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ESSAY

Diotima's Scaffolding: Marvell's Politics and the Neoplatonic View of Love in the Mower Poems and 'The Definition of Love'

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When read alongside Diotima's Ladder of Love, recounted in the *Symposium*, Marvell's mower poems and 'The Definition of Love' seem to be deeply political works. They do not, however, appear to take deeply political positions. They situate their speakers and characters in terms comparable to the Ladder of Love. In so doing, they show a Christian humanist use of love that accounts for Marvell's neutral wit. Our poet created mirrors for gentry in republican England that encouraged the creation and maintenance of networks based on love. His focus moves away from national politics toward county life and the need to move past the parliamentary-royalist divide. In short, by reading these four poems beside the Ladder of Love, we better understand how Marvell manages to be political without clearly expressing his religious or political positions.

Keywords: Neoplatonism; pastoral and georgic; love; ladder of love; politics

Andrew Marvell responded to the challenges of the King's deposition by turning toward faith. His turn was political, though it supported no person or party. Nor was his turn in support of religious faction. He drew from the Neoplatonist discourse of Reason and of Love to emphasize individual relationships. In so doing, Marvell uses a faith-based virtue, love for fellow men, to promote a stable polity. He blends religious concepts with politics just before a discourse of the 'self-sufficient power of reason' made such a move unpalatable.¹ We have, in the past decades, again begun

¹ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 9.

to question reason's self-sufficiency: an objective view of the world can be enriched when complemented by a language of faith.² Such language was integral to politics in Marvell's time, as intellectual historians have noted. John Coffey and Alister Chapman call for fuller studies of religious thought as a field on par with political history.³ The present work answers this call by blending spiritual and civic fields to capture the complexity of Marvell's response (and perhaps that of other moderate minds) to the end of monarchy and the uncertain future of a republic.

The combination of religion and politics that I propose was *de jure* among Neoplatonists in Marvell's time. Nathaniel Culverwell, a Cambridge Platonist based at Emmanuel College, published *An Elegant and Learned Discourse of the Light of Nature* in 1652. Culverwell argued that reason was a faculty that sought objective truth from Nature; faith imbued objects and life more generally with meaning by allowing souls to ascribe meaning to unexplained phenomena.⁴ John Milton's *Paradise Lost* has been read as an extension of that division particularly focused on politics. Paul Stevens, for example, reads Milton's epic as a political extension of justification by faith alone (*sola fide*), which manifests in the political, fallen world as faith in the possibility of community.⁵ John Locke's treatises also take up this theme, outlining the appropriate ways to express love so as to advance and secure social unity.⁶

I suggest that Marvell paints faith and reason as complementary phenomena and does so in a Neoplatonic fashion. Marvell's representation is best elucidated with reference to Plato's description of the 'Ladder of Love' in the *Symposium*. Diotima's Ladder of Love stipulates that an understanding of love is required for rulers to govern and for men more generally to achieve stable communities in God's image:

² Mike King, 'Art and the Postsecular', *Journal of Visual Art Practice* 4 (2005): 3–17; John A. McClure, 'Postmodern/Post-Secular: Contemporary Fiction and Spirituality', *Modern Fiction Studies* 41 (1995): 141–63.

³ Alister Chapman, John Coffey, and Brad S. Gregory, eds., *Seeing Things Their Way: Intellectual History and the Return of Religion* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), 4.

⁴ Nathaniel Culverwell, *An Elegant and Learned Discourse of the Light of Nature*, ed. Robert A. Greene and Hugh MacCallum (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 141–42.

⁵ Paul Stevens, 'The Pre-Secular Politics of *Paradise Lost*', in *The Cambridge Companion to Paradise Lost*, ed. Louis Schwartz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 94–108.

⁶ 'John Locke and the Fable of Liberalism', *The Historical Journal* 61 (2018): 616.

Beginning from obvious beauties he must for the sake of that highest beauty be ever climbing aloft, as on the rungs of a ladder, from one to two, and from two to all beautiful bodies; from personal beauty he proceeds to beautiful observances, from observance to beautiful learning, and from learning at last to that particular study which is concerned with the beautiful itself.⁷

Diotima's description of love was taken by Renaissance writers as dividing earthly, human love from its devotional, divine counterpart. Only those who could break free of earthly love could take a place at God's side, a point made plain in *The Book of the Courtier* (trans. 1561).⁸ This manual instructed courtiers to beware of erotic love in favor of a cleaner, divine love that focused on gratifying the soul. In so doing, Castiglione aligns Diotima with Saint Paul. Both are paragons of Christian love founded upon reverence for God and upon sexual restraint.⁹ It was only through such division that rulers could, or so it was theorized, keep their eye on the virtuous prize.

The Ladder of Love is most easily seen, I think, in three of Marvell's mower poems, 'Damon the Mower', 'The Mower to the Glow-Worms', and 'The Mower's Song' (1650–52), and 'The Definition of Love' (1649–51).¹⁰ These poems represent the consequences of love and thus serve as mirrors for the gentry (for there are no true princes left in England by 1652). Love must be generative for it to be reciprocated, and, in Diotima's telling, reciprocation is the only way to move to a greater appreciation of the relationships that undergird a stable society. Marvell gives great weight to reciprocation in these four poems, as part of his commentary on

⁷ Plato, *Symposium*, in *Plato Vol. III*, trans. W. R. M. Lamb, Loeb Classical Library 166 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925), cols 211 c–d; Christine Rees refers to the *Symposium* in her analysis of the love poems here considered, but does so only to suggest that Plato's view of love is an idealized one to Renaissance authors. See Rees, *The Judgment of Marvell* (London: Pinter, 1989), 83.

⁸ Michael Bryson and Arpi Movsesian, *Love and Its Critics: From the Song of Songs to Shakespeare and Milton's Eden* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2017), chap. 7.

⁹ Baldassarre Castiglione, *The Courtyer of Count Baldessar Castilio Diuided into Foure Bookes*, trans. Thomas Hoby (London: William Seres, 1561), sig. Yy1r-v. EBO, STC (2nd ed.)/4778.

¹⁰ For the uncertain dating of Marvell's fourth mower poem, 'The Mower Against Gardens', see Paul Hammond, 'The Date of Marvell's "The Mower against Gardens"', *Notes and Queries* 53 (2006): 178–81.

'the cultural struggle to move beyond a community of one'.¹¹ This struggle, which appears prominently in 'The Garden',¹² is one that more generally inheres in the pastoral and georgic poems that I examine. Readers in Marvell's network would have stood in line for county government, typically as justices of the peace. The Fairfaxes were in 1651/2 a premier example of this culture in the West Riding. The Ladder of Love could, in this context, be used to emphasize a view of beauty that stood between faith and reason, religion and politics.

Indeed, though Marvell is preoccupied in his early poems by the need for stable government ruled by cool minds, recent scholarship tying Marvell to Neoplatonism emphasizes Marvell's wit and the neutrality of his lyrics. Gary Kuchar's reading of 'Eyes and Tears' uses Neoplatonism to interpret the presentation of multiple views of tears as a means of coming closer to a divine truth.¹³ David C. Simon reads 'Upon Appleton House' as evidence of Marvell's 'freedom from discipline' through a studied carelessness: the poem deploys studied indifference to point up the flights of complimentary fancy in the country-house genre.¹⁴ Neoplatonism may well seem to be free of discipline when Sir Francis Bacon's scientific philosophy is used to flesh out Marvell's carelessness. Such dependence on objective observation does not fit with Marvell's metaphysical wit. We see instead that Marvell's interaction with Neoplatonism is skeptical yet informed by a search for truth that is the very heart of Neoplatonist philosophy. Hence Joan Adkins' comment that 'the ecstasy which arises from a contemplation of the beautiful forms of nature, perceived as a reflection of the Universal Soul, contracts the multiplicity of the emanation into the mystical One: such is the philosophical structure of Marvell's "The Garden"'.¹⁵ This philosophical structure is not, however, explained in Marvell's verse.

¹¹ Andrew Barnaby, 'The Politics of Garden Spaces: Andrew Marvell and the Anxieties of Public Speech', *Studies in Philology* 97, no. 3 (2000): 336.

¹² Barnaby, 336.

¹³ Gary Kuchar, 'Andrew Marvell's Anamorphic Tears', *Studies in Philology* 103, no. 3 (2006): 345–81.

¹⁴ David Carroll Simon, 'Andrew Marvell and the Epistemology of Carelessness', *ELH* 82, no. 2 (2015): 580.

¹⁵ Joan F. Adkins, 'Neoplatonism in Marvell's "On a Drop of Dew" and "The Garden"', *The Bulletin of the Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association* 28, no. 4 (1974): 85.

Marvell's adherence to the Ladder of Love allowed him to address both royalist and parliamentarian sides of the political spectrum with a centrist Christian message. Such a view extends Nicholas von Maltzahn's claim that Marvell's politics are, at least on an international scale, pragmatic and interest-based.¹⁶ Marvell's earlier lyrics display political maturity at home by reconciling Neoplatonist love with the religious and political need to translate reasoned positions into emotional terms and *vice versa*. Such a view explains Marvell's lyric strategy while transitioning from service to the Fairfaxes to service in the Protectorate regime. He attempts to show that confidence could be restored in government through strong local relationships.

This was a natural imperative that Marvell seized upon, like others of his day, to explain how to heal the wounds caused by civil war through a civic virtue descended from republican Rome.¹⁷ Searching for an appropriate 'moral musick', as Culverwell might say, with which to unify a deeply divided society preoccupied Marvell.¹⁸ His engagement with politics through love has already been suggested, albeit obliquely, by Patsy Griffin. She argues that Marvell's 'Daphnis and Chloe' is an allegory of the king's fraught negotiations with Parliament.¹⁹ The same observation may, of course, be made for 'The Unfortunate Lover' (1648–49), where the embattled lover (perhaps Charles I) fights natural forces as Love's champion. If Charles is indeed the lover, his fight may then be read as a defense of that which unifies the realm. Marvell's early poems work in similar fashion. They have even recently been divided into those generative of love and vulnerability and those that put up 'defensive' tropes to negate

¹⁶ Nicholas von Maltzahn, 'Liberalism or Apocalypse? John Milton and Andrew Marvell', in *English Now: Selected Papers from the 20th IAUPE Conference in Lund 2007*, ed. Marianne Thormählen (Lund: Wallin & Dalholm, 2008), 44–58.

¹⁷ Hugh Peters, *Good Work for a Good Magistrate or, a Short Cut to Great Quiet* (London: William Dugard, 1651), EEBO, Wing (2nd ed.)/P1706, prints a republican mirror for princes with William Dugard, who was also printer to the Council of State. For further examples, see Edward Holberton, *Poetry and the Cromwellian Protectorate: Culture, Politics, and Institutions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 43.

¹⁸ Culverwell, 28.

¹⁹ Patsy Griffin, *The Modest Ambition of Andrew Marvell: A Study of Marvell and His Relation to Lovelace, Fairfax, Cromwell, and Milton* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1995), 26, 31–34.

those same states.²⁰ The four poems I analyze use and rely on love to show that pragmatic (and longer-lasting) communities may be built at local and national levels.

I

The Ladder of Love's influence may be felt in Marvell's *oeuvre*, in part, because Christianity synthesized Plato's rendition of the Ladder, notably in the work of Marsilio Ficino.²¹ This fifteenth-century Florentine priest was the first Renaissance translator of the *Symposium*. His works found their way to England through French intermediaries. They there found poetic expression in court poets like Philip Sidney and Edmund Spenser, who utilized the Florentine Academy's combination of Virgil's *Eclogues* and *Georgics* with Neoplatonism.²²

Ficino's commentary suits Marvell's poetic and religious temperament. The *Platonic Theology* links divine intelligence with the human soul through a love and charity that, if properly acknowledged, elevates the soul. Ficino describes the soul as a conduit through which creation flows from the One into the world, hence mankind's ability to discover Nature's secrets as parts of divine revelation.²³ Ficino's exegesis of the Ladder of Love situates love at the heart of the soul's imitation of the 'angelic mind' and its perception of the world. When he asks 'Why is Love partly rich and partly poor?', only one reply obtains:

... a man who loves something does not yet really possess it completely in actuality. Nevertheless, he knows the thing itself in the reflection of his soul; he judges it pleasing, and trusts to be able to attain it. This contemplation, judgment, and hope are like some present anticipation of an absent good.

²⁰ Jason A. Kerr, 'Vulnerable Life in Marvell's Mower Poems', *Marvell Studies* 4, no. 1 (2019): 1–27.

²¹ B. J. Sokol, 'The Symposium, Two Kinds of "Definition", and Marvell's "The Definition of Love"', *Notes and Queries* 35 (1988): 169–70.

²² Sears Jayne, 'Ficino and the Platonism of the English Renaissance', *Comparative Literature* 4 (1952): 214–38. See also Valery Rees, 'Ficinian Ideas in the Poetry of Edmund Spenser', *Spenser Studies* 24 (June 2009): 73–134; Annabel Patterson, *Pastoral and Ideology: Virgil to Valery* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 64–66.

²³ Marsilio Ficino, *Platonic Theology 1: Books I–IV*, ed. James Hankins, trans. Michael J. B. Allen and John Warden, I Tatti Renaissance Library 2 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 221.

For he would not desire it unless the thing itself pleased him, and it would not please him unless it were in some way pretasted.²⁴

On this view, love is an act of faith identical to belief in the One and in a universe created and managed by a single coordinating force.

Culverwell's polemic in support of reason advances such a view of love as a mediating force between reason and faith. Reason is, at first blush, a 'sociable Light'.²⁵ Culverwell connects this light with love by insisting that reasonable creatures reproduce, which is one of the first rungs on Diotima's Ladder.²⁶ Reason is necessary for procreation because it is the individual's 'glosse of the world'.²⁷ Reason's focus on the search for objective truth allows individual minds to ascend step-by-step toward the Godhead.²⁸ Such an ascent informs social cohesion. Procreation can only occur where a stable society exists. Societies are informed by the law of nature, which is composed of common principles discovered at the center of knowledge.²⁹ Humans must, therefore, turn away from 'busy companies of men' (as Marvell observes) in order to discover the ordering principles in the Law of Nature ('The Garden', l. 12).³⁰ These general principles expand into prohibitions that regulate society.

Creating laws is itself a step on the Ladder. Culverwell frames the issue in developmental terms: '*Lex Naturae est lex intelligentiae quam tamen ignorat pueritia, nescit infantia*'.³¹ The law of nature can be the law of reason because self-reflexive individuals discover moral rules as they experience the world. Legislating gives those rules positive force, which brings them into the realm of human reason. Culverwell ties

²⁴ Marsilio Ficino, *Commentary on Plato's Symposium*, trans. Sears Reynolds Jayne, The University of Missouri Studies 19 (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1944), 191.

²⁵ Culverwell, 135.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 41.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 147.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 82.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 56–57.

³⁰ All references to Marvell's poems are to *The Poems of Andrew Marvell*, ed. Nigel Smith (London: Pearson Longman, 2003). Line numbers will appear in parenthesis.

³¹ Culverwell, 82: 'the law of nature is the law of reason, of which, however, youth is ignorant and infants unaware'.

punishment to disobedience of these enacted statutes: penalties are for correction or for dissuasion.³² Penalties, in other words, aim to bring subjects back to the path of Love, which Culverwell identifies with a state of nature: 'Insomuch as that if there were no Law or Command, yet a Rational being of its own accord, out of meere love would espouse it self to such an amiable good'.³³ Rather than a state of fear, which Hobbes proposed just one year earlier as humankind's original state in a lawless world, Culverwell suggests that reason relies upon Love. Punishment is reserved for those who do not find it reasonable to love.

II

Pastoral and georgic modes are the natural vehicles for the exploration of love in the Mower sequence. Reading these poems with the Ladder in mind evokes a 'hard pastoral'—that is, a 'sexually frank' genre 'skeptical of erotic love, socially critical'—that allows Marvell to deploy pastoral and georgic within the same text to reflect differing social orders.³⁴ Movement within this social structure requires the ability to forge personal connections, which is where Marvell situates his mower.

A community in republican England was tied to the land as well as its people.³⁵ The continuity that these poems espouse grounds love in a genuine relationship with the land, which prioritizes local concerns. They thus focus on the need for local resolutions of disputes in order to promote effective relationships at the county level, rather than (as Hobbes and, later, Locke suggest) a national focus on the creation and imposition of laws. Marvell's use of georgic resists mutually exclusive accounts of war and peace. He instead blends georgic with Neoplatonism to demonstrate personal relationships' contribution to a functional polity. Marvell's exploration thus expands on the Ladder's Neoplatonist content in 'the Virgilian language of writerly

³² Ibid., 44.

³³ Ibid., 50.

³⁴ Boyd Bradford, 'Marvell's Mower Poems as Alternative Literary History', *Marvell Studies* 1 (2016): 1–11.

³⁵ Kari Boyd McBride, *Country House Discourse in Early Modern England: A Cultural Study of Landscape and Legitimacy* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), 35–37; Melanie Hansen, 'Identity and Ownership: Narrative of Land in the English Renaissance', in *Writing and the English Renaissance*, ed. Suzanne Trill and William Zunder (London: Routledge, 1996), 87–105.

self-recognition, embedded with historical meaning several strata deep, whose allure was less of origins than continuity'.³⁶ This reading of the mower poems extends Melissa Schoenberger's analysis of 'Upon Appleton House' to the contemporaneous mower sequence.³⁷ Such continuity is appropriate to the Ladder's and Neoplatonism's purpose, and it may even have inspired Virgil's description of Aeneas's love for his people in the *Aeneid*.³⁸ Marvell deploys the Ladder of Love in the mower poems to continue the twin traditions depicted in the *Eclogues* and *Georgics*.

Virgil's poems are at first glance useful for Marvell because Virgil writes after the close of Rome's civil war, which ushered in the empire. Virgil, like Marvell, uses country labor as the setting for a pedagogy meant to heal the wounds caused by war. Closing such wounds is best left to local authorities. Marvell's focus on the meadow resists subjection to central power, which was a running theme in the recent wars. Learning to respect the plough again requires fresh emphasis on local relationships.³⁹ Both poets are concerned with nation-building. At the end of the first *Georgic*, Virgil connects his work to the civil wars:

*quippe ubi fas versum atque nefas: tot bella per orbem,
tam multae scelerum facies; non ullus aratro
dignus honos, squalent abductis arva colonis,
et curvae rigidum falces conflantur in ense.* (bk. I, ll. 505–508)

[For here are right and wrong inverted; so many wars overrun the world, sin walks in so many shapes; respect for the plough is gone; our lands, robbed of the tillers, lie waste, and curved pruning hooks are forged into straight blades.]⁴⁰

³⁶ Patterson, *Pastoral Ideology*, 62.

³⁷ Melissa Schoenberger, 'Cultivating the Arts of Peace: English Georgic Poetry from Marvell to Thomson' (PhD diss., Boston University, 2015), 69, 81. This thesis has since been published as *Cultivating Peace: The Virgilian Georgic in English, 1650–1750* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2019).

³⁸ Hassan Ali Abdullah Al-Momani, 'The Influence of the Conception of Love in Plato's Symposium on Virgil's *Aeneid* and the French *Eneas*', *Studies in Literature and Language* 4 (2012): 17–22.

³⁹ Schoenberger, 'Cultivating the Arts of Peace', 5.

⁴⁰ Virgil, *Georgics*, in *Eclogues, Georgics, Aeneid: Books 1–6*, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough, Loeb Classical Library 63 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1916).

As Kevis Goodman maintains, labor is not wasted.⁴¹ The passage resonates in Marvell's England because the wars impeded the ability to labor, which was central to county life. Virgil's concern is that country living is disrupted by war. The poems that I am interested in do not directly address this anxiety. Marvell's more pastoral 'The Nymph Complaining for the Death of Her Fawn', however, speaks to the incredible disruption visited upon country folk when royalist and parliamentary armies billeted on the land during the civil wars.

Virgil's association with the Ladder of Love and Neoplatonism is illustrated by Michel de Montaigne's essay '*Sur des vers de virgile*' (published in England in 1603). Montaigne uses Virgil's *Georgics* and the *Aeneid* to show that love must be tempered by reason.⁴² Although some criticism reads him as critical of Neoplatonist philosophies of love,⁴³ Montaigne does not dispute love's importance. He cites Virgil's *Georgics* for the proposition '*Quo rapiat sitiens venerum interiúsque recondat*' and glosses this text: '*Je ne vois point de mariages qui faillent plus tôt et se troublent que ceux qui s'achement par la beauté et désirs amoureux. Il y faut des fondements plus solides et plus constants*'.⁴⁴ Love's emotional content allows relationships to begin; reason, however, is a much more solid base on which to build a marriage.

III

The three mower poems that we can date to the 1650s present a mower who errs beyond recovery because his solipsism makes him unable to love another, let alone a nation. 'Damon the Mower' presents the mower's initial error: he falls prey to the

⁴¹ Kevis Goodman, "'Wasted Labor': Milton's Eve, the Poets Work, and the Challenge of Sympathy', *ELH* 64, no. 2 (1997): 420.

⁴² Michel de Montaigne, *Essais livre troisième*, ed. Pierre Michel (Paris: Gallimard, 1986), 97.

⁴³ Cynthia Skenazi, 'The Art of Aging Gracefully: Castiglione's Book of the Courtier and Montaigne's «On Some Verses of Virgil» (Essays, III, 5)', *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 70 (2008): 587; Barbara Bowen, 'Montaigne's Anti-Phaedrus: «Sur Des Vers de Virgile» (Essais III, 5)', *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 5 (1975): 107–22.

⁴⁴ Virgil, *Georgics*, in *Eclogues. Georgics. Aeneid: Books 1–6*, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough, Loeb Classical Library 63 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1916), bk. III, l. 137, has the Latin '*sed rapiat sitiens Venerem interiusque recondat*', which is translated to: 'it may thirstily seize upon the seed, and store it deep within'; Montaigne, *Essais*, 3, 98: 'I see many more marriages that become troubled and quickly fail than those that succeed by placing stock in beauty and amorous desire. Marriages require much more fast foundations' [my translation].

acquisitive desire inspired by Juliana's existence. Damon, in Diotima's terms, becomes enraptured by another's physical beauty. He stalls on the Ladder. The two poems that follow 'Damon the Mower' are an allegorization of these facts. The mower in 'The Mower to the Glow-Worms' enters a suspended realm between life and death. His desire carries him beyond help. 'The Mower's Song' elegizes Damon's folly while emphasizing that Damon could have been saved had he turned to love and to the Ladder's prescription: appreciation of beauty must extend beyond physical delight to connect with the beauty inherent in souls.

Damon's Neoplatonic choice in 'Damon the Mower' is to either move up or stagnate on the Ladder of Love. Damon chooses to stagnate on the Ladder as he fixates increasingly on Juliana's physical beauty. By ignoring that 'fair shepherdess' and her wishes, Damon demonstrates his failure to see past her beauty (l. 33). The mower's failure is individual. He becomes a thief whose function, in scriptural terms, is wholly destructive: 'to steal, to kill, and to destroy', all of which are represented by Damon's scythe (John 10:10).⁴⁵ Juliana opposes the symbolism of Damon's scythe by representing the beauty of Christian hope in the common where man might redeem himself (like Abel) by tending to God's creation.

Marvell's distinction between pastoral and georgic characters takes on political implications that replicate England's economy: export wool manufacture in which shepherd and shepherdess figure prominently.⁴⁶ He inverts the Caroline pastoral emblem, a 'fair shepherdess' (l. 33), to create a sharp break between the recent royal appropriation of pastoral in favor of a purer Christian form.⁴⁷ Juliana's devotion to the 'piping shepherd' (l. 49) evokes Christ's association with virtue as an emanation from the One (John 10:11, 15–17). It further evokes Culverwell's description of shepherds: 'as for Lawes, they should be like so many green and pleasant pastures, into which

⁴⁵ All references to the Bible are to the Authorized Version. *The Bible: Authorized King James Version*, ed. Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁴⁶ Alastair Fowler, 'Georgic and Pastoral: Laws of Genre in the Seventeenth Century', in *Culture and Cultivation in Early Modern England: Writing and the Land*, ed. Timothy Raylor and Michael Leslie (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1992), 84–85.

⁴⁷ Anthony Low, *The Georgic Revolution* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985), 276–77.

these [... shepherds of nations] are to lead their flocks'.⁴⁸ Damon's solipsism, on the other hand, blinds him to the generative potential of communion with nature (on which Reason works) and with his fellow man.

Marvell ironizes the distinction between pastoral and georgic. The mower cannot possess the field that he works in georgic fashion because of his love for a pastoral figure. Marvell in this way also plays on the mower's position as a wage laborer in the changing economy. Damon's status has sown the seeds for potential divorce from a generative connection with the land and with the origins of pastoral and georgic. Damon's gift of the 'harmless snake' emerging from the garden is thus no gift at all, nor is it a bridge between genres.⁴⁹ Juliana's refusal of that gift, moreover, does not constitute 'clownish disinterest', although Juliana and Damon are 'clowns' in their country lifestyles.⁵⁰

The true georgic laborer is, like a shepherd, master of his own domain. Damon's myopia makes such mastery impossible. He stagnates on the Ladder because, as Culverwell tells us, 'though a sensitive soul may creep upon the ground, [...] yet an intellectual being scorns to look lower than heaven it self'.⁵¹ Damon's obsessive carnal interest rises against such judgment, after he is spurned, to the level of hubris:

'I am the mower Damon, known
Through all the meadows I have mown.
On me the morn her dew distills
Before her darling daffodils.
And, if at noon my toil me heat,
The sun himself licks off my sweat.
While going home the ev'ning sweet
In cowslip-water bathes my feet'. (ll. 41–48)

⁴⁸ Culverwell, 32.

⁴⁹ Low, 276.

⁵⁰ Leah Knight, *Reading Green in Early Modern England* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 124, 133.

⁵¹ Culverwell, 96.

These lines mirror Damon's opening movement of setting to work with Juliana in mind. The meadows may know the mower, but the egocentric rendition that Damon gives encloses those meadows as though they are his ken.

Such myopia takes on further Christian symbolism as Damon attempts to interact with Juliana. Damon's plaint centers upon his body and his consciousness, upon its situation in the meadow, and upon his perception of Nature's 'scorching' response to his woe (l. 6). Creatures flee this heat, but 'the snake', remains glittering 'in its second skin' (ll. 15–16). That emblem of Satan is, however, surveilled in much the same way as Milton later portrays God's knowledge of Satan's movements in *Paradise Lost*, for Damon ironically attributes the unusual heat to 'an higher beauty', Juliana (l. 19).⁵² That beauty, however, may equally refer to the celestial beauty of the 'sun' and 'Dog Star' (ll. 17–18): God, whose flame resides within man as much as without.⁵³

Juliana's lack of agency throughout the poem suggests the latter reading. Damon ties his ability to love to Juliana, misidentified as the source of heat. Moreover, in Damon's version of the story, her only agency resides in denying him.⁵⁴ So voiceless a representation is akin to the representations of Clora in 'The Gallery' (composed in the early 1650s). The speakers of both poems project images created by their emotional states onto a human body. Marvell's message in the opening lines of 'Damon the Mower' becomes plain: the Mower is unable to transcend himself and to thus ascend the Ladder toward God by learning to love himself and others.

Damon's attribution so early in the poem suggests that he has gone astray. Raising the shepherdess to a false idol and interpreting natural beauty in this light leads to error. In this way, Damon becomes bound by 'the cords of his sins', which implies a form of excommunication that becomes manifest in Nature: 'He shall die without instruction; and in the greatness of his folly he shall go astray' (Proverbs 5:

⁵² John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Helen Darbishier, *The Poetical Works of John Milton* 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), bk. 3, ll. 56–128.

⁵³ Culverwell, 137.

⁵⁴ See Judith Haber, *Pastoral and the Poetics of Self-Contradiction: Theocritus to Marvell* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 123, where she suggests that Damon focuses more and more as the Mower sequence progresses on Juliana's implication in his fall rather than his solipsism and its ill effects.

22–23). This biblical reading stands in contrast to Culverwell's description of laws immediately following his description of shepherds: 'Laws should be cords of love, not nets and snares'.⁵⁵ These opposed uses of 'cords' are reconciled in Culverwell's favor. Damon's error requires punishment, both exemplary and correctional, because he ignores the rational basis for laws (love). Damon is, on this basis, an outlaw. The subject, however, who accepts love and to love based on the reasoned approach seen in the Ladder, instead finds that law supports his initiatives.

That combination of covetousness and disconnection from the land creates an imbalance that prompts divine intervention. Damon's jealousy, like Adam's, is twofold: he covets the shepherd's woman and, just as in scripture, Damon also covets the shepherd's resources (Gen. 4: 4–5). Two great Neoplatonic spirits, Nature and Love, punish Damon by inspiring the 'careless chance' that mows him down (l. 77).⁵⁶ Damon is struck while brooding on a love that might have been, 'Had not Love here his thistles sowed' (l. 66). Male Love uses Nature's 'thistles'—a badge for God's punishment of mankind in the Fall—to frustrate a union that, at least in the mower's eyes, was meant to be.

Damon's suffering from 'slight' wounds that could be easily healed further suggests the depths of his isolation. The mower is bound by the cords of his sin against the cosmological order the Ladder of Love describes. Instead of taking a step up the Ladder by communicating his desire to Juliana, or by laying that unproductive desire aside after finding that her affections lie elsewhere, Damon allows it to isolate him from his kind—mowers and humans—and from the Nature in which he toils. Damon's solipsism inspires the punishment: 'Only for him no cure is found,/Whom Juliana's eyes do wound' (ll. 85–86). Because of his negligence while cutting the grass, Nature and Love complete their punishment by failing to assist the Mower.

In such a weakened state, the Mower ought to take stock of his mistakes, but, as his consciousness is shown to leave his body in 'The Mower to the Glow-Worms',⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Culverwell, 32.

⁵⁶ Donald M. Friedman, *Marvell's Pastoral Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), 135.

⁵⁷ See Smith's introduction to the poem in *The Poems of Andrew Marvell*, 141; Haber, 100.

Damon remains unable to relinquish his desire. He compounds his error by spoiling his corporeal and his intellectual existence with his focus on a single body. The Mower's 'mind' in this poem is not located in a specific space, which hints at the allegorical implications of the 'glow-worms' ('The Mower to the Glow-Worms', l. 15). The speaker situates himself by looking upon 'living lamps' (l. 1) and 'country comets' (l. 5)—both metaphors for glow-worms that Culverwell relates to Plato's description of souls suspended between corporeal life and full ascension to the One.⁵⁸ These worms should be to the mower's benefit. They lead 'wand'ring mowers' back to communion with Nature (l. 10). With Marvell's previous poem as backdrop, however, Damon cannot find the way back to his role. He is outlawed. If not a murderer, Damon remains a consciousness lost in the idea of Juliana: 'For she my mind hath so displaced/That I shall never find my home' (ll. 15–16).

Damon is then completely lost in 'The Mower's Song'. The poem closes out the trilogy with an unapologetic recounting of a life squandered. He is removed from instruction in the Ladder, for his soul cannot transcend its preoccupation. Marvell presents a mock-celebration of the mower's life to underscore the mower's inability to climb further. The poem introduces, in the mower's voice, Damon's life as recounted in the preceding lyrics.

The opening lines recall Damon's initial state as a subject dutifully working up the Ladder of Love. A self-conscious speaker understands the position of his 'mind' as 'the true survey/Of all these meadows fresh and gay' ('The Mower's Song', ll. 1–2). 'Survey' implies an abstract, managerial knowledge that the mower accrues as he cares for the meadows, which reflects Neoplatonic definitions of reason as the interpretation of natural phenomena. That survey allows the Mower to uncover some of Nature's secrets during his work, and that potential is represented in the Mower's 'hopes', which his mind locates 'in the greenness of the grass' (ll. 3–4). The green of these meadows is 'the colour symbolic of hope', and Marvell might also use the word 'hope' in its dual sense of 'expectation' or 'prospect', but also 'a small enclosed valley', a 'local nomenclature' particular to Scotland and the northern reaches of

⁵⁸ Culverwell, 79–80.

England.⁵⁹ Damon's hope confirms his role as a human witness to Nature's secrets. It also locates that nature in Marvell's native geography.

The Mower's fixation on Juliana in the refrain first becomes its own hope, which is a natural course in Diotima's Ladder. But the Mower does not move on to a generalized understanding of beauty. The smitten speaker's thoughts, at first growing 'more luxuriant still and fine' (l. 8), turn abruptly to resentment as Nature, portrayed as 'Unthankful meadows' (l. 13), continues to grow even as the Mower is distracted by his love. Marvell contrasts Nature's constant growth with the Mower's stagnation. That stagnation has been passed over in some criticism, where it is instead ascribed to an 'innocent Fall' caused by the 'discovery of experience, whether the experience of Society in any wider sense, or merely the society of Eve'.⁶⁰ Pastoral and georgic conventions are skewed in readings of the Mower as innocently (or, perhaps, mistakenly) fallen. Marvell's patent purpose when he chose the mower figure is to represent a fallen laborer against the purer pastoral example of Juliana and her lover. Keeping within the post-lapsarian terms of the genre and of the trilogy, mowers are always fallen. They are mortal and cannot be associated with pre-lapsarian Adam. Marvell thus casts Damon as a jealous character—whether Cain or Judas—against God's favorite shepherd and law-maker. Jealousy is a corruption in the soul that impedes a more general understanding of beauty.

The Mower's fallen state (in biblical and platonic senses) is, moreover, alluded to in the phrasing of his song. Nigel Smith describes 'The Mower's Song' as a 'dirge, specifically on account of its repeated refrain', which is written in the present tense.⁶¹ The Mower is not, however, dead.⁶² Marvell's verb tense thus presents current reality—one confined to the Mower's spiritual death—against the opening of each stanza in the past tense. Such openings demonstrate what 'was once ... true' ('The Mower's Song', l. 1). The Mower held dominion over the meadow when he did not engage in

⁵⁹ Smith, *Poems*, 145; *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. 'hope (n. 1)' and 'hope (n. 2)', accessed 15 March 2017, www.oed.com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca.

⁶⁰ Barbara Everett, 'Marvell's "The Mower's Song"', *Critical Quarterly* 4 (1962): 224, 222.

⁶¹ See Smith's introduction to the poem in *The Poems of Andrew Marvell*, 144.

⁶² See Knight's treatment of the mower sequence *Reading Green in Early Modern England*, 135.

so solipsistic an obsession; his reason allowed him to reach further up the Ladder. The mower's ability to understand the existential implications of his circumstances allowed him to slowly access bits of philosophy. That 'survey' is, however, now past, and the present result is the Mower's disconnection from Neoplatonic fire.

Damon's embrace of his fallen state with his song further embraces the mantle of human corruption. The mower's human nature must mediate between the fountain of knowledge and the beauty that resides in Nature.⁶³ Damon's desynchronization with the land isolates and ultimately removes him from communion from the Neoplatonic fire. He falls from the Ladder of Love because he cannot transcend his selfish preoccupation. In this corruption, Damon takes on the specific nature that Marvell warns against at the opening of his sequence, thus making these poems mirrors for gentry at a time when new 'cords of love' were being created in protectoral England.⁶⁴

IV

'The Definition of Love' is a counterpoint to the Mower's dour fate—and it is Fate, with her 'tyrannic power', that lies at the heart of Marvell's definition (l. 16). The poem gives a generative account of transcendence between two lovers that much more clearly seems to conform with the Ladder of Love. B.J. Sokol connects 'The Definition of Love' to Diotima's Ladder, but only to draw together suggestions for Marvell's ancient muses. Sokol thinks that Marvell's attempt at definition parodies these ancient sources 'to refine an argument of "sour grapes" into an object of wit and true feeling'.⁶⁵ Those grapes are much sweeter than Sokol thinks. A fuller account of Neoplatonism's place in the poem shows that Marvell advocates a union of souls in marriage that folds Reason into Love, for the two are (as Montaigne suggests) necessary to join souls in matrimony.

⁶³ Friedman, *Marvell's Pastoral Art*, 135; Everett inverts the act of revenge, suggesting instead that the Mower takes his revenge upon Nature (223). Her criticism, however, proceeds on the assumption that the Mower is in the midst of an 'innocent Fall', where the onus is placed upon Juliana as tempter. This critical approach seems unfair to Juliana, who herself is not granted agency in the poem.

⁶⁴ Culverwell, 32.

⁶⁵ Sokol, 170.

The speaker's lapsed condition is again on display, for Fate is a lesser god that must compete with man's own divinity—a Neoplatonist trope that allows the speaker to find an almost-masochistic 'joy' in his separation from his lover who, whether a human or a more divine object for love, stands in the same distant position from the speaker.⁶⁶ Marvell's attempt at definition is thus a display of his own progression from 'The Unfortunate Lover', with its martyr's combat against both 'Fortune' (l. 43) and 'Love' (l. 45). He moves toward a less combative stance, more at ease with the notion of 'fountains cool, and shadows green' (l. 4). The generative love that Marvell expresses is an existential threat against Fate herself:

For Fate with jealous eye does see
Two perfect loves, nor lets them close:
Their union would her ruin be,
And her tyrannic power depose. ('The Definition of Love', ll. 13–16)

Marvell's drama pits man against a lesser god in a quest for union but leaves the measure of that final result ambiguous at this early stage. 'Union' may refer to physical or spiritual love. If a physical bond, Fate carries the day, but the more 'divine' (l. 6) quality of the speaker's lesson from 'Magnanimous Despair' (l. 5) is a confirmation of Christian 'Hope' (l. 7) reposed in the deep source of a soul's love.

Social struggles beyond an individual's ken are framed in this light as opportunities to gain some wisdom or to gain new love: that is, to ascend Diotima's Ladder. Marvell uses the root of Damon's fall (lack of hope) as the source of firmer affections in a 'conjunction of the mind' (l. 31). Plotinus's framework for understanding beauty expands upon Plato's initial presentation of the Ladder:

... one must transport what one sees into oneself, and look at it as one and
look at it as oneself, as if someone possessed by a god, taken over by Phoebus

⁶⁶ See Ann Evans Berthoff, 'The Allegorical Metaphor: Marvell's "The Definition of Love"', *The Review of English Studies* 17 (1966): 16, for a reading of 'The Definition' as a devotional poem.

or one of the Muses, could bring about the vision of the god in himself, if he had the power to look at the god in himself.⁶⁷

A sliver of divinity resides within each virtuous being. Marvell's definition of those affections requires two minds *ad idem*. Such agreement extends beyond reason into the realm of faith because, as Culverwell argues, reason relies upon objective truth while faith is a subjective state that requires personal investment.⁶⁸ Ascending the Ladder leads to equal measures of reason and of faith.

If Plotinus is taken at his word, the union of two souls implies an expansion of the god within each party. Such a view explains the speaker's description of his arrival before the person where his 'extended soul is fixed' (l. 10). The soul's extension accounts for an addition to the *genius familiae*, a Roman family's god and its individual instantiations in each family member that, according to Horace, is '*natale comes qui temperat astrum,/naturae deus humanae, mortalis in unum/quodque caput, voltu mutabilis, albus et ater*'.⁶⁹ Such an addition is contemplated using reason; its effects are intangible and are thus under faith's purview. Marvell deploys this concept in 'Upon the Hill and Grove at Bilbrough' (~1650–2) to describe the relationship of Fairfax as patriarch to his property and to his wife: 'The Genius of the house' binds Nature on Fairfax's land to the love he experiences for his wife (Upon the Hill and Grove l. 52). As Nature responds to Fairfax's love, so, too, does the family's god transcend spatial or geographic terms in Marvell's definition. The lovers' separation is described as 'iron wedges' (The Definition of Love l. 11) driven between the lovers; they are located at 'distant poles' (l. 18); and the divisions of a map are evoked with reference to 'oblique' (l. 25) and 'parallel' (l. 27) lines. The lovers' connection moves

⁶⁷ Plotinus, *Ennead V*, trans. A. H. Armstrong, Loeb Classical Library 444 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 273.

⁶⁸ Culverwell, 141–44.

⁶⁹ Horace, *Epistles*, in *Satires. Epistles. The Art of Poetry*, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough, Loeb Classical Library 194 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926), 247–441, Epistle II.2.II. 187–9: 'that companion who rules our star of birth, the god of human nature, though mortal for each single life, and changing in countenance, white or black'.

away from mortal love expressed in these cartographic terms to embrace the universe created by the lovers' expanded *genius*. The speaker weakens Fate's 'decrees of steel' with an aside suggestive of the genius' transcendent measure—'(Though Love's whole world on us doth wheel)' (l. 19).

This line recalls Marvell's forceful argument for erotic union in 'To His Coy Mistress': 'though we cannot make our sun/Stand still, yet we will make him run' (ll. 45–46). Those concluding lines defy another ancient deity and natural force, 'Time', associated with the sun and with the titan *Kronos* (l. 39).⁷⁰ The experience of erotic love in 'To His Coy Mistress' subjugates time to amorous experience; in 'The Definition of Love', the emotional bond created through love co-opts the world maintained by a personified Love. In so doing, Marvell's lovers establish a 'plani-sphere' (l. 24) that, as Timothy Raylor suggests, maps out the heavens that hang over the speaker and his love.⁷¹ These heavens are populated by the great spirits that in the poem restrict the intersection of lover and beloved in 'oblique' (l. 25) erotic union. The speaker's decision to unite his familial deity with his lover's creates 'parallel' (l. 27) lines also reminiscent of the genealogical notation for union (=) to which Marvell was exposed in the Fairfax household.⁷² The formal union of souls in marriage thus defines love, but not as a ritual speech-act. A spirit is born out of the act that can at least lend itself to equal combat with greater spirits.

The union bolsters each lover's commitment to the source of their love by overcoming intermediate deities that stand between them and faith. Lesser gods are overcome in order to achieve communion between two minds and their attendant souls. The gap between individuals is reconciled by turning inward to rely on the resources drawn from the soul's eternal fire, a fire that can, if the individual is willing and able, put itself up against the brightness and strength of the stars themselves. By turning to that inner fire, individuals tap into a universal morality—a divine law in Christian

⁷⁰ See Smith's gloss on this point in *The Poems of Andrew Marvell*, 83.

⁷¹ Timothy Raylor, 'The Cartography of "The Definition of Love" Revisited', *Andrew Marvell Society Newsletter* 2 (2010), <https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/marvellsociety/newsletter/the-cartography-of-the-definition-of-love-revisited/>.

⁷² Robert Bell, ed., *The Fairfax Correspondence: Memoirs of the Reign of Charles the First*, vol. 2 (London: R. Bentley, 1848), xxiii n. (*), lviii–lvix.

Neoplatonism—that allows individuals to discover language and conduct on which social unity may be based. The inner fire is the flame that those destined for God's city might grasp in order to find the same flames dancing in the eyes of others.

V

Marvell brings just that kind of strength to bear in his later years as a Parliamentarian, thus exhibiting reflexes that he developed during his tenure with the Fairfaxes and in the republican government. The reading of the Mower trilogy and of 'The Definition of Love' that I have suggested works through early steps along the Ladder: appreciation of one's self-love and of individuals' love. Marvell demonstrates a maturing understanding of love's social power in these poems. These early lessons continue after the Restoration in the *Rehearsal Transpros'd*, when Marvell describes Bishop Samuel Parker's education. Although he 'preserved always the Civility of a *Platonick Knight-Errant*', his solipsism means that he pays only lip service to his vocation.⁷³ The insult repeats the cause of Damon's fall: Marvell undermines Parker's authority for want of self-awareness and for want of the ability to love.

Marvell deploys love more generatively in his description of Oliver Cromwell's leadership. He ties love of country with family in a further display of ascent up the Ladder. His description of Cromwell's eminence while leading England out of Civil War in 'The First Anniversary of the Government under His Highness the Lord Protector' borrows from the bucolic scene that greets Noah after the ark finally finds land:

Thou, and thine house, like Noah's eight did rest,
 Left by the wars' flood on the mountain's crest:
 And the large vale lay subject to thy will,
 Which thou but as a husbandman wouldst till:
 And only didst for others plant the vine
 Of liberty, not drunken with its wine. (ll. 283–89)

⁷³ Andrew Marvell, *Rehearsal Transpros'd* in *The Prose Works of Andrew Marvell*, vol. 1, ed. Martin Dzelzainis and Annabel M. Patterson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 74–76.

Cromwell is depicted as the industrious laborer this time working for the nation's account as an intermediary between the divine and lesser, drunker men. Hence his work planting a sustainable vine. Cromwell's character inspires the nation that 'had been ours, but his one soul/Moves the great bulk, and animates the whole' (ll. 379–80). That single soul, Marvell later suggests, is the only animating quality behind Cromwell's rule. Cromwell's daughter Eliza is depicted inspiring her father as he inspired a nation: 'When she with smiles serene and words discreet/His hidden soul at every turn could meet' ('A Poem upon the Death of his Late Highness the Lord Protector', ll. 41–42). In thus meeting Cromwell's soul, Eliza strikes the balance so necessary to generative love. The nation benefits from a father's love for his daughter.

The instances of love in Marvell's lyrics predating the Restoration and his fuller political maturity allow the historicist critic a glimpse of Marvell's practice as a writer forced to be a part of his world. The bursts of contemplative brilliance that his poems leave us boil down, as I have suggested, to an appreciation of love as the ultimate means through which to achieve virtue. John Locke may later echo such sentiments, though he does so from the context of a near-bloodless Glorious Revolution. Our poet leaves a fascinating thread to pull: the devotional texts of Elizabethan and Jacobean England place much stock in man's relationship with God; Marvell's poems on love suggest instead that godliness is best achieved by perfecting one's understanding of men. Such a subtle shift lays the ground for a separation of church and state, but not because religion is the root of social discord: social discord is a challenge that men must overcome by devoting themselves to their fellows, thus ensuring a polity bound through emotion rather than pure reason.

Marvell's generative focus on emotion contrasts with the equally emotional division created by the sectarian conflicts of protectoral England. Marvell's application of Christian Neoplatonism presents an opportunity for sects to reconcile through a common language of Christian love. Failing at that opportunity opens offending sects to censure in Marvell's later accounting of religious politics: they become a burden on the polity because they cannot generatively participate in the community's

emotional bonds.⁷⁴ This ecumenical message explains Marvell's pragmatic yet deeply devotional approach to English politics in his time.

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⁷⁴ Marvell, *Rehearsal Transpros'd*, 104–6.

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