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ESSAY

Eros and Objecthood in 'Upon Appleton House'

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This essay explores the peculiar erotics of the material world in Andrew Marvell's country house poem. The discussion builds upon previous scholarship regarding the role of sexuality in this text in order to offer new directions for interpretation by combining recent approaches from queer theory with those of the new materialism. The essay finds that the trope of mirroring subtends the poem and that tracing the operations of reflection allows us to draw linkages between the personified landscape's ruins of a highly sexualized nunnery and the humans who await personal contact and long for the pleasure of connection. The analysis here dwells particularly on the speaker's role in relation to the physical environment and how that interrelationship might fuel the erotic excitement explored in 'Upon Appleton House'. The poem's culminating fantasy ultimately allows the speaker to lose his position as a subject and instead feel what it is like to be an object—not just an object of desire but a material object. To better understand the speaker's experience of desire in the absence of another subject, the essay draws our attention to his desire to take on the qualities of the natural environment, which is described in terms of the mirror. I ultimately argue that the speaker's desire to be rendered an object relies on the notion that estrangement offers a potent experience that heightens erotic pleasure.

Keywords: Andrew Marvell; 'Upon Appleton House'; queer theory; materialism; object-oriented ontology; masochism; sexuality

Indicating that temporality will play a prominent role in the poem, 'Upon Appleton House' (1651) offers a paean to the country-house estate of Thomas Fairfax not only by depicting the space in the speaker's present but also by contemplating the priory that once occupied the space. By describing the country house in relation to the 'nunnery [that] first gave it birth', Marvell sets up a history of the space that seems

initially to be teleological (11.85).¹ Just as the nunnery gives birth to the Fairfax country house, the space also yields a virgin bride able to produce heirs to the Fairfax lineage. The nunnery reluctantly gives up Isabel Thwaites, who would yield to becoming the wife of William Fairfax (and thus grandmother to Marvell's dedicatee) in 1518, when 'waving [the nuns' tongues] aside like flies,/Young Fairfax through the wall does rise' (33.257–58). Nun Appleton Priory was dissolved in 1539, when 'the wasting cloister with the rest/Was in one instant dispossessed' (34.271–72), and the land was shortly thereafter acquired by the Fairfax family where they built Appleton House. The replacement of the nunnery with Fairfax's estate represents a supersession of Protestant ideals over Catholic ones, but it also dissipates a celibate female community in favor of inevitable heterosexual marriage. Steven Zwicker finds that 'the ethical force of monogamous heterosexual coupling is unmistakable throughout the historical drama of "Upon Appleton House" [where] [d]estiny recognizes only one appropriate sexual model; all others are corrupt or immature'.² This essay complicates such a reading by suspending the familiar logic of placing chastity, autoeroticism, or homoerotic experience as precursors or *phases* prior to normative heterosexual coupling. Such a reading renders visible an intriguing and wide-ranging matrix of erotic experiences flowing through the poem.

In order to illuminate the at times surprising forms of desire and fulfillment in the poem, this essay seizes upon theoretical approaches involved in what is sometimes termed the 'new materialism'.³ That is, the analysis that follows embraces the

¹ All quotations from Marvell's poems are drawn from Andrew Marvell, *The Complete Poems*, ed. Elizabeth Story Donno (New York: Penguin, 2005). Stanza and line numbers appear parenthetically after the quotations.

² Steven N. Zwicker, 'Virgins and Whores: The Politics of Sexual Misconduct in the 1660s', in *The Political Identity of Andrew Marvell*, ed. Conal Condren and A.D. Cousins (Brookfield, VT: Scolar Press, 1990), 86–87.

³ Useful starting points for the central concepts of 'new materialism' (which overlaps with and is sometimes used interchangeably with 'object-oriented ontology' and 'thing-theory') are Jane Bennet's study cited in the following footnote, as well as Ian Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology, or What It's Like to Be a Thing* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012) and Graham Harman, *Object-Oriented Ontology: A New Theory of Everything* (London: Penguin, 2018). For a helpful overview of the evolution of material culture studies into 'new materialism', especially regarding how early modern studies have increasingly focused on things and objects, see James A. Knapp, 'Beyond Materiality in Shakespeare

idea that human subjects define themselves based on their interactions with and relations to the non-human world, which is often a repository for memories and a screen upon which feelings are projected. In particular, the following discussion will explore how the nonhuman world in Marvell's poem might be possessed of 'thing-power', to borrow Jane Bennett's term, as the estate constitutes a space where 'human being and thinghood overlap, the extent to which the us and the it slip-slide into each other'.⁴ The essay also draws upon the terms and ideas of queer theory, another methodology that is particularly invested in how typical binaries (e.g., subject/object, human/non-human, past/present) break down under the pressure of lived experience or narrative explanation. The analysis below begins with a consideration of the peculiar temporality of 'Upon Appleton House' and its described estate before moving on to examine the speaker's interaction with the estate itself. In doing so, the following argument suggests that we should acknowledge the poem's interplay between queer temporality—where the estate's past is never truly left behind—and object-oriented ontology—where material elements can take on sentient qualities and appear to evince their own subjectivity. Such a line of thinking productively complicates whether Marvell's poem is interested in advocating for or against retreat and passivity, as the following argument suggests that the poem's engagement with passivity has strong erotic and poetic motives.

Tracing Sexual Histories

Crucial to understanding the role of sexuality in the poem, especially how sexuality has a complex relationship with the passage of time and the physical geography of the estate, is acknowledging the role of material culture in Marvell's palpably erotic depiction of the Nun Appleton Priory. On one level, the cloister buildings

Studies', *Literature Compass* 11, no. 10 (2014): 677–90. For several good examples of such approaches to early literature and culture, see *Object Oriented Environments*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Julian Yates (Goleta, CA: Punctum Books, 2016). An intriguing mix of discussions of medieval and early modern examples, alongside more contemporary ones, is *Animal, Vegetable, Mineral: Ethics and Object*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Washington, DC: Oliphaunt Books, 2012).

⁴ Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 4.

metaphorically stand for the nuns' sexuality. Sarah Monette, for example, interprets the cloister gates to 'serve as a macrocosmic figuration of the unavailable female body within [which] the nuns figuratively shut the gates of their own bodies'.⁵ While a reading such as Monette's accurately pinpoints the nunnery as a space where Thwaites and other women can avoid heterosexual marriage, the rich homoeroticism that pervades interpersonal relations in the nunnery troubles the notion that Thwaites might maintain what Monette describes as 'her edenic virginity'.⁶ 'Upon Appleton House' offers an initial glimpse of the seductive qualities of the nunnery when the poem describes how:

... oft [Thwaites] spent the summer suns
 Discoursing with the subtle nuns.
 Whence in these words one to her weaved,
 (As 'twere by chance) thoughts long conceived. (12.93–96)

The depiction intertwines the activity of weaving cloth with the *conceiving* of thoughts and, in turn, presents an interaction with a material object as an analogue for sexual reproduction. Derek Hirst and Steven Zwicker note the 'sexual alterity [in] Marvell's depiction of the sewing nuns of *Upon Appleton House*, where material reproduction of the human form is realized through aesthetics'.⁷ Indeed, the notion that the alluring thoughts are 'weaved' leaves ambiguous whether they belong to Thwaites or the subtle nuns, and the fact that they are 'long conceived' draws our attention to the space itself possessing a sexualized history. That is, we do not know for how long these thoughts have been gestating, and we do not know what sort of agenda to sense in the nun's subtlety. However, we can hypothesize that the thoughts and the bodies being created and joined here through weaving—a term used to describe how materials are joined together to form new materials—may tap into long histories of erotic engagement within this isolated community.

⁵ Sarah Monette, 'Speaking and Silent Women in "Upon Appleton House"', *SEL* 42, no. 1 (Winter 2002): 160.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 159.

⁷ Derek Hirst and Steven Zwicker, 'Eros and Abuse: Imagining Andrew Marvell', *English Literary History* 74, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 388.

Perhaps the most striking account of sexual expression in the nunnery comes when we hear the nuns promise Thwaites that she will:

Each night among us to your side
 Appoint a fresh and virgin bride;
 Whom if Our Lord at midnight find,
 Yet neither should be left behind.
 Where you may lie as chaste in bed,
 As pearls together billeted.
 All night embracing arm in arm,
 Like crystal pure with cotton warm. (24.185–92)

Melissa Sanchez helps us see how this stanza calls into question the idea of the nunnery as simply a chaste space meant to delay heterosexual union. She argues that this passage evinces how 'sex at Nun Appleton is a communal affair that mirrors the communal ownership of the convent [where] Isabel may have a new "fresh and virgin bride" in her bed each night, and she may adopt and discard the masculine role of penetrating bridegroom at will'.⁸ I would add that this stanza introduces tropes that we will see later in the speaker's own erotic experience of the estate, when his own sensual pleasures will be derived from confinement, restraint, and operations of mirroring. The sense of pleasure through restraint is bolstered by the choice of the term 'billeted', which in the early modern period not only denoted 'to enroll' and 'to assign quarters to' but also operated as a noun connected to dynamics of restraint and insertion: 'a pocket or loop which receives the end of a buckled strap', 'a (thick) stick used as a weapon', or 'a small bar of metal'.⁹ Sanchez notes that by choosing the term 'billeted', the poet 'expands the definition of celibacy to include sexual penetration

⁸ Melissa Sanchez, "'She Straightness on the Woods Bestows": Protestant Sexuality and English Empire in Marvell's "Upon Appleton House"', in *Atlantic Worlds in the Long Eighteenth Century: Seduction and Sentiment*, ed. Toni Bowers and Tita Chico (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 86.

⁹ All references to English word definitions and etymologies are drawn from the *Oxford English Dictionary*. See *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (1989), s.v. 'billet (v.) and (n.)', accessed December 15, 2018, www.oed.com.

and pleasure'.¹⁰ It is also important to note that the term introduces the notion that sensual excitement can be drawn from interaction with—or the sensation of feeling like—a material object.

While the billet might operate as a metaphor for the nuns' sexual connection, it also invites us to imagine that forced confinement to a bed can be exciting and that a nonhuman object can add to sexual excitement. The closing line of the stanza, where we see the union of 'crystal pure with cotton warm', invokes the interplay of opposites: hard and soft, mineral and fabric, cold and warm. The objects at the priory might seem too cold, even too cruel, to hold the promise of intimacy. However, if we suspend that concern and take seriously Sara Ahmed's notions that '[sexual] orientations involve directions toward objects that affect what we do' and that 'we move toward and away from objects depending on how we are moved by them', the material world of the nunnery presents possibilities for new sexual identities and activities.¹¹ It is also interesting to note that this line from the poem introduces the material glass, which carries with it connotations of reflection and mirroring that are central to not only later depictions of Marvell's poetic vision but also the experience of erotic pleasure in the poem.

The depiction of sexuality here and throughout the poem thrives on ambiguity. At one point, the motives behind the nuns' seduction of the young novice is called into question when Thwaites is warned, "'tis thy 'state,/Not thee, that they would consecrate' (28.221–22). James Holstun interprets the lines to reveal that the nuns' 'professed desire for Thwaites masks their actual desire for her inheritance'.¹² This desire for material gain need not be disaggregated from physical desire, however, given that the early modern definition for the word 'estate' encompassed both one's 'condition with respect to worldly prosperity, fortune' and one's 'state or condition

¹⁰ Sanchez, 'Protestant Sexuality and English Empire', 87.

¹¹ Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), 28.

¹² James Holstun, "'Will You Rend Our Ancient Love Asunder?": Lesbian Elegy in Donne, Milton, and Marvell', *ELH* 54, no. 4 (Winter 1987): 850.

in general, whether material or moral, bodily or mental'.¹³ Holstun ultimately argues that 'Upon Appleton House' leaves 'lesbianism utterly a creature of the papist past and possibly no more than a self-interested economic fiction', going on to posit that 'lesbian desire simply does not exist in Marvell's idealized Protestant aristocratic order'.¹⁴ Yet, as Sanchez and Nigel Smith have noted, a later description of Mary Fairfax carries connotations of female same-sex desire because the depiction echoes Donne's 'Sappho to Philaenis'.¹⁵ As we will see below, the homoerotic undertones of the depiction of Mary derive directly from her imagined interaction with the physical landscape.

One of the nuns states that the priory walls 'restrain the world without,/But hedge our liberty about' (8.59–60). When we note that 'liberty' operates as a synonym for 'license' (including sexual license) and 'leisure', we see the nun's claim dovetailing with Philip Major's assertion that the poem 'continuously manages to find prison-like things desirable to the imprisoned'.¹⁶ We need not assume, though, that depictions of imprisonment suggest that the sexuality of the nunnery is compartmentalized in a space that can be demolished or confined to a past period cordoned off from the present. The poem tells us that 'vice infects the very wall' of the nunnery, and this recalls an earlier stanza where we are told that Appleton House 'rose' from the 'neighbour-ruin' of the priory whose abandoned buildings constituted the 'quarries' for Fairfax's home (27.216, 11.87–88). The imbrication of past and present invites us to set aside teleological readings of sociality and sexuality in the poem. In doing so, we can resist adhering to the logics of 'straight time', which queer theorists have described as a progressive version of temporality that links sexuality to reproduction,

¹³ See *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (1989), s.v. 'estate, (*n.*)', accessed December 15, 2018, www.oed.com. The abbreviated version of 'estate' that we see in the line ('state') carried similar meanings of a person's 'mental or emotional condition', 'physical condition', or 'livelihood, wealth, or possessions'. Intriguingly, our modern notion of 'estate' as 'landed property' is not attested until the late eighteenth century.

¹⁴ Holstun, 851–52.

¹⁵ Sanchez, 'Protestant Sexuality and English Empire', 90, and (cited in Sanchez) Andrew Marvell, *The Poems of Andrew Marvell*, ed. Nigel Smith (New York and London: Routledge, 2006), note to ll. 695–96.

¹⁶ Philip Major, "Liberty" in Line 100 of Marvell's "Upon Appleton House": The Meaning and the Context," *Notes and Queries* 54, no. 4 (December 2007): 421–22.

accumulation, and the development of the family.¹⁷ We can productively generate a queerer reading of the text, especially if we answer the recent challenge from Valerie Traub that scholars rethink our 'presumptive knowledge' about sex in the past and that we question 'how we know as much as *what* we know'.¹⁸ In the case of Marvell's poem, we do not know what, if any, sexual activities are imagined to be occurring in the priory. However, we are told that these non-specific vices resonate in the building's stones and that these stones now house the present-day occupants of the estate. Admitting this helps us suspend the impulse to read Marvell's poem as narrating inevitable progress towards Protestant married life within the Fairfax estate as such a life does not preclude other types of relations or pleasures.

The redeployed physical structure of the nunnery represents the ways in which previous experience—whether as cultural memory of a Catholic past, personal memory of life before marriage, or proprietorship of land—is never truly elided with the onset of new eras. Neither the estate nor the poem can obliterate objects and material traces as it develops in narrative (historical, poetic, or otherwise). In a now famous formulation, Lee Edelman has described 'reproductive futurism' as that drive which insists that narratives of progress place primacy on the child and the biological reproduction of future generations.¹⁹ Certainly, such a teleology is present here, as the poem considers earlier generations and celebrates new ones. However, the text also valorizes a recursive form of reproductivity, where the past is not left behind with the advent of the present but rather imbues the present with not only meaning but also erotically charged energies. Access to experiences that took place in the past,

¹⁷ For discussions that help us to understand the logics of 'straight time' and to think about how queer experience can trouble those logics, see Tom Boellstorff, 'When Marriage Fails: Queer Coincidences in Straight Time', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 13, no. 2–3 (2007): 228, and J. Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: NYU Press, 2005), 10.

¹⁸ Valerie Traub, *Thinking Sex with the Early Moderns* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 34.

¹⁹ The first chapter of his book offers a cogent articulation of the idea. See Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 1–32.

enabled by a fantasmatic relation to the natural environment itself, offers the promise of new and sometimes solitary pleasures.

Marvell's Reflecting Objects of Desire

As we saw in the case of the pure crystal intermingling with warm cotton, Marvell invokes the material glass at junctures when the poem considers non-heteronormative forms of erotic relations. As the poem moves into its narrative present, the time of the speaker's interaction with the estate, glass becomes a highly charged material for discussing his sensations of estrangement and his Narcissus-like engagement with the natural world. In the fifty-eighth stanza, Marvell likens his poetic depiction of Fairfax's estate to the experience of gazing through glass when he describes cattle that 'seem within the polished grass/A landscape drawn in looking glass'.²⁰ Already, even before the introduction of the word 'glass' in the couplet's second line, we see the introduction of the material into the reader's mind, as we are invited to slip on the phrase 'polished grass' to read *polished glass*. The wordplay also asks us to see resemblance between two very different objects, just as we are asked earlier to imagine cotton and hard crystal intermingling when the nuns share beds. Glass and grass are not particularly similar, and we do not think of grass as being polished. However, Marvell calls our attention to the unexpected kinship that can occur between elements, and this kinship extrapolates to relations between humans, as well as between humans and objects, in the poem. Marvell then writes that the cows:

... shrunk in the huge pasture show
 As spots, so shaped, on faces do.
 Such fleas, ere they approach the eye,
 In multiplying glasses lie.
 They feed so wide, so slowly move,
 As constellations do above. (58.459–64)

²⁰ For an excellent discussion of how Renaissance poets seized upon tropes related to the making and utilizing of glass in order to discuss the poetic process, see Rayna Kalas, *Frame, Glass, Verse: The Technology of Poetic Invention in the English Renaissance* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2007).

The poet's gaze operates at once as a 'looking glass' or mirror, suggesting that his poem can render a pastoral scene that accurately reflects the natural world. Yet the lines here emphasize that the poet can play with perspective, just as glass can. Replicating the magnifying or 'multiplying' glasses of the microscope and the telescope, the poem can transform cattle into spots on faces, into fleas, and then into distant stars or planets. The operations of glass (and, by extension, the work of the poet) enable an intimacy between the human and non-human, as well as animal and non-animal, when cows become spots or become fleas then safely come close to the human eye. This intimacy has an estranging quality, too, as the viewer experiences the close presence of cows or stars even though they are physically absent from the viewer's immediate vicinity.

Marvell connects the glass-enhanced gaze of the physical eye to the mind's eye lens of recollection. The latter is able to recall physical details of the estate in much the same way a microscope or a telescope can, for example by seeing cattle from afar and then up close. The mind's eye is like glass in the sense that it enables different perspectives, but it also exceeds the capability of glass, in the sense that it can revivify past experiences and describe distant places. Marvell can, for example, display the estate on the page and, in doing so, express his intimate connection to Fairfax's home. Yet, as we will see, the poem is much more than a mirror. Joan Faust describes Marvell as 'designing the poem as a type of mirror for magistrates, yet angling himself within the portrait mirror'.²¹ While the poem does place Marvell's speaker in a space in which he encourages Thomas Fairfax to see himself, it also places the speaker there alone. This strategy represents a break from other poems in the country house genre. In Aemilia Lanyer's 'The Description of Cook-ham' (1611) and Ben Jonson's 'To Penshurst' (1616), for example, the authors depict themselves accompanying the owners of the estates.²² Marvell's approach allows the poem not

²¹ Joan Faust, "'Upon Appleton House': Marvell's Creation of a Liminal Realm', *Explorations in Renaissance Culture* 35, no. 1 (Summer 2009): 54.

²² Describing how her patron's virtues appear in her poem, Lanyer maintains that, 'my glasse being steele, declares them to be true'. This at once calls our attention to the power of glass as a truth-telling element but also stresses that the term 'glass' is multivalent because it can describe metal. Aemilia

only to trouble our sense of the mirror as a purely reflective surface but also to meditate on absence. For Marvell, the Fairfax estate can resuscitate the erotic energies of nuns from a past era and offer sensual experiences even without the presence of another human being. It is interesting to note that Marvell's references to glass correspond to contemporaneous advances in the manufacture of crystal mirrors, as well as a fascination with methods for scientific discovery and their implications for social relations. Nigel Smith notes, 'Marvell knew Robert Boyle and was evidently keenly familiar with the new science and the inventions that were making possible its discoveries'.²³ The poet's imagination goes beyond that of the natural philosopher, however, to speculate about how new forms of perspicuity might drive new forms of desire.²⁴

Returning to the notion that glass has transformative powers, 'Upon Appleton House' invokes the image of a mirror to ask us again to imagine grass as glass. The river:

... everywhere the meadow holds;
 And its yet muddy back doth lick,
 Till as a crystal mirror slick;
 Where all things gaze themselves, and doubt
 If they be in it or without. (60.635–39)

Lanyer, *The Poems of Aemilia Lanyer: Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, ed. Susanne Woods (New York: Oxford UP, 1993), 31, l. 212). Lanyer's poem complements Marvell's as both poets seize upon the country house poem as an occasion to discuss erotic desire. Amy Greenstadt has argued that Lanyer frames Cookeham as a blissful homoerotic space for women like the nunnery glimpsed in Marvell's poem. Amy Greenstadt, 'Aemilia Lanyer's Pathetic Fallacy', *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 8, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2008): 67–97. See also Michael Morgan Holmes, 'The Love of Other Women: Rich Chains and Sweet Kisses', in *Aemilia Lanyer: Gender, Genre, and the Canon*, ed. Marshall Grossman (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1998), 167–90.

²³ Nigel Smith, *Andrew Marvell: The Chameleon* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 204.

²⁴ For a broader discussion of how glass operates in poems by Marvell and his contemporaries, see John Garrison, *Glass* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), 24–36. The present essay extrapolates from that book's larger theorization of the relationship between the material glass and the operations of desire.

Like a 'crystal mirror' with its uncanny capabilities, the meadow can capture things that gaze into it and cause them to question whether they are outside or inside the reflective surface. The estate is a site for seeking one's reflection and also for troubling the notion of oneself as a singular, human subject. Echoing Foucault's description of the mirror as a heterotopia 'that enables me to see myself there where I am absent', the river motivates gazers to question their location and whether they are part of the physical world itself.²⁵ One recognizes for a moment that one is composed of the material that presents the reflection. Thus, the physical environment takes on the quality of a subject, first because one can imagine the self as constituted in a reflective surface and then because one can imagine that surface having a personality of its own. Stephen Guy-Bray insightfully observes that the 'important actor in this part of the poem is not the speaker, who desires passivity, but the river [because] the river is not only like an artificer but also like a lover'.²⁶ As the river is granted subjectivity, the world around it seems to take on agency and personality too. The river interacts with the meadow to grant it reflective properties so that 'all things gaze themselves' within, stimulating sentience in other objects. In 'Upon Appleton House', glass seems to take on a subjectivity of its own. It transforms subjects into objects. Whether in the form of new scientific ways of knowing or in terms of new mirrors, Marvell turns towards the past and towards the evocative erotic opportunities available within the natural world. And he does so by orientating himself towards glass.

In this peculiar world, where 'all things gaze themselves', the mirror-river seems at once to grant subjectivity to any object reflected in its surface and to invite a turn inward. Directly following the description of cattle transformed by looking at them through glass, Marvell sets a scene 'to conclude these pleasant acts' with the opening of 'cataracts' that transform the meadow into a 'sea' (59.467–74). Early modern meanings of the term 'cataract' included both 'a violent downpour or rush of water' and 'an opacity of the crystalline lens of the eye'. With the double meaning of 'cataract',

²⁵ Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', trans. Jay Miskowicz, *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1986): 24.

²⁶ Stephen Guy-Bray, 'No Present', in *Sex, Gender and Time in Fiction and Culture*, eds. Ben Andrews and Jana Funke (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 47.

the transformation occurs both because the meadow is flooded and because we see the meadow as something else by means of the glass-like 'crystalline lens' of the eye. Though now covered by water, the meadow is not truly a 'sea', but its reflective surface and our imaginative act of *seeing* can make it so. Marvell thereby seizes upon the tension wherein 'cataract' invokes the notion of sight while simultaneously suggesting a condition that can alter or diminish human sight. The estate land once more resounds with its history. The space is the new form (sea/glass) while remaining the old form (meadow/grass). Ahmed posits that orientations derive from identifying a desired object, that the world of material objects has a crucial role in how sexual orientations are constituted. She also notes how 'disorientation [...] involves not only bodies becoming objects, but also how objects are gathered to create a ground, or to clear a space on the ground (the field)'.²⁷ In using the term 'ground', Ahmed is speaking less literally about the earth and more about space and the way that it *grounds* subjects and objects in physical relation to each other. Still, I think the choice of word throws into relief a key dynamic in Marvell's poem. To talk about what desire wants, the speaker of 'Upon Appleton House' must first confuse his orientation—mistaking one object for another, confusing subjects and objects—in order to meditate on the erotic potential for such disorientation. Indeed, he uses the natural world to both depict the titillating charge of subject/object confusion and to argue for the naturalness of it.

To explain the interplay between gazing, disorientation, and transformation, the poem invokes the myth of Narcissus. This figure, who mistakes a watery reflection for a sentient subject, renders visible the interplay between desire and absence. When Marvell tell us, 'for his shade which therein shines,/Narcissus-like, the sun too pines', we see a startling instance of desire as a desire for absence (80.639–40). That is, the sun longs to be where it is not. Paul Hammond argues that the sun's pining is 'overtly a moment of homoerotic and autoerotic rapture' and points to a string of instances where contemporaneous readers of Marvell's lyric identified depictions of same-sex

²⁷ Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 160.

desire and self-pleasure in his work.²⁸ Yet it is not simply that the sun is imagined to possess subjectivity and to desire something that is simply a reflection of itself. The Narcissus myth invites a more complex formulation for desire, especially when we acknowledge that the youth in the myth desires not himself but a version of himself made from non-human matter. Hammond posits that, in gender and in 'Upon Appleton House', 'Narcissus stands for self-love, for auto-eroticism', yet Guy-Bray's incisive analysis of Marvell's poem argues that the author uses the figure to articulate a more complicated take on sameness and difference.²⁹ Guy-Bray shows us that Narcissus 'desired not himself but rather his reflection. The subject's reflection in the mirror is an obvious example of something that is both the same as one and not the same as one'.³⁰

We can see support for Guy-Bray's claim where the sun counterintuitively shines in the shade and in fact desires to be in the space of the shade where sunlight is absent. With the pun on the word 'pines' as both a form of longing and a form of tree, the sun at once desires to be shaded from itself and to bask in its own rays as the forest does. The layered logic of the image, then, suggests that to desire something is to desire to resemble that thing. Yet to desire a material object is to desire to lose oneself as a subject. The shining shade instantiates Marvell's complex meditation on desire and on subject/object relations. The Narcissistic sun longs to be in the space where it can feel the effects of its absence, but this space exists only when he gazes upon it.

Like the sun which desires to occupy the shade, which itself is generated by the sun's gaze and is a space where the sun is not, Ovid's Narcissus directs his desire towards an *umbra*.³¹ This Latin term, which can denote both a shadow and a ghost, emphasizes that Narcissus longs both to enter the mirror's space that shows an

²⁸ Andrew Hammond, *Figuring Sex Between Men from Shakespeare to Rochester* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 206.

²⁹ Hammond, 205.

³⁰ Guy-Bray, 'No Present', 45.

³¹ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Frank Justus Miller (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1951), 154, l. 434.

outline of his absence and to connect with a representation of himself as no longer living. In this, we see a compelling instance of Leo Bersani's well-known formulation of desire as self-shattering. Indeed, Ovid's Narcissus and Marvell's speaker both provide compelling case studies for Bersani's formulation, which he has recently articulated as the state of achieving 'the very essence of the sexual that would consist in a shattering of ego boundaries produced by any number of "unaccountable", unclassifiable objects'.³² In Foucault's heterotopic mirror, 'I discover my absence from the place where I am since I see myself over there'.³³ We see this in Ovid, too, when the youth cries

Oh, that I might be parted from my own body!
and, strange prayer for a lover, I would that what I love were absent from me!

o utinam a nostro secedere corpore possem!
*votum in amante novum, vellem, quod amamus, abesset.*³⁴

Leonard Barkan interprets the myth to suggest that 'Narcissus's mirror-image is his own metamorphic form' when the young man is 'revealed to love a bodiless hope'.³⁵ Thus, Narcissus's destruction fulfills his desire because he achieves absence by abandoning his body and becoming a mere reflection. An interpretation of him becoming a flower at the end of the tale would suggest that the scene resolves with him joining the natural world. In either interpretation, we see the myth possessing ties to the situation for the speaker at the end of Marvell's poem, whose body joins with the natural world of the estate.

Thus far, I have suggested that we should acknowledge how the poem's temporality rejects teleology—as the estate's past resonates within the present—and how the poem's depicted objects evince subjectivity—as material and environmental

³² Leo Bersani, 'The Power of Evil and the Power of Love', in Leo Bersani and Adam Phillips, *Intimacies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 67.

³³ Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', 24.

³⁴ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 156, ll. 467–68.

³⁵ Leonard Barkan, *Mute Poetry, Speaking Pictures* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 52–3.

components appear sentient. This allows us to go further than simply arguing that homoeroticism pervades the early part of the poem or even that later inhabitants of the estate experience homoerotic longing. We can argue that the estate itself is charged with the promise of desire and fulfillment, and that this presence of sexuality unlinked to human bodies allows the poet to blur lines between sentient and non-sentient entities. Indeed, it is that very blurring that generates erotic energy. In the eighty-eighth stanza, Mary is invited to gaze into the natural world of the estate and see herself as desirable. She takes 'for a glass the limpid brook,/Where she may all her Beauties look' (88.701–2). In one of several of the poem's allusions to the Narcissus myth, these lines position glass as a reflective surface that enables an awareness of one's desirability and as a lens through which the poet can view the past inhabited by Isabella Thwaites. Maria's vitrification of nature is a form of interaction, as her longing to know her own attractiveness transforms water into glass. Diverse entities—Isabella, Mary, the sun, the river, the meadow, and eventually the speaker—all seem to engage with crystal and glass materials. The poem showcases an eros that does not necessarily connect people with other people, but instead eliminates the need for others. Mary appears cloistered as she experiences a form of same-sex longing for her own 'beauties' because 'since she would not have them seen,/The wood about her draws a screen' (88.703–4). While a community based in female same-sex desire does disappear in the poem, echoes of such relations obtain in the lands themselves, resisting foreclosure of erotic possibility. And, if the land is a space of erotic history, we begin to see here the speaker's desire to be like the landscape and to connect to its erotic promise.

Reflection and Restraint

In 'Upon Appleton House', the description of the sun as Narcissus coincides with the speaker's entry into the shaded woods that the sun pines to enter. Ryan Netzley reads the speaker's decision to retire into the woods as a break from the series of reversals that characterize both Marvell's poem and Fairfax's career in politics. While Netzley interprets Marvell's (and, by implication, Fairfax's) retirement as 'the termination of one's ensnarement within the world of politics and pragmatism', I would note that

the woods offer a new form of ensnarement.³⁶ As described above, the bed-sharing nuns were depicted in terms of physical restraint. The same dynamics carry into the estate of the speaker's present. This is no longer a space of daily weaving and nightly sleeping 'together billeted/All night embracing arm in arm'. Yet, it is still a space that cultivates forms of bondage. The speaker pleads with the estate lands to restrain him in an evocative scene:

Bind me ye woodbines in your twines,
Curl me about ye gadding vines,
And oh so close your circles lace,
That I may never leave this place. (77.610–13)

Previous scholarship has noted the powerful erotics in this scene and their parallels to those that occurred in the space's past. Sanchez, for example, observes that the scene 'evokes the same eroticized celibacy as the nunnery', and Holmes observes that these lines show how the nuns' promises of 'mystical sexuality [...] mirror the narrator's own alluring religio-erotic fantasies'.³⁷ I extend these arguments by suggesting that the narrator experiences something more than what the cloister offers. The dynamics do indeed mirror the estate's sexual history but the narrator has moved to the other side of the mirror and into the space characterized by its capability to reflect. He achieves sexual excitement without human community and by rendering himself an element of the natural environment. This assertion need not exclude a reading in which the speaker anthropomorphizes the vines. Indeed, the queerness of the scene resides in the blurred lines between the material world being given human agency and the human actor taking on qualities of the material world.

The tendency of the estate to want to tie him down is embedded in the language itself: the chime of rhyme signals a desire for new forms of kinship and affinity. That

³⁶ Ryan Netzley, *Lyric Apocalypse: Milton, Marvell, and the Nature of Events* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 154.

³⁷ Sanchez, 89, and Holmes, 170.

is, the operations of the poetic language showcase the intertwining nature of present and past sexual excitement that Marvell ponders. The speaker expresses the same desire for an enmeshed experience of the landscape that the sun expresses, not only by seeming to intermingle with the flora but also through the increased internal rhyme where 'woodbines' will 'bind' him in their 'twines'. By emphasizing that both the priory's nuns and the speaker relish pleasurable restraint, the poem suggests a shared masochistic ritual. And once more we see Marvell exploring sexuality's historical dimension. The poem offers an apt case study for the ways that, as Elizabeth Freeman puts it, 'the body in sadomasochistic ritual becomes a means of invoking history—personal pasts, collective suffering, and quotidian forms of injustice—in an idiom of pleasure'.³⁸ The interlinking of sounds and the depiction of physical 'lace' offer a gentle entry into the fantasy of bondage that will exhibit the speaker's success at achieving ego-dissolving connection with the estate.³⁹ The obscure origin of the word 'gadding' contributes to the erotics of the scene. The common view is that the adjective 'gadding' derives from the primary sense of the verb 'gad': 'to rush about like an animal stung by gad-flies'. This meaning, which conflates penetration and restraint when applied to vines in Marvell's poem, shows us that no matter how pleasing the speaker finds the notion of being bound to the estate, he is still aware of the green world's pernicious side. As Vin Nardizzi has shown, any manicured estate can be the site of 'darker and more perverse figurations' because 'greener grass may look better, but it's not always safer'.⁴⁰

The speaker of Marvell's poem seeks to be assured of his bondage. Unsure of the vines' tenacity, he speaks directly to them:

³⁸ Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 137.

³⁹ The exaggerated rhyme also might be played for humor, of course, as the chime—like the estate's gadding vines—is somewhat cloying. Thomas Drant's 1567 translation of Horace's *Arte of Poetrie* warns against poets who 'dothe belch out puffinge rymes, And gaddingly doth straye'. Just as Horace warns, Marvell does gaddingly stray here—into an extended depiction of a steamy encounter with gadding vines no less. Horace, *Horace his arte of Poetrie, pistles, and Satyrs Englished*, trans. Thomas Drant (London: 1567), B, vij.

⁴⁰ Vin Nardizzi, 'Greener', in *Prismatic Ecologies: Ecotheory Beyond Green*, ed. Jeffrey J. Cohen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 153.

But, lest your fetters prove too weak,
 Ere I your silken bondage break,
 Do you, O brambles, chain me too,
 And courteous briars nail me though. (77.614–17)

The natural world and its plant materials now seem an interlocutor for the speaker of the poem and one that possesses human attitudes such as courtesy. Just as the interpenetration of cotton and crystal characterized sexual relations in the priory, soft and hard coalesce around the silks and lace that become chains and nails which weave him into the estate. In this fantasy of chaining and nailing, the speaker finds himself experiencing conflated erotics that tie alliteration and repetition to the space and tie that space to sensuality. This scene takes us back to the description of the nuns arm-in-arm and 'billeted' together in bed. In the stanzas about the nunnery discussed above, Thwaites accessed the pleasures of an encounter with a bride while constrained to a bed and while interlocking arms with other women. This depiction also recalls the invocation of weaving in the nunnery episode, which introduced the trope of binding and restraint that is now central to the narrator's erotic experience of the estate. The 'lace' and 'silken bondage' of the passages above give us scenes of weaving, as the natural and the human interleave just as past and present do. Yet the experience—like that of Mary or the sun—is one of estrangement. The speaker here can experience these forms of erotic attachment without the presence of others because the land itself is so charged with sexuality.

The seventy-eighth stanza frames the speaker's encounter with the estate as enhanced by daily ritual:

Here in the morning tie my chain,
 Where the two woods have made a lane;
 While, like a guard on either side,
 The Trees before their Lord divide (78.618–21)

His chain binds him to the land, and we see that the trees can be understood as human guards who will part for Lord Fairfax. Yet we do not see this arrival of Fair-

fax. Like Narcissus, Marvell's speaker is restrained by the promise of future connection and seems satisfied to have that connection infinitely delayed. He resembles the speaker in Barthes' *A Lover's Discourse*, who states: "the being I am waiting for is not real. ... "I create and re-create it over and over, starting from my capacity to love, starting from my need for it": the other comes here where I am waiting, here where I have already created him/her. And if the other does not come, I hallucinate the other: waiting is a delirium".⁴¹ Marvell's speaker experiences love in isolation in two ways: as the writer sitting and longing for the connection described in the poem and as the character whose autoerotic encounter presages the arrival of the lord of the estate. In this, we can see the notion that masochism has a temporal dimension because it 'prolong[s] preparatory detail and ritual at the expense of climax of consummation'.⁴² This bonding with the land satiates the speaker's desire for connection, even while the subsequent arrival of his lord remains speculative. The poem is thus situated to answer those who might wonder if 'the truth about sex is that we would rather do it on our own or that, indeed, we are doing it on our own even when we seem [...] to be doing it with other people'.⁴³ Put simply, in the past and present worlds of Appleton in this poem, the answer is *yes*.

The pleasurable scenario in 'Upon Appleton House' resembles that in Marvell's 'The Garden', where self-satisfaction derives from the absence of other human beings. The poem depicts Adam as happiest before the Fall, where 'such was that happy garden-state,/While man there walked without a mate' (56–7). The situation in 'The Garden' exhibits striking parallels to the pairing of erotic restraint with the operations of the mirror in 'Upon Appleton House'. The speaker in 'The Garden' encounters a space where 'the luscious clusters of the vine/Upon my mouth do crush their wine' and when 'Ensnared with flowers, I fall on grass' (35–6, 40). The scene relies on the garden as a profound reflection of the speaker, where his 'mind' in the natural world 'Does straight its own resemblance find' (44). This propensity for the desiring subject

⁴¹ Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 2010), 39.

⁴² Kaja Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 189.

⁴³ Adam Phillips, *Side Effects* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2007), 59.

to find likeness in the non-human and to find desirable the natural world's promise of aggressive restraint instantiates Cynthia Marshall's supposition that 'the concept of sadomasochism proves particularly helpful in understanding the desire for violence in textuality and in uncovering the early modern impulse to undo or negate the emergent self'.⁴⁴ That is, if Marvell cannot in actuality find a garden that will tie him down for its pleasure, he can at least fantasize about his mirror-self in the poem experiencing such an encounter in both 'The Garden' and 'Upon Appleton House'.

At the end of the stanza where he asks to be chained between the woods in the morning, the speaker of 'Upon Appleton House' asks to be restrained again in the evening: 'But, where the floods did lately drown,/There at the evening stake me down' (78.624–25). Just as Gilles Deleuze describes the masochist as one who 'experiences waiting in its pure form' because he 'waits for pleasure as something that is bound to be late',⁴⁵ Marvell's speaker will keep waiting, day after day. Indeed, given the rich erotics of the encounter with the natural world of the estate, the reward of waiting may obviate the need for Fairfax to arrive. Karmen MacKendrick argues that because erotic bondage exhibits an inherent focus on 'delay, this ritualized and sometimes seeming violence of restraint, opposes both the productive and the teleological'.⁴⁶ The situation in 'Upon Appleton House' is Janus-faced as the speaker looks forward to the always imminent arrival of Fairfax while looking backward to revivify the legacies of eros in the estate's past.

The ultimate payoff of the engagement with the estate lands seems to be a loss of distinction between the speaker and the natural world. He remarks:

Oh what a pleasure 'tis to hedge
My temples here with heavy sedge;
Abandoning my lazy side,

⁴⁴ Cynthia Marshall, *The Shattering of the Self: Violence, Subjectivity, and Early Modern Texts* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 7.

⁴⁵ Gilles Deleuze, *Coldness and Cruelty*, trans. Jean McNeil, in *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty* (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 71.

⁴⁶ Karmen MacKendrick, *Counterpleasures* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1999), 111.

Stretcht as a bank unto the tide. (81.641–44)

The speaker underscores that he has achieved the level of ego dissolution with the estate that the sun pined for earlier. He does not stretch *on* the bank of the river; he stretches *as* the bank abutting the tide.⁴⁷ The speaker renders himself an object in order to re-enact past scenes of eros, but the kinship he feels with objects in the natural world enables pleasure without a human partner.⁴⁸ And it is counter-intuitively an active position, as he does not abandon himself *to* his lazy side but rather *abandons his lazy side* as he takes on the material quality of the landscape itself. The speaker yearns

... to suspend my sliding foot
 On the osier's undermined root,
 And in its branches tough to hang,
 While at my lines the fishes twang! (81.645–48)

He now becomes the restrainer, at once teasing the roots that bind the trees to the land and then casting rope to catch fish. Although not necessarily true for every masochistic experience—depicted in literature or otherwise—James Bromley's assertion holds true for Marvell's poem: '... since masochism insists that submission be geared toward the production of pleasure, masochistic sexual practice endows the simulated position of powerlessness with a degree of control over the terms of the simulation'.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Levi Bryant describes a point of view that embraces what he has termed an 'onticology', where 'being itself is composed of objects', as well as relations between objects, rendering visible how subjects themselves are inevitably objects. See Levi Bryant, *The Democracy of Objects* (Ann Arbor: Open Humanities Press/University of Michigan Library, 2011), 50.

⁴⁸ Writing about contemporary artistic performance and production, Eunjung Kim has suggested ways in which objectification, or framing oneself as an object, has possibilities for liberation from the negativity that has haunted the concept. Eunjung Kim, 'Unbecoming Human: An Ethics of Objects', *GLQ: A Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies* 21, no. 2–3 (June 2015): 295–320.

⁴⁹ James Bromley, *Intimacy and Sexuality in the Age of Shakespeare* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 81. Indeed, Marvell's poem tracks to a strand of thought that Lisa S. Starks-Estes finds in Shakespeare's work, 'the traumatic shattering of the self that is the effect of masochism in the

The poem's ending finds the narrator taking on the qualities of the river, the very entity whose reflective properties entice Narcissus in Ovid's tale and whose transformational capabilities promised to turn the sun into shade and a meadow into a sea. At the same time, the poet explicitly tells us that Mary has the power to leave 'Nature ... wholly vitrified' and that 'Nothing could make the river be/So crystal-pure but only she' (86.688, 87.693–4). Mary's and the speaker's separate erotic experiences of the estate may be solitary in nature, but they also connect the two individuals. That is, Mary transforms the estate into a world made of glass that reflects her beauty back to her and inspires the speaker to reflect upon her beauty. This environment hewn from reflective material enables human visitors to experience the erotics of time and history, as they find that delay enhances pleasure and that pleasures in the present may be fueled by pleasures that took place in the past.

In this paean to a country estate and its history, the reader finds a depiction of time's queer operations and of humans' longing to be other than they are. New forms of pleasure emerge as the poem suspends expected logics of before and after, of human and non-human. In contemplating such possibilities, Marvell's speaker ends up experiencing the world as an object does and, in turn, gaining access to the speculative pleasures held within the natural world of the estate. Indeed, it may be that the objects that inhabit the estate—its rivers, meadows, branches, and such—seem better suited than humans to endure the delay of awaiting connection that may or may not occur in the future. Whatever the case, the poem's final stanza presents a situation where distinctions blur once more. Fishers in canoes seem like tortoises, which in turn merge and become one with the 'dark hemisphere' (97.775). This transitional space where humans become animals and animals become landscape incites desire in the speaker, who ambiguously states 'let's in' (97.776). Perhaps, as readers, we are being invited to join him.

extreme—the ultimate splitting or rupture of male subjectivity'. See Lisa S. Starks-Estes, *Violence, Trauma, and Virtus in Shakespeare's Roman Poems and Plays* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 105.

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The author has no competing interests to declare.

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