

Spring 5-13-2017

# Organic Morality: A Poetic Garden Rhetoric Originating in the 18th Century

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## Recommended Citation

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Organic Morality:  
A Poetic Garden Rhetoric Originating in the 18th Century

Heather Robinson

M. A. Seton Hall University, 2017

A Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Master of Arts

In

The Department of English

Seton Hall University

May, 2017

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Approved by:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Karen Gevirtz", written above a horizontal line.

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Dr. Donovan Sherman, Second Reader

## Abstract

Many literary critics have researched and conjectured on the 18<sup>th</sup> century poets' connections to the developing landscape gardens of the time. For example, Francesca Orestano, in "Bust Story: Pope at Stowe, or the Politics and Myths of Landscape Gardening," discusses at length the presence and creation of Pope's development of aesthetics at the Stowe landscape gardens. However, most critics have focused solely on the idea of the aesthetic that gardens create and their relationship to the human experience of nature. Markus Poetzsch, in "From Eco-Politics to Apocalypse: The Contentious Rhetoric of Eighteenth-Century Landscape Gardening," describes the heated political world of landscape creation and critique. Other critics have focused on the politicized nature of gardening during the time period. Orestano discusses the changing political viewpoints of 18<sup>th</sup> century poets based on their writings about landscaping styles, while David C. Streatfield, in his article, "Art and Nature in the English Landscape Garden: Design Theory and Practice, 1700-1818," evaluated Pope's standards and methods of judging and inventing beauty and aestheticism in a garden. For most of these critics, the aesthetic, rather than the productive, nature of the garden has been their focus. Some critics, such as have written about the prescriptive, not merely the descriptive, nature of poetry regarding gardens at that time, giving the poem the power of change in the developing strictures of what made a "good" landscape garden in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

In my research, however, I have not yet found a critic that has explored these poets through a lens of environmental morality. This paper will investigate how poets looked at gardens in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and how they create a way of looking at gardens that has snowballed into our modern day obsession with organic gardening. The paper will then investigate the

rhetoric of organic gardening and its connection to the writers in question. It will explore the concept of environmental morality as a moral structure that finds its motivation within the relationship between human and nature. In other words, a moral system that is based on the environmental would look at nature and how humans treat and use nature, otherwise known as gardening, as a method by which the virtue of a person can be discovered. These authors, unlike their predecessors, such as Andrew Marvell who used gardens as a scene or object of description in poetry, used poetry as a way to analyze and moralize gardens and the act of gardening. They create a discourse of garden morality that has morphed over time into the discourse surrounding organic gardening today. This eco-critical analysis of the poets Alexander Pope, Stephen Duck, and William Cowper will expound upon this idea and explore the connection between their works, 18<sup>th</sup> century landscape gardening, and the development of an organic-based garden morality system that has come to the forefront of our society today.

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Dr. Gevirtz

Master's Thesis

May 4, 2017

## Organic Morality:

### A Poetic Garden Rhetoric Originating in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century

With the massive amounts of organic gardening co-ops, organic gardening self-help books, and high demand for organic food markets, the rhetoric of organic morality is on the tongue of our society. When I rang up organic fruit for the first time while working as a cashier at ShopRite, I thought that I had made a huge calculation error. The banana I had rung up was almost twice as expensive as the one that I had rung up before. When the woman saw the price difference, she asked me if the first banana had been organic. Not finding the “organic” label on it, she wanted to return it in exchange for an organic fruit that was twice as expensive. That was my first introduction to the concept of the organic, and since then it has evolved to become even more prevalent in Western society. From groceries to paper companies to clothing stores, the organic craze is on the rise. The organic gardening movement has become an increasingly prevalent trend in the past few decades.

When did this fanaticism over organic gardening originate? As Nicola Shultnan cheekily points out in her article, “The Genius of the Place,” “By general consensus, the English are good at two things: writing and gardening” (16). While this is a reductive view of English society, it does uncover a connection between the two arts. It would make sense, then, that the two would be strongly intertwined and the discourse of organic ideology could be traced to influential

poetry about gardens. This paper proposes one possible literary push that could have sent this ball of organic discourse rolling. This paper will investigate how poets looked at gardens in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and how they created a way of looking at gardens have evolved into our contemporary obsession with organic gardening. The paper will then investigate the rhetoric of organic gardening and its connection to the writers in question. It will explore the concept of environmental morality as a moral structure that finds its origins in the relationship between human and nature. In other words, a moral system that is based on the environmental would look at nature and how humans treat and use nature, one form of which is gardening, as a method by which the virtue of a person can be discovered. They create a discourse of garden morality that has morphed over time into the discourse surrounding organic gardening today. This eco-critical analysis of the poets Alexander Pope, Stephen Duck, Anne Finch, and William Cowper will expound upon this idea and explore the connections among their works, 18<sup>th</sup>-century landscape gardening, and the development of an organic-based garden morality system that has come to the forefront of our society today and in the self-congratulatory organic grocery shoppers confusing cashiers across the land.

From the late 17<sup>th</sup> to the early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, gardening was changing. It moved from the highly stylized and intricate patterns of meticulously pruned baroque maze gardens to the free-roaming landscapes of William Kent and Lancelot “Capability” Brown. The new form of landscaping looked not to control nature, but rather to enhance it and to make the landscape appear natural while still using good judgement to guide nature. Rather than focusing on the control of nature, it looked to embrace the landscape’s natural tendencies, and highlight its beauties. Brown, one of the most famous landscape architects, got his nickname of “capability”

because, when surveying a landscape he was going to work on, he would comment on how capable his client's land is of improvement. Methods of gardening were starting to follow new ideals, putting nature's ability to adapt as a standard of which to base your garden on.

Many literary critics have investigated 18<sup>th</sup>-century poets' connections to the developing landscape gardens of the time. However, most critics have focused solely on the idea of the aesthetic that gardens create and the garden's relationship to the human experience of nature. For example, Francesca Orestano, in "Bust Story: Pope at Stowe, or the Politics and Myths of Landscape Gardening," discusses at length the presence and creation of Pope's development of aesthetics at the Stowe landscape gardens. Using a bust of Pope at Stowe as a focal piece of her article, Orestano offers a socio-political and aestheticist reading of Pope's writings on garden landscapes. She discusses different critics that have made conjectures about Pope's influence on various garden designs around England, connecting them to the intertwined political and aesthetic principles that were being proposed and / or contested at the time. By looking at Pope's critiques and praises of gardens that he visited, Orestano develops a view of Pope's philosophy as one based on variety. While the copying of natural variety is an aesthetic that reflects an organic sentiment towards gardening, this view reduces gardening practices to mere aesthetics, while this paper will look at how humanity's physical imitation of nature in gardening goes beyond the aesthetic and reaches moral significance.

Other critics have focused on the politicized nature of gardening during the time period. Markus Poetzsch, in "From Eco-Politics to Apocalypse: The Contentious Rhetoric of Eighteenth-Century Landscape Gardening," describes the heated political world of landscape creation and critique. Orestano also discusses the changing political viewpoints of 18<sup>th</sup>-century

poets based on their writings about landscaping styles. While Poetzsch brings in the changing concepts of divine order in society, neither scholar connects these political garden statements with a morality of gardening. In fact, these critics limit the influence of these poets by looking exclusively at the political scene at that historical time, and not the far-reaching effects that these writings have had on our culture today.

Other scholars have followed questions about aesthetics and the treatment of nature, particularly questions at the intersection of poetry and gardening. David C. Streatfield, in his article, "Art and Nature in the English Landscape Garden: Design Theory and Practice, 1700-1818," for example, evaluates Pope's standards and methods of judging and inventing beauty and aestheticism in a garden. The article gives a detailed description and explanation of the shift in gardening style that occurred in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. He describes the ideological, financial, and political reasons for the shift away from highly geometrical baroque and Dutch-French garden styles. Many critics, such as Raymond Williams, Heinz-Joachim Müllenbrock, and Joan Bassin say that the gardens went from being easily read and emblematic to a more interpretive setting where the "reader" of the landscape made the meaning. Because of the shift in garden styles, the idea of how a garden-goer should experience and "read" the garden they are visiting became a topic of debate in the 18th century.

Garden poetry was a major influence that shaped the idea of the garden experience at the time. Stephen Bending, in his article, "Re-Reading the Eighteenth-Century English Landscape Garden," writes about the inadequacy of the narrative of the gardening transition that occurred over the 18th century in England. Bending argues that the experience of the landscape garden was highly influenced by the different texts of the time that discussed the proper way to interpret

a garden. Poets and writers that were describing gardens in their works and explaining how gardens should be read were in fact leading the entire movement, according to Bending. Much like an organic garden, the meaning of the garden is not found in the visual experience of the garden, but in the literature and ideologies surrounding it. Just as an organically conscious shopper cannot visually distinguish between organic and non-organic produce without a sticker to tell them, garden-goer in the 18th century had poetry to tell them how to interpret what they are seeing.

Many eco-critics reveal valuable connections between these poetic works and human connection to nature, but some have fallen short in outlining its relevance to the organic movement of today. John Wilson Foster in his article, "The Measure of Paradise: Topography in Eighteenth-Century Poetry," discusses how most critics focus on the portrayal of the garden and landscape in their analysis of these poets' works, but asserts that poetry was not simply a literary imitation of gardening and painting techniques. He argues against this widely-held viewpoint by writing that the aspect of nature that is most emulated in these poems is that of topography and the relative elevations of the land. In landscape gardening this was an extremely important component to a respectable garden, as it was part of the allure of a landscape garden to use hills and ha-has to simulate unconfined land. Foster's observation of topography, while bringing the criticism of 18th-century garden poetry to a new level, fails to link this leveling of land to the moral equalizing of humanity and nature as well.

The 18th century is a period of transition in the rhetoric of the organic in garden poetry. Many 17<sup>th</sup>-century poets used garden imagery fairly frequently, many also used it as a scene or object of description in poetry. In "The Garden," Andrew Marvell uses nature as a setting of a

quiet retreat, labeling nature's value as in relationship with human comfort and as a canvas for human emotional catharsis. Aphra Behn, in her response poem, "The Willing Mistress," uses nature in a similar way, writing:

Amyntas led me to a Grove,  
 Where all the Trees did shade us;  
 The Sun itself, though it had Strove,  
 It could not have betray'd us. (Behn 1-4)

Behn's garden is a secret retreat resembling the maze-like baroque gardens of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, where one could hide among the alleyways and crevices. Nature, be it the Sun or the Trees, helps set the scene for lovers' intimacy and is depicted as having no choice but to act as a backdrop to human emotions in the poem.

Behn's poem, "On a Juniper-tree Cut Down to Make Busks," departs from this use of nature as mere scenery by giving a tree narrative agency. However, despite the tree's first-person perspective, it remains a bystander in the romantic action that the poem centers on. The humans in the poem use the tree as a lover's retreat. The tree states:

that in which I glory most,  
 And do myself with Reason boast,  
 Beneath my Shade the other Day  
 Young Philocles and Chloris lay. (Behn 20-23)

Rather than its own progress, or the growth of the trees around it, the tree finds its greatest pride in its ability to be a bed for lovers. Behn's tree is happiest when it can be "a joyful Looker on," and not a character of agency in its own story (93). At the end of the poem, the tree's top "was,

as fragrant Incense, burned: / My Body into Busks was turned” (105-106). In the eyes of the tree, this is the best fate that could have befallen it. While the fate of the tree’s top half reflects a deep connection between nature and the divine, this connection is only achieved after the tree has been chopped down. Rather than following its natural path of decomposition, the tree’s body is turned into the busks of a corset, serving mankind as a protector of purity rather than aiding in the fertility of its environment. Unlike in later poems, the life and death of nature in this poem is presented as being completely subservient to mankind.

Many poets of the 17th century do not show trust in nature’s grand plan for itself. Rather, through their poetry they depict a relationship of control over nature. Marvell addresses the futility of humanity to completely control nature, while simultaneously validating human control an appropriation of nature. He writes:

How vainly men themselves amaze  
 To win the palm, the oak, or bays,  
 And their uncessant labours see  
 Crown’d from some single herb or tree,  
 Whose short and narrow verged shade  
 Does prudently their toils upbraid. (“The Garden” 1-6)

These lines show the power of nature to overcome men’s attempt to control it. However, later in the poem, he affirms humanity’s right to control nature when he condones the cutting of a tree, writing, “Fair trees! wheres’e’er your barks I wound, / No name shall but your own be found”(“The Garden” 22-23). While he attributes value to nature, he upholds man’s power over it. In “To His Coy Mistress,” Marvell again envisions human control over nature when he writes,

“Thus, though we cannot make our sun / Stand still, yet we will make him run” (45-46). While these lines transition to a more ambivalent attitude towards humanity’s control of nature and recognizes the limitations that are inherent in this hierarchy, it still denies the steady and cyclical flow that governs natural processes, and gives the speaker, no matter how small, a control over the natural movement of the Sun, creating a hierarchy with humanity precariously at the top.

In many 17<sup>th</sup>-century discourses, nature and natural processes are depicted as having a beginning and end. For example, John Dryden’s “Harvest Home” describes the harvest as a celebration of the end of work, spreading excitement for the full barns and the hay that is mowed, and shouting, “Come, my boys, come; / And merrily roar out Harvest Home” (Dryden 4-5). Dryden’s poem depicts a view of farming and gardening as having a specific beginning, middle, and end, that each harvest is a separate and distinct entity than the last and the one to come in the future. The cyclicity of nature is lost in this celebration of the current moment, with no eye to the future.

Prior to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, poets used nature as metaphors for human emotion. Rather than nature having its own agency and will, it acts as a symbol of withheld emotions. For example, Marvell writes, “My vegetable love should grow / Vaster than empires and more slow” (Marvell 11-12). Vegetable is used as an adjective that speculatively serves his emotional desire for his mistress while reflecting an Aristotelian view of human emotion. While it speaks to the longevity and generation-spanning quality of gardens, it ultimately serves human need for expression. These lines give new insight to Marvell’s ending line describing his ability to make the Sun move faster. By making nature part of his dominion, the speaker in the poem, rather than using nature as a metaphor, manipulates nature to fit his human rush for love.

Marvell's poem, "Upon Appleton House", comes closer to the organic ideology that would come in later centuries by questioning man's overuse of natural resources. In the second stanza the poem asks its readers "Why should of all things Man unrul'd / Such unproportion'd dwellings build?", pointing out that all other creatures seem to lack this need to constantly expand and improve and are content using only what they need (Marvell 9-10). The poem goes on to praise the house where "all things are composed here, / Like Nature, orderly and near" (Marvell 25-26). These lines foreshadows Pope's later request to let Nature never be forgot, as it uses Nature as a positive model off of which to compare a human-composed environment. However, while the poem supports the modeling of human use of nature off of that of animals, who only use what they need, the poem does not attribute this to any intrinsic value or rights that the natural environment itself is owed. The poem goes even further to demonstrate an admiration for nature's design when it says, "But Nature here hath been so free / As if she said leave this to me," explaining that human art would "have defac'd" the beauty that nature bestowed on the place (Marvell 75-77). At this point, Nature and the value of natural garden design is beginning to be appreciated.

Marvell describes a good gardener as one who can

*Ambition* weed, but *Conscience* till.  
*Conscience*, that Heaven-nursed Plant,  
 Which most our Earthly Gardens want.  
 A prickling leaf it bears, and such  
 As that which shrinks at ev'ry touch;  
 But Flow'rs eternal, and divine,

That in the Crowns of *Saints* do shine. (Marvell 353-359)

The distinction between the human characteristic of ambition and the idea that one needs to cultivate conscience creates a very strong connection between gardening and moral development that was developed by the poets of the following century. The description of the divine eternal flowers uncovers the passage not as a call to garden morally, but as a natural metaphor for the cultivation of the inner human soul. While Marvell allows for the connection between garden and morality, he does not get to the point yet of starting the dialogue of organic morality, though he does set the groundwork for it.

Many of these 17th century writers follow the ideal of the pastoral, an aesthetic that acts as a precursor to the more organically-charged ideals that poets in the 18th century propose in their garden poetry. The practice of many 17th century poets looking to recapture a simpler, idealized version of the past evolved over time to become a moral code. By the time the 19<sup>th</sup> century comes around and the Romantics are writing, the discourse surrounding garden poetry has transformed in many ways. It is not as common to see gardens being used as scenery, objects to be controlled, or symbols of human emotion. Percy Bysshe Shelley's "The Sensitive Plant" exemplifies the completely altered garden discourse present in poetry since the 17<sup>th</sup>-century discourse. This poem tells the story of a garden that is tended to organically by a kind woman and chronicles the death of both the gardener and the garden as the seasons change. The plot of the poem demonstrates the interdependence of gardens and humans, and gives its reader an example of organic gardening lived out. Shelley uses imagery that humanizes the plants in the garden, even going beyond humanizing and comparing them to mythical gods and goddesses. For example, the poem uses terms such as, "infant," "young lovers," "naiad-like," "narcissi," and

“nymph” to describe the flowers in the garden (Shelley 18, 21, 29, 59, 68). While the term “narcissi” can refer to a genus of flowering plants that look like daffodils, Shelley’s use of this term reminds the readers of the plant’s more ancient and powerful connections, like that of Narcissus. This tribute to the ancient power of nature reflects an awe for nature that inspires moral obligation to it.

The choice to make the garden into the subject of the poem, rather than the scene or setting, is another aspect of the poem that demonstrates a focus on the organic. Shelley gives each of the plants in the garden human traits, describing their existence with action verbs. For example, the poem states that the Hyacinth “flung from its bells a sweet peal anew / Of music so delicate, soft, and intense, / It was felt like an odour within the sense” (Shelley 26-28). Like a member of a bell choir, the hyacinths act as participants in the harmony of smells being created in the garden. Rather than plants being an object that has the trait of a certain smell, the plants in this garden poem are active agents, purposefully creating a musical medley of smells. The sensitive plant shows an even greater humanity when “It desires what it has not, the Beautiful.” (Shelley 77). Nature in gardens has become an active agent that strives towards beauty on its own.

Imbuing the main plant with the adjective of “sensitive” both personifies the plant, giving it the quality of a human, and emphasizes a different role between humanity and nature.

“Sensitive” implies that the plant has acute sense, a quality that Pope will demand of his readers aspiring to gardening. Its sensitivity also helps explain the extreme care taken by the woman in the poem to tend the plant. In every aspect of her gardening, she follows the “sense” of nature and shows a precursor to the intensity of organic gardening seen today. For example, “Her step

seemed to pity the grass it pressed...And [she] sustained them with rods and osier-bands” (Shelley 135, 153). Her care for the plants is evident in her attention to detail and help that imitates the nurturing aspects of nature, giving the plants poles to climb up on their own, and enabling nature to become its best. The poem also states that, “all killing insects and gnawing worms...She bore, in a basket of Indian woof, Into the rough woods far aloof” (Shelley 41-44). Rather than using the various pesticides that were available during that time, the woman in this poem chooses to safely relocate the unwanted bugs in a way that would not harm the plants. However, she makes a conscious choice to keep beneficial and indifferent bugs in the garden when she

the bee and the beamlike ephemeris  
 Whose path is the lightning's, and soft moths that kiss  
 The sweet lips of the flowers, and harm not, did she  
 Make her attendant angels be (Shelley 163-166)

Much like organically-conscious growers of today, she is hyper-aware of the importance of bees in the longevity of a garden and only looks to help the plants grow naturally, uninhibited.

Through including moral and divine terms, the poem shows a changed view of nature, and enacts an assumed moral code towards nature. From the start, the woman is compared to a divine entity, being called, “a ruling Grace” and is to the plants, “as God is to the starry scheme” (Shelley 116, 118). When she

sprinkled bright water from the stream  
 On those that were faint with the sunny beam;  
 And out of the cups of the heavy flowers

She emptied the rain of the thunder-showers (Shelley 147-150)

the woman demonstrated her intimate and Eve-like relationship with each plant, knowing each plant's individual needs. The poem also refers to her work as "garden ministering," a term that reflects not only a stewardship of God's creation, but an acting out of one's vocational ministry, fulfilling one's moral purpose through gardening.

These poems reveal a shift that occurred in the moral discourse surrounding the role of gardens in poetry between the 17<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. As Christopher Hitt points out, "debates about art's relationship to nature date back to antiquity, but in the long eighteenth century (an age that ushered in empiricism, natural theology, and natural history) the subject assumed an increased urgency" (123). One dialogue that 18<sup>th</sup>-century poets opened up was that of the cyclical aspect of nature. One example of this is Stephen Duck's "The Thresher's Labour". While this poem discusses farming, rather than gardening, its presentation of farming reflects a distinctly organic sentiment and should be recognized in a study of the garden poetry of the time. As farming is gardening on the large scale (though sometimes not as large a scale as landscape gardens), Duck's message can be seen as the natural extension of the 18<sup>th</sup>-century garden aesthetic. Duck writes that the poem's purpose is "To sing the Toils of each revolving Year; / Those endless Toils, which always grow anew" (8-9). The reference to the "revolving" nature of time emphasizes the cyclical aspect of nature itself, and the cyclical life of the garden. Saying that their toils "grow anew", helps to tie the idea of growing (one that is usually associated with continual upward development) with a cyclical nature. In this way and throughout the poem, Duck presents the human enterprise of gardening and farming as a cyclical growth that mimics the natural growth of the garden throughout the year-long cycle of increase and decline. The

poem's structure imitates this cyclicity by ending where it started, with the harvest. Duck writes, "New-growing Labours still succeed the past; / And growing always new, must always last" (287-288). The work of farming, just like the garden or farm itself, is a process without beginning or end, a tribute to the eternal nature of creation.

18th-century poets established a moral code through their poetry when it came to natural gardening. "The Thresher's Labour" makes it clear that part of man's vocation on earth is to tend to creation when it discusses how "the poor Thresher's destin'd to pursue" (Duck 10). Duck also laces his poetry with references to Roman and Greek gods, such as "Ceres," goddess of agriculture, "Aetna," and "Thetis" (14, 28, 29). Pope, in his poem, "Epistle IV: To Richard Boyle, Earl of Burlington," evokes the same goddess in his description of nature as well, writing,

Another age shall see the golden ear  
 Embrown the slope, and nod on the parterre,  
 Deep harvests bury all his pride has plann'd,  
 And laughing Ceres reassume the land (Pope *Epistle* 173-176)

These references give a divine nature to the poem that uplifts and moralizes the actions of gardeners towards nature. These lines from Pope's work also highlight the cyclical path that nature follows, of annual growth and decline, with a gradient growth towards natural progress.

The moral aspect of garden poetry also reimagines the work of a gardener through the lens of moral acts of love. Describing the thresher's cutting of the wheat, Duck uses Christ-invoking language when he writes, "equal Force descend from high", as if the act itself was like Jesus' act of mercy on humanity, coming to earth to guide mankind (39). While Duck does not shy away from the toilsome work of a farmer, and the toll that it has on the workers, the

work is divinely given. Streatfield describes this religious ideology. Through Streatfield's description of this shift in ideologies happening at the time, he compares gardening to an attempt to "recreate Eden on earth" (Streatfield 4). This devotional aspect of gardening set up the conditions for the poets in question to express a new set of codes for a garden morality system. While devotional gardening is nothing new, these poets, especially Pope, make one's gardening style an extension of one's moral life.

Pope writes that the most important quality one must possess is "Good sense, which only is the gift of Heav'n" (Pope *Epistle* 43). Pope's "good sense" in the "Epistle to Burlington" is described in a very similar way to God's gift of grace to humanity. By referencing sense as a gift from Heaven, Pope aligns a good gardener with an eye for nature that reflects God's gift of unconditional love for creation (grace). Through his grace-like good sense, the gardener can guide nature to its true potential. The use of the word sense also implies a devoting of mind and body to a work of great importance, following one's five senses to observe nature and gain God-given sense of mind to follow the underlying eternal plan for creation. Hitt explains this idea: "nature ... is harmonious because it is part of the nature of the universe, whose ultimate concordia is guaranteed by God" (132). God's order for the universe is the only perfect plan from which a gardener can find inspiration aligned with nature.

These poets also created a rhetoric of humanizing nature. In his "Epistle to Lord Burlington," for example, Pope writes:

Consult the genius of the place in all;  
That tells the waters or to rise, or fall;  
Or helps th' ambitious hill the heav'ns to scale,

Or scoops in circling theatres the vale;  
 Calls in the country, catches opening glades,  
 Joins willing woods, and varies shades from shades,  
 Now breaks, or now directs, th' intending lines;  
 Paints as you plant, and, as you work, designs. (Pope *Epistle* 57-64)

This stanza shows a humanizing of nature that takes a step further than the works of Marvell and Behn. Just as their works used nature to embody certain human traits, Pope's work attributes human qualities to nature when he calls it "ambitious". However, Pope takes this humanizing quality further when he makes the gardener the imitator of nature's "genius". While nature at that time meant, "the defining characteristic or quality of a person," it was also used to refer to "a person's capacities, abilities, or qualities of mind" (Lynch 8). Giving this quality of "genius" to nature implies that there is an inherent quality of nature that humanity should follow. Rather than *giving* nature human-like characteristics, Pope puts nature, if not on a higher level, at least on a separate plane than that of humans, transforming nature into the original and humanity as being subject to its precedent. Nature is the active agent in this poem, no longer the passive setting as it was in previous centuries. By using strong action verbs such as "tells," "scoops," "calls," "catches" "breaks" and so forth, the gardener becomes more and more an imitator of nature's strong guidance. Rather than nature being at the mercy of man's design, nature is the force that does the designing, as is seen in the last line of the stanza above. True gardeners are directed by nature in their gardening as a paintbrush is directed by the painter. While the gardener or the paintbrush work on one small stroke in the dirt or on the canvas, the nature and the painter have the whole picture ready in their minds.

A new dialogue also emerged that showed a deep respect for nature's adaptive qualities and called for humanity to imitate and follow the intelligence and adaptability of nature. This is seen in Pope's poem as well, when he writes, "time shall make it grow / A work to wonder at" (Pope *Epistle* 69-70). The poem points out the slow, prolonged, and far-reaching qualities of nature's progress. Trying to form a landscape garden with just oneself in mind would never be as fruitful as a garden that had gardening's far-reaching generational effects in mind. A moral garden must follow nature's path, not man's. Pope elaborates on this point when he writes, "For what has Virro painted, built, and planted? / Only to show, how many Tastes he wanted" (Pope *Epistle* 13-14). These lines show the inadequacy of an aesthetic taste that is based on human fashion and not on the eternal and timeless processes of nature. If one builds a garden to follow trends and style, one loses the greater ability of following nature to grow into magnificence. Pope goes further to show how man's attempt to control the functions of nature "Fill[s] half the land with imitating fools / [...] / And of one beauty many blunders make" (Pope *Epistle* 26, 28). These lines could be commenting on the evolving practice at the time of selective breeding in plants, where botanists were trying to control the natural process of plant mutation and evolution by breeding certain plants together. As Berris Charnley points out in his article, "Seeds Without Patents: Science and Morality in British Plant Breeding in the Long Nineteenth-Century," "plant breeding in Britain during the long nineteenth century was a growth industry" (70). Though this practice was just barely starting, Pope seems to cite it as a valid concern. Rather than allowing nature to follow its own process of evolution over time, the fools that tried to imitate rather than embrace the natural process created "blunders" out of nature's beautiful processes.

Pope's exhortation, "In all, let Nature never be forgot" (Pope *Epistle* 50) summarizes the

new garden morality that these poets were instituting, one where nature acted as guide and teacher and where man's taste was formed out of a deep appreciation for and understanding of nature. Witt, discussing Pope's *Windsor-Forest*, explains that "Pope...embraces an aesthetic of wilderness that, perhaps paradoxically, becomes a reassertion of order." (132). Pope's description of gardens respects that same aspect of wilderness inherent in nature, where humanity follows the natural order of a garden's progress. Instead of overwhelming nature and deterring its growth by adding distinctly man-made designs, Pope's garden ideal looks to create a sense of balance between man's wishes and nature's guidance. "You show us, Rome was glorious, not profuse, / And pompous buildings once were things of use" (Pope *Epistle* 23-24). There are very spirited debates and writings from the time about how a garden is to be set up and nurtured. To Pope, a good landscape architect has to be able to recognize the value in a natural landscape and the potential beauty that it already possesses. Witt argues that, for Pope, "To 'copy Nature,' then, is to copy an internal rather than an external landscape" (133). Rather than simply looking at what is there, the true moral gardener sees the potential of a landscape, finding the inner path of the physical landscape.

William Cowper's poem, "The Shrubbery," is another example of the new discourse that was being created. In this poem, the speaker presents a nature as an active agent, and presents a speaker unworthy of the blessings of nature, examining the relationship between human and nature. In this poem, Cowper, similar to Duck and Pope, animates nature with qualities and abilities usually reserved for humans. For example, he describes the shrubbery as being able to "sooth," "admonish," and "tell" (Cowper 7, 22, 23). These words give nature an instructive and guiding quality, creating a hierarchy of education between plant and humanity that is expanded

upon throughout the poem.

“The Shrubbery” presents a nature that is willing to give peace and happiness to the right kind of visitor. The speaker, focused on his own inner thoughts and workings, does not find the peace he searches for in nature. He writes that Nature is “Friendly to peace, but not to me,” and later reveals that is because “fix'd unalterable care / Foregoes not what she feels within” (Cowper 2, 9-10). While a garden would normally sooth the feelings of a hurting soul, as Cowper puts it, the garden does not show such kindness to the speaker. The speaker is characterized by a deep and overwhelming interiority that projects his feelings onto the landscape, much like earlier garden poets had. In this poem, however, he is punished for it. Such attention to human emotion in a garden is seen as a transgression against nature, or as Cowper describes it, it “slights the season and the scene” (Cowper 12). To use nature as an emotional canvas is no longer seen as a moral or appropriate use or care for nature. While the poem presents nature as having innate beauty, the speaker blames it on his own perception and treatment of nature that makes its “smile withdrawn” (Cowper 15).

Cowper gives the strongest example of what many 18th-century garden poets were calling their readers to: a morality that reflects the balance of nature and humanity as described in the poetry. The poem presents a contrasting approach to nature in its description of “the saint and moralist” (Cowper 17). While the speaker uses nature as a springboard on which to unload all his human ideas and emotions, ruining nature’s beauty in the process, the morally-straight saint and moralist form their thoughts around the design of the natural world and are rewarded for it. Overtly linking the action of “tread[ing] / This moss-grown alley, musing, slow” to that of a moral garden-goer shows the importance of modeling one’s actions in nature off of the

carefully planned out slow processes of nature (Cowper 18). Man is forming himself by learning from nature, and while the saint and the speaker both may complete the same action, as Cowper points out when he writes, “They seek, like me, the secret shade, / But not, like me, to nourish woe!”, the two actions could not be more different (Cowper 19-20). While the saint sojourns in nature to imitate its slow and musing ways, the speaker is more interested in fueling his human emotion through nature than nature itself. This poem clearly replaces the use of pathetic fallacy with a relationship with nature that follows a garden’s natural tendencies.

Cowper’s poem, “The Winter Morning Walk,” from *The Task: Book V*, shows very similar views of nature and man. The poem starts out by giving nature strong characteristics and comparing humanity to a shadow in nature when the speaker sees the shadow of his legs and comments, “I myself am but a fleeting shade, / Provokes me to a smile” (Cowper 13-14). For the speaker, this observation of his own insubstantiality when put in the vastness of nature is not a source of despair, but rather of joy. In finding himself in the inexhaustible world of God’s creation, the speaker sees that his efforts to completely control nature would be futile.

Cowper also points out the cyclical beauty of nature when he describes the grass that struggles through the winter and is adorned with frost. He writes,

The verdure of the plain lies buried deep  
 Beneath the dazzling deluge; and the bents,  
 And coarser grass upspearing o’er the rest,  
 Of late unsightly and unseen, now shine  
 Conspicuous, and in bright apparel clad,  
 And fledg’d with icy feathers, nod superb. (Cowper 21-26)

The speaker in the poem recognizes the latent fertility that lies beneath the surface. He appreciates the cyclicity of nature and recognizes its need for times of retreat. As the plants turn inwards in the winter, the speaker turns inward to observe his own spirituality and role in nature, showing a value to the imitation of nature's cycle. The poem makes this point more explicit when describing the cattle waiting for their food. It reads,

The cattle mourn in corners where the fence  
Screens them....There they wait  
Their wonted fodder; not like hung'ring man  
Fretful if unsupply'd, but silent, meek,  
And patient of the slow-pac'd swain's delay. (Cowper 27-31)

These lines demonstrate the traits that are emerging in 18th-century garden poetry and changing how humanity is to morally interact with nature. In describing the cows as having the human ability to mourn, it is both giving nature a heightened level of humanity as well as showing the adverse effects of fencing in and confining cattle. It also makes a comparison between cattle and humans, where the cattle practice a patience that reflects a deeper understanding of nature's cycle than man, who worries and frets if his crop is experiencing a bad season.

In his walk about the winter landscape garden the speaker in the poem glorifies the virtue of liberty, first recognizing it as an attribute of nature and then appreciating it as a gift from God. The speaker's observation that "'Tis liberty alone that gives the flow'r / Of fleeting life its lustre and perfume / And we are weeds without it," shows both the beauty that liberty gives to flowers, and the need for humans to respect that beauty of liberty (Cowper 238-240). According to the poem, if a gardener does not respect the natural liberty of plants to grow as God intended and in

complete liberty, he becomes a weed, acting as a detriment to the beauty and health of the garden in an attempt to take over. Just as weeds will suck a garden dry, a bad gardener who does not give the plants the liberty to grow naturally undermines the fertility of the garden. The next line, “All constraint, / Except what wisdom lays on evil men, / Is evil”, emphasises this point (Cowper 241-243). However, much like Pope’s support of good taste, Cowper also has an exception to his rule forbidding constraint. If the constraint is led by “wisdom”, and not by mankind’s evil tendencies, then it can be beneficial. Cowper brings all of these ideas together into a moral framework at the end of the poem when he writes about liberty “Which whoso tastes can be enslav’d no more. / ’Tis liberty of heart, deriv’d from heav’n,” (296). This liberty of nature that mankind must respect and control only through wisdom, is a gift sent by God upon creation. In this way, mankind’s attempt to control nature and take away that liberty is, according to this poem, akin to mankind attempting to control God’s will for nature. Cowper’s poem shows the immense moral import that gardening was developing at this time.

Anne Finch’s garden poetry demonstrates that the poetical shift that was occurring was across genders. Anne Finch’s “The Tree” offers a stronger sense of support for organic morality at a slightly earlier date than the other poets. Finch sets up the same parameters for moral treatment of nature as the other poets studied. One way she establishes these parameters is by setting up a reciprocal relationship between humans and nature, where favors are exchanged and consequently mistreatments are avenged. Not only humanizing nature, but giving nature rights and the ability to strike back, the poem tells the story of a tree’s majesty and wishes upon it a long happy life, falling by a natural act of wind, rather than mankind. The poem starts out with the speaker pointing out the debt that she owes to the tree for its shade, saying, “Fair tree! for thy

delightful shade / 'Tis just that some return be made;" (Finch 1-2). The adjective, "fair" is very fitting, as the speaker seems to attribute a sort of fair justice that the tree emits. Rather than seeing nature as something from which to take for the betterment of man, this poem sees the shade given by the tree as a sort of favor, one that must be repaid. The poem makes it clear that one is not living up to a moral standard if recompense is not made for the help given by a tree. As the poem points out, the tree is repaid in multiple ways by creatures of nature and by humans that recognize their moral duty to nature. From birds, the tree "music dost from them receive;" while from travellers, "time in praising thee they spend," and shepherds "Tunes to thy dancing leaves his reed" (Finch 6, 9, 12). The poem changes a tree from a piece of scenery to a benevolent with the same rights of a human to be repaid for its kindness, a right that this poem takes as common knowledge, as nature and many humans that are in tune with nature respect.

The speaker attempts to participate in this exchange of respect by wishing upon the tree a good, natural life and describes the natural process of a tree's life as that of a hero, taken down by a rightful foe (the wind) and not being taken down by a disgraceful death by man. When wishing that "To future ages may'st thou stand / Untouch'd by the rash workman's hand," the speaker both acknowledges the longevity and expanse of nature's course of progress and presents the cutting down of a tree as out of the natural process of a tree's life, an untimely death (Finch 19-20). For the tree to live a full life, it must die a natural death and only be taken down by the natural process of the wind when "that large stock of sap is spent" and the tree has reached the end of its lifespan (Finch 21). The acknowledgement of a tree as having a natural lifespan, spelled out in its internal composition is so contrary to earlier views of nature. Instead of seeing a tree as a resource to be used, the poem shows that nature has a plan and a path and that human

interference and constraint that does not follow that path is a killing of potential. At the end, the tree must be taken down by the winds, which “Prevent the axe, and grace thy end” (Finch 26). Rather than having its body being taken down by man, it is laid to rest by the wind. The use of the word grace emphasizes that the respect of nature produces grace, not the actions of man.

The end of the poem describes a hearth as a funeral service for a tree, showing a deep religious respect given to nature. Finch writes, “But shalt, like ancient heroes, burn, / And some bright hearth be made thy urn,” when describing the end of the tree’s existence (31-32). In this moment the tree is recognized as a hero and embraces a sort of immortality through its funeral pyre. While the fire is shown respect and reverence in the poem, it is not because of the fire’s service of keeping the family warm but rather for its immortalization of both the memory of the tree and the cyclicity of nature. Unlike Behn’s juniper tree, which lived and died for the service of humanity and took pride only in what it could do for man, Finch’s tree is shown honor inherent in its existence. Rather than burning as incense for a distinctly human ceremony of worship, the tree receives its own cremation as an homage to its full life. To Finch, respect for nature goes beyond simple exchange of favors and becomes a moral requisite for humankind.

Morally, gardens were undergoing a type of scrutiny at the time as well. Heinz-Joachim Mullenbrock, in his work, “The English Landscape Garden: Literary Context and Recent Research,” observes that “The landscape garden in the first half of the eighteenth century... was essentially a moral performance” (297). Mullenbrock’s description of a garden as a moral performance highlights the idea of a garden as a place of moral decision-making, where one makes a conscious choice of how to act out one’s relationship with nature. The authors of this time period were aware of the moral obligation they had to guide people to a moral relationship

with nature through gardening. The labeling of this style of gardening as a performance creates an interesting dynamic, as it gives the garden the ability to act out this morality as well.

Landscape gardens had a productive aspect to them as well. Landscape gardens demonstrated “remarkable subordination of aesthetic interests to utilitarian and social ones” (Mullenbrock 295). Rather than just being an aesthetic that people were looking for, the landscape garden was something that was used to not only enhance the landscape itself, but to enhance and benefit the people that visited them as well. In light of the necessity of utilitarianism in the creation of these gardens, it is important to look at how these gardens are used in the literature of the time and how the use of the garden can go past its physical space and into the ideological space of man’s moral relationship with nature.

In *The Country and the City*, Raymond Williams discusses the impact of enclosure in the 18th century. As he points out, enclosure deprived small farmers of independence, of living and farming on their own terms and in their own way (Williams 99-100). He describes itself as having been an intellectually freeing way of life, assumingly in contrast to the sectioned-off labeling of enclosure. The fact that many landscape architects were designing things like ha-has to conceal the enclosures and borders of the landscape creates an interesting dynamic. Though the landowners wanted these clearly defined borders to their land, they did not want them to be seen. Socially, gardens were moving towards a more specific area of land, with the imagery of an eternally expanding horizon. They were looking toward the future of gardening, and were not looking back.

The writers of the 18th century were aware of the power of their work, but may not have recognized the longevity or adaptability of the discourse they were starting. During the time

these authors were writing, “the horticultural phenomenon that caused literally thousands of naturalistic, wooded parklands to appear across the country” was starting to show its ideological power on society (Shultnan 16). In her discussion of Horace Walpole’s “The History of the Modern Taste in Gardening,” Shultnan describes this change from gardens being “an expression of imported French despotism that deformed and enslaved nature” to “an emblem of British political liberties” (17). This shift in garden ideology, though highly politicized by many critics, essentially reflects a moral stance on the proper treatment of nature. Shultnan writes that at the end of the landscape gardening movement, Walpole believed that ““We have discovered the point of perfection. We have given the true model of gardening to the world.””. But it also exposed the inherent contradictions which would bring about its end” (20). While the specific aesthetic of the landscape garden did not survive, the moralized view of nature and man’s relationship to it that our poets embodied in their poetry persisted long after landscape gardens went out of style.

The tenets of 18th-century garden poetry, which created a transition from what came before and helped form what came after, are the same tenets of the organic gardening movement of today. As David and Rebecca Nowacek point out, “the past forty years have seen a meteoric rise in the demand for organic foods” (403). While the discourse might have become more explicit and popular in the past 40 years, the basic guiding principles reflect the same rhetoric as the garden poets centuries earlier. After much discussion of various meanings of the word, the article settles on the idea that the term, “organic” has a fluid definition, reflecting a “discourse” rather than a set definition (Nowacek 409). While the definition might be difficult to pin down, the ideas and theories that guide the moral role of a gardener have not changed since the 18th century.

Organic rhetoric is laced with references to nature that attribute a level of humanity to a garden. Audrey Windram, in her book, *The Organic Grower: A History and Practical Guide to Organic Farming*, applauds “countries which have treated their soil with the respect due to a living thing” as they “have been able to continue sowing and harvesting the same areas of land for generation after generation” (loc 108). Her labeling of the land itself as a living thing reflects the humanizing of nature that we have observed in the poems discussed here. Just as Anne Finch’s tree has a life and soul, Windram assigns the level of respect reserved for living things even unto the ground from which the plants grow. This acknowledgement of rights is the first step towards creating a moral code around those rights.

Windram not only gives these particles of soil the rights of living things, she also acknowledges a level of agency, describing how the microbes in soil perform their job of “soil building and soil-maintenance, provided that they have sufficient water and oxygen” (loc 131). She attributes a level of autonomy to soil, showing that it can perform its moral duty of growth if the proper conditions are met, and showing the importance of the unity of mission between gardener and garden.

Organic rhetoric recognizes and celebrates the cyclical aspect of nature. Windram uses descriptions such as “parent material of soil - rock” and “infant earth” that respect the generational and cyclical aspect of nature, harkening back to Pope’s landscape garden, which will grow to full potential after the planter is long gone (Loc 134, 137). As Windram puts it, “the environment does not profit from haste” (loc 333). These processes of soil and plant life cycles are described as “ancient processes [that] are also of the present and future” (Windram loc 145). Echoing Duck’s “toils of each revolving year”, this perpetuation of ancient processes through the

practice of gardening models itself off of the circle of life in a garden. Just as Cowper observed nature to become more in tune with creation, Windram writes that by observing the natural processes of a garden “we are glimpsing the cyclic process of life that keenly concerns us; the process we want to avoid disrupting” (loc 183). We are not designers of nature, but partakers in it.

Organic rhetoric has a tone of morality to it that emphasizes a level of respect that it is humanity’s duty to show to nature. In the introduction to her book, Windram is described as having “been living the organic life, variously as an organics pioneer, producer, evangelist, educator and author, all the while ‘practising what she preaches’ and preaching in the most gentle of ways” (loc 26). Much like the gardener in Shelley’s “Sensitive Plant,” Windram is made into a moral role model for others to follow. Windram, as the garden evangelist she is, points out that one of the greatest difficulties the first organized groups of organic gardeners faced was “how to protect the ethics of the fledgling organic movement, which could have foundered on greed and misrepresentation, without guidelines” (loc 70). In other words, the leaders of the organic gardening movement were trying to articulate a code of ethics already inherent in their practice, one that poets had realized much earlier.

Organic rhetoric also supports the idea of balance. Pope criticizes those that see the value of gardening in “the size and dimension, instead of the proportion and harmony of the whole” (“Epistle 4” 1). This same idea of the value of balance in gardening is seen in the organic rhetoric of today. Windram writes that “the flaws that have become apparent in chemical farming are the result of imbalance” (loc 305). Though framed as a reaction to the overuse of chemical farming in the past century, this support of a balanced approach to gardening emerged centuries prior.

Organic rhetoric demonstrates a trust in the natural process of adaptation and improvement that a garden goes through and models its practices off of nature's sense. They put trust in what Windram refers to as nature's "great chemical laboratory" (loc 315). An organic gardener "believes there is virtue in working with nature, utilising natural systems and elements, and building fertility with the aid of the micro-organisms which inhabit...soil" (Windram loc 114). Not only does the practice of organic gardening imbibe the gardener with virtue and enhance his moral and spiritual life, just as we see in William Cowper's poetry, but this method of gardening is presented as a joint effort between the gardener and the gardened. The gardener teams up with natural systems, elements, and even the invisible microbes that make up the environment they are working in. Windram points out the role of a gardener is to work with "all these interconnected processes...to complete the cyclic pattern of plant nutrition" (loc 293). Just as the landscape gardeners of the 18th century realized, a garden is not a painting, and while one may want to create a landscape according to one's will, human influence is only one of many interconnected processes that guide the natural life of a garden.

Just as Pope asks his readers to align their sense with that of nature, the organic gardener does this in his own way, "'his own way' being as close to nature as possible" (Windram loc 119). Pope's requirement for good taste is that "nature never be forgot", and organic gardeners of today, perhaps unwittingly, take that mantra to heart, trying to "utilise natural processes by speeding them up and redirecting them a little" (Windram loc 152). Similar to how the poets of the 18th century supported the idea of a gardener's map being the guiding processes of nature, organic growers today seek to merely aid nature in achieving its intended potential. Windram explains this idea of molding our plans to the plans of nature before ever putting shovel to soil

when she writes, “we should start our agricultural planning by noticing what kind of life is maintained there before we decide what kind of a garden we want to make” (loc 522). While Capability Brown would look at a tract of land and see the landscape garden potential within, or Finch would see a tree and the natural processes that may affect its future, the organic rhetoric of today reflects the gardener’s role as being guided by the plans of nature.

The Nowaceks provide a deconstructionist reading of the recent history of organic farming by looking at the market trends associated with the organic gardening movement in an attempt to find the meaning of the word “organic”. They look at the difficulty with which organizations have attempted to solidify the definition of “organic” and codify it into a set of parameters that produce can be measured up against. These elusive parameters describe a secular morality, codes that define the true good from the bad. In their exploration of the history of organic gardening codes and the attempt to mass-market this set of morals, they describe the discourse that surrounds and defines this movement. They present a description of organicism that changes depending on the natural landscape conditions in which the organic product is found. This code based on modeling one’s gardening after the tendencies of nature is perfectly aligned with the set of morals that the 18th-century garden poets created.

The trust that organic gardeners put in the adaptive processes of the garden not only celebrate the cyclical nature of plants but adds a new dimension to the discussion of garden progress. Windram describes how plants will naturally pave a path towards growth, and describes how “each plant form has left behind a residue which will sustain life a little higher than itself” (loc 180). While the cyclical life of the singular plant has come to an end, the clandestine path of the garden continues in an upward spiral of fertility. One small change made

by a gardener can have monumental effects on the trajectory of a garden's growth.

Poets of the 18th century observed and influenced changing ideas about gardening through their poetry. While many critics have observed the aesthetic and stylistic influences of these authors on the changing garden techniques of the time, many have not extensively explored the aspects of their writing that have had much more far-reaching influences into society today. Pinpointing the characteristics of the shifts that occurred in the discourse of garden poetry from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century reveals a new appreciation for the cyclicity of natural processes, a respect for nature that is deeply humanizing, and a feeling of moral obligation towards human treatment of nature. These tenets are reflected by the organic gardening methods and philosophies of today, showing a continual rhetoric of garden morality that initiated in the 18th century and evolved into the organic movement today.

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