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Author(s): Daniel O'Quinn

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Gardening, History, and the Escape from Time: Derek Jarman's *Modern Nature**

DANIEL O'QUINN

*Small pleasures must correct great tragedies,
Therefore of gardens in the midst of war
I boldly tell.*

—Vita Sackville-West,
“The Garden” (1946)¹

*[H]istory—if we can remove this word from its
metaphysical, and therefore historical determi-
nation—does not belong primarily to time,
nor to succession, nor to causality, but to
community, or to being-in-common.*

—Jean-Luc Nancy,
“Finite History” (1994)

From *Sebastiane* to *Blue*, Derek Jarman's films have been accompanied by a series of journals that narrate the events of making love and film in a time of historical crisis. Borrowing a turn of phrase from Neil Hertz, I want to argue that Jarman's method of writing

consists in the more or less violent fragmentation of literary bodies into “quotations,” in the interest of building up a discourse of his own, a discourse which, in its turn, directs attention to passages that come to serve as emblems of his most acute, least nostalgic sense of what he is about.²

* I would like to thank Jim Ellis, Deborah Esch, Jody Greene, Dana Luciano, and Charles Reeve for their encouragement and their insightful commentary on earlier drafts of this essay.

1. Sackville-West's poem resonates with much of Jarman's discussion of his own garden and with his filmic practice in the late 1980s. Her attempts to counter great tragedies with “small pleasures” may well be on Jarman's mind when he argues for a “cinema of small gestures” in relation to *The Angelic Conversation*.

2. Neil Hertz, *The End of the Line* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p. 14.



Derek Jarman's garden at Prospect Cottage, Dungeness.

Benjamin's remark on quotation is equally apt with regard to Jarman's texts: "Quotations in [his] works are like robbers by the roadside who make an armed attack and relieve an idler of his convictions."³

This sense of ambush by quotation is most evident in the diaries from 1989 and 1990 that are collected under the title *Modern Nature*.⁴ It is perhaps the fact that the quotations which interrupt and link together Jarman's personal reminiscences are culled from a variety of writings on gardening, both ancient and modern, that makes this mugging feel more like a seduction. After all, one is tempted to give up whatever convictions one has been guarding after a passage such as the following:

Gerard says of violets—that they:

Stirre up a man to that which is comely and honest; for flowres through their beauty, variety of colour, and exquisite forme, do bring to a liberal and gentle manly minde, the remembrance of honesty, comlinessse and all kinds of virtues, because it would be an unseemly and filthy thing (as a certain wise man sayeth) for him that look upon and handle

3. Hertz is comparing Longinus and Benjamin (ibid., p. 14); the quotation from Benjamin is cited by Hannah Arendt in her introduction to Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken, 1969).
4. Derek Jarman, *Modern Nature* (London: Century, 1991). Hereafter cited in the text as Jarman.

faire and beautiful things to have his mind not faire, but filthy and deformed.

Culpeper adds, "They are a fine pleasing plant of Venus, of a mild nature, no way harmful." Pindar called Athens "violet crowned"; garlands of violets were worn on all festive occasions, particularly on the feast of Demeter, when young men were crowned with them. In German it is still known as "boy's herb." Goethe always carried violet seeds on his country walks and scattered them. . . . Day after day I returned from the dull regimental existence of an English boarding school to my secret garden—the first of many that blossomed in my dreams. It was here that I brought him, sworn to secrecy, and then watched him slip out of his grey flannel suit and lie naked in the spring sunlight. Here our hands first touched; then I pulled down my trousers and lay beside him. Bliss that he turned and lay naked on his stomach, laughing as my hand ran down his back and disappeared into the warm darkness between his thighs. He called it "the lovely feeling" and returned the next day, inviting me into his bed that night. (Jarman, pp. 37–38)

In passages such as this one, a cascade of quotations crashes into a rememorative text: Gerard's remarks on the purity of violets, Pindar's presentation of the youths of Athens trimmed with violets, and Jarman's escape from the militarism of public school into the arms of his lover all become mutually involved. And this involution is itself enfolded in a complex archaeology of what I will tentatively call sacred sodomitical space. To get some purchase on this archaeology and to appreciate the role of measured time in the above passage on violets requires that we dig around in Jarman's garden.

Modern Nature is comprised of serially presented journal entries whose personal reminiscences and historical meditations are quilted together by a detailed account of the cultivation of Jarman's extraordinary garden from the harsh environment of the shingle surrounding his cottage at Dungeness. But as the following quotation indicates, this turn toward nature does not travel by way of England's "green and pleasant land":

I was describing the garden to Maggi Hambling at a gallery opening. And said I intended to write a book about it.

She said: "Oh, you've finally discovered nature, Derek."

"I don't think it's really quite like that," I said, thinking of Constable and Samuel Palmer's Kent.

"Ah, I understand completely. You've discovered modern nature."

(Jarman, p. 8)

Jarman's narrativization of the process of tending his garden focuses on the surprising survival of herbs and flowers in a place where they should not thrive. The allegory is palpable here, for just as violets and daffodils and poppies make a

living among the stones in the shadow of the nuclear plant which overlooks his cottage, so also Jarman and the communities he invokes—PWAs, queers, communists, inverts, and saints—demonstrate their strength and their resilience in the face of the personal, cultural, and social crisis of Thatcherite Britain. In *Modern Nature*, gardening is an emergency praxis whose imperative opens onto a motivated consideration of the relationship between time and community. Jarman's journal writings attempt to rupture monumental history with the reconstitution of the sacred. To modify a passage from "Theses on the Philosophy of History," I want to argue that the articulation of Jarman's personal history with a fragmented history of gardening does not attempt to recognize the past "as it really was"; rather it "seizes hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger."⁵ At every disjunction in the journal's unfolding, one can find the conviction that *even the dead* will not be safe from the ruling classes if the practice of history is ceded to them.⁶

Jarman indicates that his project resists a certain kind of history in a brief statement of intent:

A personal mythology recurs in my writing, much the same way poppy wreathes have crept into my films. For me this archaeology has become obsessive, for the "experts" my sexuality is a confusion. All received information should make us inverts sad. But before I finish I intend to celebrate our corner of Paradise, the part of the garden the Lord forgot to mention. (Jarman, p. 23)

The address to "us inverts" marks the existence of a community alienated from "all received information" and especially from the knowledge practices that attempt to understand the causes and determinations of its members' sexuality. Jarman meets the sadness of this alienation with the intention to celebrate the queer corner of the Garden of Paradise that God was too careless to recognize. This celebration takes the form of what Jarman calls an "archaeology of soul," which challenges the monotheistic monopoly on the sacred by simply pushing it aside and beatifying queerness. This is precisely what is at stake when Jarman's 1990 film *The Garden* rehearses the Passion with two male lovers in the place of Christ. The scene of two boys on the cross is only the most condensed figure of Jarman's engagement with the sacred.

In order to elaborate on the question of sacred sodomitical space, I want to turn to a passage in *Modern Nature* that celebrates "part of the garden the Lord forgot to mention" in the context of an archaeology of two famous gardens—the gardens surrounding the Villa Borghese in Rome and Vita Sackville-West's garden at Sissinghurst. Jarman's meditations on the fate of these two gardens present what I consider to be the fundamental thematic threads which, incessantly knotted and unknotted, come to stand for what the journals are about. If we turn to the

5. Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, p. 255.

6. *Ibid.*

entry for Valentine's Eve, February 13, 1989, we find Jarman describing in some detail how high winds have already defoliated his rosemary plants and are presently destroying his newly flowering daffodils. It is not insignificant that previous entries identify rosemary as "the herb sacred to remembrance, and therefore to friendship"⁷ and suggest that daffodils first came to Britain in the packs of Roman soldiers because their bulbs were used by Galen to "glue together wounds and gashes" (Jarman, p. 12). The figurative destruction of memory *and* the potential for healing in Jarman's description of his ravaged garden are interrupted by a memory of being in another garden in ruin, as Jarman turns to a reminiscence of the Borghese Gardens shortly after the Second World War:

Rome 1946—Borghese Gardens

There we lived in a flat requisitioned from Admiral Ciano, the uncle of Mussolini's foreign secretary.

"And he walked in the park in the cool of the day," where he planted "every tree that is pleasant." Each park dreams of Paradise; the word itself is Persian for garden. This particular shadow of Eden was originally the grounds of the villa that Scipione Borghese built for himself early in the seventeenth century. Here in the cool of a summer afternoon I rode the tough little donkeys through glades of acanthus, under old cedar trees to a water clock which kept time on a cascade of fern covered rocks. (Jarman, p. 14)

The sudden displacement to the ruins of postwar Rome effects a historical analogy between the figurative destruction of memory in Jarman's garden and a specific historical moment. Jarman's struggling daffodils prompt a historical consideration of the possibility of "gluing together the wounds and gashes" that rent the body of Europe. The question being asked by the interruption and ensuing analogy is whether the same winds of war that have ravaged memory/history have also destroyed the possibility of its reconstitution.

Jarman's answer to this question emerges from his meditation on the relation between time and history in the context of a "particular shadow of Eden." As Francis Haskell notes, Scipione Borghese's "villa on the Pincio—the *delizia di Roma*—set in an extensive park and enriched with niches and statuary like some fantastic confectionary, was the centre of the most hedonistic society that Rome had known since the Renaissance."⁸ The garden's hedonist and sodomitical past is

7. This quote is culled from Thomas More. Jarman's text goes on to note that "in ancient Greece young men wore garlands of rosemary in their hair to stimulate the mind," and speculates that "the gathering of the Symposium was scented with it" (Jarman, p. 9).

8. See Francis Haskell, *Patrons and Painters: A Study in the Relations between Italian Art and Society in the Age of the Baroque* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1963), p. 29. Haskell also notes that "though well-born, [Borghese] was a man of few intellectual attainments, and was characterized—as the Venetian ambassador pointed out—by 'the mediocrity of his learning and a life largely devoted to the cultivation of pleasures and pass-times'" (p. 28). Jarman dramatizes the ruthless side of Cardinal Borghese in *Caravaggio*.

folded into the garden's double status as a shadow Eden, for the garden is as much an alter-Eden, or Eden's dark side, as it is a faux Eden, or Eden-simulation. Both senses of the garden's paradisiacal claims remain active as the journal entry continues and both are integrally related to the presence of Gioacchino Ersoch's water clock on the Pincio. This seemingly insignificant detail becomes the focus of Jarman's discussion of the Borghese Gardens and prompts the following remark on the mutual exclusivity of temporality and paradise:

Time must have started in earnest after the Fall, because the seven days in which the world was created we now know was an eternity. The ancient Egyptians, whose lives were measured by the annual rise and fall of the Nile, were amongst the first to mark its passage systematically; the Borghese garden commemorates the Egyptians with a gateway in the form of twin pylons. (Jarman, p. 14)

The possession of knowledge instantiated by the Fall is connected directly to the advent of temporality itself. This implies that the ur-garden is an "untimely" place, and that it is the systematic measurement of time that separates Borghese's paradise from that of Eden. But Jarman is also marking a historical development in the design of the Borghese Gardens. The Egyptian pylons were part of Luigi Canina's architectural additions to the Villa Borghese in the early nineteenth century.⁹ Ersoch's water clock was designed in the early 1870s and became a primary feature of Giuseppe Valadier's restoration of the adjacent Pincio Gardens in the late nineteenth century. These additions marked a significant alteration in the civic life of the gardens which reached a climax in the early twentieth century after they were purchased by the city in 1902.¹⁰ The slow transition from private to public saw the introduction not only of public monuments, but also of imperial artefacts. The twin pylons are haunted by deeply rooted imperial fantasies of Egypt, and this aura of "Egyptomania" is subtly extended to the water clock when Jarman compares its mechanism to the rise and fall of the Nile. The remarks on the Egyptians' systematic measurement of time not only operate as a genealogy of the water clock's ability to keep time in the garden but also link the clock to a specifically nineteenth-century imperial fantasy. This subtle link establishes an imperial allegory in which time and knowledge colonize history such that access to paradise has become prohibited.

This resistance to monumental history and knowledge understood as "received information" opens onto an alternative understanding of history as being-in-common. Jarman's last entry on the Borghese Gardens makes this resis-

9. For a discussion of Canina's interventions in the Villa gardens and for detailed illustrations of the *Propilei Egizi*, see Beata Di Gaddo, *Villa Borghese: Il giardino et le architetture* (Rome: Officina Edizioni, 1985), pp. 165–69.

10. For an extensive discussion of the nineteenth-century project to connect the Pincio Gardens with the grounds of the Villa Borghese, see Massimo de Vico Fallani, *Storia dei giardini pubblici di Roma nell'Ottocento* (Rome: Newton Compton editori, 1992), pp. 88–127.



tance explicit when he equates history that is possessed by time with a certain kind of nationalist monumentality:

In every corner the park mapped out Time's History: its glades were strewn with monuments to mark its passing. Not the least of which was a circle of marble worthies put up at the end of the nineteenth century to celebrate the unification of Italy: a series of pasty po-faced poets, politicians, musicians, and engineers, who had paved the way for the modern state. Idiotically solemn, these dumb statues were always in danger of the graffiti brush—some had red noses; for me these were the most interesting.

What Scipione with his grand vision would have thought of all these worthies in the ruins of his Eden I cannot imagine. (Jarman, p. 14)

Of the phrase "Time's History" I will have much to say later, but for the moment I want to direct our attention to the sinister yet partial obliteration of the park's sodomitical past. The circle of marble busts invoked in this passage was a key element of the redesigned Pincio's attempt to mobilize public space for nationalist effects. These busts offer an illuminating contrast to Jarman's own gardening practice. The sculptural elements of the garden at Dungeness consist entirely of found metal objects and driftwood, which testify to processes of decay.¹¹ By focusing

11. A significant portion of Jarman's garden sculptures are composed of remnants of anti-tank fencing



Design for pedestal and bust for the Pincio Gardens. Circa 1851.

on the use of monumental history to consolidate the modern state of Italy, Jarman effectively points to the specific form of community consolidation that not only devolved into the fascist Italy of Mussolini, but also reached its destination in the ruin of Rome immediately prior to his childhood experiences in the Borghese Gardens. To modify a phrase from Nietzsche, the passage stages the disintegration of a community that attempted to define itself as an immanent body by zealously dancing around half-understood monuments to figures abstracted from their historical context in order that they serve the nation in all its mystified plenitude.¹²

It is precisely this fantasy of nationalist consolidation that Jarman sees being played out in relation to the gardens at Sissinghurst:

Sissinghurst, September '88

Sissinghurst, that elegant sodom in the garden of England, is “heritized” in the institutional hands of the National Trust. Its magic has fled in the vacant eyes of tourists. If two boys kissed in the silver garden now, you can be sure they’d be shown the door. The shades of the Sackville-Wests pursuing naked guardsmen through the herbaceous borders return long after the last curious coachload has departed, the tea shoppe closed, and the general public has returned home to pore over the salacious Sundays, ferreting out another middle-aged victim

deployed along the shingle during the Second World War. Jarman discusses his incorporation of these materials into his garden in *Derek Jarman's Garden* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995), p. 63.

12. See Friedrich Nietzsche, “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,” in *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 71.

driven into the not so secret arms of a boy starved of attention and affection who has spilt the beans for the illusory security of cash. "He pulled down the boy's pants and blew him for £20 in the corridor of a cinema/a public lavatory/a deserted station, they met in a seedy club/Half Moon Street/the Dorchester."

Two young men holding hands on the street court ridicule, kissing they court arrest, so the worthy politicians, their collaborators, the priests, and the general public push them into corners where they can betray them in the dark. Judases in the garden of Gethsemane. (Jarman, p. 15)

This discussion of the "heritization" of Sissinghurst essentially repeats the trajectory of the Borghese Gardens material. In both instances "an elegant sodom" has been buried and overwritten by the monumentalizing impulse of national culture. Jarman stages the transition of Sissinghurst from private to public property in a manner that emphasizes how closets are constituted somewhere below the public sphere, for the shift into the public domain pushes the kissing boys from a formerly private space into an "underground" public space. The ensuing critique of media homophobia and the New Right discourse of Thatcherite Britain suggests that the "elegant sodom" of the Sackville-Wests has been driven underground such that it has become a site of betrayal rather than pleasure—a shadow of Eden will have been reconfigured as Gethsemane by nationally sanctioned homophobia. And it is important to recognize that the journal entry follows precisely this displacement. The passage moves from the "herbaceous borders" of Sissinghurst to the "corridor of a cinema/a public lavatory," and thus the kissing boys are displaced by the same "heritization" that constitutes them as betrayers of the National Trust.

Jarman's resistance to the displacement of sodomitical space is enclosed in two reminiscences—one of childhood and one from the early seventies—which link his meditations on the Borghese Gardens to his remarks on Sissinghurst:

One day I returned home to our flat in via Paesiello for tea, to find that the seven days of the week were now mapped out by bells—and lessons at the American School.

Years later, in 1972, I returned to the Borghese gardens with a soldier I met in the Cinema Olympia. He had thrown his arms around me in the gods; later we made love under the stars of my Eden. (Jarman, p. 14)

By juxtaposing these two moments Jarman counters the enforced measurement of time he associates with the abuse of history with a reconstitution of Paradise. Fucking the soldier in the Borghese Gardens effects the emergence of Jarman's Eden. At this point one may recall that the violets passage quoted earlier follows this same countering structure—the rigorous regulation and measurement of

time is resisted by queer sex among flowers and beneath the stars. We might ask what is the relation between this resistance to “keeping time” and queerness? It seems that Jarman is trying to *situate* queer identity in a condition of “untimeliness.”

One approach to answering this question travels via the following journal entry for March 2, 1989:

That winter my parents spent two weeks skiing in St. Moritz. . . . On their return they crept into my room in the dead of night and silently fixed a Swiss clock on the wall at the foot of my bed—a gruff little owl whose eyes moved in time to the tick.

Waking, I was certain my room was host to a demon; terrified, I watched the remorseless eyes in the half light, till dawn gave me courage to bolt shivering with fear to my parents’ bed. My father laughed: “Don’t be such a pansy Derek.” (Jarman, p. 29)

What are we to make of this fear of clocks and of Jarman’s “pansy” identity? At this moment, the diary provides a wealth of pansy-lore, including that the pansy is a strong aphrodisiac and that it also cures the clap. But this is all pulled up short with a question:

Was the pansy pinned to us, its velvety nineteenth century showiness the texture of Oscar’s flamboyant and floppy clothes? As Ficino says, the gardens of Adonis are cultivated for the sake of flowers not fruits—now what about those fruits? Pansies, before you smile, are also the flower of the Trinity. *Don’t be such a lemon.* (Jarman, pp. 29–30)

This is a cryptic passage, but the first question seems to be brushing against the grain of the common assumption that the name pansy is applied from the outside—as exemplified by his father’s remark above. Sinking into the materiality of the metaphor, Jarman seems to be uncovering a resemblance between the velvety texture of the flower and the texture of Wilde’s clothes that displaces the pejorative application in favor of a certain commonality. This archaeological gesture is continued in the following two sentences. First, the Italian humanist Ficino’s remarks on the Garden of Adonis are twisted so that this godly space is cultivated for *both* flowers and fruits, for, as in the word “pansy,” where there are flowers there will be fruits. Second, this hijacking of Ficino’s invocation of the sacred is shored up by the recognition that the pansy is a flower of the Trinity and therefore carries a sacred connotation of its own.¹³ By the end of this passage, Jarman has pulled the application of pansy identity away from his father and made it the figure of a sacred space. What interests me about this gesture is that this space belongs to a community that is estranged from the clock.

13. For an extremely illuminating discussion of Jarman’s relation to Ficino and Renaissance Hermeticism, see Jim Ellis, “Queer Period: Derek Jarman’s Renaissance,” in *Out Takes: Essays on Queer Theory and Film*, ed. Ellis Hanson (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).

If we return to the initial event that prompts this questioning, we find that it is the fear of the clock that starts this whole chain of pansy identification. A gift from his parents—a familial device you might say—the clock ticks through almost every entry in Jarman's diary. One could tie this ticking to a clock whose time is running out, but such a generalized thematization falls into precisely the determinism that Jarman associated with the British media who incessantly addressed him as one who had already died. If we look closely at Jarman's engagement with time, it becomes clear that there is "Time's History" which devolves into monumentality and there is a history that "does not belong primarily to time, nor to succession, nor to causality, but to community, or to being-in-common."¹⁴ To borrow a phrase from Jean-Luc Nancy's "Finite History," it is in this latter untimely history that Jarman and Wilde come "to be *in* common, or to be *with* each other, or to be together" (Nancy, p. 154). And this kind of being together is staged in resistance to political formations which attempt to consolidate a community as if it were an immanent being.

We have seen from his writings on the Borghese Gardens and on violets that Jarman tends to resist those institutions that understand time as a regimented succession of cause and effect with various figures of the sacred queer garden the Lord forgot to mention. He explicitly states that his own garden is such a site "where [he] can fight 'what next' with nothing" (Jarman, p. 32). In other words, Jarman counters the chain of events that make up the temporality of monumental history with a spatial figure for the suspension of time—i.e., the garden. Nowhere is this more fully articulated than in his 1984 film *The Angelic Conversation*. Jarman describes his visualization of selected Shakespeare sonnets as follows:

A series of slow-moving sequences through a landscape seen from the windows of an Elizabethan house. Two young men find and lose each other. The film ends in a garden . . . Destruction hovers in the background of *The Angelic Conversation*; the radar, the surveillance, the feeling one is under psychic attack; of course we are under attack at the moment. In the background of *The Angelic Conversation* there is surveillance of Nobodaddy.¹⁵

What is remarkable is that Jarman marks the realm of the garden and the images of the radar surveillance with differing temporal signatures. The real-time presentation of the radar tower is intercut with long sequences presenting landscape, the lovers, and the garden in which the images seem to stand still. As he states:

On the Nizo camera there is a dial which allows one to take speeded up film; you take single frames, if this is projected at normal speed, it goes

14. Jean-Luc Nancy, "Finite History," in *The Birth to Presence* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), p. 143. Hereafter cited in the text as Nancy.

15. Derek Jarman, *Kicking the Pricks* (London: Vintage, 1996), p. 133. This text was first published as *The Last of England* (London: Constable, 1987).

fast. But I have projectors which go at slow speeds, so the film is restored to a near normal pace, like a series of moving slides. . . . The single frame makes for extreme attention, a concentration that is voyeuristic. *Time seems suspended*. The slightest movement is amplified. This is the reason I call it “a cinema of small gestures.”¹⁶

What this means is that *The Angelic Conversation* counters the realm of surveillance, which he clearly links to the homophobic aggression of the New Right discourse, with a form of representation that seems to suspend temporality itself. As the film unfolds, the conflict between these two experiences of filmic temporality resolves into a single floral image. Jarman describes this resolution as follows: “*The Angelic Conversation* is gentle. There is that hovering, external violence, but at the end of the film it’s cauterized by the blossom, which obliterates the radar. The blossom takes over” (Jarman, p. 134). The flowers of this garden are literally applied to a historical wound.

It is in this light that Jarman’s declaration that Time starts with the Fall from Eden becomes particularly resonant, for every return to Eden implies a suspension where “temporality becomes something like a certain *space*” (Nancy, p. 150). It is precisely this spacing of time that Jarman associates with the practice of gardening:

The gardener digs in another time, without past or future, beginning or end. A time that does not cleave the day with rush hours, lunch breaks, the last bus home. As you walk in the garden you pass into this time—the moment of entering can never be remembered. Around you the landscape lies transfigured. Here is the Amen beyond prayer.

Dante, at the beginning of his journey back along the great antique spiral, entered this realm in a dark wood.

*Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita
Mi ritrovai per una selva oscura
Che la dir itta via era smarrita*
[Along the journey of our life half way
I found myself again in a dark wood
Wherein the straight road no longer lay]¹⁷

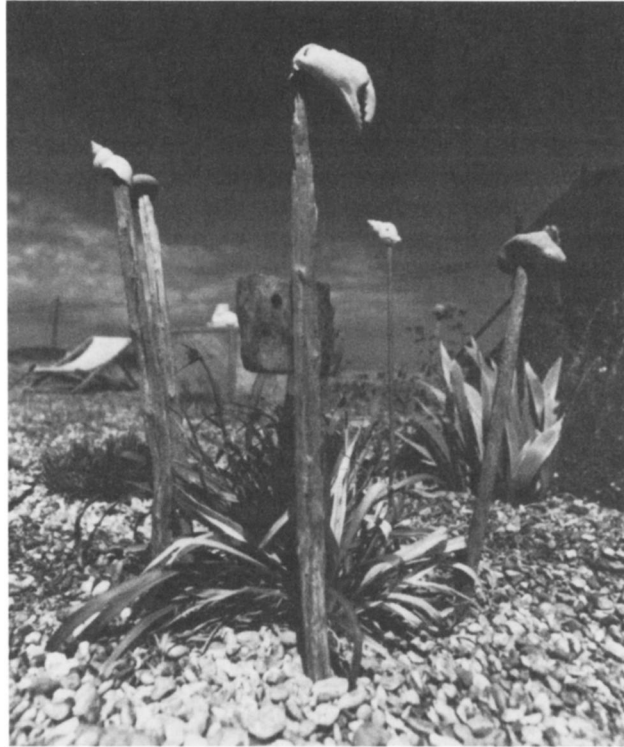
I’m brought suddenly back to the here and now by the shrill argumentative voice of the phone. My Person from Porlock is on the line, talking of time with beginning and end, literal time, monotheist time, for which you are unfailingly charged. (Jarman, p. 30)

I am particularly struck by how this passage unfolds and by the mobilization not only of the quotation from the first three lines of Dante’s *Inferno*, but also of the

16. Ibid., pp. 145–46.

17. *The Divine Comedy*, trans. Peter Dale (London: Anvil Press, 1965), p. 5.

*Jarman's garden at Prospect
Cottage, Dungeness.*



allusion to Coleridge's "Kubla Khan." The movement from a condition of measured and kept time into the spatialized temporality of the garden involves three different yet related phenomena—a moment is lost from memory, a landscape is transfigured, and finally the sacred is disclosed. This is met with a sudden textual disjunction and the quotation from *Inferno* which links the disclosure of the sacred and the suspension of time to the terrifying moment of Dante's entry into hell. The way in which the quotation modifies the "Amen beyond prayer" is significant for it draws evil and paradise into the same space. The garden is one of sacred evil or holy queerness—the shadow of Eden which Jarman finds in Scipione's pleasure park. What I find remarkable about this gesture is the degree to which Jarman's text parallels the gardening praxis he is trying to elucidate. The shift into Italian seems to figure the shift from the time that cleaves the day into measured hours to the garden's temporal suspension.

This parallelism carries with it the suggestion that the practice of gardening as Jarman is theorizing it is analogous to his practice of writing. This collocation of gardening and writing is confirmed by the allusion to the Person from Porlock and the sudden re-activation of time. Just as Coleridge's attempt to transcribe his reverie of the pleasure palace of Kubla Khan was unfortunately disrupted by a "person of business from Porlock," so also does Jarman's meditation on the untimely garden of sacred evil get broken off by his own Person from Porlock. The comparison is resonant because of the uncertain relationship between "being-on-opium" and writing in Coleridge's text—is Coleridge in Xanadu when

the interruption comes or is he writing about it? Similarly, is Jarman in the garden or writing about it when the telephone reactivates the hegemony of serial temporality? You will notice that the ambiguous status of the temporal markers “here and now” in the sentence “I’m brought suddenly back to the here and now by the shrill . . . voice of the phone” makes it impossible to decide if the phone interrupts the gardening that opens the passage or Jarman’s attempt to write about it.

This undecidability has intriguing ramifications, for if the garden figures the dispossession of history from time and discloses a nonimmanent being-in-common, to what extent can a similar calling forth of community be ascribed to Jarman’s text? I’m going to close with a foreshortened attempt to answer this question. We have already noted that Jarman explicitly resists the formation of community constituted by an identification with a common being as is frequently the case in the formation of fascist nationalisms. Rather, he seems much more interested in the possibility of merely being together with others, including being with himself as an other. As Jean-Luc Nancy suggests,

Community is the community of others, which does not mean that several individuals possess some common nature in spite of their differences, but rather that they partake only of their otherness. . . . They are together, but togetherness is otherness. (Nancy, p. 155)

If we consider the way in which Jarman fragments literary bodies into quotations and uses them in a differential fashion—i.e., in order to simultaneously mark their otherness from his reminiscences and to mark the alterity of the reminiscences from themselves—one is led to ask whether a certain kind of being together is being textually enacted. In the passages that suddenly spill into a cascade of quotations, an othering recoils on the reader such that one finds oneself othered in common with all these others. What unfolds in these interruptions is an articulation of singularities, or what Nancy has designated “literary communism.” As he argues:

This does not determine any particular mode of sociality, and it does not found a politics. . . . But it at least defines a limit, at which all politics stop and begin. The communication that takes place on this limit . . . demands that way of destining ourselves in common that we call politics, that way of opening community to itself, rather than to a destiny or to a future. “Literary communism” indicates at least the following: that community, in its infinite resistance to that which would bring it to completion [in the sense of finishing it off], signifies an irrepressible political exigency, and that this exigency in its turn demands . . . the inscription of our infinite resistance.¹⁸

18. Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, ed. Peter Connor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), pp. 80–81.