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Grasses, Groves, and Gardens: Aphra Behn Goes Green

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Abstract

Laudien argues in "Grasses, Groves and Gardens: Aphra Behn Goes Green" that Behn moves beyond the stylized and artificial backdrops of most pastoral to explore the unique ways the landscape can be manipulated to investigate gender difference and the dynamics of desire and representation. Laudien suggests that in prioritizing the pastoral as political allegory in Behn, we overlook the descriptions of nature and the importance she places on the natural environments she creates. Through close readings of several of her pastoral poems, Laudien reveals that Behn's landscapes destabilize existing notions of the pastoral space as an idealized and organized place and disorient the reader's conventional expectations of pastoral nature.

Keywords

pastoral, poetry, early modern women, environment, Aphra Behn, landscape, retirement, rural

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Aphra Behn liked green spaces. She employed them in every genre of her writing throughout her career. From her drama to her prose fiction to her personal correspondence, green spaces abound—she even gifted in green, sending “a Bottle of Orange-flour Water” to an acquaintance.¹ In her pastoral poetry, Behn shows a sustained preoccupation with greenery, moving beyond the stylized and artificial backdrops of most pastoral poetry to explore the unique and exciting ways that landscape can be manipulated. Behn’s landscapes are layered and complicated spaces. They function as the speaker’s confidante, friend, and replacement figure for the pastoral swain and are used to investigate gender difference and the dynamics of desire and representation. Is this what it meant to be “green” in the Restoration?

In his 2011 study, *What Else Is Pastoral? Renaissance Literature and the Environment*, Ken Hiltner argues that even though Renaissance pastoral is frequently concerned with literal landscapes, it “does little to describe them” (4). He begins his argument with the philosopher Cratylus, who doubted that language could represent an environment that was ever changing and wildly in flux. Cratylus thought it proper not to say anything at all and “only moved his finger to communicate by gesture” (13), a strategy that, according to Hiltner, was adopted by most pastoralists who “preferred Cratylid gestures over attempts at representation” (21). Yet Hiltner’s argument falls short, because it fails to consider the contributions of women writers such as Aphra Behn who use the pastoral to describe the literal landscape in ways that are bold, original, and detailed.² Even Behn’s contemporaries recognized her innovations with the form and freely commented on her compelling landscapes.³ The existing scholarship prioritizes the pastoral as political allegory in Behn, but I believe that, in doing so, we often overlook the descriptions of nature and the importance she places on the natural environments she creates. Close readings of her pastoral poems reveal that her backgrounds are not “kept to a minimum” (Hiltner 4) an “obligatory convention inherited from Theocritus and Virgil with no deeper meaning” (Hiltner 6). Rather, her landscapes destabilize existing notions of the pastoral space as an idealized and organized place and disorient the reader’s conventional expectations of pastoral nature.

Behn’s pastorals illustrate an awareness of her classical predecessors. While it is known that she lacked a proficiency in classical languages, Thomas Creech’s translations provided her access to Latin and Greek texts that ultimately informed her pastoral world. As M. L. Stapleton argues, Creech’s translations were “crucial to [Behn’s] understanding of the genre and its forms” (87), and René Rapin’s *Treatise de Carmine Pastoralis* in particular was “the ultimate authority on the

subject in the seventeenth century” (88), one that Behn relied on. Behn’s “To the Fair Clarinda Who Made Love to Me Imagined More than Woman” echoes Theocritus’s Idyll 12; Virgil’s influence is noticeable in the presentation of both a rustic and mannered nature in Behn’s translation of Abraham Cowley’s “Of Plants”; her appropriation of the Ovidian seduction poem is clear in “The Disappointment,” as is the Edenic landscape of Giovanni Battista Guarini’s *Il Pastor Fido* in Behn’s “The Golden Age.” Yet Behn’s response to classical predecessors shows a reworking of convention,⁴ and the way in which she writes the landscape is a testament to this thinking.

Universally, the pastoral landscape, according to its theorists, is an idealized space, “a kind of *Fairy Land*, where our Ears are soothed with the Melody of Birds, bleating Flocks, and purling Streams; our Eyes enchanted with flowery Meadows and springing Greens; we are laid under cool Shades, and entertained with all the Sweets and Freshness of Nature” (Tickell 105).⁵ From Rapin and Bernard le Bovier de Fontenelle to Alexander Pope and John Dryden, a proper pastoral landscape, we are told, should record “only the pleasant and delightful Images” of nature, drawing “such a Life as we could easily wish our selves in; and such, and only such, can bear a pleasurable Description” (Purney 24).⁶ Treatments of the pastoral repeatedly detail this similar rural scene, where nature is “little more than the locale, pleasant and innocuous for [the poet’s] elegiac reflections.”⁷ More so than not, these generic prescriptions are adopted by pastoralists (many of whom influenced Behn) whose landscapes are conventional and nondescript. Yet Hiltner does not mention convention as a reason why detailed treatment of landscape is absent in pastoral poetry. Rather, he suggests that the landscape is minimized because the question of whether nature could be represented in the Renaissance was “very much open” (5) and that many pastoralists thus felt a certain degree of anxiety detailing the landscape, especially since, in the seventeenth century, England was experiencing what we might call an environmental crisis and a concurrent shift in the way the natural world was perceived.

The Crown was, in fact, concerned with London’s sprawl and pollution, and as early as the late sixteenth century, it sought to limit the impact of new buildings. In 1580, Queen Elizabeth I issued a land-use ordinance, which limited new building to the footprint of existing or known structures within three miles of London:

The Queen’s Majestie perceiving the state of the Citie London (being anciently termed her Chambre) and the suburbs and confines to increase dayly . . . her Majestie by good and deliberate

advice of her Council . . . doth charge and straightly command all manner of Persons . . . to desist and forbear from any new building of any house or tenement within three miles of any gates of the said citie of London, to serve for Habitation or Lodging for any person where no House hath been knowen to have been in the memories of such as are now living. (Gomme 214–17)

In 1615, James I expanded Elizabeth’s three-mile ordinance to include “new Buildings with[in] seven miles of the town”; by 1657, Oliver Cromwell introduced an “act for preventing Multiplicity of Buildings in and about the suburbs of London and within ten miles thereof” (Brett-James 90). Behn was certainly aware of the increasingly urbanized landscape, yet she responded to it differently than others did: instead of limiting it to the background and merely gesturing to it, she saw urbanization as an opportunity to experiment with the landscape and explore its various capacities.⁸ Indeed, Behn’s pastorals show little of that anxiety over art’s ability to represent nature that Hiltner stresses: she makes a “green” reading of Renaissance poetry possible by crafting natural scenery with rich detail that actively participates in the drama of the poem.

In “On Mr. J.H. In a Fit of Sickness,” for example, Behn successfully creates a landscape that is realistic and in flux.⁹ The speaker describes the scene, where life is slowly being drawn out of everything that lives. The day “retires” (1), the spring “decays and dies” (2), and “each little Flower hangs down” (5), “losing the Luster” it once possessed (6). The smells of nature have dissipated; the groves are absented and the land denuded. Stanza 2 reads:

Our Bag-pipes now away are flung
Our Flocks a Wandering go;
Garlands neglected, on the Boughs are hung,
That us’d to adorn each Chearful Brow,
Forsaken looks the enameld May:
And all its wealth Uncourted dies;
Each little Bird forgets its wonted Lay,
That Sung Good Morrow to the welcome Day.
Or rather to thy Lovely Eies.
The Cooling Streams do backward glide:
Since on their Banks they saw not thee,
Losing the Order of their Tide,
And Murmuring chide they Cruelty:
Then hast to lose themselves i’th’ Angry Sea. (17–30)

Not one detail is left untouched—all is narrated with a complete externalization. This use of descriptive language and vivid imagery contradicts Hiltner’s thinking about representation. For while nature is difficult to pin down, in that it is endlessly varied and in flux,¹⁰ Behn does not sidestep this issue by avoiding mimesis. She conveys a sense of movement that mirrors change in the urban landscape. The garlands that once functioned to signal celebration and adornment are now neglected and listless on the boughs. The little bird cannot recall its tune, and the streams, absent of company, no longer know how to function. These are not the pristine, stylized, orderly spaces of typical pastoral. “Neglected,” “forgot,” “flung,” “backward,” “cruel,” and “angry:” Behn’s pastoral space is disorderly, even messy. Like the flocks of her verse, Behn abandons the conventional pastoral space and crafts a distressed landscape, one that participates in the mourning and loss of Amyntas. Layer by layer, she deconstructs the pastoral world, removing its shepherds, its flocks, its songs, and its flowers to arrive at a space that is new—one that more appropriately accommodates death and represents an ever-changing environment. Thus, despite the challenges in doing so, Behn does not gesture to “what lies outside the work” (Hiltner 5) but crafts the unstable environment with stable referents.

Interestingly, despite the challenges of writing the landscape, of pinning down what is in flux, Behn seems more at ease, or at least more capable of writing the landscape than she is of writing about the dying Hoyle. The poem reads more like a poem about nature than a lament. Behn brings the landscape to the fore instead of relegating it to the background, and in doing so, the manifest content, or at least the occasion of the poem, is subsumed. I see this happening in her death lament to Mr. Greenhill in *Poems on Several Occasions by the Right Honourable, the Earl of Rochester* (1680), which figures Greenhill’s afterlife in pastoral terms:

. . . the famous Greenhill’s dead! Ev’n he,
that cou’d to us give immortality,
Is to th’ Eternal, silent Groves, withdrawn,
Those sullen Groves, of Everlasting Dawn;
Youthful as Flow’rs scarce blown, whose opening Leaves,
A wond’rous and a fragrant Prospect vies,
Of what its Elder Beauties wou’d display
When it shou’d flourish up to ripening May! (8–16)

Notice how the speaker appears almost distracted by the presence of the grove in line 11 as she shifts her attention from the lament and pauses on the grove’s beauties. Unlike the setting of Hoyle’s death, here the groves are very much alive,

appearing “youthful” and smelling wondrously “fragrant.” The landscape is placed at the forefront, detailed, and described.

In “The Reflection: A Song,” Behn explores the possibilities of writing her landscape into the drama of the poem. What results is a reinvented pastoral space that encourages the female voice. Serena retreats to the “Rivers-side” alone to express her grief and sorrow. The speaker begins by describing her as “poor Lost Serena” (1), as if to suggest that Serena is entering a foreign space, a reinvented pastoral space and one that she does not recognize. Behn’s first invention then begins with disorienting the pastoral figure and placing her in a space that is new but certainly welcoming as the speaker “high’d” to the rivers-side (3). Having been betrayed by a “cruel swain” (15), Serena laments the loss of her innocence. Alone on the banks of the river in stanza 1, Serena is so overcome with grief that she is unable to articulate her thoughts:

High’d to a Rivers-side alone
Upon whose Brinks she sat.
Her eyes, as if they would have spar’d,
The Language of her Tongue,
In Silent tears a while declar’d
The Sense of all her wrong. (3–8)

Initially, Serena is tongue-tied. In the landscape, however, she is soon buoyed to speak, and in stanza 2 we learn that her “grief was swoln too high / To be Express in Sighs and Tears; / She must or speak or dye” (10–12). The riverbank encourages the female voice—it is the “Rivers-side *alone*” that becomes the site of heartbreak, the place where she “bemoan[s] the rigor of her fate” (1–2). Behn pushes the boundaries of the pastoral landscape here by illustrating its capacity to foster action among the pastoral figures, in this case eliciting Serena’s verbal outpouring that, “at thy Feet I lay’d . . . Tho’ now thy Trophies made” (22, 24).

As Serena recounts her love relationship for five stanzas and sets forth the particulars of her undoing, nature is never mentioned. Yet in its absence it looms large since the reader knows it is the site and sole witness of Serena’s confession. In stanza 7 she calls upon the landscape:

Witness ye Springs, ye Meads and Groves,
Who oft were conscious made
To all our Hours, and Vows of Love;
Witness how I’m Betray’d. (49–52)

Serena is livid, and she commands nature to stop doing whatever it is that nature does and “witness” this betrayal. Nature, it seems, should have seen this coming; after all, it was often made conscious of all the hours and vows of her love (50–51). One wonders why nature sat idly and did not warn her, assuming the position of a voyeur and not an active agent. Is nature naive and blameworthy, as Serena whom “heaven knows with how much Innocence / [she] did [her] soul incline” feels herself to be (17)? Regardless of how we read nature’s inaction, she blames it for not intervening to prevent her undoing, and with these lines, the tone of the poem drastically changes. The reader cannot help remembering how in stanza 1 Serena was struggling to find a voice, only able to express her sorrows through her tears. Now she commands nature, the meads and groves specifically, to engage. Nature’s inactivity, despite having knowledge, and its literal non-responsiveness (in other words, when it functions simply as the backdrop, assuming its conventional position in the pastoral) frustrate Serena, who comes to expect more from the landscape. In fact, when her command for nature to bear witness to her betrayal falls flat, she then commands nature to act and, in acting, to die: “Trees drop your Leaves, be Gay no more, / Ye Rivers waste and drye” (53–54).¹¹ Once nature is dead, Serena will use it for her own deathbed: “Whilst on your Melancholy Shore, I lay me down and dye” (56). As Serena moves through the natural process of life and death, she not only wants but also commands nature to accompany her. Indeed, nature becomes a mirror of her subjective state and, in the end, becomes not her backdrop but her tomb.

Behn reveals both the impermanence and the potential of the landscape by manipulating it throughout the poem. Originally the platform for Serena’s expression of grief, it is then entirely absent from the poem only to be called on in the end as a kind of scapegoat, a co-conspirator, an experienced presence that has a responsibility to protect and nurture the innocent victim of its dwelling. Yet in the end it, too, becomes the victim of a lost love, commanded to die, extinguished like the love that once existed among its groves. Serena’s honor is lost and because she must die, so too must the landscape that witnessed this love. Collapsing in on themselves in a commingling of bodies, losing love and life, they return to the earth, ironically a regenerative place, coming full circle from birth to death. These real spaces, complicated, detailed, and active participants in the narrative, differ drastically from the static and idealized spaces of much pastoral poetry.

In another of her pastorals, “On the First Discovery of Falseness in Amintas,” Behn’s landscape is an unknown and solitary space, one absent of love, a repository for the dejected and grieving. From the start of the poem, there is an urgency in the speaker’s voice to retreat to a solitary grove: “Make hast! Make

hast! My miserable soul / To some unknown and solitary Grove” (1–2). The idea of the grove as a solitary space is in keeping with the *beatus vir* tradition and is not new to Behn.¹² Yet here the grove is a place of escape: “Where thou maist never hear the name of Love” (4). It is also a place of consolation: “Where unconfin’d, and free, as whispering Air, / Thou maist caress and welcome thy despair” (5–6). Finally, it is a free space, atypical of the static backdrops created by other pastoralists. The speaker pleads for her “miserable soul” to find a place where “nothing may thy Languishment controle,” as if to suggest that, outside nature, societal constraints limit her (3).

Yet what seems most noteworthy about Behn’s pastoral space and is perhaps her greatest deviation from the typical pastoral landscape is the emphasis she places on defining nature concretely. Behn tackles this from an interesting perspective by first crafting the landscape based on what it will not accommodate. For example, it is a place “where nothing may thy Languishment controle” (3) and “where thou maist never hear the name of Love” (4). It is a place “where no dissembl’d complisance may veil” (7) and where “Sol cou’d never dart a busy Ray, / And where the softer winds ne’re met to play” (17–18).¹³ The emphasis on *no*, *never*, and the negatives sets specific boundaries and limitations on what the space is capable of accommodating. It is a space where certain behaviors will not be tolerated. Yet it is also a liberating space for the speaker who, in stanza 2, identifies its precise purpose as allowing her to free herself from oppression and “breath thyself out in a tale / That may declare the cause of thy unrest” (9–10). In this way, it is a controlled yet free space for the speaker’s narrative—the setting for *her* drama, much like that of the natural landscape in “The Reflection: A Song.”

Behn adds dimension to an otherwise flat backdrop by providing nature with a context. The background has its own history:

Search then, my soul, some unfrequented place,
Some place that nature meant her own repose;
When she her-self with-drew from human race,
Displeas’d with wanton Lovers vows and oaths.
Where Sol cou’d never dart a busy Ray,
And where the soften winds ne’er met to play. (13–18)

Apparently, nature is not just a place but a subject that can withdraw from the intrusion of human beings. The word “meant” in line 14 gives pause and prompts the reader to wonder if the place nature “meant for her own repose” is in fact the same place where “she her-self with-drew from [the] human race” (14–15).

Furthermore, if nature is the ultimate escape, where then does nature escape? The creation of nature's place of repose is a unique move by Behn, which I read as an attempt to illustrate the complexities of the natural world as a layered space. It exists as a place of double withdrawal—an outer, worldly space where streams are “unwilling” (24) to run and trees are “thrown off by every wind that breaths” (27). It is a place of discord and disruption, an “unknown region” (32), a distressed nature that, simply put, does not work the way we assume it should. Notice, too, that the reason why nature seeks out an escape is because, like the speaker, it tires of the “wanton Lovers vows and oaths” (16), and thus nature and woman share a common circumstance of disappointment. Once this bond has been established and nature's context has been supplied, both nature and the speaker act in tandem,¹⁴ existing in a commingling of perpetual melancholy:

By the sad purling of some Rivulet
O'er which the bending Yew and Willow grow,
That scarce the glimmerings of the day permit,
To view the melancholy Banks below,
Where dwells no noyse but what the murmurs make,
When the unwilling stream the shade forsakes.

There on a Bed of Moss and new-faln leaves,
Which the Triumphant Trees once proudly bore,
Tho now thrown off by every wind that breaths,
Despis'd by what they did adorn before,
And who, like useless me, regardless lye
While springing beautys do the boughs supply. (19–30)

Behn represents this phenomenon by describing the “visible and palpable” (Auerbach 6) particulars of the landscape in every line, blurring the boundaries between the speaker's and nature's emotional states, as if a friendship “naturally unfold[s] from the landscape itself” (Gerrard 65). The two are so enmeshed in their disappointment that it is difficult to know where nature leaves off and the speaker picks up: “And who, like useless me, regardless lye” (29). Deeming nature and woman as “useless” seems negative, yet “useless” could also be read as stepping outside an economy of use that might be more associated with the urban than with the green world.

In the end, the speaker calls on nature once again, this time to be an intermediary to her unfaithful swain:

But e'er thou do'st thy stock of life exhaust,

Let the ungrateful know, why tis you dy.
Perhaps the gentle winds may chance to bear
Thy dying accents to Amintas ear. (33–36)

There is some ambiguity here that heightens the poetic tension, for while it is possible to read this moment as the speaker's asking nature to carry the news of her death to her "ungrateful," it also can be read as the speaker requesting nature to tell Amintas of nature's death.¹⁵ Stanza 7 increases the ambiguity of the moment since the word "thy" could refer both to the speaker and nature. The speaker puts this idea into motion with the word "perhaps" at the start of line 35. "Perhaps" nature could advocate for the speaker; "perhaps" the gentle winds could tell Amintas "of his power / And how thy flame was once by him approv'd" (38–39). "Perhaps" nature could tell Amintas why it is that the speaker dies—to inform Amintas and to thus make him feel in some way responsible for the speaker's undoing.

After announcing that her impending death is the result of this failed love and of nature's consequent death, the speaker makes a final request of nature, the reader, and perhaps even herself:

Think, how the prostrate Infidel now lys,
An humble suppliant at anothers feet,
Think, while he begs for pity from her Eyes.
He sacrifices thee with-out regret.
Think, how the faithless treated thee last night,
And then, my tortur'd soul, assume thy flight. (49–54)

Here, the speaker instructs the natural world to consider infidelity and the ways of man, asking nature to "think." The tone of this moment is similar to that of the concluding stanzas in both "The Reflection: A Song," and "Silvio's Complaint," whereby the speaker's realization results in an assault on the natural world.¹⁶ Nature is instructed to wither and die, to drop and be gay no more, to witness infidelity and to think about it. The speaker makes it very clear, through its iteration three times in the concluding stanza, that nature is a "thinking" body, capable of observing, witnessing, responding, remembering, and feeling. Suggesting that nature is capable of any of these things, that it is a reflective body, illustrates Behn's willingness to experiment with the landscape and take risks in representing the natural world. Nature's capacities are endless, and Behn's poetic treatment of it squarely tackles the problem of representing an ever-changing environment.¹⁷ She articulates the full range of possibilities that nature can possess, creating pastoral figures who respond to the changing landscape.

The anxiety surrounding nature's unrealized capacity to bear witness has a counterpoint in Behn's representation of shade and its ability to obfuscate. In the ninety-eight poems I catalogued from *Poems upon Several Occasions: With a Voyage to the Island of Love* (1684), Behn refers to *shade* seventy-two times. It is often coupled with the grove to create a private space, one that shelters, protects, and encloses various activities, from sleeping to snogging: "Then vanish in the Shades of Night" (poem 33, line 39), "Loosly in Shades on Beds of Flow'rs" (poem 35, line 22), "Retir'd to shun the Heat o'the'Day / Into a Grove, beneath whose shade" (poem 37, lines 7–10), "In Yonder Shade, in Yonder Grove" (poem 38, line 29), "Beneath the Shelter of a shaded Rock (poem 59, line 2). Although at times Behn gestures to the shade to signal a retreat space, her shade is frequently much more complicated. Elsewhere I argue that Behn's shade is a liberating space—one where love that is not culturally sanctioned can exist free of censure.¹⁸ Yet in several of her poems the shade plays a different, more complicated role.

While it is hard to overlook the political allegory in "Silvio's Complaint: A Song, to a Fine Scotch Tune,"¹⁹ in this poem Behn writes a landscape that is a space for thought and reflection, one that propels the public world. The poem, set in the "blooming time o' th' year" (1), mentions many landscape particulars—the fields, the murmuring brooks, "bleating flocks," and the singing spring—perhaps an idealized vision of a bucolic English countryside. In this space, the swain recalls his former self, which existed before his introduction to the pastoral space: "How Bonny a Lad I'd been" who "nere Aim'd high, / Or wisht to be a King" (lines 14, 15–16). He is described as "Noble" (5) and speaks of his "Unambitious Friends." This was a time of innocence, before cavorting with swains and partaking of pastoral employments. Recollecting this moment, he cries, "Then from his Starry Eyne, / Muckle Showers of Christal Fell: / To bedew the Roses Fine, / That on his Cheeks did dwell" (9–12). Likening the lad to an innocent and fresh nature serves to heighten the contrast between the two pastoral spaces that Behn details in this poem. For at the mention of the shade, we see the darker side of nature, one that is blamed for housing the swain's nascent ideas about power and kingship:

How oft in Yonder Mead
Cover'd ore with Painted Flowers:
Au the Dancing Youth I've led,
Where we past our Blether Hours.
In Yonder Shade, in Yonder Grove,
How Best the Nymphs have been:
Ere I for Pow'r Debaucht Love,

Or wisht to be a King. (25–32)

In the shade of the grove, the swain freely dances and pipes his tune, bedecked with flowering wreaths among other “Arcadian swains” (33). Yet he soon realizes that this idyllic space is actually the site where both his pride and ambition were born:

But Curst be yon Tall Oak,
 And Old Thirsis be accurst:
 There I first my peace forsook,
 There I learnt Ambition first.
 Such Glorious Songs of Hero’s Crown’d,
 The Restless Swain would Sing:
 My Soul unknown desires found,
 And Languisht to be King. (41–48)

Notice the repetition of “there” to signal the pastoral space. It was “there” that his peace was “forsook” and it was “there” that he learned ambition first and heard the songs of “Hero’s Crown’d.” It was “there” that the swain was not at peace but was in fact “restless.” Nature is cursed and blamed for the swain’s undoing. One wonders, had the shady grove been absent from the landscape whether the swain would have found an alternative space to think, to dream, and consequently to be undone. Notice also the tree, which is similar to the tree of Serena’s landscape and is the speaker’s first target of invective.²⁰ While it initially provides shade and protection, when absent of leaves that “To the ground neglected fall,” it is rendered incapable of providing either (52).

In this landscape, despite its “freshness” and “gayness,” the swain discovers “unknown desires” that ultimately transform him. He is corrupted by the landscape in which he is so intimately bound. The natural world attempts to provide solace, “Au the Heaves were glad and clear, / Au the Earth was Fresh and Gay” (3–4), yet it acts as a constant reminder of the swain’s undoing, “How ofte in Yonder Mead / Cover’d ore with Painted Flowers: / Au the Dancing Youth I’ve led, / Where we past our Blether Hours” (25–28). His nostalgic recollections of an Arcadian paradise are continually tainted by his reality—his innocence was lost in this space. Creating a landscape that teeters between beauty and tragedy, Behn never lets the reader forget that her pastoral space is provocative. She weaves us in and out of the complexities of a landscape that is at once a beautiful *locus*, a reminder of youth, and a place that incites desire and corruption, where her “sweet repose molest” (53). In the end, the swain concludes, “twere better I’s was nere Born” (7) and cries, “would God I’d dy’d here” (23).

Behn's attraction to the pastoral was timely and important. It is clear from these readings that she expands the possibilities of the natural world by writing green spaces, albeit difficult to do so, in every genre of her oeuvre. She represents the natural world with rich detail, calling upon it to bear witness to crisis—a crisis staged in the environment. Her pastoral landscapes encapsulate the strain: Behn is deeply concerned with nature's capacities to represent, on the one hand, and to obfuscate, on the other, and creates complicated spaces that function as more than backdrops. While Hiltner is correct that much Renaissance pastoral simply gestures to the landscape (for Behn, too, does this with an occasional tree or plain), the landscape is a preoccupation that gets written and rewritten throughout her career.²¹ She sees the landscape as an opportunity to experiment with its many possibilities, writing it as a confidante, a witness, and even a provocateur. Behn's landscapes are reflections of the generic and historic influences she inherits, yet she breaks with convention to write a pastoral space that is layered and various. She shows a clear awareness of the environment as a place in flux, and its complicated and ever-changing roles in Behn's pastorals are a testament to her efforts to write what was green and to do so in a way that was original and that is still worthy of consideration.

¹ O'Donnell, entry 040.

² See Gardiner for a discussion of how pastoral conventions operate in Behn's erotic poems; Crawford for a study of bower conventions and Victorian female pastoral poets; Young on Behn's pastorals; and Gerrard for a treatment of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's poem "Constantinople, To—."

³ See stanza 5 of Daniel Kendrick's dedicatory poem "To Mrs. B. on her Poems," which prefaces *Lycidus; or, the Love in Fashion* (1688).

⁴ See Young, who argues that Behn was writing pastoral not simply as an exercise in applying convention, but as a means of employing convention in order to break it (525). See also Spencer, who suggests that Behn "established herself as a bold woman, a professional, a modern ready to try out new staging techniques, and with not much respect for the ancients and the rules" (23) and that Behn was thus likely unaffected by pastoral prescriptives.

⁵ Appearing in numbers 22, 23, 28, 30, and 32 of the *Guardian*, Tickell's writings on the pastoral landscape are one of the most sustained treatments of pastoral mediation. In number 22, Tickell is very specific about what constitutes a proper pastoral space, stating: "Thus in writing Pastorals, let the Tranquility of that Life appear full and plain, but hide the Meanness of it; represent its Simplicity as clear as you please, but cover its Misery" (106).

⁶ Purney believed that the pastoral should depict contemporary rural life divested of what was vulgar and painful. This aligns him with Joseph Addison, Tickell, Ambrose Philips, and Fontenelle as opposed to the school of Rapin, Pope, and John Gay, who argued for a portrait of the golden age. Further discourses on pastoral poetry, such as Pope's, asserts that the pastoral

landscape should be “drawn from the most agreeable objects of the country” (Pope 121). And while Dryden, in his dedication to pastorals in *The Works of Virgil* (London, 1697), spends little time detailing the pastoral landscape, his language of “rural recreations” and “innocent pleasures” (vii) echoes that of his contemporaries.

⁷ Rosenmeyer, 182. For example, nature serves an ornamental function in the pastoral “Harpalus’ Complaint,” by Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey. John Fletcher and Edmund Spenser create idealized spaces against which the actions of their characters are set. Philip Sidney’s landscapes are stylized and static, much like those of Nicholas Breton and Michael Drayton.

⁸ For other responses to the urbanized landscape, see John Denham’s “Cooper’s Hill,” Emilia Lanyer’s “The Description of Cookeham,” Anne Finch’s “To Lady Worsley at Longleate,” Pope’s “Windsor Forest,” Andrew Marvell’s Mower poems and “Upon Appleton House,” Margaret Cavendish’s “Nature’s House,” and Ben Jonson’s “To Penshurst.”

⁹ It is known that “Mr. J. H.” refers to John Hoyle, the lawyer with whom Behn had a relationship in the 1670s and to whom she gives the name *Amyntas* in other poems.

¹⁰ Hiltner suggests that no sooner have we uttered a word or produced some other sign in an effort to signal it than that which was to be signified has already changed and slipped away (5).

¹¹ These lines are echoed in the final stanza of “Silvio’s Complaint: A Song, to a Fine Scotch Tune,” in which the speaker, upon feeling betrayed by the landscape, commands the garlands to wither and vanish. This narrative is also reminiscent of Behn’s “On a Juniper Tree Cut Down to Make Busks.” Young comments, “when even the action of voyeurism is taken away from the juniper tree, it considers that it would be better off dead” (528).

¹² See Røstvig. The *beatus vir* tradition was a common mode of the seventeenth century that explores a contrast between the affection and corruption of court and city, and the calm beauty of country life. The character who pervades this space is alone and characterized by inner peace, self-mastery, freedom from slavery to the passions, mental independence, and emotional equilibrium.

¹³ The language here is not new to Behn. Readers will recognize her use of “dissembl’d complisance” in Philander’s first love letter to Sylvia in *Love-Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister* (1684); in “The Dream” from *A Voyage to the Isle of Love* (1684); and following Brillard’s letter to Octavio in part 3, “The Amours of Philander and Sylvia.”

¹⁴ Young suggests that Behn’s pastoral inventions acknowledge that nature can be transformed into a participant in a mutually rewarding relationship (531).

¹⁵ See Toliver for a discussion of the “dialectical, tensive structure” that he deems “characteristic of all worthwhile pastoral” (5).

¹⁶ Behn’s treatment of nature here differs from the natural world she details in other poems of betrayal, such as “The Dream,” in which it provides a restorative space for the betrayed lover.

¹⁷ Fletcher argues that it was not until James Thomson’s *The Seasons* that writers attempted to represent the physical environment (28).

¹⁸ See Laudien.

¹⁹ In a note to her edition of “Silvio’s Complaint,” Todd explains that the poem is a comment on the Duke of Monmouth, Charles II’s illegitimate son (397–98).

²⁰ It is hard to avoid reading the political implications of trees, which are often interpreted allegorically as Jacobite images, emblems of the Stuart monarchy. For a discussion on how the

depiction of trees draws from seventeenth-century sylvan pastoral and from Royalist allusions to Virgil's *Eclogues*, see Hamrick; see also Young's discussion of Behn's uses of trees.

²¹ By systematically cataloguing the nature images in her 1684 volume *Poems on Several Occasions*, excluding her *Voyage to the Island of Love* and her translation of *Aesop's Fables*, I find that Behn uses greenery in eighty-seven of these ninety-eight poems, frequently crafting lush, descriptive environments.

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