relationships with environments that leads to my dissection and deconstruction of the texts so invested in such relations.

Although work on the first two directions may prove useful tangentially, such as the work done by scholars such as Matthew Gandy on the interconnectedness of land and

sexuality when it comes to living space, the last not only remains the most relevant, but also branches off in directions with concrete use to my project. One of two key points in bringing the two fields together is an understanding of what Dianne Chisholm describes as “biophilia,” in her words the “desire [of] human beings to interact with nature,” and how that interacts with perceptions of preservation (360). Chisholm links queer ecologies to biophilia through a discussion of Edelman’s *No Future*, arguing that environmental concerns intermingle with human desire to experience and be with nature while being in direct conflict with notions of futurism by desiring preservation for future generations as the primary rationale. On the same idea, Cameron Butler, throughout “A Fruitless Endeavor: Confronting the Heteronormativity of Environmentalism” (2017), challenges the “Green” movement of environmental preservation by dismantling the reprocentricity that lies at the heart of the sustainability movement’s focus on preservation for the next generation. Butler additionally uses the queer ecological lens to analyze concerns of overpopulation to ultimately show that in near all discussions of MSM (re-appropriated here as “mainstream sustainability movement”) those outside of the heteronormative are, at best, forgotten (271). Although Butler does not get into direct notions of biophilia, the idea remains that some level of preservation has become broadly desirable culturally. The question then becomes, if the focus should not be for future generations, then for whom and why?

Before answering this question, an understanding of what appears to be the other key point in this particular section is necessary, which is the still hotly debated usage of the terms “nature” and “natural.” What is most often brought to light in terms of scholarship and queer ecologies is the notion that “natural” is not only a flawed term at its core, but also serves as a tool to create a hegemonic, normative definition. In the introduction to *New Perspectives on*

Environmental Justice: Gender, Sexuality, and Activism (2004), Rachel Stein cascades through a number of issues that culminate in a call to analyze environmental issues through the lens of women's, gender, and sexuality studies. Stein seeks to show that by analyzing how discourses of "nature" and what is natural have been used to enforce heteronormativity, to police sexuality, and to punish and exclude those persons who have been deemed sexually transgressive, we can begin to understand the deep, underlying commonalities between struggles against sexual oppression and other struggles for environmental justice. Toward a similar goal of elucidating the relation between nature and cultural hegemony, Jonathan Gray in "Heteronormativity without Nature: Toward a Queer Ecology" (2017) discusses the problems revolving around the word "nature" and seeks to advance the notion that as "nature" is simultaneously authentic and subhuman, it is often twisted to benefit hegemonic systems (138). Gray notes that heteronormativity relies on implicit assumptions about what is and is not natural, and that the interrogation of such ideas benefits queer theory and ecocritical theory through a continued analysis of oppressive systems. Both scholars push back against the heteronormative assumptions intrinsic in defining anything as "natural" by showing the relation between oppressed peoples and the environment (in Stein's case) and the intrinsically destabilized notion of "nature" that is simultaneously the ideal and subhuman (in Gray's case).

This historic opposition of "queer" and "natural" has brought into question both what is considered natural and what makes anything non-normative fit outside the realm of it. Queer ecologies make the case that denoting anything as "natural" is inherently flawed, ultimately as a result of the reinforcement of hegemonic ideals. With this information, it then becomes possible not only to look at what it means for things denoted as "natural" to be

complexly flawed, but also to grapple with ideas about what is hidden or pushed aside as a direct result of cultural hegemony in regards to nature and sexuality.

Early Modern Specifics

In terms of queer ecologies during the early modern period, there exists quite a bit of overlap between to queer theory and ecocritical discussions on authors such as Shakespeare, though few have begun to apply the framework of queer ecologies explicitly. Most often, scholars appear to be interested only tangentially in the intersection that upon looking at the framework here seems exceptionally relevant, with discussions surrounding Milton's poetry being a prime example. Although somewhat dated at this point, James Clark's "Milton Naturans, Milton Naturatus: The Debate Over Nature in *A Mask Presented At Ludlow*" (1984) shows an early interest, though the term had not been coined yet, in queer ecologies, as the emphasis is simultaneously on virginity and the ploys and stratagems involving natural imagery and discussion that the Lady uses to attempt to escape from Comus (3). Although the piece does not specifically bring to attention social standards in relation to nature, Clark's work is pertinent for the way in which sexuality and nature appear linked.

Moving forward, James Bromley's *Intimacy and Sexuality in the Age of Shakespeare* (2011) offers a wealth of knowledge in terms of understanding the complex non-normative sexual practices and forms of intimacy that exhibit themselves in works such as Shakespeare's plays. Bromley looks carefully at the concept of intimacy and works to figure intimacy's place through an understanding of the texts, ultimately seeming to take a similar stance as Edelman, in that non-reproductive forms of sex and intimacy sit outside the hegemonic and are otherwise looked down upon as failures. Two years later, Bromley and Will Stockton's edited collection *Sex Before Sex: Figuring the Act in Early Modern England*

(2013) was published, and it too remains a relevant resource for unpacking understandings of sex and sexuality in the period. What remains most salient from the work as a whole is a slight departure from Bromley's previous work, which is that the notion that sexuality as we understand it today remains so far removed from sexuality of the early modern period that an argument can be made as to whether or not hegemonic sex was actually of principle concern to early modern writers.

John Garrison, in his article "Plurality and Amicitia in Milton's *Epitaphium Damonis*" (2012), discusses the friendship between the speaker and his deceased friend, going in detail to discuss the bond shared between the figures before calling specific attention to the animals around and the similarities between the emotions felt by the speaker and the animals during grieving periods. This reading seems open to interpreting different types of intimacy and affection with societal norms in relation to the way nature is commodified, in the form of a herd of sheep, and what "nature" deems as the appropriate response to grief. Instead of applying this framework in this capacity, Garrison speaks to the benefits of group friendship, arguing that the poem is a rebuke against such steadfast intimacy with a single person. Readings such as these that have an intersection between ecocriticism and queer theory are abundant throughout the period, though with the exception of few cases, is a relatively unexplored field via the specific theorization of queer ecologies.

More recently, early modern scholars have started to engage with the idea that in many instances confounded sexuality is linked to the natural world. On this idea, in a 2013 article on Andrew Marvell's "The Garden," Stephen Guy-Bray remarks that "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). This article, along with the others in *Sex*

Before Sex: Figuring the Act in Early Modern England, seeks to enhance our understanding of sex and sexualities in the period, but the intersection Guy-Bray specifically works through, that of queer theory and its potential relation to ecological concerns and thoughts of the time, is one that fascinates me in how broad it seems to range in the period. More specifically, it is the notion of non-normative desire directed towards “plants rather than toward human beings” that urges a thorough interrogation of not only hegemonic discourse that makes it non-normative, but also what this means for notions of desire and its fulfillment. Likewise, in her article “‘What Hath Night to Do with Sleep?’: Religion and Biopolitics in Milton’s *Mask*” (2018), Melissa Sanchez grapples with similar notions of complicated sexuality in relation to nature, focusing on the struggles of Comus being subjected to heteronormativity within Milton’s *A Mask*. Sanchez argues that the stringent hegemony that Comus finds himself outside of, a hegemony placing greatest importance upon virginity, culture, and marriage, causes Comus to be considered detached from society and secondary, which is most notably done through denoting Comus as subhuman and closer to nature and animals. These scholars, among others, seem to gesture toward what Simon Estok (2008) was attempting to encourage years prior by stating that “to talk simultaneously in theoretical ways about the degree to which the drama problematizes human/environment relations, we need to talk about and ... connect ecocriticism with other radical theories ... in ways that radically challenge socially and environmentally oppressive thinking” (101). Although these scholars do not explicitly name queer ecologies a central concern, their interests and arguments nonetheless skirt the line of intersectionality between queer theory and ecocritical theory.

Although many early modern scholars address questions of interest to queer ecologies without the theory’s full applications, Vin Nardizzi has done interesting work looking at

terms such as “pastoral” in works such as Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* with an explicitly articulated framework of queer ecologies. In “Shakespeare’s Queer Pastoral Ecology: Alienation around Arden” (2016), Nardizzi traces the lineage of “pastoral,” arriving at the conclusion that the term not only brings about representations of the English environment, but also is intrinsically linked to male homoeroticism. Nardizzi uses this explanation to argue that Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* is pastoral in regards to representations of the environment and necessary components such as irony, while also delineating the fraught relation between societal expectations of marriage, hegemonic sexuality, and the environment, calling attention to specifics such as figures not having land to give as part of a dowry to prove the connection. Ultimately, Nardizzi argues that if one is not looking with such a framework, one may miss “the homoerotic pleasures, the conservative and progressive eco-political work, and the ironic play in which the disguised female cousins engage while under the shade of queer pastoral ecology” (578).

In continuing to be a leading voice in studies of early modern queer ecologies, Nardizzi’s work “Shakespeare’s *Transplant* Poetics: Vegetable Blazons and the Seasons of Pyramus’s Face” (2020) brings attention to blazons of people created out of vegetable matter to show that many such depictions “disarrange typical patterns of gender in both media and so prompt a double-take of these poetic and pictorial vegetable bodies. In doing so, these vegetable compositions are also sites where we may speculate on the intensities and operations . . . in which plant figures trans that body’s perceived gender presentation” (157). Nardizzi’s articulation of what is deemed “*transplant* poetics” gestures toward the ability to continue reading depictions of humans and their relations with nature as inherently queer. If nothing else, Nardizzi’s linked discussions of the relation between the pastoral and

hegemonic sexuality and the relation between humans being depicted via vegetable matter and gender pushes forward a specifically queer ecological analysis within the period and the merit that such work holds.

It is here that I seek to expand the field of scholarship and, similarly to Estok and more directly like Nardizzi, pursue extensive readings of early modern literary works through a queer ecological lens. Whereas Nardizzi's interests range from linking the term pastoral and the ecological concerns inherent in such a term, to nonheteronormative sexualities and intimacies, to looking directly at critical plant studies to show the way that vegetable blazons unsettle normative depictions of gender, I, put broadly, seek to examine the many instances in early modern literature where nature is anthropocentrically modified in ways that muddle and complicate sexuality and desire.

The first chapter of my thesis will be centered on Andrew Marvell. I seek to explore more concretely the circumstances that result in Marvell's works confounding hegemonic notions of desire via flora and fauna. I plan to look most specifically at Marvell's "Mower Poems," a collection of four poems placing emphasis on the titular "Mower's" relationship to his occupation and the garden he finds. It is through the Mower's role as a preserver of "nature," a role that has been twisted to suit the desires of the garden owner, that the contradictions inherent in such a role are brought to light. It is at this nexus, where "natural" is simultaneously the ideal to have around and yet not good enough for the humans in the work, that I seek to interrogate and explore the aforementioned questions of whom this modification is for, and what the purpose of it is. It is thus through Marvell's "Mower Poems" that I seek to show the intersection and begin to trace the destabilized notions of human sexuality and exceptionalism made evident in human modification of nature,

characterized not only by the already, as previously mentioned, destabilized notion of “natural,” but also by the fulfillment, sometimes like consummation, of desire that happens when the Mower is alone in the garden, tending to the sexualized flora.

My second chapter will focus on John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* and *Comus*, analyzing more fully the delicate relationship between human and nature, and how human-human relations are described in reference to nature. I plan to work through *Comus*, looking most specifically at the titular character. Of notable interest with *Comus* is his alignment with those outside the hegemonic, which is emphasized by his entourage of “*a rout of monsters, headed like sundry sorts of wild beasts, but otherwise like men and women, their apparel glistening*” that are also deemed secondary (92 [stage direction]). As a result of this instance, *Comus* is closely aligned with nature, yet the figure of Sabrina, standing as a beacon of chastity and perseverance for the Lady, is likewise attributed to nature. This contradiction, among others within the text, serves to confound any objective traits put onto nature, and encourages a closer examination of what is really going on when characters are described via natural imagery. Conversely to the dark, monster inhabited woods of *Comus*, *Paradise Lost*’s depictions of Eden, Eve, Adam, and all of their relations, provides a view of “original” nature that is slowly worked on by humans while also commenting on topics of sexuality and how that manifests in a society of two humans surrounded by nature. Following such topics, what becomes clear in the wake of Eve’s coupling with Adam and the work that must be done to sustain Eden is that the propagation of hegemonic anthropocentric culture is God. As a result, the validity of those claims and their merit is called into question, potentially positing an ethics of living outside the hegemonic anthropocentric as the ideal.

Lastly, I will examine Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which likewise encapsulates the issues queer ecology seeks to unpack, principally the role the natural world takes in sexual discourse both inside and outside of hegemonic culture. Within *Midsummer*, there exist myriad scenes in which the lines between human and nature are skewed when relationships are discussed, with one prominent example being Titania's infinitely complicated desire for Bottom while he has the head of an ass. Within that relationship, Titania's warped perception following the love-in-idleness applied to her eyelids subsequently raises questions regarding what can be considered normative and what the difference that posits humans and non-human animals as dichotomous really is. Additionally, the language used by figures such as Helena further complicates the issue, as her discussion of her relationship with Demetrius inverts the traditional power balance of houndmaster and spaniel to her own ends. With Shakespeare as my final component, I seek to analyze the emphasis placed on heteronormativity and its subsequent hierarchies being subverted in relation to the wood near Athens, what these instances mean within the work, and what purpose there might be in often having nature serve as the setting for encounters that exist outside of the heteronormative hegemonic.

My thesis ultimately seeks to expand upon several intersections within early modern scholarship, namely through an exploration of the destabilized notion of "natural" and the way hegemonic sexuality is articulated and confounded in relation to that destabilized notion. More so than a gesture toward unpacking these specific authors, I hope this project serves as a step in the direction of more fully applying the field of queer ecologies to authors in the early modern period as a whole. Although a project of this size cannot hope to fully encapsulate all of the intricacies regarding nature, sexuality, and their appearances within

hegemonic culture of the early modern period, I do hope that the development of this project will ultimately culminate in a significant contribution to the enormous task that is understanding the interconnectedness of the above topics, done here through a close exploration of anthropocentric modifications of nature, what the term “natural” entails, and the ways in which human sexuality is confounded in relation to those ideas.

Chapter One

Marvell's Gardens and Ecology

Interpretations of Andrew Marvell's poetry often 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 is the potential overlap, noteworthy 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)

Marvell here brings up what appears to be a contradiction, that fond lovers, rather than extolling the "fair trees," with emphasis on the conflation of "fair" used to denote the trees rather than the mistresses, instead cut into them as a method of showing their affection to other people. To Andrew McRae, "[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). Taken to a logical extreme, the process of "giving a name" is intrinsically malevolent, here resulting in cut-up bark, but otherwise serving to establish a hierarchy of human superiority over nature. Marvell calls attention to gardens as modifications of nature, returning repeatedly to human culture as violent when enacted upon it. Additionally, McRae unpacks 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 McRae 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, "[E]ach 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 McRae, 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.

Although McRae and Klawitter offer differing interpretations, they both discuss to varying degrees the connections between sexuality and nature, with McRae using a discussion of grafting as sexual to further his argument of human culture as violent and acquisitory and Klawitter pondering sexual fulfillment of oneself within a solitary setting. 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 argue "modification" in the sense that nature is altered to make it pleasurable for human consumption and experience. Through this, I work 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.

Within “The Garden,” allusions to Eden and a pre-Eve Adam suggest a sexuality that predates the heterosexual couple—a sexuality, moreover, that roots itself 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, too, the very idea of so-called natural or normative sex. In an opposing vein, “The Mower Against Gardens” interrogates the potential underside of this fantasy of nature’s solitary sexual pleasures by looking at the harm arising from altering nature for 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 might appear to be a conventional heterosexual love poem with the beloved Juliana at the center. Despite this, 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 the verse is at pains to reconcile.

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

Marvell’s “The Garden” seems to challenge heteronormative 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 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 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 conjures 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 ecologies 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 needn’t 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, 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 not only that the Garden of Eden is an ideal state for humankind, but also 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. Although 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, which subsequently bring him satisfaction, repurposes an otherwise loaded term into a reclaimed act in this instance. The positivity of the event, broadly speaking, acts as a reclamation of "the fall," changing it from an ominous departure to a sensuous reimagining of the speaker in nature. 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, “[T]he 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 exist and are 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 an instance of plant-human relations being expressly divine. Marvell, in doing so, is simultaneously laying the foundation for discussion of plant-human relations, those being most notably the satisfaction humans in the relations get from plants, and denoting explorations of human-plant sexuality older 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 plants were 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 desiring plant relations, “The Garden” articulates how humans also benefit from nature. More often than not, this comes from some form of modification from people, 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 in accordance with hegemonic

culture, the exact word choice of “win” carries with it not only the connotation of attaining honor, but also, following the *Oxford English Dictionary*,” 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. Throughout, the poem figures non-heteronormative encounters as the ideal, with men carving the names of women into trees as the negative and the satisfaction people get from appreciations of nature being the ideal. Human-plant sexuality within “The Garden” is denoted not as normative, but as desirable, and in speaking of human-plant relations as pleasurable for the speaker, the poem further explores sexual diversity beyond human-human.

The speaker within Marvell’s “The Garden” not only notes the fact that other humans seek pleasure or gain from nature, but also seeks something similar himself, his gain taking the form of sexual satisfaction. Despite this, the speaker figures his own instances as helpful, even to the ends of his desire being the ideal. The poem seems to suggest queer ecological possibility, depicting human-plant sexuality in terms of biblical and pagan ideas, in many ways extolling the speaker’s fantasy as the paradigm to strive for.

II. “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

harmful as a direct result. Following “The Garden,” I read “The Mower Against Gardens” as a form 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 on 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 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 enables discussions of human exceptionality in light of using nature however men 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 harmful connotation in "seduce" in line 2. My point here is not that plants themselves are not sexual, but rather, that their sexuality is often put into concepts of human desire and pleasure, shifting their sexuality to be human centered in instances where it is brought to attention.

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 harm caused by gardens and alteration of nature to a head, noting the ways in which nature essentially 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 in any way 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, made such by the various fruits that would not have originally grown in such a garden. In working through this, 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, although he speaks on "The Garden," also takes root in a discussion of "The Mower Against Gardens" (210). This 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 more 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 within "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 otherwise change it from its natural form 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 plays to the idea of nature's allure, prompting human spraying of perfumes upon roses. In addition to "taint" denoting such an alteration as harming the rose in some way, the perfume itself is likely crushed and killed flowers itself, resulting in a paradox of man destroying nature in an attempt to further modify it for human pleasure. Such a beautification is done purely in terms of human pleasure, with the action benefiting the roses in no way, and in fact killing them to achieve such ends. The following lines create a similar situation, in which the flowers within 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 the 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 that "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). Jaeckle’s discussion of plants being transformed from naturally to artificially beautiful is an insight worth discussing in light of queer ecologies, made especially paramount by Jaeckle’s situating of the humans and plants within stereotypically heteronormative roles of nature as feminine. This return to humans altering nature, once again in terms associated with romance and sexuality, informs our understanding of the poem by calling to attention the fact that nature is being harmed in this society much in the way women might be, forced to don perfumes and “interline [their] cheek[s],” in order to conform to beauty standards set by men (14). In making the flowers recipients of human desire, the question is once again raised as to what difference there is 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 harm otherwise glanced past by those in power, in this case “man” in both senses of the word.

The modifications of nature not only result in dead plants and roses, but also have the capacity to alter, which is to say harm or kill, all future plants. 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 destructive modifications that only enact themselves upon the plants: 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 bastardization of human influence and nature. With the emphasis heteronormative sexuality places upon procreation, human alterations of nature as “uncertain” and “adult’rate” calls into conflict that very idea of lineal reproduction, rendering such fruits and benefits of this garden irrelevant in light of heteronormative discourse and its concerns with reproduction and lineage. 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 has and how desire for nature plays may cause it, specifically here with concerns regarding lineage and the legitimacy of reproductive union. Continuing with the idea of grafting, reproductive concerns in light of heteronormativity are 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” according to the Oxford English Dictionary (“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, is that in equating gardens with institutional indentured sexual servitude, Marvell is lamenting upon gardens as being completely for the purpose of anthropocentric pleasure, rendering them exploited in the efforts of man seeking pleasure. Additionally, the extension to include “eunuchs” within such a harem space further questions

the sexual space of such a garden, creating a liminal space within heteronormative sexuality. As eunuchs were castrated, reproduction is nonexistent, rendering them outside of such a heteronormative hegemony focused upon procreation, but as eunuchs were perpetuated, as here, they still remain within the heterosexual household. The queer ecological framework within “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 worse. 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, created in an attempt to elicit pleasure.

In his discussion of gardens here, Marvell’s speaker makes it clear that the idealized garden fantasy within “The Garden” comes with several drawbacks, the connection being most clear through 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, within “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.

III. “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), but through the framework I have established, I believe it is possible to further elucidate the ways in which heteronormative sexuality is coded within the poem and discuss nature as a victim to the scorns and strife 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). I seek to extend Funari’s discussion of Damon being introduced to his own sexuality through Juliana to show not only the way Damon loses his harmonious relation to nature, but also how an introduction of human-human sexuality causes him to harm nature. According to George Klawitter, “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 posit this either, as Damon is repeatedly scorned and seeking comfort or shelter from his affections. As queer ecology alters the way we perceive nature and Damon’s relationship, it in turn provides a conduit for pleasure for the scorned Damon. Queer ecology also allows us to glean insight on Damon’s relationship with Juliana, which consists of Damon attempting to woo Juliana in conventional and heteronormative ways, and discuss the ways such methods are represented as detrimental to nature.

In looking at “Damon the Mower” through a queer ecocritical lens, of note is the relationship between the unnamed speaker recounting Damon and Damon himself. Scholars such as Joan Faust have noted the appearance of a speaker other than Damon: “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 frame Damon and that the speaker is invested throughout in representing Damon’s heteronormative relationship as harmful to both Damon and nature, reflecting upon the ways he suffers due to Juliana and how nature in turn suffers due to him. Always discussing Damon in the past, the speaker begins the poem, telling us 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 common word choice, both equates the love to the natural sting of a bee or similar animal and deems it harming to Damon as being stung incurs pain and ailment. Juxtaposed against Damon’s desire is his job as a mower. Through his occupation, Damon “paints” nature to be exactly as he desires it, resulting in nature being anthropocentrically modified in such a way that he has no complaints about it. Within the first four lines of the poem, the stakes are already established: Damon is a mower content to shape nature as he sees most fit until Juliana arrives. 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 causes disaster to befall nature. Such a confounding presents Damon's relation to nature as mower, and the stakes, clearly, made even clearer by the way in which Damon, in his relation to Juliana, is equated 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 seen continuously as destruction upon Damon in each instance Juliana or his desire for her is mentioned. This destructive heteronormativity is made most visible in the fifth stanza, quoted here in full:

'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 broaches upon her, many stemming 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 they are discussed as emasculating and potentially outside of the heteronormative and reproductive norm through the relation with reptiles different even insofar as their being cold-blooded as opposed to the warm-blooded Damon. 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 pains 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 as a result of penetration. 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 upon human and, in turn through Damon, nature. Additionally, this brings under scrutiny the notions of “nature” and “natural,” in regards to their relations to humans, causing us to see that in circumstances such as this,

such classifications are ultimately whatever humans denote at the time and are ultimately invalid.

With the harm from 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, here a metaphor for desire, to Juliana, but depicts it as something to avoid 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 here and throughout the poem in Damon modifying nature to receive comfort. Conversely, comfort here and throughout exists in nature, through caves and fountains filled with cool water. Although 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 desire for 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 that seemingly plagues him. Damon explicitly codifies 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. 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 are completely absent within the relationship he has with Juliana, and although Damon himself does not view nature as sexually desirable, he seems to consider nature as pleasurable to him in a capacity that his modifications achieve. Marvell’s queering of nature here, in conjunction with my earlier readings of “The Garden” and “The Mower Against Gardens,” gestures toward another figure with a pleasurable relationship with nature. In doing so, while critiquing the way in which Damon suffers with Juliana, Marvell explores the benefits of a sexually charged relationship with nature, providing it as a sustainable 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 extol 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 harmful impacts 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.

Although the speaker only returns once, during which he discusses how Damon’s injury is reminiscent of his occupation, it is of importance that the speaker is recounting everything Damon says, evidenced by “‘Alas!’ said he,” in line 81. In having the speaker recount everything Damon speaks, we may argue 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 edged 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, such desire is firmly equated with destruction, finally moving past the nature Damon’s

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:

‘Alas!’ said [Damon], ‘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, according to Nigel Smith, “were supposed to stop bleeding and cure wounds” (139), even though Juliana’s emotional wounds against him cannot be cured. Once again drawing a harsh contrast to these two relationships the mower finds himself in, it becomes plainly visible that the heteronormative here is strictly rebuked 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 therefore sought after in a world where heteronormative discourse is so harmful to Damon.

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 anything other than harming to the plants often modified in relations. It becomes evident quickly that the unrequited heteronormative love within the poem weighs heavily upon Damon, and in turn the garden, causing him strife that he then exerts 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. Such a reading of “Damon the Mower” enables us see our relation to nature as inherently harming through heterosexual and institutional hegemony creating a sense of human exceptionalism, as

relations with plants are deemed inferior in such a scheme. We can then in turn understand that any relation with nature rooted in the heteronormative conceptions of hierarchy and “proper” relations of any kind, are 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, emerges as a viable alternative is created and explored.

Following David Kalstone, I believe that overall Marvell is distinctly interested in “what we try to *make* of nature” (187), and, furthermore, that Marvell is acutely calling attention to our seeking pleasure from nature through twisting it away from its original form. With all of this in mind, we are invited to ask 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 each case, however, one thing remains certain, which is that if we are to love nature, similarly to the way one may love in a heteronormative relationship, 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.

Chapter Two

Milton's Forests and Eden

In my previous chapter, my emphasis was placed specifically on the instances throughout Marvell's "Mower Poems" in which relationships with nature directly seemed to be, if not the antithesis to heteronormativity, then at least a very pleasing alternative to it. Following such an understanding, the previous chapter furthers an answer to the question of why it seems that in gaining pleasure of any kind from nature, humans must alter or modify it drastically to suit their needs before concluding that anthropocentric relations with nature will, invariably, destroy its physical existence. In building on these ideas, I shift to Milton's *Comus* and *Paradise Lost* because both predominantly consist of occurrences in fields, woods, and the first garden of any sort, which serve as the sites for a host of sexually charged language and confounding of nature's relations with characters. Within *Comus*, the relations between nature, sexuality, gender, and status in society arise as the primary issues, whereas the positing of an "original" sexuality in the Garden of Eden that fits outside of heteronormativity that the characters within *Paradise Lost* (primarily Eve) grapple to understand situates itself at the center of queer ecological discussions. Similarly to Marvell, each of these issues is discussed in direct relation to nature through multiple avenues, with the "bestial" companions of Comus and his opposition to cultural ideas surrounding sexuality sharing a close bond, and the paradisaical aspects of Eden that Eve is reflective within as she considers her relationship with herself and Adam, to name two. Of note in my transition from Marvell to Milton is the drastically different focus on the subjects' gender. With Marvell's Mower being a man and the Lady and Sabrina in *Comus* and Eve in *Paradise Lost* being women, such a shift in subjects invariably means that conceptions of heteronormativity, as

well as characters' relations to them, will be articulated and understood differently. This is most notable in the character of Sabrina, who is the character most rooted in nature in *Comus*, as she is most often defined by her chastity and virginity before these notions are rapidly destabilized precisely because she has such a close relation to nature. Of note also is my transition from Marvell's Mower who, as mentioned in the previous chapter, is often figured as a Pre-Eve Adam figure, to the literal Pre-Adam Eve and her identity before Adam. Whereas in Marvell's "Mower" Poems we are able to glean what an ideal relationship with nature may look like and how anthropocentricity is damaging to such a relationship, Milton's verse allows us to perceive the instability of myriad dichotomies set up via relationships and understandings of nature. Such dichotomies are codified most specifically through the relationships women in his texts garner with nature and themselves that in turn similarly impact human ability to sustain relationships with nature.

I. Bestial Figures, Night, and *Comus*

Nature, sexuality, and gender appear throughout *Comus*, long made evident through the work of scholars who have brought attention to scenes such as the argument between Comus and the Lady. One such scholar, James Clark, emphasizes that "the opposing positions of Comus and the Lady with respect to the nature of nature," has them working towards what they think "correct" way to express and deal with sex and chastity via nature, with Comus taking the side of nature spreading bounties for all to enjoy while the Lady attests to the opposite (7). Clark additionally discusses the figure of Sabrina more in-depth as a potential reconciliation between the two opposing views Comus and the Lady have on nature. While Clark analyzes how nature is used specifically as rhetoric, more recently James

Broaddus and Ross Leasure have made strides examining the sexual aspects of the text and their implications. Broaddus in his article situates the gums of “glutinous” heat found in *Comus* within an understanding of virtue and uses a comparison with Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* to argue that “the Lady and Britomart exude the same gums and that their exudation plays a significant part in their representation of their respective virtues,” allowing him to make the point that Milton’s Lady is more concerned with keeping her mind clear and pure and having less concern for her body (205). Such an interpretation refocuses the piece away from the physical and gestures more directly toward the mental and emotional aspects imperative in sexuality. Whereas Broaddus looks at the sexual nature of the gums cementing Milton’s Lady to her chair, Leasure examines specific quotations from the text in an effort to show that Comus is not solely desiring the Lady, as he has an “ambiguous sexuality” and as such, “it becomes possible to read the deity as a sexual threat not only to the Lady, but also to the two boys who attempt her rescue, her Brothers” (64). Both discussions of sexuality yield pertinent information regarding the non-normative capacities sex and sexuality exhibited in the text, but miss looking at the most common mode for which sexuality and gender are discussed, which Clark discusses in terms of rhetoric instead of sexuality: nature.

This common mode, which remains implicit at best in Broaddus and Leasure’s works, is exactly what Melissa Sanchez’s “‘What Hath Night to Do with Sleep?’: Religion and Biopolitics in Milton’s *Mask*,” works through, as she deals directly with understandings of Comus as outside of the hegemonic human, remarking that he appears “perverted and bestial because he flouts both normal daily rhythms (decent people work during the day and go to bed early) and normative developmental trajectories (one becomes a grown-up only when one marries and has children)” which is later reinforced by his kidnapping of the Lady (182).

Such a grappling with the character of Comus in regards to how he fits into the society within *Comus* changes our understanding of the text as a whole through subjecting society, bodily needs, and desire to scrutiny. Additionally, this concept opens up discussion on the difference between beast and human that Sanchez describes as “not as natural and obvious as that between day and night,” and our understanding of sexuality in light of the hegemonic (202). In going forward, whereas Sanchez looks to the intersection of feminist theory and queer theory for her discussion, the terminology and understandings afforded by queer ecologies prove just as apt a method to extend discussion regarding the complexities surrounding sexuality and nature within *Comus*.

Through such an analysis, it becomes inevitable that the dichotomy that scholars such as Broaddus and Sanchez point out exists in such a manner that the heteronormative and anthropocentric notions these dichotomies are founded upon collapse under their own weight. As such, I seek to extend the discussion to encompass what I feel is lacking in previous scholarship surrounding *Comus* and applications of queer and ecocritical theory through a focus upon the conventions tied to gender and sexuality within the text, and what it specifically means for each to be coded in relation to nature through the usage of queer ecologies. Although it is certainly not a new concept in the field of queer theory, what appears most at the heart of *Comus's* dealings with gender are the instability attributed to characters such as Comus and Sabrina via their relationships to nature and how this in turn confounds our concepts of “natural.” Within her chapter in *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire*, Stacy Alaimo notes that “the question of whether nonhuman nature can be queer provokes larger questions within interdisciplinary theory regarding the relations between discourse and materiality, human and more-than-human worlds, as well as between

cultural theory and science” (51). In building on Sanchez’s discussion regarding Comus and his status outside of the hegemonic, his status as the non-human then can be extended to allow an analysis of nature within Comus and how the sexual attributes given to it, or at the very least the notion that it is the place to be when engaging in anything sexually unrestrained, may gesture towards new understandings about the relationship, and potential relationships, between humans and nature, most prominently made through the oftentimes contradictory depictions of gender. By looking closely at the discussion between Comus and the Lady, in which nature is simultaneously made the signifier of the male Comus’s sexual desire and the female Lady’s chastity, and other key points of conflation between nature and gender such as the Brothers’ argument regarding chastity while in the woods and the supernatural figure of Sabrina saving the Lady, we can see that the ways in which nature is used to express sexuality and the gendering attributed to nature are rendered wholly unstable.

With all of this in mind, it comes as no shock that the introductory setting of Milton’s *Comus* (1634) is nature, a setting that here encompasses a dark wood brimming with sexual imagery. Sexual imagery attributed to nature is most apparent in lines such as “teeming Flocks and granges full / In wanton dance [unleter’d Hinds] praise the bounteous Pan” (175-76) spoken by the Lady upon becoming separated from her Brothers. These instances go beyond just giving nature character; this imagery begins the theme repeated throughout that nature exists as a locale for desire and sex to be exhibited, made most evident by the specific usage of “wanton,” to show a lack of sexual restraint, and “teeming Flocks,” which indicates a large number of entities engaging in such actions to the point of overflowing. As a result, the wood is already beginning to be figured with emphasis on human sexuality. Such imagery is continued throughout *Comus* and reaches a climax when nature is evoked as the primary

catalyst in the argument between Comus and the Lady, in which each tries to steer the other toward their beliefs regarding chastity. Following this general understanding of her setting, after the Lady ventures off with Comus in shepherd garb, the Brothers realize that she is nowhere to be found. Discussion between the Brothers immediately turns to her safety and her ability to stay chaste, two sentiments often indiscernible from one another, such as when the Second Brother states:

Perhaps som cold bank is her boulder now
Or 'gainst the rugged bark of som broad Elm
Leans her unpillow'd head fraught with sad fears.
What if in wild amazement, and affright,
Or while we speak within the direful grasp
Of Savage hunger, or of Savage heat? (353-358)

This discussion from the Brothers serves as one of the first of many areas in the text where nature is made out to be the locale for sexual revelry. Although it is made explicit that the Second Brother cares at least in part for her safety through his concern for her physical wellbeing in the early parts of the speech, he immediately swaps to ponder her ability to stay virtuous when he places emphasis upon “wild amazement,” which may tempt her out of her hegemonic role of chaste maiden, and “the direful grasp ... of Savage heat,” which, after expressing concerns that she may be on a cold bank, leads to an understanding that his final concern about his sister is in regards to her sexuality. As William Shullenberger puts it, “[W]ith the disappearance of her brothers, the ‘kind hospitable Woods’ (187) have become a brooding labyrinth whose darkness closes in around her” in the minds of the Brothers, with the Second Brother worrying not just about her safety, but also the potential dangers to virtue that he deems as lurking within the woods (109). This discussion by the Brothers, in which the focus is upon the Lady’s chastity once primary concerns about overall safety are moved past, serves to make chastity the most intrinsic and threatened aspect of the Lady’s character.

This is no great revelation, as scholars have long noted the emphasis placed upon the chastity of Milton's Lady, yet the active role nature plays within such a threat, either through lines like these from the Brothers or Comus's argument, shows the instability of nature within the text, as nature so quickly transitions from an idyllic place to walk to a threat to chastity based solely on the speaker's concerns.

The other character presented as primarily feminine within *Comus*, Sabrina, is similarly defined by her chastity, even being introduced as a "true Virgin here" (905) before freeing the Lady from the chair she finds herself stuck to, emphasis placed upon "true" as a qualifier for her state of chastity. In addition to attributing her as a chaste figure, the Spirit also emphasizes her relation to nature with the following:

Made Goddess of the river. Still she retains
Her maiden gentleness, and oft at eve
Visits the herds along the twilight meadows,
Helping all urchin blasts, and ill-luck signs. (842-845)

Made specifically a "Goddess" of nature, she is described as a maiden still possessing gentleness, further showing the aspects of femininity within the text attributed to her.

Emphasis on chastity and aspects of gentleness are only brought up in regards to Sabrina and the Lady, and as a result, any time feminine sex or desire is brought up, the text associates chastity with the feminine.

Whereas chastity is attributed to the feminine figures in *Comus*, voracity and desire are associated with the male figure of Comus. The threat of desire against the Lady is exhibited in lines such as "one sip of this / Will bathe the drooping spirits in delight / beyond the bliss of dreams" (811-13), in which Comus attempts to have the Lady drink from his glass, which would then result in her compliance with his desire. Coupled with his appearance with a "Charming Rod" and glass in hand, and arguments throughout against

chastity, these lines reveal Comus as a stand-in for sexual desire fulfilled: the direct threat to the Lady and her chastity.

Although Comus is the primary threat to the Lady in the text, the Elder Brother makes apparent that nature serves as a catalyst for such threats to chastity:

‘Tis chastity, my brother, chastity:
She that has that, is clad in compleat steel,
And like a quiver'd Nymph with Arrows keen
May trace huge Forests, and unharbour'd Heaths,
Infamous Hills, and sandy perilous wilds,
Where through the sacred rayes of Chastity,
No savage fierce, Bandite, or mountaineer
Will dare to soil her Virgin purity. (420-427)

These lines work towards the gendering of nature to fit each character's understanding of desire and sexuality within *Comus* and result in the gendering of nature either in exceedingly masculine or exceedingly feminine terms depending on what point the speaker is attempting to convey. Through dialogue such as this, it becomes apparent that nature here, to the Brothers, symbolizes threats to chastity that lay hidden underneath the "Infamous Hills" and "perilous wilds" waiting to "soil [the Lady's] Virgin purity." Such a threat, as mentioned, is exactly enacted in Comus, and through the conflation of Comus, or a similar threat to chastity, with these hiding spaces, nature takes on the societal conceptualization of the masculine of the text in these instances despite previously being the feminine.

To the likely chagrin of the Brothers if they were made aware of such a discussion, Comus later positions nature as disregarding chastity. Comus's attempts at converting the Lady to share his desires are met with rejection due to his deceit, trickery, and camaraderie with monsters, resulting in the following discussion of sexuality in regards to nature:

Wherefore did Nature pour her bounties forth,
With such a full and unwithdrawing hand,
Covering the earth with odors, fruits, and flocks,

Thronging the Seas with spawn innumerable,
But all to please and sate the curious taste? (710-714)

Put into terms of sexual wantonness, nature is thus the direct opposite of feminine notions of chastity within the text. In this way, Comus begins to blur the lines of gender by denoting nature with a feminine pronoun and then equating it with what he himself is doing, in both “Covering the earth [...] with spawn innumerable” and “pour[ing] bounties forth.” Comus, similarly to the wanton nature he deems female, seeks to populate the world with those similar to him in terms of desire. Not only does Comus's desire here help us challenge “proper sexuality,” but it further removes nature from normative understandings of gender within the text by situating it simultaneously outside the masculine through pronoun usage and outside the feminine by having a one-to-one comparison with Comus, whose masculine representation of desire is in direct opposition to the Lady's chastity. This is to say that the logical extension of Comus being outside proper sexuality is to show that nature is outside any notion of “proper gender,” i.e. binary, as the characters in the text seem to believe. Ultimately, it is this pairing of figures' sexuality with nature that allows us to arrive at the conclusion that the dichotomy set up throughout is fallible due to its establishment being rendered nonsensical via its usage as a catalyst to express any point any speaker wishes, be it in favor of chastity, voracity, or anything at all.

Following Comus's description of nature as similar to him in the way it desires open sexuality, the Lady expresses an opposing opinion of nature, made most concise in the following lines:

Impostor do not charge most innocent nature,
As if she would her children should be riotous
With her abundance, she good cateress
Means her provision only to the good
That live according to her sober laws,

And holy dictate of spare Temperance:
If every just man that now pines with want
Had but a moderate and beseeeming share. (762-69)

Nature is set up as the ideal to strive towards in terms of sexuality, yet here nature aligns with the ideals of the Lady and her desire to stay chaste. As William Shullenberger observes, “[the Lady] is able to envision and articulate a more compelling and comprehensive alternative. By the end of her account of Nature’s temperance and her encomium to virginity (756–99), she holds the upper hand in the rhetorical and psychological contest with her supposed enchanter” (189). Such a discussion shows, once again, the rhetoric of her specific argument results in a gendering of nature as feminine by casting nature as a symbol of chastity, following “sober laws, / And holy dictate of spare Temperance” instead of the lack of withdrawal to which Comus alludes. The feminine reading here is further enforced, as “if she would her children should be riotous” creates the image of motherly nature, falling in line with the caretaker image the Lady seeks to create. Although this rhetoric is indicative of the Lady remaining disillusioned and keeping herself chaste, it again genders nature as feminine through pronoun usage and rhetoric.. The two lines ending this selection cause feminine gendering of nature by equating desire with the masculine and nature through the pun of “man that now pines with want.” Even in places where the Lady is describing nature in explicitly feminine characteristics, there is still ambiguity about how nature truly interacts with sexuality.

The last figure most representative of this ambiguously gendered nature is Sabrina, the “Goddess of the River,” who is tasked with freeing the Lady from the chair to which she remains fixed. Sabrina, like Comus, exists in explicitly described relation to nature and is gendered specifically toward the feminine ideals of chastity that characters throughout the

text repeatedly discuss. Such details are summarized and discussed in great detail by Will Stockton:

Like Comus, Sabrina appears in response to a song. The Attendant Spirit summons her to “Listen and save” (889), but his specific invocation of “the Songs of Sirens sweet” (878) also codes her “salvation” as vaguely threatening. (As Roy Flannagan notes, we are not sure if the Attendant Spirit is referring to the Sirens who seduce sailors to their death with song or the Sirens who orient the spheres of heaven.) Whereas Comus approached the Lady with his poisoned cup, Sabrina approaches with “pretious viold liquors” (846), “Drops that from my fountain pure / I have kept of pretious cure” (911-12). (“The Seduction of Milton’s Lady” 255)

Stockton articulates that the feminine must be what saves the Lady while also elaborating on the striking resemblance Sabrina bears to Comus. This particular notion that Stockton then moves on from, which is that as she is a figure of nature, shows that her similarity to Comus serves to further blur the line of gender within nature by having Sabrina, a direct representation of nature, be simultaneously an overtly feminine chaste figure that frees the Lady yet comparable to the masculine figure of desire in Comus. Insofar as they are gendered this way, they are still attributed heavily towards being beings of nature. As a direct result, gender and sexuality become even harder to stabilize within the text, as even a figure such as Sabrina, who is meant to embody chastity, is complicated by her close comparison to Comus and relationship to nature.

With these pressing examples of nature as consistently unstably gendered in the text brought to light, I return to an early part of Milton’s *Comus*, the stage directions that indicate the capacity in the beings with Comus are simultaneously like humans and like non-humans: “with [Comus] a rout of Monsters, headed like sundry sorts of wild Beasts, but otherwise like Men and Women, their Apparel glistering” (92 [stage direction]). As with nearly every instance of nature’s gendering, the “wild” headed monsters that accompany Comus are a myriad of entities that are like male and female bodies. What does it mean that gender in

discussions of nature is so erratic in this text? Put simply, the repetitive back and forth of nature's gender breaks down an established dichotomy that is intrinsic to the text, which is to say that desire and sexuality are coded based on divergent notions of masculine and feminine found most muddled in descriptions of nature. The understanding that such a dichotomy is ultimately existent yet fallible goes beyond assertions by scholars such as Leasure, who sought to show sexual ambiguity among characters such as Comus, and further extends notions made by Sanchez regarding characters as being constructed in relation to their temporality. The instability surrounding the gendered terms that most arguments in the text are based on results in each character defining themselves and their desires in vague, non-hegemonic terms, stemming from the instability.

In showing such a dichotomy confounded in the text, I seek to then gesture toward the potential implications of this understanding when it is applied to characters already discussed. Such an understanding not only reveals characters' desires to be vague in regards to how they achieve desire, but also opens more discussion regarding normativity surrounding chastity and desire. Is nature righteous and feminine when being described in feminine terms by the Lady, or is this instead an invitation to analyze chastity as gendered and look at Comus and the Brothers through such a lens? What are the implications of looking at Comus in terms of the feminine and still the direct antithesis to chastity? To what extent does gender work at all in *Comus*? The most pertinent of applications lies in the appearance and freedom of the Lady by the character of Sabrina. Despite the reassurance of her desire to "help ensnared chastity," lines such as the following conflate chastity, desire, and sexuality as a result of the character of Sabrina being "natural" and thus ambiguously gendered:

Thus I sprinkle on thy breast
Drops that from my fountain pure,
I have kept of pretious cure,
Thrice upon thy fingers tip,
Thrice upon thy rubied lip,
Next this marble venom'd seat
Smear'd with gums of glutinous heat
I touch with chaste palms moist and cold. (910-917)

Lines such as those above, with emphasis on sexuality made as a result of words such as “breast,” “rubied lip,” and “chaste,” would be interpreted much differently spoken by Comus, yet coming from Sabrina, characters within the text seem content hearing it. As scholars such as Stockton have noted, there also lies potential for “female homoerotic activity” through “the salvation and restoration of chastity outside a phallic economy” (“The Seduction of Milton’s Lady” 255), but if we read the images of nature as ungendered in the text, an opportunity to completely dismantle labels emerges for if nature is continuously referred to using feminine pronouns, but is masculine in practice and existence, nothing prevents a similar assertion from being made about Sabrina in this capacity, who never identifies their gender beyond what outside forces seem to attribute.

II. The Hierarchies of *Paradise Lost*

When I beheld the poet blind, yet bold,
In slender book his vast design unfold,
Messiah crowned, God’s reconciled decree,
Rebelling Angels, the Forbidden Tree,
—Andrew Marvell “On Mr. Milton’s *Paradise Lost*”

Comus’s setting of the hazy, unnavigable, and even tempting woods in which three siblings find themselves wandering lends itself throughout to questioning issues of desire and hegemony. The Lady’s isolation from her Brothers and Comus finding himself at home here which lead to questioning is somewhat a given, the most direct comparison being Dante’s

Dark Wood of Error and the sin located within being the perfect setting for a dismissal of chastity by Comus. *Paradise Lost*'s Garden of Eden, the prelapsarian environment that has no ability to contain or account for the sins of humans would at first glance appear to be the opposition to such a Dark Wood, positioning away from temptation. Nonetheless, *Paradise Lost*, even before Satan tempts Eve to eat the forbidden fruit, is still host to temptation throughout that in many ways contradicts what one may picture the idyllic prelapsarian Garden of Eden to look like, especially in comparison to the Dark Wood of Error the figures of Comus find themselves in. *Paradise Lost*, similarly to Comus, is host to vast representations of sexual desire discussed throughout, ranging from pre-fall humans that seemingly have sex without worry of reproduction to angels joining together in a method too beautiful for even pre-fallen Adam to understand. If, therefore, the enforced dichotomy of gender and sexuality one can see throughout Comus inevitably breaks down and causes us to reconsider ideal relations of any kind, then when looking at the complicated issues of sexuality within Milton's *Paradise Lost* we can once again see nature as a locale for interrogating heteronormative ideas, albeit at the moment of creation in an environment seemingly quite unlike the Dark Wood of Error. In turn, it becomes apparent that the setting, be it a hazy wood or the prelapsarian Garden of Eden, bears little impact so long as it is nature, as something about the existence of figures in nature pushes issues of cultural and sexual hegemony to the forefront of questioning.

Within the recently published *Queer Milton* (2018), scholars such as Stephen Guy-Bray and Thomas Luxon have done a great deal of work elaborating on why *Paradise Lost* can inherently be read as queer, building upon nearly every relationship described within the text, from angels, to Satan, to Adam and Eve, in order to discuss destabilized

notions of heteronormativity. Such notions are readily evident to Guy-Bray, whose analysis of angels, Satan, humans, and their relationships leads him to the following conclusion:

[I]n *Paradise Lost*, Adam and Eve are not even the first heterosexual couple: that honor is reserved for Satan and Sin. What is more, it is the relationship between Adam and Raphael that is the poem's best relationship. For Milton, while humans apparently cannot escape from heterosexuality, even the marriage so central to church and state can only be an imperfect imitation of heavenly homoeroticism. (149)

Following this framework, it stands to reason that in going forward, analyses of Adam and Eve's relationship may always be seen through an already-imagined queer lens, as even their relationship, the first human-human heterosexual relationship, is set up as being the follow-up to relationships between angels. Luxon, following what he calls Guy-Bray's "path-breaking reading," works to queer the text by unpacking Adam and Eve's relationship, paying specific attention to the fact that Eve is conjured from Adam rather than God, yet seemingly does not fulfill the full purpose of curing solitude in Adam, nor does she become the missing piece to his supposed lack of wisdom. In looking at the sexual relations between angels, Luxon argues that they can be seen as "beyond flesh even beyond soul" before promptly asking "But what if angel sex is even beyond homoerotic because it is beyond gender altogether" (50)? Likewise, in "Adam and Eve and the Failure of Heterosexuality," Will Stockton draws upon moments throughout in which queer temporality "organizes itself not only around symptomatic expressions of desire that interrupt a straightforward narrative, but symptomatic expressions of desire that are all the more queer because they are not oriented by gender" ("Failure of Heterosexuality" 224). Taken together, the work of Guy-Bray, Luxon, and Stockton posit specific interest toward both the effects that gender has (or in some cases do not have at all) in the construction of relationships within *Paradise Lost*

and towards the originary order of heteronormativity that must be scrutinized in the tale of the first heterosexual couple.

Just as the creation story of the first heterosexual couple on which all humans originate ironically lends itself to queer readings through the relationships described within, the idyllic and utopian Garden of Eden lends itself to ecocritical readings through the repeated work and maintenance Adam and Eve must perform on nature. Just as queer readings bring under investigation the culmination of Adam and Eve into a heterosocial hierarchy, ecocritical readings of *Paradise Lost* often culminate in capacities that question anthropocentric hierarchies and the purpose Adam and Eve serve in the Garden. Nick Pici, for example, details the supposed “wilderness” discussed throughout *Paradise Lost* that Adam and Eve often have to keep back and control, likening it to modern-day notions of “civilization” against “wilderness” (39-40). Throughout Pici’s article, attention is drawn toward the contradiction that such a paradise would be denoted as wilderness and in need of maintenance, a notion that Jude Welburn also confounds in “Divided Labors: Work, Nature, and the Utopian Impulse in John Milton's *Paradise Lost*.” Welburn, though looking through a Marxist perspective, articulates ecocritical concerns similar to Pici’s with the following:

In *Paradise Lost*, Adam and Eve's work is not simply play or blind duty, as in earlier iterations of the story. Instead, it is purposeful and necessary, actively shaping nature and giving it form and function. The need to "humanize" nature in Milton's paradise, to subject an untamed yet unfallen wilderness to human needs and ends, places the discipline of work and the organization of social being at the center of humanity's purpose and self-understanding in Eden and thus introduces a utopian impulse into the story. (507)

Welburn brings to the forefront the anthropocentric hierarchy that seems to exist within *Paradise Lost*, made apparent by the attention Welburn calls to shaping and “humanizing” the wilderness throughout. Such concepts became apparent in Marvell’s Mower Poems, and

here again they surface, though in this case, rather than focusing solely on human pleasure derived from such modification, we may unearth the creation of such an anthropocentric order created at the same time a heteronormative order is conjured. These concepts, coupled with the work done by scholars such as Guy-Bray, Luxon, and Stockton, put on full display the hierarchical order heteronormativity and anthropocentricity make central to *Paradise Lost*. As such, I seek to extend our understanding of the effects of the establishment and enactment of orders through a combination of these discussions through a queer ecocritical lens. In short, the creation of hierarchies throughout *Paradise Lost* is worth investigating, as the arbitrary and/or inconsistent nature of their existence continues raising questions regarding notions of anthropocentricity and heteronormativity.

One of the most telling moments in establishing the anthropocentric and heterosexual hierarchies adhered to throughout is at the moment before Eve's creation when Adam's quest to cure solitude is initially inconclusive. Adam, in bringing it up to God with the statement "Thou hast provided all things: but with mee / I see not who partakes. In solitude / What happiness, who can enjoy alone" (8.363-365), thus shows his desire for a mate, with his seeming understanding that he is incredibly alone. Despite acknowledgement that he is lacking a companion similar to himself, Adam is quick to concede that God has provided him with all things. Even here, however, Adam is codifying the anthropocentric hierarchy that exists simply as a result of him existing, inherent in his desire to have a companion similar to himself to "partake" of the things provided to them. Additionally, the position he takes that such enjoyment cannot be done by himself, while not positing specifically heterosexual coupling, does position him as aligning with some human-human coupling being necessary

to his happiness and existence in the Garden. In response, God scrutinizes these perspectives with the following words:

What call'st thou solitude, is not the Earth
With various living creatures, and the Aire
Replenisht, and all these at thy command
To come and play before thee; know'st thou not
Thir language and thir wayes? They also know,
And reason not contemptibly; with these
Find pastime, and beare rule; thy Realm is large.(8.369-375)

Conversely to Adam's statement immediately preceding, God's conception of Earth not having a lack of solitude seems to simultaneously contradict the establishment of human-human coupling being necessary through his explanation of solitude not existing while animals exist, while reinforcing the establishment of anthropocentricity as Adam is set to command the animals. The specific phrasing of calling animals to "come and play before [Adam]" cannot help but make one ask questions such as those posited by Luxon: "Having deliberately arranged the beasts in couples, "play" cannot rule out sexual play, can it? Is God suggesting voyeuristic pleasures?" (53). This moment, causing friction due to the contradiction of what hierarchies and orders exist, is lastly reiterated by God further creates a divide between human and the other "various living creatures" as Adam is meant to "beare rule" over them, potentially shaping them for human satisfaction much in the way Adam and eventually Eve work on the wilderness. However, if it is the case that God has created this Garden and various creatures within to allow Adam not to feel solitude, as he claims, what are we to make of Adam himself seeing other couples of animals and ordaining that he must have one similar to himself? Here, it seems that though God ordains that anthropocentric hierarchy exists, Adam should be able to find relief from solitude through creatures that are beneath him, despite Adam's protests that solitude may only be cured by one like himself.

Whereas Pre-Eve Adam is encouraged by God to subjugate the creatures of the Garden for his enjoyment after waking up and glancing to the heavens, Pre-Adam Eve awakens and immediately questions her existence and status/placement within Eden. Eve's journey to work through her loneliness, which does not manifest until there is a solution, differs greatly from Adam's in that her contentment is not based upon a coupling of any sort, nor does contentment rely upon the subjugation of nature. Her assertion that "I first awak't, and found my self repos'd / Under a shade of flours, much wondring where / And what I was, whence thither brought, and how" (8.450-52) differs from Adam's in the attention to her physical surroundings, as Adam looks to the heavens rather than flowers when he awakes. Eve is not exalted by God as being above the various living creatures in the Garden, nor is she told immediately that the Garden is hers to manipulate or work through, and as such, rather than making the immediate assumption that either of these reign true, she instead explores her physical surroundings and ponders her placement within. As such, the thread of anthropocentricity brought about before her creation directly comes from God bestowing knowledge of the Garden on Adam, and ordaining it to work a certain way, not through any inherent difference between human and nature self-evident upon Adam or Eve's awakening. Adam, the figure God establishes as being able to seek a lack of solitude through nature, looks to the heavens and endeavors to work to please and accomplish God's will, resulting in part in his earlier anthropocentric thinking, whereas Eve is enamored of her immediate surroundings. Following this, Eve recollects that "with unexperienc't thought, and laid me downe / On the green bank, to look into the cleer / Smooth Lake, that to me seemd another Skie" (8.457-59), again distancing her awakening from Adam's as she continues to marvel at nature and the elements around her that she exists within. Eve's awakening marks a decided

difference between her and Adam, in that her communion with nature causes her to focus on the beautiful components of nature and the garden that she finds herself in, whereas Adam is markedly pining to communicate with, and find, God. As she focuses on nature, her naivety regarding the surroundings and her purpose in Eden is exemplified in her comparison of a body of water to a sky, which doubly shows this new innocence and again gestures toward her lack of understanding that God has told Adam that the Garden is for them. This difference reaches a fever pitch when the necessity for coupling with another human is rendered nonexistent in the mind of Eve upon her awakening:

As I bent down to look, just opposite,
A Shape within the watry gleam appeard
Bending to look on me, I started back,
It started back, but pleas'd I soon returnd,
Pleas'd it returnd as soon with answering looks
Of sympathie and love; there I had fixt
Mine eyes till now, and pin'd with vain desire,
Had not a voice thus warnd me, What thou seest,
What there thou seest fair Creature is thy self. (Book 8.460-468)

The emphasis on “pleas’d” is telling, not only as a result of her reflection being mirrored to her through water, but also because her first inclination upon creation is infatuation with nature, followed by infatuation with her own image reflected in nature. Eve is rendered naive, a completely blank slate upon her creation, and yet her inclination is not to follow any of the things God has told Adam, but rather to become infatuated with herself. In opposition to the solitude that Adam feels when he is the only human in Eden, Eve finds “sympathie and love” in the reflection of herself. It is thus relayed by God that Eve is unaware that this image is of herself, hence, this image that Eve “pin’d with vain desire” is, within Eve’s understanding, a differing entity that in many ways renders her free from the solitude Adam faces. Exhorting Adam and Eve to couple, God’s voice hierarchizes human relationships.

Though Eve seems to follow God's earlier insinuation that nature is suitable for preventing feelings of solitude, the creation of Eve at this point shows a hypocrisy towards that point, while also furthering the notion of an anthropocentric order in Eden. Despite Eve's seeming contentment alone with nature, the coupling of Adam and Eve through the will of God seems to posit anthropocentric heterosexual coupling as the normative, despite its attainment only happening through his direct instruction and intervention.

To these ends, the creation of Adam and Eve, followed by the subsequent interference with them, seems to be the driving force within the text behind the establishment of hierarchies. Despite God's push within the text towards such ideals, Eve's self-actualization and desire for herself, or rather the image of herself in nature, stands as a harsh pushback to hierarchies, as her initial inclination is in direct opposition to those ideals. Such opposition is only further reinforced when she spots Adam and states that, on his image, she found him "less faire, / Less winning soft, less amiable milde, / Then that smooth watry image; back I turnd" (8.478-480). It is only through obligation and divine intervention that Eve returns to Adam, though only after an originary attraction to self. Upon awakening, her thoughts shift from the beautiful flowers she finds herself amidst to the gorgeous lake she literally finds herself in, positing her as a figure that can seemingly glean all of the relations she needs from nature and herself, unlike Adam who requires Raphael or Eve. This is not to posit Adam as inherently flawed in seeking such constructions, but rather, as Eve is not as rapidly communicated with as Adam, she offers an even less imprinted slate at hierarchized human desire. Moreover, God's creation of Eve is inherently unstable, as she exists to fulfill these hierarchies with Adam, and yet she has no innate reciprocated desire before receiving further instruction from her creator. Her creation with desire for only herself and her surroundings in

nature serves as the catalyst to revisit relationships and the order of humans, nature, and relationships within the poem.

Turning to Marvell's own words about *Paradise Lost*, perhaps "God's reconciled decree" is what we must continue to interrogate and unpack for, at the very least here, the establishment of systems that subjugate nature and force Eve into a coupling she initially has no desire for is directly a result of God's interference. Similarly to Marvell's Mower, it seems Eve is more content with a life of solitude in nature, culminating most fully in her desire for her own reflection in the water. As such, one must ask, would Eve's life have ended up more fulfilled (and in turn less fallen) were she permitted to, as God permits Adam, seek a reprieve from solitude in the garden they find themselves in? A queer ecological reading posits the answer to this question as a resounding yes, as the effects resulting from Eve's forbiddance to stay solitary in nature, but not in solitude, harshly rebuke the coupling of specifically Adam and Eve together.

Chapter Three

Shakespeare's Woodlands and Athens

At the close of *Paradise Lost*, Adam and Eve depart with tearful eyes, having lost their “happy seat” in Eden (12.642). As discussed in the previous chapter, this departure acts simultaneously as a setting for prelapsarian communion with God and as yet another site of temptation not unlike the woods of *Comus*, as Adam and Eve enter the world with “Providence their guide” (647). Milton’s epic ends on this note, but the questions raised in light of the previous chapter remain salient: with God’s Providence as the guiding force, what continues to become of relations between humans, nature, and the earth? Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* is one place we might look for further answers, primarily through interrogation of two key components: what does it mean for figures to continuously imagine and depict human-human relationships through the usage of non-human animals, and what are we to make of the distinctions in setting between nature and civilization in accordance to the way desire and social order are exhibited and acted out?

In transitioning from Marvell to Milton to Shakespeare, what becomes perhaps the starkest difference is the portrayal in *Midsummer* of the city of Athens, which serves as the backdrop for the play’s beginning and end. Unlike Milton’s and Marvell’s texts, Shakespeare’s play provides a stark point of comparison via an urban locale directly related to a city, showing what results from being in a setting oppositional to nature before and after entering the wood. Such a contrast in setting allows an exploration of the establishment of non-normative, or rather anti-hegemonic, actions resulting from desire. This difference is readily apparent in instances such as when Lysander and Hermia abscond to the woods to marry, which additionally comments upon the creation of additional hierarchies within

human relations that may then be worked through and compared to others, such as Hermia's relation to her father, and the patriarchal heterosocial laws established that she must follow once Theseus hears of the plight. As a result of the opposition in settings between the urban and the non-urban within *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the established hierarchies, dichotomies, and relationships that, once looked closely at, confound all rationale as to their establishment. This in turn leaves us wondering about the difference between what is considered natural and unnatural and to what ends any of the aforementioned social structures hold any weight.

I. Desire in and Out of Town

As a result of the main action in *Midsummer* taking place within "A wood near Athens," it comes as no surprise that the play has inspired ecocritical scholarship ranging from topics as discursive as the concept of self to whether or not one wishes to consider the play pastoral (II.I.sd). This setting of a wood near Athens functions as a liminal space, one that is not part of the city yet still bearing some relation to the city itself. One particular thread of scholarship that interrogates this status is broached by Gabriel Egan, who writes:

In this kind of writing, the countryside is not – as it is in pastoralism – merely a place for city-dwellers to recuperate. The plays' wild places are, in fact, niches defined by separateness. The forest does not surround Athens, but is "a league without the town," and... these niches are, however, available to all classes: "Nature in these two plays is not yet a privately owned resource for commodity production, or only a retreat for elites." (29)

In Egan's assessment, the space of Shakespeare's wood near Athens serves as a space not solely as a place for the elite to go hunt, rest, and enjoy themselves outside of the city, but also as a space for people of all classes. True enough, looking at the figures and settings within *Midsummer*, this text hosts the environment in which the most people are able to

interact with nature, as Marvell's Mower works on gardens for those above him in class, the figures of the Lady and her Brothers in *Comus* are royalty, and Adam and Eve are God's first creation with whom he directly interacts. As early as Act 1, Scene 1, this understanding of the wood near Athens is evident, with Lysander acting as the catalyst for the play's foray into the wood through his rationale to escape there with Hermia. The Rude Mechanicals, who similarly venture into the woods in an effort to practice their play, also head into the wood, their name itself being all the evidence necessary about members of various social classes being allowed to go and use the space of the woods. Through these figures we are thus able to look at characters rigidly tied to societal ideals briefly while directly in that society and while in natural settings.

Despite a rigid sense of patriarchal law and social order in Athens, the hierarchies and denotation of what constitutes humans and non-human animals are often in flux within the wood near Athens, with even the time of day playing into such a distinction. Laurie Shannon's *The Accommodated Animal: Cosmopolity in Shakespearean Locales* delineates the difference time of day has on concepts of human authority, hierarchy, and jurisdiction:

Midsummer's night setting thus alters the problem of resort beyond "the peril of the Athenian law" (4.1.152), intensifying it as a literal wandering in the dark without the protections human sovereignty is supposed to provide. To enter "a shadie wood," in Peacham's words, "resembling chaos, or the hideous night," means switching between two perils. As Athenian power extends only to the city limits, so human authority finds the edge of its reach. Instead of a territorial horizon, though, we find a temporal one: human jurisdiction coincides, more or less, with daylight. (181)

A key point of Shannon's is in showing just how much of a role night has in determining the status of the human hierarchy over nature. Shannon's notion of human authority reaching its limits with nighttime allows a close look at the difference in behaviors exhibited by characters when they are in Athens during the day and the woods during the night, ultimately

furthering the distinction that in many ways, the reach of the law and its implications of any kind in the “civilization” of the text is brought into question entirely once characters find themselves in the wood.

As ecocritical scholars have picked at this thread of temporality in *Midsummer*, queer scholars have worked through instances that act as the catalyst for pushback against heteroerotic lust and strict adherence to cultural norms regarding relationships and marriage. Bruce Boehrer and Melissa Sanchez, for example, have extensively worked through the various modes desire and relation take on within the text—in Boehrer’s case through meditating on the nervousness surrounding same-sex couplings, and in Sanchez’s case through examining examples of female desire and friendship. In “Economies of Desire in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*,” Boehrer convincingly argues that heteronormativity within *Midsummer* is fraught with nervousness and subtleties that often result in figures pushing back against heteronormativity. This is most paramount to Boehrer in the relations between figures such as the Mechanicals, as he states that “*A Midsummer Night's Dream* is fascinated by same-sex attachments and communities, which it tends to evoke in juxtaposition to—and in competition with—its various visions of heteroerotic marital fulfillment,” attachments and communities that thus find themselves most often seated within the wood near Athens (102). Throughout, instances of same-sex relations as being the sturdiest and most ideal are evident, with communities such as the Mechanicals, whose bickering and camaraderie enable their performance, Oberon and Puck, who interact and spend more time on stage together than Oberon and Titania, and Hermia and Helena, who express their love for each other throughout the text with allusions to their past as evidence. As such, the space provided by the wood near Athens in *Midsummer* serves not only to be a refuge for people of all classes,

but also, in many ways, to be an enabling site for queer relations forged through disillusionment with the hegemonic heterosocial order enforced by figures within the city areas.

The overarching backdrop of *Midsummer*, Theseus and Hippolyta's marriage, serves as an excellent point of contrast for the difference in how desire and couplings are formed in and out of the wood near Athens. Theseus's statement at the play's start—"Hippolyta, I wooed thee with my sword / And won thy love doing thee injuries, / But I will wed thee in another key" (1.1.17-19)—begins the trend of malevolent social order and hegemony present in the text, as the plot establishes from the start that one of the primary marriages is forced through violence and domination. Thus as early as line 17, Theseus is situated as a ruler content to subjugate any and all he feels fit to rule or conquer, seeing love as a prize to be "won" through violence, and articulating "wooing" as something akin to force. Moreover, when Theseus asked to intervene on behalf of Hermia's father, her options all point to containment: obey her father, join a convent, or face execution. Here, in the realm of Theseus, Hermia remains unable to express her desire in opposition to the patriarchal order, though it becomes clear when she speaks to Helena that the wood is representative of an area both hopeful and helpful. Hermia's description to Helena of "the wood, where often you and I / Upon faint primrose-beds were wont to lie, / Emptying our bosoms of their counsel sweet," extolls it as a place outside of society's eye where they would be allowed to meet and converse to their hearts' contents (I.I.219-221). The "counsel" that they "empty," simultaneously a play on the social power of a council and an expressing of their discussions regarding love, is given credence here, able to be worked through despite its potential implications in Athens. Again, attached the moniker of simply "the wood," it exists as a

locale not only for? discussing desire directly oppositional to the social order, but also of civil disobedience itself. The wood thus allows the non-hegemonic, or rather anti-normative, pairings to be brought to attention, whereas similar open discussion results in threats of death within Athens, a sentiment that results in Hermia and Lysander fleeing from Athens through the wood.

As Lysander and Hermia escape to the woods to flee Athenian law, Helena tells Demetrius and then follows him, prompting herself to receive “thanks” that serves “to enrich [the] pain” of Demetrius scorning her for Hermia, already laying the backdrop for the non-normative expression of desire and relationality when Helena describes herself as Demetrius’s spaniel (1.1.254-256). The desire for a relationship in this capacity, similarly to Lysander and Hermia’s, is already present prior to going to the woods, though the Athenian law and social structure renders such a coupling impossible in both instances. Helena’s clear expression of the relationship she seeks with Demetrius appears once both figures are in the wood together, an expression that is, similarly to Lysander and Hermia’s, anti-normative in its enactment. So anti-normative is this pursuit that Helena seeks to rewrite myth, stating that “the story shall be changed: / Apollo flies and Daphne holds the chase;” inverting the story and power dynamic (2.1.237-238). Her swapping of the pursuer in the myth, the god Apollo, removes the power associated with his godhood and status as pursuer, giving instead the power to Daphne, a river nymph that is the figure to reject Apollo. In turn, Helena has subverted every dynamic of the myth by swapping who is pursuing whom, as the resulting myth instead appears, like in her case, to be a situation that disables Daphne from ever attaining her desire, as Apollo is a god who is avoiding her. Such a fact, however, does not prevent Daphne or Helena from worshipping the figure they pursue, in turn carving out a

position and power even in a relationship that is solely for them. Like the myth itself, the relationship is given space to be spoken about and articulated from the view of Helena when deciding to venture to the wood, a courtesy seemingly unpermitted in Athens given the harsh punishments Hermia faces should she disobey the coupling her father and Theseus attempt to force on her.

Hermia's fleeing of Athens with Lysander following the initial argument with her father does not result in her disregarding all law and social order regarding relationships as one might expect. After appearing together in the play's first scene, Hermia and Lysander do not reappear until Act 2, Scene 2, and when they do within the wood near Athens, the particulars of their conversation suggest they have not abandoned the norms of their Athenian upbringings. Following an ultimately unconvincing plea from Lysander for Hermia to lie with him, Hermia states:

But, gentle friend, for love and courtesy,
Lie further off in human modesty.
Such separation, as may well be said,
Becomes a virtuous bachelor and a maid.
So far be distant; and good night, sweet friend. (2.2.62-66)

Hermia's calls to modesty and maidenhood are reminiscent of the Lady's in *Comus*, though here, despite being in nature, Hermia alludes to "human modesty" as opposed to discussing her desire to remain physically separate in terms related to nature. Moreover, Hermia's emphasis twice on calling Lysander "friend" rather than a lover posits their relation as one of less development in this instant than what she previously explained to her father.

Additionally, as it is nighttime, one might expect the social cues from Athens to in many ways also be lessened, in line with the notion that Athenian law's reach lessens when day goes away, yet this is not the case. If anything, the laws Hermia is used to become a sort of

anchor, rooting her desire for physical separation in the social hegemony in the daytime Athens of the earlier play. The argument for physical separation is expressed most notably in her distinction on her and Lysander staying a virtuous “maid” and “bachelor” respectively, a status they can only maintain through their constant adherence to “separation” that is “becoming” of those positions. Though they are now away from Athens, the previous social constructs that were in place regarding concepts of virtue, human modesty, and maidenhood are brought to the forefront of their discussion, and if anything, reinforced, counter to what may be expected following their departure from society.

Lastly, in addition to the four lovers and their interactions, the Rude Mechanicals exist as figures situated both inside and outside of the wood, rendered anti-normative by Theseus and society for attempting to put on a play. Bottom the Weaver, who undergoes the most transformation throughout the play, is not only non-normative for his transformation into a half-ass, but also for his stance on acting, evidenced by his emphasis on his own abilities not shown in any of the other Rude Mechanicals:

And I may hide my face, let me play Thisbe too.
I'll speak in a monstrous little voice: “Thisne,
Thisne!”—“Ah Pyramus, my lover dear! Thy Thisbe
dear and lady dear!” (1.2.49-52)

Bottom’s insistence that he should easily move audiences to a storm of tears is followed by assertions of his ability to play multiple parts, including his character’s female love interest. In addition, Bottom’s idea of portraying a heterosexual coupling in the best way is that he himself will pretend to love and kill for himself. In doing so, Bottom parodies heteroerotic relations via his ideas towards performing the play, and though it does not end up being solely him performing, rather than wanting a portrayal of a heterosexual coupling involving two people being performed by two people, Bottom feels it most feasibly done by one.

Furthermore, looking at the reception of Theseus specifically, Kirk Quinsland elaborates on the Rude Mechanicals' anti-homophobic force, focusing most specifically on the play itself and the responses given:

As Theseus sees it, the Mechanicals will become better through imitating their betters. More implicitly, they will become better through presenting heterosexual discourse in a culturally approved way: the play, on its face, might fail at completing heterosexuality – Pyramus and Thisbe die, after all, but at least they get to be in straight love for a while first – but Theseus seems to regard the play as something which will allow the outsiders to enter the cultural world and practices of the court. But of course they are not actually allowed access to this space, except as theatrical interlopers. (70)

Following both Quinsland and Egan, I want to suggest that the Rude Mechanicals exist in a liminal cultural space, where they traverse the coded spaces of the court of Theseus and the wood near Athens. Although Quinsland focuses upon the direct statements made by Theseus prior to and during the play, his articulation of the Rude Mechanicals working as outsiders to present culturally appropriate discourse is spot on, made all the more convincing by the Rude Mechanicals needing to practice their craft in the wood, a space separate from their normal jobs as tailors, tinkers, and other occupations of the like. As in the case of the four lovers, the Rude Mechanicals exhibit their non-normative desire while still in society, and in fact, said desire comes directly as a result of societal ideals in this case. In accordance with this is the relation made to night that Theseus blatantly speaks of:

This palpable-gross play hath well beguiled
The heavy gait of night. Sweet friends, to bed.
A fortnight hold we this solemnity
In nightly revels and new jollity. (5.1.384-387)

The play after it has been performed is labeled “palpable-gross,” simultaneously understandable yet disgusting to behold. While it is both of these things, it also provides a confusing reprieve in the interim time between afternoon and night, sitting in a frame

between the Athenian day when law is most pertinent and the night full of revelry to which Theseus himself alludes. The play fits outside Theseus's ability to normalize or label it and concludes with more activity outside of the normal processions of the city, parties, and revelry at night. As a result, the actions of the Rude Mechanicals serve to further delegitimize the social structure of the play through their use of nature to rehearse, through Bottom's proclivity towards performing in a non-normative capacity, and through the rationale from Theseus in allowing them to perform before associating the play with night.

The desires exhibited by the characters within the text are, in each of these cases, articulated and given room to exist in the wood near Athens, ultimately culminating in the acquisition of desire in each instance. As such, the wood near Athens serves as a space allowing for relationships and desires to come into discussion. Through this enactment being allowed in some capacity, especially with a clear antithesis in the text exhibited via the behaviors of characters in Athens, the tenuous hierarchies and hegemonic orders in regards to relationships and culture are parodied, ultimately casting doubt upon the hierarchies and social hegemonies via the interventions of characters within the text.

II. The Spaniel and The Ass

One of the most jarring moments within *Midsummer* is the transformation of Bottom into the half-human half-ass he becomes in the third act. In what follows, I hope to consider what makes someone a human as opposed to a non-human animal and how the language used by those interacting with Bottom and those in human-human relationships use metaphor and imagery couched in animals to show their non-hegemonic desire. In Milton's *Comus*, similar worries regarding the status of Comus as a human or beast are brought to the forefront of the

characters' minds and the ever-looming groups of bestial figures Comus finds himself surrounded by exhibit an aura of anxiety regarding social order unto the Lady and her Brothers. In *Midsummer*, the prospect of a human that is physically half animal results in no change in Bottom's behavior, and the backlash, which is exhibited via a singular instance of negativity from his companions running away that is soon forgotten by him, is strictly outweighed by the actions of the other characters, rendering it in many ways normative to them.

Looking specifically at Bottom and how he fits into the relationship between Oberon and Titania, Bruce Boehrer calls to our attention how this conflation of human and non-human animal relates to relationships and the ordering of households:

The present analysis takes this question as central to *A Midsummer Night's Dream's* exploration of marital arrangements and household order. From this standpoint, the unproblematic distinction between human and bestial nature—a distinction to which this comedy of Shakespeare's might at first seem fully committed—ultimately emerges from the play as neither unproblematic nor particularly distinct. The play's various discursive mechanisms force human nature to amalgamate with animal nature and vice versa. ("Shakespeare Among the Animals" 43)

In pointing out the "unproblematic distinction between human and bestial nature," Boehrer challenges notions of social order within the play reflecting Oberon's choice to force Titania and Bottom together, critiquing previous scholarship by claiming it lapses into assumptions of anthropocentrism that are not fully committed to in the play, most notably Oberon's establishment of a hierarchy of Faeries and mortals above animals. As such, anthropocentric readings, which claim some form of "absolute" social order that results in the events of the play, thus become inherently contradictory, as through the actions and words of those within the play, nature remains its own entity of worth rather than something under or subservient to the humans of the play.

In a similar vein to Boehrer, Richard Rambuss interrogates relationships between humans and all other types of beings. Rambuss writes, “Oberon, in this catalogue of potential animal paramours for Titania, slips from the bestial ‘it’ to the anthropomorphizing ‘his’” when Oberon is about to force Titania to fall in love with whatever she sees next (238). Such a shift in language denotes the creature that Titania loves, coincidentally a half-human half-ass, as already imagined partially human, or at the very least elevated above the animal Oberon originally imagines it to be before she is forced to fall in love with it. Rambuss asserts that further queer possibilities expand to include all sorts of relationships and figurings, including those between humans and non-human animals. Thus, Bottom simultaneously fits into the mold of “he” in his and Titania’s understanding and the “it” of a monster when Puck talks of him. Oberon’s establishment of Titania’s next love as both a “he” and an “it” conjures a queer articulation of nature, albeit in service of the hegemonic order, making Bottom simultaneously the ideal and the subhuman:

Love and languish for his sake.
Be it ounce or cat or bear,
Pard, or boar with bristled hair,
In thy eye that shall appear
When thou wak’st, it is thy dear. (2.2.29-33)

In imagining Titania as still above the animal Oberon causes her to love, the “his sake” Oberon attributes to the animal he forces Titania to love makes it something anthropomorphized, a choice notable due to the several usages of “it” that follow, which lower the animal back beneath Oberon and Titania. This double-speak by Oberon thus begins to show the inherent contradiction in anthropomorphic views on nature: nature, such as the animal here, is looked at as both lesser and equal when anthropomorphized or discussed differently in order to further the ends of those in power. As such, I contend that extending

the ideas of both Boehrer and Rambuss, which seem to intersect on the notion of unstable definitions of nature in relation to Bottom, positions us one step further towards queer ecologies through tying in the “inherent” power imbalance in human and nature. Such an imbalance is codified in the text via non-normative relationships that ultimately end up making the power dynamic fallible, furthering the question as to who in specific instances is socially in control and what is truly going on when characters discuss relationships via animals and nature.

Before continuing my discussion, I must bring attention to Titania’s inability to consent and the change in her due to the briefly aforementioned “prank” Oberon plays on her in Act 2, Scene 2. This prank, the application of “love-in-idleness” to her eyelids, makes “man or woman madly dote / Upon the next live creature that it sees,” thus being the direct cause of her later affections for Bottom even after his transformation (2.1.177-178). Although her sight is figuratively and literally transfixed onto Bottom as a result of Oberon, any “live creature” would have sufficed, and the fact that a human with the head of an ass is the one Titania sees first is a direct result of Puck’s meddling and warping the situation more for the humor he and Oberon share. Her inability to consent renders this interaction, which I refer to as a relationship as a placeholder for the lack of suitable words to concisely note the intricacies within it, a fraught matter to discuss in regards to attraction and desire. As a result, my emphasis when looking at said relationship is primarily couched in what her perception is of Bottom once he is transfigured rather than what her desire is beyond the way she and others around her classify Bottom.

The relationship that Bottom and Titania have comes in the moments following Bottom's transformation, as he sings a song that promptly awakens Titania to the following statement:

I pray thee, gentle mortal, sing again.
Mine ear is much enamored of thy note.
So is mine eye enthralled to thy shape.
And thy fair virtue's force perforce doth move me
On the first view to say, to swear, I love thee. (3.1.64-68)

Though Bottom is transmuted into the half-human half-ass at this point, Titania calls him a "gentle mortal," whose shape she is enamored with regardless of appearance. This statement fits in line with the previous remark from Oberon, in which the flower, which is nature itself modified to the purposes of Oberon, causes her to become enamored with any "live creature." Of note, of course, is Titania's status as the Faerie Queen within the work, which seems to elevate her over mortals such as Bottom due to the ability for the Faeries to manipulate and warp the lives of the mortals at a whim. Her conversation with him, informed by her status as the Faerie Queen and the "love-in-idleness," and the attribution of him being specifically a "gentle mortal" implies one of two possibilities. The first possibility is that his form is not so far removed from the realm of human as to render him spoken to differently or called anything other than a mortal. Taken this way, the distinction between human and nature becomes even more frail, as Titania would thus see no difference in Bottom and the other humans she has seen, such as the friend that left a child in her stead. The second possibility is that in Titania's conceptualization under the effects of the "love-in-idleness," there is functionally not enough of a difference between humans and non-human animals to denote them in any more specificity than mortal or "live creature." Taken this way, Titania's disinterest in calling Bottom anything more specific than a mortal would seem to insinuate that there is just as much possibility for her, in her state here, to find pleasure in a human's

shape, as in a half-human half-animal's shape, as in an animal's shape. Regardless of which possibility is the correct one, what Titania "sees" when under the effects of "love-in-idleness" blurs the line between human and non-human animal more, either as a result of the hybrid Bottom appearing as a full human or as a result of him being on the same "mortal" level as animals. Though figures within the play and the audience distinguish Bottom as different than a human in some physical capacity, what Titania "sees" when under the effects of a plant modified by Oberon causes us to question what said distinction really is, and to what degree the head of an ass on actually Bottom changes him.

Titania's inability to distinguish between Bottom and other figures in whatever form they take is not made of note by her in her relationship with him. Conversely, when describing Bottom to Oberon, Puck states that "My mistress with a monster is in love," of course standing in opposition to Titania's previous words about Bottom as mortal (3.2.6). The constant shifts in how Bottom is described, as a monster by Puck, as a mortal by Titania, and as something both a "he" and an "it" by Oberon, show most concretely the inherent contradictions in trying to assign place or worth to Bottom, or anyone, through comparisons to nature or animals: since what is "natural" is constantly shifted to benefit those speaking about it, rather than rectifying or resolving what is hegemonic in the play, the constant references to animals and some sort of naturalness throughout instead cast harsh critique upon what it means when a figure uses animal allusions in discussing other people or relationship dynamics. Both perspectives, Titania's and everyone else's, are equally true in their expression and discussion of them, but the contradictions between perceptions render them fundamentally incompatible, and as a result, cause us to question concepts of anthropocentricity and notions of human versus nature.

Just as Bottom's transformation and subsequent relationship with Titania conflate the difference between human and non-human animals, Helena's expressions of herself via animal imagery queer the notion of normative relationships of any kind through positioning herself in a relationship in which she is likened to a dog. Helena's anguished cry for Demetrius to "Use me but as your spaniel, spurn me, strike me, / Neglect me, lose me; only give me leave, / Unworthy as I am, to follow you" fails to achieve the goal she wishes of getting his affections, though it does offer insight as to the ends to which she wishes to make Demetrius if not just her husband, then at least master over her in any manner (2.1.205-207). The power dynamic of such a relationship, with Helena seemingly willing to give up all autonomy and serve Demetrius in any capacity she is allowed, sets itself outside of the normative, as Helena's desire for Demetrius reduces her, in her own description, to an animal, unworthy in her own words even to follow him. Despite this reduction however, Helena can in many ways be seen as claiming power or agency. On this power dynamic, Melissa Sanchez states, "Instead of upholding patriarchal power, Helena's relentless devotion demonstrates how, taken to a masochistic extreme, fantasies of female submission and obedience can pervert and threaten men's privileged access to sexual initiative and agency" (505). Sanchez's argument thus informs queer ecologies as well, as the specific avenue through which Helena attains sexual initiative and agency is through conjuring the trope of houndmaster and spaniel; as a result of it being empowering, the relationship between spaniel and houndmaster is thus inverted, with the spaniel seizing power in some capacity in the relationship akin to what Helena is doing. This relationship, even if completely imaginary, places the impetus upon Helena to define her ideal and seek acknowledgement of it, rather than just exist in Demetrius's life in the capacity that he allows. Avoiding value judgements

of Helena's statement, what is clear nonetheless is that usage of animal imagery is effective for precisely the opposite reason one might expect: by setting herself up as the subservient entity in the relationship through animal imagery, she is pursuing and attempting to claim a status for her own in Demetrius' life despite his desire for her to leave his side. Similarly to the relationship Bottom and Titania have, the attribution of a clear anthropocentric social order, human above non-human animal in all iterations of this relationship, is made flimsy as here where the relationship between master and spaniel appears clear cut, the exact deployment of it renders the assumed anthropocentric relationship anything but, ultimately as a result of Helena's disruption of patriarchal and heterosocial deployment of her own sexual autonomy via the spaniel metaphor.

Beyond the spaniel, Helena identifies with other aspects of nature in the play, though instead of doing so to make a point and win over a child as Oberon does, Helena both lowers herself and elevates herself to the status of myth by bringing herself closer to nature. Beyond the attribution of herself as Demetrius's spaniel, unworthy but desiring to be used, Helena also remarks that she is "as ugly as a bear, / For beasts that meet me run away for fear," states that in the case of her and Demetrius "The dove pursues the griffin," and is imagined as a one part of a pair of songbirds alongside Hermia that were "warbling of one song, both in one key, / As if our hands, our sides, voices, and minds / Had been incorporate" (2.2.95-96; 2.1.239; 3.2.211-213). Helena's statement that "beasts" run from her conflates nature and human, chiefly because the single entity we have seen flee from her be Demetrius. In addition to the natural imagery having the capacity to rebuke Helena, her inversion of what one would consider normative in regards to a dove and a griffin, i.e., the more powerful mystical entity pursuing the more frail bird, shows just how quickly nature can also be made

the catalyst for empowering Helena's pursuit. Even going beyond the pursuit of Demetrius, the comparison of Helena and Hermia to two songbirds harkens back to their previous discussion during forays into the wood together, as this notion of "warbling of one song" and the subsequent testament to their linked ideologies and experience positions their relationship as one of the healthiest and otherwise most successful barring the love-in-idleness confusion that takes place during the play. Just as the metaphors to animals spoken from Helena have the capacity to render her subservient to Demetrius, yet still empowered in her subservience, they can simultaneously extoll her in the relationship and empower her in her pursuit as well. In the case of animal imagery as placeholder for humans and their relationships, *Midsummer* seems to further anthropocentric views on social order as flawed, as in each instance where a figure discusses, or is discussed in terms of, animals and nature, the end result is either confounding of hierarchies or disruption of some ends as a result of its placement outside of the hegemonic.

Conclusion

In working with each of the texts herein discussed, I hope to have shown that though there exist stark differences in the relationships characters hold with each other and with nature, the framework provided by queer ecologies allows renewed exploration of the intersection between queer theory and ecocritical theory through showing their shared anxieties regarding nature and desire. Such anxieties, be they the harm caused through anthropocentric human fulfillment via nature, the lack of concrete reason for hegemonic hierarchies regarding humans, non-human animals, and the environment, or the subversion of normativity via language couched in animal and plant figures, all afford an exploration of the ethics surrounding the often fraught connection between humans and entities denoted as nature.

Throughout my chapter on Marvell, the most relevant connection between nature and human is the directly sensual relationship that both the Mower and Damon experience. From this connection, we can glean two important points at contention with each other: on the one hand, human relationships with the flora and fauna of a garden have the capacity to provide more satisfaction than relationships with another human, and on the other, human relationships with flora and fauna that are predominantly anthropocentric result in harm and destruction of the flora and fauna that are captivating. In many ways, the bonds exhibited with flora and fauna within Marvell help us explore the capacity of queer ecologies through

their proposal of a new ideal. Said exhibition invites us to ponder the ethics and impacts, some harmful following anthropocentric focuses, of discursive relations with nature.

Following Marvell, my analysis on Milton's *Comus* and *Paradise Lost* steered from the specific pleasure humans received from physical relations with nature, and instead began to unpack questions as to why nature existed as a locale that was ambiguously attributed aspects of the feminine and masculine interchangeably and why even the Garden of Eden could exist as a locale that enabled non-normative sexuality and desire amongst the humans residing there. Confounding gender norms, *Comus* raises questions about efforts to impose Anthropocentric conceptions of masculinity and femininity onto aspects of one's surroundings in nature, almost always in reference to chastity and concepts of maidenhood. Used as a catalyst for expressing anxieties and desire, dichotomies of gender are not as rigid as characters believe, and indeed threaten to collapse under such pressure, and with them distinctions between normative and nonnormative notions of sex and sexuality. Somewhat similarly, my application of queer ecologies to *Paradise Lost* reveals that heteronormativity and hegemonic social structures are enacted solely due to God's desire for them, but even prior to enactment, encouragement from God to have Adam enjoy the flora and fauna around him in place of companionship invites questions about the so-called natural order of things.

In my final chapter, I sought to unpack both the capacity in which characters figuring themselves, and others, as animals affects conceptions of relationships in Athens and in the Athenian Wood in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. As a result of the language

throughout used by Helena, the Rude Mechanicals, and Titania, in addition to the forays into the woods from Hermia and the Rude Mechanicals, consistency in the hierarchies of humans over animals is fallible and as a result, relations figured throughout are non-normative in their existence.

In continuing to pour over texts from the early modern period, I have found that the one thing that becomes increasingly clear to me is the depth to which the texts grapple with the hegemonic, continuing in turn to shape how we look at and place value upon the different relations within. What started as an exercise in attempting to figure out why it seemed Marvell specifically emphasized gardens as the setting for his myriad works has developed and branched out to become a work that, in essence, looks to figure out an ethics of living informed by queer ecologies. This ethics of living incentivizes a non-anthropocentric look at the world that subsequently works to place value upon all the different forms relationships amongst humans and all things denoted as nature, to the ends of a reduction of the harm caused by anthropocentric heteronormativity.

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