

## Questioning Gynocentric Utopia: Nature as Addict in “A Description of Cooke-ham”

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IN HER 1610 country house poem “A Description of Cooke-ham,” Aemilia Lanyer presents the estate as a lost *locus amoenus*, an Edenic space in which women and nature have existed in poetry-inducing harmony until the intervention of man. Lanyer’s poem highlights the anthropocentric and deferential relationship the women have not just with animals (who “sport . . . in her eye” and “attend” on Margaret Clifford), but also with the landscape itself: the hills “descend” to meet Clifford’s footstep and then raise themselves again. However, despite this apparent symbiosis, I would like to suggest that this utopian vision actually dramatizes a landscape that is not simply oriented around the female community led by Margaret Clifford, but subordinated and addicted to it in inherently destructive ways.<sup>1</sup>

In keeping with the recent turn in early modern scholarship to highlight the role of the nonhuman in early modern texts, I would like to examine not only how nature is used to explore human interactions in the poem, but also how the poem imagines the relationship between the women and the nonhuman. In this article, I suggest some ways in which the apparent alignment of female and natural in the poem fails

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1. In using the word “addiction” to describe the relationship between the animals and the women here, I do not intend to simply overlay a modern concept of pathologized illness on the complexity of Lanyer’s engagement with the estate. However, as Rebecca Lemon has recently argued, early modern concepts of addiction were much more nuanced, carrying both positive and negative associations that I explore further in my discussion of the relationship between the women and the estate.

to fully support the nonhuman as independent agent in a way perhaps more problematic than the overtly exploitative mode we see in the oft contrasted “To Penshurst” of Ben Jonson.<sup>2</sup> Lanyer’s poem highlights a tension in both early modern and contemporary celebrations of nature and the feminine between a fully biocentric understanding and the tendency to enlist nature as subordinate ally in existing hierarchical struggles.<sup>3</sup> I argue that the differentiation between human and nonhuman in Cookham reinforces existing hierarchical concepts that, while they inscribe woman as subject to or inferior to man, also use the animal as a lower point in that hierarchy to reaffirm the women’s human superiority and reason.

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2. In questioning the relationship between the women and the nonhuman here, I am not trying to dismiss the distinctions between Jonson’s and Lanyer’s poems, nor am I trying to flatten the significance of the agency that the women express in Lanyer’s work. Instead, I attempt here to continue to question our frequent assumption that feminist goals and nonhuman goals are automatically aligned in their oppression by masculine agents. As Rebecca Laroche and Jennifer Munroe argue: “Underlying ecofeminist work is a desire to redress inequalities that result not only from forms of domination that subject women, colonial Others, the poor and nonhumans to destructive practices, but also those that might well appear to have the best interests of the most vulnerable men, women, and nonhumans at heart.” Rebecca Laroche and Jennifer Munroe, *Shakespeare and Ecofeminist Theory* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2017), xvii.

3. Among works that consider the role of the natural in discussing human hierarchies in the poem, Amy Greenstadt notes the use of the landscape to highlight interactions between Clifford and Lanyer. Greenstadt points to Lanyer’s self-conscious use of the pathetic fallacy to illuminate erotic tensions between the women and the coercive role of Clifford’s superior social status: “The pathetic fallacy, a technique that earlier had seemed to express the writer’s empathy with the natural world, now appears as the coercive imposition of the poet’s will on a helpless landscape—a will that masquerades as objective reality. But in enacting such exploitation, it seems Lanyer is only repeating what has been done to her . . . In ‘tak[ing] leave of the tree, Clifford exposes the women to the violating gaze of not only Apollo, but other outsiders.” “Amelia Lanyer’s Pathetic Phallacy” *The Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 8, no. 1 (2008), 84–85, [www.jstor.org/stable/40339590](http://www.jstor.org/stable/40339590). In this article, I want to consider how this sense of coercion that Greenstadt sees Lanyer as embedding in the landscape to comment on coercive human hierarchies also comments on the coercive hierarchy of human/nonhuman relations.

Some recent work in early modern studies has called Renaissance ideas of human exceptionalism into question, particularly the imagination of the “Great Chain of Being” as creating a fundamentally static model of human supremacy. As Tiffany Jo Werth notes, the language used by early modern authors contradicts the static supremacy read by some earlier critics; for instance, the concept of the scale of nature actually emphasizes humans as existing in a continuum: “The multivalent meanings of ‘scale’ prompt a re-evaluation of the relationship between the categories, and place, of various living and non-living forms, making it easier to see how categories might bend, jump, or ‘swerve’ beyond their neighbors.”<sup>4</sup> The problematization of human superiority creates an intriguing tension for individual and collective agency. This imagined flexibility of positions calls into question the static nature of these hierarchies, simultaneously enabling the rhetorical negotiation of positional identity. I take this more pliable understanding of hierarchical creation as a fundamental component of my argument here—the space it creates for questioning position enables Lanyer to use the landscape itself to affirm the superior capacity of the (female) human subjects of the poem in a way that undercuts the logical authority of social position and gender.

In discussions of the English country house poem, Lanyer’s *Cookham* is frequently paired with Ben Jonson’s “*To Penshurst*” as the earliest examples of the genre.<sup>5</sup> Jonson’s poetic *Penshurst* presents a labor-free estate whose self-sacrificing landscape not only yields its deer, birds, and eels for the consumption of the estate’s owner, but also describes the young daughters of the estate residents “whose baskets bear / An emblem of themselves in plum or pear,” positioning the women as similarly commodified for consumption.<sup>6</sup> In her discussion of gender in

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4. Tiffany Jo Werth, “Introduction: Shakespeare and the Human,” *The Shakespeare International Yearbook 15: Special Section, Shakespeare and the Human* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2015), 5.

5. For a recent discussion of the English country house as a cultural object and the country house poem as a literary genre, see Kari Boyd McBride, *Country House Discourse in Early Modern England: A Cultural Study of Landscape and Legitimacy* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001). For a specifically ecocritical consideration of the country house poem, see Ken Hiltner, *What Else is Pastoral* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), particularly 42-61.

6. Ben Jonson, “*To Penshurst*,” *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 10th

the country house poem, Jacqueline Pearson notes how Jonson's poem aligns women's bodies and the natural landscape as equally subject to the estate's masters: "The female body and the products of the landscape become indistinguishable, naturalizing Jonson's conservative construction of gender difference. Moreover, the female body becomes a metaphor for exchange, social, sexual, and . . . poetic."<sup>7</sup> This imagining of a fecund feminized landscape articulates a vision of ordered nature as human-centered and productive, one that reaffirms Protestant visions of divine order. We might compare this vision from Jonson's poem to Edmund Spenser's idealized garden of Venus and Adonis, which similarly produces without labor:

Ne needs there Gardiner to sett, or sow,  
To plant or prune for of their owne accord  
All things, as they created were, doe grow,  
And yet remember well the mightie word,  
Which first was spoken by th'Almightie lord,  
That bad them to increase and multiply:  
Ne doe they need with water of the ford,  
Or of the clouds to moysten their roots dry;  
For in themselues eternall moisture they imply.<sup>8</sup>

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ed., ed. Stephen Greenblatt et al. (New York: W.W. Norton, 2018), 1096-98, lines 55-56. Raymond Williams remarks on the elision of labor from Penshurst's landscape and its impact on the role of the landscape. "Jonson looks out over the fields of Penshurst and sees not work, but a land yielding of itself." Raymond Williams, *The Country and The City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 32.

7. Jacqueline Pearson further notes Jonson's ambivalent approach to social hierarchies as centered around the female body: "'To Penshurst,' then, enacts contemporary contradictions around the female body, social stability, and poetry. Stability depends on the compliance of the female, the great lady as well as the ripe daughters of the peasantry, but the female body threatens as well as sustains that order. The poem's metaphorical discourse echoes this ambiguity: its linear structures and performance of the act of penetration identify the poet as by definition male, while the female serves as a metaphor for text, landscape, poem." "'An Emblem of Themselves in Plum or Pear': Poetry, the Female Body, and the Country House," in *Write or be Written: Early Modern Women Poets and Cultural Constraints*, ed. Ursula Appelt and Barbara Smith (Routledge, 2016), chap. 5, Kindle.

8. Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A. C. Hamilton (New York:

In Spenser's ideal source of all divinely appointed generation, the land self-tends, obeying its divine position as subordinated to humanity.

In contrast, the early lines of Lanyer's poem describe the cooperation of the place, elements, and creatures as mutually beneficial. She describes the role of the landscape in helping her patron, Margaret Clifford, practice religious contemplation:

What was there then but gaue you all content,  
While you the time in meditation spent,  
Of their Creators powre, which there you saw,  
In all his Creatures held a perfit Law;  
And in their beauties did you plaine descrie,  
His beauty, wisdom, grace, loue, maiestie.  
In these sweet woods how often did you walke,  
With Christ and his Apostles there to talke;  
Placing his holy Writ in some faire tree,  
To meditate what you therein did see:<sup>9</sup>

The grounds and creatures of Cookham enable Clifford to connect with a divine presence and obtain a fuller divine knowledge, one that inhabits the woods, trees, and creatures through her engagement with them. The natural landscape is similarly described as benefitting from this connection:

The very hills right humbly did descend,  
When you to tread on them did intend.  
And as you set your feet, they still did rise,  
Glad that they could receive so rich a prize.  
The gentle winds did take delight to be  
Among those woods that were so graced by thee,  
. . . Each arbor, bank, each seat, each stately tree,  
Thought themselves honored in supporting thee.  
(35–46)

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Longman, 2001), 3.6.34.

9. Aemilia Lanyer, "The Description of Cookham," in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 10<sup>th</sup> ed., ed. Stephen Greenblatt et al. (New York: W.W. Norton, 2018). 986–90, lines 75–84. Further references will be documented parenthetically by line number.

Lanyer imagines a landscape whose natural occupants experience their own emotional responses to the women's presence, "glad," "tak[ing] delight," feeling "honored" by Clifford, and the old oak of her particular favor "Joying his happinesse when [Clifford was] there" (66). This happy symbiosis ends through the exile of the women, causing both them and the estate to suffer.

The contrasting relationships of the human occupants, particularly the women, to the landscape in Cookham might lead us to see Lanyer's poem as a feminist alternative that aligns women and nature against outside forces. However, this feminine retreat is not entirely happy for its occupants; the birds who attend Clifford "fly away for fear they should offend," and the animals run away "feareful of the bow in [her] fair hand" (47–52). The superficially symbiotic relationship elides a tension in the natural creatures that simultaneously desire to gaze on Clifford and fear invoking her fatal wrath. In contrast to the self-sacrificing creatures of Jonson's Penhurst or of Spenser's garden, the creatures of Cookham display an awareness and agency that highlights their subordinate position to the women who occupy the estate.

In some ways, this self-awareness of their own hazard would seem to provide more opportunity for the validation of nature as agential in the poem, but it simultaneously re-inscribes a hierarchy of place that places nonhuman agents as inherently lesser. Andrew Hadfield remarks on the parallel of social hierarchies with natural ones in the poem in his suggestion that "Lanyer represents nature as a court presided over by the countess."<sup>10</sup> Stacy Alaimo explains the standard consequence for women of their frequent association with the natural: "Casting woman as synonymous with nature actually constituted woman as 'woman,' that is, as a completely sexed being. Defining woman as that which is mired in nature thrusts woman outside the domain of human subjectivity, rationality, and agency."<sup>11</sup> Notably, the differentiation between human and nonhuman in Cookham reinforces the philosophical and social model of the Great Chain of Being, which, while it inscribes woman as

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10. Andrew Hadfield, *The English Renaissance, 1500–1620* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 82.

11. Stacy Alaimo, *Undomesticated Ground: Recasting Nature as Feminine Space* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), 2.

subject to or inferior to man, also uses the animal as a lower point on that hierarchy to reaffirm human superiority and reason.

By contrasting the women's intellectual, emotional, and social capacity to the subordinate natural creatures of the estate, Lanyer affirms the women's reasoned humanity, an inherently hierarchical debate in early modern England. As Erica Fudge argues,

ultimately discussions of reason in early modern England are discussions of order. Simply put, the human possession of reason places humans above animals in the natural hierarchy. Reason reveals humans' immortality, and animals' irrationality reveals their mortality, their materiality. Reasonable humans are the gods on earth. Because of the link between reason and the natural order, then, texts that might appear to have little to say about the nature of animals become significant to the historian of animals. In discussing humans, their souls, their status, these texts are outlining the framework by which humans lived with, and declared dominion over, animals.<sup>12</sup>

In asserting Clifford's closeness to Christ and the apostles and her ability to read divine law in the creatures around her, or in contrasting her own ability to articulate her grief poetically and endure where the animals fail, Lanyer asserts the women's inherent difference from and superiority over the animals that broader cultural and poetic practice would align them with. We often assume that the oppressive structures of patriarchal thinking align women with nature in resisting oppression, but within the rigid but embattled hierarchies and the structural anxieties of late medieval and Renaissance England, Lanyer's poem may suggest that women are kinder masters (mistresses?) of nature than their male counterparts, but that they have mastery nevertheless. "Description of Cookham" draws from this idea of an alliance between nature and the female, but uses it to reassert female subjectivity and rationality by differentiating nature as below and subject to female rule.

While the landscape's willing self-deformation, raising and lowering

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12. Erica Fudge, *Brutal Reasoning: Animals, Rationality, and Humanity in Early Modern England*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), 3.

itself beneath Clifford's feet, could be conceived of as a happy servitude, the consequences of the women's removal from the estate highlight just how perilous this relationship is. The trees sorrow and begin to die:

The flowers that on the banks and walks did grow,  
Crept in the ground, the grass did weep for woe.  
The winds and waters seemed to chide together,  
Because you went away they knew not whither;  
And those sweet brooks that ran so fair and clear,  
With grief and trouble wrinkled did appear.  
. . . Each arbor, bank, each seat, each stately tree,  
Looks bare and desolate now for want of thee,  
Turning green tresses into frosty gray,  
While in cold grief they wither all away.  
The sun grew weak, his beams no comfort gave,  
While all green things did make the earth their grave:  
(179–97)

The landscape becomes blighted; all green things seem suicidal in their mourning. Moreover, the animals forsake their natural behavior. The birds “neither sing, nor chirp, nor use their wing” (186). Their dependency on the women has disabled them from acting in accordance with their instincts and created an imaginary version of a “natural” space in which natural instinct has been replaced by anthropocentric addiction. The estate may have agency to act, but suffers from the coercion of desire.

This simultaneously elevating, desiring, yet potentially destructive model of engagement may seem odd to a modern reader, used to encountering addiction as either pathologized illness or moral failing. However, early modern concepts of addiction can provide us with a way to understand some of the tensions present in Cookham's landscape for both the women and its nonhuman elements. Rebecca Lemon highlights how addiction as a concept bridged tensions between individual isolation and communal connection.

Early modern models of addiction offer one way of rethinking subjectivity through what has arguably proved the ideological and ethical impasse of self-sovereignty and individuality. . . . If, as Berlant

suggests, we conceive of human agency in concert with militarized action, celebrating positivity and the exercise of control, then it is no wonder that scenes of being that challenge individual sovereignty might invite condemnation and medicalization. Deep attachment or devotion holds the potential to gesture beyond isolated and isolating modes of life. Addiction offers one such model. Drawing attention to addiction as utterance and ravishment, this project explores how the early modern mode of addictive release might be admired and imitated for offering a form of related living based on connection rather than isolation and on community rather than individuality.<sup>13</sup>

For both the nonhuman and human inhabitants of Cookham, their shared community enables a form of religious transcendence in which both benefit from the presence of the divine. However, the ability of the women to exercise both agency and reason in pledging their connections via human modes of communication allows them to experience addiction (fundamentally dependent, as Lemon informs us, on verbal utterance—on the declaration of devotion and the intentional act of surrendering individual will) as a form of elevating devotion, rather than the irresistible dependence experienced by the nonverbal nonhumans who remain unable to clearly articulate or exercise a will that seems dominated by the human object of their devotion.<sup>14</sup>

Indeed, Lanyer's use of the Echo and Narcissus myth to imagine the animals' grieving process underscores the tensions around successful animal agency independent of human stewardship. The poem notes how at the women's leaving, "Delightful Echo" dies with sorrow, literally—we can understand—through the removal of the words that enabled her to speak. In Ovid, Echo is incapable of speech other than the repetition of others' words. Unable to articulate her own desire, she can merely reflect back the words of Narcissus, with whom she is unrequitedly in love. Her inability to express her own thoughts leads Narcissus to flee from her, and she fades into nothingness from grief. Echo's inability to pledge her

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13. Rebecca Lemon, *Addiction and Devotion in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), xiii-xiv.

14. Lemon, xi- xii.

desire leaves her dependent on others' speech acts for her own spoken agency. Like Echo, the nonhuman in Lanyer's poem lacks the speech acts necessary to literally "addict" themselves through spoken pledges and are thus left unable to exercise a fully participatory agency in the community of the estate, dependent as they are on the women, particularly Clifford, for their own limited transcendence.

The nonhuman dependency on the women in the poem underscores the biblical model of stewardship presented in Genesis that renders animals dependent on humanity for guidance and control, an idea clearly articulated by early modern thinkers. In his 1677 *The Primitive Origination of Mankind*, Matthew Hale noted the stewardly role and dominion assigned to Adam in Genesis:

Because God Almighty intended him a liberal Patrimony, which he would furnish and compleat in all its numbers before Man was created, and as soon as he had created him, gave him this inferior World, as his *Usufructuary and Steward at least*; but yet withall gave him a subordinate dominion of that *whereof he made him his Steward*: and this great Benefactor prepared this Gift of this inferior Terrestrial World to be ready for his Creature Man's reception as soon as he had a Being, and accordingly *gave it him with all its Furniture*" (emphasis mine).<sup>15</sup>

The tension between devotional addiction and unhealthy dependency in the poem thus underscores the superior capacity of the women for both reason and religious devotion.

In *The Death of Nature*, Carolyn Merchant famously mapped out the objectification of nature by male-dominated science in the early modern period and the alignment of that nature with an objectified female body.<sup>16</sup> As Sylvia Bowerbank notes, this often positioned early modern women to "speak for nature."<sup>17</sup> However, in Lanyer's pastoral, this speaking serves to refute the marginalization of the women as part

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15. Matthew Hale, *The Primitive Origination of Mankind* (London, 1677), 317.

16. Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (New York: Harper and Row, 1990).

17. Sylvia Bowerbank, *Speaking for Nature: Women and Ecologies of Early Modern England* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).

of feminized nature. Instead they are visibly situated as hierarchically above the animals, clearly human and connected to the divine. The poem engages with the model of the Great Chain of Being, referencing the path of divine authority from Jesus and the Apostles to the women to the animals to the landscape in order to affirm the women's authority.

Ken Hiltner argues that the country house poems are a form of celebrating that which is under threat or passing away, the English country estate, threatened by the expansion of London.<sup>18</sup> In Cookham, however, what actually threatens the estate is the absence of Clifford; the estate has become unhealthily dependent upon her. It is the sympathy between the women and the estate that creates this despair. This imagined dependency suggests an anthropocentric reimagining of women as better readers of nature than men but nature as fully realized only when occupied by the human presence of women. Even the ground itself transforms to better suit Clifford's needs and is left permanently diminished by her removal.

In reality, the death of the estate simply marks the turning of the seasons, and the grief that Lanyer ascribes to the estate is merely pathetic fallacy. However, in considering the transformation of the very real landscape of Cookham to a utopia imagined as dependent on the human to survive, we might want to consider the way in which this overwrites any possibility of agency here for the nonhuman. Despite the aesthetic alliance of women and the estate in the poem, this appreciation likely contrasts with not simply the hunting we see, but with the everyday use of these animals by early modern Englishwomen as well. In discussing the medical use of animals in women's daily practice, Michelle DiMeo and Rebecca Laroche trace the practice of creating swallow-water and oil of swallow in the early modern household, both of which involved the violent processing of live fledglings. Through this study they suggest the necessity of recognizing material practices, rather than simply literary ideals, and recognizing the emotional disconnects between aesthetic appreciation of animals and their actual treatment.<sup>19</sup> The presumed

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18. Ken Hiltner, *What Else is Pastoral*, 43.

19. Michelle DiMeo and Rebecca Laroche, "On Elizabeth Isham's 'Oil of Swallows': Animal Slaughter and Early Modern Women's Medical Recipes," in *Ecofeminist Approaches to Early Modernity*, ed. Jennifer Munroe and Rebecca Laroche

sympathy between Clifford and the estate is troubled for a modern reader by a frank engagement with the realities of relations between early modern Englishwomen and the nonhuman.

It has become a truism that the difference between male and female writing about nature in early modern England is that male writers objectify nature as they do women, whereas female writers emotionally engage with their environment and ascribe agency to it.<sup>20</sup> And while an active agency would seem to provide more opportunity for recognition and validation, what do we do when the agency ascribed to the environs is unhealthily dependent on that female engagement and cannot survive independently? I would suggest that both Jonson's and Lanyer's perspectives inherently reinforce the hierarchies in which they are embedded and that the human relationship to the environment in Cookham cannot just be read as simple sympathy. Lanyer's poem is not an escape from, but a reassertion of, social hierarchies. In imagining a subordinate nature, obsessed against its own well-being, Lanyer attempts to elevate women's condition by emphasizing the absolute subjectivity of nature. Where Lanyer (as poet) grieves, the plants wither and the birds sit in silence. The conversion of the real into the unreal here flattens the natural world from independent agent into subjected anthropocentric imaginary.

In Cookham, despite its British location, we might consider the engagement with the landscape as creating a relatable other. Just as the writings of English women in colonial spaces suggest the "civilizing" benefits of empire, so does Lanyer's poem suggest the engagement of the place with the Christian divine only in the women's presence.<sup>21</sup> In a

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(New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 87–104.

20. See as an example of a female author's engagement with the landscape Bowerbank's discussion of Mary Wroth's *Urania* in *Speaking for Nature*, chapter 1.

21. In speaking of women writing about colonized places, in the context of the British Empire, Mona Domosh and Joni Seager characterize a distinction between male and female writing, noting that women "often wrote of their own personal, emotional response to different landscapes and different cultures." *Putting Women in Place: Feminist Geographers Make Sense of the World* (New York: Guildford Press, 2001), 144. Similarly, Alison Blunt describes the writing style of one Victorian woman as "emphasizing the connections between observer and observed, quite different from the standard, male style of providing a panoramic gaze that objectifies

similar logic to the rhetoric of imperial expansion that saw indigenous peoples (also described as “fearful and reverent”) as requiring Christian intervention to become civilized and reach an eternal salvation, the fearful creatures of the landscape gaze in reverence at the women who connect them with Christian divinity. In his 1588 “A Briefe and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia,” after listing the ample commodities that can be gained from the landscape by English settlers, Thomas Hariot goes on to describe the indigenous peoples of Virginia in language markedly similar to that Lanyer applies to the animals of Cookham: “they in respect of troubling our inhabiting and planting, are not to be feared, but that they shall have cause both to feare and love us, that shall inhabit with them,” adding that “it is probable that they should desire our friendship and love, and have the greater respect for pleasing and obeying us. Whereby may be hoped . . . that they may in short time be brought to civilitie, and the imbracing of true Religion.”<sup>22</sup> Here an imperial Christian narrative subordinates both the colonized peoples and environment, viewing both in terms of utility rather than stewardship. When we consider how later British imperial culture connects women with a “civilizing” influence necessary to the transformation of the colonies, we may well find ourselves skeptical of the reverence the animals and landscape display.

This kind of utopic transcription of the existing landscape prioritizes human values and ideas in a way that denies the very possibility of a biocentric vision. We must then ask whether in identifying both women and nonhumans as oppressed by the patriarchal system, do we ignore the further subjection of nature in asserting female needs and authority? When women speak here for nature, they subject it to their priorities, priorities that re-entrench the established hierarchies of human/animal. The language of control and subjection may be more directly articulated in Spenser and Jonson, but Lanyer’s poem operates by the same anthropocentric logic.

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landscape” (qtd. in Domosh and Seager, 145). But while these connections create sympathy, they nevertheless reinscribe the hierarchical models that support empire.

22. Thomas Hariot, “A Briefe and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia,” in *The English Literatures of America, 1500-1800*, ed. Myra Jehlen and Michael Warner (New York: Routledge, 1997), 82–84.

The poem is, in the end, understandably embedded in extant social hierarchies, hierarchies that are inherently anxious ones. While early modern male self-fashioning might be imagined to construe an absolute divide between self and other, the kind of self-fashioning we see in Cookham is fundamentally cooptive.<sup>23</sup> In imagining a subordinate nature, obsessed against its own well-being, the poem attempts to compress human social differences (between Lanyer and Clifford) by emphasizing the absolute subjectivity of N/nature. Lanyer “evermore must grieve” being removed from the “recreations” Clifford found at Cookham, but she can memorialize their virtues in her poem (126, 124).

Indeed, Lanyer’s reference to Echo, who “wonted to reply” in happier times, dying “for sorrow” (199–200) drives home the unequal nature of the relationship depicted in the poem between the women and the grounds of Cookham. Clifford, the human, can take the “noble Memory” of the animal’s “former pleasures” with her while the animals are left “powerlesse to receive / [her] favor,” and incapable of the comfort memory can afford, as (per Aristotle) they are understood to lack intellectual memory and “exist only in the present.”<sup>24</sup> In Ovid, Echo dies of sorrow at being rejected by Narcissus, who is so obsessed with his own beauty that he spurns her attempts to initiate a relationship (and later dies trying to embrace his reflection). Echo’s grief destroys her: “weeping vigils waste her frame away; / Her body shrivels, all its moisture dries; / Only her voice and bones are left.”<sup>25</sup> Like Cookham, she withers with grief at her unrequited desire. Despite the poem’s notable acknowledgement of the nonhuman at Cookham, we might well consider how the poem’s anthropocentric “narcissism” relegates nature to the role of desiring addict, denied the possibility of self-actualization, always merely the pale Echo of the dominant human.

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23. Greenblatt in *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

24. Aristotle, *De memoria*, quoted in Erica Fudge, *Brutal Reasoning*, 24.

25. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, ed. E. J. Kinney (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 152.