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ESSAY

Loving Gardens, Loving the Gardener?
'Solitude' in Andrew Marvell's 'The Garden'

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In 'The Garden', Andrew Marvell devotes a lot of time to extolling the virtues of the solitude he experiences in the garden of the title. Despite Marvell's insistence that he prefers solitude to 'society', at the end of the poem his attention comes to rest approvingly on a human figure: the Gardener. Reading 'The Garden' alongside 'Damon the Mower', this article suggests that Marvell's sensually-charged engagement with the plants, trees, and fruits in 'The Garden' can be interpreted as a means of accessing and loving the Gardener himself. On one reading of 'Damon the Mower', the narrator caresses Damon through the landscape. Tracking similar themes in 'The Garden' suggests that something similar may be occurring in this poem, too.

Keywords: Andrew Marvell; poetry; sexuality; pastoral; solitude

In 'The Garden', the speaker devotes a lot of time to extolling the virtues of the solitude he experiences in the garden of the poem's title. The second stanza ends, definitively, with the pronouncement: 'Society is all but rude,/To this delicious Solitude' (2.8).¹ 'Rude', with its connotations of ignorance, harshness, lack of culture and irrationality,² is opposed to a 'solitude' that is literally delicious to the taste buds; the garden is filled with delectable ripe fruits. However, for the speaker, perfect 'solitude' does not mean being completely alone. Rather, I suggest, this solitude opens up the possibility for multiple engagements: with nature, with classical myths, with himself,

¹ Andrew Marvell, 'The Garden', in *Miscellaneous Poems by Andrew Marvell Esq* (London: For H Boulter, 1681), H5v–H6 v. This edition is used throughout the article, and future references are in the form of in-text stanza and line numbers.

² *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. 'rude (*adj.*) and (*adv.*)', accessed 26 May 2018, www.oed.com.

with solitude itself, and with the figure of the Gardener who creates the garden he so enjoys. These strands are woven together and coexist throughout the poem, but I wish to draw out one underexplored strand by examining how the speaker potentially engages with the Gardener by reciprocally loving and being loved by the landscape the Gardener has created.

The speaker imagines the garden as an Edenic space, but one that is vastly improved because it recalls Eden in the time-period after the creation of Adam but before the creation of Eve. According to the speaker, who aligns himself approvingly with Adam, this absence of (Eve's) company is what makes Adam so joyful: 'Such was that happy Garden-state/While man there walk'd without a Mate' (8.1–2). Adam is in a happy 'state' in the sense of a happy condition, but the garden is also a joyful society (a 'state' in this second sense of a nation) all in itself. Having rejected the rudeness of everyday 'society', the speaker asserts himself, seemingly, as a nation of one. Blair Worden maintains that Marvell 'can seem a spokesman for solitariness', while James Loxley describes him as a poet who imagines the Fall as 'the moment when the original self has to make room for another'.³ The word 'happy', thanks to its Miltonic connotations of temptation and Edenic good fortune, suggests a balance between remaining content with one's lot and yearning for something beyond it. According to Eve's retelling of her dream in *Paradise Lost*, Book 5 (1674), Milton's serpent seduces her with the words, 'happie though thou art,/Happier thou mayst be'; God then sends Raphael to redress the balance by visiting Adam to 'advise him of his happie State'.⁴ The word 'happie' and its variant forms, 'happiest' and 'happier', echo throughout

³ Blair Worden, *Literature and Politics in Cromwellian England: John Milton, Andrew Marvell, Marchamont Nedham* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 54; James Loxley, 'The Social Modes of Marvell's Poetry', in *The Cambridge Companion to Andrew Marvell*, ed. Derek Hirst and Stephen N. Zwicker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 8: 'Marvell once confessed that he was "naturally ... inclined to keep my thoughts private" (*Letters*, 166). Many readers over the years have discerned this private figure, reserved though not that austere, moving alone through the self-reflecting worlds of his lyric poetry. *The Garden* finds the Fall in the moment when the original self has to make room for another, rather than in any dalliance with tempting fruit: the human tragedy, it seems, lies in our not being able or permitted to live alone. No wonder, then, that Marvell "can seem a spokesman for solitariness"'.

⁴ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, in *The Riverside Milton*, ed. Roy Flanagan, (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1998), bk. 5, ll. 77–8, p. 234.

the rest of Milton's poem as Adam and Eve struggle to reconcile the affirmation that they are 'happie' as they are with the notion that they might be 'happier' if they strove for more. If Marvell's Eden has Miltonic echoes, it is worth noting that it represents a distancing from Milton, too. Matthew Augustine argues that Marvell sought an 'idiosyncratic liberty' in solitude, removing himself from the political furores surrounding him, which included accusations that he and Milton were lovers, furores exemplified by the 'busie Companies of Men' he eschews in 'The Garden'.⁵

In the eighth stanza of 'The Garden', the speaker breaks apart the word 'help-meet', the Biblical word for Eve, filling it with negation and hypotheticality: 'After a Place so pure, and sweet,/What other Help could yet be meet!' (8.3–4). Adam does not need a helpmeet or mate, because everything is perfect as it is: Eve's 'help is *not* 'meet' (appropriate). The speaker's exclusion of a female companion from 'The Garden' can also be described as in keeping with the pastoral genre. Within this genre's conventions, an insistence on the enjoyability of solitude—defined as the absence of female company—is identifiable as a trope to indicate that the male speaker of 'The Garden' has a balanced mind. Writing of the Tudor poet Thomas Howell (*fl.* 1560–81), Elizabeth Heale argues that women were frequently excluded from pastoral because this genre centres around the male poet's control over his own mind and over the poems he uses partly to construct and present his selfhood; women are 'that which most threatens the gathered and well-framed male self'.⁶ Though the genders

⁵ In his discussion of Marvell and Milton, Matthew Augustine argues that Marvell turns to solitude to avoid the politicised furore around his writing, against those 'who want at every turn to associate or identify him with certain "busy companies of men"—with republican juntos and enthusiastic sects—Marvell writes himself into "delicious solitude," into singularity, refusing identification with anything beyond the specific terms of his defense of toleration or without the specific occasions and conditions of his writing'. See Matthew Augustine, 'The Chameleon or the Sponge?: Marvell, Milton, and the Politics of Literary History', *Studies in Philology* 111, no. 1 (2014): 147. Augustine writes that though 'Miltonized' by his critics, Marvell should, be read in his own right: 'Rather than "veneration of Milton", we find calibration and unease here; friend to toleration though he may be, almost everywhere in these pages we see Marvell opening up distance and difference not just from Milton but from the radicalism of the 1640s and 50s' (146).

⁶ Elizabeth Heale, *Autobiography and Authorship in Renaissance Verse: Chronicles of the Self* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 19. Heale also maintains that this is 'a tension that is apparent in all the male-authored early Elizabethan collections: on the one hand the writer is displayed as a man of moral weight and virtue, able to receive and give good counsel and turn a pithy distich, on the

of neither the speaker nor the Gardener in 'The Garden' are explicitly defined, critics tend to lapse into male pronouns when discussing these figures in the poem. They readily fill the poem's uncertainties with the certainty that the speaker shares the gender ascribed to the poet and to the traditionally male pastoral narrator identified by Heale. Though I find it useful to reflect this lapse in my own writing to explore the queer possibilities of the speaker's relationship with the Gardener, I do so with the caveat that there is an element of indeterminacy in their relationship, too. Their identities are, as we shall explore, not fixed.

However the speaker is gendered, they accept female company in 'The Garden' only briefly, and only as a feminised personification of a lack of company:

Fair quiet, have I found thee here,
And Innocence thy Sister dear!
Mistaken long, I sought you then
In busie Companies of Men (2.1–4).

There is also, in the implied comparison between a human 'Help ... meet' and the 'Place so pure, and sweet', a sense of equivalence. There is something about the garden that makes it similar or comparable—and, crucially, preferable—to a female human helpmeet. In keeping with the statement that society is 'rude' compared to the cultivated garden, the speaker links horticulture with human intelligence and culture.

The garden is a site of 'cultivation' and 'culture' in several senses of the word. Though Marvell does not use these words himself, a link between the cultivated mind and the cultivated garden was part of his cultural backdrop. 'Cultivate' and cognates like 'cultivation' and 'cultivated' began to enter the English language in the sixteenth century, applying at first to agriculture and horticulture. By the mid-seventeenth century, their meanings were extended to apply to a mind refined like a fertile field

other, courtly behaviour entails the courting of women who were habitually represented in Protestant humanist discourse as irrational, unfixed, a danger to male virtue, and deceitful. As the inflammatory objects of masculine fancy and passion, they are represented as that which most threatens the gathered and well-framed male self (19).

or well-tended garden.⁷ As well as being a fertile plot of land, Marvell's garden-state is a state of mind, with attributes of rationality, sensual enjoyment, and sensitivity. It enables Marvell to show his refinement as a pastoral poet, through classical allusions and a gendered emphasis on his balanced, solitary mind. The following paragraphs explore how the garden is imbued with intentionality, agency, and desire, and how this leads to the speaker's acknowledgement of the Gardener behind the garden in the final stanza. Rather than constituting a definitive statement that the speaker rejects heterosexuality in this poem, this (at least partly) generic rejection of female company opens out a space for the simultaneous exploration of solitude, engagement with nature, and queer sexuality.

Like Adam in Eden who is accustomed to 'the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day' (Genesis 3.8),⁸ the speaker is not truly alone in his garden. At the end of the poem he senses and adores the presence of a gardener who created the paradisaal garden, 'How well the skilful Gardner drew/Of flow'rs and herbes this Dial new' (9.1–2). Though the speaker's earlier emphasis on the superior joys of 'solitude' indicates a disavowal of female company and 'rude' society, this solitude ultimately allows him to focus on appreciating not just the garden but the Gardener himself. His solitude is thus not absolute because it leaves room for the positive acknowledgement of another person's presence, or at the very least the effects of another person's presence, in the garden. Before discussing the identity of the Gardener and his relationship to the speaker, I will discuss some existing studies of sexuality in Marvell's pastoral poetry; this article draws on and, at points, diverges from these studies.

I. Theorising the speaker's relationship with nature

Existing criticism has emphasised the ambiguity in Marvell's pastoral poetry, suggesting that queer sexuality is expressed not homonormatively but as part of an interplay of a multivalent desire and rejection of desire that encompasses overarching heterosexual plotlines, an erotic and aesthetic love of nature, homoerotic

⁷ OED, s.v. 'cultivated (*adj.*)', 'cultivate (*v.*)', 'cultivation (*n.*)', accessed 26 May 2018, www.oed.com.

⁸ All quotations from the Bible are from the King James Version.

descriptions of male beauty, and a desire to be alone. Paul Hammond's work, though challenged by subsequent critics, remains a key point of reference for articulating ideas about textuality and sexuality in Marvell's poetry. Hammond notes that the most direct statements that Marvell was queer come from the detractors with whom Marvell was engaged in a battle of words centring round *The Rehearsal Transpros'd*; here, religious and political disagreements frequently crystallise into accusations of sodomy.⁹ But, he traces a clear homoerotic strand in Marvell's poetry. Hammond cautions against viewing homoeroticism as 'repressed' in Marvell's poems and instead counsels the reader to accept that Marvell writes with the 'acknowledge[ment] that homoerotic desire cannot at this period inhabit a coherent textual space'. As a result, his poems are textual space(s) 'including homoerotic desire but including also the desire to be rid of desire and its complexities and to retreat to the green shade of impossible innocence'.¹⁰ Hammond's reading assumes a strong link between homoeroticism and narcissistic love of the male self ('[Marvell] writes a poetry not of relationship but of self-relationship' such that the rejection of women 'preserve[s] the all-male circuit of vision')¹¹ and uncovers, in writers like Vergil, the homoerotic 'pre-texts' behind Marvellian pastoral. It also emphasises that Marvell's 'poetry repeatedly figures unrequited homoerotic desire and the self-sufficient, even self-loving, observer'.¹² Rather than being principally explicable through the short-circuit of narcissism, I argue that (queer) desire has multiple objects in 'Damon the Mower' and 'The Garden'.

⁹ Hammond notes 'the association between different kinds of nonconformity, religious, political and sexual' and that 'implicitly in the pamphlets against Marvell, sodomy is a sign of religious and political nonconformity'. He adds that 'little is known about Marvell's sexuality beyond these caricatures by his opponents, and the personae of the poems are never uncomplicatedly autobiographical' but we can 'examine the disturbances created by homoerotic subtexts within apparently heterosexual or homo-social narratives, and so ... chart the kinds of textual spaces which Marvell created for and through his exploration of a complex—and strongly homoerotic—sexuality'. Paul Hammond, 'Marvell's Sexuality', in *Andrew Marvell*, ed. Thomas Healy, (New York: Longman, 1998), 182, 185.

¹⁰ Hammond, 202–3.

¹¹ Hammond, 193.

¹² Hammond, 201.

Rather than reading homosexuality into these ambiguous poems as a univocal 'solution' to their indeterminacy, it is fruitful to leave the ambiguity as it is and see their 'textual space' as understandable only *as* ambiguous. Critical studies of Marvell's poetry have often noted the erotic way in which this poet describes the natural world, and I build on this to suggest that the speakers in both 'Damon the Mower' and 'The Garden' access human bodies through plant life. Meanwhile, the garden in 'The Garden' becomes an anthropomorphic body that multivalently accesses the speaker's body, whereas the landscape in 'Damon the Mower' acts on Damon's body with erotic intentionality. Stephen Guy-Bray argues that the speaker's relationship with the garden could be a sexual one, reflecting a wider early modern trend whereby human sexuality encompassed a desire for plant life: 'Human desire in "The Garden" is directed towards real plants rather than toward human beings, who could be said to resemble those plants in one way or another' such that 'the apples, grapes, melons, and grass of the garden do not stand in for human flesh or human attitudes toward sexual experience but should rather be understood as the real objects of the poet's desire'; 'in the Renaissance, the resemblances between human and animal sexuality were more seriously pondered' than they are today and 'both the boundaries among various kinds of living organisms and the boundaries that structure our contemporary sexual taxonomy were largely unfixed'.¹³ Guy-Bray draws on Thomas Browne's statement that he wishes that humans could procreate as trees do, positioning human sexuality within 'a larger love for beauty', and concludes that in the Renaissance 'we could see human sexuality itself as something that might not be restricted either to humans or to what we would now call sexual acts'.¹⁴ He discusses how the plants in 'The Garden' have agency, and are able both to provoke and to feel lust: 'Instead of wanting to procreate like trees, the speaker of Marvell's poem wants to have sex with them. Discussions of the sexual aspects of "The Garden" have been hampered by their unwillingness to take seriously the idea that the human

¹³ Stephen Guy-Bray, 'Animal, Vegetable, Sexual: Metaphor in John Donne's "Sappho to Philaenis" and Andrew Marvell's "The Garden"', in *Sex Before Sex: Figuring the Act in Early Modern England*, ed. James M. Bromley and Will Stockton (Minnesota: Minnesota University Press, 2013), 171.

¹⁴ Guy-Bray, 172.

experience of nature could be a sexual experience. To Marvell, however, this idea is obvious'.¹⁵ Homing in on Marvell's engagement with classical mythology, Guy-Bray parses the speaker's rejection of female company as a definitive turn towards plant life: 'While we traditionally see the laurel and the reed as substitutes for the women the gods desired, Marvell's point is that the women were actually the substitutes and that the stories thus end happily rather than in sexual frustration'.¹⁶ The present article works within the same broad spectrum, acknowledging that the garden has sensual attractions in its own right. But, though I do not aim to map the attractions of the garden unproblematically onto the attractions of the Gardener, I explore the idea that the speaker does not completely cast aside the attractions of human beings in favour of plants. Rather than turning to plant life as a preferable alternative to humans, the speaker interleaves his desire for humans with his desire for plants. He accesses human, or at least anthropomorphic, bodies and minds through plants, and enables them to access him in return.

My reading moves away from Guy-Bray's statement that 'The Garden' is 'against sex altogether' for 'In [Marvell's] vision of paradise, the human body is sexually united with the vegetation of the garden, and the human soul leaves the world altogether'.¹⁷ Rather than deserting the world, the soul remains within the garden, preening itself in the form of a bird amid the 'boughs' in stanza 7; it 'till prepar'd for longer Flight,/Waves in its Plumes the various Light' (7.7–8). We watch the bird enjoyably waiting out its time until some future 'longer flight' (sunning and whetting its feathers, 7.6–8) but we do not witness it actually fly away from the garden. Entering this new avian form opens out further possibilities for the speaker to engage with a landscape infused with desire. Moreover, though Marvell, on one reading, does indeed describe the garden as a retreat from passion 'When we have run our Passions heat/Love here makes his best retreat' (4.1–2), even this is

¹⁵ Guy-Bray, 179.

¹⁶ Guy-Bray, 180.

¹⁷ Guy-Bray, 183. Guy-Bray argues that the plants in 'The Garden' are not metaphorical: they are loved in their own right and not as symbols of something else. But, he argues, the bird is a metaphor. I suggest it is more of a simile (the speaker's soul is 'like a bird') that is imagined very physically and vividly, down to the feel and colour of its wings.

ambiguous. It is not clear whether this is the retreat from feelings of love exhausted by passion, or whether it is a retreat *for* a personified Love to enjoy himself. Though the word 'heat' most obviously implies a burning passion, it can mean a preliminary race before the real race,¹⁸ which lends strength to the idea that unfulfilling and preliminary passions are experienced outside the garden in preparation for the experience of true Love within. This notion that life outside the garden is merely an unsatisfactory initial trial is also present in the word 'rude' as applied to society in the first stanza; in Marvell's time 'rude' could also mean 'preliminary'.¹⁹ Society and its crude engagements is a 'rude' state before the more cultured state of solitude and the more fulfilling engagements that this brings.

Solitude does not limit the speaker's possibilities but rather opens out the possibility for a range of engagements. Ambiguity and multifariousness are central to these engagements, many of which queer the speaker's relationship to the natural world and to the Gardener. Crucially, they cannot be described as purely or even primarily homoerotic.

II. The identity of the Gardener

The identity of Marvell's Gardener is ambiguous, echoing an ambiguity in Eden itself. The creator of the garden of Eden was God ('God Almighty first Planted a Garden', as Francis Bacon famously states),²⁰ and so he is the first gardener. However, Adam and Eve are also placed in Eden as gardeners, 'to dress it and to keep it' (Genesis 2:15). The Edenic garden thus admits the possibility of both human and divine gardeners. Marvell's garden is not presented as Eden itself; rather, it is Eden-*like* because it is a 'paradise' for the speaker compared to 'society'. Nor is Marvell's garden composed of the pure Christian symbolism of something like Francis Quarles' emblematic poetry from the 1630s. Quarles compares the sun illuminating a sundial to the Holy Spirit making the Scripture clear to the reader: 'This Dyall is the *Scripture*; and the Sun,/Gods

¹⁸ *OED*, s.v. 'heat' (*adj.*, 8c), accessed 26 May 2018, www.oed.com. 'Heat' can also mean a single race, or the ground on which a race is run.

¹⁹ *OED*, s.v. 'rude' (*adj.*) and (*adv.*, 16a), accessed 26 May 2018, www.oed.com.

²⁰ Francis Bacon, 'Of Gardens', in *The Essays or Counsels, Civill and Morall* (London: John Haukland, 1625), Mm1v.

holy *Spirit*.²¹ Dominic Gavin has discussed the difference between Quarles' almost diagrammatically metaphorical dial and the floral 'Dial' in 'The Garden', linking this to a tendency towards literalism in Marvell's poetry and giving as another example of this literalism the way in which Marvell turns Eden's divine Creator into a human gardener.²² Hammond's emphasis on the narcissism of the pastoral poems suggests that the Gardener can also be seen as a reflection of the poet Marvell who created the garden-poem and thus is in a sense its 'skilful Gardener'. The creating, shaping mind is certainly applauded in this poem for both its self-reflective powers and its ability to move beyond narcissistic contemplation of its 'own resemblance' to bring new natural phenomena into being:

The Mind, that Ocean where each kind
Does streght its own resemblance find;
Yet it creates, transcending these,
Far other Worlds, and other Seas ... (6.3–5)

The speaker partakes of this creative power by ranging freely through and entering in to the landscape. He flits in an instant from a fountain to a tree, and tries the natural world on like a wardrobe, throwing aside his body like a 'vest' and selecting instead the costume of a bird:

Here at the Fountains sliding foot,
Or at some Fruit-trees mossy root,
Casting the Bodies Vest aside,
My Soul into the boughs does glide:
There like a Bird it sits, and sings,
Then whets, and combs, its silver Wings ... (7.1–6)

²¹ Francis Quarles, 'On a Sun-Dyall', in *Divine Fancies* (London: MF, 1633), A4v.

²² Dominic Gavin, "'The Garden' and Marvell's Literal Figures', *The Cambridge Quarterly* 37, no. 2 (2008): 224–252. Writing of Marvell's 'literal forms', Gavin explains, 'the deity, apparently, becomes a gardener' (249). For Gavin, that is part of 'the poetry's tendency towards literal figure, the paradox of figure that seemingly denies its own power to refer beyond itself. While allegory points beyond its own means of expression, literalism is often a sign of the poet's tendency towards retreat or self-enclosure in nature' (224).

Rather than simply being passively shaped and entered by the speaker, the Gardener, and/or a deity, the garden also seems imbued with the power to shape itself. In stanza 1, in contrast to the 'uncessant Labours' of humans who weave crowns of palm, oak and bay, these trees 'prudently their Toyles upbraid' (1.1–3, 6). As well as indicating that the trees criticise humans' efforts to turn their leaves into decorations, the word 'upbraid' establishes that the trees counter the humans' plaiting and weaving action with their own. The garden's superior ability to shape itself is reaffirmed later in the stanza when the plants fashion themselves into a crown not of competition but of peaceful rest, 'all Flow'rs and all Trees do close/To weave the Garlands of repose' (1.7-8). The garden offers itself as a costume or ornament for the peace-loving speaker to wear. Crucially, we might wonder whether the perfectly woven and plaited garden is achieved through nature alone or whether we detect the Gardener's guiding hand and creative mind from the outset.

The speaker's intentionality is met with a creative intentionality inherent in the garden. But, this engagement with the garden is not just one of mutual creativity and intentionality but also of sensuality. The speaker's acknowledgement of the Gardener's presence is preceded by a sensually charged description of the garden in stanza 5. In contrast to the existential drama of Eden, the 'fall' precipitated by the speaker's engagement with the fruits of his garden is a literal, gentle, painless and seemingly sinless 'stumble':

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 Nectaren and curious Peach
Into my hands themselves do reach;
Stumbling on Melons, as I pass,
Insnar'd with Flow'rs, I fall on Grass. (5.1–8)

As the stanza progresses, the natural world gains more agency and appears more human. Initially, the apples 'drop' around the narrator. The verb 'drop' is applied to

inanimate objects succumbing to the force of gravity and, when applied to animate beings such as humans, it indicates that they are behaving in an inanimate, often unconscious manner: we drop with death or tiredness when we have lost control of our bodies. The vines are a different matter: the mouth mimics a kiss as it pronounces the phrase 'Luscious Clusters', and the vines quite literally press their grapes into the speaker's mouth, crushing them so that they run with liquor. This liquor, described as 'wine' rather than 'juice' (though the latter was a common word at the time),²³ implicitly leaves him giddy, intoxicated; this sense that the grapes have affected the speaker's whole body and its coordination is borne out when he 'stumbl[es]' in line 7. The iambic rhythm emphasises the sound of the human body-part 'neck' in the word 'Nectaren', whilst in being 'curious' the peach has attributes suggesting mental activity: inquisitiveness, artistry, ingenuity, and fastidiousness.²⁴ The verb 'reach' emphasises the prying, over-anxious element to the peach and nectarine's curiosity, whilst their spherical shapes pressing into the narrator's hands suggest a sensual encounter with any rounded human body part that might jump into the reader's mind.

In this stanza, the garden reveals itself as a giant body, eager for the speaker's touch and eager to bring him enjoyment through contact with him. An ingenious, creative, 'curious' mind seems to be propelling this body, and it is met with intoxicated delight by the speaker, who revels in not just touching and tasting but also inhabiting and 'wearing' different aspects of the landscape, from the garlanded leaves to a fabulous preening bird. Though it is most concentrated in stanza 5, this sense that the garden is a site of erotic love is present throughout the poem. In stanza 4, for example, he suggests that Pan and Apollo were more inflamed by Daphne and Syrinx once they had assumed plant form:

²³ OED, s.v. 'juice (*n.*)', accessed 26 May 2018, www.oed.com. The word has been used since the thirteenth century to mean the watery substance in fruits and plants. 'Juice' can also mean 'wine' (as in the reference to 'the juice of Egypt's grape' in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*), however Marvell's choice of the word 'wine' makes it much less ambiguous that he is talking about an intoxicating liquor. See William Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, in *Mr William Shakespeares Comedies Histories and Tragedies* (London: Isaac Jaggard and Ed. Blount, 1623), 5.2.281.

²⁴ OED, s.v. 'curious (*adj.*)', accessed 26 May 2018, www.oed.com.

Apollo hunted *Daphne* so,
Only that She might Laurel grow.
And *Pan* did after *Syrinx* speed,
Not as a Nymph, but for a Reed. (4.5–8)

This is seen in previous stanzas, for instance in the statement that the fresh verdancy of the vegetable kingdom is much more erotic and beautiful than the blushes of human flesh: 'No white, nor red was ever seen/So am'rous as this lovely green' (3.1-2). The speaker's acknowledgement that this garden was created and shaped by the ingenious artistry of the Gardener adds another layer to this eroticism: does he imagine accessing the Gardener's body and mind through the garden? As the speaker's 'soul' enters into various plant and animal life in the landscape, tries on 'the Garlands of Repose', and grabs at perfectly ripened fruit, what does it mean to consider that there may be another human being guiding and motivating the garden's reciprocal movements?

The garden's attractions, though desirable in their own right, are from the outset of the poem imbued with hints of human intentionality and become increasingly anthropomorphic as the poem progresses. The suggestion that the speaker may be accessing the Gardener through his garden, and that the Gardener is the driving force behind the garden's exertions as it pays a gently caressing and then insistently erotic attention to the speaker, is strengthened when we compare 'The Garden' to another poem by Marvell: 'Damon the Mower'.

III. Damon the Mower

We can better understand the narrator's relationship with the Gardener in 'The Garden' by comparing it to the narrator's relationship with the eponymous mower in 'Damon the Mower'. 'Damon the Mower' precedes 'The Garden' in *Miscellaneous Poems*, though the precise dating of this poem is unclear and the ordering may not be Marvell's own.²⁵ In this poem, Damon is a human figure with attributes of both

²⁵ Andrew Marvell, 'Damon the Mower', *Miscellaneous Poems*, H1r–H2v. Future references to this poem are in the form of in-text stanza and line numbers. The ordering of the poems in *Miscellaneous Poems* may be that of Mary Marvell who claims in her prefatory note to be Marvell's wife and to have discovered the poems amongst his papers.

the Grim Reaper and Theocritus' lovelorn Cyclops, Polyphemus. The narrator gazes on Damon with what can be described as desire as he depicts the natural world interacting with Damon in a loving, erotic manner. This is seen most strongly in the sixth stanza, when Marvell ventriloquises Damon's song:

'... On me the Morn her dew distills
Before her darling Daffadils.
And, if at Noon my toil me heat,
The Sun himself lick's off my Sweat.
While, going home, the Ev'ning sweet
In cowslip-water bathes my feet'. (6.3–8)

The way that Damon (and, ultimately the narrator) chooses to describe his engagement with the landscape suggests that the sun, the morning and the evening have human characteristics. As in 'The Garden', the joys of touch and taste mingle with kinetic delight: the landscape moves to interact with Damon's body. Rather than passively wetting Damon's feet, the evening performs an intentional action that is caring and even worship-like: bathing. The morning is like an apothecary or brewer, carefully 'distill[ing]' concoctions onto Damon's skin. And, the sun does not evaporate his sweat but 'lick's' it. This word is striking, as it is relatively rare in the period to use the word 'lick' to describe the sun evaporating liquid. Another example is Marvell's fellow Yorkshireman, Captain Luke Foxe, who describes seeking the northwest passage in *North-West Fox* (1635): '... this morning the Sunne lickt up the Fogges dew, as soone as hee began to rise, and made a shining day of it'.²⁶ To lick is, specifically, to use a tongue to wipe or drink from a surface, though it can also simply be used of the lapping motion of a flame.²⁷ All of these meanings are in play: the sun is literally a hot fire that plays upon Damon's back and evaporates the sweat on it. But, there is also an erotic personification: the sun is male ('himself', echoing the 'his' used of the sun in 3.6, the same gender Foxe ascribes to the sun) and queerly licks Damon's skin.

²⁶ Luke Foxe, *North-West Foxe* (London: B Alsop and Tho. Fawcett, 1635), Z1v.

²⁷ *OED*, s.v. 'lick (v., 1–3)', accessed 25 May 2018, www.oed.com.

The word 'sweet' in the following line strictly belongs to the noun 'Ev'ning'. However, its half-rhyme with, and position just above, the word 'sweat' gives a sense of how Damon's sweat will taste: 'sweet'—delicious like the 'wine' crushed from the fruits in 'The Garden'. There is potentially an implied intentionality and deliberation on the sun's part: it is plausible to interpret the first two lines quoted as the sun noticing that Damon has been heated by toil and *therefore* licking his back, either because the sun wants to be helpful, or because he finds the idea erotically enticing.

Marvell also uses the word 'lick' in 'Upon Appleton House',²⁸ and again the word is the crux of a physical engagement with a quasi-personified nature: 'Ivy, with familiar trails,/Me licks, and clasps, and curles, and haies' (lxxiv.5–6). The image of licking a back appears in this poem too, though here the landscape licks its own back: the river ('our little Nile') lies in the meadow and

... its muddy back doth lick,
Till as a *Chrystal Mirrour* slick;
Where all things gaze themselves and doubt
If they be in it or without. (lxxx.3–6)

There is a confusion between subject and object at the start of the passage quoted: does 'its' refer to the river licking itself, or to the river licking the meadow? This confusion is echoed by 'all things', who are unsure whether they have been incorporated into the 'Mirrour' of the river-meadow or whether they remain objects in their own right: they 'gaze themselves and doubt/If they be in it or without'. Highlighting the homoerotic connotations of the sun and of mowers' sweat throughout Marvell's poetry, Hammond describes the sun's lick in 'Damon the Mower' as 'an obviously homoerotic gesture', and the sun's ability to gaze on himself in the river at Nunappleton as 'overtly a moment of homoerotic and autoerotic rapture'.²⁹ These moments are more unstable and ambiguous, though, as it is not clearly defined who is desiring whom and who

²⁸ Andrew Marvell, 'On Appleton House; To My Lord Fairfax', *Miscellaneous Poems* M2v-P3r. Future references to this poem are in the form of in-text stanza and line numbers.

²⁹ Hammond, 197, 187.

is acting on whom. As we have seen, in 'The Garden', it is often unclear who is driving these sensual natural encounters: they may be animated by the speaker, the poet, the Gardener, or the garden itself—or all of these actors at once.

One way to read 'Damon the Mower' is as the speaker imbuing the landscape of the poem with his own desires and intentions, using it to caress Damon. We have seen that the speaker can be said to enter into and 'wear' the landscape in 'The Garden', and perhaps we can trace a similar trajectory when 'the fountain's sliding foot' in 'The Garden' (7.1) becomes '*my* sliding Foot' (emphasis added) in 'Upon Appleton House' (lxxxi.5). In 'Damon the Mower', perhaps licking Damon's back, bathing his feet and anointing him with distilled liquors is what the narrator wants to do to Damon. He acts through the landscape: the sun becomes his tongue, the cowslips become what may be water, or what may be his tears (recalling Christ and Mary Magdalene) or any other fluid. Or perhaps the narrator's imagination leads him to see Damon being licked and his feet bathed as he watches him sweating in the sun and walking through the wet flowers, but he conceals his desire by transferring these actions onto more distant, less human actors: the sun, the evening, and the morning. On this reading, the narrator sees (or envisages) the cowslips drenching Damon's feet in water, and the sun drying the sweat on his body and imbues this with his own intentions and desires.

Damon too blends in with the landscape, nor is the boundary between his identity and the speaker's clear-cut. This notion of a link between Damon and the landscape is not new; indeed Damon himself repeatedly makes this comparison. Joan Faust contends that Damon is depicted as part of the landscape just as Edward Norgate (in *Miniatura*, a treatise on painting in Fairfax's library, as well as other manuscripts in wide circulation) advises painters to blur faraway figures into their surroundings. Multiply significant and ambivalent, Damon 'is a liminal figure, the blurred form in the framed landscape, challenging the expected characteristics of art and nature, good and evil, action and contemplation, life and death'.³⁰ Faust

³⁰ Joan Faust, 'Blurring the Boundaries: Ut pictora poesis and Marvell's liminal Mower', *Studies in Philology* 104, no. 4 (2007): 539, 541.

also suggests that Damon can be seen as 'a false and even anamorphic image of the speaker, so misguided that we must be introduced to him by an omniscient narrator in the first and tenth stanzas'. That identification is strengthened by the fact that, with what Faust calls his surprisingly 'sophisticated' vocabulary in 'The Mower to the Glow Worms', 'the Mower reveals himself as more astute than any country mower could be',³¹ and thus can be seen as ventriloquising the concerns of the more erudite speaker. This can lead us to ask who ultimately wrote Damon's song in 'Damon the Mower': Damon himself, the speaker, or the poet? Faust emphasises that Marvell uses the framing device of Damon's song to put the reader back into perspective; this song, she argues, delineates Damon, his surroundings, and the speaker as distinct entities once more, after the poem has encouraged the reader to blur them together with each other and with the landscape itself. However, I have found it fruitful to linger further on these moments when human figures blur into and become indistinguishable from the landscape in 'Damon the Mower' and 'The Garden'.

'Damon the Mower' is a poem filled with diffuse, all-encompassing desire that exceeds the expected source(s). 'Unusual Heats' (2.1) fill the landscape, and they cannot be wholly attributed to the sun, which is 'Hotter then his own *Phaeton*' (3.6): i.e. hotter than himself. Damon attributes the heat to the heat of '*Juliana's* scorching beams' (3.8) and to 'hot desires' (4.2) that do not definitively stem from any single subject. However, Juliana's heat is neutralised when we hear of her 'Icy Breast' (4.8), and Damon is described in a way that suggests that the person doing the describing feels a desire for his body. In both 'Damon the Mower' and 'The Garden', desire suffuses the landscape but also comes to focus at various points in each poem on specific objects, which include plants (the nectarine and the curious peach) and human figures: Damon and the Gardener. It is difficult to locate the source of this desire in a single relationship precisely because it is diffuse and multitudinous; it is apparent within the landscape and yet it exceeds it. The ability of the Marvellian narrator and the objects of his desire to change and alter has been noted in several studies of Marvell's poetry. For example, Rosalie Colie describes him as 'this poet-without-persona or

³¹ Faust, 550–51.

this poet-with-too-many-personas'.³² Diane Purkiss writes that 'The image of "the sun himself" who "licks off my sweat" (line 46) suggests that an unspecific sensual bodily realm of pleasure may be restorative as opposed to the menace of desire and consummation'.³³ Earlier in her chapter, Purkiss opposes solitude in 'Upon Appleton House' with queer desire, writing that 'Marvell's eremitic and Edenic singleness is the alternative obverse of the nuns' unnatural longings; the latter exist to sanction and make space for the former'.³⁴ However, the reading of 'The Garden' that I have suggested indicates that an ostensible 'solitude' reveals opportunities for desire.

Purkiss's argument that desire and pleasure in 'Damon the Mower' are unspecific, sensual, and bodily fits with the multitudinous nature of the desires in this poem: Damon desires Juliana; the sun and the dog star are maddened with heat; the fairies 'contract their Ring' (8.8) around Damon in a dance or around an unspecified part of his body in a sexual act; and Damon is 'scorch[ed]' by Juliana's 'beams' (3.8) even if she does not reciprocate his desire. Some of these agents are satisfied and some are not. There is no one single model of love at work. As well as being diffuse, desire in 'Damon the Mower' is also mysteriously excessive. The intensity of emotion in this poem is presented as being too great to have been produced by any or all of the sources in this poem: the sun, Damon, and Juliana. It is also not entirely produced by and contained in the landscape. Though Damon cuts at the landscape that represents his mind, he cannot uproot the emotions stemming from his craving for Juliana: 'And with my Sythe cut down the Grass,/Yet still my Grief is where it was' (9.5–6) (this (in)congruence between Damon's mind and the landscape is explicit in the refrain of 'The Mower's Song': 'She/What I do to the Grass, does to my Thoughts and Me').³⁵ This suggests that perhaps there is a desirer who has not been factored

³² Rosalie Colie, *My Echoing Song: Andrew Marvell's Poetry of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), 5. Colie writes that 'Persona, in other words, is bound up with the theme and tone in these poems; like them, persona is a device treated as a problem, and presented problematically. Some poems have little or no "speaker" in them; others have several; others, apparently united but later divergent speakers; still others, of which "Upon Appleton House" is the chief example, a multiplicity of speakers, voices, tones, personae' (5).

³³ Diane Purkiss, 'Thinking of Gender', in *The Cambridge Companion to Andrew Marvell*, 75.

³⁴ Purkiss, 69.

³⁵ Andrew Marvell, 'The Mower's Song', *Miscellaneous Poems*, H3r-v.

into this analysis: a desiring figure who is present in the poem but not explicitly mentioned. There are several figures that might occupy this role of the unmentioned desirer: the reader is one, and another is the speaker himself.

IV. Conclusions

Marvell is not alone in Paradise. In 'The Garden', he speaks of solitude but moves on to warm praise for the skilful Gardener. He does not like 'busie Companies of Men', but he does allow his attention to rest approvingly on this one single person. His appreciation for the Gardener is not overtly queer, but reading 'The Garden' alongside 'Damon the Mower' illuminates a similar approach to desire in both these poems. In both, desire is diffuse and various, suffusing the entire landscape of the poem and coming to rest on different specific objects and human or quasi-human agents. In 'Damon the Mower', the narrator uses the landscape to caress Damon's body, or at the very least approvingly imagines it doing so, which raises the idea that in 'The Garden', the speaker's erotic engagement with the landscape is part of his appreciation of the Gardener. As the peaches press themselves into the narrator's mouth and as he falls prostrate onto the grass, is he loving the landscape alone, or is he using the landscape as a vehicle for imagining contact with the person behind that landscape: the Gardener?

Gavin locates a tendency to excess or 'surplus' in 'The Garden' ('The pun that "Two Paradises 'twere in one/To live in Paradise alone' is an instance of a recurrent idea in Marvell, that of the condition of sufficiency which still admits a surplus—as if an ideal state could be more like itself").³⁶ This excess is not necessarily sexual but what it does emphasise is that there is more than one meaning, type of desire and way of enjoying oneself in 'The Garden'. Any homoerotic desire for the Gardener is set against a backdrop of overdetermined desires: religious, solitary, nature-loving. And as Andrew McRae writes, 'nature is rarely—if ever—just nature for Marvell. In the tradition of pastoral poetry, the natural world provides an avenue, with its own rich and highly stylized stock of imagery, for reflecting on wider issues of human life, ranging from love and sexuality through to matters of state'.³⁷ Whether the plant

³⁶ Gavin, 241.

³⁷ Andrew McRae, 'The Green Marvell', in *The Cambridge Companion to Andrew Marvell*, 122.

life in 'The Garden' is an end in itself or a layer hiding a human figure, one thing is certain: the fascination with what might lie behind Marvell's depictions of the natural world shows both that his persona is eternally elusive and that it compels us to seek hidden meaning in his depictions of everything from nectarines to sunlight. A kinetic landscape that appeals multimodally to the senses, assumes human traits, and as the speaker's imagination roams through and explores different modalities of desire, he comes to rest on the Gardener.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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