



## Environmental Conflict and the Politics of Localism in *Upon Appleton House*

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This essay places Marvell's *Upon Appleton House* amidst the ongoing transformation of the landscape in South Yorkshire and North Lincolnshire caused by improvement efforts by local landowners and the government and especially their attempts to drain the area's fenlands. In doing so, it argues that the poem's immersion in the South Yorkshire countryside should be seen as an intensification of the poem's political commentary, an acknowledgement of, and investigation into, the enmeshing of landscape and environment in the fraught debates over local rights and a centralized state roiling the country in the summer of 1651. In its arresting details, its tactile and often unsettling images of this landscape, the poem suggests an alternative to the abstract and homogenizing power of a centralized state. In this way, the poem stands as one of our most lasting and distinctive paeans to a vernacular landscape under pressure. Nonetheless, even as it demonstrates the power of this particular aesthetic form to represent such a variegated natural world, in its self-conscious and persistent ironies, its refusal to allow the reader to settle into its naturalist idylls, it admits the dangers of such potentially comforting and idle aestheticization.



Two of the most arresting lines in Andrew Marvell's 776-line country house poem *Upon Appleton House* come right near the close, in the penultimate stanza: "'Tis not, what once it was, the world; / But a rude heap together hurled" (761–62).<sup>1</sup> The lines stand out not only for the striking deflation of the first line's closure, created by the inverted syntax and the mid-line metrical confusion, but also more generally for their abrupt directness coming after over seven hundred lines of meandering, often mesmerizing, strangeness and mystery. The blunt statement of nostalgic loss resonates in the immediate context of the poem, which had spent the last several stanzas leisurely praising Mary Fairfax's beauty, standing out after the layers of detailed description, shaded irony, and equivocal allegory that characterize the rest of the poem. In its simplicity, its brevity, line 761 feels conclusive, a summative evaluation of the failing world amidst which the poet has placed Appleton House in the preceding 95 stanzas. But what precisely is the poem lamenting here? What exactly has been lost? To be sure, the nostalgia here completes the recurring gestures to a lost Eden against which is clearly set the postlapsarian world in which the Fairfaxes and their house must exist. It is this depiction of a post-Edenic landscape that the poem, and its critics, often link directly to the damages caused by nine years of civil war.<sup>2</sup> In this politically tinged reading of the poem, an idyllic England, once an island immune to the broils of the Continent, has been riven and destroyed by internal strife: "Oh thou, that dear and happy isle / The garden of the world ere while, / [...] / What luckless apple did we taste, / To make us mortal, and thee waste?" (321–22, 327–28). The Lord General Fairfax's retirement to the gardens and grounds of Appleton House thus becomes a removal from this fallen world, a decision tinged alternatively with wisdom, with regret, and even with naïveté.

Indeed, ever since Derek Hirst and Steve Zwicker's seminal article on the precise contexts surrounding the Fairfaxes and Marvell in the summer of 1651, critics have usefully identified the seemingly endless nuances to Marvell's depiction of his patron, the house, and himself amidst these particular weeks.<sup>3</sup> Most recently, Julianne Werlin has summarized this critical tendency by reminding us that Marvell's poem was written

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Marvell, *The Poems of Andrew Marvell*, ed. Nigel Smith (London: Pearson Education Limited, 2003), 241. All further citations from the poem will be taken from this edition and cited by line numbers in text.

<sup>2</sup> For a reading that focuses on the fallen landscape in the poem, see Nicholas McDowell, "Marvell Among the Cavaliers," in *The Oxford Handbook of Literature and the English Revolution*, ed. Laura Lunger Knoppers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 255–56. On the effects of the fallen world more generally in the poem, see Frederic H. Roth, Jr., "Marvell's 'Upon Appleton House': A Study in Perspective," *Texas Studies in Language and Literature* 14, no. 2 (1972): 269–81 and, in her study of attempts to recover what was lost in a postlapsarian world, Joanna Picciotto, *Labors of Innocence* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 356–66.

<sup>3</sup> Derek Hirst and Steven Zwicker, "High Summer at Nun Appleton, 1651: Andrew Marvell and Lord Fairfax's Occasions," *Historical Journal* 36, no. 2 (1993): 247–69. This article has set a model for precise historical contextualization not only for this poem in particular, but early modern studies more broadly.

for *this* estate, at *this* precise moment.<sup>4</sup> It is not my intention in this essay to deny these local pressures, the knowledge of which has markedly improved our understanding of the poem; I aim rather to add important additional pressures, no less political nor local, focused on the ongoing transformation of the landscape in South Yorkshire and North Lincolnshire caused by improvement efforts by local landowners and the government and especially their attempts to drain the area's fenlands. The poem comes at a precise moment in England's, and more specifically, the North Midlands', environmental history, a moment where questions over the precise extent of human intervention in the natural landscape intersected complexly with the broader intellectual and political conflicts continuing to splinter the nation in 1650–51. Throughout the poem, as we will see, Marvell sets the house within the wet landscape of South Yorkshire and the specific realities of its agricultural and natural cycles. By doing so, Marvell reminds his audience of these intense debates over environmental policy, debates that in the months surrounding the poem's creation had prompted a slew of recent publications on agricultural improvement and its limits as well as numerous court cases and even localized riots. The withdrawal to the country house and its environs enacted by the poem should not be seen thus as a retreat from politics, although many critics have viewed it so, nor even merely as an engagement with debates over *otium* and *negotium* in a time of upheaval.<sup>5</sup> In fact, the poem's immersion in the South Yorkshire countryside should be seen as an intensification of the poem's political commentary, an acknowledgement of, and investigation into, the enmeshing of landscape and environment in the fraught debates over local rights and a centralized state roiling the country in the summer of 1651. The detailed depiction of the wetlands world of the country house shows us a poet holding up for literary examination the precise nature of humans' interactions with their environments at an instant in which state policy and scientific advancement were transforming this relationship. Understanding the contours of this examination shifts our sense of this poem's complex commentary on the intellectual culture and politics of the moment as well as the role of poetry itself within those politics.

In linking Marvell's sprawling country house poem to the distinct ecopolitics of the fenlands of South Yorkshire, my analysis picks up on two recent strands of early modern ecocriticism. Most directly, my analysis takes up the interest in wetlands and

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<sup>4</sup> Julianne Werlin, "Upon Appleton House," in *The Oxford Handbook of Andrew Marvell*, ed. Martin Dzelzainas and Edward Holberton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 481. For another recent careful reading situating the poem amidst the precise circumstances of 1651, see Matthew Augustine, *Andrew Marvell: A Literary Life* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 105–27.

<sup>5</sup> For a recent reading that hinges on the debate between retirement and activity, see Keith McDonald, "The Genius of the House': Andrew Marvell's Private Lord Fairfax," in *England's Fortress: New Perspectives on Thomas, 3<sup>rd</sup> Lord Fairfax*, ed. Andrew Hopper and Philip Major (Surrey: Ashgate, 2014), 193–212.

the damages that human action had on these disappearing habitats most evident in Hillary Eklund's work.<sup>6</sup> Similar to Eklund's examination of early modern responses to this crisis, my analysis locates in Marvell's representation of this environment a complex mix of nostalgia, resistance, and celebration (tinged with a significant dose of Marvellian irony) as he contemplates human efforts to improve and "modernize" these fecund yet boggy hinterlands. Secondly, in contextualizing Marvell's depiction of the natural environs around Appleton House within the complicated politics of fen drainage and state intervention circa 1650, my readings bear a similarity to Todd Borlik's attention to the geopolitics of the Stuart court as he seeks to understand Shakespeare's natural worlds.<sup>7</sup> For Borlik, and for me here, we cannot analyze early modern literature's representation of nature without an understanding of the broader ecopolitical structures in which these representations existed. The unique contours to Marvell's country house poem do not just transform environmental literary traditions, nor do they respond generally to English politics in 1651. Marvell's nature can best be understood amidst the precise local environmental politics of the South Yorkshire fenlands in the immediate aftermath of Parliamentary victory, a local politics inevitably responsive and mostly resistant to the broader national push to homogenize the English countryside. My hope is that this analysis can deepen our sense of the myriad ways in which environmental literature, and poetry more generally, remains enmeshed in and responsive to the deleterious ecopolitics of human action.

While England's landscape broadly in the mid-seventeenth century was being transformed by rampant deforestation, enclosure of common lands, and the advent of widescale agrarian capitalism, the areas surrounding Appleton House in South Yorkshire were particularly affected.<sup>8</sup> By the summer of 1651, these areas, and especially

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<sup>6</sup> Eklund has taken up the significance of wetlands and the eastern fens in "After Wetlands," *Criticism* 62, no. 3 (2020): 457–78. See also her essay, "Wetlands Reclamation and the Fate of the Local in Seventeenth Century England," in *Ground-Work: English Renaissance Literature and Soil Science*, ed. Hillary Eklund (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2017), 149–70.

<sup>7</sup> Todd Borlik, *Shakespeare beyond the Green World: Drama and Ecopolitics in Jacobean Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023).

<sup>8</sup> For more on the wider environmental changes enacted by human action in the seventeenth century, see Franklin Mendels, "Proto-Industrialization: the First Phase of the Industrialization Process," *The Journal of Economic History* 32, no. 1 (1972): 241–61; Jane Whittle, *The Development of Agrarian Capitalism: Land and Labour in Norfolk, 1440–1580* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000); John F. Richards, "Landscape Change and Energy Transformation in the British Isles," in *The Unending Frontier: An Environmental History of the Early Modern World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 193–241; Michael Williams, "Clearing in Europe, 1500–1700," in *Deforesting the Earth: from Prehistory to Global Crisis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 168–201; Paul Warde, *The Invention of Sustainability: Nature and Destiny c. 1500–1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018). For an excellent anthology of early modern writing in response to these changes, see *Literature and Nature in the English Renaissance: An Ecocritical Anthology*, ed. Todd Borlik (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

just to the south of Fairfax's estate, had been subjected to a decades-long and large-scale series of drainage projects led by various Dutch and English projectors and backed by the Crown and, after 1649, the new Parliamentary regime.<sup>9</sup> This part of northeast England, bisected by a network of tidal rivers flowing out of the Humber, was naturally fenny, characterized by wetlands that experienced cycles of flood and drought. The inhabitants lived off of the land naturally by fishing and fowling in the wetter months and harvesting and grazing cattle upon the rich grasslands in the drier ones. However, beginning in the early part of the seventeenth century, nobles and investors supported by the monarchy made efforts to "improve" this area by draining the fens to make the land more suitable for large-scale farming of staple crops such as rape, coleseed, and hemp. In order to drain these areas, the Crown granted large swaths of common land to outside investors, contributing to the increase in the enclosure of lands previously available to the local inhabitants. By the 1630s, two huge drainage projects, the Great Level to the south and the Hatfield Level, just twenty or so miles south of Appleton House, had been undertaken under the direction of the Dutch projector Cornelius Vermuyden. The dream was a more homogenous, more arable, landscape under the at least nominal control of a centralized and scientifically grounded state authority.

At the same time that Parliament put its support behind these state-supported projects at the close of the 1640s, individual gentleman landowners were being encouraged by a variety of handbooks, profit manuals, and natural histories to improve their lands through novel, scientifically supported, agricultural practices. Inspired by the Baconian directive to order and work upon the natural world, as well as a moralistic view of the landscape, prominent networks of gentlemen virtuosi, such as the one led by Samuel Hartlib and John Dury, exchanged information about the proper management of resources and new agrarian improvements.<sup>10</sup> Many of the improvement treatises paid special attention to the management of the kinds of wetland areas prominent around Appleton House, outlining specific techniques for the control of waterways, irrigation, and flooding. As Hyunyoung Cho details in her article in this issue of *Marvell Studies*,

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<sup>9</sup> The most comprehensive study on fen drainage in England is Eric H. Ash, *The Draining of the Fens: Projectors, Popular Politics, and State Building in Early Modern England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017).

<sup>10</sup> For more on these gentlemanly networks and the culture of improvement, see especially Charles Webster, *The Great Instauration: Science, Medicine and Reform, 1626-1660* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1975), 465-83; Paul Slack, *The Invention of Improvement: Information and Material Progress in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), esp. 91-128 and Warde, *The Invention of Sustainability*, 102-27. For an earlier case study, see Michael Leslie, "The Spiritual Husbandry of John Beale," in *Culture and Cultivation in Early Modern England: Writing the Land*, ed. Michael Leslie and Timothy Raylor (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1992), 151-72. For literary studies that engage with the impact of this culture more broadly, see Andrew McRae, *God Speed the Plough: The Representation of Agrarian England, 1500-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); and more recently Charlotte Scott, *Shakespeare's Nature: From Cultivation to Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

Walter Blith spent several chapters in his 1649 handbook *The English Improver* (revised and expanded in 1652) advocating that landowners interested in improvement take up more modern practices to control their wetlands such as floating the fields, a controlled flooding to enrich the lands that Marvell describes in detail in the middle of his country house poem.<sup>11</sup> Many of these writers sought to make a distinction between the gentlemen improvers that they encouraged, who operated with an ethics of virtue, and outside projectors, who operated with an ethics of profit.<sup>12</sup> However, it is important to note that royal, and by 1650 Parliamentary, officials who defended widescale fen drainage took up the same language of improvement and profitability as these treatises, claiming that such drainage would not only increase productivity of the land, but also reform the lazy and indolent inhabitants who lived in the swampy and corrupt fenlands.<sup>13</sup> In addition, those advocating for improvement by landowners were coming around to these bigger drainage projects; in his 1652 edition of *The English Improver (The English Improver Improved)* dedicated to Cromwell and the Council of State, Blith added a full-throated defense of state-led drainage that claimed that the local Commissioners of Sewers could not properly undertake a project of this magnitude.<sup>14</sup> Marvell's poem, written almost certainly in summer 1651, thus comes at a moment when local landowners such as Thomas Fairfax, who had just retreated to his country estates as he withdrew from Parliamentary politics, were being encouraged to intervene in and improve their tenants' agricultural practices, although attitudes towards the specific nature and extent of this intervention were shifting and under intense debate.

Significantly complicating these debates over the gentleman landowner's proper management of wetlands agriculture in 1650–51 was the intense resistance that drainage projects increasingly faced in these areas, a resistance importantly that began decades earlier and that was rooted in anti-monarchic principles.<sup>15</sup> The local inhabitants of Lincolnshire and Yorkshire saw the projectors' incursions far differently

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<sup>11</sup> Hyunyoung Cho, "A Green Marvell: Seventeenth-Century Draining of the Fens and 'Salmon-Fishers Moist' in *Upon Appleton House*," *Marvell Studies* 10, no. 1 (2025): 11–14.

<sup>12</sup> Slack, *The Invention of Improvement*, 102–6 and Warde, *The Invention of Sustainability*, 104–5.

<sup>13</sup> Warde, *The Invention of Sustainability*, 127–134. For an example of this moral language in defense of fen drainage, see the later text Timothy Nourse, *Campania Foelix* (London, 1700), 12–16.

<sup>14</sup> Blith, *The English Improver Improved* (London, 1652), ch. 9. Writing from the Restoration, John Houghton noted that in the 1640s people had generally been adverse to all suggestions for improvements but that in later years, especially after 1649, gentleman farmers had wholly supported and enacted these improvements on the land (*A Collection for the Improvement of Husbandry and Trade*, ed. Richard Bradley, 4 vols. (London, 1727–8), 4.80. See also, Slack, *The Invention of Improvement*, 108–9. For more on the advocacy for the control of these lands in the 1650s and its relationship to the literature of the moment, see Kathryn Attie, "Enclosure Polemics and the Garden in the 1650s," *Studies in English Literature* 51, no. 1 (2011): 135–57. Hillary Eklund provides a sophisticated close reading of Blith's treatise in "After Wetlands," 462–68.

<sup>15</sup> For more on these earlier protests, see Ash, *The Draining of the Fens*, 109–78.

than their advocates, and even as early as the mid-1630s, resistance to these larger projects had grown considerably. For the locals, these drainage efforts represented a destruction of their entire way of life, ill-conceived attempts to alter the landscape wholesale, dreamt up by distant, or even worse, foreign projectors. The human-led attempts to control completely the tidal rivers only led to worse flooding elsewhere, the displacement of whole habitations, and the unjust enclosure of lands by royal prerogative that were previously promised to area residents.<sup>16</sup> Contributing to this sense of localist resistance against distant power was the prominent presence of a large number of French, Walloon, and Flemish tenants who settled in the thousands after Vermuyden and his Dutch workers had cleared the land.<sup>17</sup> These foreign settlers, many of whom worked land taken from local inhabitants, became for long-time fenland residents the face of the troubling alliance between English and foreign investors. Local resistance to these crown-led efforts continued with intermittent rioting and protests into the 1640s. For anti-royalists, fen drainage had become synonymous with monarchic overreach and a sentence complaining of Charles's abuses of power in the fenlands was even included in the Grand Remonstrance in November 1641.<sup>18</sup> Charles's support of the drainage efforts certainly increased the kind of local opposition to royal power that led to so much of Parliament's early successes in the war; fenland rioters in 1642, for example, attacked drainage projects in the name of Parliament.<sup>19</sup> However, by the time Marvell had come to write his country house poem in 1651, the local politics of the area, and of fen drainage itself, had shifted considerably. In 1649, Parliament had passed an act supporting the continuation of the state-led drainage projects and by October 1650, violent riots had broken out across the Hatfield Level, with much of the anger directed not only at the foreign inhabitants in the area but also at a Parliamentary government that had begun, for these locals, to resemble the monarchy that they had just removed from power.<sup>20</sup> These riots continued well into 1651 and were ongoing as Marvell was composing *Upon Appleton House* just to the north. Many critics of the poem have gestured to the upheavals in the area as Leveller riots, a characterization notably forwarded by those in power in the new Parliamentary regime; however, it would be far

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<sup>16</sup> For more on the displacement of populations and the ecological damages of fen drainage, see Eklund, "Wetlands Reclamation and the Fate of the Local in Seventeenth Century England," 149–70.

<sup>17</sup> For a recent study of these foreign communities and their integration into the area, see Elly Dezateux Robson, "Fen Plantation: Commons, Calvinism, and the Boundaries of Belonging in Early Modern England," *Journal of British Studies* 63, no. 1 (2024): 30–62.

<sup>18</sup> "Large quantities of Common, and severall Grounds, have beene taken from the subject, by colour of the Statute of improvement, and by abuse of the Commission of Sewers, without their consent, and against it," *A Remonstrance of the State of the Kingdom* (London, 1641), 7.

<sup>19</sup> Ash, *The Draining of the Fens*, 223–4.

<sup>20</sup> Ash, *The Draining of the Fens*, 229–38.

more accurate to characterize these protests as locally motivated fenland riots whose anti-enclosure politics overlapped with Leveller beliefs (“Which Levellers take *pattern* at” [450, italics mine]).<sup>21</sup> While John Lilburne finally did arrive on the scene of the riots in October 1651, after, it should be noted, Marvell had most likely finished his poem, and had been working on behalf of the Hatfield protestors in London before that, the violence and anger had far more regional and long-standing motivations rooted in the fenlanders defense of their common rights and local way of life. While the rioters certainly objected to some of the same statist abuses that Lilburne and his followers did, these objections were consistent with an enduring resistance to centralized intervention in local environmental affairs. It is perhaps lingering sympathy for this tradition of anti-monarchic, anti-governmental localism in the rioters’ motivations that led the Parliamentary Army and its leaders, including Fairfax, who still held his military post even after his retirement, to avoid intervening forcefully to quell these fenland riots.<sup>22</sup> Fairfax himself seems to have been aided by men associated with the anti-drainage movement at the Isle of Axholme early in the Civil War, a fact that those associated with resistance to Parliamentary drainage efforts reminded him of in 1653.<sup>23</sup> The Yorkshire residents angry at continued state incursions into their local environment seem to have seen a useful and experienced London ally in Lilburne, just as Lilburne, always the opportunist, saw these local upheavals as another opportunity to prick at Parliamentary authorities. To characterize the conflicts surrounding the Fairfax estate in 1651 as Leveller riots, as many critics of the poem have, is thus to mistake long-standing and simmering regional anger for one event in the Leveller story, a mistake the poem in its attention to the immediate inhabitants and their actions does not make.

As a country house poem, *Upon Appleton House*, by its very generic conventions, deals with the relationship between humanity and the natural environment. In August 1651, depicting this relationship meant, for the poem’s author and patron, negotiating the complicated and shifting arguments concerning land improvement and environmental practice. On the one hand, moral and economic improvement treatises encouraged

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<sup>21</sup> The broad gesture to Leveller riots in the area is myriad in criticism of the poem and even persists in the poem’s most careful readers, beginning with Hirst and Zwicker, “High Summer at Nun Appleton,” 252–3. See also, Smith’s headnote to the poem in his edition, *The Poems of Andrew Marvell*, 212; Picciotto, *Labors of Innocence*, 356–7; and, Augustine, *Andrew Marvell: A Literary Life*, 115. Ash is clear on his assessment that the riots were not a “Leveller-inspired insurrection” (*The Draining of the Fens*, 235–8).

<sup>22</sup> Ash, *The Draining of the Fens*, 245–6. For more on Fairfax’s continued involvement with the Parliamentary army and government, see Andrew Hopper, *‘Black Tom’: Sir Thomas Fairfax and the English Revolution* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 115–6.

<sup>23</sup> The fenland protestors reminded Parliament generally of their service during the Civil War and specifically reminded Fairfax of their life-saving assistance and rescue of the commander at the Isle of Axholme in *The Anti-Projector or the History of the Fen Project* (London, ca. 1646), 6.

gentlemanly landowners like Fairfax to study and implement a series of experimentally supported human interventions into the local countryside, including the manipulation of local waterways, to increase agrarian production on their estates. On the other, many local inhabitants in the lands surrounding Appleton House viewed the widescale transformation of wetlands and pasture into arable, drained fields by state-supported projectors as a direct infringement on their inalienable rights and a destruction of their culture by a distant, and increasingly tyrannical, centralized government, whether monarchic or Parliamentary. Throughout the poem, Marvell does not shy from these questions but rather purposefully emphasizes the distinct natural realities of the Fairfax family's country retreat, thus engaging poetically with the fraught scientific and political debates over environmental policy just as his patron had seemingly made the management of his estate his chief concern.

Indeed, throughout the poem, and especially in its second half, we are immersed in the environmental and seasonal details of the South Yorkshire estate. Marvell signals his knowledge of these realities at various points in the poem, none more striking than in the final stanza, where he admires the "moist" salmon fishers, a familiar wetland figure: "How tortoise-like, but not so slow, / These rational amphibii go!" (773–74). While critics have puzzled over the second line here, many adducing a reference to Thomas Browne's depiction of amphibious humans in *Religio Medici*, Marvell also seems more immediately to be drawing on the numerous contemporary descriptions of the fenland inhabitants as half-fish, half-human, a characterization also evoked earlier in stanza 48 as the speaker watches men dive into the grassy meadows. In an anonymous account written by a Norwich traveler through the northern fens in 1635, the writer remarks with disdain, "I know not what to make of [the people], I think they be half fish, half flesh, for they drink like fishes & sleep like hogs."<sup>24</sup> Invariably these descriptions of the fenland inhabitants were negative, emphasizing their indolence and reptilian behaviors, behaviors encouraged by the corruptions of the boggy and watery climate and the lifestyle it necessitated.<sup>25</sup> Notably, in *his* depiction, Marvell eschews any direct criticism of the fisherman, replacing disdain with a fanciful strangeness tinged with foreboding. In negative contemporary accounts, the inhabitants' laziness was used as a justification for crown-supported drainage projects. Here, in the final

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<sup>24</sup> "A Relation of a Short Survey of the Western Counties, in Which Is Briefly Described the Citties, Corporations, Castles, and Some Other Remarkables in Them," cited in Ash, *The Draining of the Fens*, 17.

<sup>25</sup> For more on these criticisms of fenland inhabitants, see Eklund, "Wetlands Reclamation and the Fate of the Local in Seventeenth Century England," 156–7; Kate Luce Mulry, *An Empire Transformed: Remolding Bodies and Landscapes in the Restoration Atlantic* (New York: New York University Press, 2021), 74–115; Todd Andrew Borlik, "Caliban and the Fen-Demons of Lincolnshire: The Englishness of *The Tempest*," in *Shakespeare Beyond the Green World: Drama and Ecopolitics in Jacobean Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 138–66.

stanza of Marvell's poem, the "sense of cosmic menace" (to borrow a term from Hirst and Zwicker) that surrounds these "rational amphibii" seems gently to suggest the looming environmental collapse of an entire way of life, not a critique of it.

The salmon fishermen are not the only, nor even the most prominent, local inhabitants to appear in *Upon Appleton House*. The most vivid depiction of humans in this habitat comes directly in the middle of the poem, when the speaker's eye dwells for several stanzas on the mowers in the house's meadows. Of course, these are not the only mowers to appear in Marvell's poetry during this period, and it is useful to consider Marvell's choice of this particular pastoral figure in light of his interest in the local landscape. Critics have long recognized that these poems' representations of the mower are central to Marvell's assessment of the agricultural improvement debates being waged across these years; however, they have also long disagreed over said assessment. While most have viewed the mower as a key figure in Marvell's depiction of a post-enclosure countryside, opinions have varied widely on the tenor of this depiction—the mower has variously been construed as an idealized improver returning the land to pre-lapsarian perfection, a disingenuous poetic fiction that hides the realities of a new wage-labor economy, or else part of a wider critique of the damages of agrarian capitalism.<sup>26</sup> Such disagreements are not atypical for a poet who trafficked in subtle irony and self-conscious ambivalence. However, we should hesitate over the more general assumption by all of these disparate readings that what we see in the meadows section and its mowers in *Upon Appleton House* represents the new agricultural realities of the drained fenlands. In fact, one of the most distinctive features of the wetlands environment before drainage was its tall and rich grasslands that were enriched by the seasonal flooding, grasslands that were mowed and used in common by inhabitants to feed valuable livestock.<sup>27</sup> The agricultural improvements of enclosure and drainage, which broke this cycle of flooding and growth, alongside consistent over-grazing, led to increasing grass shortages in the seventeenth century.<sup>28</sup> Locals became increasingly angry as grass yields fell; a 1653 petition from Daniel Noddell, a Hatfield Level resident, complains about these reduced yields and the subsequent displacement of a number

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<sup>26</sup> In order, these readings of Marvell's mowers are from Picciotto, *Labors of Innocence*, 360–2; Rosemary Kegl, "'Joining my Labour to my Pain': The Politics of Labor in Marvell's Mower Poems," in *Soliciting Interpretation: Literary Theory and Seventeenth-Century English Poetry*, ed. Elizabeth D. Harvey and Katharine Eisaman Maus (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 89–111; and Jonathan Crewe, "The Garden State: Marvell's Poetics of Enclosure," in *Enclosure Acts: Sexuality, Property, and Culture in Early Modern England*, ed. Richard Burt and John Michael Archer (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 270–89.

<sup>27</sup> Joan Thirsk, *English Peasant Farming: The Agrarian History of Lincolnshire from Tudor to Recent Times* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957), 25–48.

<sup>28</sup> Thirsk, *English Peasant Farming*, 108–117.

of freeholders who were forced to sell their herds and move elsewhere.<sup>29</sup> Once drained, the fenland meadows were usually immediately put to the plough and the formerly grassy, seasonally flooded plains, plentiful with grazing livestock, were made ready for coleseed or oat crops.<sup>30</sup> Marvell gestures clearly to a distinctly pre-enclosure idyll maintained on the Fairfax lands as the narrator considers the locals and their livestock: “The villagers in common chase / Their cattle, which it closer rase” (451–52). At least in the areas overseen by Lord Fairfax envisioned in this poem, local inhabitants continued to have access to commons for grazing and mowing; the mower in Marvell’s imagining, “commands the field” seemingly not in service to some absent wage employer.<sup>31</sup> We might see Marvell’s creation of his unique pastoral character, then, not only as a pointed revision to centuries of literary tradition, but also as a nostalgic depiction of a well-known South Yorkshire figure. With sheepherding increasingly associated with enclosure and the damages of agrarian capitalism, Marvell in his pastorals turns demonstrably away from the shepherd to a character straight from the older landscapes of the eastern wetlands.

This is not to suggest that Marvell’s characterization of these wetland laborers, generally, as well as specifically in *Upon Appleton House*, is univocally or simply positive. As numerous commentators have noted, the mowing tableau in the middle of the poem is rife with violence.<sup>32</sup> Marvell’s representation of his mowers has long been singled out for its clear emphasis on georgic labor, but what could be a scene of rural industry here becomes as well a battlefield scattered with the bloody carcasses of fowl and piles of hay that resemble the dead:

Or sooner hatch or higher build:  
The mower now commands the field;  
In whose new traverse seemeth wrought

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<sup>29</sup> Daniel Noddell, *To the Parliament of the Commonwealth of England, and Every Individual Member thereof, the Declaration of Daniel Noddell Solicitor for the Freeholders and Commoners within the Mannor of Epworth, in the Isle of Axholme* (London, 1653), 13.

<sup>30</sup> Thirsk, *English Peasant Farming*, 127–9.

<sup>31</sup> Kegl too easily associates the mower with wage labor throughout “The Politics of Labor in Marvell’s Mower Poems.” While mowers were certainly employed as wage laborers in the growing agrarian capital system, mowing and the grasslands held in common throughout the area were also central, and most likely more common, to the pre-enclosure economies of the area, before the countryside was converted to arable land.

<sup>32</sup> See, for example, Robert Markley, “‘Gulfes, Deserts, Precipices, Stone’: Marvell’s ‘Upon Appleton House’ and the Contradictions of ‘Nature,’” in *The Country and the City Revisited: England and the Politics of Culture, 1550–1850*, ed. Gerald MacLean, Donna Landry, and Joseph P. Ward (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 89–105; and Andrew McRae, “The Green Marvell,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Andrew Marvell*, ed. Derek Hirst and Steven Zwicker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 122–39.

A camp of battle newly fought:  
 Where, as the meads with hay, the plain  
 Lies quilted o'er with bodies slain: (417–22)

The tableau is both a nod to classical georgic precursors, such as Virgil's fourth Georgic, that lament the injury to fauna at the hands of human industry and a thinly veiled allusion to the dismemberment and death recently experienced in the civil wars.<sup>33</sup> Picking up on the wistfulness and over-emotional lament that had run through the prior stanzas' militarization of Fairfax's flower garden, the mowers episode continues the poem's moralizing on the spectacle of humanity in nature, lamenting in this section the fact that even lowliness could not save the murdered birds, and linking human intervention in nature to the hostilities of the recent conflict in England. Much of the language and tone here echoes the critical, yet accepting evaluation of Cromwell and his followers, the "armed bands" in the Horatian Ode, from an echo of their violence ("bloody Thestylis" [401]) to the callous victory celebrations, admittedly figured slightly more positively here: "And now the careless victors play, / Dancing the triumphs of the hay; / Where every mower's wholesome heat / Smells like an Alexander's sweat" (425–28). As in the Horatian Ode's depiction of Cromwell's power, the moralizing in this episode both celebrates the mowers' command of the landscape while acknowledging its victims, thereby placing the harvest amidst the wider and inevitable cycles of force and violence seemingly endemic to Marvell's vision of human action. The mowing episode in *Upon Appleton House* thus raises lingering questions about the effects of any human intervention in the natural world, even that associated with an older, less intrusive economics. It is at once an idyllic picture of pre-fen-drainage fertility and harvest as well as a reminder that these nostalgic idylls are themselves artistic creations, as is the moralistic grief extracted from such episodes. It is nearly impossible, after the overly effusive laments on the deaths of the birds, not to detect ironic exaggeration as well in the aestheticized depiction of the harvest celebrations: "Their females fragrant as the mead / Which they in fairy circles tread: / When at their dance's end they kiss, / Their new-made hay not sweeter is" (429–32).

There is a self-conscious blitheness here that reappears as well earlier in the mowing section, where, in a much commented upon moment, a female laborer, reimagined as the pastoral character Thestylis, interrupts the poetic narrative to

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<sup>33</sup> Smith notes an allusion to the fourth Georgic in *The Poems of Andrew Marvell*, 228. Richard F. Thomas also adduces the allusion in "The 'Georgics' of Resistance: From Virgil to Heaney," *Vergilius* 77 (2001): 138. See also, on the mower tradition more generally, Francesca Gardner, "Lawnmower Poetry and the Poetry of Lawnmowers," *Critical Quarterly*, forthcoming.

object to the speaker's imaginings: "He called us Israelites" (406). This interruption pierces the aesthetic fictions of the poet, making a mockery of the speaker's concern over the deaths of the field birds and his moralizing projections.<sup>34</sup> This gesture to the aestheticization of the scene aligns with Marvell's repeated foregrounding of the theatrical nature of his visions of the meadows: "No scene that turns with engines strange / Does oft'ner than these meadows change," and later, "This scene again withdrawing brings / A new and empty face of things" (385–86, 441–42). In the *Thestylis* moment, the reader is reminded that the mowing of the fields was a seasonal, habitual practice, mundane in its necessity, the hay and fowl harvested essential goods to the economy and subsistence of the local inhabitants. However, despite the striking surprise of *Thestylis*'s interjection, its radical refiguring of the poetic speech act, her lesson seems to go unheeded by the speaker as he returns to his anthropomorphic and idealizing perspective in the following stanzas. The entire sequence is an admission by Marvell of the inevitable attractions of nostalgia, particularly when it comes to the imagining of humans interacting with the natural world. Overall, the detailed depiction of the mowing of the meadows memorializes a local way of life and associates Fairfax's estate with such labor. However, in its artificiality, it also registers the dangers of such memorialization and allows the space for questioning the desire to hold onto older practices in the face of economic realities.

While *Upon Appleton House* tends to obscure these changing economic realities in its depiction of the Fairfax estate and its mowers and salmon-fishers, it does contain brief gestures to the upheavals and transformations brought about by fen drainage and the local conflicts it caused. Perhaps the most puzzling instance of such a gesture occurs early on in the poem, in stanza 9, where the speaker begins his detailed survey of the Fairfax estate at its entrance: "A stately frontispiece of poor / Adorns without the open door" (65–66). From 1646 onward across the English countryside, a series of bad harvests had created famine conditions for many of the rural poor.<sup>35</sup> These conditions increased public unrest and unhappiness with the Parliamentary regime; in 1649 in Tadcaster, just five miles up the road from Appleton House, an observer reported that many of the "meaner sort were forced to pawn their bedding or sell their wearing apparel" and were prepared to "crye up a Kingly government or any other" or "turn Levellers upon necessity."<sup>36</sup> Marvell draws brief attention to the plight of the impoverished in these lines, suggesting that Fairfax's estate in its prototypical

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<sup>34</sup> Picciotto emphasizes the poetic radicalism of the moment in *Labors of Innocence*, 360–1.

<sup>35</sup> Steven Hindle, "Dearth and the English Revolution: the Harvest Crisis of 1647–50," *Economic History Review* 61, no. 1 (2008): 64–98.

<sup>36</sup> Cited in Hindle, "Dearth and the English Revolution," 67.

country house plenty, serves as a refuge from such dearth and its attendant political upheavals. However, the poem offers such compensatory praise in bizarrely cold terms, envisioning the pleading inhabitants as a decorative “stately frontispiece.” It is one of the odder images in a poem full of them and suggests a distinct, perhaps even ironic, reticence to engage fully with the environmental and economic degradation of the area. As with the *Thestylis* interruption, Marvell combines idealized praise for the workings of the Fairfax estate in the midst of environmental and economic upheaval with seemingly self-aware artifice that could serve as a subtle warning against congratulatory poetic nostalgia.

Nonetheless, the poem overall very clearly envisions a wetland and pasture environment around Appleton House not entirely transformed by the widescale drainage practices that were the primary cause of the contemporary unrest in the area. For whatever the effects of the ambivalences and ironies surrounding Marvell’s depiction of Appleton House’s landscapes, it is these very complexities that contribute to the detailed and localized affective environment that the poet creates over 97 stanzas. The poem might show us a poet questioning proper human behavior in this wetland environment; what it is not showing us is a poet questioning the value or the very existence of that environment, as those advocating for drainage were, as, for example, in a 1629 description where the land is described as a place with “no element good. The air, nebulous, gross, and full of rotten harres; the water putrid, muddy, yea full of loathsome vermin.”<sup>37</sup> Marvell paints a far different picture of the natural state of the lands surrounding Appleton House from the start of the poem, emphasizing in stanza 10 Nature’s power over the landscape:

But Nature here hath been so free  
As if she said, ‘Leave this to me’.  
Art would more neatly have defaced  
What she had laid so sweetly waste;  
In fragrant gardens, shady woods,  
Deep meadows, and transparent floods. (75–80)

In praise that comes right out of the country house poem tradition, the perfection of the natural world surrounding the Fairfax estate needs no human artifice to shape it. The depiction in these lines distinctly reminds readers of both the fecundity and the vagaries of the wetlands around Appleton House while clarifying that human efforts to

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<sup>37</sup> H.C., *A Discourse Concerning the Drayning of the Fennes and Surrounded Grounds in the Sixe Counties of Norfolke, Suffolke, Cambridge with the Isle of Ely, Huntington, Northampton, and Lincolne* (London, 1629), A3v.

improve the lands, efforts such as the drainage projects against which inhabitants were currently rioting, only damage the natural habitat.

In these lines, and in Marvell's poem generally, even the flooding of the fields is characterized as one of the landscape's "pleasant acts." Critics who have drawn a connection to destructive floods of the past, Biblical and otherwise, while illustrating the aptness of such a comparison in the midst of the upheavals of 1651, neglect the importance of this seasonal occurrence to the land's richness, an importance of which the poem itself seems acutely aware for example in the picture of "pikes" being "taken in the pound" by the boats on the flood.<sup>38</sup> As Cho demonstrates in her essay in this issue, in this episode Marvell is alluding not only generally to the flooding that recurred in South Yorkshire and that was essential to the area's economy, but also to recent guidelines to landowners on how to "float the fields" properly, a process of controlled flooding meant to increase crop yields in the wetlands.<sup>39</sup> Marvell does remain coy about the nature of human improvement in this moment—Fairfax's other estate, "Denton," "sets ope its cataracts" (466), not any human hand.<sup>40</sup> However, he also makes clear that the flood is purposefully let loose, demonstrating that he does not entirely ignore the mid-century push to change husbandry practices, including instituting novel irrigation and drainage methods, based on recent scientific advances. It should be recalled that by 1650, few landowners, if any, were entirely resistant to some form of human intervention and that gentlemanly interest in these new improvement practices was ubiquitous.<sup>41</sup> The flooding of the meadows as depicted in *Upon Appleton House* gives us a moment where human ingenuity guides and improves, but does not transform, the natural environment, aiding it as it replenishes the fertile land. When we understand this moment amidst the realities of the wetland environment to which Marvell so insistently gestures in the poem, the house becomes not an island amidst a sea of chaos (as tempting as this image is to political readings of the poem), but the center of a fecund environment governed by the natural cycles of harvest and replenishment and aided by human industry and resourcefulness.

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<sup>38</sup> For more on the floods as essential to the pre-drainage economy, see especially Ash, *The Draining of the Fens*, 17–23. For a Biblically-tinged reading of the flood episode in *Upon Appleton House*, see Hirst and Zwicker, "High Summer at Nun Appleton," 252. It is also worth noting that local Parliamentary supporters used directed flooding during the Civil War in order to stop Royalist troop advances in the area, even as these acts were also a protest against the king's projectors' incursions into the fenlands.

<sup>39</sup> Cho, "A Green Marvell," 13–15. For the original description of the process, see Walter Blith, *The English Improver, or a New Survey of Husbandry* (London, 1649), 21–25.

<sup>40</sup> Smith notes the elision of the human-induced opening of the sluice gates with the seasonal flooding in his notes to the poem in *The Poems of Andrew Marvell*, 230. For more on the Denton sluice-gate, see John Barnard, "Marvell and Denton's 'Cataracts,'" *Review of English Studies* 31, no. 123 (1980): 310–5.

<sup>41</sup> Ash, *The Draining of the Fens*, 215.

Nonetheless, the coyness with which Marvell treats human agency in his depiction of the floating of the fields does suggest a hesitation to attribute the fertility of the Fairfax estate directly to human ingenuity. In that vein, the poem makes no effort to represent recent, state-controlled efforts to transform South Yorkshire. Notably absent from Marvell's picture of the Fairfax's rural estate are the drainage projects and workers that had arrived in the preceding decades and that had aroused so much local anger. Many of these workers came from the Continent, brought in by Dutch projectors such as Vermuyden, and settled their own communities in the area.<sup>42</sup> Marvell could be subtly critiquing the influx of foreign engineers and projectors with his clarification that Appleton House was the work of "no foreign architect" (2). Perhaps more notable, however, is the absence, especially from the second half of the poem as Marvell moves to the lands surrounding Appleton House, of the lord of the estate himself, a feature several commentators have noted. To be sure, we may see in this removal of Fairfax from his own poem a commentary on the impropriety of retirement in these fraught months of 1651 or even a turn away from such commentary at the poem's climax.<sup>43</sup> And yet, we may also see in this feature a complex reflection on the increasing involvement of the community of gentlemen landowners in their lands' management and improvement. As Cho notes in her own essay, Marvell does signal his awareness of the new methods encouraged by improvement manuals at various turns in his poem. Indeed, as I have noted, most locals at nearly all levels of society, despite their anger at the large, state-sponsored projects, supported and understood the need for these kinds of improvements to the landscape. Marvell's depiction of Fairfax ranging through his orderly gardens and of the floating of the fields in the mowing section of the poem illustrate his praise of such involvement from Appleton House's lord.

However, in the last sections of Marvell's poem, it is not the tireless hand of the virtuosic male projector that improves the natural world, but instead the strangely powerful, but passive, presence of Maria Fairfax. In stanza 87, for example, Marvell goes out of his way to emphasize her agency in the reform of nature: "'Tis she that to these gardens gave / That wondrous beauty which they have; / She straightness on the woods bestows; / To her the meadow sweetness owes" (689–93). The syntax and meter of these lines, and those that follow, place the metrical stresses firmly on Maria Fairfax, underlining her impact on both the beauty and order of the Appleton

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<sup>42</sup> For which, see Robson, "Fen Plantation: Commons, Calvinism, and the Boundaries of Belonging in Early Modern England."

<sup>43</sup> Hirst and Zwicker, "High Summer at Nun Appleton," 262–4. See also, Werlin, "'Upon Appleton House,'" 488–91. Hirst and Zwicker see Fairfax's removal from the poem as a matter of tactics as the poet shies from commenting on his patron's notable retirement from public life. Werlin also notes the prominence of Mary Fairfax in the final section of the poem, arguing that the speaker and his feminine pupil belong more easily in the private world envisioned.

House environment. In praising Fairfax's daughter for her influence over nature, Marvell is following a long panegyric tradition in which the poet envisions the power of female beauty to transform a landscape.<sup>44</sup> This tradition is given new shape here, however, due to the poem's immediate context, its immersion in and awareness of the languages and politics of natural improvement circa 1651. In fact, the praise of Maria Fairfax is suffused with contemporary scientific language, thereby aligning her reform of the environment with recent experimental efforts. At the same time, this praise remains enmeshed in feminized stereotypes; Maria's power has nothing to do with her knowledge or care for the natural world and is entirely and passively dependent upon her beauty. She possesses a bizarre and inexplicable influence over the environment merely by passing through it as the world comes to a jellied halt. As in the mower episode, Marvell here seems to be simultaneously remarking on and praising the improvements done to the Fairfax estate, such as the ordered gardens and controlled woods and meadows, while also subtly admitting the artificiality of his own poeticization of this process in the strange and exaggerated depiction of Maria's effects. Once again, the poem both suggests the perfections of the balanced and scientific, yet not overly invasive, approach towards improvement at Appleton House and hints at the ways in which poetry can occlude the real, human-driven interventions that can transform the environment. In this admission of poetry's fictions, and the hesitations over assigning credit for the environment of Appleton House's beauty directly to human artifice, we might also see a resistance to the zeal for a more widespread reformation of the wetlands areas in the east of England.

Even with all of its subtle ironies and exaggerations, Marvell's memorialization of the South Yorkshire environment in his country house poem provides its readers with a vision of a landscape free from the widespread human-induced transformations advocated for by projectors and, in 1651, the Parliamentary regime. In doing so, *Upon Appleton House* offers a clear commentary on the politics of these large-scale improvements. As Paul Warde, Kate Luce Mulry and others have all so cogently argued in their work on the invention of a culture of improvement and environmental intervention in the mid-seventeenth century, this enthusiasm for an extensive reconfiguration of natural lands was intimately connected to the ongoing political project of the formation of a centralizing state power.<sup>45</sup> This connection was certainly not lost on the fenland rioters who, in 1650–1651, became increasingly angered by

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<sup>44</sup> For more on this tradition, see J.B. Leishman, *The Art of Marvell's Poetry* (London: Hutchinson, 1966), 81.

<sup>45</sup> See, especially Paul Warde, *The Invention of Sustainability*, 144–59; Mulry, *An Empire Transformed*, passim. Eklund couches the conflicts in the fenlands as one between local inhabitants and an increasingly nationalizing and homogenizing centralized state in "Wetlands Reclamation and the Fate of the Local in Seventeenth Century England," 149–70.

what they perceived to be Parliamentary overreach no different from the abuses of royal prerogative that they had been fighting against since the 1630s. The shifting allegiances of the area's inhabitants, many of whom had fought in the Parliamentary army but now took up arms against that government's representatives, highlights the complexity of the political moment in post-regicide England, a complexity often driven by local concerns and characterized by unexpected alliances. In its depiction of a landscape still populated with flooded meadows and lush woods, with fishermen and mowers, with grazing livestock and salmon, with birds of all kinds, *Upon Appleton House* makes clear its affinity for the estate's local environs without state-led intervention, an affinity that itself was a political statement in these months of resistance and anti-state fervor. Fairfax himself had long been motivated and supported by local Yorkshire political concerns, even from his entry into the political fray in 1642.<sup>46</sup> As late as 1653–54, he can be found intervening on behalf of the powerful clothiers in Leeds against outside Parliamentarian interference.<sup>47</sup> If one thing is consistent in Fairfax's politics it seems to be his defense of local authority against an interfering, centralized state power. In its depiction of a particularly local way of life, Marvell's country house poem engages with and appears sympathetic to the localist loyalties of those resistant to Parliamentary involvement with the area's environmental affairs, suggesting perhaps similarly localist leanings in the poem's patron immediately after his retirement from his state-appointed military commission.

At the very least, Marvell's poem stands as an elaborate lyrical critique of human and state intervention into the natural environments of a particular region, a commemoration of a distinctly heterogenous natural world particular to South Yorkshire. Indeed, in the final third of the poem, as the speaker retreats to the woods surrounding the Fairfax estate, he provides a detailed account of the flora and avian fauna that flourish in the area. In these stanzas, the speaker wanders languidly through the sedge, oaks, ivy, moss, strawberries, and woodbines, attending to the variety of birds living in this habitat, beginning with the prototypically poetic nightingale, but moving to dwell on more local native species, including the stockdove, throstle, heron, hewel, and later the halcyon. In its naturalist catalogue of the various birds of the region and their behaviors and songs, this portion of Marvell's poem recalls Michael Drayton's meticulous lists of England's avian populations in his topographical poem *Poly-Olbion* more than any country house predecessor. The similarities to Drayton's survey of the birds living in England's disappearing woodlands suggests that we

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<sup>46</sup> Hopper, 'Black Tom': *Sir Thomas Fairfax and the English Revolution*, 33–46.

<sup>47</sup> Derek Hirst, "The Fracturing of the Cromwellian Alliance: Leeds and Adam Baynes," *English Historical Review* 108, no. 429 (1993): 887.

view these stanzas as a memorial of the avian inhabitants of the Yorkshire wetlands, tinged with a similar nostalgia as Drayton's catalogues. And yet, inevitably, even as he carefully details the birds' features and behaviors amidst the Nun Appleton flora, Marvell suffuses these stanzas with a fanciful and self-conscious strangeness. The possibility of ironic detachment that lingers everywhere in the poem emerges again here as the speaker entangles himself in brambles, treads on strawberries, and plays as "prelate of the grove." The speaker eventually admits in stanza 82 that these poetic imaginings really seem idle toys, an admission that questions the utility of such poetic memorials in the face of ecological change. As much as this section's whimsy might be an indirect warning to Thomas Fairfax against the dangers of retirement, it also serves as another reminder of the potential limits of poetic intervention against the ecological incursions of state power.

As we have seen, the poem's self-aware irony, its irreducible ambiguities in tone, seem even more heightened when we focus on its representations of humanity, such as the mowers or Thomas or Maria Fairfax, in the Appleton House landscape. This is no simple nostalgic celebration of a bygone era prior to widescale human incursion. However, one thing that does become clear when we consider the poem's sustained engagement with the details of the Fairfax's estate's landscape and its changing conditions is the way in which Marvell uses the rough edges of poetic expression to memorialize and accentuate this local environment in all its complexity. In its arresting details, its tactile and often unsettling images of this landscape, the poem suggests an alternative to the abstract and homogenizing power of a centralized state. In this way, the poem stands as one of our most lasting and distinctive paeans to a vernacular landscape under pressure. Nonetheless, even as it demonstrates the power of this particular aesthetic form to represent such a variegated natural world, in its self-conscious and persistent ironies, its refusal to allow the reader to settle into its naturalist idylls, it admits the dangers of such potentially comforting and idle aestheticization. "'Tis not, what once it was, the world" after all.

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## Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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