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Article

# The Nostalgic Gardens of Derek Jarman's England

Lavinia Brydon



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PARADOXES, AMBIGUITIES AND INCONSISTENCIES pervade the work of Derek Jarman. Many of these seem to centre on the question of Englishness. Jarman is, for example, frequently labelled as a rebel, a passionate advocate of social change and, subsequently, remembered by his friends as a 'genuine British original';<sup>1</sup> however, many commentators also consider him a traditionalist, too respectful of the country's cultural legacy to be properly innovative, a true radical.<sup>2</sup> Within his films there is much evidence to support both positions. For those who understand Jarman to be an inspired artist who challenges the conventions of English society through work that is 'raw and dusty and inarticulate', there is the fusion of two Elizabethan ages in *Jubilee* (1978), the apocalyptic vision of London in *The Last of England* (1987) and the brave interpretation of a Christian text in *The Garden* (1990) to consider.<sup>3</sup> Conversely, for those that hold the view that Jarman is too accepting of England's political and cultural traditions, support can be found in the same films: the pastoral scenes of Elizabethan England in *Jubilee* present the country in 'some sort of state of grace', J. M. W. Turner's paintings are evoked in *The Last of England* and there are several references to Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger's films in *The Garden*.<sup>4</sup> Jarman's love of his country is, however, best expressed by his nostalgic employment of a distinctly English landscape, often metonymically represented by the space of a garden. Moreover, his systematic imag(in)ing of gardens through flashbacks, rear projection and found footage evokes multiple pasts, including a personal history. The following aims to

investigate this aspect of Jarman's work in more detail, looking at both the methods and reasons that lie behind his nostalgic gardens.

## Searching for the gardens of the past: childhood memories, landscape traditions and home movies

Jarman's interest in the garden space significantly predates his career as a filmmaker. Indeed, it can be traced to early childhood when, shortly after his fourth birthday, Jarman's parents presented him with a large Edwardian garden book, entitled *Beautiful Flowers and How to Grow Them*. In his journal *Modern Nature* Jarman admits that he cannot recall a reason for the choice of gift, particularly as it would be some time before he could read the various flowers' descriptions or, indeed, his parents' own carefully inscribed dedication. Yet, he acknowledges that *Beautiful Flowers* triggered his fascination for the colours and shapes of the English landscape metonymically represented in the space of the English garden: 'Who can look on a picture of a beautiful garden without feeling the impulse to grow flowers, and what results this can have!'<sup>5</sup> The burgeoning interest in gardening was fostered by his parents who began to delegate outdoor chores to their son, such as lawn mowing. However, according to Jarman, the childhood passion was prematurely terminated when he moved to London aged eighteen, at the behest of his father who wished him to obtain a university education.<sup>6</sup> For the next three years Jarman studied English, History and History of Art at King's College London with the intention of pursuing artistic endeavours at a later date. Although he was unable to comprehend its value at the time, Jarman's attendance at university had an important bearing on his later career. In essence, it ensured a lasting respect for the traditions that he would later playfully appropriate in his films. In his words, the academic upbringing allowed him to break the rules:

I had this background which enabled me to dispense with certain concerns. It was a huge advantage. I would see people attempting to do the same things but they didn't have enough grounding; they couldn't take the leaps that you need, say to set Edward II now or Caravaggio in the 1940s. At the time I didn't understand why I was at university but it actually paid back.<sup>7</sup>

A similar comment is made by one of the cast members of *The Garden* who suggests that Jarman is a successful iconoclast because he understands the iconography he is tampering with.<sup>8</sup>

Prior to the controversial interpretation of historical figures in his films Jarman had already gained a reputation as an outsider while at the Slade School of Art, which he attended on completion of his degree. In an unexpected way, the conservative tendencies discussed and developed during his earlier university education helped to set him apart as a painter. Jarman, for example, frequently chose the English landscape as his subject matter, which placed him in stark contrast to the trends of the time. As he recalls:

I was painting landscapes, close to the red earth of north Somerset, the flowers, butterflies in the meadows. My influences? William Scott's pots and pans, Paul Nash and the megaliths. It was impossible to paint these landscapes at the Slade in 1964; everyone was falling over themselves for pop-art, we were focused on Manhattan.<sup>9</sup>

Although Jarman's preferences can be attributed to his academic background and, accordingly, considerable exposure to the numerous inspiring works created within the British art tradition of landscape painting, they also recall and develop his childhood interests. To return to Jarman's memories of the book *Beautiful Flowers*, it seems that its colourful illustrations not only aroused a passion for gardening but also encouraged a painterly instinct: 'delightful watercolour illustrations and neat little line drawings [...] they held me spellbound on many a rainy day'.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, as he details, these drawings first attracted the young Jarman to scribble across the exotic pages with coloured crayons and, later, provided the images from which he would copy in order to make his own first drawings of flowers.

Arguing that Jarman's art is inspired by his childhood gardening interests leads to the supposition that his work will always be infused with a nostalgic quality. Even in those works where gardens do not appear, the very act of painting can be read as an attempt to connect to the past. The same is true of Jarman's film-making. However, in several of the films, Jarman's need to recall a personal history is made more explicit. In *The Last of England*, for instance, Jarman persistently punctures the narrative with home movie footage of his childhood. Shot in the 1940s and 1950s by Jarman's father, these excerpts include pictures of Jarman and his sister playing ball or picnicking in the back-garden. By constantly returning to the warm-hearted activities of these images in a film dominated by violent scenes of contemporary England, Jarman embarks on a set of nostalgic journeys. Indeed, Chris Lippard frames these juxtapositions as the search for 'some kind of lost landscape', to which the film-maker readily agrees, 'Yes, that's right, I mean, it could be as simple as the loss of the flower meadows of my childhood.'<sup>11</sup>

In Tracy Biga's essay on the principle of non-narrative in Jarman's films she notes that the format of the home movie as well as its content contributes to the film-maker's decidedly non-linear approach to history.

As a genre, the home-movie is profoundly non-narrative, with no clear beginning, middle or end. The length of shots is often determined less by an artistic choice than by the length of the reel, or the actors simply leaving the frame.<sup>12</sup>

The use of this format thus secures and strengthens the disjunctive narrative structures favoured by Jarman and, accordingly, accommodates his nostalgic impulses. In *The Last of England*, for example, the footage of the young Jarman works with the film's framing device of the monastic-looking adult Jarman to disrupt the audience's sense of chronological order. Indeed, the fragmentary format of the home movie contributes to a whole host of jarring qualities that these two sets of images possess within the film's context: unusual formal properties (the grainy texture of the home movie excerpts and the black and white imagery of the adult Jarman); odd narrative positions (both are intercut with dark, violent images of present-day England); curious old-fashioned content (the young Jarman playing with his family and the adult Jarman writing in his study). Arguably, this disruption of classical narrative techniques encourages the audience to consider the film's political message, especially its anti-consumerist position.

Whereas the scenes of the adult Jarman imply the desire to return to the past through the *mise-en-scène*, chiefly through the simply tailored robes and use of old-fashioned pen and paper, the home movie clips in *The Last of England* make a far

more explicit request. Moreover, by returning to the images of his childhood Jarman raises the question of whether his nostalgic journeying concerns the search for lost innocence. The garden setting provides persuasive support for this reading, doubling as a prelapsarian Eden with its sun-drenched tones and lush scenery. In the journal that accompanied the release of *The Last of England*, Jarman comments on the garden's position as playground and paradise, framing it as a common theme within the home movie format:

The home movie is bedrock, it records the landscape of leisure: the beach, the garden, the swimming pool. In all home movies is a longing for paradise.<sup>13</sup>

Given Jarman's preference for a home movie sensibility it is unsurprising that these connections run throughout his oeuvre. The tendency to work with an amateur gauge, a cast of friends and improvised scripts means that Jarman often conjures playful, dream-like work, which is appropriately accommodated and advanced by his preferred garden setting. In a documentary charting the production of the later film, *The Garden*, Jarman further vocalises the importance of the garden's paradisiacal associations, stating that its mythological status in Judeo-Christian religions provided the starting point for the film's narrative concerns. He concludes this segment of the discussion by drawing attention to the etymology of the word 'paradise' and its impact on his understanding and, therefore, portrayal of the garden space within the film: from the original Iranian 'pairidaeza' the word translates to 'garden'.<sup>14</sup>

### Locating the gardens of the present: angelic figures, persistent creatures and revived vegetation

In favouring the garden as an otherworldly space with an everlasting innocent quality Jarman frequently positions angelic, magical and child-like figures within his cinematic gardens. In *Jubilee*, for example, it is the alchemist John Dee who accompanies Elizabeth I in her garden walks and it is he who summons the spirit guide Ariel (David Haughton) to transport them four hundred years into the future. Later in the film, the kind-hearted incestuous brothers Sphinx (Karl Johnson) and Angel (Ian Charleson) help their partner Viv (Linda Spurrier) pick flowers from a garden that survives within the concrete-clad, near-future London. As Biga notes, the very names of the brothers 'evoke the transcendental, timeless and ungendered' while that of their female companion 'suggests life'.<sup>15</sup> Clearly these are qualities of the garden space that Jarman treasures and, arguably, the film-maker uses the three characters to evoke the harmonious essence of the garden space in the absence of its physical manifestation. Thus, in a film which presents a discordant, dystopian vision of England, Jarman persistently provides a glimmer of hope.

Indeed, in viewing Sphinx, Angel and Viv as an extension or embodiment of the garden space, *Jubilee* subtly evidences the optimism that is more readily expressed within *The Last of England* and *The Garden*. This earlier film, however, differs from its successors in that the political message is not framed by a personal vision; rather Jarman employs pastoral scenes of Elizabethan England to bracket a narrative which depicts vicious girl gangs roaming the depressing, decaying streets of a near-future London. In his eyes the country's physical, moral and cultural

decline – exemplified and exacerbated in the 1970s by London's emptying docklands, violent rioting that stretched from Notting Hill to Chapeltown, and the anarchic Punk movement – required a framing device that would remind his audience of the nation's noble history via its glorious but threatened geography. Jarman hoped this recollection would lead to England's recovery. As Michael O'Pray would reflect in later years: '*Jubilee*, made in the white heat of the punk movement, was Jarman's first attempt to shape the present by means of the past.'<sup>16</sup>

Jarman's employment of the country's landscape and artistic traditions in *Jubilee* evidences his love and loyalty to England, despite the film's often apocalyptic atmosphere. The determination to uncover, examine and rebuild distinctive English artistic practices, first demonstrated by his landscape paintings at the Slade, remained. However, true to Jarman's contradictory nature, *Jubilee*'s persistent use of Punk icons, fashions and music suggests both his contempt and curiosity as regards the country's then current cultural preferences. Arguably, it shows that while Jarman reviled Punk's hell-bent rejection of sacred English institutions, he also revelled in its unrestrained, unsettling vibrancy. His ambivalence culminates in a fetishistic display of Punk's most prominent features midway through the film when Amyl Nitrate (Jordan) rehearses her Eurovision song contest entry. Here, assisted by the ever-disruptive musical interlude and carefully-coded clothing, Jordan's star status as Vivienne Westwood's shop girl and Sex Pistols groupie easily transcends her character's activities and ambitions.<sup>17</sup> She is Punk personified. Thus, in a tight-fitting pinafore, emblazoned with the Union Jack, and with bright pink make-up painted from her forehead to her nose, the statuesque Jordan struts around the stage belting out a bastardised Punk version of 'Rule Britannia'.<sup>18</sup> At this point, Jarman's fascination with a 1970s cultural icon results in a performance of such excitement and energy that it momentarily outweighs *Jubilee*'s narrative and thematic concerns.

Although Jarman's political message is somewhat forgotten in the 'Rule Britannia' sequence, it is at the forefront of the film's outdoor sequences. Jarman's wish to draw attention to and then somehow rebuild his country's ruined landscape is effectively communicated by juxtaposing warm, sunny images of a rural past with dark, distressing images of an urban future. Indeed, through the construction of a dystopian London, Jarman shows that the country's persistent preoccupation with modern advancement will only lead to derelict buildings, waste grounds and burning rubble. As *Jubilee*'s unscrupulous capitalist Borgia Ginz (Jack Birkett) states before entering London's newest nightclub, formerly Westminster Cathedral: 'Progress has taken the place of Heaven.'

Yet, as the narrative progresses, there are brief suggestions of garden spaces within the London wasteland, offering hope that the pastoral, idyllic England is set to be restored by the film's conclusion. The previously discussed affectionate relationship between Sphinx, Angel and Viv as well as their discovery of the only (non-artificial) garden within the damaged landscape are examples of Jarman's innate optimism. Indeed, in picking flowers from a garden, the three engage in a tender exchange that stands in stark contrast to the aggressive actions of the other characters. Moreover, the activity briefly introduces a softer colour palette into the near-future sequences, which are beset by depressing greys and violent reds, pinks and oranges. However, a more interesting example of Jarman's faith in the country and its residents centres upon Amyl Nitrate, whose first appearance shows her spinning a globe that bears the words: 'NEGATIVE WORLD

STATUS; NO REASON FOR EXISTENCE; OBSOLETE.' This self-style historian seems to confirm her belief in the slogan's relevance to this post-modern world, stating that her subject is 'so intangible. You can weave the facts any way you like. Good guys can swap places with bad guys'. Despite this show of disillusionment and distrust there are, nevertheless, moments in which Amyl Nitrate reveals her knowledge and appreciation of the past. When she sprays herself with perfume, for example, she is heard thinking, 'Carnation from Floris, not all good things have disappeared.' As William Pencak remarks in his analysis of this incident:

What we can take from flowers, even the scent that remains when they are dead, is a symbol for Jarman of a world we have lost that can still inspire us to create beauty and fight evil.<sup>19</sup>

The lasting scent of flowers is, thus, soon followed by other, similar signs of England's survival and revival: white flowers surround Elizabeth II's dead body; green weeds puncture the expansive black tarmac; a pesky caterpillar crawls from behind one of the plastic petunias cultivated by a mercenary named Max (Neil Kennedy).

Arguably, the signs of life within the film's narrative wastelands parallel Jarman's own film-making activities. In other words, the very practice of making films is Jarman's attempt to breathe life into the county's moribund condition. The comparison appeals not least because Jarman's approach to film-making shares the same spontaneity and defiance exhibited by the flowers, weeds and caterpillar. Indeed, when questioned about *Jubilee's* formal style, he details its haphazard construction: '*Jubilee* was structured like a collage, created from juxtaposition, it's parochial, too particular, juvenilia, and at times silly.'<sup>20</sup> He also makes references to his organic film-making approach when discussing *The Last of England* and *The Garden*. Of the earlier film, he explains that there was no casting, 'it happened quite spontaneously, we didn't worry if someone didn't turn up', whereas he describes *The Garden* as a natural development, having filmed some landscape scenes at his home in Kent.<sup>21</sup> These comments prompt Lawrence Driscoll to look at Jarman's films as an extension of both Jarman's painterly instincts and his horticultural concerns: 'If Jarman communicates the destruction of the British landscape with the eyes of a painter, he feels it with the hands of a gardener, whose concern, above all, is growth.'<sup>22</sup>

In the journal *Kicking the Pricks* Jarman confirms that his gardening interests signal a desire to help, rather than hinder: 'Like all true gardeners I'm an optimist.'<sup>23</sup> Hence, it is fitting that at *Jubilee's* conclusion hope is restored. The uplifting ending is achieved by rejecting a conventional narrative trajectory and returning to the images of rural Elizabethan England, bathed in sunshine. Here, Elizabeth I and John Dee walk Dancing Ledge, part of the Dorset coastline, and discuss the beauty of England as it stands in their time, rather than the future destruction they have witnessed: 'All my heart rejoiceth in the roar of the surf on the shingles, marvellous sweet music it is to my ears – what joy there is in the embrace of water and earth.' In *Jubilee's* final nostalgic journey to the past, Jarman thus underscores England's once glorious position in the world and, accordingly, the need for change in the present. Effectively, he asks his audience to make current decisions by looking to the country's past and to its future. Discussing *Jubilee* in *Kicking the Pricks*, Jarman describes the film as a 'healing fiction', one in

which the 'past dreamed the future present'.<sup>24</sup> He considers *The Last of England* to have the same form but makes a crucial distinction: 'this time I have put myself into the centre of the picture. Here the present dreams the past future'.<sup>25</sup> The statement draws attention to the later film's underlying optimism, suggesting that Jarman's activities in the onscreen present negate the film's apocalyptic vision of the future. The opening sequence helps to illustrate the idea. As briefly mentioned earlier, it shows the film-maker dressed in monastic robes at his writing desk. These images are intercut with those of a young man (Spring) who eagerly injects heroin and furiously wrecks Caravaggio's 1602 painting, *Amor Vincit Omnia/Love Conquers All*.<sup>26</sup> The contrast between the two figures and their actions works to highlight contemporary England's needless and, moreover, harmful rejection of the past. As Driscoll points out, '[c]ut off from history, like the punks in *Jubilee* (1978), Spring represents a cultural dead end'.<sup>27</sup> Driscoll's point can be pushed a little further. Spring's dependence on drugs combined with the dark, depressing *mise-en-scène* of empty buildings and crumbling walls implies that his dismissal of culture ultimately leads to spiritual and physical decline. The film's fleeting but frequent visits to Jarman's study in this sequence, however, promote a productive, profitable alternative. Here is a world where past traditions are continued and celebrated, evidenced and emphasised by Jarman's use of a traditional ink pen. Its inclusion offers hope. Furthermore, Jarman's position within this sequence facilitates the view that the making of *The Last of England* is itself an optimistic act. As he puts it, 'the activity is the hope'.<sup>28</sup>

Nevertheless, *The Last of England* is frequently read differently. Janet Maslin of *The New York Times*, for example, described it as the 'longest and gloomiest rock movie ever made' on its release while David Hirst questions Jarman about its lack of hope in *Kicking the Pricks*.<sup>29</sup> With audiences unable to perceive the film as a celebration of England and its ability to survive current ills, Jarman made several attempts to set the record straight. A key example occurs in his discussion of *The Last of England* for the documentary *Derek Jarman: Know What I Mean*. In response to the common perception that the film is a vicious attack on the country, Jarman explains:

It's a love story with England. It's not an attack. It's an attack on those things that I perceive personally as things without value. Things that had invaded the mainstream of British life. That's not an attack on England. It's the opposite.<sup>30</sup>

However, we can also look to the fleeting glimpses of gardens as evidence of Jarman's commitment to and confidence in England. A welcome interruption to the disheartening images of a damaged London, they serve as small signs of the country's rebirth. As Andrew Moor explains:

Among the riotous dystopia of the image track, muted moments of calm can nevertheless be glimpsed. Brief shots of bees, flowers, and of Tilda Swinton among a host of daffodils are matched to reflective music scored for strings, and all hint at the possibility of regeneration.<sup>31</sup>

Driscoll too is keen to emphasise the sun-drenched scenes of Swinton running through the flowers and grass, arguing that they strengthen Jarman's long held interest in the symbiotic relationship between England's identity and its landscape.



Specifically, he states that these images 'restor[e] our focus on the traditions that reside in nature and femininity'.<sup>32</sup> The point is valid, but without further development, the words also dangerously imply that Jarman has fixed ideas about anatomical make-up and gender and, in this instance, advocates the clichéd collapse of the female body onto the landscape.

Throughout his work, Jarman shows a far more complex attitude towards biology, gender and, correspondingly, identity. In *The Last of England*, the unsettling encounter between a balaclava-masked terrorist and a suited professional effectively illustrates this position. A high camera angle calls attention to the Union Jack, which drapes their bed, allowing Moor to read the couple's sexual scuffles as 'the homoerotics of soldiery and the public school system, and a subversive (homo)sexualisation of Great Britain's Establishment'.<sup>33</sup> Although Moor argues that this first reading remains valid, he admits that it is 'mockingly upset' by Jarman's revelation that the terrorist is a woman in his journal.<sup>34</sup>

The perception of apparently cogent and stable gender positions is thus tricked, and aspects of performance, masquerade and costume are brought into play, albeit invisibly. The signs have misdirected us [...] By so wrong footing us [the sequence] serves as a warning against the easy categorisation of biology, gender, sexuality and performance.<sup>35</sup>

Indeed, Jarman's own comments on the scene include a remark about a certain strand of Englishness which has an unhealthy tendency to make things 'too cosily suburban' and fit 'too nicely'.<sup>36</sup>

In light of this remark, Jarman's cinematic gardens take on another meaning. They show the film-maker's desire to rediscover and reinstate England as an accommodating place, respectful of difference and appreciative of diversity. After all, in the garden a multitude of different identities and sexualities survive and, furthermore, flourish. The persistent nostalgic journeys to past gardens in the films are, thus, an attempt to recall England's pluralistic history: the lost landscape of tolerance. In *Jubilee* Jarman employs Ariel to speak on his behalf: 'Consider the world's diversity and worship it, by denying its multiplicity you deny your own true nature'. In *The Last of England* the message is confirmed by the chaotic mix of the world's cultural traditions, from Greek tragedy to American pop promos. However, in the later film, a greater sense of urgency regarding England's increasing narrow-mindedness is conveyed, chiefly via the frequency of abrupt cuts and quick camera movements. Jarman's fears were not misplaced. A year after the film's release the Thatcher government passed Section 28, advocating dangerous social prejudices.<sup>37</sup> Yet, the brief glimpses of gardens within *The Last of England* show that, as always, Jarman's concerns for the country never quite extinguish his faith in it.

## Planning the gardens of the future: peaceful gatherings, intimate exchanges and joyous diversity

Released in 1990, *The Garden* best evidences Jarman innate and, to quote Biga, sometimes 'inane' optimism.<sup>38</sup> Described in his journal as 'a simple domestic drama, a document' the film offers a loose account of the Passion of Christ.<sup>39</sup> The Christian text provides a suitable blueprint for Jarman's different and differing concerns, allowing the film-maker to draw parallels between the past and present-

day treatment of society's disenfranchised, but also permitting some sense of reconciliation by the film's end. Hence, in *The Garden*, a homosexual couple move from scenes of tenderness (such as bathing together) through violent episodes (such as their torture at the hands of a policeman) to a final warm-hearted scene of communality where they share a meal within a makeshift family unit. At the heart of these scenes stands Jarman's Dungeness garden, extending and enhancing the film's emotional impact with images of 'dragon-toothed' flints, battered sea kale, crumbling driftwood sticks, delicate young saplings and bright red poppies.<sup>40</sup>

Although Jarman described *Jubilee* as a 'healing fiction', the label more readily applies to *The Garden*. The film grants Jarman an opportunity to protest against Britain's damaging new policy regarding homosexuality and to present an alternative, accommodating attitude. Thus, on the one hand, numerous surveillance shots illustrating the bleak shingle coastline and the shadowy presence of the Dungeness power station combine with the characters' aggressive actions to speak for the state of the nation under Thatcher's rule. It is a depressing scenario and, no longer able to preserve or pretend a detached position, Jarman boldly enters this film to explicitly vocalise his increasing anxiety regarding England's identity. At one point, for example, he reads about the passing of Section 28. On the other hand, the film offers several moments where an unobtrusive camera quietly captures the beauty of Dungeness and the characters during intimate exchanges. It is a far more appealing portrait of England and Jarman similarly seeks to take a position within it. Hence, there is a sequence which shows him carefully tending to new seedlings before cutting to his long-time friend and collaborator, Tilda Swinton, who sits in a bluebell meadow. Appropriately reflecting Jarman's interests in time, the cut connects the friends via their temporal, rather than spatial, proximity.

Jarman's increasingly subjective film-making, evidenced by his numerous appearances in *The Garden*, is undoubtedly bound to the events within his private life. In December 1986, shortly after finishing work on *The Last of England*, Jarman discovered he was HIV positive. Though devastated, Jarman refused to hide his illness and entered, instead, into a period of great productivity. Alongside making films and writing journals, he picked up his paint brushes again and was prompted into buying a fisherman's cottage in Kent, an area he had fallen in love with whilst scouting locations for *The Last of England*: 'I had been struck by the area's otherworldly atmosphere – unlike any other place I had ever been – and the extraordinary light.'<sup>41</sup> Most importantly, he began to cultivate the land that adjoined the cottage, despite initial misgivings regarding the sparse vegetation. Jarman describes the garden's inception as an accident, the result of few beach-combed treasures:

At the back I planted a dog wood rose. Then I found a curious piece of driftwood and used this, and one of the necklaces of holey stones that I hung on the wall, to stake the rose. The garden had begun.<sup>42</sup>

Jarman admits that his love for this garden gave him a purpose as his body deteriorated. In his words, it offered 'a therapy and a pharmacopoeia'.<sup>43</sup>

Both the eerie beauty of the Dungeness garden and the pain that lay behind its creation are impressively portrayed in *The Garden*. The shots of the garden's geometric designs are especially affective, their formality fascinatingly at odds with the fragmentary nature of the materials used to build them: oddly shaped stones

and flints of varying whites, greys and reds. The simple designs have, in Jarman's words, the 'mysterious power to attract'.<sup>44</sup> Yet, the garden's strangely charming features also silently speak for Jarman's illness. As the film-maker notes in *Derek Jarman's Garden*, the dominant colour is that of bone, and shapes are frequently skeletal.<sup>45</sup> In the film, the appearance of Jarman often brings these associations to the fore. His fragile frame fits neatly into a garden which constantly exudes its worn and vulnerable condition through colour, form and texture. In this way, *The Garden* is as much a personal meditation on the film-maker's illness as it is a public message about the country's poor (spiritual) health. However, Jarman remained unconvinced that the film accurately conveyed both the personal and public plights arising from the AIDS epidemic: 'The garden was made into an AIDS-related film but AIDS was too vast a subject to "film". All the art failed. It was well-intentioned but decorative.'<sup>46</sup> Yet I consider Jarman to have misjudged his abilities. *The Garden* is a powerful work which moves between sumptuous and shocking imagery, mixes Super-8 footage with time-lapse photography and muddles its narrative to efficiently express the varied emotions that arise from the issue of AIDS. To agree with O'Pray, at the film's end, 'there is an exquisite sense of being in touch with mortality'.<sup>47</sup>

The emphasis on self-expression that pervades *The Garden* reinforces Jarman's desire to create links with the English romantics. Driscoll is particularly keen to explore this self-styled 'alliance with a British tradition of middle class dissent' and convincingly argues that Jarman persistently seeks inspiration from Blake, an artist who similarly fought the dominant ideology of the period.<sup>48</sup> As such, he links Jarman's assessment of England's sexual supervision in *The Garden* to Blake's poem *The Garden of Love* (1794). This reference to Blake's work confirms that Jarman purposefully maintains his nostalgic impulses even though *The Garden* lacks the framing devices or flashbacks employed in *Jubilee* and *The Last of England*. Arguably, in this film, the dramatic temporal shifts are not needed because Jarman explicitly links to the past while in the present.

The 'Think Pink' sequence helps to further illustrate this argument. Here, a singer (Jessica Martin), styled as Audrey Hepburn, parades in front of footage of Jarman's garden while lip-synching to the musical number from *Funny Face* (Stanley Donen, 1957). The openness of the cinematic quotation emphasises the importance of looking to and learning from the past but, notably, the composition of the sequence, especially its use of rear projection, grants the past an immediacy that is not always apparent in *Jubilee* or *The Last of England*. Discussing the use of rear projection in relation to Powell and Pressburger's work, Pam Cook offers a useful explanation of its peculiar function:

Rear projection can be seen as a mechanism for articulating memory, since a process shot precisely combines the past (that is, location footage) with the present (that is, studio footage), superimposing one upon the other.<sup>49</sup>

Importantly, the fusion of the past (location) image with a present (studio) image prompts myriad associations in the 'Think Pink' sequence that go beyond the simple critique of *Funny Face* with its promotion of American consumerist culture and objectification of its female star. Firstly, the choice of song which unreasonably dismisses colours ('Banish the black, burn the blue, bury the beige') is combined with colour-filtered images of the Dungeness garden to create a further

commentary about racial prejudice. The harsh, pink visuals make it clear that the garden space loses much of its beauty when one colour dominates and, therefore, negates its potential to celebrate (bio)diversity. More pertinent to the film's narrative and thematic concerns, however, is how the lyrics' and images' wilful exclusion of colours reads as a note on Queer culture. I need only point to the rainbow flag that has been a symbol of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) pride since the 1970s to confirm this association, but Jarman makes the link explicit when he replaces the pink-tinted images of the garden with those of a LGBT pride march. Thus, as the sequence critiques and condemns capitalism, female stereotypes and racial prejudices, it also assesses and attacks the brutal banishment, burning and burial of different sexualities.<sup>50</sup>

Interestingly, the 'Think Pink' sequence is immediately followed by images which illustrate the different colours, textures and shapes found within Jarman's garden. Accompanied by a gentle, melodic tune these include the white stone circles, thin blades of grass, delicate blue cornflowers and, notably, a contented Jarman who waters and weeds. The different tone struck between these two sequences permits the viewer to contrast the inhospitable garden and streets of Thatcher's England with the accommodating space of the English garden under Jarman's care. Moreover, it cleverly alerts the audience to the fact that the country's garden spaces are not so easily ruled and regulated, as implied by the projected footage. Indeed they have long proved a safe haven from the cruelly controlled boundaries of a heteronormative culture. Jarman's own journals recall numerous exciting liaisons on Hampstead Heath, for example, often describing the space as a veritable English Eden: 'Sex on the Heath is the idyll pre-fall'.<sup>51</sup>

As *The Garden* progresses towards its conclusion the passionate concerns that lie behind Jarman's imag(in)ing of his English paradise becomes ever more powerful. This culminates in the film's final sequences which foreground nature's omniscient authority: wind batters the land, a fire blazes in the night, waves crash against the shore. It is a montage of violent elegance and, as O'Pray comments, the images are 'unsurpassed in their beauty and invigoration of spirit'.<sup>52</sup> As with *Jubilee's* and *The Last of England's* conclusions there is too the suggestion here that the audience must take inspiration from nature's energy and rebuild the country's physical, spiritual and cultural identity. However, unlike the earlier films, Jarman permits a coda which optimistically suggests that this process has already begun. *The Garden* thus ends with the young gay couple, the boy, a fatherly figure and a Madonna-like Swinton eating outdoors. On finishing their meal, this alternative family light the wrappers of their Amaretti biscuits and watch them elegantly rise and fall in the night sky. Arguably, the activity best illustrates what Moor considers Jarman's 'nostalgic endorsement of values of "community" (whose existence Margaret Thatcher denied) rather than [...] the atomisation of modern capitalist society'.<sup>53</sup> Here is the family unit that the punks were unable to sustain in *Jubilee* and tragically failed in *The Last of England*. Jarman finally realises his dream of an England where everyone is welcome: 'Why shouldn't I invite people into another garden rather than walk in theirs?'<sup>54</sup>

Indeed, through the creation and cultivation of nostalgic screen gardens Jarman found a way to cope with present personal difficulties as well as care for an ailing England. However, as his writings frequently show, he was also acutely aware of the fragility and failings of these carefully developed green spaces. To appropriate the words he uses in *Derek Jarman's Garden*, gardening is a 'chancy business' and

thus, as with the seeds sown in the Dungeness ground, the ideas Jarman planted in his films had no guarantee of future success.<sup>55</sup> Yet, like all gardeners Jarman never gave up. As Hugh Johnson states, 'planning, projecting, imagining are the very soul of gardening' and Jarman's persistent use of gardens in his films demonstrates a deep understanding of their potential as well as their present value.<sup>56</sup> In this way the gardens in *Jubilee*, *The Last of England* and *The Garden* both mark Jarman's attempt to rebuild England and offer his audience a design on which to continue the work, in particular the reconciliation of tradition and progression. In fact this ability to juxtapose incompatible qualities leads me to conclude that, as with the garden that exists in Dungeness, the gardens that exist in Jarman's films possess a certain kind of magic, one of surprise and possibility.<sup>57</sup>

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## Notes

- 1 John Maybury in *Jubilee: A Time Less Golden* dir. by Spencer Leigh (The Criterion Collection, 2003).
- 2 Simon Field notes the conventional aspects of Jarman's work and how they problematise his role as an innovator. See Simon Field, 'The Troublesome Cases', *Afterimage*, 12 (1985), pp. 3–5.
- 3 Tilda Swinton, 'No known address or... Don't look down...', *Critical Quarterly*, 46.1 (2004), pp. 93–102.
- 4 Vivienne Westwood, 'Open letter to Derek Jarman from Vivienne Westwood: *Jubilee*', printed top from Westwood's 'Seditionaries' Collection (1978). Held in the Victoria and Albert's textile and fashion collection.
- 5 Derek Jarman, *Modern Nature: The Journals of Derek Jarman* (London: Century, 1991), p. 10.
- 6 Derek Jarman, *Derek Jarman's Garden* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995), p. 11.
- 7 Derek Jarman in Chris Lippard, 'Interview with Derek Jarman', in *By Angels Driven: The Films of Derek Jarman*, ed. by Chris Lippard (West Port, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), pp. 161–169 (p. 164).
- 8 Roger Cook, in *Making of Documentary*, on *The Garden* DVD extras, Artificial Eye.
- 9 Derek Jarman, *Kicking the Pricks* (London: Constable, 1987), p. 41.
- 10 Jarman, *Modern Nature*, p. 10.
- 11 Chris Lippard and Derek Jarman in Chris Lippard, 'Interview with Derek Jarman', in *By Angels Driven*, pp. 161–162.
- 12 Tracy Biga, 'The Principle of Non-Narrative in the Films of Derek Jarman', in *By Angels Driven*, pp. 12–30 (p. 17).
- 13 Jarman, *Kicking the Pricks*, p. 54.
- 14 Jarman in *Making of Documentary*, on *The Garden* DVD extras.
- 15 Biga, 'The Principle of Non-Narrative in the Films of Derek Jarman', p. 21.
- 16 Michael O'Pray, 'Edward II: Damning Desire', *Sight and Sound*, 1.6 (1991), pp. 8–11 (p. 8).
- 17 Laura Mulvey notes how the musical song-and-dance number interrupts the flow of diegesis within classical cinema and, therefore, momentarily prioritises spectacle over narrative. See 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', in *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Hampshire: Macmillan, 1989), pp. 14–28, (p. 19) (first published in *Screen*, 16.3 (1975), pp. 6–18).  
It is actually Suzi Pinns' recording of 'Rule Britannia' that is used in this sequence.
- 18 William Pencak, 'Jubilee without John Dee? Modern Times', in *The Films of Derek Jarman* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2002), pp. 132–141 (p. 134).
- 20 Jarman, *Kicking the Pricks*, p. 173.
- 21 Jarman, *Kicking the Pricks*, pp. 197–198; Derek Jarman in *Making of Documentary* on *The Garden* DVD extras.

- 22 Lawrence Driscoll, "'The Rose Revived': Derek Jarman and the British Tradition', in *By*  
*Angles Driven*, p. 75.
- 23 Jarman, *Kicking the Pricks*, p. 151.
- 24 Jarman, *Kicking the Pricks*, p. 188.
- 25 Jarman, *Kicking the Pricks*, p. 188.
- 26 Jarman refers to the painting as *Profane Love* in *Kicking the Pricks*.
- 27 Lawrence Driscoll, "'The Rose Revived': Derek Jarman and the British Tradition', p. 69.
- 28 Jarman, *Kicking the Pricks*, p. 109.
- 29 Janet Maslin, 'Review of *The Last of England*', *The New York Times*, 28 September 1988  
<<http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=940DE3DE1231F93BA1575AC0A96E948260>> [accessed 10 January 2009] and David Hirst in Jarman, *Kicking the Pricks*, p. 108.
- 30 Jarman, *Derek Jarman: Know What I Mean*, dir. by Laurens C. Postma (Yo-Yo Film, Channel  
Four, 1988).
- 31 Andrew Moor, 'Spirit and Matter: Romantic Mythologies in the Films of Derek Jarman', in  
*Territories of Desire in Queer Culture: Refiguring Contemporary Boundaries*, ed. by David  
Alderson and Linda Anderson (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press,  
2000), pp. 49–67 (p. 59).
- 32 Driscoll, "'The Rose Revived': Derek Jarman and the British Tradition', p. 74.
- 33 Moor, 'Spirit and Matter: Romantic Mythologies in the Films of Derek Jarman', p. 61.
- 34 Moor, 'Spirit and Matter: Romantic Mythologies in the Films of Derek Jarman', p. 61. For  
Jarman's comments on the scene, see Derek Jarman, *Kicking the Pricks*, p. 196.
- 35 Moor, 'Spirit and Matter: Romantic Mythologies in the Films of Derek Jarman', pp. 61–62.
- 36 Jarman, *Kicking the Pricks*, p. 194.
- 37 Section 28 of the 1988 Local Government Act was a controversial amendment to the United  
Kingdom's Local Government Act 1986. It stated that a 'local authority shall not  
intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting  
homosexuality' or 'promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of  
homosexuality as a pretended family relationship'.
- 38 Biga, 'The Principle of Non-Narrative in the Films of Derek Jarman', p. 23.
- 39 Jarman, *Modern Nature*, p.130.
- 40 Jarman, *Derek Jarman's Garden*, p. 24.
- 41 Jarman, *Derek Jarman's Garden*, p. 64.
- 42 Jarman, *Derek Jarman's Garden*, p. 12.
- 43 Jarman, *Derek Jarman's Garden*, p. 12.
- 44 Jarman, *Derek Jarman's Garden*, p. 24.
- 45 See, for example, Jarman, *Derek Jarman's Garden*, p. 16, p. 20 and p. 27.
- 46 Jarman, *Derek Jarman's Garden*, p. 91.
- 47 Michael O'Pray, *Dreams of England* (London: British Film Institute, 1996), p. 182.
- 48 Driscoll, "'The Rose Revived': Derek Jarman and the British Tradition', p. 66.
- 49 Pam Cook, *Screening the Past: Memory and Nostalgia in Cinema* (Oxford: Routledge, 2005),  
pp. 90–91.
- 50 William Pencak makes another valid reading whereby 'Think Pink' connotes the pink  
triangle, which once stood for the persecution of homosexuals but has been reclaimed as a  
symbol of homosexual pride. Consequently, in his reading, the sequence simultaneously  
speaks for oppression and liberation. See William Pencak, 'The Garden: The Relevance of a  
Queer Jesus', in *The Films of Derek Jarman*, pp. 29–43 (p. 35).
- 51 Jarman, *Modern Nature*, p. 83.
- 52 O'Pray, *Dreams of England*, p. 182.
- 53 Moor, 'Spirit and Matter: Romantic Mythologies in the Films of Derek Jarman', p. 58.
- 54 Jarman, *Kicking the Pricks*, p. 108.
- 55 Jarman, *Derek Jarman's Garden*, p. 21.
- 56 Hugh Johnson, 'Introduction', in *The Garden: A Celebration of One Thousand Years of British*  
*Gardening*, ed. by John Harris (London: New Perspectives Publishing Limited, 1979), pp. 4–  
5 (p. 4).
- 57 Jarman, *Derek Jarman's Garden*, p. 47.

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