

SPEAKING GARDENS: CONSTRUCTING GENDER IN EARLY MODERN ENGLISH  
POETRY

By

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To my Lord, who made this possible, and to Charles, who made it happen

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The topos of the pleasure garden has from antiquity been associated, sometimes even equated, in Western culture primarily with ideologies of the feminine in literature and in culture more generally. In the seventeenth century, the garden and naturalized spaces offered a particularly powerful symbolic matrix to the project of gender construction and manipulation in English literature. This dialogue involved both male and female poets, although they approached the topos from different perspectives and consequently employed it to different ends. Published female poets of the time exploited the gendered associations of the garden topos to gain authority in their art.

The study begins with an ecocritical and historical evaluation of real-world pleasure garden spaces as they were created physically and culturally in seventeenth-century England. It then moves to establish the theoretical framework by which the poetic readings are constructed. This framework utilizes ecocritically inflected feminist spatial theory and speech act theory to read the use of the garden topos in the poems that follow. Native and European Renaissance garden traditions combine in early modern England, to create a strong garden imaginary with which poets could interact creatively. The study thus surveys canonical works that feature gardens prominently, tracing the development of the topos to the beginning of the seventeenth century.

In that century, male poets—including Edmund Spenser, Ben Jonson, George Herbert, Henry Vaughan, Andrew Marvell, and John Milton—tended to use the garden trope straightforwardly and in line with the received traditions. Female poets, on the other hand, because they are culturally associated with it, tend to have a relationship with the garden that is both more problematic and more productive. I examine first the garden poetry of these male poets and then turn to that of Aemilia Lanyer, Rachel Speght, Margaret Cavendish, Katherine Philips, and Aphra Behn. These writers used the symbolism of the garden performatively to interact with the world as artists, and it helped them craft voices that contributed to the shape of literature and culture in England in the following years.

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Feminist scholarship has become well established in the study of early modern literature in the last thirty years, and much of it has been devoted to rediscovering a “women’s literary history” (Ezell). Studies in the seventies made the case for studying unknown works by women in general, and the eighties and early nineties responded with an outpouring of reclamation work. Having rediscovered so many texts, the challenge next seemed to lie in the area of relating them to men’s work and making a case for their inclusion among some of the most entrenched members of the English literary canon. But even that step is now coming to a close, and it is time to begin to address at least some of these works from a less defensive critical posture. This study aims to do just that, starting from the assumption that the five female poets I consider in these pages have produced literature that is now part of a pool widely available to criticism, and that they need not be compared to a masculine standard but rather can be evaluated on terms that are applicable to both male- and female-authored works.

These terms I have found in the topos of the garden, a common, highly influential literary image that integrates a rich matrix of meanings in late medieval and early modern literature. A large proportion of these have to do with gender ideologies, in which the garden is associated with women, their sexuality, and their social position. However, the garden in early modern literature also alludes to other traditional and less obviously gendered concerns: personal communion with God, sensual (not necessarily sexual) delight, righteous activity, artistic and especially poetic creation. It is also an artistic topos with a closely related correlative in the real world. Because they are cultural creations and arise out of a shared language of signs, literary and physical gardens both influence and reflect each other’s design and execution. Further, real world gardens may enact literary fantasies, or may provide a foundation upon which the literary

can build. Therefore, the garden is more than “just” a literary image or icon; it is a site of cultural meanings that incorporates many aspects of culture. Those meanings may be performed in the establishment of garden space, and they may also be enacted within that space, but they are always present in the fabric of its being.

The garden topos as used in early modern literature, and art more generally, received a great deal of critical attention from early formalist critics like Northrop Frye, but then its popularity as a subject for examination lapsed until the last decade. However, the influences of cultural materialism and ecocriticism have helped restore this object to inquiry recently. As it is also a gendered image that both male and female writers used, it is potentially a rich analytical key to any study, such as this one, that seeks to examine the early modern work of both genders on a shared scale. The primary focus of this study is on the work of five published women poets of the seventeenth century, which is brought into relief by examination of the well-known poetry of some of their male contemporaries. I have chosen to concentrate on the seventeenth century for three particular reasons. The first is that a significant number of female writers who published during this century have been established in the critical literature, and they are thus positioned well for more textually oriented work to be done on their poetry. The second is that the seventeenth century saw some of the most sophisticated and famous uses of the garden topos in early modern English poetry. The final reason is that the broad cultural understanding of “garden” changed significantly over the course of the century, acquiring during this time the strong social force it was to have in England from then on.

I devote significant attention to the early modern cultural context and discourse of gardens, what their ideological limits were, and how this discourse was used to communicate particular messages. The two cornerstones of this study, which draw these divergent strands together and

make them less unwieldy, are gender and power. Various artistic discourses were available to early modern scholars, poets, and didactic writers for use in constructing and enforcing ideals of feminine behavior, that is, for wielding power over the construction and maintenance of gender. However, language available for one use is also available to those who wish to present an opposing viewpoint. Therefore, the garden as a matrix of gendered prescriptions and power structures is available to those upon whom it has been imposed, and it can be interrogated and potentially challenged. Like nature itself, language is endlessly fertile and mutable. This study is interested not only in how writers and designers use gendered garden discourses to construct ideologies, but also in how poets, particularly female poets, use them to question and disrupt these same ideologies.

*Garden* is a word small in size but a concept large in stature. It conjures up an image that may vary widely depending on an individual's experience, but it can also be reduced to "an enclosed piece of ground devoted to the cultivation of flowers, fruit, or vegetables" ("Garden," def. I.1.a.). The word itself is ancient, deriving from Latin *gardinum* or *gardum* via Old French *gardin*, and it is closely related in form and meaning to the Old English *deard*, which evolved into both *yard* and *garth* (another word for a small garden attached to a private household; "Garth"). The basic concept of a garden has been around much longer of course, ever since humanity began practicing cultivation. The Persians, for example, used the term *pairedaeza*—from which *paradise* derives—to refer to an enclosed piece of ground including a water source and fragrant plants, and devoted to the purpose of pleasure (Giamatti 11). Pleasure, in fact, is the delimiting thematic factor of the gardens on which this study will concentrate. Utilitarian gardens, such as kitchen gardens, also encode cultural values, but they are rarely used as significant poetic images. Pleasure gardens, however, have no purpose other than to enter into

discourse with culture, and the garden image early modern poets most often represent is that of the space devoted to pleasure. It is therefore more immediately a cultural artifact because it is solely a product of desire and embedded in a particular discourse and sign system. The basic structural elements of a garden as listed by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, in their pleasurable permutations, reappear throughout the early modern period, both in literary and in physical manifestations, although they also change and fade over time.

The first motif, *enclosure*, addresses several concepts that prove vital to this investigation. First, there is the question of separation between an inside and an outside. How are garden areas defined, by whom, and where does the distinction between the two lie? What is the purpose of an enclosing feature around a garden? In some instances, especially literary ones, the purpose may be to keep things or people inside, confining and/or protecting them from an unruly outside. The flip side of this is the exclusion of unauthorized elements from the space of the garden. Further, of what are a garden's borders comprised, and how are they maintained? How permeable are they? The present study finds that borders are nearly always fallible in some manner, often unanticipated by those who establish them. Such a conclusion more or less reflects the assertions of scholars who study borderlands, liminal spaces, and psychoanalytic identity constructions. Some of the same mechanisms they find in their work are played out through the garden topos in the poems of this study.

The requirement within this definition of "garden" to include a *piece of ground* also has notable repercussions, because it covers the element of human relationship to earth. This relationship is an interest in areas as divergent as ecology and economics. Ecology is concerned with the material effects of that relationship upon the ground and people. Economics considers the social effects of systems of land ownership and use. Numerous other disciplines address

some part or combination of those aspects. The piece of ground as considered in literary criticism also raises questions of the materiality and size of the ground, that is, what it is like. What is this ground used for, and why is it enclosed and privileged? What elements constitute it, and how does it differ from the ground of the space outside it? In the garden, the fertility of the ground holds special symbolic and physical importance. The ground of the literary garden is defined by its boundaries and by the application of a directing will to it, which alters it from its original similarity to what then becomes an unchanged space outside the boundaries of the garden space. The early modern model, both literary and physical, is to oppose a highly ordered inside to a disordered outside, or else to oppose a productive and fertile inside to a waste outside. Other versions of this topos, such as the bower or the grove, enact parts of the garden space if not the whole. They thereby invoke different parts of the garden codes, using them to communicate different messages that are yet related to the garden as usually understood.

The “piece of ground” can be made to symbolize both materiality and mentality. In explicitly gendered poetry, for example, the ground may be the female body from which sprout, in an enactment of fertility, items that offer sensual pleasure, such as fruit trees or beautiful flowers. In more spiritually oriented poetry, the ground may be the symbol of a believer’s life, in which God as *gardener* applies His will to make that life productive and orderly, a social ideal reflected by the ideal formal garden, similarly ordered and controlled. In both instances, the symbolism of the ground may be reinforced by the presence of a human figure whose behavior reenacts it. Thus, in each of the enchantresses’ gardens that A. B. Giamatti examines in *The Earthly Paradise and the Renaissance Epic*, the garden itself is nearly as seductive as the witch who presides there. In a different vein, in George Herbert’s meditative poems, the believer sits in an enclosed, formal garden and enjoins himself to live an orderly life, to remain within bounds

and set apart from a sinful outside. In both instances, the garden is simultaneously the sign and the setting of human psychology and activity. The materiality of a piece of ground situates the garden in space and thereby introduces it into critical discourses that are concerned with the evocation, representation and theorization of space, such as ecocriticism, art history, and some forms of feminism. This study applies these critical lenses to poems and physical gardens of the early modern period in order to clarify how garden space is culturally constructed through physical and linguistic manipulation. That understanding in turn illuminates the construction of gender through the garden topos.

The purpose of the garden as a space *devoted to the cultivation* of a variety of plants encapsulates the remainder of the motifs that construct this topos as a site that generates cultural meaning. These have to do with questions of both fertility and aesthetic choice. Fertility is an arena of conflict within the space of the garden; for example, the maintenance of a physical garden's design requires domination over fertility, particularly in highly ordered fashions. Fertility thus becomes the site upon which mastery of the garden is contested between the gardener and the ground again and again. What will grow and what will not? What is to be included, and what insists upon its presence, like a weed, regardless of human choice? Which is stronger, Nature or Art? The pleasure the garden provides is dependent upon its satisfaction of a user's desire, and the degree to which garden space accomplishes that end determines its existential success. The content of the user's desire in a garden is bound up with aesthetic valuation, one of the elements most closely affiliated with broader cultural construction. The artistic value of an item is established by the culture as a whole: the value of a rose as opposed to a dandelion, for example, is determined by a world of judgments. The distinction is not built into the flowers themselves; it is encoded in human reaction to them. Thus gardens, whether physical

or literary, are an artistic embodiment of a culture's constructions of meaning and value, and they both enact and reinforce those values.

It has become nearly a commonplace today, especially among cultural theorists, that landscape is an influential element in the establishment and maintenance of cultural ideologies of power. The rubric of "landscape" can cover a lot of ground, from the archetypal city, to psychological and private spaces, to the regional American south, to the historical Sri Lankan kingdom in James Duncan's *The City as Text*. It is often, however, understood in a broad sense of space in which humanity is embedded and with which humanity interacts in some way. Such serious study was fostered by Raymond Williams and Gaston Bachelard, among others, and the theorization of space and place seems to have established an indelible foothold among the schools of scholarship at this point. It has also attracted more and more gender-oriented scholars, as inquiries into gender's relation to space and place have proven fruitful. In 2005, the editors of *Gender and Landscape*, a collection of papers presented at a conference in 2001, remarked in their introduction that gender was an overlooked element in questions of landscape and culture (Dowler et al. 1). While this might have been true in 2001, it certainly is not now.

Nonetheless, while the garden has a long history of attracting scholarship to itself, it has only recently appeared as a significant feature in the realm of spatial theorization. Though broadly conceived, study of "landscape" has generally not focused on gardens. Urban, suburban, and wild landscapes have dominated much of the discussion to this point.<sup>1</sup> Discussions that have considered gardens have either, like John Dixon Hunt's work and Alistair Duckworth's *The Improvement of the Estate*, concentrated upon the dramatic landscape garden design movement that arose in the eighteenth century or, as in the case of Laura Howes's *Chaucer's Gardens and*

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, A. Kolodny, *The Lay of the Land*; Dowler et al., *Gender and Landscape*; A. Wilson, *The Culture of Nature*; L. Orlin, *Material London, ca. 1600*.

*the Language of Convention*, have ended the study well before the seventeenth century. One of the major figures in garden history studies from the last thirty years has been Dixon Hunt, who has made a name for himself by concentrating on the history of the landscape garden and its artistic representations. Although he has branched out into some broader examinations of English gardens (in *The Oxford Book of Garden Verse*, for example), Hunt has primarily concentrated on this single area of scholarship and, by incorporating landscape design, art history, and literary history, has shown just how interdisciplinary it can be. It would not be accurate to imply that no work has been done on space during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In both social history and literary criticism, urban and domestic spaces have commanded some attention, as has rural landscape (Williams; Turner). Pleasure gardens, however, have been generally reduced to an appendage either of formalism or feminism, and have not been appreciated as the independent loci of interest that scholars of later time periods have found gardens to be.

The gardens of the seventeenth century deserve more focused and thoughtful scholarly attention. As Maggie Campbell-Culver says, “the seventeenth century has turned out to be the floristic fulcrum of the last thousand years in Britain, mainly because the newly expanding sciences of botany and horticulture were, for the first time, subjects to be studied in their own right” (122). During this time period, the “gardenesque” was the cultural powerhouse in reality that it was in literature. While gardens were deeply steeped in conventionality, that cannot be considered a legitimate basis for neglect, as studies of women’s writing and pastoral poetry have made clear. Scholars such as Barbara Lewalski and Paul Alpers have demonstrated that art does not have to be surprising and highly original in order to have value; poetry that exploits convention also participates in artistic discourse and can be just as effective as more startling

works. Conventionality may be a powerful means of rhetorically negotiating social and cultural realities for artists of all sorts.

This study attempts to redress scholarly neglect of the time period by examining gender ideologies as embodied in discussions of garden spaces in seventeenth-century England, primarily in literature, though also in the related area of physical gardening. As Don Wayne demonstrated in 1984, certain texts must be understood in terms of their relationship to real-world places. It was during the seventeenth century also that landscape painting first gained popularity in England and significantly changed processes of visually perceiving and understanding, and subsequently representing and constructing, the natural world. These changes are not confined to the visual arts but stretch through the culture into all different representations of landscape, including garden space. Landscape art aestheticized certain motifs, introduced new fashions of style for expression, and made available new visual perspectives (Ogden and Ogden).

The cultural, symbolic creation of garden space brings in the final theoretical area that will structure this argument, one to which gender theory has also made significant contributions: speech act theory, and specifically the concept of *performativity*. The performativity of early modern language about garden space both constructed and maintained ideologies about gender, and vice versa, establishing a mutually influential loop. As female writers participated in this discourse, the performative link enabled them to propose and perform changes in both areas, changes whose outcome can be seen in the early landscape gardens as well as in the increasing number of female writers in the early eighteenth century. The feminine had long been allowed culturally approved discursive power within the limited space of the garden, as this study will demonstrate, but as both sides of the relationship (gender and garden ideologies) changed

significantly in seventeenth century England, women writers were able to use that equation to claim authoritative space in which to speak more broadly.

The study traces a broadly thematic and chronological path. Chapter 2, “Real-World Gardens,” describes and contextualizes the physical pleasure gardens and related landscapes of early modern England. It begins by establishing the theoretical and analytical relevance of including a lengthy discussion of materiality in a study fundamentally devoted to literature, concentrating on justifications that consider humanity’s interactions with nature and with space more generally. While continental fashions and exotic botanical specimens contributed to the popularity of certain designs, personal and national history and resources also played an important part in their conception and execution. These pages also discuss the development of the English country house, which came into existence in the late sixteenth century as the social system we recognize today. The use of physical design to conceptualize, perform, and maintain real social power is explored in this section. The discussion concludes with a brief look at non-literary writing about gardens and gardening, a popular theme of printed works throughout the seventeenth century. These manuals, herbals, and miscellanies demonstrate that garden discourse is encoded across the written spectrum, for different audiences and different purposes. Yet the performative nature of garden writing, its impetus toward material realization, is present in both literary and non-literary works. Overall, chapter 2 seeks to establish the physical contexts of garden discourse and the pleasure garden space in which the poetry of the seventeenth century was situated, as well as to link that materiality with the literary worlds created by the poets who follow.

Chapter 3, “Performing Female Identity in Created Space,” anatomizes the theoretical underpinnings of the study. It incorporates several approaches designed to work together as a

matrix of associated interpretive strategies, imposing upon the field of chosen material a particular order that gives it meaning in literary culture. In this way, the theory of this study works like a gardening ideology itself. The first section of chapter 3 identifies spatial theories relevant to early modern garden poetry, concentrating upon work that emphasizes how spatial awareness and manipulation affect the creation of female identity. It also looks at materiality and how its perception and representation are caught up in cultural assumptions about gender, and vice versa. The second part bears down on the concept of performativity, establishing the parameters of its use in the remainder of the study.

The remainder of the study applies this body of interpretive strategies to a range of non-dramatic poetry, a genre chosen because of ancient traditions linking gardens with poetic creation, and also because the highly organized and discrete poetic form reflects the similar structure of the seventeenth-century garden. Chapter 4, "Literary Gardens and Symbolic Landscapes," establishes a literary history of the topos upon which the study concentrates. It follows the traditions from their ancient influences through some late medieval and early Renaissance examples that together constitute the cultural models with which seventeenth-century English poets were working. It illustrates the structure of the pleasure garden, highlighting its two main symbolic tracks, that of the enclosed sexual/spiritual garden and that of the pastoral poetic *locus amoenus*, and then shows how they are reinterpreted and adapted in early modern European and English cultural traditions. The argument glances at highly influential and canonical works, emphasizing their individual contributions in content, style, or meaning to a multivalent literary orthodoxy. By the end of the time period surveyed, the garden's associations with sexuality, spirituality, poetic creation, social interaction, and idealized femininity have been firmly established. The history of the tradition anticipates the directions

that gendered gardening ideology will go in the seventeenth century, in both literature and the physical world.

Chapter 5, “Poetic Gardens of the Seventeenth Century,” begins the final and main part of the study, the examination of seventeenth-century poetry that utilizes the garden topos. It considers a representative selection of poetry written by men, which is meant to function as a mainstream foil for the representation and interpretation of the gendered garden image by the female poets who follow. Moving from Spenser through Marvell and Milton, it reads a range of different literary gardens, some almost purely imaginary and some solidly based in physical places. These poems indicate that the normative early modern poetic point of view approaches the garden image in ways that reflect both the poetic traditions and the poet’s gender affiliation. The literary garden enacts the aesthetics favored in both real-world garden design and female identity construction, and the works included illustrate that maneuver. Generally, these poets interact with garden space highly symbolically, disregarding material “truth” in favor of abstract “truth.” Thus, the garden image, gendered female and thus as fundamentally outside these poets’ own constructed identity, is consistently represented as a slightly uncanny object to be experienced and interpreted by the speaking subject. The pleasurable garden space is both receptive and resistant to its poetic creator. The topos thus provides a means of reading these texts that illuminates the deeply gendered cultural constructs that this space embodies in the seventeenth century.

Chapters 6 and 7 launch into an extended study of the published poetry of five women from the seventeenth century. The first, “Feminine Worlds,” looks at the work of Aemilia Lanyer, Rachel Speght, and Margaret Cavendish, while “Beyond the Pale” is devoted to Katherine Philips and Aphra Behn. Each poet interacts with garden discourse and imagery in her

work, although in ways very different from the masculine mainstream. They too saw themselves as inheritors of a literary culture that configured a direct correlation between women and gardens, but as the culture situated them inside the image, that became the imaginative space from which they began to speak. These five women make a performative move to co-opt a discourse imposed upon them: garden imagery gives them a means to envision themselves as poets and to express their experience and desire with authority. Because it is a space of both long-held tradition and uncanny resistance, it opens up room for them to speak within constructs that promote silence, stasis, and order. The garden topos becomes an effective way for them to insert themselves into the artistic world and into culture more generally.

Ultimately this study proposes a reassessment of the early modern garden topos in literature, realizing its full potential by utilizing its affiliation with several of the current theoretical approaches. It is time to recognize the image as more than just an “archetype” and the real-world garden as more than a “derivative” creation. It is a rich symbolic and material space that enables an understanding of the establishment of women’s voices in English literature as a continuing presence, rather than as an anomaly. My main business here is to propose a way of considering the language of garden imagery that opens up a new way of approaching early modern texts, by both women and men. I concentrate here upon works by women because there is more to be done with their poetry, and because theirs are the voices most empowered by such a program.

The garden topos makes possible a poetics of resistance and subversion that gains power from what seems at first to be an oppressive construction, and that poetics is put to use in women’s printed literature. The last few decades in early modern studies have seen the explosion of feminist scholarship. That same time period has also witnessed the burgeoning of an

ecocritical turn in literary criticism. If the many theories having to do with the importance of the relationship between people and their environments (biophilia, psychogeography, etc.) have merit, then they are worth extending into examinations of cultures and literatures that help shape our own, especially if current culture tends simultaneously to hold these literatures up as icons and to dismiss them as irrelevant. Critical approaches that have meaning to our “real” lives both offer more critical understanding of “icons” and illustrate their relevance. An understanding of earlier ways people have constructed the world informs modern strategies to do the same.

Anthony Low writes, “In an age when political and social leaders regularly read and often wrote poems themselves, poetry provides us with an even more significant means of investigating attitudes and especially of digging into those underlying assumptions that are too basic for any culture to discuss openly or in some cases even to bring to conscious awareness” (5). This study aims to shed light on some of those “underlying assumptions” that still carry weight today, below a level of “conscious [cultural] awareness.” Bringing these into awareness can only be good for the study of early modern culture and the mindful creation of our own.

## CHAPTER 2 REAL-WORLD GARDENS

### **Introduction**

Most studies of English garden history have concentrated on the landscape garden of the eighteenth century. That has also been the case with work on the relationship between gardens and literature. Studies of seventeenth-century environmental relations have generally concentrated on the country house, the city, or the rural landscape. The seventeenth-century garden, on the other hand, has generally been an afterthought or considered useful primarily as a prelude to the main subject. However, scholars keep re-discovering that the seventeenth century offers more than they had anticipated. This study aims to expand discourse about gardens during this century. As feminist and new historicist literary work has shown, texts long considered “minor” and of little value or use may yield great treasures if they are approached receptively. This part of the argument applies that lesson to a century of gardens in England long considered derivative and unoriginal, useful only as a background against which the dramatic changes of landscape garden theory could react.

The physical world and artistic, especially literary, creation mutually influence one another. These pages paint a picture of the state of gardening in the *soil* and in the *discourse* of England and its people during that time period, in order to establish the physical contexts relevant for the selected literature. In addition, some of the same symbolic associations found in literature manifest themselves in the “real world.” We open with a theorizing of garden discourse and move on to a brief history of country houses, physical gardens, and non-literary garden writing of the seventeenth century. This history is inflected by the theoretical discussion, as well as by gender issues that are examined more closely in chapter 3. Our first concern is with the language of seventeenth-century physical gardens, which interacts with the symbolic language of

the garden topos in the literary world. This dialectic led to major, though not absolute, changes in the meaning and performance of both garden registers by the end of the century, changes that would reverberate over the next century.

The amount of attention the English landscape garden has received in the scholarly world lately has gone a long way toward establishing its significance as a historical development, a social sign, and a highly gendered artifact. However, the gardens of the century that preceded the development of this style are generally dismissed as being derivative of Italian, French and Dutch designs. There is no denying the influence of Europe upon fashionable gardening aesthetics of this time, but similar influence has not precluded study of England in other historical areas. On the contrary, it offers an additional means of interpretation. The same dismissive attitude has been conquered in other scholarly areas, such as translation or non-canonical literature, and garden history of the seventeenth century offers significant reasons for doing the same in this area. Not least among these are gardens' relationships with literature of the time. Milton's Eden, for example, is one of the most famous literary gardens in English literature. Is it not sensible to give some thought to the gardens, and ideas about gardens, to which Milton was exposed during his lifetime?

The literature at the heart of this study is defined by awareness of its own environment. Malcolm Kelsall expresses this truth well: "Written sign and architectural sign reflect one another. Writers interpret what they see, and the way in which things are seen is conditioned by how they are described. There is no firm division between the visual arts and literature" (8). His words ring particularly true when the literature and visual art considered are more than usually reflective of the author's surroundings, or when that artist or author attempts to address what he or she sees in the material world. The theoretical foundation of this study is a synthesis of

ecocriticism and feminism,<sup>1</sup> as gender deeply inflected early modern perceptions of the material world, particularly those parts closely allied with the “natural.” As the remainder of this chapter explores first ecocriticism generally and then ecologically-inflected, garden-oriented social structures of the material world of early modern England, gender emerges as a constant refrain. It inflects perceptions, representations, and creations of physical space. Chapter 3 offers a theoretical apparatus to evaluate this relationship and apply it to literary texts: the garden as a speaking space is peculiarly fitted to comment on ideological feminine identity, especially in the realm of speech. But for now it is necessary to establish the cultural, social, and physical environment in which gardens accrue this identity.

### **Thinking Green Thoughts**

One of the most conspicuous issues our world faces today is humanity’s relationship with the natural world, although the editor of *Renaissance Ecology*, Ken Hiltner, pushes this concern back at least to the early modern period, indicating it might not be a *new* concern. Under the current watchword of “sustainability” falls a broad array of separate though related concerns, including population growth, medical advances, agricultural practices, urban planning and architectural design. Clearly a right relationship of modern humanity with nature, whatever that means, is a concern that stretches into all cultural areas. Edward O. Wilson has labeled this *biophilia*, which has come over time to indicate an innate human need to have some sort of relationship with the natural world (Kellert and Wilson). Different interpretations of this basic hypothesis emphasize different aspects of it, such as sociobiology, also expressed by Wilson, or social ecology (Stephen Kellert). In architecture, it may take the form of biophilic design, or what Robert Pogue Harrison calls “chlorophilia,” referring to the relationship of humanity with

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<sup>1</sup> I resist collapsing the two terms into *ecofeminism*, as that seems to refer to an ideology at least as much as to an analytical approach. I am not interested in a “best” reading, only in establishing “another good” reading strategy.

plant life (*Gardens* 43). Sustainable living is a current method of expressing anxieties about the nature of our relationship with “nature,” commonly figured in ecological rhetoric as a site of political meaning and force. That cultural construction is also represented as having (dire) material effects as well. All this “hysteria” (as Timothy Morton puts it in *Ecology without Nature*) adds up to the latest configuration of a relationship that has always been dynamic and is currently expressed in mainstream American cultural rhetoric in terms of “crisis” (1). A redress of “crisis” in this instance requires both discursive and material change, a requirement that illustrates the fundamentally dual nature of this relationship: its spheres of activity must be both imaginative and physical.

The rise of ecocriticism, the study of biophilic relationship expressed in literature, as a systematic method of examining cultural texts has borne extensive fruit recently. So far, American and contemporary studies have dominated the landscape, but the field of inquiry continues to expand. Annette Kolodny rightly argues that the task of the critic “is to initiate nothing less than a playful pluralism, responsive to the possibilities of multiple critical tools and methods, but captive of none” (“Dancing” 19). Scholars can approach early modern texts from an ecocritical standpoint that is historically informed, because previous scholars in fields such as new historicism have already demonstrated that “Insofar as it is socially constructed, the category of nature is also historically contingent, for every era creates its own nature” (Bushnell 3). The interaction of interpretive strategies can sometimes lead to productive outcomes. In other words, it is worthwhile to study the rhetoric of humanity’s relationship to nature because that relationship is socially and historically constructed and thus open to critical interpretation and application. Therefore, it makes available yet another means of learning about a culture and its members, including authors and texts.

Very recently, ecocritical discourse in early modern studies has become more noticeable. In 2006, for example, Robert N. Watson's *Back to Nature*, which addresses a perceived desire in early modern literature to recapture a lost "reality" through primitivism, was published. Last year saw several indications of interest in the field of early modern ecocriticism, some built around gender theory and some not. K. Hiltner's edited collection, *Renaissance Ecology: Imagining Eden in Milton's England*, concentrates solely on Milton's writings. In December, the Modern Language Association Convention sponsored a roundtable discussion on "Spenser's Environs," which practiced ecocritical analysis upon Spenser's poetry. Rather closer to my own interests is the study by Jennifer Munroe, *Gender and the Garden in Early Modern English Literature*, which offers the first sustained cross-disciplinary study of gender in early modern gardens and literature that I have seen. Her work, however, is more oriented toward utilitarian gardens than is mine. And whereas she, like Rebecca Bushnell, author of *Green Desire* (2003), seeks to deal primarily with non-literary or even entirely non-verbal texts, the present study claims canonicity as a significant article of interest.

This study conceives the natural world in early modern literature along lines similar to those proposed by Timothy Morton in *Ecology without Nature*, a theory that agrees that the natural world may exist apart from humanity ("It isn't language that has a hole in its ozone layer" [Soper 151]), but that people must always interpret it through culturally created framing strategies. "Nature" has no apprehensible meaning otherwise, and distinctions between "the human" and "nature" therefore continually collapse. "When you realize that everything is interconnected, you can't hold on to a concept of a single, solid, independent thing 'over there' called Nature," writes Morton (*Ecology without Nature* blog). There is no originary "truth" to be elicited from a physical environment unless human intervention has already brought it into a

system of cultural meanings. Yet, as Rebecca Bushnell points out, “human beings persist in opposing nature and ‘not nature,’ needing a nature outside of ourselves, even while we map it according to social structures, perceptions, and needs” (2). Thus, a study of “nature” is always a study of mediation between the human and that which it contrasts with itself. The “nature” this particular study is concerned with, the early modern pleasure garden, is explicitly mediated and makes no claims to naturalism. The aesthetics of the early modern pleasure garden tend toward the formal and the artificial, insistently advertising the intervention of the gardener’s desire and effort.

One of the limiting factors of this study has been a concentration upon place. Most available studies of physical gardens of the seventeenth century concentrate upon the rural estate as an economic and social whole, upon the country house as a marker of social importance, or upon landscape as the grounds upon which scholars can gain some sense of early modern mankind’s perception of the natural world. James Turner attends to this last territory in *The Politics of Landscape*, a cogent look at the relationship between rural landscape and mid-century literature, with an eye toward theorizing where the two meet in a social, linguistic, and mediated world. Landscape here is outside the household garden boundaries. Anthony Low’s *The Georgic Revolution* examines the (un)popularity and design of the mode of georgic writing, which he defines as work-oriented rural writing, in the seventeenth century. Raymond Williams’s *The Country and the City*, one of the most influential early studies of socially constructed space in the seventeenth century, also concentrates on the rural landscape. Jeffrey B. Spencer examines its depictions in seventeenth-century literature in *Heroic Nature*. In contrast, the present study confines itself to the bordered pleasure garden space: formal, disciplined, ideologically and sometimes physically enclosed, and deliberately referential. It also ignores purely utilitarian

gardens; they were necessary and abundant cultural artifacts, and intimately related to pleasure gardens, but they invoke a different cultural register. The garden created purely for delight, built for leisure, meditation, thought and speculation, closely approximates the materiality of the literary poem. Low illustrates the same mechanism in early modern poets' preference for pastoral themes over georgic themes: the former lent itself to the pleasurable *otium* that Thomas Rosenmeyer emphasizes in his study of pastoral, while the latter required praising hard work usually relegated in that society to the lower strata (Low 18-23).

Recently the pleasure garden has been more often recognized by scholars as a politicized space that enacts conventional signs and images. Although they are entirely physical spaces and grounded in the natural world, gardens are amenable to a broad spectrum of linguistic, religious, social, and cultural meanings. Because it is a space where the human will interacts with the natural world, a garden lends itself to discourses on the interaction of the human with the nonhuman, of art with nature, natural with unnatural, human will with divine will. A single study can only hint at the variety and depth of these discourses. The term "discourse" implies an audience, and gardens, particularly non-utilitarian gardens, are designed to communicate particular ideas to specific audiences. The gardens of Versailles, for example, were famously designed to communicate the absolute power of the French king (Miller 22). Similarly, Catherine de Medici used her palace gardens as governing spaces, emphasizing her disavowal of the conventions of male rule (Ffolliott). Sometimes these ideas are more subtly expressed, but a pleasure garden works like a text whose messages can be read by an educated audience, through symbolic language materialized in both design and content.

Gardening, like writing, offers its practitioners an opportunity to "mak[e] art and transform... themselves as well as their surroundings" (Bushnell 7). Gardens are transformative

spaces at the same time that they themselves are constantly transforming, all the while evoking a timeless mythic quality. In this way, gardens participate in the dialectic of art. They transform through excess—of form, pleasure, meaning, materiality. Harrison has pointed out the relaxation that most people almost automatically feel within the garden space, and he argues that a function as a “sanctuary of repose” is one of their defining characteristics (*Gardens* 42). He argues that this quality undermines analysis of gardens, though Mara Miller attributes that to their status as artworks (47-50). Gardens resist interpretation while multiplying their different meanings, generally through allusion or deferral to what is “beyond” or “above.”

Thus many studies that try to advance, or even just explain, gardens or garden theory feel an almost irresistible pull toward origins, toward an “original” garden. It is hard to talk about a particular garden; the tendency is to talk about The Garden as an archetypal ideal. This is certainly due to the artistic excess that gardens display, but also to the performativity of gardens. This is examined more fully in chapter 3, so I will just briefly say here that gardens gain meaning by reference to previous iterations of gardens. Meaning in gardens, real or literary, is continually deferred back in time through the apprehension of citation (the present garden cites past gardens; in this way it gains meaning and identity *as* a garden).

### **Great Houses and Green Spaces**

In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, a number of country estates were built or renovated by the new nobility and gentry created by the Tudor and Stuart dynasties. The dissolution of the monasteries in the late 1530s made a huge impact on land use and rural labor in England. According to Linda Levy Peck, “The Dissolution put 25 percent of the land in the hands of the laity by the end of the seventeenth century and opened up substantial areas of London for development” (273). Henry VIII granted and sold land to many members of the new power families, who did several things with the land. First, if desired and if necessary, they

would finish the destruction of any church buildings upon the property, often using the stone and other materials to construct their own houses. They would then build what became historicized as the first generation of “country houses,” in contrast to earlier castles or manor houses, which had been designed with to prioritize defense (McLean 90). Country house designs sometimes maintained structural elements from manor houses, and even from castles, but not for practical reasons. Rather, these elements allowed new owners to invoke and appropriate sign systems of ancient power and authority (Wayne).

Not only were newly powerful families suddenly responsible for land and tenants, but they also operated under a system of conspicuous consumption that at least partly translated into the improvement of estates through building projects, land enclosure, resource management, and garden design (Peck 269-71). Even in London, the powerful undertook building projects and renovations, sometimes expressing their wealth through rural signs. In 1621, Lionel Cranfield, Master of the Court of Wards and later Lord High Treasurer of England, made plans to add a park to his recently acquired Chelsea mansion (268). The ability to maintain undeveloped land, especially in London, purely for the purpose of pleasure was a sign of wealth and power. While green spaces had always been cultivated in the city, most before the seventeenth century adjoined private dwellings (McLean 63-66). However, this century saw the establishment of the first public gardens, such as the Moor on the north side of London, which was designed, drained and built beginning in 1606 (Schofield 314). Later in the century, St. James’s Park, and then Hyde Park, were opened to the public and became vibrant centers for recreation and social interaction.

The middle to late sixteenth century saw the first fashionable estate architects in England, commissioned on the basis of their reputations to design and build great country houses. Estates

began to function as a kind of fashionable couture, and to have a house and grounds designed by Henry Wotton or Robert Smythson, for example, was a mark of one's prestige and taste. The following century experienced the same branding of garden designers, and the eighteenth century of landscape architects. These particular professions arose because estates were both source and sign of wealth and power in English society through these centuries (Girouard 2-5). Also, by this time the country was stable and peaceful enough to make aesthetic, as opposed to defensive, investment in property worthwhile. Smythson and his son dominated the field in the latter part of the sixteenth century. He was succeeded in popularity by Henry Wotton, who was followed by John Evelyn in the middle part of the seventeenth century (Kelsall).

Evelyn is remembered more often as the gardening theorist who wrote *Sylva* (1660), but he also wielded influence in architectural circles at the time. His design work illustrates how political ideology could be expressed through architectural and garden design. He is classified by some architecture historians as a royalist designer, because his theories during the interregnum and in the early Restoration emphasized the royalist values of neoclassical balance and conservative design (Myers). The same values—balance, resource management—are also apparent in his garden designs. The influential names of the late part of the seventeenth century and the early part of the eighteenth in estate and house design were Pope and Walpole, and then in the first half of the eighteenth century, the landscape garden came into full flower under the auspices of the new landscape designers such as Bridgemen, Kent, and Brown. Stowe House, the estate most closely associated with that movement, was built in the 1680s, but the famous gardens were redesigned in the 1730s (Ross 18).

Hardwick and Wollaton Halls, both designed by Smythson, or Penshurst Place, which underwent a renovation in the latter part of the sixteenth century, share similarities that vanish

from the houses built or renovated in the late seventeenth century, such as Stowe, Uppark (1690s), or Blenheim Palace (1706). These include dark, heavily paneled interiors; intimate inside spaces; less separation between owners and servants; and smaller scale adornments on the exterior (such as small window and tracery along the roof lines). The Palladian style that became dominant during the seventeenth century emphasized symmetry, classical design features, larger public rooms, and greater individual privacy. As England and the rest of Europe moved into the era of the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century, this style became more established and refined (Girouard).

Gardens attached to such houses also reflected national and international fashions and changed over time, with elements appearing and disappearing, although some, such as water features, were only adapted and never disappeared, indicating the enduring popularity of these elements. Earlier gardens were smaller, more formal, and incorporated elements from late medieval styles as well as from Italian fashions (Hunt, *Garden and Grove*). Medieval elements included turf benches, gravel walkways, arbors, and the cultivation of flowers and fruit trees. The lawn or “flowery mead,” too, was an old element that retained some popularity in early modern English gardens (McLean 118). The Italian influence added the concept of relating the garden and the house; the incorporation of strong simple lines and geometric shapes in both hardscape and greenscape; and the addition of “ground patterns,” from which were derived Tudor knots, labyrinths, and, with French influence, the later parterres (Jennings 17-18). Native Tudor additions included a fascination with the rose, and the use of heraldic devices and colors in garden furnishings such as statuary (Hadfield 41). But overall, the early styles of the century were highly formalized, abstracted, and dominated by shape rather than color. Inigo Jones was

among the designers who were increasingly influenced by French garden fashions in the last years of the sixteenth and the first half of the seventeenth century.

The French style was eventually defined by Andre le Nôtre, designer of Versailles, who approached gardening as a visual artist rather than a horticultural enthusiast, and whose motto was, appropriately enough, “forcer la nature” (Johnson 400). French design was about attaining total control over the vagaries of nature. The creation of Versailles involved major earthworks, reconfiguring the terrain to the requirements of designer and owner (396-97). The style’s innovations included parterres, fantastical water creations, automata and statuary, greater use of flowering plants as design elements, and particularly the creation of vistas or prospects (Jennings 51-62). The size of pleasure gardens also greatly increased, and those who could afford it had acres of land devoted solely to fashionable beauty. The English appropriations of French style may have been somewhat more modest and created on smaller canvases, but they importantly followed the lead in expanding the horizons of the garden to incorporate more of the outside world. This movement eventually helped lead to the complete disappearance of a visible boundary between inside and outside the garden in the landscape gardening designs of the following century.

The final, and probably least influential, of the European styles to be adopted in England during the seventeenth century was the Dutch fashion. It gained prevalence in the last decades of the seventeenth century, with the reign of William and Mary. According to Jennings, the English adopted these new fashions with a great deal more mediation than some of the earlier styles. Gardeners combined elements that were shown to work with English topography, such as avenues, both varied and homogeneous flower beds, and container gardening, with the traditions that were already in place from the past century, in order to create an English version of

international garden style (69). However, nearly all this carefully accrued aesthetic was swept away within fifty years, as the landscape garden completely reshaped the horticultural scene. Such dramatic changes arose not from a linear movement of unquestionable progress but out of a matrix of factors that interacted with increasing complexity and led to changes in ideas about the nature of gardens and gardening, which in turn led to changes in created gardens themselves. The designs of pleasure gardens over the century were used to communicate power, control, and propriety. They became a means for representing the contentions of European culture.

The English country house, to which most of these pleasure gardens were attached, is today one of the signs of an idealized England, each house drawing thousands of anglophile visitors each year, who come like nostalgic pilgrims to a fantasy of a life that never was. Malcolm Kelsall summarizes the foundation of this fantasy: “The great country house, it is claimed, is a natural excrescence. It has not been built so much as grown by organic process from the English soil” (6). The great estate is imagined to recreate Eden in some ways, offering a conservative fantasy of stability grounded in place, beauty, and abundance. As Raymond Williams has illustrated, though, this fantasy does not include the laborers and their work required to maintain the country house way of life.

Mark Girouard’s study, *Life in the English Country House*, has influenced most scholars in the field to follow his lead, marking their own contributions in terms of gender issues or studies of particular houses or personalities. Alice T. Friedman, for example, has traced the entwined histories of Wollaton Hall and its owners, the Willoughby family. She examines how social mores shape spaces, and then how those spaces in turn exert an influence on individuals and communities, especially in terms of women’s social roles. David Burnett found subject matter for a whole book in the history of a single estate in *Longleat*, and Don Wayne’s involved

analysis of Penshurst is as much about the place as it is about Jonson's poem. Kari Boyd McBride takes a more oblique and less concrete approach to the material, examining the social "discourse" that created the sign systems of the country house, while William A. McClung interrogates the representation of the country house in early modern poetry. Each of these authors contributes to study of the discourse of the sign of the English country house, while concentrating on different levels of materiality. This discourse supported the imaginary of the status quo; the house and its society, and the texts that reinforced it, were visible signs of the systems of power in England. Consequently, they both enacted and reinforced those systems, and the signs were made more and more prominent as those who owned estates felt the need to perform their meaning.

### **Garden Designs and Uses**

One of the most common representations of the garden is of a space divided from a negative outside world, by a wall or some sort of recognizable boundary, and therefore defined in opposition to that negativity. Harrison, in *Forests*, opposes the city, sign of humanity's power, against the uncanny forest space, but the same relationship exists between gardens and forests as between gardens and cities. Gardens are always an in-between space, a borderland, idealistically created and tenuously maintained. The untamed forests of England may have been few and far between by the late sixteenth century, but their association with the suspension of civilization remained and contributed to the imaginative creation of the garden space as a natural area that expressed the power of civilization (Harrison, *Forests* 69). The popular designs of early modern gardens emphasized formality and artificiality, as if to proclaim the power of the human will over the natural world.

Few people would have the land or resources to devote entirely to the production of pleasure, marking these gardens as luxuries and signs of conspicuous consumption. From a

bird's-eye view, as many early and mid-century gardens are drawn, they seem to stretch on for miles (Hunt, *Genius*). Those who owned estates employed armies of people to maintain them, from head gardeners down to weed women. They were investments and power plays in the political arena of early modern England. The vast majority of small, private gardens would probably have been used incidentally for pleasure, but their primary purposes were utilitarian (McLean 66). In this case, the literary record does not reflect the real world: most gardens described in literature are pleasure gardens, possibly because of their aristocratic audience and imaginative context.

The medieval pleasure gardens of both literature and the real world share a number of recognizable features. Both generally are enclosed by a wall or fence, with a gate through which the authorized are allowed to proceed. Gates both include and exclude; walls simultaneously protect and confine, a social necessity in an unstable world. Thus the walls of the garden reflect the defensive walls of the castle or manor house, which served the needs of the culture. However, by the time period under consideration, a full enclosing wall was a vestigial motif. The early modern pleasure garden employed shaded walks and fragrant plants to crush underfoot as one walked. It almost always included a water feature, generally understood to symbolize the fountain in the Garden of Eden. Another edenic allusion comes in the paths of early modern formal gardens that divide a garden's space into four quarters: the mythic fountain was said to divide into four rivers upon leaving Eden (Gen. 2:10). The mythic allusion is reinforced by the fact that this is also a cruciform design, replicating the Cross, and giving any fountain in the middle an extra symbolic association with the Fountain of Life. Thus, a popular design and the furnishings (fountain or focal point, gravel paths) that enact it in the medieval and early modern Tudor knot gardens derive from a strong sense of spatial mythos.

The pleasure garden appeals to all the senses, so it also invariably has trees, usually fruit trees, which provide shade and nesting places for songbirds, themselves a vital part of the garden image, as they are traditional symbols of self-representation for poets. Often, both literary and real gardener will endeavor to include fragrant plants, like lavender, but may not identify them by name. Fruits may be incorporated, and often were, but not for use on the table, rather for the visual and immediate gustatory pleasure they could offer the garden's visitor as he or she experienced the place. A real-world garden may not have all the trappings that an imaginary space can include, if only because of climatological or economic limitations. But it will always be designed to maximize sensual pleasure, and the means of doing so is to be found in cultural scripts of authorized pleasure.

During the seventeenth century, a new and specialized garden fully emerged for the first time in England: the botanical or specimen garden. The first of these had appeared in Italy in the previous century, but the English botanical garden was not established until 1621, by Henry Danvers at Oxford (Campbell-Culver 15). It is no accident that this is also the time period in which the figure of the professional gardener also appears, nor that it is at this time that the growth of exploration made available exotic new plant and animal specimens from the New Worlds. Brought back to Europe, these found their way into the gardens of the wealthy and fashionable, who both studied and displayed them, combining theater and burgeoning science. Specimen hunters began to accompany expeditions and to illustrate, classify, name, and collect new plants and variations of known plants. John Tradescant the Younger was one of these intrepid explorers. He and his father did a great deal to professionalize the world of gardening during this century. They became some of the first career gardeners, working for royalty and the nobility to design, stock and maintain their gardens (Campbell-Culver 132).

At the same time, it was becoming a symbol of one's social status to have exotic plants and garden layouts, as well as professional gardeners to design and take care of them. As trading to the East opened up, the fashions of Chinese and Japanese gardens enjoyed their own adherents. This rise in gardening as both a profession and a status symbol contributed to the sociological trend of pushing the lady out of the real world garden. By the time the landscape garden came about, the gardening profession had grown sophisticated enough to attract professional men, and the design and creation of gardens had become considered an occupation, even a career, requiring skilled labor and extensive study; thus it was no longer an appropriate sphere for women. Nonetheless, the imaginative association between women and gardens would continue just as strongly, if in constantly changing forms (Fabricant 109). Women also continued to constitute a physical presence in less auspicious garden spaces, such as utilitarian or smaller pleasure gardens.

### **Non-Literary Garden Writing**

Gardens were also a popular subject for publication in England during these years. Thomas Hill began publishing popular gardening manuals and miscellanies in the mid-sixteenth century, such as *The Gardener's Labyrinth* (1577), which stayed in print until 1660. Gervase Markham's *The English Husbandman* (1613) was another popular non-literary text that encoded early modern garden values and aesthetics for the general reader. The amount of non-literary writing on gardening themes grew with the passage of time and the expansion of printing, and during the seventeenth century, particularly in the first half, the number of gardening manuals increased significantly. This publishing history has provided the material of some thorough studies, such as Rebecca Bushnell's *Green Desire*, or the collection of primary sources in *The English Garden: Literary Sources and Documents*, edited by Michael Charlesworth. Both collect, and the first also comments upon, the rhetoric of real-world gardening during the century. The latter applies

sign theory to the “reading” of gardens, implying that gardens are texts to be read, that they are symbolic as much as they are material, and that they perform their meaning by citing their predecessors, being designed to signify something beyond themselves (especially in early pleasure gardens). For example, Thomas Hill published *The Arte of Gardening* in 1608, a collection of classical writings on gardening, a contemporary guide to bee-keeping, information to interpret the weather, and a discussion of the medicinal properties of common garden herbs. It draws on the authorities of the past to propose methods of constructing gardens in his present, regardless of distinctions between the environments. A garden in imperial Rome is likely to require a rather different approach than one in Stuart London, yet Hill treats the physical spaces as texts that can translate across cultures like any other text.

Gardening became a national pastime, and the taste makers, the socially conservative, and the financially interested all found room to speak and receptive audiences (Bushnell 50). Most of these works were addressed to the individual home gardener. Gardening and writing, literary or not, have long been associated, and the popularization of printing only enhanced that relationship. Its effects on gardening were to reinforce the rhetoric of a virtuous domestic activity and to introduce and then reinforce popular designs. According to Bushnell, early gardening manuals promoted “fantasies of better living through gardening” (9), fantasies that were at least partially based not only in a general interest in gardening, nor in burgeoning fashions of pleasure gardening, but also in long-standing literary fantasies and myths of the “good life” that could be sought in gardens, whether one created them or just enjoyed them.

### **Conclusion**

England is justly famous for its gardens, which have, over the last millennium, changed the face of the island dramatically, introducing extravagant variety where once was narrow vegetable monotony (Hadfield 16). The innovation of English gardeners captured European admiration

with the development of the landscape garden, one of the most popular and influential artistic and cultural exports from England, with aesthetic effects that are still popular today (Wilson 94). The dramatic departure of this style from its predecessors, together with its lasting influence, have led scholars interested in gardening history and garden aesthetics to concentrate primarily upon this time period. However, that artistic style emerged from and in reaction to a very long and complex tradition. This tradition was part of a dynamic interaction between physical and imaginative cultural constructions of gardens and the values and ideologies they promote. This chapter has surveyed the history and construction of early modern English gardens, including discussion of their elements (such as walls, fruit trees, and water features), their uses, and the ways they changed between the late sixteenth century and the end of the seventeenth, with an eye toward illuminating the complexity of that matrix of associations as enacted in the physical world.

All gardens, whether in the real world or in art and literature, function as speech acts; their creators communicate through them, and thereby either reinforce or subvert the various societal norms and mandates that fall within the purview of the language of gardening. The following pages will first dig more deeply into different critical and philosophical explanations for why this might be and then address gardens that are more literally acts of communication, or speech acts: “literary gardens,” as Laura Howes calls them. These include gardens that may have existed in the real world but that poets drew into their own imaginative realms and transformed into new creations, made up only of words, images, and symbols. We will look at these gardens through the lenses of speech act and gender theories, assessed in detail in chapter 3. The poet does not have to deal with the limitations of reality; the imagination can create and communicate just as it pleases, and it can do so more directly oftentimes than can the creator of a real-world garden.

The remainder of this study demonstrates that, just as real-world gardens were embedded in social systems of meaning, literary gardens also participated in discourses that stretched beyond themselves. The garden topos is not a closed symbol that refers only to itself but is rather a dynamic and fecund space that offers all artists ways of interacting with the social world. It offers to female poets, especially, a rare chance to establish themselves as artists and gives them a stable space of power from within which to do that. The garden that may have been originally a confinement becomes a fluid space with potential for both reinterpretation and appropriation.

## CHAPTER 3 PERFORMING FEMALE IDENTITY IN CREATED SPACE

### Introduction

Chapter 2 established the historical moment of the topos under consideration in this study, concentrating on the world of physical gardening, particularly in the realm of the pleasure garden. Chapter 4 establishes the chronological literary background of garden poetry of the seventeenth century, showing the development of the trope up to the start of the study proper. Both establish contexts of creation, and it is the duty of this chapter to justify the study's methodology and provide a reasonable link between the physicality of Chapter 1 and the imaginativeness of the last chapters, as well as establishing why this trope should be of particular relevance for the interpretation of women's texts of the time. This will require a broad-based analysis. The first prong will address the cultural construction of space, comprehended more abstractly than in Chapter 2, with a concentration on early modern constructions of gendered psychological space. The second part considers the purposes and means of different literary representations of materiality. Both of these feed into the final concentration of this chapter: the strategy of performativity to gain agency in a culturally constructed world. This should reveal why poetry utilizing the garden trope during the seventeenth century is particularly well-suited to illuminating the artistic strategies of women writing at the time.

Literature from the pens of early modern female writers has only been explored in any depth starting in the last thirty years, after having virtually disappeared for nearly two centuries.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, much of the necessary work that has been done is that of archival recovery. Elaine Beilin's seminal book on early modern women writers, *Redeeming Eve*, was only published in

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<sup>1</sup> Because of this, Virginia Woolf and, more recently, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, could claim a lack of significant writing coming from the pens of Englishwomen before the eighteenth century. The feminist reclamation of the canon is a perennial responsibility of feminist scholars; so we will mention it in passing, referring the reader to the work of Beilin, Ezell, Lewalski, Greer, and others.

1987. Janet Todd's critical collection of Aphra Behn's work appeared in 1992. Josephine Roberts's authoritative edition of the first part of Lady Mary Wroth's *Urania* was published in 1995, and at present, there is still no significant critical collection of Margaret Cavendish's poetry. The recovery work must continue, but enough headway has been made to allow the next steps, of deeper and broader analysis, to be taken in the pursuit of understanding early modern women's writing. It is now possible to integrate these works more completely into their cultural and social moments, and no longer necessary to represent them in a defensive posture.

Anthologies of women's writing abound, as do relevant essays, but sustained monographs are still sparse. The anthologies of women's writing, using diverse criteria, have made a broad range of texts available to students and scholars, which is a testament both to the number of texts still extant as well as the skill and dedication with which scholars have pursued them. Often these collections are oriented toward recovery for its own sake and in order to help equalize across the sexes the numbers of texts available. Germaine Greer's *Kissing the Rod* prosecutes this goal with some asperity both in editorial apparatus and selection criteria. Most of the poems included interact easily with early feminist programs, which emphasized female relationships and evidence of interests outside the domestic sphere, in order to re-narrate women's history. Cooperative creation, collaborative publication, and coterie development and consumption have all been thoroughly analyzed in early modern literary criticism, and these reconceptions of literary production have revolutionized scholarly understanding and broadened conceptions of publishing and the construction of art at the time. This historical sensitivity was not present in the earliest feminist attempts to create a "women's literary history" (Ezell), but later anthologies of women's writings have tried to take this weakness into account. For example, *Lay by your needles, Ladies, take the Pen* deliberately chooses a "'messy mixture' of both women's writing

itself and the contradictory attitudes to it that co-existed” (3) in order not to foreclose voices that do not fit neatly into a feminist criticism based on anachronistic assumptions. In doing so, its editors make clearer the heterogeneity of early modern women’s voices, illustrating that the “female literary canon” is as diverse and interesting as the male. Other critics have made this step and then moved beyond it, emphasizing the necessity of understanding women’s writing in dialogue with men’s writing and with culture more broadly. This seems to be where we are now, accepting that there are broad gender differences, perhaps even real differences that derive from the distinction between masculine and feminine experiences per se. It is time now both to find those differences and to discover why they matter.

Gilbert and Gubar’s *The Madwoman in the Attic*, is one of the best-known and most influential examples of the distortions inherent in attempting to construct a trans-historical tradition from a culturally bound situation. Working with the Romantic construction of the artist as solitary genius, they claim that “female bonding is extraordinarily difficult in patriarchy: women almost inevitably turn against women” (38). This is, however, not reflected in either the lives or the writings of many early modern women. Barbara Lewalski and Louise Schleiner, among others, have produced excellent studies indicating the opposite, and the poems examined here feature supportive gynocentric community as one of their major motifs.<sup>2</sup> This historical blindness ignores literary conventions that support women or accept them as worthy members of society, such as, for example, in the case of “feminine” virtues attempted by men, as the later discussions of Herbert and Vaughan illustrate.

One thing Gilbert and Gubar do highlight, which is useful for this study, is the notion of framing or imprisoning the female figure within texts: “Since both patriarchy and its texts

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<sup>2</sup> Lewalski, *Writing Women in Jacobean England*; Schleiner, *Tudor and Stuart Women Writers*.

subordinate and imprison women, before women can even attempt that pen which is so rigorously kept from them they must escape just those male texts which, defining them as ‘Cyphers,’ deny them the autonomy to formulate alternatives to the authority that has imprisoned them and kept them from attempting the pen” (13). This assertion, while superficially compelling, is complicated by the garden image for two reasons. First, the garden provides a highly conventional space the structures of which *authorize* women to create, speak, or “attempt the pen.” This authority is based upon both religious convention and eroticized literary tradition. The second reason, which is a consequence of the first, is that the garden also presents a contained but uncanny and resistant space in which expected hierarchies are suspended. The “frame,” which in the garden imaginary translates into the enclosing wall or boundary, functions as a container for unconventionality. In this way, the dividing line accomplishes the opposite of the purpose described in Chapter 2: instead of protecting an orderly inside from a chaotic outside, it keeps the chaos contained for the protection of an orderly culture outside. Lynda Nead has shown how this mechanism plays out in the world of painting, in which literal frames contain resistant visual texts inside themselves.

Women may be culturally imprisoned in these spaces, but within them there is potential for claiming subversive agency, and as the gate in the garden wall indicates, there is always congress between the inside and the outside, so imprisonment is never as final as it may seem. These framing devices, abstract as they appear, can have very physical consequences. Leo Bersani writes that “language doesn’t merely describe identity but actually produces moral and perhaps even physical identity” (194). Texts establish methods by which to create the self. To a certain extent, one is always limited to how one can conceive of oneself, or how one can imagine oneself, by what material is available in culturally ordained texts. In a manner similar to that

discussed above for the comprehension of “nature,” the comprehension of one’s own “self,” if that is possible, is only possible through language. Even personal experience is interpreted through the lens of what one can comprehend or imagine, usually established by the cultural texts one incorporates into one’s understanding of the world. The spatial metaphors of imprisonment rhetoric indicate that topography can play a fundamental part in this imaginative construction of social reality and power.

Thus it is no accident that the male characters of early modern poetry always come from the outside world into the garden. This interaction can be figured in two ways. Outside the garden walls may be an unruly world, where unexpected adventures happen, while inside is a state of repose and order. In this configuration, the crossing of the boundary is a retreat from the wild outside into the cultured and highly pleasurable inside. The other method of interpretation structures the entry of the hero as a colonization of the resistant space, upon which a larger world of patriarchal values imposes its perspective. Thus the garden space is both receptive and resistant to the stranger from outside, and the poet whose culture equates the garden space with female “nature” must treat both sides of the topos. For the female poet in particular, this construction offers strength: the trope of receptivity performs a “proper” feminine persona, while the trope of resistance opens up the possibility to be creative and even subversive. Thus the literary garden confines but also frees the woman who is able to use it to her advantage: the topos is not nearly as simple and monolithic as it might first appear. The garden space traditionally hosts activities that are transgressive, usually in the realm of sexuality, but also in speech and creativity. The analysis of poems that follows shows that even in the most canonical of works, this transgressive nature allows for the conception and subsequent appropriation and wielding of female power in all three areas. The five women poets examined at the end of this study take

advantage of that power to constitute themselves as creators within their culture. They appropriate a situation they have not chosen to find and exert power upon their lives and upon the world. And to varying degrees they succeed.

Both anxieties and fantasies are played out in garden imagery. If the garden space is symbolic of female sexuality and pleasure-giving feminine properties more broadly,<sup>3</sup> then the necessity for control over that sexuality is indicated by the garden's border and monitored entrance. The degree to which the particular woman or instance of sexuality is understood to be available—the degree to which she is “chaste”—is symbolized consistently by the degree to which the boundary and gate(s) perform an excluding function. If a garden's borders are easily crossed, if there are many gates, or if the gates are hardly guarded, the sexuality within is understood to be unchaste because the *space* is promiscuous. Thus, it takes little effort to understand how sexuality, especially for a woman, can be so bound up with language. One must be open, both giving and receiving, for creative production to take place. Women's public writing was metaphorized as sexual promiscuity at least throughout the seventeenth century, a fact often remarked when, for example, explaining representations of the figure of Aphra Behn, who was a prolific and prominent writer in her day and also maligned as a prostitute. This is partly due to her participation in the artistic culture of the Restoration libertines, but a good part of it also seems to have had to do with the mere fact of her writing. Katherine Philips, by contrast, was represented as a chaste woman. While Philips also wrote extensively, she did not attempt to pursue it as a profession, publicly adopting instead the persona of a gifted amateur.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, the fact of commercialization modifies this equation of sexuality and language.

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<sup>3</sup> The history of this metaphoric association is discussed at much greater length in chapter 4 of this study.

<sup>4</sup> For the complexities of this persona, see chapter 7 of this study.

Philips keeps her “borders” tightly controlled and allows only “good friends” into her Society of Friendship’s garden. Behn, on the other hand, offers the pleasures of her mind, her speech, her creative capacity to all who will pay.

### **Space and Materiality**

Space plays an important part in the construction of identity, particularly performative identity. Thinking of things in terms of spatial metaphors enables an approach from more than just a single, logical direction. Such metaphors help us conceptualize situations in terms of “imprisonment,” structural relationships, and social relationships all at the same time. Recent decades have seen much work done on spatial issues in literature as well as more broadly, for example in the social sciences. Scholars who study the materiality of texts are in many ways considering questions of spatiality: what is included in the favored space of the page, how is space used, what is considered to be a “real” part of the text, how does white space function as a framing mechanism? They consider the materiality of the textual *space*—paper, ink, typescript, etc.—as well as the content of what is written upon it. Other scholars, particularly those in anthropology, have begun to consider how people and landscape influence one another to create unique environments. Malcolm Kelsall, Lena Cowen Orlin, and others have begun to look searchingly at particular landscapes and their materiality, such as, for example, the city of London. They consider such factors as space designation and the availability of necessary elements, and they analyze how these affect the cultures that come into being there. This builds upon the work of more abstract theorists, such as Walter Benjamin, who anatomized Paris in *The Arcades Project*, examining many of its locales in order to comment upon its overall character, or Peter Ackroyd, who has done something similar in his *London: The Biography*. Benjamin and Ackroyd both approach these cities with a sense of their unfathomable complexity and

extraordinary power upon the people who live there, who create the psychogeography of the place.

Lena Orlin has collected a number of essays dealing with the materiality of London, in *Material London ca. 1600*. These works consider everything from Ben Jonson's representation of "foreigners" in *Westward Ho* to sewage access, upper-class citizens' gardens, and boundary disputes. The effect is a better understanding of what should be obvious but which is often overlooked: people are both affected by and affect their environments, and therefore the materiality as well as the relationship is important. Generally, this tenet of ecocriticism is considered only in light of recent culture and art, but it was true in the seventeenth century as well. Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* set the foundation for many of the assumptions that current spatial theory and the related field of ecocriticism work upon. He demonstrated that intimate, domestic, everyday space has much to say about the construction of humanity and individuality.

James Turner's *The Politics of Landscape* moves that concern with space into a field broader than the domestic, intimate individuality with which Bachelard was concerned. Turner examines literature and art history, using spatial relationship as the beginning of a consideration of the radicalization of English society in the mid-seventeenth century, offering historians and literary scholars a new means of explaining and interpreting some of the landmark events and artworks of that century, and their relation to one another. Richard Burt and John Michael Archer have collected a group of essays into *Enclosure Acts* (1994), which combines spatial considerations with economic and gender concerns of ownership and control in early modern society. Space thus appears as a scholarly interest that plays well with others, so to speak,

primarily because it offers a means of recasting, or reconfiguring, structures and relationships of all types.

The study of literature has recently begun to discover how sensitivity to space can enrich our studies as it has the disciplines of anthropology, history, and art history, among others. In addition, the long-term state of affairs in literary criticism has been to react against older, apparently sterile, approaches to formalist image studies. Admittedly, to a certain extent, in literature, spatial consideration can appear rather like formalist methodology. Yet this appearance is misleading, and the reaction against the visual, the spatial, the experiential, is a vestigial fallacy inherited from earlier attitudes that dismiss the importance of the material environment. These other disciplines have shown that it is impossible to be unaffected by one's environment, and these same short-sighted attitudes toward the "natural world" have contributed to the current culture of ecological "crisis" discussed earlier. Ecocriticism, in particular, aims to correct these fallacies.

The Lacanian psychoanalytic theory of the Other that one opposes to one's Self is at a basic level dependent upon a conception of space because the recognition of the existence of an Other requires the recognition of reality beyond or outside of the Self ("On a Question Prior to Any Possible Treatment of Psychosis"). The Other must exist in some place that is not part of the Self, a space that is neither controlled by the Self nor collapsible into the Self. The Other must be understood as entirely separate from and alien to the Self in order for the Self to recognize its existence. Built into this theory is the recognition of psychic incommensurability between the self and some Other, the reactions consequent upon that recognition (the desire, for example, to bring the Other under control, and the simultaneous anxiety-producing recognition that any control will be illusory), and the recognition that space exists between the two that cannot be

collapsed. This relationship, Lacan hypothesizes, drives behavior in life, as the Self constantly seeks ways to fill the lack inside itself that the recognition of the Other has brought into focus. The male poet posits the female figure inside the garden, a person-space that is Other to himself, and he fantasizes that his control over the place and her presence can supply his own lack and make him self-sufficient. However, the poet must remain aware that this is a fantasy because his lack can never be filled. The performative power of speech is what makes it possible to assume a Self-identity by choice, rather than by default. The female poet, placed originally in the position of the Other, must deny that position, co-opt the creative speech, and make herself and her world the speaking and *unfulfilled* Self, denying the object position of *unfulfilling* Other. This is one mechanism by which a poet can gain her voice and find space in which to create herself as a desiring Self. Neither the garden nor the woman inside it can ever be entirely fulfilling, because no individual other (little o) can accomplish the job of a cosmic (nonexistent) Other (big O). Even Eden (the perfect place) and Eve (the perfect mate) can never satisfy the poet absolutely, as we will see in the following chapters.

Space and relationship also interact in the concept of an idealized community focused around a particular interest or commonality, such as gender or poetic vocation, which is an ancient trope. Yet the space in which these communities are imagined to exist is often not closely considered. Attention is more often paid to the members who make up the community and their effect upon each other's work. Paul Alpers provides an example of this in his study of pastoral poetry, in which he argues that what holds the mode of pastoral together most strongly is the trope of poets in dialogue with one another. He argues that their environment is virtually immaterial, an argument that directly contradicts some of the earlier theorists of pastoral, such as Rosenmeyer. Within the area of early modern gender studies, Louise Schleiner similarly

explored this concept in her study of women's "reading formations," concentrating on the structure of the relationship and without interest in its potentially structuring environment. The theorization of the spaces in which these communities are built has not been explored deeply. That is one of the matters this study attempts to address: how thoroughly imagined space both models and makes possible supportive social relationships both through and within literature. It may of course be material space, when the community is physical, or it may be symbolic and tropological, even just imaginary, when the community is not. For example, one can consider the pseudo-pastoral poetic coteries of the late seventeenth century in England and France, participated in by Katherine Philips and Aphra Behn, among others (Barash). These groups may or may not have begun in a position of physical proximity, but their relationships continued in no less real a way when no physical contact was possible, through exchanges of private and public letters and poems.

### **Performativity**

In the 1950s, J. L. Austin gave the name "performative" to a very specific linguistic category, the "speech act" that accomplished something in the physical world. This concept has been found valuable by a wide range of literary theorists since its description, particularly by those interested in the political constructions and ramifications of language. Theorists who have contributed to the expansion of the concept into the broader category of "performativity" include Paul de Man, J. Hillis Miller, and Jacques Derrida, the latter of whom is discussed briefly below. However, Judith Butler's iteration of this concept has been particularly useful in the realm of gender studies. Because her version posits the centrality of the culturally constructed, eroticized body, it has been ideal for application to the garden image. As we will see, "speech act theory" is well suited to elucidate the function of the garden topos in early modern women's poetry and the culture more generally.

Although the concepts of “the performative” and “performativity” are closely related, the latter arising out of the former, they cannot be simply equated. However, neither of these categories is clearly demarcated, and each tends to shade into the other or into broader areas of interest. Butler’s concept, for example, borrows not only from speech act theory, but also from traditional philosophy, Lacanian psychology and feminism in order to critique the identity politics of queer theory and gender theory more generally. These pages discuss these two terms, their similarities and differences, and more importantly, how gardens, both physical and literary, function as performatives.

Austin’s work is in the fairly stratified realm of philosophers and grammarians. In *How to Do Things with Words*, the analysis that introduced the concept of speech acts and the performative grammatical case, he is trying to pin down language usage as specifically as possible. The beginning of Austin’s anatomy of the “performative” is straightforward and accessible. A performative is a speech act that accomplishes a real result *through* its utterance. It is not “constative,” the label Austin uses for statements, nor is it descriptive or predictive or anything other than immediately active. As Austin puts it, “[T]o issue a constative utterance (i.e. to utter it with historical reference) is to make a statement. To issue a performative utterance is, for example, to make a bet” (6n2). Austin’s examples include the statement “I do” within the frame of a wedding, and the statement “I bet you (X) dollars” within the frame of a betting agreement. The element that each of these shares with the other and with all performatives is that the actual utterance of them accomplishes the act to which they refer.

The performative, when defined in this manner, seems to encompass only a very small category of utterances, and the remaining lectures in Austin’s series are spent enumerating qualifications, necessary contexts, and general limitations to the concept. The situation in which

the performative is uttered, for example, must be designed to support its action (that is, it must be a real marriage ceremony, with willing and legal participants; or it must be a real agreement to bet, with real money, etc.). Otherwise, the utterance will not be an effective performative. Similarly, the person or people who utter the performative must *mean* what they say; they must have the intent to accomplish a performative, and also have the intent to honor the words they utter. Such strict demarcations contribute to an illusion that language can be pinned down, rather than being the slippery construct it is. Austin declares that the action a performative accomplishes must also be able to happen through other means (8), and it must be supported by the society at large (14-19). The performative, therefore, may be impotent (Austin uses the term “unhappy”), despite fulfilling the above requirements, unless it is accepted within the discourse of a society.

The concept of “performativity” expands on the term “performative” in order to express theories having to do with the material consequences of language. Usually it refers to discursive acts that accomplish a real result within a particular society or community. The concept has been embraced and expanded within the field of cultural theory and gender studies in particular, because of that area’s concern with linguistic methods of constructing and enforcing gender. Austin’s own attempts to define the performative speech act work uncomfortably within the assumption that such a thing is possible. His divisions, limitations, and parameters are, as Julian Wolfreys says, “rigidly maintained” (183), because he desires to establish and anatomize the linguistic body of the performative, and all its parts, thoroughly and permanently. However, Derrida, Butler, and others who adapt the concept, are unwilling to do so, because of a theoretical assumption that language is not only powerful but deceptive, an assumption arising from political beliefs that oppression is made possible through language.

Derrida, in *The Margins of Philosophy*, introduces to performativity the concept of “citation,” or “iteration,” and “iterability.” This takes into account the social needs of the performative, which requires an established discursive context in which the performative speech act may become merely a reiteration of a formula. Derrida asks whether it is possible to have performatives that are not merely formulaic repetitions. If the wording is changed, does the speech act still maintain its discursive power? If so, then where exactly does its power lie? He argues that each performative act is a reiteration, or what he calls a “citation.” And, while Austin is stringent in excluding instances of the utterance that do not conform to the accepted conventional situation, Derrida argues that these “citations” of a convention are really deliberate modifications of the original citations that Austin does accept. Thus, the clear lines of Austin’s anatomy dissolve into provocative inconclusiveness. They break down further when Derrida points out that the citations will not always (if ever) be imbued with the single-minded intention that Austin implies is necessary for the accomplishment of a performative, that speech acts are always inherently unstable because they can be cited and manipulated for various purposes, and thus never can be stabilized in the ways Austin attempts, by determining essential and unchangeable rules.

Judith Butler transplants the concept of performativity from academic postmodern linguistic theory into highly politicized gender theory. Working from within a literary and gender theory background, she uses the concept of performativity to consider how identity and social truth can be formed or changed through the use of discourse and how the power of words is a real power, with real consequences for individuals. The roots of Butler’s study in *Bodies that Matter* lie in the poststructuralist claim that bodies are discursive, questioning how this can be true when they are obviously material. Yet Butler argues that materiality itself is discursive, and

by implication discourse is material. If matter is not prelinguistic but is instead created (at least as far as humanity is concerned) through discourse and power relations, then neither sex nor gender is a fixed material category, and both are instead variable. In fact, as discussed above, “nature” in any shape cannot be considered a fixed material category in relation to humanity. Butler utilizes Foucault, Aristotle, Freud and Lacan to authorize her theory, which underlies the argument of this study that garden space functions in the same manner as her site of choice, the discursive female body.

A category, such as “women,” may be understood as a domain of intelligibility, created through exclusion. “Women” is supposed to include within itself everything that label can legitimately name, and it is supposed to exclude everything else. The maintenance of the category requires the maintenance of its boundaries. “Women” will cease to exist if the group as a discrete unit ceases to exist and one can no longer tell what is inside and what is outside of it. Generally, those in power have an interest in maintaining the categories they have created, while those who are denied existence, who are outside of all created categories, have a political interest in questioning or destroying the boundaries that exclude them and reframing material into groups to which they can belong. Butler’s idea is structured along spatial lines adapted from Lacan’s work. Within discourse, there is an inside and an outside to every linguistic or intelligible category. The inside is the fully symbolizable, fully articulated ideal that is granted existence. Outside this ideal, along the border, lies the abject other, symbolizable and articulated to some extent but not close enough to the ideal to be allowed within the category of existence as long as the matrix of power can maintain that category and its borders. While the discursive abject obviously has an interest in disrupting that power matrix, Butler argues that those included in the

idealized group share that interest, because individual agency is achieved by resistance to or appropriation of prescriptive, containing conventions.

Performativity is thus the means of expressing this broader power of language. In the current study, “performativity” is understood to indicate the activity of wielding socially constructive power through language. The construction under examination is that of culturally determined gender and power ideologies or identities. The garden topos provides the performative language by which these material effects are created, both physically and poetically. Thus, Spenser, for example, performs the ideology of the dangerously sexualized female through the creation of Acrasia and her Bower of Blisse. Aemilia Lanyer, however, performs the ideology of the virtuous female community through her creation of the garden at Cooke-ham. Both are proposing a means of constructing and comprehending female identity, the first by invoking convention, the second by appropriating the conventions. In this case, female poets are constituted, as Butler envisions it, within the linguistic category of “women,” a category figured symbolically in the conventions of the garden topos. Although “women” are culturally placed “inside” both category and garden, these potentially limiting constructs nonetheless enable performative maneuvers to reconfigure both category and topos, leading to an increase in both individual and gender agency. The means of doing all this is, not surprisingly, creative language.

The element of material productivity inherent in both the performative and its theoretical offspring is entirely applicable to the garden topos. For Austin, the utterance of the words performs the action they embody, within a set of conventions accepted by the culture in which the utterance takes place. This leads to what is probably the most obvious difficulty of correlating Austin’s performative with the garden: the fact that a garden is not a verbal speech

act. Austin goes to great pains to define the performative as a speech act, and a garden is proverbially silent. However, to the extent that language is a means to communicate with others, the definition can be expanded significantly and without much distortion. A garden can communicate ideas of order, space, beauty, power, and much more. Such communication is a real artifact that is passed from the gardener to the visitor, and the creation of the garden is the enactment of ideas of order, space, and design.

Gardening, like speaking or writing, is the enactment of culturally-defined conventions, a symbolic language, and therefore its creation (whether in the real world or in imagination) is a form of speech act, a communication of particular ideas through the language of material arrangement and design. Agency, or the power to act, lies in Austin's speaker and in the gardener, both specific individuals who precede the linguistic actions they perform. Through the creation of the garden, the gardener both enacts and communicates his or her ideas about what a garden should be and should be about. Public gardens in particular partake of the conventional nature of Austin's theory of the performative, in that they are undeniably created for an audience other than the gardener herself and therefore invoke something of the community-oriented aspect of performatives that Austin requires when he says that a performative must have a specific convention within which it operates. Austin also requires that the performative be materialized, specific, "real" in the most banal sense. The performative must be uttered in order to exist; gardens are the physical manifestation, the materialization, of certain ideas "uttered" by the gardener.

In the prosecution of garden "performativity," we also enter in complication: Butler does not accept an acting subject who exists prior to the action he accomplishes (*Excitable 5*). Therefore, there is no gardener prior to his or her creation of a garden: the act creates the actor.

However, the similarity remains that that which is enacted must take place within a framework that can be comprehended, and in order for something to be understood, it must be symbolizable. The symbolizing framework is that of discourse, which gives meaning to everything through defining it. Definition works through exclusion, which requires the establishment and maintenance of boundaries. The imposition of the gardener's will upon her garden is an attempt to fix or circumscribe both the idea of the garden and this individual utterance or, to use Butler's term, citation, of that idea. At the beginning of *Bodies that Matter*, Butler gives a distilled definition of performativity: "the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names" (2). Western gardens accomplish this by reiterating the myth of the original, and forever lost garden, whether in Eden or Arcadia. Mankind tries to recover what is lost in a number of different ways. One way is to continually cite or try to recreate the original situation, even though success is impossible. Nothing can recover the original, and each citation is merely a repetition that must be slightly different, creating a chain of citationality, a constant (but constantly different) reiteration. Eventually, according to Butler, meaning builds up in the accrued utterances. We can only approach ideas through the sedimented meaning within discourse. That is, we're so far down the chain that meaning for us must lie in discourse, in the sediment, in the history of failed attempts. Therefore, gardens also cite their more recent predecessors. In a similar way, poets in the pastoral mode may cite Apollo or Daphnis, but they also cite each other, and each specific instance continues a chain of poetic output.

The desire is always for the lost paradise—literally in this instance<sup>5</sup>--and each reiteration is another already failed attempt to permanently fix, or finally accomplish, The Garden. The gap between the impossible ideal and the constant failure is the space wherein performativity can

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<sup>5</sup> Another version of the Lacanian Other

work. Just as a garden must be constantly maintained and the definition of discursive categories must continually be asserted, so the idea of the garden must be continually renamed because it always fails completely to encompass every possibility of a garden. There is always an outside that cannot be contained by language because it cannot be symbolized. This unknowable outside constantly threatens the integrity of the boundary between itself and the inside, so that the order that has been imposed upon the latter must continually be restored. For Butler, political power lies in the flexibility of any term. With the change inherent in each new utterance, in each new garden, the idea of “garden” remains malleable and therefore useful for any who will take it up in his or her own way. Each new utterance, accepted as an “imperfect” repetition, a unique reinterpretation, offers space for appropriation and resistance to convention. As we will see in chapters 6 and 7, that is exactly what the five women poets do: they find agency through the performativity of the garden topos.

Such shared language renders the garden intelligible and makes it a possible site of communication, reiteration, naming, and attempts to recover what is lost. This is where Austin and Butler can intersect with regard to the garden topos. Each garden, whether present in the “real world” or in the purely linguistic realm of poetry, is a specific performative site. It is an intelligible enactment of its creator’s ideas and intentions about gardens, which have arisen, as has the creator himself or herself, within the inescapable realm of discourse. The psychoanalytic loss of the phallus is traditionally expressed as, among other metaphors, the loss of the site of innocence. This site, in myth, is consistently represented as a garden, a place of harmony between man and nature. Each individual garden since (in the cultures that share such a myth), and each figuration of the garden, in materiality or imagination, is to a certain extent an attempt to recover that loss. The impossibility of that desire is inherent in the nature of discourse.

Ultimately the desire is to recapture the “green thought,” lost with the acquisition of the ability to phrase it as such.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has covered theoretical ground that could have gone on indefinitely, but I have tried to create and reinforce my own necessary boundaries. The goal of the study as a whole, however, is to propose a method of reading that partakes of a wide strategy and is applicable to a broad range of texts. The remainder of the argument makes this application, which in turn elucidates how attending to the garden topos highlights the performative maneuvers that early modern female poets make in order to increase their own and their successors’ agency. The purpose of attending to the garden lies in the value of spatial relationship for the understanding of cultural constructs, of social interaction as well as seemingly static concepts such as “women,” “beauty,” and “nature.” The rewards of doing so come in the finding of power in the pens of women poets in an age when previous critics have concentrated on their “silence.” When feminist literary history agreed that early modern women were not universally “chaste, silent, and obedient,” the question arose of how they were able to construct themselves as artists and speakers (Beilin). The reading procedure of this study, grounded in a number of related critical strategies (feminism, ecocriticism, cultural materialism, and formalism), offers an answer to that question. It is only by attending to the garden, both physical and imaginative, that we can see better the environments from which these poets drew creative power.

CHAPTER 4  
LITERARY GARDENS AND SYMBOLIC LANDSCAPES

**Introduction**

The use of garden imagery by seventeenth-century poets did not arise out of a vacuum but out of an ancient and complex tradition. This chapter will touch on some of the literary texts that belong to that tradition. Although this is not an attempt to trace lines of influence, I will highlight artistic and conventional choices in these works that seem to prefigure trends in later ones. While the path followed is chronological, I do not attempt seamless and unbroken linearity. Rather, this study falls most clearly into two sections: ancient roots of the traditions, and late medieval and early Renaissance forebears. Those who wish to fill in the large gap between the two would do well to start with the work of Ernst Curtius.<sup>1</sup> The limitations of the argument at hand allow us to confine ourselves to the literary and the immediately relevant. The first two sections cover Judeo-Christian and classical texts that the later works recast and adapt, addressing their own needs, interests and anxieties. The “Literary Gardens” section then surveys some of the most representative and influential of these later works, concentrating on this very recasting. From these works emerges the matrix of associations central to the argument of this study. Other studies have covered similar ground, so this chapter will be brief.<sup>2</sup>

**Judeo-Christian Garden Traditions**

The story follows two primary tracks, both ancient. The older of the two is the Judeo-Christian track derived from Biblical materials and traditions, including commentaries both

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<sup>1</sup> *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* has two chapters devoted entirely to subjects related to this study: “The Goddess Natura” and “The Ideal Landscape.”

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g. Ilva Beretta, “*The World’s a Garden*”; Maren-Sophie Rostvig, *The Happy Man*; Renato Poggioli, *The Oaten Flute*; Hary Levin, *The Myth of the Golden Age in the Renaissance*; Terry Comito, *The Idea of the Garden in the Renaissance*; Thomas G. Rosenmeyer, *The Green Cabinet*; Ann W. Astell, *The Song of Songs in the Middle Ages*; A. Bartlett Giamatti, *The Earthly Paradise and the Renaissance Epic*.

rabbinic (Norris) and patristic (Astell). Because of the dominance of Christianity as the religion of Europe during the period constructing this cultural tradition, the metaphors and symbols embedded in these materials recurred in the culture that embraced them. Further, the imagery was adapted as cultural realities changed over time. Thus, the figure of Eve, an orthodox model for women in general, was reinterpreted in different ways as different qualities were valued in female behavior. And because this matrix was bound up with religion, every interpretation could be declared to have divine authorization, regardless of how contradictory it might be to other interpretations or earlier traditions.

The three main Biblical elements of the garden topos tradition are the myth of the Garden of Eden containing the figure of Eve, the Beloved of the Canticle, and the figure of the Virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus. The two named women are joined through the mediating filter of the Canticle, and all three are held together through a complex system of associations that entangle women with sexuality, language, the soul, the church, and the garden. This matrix of associations offered fertile ground for expansion by writers and other mythmakers in the centuries that followed, and it was so often repeated and varied that a kind of performative turn took place: it became a verbal language with real power to affect as well as reflect gender creation and relations. As these authorities lost potency after the Reformation, authority was still to be found in other cultural sources, and the matrix continued to function.

Eve, the mythical mother of mankind, carried a wealth of symbolic associations in the early modern English world. A Janus-faced character, she was both the best of women and the worst. The chain of associations tended to reinforce itself (McColley). Genesis has little to say about Eve beyond her creation, her deception, her shared fall with Adam, and her procreation afterward (ch. 2-4). Her physical appearance is not mentioned at all. Saint Paul applied her

example to all women in 1 Timothy: “Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression” (2:11-14). Thus she is both “the mother of all living” (Gen. 3:20) and “in the transgression.” Her presence is vague and mythic enough, therefore, to be embroidered to reflect the values of any particular age. The biblical assertion that Adam was created first, for example, strengthened the long-held popular notion that women were imperfect men: Adam was the pinnacle of creation and Eve was the less perfect version.

Although her body is not described in Genesis, Eve’s original creation as a flawless woman seems to have necessitated for commentators that she have great physical beauty, which interacted subsequently with the beauty of Eden (the beauty of which was also elaborated over the years; it too had been sparingly described in the source material). There is resonance between the pleasure of experiencing the garden and the pleasure of experiencing the woman within it. There is also the factor of deliberate and controlled fertility. Eve’s name indicates that one of her primary purposes is reproduction, and the garden also is a symbol of natural fertility brought under the controlling hand of humanity. The final tradition established by the story of Eve in Eden is the domestic nature of the garden space. Partially because real gardens are associated with households, the garden is conventionally considered a “safe” place. According to the Judeo-Christian tradition, God placed Adam and Eve in what is essentially a cradle of humanity, a space in which the Creator Father himself, the ultimate figure of safety and security, visits mankind. There He establishes rules of order, defines and limits humanity’s experiences, and provides safety and succor before Adam and Eve fall to temptation. So, this sense of divinely established order, homeliness, and safety contributes to an understanding of gardens as safe and

domestic spaces, especially in contrast with the tragedy that follows. Eden becomes a Western archetype of the function and definition of gardens; all are descended in spirit and design from it.

Much less mythic, and less well known, the *Canticle*,<sup>3</sup> a short book in the Hebrew Scriptures, poetically celebrates romantic and physical love, and is voiced by a Lover, his Beloved, and her friends. Among them, they explore the range of emotions associated with passionate romantic love, from exaltation to profound fear, including social reactions to intimate relationships. One interpretive tradition holds that the poem is the record of a historical relationship, possibly one of the marriages of King Solomon (Stewart 15). Another argues that this is a poem about the idea of marriage, rather than about a literal courtship and wedding. This is supported by the anonymity of the participants and the heightened emotion and range of experiences, as well as by the importance placed upon marriage in the culture that produced the book (Norris). Such an understanding allows the *Canticle* to fit neatly among the wisdom books of the Bible, all traditionally believed to have been written by Solomon. The most influential medieval interpretation of the *Canticle* is that advocated by Origen, that the poem is not meant to be understood literally but allegorically, as a representation of the soul's search for, and intimate relationship with, God. Another version of this interpretation replaces the soul with the Church as the Beloved of God, which is supported by other biblical passages that refer to the Church as the Bride of Christ (Astell).

The book itself is short, only eight chapters, and insular in content. It details the emotions involved in the establishing of a romantic relationship, threatened at times by mysterious outside forces as well as by the insecurity of the lovers themselves. Their passion, delight, jealousy, and desire are all openly canvassed: "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth—for your love is

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<sup>3</sup> Also, "Song of Songs" and "Song of Solomon"

more delightful than wine” (1:2); “Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm; for love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave” (8:6). The Beloved is given a great number of the lines. It is not accidental that this is within the context of a sexual relationship; this area is one of the few where female characters have wielded power. The Beloved is a well-developed character. She values her friends, and the emotions and desires she voices are recognizable to a reader.

The motifs of the poem that tie it to garden literature are spread throughout the poem. One of the settings of the poem is a private space outside, where the couple imagines making love under trees and among flowers. The Cantic’s most memorable and most imitated literary feature is the use of garden, pastoral and other natural imagery to describe the lovers’ bodies, particularly that of the Beloved. Thus, what is created is an explicit linking of the female body with both the land and the good things that are produced upon it: “Awake north wind, and come south wind! Blow on my garden, that its fragrance may spread abroad. Let my lover come into his garden and taste its choice fruits” (4:16). “My lover has gone down to his garden, to the beds of spices, to browse in the gardens and to gather lilies” (6:2). “I said, ‘I will climb the palm tree; I will take hold of its fruit.’ May your breasts be like the clusters of the vine, the fragrance of your breath like apples” (7:8).

As with the traditions of Eve in Eden, the woman here is intimately associated with, sometimes almost identified with, the land and the natural environment. This association continues to strengthen and to become more apparently “natural” as time progresses and it is repeated across texts. Human fertility is not an important issue in the Cantic, and whereas Eve was textually important first as a companion and then as a mother, and was only recreated into a sexually pleasurable object by later imaginations, the Beloved is primarily a source of emotional

and sexual pleasure. One verse in particular both provides an encapsulation of the woman-as-land topos and introduces the image that will define the final and most powerful image of a biblical woman as a garden: “A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed” (4:12). This particular quotation emphasizes both the garden connection and the popular fantasy of enclosure in medieval and early modern gardens, both real and literary.

The final biblical character the interpretation of whom affects the creation of the cultural associations of women with gardens is Mary, the mother of Jesus, both virgin and symbol of fertility. There is no biblical text explicitly linking the Virgin Mary with garden imagery, but there is a long tradition in European religious thought that firmly establishes this connection (Stewart). Much of it is predicated upon the figures of Eve and the Beloved, who are understood to prefigure her. If Eve is humanity’s first mother whose sin brought death into the pure gardens of Eden and the soul, then Mary is the redeeming mother whose righteous submission brought forth life for humanity in the person of Jesus. If the story of the Canticle acted out the soul’s and the church’s mystic marriage with God, then Mary enacted her own mystic marriage with God, becoming “one flesh” with him through the child Jesus, the God-man. Spiritual ecstasy is figured as erotic in the Canticle; erotic ecstasy is entirely spiritual between the Virgin Mary and the Lord. None of these parallels is explicitly about gardening or about Mary’s place within the garden image. However, the parallel extends through her types to her: Eve and the Beloved are both women in the garden; Mary is the perfection or the redemption of what they represent; she therefore is the perfection and redemption of the woman in the garden. Thus the figure of the *hortus conclusus*, the Latin translation of Canticle 4:12’s “enclosed garden,” is traditionally applied to the Virgin Mary. This image, in which are symbolically combined all three characters discussed here, also has a literary and real-world referent: the enclosed pleasure garden. Thus all

three women are joined together in a symbolic matrix laid over the enclosed pleasure garden, and the rich traditions of sexuality, church, soul, righteousness and transgression associated with *them* inform the topos itself. At this point, when the garden is thoroughly associated with female sexuality, virginity easily becomes figured as an enclosed, pure garden. Chastity is a garden whose borders are well-maintained and whose gate opens only to the husband who has the key of authorized access. Eventually, this principle expanded to govern a broad range of women's social activities, beyond but fundamentally structured by sexuality.

### **Classical Pastoral and Retirement Traditions**

As strong as that part of the tradition was, however, there was another, nearly as strong in early modern texts, that grew up alongside it: the pastoral. In fact, within poetry, these two lines of influence sometimes nearly collapse into one another, depending on the literary fashions of the time. The pastoral tradition arises from the classical world. Its acknowledged literary originator is Theocritus, an Alexandrian poet, but he was drawing on traditions more ancient than his own experience, traditions derived from texts such as Hesiod's *Works and Days*. The poetry of Theocritus narrates the experiences of both mythic characters and working and lower-class Greeks, representing their social relations and religious practices. Post-Roman Europe, however, understood pastoral poetry almost exclusively through the work of Vergil, who was by far the most influential figure in this tradition. His *Eclogues*, based on Theocritus' *Bukolika*, was widely read and imitated by early modern authors. They were represented, along with the *Georgics*, his other collection of rural poems, as works Vergil undertook in preparation for the *Aeneid*, his magnum opus. Because of the narrative of Vergil's poetic development, and because of Aristotle's scheme of literary hierarchy, pastoral poetry gained a reputation as a "lesser" genre in which to work, one in which a poet could serve his apprenticeship before moving on to more important forms, such as epic. And many poets, including female poets, did. Finally, this section

will also consider two of the epodes of Horace, who originated the model of the country retirement poem that was to prove so popular in the seventeenth century.

Theocritus was so broad in his choices of subject matter that several of his poems in *Bukolika* (or *Idylls*) do not fit within the limitations of pastoral set by some later literary theorists. Only a little over half the poems feature herdsmen as central characters, and several take place in the very urban streets of Alexandria. For example, “Idyll 2” is the story of a sorceress working a charm to get back her lover while she remembers their love affair. “Idyll 14” feels entirely modern as Aeschinas and Thyonichus meet on a street, where the former tells the latter that the girl he loves desires someone else, and that he’s therefore thinking of joining the army. Yet the dramatized singing contests and melancholy laments among herdsmen and reapers are the poems consistently associated with pastoral. Paul Alpers, too, has pointed out the large role discourse plays in Theocritus’ works, a role that continues to define pastoral through the centuries. In most of these poems, characters tell stories and news, engage in competitive dialogue or singing, give advice, reminisce or worry about the past or future. Even if we do not consider the circumstances under which he created his poems, apparently as an adjunct member of the Alexandrian court of Ptolemy I, and confine ourselves to content, it is clear that not all of the *Bukolika* fits the limits of pastoral that modern readers are used to (Hunter).

This discursive nature makes it of particular interest to both poets and those who study them. Pastoral poetry is built around dramatized situations, often involving either a monologue or a dialogue. In the hands of later practitioners this loquacity sometimes becomes weak and lethargic (Messenger), but Theocritus exploits its possibilities with great vitality. The characters in his poems have a lot of life and vigor to them. In “Idyll 15: The Women at the Festival,” for example, the character Praxinoa complains, “Ye gods, what a crush! How can we get through

this rabble? / We'll be late. ... Don't tread on me, my good man! ... What a good thing I left the baby at home" (44-54). While pastoral poetic encounters usually take place in a *locus amoenus* setting, pastoral poetry itself also importantly has to do with characters' interaction through and about language. Their wordplay and creativity show shepherds to be stand-ins for poets in pastoral situations. The clearest example of this is the recurrent figure of Daphnis, the dead poet-shepherd, whom all the rest mourn as the best of them. Thus, pastoral poetry becomes the mode in which a poet can explore and comment upon his or her own profession and its members. Richard Hunter puts it nicely in his introduction to Verity's translation of Theocritus, "of all poetic genres, it is epic and its rustic cousin pastoral which give the greatest prominence to the idea of 'succession' in poetry, that is of later poets as the heirs of their predecessors, and Theocritus' herdsmen too carry with them this sense of the past and its loss" (vii-viii). He is saying, as Alpers also argues, that one of the main interests of pastoral poetry is the self-aware enactment of poetic community, which includes friends, rivals, and predecessors. As garden poetry and pastoral poetry intermingle, garden poetry adopts some of the same potential to perform creative society. The pastoral *locus amoenus* as a space of divine inspiration (from the Muses) combines with the enclosed pleasance as a space of pleasure and divine inspiration (from the Lord). Such inspiration leads to artistic self-consciousness in both author and characters.

Theocritus incorporated politics into his work, with several idylls praising Helen of Troy and her family, a myth that had been appropriated by the Ptolemaic dynasty of the time (Hunter). However, Vergil's poems seem self-consciously political and symbolic, while those of his predecessor do not. Every Eclogue is more than it seems, and several interact loosely in a narrative of poetic community, employing recurring characters drawn from a fairly small cast. The richness of the poems individually and as a group, and Vergil's poetic prowess and high

reputation, along with the potential of the mode for the expression of a broad range of subjects of interest to poets, all contributed to the viability of pastoral as a poetic means of expression up through the seventeenth century.

Vergil reshaped Theocritean pastoral into something altogether more self-consciously artistic. Despite the brevity of his ten *Eclogues*, they have exerted an impressive influence on the imaginations of later poets. He created for pastoral a world of its own, Arcadia, landscaped with hills, groves and rivers, and peopled with well-spoken woodland deities and herdsmen surrogates for Vergil, his colleagues and patrons. Rather than complaints about lost love or personal disappointment, Vergil's pastorals tend more often to comment upon social and artistic success and responsibility. Thus his work is much more representative of the Empsonian conception of pastoral, as a complex code through which to speak on sophisticated issues. A famous example is "Eclogue 1," which dramatizes the dialogue between two friends, one of whom has been driven off his lands by the results of civil war, while another is protected by a powerful young man. The usual interpretation is that the protector is Augustus, the protected shepherd represents Vergil's point of view, and the poem is commenting upon the just management of land in tumultuous times. "Eclogue 5" narrates the Theocritean story of the death of the great poet Daphnis but is understood to be referring to the death of Julius Caesar.

The final figure of interest in this classical thread of tradition is Horace, whose *Epodes* include two poems of "retirement." Neither is straightforward in its praise of country life, but the images he created, particularly in Epode 2, have proved compelling beyond the context of their irony. Thus, many poets have adapted the rural estate tropes into straightforward laudatory poems. A contemporary of Vergil's, Horace was primarily an urban poet and a gifted satirist. Epode 16, "An escapist's dream," fantasizes about avoiding more civil strife by retreating to the

Isles of the Blessed where the Golden Age still reigns, an image repeated by later poets. His satire here targets conflict in the city of Rome and the escapist, not the impossible fantasy itself; he does not mock that. The epode that is most directly relevant to this study, however, is the second, “Country joys,” in which he illustrates the Roman dream of retiring from the *urb* (city) to the *suburb*, after conducting a long and honorable civic career. Besides the beautiful naturalistic landscape, this retreat includes happy cattle and sheep, productive fields and gardens, and good hunting, as well as a proper wife who makes the house and family the greatest pleasure of all. All of this is undercut, however, by the end of the poem which reveals that the speaker is a money-lender in the middle of a transaction who has no real interest in leaving the city but is merely daydreaming (277). Yet, again, the images used were powerful enough to transcend the immediate purpose of the individual poem when they were revived in the seventeenth century.

These, therefore, are the two strands of the garden topos as it was inherited by writers of the seventeenth century: a Judeo-Christian vision of a sexualized, enclosed pleasure garden and a classical tradition of poetic community enacted in an ideal rural landscape outside the limits of the city. However, by 1600, both had been significantly altered, gaining symbolic associations, nuance and detail. They also had to a certain extent become interlaced with one another. The remainder of this chapter reads the two traditions as they are enacted in highly influential and canonical late medieval and early modern texts. It examines how the themes considered in chapters 2 and 3—materiality, authority, social and sexual order, creativity, and discourse—are communicated through the specifics of the garden topos as it appears in these texts. We will look primarily at the structures of the gardens, their design and furniture, and the authors’ general tone toward both topos and themes. We will see the same symbols appear often enough to indicate their function as shorthand for more abstract meanings and to see them become almost

naturalized by poetic succession into tropes that stay virtually unquestioned until the start of the seventeenth century.

### **Literary Gardens**

Pastoral poetry and bucolic art more generally tend to work best in thematic opposition to a thriving urban center, because their nostalgic charms can then be highlighted by contrast with a strong counterbalance. Thus the mode was developed by a poet who lived in the metropolis of Alexandria; it did well when Rome was highly powerful; it thrived in an era of urban development, when cities such as London and Paris were centralizing political, social and economic power. The literature of the late Middle Ages, tended, however, to concentrate more on the enclosed garden image. Pastoral images did not disappear, but they were not nearly as popular in literature as the enclosed garden. They would only regain that power in the sixteenth century. The formal garden topos offered the image of a safely enclosed, restful, ordered, controlled space. The structural exclusion of an unpleasant wilderness outside made that fantasy all the more attractive to cultures in upheaval.

Probably the most influential and complex of the medieval allegorical gardens is the garden of Pleasure in the thirteenth-century epic *Roman de la Rose*, by Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun. The first part of the story, written by de Lorris, creates the basic shape and meaning of the allegorical garden. The narrative follows the progression of a love affair, represented allegorically. De Lorris was working from a conception of romantic love developed in the centers of the ideology of courtly love, a simultaneously social and philosophical creation with thoroughly developed rules and codes of feeling and behavior. Therefore, the affair illustrates these codes. The protagonist has a dream in which he approaches a walled garden, on the outside of which are visual representations of allegorical figures, such as Old Age and Poverty, who supposedly stand in the way of true love. Thus, they have been excluded from the

garden. The dreamer finds the gate through this wall which will allow him into the beautiful garden; it is guarded, nominally, by Lady Idleness, who is more than happy to allow the dreamer inside. The lord of the garden is Pleasure, and once there, the dreamer falls in love with the image of a rosebush, meets Fair Welcome but then is confronted by Rebuff, and the story unfolds conventionally from there, eventually incorporating the God of Love, Courtesy, Nature, and other constructs. Jean de Meun expands the basic composition to enable learned discourse on philosophical problems of the time, such as sexual behavior, the relation of mankind to nature, and broader gendered social relationships.

The choice of a garden as the *Roman's* setting makes possible the invocation of the Biblical traditions to attain both symbolic resonance and spiritual authority. In return, its marriage of philosophy and spirituality with symbols of secular eroticism, as well as the *Roman's* great popularity, made the enclosed pleasure garden the preeminent means of symbolically expressing erotic and gendered social themes for centuries to come. The rose symbolizes the sexuality of the female beloved, the authorized claiming and consumption of which requires the lover to undergo tests of his worth, performing both a discourse of desire and a material, though symbolic, sexual encounter within the garden space. De Lorris and de Meun codify the symbols of the enclosing wall, guarded gate, running water, shade, flowers, and music into the sexualized tropes that are later virtually unassailable. The *Roman* follows the point of view of the male speaker, who enters the garden from the outside. The garden is understood as something completely separate from the dreamer, from the author and (through sympathetic identification) from the reader. The dreamer is free to enter or leave the space as he pleases. It is something that he experiences; he is not constructed as a part of the space itself. His beloved, on the other hand, is entirely naturalized into the space by being identified with the rose. The *Roman*

sustains the metaphors of the Canticle—of the woman’s body as landscape and plant—throughout the allegory. She thus is transformed into the “garden enclosed” and the flowers within, created for the dreamer’s pleasure.

What, therefore, does this particular poem have to say to its readers about the garden topos? First, it is a place of sensuality devoted to the pursuit of Pleasure and (romantic) Love. It is a place of exclusivity that requires (at least nominal) authorization to enter, because it is highly ordered, highly mediated, and highly controlled.<sup>4</sup> It exists prior to the dreamer’s awareness of it, and it seems to have been created at least partly for his delectation. It is a place suited for discourse about philosophical and social issues, either through conversation or through allegorical performance. And finally it is a place dedicated to the construction and reinforcement of the sexuality of a desired woman as a *part* of the garden. Her body (the rose bush) is constituted by the materiality of the space, and the narrative’s concentration upon her eroticism implies that her sexuality is constituted in the conventions here as the most important part of her being. Most of these elements will reappear in later works, sometimes carrying the same symbolic weight, sometimes altered, but always containing that gendered, sexual importance.

Dante’s experience in the Garden of Eden in the final seven cantos of *Purgatorio* brings the trope of the beloved woman in the garden to something of an apex, combining all the different traditions and elements into a rich synthesis of meaning. When he enters Eden, “Dante” encounters two memorable characters, both female. The first is Matelda, a kind of guiding spirit who also explains the structure of the garden. Matelda resembles, and is compared to, a nymph in the classical tradition, which helps explain why she is a more open and less portentous figure than Beatrice, who is rather terrible. This other main character of the Eden episode is associated

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<sup>4</sup> In this, the form and content reflect one another: allegory is a highly ordered genre.

with Mary through her purity, her power, and her domination of a *hortus conclusus*. While Matelda is able to explain the material and scientific reality of the Garden, Beatrice tends to be more obscure. As Dante has created her to be a model of the contemplative life, her preference of the spiritual to the material is not surprising. Beatrice is the summit of the poet's emotional investment in the work. If Eden is where "mankind is happy" (30.75), it is necessary that the symbol that "Dante" has made of his happiness should also be there.

But let us look at the structure of the garden before returning to the figure of Beatrice. Eden is situated on top of the mountain of Purgatory, enacting its importance through its position in a high spot, but it does not seem to recapitulate many of the motifs from the *Roman*. For one thing it is covered with trees, a detail derived from Genesis (2:9). The traditional fountains and streams are there, characterized by cleanliness and purity. But other traditional motifs—grass, flowers, birdsong—are either absent or not emphasized. A solid enclosing and dividing wall is also conspicuous by its absence. Dante, in fact, may be one of the few poets utilizing the pleasure garden topos who theorizes it as an absolutely sinless place in which the enclosing wall is completely effective. The sin of Adam and Eve was expelled from Eden with them, and all who are now authorized to enter are fully purged of sin beforehand. The wall that does surround the garden is a wall of flame, and there is no gate, because none is necessary; the entire wall is permeable, but the very process of penetrating it leaves one worthy to enter the garden. The mere fact of reaching the wall means that one has already gone through a series of purifying steps. Only those who are authorized are physically able to enter the garden, and no gatekeeper is needed. This is a supernatural place, where people go once their material bodies are no more; however, at the same time it is a physical place, causing physical pains and pleasures, and located on the earth.

Dante effectively uses the figure of the Mount in symbolically structuring the world, the physical space, of Purgatory, placing its greatest good space at its physical peak. This simultaneously invokes Mount Parnassus of the Muses, source of classical poetic authority, and reflects the hierarchical moral philosophy Dante is also exploring. The setting remains fairly vague to the reader, although Dante is very specific about some of its aspects, such as the direction in which the river Lethe flows, or the number of paces from one part of the garden to another, or the shape of the tree of Knowledge. At this point, he has deliberately left behind classical sources, quite literally when Virgil disappears during this episode.

The resulting Eden is a rich tapestry, but one rather devoid of color in the landscape, in the form of flowers and fruit. Plenty of color, however, appears with the members of the procession and Beatrice herself, all of whom process through Eden while “Dante” watches. In a way, they stand in for the flowers, as their superior substitutes. The cardinal virtues wear purple, while the theological virtues are dressed in white, green and red, as is Beatrice herself. They make a colorful tableau, even when Christ and the male figures in the procession have left. Dante’s Garden of Eden stages the height of human happiness on earth, contains the woman who personifies that happiness in her person, requires purification in order to enter, works upon the psychological state of the visitor, allegorically enacts the whole history of the church, is a place of inspired vision, and is the gateway to Paradise. The space carries a lot of symbolic, if not material, weight.

Beatrice herself is an extremely powerful figure, and her power is conventionally tied to Dante’s erotic desire for her. At the same time, though, as an author he has chosen material that must approach such motivations as purely as possible, so mere erotic desire is not enough to allow him to see Beatrice, let alone claim her. His primary representation of romantic desire

seems to be as a triviality, which if given too much weight, becomes a distraction from the more important desire for God. Beatrice is the female spirit of this place, while Matelda and the virtues approximate nymphs, and function as her handmaidens. Beatrice embodies some aspect of each female character already associated with the garden space: the desirability of the Rose, the purity of the Virgin Mary, the intimacy of the Beloved of the Canticle, the redeemed soul beloved of God, and the perfection of Eve. Hers is a garden defined by Love, but it is spiritual, righteous Love, entirely sensual yet not corrupt. Beatrice's power is spiritual, though it also carries the sexual charge that has stricken Dante. In her person, and in her interaction with "Dante," then, Beatrice in the *Divine Comedy* becomes a commentary on idealized sexuality and gender relationships.

Laura Howes, in *Chaucer's Gardens and the Language of Convention*, examines gardens throughout Chaucer's repertoire and finds that Chaucer used the conventions of garden literature in order to make entirely unconventional statements, especially about gender. I will only touch briefly upon one of the gardens from the *Canterbury Tales*, which plays a prominent part in the narrative of, and also advances the tradition of, garden imagery as a space of female power in English literature. This is January's garden, from "The Merchant's Tale." Chaucer explicitly compares this garden to that in the *Roman de la Rose*, which he translated. The two gardens share a surrounding wall and an identity as a space for erotic pleasure. January makes a habit of consorting with his wife May alone together in the garden, and Chaucer emphasizes that the old man has the only key to the only gate in the wall, at least until May connives at procuring a duplicate for her lover, Damyan. January thus believes that he has complete control over access to both his wife's body and his pleasure garden. His conception of the equation between his two treasured properties is reinforced by several elements: January consistently refers both to

marriage and to May's body as "paradise"; a statue of Priapus, god of gardens and potency, holds a prominent position within the space of the garden itself; finally, January speaks in the language of the Canticale in his ecstasy over May's beauty. Unfortunately for him, he can control neither property. The figure of Priapus is derived from Roman gardens, in which an idol of the god, who was believed to have influence over both gardens and fertility, was often placed in order to establish authority over one's garden space (Pagan).

Of course it is within the space of the garden that May cuckolds her husband, evincing her own sexual power. However, Chaucer also configures this garden as a space of female power more generally. Like Oberon and Titania, Pluto and Proserpina project their domestic problems onto mortals and interfere in their lives. Thus Proserpina is shown by Chaucer both to get the best of her husband in an argument about women's speech and behavior and to grant the same discursive power to May and all women to follow her. The elements Chaucer chooses for this garden are taken straight from the traditions: the confining yet unexpectedly permeable wall, the pleasant walks, the pear tree. The design of the garden draws from the *Roman* and Boccaccio's *Decameron* (7.9).

However, much less conventionally, the actions of Pluto and Proserpina, and May's ensuing verbal gymnastics, emphasize a conjunction between speech and sexuality within the garden space. Pluto may make January able to see "as wel as evere he myghte" (2356)—however ironically this is to be interpreted—and thus devastatingly aware that he cannot control his wife's sexuality, but Proserpina gives May the ability to reinterpret what January has seen, creating a different narrative that accomplishes her own goal. Within the garden space, May rules both her lovers with her words as well as with her body, and her power and creativity show her to be their superior at least mentally. Thus, while January has created the garden space as a locus of his

erotic desire, his wife linguistically and sexually restructures it to match her own desire. She makes it a place wherein to create herself, rather than one in which she is created by another. Laura Howes recognizes May's assertion of self-control, although she figures it as rebellion against gendered social convention, rather than focusing on May's *appropriation* of discursive power through the claiming of sexual power (100). The character of May is more than her sexuality, and she acts separately from the social script of January that would reduce her to that if possible. Chaucer imagines the broader possibilities that the gendered garden offers for women by his exploration of feminine discursive power.

The seventeenth-century women examined later in the study follow the next author's footsteps in some illuminating ways. Christine de Pizan's *The Book of the City of Ladies* is not a major factor in the development of garden or pastoral tradition, as gardens do not play a significant role in this work. However, her approach to materiality both anticipates that of other feminine poets and compares creatively with that of masculine poets. This fascinating text, quite popular in its time, is a wide-ranging catalogue of a number of stories to interest contemporary women. In the very beginning of the framing story, Christine is visited by three ladies (allegorical constructs) who admonish her despair, engendered by misogynistic reading, and advise her to build a city in which women can join a supportive community. The borders of this city must be established first, indicating the need to exert control over the space in which it will be created, and those borders will be strictly maintained, unlike those of the garden of Pleasure in the *Roman de la Rose*: "Only ladies who are of good reputation and worthy of praise will be admitted into this city. To those lacking in virtue, its gates will remain forever closed" (11). Further, the space is to be built out of the literary representations of women's lives. Women's lived (and culturally mediated) experiences literally interact with the ground as well as making

up the towers and walls of the city, as Christine digs the foundations and constructs the walls and buildings out of the tales that Reason, Rectitude, and Justice tell her. Thus, women's lives—processed into stories—make up the materiality of this idealized space. Her conjunctions of life, story, mind, and matter create a rich association of meaning within the topos of her city. For example, she describes her own mind as fertile ground refreshed by the “sweet rain and dew” of the words of the allegorical constructs (15-16). Christine then builds the city around herself upon a fertile “Field of Letters.”

Her stated purpose is to effect real change upon women's lives in the future, and she plans to do this by making available the stories of other women's lives. Through community, which Christine makes material, material change can be effected. Like Margaret Cavendish's *Convent of Pleasure*,<sup>5</sup> Christine's *City of Ladies* spends time and effort upon the details of physical description. Further, this text concentrates much more on the materiality of the city itself, its grounds and other lands, than have any of the poets examined thus far. Whereas the garden in the *Romance of the Rose* was clearly metaphoric, with every item pointing to a particular abstract equivalent, Christine takes the opposite approach, condensing, but not reducing, the stories of women's lives, and literalizing them into materiality (of the city “Christine is building,” but also of the book that Christine is writing). The materiality *is* the stories of these women's lives: such stories are important in and of themselves, not as signs to point to something “more” important. For the purposes of this study, we also note that Christine is directed and authorized to create the city, that she builds it around herself so that she is inside, and that its purpose is to create and strengthen women both as individuals and as a community. She is not an outside visitor to a

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<sup>5</sup> See appendix, pg. 242.

place already created for her; she is the creator who labors not just for her own pleasure but for that of others, to create a transcendent community of women.

Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron*, in its great variety and loose structure has much in common with both *The Canterbury Tales* and *The Book of the City of Ladies*. The most focused spatial interest is in the framing story, so this examination will concentrate on that. It takes place in different settings, but all one hundred tales are told in three idyllic outside spots of varying degrees of artificiality, all described with great care by Boccaccio. After leaving Florence in order to avoid the plague, the tale tellers convene at the country house of Pampinea. They while away their time wandering through the gardens, dancing, and telling stories in a meadow out in the grounds. On the third day of storytelling, the group moves from Pampinea's household to one situated about two miles away, which belongs to an anonymous gentleman.<sup>6</sup> At this estate they first tell their stories in a walled garden, lushly described. The group agree that it is an earthly paradise, which assessment is enhanced by the presence of tame animals in the garden, as well as the impossible beauty and order of the place (the paths are perfectly straight, for example), and the single fountain whose streams divide and then recombine upon leaving the garden, recalling the fountain of Eden. The sixth day introduces the group and the reader to the Valley of Ladies, which becomes the setting for their amusement on the seventh day. The valley is small and naturalistic, covered with trees filled with songbirds, and graced with a pure pool of water in the middle.<sup>7</sup> The final three days return the storytelling to the formal garden.

In three different set-pieces, then, Boccaccio reinterprets the poetic *locus amoenus*, which takes place in a privileged outside space (both in its pastoral and in its pleasure garden forms)

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<sup>6</sup> The owner never appears, nor is he named, over the course of the story. The estate is *providentially* provided for the pleasure of these friends.

<sup>7</sup> The valley is reminiscent of a classical poets' grove and Dante's version of Eden in Purgatory.

among an exclusive group of people dedicated to building community through creative discourse. The ladies and young men recapitulate the roles of the poets on Mount Parnassus, or of the shepherds in Vergil's *Arcadia*, creating literature for entertainment and instruction. But they also, more subtly, recall the acts of creation that culminated in Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. These friends live an ideal (and, as they continually point out, morally innocent) life in a perfect garden among animals who do not fear them and will not harm them, and they pass the time indulging in smaller acts of creation—of stories and songs—that fill Boccaccio's larger story.

Gardens also figure in some of the tales—although none is afforded the attention to detail that Boccaccio gives to his framework—and in such a way as might be expected. For example, in the first story on the third day, Masetto becomes a gardener at a convent, and subsequently becomes the lover of all the nuns: “‘Once you put me inside that garden of yours,’ he said to himself, gleefully, ‘I’ll tend it better than it’s ever been tended before’”(237). When the Abbess takes him away, interrupting his activities with the other nuns, “she kept him for several days, thus provoking bitter complaints from the nuns over the fact that the handyman had suspended work in the garden” (239). As all previous assignations had taken place within the space of the garden itself, Boccaccio's wordplay runs rampant. Another, sadder, example is the seventh story from day four, when Simona and Pasquino rendezvous in a garden, only to be poisoned by a sage plant growing there. For the most part, though, gardens function as realistic settings in the tales, together with houses, churches and city streets. In contrast, the gardens of the framing story, although more attention is paid to their material elements, are more surreal, more archetypal. They are, in short, more poetic and more open to interpretation.

The gardens of the Continental Renaissance pastoral epics have been ably summarized and analyzed by Giamatti, and I will here address only the works of Ariosto and Tasso, which follow similar formulas as those examined above, although an element of moral solicitude appears that has not yet been very prominent in the works examined thus far in this study. Each has an episode in which a male hero leaves the main arena of action, whether it is France or Palestine, and enters a beautiful *locus amoenus* controlled by a dangerous woman who almost invariably uses sexual control as her weapon of choice to foil the plans of enemies or to indulge her own desires. These works were both highly popular throughout Europe and, although quite different, each manages to express ambiguity about female sexuality through representations of the pleasure garden. Together, they establish the generic fabric upon which later pastoral works would be based, and as the garden interludes are similarly designed, they can be profitably considered together.

The relevant section of Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata* (1581) modifies that of Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (1532), and in its turn was imitated (and adapted) by Spenser. While both enchanted gardens are to be found on islands in the Atlantic Ocean, and in each case, someone from the outside world must come to rescue a character who has succumbed to the seduction of the enchantress, the similarities do not go much further. Alcina (from *Orlando*) is an inhuman enchantress who has more in common with *The Odyssey's* Circe than does Armida (from *Gerusalemme*). Her insatiable sexual appetite means that she collects lovers from around the globe, enjoys them and, when done, transforms them into animals, trees, even water. Her entire realm of power is governed by the property of deceit, and neither she nor her followers nor her land is what it appears to be. Further, her arena of power disregards conventions of order by deemphasizing boundaries. For example, her ex-lovers are made to cross constitutive physical

boundaries in being transformed to inhuman, sometimes inanimate, objects. Her garden, as well, is an ambiguous space, part naturalistic pleasance and part palace or walled city, and bedrooms and bowers melt subtly into one another, so that the reader is rarely sure exactly where an action occurs. The effect is both to imply similarity among all these spaces and to disrupt strict definition of any space or activity.

When Melissa arrives to rescue Ruggiero, she succeeds by placing Angelica's disenchanting ring upon his finger. At that point, he is able to see everything as it really is, and all seductive power is dispelled, especially that of Alcina's body, which is revealed as that of an old, ugly crone. Neither Alcina's garden nor her sexuality are sites Ruggiero wishes to linger in at this point, but the trope of exclusivity is now revealed to have been reversed in this garden. It was much easier for him to get into the garden than it is for him to leave it; he too must resort to deception to accomplish it. The danger of Alcina's Island is not its sexuality but its deceit, and the waste that deceit leads to. Melissa has determined to rescue Ruggiero because she feels it is important that he and Bradamante produce the offspring that will become the d'Este family, patrons of Ariosto. When Ruggiero has been freed and ridden off, and Alcina has gone after him, Melissa stays behind to disenchant Alcina's other captives. Unlike some other evil enchanted gardens, the physical world of Alcina's space does not need to be destroyed as long as its power is destroyed. Yet the magic has had real effects upon Alcina's various lovers, who have lost years of their lives in their imprisonment by deceit (80-109).

Tasso's enchantress Armida is much more human than Ariosto's ugly little gnome, but that also makes her more of a force to be reckoned with, since she earns both Rinaldo's and the reader's sympathy. She is not confined by the story to her garden space, either, but plays several active roles in the defense of Jerusalem, drawing off forces from the enemy and eventually

entering into battle herself. After her defeat on her island, which is part of the chain of the Fortunate Isles, she reappears in the story, driven by personal interests such as her love for Rinaldo and her desire for revenge. And although Rinaldo is reproached by the narrator for rejecting masculine war in favor of effeminate love, Armida is not attacked in the way her counterparts are by Ariosto and Spenser; she remains a sympathetic character.

At the same time, Tasso's work itself is rather more morally fraught than Ariosto's, which is casual in its elegant insouciance about religion and duty. Tasso's work is much more concerned with proper behavior according to church mandates. While this may have something to do with Tasso's own personal conflicts with faith, or with the material of the epic, John Nelson in his introduction to Edward Fairfax's 1600 English translation argues that it had at least as much to do with the legislation of society in the half-century between Ariosto and Tasso (xxiv). In short, Tasso's epic takes behavior, and relationships, and thus these characters, including Armida, more seriously than does Ariosto's. Armida's existence outside her enchanted garden supports this authorial attitude by making her more than a sexual object or a sexual predator. She and Rinaldo create a real relationship, and as a character complex enough to carry that much weight, she is able to act across a broader spectrum of landscapes and activities and is not confined to the space of the garden.

In both pastoral epics, the *locus amoenus* is separated in space from the real world and seems like paradise but is not; each one is a false paradise. Further, the notion of protecting the boundaries is invariably also a deceit, since the purpose of these places is to be open to all comers, to pretend exclusivity while practicing absolute inclusion. In each case, the source of authority is the enchantress's own power, exercised through sexual attraction and deception, the dangers traditionally associated with Eve, and indeed, Alcina and Armida have both created a

parody or travesty of the garden that God first created, using that original garden's elements for a corrupt purpose. Each of these gardens is an expression of significant, if unsanctioned, creativity by powerful women. These gardens are their poetry, characterized by enticing sensuality and naturalism, as well as sexual desire, in which women are conventionally declared to be dominant over men. Whereas Christine de Pizan built a city, these enchantresses build gardens. She means to attract women to create a mutually supportive society; they seek to attract men to manipulate them to serve their own purposes. Although Christine's *City* repeatedly declares her divinely ordained authority to create both place and book, she also represents herself as writing a radical work that contradicts the dominant narratives of the time. Both spaces—female-created city and female-created garden—are resistant to patriarchal narratives of authority and allow women to create their own authoritative voices. When Armida awakes from her faint and realizes that Rinaldo has not been moved by her pain and has gone away, she cries, "I hate myself!" and promptly sets about destroying her garden. In the conventional narrative, female self and garden space go hand in hand.

## CHAPTER 5 POETIC GARDENS OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

### Introduction

These pages consider some of the most famous literary gardens created by male poets in the seventeenth century, proceeding chronologically. I will begin with a look at Spenser's two major garden episodes from the *Faerie Queene*, because these function as a foundation for what was produced the rest of the century. This is followed by a discussion of Jonson's "To Penshurst," the most famous of the seventeenth century's country house poems, and this exploration is meant to be understood in conversation with later examinations of Marvell's "Upon Appleton House," and Aemilia Lanyer's "A Description of Cooke-ham," which begins chapter 6. I will also consider three of Marvell's other poems. Before that, however, I offer an interlude devoted to the meditative works of Herbert and Vaughan that are indebted to the garden tradition. The finale of the chapter considers Eve and Eden in Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

This selection demonstrates the strongest trends in usage of the garden topos by canonical, male, normative poets over the course of the century. These trends are three: the garden functions almost solely as a symbol, with its materiality de-emphasized; the garden is a means of expressing gender ideologies; and the garden offers a way to engage with broader social concerns. Although the division into male and female poets oversimplifies, this study must deal with gender seriously. The fact of being assigned to one gender or another, complicated as it may be, establishes a dividing line between the perspectives from which a poet of the time approaches the garden topos. The inescapable cultural assignment of the woman to the garden space predisposes female poets to identify with that space, while male poets are encouraged to see it as "other," and particularly as sexualized other.

The strength of the garden as a poetic topos at this time is demonstrated by the number of poems produced in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that are entitled merely “The Garden.” *The Oxford Book of Garden Verse*, containing poetry spanning over six hundred years, indicates that while it was a consistent item of poetic attention, until the 1500s there were few poems entirely devoted to gardens. An anonymous short song, written in the early fifteenth century and entitled “I Have a New Garden,” appears to be the first poem in English entirely devoted to the garden as an organizing image, rather than just as a setting for more important action. In this poem, the garden is a clear correlative for a sexualized body, in this case that of the male speaker. His body is a garden with a tree in the middle that bears early “Jenet” pears (7). “The fairest maid of this town” (9) requests that he “graft” from his pear tree, apparently onto hers, although this is not made explicit. Each sexualized body is thus conceived as a garden, and the poet chooses the pear, which is primarily made to reproduce by grafting, so that an act of deliberate and literal combination of parent plants is needed to produce new pears. The metaphor is made explicit in line 20, when the woman’s garden is named: “womb.” The joke at the end of the poem, that the fruit of the “grafting” is “a pear Robert / But not pear Jonet” (23-24) plays on the facts of both human—that only one genetic combination will produce “fruit”—and pear fertility, as well as punning on the speaker’s name (“John,” or “Jonet,” which is very similar to “Jenet,” the type of pear). At the very beginning of garden poetry as a distinct interest in English literature, the connection with the sexualized body is already well established.

In 1557, a short poem entitled simply “The Garden,” by Nicholas Grimald, indicates that the image had accrued enough poetic resonance to stand on its own as the organizing schema of a work. Grimald’s poem is not terribly complex but is important because it is a celebration of the material garden itself, without any need to use it only as a metaphor. As far as Grimald is

concerned, it is enough to concentrate only on the garden itself, which even deserves a traditional invocation of the Muses. “The Garden” enumerates what have become the traditional motifs of garden imagery: fragrant plants, flowers, fruit, bees, running water, and shade. After mentioning and briefly describing each, Grimald concludes with a paean to the treasures of the garden, combining all he has listed:

The garden, it allures, it feeds, it glads the sprite;  
From heavy hearts all doleful dumps the garden chaseth quite.  
Strength it restores to limbs, draws, and fulfilts the sight,  
With cheer revives the senses all, and maketh labour light.  
O, what delights to us the garden ground doth bring;  
Seed, leaf, flower, fruit, herb, bee, and tree, and more than I may sing. (21-26)

The garden represents to Grimald the traditional space of pleasure and fertility. Yet, even though there is no indication that Grimald is interested in the garden as anything more than a physical space, he still manages to describe it in terms that recall archetypal feminine roles. The garden “allures,” attracting the speaker in a specifically erotic fashion, and it acts. This implies intention and desire on the part of the garden. This is no passive space but an active locus of desire. In a real way, this part of Grimald’s fantasy is directly related to the sexuality that has invested the garden space in cultural thought.

### **Edmund Spenser**

Spenser provides a link between earlier Renaissance Italian epic romances and English native lyric traditions, such as the poems above, and the experimental playing field into which the seventeenth century would expand. Because this study only intends to consider Spenser as a starting point, the discussion of his work that follows covers a small, but extremely influential, sample—the two episodes in *The Faerie Queene* that fall most neatly into the tradition of garden

poetry. The Bower of Blisse (2.12) and the Garden of Adonis (3.6) partake of the European tradition of allegorical gardens within epics. Yet these two gardens also play out the preoccupations of this particular epic as a whole, and these preoccupations reflect the general interests of garden ideology: art and nature, change, fertility, female power and male reaction. The places are thus more than simple settings; they are performative spaces through which Spenser enacts his themes and arguments.

As the Garden of Adonis is a more straightforward poetic construction, we will deal with that before facing the Bower of Blisse, despite the fact that it appears later in *The Faerie Queene*. It is a very positive place—a site of sexuality, not given over to sterile erotic pleasure, but rather characterized by intense fecundity and a general air of vitality. This is signaled from the start, by the introductory summary of the canto:

The birth of faire Belphoebe and  
Of Amoret is told.  
The Gardins of Adonis fraught  
With pleasures manifold.

This garden is contextually united with birth and with the origins of strong and honorable female characters. The purpose of the garden is to complete the natural cycle of birth, death and rebirth. The canto too follows that pattern. Here, death is not something to be hidden by the artificial manipulation of images and exclusion of the natural but is rather understood to contribute to life and to the future, although that contribution is painful. This element of pain gives ambivalence to this episode's attitude toward death. The Garden of Adonis has two gates, one through which new souls—of plants and animals as well as people—go out into the world, and one through which they enter after having lived a full and productive life. On this level, then, death is a source of reunion and thus carries a positive valence. On the other hand, Adonis' death is not

portrayed in such a positive light and is in fact represented with a certain amount of denial.

Spenser is coy, speculating that he may not in fact have died but is rather living a secluded and idyllic existence among family in a grove at the top of the mountain in the middle of the garden.

Simultaneously, however, he uses Adonis' death to make his famous argument for posterity:

All be he subject to mortalitie,  
Yet is eterne in mutabilitie,  
And by succession made perpetuall,  
Transformed oft, and chaunged diuerslie:  
For him the Father of all formes they call;  
Therefore needs mote he liue, that liuing giues to all. (3.6.47)

This theme, as others have pointed out, runs throughout *The Faerie Queene*, and it provides one of the main distinctions between this garden and Acrasia's Bower of Blisse.

Together with Adonis at the top of the Mount, according to Spenser, reside Venus (periodically), Eros and Psyche, their daughter Pleasure, and Amoret. Amoret is given over especially to the care of Psyche to be trained up in "goodly femininitee," and at this Psyche apparently succeeds, for when Amoret, once mature, leaves the garden, she travels to the court of the Faerie Queene. There she attracts the admiration of many of the faerie knights, but she gives her love to Sir Scudamore. It is entirely appropriate to the concept of "goodly femininitee" that her original fate, in the 1590 version of *The Faerie Queen*, was famously to unite so closely with Scudamore—after being rescued by Britomart (knight of Chastity)—that the two become a hermaphrodite, one of the images utilized by the contemporary commentaries on marital bliss (Cheney 193). While it could represent unnatural deformity to some, to others, it was, like the ivy and elm combination, an appropriate representation of the biblical assertion that a married couple become one flesh, a single entity, that in the words of the Church of England's marriage

service “God has joined” and “no man [shall] put asunder.” Raised in an ideal garden, Amoret has grown up into one of the exemplars of the ideal wife—the helpmeet, entirely adjoined with her beloved.<sup>1</sup>

Beyond this happy family group, surrounded by Venus’ myrtle trees, the garden stretches out to its double walls and its double gates with its double Genii sending souls out into the world and letting them back in at the end of their lives. With the Mount at its center, with borders both containing it and protecting it, and with ingress and egress tightly controlled, this seems to be an ideal allegorical garden. Closer examination strengthens this impression. It is a pleasurable place—presided over by Venus, how could it not be? It is also a wholesome place, since it is Venus herself, not an imposter, who is the female spirit giving form and life to this garden. As such, her nature allows for the full range of love to be associated with the garden, rather than a limited imitation that embraces only lust, beauty or pleasure. The fullness of love, it is implied here, must allow for death, pain and change, because life includes these as well. Honest acceptance of life’s entirety is fundamental to embracing the entirety of love.

Life, death and time, therefore, are all fundamentally woven into the fabric of this garden. This is made clear from the beginning, not only by the name of the place (“Adonis” is forever linked with early, violent and painful death), but also by the explicit declaration that this garden has been “devized” by Nature (3.6.29). This labeling as “natural” marks it as positive. Further, when Diana and Venus meet early in this canto, before the garden is described, Diana claims that Venus is most often to be found in gardens, particularly in contrast to the “salvage” woods in which they have met. This garden, Venus’s own garden, must then clearly be a space of the highest eroticism. That translates not only into satisfaction of the body (Cupid / Eros), but also

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<sup>1</sup> In the 1596 version, Britomart and Amoret return to find that Scudamore has despaired of their success and gone off with Britomart’s squire to seek some other help. The striking image of fulfilled love has sadly vanished.

satisfaction of the mind (Psyche), and the Pleasure and life that eroticism engenders. The canto itself begins with a double birth that is simultaneously mystical and highly physical. Belpheobe and Amoret's mother was impregnated as though her body were the mud of the Nile, in which creatures are spontaneously created by the heat of the sun's rays. Here the twin girls are similarly created, although Spenser does make things a little more conventional by personifying the sunbeams as Titan. However, their mother does little more than provide a home for them for nine months, again falling unconscious at their birth. Her body is almost literally the soil in which ideal femininity is engendered and brought to fruition. Consciousness is beside the point; the process is a focalization of the myths embedded in the nature/gender matrix.

The garden combines several related traditions in literary garden history and brings them together into an imaginative version of Platonism. Each of the items growing here—the souls of plants, animals, minerals, and people—is the perfect Form of the versions of it on the earth.<sup>2</sup> Harrison describes the “gardens of Adonis,” miniature gardens forced into quick growth in containers, and thrown from windows during the Adone, the Greek festival honoring Adonis (*Gardens* 63). They were meant to symbolize short life and early fertility. This garden, while suffused throughout with the phantom of Adonis, is a stable space, although constantly changing. The specter of death is also ever-present, because of the death of Adonis.

Spenser has allowed for some touches to this garden that seem to place it right in the midst of the reality of gardening in his own time. He mentions several real plants, which help to give the space an air of materiality. Another element that marks a similarity between real-world fashions current in his time and allegorical features is the mountain in the middle of the garden. An elevated piece of land is useful in the construction of allegory, as it indicates the importance

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<sup>2</sup> Thus Adonis can be the “Father” of all things, a version of Adam paired with a Venus-Eve who, by being the force of fertile female sexuality, is the mother of all.

of features situated upon the top of the mountain, both through their elevation and their centrality. At the same time, this was a real-world fashion as well: an elevated bit of land that derived from security measures at medieval castle gardens (wherein they provided a safe vantage point from which to survey the surrounding lands). One of the best known features of Hampton Court's famous gardens, created during the sixteenth century in the form that made them famous, was the Mount, "densely planted with hawthorn through which a winding path led to the top where an arbour, three floors high, provided a protected environment" (Jennings 31). Spenser seems to recapitulate this structural element in his imagined garden, effectively combining high allegory with earthly materiality.<sup>3</sup>

He also refers more explicitly to contemporary horticultural trends in the remarkable organization of the soul-plants within the garden. Each is laid out in a particular bed, its individuality emphasized. These Platonic forms are not limited to plants but include everything born upon the earth, including animals: the elm tree grows in its plot; the python in its own; and the jellyfish in its own. This design emphasizes singularity, rather than any kind of communal effect, and is reminiscent of contemporary gardens that were created to do just that. Significant botanical gardens appeared in Italy in the mid-sixteenth century, but the first English establishment was only made in 1621 at Oxford (Campbell-Culver 15). During Spenser's lifetime, however, some of the British had started collections of exotic specimens brought back from exploratory voyages to the New World. Orangeries and menageries both attest to the popularity of the collection and display of natural exotica in early modern Europe (Hadfield 94-

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<sup>3</sup> It seems perfectly possible that this was also a serendipitous way for Spenser to flatter Queen Elizabeth in a bid for patronage. By subtly referring to one of her father's well known accomplishments (Hampton Court), he makes a sophisticated connection between this life-giving, idealized garden, and the virtue of the royal family.

105). A place like Venus' garden then provides the ultimate opportunity for display as collection: all items have their source here.

The Bower of Blisse, counterpart to the Garden of Adonis, appears at the end of book 2, as the staging of the final temptation for Guyon, the knight of Temperance, and, not only is it the setting of the temptation, but it also participates in that temptation. This canto is prefaced by the journey to the Bower by Guyon and the Palmer, a journey both difficult and dangerous, and unnatural death is a constant threat. Accompanied by the Palmer, Guyon must enter the garden, resist its various blandishments as well as those of its creator, Acrasia, and destroy the Bower (the garden's center), leaving it in ruins that cannot pose a threat to anyone else. The Bower seems a straightforward descendant of the evil pleasure gardens of continental Renaissance epic and Acrasia a descendant of their typical mistresses, evil and seductive sorceresses in the mold of Circe, and all a perversion of the character of Venus.<sup>4</sup> Like the classical witch, Acrasia has turned her suitors into beasts.

The point of view moves with Guyon and the Palmer. Together we approach a broken-down fence guarded by a sloppy, lascivious character, who is much more interested in letting people in than in keeping them out. The ramshackle fence symbolizes the moral laxity of this garden, as pointed out by Stanley Stewart in *The Enclosed Garden*: strong walls imply rectitude and control; weak, crumbling walls signify weak and crumbling morals and promiscuity, because the garden is open to offer pleasure to all comers. With these characters, the reader experiences the deceptive beauty of Acrasia's realm. This is a garden well described by the horticultural term "forced"; here the balance between the real and the artificial has fallen firmly on the side of the artificial. The most famous examples are the vines from which artificially created golden fruit

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<sup>4</sup> Acrasia's similarity to Circe is marked by Guyon's approach to her garden through dangers that recapitulate those Odysseus faced: Scylla and Charybdis, the Sirens, etc.

hangs together with real fruit among the shadowed branches. Some proof that the artificiality of this garden is tied closely to female sexuality, and particularly *unnatural* sexuality, is to be found in the two nymphs Guyon encounters in the stream. Their nudity and interaction is explicitly designed for titillation through the sense of sight. Acrasia also uses sexuality to accomplish her own ends; her sexual allure is similarly not “natural.” Perhaps this is reinforced by the fact that she controls the liaisons with her victims, encouraging attitudes of passivity from them while she takes the superior position, physically as well as relationally.

At least this is the tableau that Guyon and the Palmer witness: the knight’s head is in her lap and his eyes are closed, while she bends her face over his, seeming to suck his breath out, like a succubus. Certainly she is sucking out his vitality, his life force, recreating in him a mirror of her garden: a tilting away from nature, fertility and growth toward artifice, sterility and death. The garden space recreates the hidden reality of Acrasia’s person, a space into which male victims offer their sexuality and in return receive only death, both spiritual and physical. Deluded knights believe they are seeing true female sexuality because they have been invited into this beautiful garden, but they are granted only the illusion of pleasure and fulfillment.<sup>5</sup> Guyon’s unfortunate predecessors were not good readers of the garden topos; otherwise they would have had insight into the situation they had entered, which is psychic in the guise of spatial. Had they understood the crumbling fences, the lax gatekeeper, and the golden fruits, they would have been safe from seduction by Acrasia and her minions, and they themselves would not have withered vitally, sexually, or spiritually.

The reader, through the use of point of view, is made to identify with Guyon and the Palmer, experiencing each element as they experience it, while Acrasia and her garden are seen

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<sup>5</sup> Pleasure, legitimate daughter of Eros and Psyche, lives in the Garden of Adonis.

as completely *other*. The central male figures (the heroes) come into the garden from outside of it, and the garden and enchantress are both experienced as something to be seen, judged, and acted upon. They are presented to the reader's gaze, not opened to the reader's self-identification. Acrasia does not lack power, but it is a threatening power steeped in sexuality, and it calls for a particular set of reactions from the reader, who is assumed to be male. The garden plays out the threats of the female in a more subtle and passive way, and its protracted self-presentation to Guyon, as he walks through it, gives him—and the reader—a chance to experience the pleasures of sensuality without committing to the moral decay necessitated by a more active engagement with the same elements represented in the female body. He can remain a virtuous knight at least partially because he is inoculated through exposure to the garden before meeting Acrasia, who is the focal point of the space.

At the same time, the garden also recapitulates the creative effect of Spenser's writing. He is such a highly ornamental poet that he walks a fine line between the attractions of artifice and the conventional virtue of naturalism, achieving a balance similar to that of the formal garden aesthetic itself. His work has a filigree quality filled with rhetorical embellishments, and he is a conscientious stylist. Spenser, as Giamatti saw, adds a great deal of depth to the artistic traditions of the earthly garden, stretching that trope while still maintaining a strong sense of its origins. He consequently firmly establishes the parameters for imagining literary gardens in British literature during the next century. By solidifying the matter, making it thoroughly English and transcendently mythological and allegorical, not to mention popular, he helped to set the foundation for the rest of the garden poetry we will look at. The explicit association in this work between female sexuality and the space and ground of the garden was recapitulated by those who followed him.

Let this section of the discussion end with a summary of the conventions Spenser's work contributes to the imaginative representations of gardens in the century that followed. First, the point of view is that of an outsider regarding the garden. For the Bower of Blisse, the reader is meant to identify with Guyon and experiences the garden through his eyes. For the Garden of Adonis, the point of view is that of an omniscient narrator, separate from the story and recounting something that is already in the past. Readers are not called upon to identify with Venus. Her thoughts are always somewhat murky and mysterious: we learn some of her motivations, but by no means all, nor do we know when and where she comes and goes. Second, both gardens provide an imaginative canvas upon which to consider questions of gender relations as well as the sexual nature of women. These questions are played out not only in the activities that take place within the garden but also within the plants of the garden, its furniture, its inhabitants, and the way the space is designed to be experienced. Further, the garden space allows for exploration of scientific and land management trends as well as philosophical meditation and aesthetic consideration. Spenser, in these two gardens, has created a microcosm of human concerns. At the same time, though, it is wrapped up in the language of female sexuality and bodily nature, and this question must ultimately trump all others, since the ground of the garden is finally the ground of the female body, and its value is directly tied to just how domesticated or natural (i.e., wild) it is. For the male poets who follow Spenser in the next century, this will remain the case and will color both the interpretation of existing gardens and the design of new gardens. Garden fashions from the real world will both influence and be influenced by the cultural assertions that these poems both illustrate and help to maintain.

### **Ben Jonson – “To Penshurst”**

Ben Jonson's "To Penshurst" is undoubtedly the best known of the seventeenth-century country house poems, and it is included here as part of this subset of topographical poems. The

country house poem is constructed around the figure of the landed estate, and gardens play an enormous part in the meaning of these poems. This reading of Jonson is influenced by the work of Don Wayne, which approaches Penshurst as a real, material place. Other readings have the habit of mentioning in passing that Penshurst is a real place, but then setting the materiality, the embodiment, of it aside in favor of treating it only like a poetic construct. Wayne understands the poem as a dialogue with physical reality, in which Jonson is incorporating poetry, land, family, and society into a whole matrix.

Jonson adopts a distanced though encomiastic tone toward the land of the Penshurst estate. This is, of course, part of Jonson's usual poetic persona, but in this case it follows Spenser's example of the approach to the Garden of Adonis. Jonson is both a figure from the outside (the figure entertained by the family) and an authorized observer and judge (the disembodied voice of the first part of the poem). Primarily, Jonson treats the estate like an extension of the Sidney family, which minimizes the importance of the estate in and of itself. As Wayne has pointed out, Jonson was a careful observer of the geography of the estate, and that indicates a measure of interest in the materiality of the landscape, but the primary interest is in molding the representation of the estate to that of the Sidneys.<sup>6</sup> While Marvell, for example, seems to enjoy the out-of-doors, Jonson is fundamentally an urban writer and emphasizes the social determination of spaces in his work. His primary interests lie in exploring and commenting upon those constructs, and manipulating them to accomplish his own ends. The social circle within which potential patrons were to be found, the aristocracy, created social status in the early seventeenth century through country houses, so Jonson writes a poem having to do with a country house. It was, as much as anything, a political move, and it is shot through with

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<sup>6</sup> Of course, the two purposes are not mutually exclusive, and it seems likely that Jonson paid attention to the one in order to please the other.

awareness of the very social webs he explores in his other work. Jonson relates to the estate as though it were a text, something to be read and related to intellectually, but not something to experience bodily.

The first interest of the poem is in the house itself, and while Jonson soon moves into references to the natural aspects of the estate, they remain subordinated in the logic of the poem to the house:

Thou [the house] joy'st in better marks, of soil, of air,  
Of wood, of water: therein thou art fair.  
Thou hast thy walks for health, as well as sport;  
Thy Mount, to which the dryads do resort,  
Where Pan and Bacchus their high feasts have made  
Beneath the broad beech and the chestnut shade;  
That taller tree, which of a nut was set,  
At his great birth, where all the Muses met. (7-14)<sup>7</sup>

The soil and walks and all belong to the house; the land is not approached as if it has merit beyond its role as servant to Robert Sidney's house. In this quotation, as well, Jonson's first references are vague, and when he moves to specific aspects of the landscape, they are only more subordinated to the family. The Mount is the meeting place of classical gods associated with poetic creativity, an imaginative choice that both moves the reader smoothly into the next lines referring to Sir Philip Sidney, and gives classical authority to the whole scenario. These lines have tied Jonson's poem, and by extension himself as poet, to the tradition of classical pastoral and retirement poetry. The contemporary educated reader will here recall Vergil, Horace, and perhaps more distantly, Theocritus, and this associative process is precisely what Jonson is

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<sup>7</sup> Note the presence of the fashionable Mount.

aiming for. The oak that follows is only of interest because it is associated with Sidney's birth, and the Lady's oak (18) and the Gamage copse (19) continue this pattern.

The next segment of the poem depicts the extreme fertility of both estate and family, heralded by the birth of Philip under the oak in the park. The abundance and generosity of the land is imagined by Jonson as if the land naturally (i.e., without the husbandry of humanity) produces food and materials for the household. The copses serve "seasoned deer" (20) as though fulfilling the duties of gamekeeper, huntsman, butcher, and cook all together; fields breed the horses (24) while banks "yield thee coney" (25), and the trees shake dead game birds down upon those who fancy a pheasant (28). Others have pointed out the comedy inherent in this fantasy, so I will refrain, but the message is relevant: the land serves the house(hold); all is subordinated to the lord in the middle of the estate.

The perspective of the poem moves inexorably toward the feast in the great hall with a kind of centripetal force. In this way Jonson seems to be representing the social construction of Stuart Britain in a mythic, and naturally authorized, way: the lands of England gladly produce their best (men, food, timber and other resources) in the service of the divinely ordained monarch who sits at the center of the world (the court) and fulfills his duty to take care of the rest. Jonson in his representation of Penshurst has thus created an idealized microcosm of the kingdom, a relationship illustrated by the anecdote of James I's proverbially warm welcome upon his unexpected arrival. The gardens themselves are given hardly a passing mention, and are combined closely with the orchards. The poem concentrates much more on fruitfulness than on ornamentation, for the former is the mark of virtue in this scheme. Penshurst is not "built for envious show," but for the provision of plenty. In the end, less than half the poem is devoted to the description of the place; the second sixty percent or so discusses the virtue of the family more

directly, particularly that of Barbara Gamage. Her housewifely provision is honored in the story of James, and her chastity is also honored in the final lines of the poem. These might seem a bit out of place if the traditions of the garden are not understood, but in the midst of this paean to an Edenic relationship between humanity and the land, the lady is conventionally understood as both fruitful and chaste—properly ordered and productive female sexuality is one of the keystones of the tradition. Thus, in the very last line, “thy lord” dwells not only in the female-populated Penshurst, but in the female-grounded social webs that construct the meaning of the estate. But the lord, like Jonson, is not a part of the estate: rather, he owns and “indwells” it.

### **Herbert and Vaughan – Gardens of the Soul**

I have grouped these two poets together because they showcase the use of nature in religious lyrics, while the work of the other poets represented in this chapter is more secular, although at times some do incorporate aspects of Christianity. Only these two poets, however, can be said to have devotion, meditation, or reflection on the Christian life as their primary stated purpose for writing. Both Vaughan and Herbert use natural imagery in their work, the former more commonly than the latter. Herbert tends to be more internally focused, while Vaughan is more externally oriented. Thus Vaughan gives more heartfelt and extended descriptions of the natural world; many of his poems take place there, while Herbert’s tend to take place almost entirely in the psyche of the individual or of the universal church. They are full of the building he worked in daily, the people with whom he came into contact, and his own thoughts. I will only glance at a few of the poems of each, illustrating the use of the traditional gendered imaginary that the garden topos maintained from Christianity.

Herbert’s “Sinne” is one of his few poems directly to utilize the garden traditions, even in a disguised sense. The first line is “Lord, with what care has thou begirt us round!” after which he goes on to list various ways in which people are guarded and confined for their own sakes by

those who love them. The image of the containing wall reflects that of the enclosed garden, so that the believer becomes like the garden, or even like the character within the garden, in the sense of being contained or confined. The different symbolic levels are smoothly conflated: soul = garden = woman in garden. Traditionally associated with these symbols are those of God as the gardener who maintains the garden of the soul, pulling the weeds of sin and planting seeds of righteousness, and of Adam (and to a lesser degree, Eve) as gardeners, of gardening as being the first vocation, as the Lord God “put the man in the garden to tend and work it” (Gen. 3). This aspect is of course most thoroughly explored through *Paradise Lost*, but it underlies much of what was going on in the associative sphere at the time (Stewart). Strengthening this associative matrix are Biblical references, such as the description of Christ as “the second Adam” (Rom. 5:12, 15; Rom. 5:14) and the newly risen Christ’s self-representation as a gardener (John 20:15-16).

The wall here is seen by the speaker as a positive thing, but by its following just upon the heels of the poem’s title, “Sinne,” the reader is made aware of how a wall is often considered to be a hindrance more than a help by those who do not recognize its benefits. To the redeemed soul, the wall is a protection, while to the natural soul, it is a barrier from pleasure. Herbert presents the world outside the wall, the wilderness area, as the world of sin, and it is only by removing the wilderness from within the soul (by spiritually weeding and pruning the garden) that a distinction can be maintained between the good inside the wall and the bad outside it. Sin is that which is excluded from the tender plant by the gardener who knows better. Yet Herbert’s participation in this very orthodox imaginative argument is nonetheless that of a person who is aware of the sinful world outside, who has been allowed by the social world to explore the wilderness. He speaks feelingly of how much better life is inside the wall than outside, but his is

the voice of experience. Those who are confined within a wall not by their own choice understand the enclosed garden as not the simply good place Herbert's replication of tradition represents it to be. For them, it is a much more complicated space, because there is no experience of the outside with which to contrast it.

"The H. Communion" incorporates this moral shorthand into the language of the poem, the imagery of inside and outside, of dividing walls and their associations with gardens and especially the Garden of Eden:

Thou, who from me wast sold,  
To me dost now thy self convey;  
For so thou should'st *without me* still have been,  
Leaving *within me sinne*

.....

Yet can these not get over to my soul,  
Leaping *the wall that parts*  
*Our souls and fleshly hearts;*  
But as th' outworks, they may controll  
My rebel-flesh

.....

For sure when Adam did not know  
To sinne, or sinne to smother;  
*He might to heav'n from Paradise go,*

As from one room t' another. (5-6, 13-17, 33-36; emphasis added)

Here is Herbert's consciousness of the negative aspects of walls: in this poem, walls divide the sinner from his savior until the savior leaps over them to combine the essence of the two. Adam,

by sinning, erected a wall between God and mankind; he introduced division and imprisoned each succeeding individual to his or her own irreducible materiality, the “fleshy hearts,” the “rebel-flesh” which can no longer be blown to heaven with a “fervent sigh” (31) but must remain chained to the physical world. Clearly, while Herbert is happy to adopt the language of gardens in order to express spiritual and meditative concepts, he does not privilege the material register of meaning. Here is garden as Idea, not as Object, a preference indicated by the lack of specific references to plants or other materials.

His harnessing of the trope of the enclosed garden in the service of a morality of self-restraint is apparent as well in “Content,” in which he abjures his soul not to “grudge to keep / Within the walls of your own breast” (1-2) and to “Gad not abroad” (5). This echoes advice often written to women in conduct manuals, though it is also used in other works, such as Marvell’s “The Garden” (where he finds quiet and “Content” in the garden after chasing fruitlessly after ambition and fame). Christian virtues of self-denial, including chastity, temperance, and humility, were consistently enjoined upon Christian women in particular. That feminine bent is made clear by Herbert’s diction. For example,

Gad not abroad at ev’ry quest and call  
Of an untrained hope or passion.  
To court each place or fortune that doth fall,  
Is wantonnesse in contemplation.

Mark how the fire in flints doth quiet lie,  
Content and warm t’ it self alone:  
But when it would appear to others eye,  
Without a knock it never shone.

Give me the pliant minde, whose gentle measure  
Complies and suits with all estates;  
Which can let loose to a crown, and yet with pleasure  
Take up within a cloisters gates. (5-16)

“Gad,” “wantonnesse,” “pliant...gentle”—these are female-inflected words in early modern England. The middle stanza quoted here is concerned with self-presentation, closely related to vanity, traditionally a concern applied to women. Finally, this self-containing, self-restraining fantasy is closed with an idiom invoking the land: “Then cease discoursing soul, till thine own ground” (33). The soul is to set aside the vain folly of discourse and to concentrate upon its own local concerns. The garden, here the meditative garden, provides the imaginary ground upon which the ideal male and female are combined in the imitation of Christ.<sup>8</sup>

Henry Vaughan, who published most of his works in the 1650s, wrote both secular and sacred works and was heavily influenced by Herbert, by his own immersion in the Bible, and by his life in Wales. Some of his secular works are relevant to our study, so we will glance at them in passing, but my main emphasis at this time will be on his meditative poems, some published in *Silex Scintillans* (1650/55), some in *Thalia Rediviva* (1678). Vaughan is a very visual poet, much more so than Herbert. His strength lies in the images, particularly the natural images, he creates, rather than in wordsmithing. He also creates a believable persona of a man striving to attain his spiritual potential and to create an identity separate from the sinful man he believes himself to be. Vaughan’s primary images are not those of the garden, though they are those of the rural landscape. He seems much more taken with the image of light in all its many variations,

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<sup>8</sup> For other examples of Herbert’s dispassionate use of the general garden trope, see “Sunday” and “Even-song.” This latter is one of the few times he does not privilege an innocent inside against a corrupt outside, because both “garden” and “grove” stand in for positive originals.

with the sky, and with spacious landscapes and in his sacred poems is not particularly specific about material objects, preferring to imagine what spiritual truths the objects point to. In the sacred poems, flowers tend to be either broadly referred to or limited to the most emblematic choices: he frequently uses the images of roses, tulips, lilies and violets, but few others make an appearance. The “crown imperial” (*frittilaria imperialis*), an unusual flower, occurs once, in “The Request,” but that is an unusual choice.<sup>9</sup> Interestingly, though, in his secular poems, he sometimes seems a little more aware of individual types of plants. In *Man of Darkness*, for example, there is some surprising floral detail: “there (amongst *thorns* and *weeds*) / Cheap herbs and *coleworts*, with the common *seeds* / Of *chesboll* or *tame poppies* he did sow, / And *vervain* with *white lilies* caused to grow” (viii.5-8; emphasis in original).<sup>10</sup>

Vaughan references several particular women prominent in the Judeo-Christian tradition, and with none of them does he emphasize the garden trope, although he does press the “natural” aesthetic. Rachel (“The Ornament”) and Rebecca (“Isaac’s Marriage”)<sup>11</sup> are both praised for being “simple” and natural, not coy, overdressed or artificial. He honors the Magdalen for having turned away from artificiality and vanity, now “despising” her own looks (“St Mary Magdalen”). Mary, the mother of Jesus, is understood more symbolically, as the Queen of Heaven, and the *hortus conclusus* is not the image he chooses to use for her (“The Knot”). In his secular poems, Vaughan is much more apt to use the imaginary along conventional lines to emblazon the body of the female beloved. For example, in “Fida,” the pastoral beloved’s body is compared to

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<sup>9</sup> Much like the “marvel of Peru” (*mirabilis jalapa*) in Marvell’s “The Mower Against Gardens,” its appearance is highly significant in its particular context. Unlike the “marvel,” however, there is no extra pun (marvel=Marvell): Vaughan is interested in this particular flower because its name refers so neatly to the spiritual truth he is trying to express.

<sup>10</sup> This is from Vaughan’s translation of Vergil’s *Georgics* 4. *Man of Darkness* is part of Vaughan’s prose work, *The Mount of Olives* (1652). The basic text comes from Vergil, but Vaughan’s selection and translation of it indicate a greater interest in flora than a reader might have thought from *Silex Scintillans*.

<sup>11</sup> In this poem, Isaac is also praised for being simple and righteous.

various traditional natural elements, such as snow and cherries (342) and is “a rich and flowery *plain*” (56). But these are unusual forays for Vaughan. In general, the domesticated material world holds little interest for him; only in the context of poetic convention, to make a comparison or highlight a symbol, does he adopt its use. For example, the trope of the person or soul as a plant dependent upon God for nourishment can be found in “The Morning-Watch,” “And do they so?” and “Unprofitableness,” but the image is not central to any of these poems. Vaughan invokes it, then allows the convention to do the work. Other poems figure the believer as a piece of land (“Affliction [I],” “Love, and Discipline”), or the Bible as a seed to be planted (“The Law, and the Gospel”), or the believer’s good works as flowers (“The Wreath”), all of which are highly traditional metaphors.

The language of nature in poetry provides the background to much of Vaughan’s work, which is one reason he has gained a reputation as a “nature” poet, not necessarily because he is interested in nature in and of itself. It seems likely that Vaughan’s Hermetic philosophy and immersion in the Bible both strongly conditioned his poetic use of nature. Hermeticism allows that creation gains importance by pointing to the Creator, but it is not important in its irreducible individuality. Further, Vaughan is at least as interested in the biblical landscape as in his immediate surroundings. The biblical landscape, especially that of the Old Testament, is conflated in his poetry with the poetic landscape he has created (like a Welsh Arcadia), and both translate at times into psychological space, in which Vaughan’s speakers may imagine themselves within the stories of the Bible or may find their own states of mind reflected in biblical landscapes.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Aemilia Lanyer makes the same move in “A Description of Cooke-ham” See chapter 6 of this study.

“The Bee” is probably the most relevant of Vaughan’s poems for this study. One of Vaughan’s longest original poems, it appears in *Thalia Rediviva*, as part of a subset of “Pious Thoughts and Ejaculations,” all religious lyrics, and is undated. This is one of Vaughan’s very few poems that identifiably takes place, in any way, in a garden. The speaker begins in the garden but immediately leaves it behind:

From fruitful *beds* and flowery *borders*  
Parcelled to wasteful ranks and orders,  
Where *state* grasps more than plain *truth* needs  
And wholesome *herbs* are starved by *weeds*:  
To the wild woods I will be gone,  
And the coarse meals of great *Saint John*. (1-6)

The garden here is made to symbolize the “civilized” world, which is, in the speaker’s judgment, unduly controlled and thereby corrupted by the state and, as the next lines make clear, the established church as well. In contrast, the speaker expects to find a purer space in the wilder landscape of the woods. In fact, he imagines it with many of the traditional elements of the *locus amoenus*: fountains, shade, repose, green, flowers, birds, and trees. For him, in the woods “something still like *Eden* looks” (23). The speaker’s “home,” identified in the last line, is this civilized world, this garden space, and in an unusual turn he desires to move from the inside (garden) to the outside (forest) for a time, but then to return back to the domestic space, “laden” with the nectar of having communed with the Lord in “*truth* and *spirit*” (74). This out-and-back movement enacts the point of view of the bee.

The imagination of the speaker transforms what is traditionally a wild or uncanny space into a “natural” idyll opposed to the garden. Vaughan’s woods are reminiscent of the traditional medieval allegorical gardens, in that they are the space of the poets’ delight. Vaughan’s unusual

emphasis upon the figure of the hermit, however, comes from a different tradition. The first tradition imagines the poet-lover's revivifying experience under the trees, by the water, listening to the birds. The other is the religious hermit out in the desert communing with God and gaining new life through an ascetic ethos. Both experiences offer a kind of ecstasy, whether erotic, creative, or spiritual, and both can thereby represent the landscape in which such encounters take place as a type of *locus amoenus*. Thus, Vaughan offers here a sophisticated reading of place in keeping with both his visual imagination and his self-conception as a marginalized yet righteous commentator upon "the world." This poem promotes the same virtues of simplicity and innocence as many of his others, such as those about the female biblical characters. Gender ideology is downplayed in the poem, however: nature and the bee are both gendered female, and the hermit is male, but there is no insistence here upon fertility or eroticism of any kind. The pleasure the speaker imagines has far more to do with the spirit than with the body.<sup>13</sup>

Another poem that makes Vaughan's understanding of this most traditional set of images a little clearer is "Tears." This short work imagines an ecstatic face-to-face meeting with God as the Living Water:

O when my God, my glory, brings  
His white and holy train  
Unto those clear and living *Springs*,  
Where comes no *stain*!

Where all is *light*, and *flowers*, and *fruit*,  
And *joy*, and *rest*,

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<sup>13</sup> The speaker is technically ungendered, though perhaps Vaughan's use of "I" encourages a reading of him as male. The tendency to do so, however, does not rest on any internal evidence within the poem.

Make me amongst them ('tis my suit!)

The last one, and the least. (1-8)

This is a heavenly space, indicated by ecstatic language and exclamations as well as the centrality of the fountain, identified by its proximity to the first line's "God." The presence of flowers and fruit, as well as the references to joy and rest, may at first seem to indicate that this takes place in an allegorical garden. However, no mention of enclosure refuses this as a definitive answer, and other elements imply that the poem does not take place in the formal garden normally associated with this symbolism. For example, the water is referred to as "Springs" and a "stream" (10), never as a fountain or well. The latter terms carry the burden of artificiality because mankind always has a hand in creating them, while springs and streams occur naturally. Thus they would likely appeal to Vaughan and seem to him to be closer to divine favor. Also, he imagines the speaker as an "Ass" (11) coming to drink after a long train of the righteous. Vaughan in other poems ("The Ass") has claimed this identity for himself, and it seems to be one he is fond of. But it is hard to imagine a donkey in a garden; the two images are incongruous. Also the inclusivity that is the point of the poem (the speaker is begging to be included among the righteous, and he reminds the Lord that he accepts even beggars) intimates against the rhetoric of the garden generally, which is constructed according to the principle of exclusivity. This heavenly place seems to be imagined as an open space, naturally occurring, and with little human intervention at all (the Ass and the Lord are the only individuals in the poem).

This value system is reinforced by the final poem examined here, "The Search," which is about turning away from a deceptive worldly "shell." The speaker has sought an encounter with Christ in all the places he is said to have been in his lifetime. Having checked the garden of Gethsemane (and found only "*Ideas* of his agony" [38]) and Calvary and the grave, he determines that he will find him in the wilderness. Thus, Vaughan is once again asserting the

imperative to seek the Lord in the wild places of the earth. This maneuver contrasts with that made by Herbert in “Sinne.” Vaughan finds God in the wilderness, and the garden is a symbol of the corrupt veil of artificiality, while Herbert sees God in the enclosed garden, with the uncanny wilderness always threatening to corrupt this well-ordered space. The desert here becomes the *locus amoenus*:

With Seraphins there talked he  
His father’s flaming ministry,  
He heavened their *walks*, and with his eyes  
Made those wild shades a Paradise,  
Thus was the desert sanctified  
To be the refuge of his bride;  
I’ll thither then. (59-65)

He is conflating this with a paradisaal space, turning the desert into a garden, the garden of the Canticle in some ways, indicated by the reappearance of the Bride. Yet it too turns out to be a failure:

But as I urged thus, and writ down  
What pleasures should my journey crown,  
What silent paths, what shades, and cells,  
Fair, virgin-flowers, and hallowed *wells*  
I should rove in, and rest my head  
Where my dear Lord did often tread, (67-72)

he hears a voice telling him that this is an illusion, and that he cannot find such rest and satisfaction in the material world. Here then is the crux of Vaughan’s attitude toward that world: it is the “shell” for the “kernel” of God within it, which is the part that really matters. He cannot

find true communion with the Divine either in the Book of Nature (the material world) or in the Book of the Word (the Bible in which these stories are recorded). He asserts that the modern believer too often tries to find God through methods that have worked before (for Elijah or Jacob) but that cannot work for him or her. Rather, modern people must seek communion with God in their own backyards, in the woods and streams and starry night skies they already know, understanding always that God is ultimately unreachable and only shows a glimpse of himself through creation.

In the end, Vaughan turns his back on the image of the garden because he sees it as a corrupt space further away from God than more naturalistic places. He uses the matrix we have been examining here, but only conventionally, and he does not find much inspiration in it. He is a highly visual poet, and he seems not to trust too much ornamentation or prettiness, that tension that Spenser had also dealt with explicitly.

### **Andrew Marvell**

Marvell too is a visual poet. He is also clearly at home in the outdoors, producing some of the most beautiful and fully realized natural images in seventeenth-century poetry. So much of his most famous work invokes the pastoral mode that he seems a natural keystone of this chapter, which considers four of Marvell's poems, "The Picture of Little T. C. in a Prospect of Flowers," "The Mower against Gardens," "The Garden," and "Upon Appleton House." Each of these poems is primarily secular, and in returning to this milieu, the sexualized nature that is a fundamental part of the garden conventions leaps back into prominence. The poems of Herbert and Vaughan sublimate gender relations and sexual ecstasy into spiritual ecstasy, recasting the male-female relationship as the God-believer or God-church relationship. The elements of constraint and control are thereby transformed into ungendered *self*-control, and the importance of the material world and its details fade into insignificance. In these sacred poems, the garden

imaginary functions more like an empty set of signs than in secular works, due to their interest in a spiritual as opposed to a corrupt and deceptive physical world. The secular works included here also have ambiguous relationships to the physical world, but they tend to reflect somewhat more awareness of that world than do the sacred works of Vaughan and Herbert. Marvell, for example, contrasts significantly with these poets. His lyrics are full of color, detail, and sophisticated awareness of social and sexual relations. They have a certain weight about them that derives partly from the complexity of his poetry and thought but also from the materiality of his verse.

“The Picture of Little T.C.” offers a charming, and quite conventional, image of a girl in a garden. The male speaker emphasizes her sexuality and her relationship to nature, claims himself as one of her victims (he must “be laid, / Where [he] may see thy glories from some shade” [23-24]), and thereby emphasizes her position as both (potentially) erotic actor and object to be consumed by the male gaze. This is reinforced by the title: this poem is a “picture” of the girl. The garden as envisioned here follows informal, open, classical lines, which is fitting for a “Nymph” (2) and “Darling of the Gods” (10). It is, after all, a “Prospect of Flowers,” where *prospect* incorporates the broad meanings of landscape, of an open place, here one apparently distinguished by floral abundance. “T.C.” exhibits the ethos that Damon the Mower puts forth in the poem discussed next—that the untamed and undomesticated is best.

This figure radiates an erotic innocence similar to Milton’s Eve, while she accomplishes tasks akin to those of that lady: naming the wildflowers and provocatively playing with the roses. The invocation of wildflowers carries an association of wantonness, lilies of the field and the innocence of pastoral youth, all of which conventionally elicit the soubriquet “nymph.” Roses, on the other hand, call up the system of associations having to do with conventional sexuality: medieval allegorical gardens, Venus, and the Virgin Mary. One floral type is the beauty of



Marvell's speaker imagines himself cast aside in a Petrarchan love encounter with a nymph who functions as a kind of minor flower goddess.

In the next poem under consideration, "The Mower Against Gardens," the speaker declaims against the very fact of gardens, describing them as unnatural, sterile, and exclusionary. Much of what he attacks is the practice of genetically manipulating plants: the pink turns into a double flower, the tulip develops striations of color, roses are bred to have different scents (9-14). He also derides the economic frenzy over exotic plants, with prices reflecting power: those who can afford the latest tulip or the "marvel of Peru" will pay the equivalent of a meadow for it (15-18). The control of sexuality within the garden is also denigrated by the mower, who points out both enforced sterility and the practices of grafting and asexual reproduction. All are represented as "unnatural" and a reflection of mankind's "vice" (1). Much of the imagery of the poem has to do with false appearance and sexual control—mankind encloses nature in the garden by "seduc[ing]" it (2) and "allur[ing]" it (3), with the goal of exerting absolute and corrupting control over nature. Contrasted with this is the classless, free and natural world of the meadows, and the one to which the mower argues it would be wiser to return.<sup>14</sup>

Unlike the particular and very personal interests displayed in the previous poem, "The Garden" is a highly ideological work, concerned not with any concrete place, nor any concrete reality, but rather with the trope of gardens as purely literary or artistic constructions—imaginary rather than physical. The point of the poem is revealed in the mystical sixth stanza, in which the speaker's mind withdraws from all contact with the real world, into a world of its own making, represented as superior to the outside world (which offers "pleasure less" [41]). The poem is

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<sup>14</sup> There is some question as to how seriously the reader is supposed to take the mower. Marvell's ambiguous approach to the character makes it unclear: the speaker's anger indicates his biased point of view, but his language ("nutriment," "interline") indicates that he is not just a simple rustic.

concerned with the garden as trope, as symbolic matrix, and as allegory. Marvell's speaker, following the path of tradition, has come to the garden by choice in search of "repose," "Quiet," and "Innocence" (8-10), retreating from the outside world with which he has grown disillusioned.

The poem's ideal garden is first of all a place of "repose," which Robert Pogue Harrison has labeled as the primary purpose of all gardens. It is contrasted with the miniature, representative "gardens" of fame for which laurel wreaths are synecdoche. Marvell's speaker argues that he prefers a "real" garden, an example of it rather than a representation of it. One might think that this indicates a preference for material reality rather than abstract ideals. However, the garden here is itself an abstract idea of Garden, a place that encompasses all the traditional elements and consolations of the garden. The poem's progression of idealization eventually extends right into the mind itself, where such ideals are created and the only place they exist.

After extolling the virtues of "repose" in the first stanza, Marvell's speaker moves on to "solitude" and the virtues associated with edenic space, such as an isolation that is yet full of innocence, the garden of childhood. Because the adult speaker is too experienced to be the usual inhabitant of such a garden, he must enter the garden from the outside world, and in doing so, he rejects that world in favor of a space he has idealized. He expects to find here virtues that he represents as female: "*fair* Quiet" and "Innocence, thy *sister dear*" (9-10; emphasis added). He says that he has vainly sought both "In busy companies of men" (11), contrasting the garden space with those dominated by busy men. This quest, at once erotic and philosophical, is bound to find fulfillment (or at least anticipated fulfillment) in a garden. The philosophical constructs

the speaker seeks must be gendered female; they are the original inhabitants of the garden, while the male seeker must enter it in order to find the object of his quest.

This reading is borne out by the following stanzas, which make explicit the erotic register of the poem. Stanza 3 plays with Petrarchan imagery—cruel mistresses, the colors of red and white, and the violent inscription of love upon the trees. Marvell has already represented the garden as a space in which female allegorical figures are to be found, but here, the garden itself is eroticized as a female body, invoking the traditions derived from the Cantic. For example, the “lovely green” is compared to red and white, the traditional colors of love, but more specifically the ideal colors of the beloved’s body—lips, cheeks, and skin. The garden’s beauties far “exceed” those of any human mistress. And the final two lines make these associations explicit: “Fair Trees! Wheres’e’er your barks I wound, / No names shall but your own be found” (23-24). At this point, he apostrophizes the trees themselves rather than allegorical characters; the interest has moved from the intellectual to the physical. The wounding inscription upon the body of the garden is the name of itself.

The fourth stanza famously incorporates this biophilia (in a most literal sense) into classical tradition: Apollo desired the laurel, not the nymph Daphne; Pan lusted after the reed, not after Syrinx. The speaker indicates that his desires are therefore authorized, both as a pastoral poet and as a lover (Apollo, a god of poetry; Pan, a god of pastoral; both, divine examples of love). The fifth stanza, too, increases erotic tension while incorporating the idea of the garden as beloved body:

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,  
Ensnared with flow'rs, I fall on grass. (33-40)

Amusing when taken at face value, this scene becomes sensuous if understood to reflect the traditions of the *Canticle*. These fruits traditionally symbolize the pleasures of the beloved's body, lush sweetness for the lover to delight in.

The following stanza is the ecstatic climax of the poem, in which the mind "Withdraws into its happiness" (42), two become one ("each kind / Does straight its own resemblance find" [43-44]), and the world dissolves and collapses into the immediate and absolute presence of the lovers ("Annihilating all that's made / To a green thought in a green shade" [47-48]). Of course, Marvell is also playing with philosophical ideas, but in this poem he has most strongly been imagining, and enacting, a sexual encounter between lovers, in which the speaker is a human actor and the beloved is the garden. This encapsulates many of the cultural associations between women and gardens: the body of the beloved is a site of pleasure the poet-lover can enter and enjoy, find repose, beauty and solitude in, and then leave if necessary.

In the final three stanzas, the speaker gradually returns from his ecstasy, first imagining his soul as a bird sitting preening in a tree. This is an ecstatic image, understood as the soul separated from the body (Stewart 178). However, it is first and foremost a concrete image, indicating that the speaker is again aware of the world around him, rather than floating in the mental sea of the previous lines. This section seems to dramatize a sort of afterglow, where the bird-soul sits, resting, "And, till prepared for longer flight, / Waves in its plumes the various light" (55-56). Stanza 8 has been denigrated by critics for misogyny because it seems to argue that the presence of Eve destroyed the paradisiacal nature of Eden before sin ever entered the

picture. Certainly there is some comic misogyny in the manner of expression (“Two paradises  
‘twere in one / To live in Paradise alone” [63-64]). However, following Marvell’s logic, the  
meaning of the stanza seems to be that the body of Eve was a redundancy for sexual desire, or  
would be if it were not “beyond a mortal’s share / To wander solitary” in the garden (61-62).  
*Nature*, whether in the form of the female body or the garden—which in this poem are very  
nearly equivalent—is the site of sexual attraction for a man. But, as the speaker says, unlimited  
natural stimulation—eros in the uncontainable vegetable world—is “beyond a mortal’s share.”  
Therefore, if man lived in the Garden alone (without the limited and imperfect form of erotic  
pleasure localized in the body of the woman) he would be in a constant state of ecstasy, and the  
world for him would be “annihilated” to that “green thought in a green shade” (48).

The final stanza returns to an appreciation of the broader world: the speaker is cognizant of  
the absent gardener, who has left signs of his existence behind. He is again aware of time, of  
work (brought to mind by the bees), and of the natural world around him. This erotic interlude  
has renewed his willingness to partake of the broader world. Unlike his hypothetical Adam,  
because he begins in a fallen state and knows the world with women and with all its  
imperfections, he is able to separate from the disintegrated sea-state of ecstasy, perhaps with  
some regret, but able to characterize the experience as “sweet and wholesome hours” (71). There  
is no longer frustration or tension, only a sense of good will that includes others (such as the  
gardener and the bee). Now the speaker is willing to be “industrious,” whereas in the first stanza  
he had rejected the world and its “uncessant labors” (3). He has been refreshed and renewed; the  
garden has provided the repose, quiet, and innocence he needed. This return to Eden has made  
him into a new man.

Marvell's choice to imagine an ideal garden, not any particular place, allows him to make sweeping conclusions. To draw parallels to the following works of female poets, this poem of Marvell's is most similar to Speght's "The Dreame." Only toward the end are there signs that move this poem more into the immediacy of Marvell's historical context, and out of its previous neo-Platonic meditative limbo. The sundial and flower-clock in the final stanza are both concrete, historical markers of garden fashion and garden art. They are not the timeless fountains, birds, or fruit trees of the rest of the poem. These items also pull the work out of an imaginary classical past (in which the gods enact their various myths and "men themselves amaze / To win the palm, the oak, or bays" [1]) and into the material and immediate present. This immediacy contributes to the impression of the speaker taking up the reigns of everyday life again, but it is just a concluding effect. It is not vivid or lengthy enough to counteract the dominant idealism of the rest of the poem, nor does Marvell intend that it should do so.

"Upon Appleton House" by contrast, is firmly planted in a very particular reality. A complex creation, it draws heavily on the material world as well as the symbolic and social ones. Probably the second most famous country house poem after Jonson's "To Penshurst," Marvell's goal is similar to that of Jonson, and his approach is in some ways nearly identical. For example, both use family history to create a mythology of the naturalized power of the families they valorize. While Jonson emphasizes classical virtues of family honor, hospitality, and social responsibility, Marvell creates a more realistic history that has as much to do with the land as with the family itself. Although the Fairfaxes are present throughout the poem, the bent of the piece is not resolutely toward the hearth of the blessed family.

This is reflected in the movement of the point of view. While "To Penshurst" opens with a brief introduction of the house before jumping out to the perimeter of the estate and working its

way back toward the middle, “Appleton” begins with the house and moves outward, through the gardens, to the meadows, woods, and river. The effect is of a strong center radiating influence outward, a centrifugal force as opposed to the centripetal force Jonson creates by forcing all lines of interest in toward the center of the estate. This structure allows Marvell subtly to communicate some ambivalence toward the family and the power structures it represents, while Jonson accepts those structures and seeks to manipulate them to his advantage. In addition, the social system had gotten perhaps more complex, and certainly more open to the power of the individual, by the time Marvell was writing his poem, about thirty-five years after “To Penshurst” was published. The experience of the Fairfax family themselves, and Edward Fairfax, Marvell’s employer, in particular, bears this out. The leader of the Parliamentary forces in the first part of the civil wars, Edward was by most accounts an effective and forceful leader, and his individuality resulted in a stellar career and personal power. However, by the time that Marvell was living at Nun Appleton as the tutor of his daughter, Fairfax had retired out of objection to Parliament’s orders for the army. He had taken up the life, at least for awhile, of a country gentleman on his estates, and this choice by his employer colors Marvell’s representation of this particular estate. Thus instead of creating a timeless, mythic space, Marvell’s poem evokes one defined by geography, political context, and personal choice. He even constrains himself to a single day at a particular time of the year, although the speaker’s imagination roams freely across the estate’s history.

Fairfax is present in the manor and in the legends of his family that Marvell rehearses, but at the same time he seems a less dominant force than are the Sidneys in Jonson’s poem. Rather, the effect at the beginning is to make Fairfax into a superman (too large to fit in the house, for example) and a presence that underlies the authority of the poem, but one that fades into silent stasis, as foundations tend to do. In contrast, the Sidneys were invoked throughout Jonson’s

poem. The most conspicuous personality in this poem is the speaker: he is the presence who walks through the landscape, bringing it under his mastering gaze. The speaker wields the power of observation, but he is not the landowner, merely an interloper or visitor, taking a walk out in the grounds. This point of view is much more expansive than Jonson's, situated in the great hall (a very socially scripted and predetermined space) and only aware of the rest of the estate by report. Marvell, by contrast, occupies a place similar to that of Aemilia Lanyer's speaker, in that he personally experiences the estate and is familiar with its house and grounds, and with its family.<sup>15</sup>

The third part of the poem, after the introduction and the rather scandalous (and highly politic) narrative of the nuns in the Appleton Priory, begins to describe the estate gardens directly. The truly striking element of their description is the running military theme, which continues through the mower section that follows. Marvell compares the garden elements to military items, appropriate in light of Fairfax's career. The emphasis is on the formality of the gardens, with shrubbery laid out in parterres and flowers playing a prominent part in both metaphor and design. Flowers, like troops on parade, flaunt their colors and shoot off "cannons" full of scent to please their "governor." They line up in straight rows, ordered like a good military camp and presenting themselves to his view. One consequence of this set of images is to trivialize, or domesticate, militarism. Fairfax has retired from the wars to his country estate here, like a virtuous Roman citizen, but he cannot put behind him all his career interests. Marvell therefore imagines him lord of a military manor, at once an Adamic figure (a supreme yet sympathetic ruler over his land) and a slightly pathetic one (the troops he manages now are only

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<sup>15</sup> See chapter 6 of this study.

flowers). Yet, the long Horatian tradition enhances the attraction of this way of life, so the position Marvell represents Fairfax in is a rich and ambiguous one.

The estate's history helps elucidate Marvell's attitude toward the garden. Nun Appleton had originally housed a religious community, which came into conflict with the Fairfax family when Barbara Thwaites, betrothed to an ancient Fairfax, briefly joined it. It is a bit difficult to say just from the poem what the situation was, because Marvell presents it in a highly biased manner. But at the heart of his narrative is the conflict between a community of females (religiously authorized) and a secular male (politically authorized) over the person and property of a particular woman. Apparently, Barbara Thwaites had been affianced to the Fairfax lord but subsequently determined to enter the convent adjoining her family's property (of which she was the heir). Fairfax complained to the crown over his rights, won his case, and gained the woman's lands, properties, and person, upon which future Fairfax generations were to be gotten.

In all ways Fairfax prevails over the nuns, meaning that in this instance the sexual male takes the sexual female from the community of females. He is supported by secular authority, which goes on to destroy religious authority more generally (in the Dissolution, which affected this convent) and to impose the secular upon the land more generally (the Fairfax family received this piece of land and now has come to rule over it completely). Yet the specters of ancient religion and of female community still haunt Appleton. Edward Fairfax himself had fought for an egalitarian concept of government, which stressed the virtue and power of community over a single ruling individual, a value more closely associated with the priory's argument in the ancient conflict dramatized by Marvell. The question of female sexuality also reappears in the poem in the person of Mary Fairfax, whose very name recalls the religion of those ancient nuns. In some ways, finally, the garden seems to echo the earlier situation, because

the flowers do not salute Mary with volleys of scent as she passes. Her father and mother are recognized as the plants' "governor" and "governess," but Mary is acknowledged to *be* one of them. She belongs to a community that includes plants, recapitulating in a non-threatening way the situation of her ancestor Thwaites, one among a community of flower-like females. The land remembers its history, and the garden enables both the ancient religion and the female community that defied male dominance to recur in another form.

Marvell's interest in physical reality is central to his representation of the garden, which is fashionably designed with alleys, parterres, formal topiaries, and prominent flowers. The flowers themselves indicate the fashion as well: the rose and pinks both have a long history in English gardening, but the tulip was a latecomer, gaining cultural capital only in the seventeenth century. The prominence of tulips here marks Fairfax's awareness of and interest in garden fashion, as does the lack of a wall around the formal garden. The speaker can see from within it out to the meadows beyond, and he can also move there easily. The five-stanza description of the gardens is followed by a three-stanza application to England as a whole, a "garden," a "Paradise" planted to please the English, but which they have laid waste by their civil wars, reenacting the Fall. This garden, earlier made a pastiche of a military base, is now reconceived by the speaker as an ideal type of the same space:

When gardens only had their tow'rs,  
And all the garrisons were flow'rs;  
When roses only arms might bear,  
And men did rosy garlands wear?  
Tulips, in several colours barred,  
Were then the Switzers of our Guard.

The gardener had the soldier's place,  
And his more gentle forts did trace.  
The nursery of all things green  
Was then the only magazine.  
The winter quarters were the stoves  
Where he the tender plants removes.  
But war all this doth overgrow;  
We ordnance plant, and powder sow. (331-45)

Thus war has become a weed, infesting the garden of England and destroying its order and beauty. These few stanzas represent Marvell's attitude toward the practice of war as something melancholy or sad, a product of a fall from grace. If lordly men like Fairfax choose to perpetuate the military, they had better do it in their gardens. Fairfax, according to the poem, has made a virtuous choice in rejecting the government of the "Cinque Ports" (350) in favor of the government of his plot of land. His gardening of himself conveys the same message: "For he did, with his utmost skill, / Ambition weed, but Conscience till" (353-54). Here, unlike in earlier representations of the soul as a garden to be maintained by God the gardener, Fairfax is able to tend his own soul-garden. This change seems to reflect Marvell's secular outlook, but it also brings into play classical virtues such as stoic self-control and humility.

From this highly ordered and symbolic garden, here made to tell the tale of virtuous men and the right government of the country, Marvell's speaker turns his attention to the "abyss" of the meadows to be mowed. The lengthy episode (nine stanzas) is also described in military terms: a mower's wife, for example, is "Thestylis" (401), and the mown meadow seems "A camp of battle newly fought" (420). While Jonson draws a picture of a forest in which the resources harvest themselves, Marvell allows workers to appear here. The peasants in the Penshurst

landscape are there in order to showcase both the generosity of the Sidneys and the fruitful, almost magical, abundance of the estate virtuously ruled. The peasants in the Appleton landscape, however, must work hard; they have economic purpose and are affected by natural disasters. They are much more realistic and more fully realized characters than their counterparts in “To Penshurst.” The meadows flood, and the speaker retreats to the wood, moving yet further away from the house, and from the person and time of Edward Fairfax, as that character, who is so prevalent in the first half of the poem, slowly fades into a long view of the estate as representative of the world.

Once in the forest, Marvell’s speaker seems to relax into a psychic state similar to that of the speaker in “The Garden.” This is a space somewhere between a real wood (individual trees and plants are discussed as well as the depredations of worms and woodpeckers) and an idealized poetic forest (it is supernaturally thick on the outside and idyllically park-like on the inside, the vines treat the speaker with conscious desire). The presence of a great symbolic oak, though it has been corrupted by a traitorous worm, reflects the associations of garden ideology and the strength of this particular symbol. One wonders exactly what the oak is supposed to stand for: is it the nation, or perhaps an ideology? Marvell leaves interpretation open, relentlessly ambiguous, but in either case, the destructive worm makes a critical statement.

The end of the poem follows the speaker from the forest back through the meadows, to join Mary Fairfax in a stroll through the grounds to the house as the evening closes in. The poem thus ends firmly situated in time (one particular day), in action and in space. The whole of the estate is also, at the end, collapsed into the person of Mary Fairfax. She is “Woods, Streams, Gardens, Meads” (752), all the natural elements of the estate, though notably *not* the house, which is associated entirely with her father. But she is here the symbol of her family’s lands, which have

earlier been made to represent the whole world. This final section feels more like flattery than any part except the opening, but it reflects the assumptions of the time as well as the real power situation in which Marvell was involved. Mary's presence, authorized by her father, makes of Appleton a superior version of the traditional earthly paradises, both mythic (the Idalian Grove and the Elysian Fields) and realistic (the Aranjuez and Bel-Retiro). She is "Heaven's Center, Nature's Lap, / And Paradise's only Map" (767-68).

So as the day closes, Marvell makes the structure of this estate clear: it is a true earthly paradise, complete with authority from the father (derived from the state) and a focusing presence in a female whose sexuality is potential but unassigned. Mary is a new but chaste Venus, an example of "goodly femininitee," representing her family as well as her gender. The estate is a positive place, a descendant from the Garden of Adonis line of the earthly paradise; "Appleton" illustrates some significant shifts in the representation of gardens and landscape, while this foundation has remained the same. For example, the wall between the formal gardens and the lands beyond has disappeared. The garden is devoted to aesthetic and sensual pleasure, not to practical use in any way: the fields, woods and stream have agrarian uses, but the garden does not. It also reflects the fashions of the time in choice of design and plantings, indicating interest in and engagement with the outside world. The garden has shifted in use as well as in design and relation to the rest of the landscape. The makeup of "Paradise" now includes meadows and woods as well as the formally ordered garden. This ideal world, explicitly unlike the real world, is in "more decent order tame" (766), indicating that order is still the method of creating paradise, but the inclusion of these wilder landscapes implies a broadening of the conception of the ideal space. It is no longer simply an enclosed pleasure garden, yet the desire

for order and the gendered associations remain. This complexity reflects the complication of the conception of gardens and gardening taking place over the course of the century.

### **John Milton – *Paradise Lost***

Milton inherited and in *Paradise Lost* adapted the gendered gardens of his forbears, back through Spenser to Tasso and Ariosto (Giamatti). His Eden performs all the classical and Judeo-Christian traditions of the garden as idyllic space. His Eve is beautifully nuanced, a more complex version of the garden sorceresses, of the *hortus conclusus*, of the Canticle Beloved, and of the Theocritean shepherdess, as she was received by seventeenth-century Western culture. His Adam and his narrator relate to Eve as though to a completely unmediated version of an ideal, “natural” yet domesticated, woman. As one of a limited cast of major characters, it is perhaps not surprising that Eve has garnered a lot of critical attention, especially since the advent of feminist scholarship. Giamatti’s interpretation of her as a cultural endpoint of the garden sorceresses, a culmination of that line of symbolism, is highly useful for this study. Yet, like Marvell with Mary Fairfax, Milton was doing quite a bit more with the character than just recapitulating the Circe figure, or even the more positive counterpart of the true Venus. He utilizes the whole of the tradition and the result is a complicated statement about the nature of women, of nature itself, and of gender relations.

This study will only consider some of the more famous passages having to do with the perception of Eve and with her relationship to the space and furnishings of the garden, beginning with book four, which contains the major descriptions of both Paradise and the person of Eve. From the beginning, Milton’s Eden partakes of the traditional aspects of the paradisiacal space: flowers and fruit together (4.147-48); sweet, scented breezes (4.156); a fountain (4.229); all kinds of flowers (4.241); groves at the top of a mount (4.249); grassy spaces both in sun and shade (4.252); singing birds (4.264); and eternal spring (4.268). Milton adds in a biblical element

by also including many kinds of animals existing in peace with one another and with Adam and Eve: “Sporting the Lion rampd, and in his paw / Dandl’d the Kid” (4.343-44). This inclusion approaches the harmony prophesied by Isaiah of the Messianic age to come (Is. 11:6; 65:25), but it is an unusual and purely Christian addition to the earthly paradise.

The structure of the garden Milton lifts from his predecessors with few changes. It is on top of a high wooded hill, covered with impassable undergrowth. He describes it as seeming to have “hairy” sides, with magnificently tall trees, and Satan is unable to ascend through it. He must, in the end, fly to the top of the mountain. Placing Eden on top of a Mount, Milton draws directly from Dante, and more indirectly from Spenser’s Garden of Adonis. It is surrounded by a tall green wall with a gate facing eastward. Just inside the wall is a circle of fruit trees. The Tree of Life (the tallest in the garden) and the Tree of Knowledge are both planted in the middle. Beyond this, Milton gives no placement specifics, perhaps due to a combined desire to express Satan’s limited point of view (which the reader shares [Fish]) and a coyness about such a culturally fraught space.

However, Milton is quite precise about where the garden is located geographically, much more than many other literary texts making similar moves. He sets aside his age’s tendency to dislocate Paradise from experienced reality, at least in terms of space. Time, on the other hand, is treated more flexibly, and while Paradise sits on the earth, it is only vaguely situated in time and not approachable in the present. Theoretically, the reader could travel to the place on earth where the garden was: Milton gives enough archeological specifics to imply that fantasy is possible, but he or she could never find Eden in its perfection. Thus Milton walks a fine artistic line, holding out the hints of a real, recoverable space but then fading into metaphor rather than reinforcing that materiality.

The garden is lightly yet consistently characterized as female. Its first appearance before Satan is the appearance of a body:

So on he fares, and to the border comes,  
Of *Eden*, where delicious Paradise,  
No nearer, Crowns with her enclosure green,  
As with a rural mound the champain head  
Of a steep wilderness, whose hairie sides  
With thicket overgrown, grotesque and wilde,  
Access deni'd. (4.131-37)

The image asserts the same meaning as the Beloved from the *Canticle*, or the Christian *hortus conclusus*: the pleasurable space that grants access only to those approved. This whole authorizing construction is reinforced later when the garden is represented as a type of country estate—a “happy rural seat” (4.247)—in which the gardens are designed and established by nature (4.241-46), the flocks feed safely (4.252), and it “to our general Sire gave prospect large / Into his neather Empire neighbouring round” (4.144-45). Adam here (much more than Eve, who is from the first associated with the materiality of the garden) is the proprietor of the “estate” of Eden and its surrounding neighborhood. Further reinforcing the land-as-female association are references to the space as “her,” and then most clearly the description of the lawns and “the flourie lap / Of som irriguous Valley spred her store, / Flours of all hue, and without Thorn the Rose” (4.254-56). However, the border is permeable, even here. The protecting wall meant to keep the inside and the outside separated cannot in the end do so, and Satan has no trouble leaping over it and subsequently destroying those meant to be protected inside.

One final sexual element of the topography is important to highlight. Eden is explicitly contrasted with Hell, not only as a place but as a metaphor of the female body. Satan, imagining

a conversation with Adam and Eve, describes Eden as having “narrow” boundaries, while Hell is figured as being very broad. He says

Hell shall unfold,  
To entertain you two, her widest Gates,  
And send forth all her Kings; there will be room,  
Not like these narrow limits, to receive  
Your numerous offspring. (4.381-85)<sup>16</sup>

The female personification seems to make the implications clear. While Eden is virginal (narrow and well-defended), Hell is whorish (wide open and enticing). This subtle image play is reinforced later when Satan, watching Adam and Eve exchange kisses, says,

Imparadis't in one anothers arms  
The happier *Eden*, shall enjoy thir fill  
Of bliss on bliss, while I to Hell am thrust,  
Where neither joy nor love, but fierce desire,  
Among our other torments not the least,  
Still unfulfill'd with pain of longing pines. (4.506-511)

Satan conceives of conjugal fulfillment as a psychic version of Paradise, which can only be parodied in Hell. His experience replaces love with “desire” that can never be satisfied. The use of the verb “thrust” to describe Satan’s relationship with Hell—which has earlier been gendered female, and which Satan has already realized he carries around as a psychic state—finishes the case.

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<sup>16</sup> There is a simultaneous reference to Luke 13.24—Jesus says, “Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to.” The traditional image is of “the straight and narrow” vs. the broad “primrose path” to hell.

Regarding the character of Eve, Milton initially presents Adam and Eve together, of a piece with one another. Satan and the reader first see them walking hand in hand after a day's gardening. Then they enact a highly traditional scene of shared repose within the pleasant space: they recline to share a meal on the grass, beside a fountain and underneath a tree. It is an image of quiet pleasure, of perfect communion between the couple, as well as between them and their environment, a scene of prelapsarian, yet entirely earthly, joy. After this they are divided into two differently sexed individuals, and their relationship and the character of each is summed up in about sixteen lines. In a construction similar to that of Genesis 2, the first creation story, the reader is introduced to humanity in general before they are differentiated into two sexes and given unequal status. So Eve partakes of the honor of

far nobler shape erect and tall,  
Godlike erect, with native Honour clad  
In naked Majestie seemd Lords of all,  
And worthie seemd, for in thir looks Divine  
The image of thir glorious Maker shon,  
Truth, wisdom, Sanctitude severe and pure. (4.288-93)

However, Milton follows his culture and biblical authority in his representation of Eve as created *for* Adam (1 Cor. 11:8-9), and to Milton, her main function is to give pleasure.<sup>17</sup> The same can be said about Paradise: it was created for Adam, to provide him pleasure. Neither is assumed to have any real purpose outside of this. In fact, Eve acknowledges this: "O thou for whom / And from whom I was formd flesh of thy flesh, / And without whom am to no end" (4.440-42). As

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<sup>17</sup> This kind of pleasure is similar to Spenser's character Pleasure, the daughter of Eros and Psyche: Eve satisfies Adam psychically as well as physically because she is his counterpart.

she does not seem to find it troubling, and she is yet unfallen, it appears that Milton conceives of this as the proper state of affairs.

Book Eight provides a great deal of information about the unfallen world as seen from an unfallen perspective, rather than from Satan's corrupted point of view. In the course of this book, Raphael and Adam discuss the nature and history of the universe. While Adam enjoys this immensely Eve is not as interested, and not far into the beginning of the book, she wanders off to take care of her plants, says Milton. Roy Flannagan, in his notes to the 1674 edition in *The Riverside Milton*, goes to some length to "prove" that this does not mean that Eve is unable to understand the angel's teaching but rather indicates her preference for instruction mixed with physical or emotional pleasure. Adam and Raphael, however, stay and talk, first about the stars (Raphael answers Adam's questions both cautiously and ambiguously), and then about Adam's own recollection of his history.

What the reader receives in this book is Adam's perceptions of both Eden and Eve, rather than Satan's perception or Eve's, narrated in the fourth book. Adam's description of Eden is clearer than Satan's was:

So saying, by the hand he took me rais'd,  
And over Fields and Waters, as in Aire  
Smooth sliding without step, last led me up  
A woodie Mountain; whose high top was plaine,  
A Circuit wide, enclos'd, with goodliest Trees  
Planted, with Walks, and Bowers, that what I saw  
Of Earth before scarce pleasant seemd. Each Tree  
Load'n with fairest Fruit that hung to the Eye  
Tempting, stirr'd in me sudden appetite

To pluck and eat. (8.300-309)

“He” refers to the Creator, although Adam is a little unclear on this point, not having been able to gaze upon him directly. The Lord has, just before this passage, described Eden as Adam’s “Mansion” (8.296) and his “seat” (8.299), the landed estate that belongs to him. Milton draws close parallels between the situation of landholding aristocracy, with their county seats and country estates, and the divinely ordained father of the human race. Just as in book four Eden is described as a height from which Adam can survey his “Empire,” the parallel here is to a similar contemporary institution.

Other elements of Adam’s story recapitulate trends in the use of garden imagery that the previous authors in this chapter have followed. The construction of perspective, for example, is telling. While Satan’s perspective was limited to an awareness of details and their direct effect on him (for example, the sides of the mountain were woody and impassable, like the hairy sides of a monstrous body), Adam, held in the hand of God, gets a divine perspective and sees the whole picture. This top-down point of view may contribute to his character’s self-centeredness: he has been told by God that this is a place created to please him. Just as he considers Eve primarily an extension of himself, which will lead to his fall, he understands Eden as ground created for his pleasure, which also may contribute to his later problems. He is emotionally detached from the place; as far as he is concerned, it could be some entirely different and equally pleasant space. This attitude, derived in part from perspective, reenacts that of the speaker of “To Penshurst,” with similar effect: a god-like, detached perspective leads to a thoughtless presumption of self-importance. A ground-level perspective, like that of Eve, creates a relationship with a space that is defined by the individuality of that space.

Adam has also come from outside *into* the garden, following the path of nearly every other male character examined here. Unsurprisingly, then, his is a spectacular, consuming relationship

with it—he relates to it as something other than himself and created for his use. Eve, on the other hand, is created inside the garden. She is a combination of the substance of Adam and the substance of the earth he now inhabits, but she is the main spirit of the place and the personification of Eden’s purposes of visual and erotic pleasure. Her status as the Venus-figure of this idealized pleasure garden is reinforced when Adam and Eve’s first action upon meeting one another is to go to their “Nuptial Bower.” Their psychological and spiritual connection in this garden made for blissful communion is expressed through physical connection. Milton thus makes explicit the use of the garden as the site for the combination of social, spiritual, and physical concerns into symbolic constructs.

Milton’s representation of unfallen marital relations is problematic because the weight of the traditions with which he is working bends inexorably toward making Eve either a Venus-figure or a Circe-figure, neither of which is entirely appropriate, but both of which he must evoke due to his use of the garden topos, and its cultural connection to female sexuality. Adam’s time in the garden is devoted to three activities: pleasurable intercourse and discourse (sexual, personal and intellectual), reverie (seeing and experiencing the pleasure of being in the place), or working (light gardening, much more pleasurable than onerous). These are the three main categories of activity for virtually all visitors to poetic gardens, whether lovers, heroes, or poets.

The final sections to be examined for this study come from book nine, in which Milton more strongly associates the couple, and Eve in particular, with the garden and with the earth. Eve’s stated reason for separating from Adam is to gain more control over the garden’s fertility, which she represents as tending toward wildness. Adam argues that such control is unnecessary if it requires much hard work; he does not desire to subject the natural world to a heavy hand. Eve, however, promotes a gardening aesthetic of neatness and order, both in her words and in her

actions. She is associated more closely than Adam with both gardening tasks and tools. Adam is not shown actually doing work, but the Serpent does see Eve binding up plants and vines. In doing so, she continues to be associated with the garden itself: “What pleasing seemd, for her now pleases more, / She most, and in her look summs all Delight” (9.453-54), as well as with its vegetation. Satan is so entranced by her that he must spur himself on to his evil act, and the reader recalls that, at the beginning of this book, he was also distracted by the pleasures of Eden and reminded himself of his desire to destroy its pleasures, not enjoy them. After Eve’s transgression, the garland of roses that Adam has woven for her fades (9.893), and Adam knows that she has been “deflour’d,” (9.901), a loaded term for the “fairest...Flour” (9.432) of Eden. She is no longer her true self, and Adam knows it, but unwilling to conceive of her apart from himself, he follows her down. At this point, he is required to choose between Eden and Eve, both created for his pleasure. His creation outside the space of the garden, however, allows him to conceive of Eden as something apart from himself, while he cannot do that with Eve. Therefore he follows that “part” of himself, disregarding the consequences.

The great deal of time and attention he spends on visualizing the Garden of Eden rewards Milton in his thorough characterization of Eve. Eden is a poetic space the reader can experience deeply, and although it is mythical and timeless, the aesthetic values it reflects are those of the mid- to late seventeenth century and reflect the contemporary tension between formalism and naturalism in garden designs. Further, Milton invokes the social systems of the English country house through his representation of Paradise as a whole, Adam’s “rural seat” in which he lives a virtuous life on the land and rules uncontested over his earthly property—land, dwelling, garden, and wife. As Eden combines the ideals of garden and country house conventions in its structure and symbolism, Eve too models the ideals of contemporary wifely behavior. At some points,

Milton does deviate from the bent of cultural garden tradition. Even after the Fall, for example, Eve is not the seducer in sexual relations that have become defined by lust. Their sexual encounter after sin has much in common with traditional erotic tropes, mainly derived from classical sources and romances, rather than from Judeo-Christian sources. Eve is no longer the embodiment of the Cantic-type pleasure garden (having been “deflowered”) but a Petrarchan mistress, with eyes “dart[ing] contagious fire” (9.1036), and a participant in “amorous play” on a convenient shady bank (9.1037-45), like the nymphs in Restoration pastoral poems. The first couple’s great epic romance has become the stuff of trite erotic convention.

From here Adam and Even will be sent out, supported with hope for the future but debarred from the perfect relationship they previously had with each other and with the land. Eden, as a sacred space, is always to a degree inaccessible to *fallen* man, but it is also, as a garden, always to a degree separate from *man*, who must enter from outside and usually sees the garden as a space to be surveyed, consumed, and submitted to a larger discourse. Thus there is always a wall, or a veil, between these poets and the space they see. There is a culturally determined, gender-oriented difference in the conception and therefore the use of the garden topos. Ultimately, these male poets use the garden as a symbolic language in which to discuss more abstract subjects, almost always including female gender and sexuality. They relate to the space from outside, from a psychically separate point of view. The space is a means to an end predetermined by the whole weight of tradition. Chapters 6 and 7 of this study show that the female contemporaries of these poets take an entirely different approach to the garden topos, and that approach opens up different questions of interest and power for them.

CHAPTER 6  
FEMININE WORLDS: LANYER, SPEGHT, CAVENDISH

**Introduction**

This study has marshaled a broad array of material relating to the representation of gardens and women, both in literature and in reality. I have tried to demonstrate the deep, ancient and complex associations of these two spheres in the imaginary of seventeenth-century Europe, and of England in particular. I have shown the classical and religious roots of these associations, briefly traced their coincident development both in art and in the real world, and revealed how these worlds have influenced each other. The study so far has demonstrated how some of the best known male poets of the seventeenth century utilized this matrix of associations to comment on gender, power, and the “natural” order of society, and how garden designers and theorists also reflected changes in garden designs and literature.

However, the goal of this study has consistently been examination of the literature produced by women during the seventeenth century, literature that also took up this ancient association, but from within it. While I have not the space thoughtfully to address every woman writer, or even just the published ones, of the seventeenth century, I will address several whose voices in this discourse stand out. Further, the women I address come from across the century, in order to show how female voices fit into the temporal progression that I have outlined above. This and the following, related, chapter argue that these female poets use garden imagery to create space in which they have agency to consider and express their individual situations, desires and needs, as well as to create communities in which they can be fully participatory members. They tend either to resist or to appropriate the traditional sexual and hierarchical aspects built into this matrix of ideologies. These poets found that the garden imaginary, the

poetic landscape, offered them a way to speak about their own experience both as women and as poets.

The poets addressed so far have most thoughtfully and interestingly utilized garden imagery in order to say different things about the conventional status of women. They have spanned the continuum laid out in chapter 4, of the different cultural associations that developed, over a long period of time, between ideologies of the feminine and ideologies of nature. In many cases, the associations were internalized so completely as to become a kind of symbolic shorthand through which artists could make commentaries in different registers. In each case examined thus far, the gardens have included a gendered aspect, whether it is made explicit or not. Marvell's "The Garden," Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Herbert's meditative poems, Vaughan's celebrations of the natural world, and the various country house poems have all in some way partaken of or responded to the European Renaissance literary tradition of identifying gardens with a female genius or spirit (Giamatti).

As a space within which women are authorized to wield power and to have agency of their own, though limited, gardens in these poems offer their authors a chance to consider what female power and agency might look like. Generally it looks sexual, with the female spirit, or enchantress, emasculating men who fall under her power through seduction and deception. Further, this sexual power is often represented as dangerous and unnatural because it does not conform to standard contemporary social patterns of hierarchy. The garden in these cases has become a space within which such patterns are able to be suspended and thus challenged. Generally, although such patterns are usually reinscribed and thereby reinforced by the outcome of events that take place in the garden, the fact that they can be questioned, that they are found to

be vulnerable to reinterpretation, makes the garden a potentially revolutionary space, a fact that raises the necessity of a boundary, a limiting factor, around the garden.

So, was this the case for their literary sisters? Were female poets just as interested in the sexualization of landscape and flora, particularly in the pleasure garden setting, as the men were? The answer to this is complex. Aemilia Lanyer and Rachel Speght, poets writing in the early part of the century, seem to offer a resounding “no,” while the sexual register is just another tool for Aphra Behn, writing at the end of the 1600s. Both early poets explicitly exclude not only much of the masculine, but the sexual more generally, from their poetic gardens, presenting these as something of a threat to perfect female community and intellectual and personal fulfillment. Even more than male poets, these writers both utilized and questioned the meaning of garden space in their writings, finding it useful if limited. Later poets, such as Behn, and even Margaret Cavendish and Katherine Philips in a tangential way, did bring erotic and sexual issues back into consideration through garden space, but such spaces became intimately conflated with pastoral *locus amoenae*, as the ideology of the real-world garden in England also began to change, such that the whole imaginary shifted significantly.

However, the deep symbolism of the garden in creative conventions gave all of these poets the language and space necessary to express and explore themselves as artists, regardless of how different those needs may have been. In this way, garden imagery functioned like some other literary areas, such as mothers’ advice books, religious poetry, and the pastoral mode, to create a space within which women had agency to speak.<sup>1</sup> At the end of the century, as more women were both writing and publishing, they did not lose the ability to speak in the garden, but this particular literary space became more marginalized as it was subsumed into pastoral poetry, and

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<sup>1</sup> See Elaine Beilin on mothers’ advice books, for example, and Ann Messenger on female writers in the pastoral mode.

that genre in turn decayed in the Augustan period (Messenger). The poets examined in these final pages take advantage of the multiple natures of garden symbolism, of its simultaneous conventionality (safe stasis) and flexibility (revolutionary potential), of its concurrent open and closed aspects, or of its associations of both exclusivity and quarantine.

I have chosen writers for this study using the following criteria. The first is frankly name recognition and the amount of scholarly material available with which to work. All five of these writers are in the top echelon of scholarship, the “big names,” with a comparatively large amount of work done on them. Nonetheless, most of this work has had to be in the nature of biography and the archival work of textual reclamation. Only very recently, now that that broad base has been established, has it become possible for scholars to move to the next level of analytic, formal, and contextual work, which is the area in which this study resides. Further, each of these poets, with the exception of Speght, contributed a sizeable amount of poetry with which to work. Speght’s poetic output is small, but of high quality, intrinsic interest, and relevance, and thus is included as well. The other poets have also produced skillful and interesting works, worth further examination in their own right, as literary creations, not just as material for a sociological or historical argument. In addition, each of these poets produced at least one substantial poem that utilizes garden imagery and engages with that matrix of associations and ideologies.

Finally, these poems were made available through general publication during the lifetimes of the writers, all, with the exception of Philips, by the will of the authors themselves. While of course some women did publish (or get published) publicly (as opposed to solely through manuscript circulation) before this time, the number swelled significantly in the seventeenth century, as the publishing industry itself swelled, together with a need for works to produce and sell. However, the stereotype of a proper woman as “silent,” if not in person at least in print,

remained strong throughout these years, so that in 1653, when Margaret Cavendish published *Poems and Fancies*, Dorothy Osborne could (now famously) declare, “Sure the poor woman is a little distracted, she could never be so ridiculous else as to venture at writing books and in verse too” (Letter 17). Each of these poets was making a performative statement simply by writing with an eye toward distribution, whether private or public; each was making a bold move, whatever her social situation. Recent scholarship has made abundantly clear that certain nonconformist religious sects encouraged all their members, women included, to construct and communicate life and conversion narratives in the service of evangelizing and teaching (Ezell). And certainly individual situations would have had an impact upon a woman’s drive or ability to write: Cavendish had social clout enough to control the publication of her works; Aphra Behn and Aemilia Lanyer, in need of income, were able to capitalize on their intellect and education; Rachel Speght seems to have been interested in contributing her voice to popular issues that directly affected her. Those who worked substantially with standard garden topoi, more than the male poets discussed above, both performed and questioned what the poetic garden offers ideologically. Further, the deep symbolism of the garden in artistic thought gave them a language to perform themselves, simply because women had always been allowed to speak within the space of the garden, even though this accepted sphere of influence may have stopped at the garden walls.

### **Aemilia Lanyer**

For a writer who only produced one published work and left behind, so far as is known, none unpublished, Aemilia Lanyer has excited among some recent scholars what might be a surprising amount of interest. Those who have written on her book, *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, have tended to emphasize its religiosity (Beilin), its creative defense of women, or its imaginative creation of an idealized female community (Lewalski). “A Description of Cooke-

ham,” the closing poem of the book, combines all three of these scholarly touchpoints by creating its textual space within a garden. It is important to note that Lanyer employs garden imagery and pastoral conventions throughout the book; she is clearly comfortable in this symbolic register. In the dedicatory poem to Lady Mary Sidney Herbert, for example, she evokes the countess’s own pastoral writings and imagines “fields with sundry flowers clad, / Of sev’rall colours, to adorne the ground, / And please the senses ev’n of the most sad” (110-12); to Lady Anne Clifford, she affirms the trope of the soul or life as a garden in which good seed must be sown and tended in order to reap a good harvest (58-78); and in the title poem, Christ is imagined in terms reminiscent of the Canticle: “Yea, he is constant, and his words are true, / His cheekes are beds of spices, flowers sweet; / His lips like Lillies, dropping down pure mirrhe” (1317-19). Yet in these poems, such instances dwell among many other conventions. In “Cookeham,” they dominate, and Lanyer makes explicit that she draws her use and her interpretation of these images directly from the Bible.

One of the most striking things about Lanyer’s work is the author’s confident gynocentric advocacy that sounds almost modern, though it partakes of many of the *querelle des femmes* tropes of the time. For example, Eve, who traditionally functions as a metonymy for all women in this debate, is found to be less sinful in her action of eating the forbidden fruit than Adam, due to her ignorance and her love for him. At the same time, though, Lanyer seems to move a step beyond such simplistic, worn-out tropes in lines like the following:

Not Eve, whose fault was onely too much love,  
Which made her give this present to her Deare,  
That what shee tasted, he likewise might prove,  
Whereby his knowledge might become more cleare;  
He never sought her weakness to reprove,

With those sharpe words, which he of God did heare:

Yet Men will boast of Knowledge, which he tooke

From Eve's fair hand, as from a learned Booke. (801-808)

This assignment to women of desire both to gain and to share knowledge, especially through books, is prominent in “A Description of Cooke-ham,” as well as in Speght’s “The Dreame,” and in both instances, the female character’s presence in a garden enables the acquisition of knowledge and the building of some sort of community through that acquisition. Louise Schleiner has discussed the importance of feminine companionship in the acquisition of knowledge for many early modern women, who participated in “reading formations,” (a term she borrows from Tony Bennet), in which reading becomes a communal activity. Lanyer imaginatively uses community to enhance reading and learning, while reciprocally acquiring knowledge to enhance feminine community, the lot of its individuals, and the gender as a whole. Lanyer builds it through the many dedications she appends to the front of the poem, seven of which are addressed to influential court ladies, in an indirect appeal for patronage, as well as in her consistent evocation of various voices and her use of “we,” “us,” and “you,” to establish commonality and rapport with the reader (Lewalski 213-19).

“A Description of Cooke-ham,” which fits most comfortably within the subgenre of the country house poem, was published in 1611, making it officially five years older than Jonson’s “To Penshurst,” until recently generally cited as the earliest English poem in this subgenre. An argument might be made that this claim is not actually overturned by Lanyer’s prior accomplishment, because “Cooke-ham” does not fit very comfortably under this label at all; it may perhaps more accurately be called a country *estate* poem. Lanyer’s speaker interacts with the Clifford women entirely out of doors, and it is outside, too, that holds the emotional charge for her, as well as for them. The house lurks in the background, shut up and empty, projecting the

message that it is not entirely part of the poetic world, but is a place excluded and uncanny. In “To Penshurst,” Jonson’s point of view passes through the gardens on its way toward the house, and while the gardens provide material for commentary and analogy, they are not the ultimate destination. Jonson’s progression tends inexorably toward the great hall, a powerful symbol, as both Raymond Williams and Alistair Duckworth have shown, of both social stability and power, often imagined essentially or naturalistically. This is the general emphasis in most country house poems, classical and modern (Kelsall). In the Clifford family history, however, as in most of English history, it is power that legally rests almost solely in the hands of the male members of the family.

One of the underlying reasons for the emotional separation from the house of the characters in Lanyer’s poem is the fact that, historically, Margaret Russell, the Duchess of Cumberland, was there in lieu of living on her estranged husband’s lands. Her brother rented Cooke-ham, and Margaret and her daughter Anne lived on it periodically until around 1605, the year of the death of the Duchess’s husband, George Clifford (Clarke 389n1). Upon his death, disregarding an entail placed on the property by decree of Edward II, he willed it away to his brother Francis, his closest male family member and inheritor of the title, rather than allowing it to pass to his daughter, his only surviving child. Margaret, on behalf of her daughter, and then Anne on behalf of herself, contested the will in a decades-long legal battle against Francis Clifford, James I, and even Anne’s own husbands, who discouraged her pursuit, in a futile attempt to reclaim the Clifford estates. Eventually, Anne gained rights to the land by outliving every potential male inheritor and, in her later years, retired, reportedly joyfully, to the north of England where she took an active interest in managing her estates and never again left them (Clifford ix).

Cooke-ham, the house, therefore, is out of the immediate sphere of interest for Lanyer's poem, which concentrates on these two Clifford women and Lanyer's speaker, whom readers are encouraged to identify with Lanyer herself. The house does partake in the emotional response of the entire estate to the Cliffords, but it is only granted 4 lines out of 210, two at the beginning and two at the end:

The House receiv'd all ornaments to grace it,

And would indure no foulness to deface it.

...

The house cast off each garment that might grace it,

Putting on Dust and Cobwebs to deface it. (19-20, 201-202)

They share rhymes but contradict one another: the first quotation describes the house when Margaret Clifford is there; the second after she has left. Although it is not officially theirs, and they are not admitted to it in the course of the poem, the house mourns the loss of the women, following the lead, perhaps, of the natural world, the space within which it exists. It also is feminized, imagined as a woman who dresses herself gaily when her situation is joyful and then puts on mourning when sad, making it another character, though marginalized, that takes part in the imagined naturalistic female community Lanyer created in the garden of this estate. The women find that they can read, write, learn, discuss, practice an almost prelapsarian virtue, and find joy within the space of the garden. There, the natural world is in sympathy with their situation, a characteristic that will stretch across the century, in the work of each poet we will examine, appearing again particularly strongly in Behn.

Lanyer finds the little community at Cooke-ham to be ripe for symbolism. While the present of the poem is after Anne Clifford's marriage to Richard Sackville, the Earl of Dorset, the speaker is nostalgic for a past from before that marriage and concentrates upon it, making

Anne the very image of a virgin in the garden. This move therefore symbolically makes Margaret a holy mother figure, and Lanyer's speaker, "I," is established as the historian or recorder who immortalizes the other two. This symbolic trinity evokes that of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, as here is Mother, Daughter, and disembodied, "inspired" speaker. Lanyer here is following the pattern she established in the very beginning of *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* by revising Biblical representation to rehabilitate female characters. The garden of Cooke-ham, for example, is represented as a holy place. The women, led by Margaret, read the Bible out loud to one another, as part of a redemptive reading formation. Even more than that, however, they actually inhabit the stories as characters, again led by Margaret's example:

In these sweet woods how often did you walke,  
With Christ and his Apostles there to talke;  
Placing his holy Writ in some faire tree,  
To meditate what you therein did see:  
With *Moyses* you did mount his holy Hill,  
To know his pleasure, and performe his Will.  
With lovely *David* did you often sing,  
His holy Hymnes to Heavens Eternal King. (81-88)

Lanyer has imagined a garden in which the inhabitants experience perfect harmony with God, repeating the situation of the Garden of Eden before the Fall. They experience this through becoming characters in the Word of God while in the natural world. Their efforts are apparently approved and blessed, as well, because the natural world is entirely in sympathy with them. Lanyer's argument here rests on the same assumption as that of *Eve's Apologie* in the title poem, namely, that women are not to blame for the sin of mankind. Even in this very personal, even idiosyncratic, exercise in a classical topological poem form, Lanyer manages to inject her

rehabilitative worldview. It is clear that, without the interference of men in this new Eden, the women would never have been forced to leave, thus precipitating Cooke-ham's Fall (as well as its fall, that is, autumn). As in the biblical original, the inhabitants of this Garden of Eden are driven from their holy sanctuary, and the natural world responds by dying away.

The trees, and one beloved large oak tree in particular, are pressed into heavy symbolic service and associated with virtue and learning from the Bible, as well as participation in the creation of female community through personification:

The Trees with leaves, with fruits, with flowers clad,  
Embrac'd each other, seeming to be glad,  
Turning themselves to beauteous Canopies,  
To shade the bright Sunne from your brighter eies. (23-26)<sup>2</sup>

They combine as individuals into a group to serve Clifford, and the joy and sympathy between themselves and the women, as well as the naturalness of their actions, indicates the favored, even blessed, situation of the scene. The trees also stand in for the cross—indicating the Clifford women's virtue—and function as counterparts to the fatal tree of knowledge associated with Eve. Thus the trees, while literally holding Clifford's Bible, become part of the space within which its own words are reenacted by the women. Recalling D. W. Robertson's catalogue of tree symbols, the reader realizes that the trees also become new books of their own, whose *leaves* may fall but whose bodies provide material memorial of the beloved women for the benefit of future generations. This benefit adheres to the narrator herself when she returns to Cooke-ham after the Clifford women have left it, in the present of the poem.

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<sup>2</sup> Note also the edenic fertility of the trees, which produce both fruit and flowers simultaneously.

The poem itself fulfills the same memorial function as the trees within it. The poem's imaginative space enables a parallel to be drawn between that material artifact and the Bible that figures so heavily within it. The link is to be found in the person of Margaret Clifford and her actions within that space, very deliberately a garden because the garden is the biblically-modeled space within which women can act, learn, speak, be sanctified or redeemed. Here they have agency, just as Eve did in Eden, just as the Beloved does in the Canticle, and just as a feminized Christ does in Gethsemane, a scene that Lanyer dramatizes in her title poem. Lanyer's speaker says Cooke-ham is the place "where the Muses gave their full consent, / I should have powre the virtuous to content" (3-4); it is the place wherein she is authorized to exercise creative power, the result of which is found in the poem's lines. Further, beyond being authorized by the classical Muses, Lanyer is authorized by the estate itself "to indite, / The sacred Storie of the Soules delight" (5-6). Lanyer's Christ is throughout associated closely with women: a vital part of her argument is that his connection with women is much stronger than that of men. She emphasizes his femininity—describing his body in language reminiscent of the descriptions of the female Beloved in the Canticle—and uses both his unfailing virtue and his physical suffering (his body being the site through which the sins of mankind are punished) to strengthen her sense of garden space as equating virtue, redemption, inspiration, and authority for women, especially in the face of the suffering imposed upon them by mankind, redeemed but not sanctified in Lanyer's eyes.

Clifford performs the Bible passages—walking with Christ and the Apostles, climbing mountains with Moses, singing with David—within the space of the garden by repeating them with a difference that makes them new creations, and the performances are then recorded in Lanyer's poem. Since, of course, the only record we have of these actions is the poem itself, Lanyer's "recording" of them is for all intents and purposes "creating" them. Therefore, what we

have in this situation is a multilayered example of Judith Butler's concept of performativity, creation by reiteration, citation, or repetition with a difference. For example, the Garden of Eden is reflected and repeated in the garden of Cooke-ham, with the significant omission of Adam. Christ's teaching of his Apostles is reenacted in Clifford's teaching of Anne and Lanyer. The function of Law-giver, Moses' traditional role, is undertaken by Clifford as well. And, together with David, Clifford and her party sing the Psalms and worship.

The single major tree that dominates the landscape of the poem is intriguing in itself. It incorporates some features of other trees and does significant poetic duty in rooting the various symbolic meanings of the garden of Cooke-ham. In "To Penshurst," the "Sidney Oak" figures prominently in the myths of fertility and divine blessing with which Jonson flatters the Sidneys (13-18). In Lanyer's poem, the tree seems to carry more orthodox and less personal weight. At first the oak's height is emphasized: it "did in height his fellowes passe, / As much as lofty trees, low growing grass" (55-56). Within the context of the symbols linking this garden so closely to Eden, this seems to invoke most closely Christ, who far surpassed all humanity, or more generally to indicate God, who far surpasses all other gods, in the ethos of the Bible with which Lanyer is working. This same logic flatters Margaret Clifford, whom Lanyer has created as a character far surpassing her "fellowes" in class, wealth, and power. The tree is also clearly supposed to remind readers of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil as well as the Tree of Life, both in the Garden of Eden, but the latter of which was also strongly identified in medieval and early modern Christian theological symbolism with the Cross, which "tree" brought life to mankind through the death and consequent resurrection of Christ (Robertson). This particular tree, then, offers the reader a double vision that radiates throughout the poem.

While Lanyer uses significantly more religious symbolism to give meaning to her garden imagery, it would be improper to ignore her use of the classical tropes related to the garden and the traditional pastoral *locus amoenus*. After all, one of the sources of her authority, though certainly not the primary one, is the consent of the Muses (3). Giamatti and Rosenmeyer both provide thorough studies of the traditional, though constantly changing, list of the motifs of the pastoral pleasurable place, and Giamatti and Stanley Stewart show how these were subsumed into Christian mythology through the association of Christian mythical gardens and classical mythical gardens and perfect places. Cooke-ham's trees are clad "with leaves, with fruits, with flowers" all at once, an indication of the mythical garden's existence outside of time, where there is no decay, but only fertility and flourishing. The abundance of trees provides shade for both the virtuous lady and the poet (25-26). There are "cristall Streames" symbolizing refreshment, and "little Birds in chirping notes ... And Philomela," both of which symbolize the poet in the natural world (27-28, 31). The combination of these three, together with the mood of repose and virtue, and the sense of distance and protection from a corrupt modern world, qualify the estate of Cooke-ham as a classical *locus amoenus*. Other elements, such as flowers (33), gentle and musical winds, and swelling banks that function as places to rest are also to be found in other instances of this kind of topos (39-43).

When the Clifford women must leave Cooke-ham, what takes place is a version of the Fall, which is played out in the natural world of the poem through the arrival of autumn. Lanyer has combined religious and classical symbols and tropes to create a garden space in which she is authorized to speak, and Margaret and Anne Clifford are authorized to create a female community characterized by virtue, learning, and perfect identification with God through Christ. The Bible is enacted by the women within the space of the garden, and all are enacted within the

space of Lanyer's poem, so that the garden provides the ground whereon all these elements are joined into a space of agency and "powre" for women.

### Rachel Speght

Rachel Speght was the daughter of a London clergyman and is best known for her participation in a particular polemical flare-up of the *querelle des femmes* that took place in the early part of the seventeenth century in England, between 1615 and 1617. Her first published book was *A Mouzell for Melastomus* (1617), and four years later, she published another book, *Mortalities Memorandum* (1621), a Calvinist meditation on death and memorial of her mother. While *Mouzell* is a prose work, this later publication is in verse, and prefixed to it is a separate substantial poem, "The Dreame," which is the work with which this study will engage.

This 300-line poem takes the form of a medieval dream allegory; in this case, the allegory is of the speaker's education. The poem encourages an autobiographical interpretation: not only is the narrator named "Rachel," she discusses people and events that verifiably took place in Speght's experience (such as the recounting of the Swetnam debate of years earlier [241-64]). She also speaks feelingly and believably about her desire and struggle to increase her intellectual accomplishments. In "The Dreame," the narrator falls asleep and finds herself in a beautiful place called Cosmus. Unfortunately, however, her awareness of its beauty makes her more aware of her own insufficient ability to understand and appreciate it. The allegorical construction Thought asks her why she is so sad and, upon Rachel's answering "Ignorance," Thought plays the role of physician to attempt to heal her of this "maladie" (41). Rachel accuses her ignorance of making her more beastly than human, thus equating learning, or Knowledge, with a link between humanity and higher spiritual realms:

Quoth shee, by it Gods image man doth beare,  
Without it he is but a humane shape,

Worse then the Devill; for he knoweth much;

Without it who can any ill escape?

By vertue of it evils are withstood;

*The minde without it is not counted good.* (205-10; italics in original)

Thought, however, cannot help her and thus sends her to Experience via Age. Experience tells her that the medicine she needs is Knowledge, specifically the “good” sort, attained by labor, and she sends Rachel off, guided by Industry, to Erudition’s garden, wherein grows the plant of knowledge. Rachel is attacked along the way by Disswasion, which offers conventional arguments about the uselessness of attempts to become more educated, one of which is Rachel’s sex. However, she is defended by Desire, Industry, and Truth, the last of whom in particular offers several cogent arguments specifically arguing for equal opportunity education for women, based upon both religious and humanist grounds. When Rachel has been convinced and Disswasion shaken off, they continue into the garden, a place of pleasure, populated with these female allegorical entities and, now, Rachel.

She and Desire “walk... wandering .../ To gather that, for which I thither came” (199-200), the plant of Knowledge, (more an herb, apparently, than a tree in this version) which she does “covet...daily more and more,” until “some occurrence call[s] [her] away” (232, 234). She does not elaborate on what this occurrence is, although its placement in the poem right before various references to real events in her life, such as the publication of *Mouzell* and the death of her mother, seems to some critics to indicate that what called her from her studies were obligations to others in her life (Lewalski xxxi). After leaving Erudition’s garden, she muzzles Melastomus with the ambiguous aid of Ester Sovernam and the more substantial help of Constantia Munda, who finishes him off, but after this successful undertaking, she finds herself facing “a fierce insatiable foe,” Death, which defeats her by taking away her mother (267). This

shock awakens her from the dream, upon which she finds it has come true, but she determines to utilize her learning to help others to *understand* and thus *withstand* Death.

Speght's use of garden imagery and the allegorical garden topos, so familiar from literary forms such as pastoral romance, is crucial to full understanding of this poem. Speght, like Lanyer, uses the poetic garden to create a space for female community. Each of the allegorical personalities is female and, as she wanders in Erudition's garden with Desire, periodically meeting them, they discuss her situation and story. The poem's entire narrative is one of community effort: Rachel, young and ignorant, cannot get to the garden alone but must be helped, accompanied, and defended by other characters, and once they reach the garden, all remain there together. Indeed, much of Rachel's pleasure is due to the presence of the others. In this allegorical world, Thought and the others are as substantial as "Rachel." In Lanyer's, however, the trees, house, and various other inanimate elements of the scene are anthropomorphized members of the community yet marginalized in favor of the human women. In contrast, Speght has presented a less socially stratified group of characters.<sup>3</sup>

The garden Speght is directed to in order to fulfill her desire for education is one belonging to Erudition, a very different character from earlier Renaissance garden owners, such as Alcina or Acrasia, and her garden is, unsurprisingly, a very different place. For one thing, the reader never meets Erudition; there is no climactic confrontation, and thus the question of whether the reinscription of social norms is necessary never arises. Consequently, that very question becomes the most vexed of the whole poem, because the reinscription of the gendered status quo is forced

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<sup>3</sup> It seems likely that this may be related to Speght's experience as a middle-class urbanite, with no relation to court circles. Lanyer, in contrast, did move and live in such circles, and strongly reinforced social stratification would be the milieu with which she would be most familiar. Another possible contributing factor may have been Speght's personal and familial association with Calvinism, which emphasizes the equality of the elect, an emphasis which manifests in the social constructions of congregations, such as government by elected body and decisions made by the entire congregation.

upon Rachel, with whom the reader has been led to sympathize, by a vague, impersonal, yet negative force. Speght has led the reader to believe that a different outcome might have been possible, and that change would be a desirable outcome. Thus, Speght has made Erudition's garden a revolutionary space, simply because she is authorized to speak from within it and does so without fear.

In this garden, Desire is not oriented toward sexuality but toward Knowledge, self-improvement, and labor, because that is what Rachel desires. Whereas in *The Faerie Queene* or *Orlando Furioso* the men who wander into the enchantresses' gardens are tempted to lay down the cares of life and embrace sensuality, leading to their downfall, Rachel is enjoined, and in fact desires, to work hard and improve herself. Erudition's garden is characterized by health-giving plants: besides Knowledge, which Rachel is authorized by Desire "to covet more and more," she is exposed to "fragrant flowers of sage and fruitfull plants," which "send sweet savours up into [her] head," a pleasure both allowed and encouraged (189-90). As in the pastoral romances, the garden reflects the character of the female spirit, so too here; and the spirit, Erudition, is virtuous, defined by that "good" type of knowledge mentioned in the beginning of the poem.

Whatever occurrence calls Rachel away, her disappointment is so palpable that, although she does not explicitly say so, the reader receives the impression that the necessity for her to leave this pleasurable place is unjust. Some of this conviction arises because of the conventions surrounding the allegorical garden trope Speght has chosen to adapt to her own situation. In Renaissance pastoral epics male characters generally must be rescued or must themselves overcome the evil seduction of the garden. If the garden is not an evil place, they are eventually able to gain their heart's desire, as in the *Romance of the Rose*. In contrast, Speght seems to argue that this garden is a good place, but that she is forced to leave unfulfilled nonetheless. The

reader's sympathy for "Rachel" strengthens Speght's argument, pursued both within this poem and within *A Mouzell for Melastomus*, that women are spiritually authorized to dedicate themselves to the acquisition of knowledge, in direct contrast to cultural assertions.

Speght uses garden imagery in a manner similar to that of Lanyer, both to take advantage of the conventional agency women are granted within a garden space, and to question some of the very assumptions that uphold these conventions. Highly controlled, delimited, and conventional spaces, like gardens, and highly controlled, delimited, and conventional literary forms, like country house poems or allegorical dream poems, seem in the early modern literary and ideological world to be safe spaces in which to grant power to a female speaker, because the unpredictable feminine gender can thereby be controlled, delimited, and defined by convention. However, writers like Lanyer and Speght take that limited agency to speak and use it to critique assumptions about the patriarchal necessity and religious mandate to control, delimit and confine to convention a female mind, community, or desire to speak and create.

The dream is external to Rachel, "a nocturnall guest. / A *Dreame* which did my minde and sense possesse" (16-17). This generic maneuver gives her significant flexibility as an author addressing a sensitive subject. The fact that it comes upon her like a vision or a heavenly gift, while she herself is powerless to do anything about it, works to increase the imaginative authority of the dream (i.e., it is from some supernatural place and not from her fallible self), as well as to defend her from potential attacks about any gender-transgressing behaviors. This is enhanced by a comment just two lines further on: this dream came "At the appoyntment of supernall power" (19), as well as by references to Biblical texts (127-38). The genre that Speght chose to use also functions as an insulating maneuver. Because the narrative takes place within a "dream," it does not offer as direct a threat to a hostile reader as a straight polemic attack on

educational practices would. Speght is thus coy about whether she has “experienced” a revealed truth about the divinely-sanctioned education of women, or whether it was just a fantasy. Thus her rhetoric is more widely appealing than it might otherwise be.<sup>4</sup>

The place “Rachel” awakes into is called *Cosmus*, likely identifiable with *Cosmos*, the created universe, which makes the next line, “Where stranger-like on every thing I gaz’d” very interesting (23). The tone is similar to Thomas Traherne’s later and unpublished poem “Wonder,” in which the speaker says, “How like an Angel came I down! / How bright are all things here!” (1-2), and the sense is that he is only newly come to the world and is not really a part of it. The same is true of Rachel. She “gazes” like a “stranger,” and “wanting wisdom was as one amaz’d” (24). She too is awestruck and supremely aware of her own separation or difference from the world. This is rhetorically figured as an asset in traditional Christian doctrine (see e.g., Ex. 34:10, John 1:5, 2 Cor. 10:3). However, what separates her from the world is ignorance, not piety, indicating that her unfamiliarity with *Cosmus* is a defect, not a virtue. She realizes that the correction of this weakness will only be accomplished through an increase in knowledge, or more specifically *erudition* (bookish knowledge). It is specifically a lack of erudition that makes her a stranger in the world, a lack reinforced by the “remoraes” of Disswasion, specifically “dulnesse, and my memories defect; / The difficultie of attaining lore, / My time, and sex, with many others more” (103-08).

Disswasion’s final argument against Rachel’s pursuit of learning—her sex—implies that because she is female, she cannot expect to accomplish much in the way of erudition. Speght sees fit to have her characters Desire, Truth, and Industry spend five stanzas refuting this last

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<sup>4</sup> For more on the medieval theory of dreams, including the ways in which authors could use them to accomplish different ends, see Macrobius’ *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, Book 1, Chapter 3. The notes and introduction of W. H. Stahl’s edition are also quite useful in understanding this. What is most important for the purposes of this study is the recognition of a tradition of ambiguity as to the amount of truth “revealed” in dreams.

argument, bringing to bear theology, reason, and fairly obscure classical references, all of which are meant to prove just how erudite the writer is, and therefore, just how much potential her autobiographical character also has in this area. The time Speght dedicates to refuting this argument implies its cultural strength—that “sex” would be a major stumbling block placed before any woman who wished to become better educated. Ignorance is universal, unless Desire, Truth, and Industrie come to the aid of students. Therefore, returning to Rachel’s original lament: women are made strangers in the world, cut off from understanding the cosmos, made brutish and helpless, denied the beauties of erudition, and driven away from God.

Although a stranger in a world that makes her aware of her defects in understanding as well as her desire to correct them, Rachel is invited, directed, and encouraged by the allegorical constructs to find, enter, and dwell in Erudition’s garden. The garden becomes a safe place wherein she grows and becomes more her own person; it is her space of agency. While Cosmos, the outside world, is a space of her lack (she cannot approach it in a useful way, and its sufficiency only makes her aware of her own insufficiency), the garden space fills that lack within her. Upon entering the garden, she has reached her “journeys end” (186):

Where being come, *Instructions* pleasant ayre  
Refresh’t my senses, which were almost dead,  
And fragrant flowers of sage and fruitfull plants,  
Did send sweete savours up into my head;  
And taste of science appetite did move,  
To augment *Theorie* of things above. (187-92)

This garden fulfills several of the traditional purposes of any garden, such as pleasure, sensual refreshment, and healing (Rachel’s senses are brought back from being “almost dead”). It is also a place of nourishment and fertility, with its “fruitfull plants.” Finally, it is a place of

knowledge—the “taste of science”—and learning, explicitly in the areas of religion (211-22) and history (223-28), but also in rhetoric and literature, to go by the content of the poem as a whole.

There did the harmonie of those sweete birds,  
(Which higher soare with Contemplations wings,  
Then barely with a superficiall view,  
Denote the value of created things.)  
Yeeld such delight as made me to implore,  
That I might reape this pleasure more and more. (193-98)

To emphasize that this garden functions as a *locus amoenus* she uses the terms “pleasure” and “delight” again. Also making an appearance are many of the other conventional elements: songbirds, pleasant breezes and combined fruit and flowers (although Speght is subtle in that particular effect) from the previous stanza. The birds indicate, as did her evocation of Mary, sister of Martha, that she highly values contemplation and equates it with knowledge and the life of the mind. The birds here “soare with Contemplations wings,” so that we see them not just as the conventional symbols for poets that they are usually made (through their “harmonie”), but also as symbols, integrated into this garden, of the freedom of thought. The next two lines contrast the view of reality attained by the informed and contemplative mind, as symbolized by the birds up high in the sky, with the “superficiall view” held by the earthbound “brutes” to which she has earlier referred. The ignorant and thus shackled and leaden animals lack a proper understanding of “the value of created things.” The birds, held aloft by thought and knowledge, gain a true understanding of creation. Speght’s narrator holds a deep affinity for the birds; their songs (poets’ work) give her great “delight,” and inspire her to further contemplation of creation, while also giving pleasure.

And as I walked wandring with *Desire*,

To gather that, for which I thither came;  
(Which by the helpe of *Industrie* I found)  
I met my old acquaintance, *Truth* by name;  
Whom I requested briefly to declare,  
The vertue of that plant I found so rare. (199-204)

Although the four-stanza dialogue with Truth that follows takes place within the garden, this is the final narration of events that happen there. Speght follows the model of the medieval allegory more closely than that of the classical topos in her character's behavior within the garden, as she and Desire "wander," that is, walk about, and "gather" the plant of Knowledge. This industry is a characteristically Christian, and particularly Protestant, virtue. As they walk, they meet Truth, who also appears to be walking through the garden: those steeped in virtue are active in their study and contemplation—there is no division between an active and a contemplative lifestyle here—and it is only through activity, by walking, that they can become familiar with truth. They converse and share knowledge, and the reader very clearly sees that Erudition's garden is centrally a place of knowledge, which is gendered female.

No less than Lanyer, Speght is reworking the association of women, knowledge, and gardens. In this case, the knowledge is a "lawfull avarice," according to Desire, a paradox that evokes the story of the Garden of Eden. A potential problem arises immediately: Eve's Desire told her the same thing, and it lied. There is even a kind of structural similarity in the stories: After Rachel finds the knowledge and tries to grasp more of it to herself, "some occurrence" forces her to leave the garden in which she has lived in such perfect innocence and harmony. The parallels are so clear as to insist upon consideration that they might be deliberate. Nonetheless, Speght encourages the reader to agree that this Knowledge is authorized for Rachel. For one thing, she has prepared for superficial similarities by having Age distinguish between good and

bad knowledge and directing Rachel to pursue the former through hard work (93-96). Truth affirms her choice, not only Desire, and Truth's discussion of Knowledge emphasizes its value by using biblical examples.

As in Lanyer's poem, there is a distinct absence of masculinity in this garden; the female community is the dominant social image here, although this community is much more egalitarian than Lanyer's. There is a difference between levels of authority and ability in Speght's imaginary world, but those levels are based on merit and experience, rather than on birth. Lanyer, on the other hand, never hints that she could someday be equal with the Cliffords nor that they help her to become more authentically herself. She never questions her socially-determined inferiority to them, but rather exploits the status quo to claim authorized status for herself as their follower. Speght, however, implies mobility in individual self-actualization as well as in the social construction of this intellectual female community. Although the allegorical constructs tend to be more aware than Rachel of situations in the dream, they are all willing to help, defend, and accompany her on her quest.

Much of this is simply due to the nature of allegory, which usually contains characters whose functions are both to instruct and to aid the protagonist. But whereas in other instances, the protagonist generally continues his travels alone or with a single companion, Rachel tends to collect personalities around her, to build up a community. In part, this is due to the truncated length of the poem; in 300 lines Speght cannot narrate many entrances and exits. Characters appear and, although they may only be mentioned for a few lines, they seem to remain because she never explicitly narrates their departures. It is the entire community working together that accomplishes Rachel's goal, and all members seem to strive toward her growth and pleasure. When she must leave the garden, she goes by herself. Apparently, then, while the seeking and

finding of righteous knowledge is a group project, the heroic application of it in active life is a solitary and individual endeavor, especially for a woman, whose erudition is not supported by dominant early modern cultural prescriptions. This assertion is supported by the assumptions of middle-class London Protestantism of the time: the importance of both study and hard work for the saving of the individual's soul, the importance of each person's soul, the value to the community of helping its members, and the potential mobility due to personal merit to be found in any community.

### **Margaret Cavendish**

Margaret Cavendish, the Duchess of Newcastle, must figure in any study that purports to address generally the work of female poets in England during the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Cavendish's imagination in many ways appears to have been caught by materiality and the natural world in general, and her outlook is also defined by an amazing expansiveness; her worldview encompasses nearly everything and finds some way to make each element interrelate with others, forming a network of associative connections. *Poems and Fancies* (1653), for example, contains quite a few works that imaginatively place the speaker throughout the natural and supernatural world. Cavendish's interest in the scientific discourse of her day is well-documented, and her prose work *The Blazing World* boldly presents many of her theories about natural science. Similarly, her play *The Convent of Pleasure* spends a great deal of time specifying the physical aspects of the convent.

This study will be limited to the examination of works from *Poems and Fancies*, a collection of poems and short dramatic and prose works on a huge number of topics. The book is not unified in any consistent way through structure or theme, or even genre, as for example, Herbert's *The Temple* is. It has an intimate and immediate, or careless, feel, as though perhaps she imagined a scene, character, or narrative, wrote it down quickly, and presented it for

publication after very little technical work on it. There is little variation in rhyme scheme or meter across the poems; she consistently utilizes the rhymed couplet and pays little attention to meter in most of her poems. Neither does she bother with standard poetic forms. George Parfitt in his “Note” prefacing the Scholar Press facsimile edition of *Poems and Fancies*, writes cogently, “The author’s oddities of spelling, syntax and metre were compounded with the many errors introduced by the hurried and mediocre printer; all of which contributed to an impression of eccentricity which is increased by Margaret’s view of poetry, one which stresses ‘inspiration’ and ‘fancy’ at the expense of craftsmanship and technical precision.” Certainly the printing was not careful—the last fifty pages or so are wrongly paginated, and in numerous instances letters such as “u” are set upside down—but it seems narrow-minded to classify her work, with a negative implication, as “eccentric” because of its individuality.

And Cavendish’s work is highly individual, full of imagination, creativity, and vitality. In several poems she imagines the supernatural world of Queen Mab, who lives “in the circled center of the Earth” in a land very like the human world on the earth’s surface (“The Fairy Queen”). In others, she feelingly tells the story of a timid hare, or a proud stag, both of whom are hunted.<sup>5</sup> In many, she draws comparisons between different parts of the physical world, like the human head to a hive of bees, a barrel of wine, or an oven.<sup>6</sup> This ductility of imagination ranges with the reader all over the map. Before moving to specific and relevant cases, I wish to emphasize the strong materiality of her verse. Cavendish may have her “flights of fancy,” but they never fly far from images and language that are easy for any imagination to grasp. Her image clusters examine the universally experienced—darkness, light, weather, food, the

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<sup>5</sup> “The Hunting of the Hare,” “The Hunting of a Stag”

<sup>6</sup> “Similizing the Head of Man to a Hive of Bees,” “Natures Oven,” “Comparing the head to a Barrell of Wine”

supernatural, clothing, the body, animals—partially to consider human experience poetically, but also as intrinsically valuable and interesting items. In many of her metaphorical constructions, she does not subordinate the vehicle to the tenor: the hive of bees is at least as important structurally as the human head. Her work, therefore, feels highly physical, and strongly connected with ordinary life, though at the same time deeply infused with the mystery of the physical and the ordinary. This is an excellent position from which to consider her approach to the symbolic, yet material and everyday, garden space in her poetry.

Unlike Speght and Lanyer, both of whom produced few, but unified, works, Cavendish's *Poems and Fancies* is a collection that much more closely resembles an anthology or a miscellany. The works included range from what some call "The Atomic Poems," to dialogues and what Cavendish labels "Morall Discourses" on various topics, to the "Animall Parliament" and a truncated Masque in poetic form. Some of the poems are a mere 4 lines long, while others stretch across pages. At several points Cavendish moves into rhetorical, persuasive prose, as in "An Epistle to Souldiers," in which she defends her choice of martial images and diction though she herself knows little of war, or in the untitled defense of her decision to write about fairies, though many believe they do not exist. This disjointedness limits the present study to examining what can only be a partial picture of Cavendish's work. Several poems dip into the deep well of garden images, and Cavendish, like Lanyer and Speght, also uses the sleepy old traditions, but usually tweaks them in favor of emphasizing the importance of the material world—the "real" world—to the truth of such conventions.

Her most explicit and focused entry into the garden poem genre is "Of a Garden," one of the longer poems in the collection at just over two full pages. Ostensibly describing "Paradise" (1), by the fifth line she has broadened her perspective considerably beyond the garden itself:

The azure sky is alwaies bright, and cleare;  
No grosse thick vapours in the Clouds appeare.  
There many Stars doe comfort the sad night,  
The fixt with twinckling, with the rest give light. (5-8)

The next line returns to a delight in the physicality of the garden, describing how each sense is pleased in turn by some aspect of the place. The overall thrust, though, is to describe an ideal space that includes not just the plot of ground that is planted but also the blue daytime sky and the stars at night, the breezes that blow through, and the rain that falls. She incorporates her atomic theory as represented by earlier poems (“Here Atomes small on Sun-beames dance all day” [15]), which adds a layer of her version of reality to the idealistic portrait she’s painting. In fact, Cavendish brings a remarkable number of personal trademarks as well as literary influences to bear in her composition of this topographical poem.

Her atomic theory, for example, is an interest to which she had devoted approximately 105 poems at the beginning of *Poems and Fancies*, in an effort to expound thoroughly upon it. Not surprisingly, then, this perspective informs many of the other poems throughout the collection, cropping up consistently, even in items that seem quite removed from any possibility of shared relevance, such as the Queen Mab poems. Another consistent maneuver on Cavendish’s part is the personification of natural constructs. This first appears in line thirteen with the lady Nature, who “intermixes” colors in the garden in order to give variety to the eyes, and she takes it further in line sixteen with the introduction of Zephyrus, the west wind. Cavendish of course did not herself originate these personifications, and Zephyr is surrounded with other ancient mythological characters, including Apollo and Orpheus. But only five lines below, and still within the mini-narrative she is telling of the west wind as producing the sweetest possible music within this idealized garden, she brings in the character of “night,” who

though sad, in quiet pleasure takes,  
With silence listens when he Musick makes.  
And when day comes, with grieffe descends down low,  
That she no longer must heare Zephyrus blow:  
And with her Mantle black her selfe inshrouds,  
Which is imbroyder'd all of Stars in clouds. (21-26)

Again, she has not created the character of Night, but this is just one more instance in which she insistently imagines personality and gender upon allegorical constructs. It is a poetic habit, or at least a habit of thought, with her, an imaginative move to which she continually returns.

Another part of Cavendish's personal poetic style is her habit of including and interrelating many different elements. For example, the walks in the garden are "Grasse, Sand, short, broad, and all sorts of measure" (28) as well as "firme, and hard, as Marble are, / Yet soft as Downe, by Grasse that groweth there" (31-32). Here is an almost compulsive inclusion of every possible positive attribute in a garden walk. Also, apparently unconfined by the label of "Paradise" from the first line, Cavendish goes on to incorporate every available garden trope in the poetic repertoire, limiting herself imaginatively only to the representation of an ideal garden space. The invocation of Apollo and Orpheus make possible the classical *locus amoenus*, and indeed the latter third of the poem is filled with birds singing in arbors (especially lines 63-66). The hallmarks of the Golden Age also appear: everlasting spring, the presence of the gods—particularly those associated with music—in space shared with humanity, and the coincidence of fruit and flowers. Shepherds at first seem glaringly absent,<sup>7</sup> but the abundance of birds and the sentiments expressed in the earlier poem "Poets have most Pleasure in this Life" indicate that

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<sup>7</sup> See Cavendish's opinions on that part of the pastoral trope in the poems "A Description of Shepherds, and Shepherdesses" and "A Shepherds imployment is too meane an Allegory for Noble Ladies."

poets are expected in this idealized garden. Since most commentators agree that the generic pastoral shepherds are usually little more than stand-ins for poets, following the logic of Cavendish's theory about the propriety of metaphor, the shepherds' absence is really more of a foreclosed presence. As for the presence of the poets, clearly Cavendish is meant to be present, although she does not dramatize herself within the scene as do Lanyer and Speght. Rather, she herself figures the poets. As on Mount Parnassus, the Muses, satyrs and nymphs populate this garden:

And every Muse a severall walke injoyes,  
The sad in shades, the light with sports imployes.  
Censuring Satyrs, they in corners lurke;  
Yet, as their Gard'ners, they with Art do work,  
To cut and prune, to sow, ingraft, and set,  
Gather fruits, flowers, what each Muse thinkes fit:  
And Nymphs, as Hand-maids, their attendance give;  
Which, for reward, their fames by Muses live. (75-82)

In this section dedicated to the classical tropes and markers of pastoral poetry, how appropriate that she makes "Satyrs" do double duty as both pastoral demigods and the "Censuring" genre of classical literature.

Cavendish is also happy to include the elements of the medieval pleasure garden, including the clear fountain:

Here Fountaines are, where trilling drops down run;  
Which sparkes do twinckle like fixt Stars, or Sun:  
And through each several spout such noyse it makes;  
As Bird in spring, when he his pleasure takes. (59-62)

The multitudes of flowers, especially scented ones, are also planted, while seeming spontaneously to arise, on “Emerauld bankes” (39), and are listed in lines 41-43. Lines 47-58 concentrate on the trees in the garden, including both fruit and shade trees. And throughout Cavendish highlights the pleasurable design of the garden, such as “walkes of pleasure” (27), “cooling Grottoes” (4), and “Prospects” (57). The moral tone of the garden seems not to be of significant interest to her. On one hand, this is “Paradise” where all is natural and innocent, while on the other, “Ecchoes there are most artificiall made” (3); some of the walks are “shaded, fit for Lovers musing thought / of Loves Idea, when the mind’s full fraught” (29-30) and at the same time, the shade trees themselves have “spreading tops ... full, and ever green, / As Nazarites heads, where Razor hath not been” (49-50) and “On other banks grow Simples, which are good / For Medicines, well applied, and understood” (45-46). This place is appropriate for lovers, a pleasurable place, and a wholesome and even holy place. Surely this seems like Eden, except for her insistence on the Classical elements and her use of the term “artificiall” in the very beginning of the poem, and the noticeable absence of Adam, Eve, or God. The hypothetical “lovers” may refer to the first two, but without the presence of God, and with the qualifying “some” in the first line (“A Garden is, *some* Paradise doe call” [emphasis added]), one is hesitant to make any programmatic declarations to that effect.<sup>8</sup>

The ambiguity Cavendish embraces, together with her totalizing habits and her interest in the scientific and so-called “masculine” pursuits of her time, should allow the reader to avoid surprise when realizing, finally, that her ideal garden has some ties to the real world. This garden is clearly literary, but it seems to split the difference between a place like Speght’s purely

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<sup>8</sup> Jay Stevenson, in a 1996 article, argues for Cavendish’s atheism. While I find his arguments stimulating, I resist affixing even that label upon Cavendish, who seems so all-embracing as to deny any stabilizing labels that may be placed upon her.

allegorical Garden of Erudition and Lanyer's idealized real-world estate garden. This placement between reality and imagination fits neatly into the narrative Giamatti traces of the development of Western cultural thought about the ideal garden space, whether it was understood to be Eden, the Garden of Atalanta, or the Fortunate Isles. In late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages, such places gradually went from being understood as displaced only in time but still accessible in space, to being understood as entirely divided from humanity, in both time and space. This garden of Cavendish's partakes more of the former sensibility, but it plays with the idea of the latter. As usual, Cavendish refuses to be pinned down to singularities, even while she emphasizes materiality and "reality." For example, the garden has a (somewhat) specific location: "The place is always th'Equinoctiall" (2), but that "always" implies that either the garden itself shifts about, perhaps along the equator, or that tales about it are repeated, perhaps with other variations. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, "equinoctial," as used at the time, can refer both to the equinox and to the equator, "whether celestial or terrestrial" (entry A.1). Cavendish makes explicit her intention of the former:

Apollo yields, and not contends with spight,  
Presenting Zephyrus with twelve houres of light:  
And night, though sad, in quiet pleasure takes,  
With silence listens when he Musick makes. (19-22)

Note that the day is divided into equal halves of light, indicating that "Equinoctiall" functions as a time-oriented label, that Cavendish has seemingly fixed the garden only in time.

But she also understands the garden as being in a place that requires "shade" "from the heat" (4) and has an "azure sky ... alwaies bright, and cleare; / No grosse thick vapours in the Clouds appeare" (5-6), that is, she also imagines it fixed in space. These are characteristics quite often believed at that time to characterize the equatorial regions, especially in the new colonial

lands opening up for the British in the seventeenth century (Kolodny, *Lay of the Land*).

Cavendish incorporates both contemporary scientific and imperial matters, claiming for her work some of the legitimacy of these discourses, a maneuver similar to her invocation of ancient gardens, which appropriates some of the authority of biblical commentary and classical poetics. At the same time, her work remains slippery in these aspects. She may have placed this “equinoctial” garden in an equatorial place, but it remains unclear exactly where. She may have intended the Americas or the East or West Indies, or she may perhaps have imagined some more mythological place that shifts around, like the older concepts of the Blessed Isles or Eden.

If, however, this term is meant to refer to an eternal vernal equinox, such a fact would require spatial movement on the part of the garden, were it to exist on the terrestrial ball. Perhaps she imagines this garden to be on the celestial equator, a possibility the *OED* seems to open up, but which also seems rather unlikely. These maneuvers mimic what she does with “Satyrs” in line 77: she takes advantage of the mutability and ambiguity of language to claim multiple meanings simultaneously. It is clear that she wishes to use scientific, or at least “masculine,” language, but at the same time, she uses it in a very organic and poetic manner, exploiting its “feminine” attributes (such as mutability) instead of confining herself to discrete and concrete concepts.

Two final particulars of the poem indicate her engagement with garden developments in the real world, the first of which looks toward the past, and the second toward the future. “On other bankes grow Simples, which are good / For Medicines, well applied, and understood” (45-46): these lines indicate the “wholesome” atmosphere of the garden, but this is also more specifically a reference to *medicine*, a use for plants rarely specified in an idealized poetic garden. Generally, the plants of these gardens do offer aromatic pleasure (see line 40), and

oftentimes certain herbs, associated with health, are cited by the poet to invoke the quality of wholesomeness, as in Speght's brief descriptions of the plantings in Erudition's garden. On the other hand, plants that are poisonous, dangerous, or merely useless are sometimes used in the descriptions of false pleasure gardens, which contain grapevines, for example (source of drunkenness), or golden ivy (unnatural).<sup>9</sup> Plants can provide poets with very efficient imagistic shorthand, but it is extremely rare that a poet describing an idealized garden will specify potential medicines and, more than that, make clear that the medicines must be compounded from the "simples" (the individual medicinal plants) and require the application of education and skill in order to be effective. This particular image, of the medicinal herbs necessitating education for efficacy, in the work of a female poet, calls to mind the proverbial herb-woman and the entire matrix of the feminine associated with plant life. At the same time, Cavendish's precise language also invokes the burgeoning scientific aspect of mid-seventeenth-century medicine. Finally, the image of plants being grown specifically for their medicinal properties invokes working, real-world gardens, illustrated in gardening, domestic, and conduct manuals of the time, in which the righteous husband or housewife was enjoined to tend vegetables, herbs and other plants for virtue as well as nourishment, savor, and health.

The final "real-world" aspect, and one that looks to the future, almost literally, is her use of the term "Prospects": "Prospects, which Trees, and Clouds by mixing shewes, / Joyn'd by the eye, one perfect peece it grows" (57-58). This term had been used to indicate a view or a landscape for nearly one hundred years by the time *Poems and Fancies* was published, so it was not new (*OED* "prospect," def. I.3.a). However, in the eighteenth century, with the development

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<sup>9</sup> Both of these examples are from the Bower of Blisse, Spenser, *FQ* 2.12.54ff. and 61ff. The grapevine is, of course, a complex symbol also containing well-established connotations of prosperity and spiritual productivity ("I am the vine; you are the branches" [John 15:5]), but in the context given, it carries negative weight.

of the landscape garden, which was derived from an aesthetic of creating naturalistic and aesthetically pleasing prospects, as seen from the landowner's house or from specific privileged sites within the gardens themselves, the term gained serious cultural weight. "Prospect" became so clichéd, as the only fashionably accepted aesthetic goal at the height of the popularity of landscape gardening that Jane Austen, in *Mansfield Park* (1814), could satirically question whether the subjection of all other concerns (and specifically historical plantings) to that of gaining a "prospect" was not perhaps a mark of *bad* taste in gardening (1.6). But the use of this term as specifically tied to the garden was unusual at the time Cavendish wrote, and it would only later gain the strength and specificity with which garden historians of the eighteenth century are now so familiar.

Cavendish's "Of a Garden" is, finally, characterized by her interest in materiality. The poem works by description; that is its primary purpose, and despite the nods to allegory and myth, she rarely provides much more than idealized physical description, because representing this imagined garden comprehends the extent of her interest. She includes pleasures for each of the senses, for example devoting six lines to the daisies on the grass (33-38). The attention to material reality is also apparent in many of the quotations given above. Unlike poems such as "Similizing the Head of Man to a Hive of Bees," or the more relevant "Similizing the Braine to a Garden," discussed below, this garden is not made to work in a figurative manner. Cavendish is even unwilling to declare unreservedly that this ideal garden is Paradise ("some ... doe call") but includes the term "equinoctiall" to reinforce the sense of a physical, material place.

Margaret Cavendish, like Lanyer and Speght, found garden space amenable to her own particular style and, more than that, a space from within which she could question the assumptions against which she openly chafed in her other work. She was able to use the tropes

and conventions to authorize some idiosyncratic and even some feminist rhetoric. Her focus on materiality and the physical realities of gardens (medicinal “simples,” the work of gardeners, the desire for a “prospect”) unusually joins the traditional poetic garden with the real, physical world. Most garden poems play with the line between physical description and metaphoric or allegorical meaning. But the metaphorical, as I have demonstrated above, tends to be of secondary or perhaps even tertiary importance to Cavendish. Even if it is hard to pin this garden down to a specific time or place, even if it is impossible that it should exist somewhere on terra firma, it still seems to be a concrete place. The blatant materiality—a poetic marker of her work—is something she can both gain and express through the conventions of the idealized garden.

She also finds the wide range of garden topoi well fitted to her desire to include everything possible, making it a useful image medium through which to express her poetic theory. She writes, in her introductory address “To Naturall Philosophers,” that she hopes her poems, “if they cannot please, for lack of Wit, they may please in Variety, for most Palates are greedy after Change,” and in “To the Reader” she declares, “For God, and his Heavenly Mansions, are to be admired, wondred, and astonished at, and not disputed on. But at all other things let Fancy flye.” Her theory of poetry, as expressed in all the epistles and poems prefacing *Poems and Fancies*, appears to be that her vocation and desire is to write, so she must write, regardless of any lack of formal training. This at least is the self-justifying narrative, but she is quite consistent in it, indicating its meaning for her.

Further, the use of this poetic subgenre acceptable for a female writer opens up space and authority for Cavendish to approach the “masculine” areas of science and exploration, areas, particularly science, in which she in other works declares her desire to gain Fame. Placing

herself as a representative poet within this very conventional garden—the only human voice among the Muses, Satyrs, and Apollo—gains her the traditional authority of the poet, as does demonstrating some knowledge of the vocabulary of the “masculine” discourses. This poetic garden, especially in its identity *as* poetry, opens up the space she needs to have authorized access to a means of Fame (her stated goal). She accomplishes this by thoroughly immersing herself in the conventions and showing her familiarity with all those the garden poem can contain yet insisting on their relation to material reality (an area in which the female gender had conventionally been confined). She deemphasizes a strong sense of order and structure (a poetic maneuver considered “feminine”), and in short, the garden allows her to embrace the “feminine” aspects of her poetry in order to claim authority to comment on the “masculine” worlds in which she was interested.

This, of course, is only one poem, but others reflect similar moves. “Natures Dresse” participates in the ancient program of personifying Nature as a woman; Cavendish figures Nature as a fashionable woman of her time, complete with powdered hair (“Milk-white Snow” [11]), and concentrates only on elaborating the conceit with a very clear eye for the image she’s building but with very little interest in doing anything beyond description. It is admittedly a pretty description, though. “Similizing the Braine to a Garden” is a part of her similizing “series,” understood informally; it is right in the midst of a group of poems dedicated solely to comparisons almost metaphysical in their “unlikeness.” In this poem, the brain is labeled by a marginal notation as “Natures Garden,” and Cavendish combines all the similar aspects she can find, with little concern for structural rigor. “Fancy,” for example, is made to be represented by both a stream (3) and various flowers (9-14). Wit is both a butterfly and a cupid (15-20), while industry and poetry are bees and birds respectively (21-30). Her personal interests come through

in the appearance of “Fame,” which helps protect the bees from the “Winter of sad Death” (24), and in the figuring of butterflies as lusty lovers:

Their Wit, as Butter-flies, hot love do make,  
On every Flower fine their pleasure take.  
Dancing about each Leafe in pleasant sort,  
Passing their time away in Amorous sport. (15-18)

This passage in particular seems like a fine example of part of Cavendish’s poetic theory at work: she draws her simile and then, with apparently slight regard for contemporary poetic conventions, in this case those of propriety and measure, she goes where her fancy takes her in terms of poetic description. This poem shows that she is comfortable with the conventions and formulas, but they form primarily a jumping-off point for her own personal vision and theory.

A number of her poems take a less radical path, making use of conventions without roping them in to even vaguely subversive service. In “A Dialogue betwixt Earth, and Darknesse,” the earth is figured feminine and the sun as an unfaithful husband that goes away at night to give light to worlds elsewhere (as she suggests in her marginal note), and the night becomes a persuasive lover. The oak tree champions traditional Stoic virtues, such as contentment in one’s place in the world, in “A Dialogue between an Oake, and a Man cutting him downe,” while the woodcutter offers visions of progress and ambition in an attempt to reconcile the oak with his actions. It seems appropriate that the oak tree, beloved classical symbol, should speak for the typical conservative point of view.

“Of two Hearts” presents the titular hearts as plots of land, “hedg’d . . . round, and ditcht on every side” (2), one rich and the other barren. She counterpoises the two as convention dictates—the fertile land bears wisdom, patience, and virtue “Fit for the Manage, or in War to charge” (8), while the other at first appears useless and therefore abandoned by the planter (“I no

good Seed will sow” [18]). However, Cavendish argues that such a plot of land, if “Rich Arable good Education plow’d, / Deep Furroughs of Discretion well allowed. / And several sorts of Seeds about did sow” (27-29), would yield crops as virtuous as the other (including charity, courage, peace, and good deeds) that could be stored in “Barnes of Honour” and made useful by the work of Truth and Honesty. The remainder of the poem makes it clear that the barren heart indicates a member of the female sex, while the fertile one is meant to refer to a man. The clear and conventional gender difference, which at first Cavendish seemed to present as a “natural” part of these two plots of land, is shown by her instead to be an effect of lack of care and attention. Her clear, though nominally metaphorical, implication is that if women were given educational opportunities equal with men, they would become just as likely to be useful and honorable to society, instead of “bearing” “crabbed Nature,” cruelty, treachery, and melancholy. The point is that education, not nature, is what makes a “heart,” this poem’s metonymy for a person, socially useful and virtuous, just as it is cultivation that makes a piece of “waste” ground useful and productive. The conventions allow Cavendish to make a bold statement about women’s education, while couching that radical argument in the safety of well-established pastoral poetic convention. The equation of humanity with a plot of ground is here, rather unusually, a method applied to masculine humanity as well as feminine, but this remarkable move fades in the context of her constant poetic comparisons and metaphoric conceits; it does not seem startling after 140 pages of similar figurative work.

“A Dialogue of Birds” takes the conventional form by which the birds each argue about which species is most abused by mankind, thus invoking what one might call a “Parliament of Fowls” format. At the same time, Cavendish is tapping into her recurrent ecological sympathy seen in other poems such as “The Hunting of the Hare,” and “The Hunting of a Stag.” In both of

those, as in this poem, the speaker's sympathy is with the animal being hunted or captured. While some emphasis is put upon birdsong, especially at the beginning and end of the poem, which might lead a reader familiar with pastoral to anticipate some invocation of the traditional bird-as-poet symbolism, she seems more interested in imagining the birds as forming a diverse community, especially in the last two pages of the poem. After a little over three pages describing the horrible things humans habitually do to birds, Cavendish has the titmouse scold the rest into resuming their domestic responsibilities, which Cavendish then describes, following up with commentary on proper housewifely behavior. She ends with a lovely image of the birds all joining together in a choral hymn of praise and supplication before dropping off to sleep. The whole sense is of a tightly knit community:

And as like Men, from Market home they come,  
Set out alone, but every Mile addes some;  
Untill a Troop of Neighbours get together,  
So do a flight of Birds in sun-shine weather.  
When to their Nests they get, Lord how they baule,  
And every one doth to his Neighbour call:  
Asking each other if they weary were,  
Rejoycing at past dangers, and great feare.  
When they their wings had prun'd, and young ones fed,  
Sate gossipping, before they went to Bed. (183-92)

This is one of Cavendish's more successful poems, because the ecological sympathy and the simultaneous and lifelike evocation of the behavior both of birds and of a human community make this poem very humane and personal. This is the kind of work in which Cavendish shines, the instances where her accumulative tendencies, because they work *within* the traditional

conventions, as they did in “Of a Garden,” provide strength and weight to the poem, instead of detracting from it. In poems such as these and the hunting poems, her immediacy and seemingly informal writing style are strengths that give the poems heart.

“A Land-skip” is really a *collection* of landscapes brought under the dominance of the speaker’s gaze from the top of a hill. The poem nicely combines both meanings of “land-skip” in use at the time, being an artistic representation of scenery while affecting to refer directly to the scenery seen. It is clear, however, that the landscape the narrator describes has more in common with the artificial representations than with a specific real-world view across land. Thus, while this poem shares some affinities with Denham’s “Cooper’s Hill” (1668), the latter poem, because it evokes the real view from a geographical spot, accomplishes its goal more subtly than does “A Land-skip.” The hill in this poem is metaphorical (a “Hill of Fancies” [1]), and so are all the views the speaker sees from it: a pastoral pleasance and agricultural field combined, enclosed meadows and hayfields, a stand of trees (“Woods”), a garden, and finally an orchard. Each landscape is pressed into figurative service, most following the conventions with which it had long been associated, although Cavendish tends to combine different meanings. The pleasance (with its animals) refers to contentment, the agriculture to productivity; the enclosures refer to privacy and physical health, both in youth and old age; the woods imply ambition, worldly concerns and sins—this is the only purely negative landscape; the garden and orchard both seem to refer to female physical, or erotic, beauty. Perhaps Cavendish’s hidden point is to enumerate different concerns of women of her time, such as work, health, beauty and pleasure, which would be in keeping with her general thematic program. However, she draws no explicit conclusions or morals, but rather ends somewhat anticlimactically (“When I had view’d this Land-skip round about, / I fell from Fancies Hill, and so Wits Sight went out” [48-49]) and leaves interpretation

open to the reader. She seems to have finished, having drawn her figurative associations within the description of the landscapes.

“The Poets Recreation” combines the conventions of the poetic lover’s garden and the biblical Paradise.<sup>10</sup> The first lines indicate that all gardens recapitulate these poetic constructs:

Where Gardens are, them Paradise we call,  
For-bidden Fruits, which tempt young Lovers all,  
Grow on the Trees, which in the midst is plac’d  
Beauty, on the other Desire vast.  
The Devill self-conceit full craftily  
Did take the Serpents shape of Flattery,  
For to deceive the Female Sex there by. (1-7)

Her combinatory tendency appears here again, where she has gathered all the conventions into a conglomeration that suits her aims efficiently. As this garden—for by line eleven it has become a specific place—becomes increasingly allegorical, it is revealed to be only a first step for a poet who will move outside the garden to other allegorical topoi. The garden is structured like a secularized Eden: there are forbidden fruits, two trees in the middle of the garden, a diabolical serpent, a distinction between the sexes, and a catastrophic fall (although in this case, the garden is destroyed, and the vague human constructs [“the Female Sex,” “The Male”] are not mentioned in connection with it).

The garden, which has been figured as a space of pure or natural human abilities and behaviors (such as beauty, desire, self-conceit, inconstancy, sexuality, confidence, doubt, fancy,

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<sup>10</sup> This poem is actually untitled, but a marginal notation next to the first line says “The Poets Recreation.” Due to the carelessness of the printing, it seems possible that this notation may be a last-minute addition of the poem’s title. After the main text was already set, with the title inadvertently omitted, the layout could not have been changed without extensive work.

wit, truth, and ignorance), is replaced in the narrative of the poem by a forest, which Cavendish has in other poems associated with worldly gain. This forest is little different, although it does not carry the wholly negative valence of the other but rather is figured in terms that evoke both positive and negative aspects of the honing of the poet's craft: knowledge, judgment, metaphoric conceits, honesty, eloquence, logic, and sophistry. This forest includes the poets' animals, birds, and is a space of growth and maturity, a space constructed around personality or behavioral choices, and devoted to increase of skill in poetic expression and structure. Yet, this too is eventually revealed as a transitional space. The final stanza finds the poet beside a river, at first fishing and then building ships to carry him or her to new and exotic lands. This segment is defined by a sense of space and possibility that seems infinite but is strictly constrained by public opinion: mariners, for example, try "to avoid a Ship-wrack of dislike," and "ships [poets' ambitions] are often cast upon the Sands of Spight" (38-39).

Thus, "The Poets Recreation" turns out to be a constant, if sometimes precarious, process of growth. The garden provides a safe and fertile beginning place for the poet, receptive to the poet's natural, but incomplete, skill. The poet must develop further by moving through the forest and eventually out onto the ocean. However, it is worth remembering that Cavendish's self-narrative consistently insists upon her own essential desires, her "fancy," her natural or immediate talent, and lack of worldly support. In other words, Cavendish consistently represents herself as still being in that garden, unwelcome in the worldly forest where others can hone their craft, and yet craving the ships of fame to carry her safely through public opinion to the "unknowne Land" of possibilities.

Many of Cavendish's poems follow the same pattern of using the conventions and ancient, accepted tropes to address her personal concerns. This discussion of *Poems and Fancies* will

conclude by briefly glancing at a few more examples. In a pair of poems, “A Description of Shepherds, and Shepherdesses” and “A Shepherds imployment is too meane an allegory for Noble Ladies,” Cavendish appears to deny the pastoral tradition, as far as its inhabitants are concerned. She is perfectly willing to romanticize and allegorize the pastoral pleasance, but here she makes it clear that she is unimpressed with the convention of romanticizing rustic people. The first poem begins with a fairly realistic picture of the dirt and discomfort of tending sheep. Her class, education and culture, it can be argued, figure significantly into her representation of shepherds *en masse* as lazy, uneducated, lascivious slobs. At the same time, however, her insistence on what she apparently perceives as reality, her emphasis on labor and discomfort, seems rather less condescending than the conventions she attacks: she at least appears to be aware of some of the difficulties of life for these members of the lower classes, especially the women. The last ten lines of this first poem are a delightful taking-to-task of other poets for their smug appropriation of lower class misery for the entertainment and self-congratulation of the upper or learned classes, starting with:

Thus rustick Clownes are pleas'd to spend their times,  
And not as Poets faine, in Sonnets, Rhimes,  
Making great Kings and Princes Pastures keep,  
And beauteous Ladies driving flocks of sheep. (29-32)

Her scorn of this playacting extends into the next poem, in which she dismisses pastoral as an organizing trope for courtship and romance. Instead, she appears to advocate the chivalric romance as a more appropriate imaginative sphere for members of royalty and the nobility (“Men, Champions, Knights, which Honour high doe prize” [13] and “To take those Castles kept by Scandals strong, / That have by errors been enchanted long” [17-18]). Some of her images and terms (“error,” “monstrous Vice,” etc.) seem to indicate more specifically that she may

have been referring to Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, or was at least familiar with it.<sup>11</sup> These two poems cut such discourses of play down to size by their satiric employment of (what she understands as) realism. Her insistence on materiality, once again, has caused her to put a different spin on poetic conventions, and the fact that these conventions are pastoral gives her the agency necessary to critique them, in this instance by advocating another literary area available to female exploitation, the chivalric romance.

Cavendish follows the patterns given above but with individual modifications conforming to her own style and interests. She finds the garden topos amenable to her poetic treatment, true, but then, there is little she does not attempt to address in this collection of poems. Also, she rarely considers the question of female community, as she more often than not adopts a lone poetic voice and rarely places herself as an active character within these poems, as do Lanyer and Speght. Instead, her voice is narrative and descriptive; she is speaker and creator, sometimes the self-reflective voice describing her desires or state of mind, but she does not generally represent herself as a character interacting with other characters inside her poems. Cavendish has produced poems that are not narrative and are sometimes introspective, closer to the category of lyric poetry. But, much more often than introspection, she delivers descriptive and figurative conceit poems.

The works examined here give her an opportunity to describe in intense material detail particular places, and with the allegorizing maneuvers she makes, it becomes clear that her worlds are both symbolic and highly physical. This combination draws authority from the ancient connection of women with the physical world, and the application of symbolic meaning to this conventional connection. Thus, when Cavendish, woman poet, describes a garden at

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<sup>11</sup> This perhaps is reinforced by her own "Fairy Queen" poems, in which she describes the world and the activities of Queen Mab and her courtiers.

extraordinary length, emphasizing its physical aspects and simultaneously invoking the conventional symbols associated with those aspects, she is enacting all the ancient associations through the very act of writing. The associations give her the authority to speak, and the content gives her the space in which that authority is acceptable. Further, she emphasizes the very aspects that had been consistently labeled “feminine,” creating through these authorized associations a *fully feminine poetic*, according to the conventions of the time, but also making no apology for itself.<sup>12</sup> Her individual style exploits the very accepted conventions and ideological associations that this study examines. They are what enabled her to write and publish poetry that was so very outside the expected range for women of that time, and yet for it to be understood, even labeled, as “feminine” poetry. Her work both reemphasized the negative aspects of that label, helping to earn her the soubriquet “Mad Madge,” and also found new ground that would change what the label meant. She created a close imaginative connection with the physical world, emphasized that her work was “natural” and immediate, and found individual agency in that world.

Cavendish required neither religion nor much in the way of classical authority to highlight and exploit these conventional associations in her poetic career. Her mandate comes from Mother Nature, her understanding of which is generally mediated by poetic, or some other cultural, representations. In a way, then, her understanding of nature is derived from a garden-type worldview. Thus she felt authorized to speak about the entirety of the physical world: to her, the world was a garden, within which she could stand and observe, and then speak. Her infatuation with fame is well-recorded, allowing the assertion that in an associative sense, the

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<sup>12</sup> I do not consider her rhetorical “apologies” for her sex, lack of education, etc., to be serious. Although she may not have been as well educated as she would have liked (Whitaker 15-17), she appears in those instances primarily to be exploiting a version of the modesty topos.

garden-like understanding of the physical world, which welcomed her poetic interpretation, allowed her to create and perform the persona through which she wished to be understood and remembered. She performed herself poetically through the agency open to her in a garden-oriented physical world. For her, the physical grounds the personal, which authorizes the poetic. This material basis of her artistic voice fundamentally divides Cavendish from her better known contemporary, Katherine Philips, to whom we will now turn.

CHAPTER 7  
BEYOND THE PALE: PHILIPS AND BEHN

**Katherine Philips**

Katherine Philips, the fancifully nicknamed “Matchless Orinda,” is a writer more interested in psychological worlds than in physical ones, in some ways very much the opposite of Margaret Cavendish, who was so vitally interested in the material world that she often cheerfully let psychological realism fall by the wayside in her work. Quite often Philips’s poems seem to have no physical space to them at all, so that Patrick Thomas, editor of the *Stump Cross* collection, could remark about “A sea voyage from Tenby to Bristoll, 5 of September 1652. Sent to Lucasia 8<sup>th</sup> September 1652,” “Lines 49-54 contain one of the few directly descriptive passages in Orinda’s poetry” (Thomas 335). However, as the title indicates, in this particular poem, physical space and time are extremely important. Upon further exploration, we find that Philips does have plenty of instances of spatiality in her poetry, sometimes conventional and sometimes particular, sometimes psychological and only metaphorically physical. In each case, her approach to space, and especially to the specific types of space this study is interested in, is illuminating for this argument.

A significant majority of Philips’s poems go about the business of creating and maintaining a community, comprised of both men and women from primarily the gentry and nobility. This community, the “Society of Friendship,” was apparently held together mostly by the force of Philips’s personality, expressed through her letters and poems. Eschewing confessional lyrics, Philips devoted most of her poetic skill to creating works that followed a Cavalier ideal of the public poet, writing pindarics, odes, epitaphs, epithalamia, and other occasional poetry. In some instances, Philips’s addressees were a part of her geographical communities in Wales, Ireland or London, but nearly as often, they lived far away, or were

people she might never have met. Thus, her poetry both physically and metaphorically creates her poetic “Society” by materially linking its members through correspondence. While some of the relationships were forged through face-to-face interaction (for example, Philips’s friendship with Mary Aubrey), others were created solely through poetic tributes or correspondence, indicating that writing, and in Philips’s case poetry in particular, was vital to the creation and maintenance of real relationship.

At the same time, the relationships portrayed in these poems do not always reflect what might be called the “real world.” Rather, they tend to be constructed in terms of the ideologies this group of people promoted, including perfect platonic friendship, personal honor and virtue, political perseverance and tolerance. Therefore, within the framework of real relationships, Philips’s poems simultaneously create poetic or imaginary (because idealized) relationships. The mixture indicates the performative nature of this body of work, primarily because each register of the writings (real world, idealized imaginary) reflects and influences the other. Thus, for example, when Philips<sup>1</sup> is upset with Rosania or Lucasia, her poetry refers to this breach, but it also constructs all disagreement in terms of the ideologies she advocated. When Lucasia refused to marry the man Philips had chosen for her and wed another instead, Philips’s poem of response gives a sense of her betrayal, but the specifics are kept obscure, casting the argument as an example of broad truth, rather than as a singular situation. An extensive knowledge of Philips’s personal life and relationships is needed to make complete sense of much of her work, because it is so self-referential. Yet at the same time, many of the poems can stand alone with personal details filled in by generic place-holders. This meshing of the two worlds, both of which seem to create and recreate each other, begins to dissolve any line between “reality” and “imagination,”

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<sup>1</sup> In this study, “Philips” refers to the author, “Orinda” to the poetic persona. At times, there is very little distinction between the two.

making Orinda's poetry performative in a very strict sense: it creates reality, and does not just reflect it. This conjoins the real and the imaginary, the public and the private, forming a neoclassical community governed by laws of platonic friendship and by social and intellectual ethics. It is bound by social conventions but also by the rather less conventional guiding spirit of Orinda and the poetic writings of its members.

Such an assessment may seem at first glance to fly in the face of this study, but a closer examination will show that the changes in the picture are not unanticipated and do not in fact materially alter the basic tenets discussed above. The major changes are the androgynous nature of the community and Philips's apparent lack of interest in the evocation of physical space. We cannot take these concerns one at a time because they are so closely interwoven as to make them inextricable from one another. In both cases, the situation is a reversion to an older and more basic understanding of the very matters the garden has always addressed. That is, it is older and more basic than the pictures drawn by the three female poets examined above, each of whom was doing something radical with both aspects, either excluding men completely from the community (as with Lanyer and Speght) or concentrating on physical space in order to comment on intellectual and spiritual space (as with Lanyer and Cavendish). In the case of the former, the purpose was to bestow power upon the female speaker, as both poets make explicit: Lanyer by the exclusion of the male-owned house, and Speght by the direct opposition of female rights against male oppression.

In contrast, Philips assumes from the outset a voice of authority and power among the members of her coterie; she represents herself in a leadership position. Gender difference and inequity play only very small roles in the majority of her poems, at least in the sense that she does not represent herself as constrained or defined by her gender. The men and women in the

group, as Philips represents them in her poetry, seem perfectly free to interact with one another as intellectual, spiritual and political equals. Certainly she does refer at times to general constraints, including some she herself experienced, as when marriage forced her retirement to her husband's estate in Wales. In her very early poems, such as "A Married State," she chafes more against these constraints than in her later work, but the persona of her mature poetry, from the 1650s and 1660s, is remarkably uninterested in any variation of "the woman question," or "gender wars": she is much more dedicated to wielding and maintaining the power she clearly has in the group. She expresses some anxiety in this role (especially when she is "thwarted" or "betrayed" by her friends), and she makes extensive use of the conventional modesty topos, which had proved useful to other women writers. But neither of these constrains her "rule" over this little group.

This set of interests and maneuvers recapitulates the construction of community and power represented as taking place within garden space throughout the Renaissance. The fact that it crops up here and now may only be surprising because garden motifs are not evoked by Philips to give the conventional symbolic framing to the community. Others in Orinda's circle, such as Henry Vaughan, did use garden and nature imagery abundantly, implying that the imagery floated in the poetic ether of the group. However, Philips figures herself as a female authority more in the mold of a *femme forte* or a *précieuse*, both contemporary fashionable models of feminine power, rather than a sexualized *femme fatale* like the traditional garden enchantress. Orinda's coterie is a real-world female-dominated poetic community, including both men and women, and while it is interested in marriages—alliances which depend on gender—it is much less dominated by sexuality than earlier poetic representations may lead a reader to expect. Marriages are figured more as social and political alliances than as relationships based on affect

and desire.<sup>2</sup> Upon her friend Regina's marrying against Philips's will, for example, her poems indicate that she was disappointed with Regina for privileging her own desires over Philips's more socially pragmatic choice. Philips represents the suitor she had chosen for Regina as motivated by desire, but she claims that Regina should have chosen based not on her desires but on less sexualized criteria, such as her trust in Orinda's ability to choose an "appropriate" match for her ("For Regina").

The lack of physical space and the setting of most of Philips's poems in a psychological world do not provide strong objections, either, as Speght's poem, for example, was entirely allegorical and not at all physical. Materiality, however, does provide the content of more of Philips's poems than one might initially think, and the exchange of the poems, their circulation, and the very real characters in the poetic world Philips creates—real people with real lives—gives the milieu of her poetry a background, so to speak, of materiality. Unlike Lanyer, Speght, and Cavendish, Philips was not writing to gratify both herself and a general publishing audience; she addressed nearly all her work to specific individuals. Thus, even if she had a more general audience at the back of her mind, and even though there is undoubtedly a strong aspect of self-gratification in her work, she has imaginative materiality built right into her creative purpose, a facet of work that only Lanyer approximates, with her many dedications. However, Lanyer had her work published, indicating that the general reader occupies a more prominent place in her motivational and creative equation than he or she does in Philips's. Many of Philips's poems, especially the epitaphs and other laudatory poems, concentrate on the actions and behaviors of

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<sup>2</sup> The modern debate on companionate marriage was just beginning to gain steam, although the model had been available for some time. See, for example, William C. Horne, *Making a Heaven of Hell*; Barbara K. Lewalski, "Literature and the Household," in *The Cambridge History of Early Modern English Literature*, which discusses the hierarchical, micro-state model of marriage and domestic life in the early part of the century.

their subjects, indicating a sense of the importance of the physical, not just the psychological. Indeed, she mixes the two beautifully, a trait that begins to emerge as one of her strengths.

She additionally creates an aura of, not so much garden imagery, but pastoral imagery, by the use of coterie names. Perhaps this is more apparent in Behn's work, where not only the names but also the actual imagery is used, but even in Philips's circle, the use of the pseudo-Roman monikers invokes an Augustan pastoralism, following as it does the fashion of many other Cavalier poets. The names Philips gave herself and her friends stretch beyond the Celias and Corinnas that populate so much of the poetry at the time. According to Thomas many of them were taken from contemporary plays—Rosania, for example, is a character in Shirley's *The Doubtful Heir*—but all draw from a general classical heritage that evokes this imaginary of associations (349). Similar naming schemes—allegorical but also classical in construction if not always in origin—are apparent in both pastoral romance and Cavalier poetry. In selecting new names by which to address one another and to represent themselves in their writings, the members of Orinda's circle (like other pseudonymous coterie) were seeking to create an exclusive group while making use of the fashionable symbolic fusion of the poet and courtier with the shepherd.

Philips's work uses the advantages created for female poets by garden and pastoral conventions without explicit reference to the images that authorized such advantages in the first place. This move is repeatedly made by the women poets examined here: the launching of oneself off a grounding of conventions created and utilized by others, the maintenance of that as a safe space from which to work, but the pushing beyond and outside of the constrictions of such conventions. Unlike Cavendish, Philips is not "fanciful" but instead closely follows fashionable conventions in form, language, and imagery. But her skill, technical assurance, and subtle

displacement of the question of gender raise her work above “mere” conventionality. If the tendency of the male-dominated society was to think of male poets as the “norm” and female poets as an aberrant category, Philips smoothly inserts herself into that normative space, appropriating its conventions and assuming authority.

Unlike the other female poets of this study, Philips did not choose to publish most of her own work. However, an unauthorized collection was printed at the very end of her lifetime, capitalizing on Philips’s high literary reputation. She protested to her friends and acquaintances, but the reception of her work was favorable, and her protestations did nothing to diminish its popularity. Before long, she was involved in producing an authorized collection, but she died soon after, and it was finished posthumously. Although she did authorize the printing of her translation of *The Death of Pompey* by Corneille, after its successful performance in Dublin, she generally chose to publish her work through coterie distribution. In this way, her poetry got to be very well known and she was accepted as one of the prominent poets of the late Interregnum and early Restoration period, yet she was able to maintain the reputation for silence and propriety society dictated for her gender and class.

Philips’s poems generally fall into three categories: poems written to commemorate public events or people, incidental poems, and poems written to or about coterie members. Those of the last group usually consider some aspect of friendship, emotion or personal expression. Lyrics are few and far between. In almost none of these works, not even the more personal ones, does she allow free rein to the language or imagery of emotion, which may help explain why she rarely ventures into the garden for her images: that setting evokes the highly sensual, immediate, and/or introspective—not a register Philips often chooses to work in. Even one of her two lovely mourning poems on the death of her son is given heavy framing: “Epitaph. On Hector Phillips.

At St. Sith's Church." There is no acknowledgment here that this is her son, and the first few lines are also held rigidly at a distance:

What on Earth deserves our Trust?  
Youth and Beauty both are dust.  
Long we gathering are with pain,  
What one Moment calls again. (1-4)

These lines seem cold and formal, until the next few open up a personal window to allow the reader to glimpse just how full of pain the whole poem really is. But grief expressed this way, from a distance, understandable though it is, is nonetheless rigid, unyielding, and heavy. Contrast this with Jonson's poems on his dead children, which are much softer and lighter in construction:

Farewell, thou child of my right hand, and joy;  
My sinne was too much hope of thee, lov'd boy,  
...  
Rest in soft peace, and, ask'd, say here doth lye  
Ben. Jonson his best piece of poetrie. (1-2, 9-10)

The two poets give us two very different pictures of grief. Jonson's is probably more beautiful, but Philips's is at least as wrenching. And this is despite, or perhaps because of, the granite suppression of personality and open emotion.<sup>3</sup>

The single topographical image cluster that Philips reuses is the opposition of country to town. Her work that was emphasized as representing an idealized femininity in the rhetoric of retirement at the turn of the eighteenth century, include the poems advocating virtuous retirement. These include such poems as "A Country Life" and "Invitation to the Countrey," both

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<sup>3</sup> In addition, the placement of Jonson's poems in the midst of comic epigrams tends to dull the impression of their sincerity. The poem on his daughter, for example, "On My First Daughter," appears right after "On Sir Cod the Perfumed," "To the Same Sir Cod," and "On Reformed Gam'ster" in *Epigrammes*.

often anthologized today. These, along with poems bearing unexceptionable titles like “God” or “Friendship,” and the protests she made at the unauthorized publication of her works, went far toward the valorization of her as an ideal female poet, before and especially after her death (Thomas 24). Yet this image of her as a refined lady poet writing discreetly and in solitude at her husband’s estate in secluded Wales, can only be constructed by the willful ignorance of the majority of her poetry as well as her actual movements and interaction with people and places. Out of the 133 poems collected by Thomas, most are formal compositions addressed to colleagues or other powerful people, or else commenting upon public events. Very few are not addressed to some individual, either in the title or in the first lines of the poem. Philips displays a governing sense of community (whether personal and intimate, or national and political) in her writing. The poems examined below are those that most strongly utilize rural or natural imagery to comment on being female, part of a community and a poet. They also afford her the opportunity to consider power and agency.

Several poems fall into the category of idealized, conduct book femininity, and Philips uses garden imagery in them as the typical shorthand of convention. For example, the very long “To the Rt Hono: the Lady E.C.” displays the range of gender-idealizing conventions, together with those of general neoclassical poetic images and class-based comparisons. Philips’s speaker (the persona of Orinda) bestows praise upon the “stock on which you grew” (25), a flattering but hardly original convention praising the object and his or her noble family. The image alludes to old root stock such as those of oak trees (associated with British nobility) as well as the tradition of calling Jesus of Nazareth the Root of Jesse (Rom. 15:12). Thus, Philips has elicited an association between E.C. and Jesus, both of whom come from illustrious family lines that they then transcend and reflect honor back upon.

Further in the poem E.C. is compared to a temple:

For as the sacred temple had without,  
Beauty to feed those eyes that gaz'd about,  
And yet had riches, state and wonder more,  
For those that stood within that shining doore;  
But in the holy place the admitted few,  
Lustre received and inspiacion too. (29-34)

This reference is to the Old Testament temple: as a worshiper moves toward the center of the temple, the barriers between him or her and the presence of God fall away. The structure works similarly to that of the traditional enclosed garden: the perfect inside is divided from the forbidden, waste, or corrupt outside, and the further in one moves, the closer one gets to the holiest spot of the garden itself, whether a pair of trees, a crystal fountain, or a perfect red rose. Just as the central area of the temple admits only a sacred few priests, the symbolic garden admits only an exclusive few into its transcendent pleasures as well.

Here the association with the female is made explicit in this three-way symbolism, as Philips compares E.C.'s favor to acceptance into the exclusive temple. Worshipers in both situations experience similar traditional pleasures associated with the garden symbol matrix: beauty, luster, wonder, and inspiration. This last, the "in-breathing" of spirit or life, is quite literally appropriate in a sacred temple setting. The Judeo-Christian Bible, however, is also rife with stories of people who have inspirational experiences with God outside, and sometimes in gardens, such as in Eden or Gethsemane, or at the top of mountains, such as Sinai or the Mount of Olives. All these instances of Spirit visitations give a worshiper luster, beauty, and wonder.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Mt. Sinai is the setting of Moses's reception of the Law from God. When he returned to the Israelite camp, his face had to be veiled because he was so full of the Spirit that it glowed (Ex. 19-34). The Mount of Olives was, among other things, the setting of Jesus' final prayers before his arrest and execution (Luke 22:39).

Philips also includes poetic inspiration, associated here with the spiritual type but most clearly present in the flattery of the image cluster. Philips and other poets are “inspired” by E.C.’s presence, which is like the spirit-filled temple. The figures of the temple, the woman, and the garden combine, as do those of the worshiper and the poet.

Another example of this can be found in the poem, “In Memory of Mrs. E. Hering.” In this formal memorial poem, Philips’s use of conventional association and imagery makes her point efficiently. The first lines of this poem open with garden imagery:

As some choice Plant, cherish’d by sun and aire,  
And ready to requite the Gardiner’s care,  
Blossoms and flourishes, but then we find  
Is made the triumph of some ruder wind. (1-4)

Line seven makes clearer what kind of plant—“Hung full of hopes thou fell’st”: she is almost certainly envisioned as a fruit tree symbolizing fertility, freshness, and long-held hopes that have been dashed. From there, Philips moves into different imagery to paint this picture of ideal womanhood, settling eventually into the themes of retirement, retreat and modesty: “Thy even mind, which made thee good and great, / Was to thee both a shelter and retreat” (17-18); “Thou hadst no arts that others this might see, / ... / But silent and retir’d, calme and serene, / Stol’st to thy blessed Haven hardly seen” (31-34). Hering’s “even mind” parallels the “Haven” to which the soul has gone, both defined by “shelter” and “retreat.” Hering’s mind is also reflected by her behavior, which too is “silent and retir’d, calme and serene,” making place and action one and the same. This performative move expresses agency, although the poem is highly conventional. Philips uses the conventions here, as elsewhere, to give her work weight and authority.

“Orinda to Lucasia” makes use of conventions to accomplish more personal, though still highly stylized and formal, ends. This short two-stanza poem presents a metaphoric dichotomous

relationship. The first stanza depicts a night scene, the earth cold and covered with dew, waiting for the return of the beloved sun: “The drooping Flowers hang their heads, / And languish down into their beds” (7-8). It is quiet and contained and includes the traditional elements of flowers, birds and brooks, all of which express desire. The second stanza ties this scene to the relationship between the desired Lucasia, as the life-giving but absent sun, and the desiring Orinda, as the absence-stricken garden. The relationship is intense, and desire is described in physical terms: her tears are dew, her heart cries, her “sadness [is] weighty, and the darkness strong” (18). She fears that if Lucasia is absent too long, she will physically die: “if too long I wait, / Ev’n thou may’st come too late, / And not restore my life, but close my eyes” (22-24). Although this poem is little more than a trifle, Philips has chosen to work in a physical manner, using garden imagery to figure an intense desire for Lucasia, to juxtapose a cold, dead waiting to the resurrection of a new sunrise. This situation is reminiscent of the suffering of Easter weekend leading to the resurrection of the Son. On Easter morning, women walk to the tomb at dawn, cold and full of despair, only to find unexpected joy. Orinda desires the return of the beloved, who will resurrect her, but she fears that Lucasia “may’st come too late,” ending the poem on an uncertain note and thrusting the reader back into the speaker’s situation of waiting for Lucasia’s return. Such poems use conventions fairly straightforwardly, making few radical deviations.

Some of Philips’s poems, however, which may at first seem to fall easily into this first category, in fact offer more complexity than such conventional works. For example, “In memory of F.P.,” about the death of her thirteen-year-old stepdaughter, labels Frances Philips a “beauteous blossom” (7) and compares her to a rose (19-23) whose sweetness is “unforced” (58). However, Philips makes further, and unexpected, use of garden imagery. Beginning in line

twenty-nine, she moves into imagining the girl's soul as the girl herself, who arises in the early morning and goes to enjoy the freshness of a heavenly garden:

Thy soule was up betimes, and so concern'd  
Too grasp all excellence that could be learn'd,  
That finding nothing fill her thirsting heare,  
To the spring head she went, to quench it there. (29-32)

Philips does not in this poem confine her images to those of flowers, but makes use of the bird-soul connection, compares the girl's short life with the brief pleasures of a masque, and exhibits it as a "mirror" for others' instruction. Yet her invocation of bucolic imagery alludes to very traditional quickly fading flowers and connects them to the lives of children in the moral heart of the poem:

So the poor Swaine beholds his ripened corne,  
By some rough wind without a sickle torne.  
Never, ah! never let glad parents guesse  
At one remove of future happinesse,  
But reckon children 'mong those passing joyes  
Which one hower gives them, and the next destroyes. (67-73)

The metaphoric link here is a version of the death-as-mower symbolic matrix, which leads to the association of short-lived plants with short-lived humans in a *memento mori*. The connection of children, especially female children, with flowers is one version of that. Unusually, Philips has here linked the pubescent-female-as-flower / fertility image cluster with the child-as-flower / fragility image cluster through the "Swaine," who is here not a shepherd but a (forestalled) mower. The final lines reinforce these connections, again using convention but in a slightly different way:

But I'll resigne, and follow thee as fast  
As my unhappy minuts will make hast.  
Till when, the fresh remembrances of thee  
Shall be my emblem of mortalitie. (85-88)

These final two lines solidify the flower connection; the spring renewal of flowers and other plants is an ancient symbol of fleeting life and of resurrection.

Another group of poems imagines the moral pleasures of non-urban spaces. Although these spaces are usually country estates, sometimes Philips finds inspiration in different topographies and in other poems juxtaposes an abstract “country” to an equivalent “city.” The primary theme of these poems is that of retirement, as in “A retir'd friendship, to Ardelia,” but in each one Philips makes an unexpected, unusual or subversive move, pushing the poems beyond mere convention into realms of individuality and innovation. In this particular case, although she advocates retirement as an aspect of friendship, the setting of the poem both enables a physical representation of how such a relationship can be constructed and maintained in the real world and raises questions about the nature of that relationship. The first line—“Come, my Ardelia, to this bowre”—implies the “friendship and privacy” she finds so necessary in “Content, to my dearest Lucasia,” discussed below. Although the poem is addressed to a female friend, the bower is an ancient poetic and erotic space. Philips’s representation of this particular bower is beautifully contrasted with the sweltering world outside, a world similar to that envisioned by Marvell in “The Garden,” heated by constant futile running after ambition and power, and characterized by quarrelling, deceit, and violence. It may also refer biographically to the Royalist rebellions in Wales with which her husband had to deal (Thomas, *Orinda* 7). In Philips’s words, it is a “scorching Age” (29). The pastoral connection is also made clear, for example, in stanza 7:

Let's mark how soone Apollo's beams

Command the flocks to quit their meat,  
And not intreat the neighbour – streams  
To quench their thirst, but coole their heat. (29-32)

Philips privileges the retired space to the “boistrous world” (34), which is not original, but the exclusion of the male from that privileged space is: only she and Ardelia will inhabit this space. Further than that, their intense union, within a space generically reserved for poetic or erotic relationship, also twists the conventions into surprising new configurations. Philips is here envisioning an ideal female relationship, a version of the idealized female community we have already seen to be so integral to the work of other female poets. This bower functions as the gardens of Cooke-ham or the Garden of Erudition do: it is an enclosed, separate space within the natural world, within which women can both build community and have agency by which to articulate themselves. As a poet, too, Philips partakes of the other traditional use of the bower: to create poetry. The fact that it is a version of an enclosed garden strengthens my argument that such a space allows the female poet to speak and function in her vocation. And the fact that it is so intimately tied to the pastoral tradition, partaking more of those elements than of the traditional formal garden, goes to show just how concepts of the garden have changed, and how much the pastoral elements are coming into prominence while Philips is writing. Even more, though, is to be gleaned from this poem, in that Philips’s penchant for metaphoric combination and overlap makes of the friends’ minds and hearts *places* wherein the structural relationship between protected feminine bower and outer, savage, masculine world are recapitulated:

Here let us sit, and blesse our Starres  
Who did such happy quiet give,  
As that remov’d from noise of warres  
In one another’s hearts we live. (13-16).

Philips is making clever poetic moves that play with the imagery while using it performatively, creating a female-dominated space from within which she has authority to write poetically, and privileging that space over the rest of the “masculine” world. And she makes these moves through manipulation of accepted convention, using the traditional material to say things that are very *untraditional*. This is a staple of her poems; in “Wiston = Vault,” for example, Lucasia’s heart is conflated with the poem itself to form Orinda’s monument and remembrance. The thing becomes a place and is combined with another thing that creates and records the writer at the same time.

Other poems establish a space of “retirement,” not necessarily in the country but also within the space of the city, as long as it is an enclosed space and partakes of the generic attributes of gardens, such as peace, quiet, meditation, and refreshment. “Content, to my dearest Lucasia,” for example, argues that content is to be found apart from all the things the world values. Philips spends most of the poem listing places and goals in which people wrongly think they will find content: courts, fashion, mirth, passion, military victory, and, perhaps surprisingly, knowledge and solitude. Rather, content, the final four stanzas claim, is to be found in the perfect union of friends in a retired, garden-type place. The relationship is of primary importance in the argument of the poem, but the congenial space is made explicit, too. The friends are “far remov’d from all bold noise, / And (what is worse) all hollow Joys” (55-56), found in the worldly ambitions that she has earlier so summarily dismissed. The friends, also, are:

By vertue Joyn’d, and by our choice retir’d.

Whose mirrours are the crystall brooks,

Or else each other’s hearts and looks;

Who cannot wish for other things

Then Privacy and friendship brings;

Whose thoughts and persons chang'd and mixt are one,

Enjoy content, or elce the world has none. (66-72)

Content is to be found in *both* perfect friendship and a private, retired space, each of which contributes to the other: the friendship is fed by the absence of the worldly “noises,” and distractions, while the place is made amenable to perfect content only by the presence of the perfect friends. The final two lines reinforce Philips’s philosophy of the virtue of combining separate entities into a new, transcendent creation. It is an almost alchemical approach, not only to the relationship between platonic “friends,” which is so clear in her life and work, but also in “thoughts” and places, as this poem makes clear.

The poem “Upon the engraving. K:P: on a Tree in the short walke at Barn=Elms” conjures up both Aphra Behn’s “On a Juniper Tree” and Marvell’s “The Garden.” The title gives the situation to which the body of the poem provides Philips’s response. Like Marvell, she laments the barbarity displayed in the carving of anything upon the bark of a tree, praising the “nobleness” and “generosity” of the tree in both “obliging” and “enduring” such defacement. On the other hand, the tree is anthropomorphized in a way that is reminiscent of Behn’s poem. This tree, like hers, is sympathetically involved in the desires and behaviors of the humans who have marked it. In Behn’s poem, the tree is both setting for and participant in the trysts of the lovers who meet beneath its branches, and when it is cut down, it is joyfully made into the stays for the corset of the female lover. There is not so much of a story in Philips’s poem, and in fact much is left unexplained: who, for example, carved “K:P” in the tree, especially if Philips herself (or, rather, her persona in this poem) was so adamantly against such behavior? Barn-Elms was Abraham Cowley’s estate, and Thomas seems unable to pinpoint a time when Philips may have visited the estate (380). What Philips seems most interested in is romanticizing the tree and simultaneously making it, and all such trees, into feminine proxies. The virtues of the tree are the

traditionally female ones of suffering, yielding, and obliging, also traditional Christian virtues. Is Philips invoking this symbolic lineage of the tree (that of the Tree of Life, or Cross) in order to comment on the relationship between Christ and women through the figure of the tree, as Lanyer did?

These elements are to be found throughout Philips's poetry and thus a comprehensive discussion is not possible, but the examination of several more of her poems that are full of the elements we are discussing will make the necessary point. The first is "A Countrey Life," written in 1650, early in Philips's career, when she was just eighteen. Her youth is reflected in her straightforward use of convention with little adaptation or subversion, as well as the relative paucity of references to contemporary people and events, and the generally lighter and less formal, more personal and overall more lyrical feel of this poem. The form is a ballad, perhaps indicating her lack of experience, but also making a significant contrast with most of her later format choices: the moving, strong rhythm, enjambment, and alternating rhyme make for a much lighter poem than the plethora of heavy, ponderous endstopped couplets she produced later in her career. The title also reflects this more lyrical approach, true of her work in general: her earlier poems follow a style more associated with earlier Stuart fashion, in the line of Jonson and other poets from the first half of the seventeenth century; her later poems, written in the very public milieu of her coterie and partaking heavily of contemporary interests and the lives of real people, reflect much more clearly the poetic fashions of the Restoration and early Augustan years, the latter half of the seventeenth century.

Philips's "A Countrey Life" partakes of the older style, with the result that it seems both less sophisticated and more timeless. A fairly long poem at eighty-nine lines, "A Countrey Life" is one of her best known and most often anthologized works. The first two lines summarize the

argument of the poem: “How sacred and how innocent / A countrey life appears,” and the rest of the work expands upon these two lines. At first Philips compares this retired life with the golden age (13), with perhaps some hint of the garden of Eden, in the cultural sense in which the two meant virtually the same thing: “the first and happiest life, / When man enjoy’d himselfe” (5-6), the more innocent and youthful mythical days of mankind. Much as Jonson described Penshurst by negatives, Philips makes the same move, describing the golden age by the lack of contemporary vices and concluding with the argument that “if there yet remaine to men / Content, sure this is it” (23-24). She then moves into the body of the poem, in which she imagines retired places that recreate this golden age “country life” and imagines herself within them, arguing the ways in which such a situation would be better than that of participants in the outside world for various reasons. It is possible that she “protests too much,” a possibility considered below, but she maintains that she prefers her situation, and she finishes with this statement:

In this retir’d integritie,  
Free from both warre and noise,  
I live not by necessitie,  
But wholly by my choice. (85-89)

She keeps some topical references, such as those to Hyde Park (66) and the Spring Gardens (68), and a statement that some “in Courtship take delight, / And to th’exchange resort” (57-58), but these are at a bare minimum here, when compared to many of her later poems. Most of the objects she attacks are traditional moral subjects: vanity, lust, greed, and violence, all found in the wide world and not in her “hermitage” (77).

But the foundation upon which this seemingly very traditional poem has been set is a highly gendered one. Throughout the main portion of the poem Philips calls up the arguments for

virtues prescribed for women, not questioning them, but rather attributing their strength and virtue to her own adoption of them, to her personal virtue and her avowed *determination to agree* with these moral precepts. This is most clearly indicated by the very brief thesis of the poem, found in lines 39 and 40: “I have a better fate then Kings, / Because I thinke it so.” Both the virtues of the country life and the virtue of the woman who has chosen it, fall within the agency of that woman. Clearly, much is dependent upon any decision the speaker makes. Ultimately, this work functions as a persuasive, not just a descriptive, poem: the speaker is not merely describing a state of affairs she has mindlessly accepted; she recognizes potential conflict inherent in the situation and thus positions her rhetoric to counter that conflict. Whether she is attempting to persuade herself or her reader is perhaps impossible to determine; I suspect, as Philips is a clever and sophisticated poet, she is doing both. The first twenty-four lines have laid out an idealized situation, coming to the conclusion that this is all the content available to mankind on earth. The next fifteen lines, ending with the “Kings” couplet quoted above, maneuver the speaker into the position of having chosen this best of all possible worlds, it being the only option right-thinking people would choose. In fact, this choice of the retired life is represented as a Christian, because humble and self-deprecating, virtue: “It is not brave to be possest / Of Earth, but to despise” (35-36).<sup>5</sup> If, as in Philips’s case, one is given no choice in the matter, it seems particularly brave, or perhaps merely necessary, to “despise” the outside world, if it is true, as she says in the following lines, that “Opinion is the rate of things, / From hence our peace doth flow” (37-38).

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<sup>5</sup> This brings up New Testament associations such as, “What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?” (Mk. 8:36; see also Ma. 16 and Lk. 9). The denial of the temptations of the world, especially for a life of quiet contemplation, has a rich Christian history, associated closely with the western history of gardening.

From this point the speaker enters into a dialogue with an implied interlocutor about her relationship with the outside world, contrasting her choices with those of others. She imagines herself to be “secure” (45), “innocent” and “safe” (49), “noble” (50), and in a position superior to the rest of the world because she can “laugh” at all the “little arts... / That do the world subdue” (51-52), rather than being subdued herself. In a position of separation and lowliness, she declares, “How unconcern’d am I? / I can not feare to tumble lower / That never would be high” (42-44). But at the beginning of the poem she had imagined the Golden Age:

’Twas here the poets were inspired,  
And sang their mysteries,  
And while the list’ning world admired,  
Men’s minds did civilize. (9-12)

As a poet in a situation she claims is the closest available equivalent to the Golden Age, she implies a concurrent desire to also claim the rewards of poetry: the admiring, listening world and the civilization of mankind, as well as inspiration and authority. In other words, if she, a poet, sits in a modern approximation of the Golden Age—a retired, enclosed space—and writes poetry (and certainly if the poetry is about idealized writing and the Golden Age), then surely she will be inspired and authorized to create work that will (should) have a civilizing effect upon the outside world and garner admiration from it as well.

Her containment within “these unenvyed walls” (45) echoes across the interests of this study. This range of associations is expanded starting at line seventy-three, as she moves from a vaguely female-gendered Christian heroic discursive register into something much more culturally feminized and determined:

But I, resolved from within,  
Confirmed from without,

In privacie intend to spin  
My future minuts out.  
I from this hermitage of mine  
Do banish all wild toyes,  
And nothing that is not divine  
Shall dare to tempt my joyes. (73-80)

The speaker sits within the enclosed, retired, and naturalized space and simultaneously resolves to be content in that space, but she is also resolved within herself, within her mind and will, thus superimposing her mind / will / self upon the garden space within which her body resides and from within which she speaks. She is “confirmed from without,” from outside the garden, from the outside world. Is this because the outside world is now “listening” and “admiring,” or is it because her decision to remain within the garden is approved by a hostile world against which she has morally set herself? The image of spinning is one of the most highly gendered in all Western folklore, and as she is spinning out time, she is linked with the Fates who spin out the minutes of each person’s life (Jones and Stallybrass ch. 1). Here, she is her own Fate and determines her own minutes, apparently. Thus, from “within” (in both senses) she is able to determine her own fate and to control her own actions.

The “hermitage,” an ancient religious concept, if gendered at all, is probably closer to the masculine end of the continuum, but “hermitages” were becoming more closely intertwined with English country estates. Within a century, it was possible to find small estates called “hermitages,” as well as toy hermitages built into gardens, as a deliberate and fanciful evocation of the very golden age and religious retirement that Philips praises in this poem. From her hermitage she has “banished all wild toyes”: what first stands out is the concept of “banishment” from a state that she represents *as* banishment. What she has excluded is wildness and frivolity

(“toyes”). This decision reflects several of the older garden concepts: the banishment of the disordered and self-gratifying Adam and Eve from Eden, the banishment of the disordered in general from the more formal of garden aesthetics, the banishment of the frivolous and/or the unexpected from many different types of gardens (the wrong kinds of flowers or vegetables, weeds, discarded children’s toys, and general garbage). Gardens, however, are also places of grace, of serendipity, and of unexpected beauty and delight, and these elements also go into garden planning (as in the planning of walks or vistas to conceal and reveal in determined ways, as evidenced by Sir Francis Bacon’s essay “On Gardens”).

Her banishment of “wildness” also reflects the feminine and garden aesthetics of the time and of later; wildness in terms of women becomes equated with “wantonness,” which implies both disordered slovenliness and sexual promiscuity, as Carole Fabricant shows. The word “wildness” more commonly comes to be used to refer to sexual misbehavior in the century following Philips; here, her banishment of wildness and frivolity together indicate her decision to promote order, but also her clear determination to promote the *virtue* of simultaneous order and chastity. Taken to an extreme, as Spenser has shown in *The Faerie Queene*, order can equal sterility and death. Philips, however, unequivocally praises it, together with chastity, its more focused version, as a virtue to be modeled. And, finally, she has invited the “divine” explicitly into this setting, asking very clearly for inspiration. At the same time, the poem also hearkens back to the conflation of the female and the divine within the garden space, as in Lanyer’s poem. The type of divinity she seems to be invoking is Apollonian, not Dionysian; there is to be no divine ecstasy in this garden. Philips may have converted to Anglicanism in her early adulthood, but her aesthetic, at least here, is entirely Puritan. In the end, her vision of the Golden Age can

only be realized within protective, but also containing and confining, walls, separated from the rest of the world.

So, in this very early poem, Philips seems to accept the cultural wisdom about the virtue of retirement for women, and both promotes and extends it. But she also recognizes and clearly expresses to the reader a sense of logical inconsistency underlying the assumptions that this is the best life for women and yet that women are not meant to be divinely inspired and creative poets. She performs the necessary maintenance of the assumptions, the walls of enclosure and separation, reinforcing them through her repetition of them, until the reader comes to wonder why they need so very much support. Imaginative physical separation from the world gives Philips agency, and she reinforces the equation of the garden with the female, but at the same time she banishes wildness, claiming an almost absolute formality and order, for the garden of her mind. This is all deliberate play that undermines the ancient assumptions, but even if she is “merely” conflicted and expressing her personal conflicts in her work, it is clear that the poetic imaginary gives her a lot to be personally involved with, and with which to struggle. It is the topos—the pastoral, garden, retirement, country house language—through which she is enabled to imagine, discuss, and finally, question gender issues through creative poetry.

This nearly concludes the discussion of Philips’s place in this study. In “La Grandeur d’esprit,” written about three years after “A Countrey Life,” Philips uses the retirement poem again as a framing device in which to discuss virtue, primarily of the civic kind, together with friendship, which she represents as a means to heal the world’s lack of virtue. This is a highly classical poem in its ethic, and she finds that it is best introduced through the pastoral, garden image standby of

A chosen privacy, a cheap content,

And all the peace which friendship ever lent,

A rock which civill nature made a seat,  
A willow that repulses all the heat,  
The beauteous quiet of a Summer's day,  
A brook which sobb'd aloud and ran away,  
Envited my repose; and then conspir'd  
To entertain my fancy thus retir'd. (1-8)

This *locus amoenus* is visually separated by white space from the “fancy” Philips’s speaker launches into for the rest of the poem. The place (imaginary as it might be) enables the reflections and also enables the writing of them—it and its tradition provide the thoughts, the language and the writing of it. In “Lucasia, Rosania, and Orinda parting at a Fountain. July 1663,” the natural fountain (“Art wants here expression, / See Nature furnish us with one” [4-5]), figured as a nymph, expresses through her body (the water / their tears) the pain that the three women cannot express in the separation of their own bodies. And, because the poem also obviously expresses this sorrow, this parting, it performs the nymph’s body, and both together perform the women’s emotions. This is most evident in stanza 4:

Cold as the streams which from her flow,  
Or (if her privater recess  
A greater coldness can express)  
Then cold as those dark beds of snow  
Our hearts are at this parting blow. (16-20)

The women’s bodies, their emotions, the nymph’s (imaginary) body, the natural fountain, and the words of the poem are all caught up together in one single expression of sorrow and pain. The motif of the fountain, a staple of the garden topos both artistic and physical, gives Philips the opportunity to create layer upon layer of thick metaphorical meaning. This meaning is both

clearly conventional (fountains equal tears) and subtly subversive (reference to the wet “privater recesses” of the nymph causes some dissonance in the reader).

### **Aphra Behn**

Cease, O my Muse, the soft delights to sing

Of flowry Gardens in their fragrant Spring                   (*Sylva* 1-2)

Aphra Behn is by far the female poet of the seventeenth century most written about in the modern scholarly project, and she seems to have attained status as one of the grand old dames of the feminist project to recover early modern women writers. She no doubt owes much of this notoriety to Virginia Woolf, who in 1929 famously extolled Behn’s ability to make writing a career: “She made, by working very hard, enough to live on. The importance of that fact outweighs anything that she actually wrote ... for here begins the freedom of the mind, or rather the possibility that in the course of time the mind will be free to write what it likes” (64).

Woolf’s particular sensibilities and lack of information on some subjects caused her to miss—and in some cases, actually ignore—all the “Judith Shakespeares” writing before Behn, both for pleasure and sometimes for profit, but she inerrantly put her finger on a fascinating character, as well as an important writer, in singling out Aphra Behn. She would be missed if excluded from this study of female poets of the seventeenth century.

In 1670 Behn’s first play, *The Forc’d Marriage*, was staged by the Duke’s Company and began her career as a playwright, which continued as her main source of income until 1682, when the demand for new plays decreased due to the merger of two of the three main playing companies. Although she had been writing and contributing to miscellanies for several years, it was at this time that she began regularly publishing translations, prose fiction, and non-dramatic poetry in addition to her plays. A political adherent of James II and Mary of Modena, and an ardent Tory, some of her poetry—such as the Prologue to *Like Father, Like Son*—indulges in

topical railing against the Whig party, and much of her poetry reflects royalist sympathies and values. Behn was also closely associated with the Restoration court libertine poets, though she was never a member of the court, apparently spending a great deal of time working, as she was an amazingly prolific writer (Todd ix). She has maintained a reputation for scandal, particularly of the sexual kind, over the centuries, partially because of the sexually open and ambiguous content of much of her work, and partly because she produced and published works in her own name, an activity considered immodest and akin to prostitution for women at the time. However, much attention to Behn's own sexual activity would not be particularly relevant to this study, and I set it aside in favor of attention to the erotic values she proposes, and the related images she utilizes.

The primary text used in this study is *Poems Upon Several Occasions, with A Voyage to the Island of Love* ("Poems"), the only collection of her poems published during her lifetime, in 1684. *Sylva*, a verse translation of part of the poem *On Plants* by Abraham Cowley, published in 1689, is also considered at the end of this discussion. There were other poems published individually, and she contributed several works to miscellany collections, some of which were included, sometimes revised, in *Poems*. Several of her plays also included poems—as songs, prologues, etc.—but this is the primary poetic work that she herself prepared for publication. The collection was republished several times after her death, into the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, indicating just how popular both it and its author were at the time, but this study will utilize the first edition.

Behn opens with a prose epistle dedicating the book to James, Earl of Salisbury. A smooth example of the genre, it flatters him without seeming ridiculously over the top, as some of Philips's encomia are. Behn also makes the rhetorical move of offering advice in the voice of the divinely inspired poet, to her potential patron, a move very prevalent in earlier works, but not in

later ones, and she even manages to request patronage explicitly toward the end. At the same time, she addresses her need to publish the work: “[H]ard Fate has obliged me to bring [it] forth into the censoring World.” This is a new way of manipulating the modesty topos that characterized published female writing of the time. Lanyer argued that she had a divine mandate to publish her work although she had but “slender skill” (“To the Queene’s Majestie”). Speght declared that she was required by honor to defend women from Swetnam although she was young and inexperienced. Cavendish maintained that she could not help writing and thought she might as well publish her works as not, in case she could help anybody else, although she was uneducated and fanciful. Philips argued that she had not chosen to publish her work at all (probably true) and never would have presumed to do so because she preferred to remain private (“To my Lord Arch: Bishop of Canterbury his Grace 1664”), although she was undeniably a public literary figure by choice. Behn fits into this pattern by hinting that she would not have published had she not needed the money. But with her reputation as poet and playwright firmly established from multiple other publications by the time *Poems* appeared, one wonders, as with all these writers, at the level of her disingenuousness.<sup>6</sup>

Following the epistle are nine commendatory verses from other poets. Most of these are addressed to Astraea or “Madam Behn,” and most are extremely similar to one another. The authors, almost to a man, remark on Behn’s beauty, and on how she is capable of inspiring Love through her “softness.” They are struck by how she combines this feminine ideal with very “manly” intelligence, wit, and strength of versification. She is represented as a poetic hermaphrodite who puts male writers to shame. As such, combining the best of both possible worlds (i.e., sexes), her fame will live forever. In fact, her uniqueness is enough to make her the

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<sup>6</sup> Personally, I think that level is *high*.

equal of Sappho, or a fitting companion for Ovid, or a divinely-appointed successor of Orinda herself. Overall, these prefatory poems are weak, uninteresting, and uninspired, with two notable exceptions. The contribution by J.W., “To the excellent Astraea,” shows the author has both a lyric touch and a sense of humor. The poem right before that one, the anonymous “Upon these and other Excellent Works of the Incomparable Astraea,” is significantly longer and more thoughtfully and formally composed than most of the other commendatory verses, and its contents indicate that the poet had read at least some of Behn’s included poems, a touch that is not repeated by the other contributors.<sup>7</sup> Most of the poems, however, are *not* strong recommendations for what is to come.

However, with the first lines of the first of Behn’s poems, “The Golden Age,” the reader is able to relax, knowing she is in the hands of a skilled writer:

Blest Age! When ev’ry Purling Stream  
Ran undisturbed and clear,  
When no scorn’d Shepherds on your Banks were seen,  
Tortur’d by Love, by Jealousie, or Fear;  
When an eternal Spring drest ev’ry Bough,  
And Blossoms fell, by new ones dispossesst;  
These their kind Shade affording all below;  
And those a Bed where all below might rest. (1-8)

The first two lines fall into the ballad format and are very regular, but right away she disrupts that meter so that the poem maintains interest as well as movement. The image of the flowering trees covering the ground below them in a soft, welcoming carpet of blossoms, is beautifully

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<sup>7</sup> The quality, style, and familiarity with the verse are the main reasons this poem is rumored to have been written by John Dryden.

done and leads the reader imaginatively into the well-known world of Arcadia and the Golden Age, slightly modified by both the French original and Behn's personal interests. Such an entrée is perfectly appropriate for Behn's book of poems, which positively revels in the *précieuse* pastoral fashions of the time.

Behn's interpretation of the Golden Age, which she picks up from the French, is thoroughly infused with an ethic of sexual freedom, a railing against "honor," which can be found in many of the poems in this book. Part of the Augustan pastoral convention, and taken from the *précieux* canon, it purports to equate "honor," that is, chastity, with the "marriage market," and a commodification of sexuality. The overall pastoral milieu of Behn's collection, though most clearly and uniformly presented in the allegorical romance *A Voyage to the Island of Love*, is nonetheless present as the background to the rest of the poems included in this book. In fact, the interchangeable "Lysanders" and "Dmons," the numerous generic songs complaining of unrequited or betrayed love, and the unending "shady groves" grow tedious long before they disappear. The tedium is somewhat alleviated by the poem "Our Cabal," which hints at who all these "swains" and "nymphs" might have been in real life. However, a more attentive reading indicates that these poems are not simple *romans à clef* that can be decoded by the strict and consistent exchange of an historical name for an allegorical one.

Certainly some, such as "A Letter to a Brother of the Pen in Tribulation," and "Silvio's Complaint: A Song, To a Fine Scotch Tune," invite realistic and historical readings. The first jokingly addresses a fellow writer undergoing treatment for venereal disease, and its very urban setting and realistic, bracing tone have nothing to do with the dreamy fields and groves Behn often elicits as backdrops, despite her naming him as "Damon." The latter poem begs for interpretation in the light of the failed rebellion of the Duke of Monmouth, John Scott, as do

other of Behn's poems written in a false Scots dialect and concerning the character of "Jemmy," a gallant but naïve and doomed hero.<sup>8</sup> In some ways, poems like these actually seem more closely related to the earliest pastoral lyrics of Theocritus, who incorporated urban concerns into his "rural" poems, than to the tired conventions of the majority of Augustan pastoral, as exemplified by some of the shallow seduction songs included in *Poems*. After all, Vergil's first Eclogue dealt with the state's eviction of farmers and shepherds from the countryside, and several of Theocritus's Idylls took place in cities. The course the traditions had taken had enervated pastoral poetry by the late seventeenth century, after years of absorption with a Horatian ethic of moral retirement, after the constriction of pastoral to the unreal worlds of romance, and after a general dissipation of pastoral elements into the vague, and vaguely subaltern, realm of nature poetry.

Across her entire oeuvre, Behn's style and use of poetic forms range broadly, but *Poems* showcases a fairly circumscribed range in these areas as well as in content. Several of the poems display interests that seem close to her heart and personal experience, and several highlight her artistic strengths, such as her sense of humor, her accessible voice and her articulate cleverness. But a great many of them are not nearly so individual and interesting, including generic songs and imagined depictions of pastoral themes. This part of the study will consider only a seriously limited portion of the poet's oeuvre, striving for representation while avoiding cherry-picking. I will briefly examine several smaller works from *Poems Upon Several Occasions*, finishing with the culminating piece of the first section of that publication, "Oenone to Paris." From there I will discuss *A Voyage to the Island of Love*, a unified work in and of itself, which reflects both the traditions of Renaissance epic, the genre that created most of the great garden literary traditions

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<sup>8</sup> E.g. "Song" and "Song. To a New Scotch Tune."

and images, and its status in 1684. Finally, the discussion will end with Behn's translation of part six of Abraham Cowley's *On Plants*, originally from his *Poemata Latina* (1668). These examinations will indicate how an accomplished, respected and professional female poet reflected the very real-world garden ideologies of her day, together with the versions of pastoral and garden literary imagery popular then.

One poem mentioned already in this study is "On a Juniper-Tree, cut down to make Busks." In this poem, the setting is made both the narrator of the poem and a participant within it, even after its bodily dismemberment and destruction. The juniper, by providing the setting wherein Philocles and Cloris make love, becomes a new version of the pleasure garden: like many of the other "groves" with which Behn covers her poetic landscape, it provides a semi-enclosed, private, natural space wherein lovers pursue erotic pleasure. Yet, the tree also sees, experiences and describes the ecstasy the human lovers feel. This move anthropomorphizes the setting and turns this feminized character into both participant and recorder. Thus, the tree in some ways fulfills much the same role as that of both Aemilia Lanyer's character and the trees on the estate in the garden at Cooke-ham. In Behn's poem, the three participants together make a community, bound by this particular sexual experience.

When the lovers have completed their tryst, they determine to take their own particular *locus amoenus* with them, by cutting down the tree and dismembering it, changing both its material nature and its purpose. As the climax of the coupling had been described like a phoenix, dying and rising again in flames, the top of the tree is burned as incense at the altar of love.<sup>9</sup> The wood is made into busks to be worn in the corset of Cloris, enclosing and protecting her heart and her sexuality, recapitulating the original scene and repeating with a difference, or

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<sup>9</sup> Another possible reading would make the branches into bedding for the lovers, recapitulating the situation from the start of the poem. In that instance the "altar of Love" would be their bed, not a literal altar.

performing, all the enclosed garden tropes that stand ranged behind this poem. The body and person of the juniper tree conjoin female individuality, sexuality, nature and enclosure—both as protection from outside violation and as control of boundaries—because the tree when standing watched the lovers, and the function of the tree when materially transformed is both to fulfill a religious mandate (sacrifice of the branches) and to discipline and protect the female body and its sexuality (as a corset).

“The Disappointment” is one of Behn’s more famous poems, although for awhile it was attributed to the Earl of Rochester, because it was first printed in a volume with some of his work, including “The Imperfect Enjoyment” (Todd 393). Both of these poems participate in a poetic fashion for the imperfect enjoyment poem, adopted immediately from the French, although originally from Ovid’s *Amores*, which depicts a sexual situation in which the male partner is unable to consummate the relationship. Often these poems rant misogynistically about the perfidious wiles of women while also haranguing the speakers’ own treacherous bodies. “The Disappointment” is nominally a translation of de Cantenac’s “Sur une Impuissance,” but Behn has made significant changes that turn this work into an original piece, changes that distinguish it from all other members of the genre. These changes all have to do with the very issues this study has been highlighting. While de Cantenac sets his poem in a contemporary city, among fashionable and experienced people, Behn removes hers to the imaginary and nostalgic pastoral landscape, attaching to the situation the charms of that setting. Like other versions, it ends with the swain, Lysander, cursing Cloris’s power (together with everything else: “not one God his Fury spares; / He curs’d his Birth, his Fate, his Stars” [136-37]), but as he has been emasculated in the reader’s eyes by this time, and because the female speaker leads the reader to sympathize with Cloris (rather than with her lover) and to find Lysander somewhat contemptible, his

misogyny carries significantly less weight. But what is most interesting about this poem is the sexualized description of Cloris's body, which employs the traditional language and symbols of the garden:

That Awful Throne, that Paradiſe  
Where Rage is Calm'd, and Anger pleas'd,  
That Fountain where Delight ſtill flows,  
And gives the Universal World Repoſe. (47-50)

Her body, sexually, *is* paradise and a fountain of delight; finally the relationship is made explicit and thereby loses much of its symbolic ambiguity.

In the final stanza, the speaker breaks in and reveals herself to be a participant in the scene—at least imaginatively—exactly as the juniper tree was in the previous poem: “The Nymph’s Resentments none but I / Can well Imagine or Condole” (131-32). Is the speaker Cloris? Or a different woman who has experienced the same thing? There is no single answer to these questions, but enough distance lies between the speaker and Cloris throughout the narrative of the poem to make the two seem like different characters (separated perhaps by time if not by identity), and the sensation of female relationship, of community, is created. It is, in addition, a community that has come together through erotic experience, set within a naturalistic landscape, and bound together against male intrusion (and failure), and it is created through poetry. “The Disappointment” is an extremely secular use of many of the conventions allowable to the female writer in the seventeenth century (translation, pastoral and garden milieu) and transforms them into an evocation of women’s experience and community.

The next few poems highlight Behn’s flexible representations of gender. For example, in “The Invitation: A Song. To a New Scotch Tune,” her speaker is male, and his purpose in writing is to seduce the nymph Phillis. The imagined setting for their lovemaking is a bed of flowers in

“yonder shady Grove” (3). In this poem and the similar “A Translation,” not to mention in *Voyage*, Behn makes clear that she is able to adopt a male perspective, both for a brief, light foray into popular song, and for a sustained narrative. This is a move none of the previous female writers studied here have made and seems to indicate that Behn understands gender in a remarkably fluid context. The commendatory poems that open *Poems Upon Several Occasions* both emphasize her gender and also represent her as a hermaphrodite, combining both the “softness” of the female sex and the “strong” qualities of the male. This latter move is conventional but also indicates possibilities in thought that were not perhaps to be found earlier in the century. According to Thomas Laqueur, this was the century when Europeans began to reconceptualize the human sexes as two opposite poles on a continuum rather than as levels in a hierarchy, whereby males had been considered the perfect iteration of the species while females were imperfect males.<sup>10</sup>

This fluidity of gender—perhaps one of the qualities that made Behn’s reputation notorious through the more sexually static centuries that followed, along with her cheerful explicitness about the erotic bodies of men and women—is particularly obvious in two poems. The first, “Silvio’s Complaint: A Song, To a Fine Scotch Tune,” is about exactly what it says, although the character of Silvio, the speaker, is a symbol for Monmouth. It is striking, though, how she has feminized him:

Then from his Starry Eyne,  
Muckle Showers of Christal Fell:  
To bedew the Roses Fine,

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<sup>10</sup> However, he argues that a two-sex model as well as a one-sex model was always available in Western thought. The problem is that the scholarly narrative has been too simplistic. That narrative has claimed that the change was intimately related to the rise of empirical science and medicine. It is also worth noting that his marking of time is rather unfixed itself, so that the seventeenth century seems to be referred to by implication, but at the same time to disappear (viii).

That on his Cheeks did dwell.  
And ever 'twixt his Sighs he'd cry,  
How Bonny a Lad I'd been,  
Had I, weys me, nere Aim'd high,  
Or wisht to be a King. (9-16)

Many of Behn's swains are girlishly beautiful, possibly because they are often seen through admiring feminine eyes, and their bodies are eroticized again and again. Her nymphs are smitten by the beauty of the swains, often unhappily. Behn's female characters are usually fully sexualized beings, as in the case of poor Cloris in "The Disappointment," or Silvia in "Song. The Willing Mistress."<sup>11</sup> Behn's swains are also effeminate in style to modern eyes: witness Mr. Grinhill ("soft and gentle as a Love-sick Maid" ["On the Death of Mr. Grinhill, the Famous Painter" 22]), Amyntas ("His sleeves a-many Ribbons ties" ["A Ballad on Mr. J.H. to Amoret, asking why I was so sad" 19]), or Philocless ("His Lips, no Berries of the Field, / Nor Cherries, such a Red do yield" ["Our Cabal" 107-08]). The last poem examined here that plays with the fluidity of both gender and desire, is "To the fair Clarinda, who made Love to me, imagin'd more than Woman."<sup>12</sup> Not only is Clarinda doubled, in a sense, into a hermaphroditic figure:

Fair lovely Maid, or if that Title be  
Too weak, too Feminine for Nobler thee,  
Permit a Name that more Approaches Truth:  
And let me call thee, Lovely Charming Youth. (1-4)

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<sup>11</sup> This latter is another example of Behn's flexibility of both voice and gender. In its first published iteration, in *The Covent Garden Drollery* (1672), under the simple title of "Song," the speaker was Amyntas, the male lover, and the first line "I led my Silvia to a grove." In *The Dutch Lover*, only a year after *Covent Garden*, the point of view had been shifted to that of Silvia, from which it did not vary in later versions.

<sup>12</sup> #80, pg. 288, in Todd. Not included in *Poems*. Published appended to *Lycidas* (1688), signed "By Mrs. B." (Todd 434).

but so is the speaker:

In pity to our Sex sure thou wer't sent,  
That we might Love, and yet be Innocent:  
For sure no Crime with thee we can commit;  
Or if we shou'd——thy Form excuses it. (12-15)

It is coyly unclear just which sex the speaker claims as his or her own. The effect is playful and allows both individuals to interact without solid reference to prescribed gender scripts. They are able to communicate transcendentally with one another because Clarinda is a “beauteous Wonder of a different kind” (18).

Before moving on to the last three poems, it is time to pause and reflect on how Behn's work fits with the broader argument of this study. Behn readily adopts the pastoral conventions, but she does not use the older, more traditional garden imagery. Concurrent with that is a reveling in sexuality and in the sexual body, both male and female. Both nymphs and swains gaze upon one another with desire; both equally experience the delights and pains of sexuality. Erotic encounters take place in enclosed spaces reminiscent of gardens, but they are only falsely, or superficially, bounded, being constructed only of the shade of groves, into or out of which one lover or another can break at any time. The privacy offered by the trees and groves is fleeting and highly permeable, they only temporarily provide a space of erotic community, and they do not confine at all, nor do they protect, except by the choice of the individual. When Cloris has been disappointed, she runs away, leaving Lysander behind. On the other hand, when Lysander, in *A Voyage to the Island of Love*, first sees Aminta, she disappears into an “envied Glade” (78) of trees, screening her from his desiring gaze. Before long, however, he has tracked her down to a riverbank full of flowers, where “all was shade” (351). She is asleep but unprotected from his

voyeuristic gaze because both occupy a shared space created by the shade. The boundaries of erotic space are not definitively established and maintained.

Formal, rigorous maintenance of order is not a characteristic of Behn's poetic world; instead, it partakes of idealized pastoral wantonness, a fashionable interpretation of the mode congenial to Restoration court culture. But it is important to note that Behn has set most of her poems, and all the erotic ones, in an idealized naturalistic landscape, a *locus amoenus* like those of the prose romances of the Renaissance. She has moved both female poetry and sexuality "beyond the pale," out of the formal, bounded, enclosed garden, into an entire world that is a garden. In some ways this foreshadows the ways gardens will change in the thirty or forty years after *Poems* was published, imitating a natural, open landscape just as indebted to conventionality as were earlier gardens, though in a different way: the conventionality of the re-imagined pastoral pleasance.

Behn, as well as Philips, is interested in creating community, combining both real and imaginary worlds, but in Behn, there is little sense of a dominant female genius that directs all other members of "Our Cabal." The dynamic is much more one of equals bound together by political affiliation and artistic interest, rather than by the force of a single personality. This may be merely an artifact of Behn's not adopting such a role while being the reader's *entrée* into the community, but the impression is powerful nonetheless. This change may be due to the filling of that dominant position by the restoration of Charles II, while in his absence part of the force of Philips's dominance may have arisen from the possibility of fulfilling that void herself, as Catherine Gallagher argues. However, it may also have something to do with Behn's socioeconomic position as a middle-class urbanite. Rachel Speght, in a similar social position (though much more shaped by Puritan values), created a similar relational dynamic in her

imaginary world. There is, however, significant difference between the two poets in sophistication, secularity, and the combination of real and imagined in order to strengthen both the community and the art. Behn creates community in the body of her texts, as well as through their material position in the discourse she herself was an active part of. As with the previous women poets, Behn makes the lines between the imaginary world and the real world permeable and tenuous. Canonized as the first professional female poet in English and made over into a figure of glamour and excess, Behn is in many ways repeating (though with differences) the moves of earlier female poets. Her poetry has been mapped onto her life and made to decode her character, which conflates the body of the poet with the body of her work, as well as the bodies in her poems, bodies that live and experience and seek pleasure in a pastoral pleasure. Is it to be wondered that she has been cast in the role of an Armida or Alcina herself, further blurring the distinction between reality and fiction?

The first of the final three poems used in this discussion is the pastoral “A Paraphrase on Ovid’s Epistle of Oenone to Paris.” At approximately 314 lines (depending on which version one is using), it is by far the shortest of the three. It is originally taken from Ovid’s *Heroides*, but in her translation Behn has made some significant and wholly characteristic changes. The poem is in the voice of the nymph Oenone, who loved and was loved by Paris while he was living as a shepherd on Mount Ida. She recounts their relationship and mourns that he has discovered his birthright as a prince, because it has led to his abandonment of her in favor of Helen’s favors and the adventures waiting in Troy and Greece. Ovid’s Oenone understands herself as the wife of Paris, while Behn has eschewed the baggage (“honor,” etc.) of that relationship in favor of a more idealistic one of true lovers. This move makes Oenone into even more of a contrast in innocence and virtue to Helen, who becomes Paris’s wife. Behn ties the social institution of

marriage to the negative political world and keeps the idealism of true love in the pastoral world where every aspect of relationship comes about wholly by choice, and nothing is forced. The themes and setting are pastoral but also include the theme common in Behn's poetry of how love can only grow only between equals: now that Oenone is no longer Paris's equal, he cannot love her, and she can only adore him as an unattainable object. This is Behn's favorite themes, of the consequences of reaching too high in life, whether it is Jemmy trying for the crown, one of the many nymphs or swains who aspire to a lover either out of their league or already committed, or Oenone here. She makes clear that Paris himself has overreached what would make him happy, both in recovering his birthright and in abducting Helen, although the reader does well to remember that the speaker in this situation is not unbiased.

Of particular note for this study is the fact that all nature witnesses and records their love, making nature a source of counter-narrative to Homer's *Iliad* and other sources of the story of Helen and Paris. This poem of Ovid's that Behn has chosen to paraphrase establishes a different form of history, one that is written (the lovers' names were carved in the bark of the trees by some unknown hand), but which tells a story different from traditional versions. According to Behn, it is a story that is both potentially happier and truer. She sets up comparison of the two different notions of history, and they break down into that which is natural and that which is artificial. The artificial, historical narrative is obsessed with power, control, and lust, and is populated by ruthless, ambitious people, and women who "with love [have] treated many a Guest" (252), like Helen. The life lived in harmony with nature and recorded as such is defined by true and faithful love between people, wildlife and the natural world. This is the traditional pastoral Golden Age *locus amoenus*. The human world, the fallen world, seduced Paris away from this edenic world, to the destruction of many people, including himself.

On one level, Behn has juxtaposed the traditional pastoral pleasance with the corrupt urban world, a dialogue that still had value at the time this was written, though of course it was very well established and starting to be a little careworn. The denigration of sophisticated court culture, though very relevant at the time for Behn and her contemporaries, was not exactly new. But what is new and interesting is the recording function of nature, the narrative that the pastoral world and its inhabitants contrast with the dominant narrative, written by poets tainted by the corrupt civilized world and incorporated into Western culture. There are few more foundational texts for traditional European self-understanding than Homer's epic poems. Yet Behn offers, through Oenone's story, an alternative perspective and an alternative narrative. This is related to the different world perceived by the character of the "noble savage," a variant of the innocent inhabitant of the Golden Age. Oenone is such a figure, and as such, she is related to other characters Behn creates, such as Oroonoko and his beloved, figures outside the dominant narrative but nonetheless affected negatively by choices made in that other world. It is the female poet and the natural world that bring these alternative narratives to the Western reader, through the naturalized female speaker. This is an example, then, of how the conventions of feminized nature and pastoral imagery give Behn the female poet an opportunity to offer something new, original, and to some extent subversive, to the poetic discourse of her day.

At nearly 2200 lines, *A Voyage to the Island of Love* is the longest of these three poems, but we will only survey it fairly briefly. Although published together with *Poems Upon Several Occasions*, it is a separate, self-contained narrative and is signaled as such by the title page and by the pagination of the volume, which restarts at the beginning of *Voyage*. Although not prose, *Voyage* follows the pattern of prose romances like *Urania*, by Lady Mary Sidney Wroth, interspersing individual poems, sometimes titled and sometimes not, with the overarching

narrative, which tells of Lysander's arrival at the Island of Love and immediate infatuation and pursuit of the lovely Aminta. As the story continues, its identity as an allegory of a contemporary love affair becomes clear. Whereas the fictional framework is very strong at the beginning, toward the end that logic slips some, making an urban contemporary interpretation much more logical.

The story is one of episodic adventure and romance, a prolonged journey or quest wherein the protagonist, despite his frustration with the roadblocks put in his way by Honor, grows through the difficulties and finally achieves his objectives. Despite a noticeable lack of monsters, there are plenty of allegorical figures throughout. Lysander proves surprisingly reasonable himself, much more like a real young lover than a fictional creation, bringing an unusual level of psychological realism to the genre. Behn's ability to maintain interest in this story is also commendable, as is her ability to make subtle distinctions in the progression of a type of love affair. The imagined relationship follows a very conventional pattern: Lysander woos Aminta and must contend with rivals, her "coldness," her protestations of honor, his own despair and depression, his lack of confidence, her fear for her reputation, and the like. At last they enter together into the Bower of Bliss,<sup>13</sup> but their bliss is shortened with the sudden and entirely pointless death of Aminta.

What makes this poem interesting is its derivation from, or recapitulation of, the Renaissance texts that are so foundational for the establishment of seventeenth-century garden imagery. Behn has turned the romance epics into a secular poetic narrative entirely relevant to her time in a much more complicated piece than at first seems to be the case. She sets the Island of Love off the coast of Africa and dramatizes a group of travelers unexpectedly encountering it,

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<sup>13</sup> Although the name and the basic purpose are borrowed from Spenser, it is a very different place, keeping the guarded entrance and the enclosure, but dispensing with the governing enchantress.

making a maneuver very popular among putatively factual exploration narratives (like those of Sir Walter Raleigh in the first part of the century) and among narrative fiction, which was beginning to arise with Behn and her contemporaries (such as Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, published in 1719). However, this is also roughly where Tasso and Ariosto set the islands of Armida and Alcina. The narrative slippage between events on the Island of Love and their corollaries in contemporary English, probably urban, space strengthen associations between an imaginary and a "real-world" register. Behn has combined the narrative poetic form with lyric and descriptive poems, as in the primarily prose works of Wroth, creating a new hybrid form. These innovations constitute a work of repetition, or recapitulation, with a difference, the essence of performativity. Behn performs the pastoral prose romance, but with the difference of it being written in meter. She performs the enchanted gardens and earthly paradises, but with significant moral and value differences. This is, in a sense, a mock romance, as some of her contemporaries produced mock epics.

Much of Lysander's tale is extraordinarily conventional, following the accepted narrative of love from the time, as a story of suffering, sighing, gazing upon the beloved, worshipping the loved woman and abasing oneself for her. Behn borrows from many of her other works. For example, when Lysander and Aminta make love for the first time, it is a "Disappointment," but their relationship continues and improves. The Island of Love partakes at first glance of many of the allegorical gardens of the earlier epics: it is a mysterious place in the Atlantic Ocean yet unapproachable except by fate or accident (like the Fortunate Isles); it is the most beautiful place Lysander has ever seen, made lovely by both nature and art, a seductive place; it is populated both by individual characters and by allegorical constructs (Lysander meets Respect, Reason, Despair, and others); there is a gate, and upon going in one is shot with the arrow of love. It is

also a world of spontaneous garden spaces, enclosed groves, and fantastical palaces. The crux of the story of Lysander's adventures is a young man creating a relationship with a young woman, and both of them learning about love. There is no overarching political or religious theme here, although there is plenty of psychological complexity and realism hidden beneath the conventions.

Behn creates an alternative narrative of importance: not the *Iliad* but "Oenone," not epic but romance with hints of psychological realism. The speaker is male and full of desire for the female body, but Behn has clearly crafted an idealized male lover. He becomes the object of the reader's desire through his desire for Aminta. This may explain Aminta's disappearance after Lysander has been schooled in what women want and in how to please them: she has become the reader's rival. This psychologically believable work enacts a female point of view in an erotic relationship and advocates the uninhibited but faithful expression of mutual desire. It is somewhat subversive material, although not as much as it would have been fifty years earlier or perhaps fifty years later. Behn can accomplish these spectacular assertions through the manipulation of safe, conventional symbolic matrices, couched in the traditions of pastoral literature and garden settings. In the *locus amoenus*, all things are possible for women, even to speak, to desire, to be equal individuals, and to instruct men. This placement, or displacement, of such ideas opens up discursive possibilities for Behn and her readers.

The final poem I shall examine is the 1726-line translation of *Sylva*, part six of Abraham Cowley's royalist poem *Of Plants*. Parts of the whole were translated by different contemporary poets, and it is debatable whether Behn translated directly from the Latin original for her contribution, or if she used the services of a translator and versified the result.<sup>14</sup> Cowley's

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<sup>14</sup> She herself claimed to know little to no Latin, according to Dryden, and Greer seems willing to accept this (*Uncollected Verse* 212-13), while Todd is more inclined to think that "a writer with such fluent French might have

original first appeared in 1668, in his *Poemata Latina*, and the translations were included in an English collection of his works, which is dated 1689. The first and second parts of *Of Plants* concentrated on herbs; the third and fourth on flowers; and the fifth and sixth were on trees (Todd 443). Behn's poem starts with the traditional catalogue of trees, well done and quite long and intricate. The second part is a royalist history of the English Civil Wars and the Restoration. There is more general history included in this poem, and it is more far-reaching than these bald statements make it sound, but these are the main two parts.

Translation is another one of those "inferior" literary practices that female writers of the seventeenth century have been denigrated for practicing. However, as Margaret Ferguson, among others, has made clear, translation is a complex and creative work, and as the works of Philips and Behn also show, translation was highly respected at the time and an outlet for creativity. In this particular instance, there are many places where Behn has ignored parts of Cowley's original, or else interpolated from it. I do want to call attention to the first lines, from which I quoted to open this section of the chapter, as a reference to the future of the literary relationship between female writers and garden imagery, as well as in general understanding of the garden itself:

Cease, O my Muse, the soft delights to sing  
Of flowry Gardens in their fragrant Spring;  
And trace the rougher Paths of obscure Woods,  
All gloom aloft, beneath o'rgrown with Shrubs. (1-4)

Here is a call to a new understanding of the matrix, of the imaginary we have been examining. The traditional, enclosed gardens were on their way out of fashion, both in real

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had enough grasp of Latin to be able to follow the original text while using a written English 'crib' or the oral help of a latinist" (443).

gardens and in poetic imagery, which had become too entrenched and clichéd; they were now too well-known. The next fashions in garden design were more subtle, with meanings and symbols only hinted at. This is reflected in the pastoral world of Behn's imagination; no longer is there interest in or need for absolute enclosure and sequestration. She can express desire and envision its pleasures enclosed only nominally, by the shadow of a tree, hidden from the eye but not inaccessible. Any cultural mandate for the silencing and separation of female desire or for the confinement and control of sexuality no longer found a relevant symbolic expression in locked gates and fences and high walls. The separation, following the sentiments expressed by the much-lauded Orinda, tended toward a separation by geography, of "proper" wives in country houses, where the image was of a sort of silence beneath shady trees, as Behn has drawn here.

The female muse was indeed from this point to step out of the flowery gardens and into the wild and lonely woods. One of the effects of this move was more efficiently to isolate the female talent, so that by the nineteenth century, we have Gilbert and Gubar's "madwoman in the attic." The muses of the women writing in the seventeenth century may have been locked away in gardens, but their imaginative spaces were places of community, of equality, of power, and of fertility and growth and nature, mediated though it might have been. Constricted the enclosed gardens were, but they were still full of life and beauty. By the next century, though, this area of power moved on one hand into household spaces, and into progressively smaller and less necessary rooms; and on the other hand into the giant artificially naturalistic gardens, planned and controlled and maintained by "improvers," "landscape architects," and other, generally male, professionals, with their boundaries supposedly reaching out to the horizon, on an inhumanly grand scale in many cases, miniature homeland instances of British imperial policy growing throughout the world.

Lanyer and Speght together give a good picture of the first half of the century; Philips's more assured and professional pieces, together with the work of Behn, represent the preferred styles and content of poetry in an England moving into the eighteenth century. Here we see the beginnings of the kinds of work that would kill traditional pastoral for good and that would lead to the rebellion of the Romantics. Augustan poetry blends very well with the landscape garden, especially in its repeated evocation of cultural signs (such as Greek gods and heroes), its variations on a subdued theme (the landscape garden is basically variations on the color green, and Augustan pastoral poetry comes to feel like variations on themes of power, ideal womanhood, etc., without much individuality to each poem), and its lack of explicit ornamentation.

The medieval and Renaissance allegorical pleasure garden died as a cultural force in England in the latter half of the seventeenth century, and female writers would have to choose different means of expressing themselves, such as through prose fiction and the development of the novel. It also seems possible that as more women published their works, it became understood as inevitable that women would write, publish, and make their voices heard in some sense in England. Thus, the garden topos was not nearly as necessary to these later artists. They would find each other and establish communities in the real world, as Philips and Behn did, without the need to create them only imaginatively. As the reality of the female writer changed from one of relative isolation to one of stronger community, the imaginative space in which these women spoke followed the opposite path, from an enclosed but highly mediated, symbolically thick, communal space, to a more open but empty, lonely space.

## CHAPTER 8 CONCLUSION

Despite its length, this study has been able to examine only a small number of texts, including a sample of highly canonical poems and a portion of the output of five prominent female poets of the seventeenth century. However, the goal of the study has not been to exhaust the question of early modern literary use of the garden topos but rather to establish it as a legitimate analytical approach. Current discourse in early modern studies indicates that it is increasingly vulnerable in the ongoing academic battles for money and students. Utility and accessibility are the watchwords of those who administrate higher education while the study of literature continues to fragment into increasingly esoteric niches. At the same time, the very weight of the long-term success of early modern literary studies works against it in a scholarly atmosphere that insists upon novelty.<sup>1</sup> How can we pursue scholarly innovation in a subject area that has had centuries to become glutted with critical apparatus while still proving ourselves relevant and making our work accessible?

The answer of course is that strategies must change as a culture's needs change. This study is part of a strategy that is ripe for our time, a strategy that both makes texts accessible and capitalizes on the current sensitivity to environmental concerns. The feminist projects in early modern studies have opened up a large number of texts whose unfamiliarity and scant critical history offer opportunities for new and exciting scholarship. Ecocriticism also provides new ways of considering these and better-known texts and illustrates how they can be supremely relevant and accessible to modern readers. Just as most readers can relate to issues of gender

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<sup>1</sup> "Novelty" is not meant pejoratively here, but in the straightforward truth that scholarship requires originality and that most scholars prefer the challenge of unfamiliarity.

construction, most can also relate to environmental representations in a text, now that ecological crisis has become a constant refrain in our cultural rhetoric.

While this is my goal conceived very broadly, the aims of this study have been more immediate. First it has been an attempt to bring several less well-known writers into a broader scholarly dialogue than has been common. Most early modern female writers have only been available to scholarly examination for the last thirty years or so, emerging with the growth of feminist scholarship. The apparatus necessary for broad-scale criticism is still being created, although a great deal has been accomplished in a short period of time. Yet there is now enough material available to students and teachers (not just to specialists) to allow us to approach early modern women's texts as critically as we might the better-known men's texts that have comprised the canon for so long. In addition, the process of recovery has worked together with the broader values of popular critical theories to expand the number of questions put to all texts, a move that continues to expand the range of the literary canon. That has been the first objective of this study: to expose these texts to an analytical program that expands understanding of both them and their culture more generally.

The second goal has been to propose and demonstrate a method of reading early modern poetry that takes into account ecocritical and feminist concerns, regardless of the gender of the poet. Garden poetry has been largely neglected in the main current of literary criticism since emphasis on archetypes went out of style. Yet it has maintained a following among some readers attracted by the topos and its uses, a limited and perhaps quiet following, but one that has produced compelling work nonetheless. With the recent surge of interest in ecocritical theories, it is only logical that early modern literature should be exposed to their interpretive gaze. Contemporary American literature may have dominated the attention of the field so far, but

interest is growing in other areas. Thus this study proposes approaching early modern literature with an eye to the ecological stance of these poets and their cultures. The perspectives and tenets of psychogeography, biophilia, and related fields reveal a rich source of material in early modern literature that illuminates cultural attitudes toward contemporary environments. This material gives some perspective to current environmental attitudes as well. In the works of Lanyer, Speght, Cavendish, Philips, and Behn, an ecocritical feminist reading reveals the necessity of the garden topos to these authors' artistic development through the mechanism of performativity made possible by the history of subversion inherent in the garden image.

Aemilia Lanyer's "The Description of Cooke-ham" imagines a country estate wherein the acquisition and practice of holy learning leads to the creation of a perfect female community, headed by Margaret Clifford, a female Christ-figure. The landscape of the estate enables this, providing a sympathetic and safe space within which society can be recreated in a divinely authorized model free from corrupting masculine influences. The society here includes personified aspects of the garden, such as the trees. All activity takes place within the limits of the garden, but the space itself also becomes a staging area of biblical activity, and its response indicates that the natural world is sympathetic to the proto-feminist program that Lanyer imagines. Further, the garden is created within the space of Lanyer's poem, making parallel the materiality of her art, its content, and the space that enables that art.

Rachel Speght's "The Dreame" also emphasizes learning as a means to self-realization. Her representation is more secular and democratic than Lanyer's, but the purposes are similar. Both writers propose equality of education for women, for the benefit of both the individual and society. Both use the garden to stage and enact that vision, positing female community as the method through which and for which education is achieved. They interrogate the constructed

nature of gender roles, applying religious or logical pressure. The discrete and unstable space of the garden can contain their proposals of a world in which naturalized gender constructions can be suspended. Although both narrate the reinscription of social norms at the end of their poems, that choice engenders a sense of melancholy for the possibilities lost in the exit from the garden. For Lanyer, the legal defeat of the Clifford women brings about Cooke-ham's Fall; for Speght, social obligations thwart her pursuit of Erudition. Yet in each case, the garden has been made a locus of the subversive possibility of constructing a reality that is more conducive to these authors' desires than the reality offered by their society.

Margaret Cavendish's various poems open a multifaceted window upon her attitudes toward writing, gender, and nature. She employs tropes of femininity—including a concentration upon materiality, fantastic imagery, and mutable language construction—in order to enter conventionally masculine discourses such as poetry and science. She consistently represents herself as lacking conventional authority, but she simultaneously claims unconventional authority for herself, gathered from her personal experience. This manifests itself in her very concrete imagery and structure and allows her to speak with a world that would not usually accept her on those terms. In other words, she exploits the female association with materiality and with the content of poetry to find a safe space from within which she can perform her chosen identities and interact with the outside world, mirroring the “feminine” mutability and chaos that for centuries was supposed to lurk behind the orderly scenes of the universe. She claims and then enacts the authority of the garden through her verse.

The verse of Katherine Philips, on the other hand, enacts the creation of psychological space rather than physical space. Her approach is to assume a position of power through rhetorical strategies of relationship. Even though she rarely devotes time to descriptions of the

garden or the natural world, she assumes the power that *topos* grants to early modern women. She positions herself as a figure who creates her own world through language-governed relationships, maintained through the materiality of exchanged poems and letters and of individual bodies and behavior. Thus, although the garden image is not obviously relevant to Philips's work, its functions (of materiality, of self-determination, of female-oriented power, and of relationship) form her foundations. Her poetic images also transform psychological spaces into physical spaces: hearts and minds become places wherein people interact. Further, the most idyllic of these spaces are those shared between Orinda herself and Rosania, Lucasia, or other idealized female friends. Philips has thus written sophisticated poetry that reverses the equation of the garden with the woman's creative body; now the creative mind functions as a garden space, and the body is the materiality whereby the mind's desires are expressed. Philips privileges these spaces over the outside world, eventually conflating this equation with the poem itself.

Aphra Behn's work sheds the trappings and authority of religious verse and *topoi*. The poetic fashion of the Restoration was Augustan pastoral, a fashion adopted from France, but which eventually led to the development of the landscape garden. Behn, a popular writer in her own time, utilized garden conventions focused through the governing lens of pastoral trappings in order to represent a female point of view. This point of view both assumes and argues for the right of women to construct their chosen identities. Behn accomplishes this through the representation of sexuality and gender as unfixated and fluid. This is evident in the bodies she describes as well as in her pastoral landscapes, covered with groves within which lovemaking takes place, but the boundaries of which are highly permeable. Behn argues that rigidly maintained divisions between inside and outside are both unnecessary and impossible. She also

highlights the creation of supportive androgynous communities, in which women can wield power. Behn is her era's public poet of female experience. At the same time, she assumes the voice of male speakers at times, a move that simultaneously reinforces a flexible perception of gender and highlights the differences between an internalized and an assumed gender. Behn dramatizes her erotic poems in an idealized, naturalistic landscape, moving female experience out of the enclosed garden into the larger, though still imaginatively limited, world.

The work of these five writers illuminates the culture of the century in which they lived. The beginning of the seventeenth century saw highly structured ideologies in the realm of both gardening and gender roles while by the end, both realms had experienced some relaxation that opened up the possibility of fluid reinterpretation of both. This possibility became reality in the landscape garden designs of the eighteenth century. While women were able to claim more room among the literati as well, thus realizing some of the gendered possibilities, sex roles in general became more reified in the following years. Yet women writers such as those surveyed here had shown that it was possible for women to construct a chosen identity and that the critical space and narrative of creativity necessary for writing were available to women across the social spectrum. They showed what women's writing could look like, and that issues of interest to women could be explored, expressed, and constructed through creative writing.

These women found in garden imagery the means to establish their presence, their voices, in the literary world of early modern England. This set of images provided them a space of authority, a realm that allowed both for safety from silencing forces and for potentially subversive rhetoric to be imagined and expressed. The enclosed garden and its symbolic associations seem a non-threatening area separate from the mainstream marketplace of ideas. However, its history in literature established it as a dangerous and fluid space only provisionally

contained within its walls. These poets used those attributes to accomplish their own ends, which included recreating society in an idealized gynocentric or androgynous form, constructing a viable model of female creativity, reinterpreting the concerns and structures of art, honoring the material world, and claiming authority over their own lives and work. Having been confined, ideologically and symbolically, within the space of a garden, these women remade it into their own world, a site of strength from which they commented on and interacted with the outer world.

At the end of the century, this site of strength was on the verge of disappearing from the culture, as garden fashions changed, and the formal enclosed garden became rarer and less relevant. However, it was no longer as necessary as it had been, because women writers had moved beyond it. Behn's sites of strength are more open and interactive than those of earlier writers, but she builds on the strength that was consolidated behind walls. The association of women with gardens offered these writers and their contemporaries the means to enter social and literary dialogues and to persist there, even when the garden was no longer necessary as a refuge. The association has persisted even to today, when the definitions of both "garden" and "woman" are under some debate. For current scholarly discourse, the garden topos offers one of the most fruitful new keys to theorizing early modern conceptions of gender roles, aesthetic concerns, power structures, and identity construction. Its identity as a liminal and paradoxical space, and its universal appeal and wide matrix of allusions, make it ideal to catalyze exploration in a diverse range of disciplines. We must return to the space of the garden as a site of authentic literary speech. Only then can we gain an authentic understanding of its many speakers.

APPENDIX  
CAVENDISH'S *THE CONVENT OF PLEASURE*

Although it does not conform to this study's generic requirements and therefore I cannot spend space in the main argument on it, I do wish to glance briefly at Margaret Cavendish's play *The Convent of Pleasure*, because it clearly illustrates much of what I am arguing. It would be a shame to ignore completely an instance that seems to support my point so well, just because I have limited my study of the literature to poetry; after all, one of the main themes of the argument is that this matrix of associations was used throughout the literary world during the seventeenth century in England. The particular section of the play that I would like to highlight is act 2, scene 2, in which Lady Happy is describing in some detail how the convent will be ordered. What first strikes the reader, or the audience, is just how specific Happy's description is: each season is to dictate the elements of interior decoration, including materials and colors. Household items, such as bedclothes, are also chosen by material, and their care is to be strictly maintained. The same unusual attention to detail is given to the outside of the convent, its grounds:

and, all along the Wall of our Gallery, as long as the Summer lasts, do stand, upon Pedastals, Flower-pots, with various Flowers; and in the Winter Orange-Trees: and my Gardens to be kept curiously, and flourish, in every Season of all sorts of Flowers, sweet Hearbs and Fruits, and kept so as not to have a Weed in it, and all the Groves, Wildernesses, Bowers and Arbours pruned, and kept free from dead Boughs Branches or Leaves; and all the Ponds, Rivolets, Fountains, and Springs, kept clear, pure and fresh.  
(225)

In such a short and disjunctive play, this extended and highly developed fantasy of the surroundings of an idealistic community of women stands out. The government and employment of the members of the community receive a much less intensive description than their physical surroundings. According to the concerns of this study, it becomes clear that this is yet another instance of physical space, and in particular domestic space, playing a vital role in an author's

understanding and representation of a fully female community. It is as though the group must have a fully realized environment within which to exist.

The setting for this convent is apparently a city house, not a rural space, but one still separated from an outside world. Indicating this is act 2, scene 4, in which several men debate burning down the convent. The effect is one of long-term psychological torment for these men, as though every day they are confronted with an impenetrable wall behind which hide women who would otherwise be sexually available to them. These men, stock fool figures with such names as “Courtly” and “Take-Pleasure,” are barred from the women’s space, although it is tantalizingly close. The plan they finally adopt is to disguise their gender under female clothing, a ruse that works for the putative hero of the story, but one these particular men are not certain of pulling off.

Cavendish has created a very concrete space, within which the garden and an entirely female community exist, while at the same time unmooring it from any concrete place.<sup>1</sup> Rather, the whole play appears to take place within a fantastic, almost psychological world. The convent is within an urban setting, yet the extensive gardens and grounds re-mark it as a country estate. The land in which it is set is pagan, since the characters invoke “the gods” (e.g. Lady Happy: “What profit or pleasure can it be to the gods to have Men or Women wear coarse Linnen” [219]). However, the materiality of the world as well as the concept of religious retirement as Madam Mediator (1.2) and others represent it to Lady Happy, seem to come straight from daily life and cultural conventions common on the continent and in England during Cavendish’s life.

Act 4 is particularly off-putting for the reader seeking logical consistency and stable characterization, as this act contains the pastoral and masque scenes, in which the main

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<sup>1</sup> Very much as she does with the “equinoctial” garden in “Of a Garden”; see chapter 6.

characters virtually disappear into other characters, the scene and staging becomes impossible, and the plot temporarily falls by the wayside. The identity of the author of these scenes even comes into question, as several are labeled “Written by my Lord Duke.”<sup>2</sup> Even the hero Prince is labeled within the play as a “Princess” until his gender is revealed in the final act, at which point the stage directions, without any commentary, begin referring to the character as “Prince” instead of “Princess.” Thus, the play’s final effect is one of disorientation and confusion, which makes such clear and solid early episodes as the physical description of the convent stand out significantly. In a world in which nothing is fixed, not even a person’s gender or name, the garden and household can offer a place of personal safety and retirement for many women, a place upon which the community can rely, and in which it can flourish, away from the problems of the outside patriarchal world.

This gendered, pleasurable space is constantly threatened by the outside forces, which recognize it as a subversive space. The enclosing wall in this case has been set up by the women in order to protect their space of agency and safety. Only when erotic charge becomes too unruly—in this case, when Lady Happy and the character named Princess begin to experience sexual desire for one another—does the wall cease effectively to divide the feminine inside from the masculine outside, and at the end of the play, the convent is to be disposed of by the Prince / Princess, who now acts on behalf of his wife (Lady Happy) with the authority of the State. He says that he will divide it by sexual experience: “I’le divide it for Virgins and Widows” (246), so that, as the silent Lady Happy leaves, the female community has been reconstituted by patriarchal authority along sexual lines, and the wall has therefore become, or perhaps been shown to be, a permeable barrier between two worlds that never were as strongly divided as they

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<sup>2</sup> Pp. 238 and following. For commentary on the authorship, see Editor’s first note, this page, as well as her comments in the Introduction, pp. 12-14.

seemed. Cavendish has used the traditional association of symbols to consider some unconventional possibilities, both in sexuality and in female autonomy and self-government, but in the end, *The Convent of Pleasure* finds the possibility to be untenable, and the feminine community, which had been made possible through the most clearly imagined, the most fully realized space in the play, falls apart through the unruliness of eros.

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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Kristen D. Smith grew up in Jacksonville, Florida, and made a name for herself as an incorrigible bookworm. She pursued her undergraduate degree in Psychology at Eckerd College in St. Petersburg, Florida, but she found literature classes more attractive and soon added Literature as a second major. While at Eckerd, she spent a semester in 1998 at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland, studying American poetry and learning to live in a vastly different climate from that of Florida. It was at this time that she first visited and fell in love with the gardens of palaces and country houses, such as Versailles and Harewood.

Upon graduation in 1999, she clerked for a year at the Jacksonville Public Library before pursuing her MA (2003) and PhD in English at the University of Florida. While studying the most challenging coursework she could find, she taught a number of classes whose students have helped shape her personal studies. Between 2004 and 2008 she also worked as Assistant to the Editor of the psychoanalytic journal *American Imago*, which gave her the opportunity to acquaint herself with her academic interest in psychology, besides demonstrating the effectiveness of combining scholarly approaches. While at the University of Florida, she has twice received the Bowers Fellowship for medieval and early modern studies, in 2003 and 2005. She currently lives in Gainesville with her husband, Charles, and looks forward to one day having a garden of her own.