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### Essay

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ESSAY

## Vulnerable Life in Marvell's Mower Poems

Jason A. Kerr

Brigham Young University, US  
[Jason\\_Kerr@byu.edu](mailto:Jason_Kerr@byu.edu)

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This essay reads Marvell's mower poems and 'The Garden' as case studies in the ethics of vulnerability that collectively work to illuminate a potential for joyful connection—with people, but also with the natural world—in the practice of critique, which otherwise has a melancholic potential for over-identifying with its object. Whereas vulnerability commonly denotes susceptibility to harm, this essay builds on the work of Erinn Gilson to show that vulnerability is ontological, a shared feature of human existence that makes both harm and connection possible. Vulnerability figures in the poems through the relationships they depict: between the mower and himself, Juliana, and the grass. As a counterbalance to the various strategies that they deploy to escape the vulnerability (and potentiality for harm) occasioned by these relationships, the poems also present the possibility of an 'innocent', non-violent relationship of mutual fruitfulness with the grass—a possibility that at least hypothetically extends to relationships with other people. These latter possibilities suggest a form of critique that escapes its melancholic temperament—the presumption that the world portends only harm—and allows even complicity to contain the potential for joyful, mutual, and fruitful connection with others.

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**Keywords:** Marvell; Mower poems; vulnerability; critique; melancholy; joy; sexuality

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Given how often Marvell's poems exhibit defensiveness and distancing irony, they might seem unlikely candidates for developing Erinn Gilson's recent (2014, 2016) thesis that vulnerability, in addition to indicating susceptibility to harm, also grounds the possibility of human connection. Yet this is what I will argue the mower poems, read together with 'The Garden', do. Whereas 'Damon the Mower' and 'The Mower's Song' seem to portend a future of continuing, recursive violence, 'The Mower to the Glow-Worms' and 'The Mower against Gardens' offer the possibility of 'innocent', non-colonizing, mutually fruitful relation grounded in shared vulnerability. In doing

so, these latter poems address a conceptual difficulty in Judith Butler's ethics of vulnerability—a difficulty that speaks to the discussion that Rita Felski has provoked about the 'limits of critique' (Felski 2015; Anker and Felski 2017). Butler responds to the reality of politically imposed vulnerability—what she calls 'precarity'—by arguing that grief offers a path to solidarity. Taking up Freud's distinction between mourning and melancholia, Butler offers grieving 'as the slow process by which we develop a point of identification with suffering itself', a process that remains politically vital only 'if the narcissistic preoccupation of melancholia can be moved into a consideration of the vulnerability of others' (Butler 2004, 30). As Amy Hollywood observes, though, in her study of mystics like Beatrice of Nazareth and Margaret Ebner, who meditated so much on Christ's suffering that they came to experience it in their own bodies (2016, 67–90), there is a melancholic risk to making 'identification with suffering itself' the *sine qua non* of ethical life. If Butlerian critique issues in laudable and necessary protest on behalf of the normatively unmournable, such protest, important as it may be, is insufficient, as Hollywood argues: '[T]he energy for efficacious action comes not solely through melancholy, but also through joy, through a love of the world, that in love, demands change. ... Not suffering *or* joy, for we can't have the one without the other; we can't live well—we can't *live*—on sorrow and anger and rage alone' (Hollywood 2016, 64). The question is what a critique that points to life and joyful connection looks like.

Critique remains useful in its sphere, lest violence gain full sway, and yet critique itself, in its perpetual restlessness, risks becoming a melancholic incorporation of the very violence it seeks to correct. Felski captures the nature of this risk when she writes that critique's 'gestures of demystification and exposure are no longer oppositional but obligatory' (Felski 2015, 115). Critique, like melancholy, risks pathological over-identification with the evasive other; if critique is obligatory, it has become unhealthily dependent on its allegedly nefarious object. Marvell's poems, by contrast, hint at a different way of being in the world, an empathic one that incorporates the other by way of enabling a kind of ethical distance between self and other. Rowan Williams (2014) articulates the paradox of such empathy as follows: 'The ethically significant respect of this sort of empathy would be in saying not "I know how you feel",

but "I have no idea how you feel". In his view, empathy consists in the double move of acknowledging that other people exist, perceive the world, and make meaning of what they see, but also that I do not finally have full access to their perceptions. In other words, I incorporate the other by acknowledging her existence as part of the shared world we inhabit, but I do not over-identify with her in melancholic ways that either frame her as a threat to my continued survival or that privilege her function in my psyche over her own external life and thereby risk authorizing forms of structural violence against her.

Collectively, these poems say most of what they do about vulnerability indirectly, through the various defensive measures they attempt to levy against it. Vulnerability is a problem for Damon the Mower, who ends his eponymous poem by mowing himself—the sort of harm that 'The Garden' hopes to eliminate through complete retirement from the world of relationality (Netzley 2017). 'The Mower's Song' extends this destruction to a revenge on 'flow'rs, and grass, and I, and all' (l. 21).<sup>1</sup> Defensiveness leading to violence connects these poems to the gender dynamics of Machiavellian *virtù* on display in 'An Horatian Ode', which suggests that refusing 'the inglorious arts of peace' and pushing 'all states not free' to a climacteric moment through sheer force of martial will could stave off the vulnerability that attends 'the spirits of the shady night' (ll. 10, 103–4, 116). The poem, with its image of a 'sword erect' (l. 116), thus encourages an overtly priapic, penetrating stance toward the world at large, attempting to destroy vulnerability by means of hypermasculine conquest: 'fortune is a woman, and it is necessary, if one wishes to hold her down, to beat her and fight with her' (Machiavelli 1964, 214–15). As depicted by these poems, invulnerability comes at the price of either adopting violent forms of relation or abandoning relation altogether.

By contrast with this familiarly defensive, Machiavellian, masculinist Marvell, the mower poems consider the possibility of an 'innocent' (which is to say nonviolent) relationship with the grass and, by extension, with Juliana, the woman whose

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<sup>1</sup> I quote the poems throughout from Nigel Smith, ed., *The Poems of Andrew Marvell*, rev. ed. (Harlow, UK: Pearson Longman, 2007).

rejection has left the mower vulnerable. The poems also allow that getting to this point might require critique, as with the barbed remark in 'The Mower against Gardens' that 'the sweet fields do lie forgot' (l. 32). The point is not so much to dismiss critique as to refuse its slide into melancholia: 'That critique has made certain things possible is not in doubt. What is increasingly evident, however, is that it has sidelined other intellectual, aesthetic, and political possibilities—ones that are just as vital to the flourishing of new fields of knowledge as older ones' (Felski 2015, 190). Rather, in these poems, love demands change by presenting an alternative to the relentless cycles of traumatizing violence and corrective critique. Marvell's poems invite us to rethink critique in terms of relationality and vulnerability, reimagining it as a form of care, which Virginia Held defines as a practice that 'builds trust and mutual concern and connectedness between persons', along with the mutuality and fruitfulness that Margaret Farley includes among the characteristics of relational justice (Held 2006, 42; Farley 2006, 220–23, 226–28).<sup>2</sup> The possibility for just relationships to emerge from vulnerability becomes clear in light of Erinn Gilson's argument that vulnerability is not only situational and conditioned, but ontological and shared (Gilson 2014, 2016). Building on Gilson, and in the spirit of Hollywood's call to see the life beyond sorrow and anger and rage, I will read Marvell's poems deconstructively, using the tools of critique to ferret out the potentiality for life, care, and connection that lurks, however improbably, amidst their defensive gestures and protestations of suffering. Acknowledging that vulnerability is ontological means, in the end, admitting that other people and things exist outside of oneself. The mower poems, I am arguing, offer a glimpse at what it means to live ethically in the relationships that such vulnerability entails.

## 1. Defenses

Of the two potentialities that Gilson finds in vulnerability, 'Damon the Mower' and 'The Mower's Song' seem most obviously attentive to harm, and they respond to this harm with a complex series of defensive gestures aimed at locating and thus

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<sup>2</sup> Held might take issue with the basically Kantian foundations of Farley's ethics, and yet the two characteristics I have identified here seem compatible with a relational ontology and a corresponding ethics of care.

attempting to contain its sources outside the self. In Gilson's terms, these externalization strategies treat all vulnerabilities as situational—distributed unevenly by political or other contingent means, and therefore more readily identifiable with harm—at the expense of acknowledging what she calls ontological vulnerability, or vulnerability as an intrinsic feature of human being in the world, including the possibility for connection. The poems' strategy, therefore, has the unintended effect of 'repudiating the condition that makes possible our pursuits, even the misguided pursuits of invulnerability and self-sufficiency' (Gilson 2016, 76). The poems depict these efforts as ineffective, but because they only construe vulnerability in terms of harm, the failure manifests as recursive self-harm instead of possible connection or healing.

The mower in Marvell's poems has come to harm, in simple terms, because he ventured his love for Juliana and was rebuffed in some form. Such venturing is inherently vulnerable: it contains the potentiality for connection and the potentiality of harm—indeed, the vulnerability consists precisely in the indistinction and inseparability of these potentialities independent of Juliana's response. The mower is vulnerable because he has placed himself and his hopes in her hands. Such vulnerability arises from the fact of relationality: living with other people in the world means that parts of ourselves are always in others' hands, even as we carry parts of others in our own hands. Identifying these poems' enclosure motifs with attempts at asserting a kind of masculine autonomy is a critical commonplace, and yet beyond the fairly obvious failure of these attempts lies a deeper, ontological vulnerability that the mower shares with Juliana.<sup>3</sup> Acknowledging this shared vulnerability requires that the mower come to terms with Juliana's existence independent of his feelings or imagination, and that cannot happen outside a reckoning with his internal defenses.

'Damon the Mower' captures the vanity of seeking to escape the vulnerability occasioned by his attraction to Juliana by offering two incompatible attempts at externalizing the source of harm. This incompatibility hinges on Juliana, whose ability to

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<sup>3</sup> On enclosure in Marvell's pastoral verse, see two essays from Richard Burt and John Michael Archer, eds., *Enclosure Acts: Sexuality Property, and Culture in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004): Cristina Malcolmson's 'The Garden Enclosed/The Woman Enclosed: Marvell and the Cavalier Poets' (pp. 251–69) and Jonathan Crewe's 'The Garden State: Marvell's Poetics of Enclosure' (pp. 270–89).

serve as a truly external source of harm depends on her existence as an independent being—an actual human, instead of Damon's fantasy. The poem, however, manifests her existence only through an amalgam of Damon's internalized affective responses, in proto-Humean fashion. She only is what Damon feels, and the poem's opening stanzas depict these experiences of feeling in terms of temperature. That the heat has more to do with Damon than with Juliana appears in the first stanza: 'Like her fair eyes the day was fair;/But scorching like his amorous care' (ll. 5–6). Juliana's eyes may afford a metaphor for the day's fairness, but the day's scorching heat comes from within Damon. This heat immediately takes on a self-consuming quality: 'Sharp like his scythe his sorrow was/And withered like his hopes the grass' (ll. 7–8). The grass withers because of the heat, and that originates in Damon's 'amorous care'. His scythe is whetted to cut the grass, which now doubly figures the effects of his love. The first stanza thus anticipates the self-mowing at the end of the poem, and in this way the poem creates a solipsistic, enclosed world that is nevertheless structurally vulnerable.

When Damon does become invested in Juliana's external existence, it is only for his own ends. The second stanza notes the extraordinary quality of the heat, and the third begins to inquire into its causes. 'This heat the sun could never raise', says Damon, before positing its source in 'an higher beauty' (ll. 17, 19). This source, eventually identified with 'Juliana's scorching beams', 'burns the fields and mower both' (ll. 24, 20). Whereas the narrator in the first stanza identified the agent of scorching as Damon's 'amorous care', Damon himself externalizes the scorching to Juliana's eyes, which the narrator had described as 'fair' (ll. 5–6). Once Damon externalizes the heat to Juliana, though, he seeks 'remedies' that he cannot find 'but in her icy breast' (ll. 30, 32). The poem presents her as both cause and cure of Damon's ailment, and the temperature metaphor breaks down as Juliana simultaneously becomes the source of unbearable heat and lamentably devoid of any passionate warmth: her coolness is no comfort.<sup>4</sup> The temperature is only ever wrong, and this wrongness places Juliana,

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<sup>4</sup> On Marvell's 'remedies' as a Derridean *pharmakon*, via Theocritus, see Judith Haber, *Pastoral and the Poetics of Self-Contradiction: Theocritus to Marvell* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 10.

from Damon's point of view, in the realm of experiential excess, the thermodynamic sublime. Damon's move here is defensive: by making Juliana the external source of his misery he closes himself off from responsibility for his own feelings. He is still vulnerable, but to her, not himself, and that makes the vulnerability more bearable, even if the relief turns out to be purely fanciful. Such an attempt to externalize his feelings, however, does not break the seal of his solipsism, but only reconfigures it. As the narrator observes, Damon's own 'amorous care' is the real issue here, and so even his attempts to cope with vulnerability by externalizing it inevitably end up pointing inward.

The poem's repeated turning back in on itself—its refusal to grant Damon even the tenuous invulnerability that externalizing the source of his woes might afford—indicates the way that Damon's feelings for Juliana have unsettled his identity. As Judith Haber observes, Damon articulates his identity through a rhetoric of intense self-enclosure: 'I am the mower Damon, known/Through all the meadows I have mown' (ll. 41–42; Haber 1994, 17). That identity as a mower is manifest and reinforced by the iterable pattern of his work: he sweats through the heat of the day before salving his feet at night, occasionally admires his reflection in his scythe, and goes happily about mowing the fields—or he would, 'had not Love here his thistles sowed' (l. 66). Now, his identity no longer provides the apparent stability or invulnerability it once did, as his accustomed actions prove insufficient:

But now I all the day complain,  
 Joining my labour to my pain;  
 And with my scythe cut down the grass,  
 Yet still my grief is where it was:  
 But, when the iron blunter grows,  
 Sighing I whet my scythe and woes. (ll. 67–72)

The poem has already presented the withered grass as a figure for Damon himself (ll. 8, 20), and here he attempts to sever the connection by cutting the grass, only to find that his grief remains: 'still my grief is where it was'. Yet he nevertheless continues



to 'whet [his] scythe' when it grows blunt: he still seems to be hoping that he might recover some sense of an intact self by projecting his grief outside himself. The self-mowing at the end of the poem, anticipated from the beginning by the equation of Damon and the grass, shows that an intact self was never in the cards, and yet the poem as a whole amounts to a heavily ironized attempt to assert one. Damon knows the herbs that can heal his cut, 'Only for him no cure is found,/Whom Juliana's eyes do wound' (ll. 85–86). In spite of his best efforts, he remains vulnerable, at least until he falls to that ultimate mower, Death (ll. 87–88). This invocation of death, though, seems but one more way of attempting to evade a vulnerability that runs deeper still: the vulnerability occasioned by Juliana, who exceeds all of his attempts to corral her into a metaphor.

'The Mower's Song' similarly attempts to achieve an invulnerable self by externalizing the self's problems to Juliana and the grass, linked in the poem's refrain: 'When Juliana came, and she/What I do to the grass, does to my thoughts and me' (ll. 4–5 and *passim*). The poem's trajectory moves from a happy union of the speaker's mind and the grass in the first stanza—his mind 'in the greenness of the grass/Did see its hopes as a glass' (ll. 3–4)—to a sense of betrayal by the grass in the third stanza: 'Unthankful meadows, could you so/A fellowship so true forgo' (ll. 13–14). The speaker repays this betrayal by mowing 'flow'rs, and grass, and I and all' in the fourth stanza, leaving the grass to become 'the heraldry .../With which I shall adorn my tomb' (ll. 27–28). Just as in 'Damon the Mower', layered ironies undercut the speaker's attempts at invulnerability. First, the speaker's admission that he, too, will fall in the 'common ruin' wrought with his avenging scythe belies the refrain's repeated assurance that Juliana does to him what he does to the grass. Juliana does not in fact mow him; rather, he mows himself to avenge what he perceives as Juliana's effect on him. He faults the grass, meanwhile, for failing to conform to the pathetic fallacy: 'But these, while I with sorrow pine,/Grew more luxuriant still and fine' (ll. 7–8); its 'gaudy May-games' run contrary to his despondency (l. 15). The irony here is that the grass is asserting its independence from his mind instead of complying with the controlling fantasy of his desired conceit. Framing this independence as a failure of 'compassion' on the grass's part—its failure to 'feel with' the speaker—he

responds with uncompassionate rage and violent revenge, meeting the grass's exposure of his vulnerability with a ruthless exploitation of its vulnerability to his scythe. Nevertheless, the inclusion of himself in the catalogue of all that will fall (echoing the self-mowing that concludes 'Damon the Mower') shows that rage and violence offer poor means of countering vulnerability. Vulnerability cannot be quenched by creating more of it.<sup>5</sup> Once again, the speaker resorts to externalization in the hope of attaining the invulnerability of an enclosed self, only to have externalization defy his wishes and self-enclosure result in self-harm.

The complex interplay of self-harm and attempts at externalization at work in these poems makes for a rather messy sense of the mower's place in the networks of power. His inability to locate the sources of vulnerability outside himself drives his own vulnerability painfully home. Some of that vulnerability may indeed be structural: as a mower, he is part of the georgic machinery, a mere wage-laborer; the cycle of recursive harm may thus signal his economic entrapment.<sup>6</sup> Within this straitened sphere, however, the mower undertakes to retain a position of power through one of the only available avenues—gender—in hopes not so much of denying vulnerability as attempting to assert control over it. Precisely because of the ways that these poems flirt with hypermasculine *virtù*, their speaker, vulnerable though he is, aligns more nearly with the possessors of power than with those subject to it. From a critical perspective, the speaker's vulnerability functions as a ploy of power, working with the familiar Petrarchan trope of masculine powerlessness before the object of desire. This trope then functions to relocate the blame for sexual violence from perpetrator to victim, as when Shakespeare's Tarquin tells Lucrece 'Thy beauty hath ensnared thee to this night' (l. 485). Tarquin thus shows that people in power can use protestations of their vulnerability as a ploy designed to exacerbate the vulnerability of others. Ontological vulnerability means that even people in power—even tenuously, like

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<sup>5</sup> Anderson refers to the vulnerability occasioned by exploitation as 'surplus vulnerability', thus acknowledging that even though eliminating vulnerability may not be desirable, reducing it certainly can be. Joel Anderson, 'Autonomy and Vulnerability Entwined', *Vulnerability: New Essays in Ethics and Philosophy*, ed. Catriona Mackenzie, Wendy Rogers, and Susan Dodds (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 151–57.

<sup>6</sup> Thanks to Ryan Netzley for suggesting this line of thinking.

the mower—are vulnerable in ways that extend beyond economies of harm to the potentiality for intimacy and human connection.

## 2. Critique and Transformation

If the mower poems obviously feature self-harm, understanding the full range of ontological vulnerability at work in them means attending also to the failures of care that they enact. The poems, I will argue, consider care in terms of place, amplified through the frequent identification of the mower with the grass. Place proves to be a vexing problem in these poems, as 'The Mower against Gardens' conjures a horticultural dystopia, while 'The Garden' exults in the pleasurable annihilation afforded by escape to a solipsistic paradise. These poems thus differently enact the consequence of Juliana's presence described in 'The Mower to the Glow-Worms': 'she my mind hath so displaced/That I shall never find my home' (ll. 15–16). Such mental displacement also seems to feature in Damon's cutting his ankle in a moment of inattention, as well as when the speaker in 'The Mower's Song' brings even himself into the 'one common ruin' he wreaks upon the grass and flowers (l. 22). The connection between mental displacement and self-harm thus suggests that care depends on remaining present both to oneself and to one's surroundings, becoming the practice that Held describes as 'more the characterization of a social relation than the description of an individual disposition' (Held 2006, 42). Displacement thus emerges as a problem of relational ethics, with care becoming the set of practices that enable person and place to come into a relationship of mutuality and fruitfulness (Farley 2006, 220–23, 226–28). The poems' call to care, therefore, offers an alternative to the cycle of melancholic critique and traumatic self-harm.

A melancholic approach to critique appears most clearly in 'The Garden', where retirement incorporates what was ostensibly retired from ('Such was that happy garden-state,/While man there walked without a mate', ll. 57–58), and 'The Mower against Gardens', which inveighs against unnatural intrusions upon nature. Both poems, as critiques, call for transformed ways of being in the world, but whereas 'The Garden' reifies the melancholic cycle through the very act of retreating from it, 'The Mower against Gardens' gestures toward an alternative that 'The Mower to the Glow-Worms' brings into clearer light.

These poems keep ontological vulnerability in play through two figures: Juliana and the grass.<sup>7</sup> Far from a fully developed character, Juliana appears in these poems—when she appears at all—as little more than a type of the scornful object of unreciprocated male desire. But even as this near cipher of a figure, she represents the world outside the mower's control, the world that renders him vulnerable by preventing him from slipping into a paradoxically tyrannical solipsism. She does not appear at all in two of the poems, 'The Mower against Gardens' and 'The Garden', both of which use hyperbolic natural imagery to grapple with the problem of relationality. If, as Ryan Netzley suggests, 'The Garden' is responding to a world in which 'there is too much relation, [such] that we are overburdened with it', I am arguing that 'The Mower against Gardens' invites us to rethink relation, rather than jettison it altogether as its companion poem suggests (Netzley 2017, 586).<sup>8</sup> At root, ontologically vulnerable relationality, construed from the perspective of a person in power, means admitting that other people and things exist outside the concepts one constructs for them. That admission acknowledges that vulnerability is ontological and shared, rather than situational and merely a product of power. The ethical force of this claim rests with the vulnerability of Juliana, as the object of the mower's erotic pursuit, and also of the grass. Whereas 'The Garden' undertakes to deny relationality altogether in hopes of procuring invulnerability—safety from that bothersome business of other people—'The Mower against Gardens' imagines the possibility of an innocent, non-harmful relationship occasioned by the shared vulnerability of humans and grass. This innocent relationality figures the joy that becomes thinkable through a critique that is not exclusively melancholic.

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<sup>7</sup> Ecology is also a form of relation, as McColley (2007, 14) makes clear when she describes Marvell as a 'poet of habitat'. Diane Kelsey McColley, *Poetry and Ecology in the Age of Milton and Marvell* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 14.

<sup>8</sup> Netzley argues that the poem valorizes an ethics of subtraction that presents an alternative to the endlessly productive, supplementary world of relationality. This position runs directly counter to Farley's valuing of fruitfulness as a mark of just relationality. For my part, I agree with Netzley that the poem opposes relationality, and I grant that the subtractive ethics for which he argues has its place, but if 'The Garden' and 'The Mower against Gardens' are both in some sense tackling the same problem, I find the latter poem's solution more compelling, as this section of the essay will argue. Ryan Netzley, 'Sameness and the Poetics of Nonrelation: Andrew Marvell's "The Garden"', *PMLA* 132, no. 3 (2017): 580–95.

'The Garden' undertakes a critique of the phenomenal world, but it responds to that critique through a withdrawal into a virtual world that, by refusing difference, attempts to inure itself against the vulnerability that attends human connection: 'Two Paradises 'twere in one/To live in Paradise alone' (ll. 63–64). An Eden *sans* Eve (*sans* anyone else) is, the thinking goes, an Eden secure against the Fall—an Eden where 'Ripe apples drop about my head' without portending any ill (l. 34). In this light, the speaker's question of 'What other help could yet be meet?' turns ironic, for he is happy to be 'without a mate' to proffer him the food of death (ll. 60, 58). Yet although Edenic companionship has obvious liabilities, the speaker rejects its advantages along with its problems.<sup>9</sup> No matter how one proposes to attain invulnerability, whether by preventing the Fall or by recreating the body of Adam *laborans*, as in Joanna Picciotto's optimistic reading, it comes at some cost to relationality and difference (Picciotto 2010, 366–74). Ontological vulnerability cannot be a feature of the Fall alone, because it also existed in Paradise, which means that recovering Paradise may be less about eliminating vulnerability than about recuperating its potential for connection.

In its own way, 'The Garden' is leveling a version of Sartre's critique: 'Hell is other people'.<sup>10</sup> But instead of bringing to life that relentless hell whose inhabitants do not in the end wish to escape, Marvell depicts a fantasy of escape, not only from other people, but from humanness itself. Humanity, the poem avers, is vulnerable to the Fall and vulnerable also to the uncomfortable critique that names the various injustices of fallenness. Relationality and difference almost inevitably give way to critique, yet this paradoxically points up the fact that other people and things exist outside of ourselves. Critique, then, emerges as a way of acknowledging ontological

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<sup>9</sup> Stephen Guy-Bray argues that 'Marvell does not direct his comments against women specifically but rather against sex altogether', noting with Paul Hammond that 'the presumption of heterosexuality here is unwarranted'. This may simply be to observe, in light of the Genesis story, that the poem's commitment to asexuality outweighs its commitment to misogyny. Stephen Guy-Bray, 'Animal, Vegetable, Sexual: Metaphor in John Donne's "Sappho to Philaenis" and Andrew Marvell's "The Garden"', in *Sex before Sex: Figuring the Act in Early Modern England*, ed. James M. Bromley and Will Stockton, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 208, 212.

<sup>10</sup> 'L'enfer, c'est les Autres'. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Huis clos suivi de Les Mouches* (Paris: Gallimard, 1947), 75.

vulnerability that reveals the possibilities for joyful connection. Read ironically, 'The Garden' is holding these very propensities up to critique and calling its readers to vulnerability and relation. Read straight, though, the poem attempts to celebrate joyful non-connection, as Netzley argues. It imagines transformative ways of seeing—'annihilating all that's made/To a green thought in a green shade'—but this transformation converges subtractively on a nullity in the speaker's mind. By seeking invulnerability from the unpleasantness of living with other people, the poem also forgoes the potential for critique, that reminder of others' existence, to invite new forms of joyful connection.

The problems of critique and vulnerability at work in 'The Garden' come under critique themselves in 'The Mower against Gardens'. If 'The Garden' celebrates retirement, a self-removal from the world of the *vita activa*, 'The Mower against Gardens' is a screed against displacement, against things that are not where and how they naturally ought to be. Here, in a delicious irony, Nature serves to displace heterosexual anxiety onto queerness, even as the poem itself quietly hints at the possibility of being joyfully vulnerable to a place in a way that refuses the acquisitive logic of heterosexual possession.<sup>11</sup> The poem's image for displacement is seduction:

Luxurious man, to bring his vice in use,  
Did after him the world seduce:  
And from the fields the flowers and plants allure,  
Where Nature was most plain and pure. (ll. 1–4)

Humanity offers a bait that draws the plants away from their place in the fields and toward a world of what the poem presents as dysgenic horticultural horror, a world covered by 'a dead and standing pool of air' and featuring flowers that 'change ... kind', produce 'strange perfumes', and use cosmetics to improve their

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<sup>11</sup> As Marjorie Swann observes, the presumed asexuality of plant reproduction gives 'vegetable love' an ironically sexualized appeal to multiple Marvellian speakers. Marjorie Swann, 'Vegetable Love: Botany and Sexuality in Seventeenth-Century England', in *The Indistinct Human in Renaissance Literature*, ed. Jean E. Feerick and Vin Nardizzi (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 146–53.

appearance (ll. 6, 10–14). Plant and place reverse their roles, as tulips, instead of growing in meadows, become commodities exchanged for them (ll. 15–16). As a result of hubristic human dealing 'between the bark and tree', the plants come to experience a displacement from their genetic origins: 'No plant now knew the stock from which it came' (ll. 21, 23). The result of all these botanical interventions includes the creation of a place that is not a place, as Marvell reframes the resulting garden as a dislocation: "'Tis all enforced, the fountain and the grot' (l. 31). Things that appear in nature have now become only simulacra, the Eiffel Tower on the Las Vegas strip.

The poem holds all of these misbegotten experiments up for critique, as the 'against' of the poem's title indicates. The point of departure for this critique is 'the fields', which reappear later in the poem as forgotten 'sweet fields' (ll. 3, 32). These offer 'a wild and fragrant innocence', affording at least the possibility of something better. For now, though, the poem's much-noted imagery of allegedly unnatural sexual practice gestures obliquely toward an alternative trajectory for the poem's critique: the kind of retirement championed by the speaker of 'The Garden'. If the Dutch *Tulpenmanie* of 1637 shows the world of proto-capitalist commerce run amok, perhaps one might escape culpability by retiring to the fields where native flowers merely grow naturally.<sup>12</sup> The poem's treatment of sexuality refuses easy alternatives, though. If all sexuality partakes in the 'forbidden mixtures' of a foreign 'seraglio', thereby suggesting the potential appeal of abstinence, the image of 'eunuchs' and its association with 'any tyrant' holds that option up for critique as well (ll. 22, 27–28). Having sex means breeding new creatures, while not having sex still means serving the tyrant in a way that displaces sexual appetite from one person to another—indeed, robs one person's sexuality to protect another's sexual property. The problem here turns out to be less the allegedly unnatural sexualities on display in the poem's first half than sexuality per se. All the world, as fallen, is subject to critique—even 'natural' human heterosexuality—and efforts to engineer a better world through experimental botany prove susceptible to the same critical scythe.

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<sup>12</sup> On the tulip as a marker of cultural anxieties connected to the expanding global market, see Benedict S. Robinson, 'Green Seraglios: Tulips, Turbans, and the Global Market', *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 9, no. 1 (2009): 93–96.

Unlike 'The Garden', 'The Mower against Gardens' offers glimpses at an alternative to melancholy critique—'sweet fields' that 'lie forgot' (l. 32)—that comes more clearly into focus when read alongside 'The Mower to the Glow-Worms', which figures a relationship to place and time that is grounded in vulnerability. In that poem, the eponymous insects 'presage the grass's fall', while their light 'to wand'ring mowers shows the way', and yet they 'waste' 'their courteous lights in vain' because Juliana 'my mind hath so displaced/That I shall never find my home' (ll. 8, 10, 13, 15–16). The poem's conclusion thus emphasizes displacement, but with an ironic twist its cause is Juliana's arrival: 'Juliana here is come' (l. 14). She is in the place, so the mower is displaced. And yet the preceding lines hold out the possibility of a different relationship to place, mediated by the glow-worms. They provide him with a 'dear light' while he spends the summer nights meditating on his unhappy love; their 'officious flame' and 'courteous lights', furthermore, offer him guidance (ll. 1, 9, 13). The mower's language suggests that he recognizes and appreciates the glow-worms' care for him. They may 'waste' their 'courteous lights in vain' in the sense that the speaker's mental displacement does not abate under their glow, and yet they are faithful, showing him 'the way' even in the face of his proclivity to 'stray' 'after foolish fires' (ll. 10, 12).

The poem's acknowledgment of both the glow-worms' faithfulness and their failure allows the speaker to inhabit his place more complexly than the final lines alone seem to allow. This complexity appears most concretely in the second stanza, where the 'country comets ... presage the grass' fall' (ll. 5, 8). As Marvell knew from Pliny, 'These Glowbards never appear before hay is ripe upon the ground, ne yet after it is cut down' (Pliny 1635, I.326).<sup>13</sup> Consequently, the glow-worms' appearance marks a brief moment in time, and one that is moreover central to the mower's identity. Thus, even though the mower's mind is displaced and he despairs of finding home, there is a kind of home at work in the glow-worms' presence because they mark the time when he can be most himself, as a mower doing what mowers do. Indeed, the mower seems to reciprocate the glow-worms' care for him, as suggested by Paul Alpers's

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<sup>13</sup> Book XI Chapter xxviii. See also J. B. Leishman, *The Art of Marvell's Poetry* (London: Hutchinson, 1966), 152.



observation that the mower treats the glow-worms 'if not exactly as his equals, then at least as belonging to the same world, occupying the same space, more than an idle curiosity' (Alpers 1996, 53). For Alpers, the poem is pastoral because its depiction of companionship with the glow-worms represents 'what a divided or suffering mind might be if it were *not* displaced' (57). My interest, though, lies less in genre than in the question of vulnerability's capacity to create empathic connection. From this perspective, the mower's displacement occasions and reifies his relationship with the glow-worms; it does not present that relationship only to relegate it afterwards to the subjunctive mood. After all, the nightingale, that bird so emblematic of melancholy love, meditates her matchless songs by the glow-worms' 'dear light'. The glow-worms, that is, facilitate the mower's articulation of his displacement; they create the place in which the poem becomes possible.

In contrast to the tenor of 'The Garden' and 'The Mower against Gardens' as laid out thus far, 'The Mower to the Glow-Worms' offers a world where melancholic critique operates alongside critique as a call to transformative joy. Fairly or not, the speaker critiques Juliana's presence by pointing to the displacement that it occasions. On one level this circumstance suggests the same solution proffered by 'The Garden': retirement to a virtual world in which the nonexistence of women shields men from the fact of their own vulnerability. Nevertheless, the glow-worms' kairotic presence offers another critique, one that calls the mower to his own present place and time. This critique fails—'Your courteous lights in vain you waste' (l. 13)—but this failure signals the existence of a distinct Other that resists absorption into the speaker's mental world. Instead of annihilating the glow-worms to a green thought in a green shade, the speaker addresses them. The address is melancholic, to be sure, but instead of a melancholy that concedes the perpetuity of a fallen world, this melancholy acknowledges the possibility of joy. That possibility resides in the gentleness of the speaker's address: he calls the glow-worms' light 'dear', notes their peaceable nature ('that portend/No war, nor prince's funeral'), observes their 'officious' fulfillment of duty, and tips his hat to their 'courteous lights' (ll. 1, 6–7, 9, 13). If the speaker does not share the glow-worms' thoroughgoing emplacement, he

nevertheless admits it as a possibility in the world he inhabits. It may be that for this speaker, too, 'the sweet fields do lie forgot', but at least the glow-worms remember, if only through their naturally kairotic presence ('The Mower against Gardens', l. 32). A kind of melancholy remains, of course, as Damon communes with the glow-worms, nightingale, and night, but this is not merely melancholy, but the relationality inherent in vulnerability.<sup>14</sup> As Hollywood writes, 'to disavow the subject's melancholic constitution [as self-reflective and self-critical] is to disavow the complex constellation of others who make us who and what we are' (Hollywood 2016, 86). By calling, again and again, to this 'constellation of others', melancholic critique may keep ontological vulnerability always in view, but in this way melancholy also becomes a condition for possible joy.

The way that the glow-worms inhabit their place thus critiques the speaker in a manner that exposes his vulnerability, but not in a way that portends his harm. Their 'courteous' presence punctures the possibility that his Juliana-related mental displacement might run away into the sort of virtual-reality enclosed garden imagined in 'The Garden'—enclosed in the sense that other people, especially women, must be walled out. The glow-worms may not be human, but they serve as one bulwark against the speaker's tendency to reduce Juliana to a mere figment or fantasy. By inviting the speaker to inhabit his place, they also invite him to imagine the possibility of relating to Juliana on other terms. In contrast, then, to the solipsistic creativity of 'The Garden' or the misbegotten botanical experiments of 'The Mower against Gardens', 'The Mower to the Glow-Worms' allows for the kind of creativity that Margaret Farley, writing about relational justice, calls 'fruitfulness': 'Love between persons violates relationality if it closes in upon itself and refuses to open to a wider community of persons. Without fruitfulness of some kind, any significant interpersonal love (not only sexual love) becomes an *égoïsme à deux*. ... [L]ove brings new

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<sup>14</sup> Analogously, see the final stanza of 'Upon Appleton House', where the salmon-fishers, figuring 'the dark hemisphere' with their canoes on their heads, play out a melancholic vulnerability precisely by fulfilling their natural function. Thanks to Ryan Netzley for getting me to think about this passage.

life to those who love' (Farley 2006, 227–28).<sup>15</sup> The speaker's unhappy love might well remain unhappy, but love itself is no longer consigned to melancholy. Joy has become a possibility, albeit a possibility complexly and even paradoxically bound up in the death-like mowing of the grass.

### 3. All Flesh is Grass

I suggested earlier that vulnerability in these poems is bound up in two entities: Juliana and the grass. The last section argued that 'The Garden' vainly attempts to evade the vulnerability occasioned by Juliana, while 'The Mower against Gardens' critiques horticultural experimentalism as a way of evading human vulnerability to grass—an evasion that affords a missed opportunity for connection. This section, then, will attend to the ways that fruitful, nonviolent connection with grass might feed back into human relationality. Of the five poems I have been discussing, three feature the speaker falling in the grass. In 'The Garden', the speaker falls 'on the grass' after becoming 'insnared with flow'rs' (l. 40). Less happily, Damon the Mower 'among the grass fell down,/By his own scythe, the mower mown' (ll. 79–80). Most ominous of all, in 'The Mower's Song' the speaker succumbs as part of a general revenge: 'And flow'rs, and grass, and I and all,/Will in one common ruin fall' (ll. 21–22). Shifting fallenness to the mower alone, 'The Mower to the Glow-Worms' anticipates the fall of the grass, but does not depict it, as the glow-worms merely 'presage the grass's fall' (l. 8), while the mower is too distracted by unhappy love to effect it. 'The Mower against Gardens' includes neither mowing nor grass, because 'the sweet fields do lie forgot' (l. 32).

This brief survey begins to suggest the complexity of the relationship between the mower and the grass. A mower who does not mow proves unworthy of the name—such is the implicit critique of 'The Mower against Gardens', where botanical

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<sup>15</sup> Thanks to Deidre Green for calling Farley back to my mind at an opportune moment in the drafting of this essay (and for introducing me to Farley in the first place, several years ago). Importantly, in light of both the anti-queer potential at work in 'The Mower against Gardens' and Netzley's arguments against productivity, Farley's concept of fruitfulness can neither be reduced to procreation nor limited to heterosexual relationships.

meddling becomes a distraction from identity itself. Similarly, in 'The Mower to the Glow-Worms', the mower's dereliction of duty marks his displacement. 'The Garden' features neither a mower nor mowing, but its speaker's fall on the grass has reminded many commentators of Isaiah 40:6, 'All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field' (KJV). This fall, however, rather than recapitulating the Fall, facilitates the mind's withdrawal 'into its happiness' that culminates in 'Annihilating all that's made/To a green thought in a green shade' (ll. 42, 47–48). With the transformation of everything into vegetation, the speaker has fallen onto grass only to become grass, albeit in a manner counter to Isaiah's apocalyptic vision, because he denies mortality rather than embraces it, refusing human sexuality for the hope of asexual reproduction. The two other poems featuring falls similarly play on a presumed identity between their speakers and the grass. For Damon the Mower, who uses summer heat to figure Juliana's effects on him, the grass macrocosmically reflects his inner world: 'And withered like his hopes the grass' (l. 8). In 'The Mower's Song', by contrast, the speaker is angry at the grass's failure to mimic his inner state:

Unthankful meadows, could you so  
A fellowship so true forgo,  
And in your gaudy May-games meet  
While I lie trodden under feet? (ll. 13–16)

Here, the speaker protests that he is more grass-like than the grass, which he thinks ought to be just as downtrodden as he is. He expects the grass to keep fellowship with his moods, but this cannot be when his happy work brings its desolation.

At issue in all of this, I suggest, is the otherness of the grass. Does the mower subsume the grass into himself, in a solipsistic relationship of domination, or can the mower have a relationship with the grass that allows for its own fruitfulness as well as his? In Judith Butler's terms, this question could be rephrased as asking whether the grass counts as 'grievable life' (Butler 2004, 20). Butler is right, I think, to see in mourning a testament to the value of a life, and she is also right to critique the practice of selective mourning that values some lives above others. Her talk of mourning,

though, is not only about death, but also about which lives we value and celebrate. In the terms I have been using, the question becomes which lives we acknowledge as existing independently of our own and whether we respond to that existence with care or with destructive frustration at whatever disrupts the pleasures of solipsism.

This dilemma comes into focus in 'The Mower's Song'. The speaker sees that, amidst his sorrow, the grass 'Grew more luxuriant still and fine;/That not one blade of grass you spied,/But had a flow'r on either side' (ll. 8–10), and yet, rather than finding joy in its flourishing, he finds resentment and seeks revenge with his scythe. The mower's loss of his former relationship to the fields appears in the opening stanza:

My mind was once the true survey  
Of all these meadows fresh and gay;  
And in the greenness of the grass  
Did see its hopes as in a glass;  
When Juliana came, and she  
What I do to the grass, does to my thoughts and me. (ll. 1–6)

In this former state, the grass was other in a way that the mower seems not to have fully grasped. Seeing its greenness as a glass or mirror reflecting his own hopes back to him suggests that it exists distinct from his own mind and perceptions, while the perceived reflection allows him to collapse that distinction in a way that sets him up for disappointment once the grass goes on being green when his soul no longer is. The poem's conclusion, in which the mower acknowledges the meadows as erstwhile 'Companions of my thoughts more green' (l. 26), at least allows for the possibility that the mower, however belatedly, recognizes the grass's distinct existence and values his relationship with it. Such a recognition would stand in contrast to his less happy relationship with Juliana. The poem's refrain, however, refuses this possibility. By equating his mowing of the grass and Juliana's cruelty to him, the mower allows only a melancholy framing of his relationship to the grass. Thus, 'fresh and gay' though the meadows may be, the grass's happiness only serves as the negative required to make its loss mirror his loss of Juliana. The loss is what counts, not the freshness, and

because the grass cannot feel otherwise than the speaker, it effectively does not exist independently of him. Its fruitfulness is tolerable only when he is fruitful.

What is missing here is 'innocence', a word that appears twice in these five poems. In 'The Garden', the speaker exults, 'Fair Quiet, have I found thee here,/And Innocence thy sister dear' (ll. 9–10). Innocence, which etymologically denotes doing no harm, refers in this poem to the hoped-for invulnerability of a man's retirement from a world where other people can hurt him. This innocence thus does not refer to a peaceful relationality, but rather to a peace achieved at the expense of relationality. The world can be fruitful, but only as it serves the speaker, who is thus freed to achieve a state of utter passivity through the trope of *sponte sua*: 'The nectarene, and curious peach,/Into my hands themselves do reach' (ll. 37–38). By contrast, in 'The Mower against Gardens', the forgotten sweet fields afford a place 'Where willing Nature does to all dispense/A wild and fragrant innocence' (ll. 33–34). This innocence is distinctly relational, with Nature as the mediator of the relationship. The grass's fragrance is 'wild', not controllable by human means. This fragrance is one component of the grass's fruitfulness, but the grass can share this benefit without any loss to itself. This sharing makes innocence possible, understood now as a kind of peaceful, harmless, mutually fruitful relationality. The grass, in its prime, gives off a rich fragrance in which the mower might also rejoice.

We come now, finally, to the question of mowing, that action which names both the mower and his relationship to the grass. How can mowing, which the mower frequently figures in destructive terms, comport with innocence? The fragrant innocence in 'The Mower against Gardens' suggests, by way of critiquing the mower's destructive mindset, that mowing need not be a melancholy task. Damon hints at this possibility when, comparing his mowing to the shearing of sheep, he observes: 'And though in wool more poor are they,/Yet I am richer far in hay' (ll. 55–56). Just as shearing costs the sheep, mowing costs the grass, and yet the cost is not ultimate: life goes on, until the next shearing or mowing season comes along. The fact that the grass will survive his mowing exposes the limits of the destructive language elsewhere in the poem, e.g., 'depopulating' (l. 74) or the 'common ruin' of 'The Mower's

Song' (l. 22). Damon thus recasts 'all flesh is grass' from an image of universal mortality to an image of the hope for resurrection, an acknowledgment that vulnerability can comport with indestructibility. As seasonal wage-labor, mowing depends on the grass growing again.<sup>16</sup> Thus reimagined, mowing becomes a practice in which both mower and grass reach their full fruitfulness together. If pastoral often trucks in rustic innocence as a foil for the grittiness and complexity of life in the city or at court, the mower poems offer a variation in which this innocence participates in the *vita activa* while mitigating against its problematic Machiavellian potentialities. Mowing, that is, becomes a practice of innocence, neither retirement of the sort that Marvell often critiques nor the militaristic *virtù* of 'An Horatian Ode'.

As a practice of innocence, though, mowing does not entail an escape from vulnerability, but rather an embrace of it. The grass's use as hay does celebrate its fruitfulness in a sense, and yet this celebration comes at some cost to the grass. Similarly, a mower working with a scythe is liable to the occasional mishap, hence the familiar recourse to 'shepherd's-purse and clown's-all-heal' ('Damon the Mower', l. 83). Beyond the grass, though, there is Juliana, who never escapes the orbit of the speaker's affective world in a way that presents the possibility of a real person rather than a poetic fiction. Even so, the poems' invitation to the mower to see the grass as grass rather than treating it as a metaphor for his inner state suggests a way forward, in keeping with Rowan Williams's ethics of empathy: 'I have no idea what you're feeling'.<sup>17</sup> Juliana is not the mower of the speaker's heart, as the refrain of 'The Mower's Song' would have it. Rather, she is a person with thoughts, desires, and motives of her own. The mower's professions of love leave her vulnerable, and she

<sup>16</sup> Here the fact that mowers are wage-laborers, while shepherds are not, proves relevant, because survival depends more directly on the availability of work. See Smith, *Poems*, 135. Again, this difference plays into the way that georgic, by emphasizing labor over the management favored by pastoral, enables the kind of joyful presence that the escapist tendencies of pastoral tend to occlude.

<sup>17</sup> See Rowan Williams, 'The Paradoxes of Empathy,' Tanner Lectures, Harvard University, 8–10 April 2014. I am thus on board with Netzley's argument that 'Marvell advances an antimetaphoric poetics', and yet I depart from his claim that this poetics 'challenges the notion that metaphor and connection are the fundamental truth of the world and that points toward a language and a realm of nonrelation—in other words, a poetics of real retirement from this world'. Netzley, 590. On my reading, metaphor is less a means of connection than one device for avoiding it.

may be no better equipped than he is to deal with that vulnerability—or she might simply have no patience for his melodrama. Releasing her from the constraints of his poetic and emotional constructions does not guarantee a happier outcome, but it does at least make one possible. The vulnerability that grounds a relationship between two people contains the prospect of pain much deeper than the melodramatic irony of 'the mower mown', and yet it also contains the possibility of healing well beyond the capacity of solitarily applied clown's-all-heal, achieved through the power of human intimacy.

In a deconstructive sense, intimacy is the aporia around which these poems circle. If power's insidiousness calls for careful critical ferreting-out, intimacy proves harder still to draw into the light, in part due to its complex intersections with power. By complaining about Juliana's rejection while externalizing its causes and striving mightily to avoid vulnerability, the mower seems to be wishing that she would just give him the intimacy he wants without him having to do any of the emotional work. Power thus turns intimacy into a commodity of sorts, hoarded by the powerful and denied to the subjugated. Thinking of intimacy as a commodity amounts, though, to the narcissism of construing someone else's fruitfulness as a response to one's own lack. That is, even as the mower demands intimacy from Juliana, his strategies for avoiding his own vulnerability mean that the intimacy he desires will be a one-sided simulacrum. The greater the vulnerability, the more potent the defense mechanisms people deploy, sometimes with protection as the result, but also sometimes with the result of isolation. And in this case, both the mower and Juliana end up isolated as his attempts at invulnerability end up mowing them both, although mercifully only in metaphor.

The poems' recurrent theme of self-harm speaks to the larger questions of vulnerability and critique that have occupied this essay. The vulnerability that critique most glories in naming is complicity, and yet this may be the hardest vulnerability to name in oneself. Critique, in other words, risks falling prey to the same attempts at externalization that a poem like 'Damon the Mower' evidences. Self-harm, like Marvell's characteristically recursive irony, may seem to make solipsism into an inescapable black hole of melancholy. Perhaps, though, this inescapability signals



complicity instead of solipsism, marking the way that one cannot avoid implication in the larger structures of human and ecological life. After all, Damon does not mow himself due to a peculiar self-obsession, self-centered though he may be. He mows himself because he is in relation, however unhappily, with Juliana. Relational unhappiness is rarely if ever one sided, and Damon's distractions (looking at his reflection in his scythe) arise from questioning his part in the problem.

Literary scholarship is similarly liable to self-mowing, for better and for worse, and sometimes only a scythe in the ankle can bring a former blind spot into view. We footnote and we gesture in hope of avoiding mishap, but these efforts inevitably encounter their limits. This is merely to say that we do not have to do anything to make our scholarship vulnerable, because it *is* vulnerable whether we want it to be or not. We can, however, let this vulnerability become a vehicle for joyful connection and, above all, care for what we study and for those with whom we engage in the process. Felski suggests that we acknowledge and embrace the attachments we develop for the things we study, and that we refuse to allow disagreement to harden 'into a given repertoire of argumentative moves and interpretative methods' (Felski 2015, 187). Beyond this, though, our time is marked by precarity that seems to grow by the minute: globally, yes, but also in the halls of the academy, increasingly populated as they are by underpaid and undervalued adjuncts, lecturers, and graduate students. A scholarship that does not cultivate care effectively participates in the fantasy world of 'The Garden', purchasing our happiness at the expense of acknowledging our material relationships to the circumstances of academic labor, to say nothing of the larger worlds we inhabit. To these realities we ought to respond with empathic openness and desire to understand rather than defensiveness. We are all complicit in the failure of criticism ever to get anything finally right, including both the subject matter itself and the troubling material conditions of its production. By letting our guard down, though, perhaps our work might invite us into mutually fruitful relation with those who render us vulnerable and whom we also render vulnerable. Complicity feels like a wound, but the urgent question that remains is what potentialities for connection, healing, and justice lurk within its sting.

## Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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