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Sex in Nature: Darwin, Depastoralized

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This essay critically assesses a pastoralizing tendency in sexuality and environmental studies' engagement with the naturalist Charles Darwin. Examining Sam See's and Elizabeth Grosz's claims for an emancipatory, Darwinian link between sex and nature reveals their shared recuperation of aesthetic feeling toward a pedagogical and ethical project that significantly deviates from Darwin's insistence on the strictly accidental quality of nature and sex. Given that this pastoralism is found not only in queer or feminist interpretations of Darwin but equally in eugenic and genocidal iterations, the essay then sketches a different Darwinism for sexuality and environmental studies. Rather than opposing the pastoral with an inverted anti-pastoral, reproducing the problem of relying on moralizing aesthetic pedagogies, the authors propose to depastoralize Darwin. Remaining below the intensities of the pastoral suggests a method for affirming the accidental quality of nature, including its sexual and gendered forms, without needing to moralize them in the first place.

Why search for sex in nature, and for nature in sex? This question, Sam See and Elizabeth Grosz have separately maintained, calls for an extended visit to the corpus of the naturalist Charles Darwin. Defying what Elizabeth Wilson has identified as an "instinctively antibiological" stance in feminist theory—a stance with equivalents in queer and trans studies—See and Grosz fashion Darwin into a guide of sorts for scholars and students of sexuality.[1] They hold that if we listened, really listened, to what Darwin had to say, we would no longer fear an intimacy between sex and nature. Woken up from the old nightmare of biological normativity grounded in appeals to the natural, we would surrender to nature's empirically infinite variation, inhabiting a utopia wherein the only norm is the proliferation of differences. Like any immanent critique of a long-taboo body of thought, this is a story with a feel-good ending. The feminist and queer rewards to relinquishing a paranoid defensiveness against Darwin's theory of evolution would represent no less than a natural pedagogy for ethics and being-together, a blueprint for a better world. Yet what is lodged inside that feeling of goodness may not be so obviously emancipatory for sexuality studies.

The present essay engages, at the granular level, See's and Grosz's provocative readings of Darwin, identifying in them a certain pastoralizing tendency: an in-extremis recuperation of aesthetic feeling toward a pedagogical and ethical project that deviates from both the authors' and Darwin's own insistence on the accidental quality of nature and sex. This pastoralism is not limited to queer or feminist interpretations of Darwin; it uncomfortably subtends all efforts to extract from his writings readymade social and political forms, from the liberatory to the explicitly genocidal. In light of this, we advocate a Darwinian depastoralization of sex and nature, evaluating its implications within sexuality studies as well as environmental studies. The latter field too has had a tense relation to nature, and its attempts to derive from the natural world knowledge about living, and living well, have likewise relied on pastoralization as a critical gesture. If Grosz's and See's Darwins harmonize sexuality and environmental studies in a pastoral key, what follows does not quite constitute an antipastoral reply to queer and feminist Darwinisms, which would directly oppose the pastoral by matching its affective intensities. To *de*pastoralize Darwin rather marks an effort to remain below such intensities, where it may be possible to encounter on their own terms the accidents of nature and sex, or to test a method for affirming such accidents without moralizing them.[2] Put succinctly, this essay makes the case that the pastoralization of nature and sex is not inevitable.

Fixing Difference

Early in the posthumous *Queer Natures, Queer Mythologies*, See formulates a diagnosis, an etiology, and a treatment plan. Queer theory, he declares, has been allergic to nature.

The Foucauldian social-constructivist paradigm, so widely adopted by queer theorists as to have become second nature to them, has reduced the natural to biological essentialism and determinism, of which Darwin's evolutionary theory is erroneously thought emblematic. A revised interpretation of Darwinian nature promises to collapse the artificial binary between aesthetic experimentation and positivist science in queer theory, specifically one whose examples stem from modernist literature.[3] See, then, casts Darwin in the role of "a queer theorist of the material world who conceptualizes nature as a non-normative, infinitely heterogenous composite of mutating laws and principles."[4] How does a nineteenth-century naturalist remembered for the principle of the "survival of the fittest" and its incorporation into genocidal logics come to earn such a title—queer theorist?[5] See insists that nature, for Darwin, is not an essentialist category; instead, "biological forms undergo an unpredictable, perpetual process of change."[6] The organism's liability or vulnerability to change constitutes, in See's estimation, Darwin's most coherent principle of evolution, the force behind the "the material world's seemingly infinite array of biological species."[7] And as many a queer theorist would assure us, nonessentialism, unpredictability, and openness to change are the province of queerness.[8] "While Darwin is shy to broach the subject of non-reproductive sexual feelings and behaviors," See sums up, "his theories of non-reproductive production (especially aesthetic production) are not only queer but account for traits like queerness that are of no exigent use to the species and therefore exist in perpetual flux or become permanently useless features."[9] That Darwin, in a rare explicit statement on the origins of biological life, identifies a "hermaphrodite or androgynous" creature as a "remote progenitor of the whole vertebrate kingdom" means for See that a certain queerness empirically and conceptually animates all of nature.[10]

If nature's queerness qua nonaccumulative difference or nonteleological change—or, in the case of the "remote progenitor," a resistance to "naturalized definitions of sex"—interferes with the pragmatics of natural selection, which is to say the transmission of traits that aid a species' adaptation and assist survival and reproduction, then it ought to be understood in aesthetic terms.[11] See goes so far as to fuse the natural and the aesthetic. An appeal to the principle of sexual selection aligns those categories. Darwin defines sexual selection, swiftly in *On the Origin of Species*, then more patiently in *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*, as "a struggle between the individuals of one sex, generally the males, for the possession of the other sex."[12] Sexual selection "depends on the advantage which certain individuals have over others of the same sex and species solely in respect of reproduction."[13] The principle of sexual selection introduces into Darwin's account of biological life an enigmatic

criterion: taste. Aesthetic considerations motivate desire—one individual's attraction to another, or to others. Imperatives of survival and reproduction do not govern taste entirely; Darwin indicates that sexual selection is "less rigorous" than natural selection, for "[t]he result is not death to the unsuccessful competitor, but few or no offspring."[14]

This is not to say, as do See's editors Christopher Looby and Michael North unequivocally, that sexual selection "is *free* of reproductive necessity and also *independent* of natural selection."[15] Darwin notes that the range of variations in taste within a species may be large, but it is not "indefinite."[16] For many animals, taste denotes, rather than the selection of "particular points of beauty," something as limited as a higher or lower "degree" of excitement or attraction toward one individual.[17] Less unbridled than Looby and North suggest, taste, we notice, nevertheless occasions some epistemic confusion in Darwin's discussion of natural selection. Sexual selection is a "form" of natural selection, and yet it does not depend "on a struggle for existence in relation to other organic beings or to external conditions."[18] Sexual selection at once specifies and negates natural selection. Its existence is illogical.

See concludes from the existence of aesthetic motivations in sex that nature is detached from the teloi of survival and reproduction. Reversing the terms of the equation, he also deems aesthetic production, or art, an expression, instead of just a representation, of natural instability and mutability.[19] Art is *in* and *of* nature. The union of art and nature is ultimately ratified by their common offspring: an aesthetic state and biological reaction that See terms "feeling."[20] By this scheme, modernist aesthetics signals the apotheosis of art's emergence and circulation as a natural artifact. Within modernism, experimentation yields variation without direction or purpose. Aesthetic experimentation grows not into a narrative ("narratives always bend their episodes to some particular end," write Looby and North) but into "a repository of feeling."[21]

Grosz, whose sustained attention to Darwin within gender and sexuality studies inspired See's, too hears in the theory of evolution a call to rethink the nature/culture opposition by folding the latter into the former. Grosz defines nature as "the endless generation of *problems* for culture"; "the insistence on such intractable problems, problems that do not have solutions but generate styles of living, . . . prompts human, or cultural, innovation and ingenuity, self-overcoming, and the creation of the new."[22] The natural force that brings about new problems for culture, one to which Darwin, in Grosz's account, "grants prominence as a quasi-autonomous feedback loop within the larger and more overarching operations of natural selection," is sexual difference.[23] See charges that Grosz's emphasis on sexual difference, which he construes as the totalizing difference between two sexes, female and male, weakens both Darwin's and her own claims regarding biological variability.[24] See finds that Grosz's project—to

assess the theory of evolution's potential contributions to a sexual aesthetics and ethics—is valuable, but it had better rid itself of its regressive, passé cornerstone of sexual difference.

See is quick, in a single endnote, to equate sexual difference with binary sex.[25] Quicker in fact than Grosz. Although it is true that she never relinquishes a certain attachment to a medical and cultural fiction of binary sex, Grosz reminds her readers that her conception of sexual difference, indebted to the philosopher Luce Irigaray, is irreducible to such a binary, indeed that it cannot be "contained only within the sexual identities of male and female."[26] "[L]ived" but not "anatomical," sexual difference "is not a comparative relation between two entities, two sexes, that are independently given . . . ; it is not a comparison or contrast of two autonomous entities but is relation that is constitutive of the two sexes, which do not pre-exist their differentiation."[27] Grosz is more loquacious on the topic of what sexual difference is not than on the topic of what it is. She nevertheless reveals that sexual difference most closely approximates a process of transformation that exceeds reproduction: "sexual difference proliferates and varies itself through sexual selection."[28] We may glean from Grosz's reverence toward Irigaray, who has decried the erasure of the subject "woman" in and beyond psychoanalysis, that the "two sexes" rule signals less a denial that there may exist additional sexes, or an insistence that the number two is the defining characteristic of sex, than a commitment to overcoming the masculinist logic of "the one" as it has played out, for example, in patriarchal accounts of lineage.[29] See's preference for relinquishing sexual difference over contemplating it in its complexity is reasonable. After all, there exists a real risk in going along with any theory of sexuality that does not reject binary thinking wholesale: the risk of, sooner or later, retreating to the terrains of essentialism and determinism, where the queer, emancipatory potential of a (re)turn to nature would find itself barricaded.

Yet the distinction between See's and Grosz's perspectives may not be as stark as it seems. Grosz clings to the incommensurability of sexual difference to accommodate an ontology "in which life is . . . construed as an open and generative force of self-organization and growing material complexity."[30] Sexual difference might connote a certain determinacy, but it remains in the service of an ontology of indeterminacy, a world alive to "the surprise of sexuality, its liability to unpredictability, to openness, formlessness, boundlessness."[31] In seeking to eliminate determinacy as a point of departure, See makes it a destination. The rejection of sexual difference's alleged fixity in turn "fixes" nature, queerness, aesthetics, and modernism *as indeterminacy*. Change that is ostensibly devoid of direction or purpose inevitably leads us to a familiar terminus: one of the aforementioned rubrics, which, See tells us, is equivalent to all the others. This inevitability has the effect of stabilizing those rubrics, making our concepts

for phenomena that escape us oddly transparent and graspable. Queer Darwinism is thereby caught up in circular reasoning: *flux is best understood as nature and queerness and aesthetics and modernism, for we know what each of those categories signifies—flux.* Instability and mutability become as firm an ontological grounding for See as sexual difference is for Grosz.

Pastoral for Better or Worse

See's and Grosz's theories are neither right nor wrong. We offer that they constitute exercises in devising Darwinian pastorals. For our purposes, the pastoral marks the synthesis of three elements: an aesthetic disposition toward nature; a belief, be it political, spiritual, or both, in nature as an untamable, uncompromised life force; and a receptivity to nature as a source of feeling (from Grosz's surprise to See's taste).[32] Formulating nature in ontological rather than geographical terms detaches the pastoral from rural settings. See, for instance, elaborates his queer Darwinism in a literary archive that covers a variety of sites, from the English countryside, where is held Miss La Trobe's pageant in Virginia Woolf's *Between the Acts*, to Harlem, New York, where is located the ballroom scene described in Langston Hughes's *The Big Sea*.[33] Whether or not they would consent to being labeled pastoralists, or to being credited for a pastoralization of Darwin, See and Grosz would no doubt recognize the polemical force of their engagement with nature. The term *nature* is contentious beyond sexuality studies, where, as we have mentioned, it connotes biological essentialism and determinism. Nature also poses a problem for environmental studies in its close association with pastoral ideals of plenitude and purity—ideals that, per the field's dominant narrative, fail to account for the interconnection and interdependence of organisms within ecosystems depleted by the colonial and imperial project of extractive and industrial capitalism.[34] While See and Grosz do not present nature as pure, they celebrate its plenitude, thinking it endlessly productive, if not necessarily reproductive.[35] *Pastoral* imposes itself as a useful descriptor for a construction of nature as that which makes (itself) anew. In feminist and queer contexts, the pastoral rhymes with a certain disavowal of determinacy, whether through the conviction that sexual difference actually enables variation, or through the conviction that designating variation as natural or queer shields it from stabilization, conceptual or otherwise.

That is the hope, at least. Whereas in queer and feminist Darwinian pastorals the disavowal of determinacy carries an emancipatory promise, another, gloomier Darwinian pastoral relies on the suppression of indeterminacy, or the minimization, manipulation, and marginalization of variability. We are referring to National Socialism. Richard Weikart's book *From Darwin to Hitler: Evolutionary Ethics, Eugenics, and Racism*

in Germany establishes in its very title a direct link between the naturalist's theory of evolution and the dictator's genocidal project.[36] While acknowledging a disagreement over whether Darwinism invited Nazi ideology or Nazi ideology "hijacked" Darwinism, Weikart states that "[j]ust because Darwinism does not lead inevitably to Nazism does not mean that we can strike Darwinism off the list of influences that helped produce Hitler's worldview and thus paved the way for the Holocaust."[37] Not everyone is as confident as Weikart when it comes to asserting Nazism's Darwinian status. Robert J. Richards's case for exonerating Darwin hinges on a two-pronged thesis: that Darwin was a moral philosopher who "fixe[d] nature with a moral spine" by endowing animals with a capacity for "ethical behavior;" and that even though Hitler "could recite the *Origin of Species* by heart and referred to Darwin as his scientific hero," neither he nor his followers can be considered Social Darwinists (as could Herbert Spencer or Ernst Haeckel, for instance), for "evolutionary theory held no special place within the community of biologists supportive of National Socialism."[38]

Whether or not one agrees with Richards's argument—and we do not: reading the theory of evolution as a moral philosophy ignores the accidentality of so much of the variation covered by Darwin, as we discuss below—it is possible to interrogate the Nazis' Darwinism without recourse to criteria of moral standing and interpretive consistency. The mode of interrogation we suggest is ironically unlocked by feminist and queer interpretations of Darwin like Grosz's and See's. The glorification and purification of the so-called Aryan race constitute an appeal to an *aesthetic* criterion—a criterion that does not coincide with the optimization of survival and reproduction. The Nazis, of course, imagined themselves to be ensuring the survival of the fittest, but they were certainly not by Darwin's measure: a large and diverse gene pool, rather than a defensive and self-enclosing group, would facilitate reproduction and survival. Nazism registers as Darwinian in the same way that the feminist and queer theories we have expounded do: through an embrace of "feeling" that, even in the name of natural selection, deviates from it. From this standpoint, the primary motivation behind eugenics, incarceration, and genocide is not preservatory but libidinal. Refracted through Nazism, sexual selection suddenly does not appear so emancipatory. The Nazis' Darwinian pastoral preserves a racial purity it claims is both natural (by rising to power, the "master race" fulfills its destiny) and in need of cultivation (it must be engineered by the authoritarian state).

We hear this pastoral's loud echoes in contemporary anti-transgender discourse, which renders state sovereignty contingent on the enforcement of so-called natural sex in the population. One of the most explicit outlets for this pastoral has lately been the figure of the child imperiled by transness. The fantasized white child, future emblem

of the racial reproduction of the nation, must be saved by an authoritarian alliance of anti-trans feminists and ethnonationalists from the gender variance and transition that are imagined, in the terms of moral panic, to produce the "irreversible damage" of infertility which stands in for the vague notion of denaturalizing a natural order of sex.[39] Here also an illogic prevails: the sex binary is so stable as to count as a natural truth that transcends human history; paradoxically, it is so fragile that the state must reinforce it at all cost through a biopolitics of anti-transness. The project of such a cisgender state is to tie the maintenance of a property regime of racialized reproduction to an aesthetic preference for a rigid sex binary labeled natural.

Caught between the canonization of Darwin and his demonization, between a pastoral that emphasizes indeterminacy to envision the liberation of sexually non-normative and marginalized people and another that emphasizes determinacy to orchestrate their capture and elimination, we propose to cast Darwin in a new, admittedly less dramatic role: that of an empiricist for whom nature and sex are united by a common accidentality. As hinted earlier and elaborated in the next section, the Darwinism without heroism we test does not quite add up to an antipastoral. We instead articulate something illegible within the terms of pastoralism. Our meditation does not directly oppose See's and Grosz's Darwinian pastorals so much as it reduces the pedagogical intensity they accord to their objects. In the conceptual space we inhabit, that of depastoralization, neither nature nor sex can be claimed to be, in any fundamental way, on the side of a given ethical project.

The Accident of Nature

Our interest in Darwin lies as much in the possibility of a different characterology for sexuality and environmental studies as in the opportunity to think the sexual and the natural without inevitable recourse to either the pastoral or the antipastoral. Because the history of sexuality indebted to US readings of Foucault's eponymous volume one has taken the moralizing, pathologizing, and subjectifying legacies of sexology's taxonomical imperative as its referent, queerness and the sexual are still easily invested with a heroism detectable in See's work; the same may be said of sexual difference for Grosz. This hero narrative is driven by the wish to scale up out of Darwin's denaturalized nature—a nature detached from its worrying association with essentialism and determinism—into the all-too-human fields of ethics and community without sexology's disciplinary oppression of queer subjects. Yet nature, even provocatively divorced from use per se, is at the eleventh hour tied to a pedagogy that See values to verify the goodness of queer sociability through feeling. And this is where we part ways with his queer Darwin.

See contrasts the scene of aesthetic judgement produced under sexual selection with Kant's apotheosis of Enlightened disinterest. Evacuated of desire and the sexual, aesthetic judgement, for Kant, must lead toward a normative ethics or social order because its impersonality scales only to the ideal of a universal reason stitched together by a nature ultimately submissive to the human mind.[40] For Darwin, on the other hand, there is no proper scale to be divined, by humans or any other species.[41] See contrasts the Darwinian theory with the sexological scene that, beginning in the late nineteenth century, would replace Kant's disinterestedness with an even more rigid taxonomical logic: "what Darwin's theories of aesthetic and sexual feeling ultimately present is a theory of queer feeling: erotic sensation that defies categorization within any sexual or affective taxonomy."[42]

If queer feelings and their erotic sensations naturally resist all categorization, then how do we know that they are good? How do we know what they mean if they lack even what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has called a "nonce taxonomy"?[43] See's reading of Woolf's *Between the Acts* lays bare the lingering tension between the implications of Darwin's dedramatized sexual field and the queer theoretical imperative to rescue pedagogy and ethics. See writes that "Woolf portrays women and men alike submitting to a transformative nature, such that submission to it is not a concession of but an acquisition of agency, specifically the participation in universal material differentiation. *Between* thus offers a queer feminist ethic of submission."[44] It is the mysterious leap from "the participation in universal material differentiation" to the apparent offering of "a queer and feminist ethic of submission" that stands out. Ironically, See elsewhere contends that "such conflations of evolution with pedagogy commit the naturalistic fallacy that has misrepresented nature in critical theory: they posit nature as the arbiter of normativity, as though survival were the ultimate biological norm."[45] In Woolf's novel, survival may not be "the ultimate biological norm," but the difficult submission of the characters to nature *is* supposed to produce the feeling of surviving, among other things, the anti-queer and misogynist fascism of the 1940s. A queer pastoral would seem a defense against Nazism's own masculinist, heterosexist, and white supremacist pastoral.

Why, then, if Darwin offers that nature has no specific use, should the aesthetic field of sexual selection reinstate community and ethics? Simply put, it feels good in this pastoralized theory when nature is queer. See imagines that, through the creative and erotic matter of taste, minoritarian subjects will find in the sexual a route toward ethical, political, or spiritual beliefs that are natural without being normative. Similarly, Grosz finds in the "surprise" of the sexual and its aesthetic production a receptivity to nature as a source for creative feeling that will lead to feminist action. These differences do

counter the anti-aesthetic quality See identifies in Anglo-American sexuality studies, which has avoided Darwin, naturalism, and ethnology for the later, modern scientific form of sexuality as a logical-discursive machine. Indeed, the sexologist Havelock Ellis begins his treatment of sexual selection in the preface to the fourth volume of *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* in 1905 by crudely excising the entire aesthetic dimension of Darwin's work, which he contends "injured an essentially sound theory."[46] By "eliminating the hazardous aesthetic element," Ellis reduces the sexual to a scope fit for a taxonomist of deviance and norms: beauty and feeling become "a response to a number of stimuli," or what he calls "tumescence."[47]

However crude Ellis's phallic logic of sex and nature appears in contrast to See's nontaxonomical aesthetic theory, the issue is that aesthetics still is not a literal equivalent to nature and sex. See's work in fact demonstrates how the aesthetic is always in tension with nature and sex in Darwin, despite whatever political or ethical desires may be afterward laid overtop. This tension raises the uncomfortable yet exciting implication of an actually *accidental* nature, or at least a nature apprehensible to humans as accident.[48] This is an implication that even the sharpest queer critiques of Darwin from within the hard sciences have avoided. Evolutionary biologist Joan Roughgarden, famous for her case in *Evolution's Rainbow* for the non-normative naturalness of both homosexuality and transsexuality in the animal world, notes that Darwin's original description of sexual selection is, by scientific standards, empirically falsifiable. She takes contemporary biologists to task for not having overturned the obvious Victorian gender norms that led Darwin in *Descent* to claim that males are universally "passionate" and competitive, whereas females are "coy" and passive.[49] Roughgarden replaces "sexual selection" with "social selection"—"selection for, and in the context of, the social infrastructure of a species within which offspring are produced and reared. The social strategies in the infrastructure generally include cooperation as much as—or more than—they do competition; and they revolve more around negotiation than 'winning.'"[50] In social selection, male and female are not the only two possible sexes or genders, nor are they adversarial or exclusively heterosexual.[51] Different phenotypical genders and social systems can work on principles of cooperation and altruism to ensure not mere group survival but quality of life.[52] In short, mating is not the sine qua non of animal life; its sociality is, and this sociality's range of forms is, according to Roughgarden, far queerer than Darwin's rigid sex roles. Despite this feminist, queer, and trans reading of evolution, Roughgarden still imbues animal sociality with an explicit purpose that might have yet satisfied the Victorian scientist: an "offspring-rearing system" where queer and trans phenotypes and sociability serve the normative logic of the population in raising the young.[53]

Dropping the nominalism of *sexual* selection undermines what is a more radical possibility in Darwin's theory: that sex is nothing more in origin than an accident itself, rather than a transcendental principle or even a functionalist imperative. Darwin recognizes the vagueness of sex's origin, as in his conjecture that some "hermaphrodit[ic]" ancestor lurks in the past. When he does speculate on the origin of sex, it's only to suggest that in a biology ruled by the variation of form, sexual dimorphism in predecessor species to humans would have arisen very gradually over an evolutionary timescale through a series of unintentional natural selections.[54] The advantage from the point of view of natural selection is that sexual dimorphism is a "division of labor," tending toward greater variation in the resultant offspring (in Darwin's pre-genetic idiom).[55] Darwin depastoralizes sex by denaturalizing it entirely. Sex is a biological form derived out of natural selection, but in giving way to sexual selection, it is not just creative but, importantly, without obvious purpose.[56] Life could have arisen and evolved in various species without sex—and indeed it has in many cases. That it did not in humans was unintentional, and it is by that logic unremarkable.

Most readers of sexual selection in Darwin overlook that this accidental sex is a racial formation. For Grosz, racial difference is ultimately subordinate to sexual difference, while for See it is subordinate to the fundamental queerness of nature.[57] Whether this insistence on keeping race implicit (an example rather than something to be exemplified) expresses an anxiety about the deeply racist, colonial, and outright genocidal legacies of nineteenth- and twentieth-century social Darwinisms or something else, See in particular ends up pastoralizing race in a chapter on Langston Hughes. See's queer collapse of Blackness into drag and spectacle into scene (which becomes the link to community) neutralizes the meanings of Blackness by situating it under an overarching queerness.[58] By contrast, *Origin* introduces race as a phenotypical concept. Rather than espousing a theory of separate human races like many of his nineteenth-century counterparts, Darwin proposes that there are many mutable "races" among all plants and animals, including humans. Here, "race" denotes a collection of consistent, inherited phenotypes, or variations that have become stable enough to demarcate a subpopulation within a species, although they will of course continue to change over time, making each phenotype ephemeral on the timescale of evolution. At certain points in *Origin*, the differences between "species," "variety," and "race" largely dissolve, which Darwin reminds us is not an empirical problem so much as an epistemological one. "I look at the term 'species' as one arbitrarily given," he explains, "for the sake of convenience, to a set of individuals closely resembling each other, and that it does not essentially differ from the term 'variety,' which is given to less distinct and more fluctuating forms."[59] While this phenotypical definition might seem to demote

the word *race* to irrelevance, we maintain that it does the very opposite: it signals that sex, as a central phenotype observable in nature, is intrinsically a racial formation—or form, to hold to the aesthetic biology of Darwin's writing.[60] Sex carries important racial significance precisely because it delineates an intense site of phenotypical variation that has been interpreted to express racial differences, as Darwin's penchant for colonial ethnologies of human sexual cultures in *Descent* reflects.[61] On this basis, a range of scholars in Black studies, trans studies, and postcolonial studies have explored the biopolitical, eugenic, anti-Black, and colonial histories of sex as a tool of racial governance, expanding the view far beyond the Nazi regime.[62]

It would seem that feminist, queer, and trans Darwinisms have yet to escape the clutches of sexuality as a discursive, logical system that scales to the ethical and to which race, dropped from the primary frame of accounts of the communal, must be "added" as an intersectional axis.[63] But "before sexuality, . . . there was still sex," as Greta LaFleur incisively reminds in her study of the eighteenth-century ethnological form of sex as a racial matter of natural variation, the predicate to both Darwinism and, later, sexology.[64] Combining Roughgarden's insistence on the empirical with LaFleur's focus on the sex that came before sexuality paves a route toward a sexuality studies that does not sneak the pastoral back in at the last minute under the guise of social or ethical imperatives.

We notice a similar return of the repressed pastoral even in the corners of environmental studies that do not primarily concern themselves with questions of the sexual. Many scholars have intoned the refrain that late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century environmental studies, in its Anglo-American tradition, entails a rejection of certain tenets of nineteenth-century nature writing. This tradition, one of us has written elsewhere, trades "an Emersonian or Thoreauvian attention to sublime, untouched nature for sites of extraction, chemical spills, and other manifestations of ecosystemic violence."[65] This is to say that environmental studies has viewed its project as, among other things, one of depastoralization. Yet the disavowal of one object, the natural beyond, could only be complete with the adoption of another: the immanence of ecological relations, or the interconnection and interdependence of organic and inorganic matter.

Imperiled ecosystems invite a plethora of feelings: mourning, melancholy, anxiety, and so on. At least two of the responses that have been cultivated by nineteenth-century nature writing have been so by contemporary environmental studies as well: wonder and fascination. In the acclaimed *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*, the anthropologist Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing writes that the

enigmatic matsutake, a weed that grows in forests disturbed by human activity, "is the most valuable mushroom on earth."[66] Its economic value as a coveted delicacy is established. Tsing calls on us to appreciate instead the pedagogical and ethical value of a mushroom that teaches the art of "living in ruins."[67] This argument hits a snag not because of Tsing's own pedagogical and ethical aspirations—by definition, a scholarly project seeks to teach and persuade readers—but because of her insistence that such pedagogy and ethics are intrinsic to her object of study, a plant that thrives amid catastrophe.

Just as the conflation of natural and social or political forms in interpretations of Darwin has been enlisted by projects of sexual liberation as well as projects of sexual capture, Tsing's equation between ecology and ethics may be scaled to divergent ends. Whereas for Tsing ecologies teach us how to live together harmoniously, the environmental geographer Ruth DeFries derives from diverse and "complex networks" of animals and plants strategies for strengthening the capitalist economy—the very system that Tsing hopes to see collapse.[68] The contrasting agendas fueled by the recalcitrant pastoralism in feelings of wonder and fascination suggest that a gap between nature or ecology, on the one hand, and ethics, on the other, might in fact be desirable. For one, this gap wouldn't threaten the integrity of environmental studies, the validity of which relies not on the morality of its objects (for example, the substitution of "bad nature" with "good ecology") but on the relevance of its methods and insights. Moreover, this gap would reinstate the mechanisms of authorial accountability that vanish when DeFries naturalizes capitalism by asserting that *ecologies* are running the show.[69] Lastly, refraining from personifying nature and ecology as wise teachers would enable us to make the claim more convincingly that nature does not exist *for us*. Nor, for that matter, do we exist *for nature* in any way we could ever understand. Neither needs the other to be the hero of the story of evolution qua differentiation.

Darwin, likewise, need not be the hero of the story of sex and nature to play a role in sexuality and environmental studies. Darwin, we have offered, might instead help embolden the centrality of a depastoralized sex and a depastoralized nature in those inter-disciplines.

Coda: A Materialism of the Accident

The depastoralization we have advocated has taken the form of a symptomatic reading of sexuality and environmental studies' pastoralizing tendencies, in particular their appeal to criteria of plenitude and purity as well as their treatment of their objects

as inherently moral and pedagogical. The practice of depastoralization stages an encounter with the amoral accidentality of sex and nature. Reducing the pedagogical intensity of sex and nature hardly sounds like the stuff of manifestos, but we insist, in this coda, on depastoralization's political salience, which is ultimately what brings us to this thinking as queer and trans thinkers living in an inhospitable world. We would, of course, struggle to formulate the negative function of *de*pastoralization in wholly affirmative terms. Moreover, migrating from the pastoralization of sex and nature to their depastoralization to mine readymade social and political forms would defeat our purpose. We nonetheless move that depastoralization, as a tactic, carries political efficacy—a quality we now assess by moving beyond disciplinary debates and toward some of the contemporary struggles tied to the rubrics of sex and nature.

One answer to the devaluation of certain subjects and environments is to endow them with moral value: this is how, in See's work, queerness and nature are ultimately made to stand in for the good. We notice this dynamic also in Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's much-debated "Case for Conserving Disability," which applies the environmental framework of biodiversity conservation to disability.[70] Garland-Thomson, who does not refer to Darwinism but addresses Nazism, deems disability conservation a "counter-eugenic logic," insofar as it seeks not to eliminate disability but to protect its flourishing.[71] The "most difficult and controversial case for disability conservation" brought up by Garland-Thomson is that of Emily Rapp, the parent to a child with Tay-Sachs, a genetic condition that causes development regression into paralysis and sensory loss, leading to death around the age of three.[72] While Rapp indicates that "had she known [her child] Ronan would have Tay-Sachs, she would have selectively aborted her pregnancy in order to prevent the suffering both her son and his family have experienced," Garland-Thomson maintains that Rapp's account "at once honors the pain, loss and suffering that is [*sic*] fundamental to much disability even while it acknowledges disability's potential as . . . an epistemic resource."[73] "Rapp's conviction that she would not have brought Ronan into the world because of his disability," Garland-Thomson explains, "comes not from acculturated disability prejudice on Rapp's part. In fact, she understands disabled lives, disability politics, and disability rights very well. She herself identifies as disabled, has lived with a significant mobility disability all her life, and has experienced disability's gifts along with its difficulty. . . . Rather, her retrospective conviction . . . would be comes [*sic*] from a careful assessment of the costs and benefits to her and her family of Ronan's suffering and ultimate fate."[74] Garland implies that there are right and wrong abortions that we can meaningfully know, even though that knowledge is here retrospective; in the case at hand, it is sufficient awareness of and experience with

disability and its politics that attest to a hypothetical abortion's mitigated wrongness. This argument sounds parochial at best, and vicious at worst, in the current moment of massive legislative attacks on people who are seeking or at any point could seek an abortion in the United States. What is more, by policing the morality of abortion, even in the name of a utopian project of disability flourishing, conservationism does not earn its badge as a "*counter*-eugenic logic." We see in the "Case for Conserving Disability" a version of eugenics simply more desirable to its author.

The example of disability conservation, wherein disability is analogized to nature, exposes the limitations of a politics governed solely by the question of "why we might want disability in the world."[75] The depastoralization of disability qua nature brings about a far more pragmatic axiom: *There exist people with disabilities now, and their access to services and care should not be predicated on the worth of such disabilities*. Detaching nature from moral and social value reduces the burden that identity must carry in liberal societies. Protection no longer depends on one's ability, in the first place, to be recognized as good by being correctly discerned. Relieving identity in turn puts welcome pressure on sociality. As we reject the moral task of deciding if and when people with disabilities, or members of other minoritarian groups, embody and express the nature we deem worthy, we must attend to why and how they are already disadvantaged or disenfranchised in the world regardless of any idealism. To depastoralize the impulse to evaluate the moral goodness or queer naturalness of minoritarian subjects is, for us, to embrace materialism. We attune better to material reality without moral hierarchies—even, or especially, the ones of our own ostensibly queer or left invention.

The social and political theorist Alexis Shotwell maps out the landscape of responsibility and accountability with which environmentalism must contend when it depastoralizes nature, or gives up its attachment to purity as the inevitable destination of political thought and action. Shotwell notes that, in the Anthropocene, "humans worry that we have lost a natural state of purity or decide that purity is something we ought to pursue and defend."[76] The enlistment of purity discourses to racist ends—via the pairing of whiteness and hygiene, for example, or the personification of toxicity in anti-Black and anti-Asian terms—is such that Shotwell positions herself, and any progressive environmental politics, "against purity."[77] "To be against purity," she explains, is "not to be for pollution, harm, sickness, or premature death. It is to be against the rhetorical or conceptual attempt to delineate and delimit the world into something separable, disentangled, and homogenous."[78] If, by maintaining an attachment to purity, even putatively liberatory environmental politics predicate themselves on the "sacrifice of human solidarity," then to reject

purity, or in this essay's idiom to depastoralize nature, enables a pragmatic approach to environmental and social justice.[79] By declaring nature accidental, we, of course, do not mean to suggest that environmental inequalities are random occurrences; on the contrary, we believe, as does Shotwell, that an environmental politics that gives up a teleology of purification is one that must work within geographies of "complicity and compromise."[80]

Although the mood, as much as the method, of depastoralized thinking may be tricky to state in the affirmative, detached as they are from both the putatively shy Darwin of the Victorian era and the purposively queer Darwin of twenty-first century theorizing, treating nature and, by the same token, the knowledge producers we are as accidents might prove a desirable relief for our critical, political, and imaginative habits. If sex and nature are not moral problems to be solved in order to ground the political in a proper pedagogy, then the impossible task of conferring stable value on minoritarian life can be relinquished for more pressing and immanent political ends. In other words, depastoralizing reminds us that it is not fundamentally interesting, or even knowable, whether nature or sex is good or bad—or, by extension, whether any of us are good because we are natural or sexual. Every attempt to assert one or the other takes the same pedagogical form, regardless of its politics, rendering the claims interchangeable. The elusive concept of "benign sexual variation" that Gayle Rubin first invoked in 1984 does not pose the challenge of thinking sexual variation's facticity, as if to do so carried with it a hidden pedagogy waiting to be revealed.[81] It is rather the political struggle that would materially realize nature's or sex's benign status in the world that is the calling of the depastoral practice. If we are all accidents, then none of us need, or ever could, certify our goodness as natural or sexual beings by auditioning for social or state recognition. Better, then, to measure goodness in materialist terms that emerge out of concrete struggle: working toward justice from the axiom that there is no deservingness to reveal in nature or sex. The ability to take on moral panics and present-day eugenic politics is not ensured by depastoralization. Its political efficacy hangs in the balance of its pragmatics, the site of material struggle depastoralization ignites by refusing the moralizing terms ensnaring us.

An anonymous reviewer of this essay offered the insightful provocation that this coda's turn to concrete or pragmatic struggle might signal the imposition of a new "good," thus rendering the depastoralization of sex and nature a divergent pastoralism, but a pastoralism nonetheless. We too wonder if, as the reviewer puts it, "depastoralization, taken to its logical end, also flip[s] into its opposite." After all, what we regard as a reduction of pedagogical intensity, others may regard as merely

a different pedagogy; scholars rarely are the best judges of their tone. At the same time, we think it important to distinguish between, on the one hand, See's and Grosz's attachment to the accidentality of sex and nature on account of the emancipatory pedagogy therein and, on the other, a detachment from sex and nature on the account that their accidentality does not have anything to teach us. Nothing guarantees that this detachment, however much relief it might afford from the moral panics of the present, will be reliably and consistently freeing. Beyond the initial solace that may be occasioned by the proposition that we need not appeal to some meaning inherent to these categories to prove our worth, we will have to live with an uncomfortable fact: what we are made of carries no signification beyond that which we impose onto it.

Depastoralization ignores all moralizing, whether reactionary and tyrannical or queer and ostensibly radical, for a simple reason: we do not need to know why we would want to be of or in this natural or sexual world. For here we already are, by way of a natural history of accidents.

Notes

[1] Elizabeth A. Wilson, *Gut Feminism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 1.

[2] Our notion of Darwinian accidentality, which, we will demonstrate, insists on the amoral and apedagogical dimensions of sex and nature, is only nominally related to Catherine Malabou's "ontology of the accident," which has to do, for its part, with the existential improvisation that occurs in the event of brain damage. Catherine Malabou, *The Ontology of the Accident: An Essay on Destructive Plasticity*, trans. Carolyn Shread (Cambridge: Polity, 2012).

[3] Sam See, *Queer Natures, Queer Mythologies*, eds. Christopher Looby and Michael North (New York: Fordham University Press, 2020), 14–16. In their introduction to the volume, Looby and North sketch a Foucauldian orthodoxy within queer theory: "Foucault's position came to dominate, to such an extent that 'nature' came to be a radioactive term. This was especially true in studies of sexuality, given that the argument from nature was used so extensively in coercive heteronormative propaganda. Thus, the notion that sexuality is not 'by nature' but rather by culture or by discourse came to be seen as the basis of an enlightened understanding of sexual identity" (3).

[4] See, *Queer Natures*, 14.

[5] Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species*, sixth ed. (London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1872), 63.

[6] See, *Queer Natures*, 20.

[7] See, *Queer Natures*, 21.

[8] A cross-section of the queer theoretical corpus displays such qualities under various configurations: quantum indeterminacy (Karen Barad, "On Touching—The Inhuman That Therefore I Am," *differences* 23, no. 3 [2012], 209–210, 221), epistemological incoherence (Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* [Durham: Duke University Press, 2004], 5), the horizon of possibility (José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* [New York: New York University Press, 2009], 19–32), and a wildness that resists modernity's orderly impulses (Jack Halberstam, *Wild Things: The Disorder of Desire* [Durham: Duke University Press, 2020], *x*).

[9] See, *Queer Natures*, 24–25. The "shy" feeling that See attributes to Darwin in the face of nature's queerness marks the scientist's ideological alignment with normative projects. Presumably that shyness would be liberated by See's reading of Darwin, shifting the affect of evolution toward something closer to the "biological exuberance" of biologist Bruce Bagemihl's study of homosexuality in animals. We are led in the queer pastoralizing project to agree that normativity is undesirable or bad in that it makes Darwin shy (and contained), whereas an embrace of queer nature is thrilling and creative—and, therefore, good. See Bruce Bagemihl, *Biological Exuberance: Animal Homosexuality and Natural Diversity* (New York: Macmillan, 1999).

[10] The statement, qtd. in See, *Queer Natures*, 25, originally appears in Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 207. It reads, in full, "It has long been known that in the vertebrate kingdom one sex bears rudiments of various accessory parts, appertaining to the reproductive system, which properly belong to the opposite sex; and it has now been ascertained that at a very early embryonic period both sexes possess true male and female glands. Hence some remote progenitor of the whole vertebrate kingdom appears to have been hermaphrodite or androgynous."

[11] See, *Queer Natures*, 25; Darwin, *Origin*, 62–65.

[12] Darwin, *Origin*, 69.

[13] Darwin, *Descent*, 256.

[14] Darwin, *Origin*, 69.

[15] Looby and North, introduction to See, *Queer Natures*, 3; italics added.

[16] Charles Darwin, "Sexual Selection in Relation to Monkeys," *Nature* 15 (November 2, 1876): 19.

[17] Darwin, "Sexual Selection in Relation to Monkeys," 19.

[18] Darwin, *Origin*, 62, 69.

[19] See, *Queer Natures*, 14.

[20] See, *Queer Natures*, 14.

[21] Looby and North, introduction to See, *Queer Natures*, 4; See, *Queer Natures*, 14, 23. Readers of Sam See's "Bersani in Love," *The Henry James Review*, 32, no. 3 (2011): 195–203, will notice here additional evidence of Leo Bersani's influence on See. See's account of aesthetic and natural feeling echoes Bersani's definition of sexuality as "nonnarrative," "a sign of the mind's failure to account for, to find the terms adequate to, the body's experience" (*The Freudian Body* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1986], 66, 65). Bersani illustrates this definition by pointing out the "truth" of sexuality

revealed by the collapse of expository writing in Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (90). In *The Freudian Body*, Bersani reads Freud alongside modernist writers, and *as* a modernist writer, as does also Maud Ellmann in *The Nets of Modernism: Henry James, Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, and Sigmund Freud* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

[22] Elizabeth Grosz, *Time Travels: Feminism, Nature, Power* (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2005), 52.

[23] Grosz, *Time Travels*, 18. See also Elizabeth Grosz, *The Nick of Time: Politics, Evolution, and the Untimely* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 10, 25, 67.

[24] See, *Queer Natures*, 84n50. See also S. Pearl Brilmyer, "Darwinian Feminism," in *Gender: Matter*, ed. Stacy Alaimo (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017), 31.

[25] See, *Queer Natures*, 84n50.

[26] Elizabeth Grosz, "The Nature of Sexual Difference: Irigaray and Darwin," *Angelaki* 17, no. 2 (2012): 72.

[27] Grosz, "The Nature of Sexual Difference," 71.

[28] Grosz, "The Nature of Sexual Difference," 90.

[29] See, e.g. Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985); Luce Irigaray, *The Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).

[30] Grosz, *Time Travels*, 37.

[31] Grosz, *Time Travels*, 214.

[32] This three-pronged definition is liberally adapted from the critical literature on the pastoral as aesthetic and ideology, a survey of which begins with Terry Gifford, *Pastoral* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 1–12; Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1995), esp. 32.

[33] See, *Queer Natures*, 52, 81n32, 108.

[34] See Gifford, *Pastoral*, 3; Jedediah Purdy, *After Nature: A Politics for the Anthropocene* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015).

[35] For a sharp critique of the disavowal of negativity in queer theory's pastoralization of nature, see Steven Swarbrick, "Nature's Queer Negativity: Between Barad and Deleuze," *Postmodern Culture* 29, no. 2 (2019), doi: 10.1353/pmc.2019.0003.

[36] Richard Weikart, *From Darwin to Hitler: Evolutionary Ethics, Eugenics, and Racism in Germany* (New York: Palgrave, 2004), 3.

[37] Weikart, *From Darwin to Hitler*, 5.

[38] Robert J. Richards, *Was Hitler a Darwinian? Disputed Questions in the History of Evolutionary Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 8, 242, 240.

[39] While we are loath to draw citational attention to such discourses, for one prescient example, this child is the fantasized justification of anti-trans pundit Abigail Shrier's incendiary book *Irreversible Damage: The Transgender Craze Seducing Our Daughters* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 2020).

[40] See, *Queer Natures*, 31.

[41] See, *Queer Natures*, 33.

[42] See, *Queer Natures*, 28.

[43] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1990), 23.

[44] See, *Queer Natures*, 61.

[45] See, *Queer Natures*, 23.

[46] Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, volume 4 (Philadelphia: F.A. Davis, 1905), *v*.

[47] Ellis, *Studies*, *vi*. Interestingly, See proposes a substantially different reading of Ellis via Langston Hughes's admiration for the sexologist's work. Focusing on Ellis's concept for transvestism ("eonism"), which at one point the sexologist terms "sexo-aesthetic inversion," See writes, "Ellis held that cross-dressers . . . were distinguished by 'aesthetic emotion,' by 'the impulse to project themselves by sympathetic feeling into the object to which they are attracted, or the impulse of inner imitation.' . . . Ellis's association of gender performance and art through the locus of feeling suggests how cross-dressers, homosexual or not, might use the expressive form of 'imitation' to convey the 'essence' of their 'inner' feeling, an affect perhaps related to the androgynous body that Darwin associates with vertebrate evolution" (*Queer Natures*, 118). A tension arises from the mobilization of a sexological thinker who explicitly rejected the aesthetic aspect of sexual selection and an intriguing reading of transvestism as possibly grounding the "naturalness" of drag and trans femininity, something that would fascinatingly, as See points out, challenge the terms of the queer performative turn that would be ushered in by Judith Butler in the early 1990s.

[48] Darwin insists on the mediation of nature by human apprehension when he tells readers that "natural selection" is "no doubt" a "false term," one of many "metaphorical expressions" that are "necessary for brevity": "So again it is difficult to avoid personifying the word nature; but I mean by Nature, only the aggregate action and product of many natural laws, and by laws the sequence of events as ascertained by us" (*Origin*, 63).

[49] Joan Roughgarden, "Challenging Darwin's Theory of Sexual Selection," *Daedalus* (Spring 2007): 23–24.

[50] Roughgarden, "Challenging Darwin's Theory," 24.

[51] Roughgarden, "Challenging Darwin's Theory," 31, 33.

[52] Roughgarden, "Challenging Darwin's Theory," 28.

[53] Roughgarden, "Challenging Darwin's Theory," 26.

[54] Darwin, *Origin*, 90.

[55] Darwin, *Origin*, 93.

[56] As in, "in most cases it is scarcely possible to distinguish between the effects of natural and sexual selection" (Darwin, *Descent*, 257). This is, among other things, a problem of the limits of human knowledge and the partiality of conceptual distinctions like natural versus sexual selection, about which Darwin is very insistent: "Our ignorance of the laws of variation is profound" (*Origin*, 157).

[57] Grosz, in *The Nick of Time*, 84–88, offers what strikes us as a curious reading of race in Darwin's theory of sexual selection. Although she concludes that "Darwin's work may add some welcome layers of complexity to understanding the entwinement of relations of sexual and racial difference, which can no longer be considered either independent but crossing terms, or additive terms," she nevertheless makes the contradictory statement in the same sentence that "sexual selection, that is, relations of sexual difference, may have played a formative role in the establishment of racial differences," such that "Darwin provides an ironic and indirect confirmation of the Irigarayan postulation of the irreducibility of sexual difference and its capacity to play itself out in all races and across all modes of racial difference" (19). This reduction of racial difference to a derivative effect of sexual difference, also evident in *Time Travels*, 23–25, seems to get matters backward. If for Darwin, as we elaborate in the present section of this essay, sexual selection is a nonaccumulative strategy that emerged accidentally and over time out of natural selection, the primary natural vehicle of variation (i.e., the phenotypical differences that constitute Darwin's loose employment of the term "races" for plants and animals, not just for humans as Grosz puts it), then it is quite clear that Darwin means to imply that sex emerges out of racial difference, not the other way around.

[58] See, *Queer Natures*, 125–126.

[59] Darwin, *Origin*, 53.

[60] Darwin, *Origin*, 199.

[61] The concept of the "secondary sexual characters," which Darwin takes from the English physician John Hunter, is his prized example: "secondary sexual characters are highly variable . . . species of the same group differ from each other more widely in their secondary sexual characters, than in other parts of their organization" (*Origin*, 148). Importantly, these secondary characteristics form the central object of the sexological interrogation of "inversion" (homosexuality and transvestism) in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In *Descent*, Darwin couches his general discussion of human sexual variation through comparisons amongst primates *and* "primitive" human cultures, calling on a great deal of colonial reportage and concluding that "[t]he secondary sexual characters of man are all highly variable, even within the limits of the same race or sub-species; and they differ much in the several races" (320). He is particularly fascinated by the fact that many non-European cultures apparently regard white skin as ugly, rather than inherently noble and therefore beautiful (347).

[62] See, e.g., Jules Gill-Peterson, *Histories of the Transgender Child* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018); Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, *Becoming Human: Matter and Meaning in an Antiblack World* (New York: New York University Press, 2020); Banu Subramaniam, *Holy Science: The Biopolitics of Hindu Nationalism* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2019).

[63] In fact, some scholars working in a Foucauldian tradition of discourse analysis have more successfully detached sexuality from morality. For instance, Kadji Amin, in "We Are All Nonbinary: A Brief History of Accidents," *Representations* 158, no. 1 (2022), extrapolates from Judith Butler's early work on the idealization of heterosexuality an account of nonbinary identity's stratospheric rise in the twenty-first century (see Judith Butler, "Afterword," in *Butch/Femme: Inside Lesbian Gender*,

ed. Sally Munt [London: Cassell, 1998], 22). "Just as homosexuality birthed an idealized heterosexuality and transgender birthed an idealized cisgender," Amin offers, "nonbinary has birthed an idealized binary identification as its (ironically, binary) opposite. If a nonbinary person identifies as neither man nor woman, a binary person not only *does* identify as a man or woman, but they (by connotation) do so in a 'binary' way, that is, without any cross-gender feelings or identifications" (114). In this context, nonbinary gender becomes the federative catch-all for those whose relation to the category of *woman* or *man* is not devoid of "rub," "ambivalence," or "sense of constraint"—as if this relation proved frictionless for those whose identities were legible through the lens of transgender or cisgender (114). Amin deflates the triumphalist narrative that locates nonbinary as the outcome of gradual gender enlightenment. Emptied of moral content, nonbinary is but a product of historical accidents that may be condensed as a discursive shift from gender variance as social (transition) to gender variance as personal (identification [115]).

[64] Greta LaFleur, *The Natural History of Sexuality in Early America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018), 10.

[65] Jean-Thomas Tremblay, "No More Nature: On Ecopoetics in the Anthropocene," *Los Angeles Review of Books*, June 24, 2018, https://www.lareviewofbooks.org/article/no-more-nature-on-ecopoetics-in-the-anthropocene/. A survey of the literary branch of environmental studies and its objects, ecopoetics and climate fiction (kept apart by the market imperatives driving the publishing industry and by disciplinary partitions that call back to a time when there were *poetry* jobs and *fiction* jobs in literary studies), begins with Margaret Ronda, *Remainders: American Poetry at Nature's End* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018); Lynn Keller, *Recomposing Ecopoetics: North American Poetry of the Self-Conscious Anthropocene* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2018); Angela Hume and Gillian Osborne, eds., *Ecopoetics: Essays in the Field* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2018); Adam Trexler, *Anthropocene Fictions: The Novel in a Time of Climate Change* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2015); Tobias Menely and Jesse Oak Taylor, eds., *Anthropocene Reading: Literary History in Geologic Times* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2017).

[66] Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 4.

[67] Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, 98.

[68] Ruth DeFries, *What Would Nature Do? A Guide for Uncertain Times* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021), 119. DeFries argues, for example, "Diversity has provided a portfolio of options for life to persist for billions of years. It brings insurance to recover after a fall. Investors discovered over time the value of diversity for their bottom lines" (81).

[69] A professor of sustainable development, DeFries takes only limited responsibility for her own unwillingness to meet ecologies on terms that exceed their economic value: "One can question whether unfettered capitalism results in the most desirable distributions of basic necessities to the world's population. But indeed, the truth of Adam Smith's marketplace—and evolution's experience that bottom-up self-organization wins out over top-down command and control—has proven itself out over time as centrally planned economies mire in outdated technologies, waste, and inefficiencies" (*What Would Nature Do?*, 138). DeFries prioritizes the term *nature*, but throughout her book—a book, we should specify, that targets a broad audience potentially unfamiliar with nomenclatural debates in environmental studies—focuses on the relations of interconnection and interdependence we associate with ecology.

[70] Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, "The Case for Conserving Disability," *Bioethical Inquiry* 9 (2012): 339–355.

[71] Garland-Thomson, "The Case for Conserving Disability," 341.

[72] Garland-Thomson, "The Case for Conserving Disability," 349.

[73] Garland-Thomson, "The Case for Conserving Disability," 350, 349.

[74] Garland-Thomson, "The Case for Conserving Disability," 350.

[75] Garland-Thomson, "The Case for Conserving Disability," 349.

[76] Alexis Shotwell, *Against Purity: Living Ethically in Compromised Times* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 3.

[77] Shotwell, *Against Purity*, 15.

[78] Shotwell, *Against Purity*, 15.

[79] Shotwell, *Against Purity*, 12.

[80] Shotwell, *Against Purity*, 5.

[81] Gayle Rubin, *Deviations* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 149.

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The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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