

Lecture 12: Intro to Literature & the Environment, *Milton, Marvel, & Herbert (The end of the "Renaissance")*

John Martin, "Raphael visits Eden" (1825)

Milton's "Paradise Lost"

Like Cooper's Hill, Paradise Lost is highly descriptive of a locale, Eden:
A happy rural seat of various view:
Groves whose rich trees wept odorous gums and balm;
Others whose fruit, burnished with golden rind,
Hung amiable—Hesperian fables true.
If true, here only—and of delicious taste.
Betwixt them lawns, or level downs, and flocks
Gracing the tender herb, were interposed,
Or palmy hillock; or the flowery lap
Of some irriguous valley spread her store,
Flowers of all hue, and without thorn the rose.

Paradise Lost must be highly descriptive of the locale, as you cannot visit Eden:
Paradise Lost is an excellent example of the power of loco-descriptive literature, as it is wonderfully able to represent an environment (in this case Eden), which cannot be gestured to, as it does not exist.

Milton similarly lavishly describes Heaven and Hell in "Paradise Lost":
Because Milton is a monist, he imagines Heaven and Hell as not only made of the same basic matter as Earth, but as strikingly similar in appearance, as these three places are filled with plants, streams, mountains, and so forth.

In fact, Earth and Heaven are so similar that they could have one day merged:
In "Paradise Lost" Milton imagines that, if there had not been a Fall, Adam and Eve would have brought about an extraordinary cosmic event:
"And Earth be chang'd to Heav'n, and Heav'n to Earth" (VII.160).

"Upon Appleton House" Andrew Marvel, 1652

Generally speaking, "Upon Appleton House" was the last "country-house" poem:
Although in the early 18th century Alexander Pope would describe the countryside around his house in the poem "Windsor Forest," for the most part country-estate poems ended with Upon Appleton House in 1652.

Although a country-estate poem, "Upon Appleton House" is highly descriptive:

In its size alone (it is nearly 800 lines in length), Andrew Marvel's great country-estate poem makes clear that description is now far more important than it was in Jonson's "To Penshurst," which was one sixth its length. Thus, country-estate poetry is transitioning into loco-descriptive literature.

Nonetheless, "Upon Appleton House" is also highly allegorical: "Upon Appleton House" contains a tirade against the Catholic Church (Stanzas 12-35), actually insinuating that Catholic nuns are lesbians, as well as metaphorically weighing in on England's Civil War (Stanzas 47-59)

"Upon Appleton House" expresses a number of perspectives on the environment: For example, Marvell imagines his patron, General Thomas Fairfax, as overseeing his garden's plants as a general would an army:

When in the East the Morning Ray
Hangs out the Colours of the Day,
The Bee through these known Allies hums,
Beating the Dian with its Drumms.
Then Flow'rs their drowsie Eylids raise,
Their Silken Ensigns each displayes,
And dries its Pan yet dank with Dew,
And fills its Flask with Odours new.
These, as their Governour goes by,
In fragrant Vollyes they let fly.
(l. 289-98)

Marvel also draws attention to, and celebrates, Fairfax's old-growth forest: But I, retiring from the Flood,
Take Sanctuary in the Wood;
And, while it lasts, my self imbarke
In this yet green, yet growing Ark;
Where the first Carpenter might best
Fit Timber for his Keel have Pressed.
And where all Creatures might have shares.
(481-87)

"Upon Appleton House" makes clear that environmental attitudes were in flux: Although celebrating the near-military control of a highly cultivated garden, Marvel is also well aware of the merits of wilderness, both for human beings and other life--an attitude moving toward ecocentrism.

The "Mower against Gardens" expresses an uneasiness toward modification of the environment. This attitude will continue to grow in the next 350 years:

Luxurious bring his vice in use,
Did after him the world seduce;
And from the fields the flow'rs and plants allure,
Where nature was most plain and pure.
He first enclos'd within the garden's square
A dead and standing pool of air;
And a more luscious earth for them did knead,
Which stupefied them while it fed.
The pink grew then as double as his mind;
The nutriment did change the kind.
With strange perfumes he did the roses taint,
And flow'rs themselves were taught to paint.

The tulip, white, did for complexion seek,
And learn'd to interline its cheek;
Its onion root they then so high did hold,
That one was for a meadow sold.
Another world was search'd, through oceans new,
To find the Marvel of Peru.
And yet these rarities might be allow'd,
To man, that sov'reign thing and proud;
Had he not dealt between the bark and tree,
Forbidden mixtures there to see.
No plant now knew the stock from which it came,
He grafts upon the wild the tame;
That the uncertain and adult'rate fruit
Might put the palate in dispute.

"Man" George Herbert, 1633

Like Marvell, George Herbert was anxious about the loss of indigenous plants:

More servants wait on Man,
Then he'l take notice of: in ev'ry path
He treads down that which doth befriend him,
When sicknesse makes him pale and wan.
Oh mightie love!

Herbs gladly cure our flesh, because that they
Finde their acquaintance there.