The Nature of Marvell’s Mower

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Marvell’s Mower poems present four vignettes of a pastoral world, which as presented by the Mower is a thoroughly charming place presided over by an attractively melancholy figure. Although a few critics suggest that the poems should not be considered as a group, usually because of the differences between “The Mower against Gardens” and the other three Mower poems, the similarities between the poems far outweigh these differences. The consistency of the protagonist and his worldview throughout the four poems suggests that Robert Wilcher is correct in stating that “they form a coherent sequence in the order in which they were originally printed in 1681.” Whether or not Marvell intended the poems as a sequence, he is at least consistent throughout all four poems in presenting a single individual who defines himself in a special relationship with nature while at the same time hinting that the reader should question that definition. For while the Mower defines himself as a demigodlike figure in an unfallen Eden, Marvell presents him as a childlike figure, unable or unwilling to distinguish between his own desires and reality.

Marvell’s Mower is an artist of immaturity, who uses his considerable mental powers to recreate an unsatisfactory natural world. He combines in his single figure the best and worst aspects of “the lunatic, the lover, and the poet,” incapable of conforming his desires to reality, but responding to the beauty of nature, desiring love and expressing his frustration poetically. Although his artistic ability and the universality of his desires for love and a world that cares for him make him a somewhat attractive figure, Marvell presents him as self-deluded. The story that the poems taken as a sequence tells us is often viewed as one of innocence and experience, and so it is—but it is one of innocence (in one limited

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sense of that word) first seeking but then denying and resisting experience and refusing to be affected by it.\(^3\)

Many critics have accepted the Mower at his own valuation even while extending him the sympathy that one would naturally extend to a child. Closely examined, however, these four poems suggest not only a major discrepancy between the viewpoints of Marvell and his creation (and his creation's creation, the nature of the poems), but also suggest a view of man and nature that may apply as well to other of Marvell's poems. Finally, the Mower's attitude toward nature and his apparently unconscious recreation of the nature with which he lives in such apparent harmony and which he professes to understand so well have implications for other pastoral poems.

Although many critics have noted that the protagonist of Marvell's Mower poems professes to have a special relationship with nature, the nature of the relationship remains somewhat questionable. Except for two stanzas of "Damon the Mower," everything we know about the Mower and his world is filtered through his persona. Although the conventional reading of these poems is that the subject of "The Mower against Gardens" is the relation of nature to art, and the subject of "Damon the Mower," "The Mower to the Glo-Worms," and "The Mower's Song" is rejected love in a pastoral setting, the Mower's subject is in fact always himself and his own reactions to the world around him as he defines it.\(^4\) The most solipsistic of protagonists, Damon the Mower throughout all four poems is a character who interprets reality in ways that favor him, complains bitterly when the world refuses to correspond to his interpretations, and finally acts out his frustration in a way that allows him to retain the role he has defined for himself in the world as he perceives it.

Nevertheless, for all his refusal to relinquish his illusions, he continues to be seen as an attractive figure, his illusions interpreted as innocence, his passivity as philosophy.\(^5\) Rosalie L. Colie, for example, finds that "taken seriously, this Mower is insane" (p. 38), remarks on "the silliness of Damon or the Mower-against-gardens" (p. 40), and describes him as "foolish" and "frighteningly vulnerable" (p. 130); yet she also calls him "a dear" (p. 40), "an innocent, a naif, a sweet if parochial man, all that the pastoral hero is supposed to be" (p. 130), and "lovable . . . a delicate bumpkin" (p. 132). Patrick Cullen characterizes much of what Damon says as "pretentiousness," "pomp," and "braggadocio," but modifies these descriptions with "charming" (p. 187).\(^6\) Such mixed but tolerant reactions to such an irrational figure as the Mower are only possible because Marvell presents him, and we accept him, as
a child, of whom little can be expected and from whom much can be excused. 7

Marvell presents the Mower as a figure similar to the protagonist of “The Picture of Little T.C. in a Prospect of Flowers.” Like the child in that poem, Damon is associated with the “green Grass,” and makes friends with the flowers; he sees himself as the “Darling of the Gods” and the “virtuous Enemy of Man.” Even the narrator’s request that Little T.C. should “Roses of their thorns disarm” is similar to “the harmless Snake... Disarmed of its teeth and sting” that Damon offers to Juliana, in its tacit acknowledgment that nature can be improved upon by being rendered harmless, thus safe for children.8 In a final parallel, “Little T.C.” ends on an ominous note with the narrator warning the child that, should she “kill [Flora’s] Infants in their prime,” Nature’s goddess may “quickly make th’ Example Yours” (lines 37-38). Damon, of course, similarly associates himself with the fields where he deals out death, and where he ultimately cuts himself down (“Damon the Mower,” lines 73-80).

Other of Marvell’s immature characters also resemble the Mower in their inability to react to the experiences of the natural world except by dying. Thyrsis and Dorinda imagine the afterlife as a nature perfected for shepherds:

Ther’s no Wolf, no Fox, nor Bear.
No need of Dog to fetch our stray.

........................................

There, sheep are full
Of sweetest grass, and softest woull.
(“A Dialogue between Thyrsis and Dorinda,” lines 22-32)

They decide to die in order to get there immediately. Similarly, although more seriously, the Nymph of “The Nymph complaining for the death of Her Faun” who—like Damon—has been disappointed in love, reacts to the further loss of her pet by declaring that she—again like Damon—will respond to this disappointment by dying. In none of these cases do we actually know if the characters will in fact die, although this is not necessarily to question the sincerity of their declarations. Death as a result of grief is, of course, a tragic theme; death lengthily and poetically proposed but unacted, however, has comic overtones almost as distinct as those of the reasons for death proposed by Thyrsis and Dorinda. If we actually saw any of the protagonists die (as we do the fawn), we would not be left as Marvell leaves us, questioning whether these declarations are the passionate but momentary reactions of immaturity to any disappointment or frustration.
Even Damon’s designation of himself as “the Mower” renders him suspect as a mature figure. Because mowing is a seasonal occupation, no farm laborer can be only “a mower” in the same way that a shepherd can be exclusively a shepherd. The seventeenth-century song “The Farmer’s Boy” provides a much fuller picture of the farm laborer’s range of duties:

Though little, I'll work as hard as a Turk,
If you'll give me employ,
To plow and sow, and reap and mow,
And be a farmer's boy.

If Damon were to include plowing and sowing among his duties, he would have to include himself as part of the humanity that attempts to improve upon nature, and would be forced to acknowledge nature as less than perfect. Moreover, because hay must be cut and stacked in a limited period of time, mowing is commonly a group activity, not a solitary pursuit. Damon’s self-definition as “the Mower” suggests that he prefers to define himself only in terms of his most self-glorifying role, just as he defines nature in terms most favorable to himself.

Nature for the Mower is truly “Mother Nature,” fecund but innocent. A number of commentators have noted the parallel between nature as described in these poems—“Where willing Nature does to all dispence / A wild and fragrant Innocence” (“The Mower against Gardens,” lines 33-34)—and the un Fallen paradise of Adam (the Mower’s paradise being without an Eve, at least until “Juliana comes”). Others have noted parallels with Gonzalo’s dream of an ideal state in The Tempest:

All things in common nature should produce
Without sweat or endeavor.

nature should bring forth,
Of its own kind, all foison, all abundance,
To feed my innocent people.

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To feed my innocent people.

Certainly there are parallels between un fallen nature and the world as perceived by the Mower. His world, of course, is not entirely free of toil, as his self-definition as a worker indicates, but then neither was Adam’s. In fact, nature in the Mower poems is not quite so bountiful as it is in “The Garden”: the Mower’s nature does not actually push fruit into his mouth (“The Garden,” lines 35-36).
According to the Mower, however, the natural world does provide everything that he needs, without forcing him to do more than take what is freely offered:

What, through the piping Shepherd stock  
The plains with an unnum’red Flock,  
This Sithe of mine discovers wide  
More ground then all his Sheep do hide.  
With this the golden fleece I shear  
Of all these Closes ev’ry Year.  
And though in Wooll more poor then they,  
Yet am I richer far in Hay.  

("Damon the Mower," lines 49-56)

In addition to apparently pleasurable occupational and economic compensation, nature has provided much more for him, according to Damon’s interpretation. It has looked after his physical comfort ("Damon the Mower," lines 43-48) and safety ("The Mower to the Glo-Worms"), provided companions ("The Mower’s Song," lines 25-26), and furnished him with an identity and a place of honor in the world ("Damon the Mower," lines 41-42, 61-64); the Mower may well feel the meadows to be, in the phrase used in "Upon Appleton House," "Nature’s lap" (line 768), in which he snuggles as comfortably as a child. Nor is the Mower ungrateful: he defends his idea of nature, if only verbally, against what he perceives as the attacks of "Luxurious Man," "that sov’raign thing and proud" ("The Mower against Gardens," lines 1, 20).

But, as various critics have pointed out, the Mower does not live in a prelapsarian world, as he himself acknowledges when it suits him ("The Mower against Gardens," lines 13-18). Nature does not, in fact, produce everything that people need. Nor, indeed, should it: in the fallen world, man is doomed not only to sweat, but to sorrow, and it is at least arguable that the work of gardeners, among others, is part of God’s scheme for the redemption of both humanity and nature. In addition, the Mower fails to recognize that in his tirade against gardens in general he blasphemes, since God, not man, created the first garden. Furthermore, Gonzalo’s perfect state is intended to benefit others, although Gonzalo "would be king on’t" (II.i.152). The Mower sees himself as already the king, even one among nature’s gods, although he is a king with no human subjects and never indicates any concern for other human beings.

Despite his declaration that nature dispenses her bounty "to all," the Mower’s world is peculiarly empty. Except for the mention of "wandering Mowers" in "The Mower to the Glo-
Worms” (line 10) and the generalized “Man” of “The Mower against Gardens,” there are no other men mentioned; except for Juliana, who is hardly present, there are no women.\(^{17}\) The Mower is a farm laborer with no apparent farm: no employer, no fellow workers, no buildings or domestic animals except the shepherd’s “unnum’red Flock” (“Damon the Mower,” line 50). His home is the open fields, and his family and friends the small wild animals—snakes, chameleons, frogs, nightingales, grasshoppers, and glowworms—flowers and grass, and the fairies. It is indeed, as Barbara Everett has described it, “a brilliant toy world” (“Shooting of the Bears,” p. 98).

A toy world is particularly appropriate for the Mower, since his reactions are those of a rather spoiled child. He is both childlike and childish, a combination that accounts for our mixed reactions to him: he reacts spontaneously to the beauty of the limited natural world in which he finds himself perfectly at home, and we find ourselves charmed by his reactions; yet he cannot accept the actions of other men or the lack of response of a woman toward him, and, from an intellectual standpoint, we find that many of his statements are questionable.\(^{18}\) One indication of the untrustworthiness of the Mower’s statements is the seriousness with which he takes himself; these poems are, to be sure, characterized by a degree of playfulness, but the playfulness is Marvell’s, not the Mower’s.\(^{19}\) Although capable of seeing correspondences between his own feelings and nature, all of the Mower’s comparisons are self-aggrandizing and illusionary. Marvell, or whomever we assume to be the observer who sets the stage of “Damon the Mower” in stanza one and describes the Mower’s fall in stanza ten, consciously amuses us with his description of the Mower as destructive agent—

While thus he threw his Elbow round,
Depopulating all the Ground

(lines 73-74)

—and ends on a pun that deflates the Mower’s pretensions: “By his own Sythe, the Mower mown” (line 80). In contrast to the conscious comedy of falling as a result of a sigh, the Mower ends the poem by comparing himself to Death, an unconsciously comic correspondence.

Further to compare the Mower’s voice with Marvell’s we can contrast the Mower’s insistence that Juliana is responsible for the “unusual Heats” of the summer with a similarly inflated claim made about Maria Fairfax’s relationship to nature:
This heat the Sun could never raise,
Nor Dog-star so inflame’s the dayes.
It from an higher Beauty grow’th,
Which burns the Fields and Mower both:
Which made the Dog, and makes the Sun
Hotter then his own Phaeton.
Not July causeth these Extremes,
But Juliana’s scorching beams.

("Damon the Mower," lines 17-24)

'Tis She that to these Gardens gave
That wondrous Beauty which they have;
She streightness on the Woods bestows;
To Her the Meadow sweetness owes;
Nothing could make the River be
So Chrystal-pure but only She;
She yet more Pure, Sweet, Streight, and Fair,
Then Gardens, Woods, Meads, Rivers are.

("Upon Appleton House," lines 689-96)

Although both speakers use the pathetic fallacy to describe a female character’s power over nature, Damon uses his art to blame the woman he supposedly loves for what he sees as nature’s transformation and his own unhappiness. The poet of “Upon Appleton House” simply celebrates both nature and Maria. Although both verses are consciously witty, the difference in tone leads the reader to tend toward acknowledging Maria’s power, her admirer having no apparent ulterior motive for praising her. This sheer celebration seems far more convincing than Damon’s self-centered blame of Juliana, which leads us to question his description: Isn’t July naturally hot, the time when dogs traditionally run mad and the fields burn to ripen the hay by which the Mower makes his living?

Damon never really considers nature as anything but a reflection of his own thoughts and feelings; his insistence on being at one with nature leads him, in the final poem of the sequence, to recall the past as a glorious time, when he was at one with the fields:

My Mind was once the true survey
Of all these Medows 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.

("The Mower’s Song," lines 1-6)
But in fact Damon, as "The Mower against Gardens" demonstrates, has been happy only in his relationship with a limited portion of nature that excludes man and his creations and only because he has interpreted natural events in a way favorable to himself:

I am the Mower Damon, known  
Through all the Meadows I have mown.  
On me the Morn her dew distills  
Before her darling Daffadils.  
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.  

("Damon the Mower," lines 41-48).

Whether this is to be seen as a charming oneness with nature or insanity, it is obvious that Damon's mind, not nature objectively considered, is the subject. For all Damon's protestation that his mind and his meadows are true reflections of each other, it is clear from what he says that the meadows are merely meadows, the glowworms merely glowworms. He is, at first, happy; the grass is grass. Then he is unhappy; the grass remains grass. Nothing in nature changes in response to all of the Mower's inner turmoil—astonishingly, not even his activities. Just as the grass goes on doing what grass has always done, so he goes on mowing just as he always has; it is only his interpretation that changes. Even he recognizes that the cause of his suffering is internal when describing his mind as "displac'd" ("The Mower to the Glow Worms," line 15). But even though the movement of the poems takes place almost entirely within his mind, it seems questionable whether he is to be seen as a contemplative figure. The Mower does not contemplate nature in an attempt to understand it or anything beyond it; instead, he merely uses nature as a metaphor for his own feelings. Harold E. Toliver summarizes the reactions of two of Marvell's true contemplatives:

Though the poet [of "The Garden"] does not emerge from the hortus conclusus where fair Quiet and Innocence dwell, he nevertheless endorses the processes of time which have threatened to destroy the contemplative life: "How could such sweet and wholesome Hours / Be reckon'd but with herbs and flow'rs!" "Upon Appleton House," too, works within the same general framework. The poet leaves the contemplative sanctuary of the grove having gained a new capacity to deal with the active world.
Damon's reflections on nature lead neither to endorsement nor new capacity, but rather to aggression misdirected against the natural world. Perhaps even more relevant is the reaction of the rowers in "Bermudas," who—like the Mower—are forced to labor in an imperfect world, but nevertheless celebrate the beauties of nature, finding in them the hand of their creator, and who also—like an earlier pastoral contemplative, Duke Senior in As You Like It—are led by their contemplations to find "good in everything."

Apart from mere cutting of the grass, which presumably would have occurred in any case, only two events in the poems occur outside of Damon's mind: his offering of gifts to Juliana and his mowing of himself, both of which can be seen as attempts to restore his mental equilibrium. Having by his own definitions of nature and his role in it made himself unhappy, Damon attempts, first and unsuccessfully, to include Juliana in his "natural" scheme and then, with limited success, to act out a pastoral revenge tragedy which restores him to a different, but still exalted, role in nature as he defines it. Although some critics have viewed Juliana herself as experience which forces itself unsought upon the innocent Mower and his innocent nature, there is nothing in the poems other than Damon's self-serving judgments that suggests that woman is something apart from nature, or that Juliana forces herself upon the Mower. Ironically, as the poet of "The Garden" recognizes, it is only in a temporary, walled-off retreat of the kind the Mower despises that man can be separated from woman. Damon seeks Juliana, for all that we can see, rather than she him, and in this respect he is responsible for what happens to him, unlike the Nymph, who does not seek the experience that causes the death of her fawn. By offering gifts to Juliana, Damon seeks experience; it is only when the experience turns out to be different from his expectations that he retreats again into what he calls innocence. The gifts offered are natural objects (although the snake has been defanged) and unlike other pastoral lovers' offerings are clearly made with no consideration of what would please the recipient (contrast the gifts offered by Marlowe's Passionate Shepherd). The gifts are consistent with the Mower's philosophy that art or artifice is to be rejected, but it is clear even to the Mower that it may be difficult for Juliana to recognize such artless offerings as gifts:

Yet Thou ungrateful hast not sought
Nor what they are, nor who them brought.

("Damon the Mower," lines 39-40)
If Juliana were somehow to recognize the snake, chameleons, and oak leaves as gifts, divine who sent them, and appreciate both gifts and giver, she would perhaps be a fit mate for Damon as a kind of human parallel to Mother Nature. But the unlikelihood of this makes it appear that Damon is courting rejection by presenting Juliana with an impossible test.

Damon’s major action, by far his most decisive, even if inadvertent, is his mowing of himself (“Damon the Mower,” lines 73-80). This event provides a contrast between mere physical injury and the mental anguish that Damon has been undergoing, the former easily healed, the latter, he says, beyond help in this life. In addition, Damon punishes himself for his vengeful thoughts against nature; clearly, it is only his thoughts that are worthy of punishment, since his action in mowing the grass is by definition what he has been doing all along. His passion, like that of a child who cries for the moon, is real; but he appears to be no more capable than the child of taking any effective action to get what he wants. Confronted with a situation in which nature does not simply offer him what he desires, he must either revise his definition of nature and his place in it or reject the experience in favor of maintaining his illusion. As we might expect, he chooses the latter course.

Like Cain, the Mower turns his murderous anger at being thwarted against an innocent party, but because his victim is only grass, we are not appalled, but, rather, amused.‡ Having wreaked revenge upon nature, Damon—in a kind of objectification of conscience—undergoes the same “punishment” he has dealt out to the grass and thereby reunites himself with the natural world, which again provides him with what he needs—the cure for his physical injury:

With Shepherds-purse, and Clowns-all-heal,
The Blood I stanch, and Wound I seal.

(“Damon the Mower,” lines 83-84)

The cure for his more significant, emotional injury is not as immediately forthcoming:

Only for him no Cure is found,
Whom Julianas Eyes do wound.
’Tis death alone that this must do:
For Death thou art a Mower too.

(“Damon the Mower,” lines 85-88)
In fact, however, no cure is sought, for to seek one would be to accept personal responsibility and the need for action beyond nature. In the poem's last two lines, with comic exaggeration, the Mower locates his cure in the natural process of death, at the same time exalting himself by alluding to the allegorical figure of Death as Mower.  

By concluding that nothing but Death can cure the wound inflicted by Juliana, Damon places himself in the same passive position as he takes in "The Mower against Gardens," and thereby absolves himself from the necessity of taking action. His "fall" is a fortunate one for him, since it allows him in some sense to regain his former position with regard to nature, which he perceives as still ministering to at least some of his needs, despite his "attack" on it. Similarly, at the end of "The Mower's Song," he renews his relationship with the nature on which he has wreaked revenge, if only to join in "one common Ruine" (line 22). Although he foresees death, nature will help to ensure that it is a noble end:

And thus, ye Meadows, which have been  
Companions of my thoughts more green,  
Shall now the Heraldry become  
With which I shall adorn my Tomb.  

("The Mower's Song," lines 25-28)

Despite the grandiosity of a tomb adorned with heraldry, however, we see his childishness continuing. Not only is his heraldry merely grass, but he continues to see himself as a solitary figure, adorning his own tomb, and in so doing offers a suggestion of the child's belief in his ability to survive his own death and enjoy the reactions of the survivors: when Juliana comes again, then she'll be sorry.

However charmed by the Mower and however sympathetic to his plight, the reader should beware of accepting his definitions. The nature that dispenses to all a "wild and fragrant Innocence" is a very limited, fantastic, and personalized nature; its opposite, as defined by the Mower, is "total corruption." The Mower presents us with miniatures which he describes as a panorama. That his idea of innocence is so closely involved with his limited view of nature should suggest to us that for him its opposite, experience, may be equally limited. And so it proves. Just as the Mower fails to include the darker side of nature in his definition, so his "experience" is limited to an emotional upset which produces no apparent change in the surrounding world and no real change in the Mower's perceptions. He continues to be perfectly egocentric,
redefining his role from that of nature's hero to that of her victim, but continuing to occupy center stage. If he is no longer innocent, neither can he be said to be experienced, since all of his not inconsiderable powers are put forth to resist such experiences as the creation and discovery of new fruits and flowers and the apparent indifference of Juliana.

Marvell in these poems exposes the limitations of the pastoral form by presenting the pastoral hero not as Pan, but as Peter Pan, whose unhappiness is the result of his refusal to grow up and accept the world as it is. Because Marvell makes it so obvious that nature in the Mower poems is a creation of Damon's mind, we are led to question the idealization of nature and her supposed benevolence in similar pastoral poems. Pastoral is supposed to celebrate the simple life, but, while Damon's outer life is as simple as that of any conventional shepherd in the pastoral tradition, his inner life is excessively complicated by his need to maintain an impossible unity between his desires and nature, even after that unity has been contradicted by experience. Other of Marvell's poems, including "Bermudas," "The Garden," and "Upon Appletown House," suggest that man can find harmony with nature, but this harmony is not Damon's solipsism but a recognition that nature is only part of a system that includes other human beings and their creations as well as God. The contemplation of nature leads the protagonists of these poems beyond themselves and makes them happy; Damon's musings lead always back to himself and make him miserable.

Although the Mower ends unhappily, however, he wins a kind of victory by his loyalty to the limited nature he loves, even when she fails to love him adequately in return, and by his insistence on his own exalted role. He ends to some degree as he began, heroic—if only in his own mind—in his grand unity with nature, but his "thoughts more green" may have overtones not of the "green Thought" of "The Garden" (line 48) but rather of the greenness of youthful folly. He is less a figure of innocence and inexperience than one of refusal to experience and insistence upon a life of illusion.
NOTES

1Michael Craze maintains that "So different is ["The Mower against Gardens"] from the other three that to generalise about 'the four Mower poems' is to court critical disaster." *The Life and Lyrics of Andrew Marvell* (London: Macmillan, 1979), p. 139. Anne E. Berthoff suggests that: "The Mower Against Gardens' stands apart from the other Mower poems because Juliana is not involved." *The Resolved Soul: A Study of Andrew Marvell's Major Poems* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1970), pp. 140-41. Rosalie L. Golie asserts that "the person of the Mower ... cannot be identical in the four poems." "My Echoing Song": *Andrew Marvell's Poetry of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1970), p. 30; also see p. 124. The speaker of "The Mower against Gardens" uses a different and more sophisticated form than the speaker(s) of the other three poems, but such variation of form to suit content is not unusual: we are not surprised that Astrophel switches from sonnets to songs and back again or that several speakers in *The Shepheardes Calender* use different—often sophisticated—forms to deal with a variety of subjects. In "The Mower against Gardens," Damon ironically uses a sophisticated form to attack sophistication. All quotations of Marvell's poetry are from H.M. Margoliouth's edition of *The Poems and Letters of Andrew Marvell*, 3rd edn., rev. (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1971).


See also Everett, who discusses the “admirable-contemplative nature of the Mower” (“Marvell’s ‘The Mower’s Song,’” p. 221); Sambrook, who describes him as a “cultivator-destroyer” (English Pastoral Poetry, p. 93); Margarita Stocker, who sees the Mower as “comic/sinister” (Apocalyptic Marvell: The Second Coming in Seventeenth Century Poetry [Athens, Ohio: Ohio Univ. Press, 1986], p. 163); and Wilcher, who states that “The bravado of his forlorn attempt to sustain an untenable view of his own significance is both absurd and poignant to the poet and his readers,” Andrew Marvell, p. 97.

Many commentators have remarked in passing on the Mower’s resemblance to a child. Colie describes the speaker of “The Mower against Gardens” as “verging on tantrum” (“My Echoing Song,” p. 36). Cullen remarks on the Mower’s “childlike reaction” toward the grass that continues to grow and describes him as acting “like a punished child” in taking his revenge upon it; he also suggests that “one has only to know the amorous hysteria of the spurned adolescent female (sic) to realize how psychologically true Marvell’s portrayal of Damon is” (Spenser, Marvell, and Renaissance Pastoral, pp. 195, 196, 197). Everett describes the Mower as being “as vulnerable as a child,” “The Shooting of the Bears: Poetry and Politics in Andrew Marvell,” in Andrew Marvell: Essays on the Tercentenary of His Death, ed. R.L. Brett (Oxford: Univ. of Hull, 1979), p. 98, and suggests that only “the mature adult in loneliness, or the child” can find a “regained natural Eden” (“Marvell’s ‘The Mower’s Song,’” p. 222). John Klausé maintains that “[Damon’s] plaints are those of a man-child devastated in growing up,” The Unfortunate Fall: Theodicy and the Moral Imagination of Andrew Marvell (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1983), p. 63. Carol Marks Sicherman states that “Damon shares the egocentric simplicity of the child who thinks all the world is made for him,” although concluding that his knowledge of the parallel between flesh and grass makes him “no child after all,” “The Mocking Voices of Donne and Marvell,” Bucknell Review 17, 2 (May 1969): 32-46, 44. Swan describes the “state of consciousness... in which the Mower was congruent with the green world though separate from it” as resembling a “‘mirror’ relationship between mother and infant, a transitional stage of development ‘where it can be said that continuity is giving place to contiguity,’” “History, Pastoral and Desire,” p. 201, quoting D.W. Winnicott, “The Location of Cultural Experience,” (1967), rpt. in Playing and Reality (New York: Basic Books, 1971), p. 101. Wilcher describes the “retaliatory violence” of “The Mower’s Song,” as “the petulance of a thwarted child” (Andrew Marvell, p. 102).
The parallels between the Mower poems and "Little T.C." are interesting not only because the protagonist of the latter is explicitly described as a child, in contrast to Damon, but also because T.C. is described by an observer, whereas most of the ideas in the Mower poems are filtered through the Mower’s persona. Nevertheless, the similarities between the two characters and the "natures" of their respective poems are striking. For the grass and flowers see "Little T.C.," lines 3-8; for parallels, see "The Mower’s Song," lines 1-4, 13-14, 25-26. For "Darling of the Gods," see "Little T.C.," line 10; for parallels, see "The Mower against Gardens," line 40, and "Damon the Mower," lines 61-64. For "virtuous Enemy of Man," see "Little T.C.," line 16; for parallels, see "The Mower against Gardens," especially lines 1, 20. For "Roses of their thorns disarm," see "Little T.C.," line 30; for "the harmless Snake... Disarmed," see "Damon the Mower," lines 35-36. Anne Ferry notes of the speaker of "The Mower’s Song" that "his relation to nature—as mower, as poet, and as lover—is developed in ways resembling the speaker’s treatment of ‘Little T. C.’" All in War with Time: Love Poetry of Shakespeare, Donne, Jonson, Marvell (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1975), p. 220. Friedman suggests that "T.C., like Damon the Mower, is pictured not only as the ruler but the very shaper of her surrounding." (Marvell’s Pastoral Art, pp. 175-76).


See, for example, "Upon Appleton House," stanzas 49-54.


See Berthoff, The Resolved Soul, p. 138.

The trustworthiness of the Mower’s statements and perceptions is discussed by Peter Berek, "The Voices of Marvell’s Lyrics," MLQ 32, 2 (June 1971): 143-57, 148-49; Carey, "Reversals Transposed," pp. 142-43; Cullen, Spenser, Marvell, and Renaissance Pastoral, pp. 185-91; Ferry, All in War with Time, p. 219; Hill, Puritanism and Revolution, pp. 348-49; Don Parry Norford, "Marvell’s ‘Holy Mathematicks,’" MLQ 38, 3 (September 1977): 242-60, 246;

19For an excellent discussion of the play element in Marvell’s poetry, see Frank J. Warnke, “Play and Metamorphosis in Marvell’s Poetry,” SEL 5, 1 (Winter 1965): 23-30. This essay also directed my attention to stanza 87 of “Upon Appleton House.”

20See Cullen, Spenser, Marvell, and Renaissance Pastoral, p. 195; and Mattz, The Wit of Love, p. 177.


22On Damon as a revenger, see Berthoff, The Resolved Soul, p. 140; Craze, The Life and Lyrics of Andrew Marvell, p. 153; Everett, “Marvell’s ‘The Mower’s Song,’” p. 228; Ferry, All in War with Time, pp. 224-26; and Patrides, “‘Till Prepared for Longer Flight,’” pp. 42-43.

23On Damon’s gifts, see Berthoff, The Resolved Soul, pp. 136-37; Colie, “My Echoing Song,” pp. 33-34; Craze, The Life and Lyrics of Andrew Marvell, p. 160; and Cullen, Spenser, Marvell, and Renaissance Pastoral, pp. 192-93.


25Berthoff, The Resolved Soul, p. 140; Summers, “Marvell’s ‘Nature,’” p. 126; and Toliver, Marvell’s Ironic Vision, p. 109. Cullen sees the parallel as “a comic diminution” (Spenser, Marvell, and Renaissance Pastoral, pp. 189-90 n. 3). Friedman suggests that “The only note of excess is in the last line, because Marvell forces the identification of death and the mower into a much broader meaning than it should be made to hold in this poem” (Marvell’s Pastoral Art, p. 135); but the last line is hardly the poem’s only note of excess. If Juliana were ever given a voice, one could imagine her echoing As You Like It’s Phoebe: “Now show the wound mine eye hath made in thee” (III.v.20).


27On the pastoral hero as Pan, see King, Marvell’s Allegorical Poetry, p. 128. Sicherman hints at the parallel with Peter Pan when she states that the Mower’s “claim to prelapsarian intimacy with the gods . . . shows him yearning for the simplicities of a pagan never-never land” (“The Mocking Voices of Donne and Marvell,” pp. 42-43).

28Wilcher makes a similar comparison: “For Damon, the phrase ‘thoughts more green’ refers to the time when his mind was a ‘true survey’ of the ‘meadows fresh and gay’; for the reader it may suggest something nearer to Cleopatra’s ‘My salad days, when I was green in judgement.’ The greenness of innocence can be regarded from another perspective as the greenness of inexperience: a state upon which the adult mind may look with a mixture of nostalgia, amusement, and perhaps—with Shakespeare’s queen of Egypt—even a touch of contempt” (Andrew Marvell, p. 103).