Chapter Four: Nature in the Sixteenth-Century Sonnet Sequences and the Early Seventeenth-Century Lyrics

As a result of its reproducing ability, nature, the important motif in literary works, is always regarded as female and “Mother Nature” and “Mother Earth” are common expressions in literature. However, according to ecofeminists, when we regard nature as a mother, we already put it in an inferior place, because the only purpose or value of its existence is to nourish and support human beings. Therefore the connection between nature and motherhood seems to result in our exploitation and devastation of the natural environment. As mentioned in Chapter Three, Irigaray and Kristeva suggest that when motherhood becomes the consecrated representation of femininity, women, deprived of identity and subjectivity, are left with the function of being mother. Similarly, when nature is reduced to the function of nourishing human beings as the mother, nature has no independent value and its value depends on how it serves human beings. Catherine Roach remarks, “Our ecological breakdown has arisen, in part, precisely from our attitude that nature is a storehouse of riches which will never empty and which we may use at will for any purpose we desire, without incurring any debt or obligation of replacement” (55). Besides, in the value dualisms and value hierarchies of Western intellectual tradition, nature, similar to the female, is regarded as inferior to human, the male. Val Plumwood has pointed out quite a few contrasting pairs as the key elements in the dualistic structure in Western thought, including culture/nature, reason/nature, male/female, rationality/animality (nature), mind, spirit/nature, human/nature (non-human), subject/object, self/other, and so on (Feminism and the Mastery of Nature 43). In these dichotomies, the left-side elements are regarded as superior to the right-side ones and along with this superiority is the “logic of domination,” as Karen J. Warren claims in Ecological Feminist Philosophies:
Oppressive and patriarchal conceptual frameworks are characterized not only by value dualisms and value hierarchies, but also by “power-over” conceptions of power and relationships of domination and by a “logic of domination,” i.e., a structure of argumentation which justifies subordination on the grounds that superiority justifies subordination. (xii)

Accordingly, nature most of the time is dominated by human beings. Yet, through rereading of some literary canons from an ecological perspective, we can find the fundamental attitude that functions in the relationship between man and nature and learn how to get along with the world around us. The main concern of this chapter will be the nature represented in the sonnet sequences in the Elizabethan Age and in the lyrics in the early seventeenth century since poets of the two literary periods hold similar attitude toward nature. I will discuss four sonnet sequences, that is, Sir Philip Sidney’s *Astrophil and Stella*, Edmund Spencer’s *Amoretti*, William Shakespeare’s *Sonnets*, and a later one, *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus* (1621), written by a female poet, Lady Mary Wroth, who is Philip Sidney’s niece. Except for Spencer’s *Amoretti*, the background information of the other three sequences has been mentioned in the previous two chapters. Spencer’s *Amoretti*, as Sidney’s *Astrophil and Stella*, follows the Petrarchan convention and shows Spencer’s love to Elizabeth, who becomes his wife finally. I will also explore both the poetry of Metaphysical poets, that of Sons of Ben, and the religious poetry by George Herbert, and Andrew Marvel. Since most critics have claimed the grouping of “Metaphysical Poets” and “Cavalier Poets” is not functional; actually, the name falls short of the reality.¹ I will discuss the poems of those three groups together according to their subject matter with no distinction made among the three groups.

The sixteenth century Britain is famous for a cultural and intellectual movement,

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¹ This idea will be further illustrated in the next chapter, which concerns the lyrics in the early seventeenth century only.
that is, the Renaissance, in which humanism is a fundamental intellectual current. Humanism, as implied by the name, signifies the importance of human beings and so, “[h]umanism, as we use the term today, simply means any view or attitude in which interest in human welfare and enjoyment is considered most important” (Smith 44). In the Elizabethan Age, “humanism was the stimulus which spread through European societies aiming at creation and development of human interests upon a higher earthly plane than that of gross, animal existence” (Smith 44). Hence, we can boldly conclude that humanism in a way indicates the anthropocentric attitude at that time. Man is the center of the world and other species, of course, will be pushed to the periphery. Since man is considered to be the most important, other species in nature will be assigned to the subsidiary role. This attitude, in a way, influences the Elizabethan aesthetics. “The term ‘artificial’ had for them good rather than dubious meanings, referring to the proper use of human ingenuity to enhance nature, to enable it to outdo itself” (Abrams 423). This kind of idea, of course, is reflected in the sonnets at that time.

In the early seventeenth century, generally from 1600 to 1660 according to The Norton Anthology of English Literature, the intellectual and spiritual attitudes are influenced by those in the sixteenth century and so are quite similar to those in the previous century. According to Douglas Bush, “[t]he working philosophy inherited by those authors was the Christian humanism which during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance had fused Christian faith and pagan reason into a stable framework of religious, ethical, political, economic, and cultural thought” (35). This European tradition comes from Plato and Cicero. “Its central religious and philosophic doctrine is order, order in the individual soul, in society, and in the cosmos” (Bush 36). Therefore to put everything in order is very important and thus results in the hierarchy in the ideas of culture and society. And Bush mentions the two main concepts that
are common in the seventeenth century:

... one is the concept of ‘right reason’, the eternal and harmonious law of God and nature written in every human mind and heart; the other is that of the great chain of being, the hierarchical order which descends from God through angels and men to plants and stones, which at once distinguishes and unites all levels of existence. This orthodox ideology was the foundation of most reflective and imaginative writing up to the Restoration.

(36)

Accordingly, men with right reason are regarded as superior to other creatures and, in the chain of being, God is the greatest and so in the highest level and the natural world is in the lowest level with men in the middle to dominate nature but be controlled by God. This kind of idea has great influence on the lyrics at that time.

The idea of nature is similar in both sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, that is nature is inferior to and should be dominated by human beings. The most obvious feature of nature in the lyrics of that time is its lack of autonomous significance; that is, nature does not exist as something of independent value but serves the poet’s purpose in the lyrics; therefore, nature becomes a thing for us, instead of a thing in itself. With the expression of the protagonist’s love to a lady (or a man, as in both Shakespeare’s case and Worth’s) as the keynote, generally speaking, nature or natural objects are never written about as the main theme or main motif in those sonnet sequences. Most of the time the sonneteers just use natural scenes or natural objects as the means to express or convey their feelings or ideas. This also happens in the seventeenth century. Yet with respective theme in each poem, the seventeenth-century lyrics are not so limited in their description or expression of nature; they provide various representations of nature in different poems. Nevertheless, nature is often regarded as inferior to man and man’s domination of
nature is also common.

The description of the beautiful mistress by means of natural objects is the most typical example of the employment of nature in both sonnet sequences and the early seventeenth-century lyrics. Natural scenes or objects, as popular in Petrarchan conceits, are employed by the poets to depict the beauty of their beloved ones. Following the same tradition, seventeenth-century lyrics are also congested with this kind of comparison. For example, eyes are usually compared to the sun, the moon or the stars. In Sonnet 2 of Lady Mary Wroth’s *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*, Amphilanthus’s eyes are depicted as stars: “Two stars of Heaven, sent downe to grace the Earthe, / Plac’d in that throne which gives all joyes theyr birthe; / Shining, and burning; pleasing yett theyr charmes” (9-11). These bright eyes even make the sun envy: “Your heavenly beames which makes the sunn to find / Envy” (6-7). And without this brightness, the poor sonneteer can only stay in darkness. Different from those male sonneteers, Wroth seldom describes the countenance of Amphilanthus in her sonnet cycle but when she does she still follows the tradition, which shows the great influence of her uncle, Sidney. In Sonnet 33, Shakespeare also applies this image to modify his beloved young man. When he saw the glorious morning on a mountain top, he thought of his love, whose glorious brightness was about the same. Therefore he claims, “my sun one early morn did shine / With all triumphant splendour on my brow” (9-10). Thomas Carew (1594/5-1640) in “A Song” says: “Ask me no more where those stars light, / That downwards fall in dead of night; / For in your eyes they sit, and there / Fixed become, as in their sphere” (13-16). Sir

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2 The citations of Wroth’s *Pamphilia and Amphilanthus* in this chapter are mainly from *The Poems of Lady Mary Wroth* edited by Josephine A. Roberts.
3 The citations of Shakespeare’s *Sonnets* in this chapter are mainly based on Stephen Booth’s *Shakespeare’s Sonnets* and Thomas Blaikie’s *Shakespeare’s Love Poetry*.
Francis Kynaston (1587-1642) in “To Cynthia. On concealement of her beauty” says:

“Do not conceale thy radiant eyes, / The starre-light of serenest skies, / Least wanting of their heavenly light, / They turne to Chaos endless night” (1-4). Thus, the sun or the star is meaningful to the poets just because it represents the eyes of their loved ones; that is, it can serve the human purpose. Some precious stones are also employed to describe the beloved. For example in Sonnet 9 of Sidney’s Astrophil and Stella, Sidney compares Stella’s face to Queen Virtue’s court and believes that it is “Prepar’d by Nature’s choicest furniture” (2). Sidney describes the magnificence of the court to imply the beauty of Stella,

Hath his front built of alabaster pure;
Gold is the covering of that stately place.
The door by which sometimes comes forth her grace
Red porphir is, which lock of pearl makes sure,
Whose porches rich—which name of cheeks endure—
Marble, mixt red and white, do interlace.
The windows now, through which this heavenly guest
Look over the world and can find nothing such
Which dare claim from those lights the name of best,
Of touch they are, that without touch do touch,
Which Cupid’s self, from Beauty’s mine did draw:
Of touch they are, and poor I am their straw. (3-14)

The front is Stella’s forehead, the cover, her hair, and the door, her lips, which locks the pearl, her teeth. Her cheeks are red and white marble. The windows that claim the best light of course are her bright eyes. In Sonnet 32, Sidney again describes that

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5 The citations of Astrophil and Stella are taken either from The Poems of Sir Philip Sidney edited by William A. Ringler, Jr. or from Silver Poets of the Sixteenth Century edited by Gerald Bullett.
even in sleep he could see the beautiful Stella and he asked Morpheus, the lively son of deadly sleep, “Whence hast thou ivory, rubies, pearl, and gold, / To show her skin, lips, teeth, and head so well?” (10-11). Ivory, rubies, pearl, and gold are quite common Petrarchan traditional conceits used to illustrate the mistress’s beauty, which can also be found in Spenser’s *Amoretti*:

. . . my love doth in herself contain

All this world’s riches that may far be found:

If sapphires, lo, her eyes be sapphires plain;

If rubies, lo, her lips be rubies sound;

If pearls, her teeth be pearls both pure and round;

If ivory, her forehead ivory ween;

If gold, her locks are finest gold on ground;

If silver, her fair hands are silver sheen.⁶ (15: 7-12)

The poets load their sonnets with those precious stones to describe the beauty of the ladies but we can only find the piling up of those stones with no true understanding of the ladies’ beauty. In addition to precious stones, beautiful flowers or plants are also common vehicles for the beloved’s beauty. For instance, in Sonnet 109 Shakespeare compares the young man to flowers. He calls him “my rose” and says: “For nothing this wide universe I call / Save thou, my rose; in it thou art my all” (13-14). In Sonnet 99, Shakespeare further uses different kinds of flowers to describe his beloved. He says that violet steals the sweet smell from his love’s breath and gets its color from his love’s vein. The lily is not as white as his love’s hands and buds of marjoram has stolen their color from the youth’s hair. Roses also get their color and fragrance from his young love.

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⁶ Citations of *Amoretti* are mainly from *Edmund Spenser: Selected Shorter Poems* edited by Douglas Brooks-Davies.
The forward violet thus did I chide:
Sweet thief, whence didst thou steal thy sweet that smells,
If not from my love’s breath? The purple pride
Which on thy soft cheek for complexion dwells
In my love’s veins thou hast too grossly dy’d.
The lily I condemned for thy hand,
And buds of marjoram had stol’n thy hair;
The roses fearfully on thorns did stand,
One blushing shame, another white despair;
A third, nor red nor white, had stol’n of both,
And to his robb’ry had annex’d thy breath;
But, for his theft, in pride of all his growth
A vengeful canker eat him up to death. (1-12)

In this sonnet, Shakespeare no longer borrows natural objects to describe his beloved. This time, on the contrary, Shakespeare claims that those flowers steal their sweet smell and beautiful colors from his love. So, at the end, Shakespeare concludes: “More flowers I noted, yet I none could see / But sweet or colour it had stol’n from thee” (13-14). This hyperbolic compliment is meant to show the peerless beauty of the youth but it also shows the poet’s anthropocentric attitude toward nature. This kind of statement is quite ingenious but it also is a kind of belittlement of and discrimination against nature. We can find the poet imposes his feelings on all the natural objects. So, he chides the violet and calls it a thief; so, he condemns the lily and accuses the buds of marjoram of stealing the color of the young man’s hair; so, one rose is blushing shame, another white with despair and the other has filched the color of both and robbed the fragrance of the young man’s breath; so, a caterpillar eats it up in revenge. All the subjective description is human being’s appropriation of
nature. When personifying those natural objects, Shakespeare imposes human judgement on the natural things. Sonnet 64 of Spenser’s *Amoretti* is also a typical example, in which the poet says:

Her lips did smell like unto gillyflowers;
Her ruddy cheeks like unto roses red;
Her snowy brows like budded bellamours;
Her lovely eyes like pinks but newly spread;
Her goodly bosom like a strawberry bed;
Her neck like to a bunch of columbines;
Her breast like lilies ere their leaves be shed;
Her nipples like young-blossomed jessamines:
Such fragrant flowers do give most odorous smell,
But her sweet odour did them all excel. (10-14)

All the physical parts of the mistress turn out to be flowers or fruits and the reader can not really know what the mistress looks like except for a ridiculous combination of all those plants. A Cavalier poet, Robert Herrick (1591-1674) describes his mistress’, that is, Julia’s lips as ripe cherry in “Cherry-Ripe”:

“Cherry-ripe, ripe, ripe,” I cry,
“Full and fair ones; come and buy.”
If so be you ask me where
They do grow, I answer, “There,
Where my Julia’s lips do smile;
There’s the land, or cherry-isle,
Whose plantations fully show
All the year where cherries grow.” (1-8)

So, the mistress’ lips are like cherries that are for men to buy and eat. This is
exploitation of nature and commercialization of the mistress’ lips and consequently is
discrimination against both. Ben Jonson (1572/3-1637) in “4. Her Triumph” in *A
Celebration of Charis in Ten Lyric Pieces* says:

| Have you seen but a bright lily grow |
| Before rude hands have touched it?   |
| Ha’ you marked but the fall o’ the snow |
| Before the soil hath smutched it?   |
| Ha’ you felt the wool of beaver? |
| Or swan’s down ever? |
| Or have smelt o’ the bud o’ the brier? |
| Or the nard in the fire? |
| Or have tasted the bag of the bee? |
| O so white! O so soft! O so sweet is she! (21-30) |

When comparing beautiful ladies to flowers or plants or some other natural things, in
addition to the emphasis on the lady’s beauty, the poet seems to imply that the lady is
like the flowers or the plants for men to enjoy and has no independent value. Cora
Kaplan comments that “if we consider how vulnerable, passive, fragile and silent
flowers are, we see that the metaphor is always subliminally degrading. It makes
women important only in their existence as a sensuous object, a function in which
their emotional and intellectual response, such as inconstancy or temperament, is the
thorn in the rose” (21). Therefore, this kind of nature imagery is actually
degradation of both nature and woman.

Besides, in this kind of figurative expression, both nature and the beloved ones
are appropriated by the poets. Readers will admire the poets’ talent and imagination
to present these far-fetched comparisons. Yet, the real beauty of those precious
stones or flowers and that of the magnificent beloved are the price we pay for the
poets’ talent. In “Ecofeminist Literary Criticism: Reading the Orange,” Josephine Donovan uses the idea of absent referent in structuralist and poststructuralist language theory to analyze this kind of domination. In language, “[t]he absent referent refers to the real or material entity signified by the linguistic symbol, the word, which is termed the signifier” (Donovan 75). And she believes that “in other symbolic systems the text, a chain of signifiers, tends to dominate, distort, and deaden what is signified—the absent referent—commodifying it for cultural and economic exchange” (Donovan 75). In those examples mentioned above, the poets use natural scenes or objects to describe the beauty of their loved ones. The natural scenes or objects are the signifiers, which are supposed to signify the beauty of the lady. However, since this kind of comparison is so far-fetched that it can only signify the abstract idea of beauty in the poet’s mind but can help little for us readers to get the beauty of the lady. Here both the literal nature and the beautiful ladies are absent referents. In one level the natural objects are the signifiers to signify the lady’s beauty and the beautiful lady becomes the absent referent. In another level, the poet’s word are the signifiers, which signify the unseen natural objects and the natural objects are the absent referents. There is the double chasm in this kind of description and accordingly we can see neither nature nor the lady clearly, what is left is only the poet’s words. This kind of signification demonstrates those poets’ anthropocentric attitude to nature and androcentric attitude to woman. Because of their anthropocentric attitude, they exploit the natural objects to describe their beloved ones without recognizing the independent value of those natural objects. Because of their androcentric attitude woman depicted becomes only the piling up of plants or stones. As Donovan has concluded,

Western symbolic discourse, then, often operate in this way as dominative practices. Their signifying texts take over and reshape the literal, the
material, expunging in the process the living being, the thou, the subject, casting it in the passive form as a signified, while retaining agency for the dominative signifier. Such a mentality has enabled destructive Western dominative practices toward nature. (77)

Natural objects function as signifiers to signify the mistress’ countenance and in the signifying process the poet’s idea is dominant of his use of the natural objects. In this chain of signifying, as a result, the real natural things and the mistress, the absent referents, are totally forgotten. In those lyrics mentioned above natural objects are figurative; they are seldom presented as things in themselves but always as things for us. They are employed either as a mirror to reflect the poets’ beloveds or a means to describe the poets’ feelings.

In addition to the employment of natural things to describe the mistress’ beauty, creatures in the natural field also serve as means to debase women in the lyrics of the early seventeenth century. For example, John Donne (1572-1631) in “Confined Love” uses natural objects to justify female promiscuity:

Are Sunne, Moone, or Starres by law forbidden,
To smile where they list, or lend away their light?
Are birds divorc’d, or are they chidden
If they leave their mate, or lie abroad a-night?
Beasts doe no jointures lose
Though they new lovers choose,
But we are made worse than those.

Who e’er rigg’d faire ship to lie in harbors,
And not to seeke new lands, or not to deale withal?
Or built faire houses, set trees, and arbors,
Only to lock up, or else to let them fall?
   Good is not good, unlesse
   A thousand it possesse,
   But doth wast with greedinesse. (8-21)

Here, woman is compared with planets, animals and even things. In “Elegy IV: Change” Donne again compares women with animals to show that it is natural for women to change: “Foxes and goats; all beasts change when they please, / Shall women, more hot, wily, wild than these, / Be bound to one man, and did Nature then / Idly make them apter to’endure than men?” (11-14). And then Donne further compares women to the plow-land and the sea: “Who hath a plow-land, casts all his seed corne there, / And yet allowes his ground more corne should beare; / Though Danuby into the sea must flow, / The sea receives the Rhene, Volga, and Po” (17-20).

Ostensibly, Donne argues for women’s change but actually he uses natural things to persuade women to be promiscuous and also to justify his own licentiousness. In this way, he debases both woman and nature since both are dominated by man and manipulated by man as in “Communitie,” Donne says that women are not good or bad but are just like fruits for men to taste. In the first stanza of that poem the poet says that we should have freedom to choose “things indifferent,” that is, things that are neither good nor bad. Then in the second stanza he further alleges that women are amoral, are “things indifferent” and so they are for men’s use. Then at last the poet claims:

   But they [women] are ours as fruits are ours,
   He that but tastes, he that devours,
   And he that leaves all, doth as well:
   Chang’d loves are but chang’d sorts of meat,
   And when hee hath the kernel eate,
Who doth not fling away the shell? (19-24)

So, woman and nature are both “things indifferent” with no identity or autonomy, and their only worth depends on how they serve the man’s purpose. In addition, in “Beauty and Denial” William Cartwright (1611-1643) also uses natural objects to argue for woman’s unchastity. In this poem the poet uses roses, lilies, the sun, apples, and fountains, to persuade the beauty to yield.

No, no, it cannot be; for who e’er set
A blockhouse to defend a garden yet?
Roses ne’er chide my boldness when I go
To crop their blush; why should your cheeks do so?
The lilies ne’er deny their silk to men;
Why should your hands push off, and draw back, then?
The sun forbids me not his heat; then why
Comes there to earth an edict from your eye?
I smell perfumes, and they ne’er think it sin:
Why should your breath not let me take it in?
A dragon dept the golden apples, true;
But must your breasts be therefore kept so too:
All fountains else flow freely, and ne’er shrink;
And must yours cheat my thirst when I would drink?
Where nature knows no prohibition,
Shall art prove anti-nature, and make one? (1-16).

Here nature is regarded as opposition to moral and the poet uses nature as an excuse to persuade the beauty to yield. In Cartwright’s opinion it is natural for both natural things and woman to yield to man. Cartwright’s poem directly reminds the reader of Thoman Carew’s “A Rapture”, in which the poet uses the same “garden image” and
also similar flowers and plants to describe his sexual pleasure. Carew compares himself to an empty bee and puts it this way:

Then, as the empty bee, that lately bore
Into the common treasure all her store,
Flies ’bout the painted field with nimble wing,
Deflow’ring the fresh virgins of the spring,
So will I rifle all the sweets that dwell
In my delicious paradise, and swell
My bag with honey, drawn forth by the power
Of fervent kisses, from each spicy flower.
I’ll seize the rose-buds in their perfumed bed,
The violet knots, like curious mazes spread
O’er all the garden, taste the ripened cherry,
The warm, firm apple, tipped with coral berry;
Then will I visit with a wand’ring kiss
The vale of lilies and the bower of bliss. (55-68)

So, woman is just like those flowers or fruits enclosed in a garden for man to seize and to taste. In this libertine garden what the male-poet cares most is how to enjoy the physical pleasure provided by both flowers/fruits and woman. Another poet, Thomas Randolph also uses natural plants and creatures to argue against the idea of chastity. At the beginning of Randolph’s “Upon Love Fondly Refused for Conscience’s Sake,” the poet says, “Nature, creation’s law, is judged by sense, / Not by the tyrant conscience” (1-2). According to Randolph, since it is natural to love then it should not be guilty to fall in love. He also argues against monogamy by saying: “It was not love, but love transformed to vice, / Ravished by envious avarice, / Made women first impropriate; all were free; / Enclosures man’s inventions be”
Here the poet condemns “enclosures” as man’s inventions and asks his mistress to follow the natural instinct. Then, the poet makes use of natural creatures to show that it is natural to have more than one lover. For example, the poet says: “Say, does the virgin-spring less chaste appear / ’Cause many thirsts are quenched there? / Or have you not with the same odors met / When more have smelt your violet?” (21-24). The poet further compares man with other animals:

Man is the lord of creatures, yet we see
That all his vassals’ loves are free;
The severe wedlock’s fetters do not bind
The pard’s inflamed and amorous mind,
But that he may be like a bridegroom led
Even to the royal lion’s bed
The birds may for a year their loves confine,
But make new choice each Valentine.
If our affections then more servile be
Than are our slaves’, where’s man’s sovereignty? (29-38).

Since man is more sovereign than animals, Randolph seems to suggest, he should enjoy more. Afterwards Randolph uses again the “garden image” and raises plants as examples to show that it is beneficial to have more lovers since the gardener can graft different kind of fruits on one tree.

If the fresh trunk have sap enough to give
That each insertive branch may live,
The gard’ner grafts not only apples there,
But adds the warden and the pear;
The peach and apricot together grow,
The cherry and the damson too,
Till he hath made by skilful husbandry
An entire orchard of one tree. (41-48).

So, the female body is the eroticized landscape and promiscuity will help beget more fruits. “Each woman should therefore bear the seed of as many men as possible. These poems are not simple allegories of sexuality in terms of nature; each image of fruit, flower, valley, or mound becomes a temptation and a challenge to the reader to unveil the poet’s ingenious euphemism for parts of the female body” (Malcolmson 254-55). Both nature and woman are thus justifiably exploited by man. This kind of landscape metaphor also appears in Donne’s poem. In Donne’s famous “ElegieXIX: To His Mistress Going to Bed” the poet seduces the mistress to strip to nakedness step by step and then he says:

Licence my roving hands, and let them go,
Before, behind, between, above, below.
O my America! my new-found-land,
My kingdome, safeliest when with one man man’d,
My Myne of precious stones, My Emperie,
How blest am I in this discovering thee!
To enter in these bonds, is to be free;
Then where my hand is set, my seal shall be.

Full nakedness! All joyes are due to thee,
As souls unbodied, bodies uncloth’d must be. (25-34)

Here, woman is man’s land, kingdom and empire, which implies that she comes within man’s jurisdiction. No matter what woman is compared to/with, flowers or land, those male poets just use natural things to justify their domination of both woman and nature. Since nature is at the lowest level in the chain of being and consequently should be controlled by man, woman, as compared to nature, should be
at the same level as nature and should, of course, be under the control of man.

One of Marvell’s four “mower” poems, however, provides us something different. In “The Mower Against Gardens” Marvell explores the relation between man and nature and describes how nature is stained by luxurious man. Marvell starts the poem directly with this idea: “Luxurious man, to bring his vice in use, / Did after him the world seduce, / And from the fields the flowers and plants allure, / Where Nature was most plain and pure” (1-4). This poem is a response to Carew’s “A Rapture” and Randolph’s “Upon Love Fondly Refused for Conscience Sake” in which flowers, fruits and garden imagery are employed to justify promiscuity as something natural. Through the mower’s criticism of the gardener Marvell tries to show that actually the libertine sexuality in those two poems is not natural but the seduction of a crafty seducer. Charistina Malcolmson says: “. . .in ‘The Mower against Gardens’ Marvell alludes to both the Cavalier poets and the Levellers in order to dramatize the extent to which “nature” was used during this period to authorize as legitimate whatever was in the disputant’s interest” (251). The whole poem describes how the gardener enforces skillful horticulture on nature to imply that the libertine garden in those poems is actually man-made, instead of natural as those poets claim. Marvell says:

He first enclosed within the gardens 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 flowers themselves were taught to paint

The tulip white did for complexion seek,
And learned to interline its cheek. (5-14)

Marvell defines man as “that sovereign thing and proud” (20) and he suggests that man’s belief of his superiority to nature results in his exploitation of nature. Different from those Cavalier poets who describe women as gardens or lands, Marvell’s imagery of land is presented as a woman and grafting is regarded as a kind of adultery. Marvell puts:

No plant now knew the stock from which it came;
He grafts upon the wild the tame,
That the uncertain and adulterate fruit
Might put the palate in dispute.
His green seragliio has its eunuchs too,
Lest any tyrant him outdo;
And in the cherry he does Nature vex,
To procreate without a sex. (23-30)

Here, the gardener becomes a Turkish sultan who can have his flowers, as his wives, enclosed in the harem. Then Marvell accuses the enforcement of man and says:

“’Tis all enforced, the fountain and the grot, / While the sweet fields do lie forgot, / Where willing Nature does to all dispense / A wild and fragrant innocence” (31-34).

Marvell criticizes man’s imposition of his own will on nature by making it serve his interests in terms of the seduction and enslavement of women. Marvell speaks for nature and regards nature as pure and innocent and asserts that it is the “luxurious man” that contaminates nature. This poem serves as a sharp contrast to those that appropriate nature, or woman. This attitude is quite rare in the early seventeenth century. Actually, in some of Marvell’s poems he not only reflects physical nature but transforms and idealizes it and this point is going to be analyzed later in this paper. Marvell’s attitude to woman, however, is not so friendly and this is going to be
explored also later when his poem “The Garden” is analyzed.

Besides being used to describe human beings, nature is also used to signify the poet’s feelings. Among the natural phenomena which poets employ to describe their state of mind, the contrast between the day and the night is the most common one in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The beloved’s eyes are the sun so the day with the bright sunshine usually represents happiness and bliss while the dark night shows the poet’s sorrow and grief. For example in Sidney’s Sonnet 89 in *Astrophil and Stella*, Astrophil, the speaker, sighs for the absence of his love, “Now that of absence of the most irksome night / With darkest shade doth overcome my day, / Since Stella’s eyes, wont to give me my day, / leaving my hemisphere leave me in night,” (1-4). As a partial imitation of Sidney’s *Astrophil and Stella*, Wroth’s *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus* also contains similar images to show the speaker’s bliss and grief. In Sonnet 20, the speaker Pamphilia agrees that the sun brings happiness to the day and ends the tedious night, “The Sunn which glads, the earth art his bright sight / When in the morne hee showes his golden face, / And takes the place from taedious drowsy night / Making the world still happy in his grace” (1-4); this description is more literal yet we can still find the reflection of the lady’s feelings so we find the sun glads and the night is tedious and drowsy. Though the sun is shining the lady yet, because of the absence of her love, can see no light: “The missing of the sunn awhile makes night / Butt absence of my joy sees never Light” (13-14). In addition, both Sidney and Wroth think that night is good company since it befits their sorrowful mood. In Sonnet 96 of *Astrophil and Stella*, Astrophil states that because he was barred from his sunlight (Stella), the sorrow and grief of the dark night is more suitable to his thought. He says, “Thought, with good cause thou likest so well the night, / Since kind or chance gives both one livery: / Both sadly black, both blackly darkned be, / Night barr’d from sun, thou from thy own sunlight” (1-4). Similar to
Sidney’s Astrophil, Wroth’s Pamphilia prefers night to day because the dark night is more suitable for her miserable state of mind. In Sonnet 15 Pamphilia says, “Truly poore Night thou welcome art to mee: / I love thee better in this sad attire” (1-2). Because it is dark at night, the night is always connected with sorrow, grief, or sadness. Later she further explains that, “I love thy grave, and saddest lookes to see, / Which seems my soule, and dying hart intire, / Like to the ashes of some happy fire / That flam’d in joy, butt quench’d in miserie” (5-8). In Sonnet 37 she directly addresses night and claims, “Night, welcome art thou to my mind destrest / Darke, heavy, sad, yet nott more sad then I / Never could’st thou find fitter company / For thine owne humor then I thus oprest” (1-4). In the end, she loves night together with silence and grief as her companions: “Silence, and griefe, with thee I best doe love / And from you three, I know I can nott move, / Then lett us live companions without strife” (12-14). Wroth seems to follow her uncle’s example most of the time but in her sonnet sequence there is still some originality, which shows her difference from the male poets. Pamphilia’s attitude toward night is not totally pessimistic; the second section of Sonnet 3 reveals, “Most blessed Night, the happy time for love, / The shade for lovers, and theyr loves delight, / The Raigne of Love for servants, free from spite, / The hopefull seasons, for joy’s sports to move” (1-4). Now night is not the symbol of grief but the blessed and happy time for love. Though Wroth shows her originality here, she still writes as a dominator of nature since whether the dark night is the sorrowful companion or the happy time for love depends on the poet’s attitude toward it.

The contrast between day and night to show the poet’s mood is also seen in Spenser’s Amoretti. Sonnet 87 demonstrates the poet’s ambivalent feeling toward night and day:

Since I did leave the presence of my love,
Many long weary days I have outworn,
And many nights, that slowly seemed to move
Their sad protract from evening until morn:
For whenas day the heaven doth adorn,
I wish that night the noyous day would end;
And whenas night hath us of light forlorn,
I wish that day would shortly reascend.
Thus I the time with expectation spend,
And feign my grief with expectation spend,
That further seems his term still to extend
And maketh every minute seem a mile:
So sorrow still doth seem too long to last,
But joyous hours do fly away too fast. (1-14)

With the absence of his love, neither day nor night is endurable since his life is full of sorrow. His love is allegorized to light and without that light the poet seems to walk in the darkness of the night: “Since I have lacked the comfort of that light / The which was wont to lead my thoughts astray / I wander as in darkness of the night, / Afraid of every danger’s least dismay” (88:1-4).

However, in Shakespeare’s sonnet sequence, the image of day and night mainly appears in the first part; that is, the young man part. For instance, in Sonnet 43, in the absence of the loved one, the poet can only see him at night in dreams and his form brightens the dark night: “Then thou whose shadow shadows doth make bright, / How would thy shadow’s form happy show / To the clear day with thy much clearer light / When to unseeing eyes thy shade shines so!” (5-8). Shakespeare enjoys seeing his love in the dream and believes that he brings him the bright day: “All days are nights to see till I see thee, / And nights bright days when dreams do show thee
me” (13-14). So, without seeing his beloved one, the day is just like the night and when together with his loved one he enjoys the night as if it were the day. The day again represents brightness and happiness and the night darkness and grief. Besides, in Shakespeare’s sonnets the images of day and night also represent something else. Because he is much older than the young man, in front of this beautiful youth, Shakespeare is always conscious of the sharp contrast between their age and hence, in Sonnet 73, he tells the young man that “In me thou seest the twilight of such day / As after sunset fadeth in the west, / Which by and by black night doth take away” (5-7). Compared to the brightness of youth, old age is the twilight after sunset and night will soon come.

In addition to the contrast between day and night, the change of seasons is also a good source for those sonneteers to express their feelings and we can find similar dualism and domination too. The sharp contrast between spring and winter is a good trope to reflect the sonneteers’ different mental state. The first song in Pamphilia to Amphilanthus is a good example, in which Wroth declares that though spring has come she is still in winter, suffering from the unreturned love:

   The spring now come att last
   To trees, fields, to flowers,
   And meadowes makes to tast
   His pride, while sad showers
   Which from mine eyes do flow
   Makes knowne with cruell paines
   Colde winter yet remaines
   Noe signe of spring wee know. (Song I. 1-8)

In her Sonnet 19 fallen leaves become the symbol of lost love. When summer passes, “[t]he very trees with hanging heads condole / Sweet sommers parting . . .” (5-6). To
Wroth believes that the trees and leaves, just like her, mourn for the absence of love.

Thus of dead leaves her farewell carpett’s made:

Theyr fall, theyr branches, all theyr mournings prove;

With leaveles, naked bodies, whose huese vade

From hopefull greene, to wither in theyr love,

If trees, and leaves for absence, mourners bee

Noe mervaile that I grieve, who like want see. (9-14)

Leaf falling is part of the natural course and it is inevitable: when autumn comes, the leaves will be falling. Yet, in this poem, Wroth’s personal feelings dominate this natural scene and so trees and leaves are mourning for the absence of her love.

In Shakespeare’s sonnet sequence we can also see this spring/winter contrast. In Sonnet 98, the poet uses this contrast to illustrate his sorrow when his love is not around. When they separate it is spring: “From you have I been absent in the spring” (1). Yet, without his love, he could not feel the joy or bliss of spring:

Yet nor the lays of birds, nor the sweet smell

Of different flowers in odour and in hue,

Could make me any summer’s story tell,

Or from their proud lap pluck them where they grew;

Nor did I wonder at the lily's white,

Nor praise the deep vermillion in the rose:

They were but sweet, but figures of delight,

Drawn after you, you pattern of all those.

Yet seem’d it winter still, and, you away,

As with your shadow I with these did play. (5-14)

Here we can see the literal description of spring: the lays of birds, the sweet smell of
flowers, the lily’s white, and the deep vermilion in the rose but all the sweetness and figures of delight, according to the poet, are drawn after the young man. Besides, all these natural objects mean nothing to the poet because he is obsessed with the absence of his loved one. Without his loved one, Shakespeare could not hear the sweet songs of the birds, nor could he smell the fragrance or see the beautiful colors of those beautiful flowers since all their sweetness and loveliness are begotten from the youth, Shakespeare’s beloved. So, the poet’s thought is always more important than nature and the dominator of course is superior to the dominated. The dualism of mind/nature is quite conspicuous here. In addition to spring, Shakespeare also adopts summer to represent the days with his love. In Sonnet 97, again the bleak winter represents the lack of love or the absence of the loved one: “How like a winter hath my absence been / From thee, the pleasure of the fleeting year! / What freezings have I felt, what dark days seen! / What old December’s bareness everywhere! (1-4) When he is far away from the young man, he can only feel the coldness and bareness of winter, “For summer and his pleasures wait on thee, / And thou away, the very birds are mute” (11-12). So, summer and his pleasure minister to Shakespeare’s loved one and the birds are silent when he is away. The poet’s domination of nature is quite obvious. Besides, Shakespeare also uses winter to represent senility and summer, youth. In Sonnet 6 Shakespeare warns the young man: “Then let not winter’s ragged hand deface / In thee thy summer ere thou be distill’d” (1-2). In Sonnet 73, Shakespeare says, “That time of year thou mayst in me behold / When yellow leaves, or none, of few, do hang / Upon those boughs which shake against the cold, / Bare ruin’d choirs where late the sweet birds sang” (1-4).

Furthermore, with verdant trees and blooming flowers, spring is always regarded as the season for love. In Amoretti Spenser says that spring comes and “calling out of sad Winter’s night / Fresh Love (that long hath slept in cheerless bower” (4: 5-6).
Here, the Fresh Love refers to young Cupid. When spring comes and Cupid starts to work, the poet advises his love to enjoy new love: “Then you, fair flower, in whom fresh youth doth reign, / Prepare yourself new love to entertain” (13-14). Here spring is at service of human beings. Though Spenser says that it is Cupid that the spring is serving, yet, Cupid is only the symbol of emotional love among humans. According to Spenser, “... lusty Spring, now in his timely hour, / Is ready to come forth him to receive, / And warns the Earth with diverse-coloured flower / To deck herself and her fair mantle weave” (4: 9-12). Here, spring is personified and personification is also a way of domination because the poet imposes his own feelings and ideas on natural things. Spring again has no independent identity because we can see spring asks the earth to decorate herself with flowers to welcome Cupid, that is, love. Hence, his only function is to prepare a good time and place for human beings to enjoy love. This same theme recurs in Sonnet 19 and Sonnet 70. In Sonnet 19, the poet complains about his love because she is a rebel in the love season. When the messenger of spring, the merry cuckoo “warns all lovers wait upon their king” (3) and when all the woods echo with the praise of love, “No word was heard of her that most it ought” (10). Here again, the cuckoo and the woods serve the poet’s purpose. So the cuckoo “warns” and the woods “echo with the praise of love.” It is actually the poet that warns and echoes, instead of the cuckoo or the woods. The poet uses the natural objects to express his own ideas and by means of that make it a kind of obligation given by nature to fall in love. Spenser may be playful but his poem still reflects his anthropocentric attitude, that is, nature serves human purpose. When the girl does not accept nature’s warning (actually the poet’s), the poet gives up and says, “Therefore, O Love, unless she turn to thee / Ere cuckoo end, let her a rebel be” (13-14). In Sonnet 70, another spring sonnet, there appears the motif of *carpe diem* and Spenser again urges his love to make the best of spring to enjoy love. This
time again spring is at the service of human love: “Fresh Spring – the herald of love’s mighty king, / In whose coat-armour richly are displayed / All sorts of flowers the which on earth do spring / In goodly colours gloriously arrayed--” (1-4). Both spring and flowers function as reminders of love. And for the poet, they only serve to awake his loved one’s desire for love. So, he urges, “Make haste, therefore, sweet love, whilst it is prime, / For none can call again the passed time” (13-14).

This kind of domination of nature also appears in the lyrics of the early seventeenth century though fewer than those in the Elizabethan Age. Cartwright in an absence poem “A Valediction” thinks that because he is parted with his mistress “nature grieves as I” (4). The poet says that he cannot feel the sunbeam “[w]hen I am parted from those eyes, / From which my better day doth rise” (5-6) and “[n]ature herself to him is lost / Who loseth her he honors most” (13-14). So when the poet is parted with his beloved, he projects his mental state, that is, his sorrow, to the outside world and nature seems sorrowful too. Henry Vaughan (1621/2-1695) in “To Amoret Gone From Him” at first describes the sunset and how all the creatures mourn for the absence of the sun and then the poet uses this as a metaphor to assure Amoret of his sadness. At the end Vaughan says: “If creatures, then that have no sense / But the loose tie of influence, / Though fate and time each day remove / Those things that element their love, / At such vast distance can agree, / Why, Amoret, why should not we?” (19-24). So, to the poet those creatures in the natural world have no sense; no wonder it is common for those poets to impose their own feelings on nature. The same attitude is also seen in “To the Lady May” of Aurelian Townshend (1583?-1651?), in which Townshend praises Lady May’s smile and says: “Heaven hath noe mouth, and yet is sayd to smile / After your stile; / Noe more hath Earth, yet that smyles too, / Just as you doe” (5-8). Ostensibly nature learns to smile through the lady’s example; actually, the poet sees the heaven and the earth smile like his lady
because he is happy to see Lady May’s smile and he projects his own happiness to the outside world.

From those examples above, we can see that day and night, the four seasons and other natural phenomena are seldom depicted literally. We never know the real natural phenomena, if it is sunny or cloudy, hot or cold, and it seems that those poets do not care either. In most of the poems, the poets themselves seem not in the natural scenes. They always speak as onlookers. Nevertheless, they never describe nature objectively as onlookers. They always impose their own experience and feelings on those natural scenes and nature functions as a symbol to represent their feelings. Sometimes, we readers may wonder if those poets really pay attention to the real circumstances in the outside world or they just follow the convention to fill their poems with those trite comparisons. So, the day is always the symbol of light, brightness, and happiness, while the night is always depicted negatively as the symbol of darkness, gloominess, and sorrow. In those poems nature is not viewed as an autonomous identity and is seldom depicted as an independent being. Natural scenes are not neutral because the poets’ mental state will always influence the way they view nature. In that human-centered culture the thought or feeling in a human being’s mind is certainly more important than the scene in nature. In this mind/nature dichotomy, mind or human thought is always considered to be superior to nature so we can seldom find the literal description of nature but always get from natural scenes the reflection of the poets’ thought or feelings. Without the projection of the poet’s mental state, the natural scenes will mean nothing to us human beings. In this kind of logic, human beings are always the subject, which is outside and superior to nature, the object. This logic results in the poets’ anthropocentric view and accordingly they regard nature as the external other, ignoring the fact that we are actually part of nature. For the human subject, nature is some lifeless thing outside
there for the use of us human beings, who are considered to be the higher order of being. Nature has no importance as a thing-in-itself and it can only get its meaning or identity when they signify the poet’s mind, as a thing-for-us. In this case, nature is dominated by those poets and those dominators tend to reduce nature to the status of other and the status of object so they can exploit it. This seems to correspond with Plumwood’s idea of “radical exclusion”:

An anthropocentric viewpoint treats nature as radically other and humans as hyperseparated from nature and from animals. It treats nature as lacking continuity with the human and stresses the features which make humans different from nature, rather that those they share, as constitutive of human identity. It leads to a view of the human as outside of and apart from a nature which is conceived as lacking human qualities such as mind and agency, these being appropriated exclusively to the human.

(“Androcentrism and Anthropocentrism” 340)

In addition to the two kinds of employment of nature seen in both the sonnets in the sixteenth century and lyrics in the seventeenth century, the early seventeenth-century poets also show their domination of nature in some other description of nature. A new type of lyric emerged in the seventeenth century, called topographical or country house poem and Ben Jonson’s “To Penshurst” is the first successful example of this new poem. In this kind of poem the poet compliments on the country residence of a famous person or family, in Jonson’s case the Sidney family, including the hospitability of the owner and the bounteouness of the natural surroundings. In “To Penshurst” while describing how the woods provide bountiful supply of food, Jonson says:

. . . and the tops

Fertile of wood, Ashore and Sidney’s copse,
To crown thy open table, doth provide
The purpled pheasant with the speckled side;
The painted partridge lies in every field,
    And, for thy mess, is willing to be killed.
And if the high-swol’n Medway fail thy dish,
    Thou has thy ponds, that pay thee tribute fish,
Fat, aged carps, that run into thy net,
    And pikes, now weary their own kind to eat,
As loath the second draught or cast to say,
    Officiously at first themselves betray;
Bright eels that emulate them, and leap on land
    Before the fisher, or into his hand. (25-38)

So, the birds are willing to be killed and the fish rush on to be the first to be caught by men. Jonson implies that natural creatures are willing to serve human beings.

Carew’s “To Saxham,” modeled on Jonson’s “To Penshurst,” is another example, in which the creatures in the wild are also willing to be humans’ food. While depicting the country residence of Sir John Crofts, Saxham, Carew says:

The willing ox of himself came
Home to the slaughter, with the lamb,
    And every beast did thither bring
Himself, to be an offering.
The scaly herd more pleasure took,
Bathed in thy dish, than in the brook;
Water, earth, air, did all conspire
To pay their tributes to thy fire,
Whose cherishing flames themselves divide
Through every room, where they deride
The night, and cold abroad; whilst they,
Like suns within, keep endless day. (23-34)

In Carew’s opinion, those creatures are willing to serve human beings and even take it as an honor to them. This attitude is really human-centered. Edmund Waller (1606-1687) also writes two “country house” poems, which also focuses on Penshurst, the house of the Sidney family. The purpose of the two “At Penshurst” poems is to court Lady Dorothy Sidney and the house is only a means to express his admiration of the lady. In “At Penshurst [1]” Waller thus chants his compliments on the lady:

Her presence has such more than human grace,
That it can civilize the rudest place;
And beauty too, and order, can impart,
Where nature ne’er intended it, nor art.
The plants acknowledge this, and her admire,
No less than those of old did Orpheus’ lyre;
If she sit down, with tops all towards her bowed,
They round about her into arbors crowd;
Or if she walk, in even ranks they stand,

Like some well-marshaled and obsequious band. (7-16)

Nature is at the command of human beings and its independent agency or value is totally denied here. Man is the center of the whole universe and the only goal which the universe exists for. George Herbert (1593-1633) in the religious poem “Man” clearly and definitely expresses this anthropocentric idea. According to Herbert God creates the man as the center of the world and all the rest of the universe are inferior to man because man has reason and speech. Herbert argues:

What house more stately hath there been,
Or can be, than is Man? To whose creation
All things are in decay,

For Man is ev’ry thing,
And more: He is a tree, yet bears more fruit;
A beast, yet is, or should be more:
Reason and speech we onely bring.
Parrats may thank us, if they are not mute,
They go upon the score. (4-12)

Man is superior to nature and is the center of the whole universe, and all the natural
things in the universe serve man and take this as the only purpose of their life.
Herbert says: “For us the windes do blow, / The earth doth rest, heav’n move, and
fountains flow. / Nothing we see, but means our good, / As our delight, or as our
treasure: / The whole is, either our cupboard of food, / Or cabinet of pleasure” (25-30).
All the things in this world exist for our good and provide food and pleasure for us.
In Herbert’s view all the things in the world have their duties to serve us human
beings so the sea, the land, the rain, the food and so on all serve the man: “Each thing
is full of dutie: / Waters united are our navigation; / Distinguished, our habitation; / Below, our drink; above, our meat; / Both are our cleanliness. . .” (37-40). With the
whole world as human beings’ servants, the poet claims: “. . . Man is one world, and
hath / Another to attend him” (47-48). This attitude corresponds with
“instrumentalism” in anthropocentric patterns of belief, and Plum thus explains:

Nature’s agency and independence of ends are denied and are subsumed in,
or remade to coincide with, those of the human. Mechanistic world views
especially deny nature any form of agency. Since it has no agency of its
own and is empty of purpose, it is appropriate that the colonizer impose his
own, and nature can only have purpose and value when it is made to serve the human colonizer as a means to his ends. ("Androcentrism and Anthropocentrism" 341)

In the early seventeenth century most of the time nature is treated this way, with no agency or independence. To serve human beings becomes its only value and purpose. In this early modern world this kind of attitude may be inevitable because it gives human beings the sense of security to face nature, which actually is not so human-friendly.

In addition to instrumentalism, Herbert’s poem also serves as an example of another common description of nature. As a religious poet, Herbert at the end of “Man” points out that as God creates the whole world to serve human beings, we should serve God and both the whole world and human beings are the servants of God. Because of the increasing significance of Christianity in the society, God and religion become important elements in poetry. Most of the time nature becomes a means to praise God since in the belief of Christians, God creates everything in this world and the beauty and bounteousness of nature signify God’s blessing. Herbert’s poem is of course a good example. Andrew Marvell (1621-1678) writes a poem “Bermudas” talking about its bountifulness and in this poem Marvell also attributes the natural richness to God and implies that God creates all for human beings, which is similar to the ideas in Herbert’s religious poems.

He gave us this eternal spring,
Which here enamells every thing;
And sends the Fowls to us in care,
On daily Visits through the Air.
He hangs in shades the Orange bright,
Like golden Lamps in a green Night.
And does in the Pomgranates close,
Jewels more rich than Ormus shows.
He makes the Figs our mouths to meet;
And throws the Melons at our feet.
But Apples plants of such a price,
No Tree could ever bear them twice.
With Cedars, chosen by his hand,
From Lebanon, he stores the Land.
And makes the hollow Seas, that roar,
Proclaime the Ambergris on shoar.
He cast (of which we rather boast)
The Gospels Pearl upon our Coast.
And in these Rocks for us did frame
A Temple, where to sound his Name. (13-32)

At the end of the poem Marvell says that they sing their praise for God while they are on the way to Bermudas: “Thus sung they in the English boat, / An holy and a cheerful note” (37-40). The whole poem idealizes nature as God’s favor and blessing to human beings, and so they sing a holy and cheerful note to praise God, of course. In addition, Mildmay Fane, Earl of Westmorland in “To Retiredness” also expresses similar ideas. Fane describes how he enjoys nature “with a mind ambition-free”,

Here I can sit; and sitting under
Some portions of His works of wonder,
Whose all are such, observe by reason
Why every plant obeys its season;
How the sap rises, and the fall
Wherein they shake off leaves and all;
Then how again they bud and spring,
Are laden for an offering;
Which whilst my contemplation sees,
I am taught thankfulness from trees.

Then, turning over nature’s leaf,
I mark the glory of the sheaf,
For every field’s a several page
Deciphering the Golden Age;
So that without a miner’s pains,
Or Indies’ reach, here plenty reigns;
Which, watered from above, implies
That our acknowledgments should rise
To Him that thus creates a birth
Of mercies for us out of earth. (21-40)

Here the poet praises nature as God’s mercies to human beings and every thing is put in order to serve human beings. Therefore when he sees nature he finds everything divine, which are the footsteps “trod of mercy by a gracious God” (80). In addition to this one, Fane’s “My Observation at Sea” also praises God by means of the admiration of the sea. Fane thinks that the ocean is the most amazing achievement of all God’s works of wonder.

The fire for heat and light
Most exquisite;
And the all-temp’ring air
Beyond compare;
Earth, composition and solidity,
   Bountiful mixed with humidity’

But here, for profit and content,
Each must give place to th’ liquid element,

   Whose admirable course, that steers
   Within twelve hours mariners
   Outwards and homewards bound,

   To raise conclusion from thence

   At once of mighty power and providence. (13-25)

Even the moon is God’s mercy because he sets “her there, chief governess of seas” (31). Since the poets believe that God creates everything for human beings, they of course take it for granted that the natural world is inferior and should be controlled and manipulated by man. Furthermore, William Habington (1605-1654) in his “Nox Nocti Indicat Scientiam. David” (meaning “Night unto nigh sheweth knowledge” derived from Psalms 19:2) contrasts the beautiful natural world created by God with the human world. Habington describes the beauty and greatness of celestial sphere, in contrast with the transience of worldly things on the earth. In the first three stanzas, the poet thus describes the beautiful night sky:

   When I survey the bright
   Celestial sphere,
   So rich with jewels hung that night
   Doth like an Ethiop bride appear,

   My soul her wings doth spread
   And heavenward flies,
Th’Almighty’s mysteries to read
In the large volumes of the skies.

For the bright firmament
Shoots forth no flame
So silent, but is eloquent
In speaking the Creator’s name. (1-12)

So, to Habington, the sky and the stars show the greatness of Almighty God. And then the poet says that man can learn heavenly knowledge even from the unregarded star because, the poet says, “It tells the conqueror / That far-stretched power / Which his proud dangers traffic for, / Is but the triumph of an hour” (21-24). Compared with the firmament, human life and achievements are transient. Therefore, Habington concludes:

Thus those celestial fires,
Though seeming mute,
The fallacy of our desires
And all the pride of life confute.

For they have watched since first
The world had birth;
And found sin in itself accurst,
And nothing permanent on earth. (36-44)

In contrast with the tremendous breadth and length of the whole universe, man is like ephemera and human achievements are ephemeral. This poem shows us the fallacious human pride as a contrast to the great Almighty God, instead of the natural world, since it is believed that everything is created by God. Although the poet
exhibits the glory of the natural world, yet his purpose is to praise God. He believes
that all the magnificent stars show us the mighty power of God. As usual, the
greatness of the universe is attributed to God’s effort. Nature, as a means to show
God’s mighty power, still cannot get the respect it deserves.

Different from those sonnets in the previous century, some lyrics in the early
seventeenth century concern natural scenery or creatures as the theme of the poetry.
In those poems, however, domination of man is still obvious or implied. The first
poem “The Argument of His Book” in Herrick’s *Hesperides* tells the reader directly
that nature is the theme of his poetry: “I sing of brooks, of blossoms, birds, and
bowers; / Of April, May, of June, and July flower” (1-2). However, most of the
images drawn from nature in Herrick’s poems are symbolic, with implied meaning
behind. Herrick sings of a river in “Dean-bourn, a Rude River in Devon, By Which
Sometimes He Lived.” In this poem, the river is described as rude and uncivil.
The poet says at the beginning: “Dean-bourn, farewell; I never look to see / Dean, or
thy warty incivility. / Thy rocky bottom, that doth tear thy streams, / And makes them
frantic, ev’n to all extremes” (1-4). The river is rocky and even people there are
rocky; “Rocky thou art, and rocky we discover / Thy men, and rocky are thy walls all
over” (7-8). Herrick calls the men there “a rocky generation” and thus describes
them: “A people currish, churlish as the seas” (11). We do not know if there is any
relation between the rude river and the rocky people there but we can be sure that
when the poet talks about the river’s incivility he actually projects his own sentiments
to the natural element. A possible conjecture is that the poet makes use of the
turbulent river to allegorize the rude people there; therefore, the river is rude and the
men are rocky. This is a wonderful rhetorical figure, yet with the sacrifice of the
innocent natural element. As mentioned above, nature is treated as something with
no agency as Habington says in “To Castara, upon an Embrace” that “trees want
sense” and “birds want soul”. Therefore nature is endowed with human emotion. Herrick also talks about “how roses came red, and lilies white.” In “How Lilies Came White” the poet says that Cupid pressed his mother’ breast and out of her ruby niplet, “. . . the cream of light, / Like to a dew, / Fell down on you, / And made ye white” (9-12). Hence, the whiteness of Venus’s breast is symbolized by lilies. And in “How Roses Came Red” Herrick says that roses were white at first and then their whiteness was vanquished by that of his Sappho’s breast. Afterwards, “A blush their cheeks bespred; / Since which, believe the rest, / The roses first came red” (6-8). So, the red of the rose is the symbol of shame. Besides, the poet also explains the origin of blue violets. “How Violets Came Blue” says that some day when Venus wrangled with the violets about whose sweet scent excels, Venus lost and fell on the violets and “beat ye so, as some dare say, / Her blows did make ye blue” (7-8). In Western civilization, violet is a color of humility\(^7\) and here Herrick evidently makes use of the color of the flower to symbolize humility. Herrick’s explanations are really witty and creative but the poet actually just imposes his own wishful thinking on those flowers as if they were just things-for-us.

Besides, at that time natural things also inspire poets’ meditation and help them express their inner feelings. For example, Herrick in “To Daffodils” and “To Blossoms” expresses his mourning for the transience of life. At the beginning of “To Daffodils” the poet says: “Fair daffodils, we weep to see / You haste away so soon” (1-2). And in the second stanza Herrick, inspired by the short life of the flower, mourns for the transience of human life:

We have short time to stay, as you;

We have as short a spring;

As quick a growth to meet decay,

\(^7\) See the explanation in 1,001 Symbols by Jack Tresidder, p. 189.
As you, or any thing.

We die,

As your hours do, and dry

Away,

Like to the summer’s rain;

Or as the pearls of morning’s dew,

Ne’er to be found again. (11-20)

Whitaker comments, “In ‘The Daffodils’ the poet shares with the flowers his sense of life’s transient beauty, feels in himself the same creative force and potential death” (72). Similarly, in “To Blossoms” Herrick says: “Fair pledges of a fruitful tree, / Why do ye fall so fast?” (1-2). Then the poet feels sorry for all the living things and says at the end: “And after they have shown their pride, / Like you a while, they glide / Into the grave” (16-18). Here, the flowers are not really the theme but the means for the poet to show his meditation. In Herrick’s nature poems, nature actually plays the subsidiary role and what really matters is the poet’s own thinking and ideas. This attitude is not rare among the poets in the early seventeenth century. For example, Richard Lovelace (1618-1658) looks to Anacreon’s original and writes the poem “The Grasshopper.” Another contemporary poet, Abraham Cowly (1618-1667) has translated Anacreon’s “The Grasshopper” and which serves as a good contrast to Lovelace’s “The Grasshopper.” In Cowly’s translation the poet mainly sings of the mirth and happiness of the grasshopper. It may be somewhat subjective since no one really knows if the grasshopper is happy or not and it is just the poet’s inference. Yet, the grasshopper is still the subject matter, the only thing that the poet talks about. In Lovelace’s “The Grasshopper,” however, the grasshopper is only the medium, not the subject matter. The poet depicts the insect just in the first half of the poem. D. C. Allen analyzes the background and structure of Lovelace’s poem in “Lovelace’s The
Grasshopper,” and says: “Stanzas I-V set a familiar measure by recalling in a submerged but personified fashion the literary ancestry of the insect that is the subject. We recognize the subtune at once; it is Anacreon . . . . But Lovelace’s poem is no forthright rendering; it is a more complicated chorus of voices” (571). According to Allen the poem was written sometime after the execution of King Charles and as a Cavalier, Lovelace was likely to be in a moment of dejection after his own imprisonment and impoverishment (570). This poem is a way for Lovelace to express his mood, not just a depiction of the insect. In the sixth stanza the poet says, “Thou best of men and friends! we will create / A genuine summer in each other’s breast, / And spite of this cold time and frozen fate, / Thaw us a warm seat to our rest” (21-24). “Thou best of men and friends” refers to Lovelace’s friend, Mr. Charles Cotton, and the subtitle of the poem “To My Noble Friend, Mr. Charles Cotton” has pointed out this. Besides, in the eighth stanza, the King is implied: “Dropping December shall come weeping in, / Bewail th’ usurping of his reign; / But when in show’rs of old Greek we begin, / Shall cry, he hath his crown again!” (29-32). As Allen has suggested, this poem mainly concerns the execution of King Charles and also the poet’s mood. Allen also thus comments: “With the sixth stanza the imaginative rhythm begins to alter, and not only is Horace heard, but there is also an immediate contrast between the past and the present, between the symbolic history of the grasshopper and the immediate history of the poet and his friends” (571).

Therefore, the insect is subsidiary and what really matters is the poet’s own thoughts and reflection. Yet, Lovelace also gives us some literal depiction of some creatures in his other poems and in this aspect, he is somewhat better than Herrick. In “The Snail” and “A Fly Caught in a Cobweb”, although there are still some subjective statements and some ideas implied, the main topic is seemingly those creatures, instead of the poet’s own thinking. The snail, the fly and the cobweb may be not
more significant than the ideas implied but they are at least of equal importance in these two poems.

Furthermore, the beauty of nature also becomes the subject matter in some of the lyrics in the early seventeenth century and nature is praised for its own sake, which is extraordinary. Randolph in “An Ode to Mr. Anthony Stafford to Hasten Him into the Country” contrasts beauty of nature with the clamor of human society: “Come, spur away, / I have no patience for a longer stay, / But must go down / And leave the chargeable noise of this great town” (1-5). After deriding city life, the poet describes the country life: “There from the tree / We’ll cherries pluck, and pick the strawberry, / And every day / Go see the wholesome country girls make hay, / Whose brown hath lovelier grace / Than any painted face / That I do know / Hyde Park can show” (25-32). Randolph also despises women: “Why do I prate / Of women, that are things against my fate? / I never mean to wed / That torture to my bed” (39-42). Then he goes on praises the joy and bountifulness of the country life:

We’ll rather taste the bright Pomona’s store;

No fruit shall ‘scape

Our palates, from the damson to the grape.

Then, full, we’ll seek a shade

And hear what music’s made;

How Philomel

Her tale doth tell,

And how the other birds do fill the choir;

The thrush and blackbird lend their throats,

Warbling melodious notes;

We will all sports enjoy, which others but desire.
Ours is the sky,
Where at what fowl we please our hawk shall fly;
Nor will we spare
To hunt the crafty fox or timorous hare,
But let our hounds run loose
In any ground they’ll choose;
The buck shall fall,
The stag and all;
Our pleasures must from their own warrants be,
For to my Muse, if not to me,
I’m sure all game is free;
Heaven, earth, are all but parts of her great royalty. (50-72)

The ideas presented here may be somewhat human-centered, since the poet still supposes that nature will serve human needs. However, Randolph’s poem shows special benevolence and justice to nature, which is seldom seen in other lyrics at that time because he says, “For to my Muse, if not to me, / I’m sure all game is free; / Heaven, earth, are all but parts of her great royalty” (70-72). In these three lines, Randolph expresses the idea that all creatures are equal and all are parts of the whole universe. In another poem “Upon Love Fondly Refused for Conscience’s Sake” Randolph says, “Man is the lord of creature . . .” (28). Yet, in this poem, at least, he shows the rare equity to all creatures. Besides, the idea that nature is more enjoyable than the court life or city life is also unique in the early seventeenth century, although quite common in Romantic poetry. In “The Garden” Marvell also expresses similar ideas. Marvell contrasts solitude with society and assures the reader of the superiority of solitude to the pursuit of worldly things, such as fame, love, or profit.

How vainly men themselves amaze
To win the Palm, the Oke, or Bayes;
And their uncessant Labours see
Crown’d from some single Herb or Tree.
Whose short and narrow verged Shade
Does prudently their Toyles upbraid;
While all Flow’rs and all Trees do close
To weave the Garlands of repose. (1-8)

Similar to Randolph, Marvell here expresses the concept that human’s pursuit of worldly things is meaningless and only repose in nature is comforting and worthwhile.

He thus describes the mirth of the quiet country life:

What wond’rous Life in this I lead!
Ripe Apples drop about my head;
The Luscious Clusters of the Vine
Upon my Mouth do crush their Wine;
The Nectaren, and curious Peach,
Into my hands themselves do reach;
Stumbling on Melons, as I pass,
Insnar’d with Flow’rs, I fall on Grass. (33-40)

Here again the poet believes that nature will serve human needs and treats human generously and willingly, but Marvell’s poem shows the significance of nature, which can provide comfort to the human soul:

Here at the Fountains sliding foot,
Or at some Fruit-trees mossy root,
Casting the Bodies Vest aside,
My Soul into the boughs does glide:
There like a Bird it sits, and sings,
Then whets, and combs its silver Wings;
And, till prepar’d for longer flight,
Waves in its Plumes the various Light. (49-56)

Although it seems that Marvell still thinks that nature is to serve human’s purpose, at least he shows more gratitude to nature and grants nature its superiority to human, instead of taking that for granted as other poets do. In another stanza Marvell, similar to Randolph, despises women. He compares nature with the mistress and says that nature is better than the mistress.

No white nor red was ever seen
So am’rous as this lovely green.

Fond Lovers, cruel as their Flame,
Cut in these Trees their Mistress name.

Little, Alas, they know, or heed,
How far these Beauties Hers exceed!

Fair Trees! Where s’eer your barks I wound,
No name shall but your own be found. (17-24)

In Marvell’s point of view, women are far less worthwhile than trees. This comparison between nature and woman is interesting. Frank Kermode in “The Argument of Marvell’s Garden” sees the garden as the contrast of the libertine garden in other poets, such as Carew and Randolph, as mentioned above. Therefore, Kermode thinks this poem is a rejection of libertine innocence and he thus analyzes this stanza: “Female beauty is reduced to its emblematic colours, red and white . . . and unfavourably compared with the green of the garden as a dispenser of sensual delight” (340). Yet, according to Kermode, this sensual delight should not exist in Marvell’s garden since in Marvell’s garden the true ecstasy is “in being rapt by intellect, not by sex” (338). It seems that to Marvell man, who is considered to be
more intellectual, is superior to woman, who provides only sensual delight. Nature, as provides comfort to soul, is meant to serve man, not woman; therefore, woman has no necessary part in Marvell’s garden. Hence, woman is excluded from this Garden of Eden, which is dominated by man.

Marvell’s attitude to nature is more benevolent and friendly although he discriminates against woman. In the long poem entitled “The Battle of the Summer Islands” Waller is also more objective and friendly in handling natural scenery and creatures. Waller depicts a battle between two whales and human beings on the Bermudas. In Canto I the poet focuses on the bountiful produce of the Bermudas (the Summer Islands), which is similar to Marvell’s “Bermudas” mentioned above except for that Waller does not attribute the bountifulness to God. Waller’s description of the natural scenes and things is more literally, seldom imposing on them his own mental state or wishful thinking. For example, he says:

Bermudas, walled with rocks, who does not know?
That happy island where huge lemons grow,
And orange trees, which golden fruit do bear,
The Hesperian garden boasts of none so fair;
Where shining pearl, coral, and many a pound,
On the rich shore, of ambergris is found. (5-10)

Throughout the whole canto, the poet most of the time thus objectively describes the bountifulness of the islands except for the end, in which he expresses his wish to be there. This first canto is only a prelude and the main subject matter is the battle between nature and human. At the very beginning of the first canto the poet actually has already pointed out this main subject matter. He says: “Aid me, Bellona! While the dreadful fight / Betwixt a nation and two whales I write. / Seas stained with gore I sing, adventurous toil, / And how these monsters did disarm an isle” (1-4). So, this
is a battle between a nation and two whales. Canto II talks about how the two whales are found. At first people there hear strange thunder and then the poet says: “At length two monsters of unequal size, / Hard by the shore, a fisherman espies: / Two mighty whales! which swelling seas had tossed, / And left them prisoners on the rocky coast” (9-12). The whales are described as monsters. Scared by their tremendous bodies, we often regard those big animals as monsters so that we can justify our deeds of hurting them. The whales are considered to be monsters and people first feel dreadful, but when they realize that the whales bring a great amount of profit, their attitude changes from dread to joy and hope. According to the poet, the two whales are a mother and her cub. Canto III is the climax, in which Waller focuses on the battle between human beings and the whales. At first people there hurt the cub and his tail batters the boat. Then the mother whale stuck in the shallow water is hurt more seriously. In order to save the mother, the cub stays between the men and the mother whale and later the cub tries to lead his mother back to the sea. The mother whale, however, is confined “by the vastness of her bulk”. This time people’s fury falls on the mother alone and they throw their darts on her. The poet thus describes the battle:

Their lances spent, one bolder than the rest
With his broadsword provoked the sluggish beast;
Her oily side devours both blade and haft,
And there his steel the bold Bermudian left.
Courage the rest from his example take,
And now they change the color of the lake;
Blood flows in rivers from her wounded side,
As if they would prevent the tardy tide,
And raise the flood to that propitious height
As might convey her from this fatal strait.

She swims in blood, and blood does spouting throw

To heaven, that heaven men’s cruelties might know. (41-52)

At first the poet depicts men’s behavior as bold and courageous but later he says that the whale’s blood seems to accuse of men’s cruelties. So a brave deed of human beings may be cruel to the natural world. From this depiction Waller seems to show that if we can see things from the nature’s aspect, then we can realize what we have done to nature is really cruel and tyrannous. In this aspect Waller is more broad-minded than other poets at that time. Besides, later when he depicts how the cub comes back again to save his mother after he hears her groan he even praises the whale and compares him to Aeneas in the Trojan War, which seems to imply that animals can be as brave and great as the god in the mythology.

He, though a league removed from the foe,
Hastes to her aid; the pious Trojan so,
Neglecting for Creusa’s life his own
Repeats the danger of the burning town.
The men, amazed, blush to see the seed
Of monsters human piety exceed.
Well proves this kindness what the Grecians sung,
That Love’s bright mother from the ocean sprung. (61-68)

Waller here shows the rare justice to nature that other poems lack. The men, discouraged, “charge their muskets / and with hot desire / Of fell revenge, renew the fight with fire; / Standing aloof, with lead they bruise the scales / And tear the flesh of the incensed whales” (77-80). Still they can not give the whale a fatal wound. Just when the men intend to send for the big engines “framed to batter walls” Great Neptune, the poet says, sends a tide so high that it saves the whales. Then the poet
ends the long poem: “And thus they parted with exchange of harms: / Much blood the
monsters lost, and they their arms” (89-90). In the battle between the nation and the
whales, both are losers and no one is the winner. This seems to tell us that if men
cannot live harmoniously with nature then both will be hurt. This attitude is seldom
seen in the early seventeenth-century poetry, in which most of the time, the duty of
nature is to serve human beings and therefore man’s deed to hurt nature is justified.
This long poem is one of the few poems in the early seventeenth century that do some
justice to nature. Waller does not say that the bountiful produce on the islands is
given to men by God on purpose; he does not justify men’s cruelty to the whales; he
even thinks that in some aspect, the whales are superior to human beings.

Similarly, Marvell’s “The Nymph complaining for the death of her Faun” also
shows more benevolence to nature and treats nature more fairly. When the little girl
mourns for her pet, the fawn, she says: “ . . . . Heavens King / Keeps register of
every thing: / And nothing may we use in vain. / Ev’n Beasts must be with justice
slain; / Else Men are made their Deodands” (13-17). Marvell seems to imply that
even though God creates the natural world for human beings, reckless slaying of
animals is not allowed by God. The Nymph’s words show some justice to the
animals as Leo Spitzer puts it, “The poem starts with the address of the Nymph to the
fatally wounded fawn in which she reveals her, as it were, modern attitude of
revulsion against the wanton slaying of a harmless animal” (374). This fawn is
given to the Nymph by unconstant Sylvio, who gives her the fawn but then loves
someone else and in this poem she compares the true, loving fawn with false and cruel
men. At first, the girl is afraid that the fawn will do the same thing to her so she says:
“Had it liv’d long, I do not know / Whether it too might have done so / As Sylvio did:
his Gifts might be / Perhaps as false or more than he” (47-50). However, after she
espies for a while she is sure of the constancy of the fawn so she continues, “Thy
Love was far more better than / The love of false and cruel men” (53-54). Besides, according to the Nymph, the fawn lies in a bed of lilies and feeds on red roses and the Nymph says: “Had it liv’d long, it would have been / Lilies without, Roses within” (87-88). According to Spitzer this is “the metamorphosis of the animal into a paragon of virtues that are not found combined even in a human being: the coolness of virginal chastity and the flame of ardent love” (378). At last the Nymph decides to die with her fawn and she will have herself and the fawn be cut statues at the grave and she says: “For I so truly thee bemoane, / That I shall weep though I be Stone” (111-12). Both the Nymph and the fawn seems too sublime for wantonness and cruelty in human world, which is signified by the unconstant Sylvio. Although the fawn and the Nymph are sacrificed in this male-dominated world, at least their lofty moral integrity and their superiority over the cruel man are shown. Marvell, at least in this poem, shows the nobility of nature and woman as a contrast to the lowness of man. Although this cannot counterbalance all those anthropocentric and androcentric ideas in the early seventeenth century, at least it begins this possibility and serves as the prelude for the surpassing power of nature in Romantic poetry.

Generally speaking, nature in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is subsidiary to man. It serves human’s purpose and interest. Regarded as something given by the Almighty, nature is justifiably exploited and appropriated by poets at that time. The frequent appearance of nature in poetry justifies its significance since poets needs it to express and symbolize their feelings and thoughts. Yet, nature often functions just as a mirror to reflect human’s thinking and what really matters is the poet’s ideas instead of nature. Thus nature loses its agency and independence. Although there are piecemeal accounts of nature’s superiority over man among the poems at that time, nature is still of subordinate importance. We have to wait until the Romantic period to see nature as the major theme in lyrics and be treated
differently by poets. Optimistically, this signifies human’s progress in facing the natural world.