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‘And Eden from the Chaos rose’: utopian order and rebellion in the Oxford Physick Garden

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ABSTRACT
Abel Evans’s poem *Vertumnus* (1713) celebrates Jacob Bobart the Younger, second keeper of the Oxford Physick Garden (now the Oxford University Botanic Garden), as a model monarch to his botanical subjects. This paper takes *Vertumnus* as a point of departure from which to explore the early history of the Physick Garden (founded 1621), situating botanical collections and collecting spaces within utopian visions and projects as well as debates about order more widely in the turbulent seventeenth-century. Three perspectives on the Physick Garden as an ordered collection are explored: the architecture of the quadripartite Garden, with particular attention to the iconography of the Danby Gate; the particular challenges involved in managing living collections, whose survival depends on the spatial order regulating the microclimates in which they grow; and the taxonomic ordering associated with the *hortus siccus* collections. A final section on the ideal ‘Botanick throne’ focuses on the metaphor of the state as a garden in the period, as human and botanical subjects resist being order and can rebel, but also respond to right rule and wise cultivation. However, the political metaphor is Evans’s; there is little to suggest that Bobart himself was driven by utopian, theological and political visions.

Thank Heav’n! at Last our Wars are o’er;
We’re very Wise, and very Poor:
All our Campaigns at once are done;
We’ve Ended where we just Begun,
In Perfect PEACE: Long may it last!
And Pay for all the Taxes past1

Abel Evans, *Vertumnus*

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1 Able Evans, *Vertumnus: An Epistle to Mr. Jacob Bobart, Botany Professor to the University of Oxford and Keeper of the Physick-Garden (Oxford, 1713)*, p. 3. *Vertumnus* refers to the Roman god of the changing seasons and of gardens.
These are the opening lines of *Vertumnus* (1713), a poem by Abel Evans in honour of Jacob Bobart the Younger, who followed his father as the second Keeper of the Oxford Physic Garden (now the Botanic Garden). The poem celebrates the garden as a well-proportioned place of peace and order, presenting Bobart as a model monarch ruling with skill and wisdom over his kingdom, the Kingdom of Plants. Thus Evans presents the Physic Garden as a utopian kingdom or model of order, simultaneously a politicized space and a retreat from the ravages of war. While the focus is on Bobart the Younger’s skill as a gardener, Evans also emphasizes the history of the building and planting of the garden, founded by the Earl of Danby in 1621. In this way, *Vertumnus* provides a useful vantage point from which to reflect over the first century of the Physic Garden, a period of intense experimentation and collecting, particularly in relation to early scientific institutions such as the Royal Society (1660) and the Oxford Philosophical Society before it. As in Emma Spary’s detailed account of the Jardin du Roi during the French Revolution, this Garden was also a contested space of both natural and political order during a crisis of monarchy and the creation of new political structures. However, unlike its French counterpart, the monarchy in England was restored and continued to affect the ways in which the Physick Garden was used to represent ideal order.

The early history of the Physick Garden (1621 to the publication of *Vertumnus* in 1713) maps on to a tumultuous century of Stuart reign (1603–1714), marked by the Civil Wars, rebellions, and fears of plague, invasion and apocalypse. Order was desperately sought after and deeply contested. Evans was writing as a Tory for whom Whigs represented chaos and disorder, in response to a crisis with its roots in the turmoil of the previous century. Relief over the long-awaited end of the War of Spanish Succession was tempered by the raging wars of party and Queen Anne’s lack of an heir just a year before her death drew the curtain on the Stuart dynasty. This paper takes *Vertumnus* as a point of departure to explore the Physick Garden as a utopian model of order, considering how order was sought in the world of plants through confinement and confined collecting spaces. These spaces were central to both utopian texts and utopian projects in the early modern period, implicated in wider debates about order including the political, theological, linguistic, poetic and philosophical.

The discovery of new worlds and new plants in the early modern period required new mental and physical spaces and structures to accommodate them; for almost everyone, these were encountered through various kinds of collections (cabinets, gardens, books, and perhaps also the globe as composite space). Utopia is one such space. Sir Thomas More coined the word ‘utopia’ to name the island described in his fictitious travel account *Utopia* (1516), combining ‘no place’ and ‘good place’, a fiction masquerading as fact in an anxiety

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2Emma C. Spary, *Utopia’s Garden: French Natural History from Old Regime to Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).
over how to recognize truth encountered second-hand and out of context. The creation of the ordered Utopian society depends upon the creation of the island itself from a peninsula: the reformation of the land and of the ‘rude and wild’ people goes hand in hand.

Howbeit, as they say and as the fashion of the place doth partly show, it was not ever compassed about with the sea. But King Utopus … which also brought the rude and wild people to that excellent perfection in all good fashions, humanity, and civil gentleness, wherein they now go beyond all the people of the world, even at his first arriving and entering upon the land, forthwith obtaining the victory, caused fifteen miles space of uplandish ground, where the sea had no passage, to be cut and digged up. And so brought the sea round about the land.3

_Utopia_ was immensely popular, generating a recognizable genre by the time Sir Francis Bacon’s New Atlantis was published (posthumously) in 1627. In his analysis of ‘Utopia, Science and Garden Art in the Early Modern Era’, Hubertus Fischer highlights the ‘island character’ as ‘the prerequisite for all spatial utopias from More to Bacon’.4 Bacon’s utopian society is even more remote and restricted: the only ones allowed to leave the island are the members of the ideal institution Solomon’s House, who collect knowledge and goods from the rest of the world. Solomon’s House, and Bacon’s experimental method on which it was based, became increasingly influential in the second half of the seventeenth century, reflected in texts such as Gabriel Platte’s _A Description of the Famous Kindome of Macaria_ (1641) and Francis Lodwick’s _A Country not Named_ (manuscript, c. 1675).5 Both the Royal Society (1660) and the Ashmolean Museum (1683) in Oxford self-consciously modelled themselves on it. Utopia was by this time not simply a literary genre, but a wide range of projects and practices including the reform of knowledge, language, nature and society through collecting, ordering and naming.

Behind every collection is a collector, so that the order of that little world is a reflection of the state of the collector’s mind. As ‘Man’s nature is mutable and frail’, it can and must be restrained and cultivated by a just king, just as plants are protected, pruned and tended by the gardener. Debates about order in seventeenth-century England were mainly formulated in terms of the relationship between constraint and freedom, reflecting different perceptions of the human condition and the state of nature. Was nature chaotic and random, as the Epicurians believed, or was it ordered as a reflection of divine

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3 Thomas More, ‘Utopia’, in _Three Early Modern Utopias: Utopia, New Atlantis, the Isle of Pines_, ed. by Susan Bruce (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 50. More’s original Latin text was first translated into English by Ralph Robinson in 1551 (with further editions in 1556, 1597 and 1624), with a new translation by Gilbert Burnet (1684) published contemporary to the concerns of this paper.

4 Hubertus Fischer, ‘Utopia, Science and Garden Art in the Early Modern Era’, in _Gardens, Knowledge and the Sciences in the Early Modern Period_, ed. by Volker R. Remmert Hubertus Fischer and Joachim Wolschke-Bulmahn (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2016), p. 170.

5 Lodwick’s manuscript was first published in 2007: Francis Lodwick (1619/1694) _a country not named_ (MS. Sloane 913, Fols. 1r/33r): _an edition with an annotated primary bibliography and an introductory essay on Lodwick and his intellectual context_, ed. by William Poole (Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2007).
creation? Was nature in a state of decay, itself thrown into chaos by the fall of Adam and Eve, or was it ordered still but beyond the perception and comprehension of the limited post-lapsarian man? In particular in the context of the Civil Wars, these debates became implicated in struggles over the nature of kingship, as natural, divinely sanctioned, a necessary evil or a form of bondage. When it came to plants, were they stable ‘loyal’ subjects, receptive to royal order, or mutable and rebellious?

Ordering the natural world in the seventeenth century was necessarily political, although the exact inter-referencing and nuances of these debates about order are not always easy to establish retrospectively. The microcosm of the collection was a well-suited mirror of the disruption or restoration of order writ large, resisting easy distinctions between literal and metaphorical interpretations. This paper explores different facets of one particular set of collections, the Oxford Physick Garden, as represented retrospectively through Vertumnus. Beginning with the building of the garden, its walls and gates, the collecting space presents a monument of order that took on Royalist associations. Within the walls, the challenges of ordering living collections of plants is explored, particularly in relation to microclimates, before looking in more detail at botanical classification projects associated with the Bobarts and their herbaria. A final discussion explores the implications of the ‘Botanick throne’ in Vertumnus, conflating vegetable and human subjects, against seventeenth-century debates about monarchical order.

1. The walled garden

’Twas Gen’rous DANBY first enclos’d
The Waste, and in Parterres dispos’d;
Transform’d the Fashion of the Ground,
And Fenc’d it with a Rocky Mound;
The Figure disproportion’d chang’d
Trees, Shrubs, and Plants in Order rang’d;
Stock’d it, with such excessive Store,
Only the spacious Earth has more:
At His Command the Plat was chose,
And Eden from the Chaos rose:
Confusion in a Moment fle’d,
And Roses blush’d where Thistles bred.6

Vertumnus presents an origin story for the Physick Garden, combining poetic convention and historical reference, replicating in microcosm the creation of the earth itself. The Physick Garden was founded in 1621 by Henry Danvers, later elevated to the Earl of Danby (1626) for his services to Charles I. The chosen plot was outside the old city walls opposite Magdalene College (from which it was leased) and beside the Cherwell River, the site of a former cemetery

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6Evans, Vertumnus.
first for the Jewish community and then for St John’s Hospital.\(^7\) Due to the risk of flooding, the land had to be raised before the building could begin, which proved to be an expensive, lengthy, and labour-intensive process.\(^8\) It would take over a decade before the walls were built, and two decades before the first Keeper Jacob Bobart the Elder was appointed in 1642.\(^9\)

The walls and gates of the garden were built on a grand scale by Nicholas Stone, master-mason to James I and Charles I, who was working on Danby’s Cornbury Park near Oxford. Evans mentions Stone only indirectly as ‘Jones’s Master-Hand: /Jones, the Vitruvius of our Land’, referring to Inigo Jones whose fame as the leading architect in England was strongly associated with displays of royal power such as court masques.\(^10\) Stone must have been particularly suited to the task of building the garden on a flood-prone site, as he learned the trade as an apprentice in Amsterdam, at the forefront of both gardening and water-engineering. When considering how the garden functions as a monument of order, it is worth noting that Stone was particularly well-regarded for his funeral monuments, for instance of Thomas Bodley in the Merton College Chapel.

The northern Danby Gate is the largest and most ornate, honouring both the Garden’s founder and his king. While the interpretation as a monument to Danby is fairly straightforward, however, the associations with royal power are less certain. The inscription on the gate reads:

GLORIAE DEI OPT. MAX. / HONORI CAROLI REGIS / IN VSVM ACAD. & REIPVB HENRICVS / COMES DANBY / DD. MDCXXXII.

To the glory of God and the greatest honour of King Charles I, for the use of the University and the state, Henry Earl of Danby, year 1632.

This dedication is an expression of the patronage which enabled much intellectual production at the time, both celebrating Charles I’s patronage towards Danby and celebrating Danby as patron of the garden. Although it was a university institution, Danby regarded the garden very much as his own and was anxious for its provision after his death.\(^11\) Indeed, these associations persisted

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\(^7\) A commemorative stone in front of the garden honours the memory of those buried at the site, which was a medieval cemetery for the Jews of Oxford from the late twelfth century until it was appropriated by the Hospital of St John in 1231, followed by the expulsion of the Jews in the late thirteenth century.

\(^8\) Chandra Mukerji describes the Potager du Roi at Versailles as a fortress, with the walls reflecting a ‘view of gardening as an exercise of power equivalent to the military use of force’. Chandra Mukerji, ‘The Power of the Sun-King at the Potager Du Roi’, in Gardens, Knowledge and the Sciences in the Early Modern Period, ed. by Volker R. Remmert Hubertus Fischer and Joachim Wolschke-Bulmahn (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2016), p. 62.

\(^9\) For all intents and purposes, Bobart the Elder was the first Keeper. Danby first appointed the famous John Tradescant the Elder, who is commonly thought to have died before he had time to start working in the garden. According Jennifer Potter, however, Tradescant actually had time to take up his post. Jennifer Potter, Strange Blooms: The Curious Lives and Adventures of the John Tradescants (London: Atlantic Books, 2006).

\(^10\) There is some confusion concerning who designed the gate. Attributions to Jones have been dismissed by, for instance, Jennifer Sherwood and Nikolaus Pevsner, The Buildings of England: Oxfordshire (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), p. 267.

\(^11\) Vernon J. Watney, Cornbury and the Forest of Wychwood (printed privately by Hartchards, London, 1910), p. 116.
particularly in relation to the Danby Gate, from the top of which his bust still
oversees the comings and goings of the garden.

He drew the Plan, the Fabrick fix’d,
With equal Strength, and Beauty mix’d:
With perfect Symmetry design’d;
Consummate, like the Donor’s Mind.12

By describing the building and garden as a reflection of Danby’s mind, Evans
is following the conventions of seventeenth-century country house poems. For
instance Andrew Marvell had honoured his employer Lord Fairfax, the
general of Cromwell’s army by praising the humble dimensions of his home
Appleton House: ‘all things are composed here/like nature, orderly and near; /
In which we the dimensions find / Of that more sober age and mind’ (ll. 25–
28).13 This was portrayed as spiritually superior to the grandiose mansions of
some of his contemporaries such as Lord Clarendon whom he would go on to
satirize scathingly. ‘Why should of all things man unrul’d/Such unproportion’d
 dwellings build?’ (l. 10) While Evans celebrates the ‘strength’, ‘beauty’ and
‘perfect symmetry’ of the Danby gate and the proportion of the garden, there
is no criticism of exaggerated expense or opulence. In the context of the early
eighteenth century, this must be read against the very public criticisms against
the huge expenses incurred in the building of Blenheim Palace near Oxford,
with direct links to the Physick Garden and the political landscape of 1713.
The estate had been awarded to the Duke of Marlborough, commander of the
British Army, for his decisive role in the victorious Battle of Blenheim in
1704, when his wife Sarah Jennings was one of Queen Anne’s closest associates.
Bobart’s younger half-brother Tilleman was in charge of establishing the gardens
at Blenheim, while helping his aging brother with the Physick Garden, and cele-
brated Marlborough’s victory by planting elm trees in the battle formation of his
battalion.14 By 1713, however, the Duke and Duchess had fallen from grace,
captured in the wars of party at home and the ongoing wars on the continent.
The vast sums poured into building the still unfinished Blenheim Palace had
made it an object of ridicule associated with the exorbitant costs of war paid
for by the ‘taxes past’ that Evans mentions at the beginning of *Vertumnus*.15

12Evans, *Vertumnus*.
13Andrew Marvell, ‘Upon Appleton House’, in *Marvell: The Poems of Andrew Marvell*, ed. by Nigel Smith (Harlow:
 Pearson Longman, 2007).
14Robert T. Gunther, *Oxford Gardens* (Oxford: Parker and Son, 1912), p. 13.
15Evans was an associate of Alexander Pope, whose poem *Windsor-Forest* (published, like *Vertumnus*, in 1713) also
combine war and politics with a portrayal of natural order. Pat Rogers’ analysis of *Windsor-Forest* also provides
valuable insight to the context in which *Vertumnus* was written, although he does not discuss Evans’s poem
directly. Rogers argues that the omission of Blenheim and the Duke and Duchess of Marlborough from Pope’s
poem is deliberate and conspicuous. ‘English politics under Anne are inseparable from the Duke and Duchess
of Marlborough, the most powerful man and woman among the Queen’s subjects for most of her reign. Any
work of literature which dealt with the history of this period would inescapably run head-on into these two
figures’. Pat Rogers, *Pope and the Destiny of the Stuarts: History, Politics and Mythology in the Age of Queen
Anne* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 209.
In contrast with the associations of the Garden with Danby in the seventeenth and early eighteenth century, the royal dimensions are more uncertain and were more contested. On the whole, Oxford was staunchly loyal to the crown. It was the royalist stronghold during the first Civil War, and the Oxford Parliament was held at Christ Church College not far from the Physick Garden. However, Danby’s honouring of Charles I through his garden in 1621 must be seen as an expression of patronage, as royalism before the Civil Wars was more normative compared to the self-conscious identity it became when openly challenged. Equally, while there were disruptions to the funding and running of the Garden during the Civil War, Bobart the Elder not only continued planting; he even published the first catalogue (anonymously) in 1648. The Civil War did not divide allegiances along coherent ideologies of ‘Royalist’ and ‘Republican’ – rather, many were ambivalent and many changed sides. In this context, the ordered garden was not an exclusively royalist expression of power any more than writing poetry in rhyme declared the poet a royalist (after all, rhyme would remain the dominant form), but both forms became strongly associated with a distinctly royal approach to rule.

It seems that the garden became a royalist monument retrospectively, after the Civil War and the recurring challenges to the throne in the late seventeenth century. A satirical poem by William Hickes (1671) pokes fun at the alleged mistaken vandalism of the Danby Gate during the Civil War, entitled: ‘Upon the taking down of the Kings Arms at Oxford, in the time of the Rump, viz. 1649. who instead of plucking down them on the Gate of the Physick-Garden in Oxford, they were such excellent Heralds, that they pluckt down the Earl of Danby’s Arms, who was the Founder there’. It appears that the poem suggests an actual event, as the garden finances for 1660–1661 include bills ‘for mending King’s and Founder’s Arms over the Gate’. While this poem suggests that during the Civil War the garden became explicitly interpreted as a royalist monument, Hickes (like Evans over four decades later) continues the emphasis on the connection between the garden and its founder Danby.

16As Charles Webster has argued, university life was surprisingly resilient and continued largely unchanged despite the upheaval. Charles Webster, The Great Instauration: Science, Medicine and Reform 1626–1660 (London: Duckworth, 1975).
17Scott Mandelbrote, personal communication 2015-06-09. However, the first professor of botany at the Physic Garden, Robert Morison, clearly identified himself and was identified by others as a royalist. Morison had spent the Civil War in exile in France, after being injured for the royalist cause in 1639. He studied in Angers and Paris, before securing a position at the gardens of Blois. At the Restoration in 1660, when Charles II returned from exile, he invited Morison to be his royal physician. Thus his credentials and experience as a royal and royalist botanist were firmly established by the time he was appointed professor of botany at the Physick Garden in 1669.
18William Hickes, Grammatical drollery consisting of poems & songs wherein the rules of the nouns & verbs in the accendence are pleasantly made easy, for the benefit of any that delight in a tract of this nature (London, 1682). The ‘Rump’ was what was left of the Long Parliament, after the arrest of members who had wished to negotiate with Charles I.
19Gunther, Oxford Gardens, p. 175.
The hypothesis that the garden became more of a royalist monument retrospectively is further supported by the addition not only of a bust of Danby but of statues of Charles I and Charles II in 1692/3.\(^{20}\) This came after seven particularly turbulent years for the Stuart dynasty: Charles II had died (1685) leaving the crown to his Roman Catholic brother James II, who was challenged the same year by an illegitimate son of Charles II in the unsuccessful Monmouth Rebellion, and finally overthrown in the Glorious Revolution (1688) by his Protestant daughter Mary and her husband the Dutch William of Orange. The two statues are included in the engraving of the Danby Gate on the frontispiece of *Vertumnus*, along with the Elder Jacob Bobart (1599–1680) – not the Younger as one might expect for a poem in his honour – who had died almost a decade before the statues were added (Figure 1).\(^{21}\)

The frontispiece is a puzzling image. It is not only anachronistic, but mixes the realistic and emblematic. Various interpretations have been put forth for the physician’s staff, the goat and dog in front of the Danby Gate and the stork flying above it. Clare Le Corbeiller interprets the frontispiece within emblem traditions to suggest that the stork represents filial piety, in contrast to Karin Seeber’s historical reading of the stork as a reference to Bobart the Elder’s hometown Danzig.\(^{22}\) These associations with filial piety and the Bobarts’ family history raise the possibility that the absent Bobart the Younger could be represented in the figure of the stork. The interpretive openness of this image is an appropriate reflection of a period of the Garden’s history shaped by the overlap of different political and scientific paradigms, as the outward symbolic importance of the medical role of the garden did not fully reflect the horticultural, experimental and taxonomical pursuits within its walls.

Beyond the iconography of the Danby Gate, the precisely planned and neatly trimmed parterres and topiary within the garden walls resemble grander contemporary gardens such as the gardens of Versailles and Het Loo (William and Mary’s palace in the Netherlands) which were employed as expressions of legitimate or natural rule.\(^{23}\) Leading up to the Civil Wars, an expression of this could be seen in the gardens of New College just a stone’s throw from the

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\(^{20}\)The statues were funded by a libel fine paid by the antiquarian Anthony à Wood. Ibid., p. 2.

\(^{21}\)For an analysis of the iconography of the frontispiece, see Clare Le Corbeiller, *China Trade Porcelain: Patterns of Exchange: Additions to the Helena Woolworth McCann Collection in the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1974). Le Corbeiller suggests that Michael Burghers was the engraver, as he had also engraved Loggan’s portrait of Bobart the Elder and fine bird’s eye view of the garden (1675). If so, the inclusion of both Bobart the Elder and the statues suggests that recognisability was more important than historical accuracy, and that the two kings had become an integral part of the iconography of the Danby Gate.

\(^{22}\)Karin Seeber, ‘Jacob Bobart (1596–1680): First Keeper of the Oxford Physic Garden’, *Garden History* 41, no. 2 (2013), 278–84 (p. 280).

\(^{23}\)For Versailles, see for instance Chandra Mukerji, *Territorial Ambitions and the Gardens of Versailles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
Physick Garden: the four parterre quadrants included one laid out in Charles I’s ensign, alongside the College arms and a sundial. The layout of the parterres in the Physick Garden changed repeatedly within the yew-hedged and

Figure 1. Frontispiece of *Vertumnus*, showing the Danby Gate and Jacob Bobart the Elder. Bodleian Library, Oxford, Gough Oxon 109(1).

24Karin Seeber, “Ye Making of the Mount”: Oxford New College’s Mount Garden Revised’, *Garden History* 40, no. 1 (2012), 3–16.
geometrically precise quadrants, but there is no evidence of the garden being planted in such explicitly emblematic patterns. The layout of the Garden in David Loggan’s well-known engraving (Figure 2) published in *Oxonia Illustrata* (1675) shows two kinds of layout: geometric labyrinthine patterns, symmetrically reflected across the central path of the Garden, and long narrow botanical beds like the ones in the *Hortus Botanicus* in Leiden.

The garden not only regulated plants, but limited and regulated access for the public. The imposing walls and gate, along with yew hedges around the quadrants, formed several levels of defences to protect the plants from being stolen or damaged by a careless boot, all under the careful eye of the Keeper. A rule or ‘order’ against visitors ‘Meddling with any of the Numbers’ (i.e. the plants were numbered in the beds) suggests that the public was a disruptive element. Unlike the Merton College Fellows’ Garden, this was to be no place for amorous pursuits, but a rational place where chaste pleasures were enjoyed and knowledge sought in the ‘delightful scientifick shade’.

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25The role of topiary in royal propaganda is discussed by Giulia Pacini, ‘The Monarchy Shapes Up: Arboreal Metaphors in Royal Propaganda and Court Panegyrics During the Reign of Louis XV’, *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 39, no. 3 (2016).
26‘Orders for the Physic Garden’ included in Gunther, *Oxford Gardens*, p. 173.
27T. F. R. G. Braun, ‘The Fellows’ Garden until 1720’, *Postmaster: The Merton College Magazine*, Trinity 1985.
Loggan’s engraving, the geometric beds are arranged nearest the gate, as if creating a protective buffer between it and the botanical beds beyond. Just visible beyond the gate, two large warrior-like topiary yews can be seen standing guard, a common object of wit in the city inspiring several ballads. Like the walls and the gates, they were imposing and forbidding, described as providing protection for the plants inside.

2. Living collections

Once the ground had been raised and the walls completed, planting could begin. However, the upheavals of the Civil War behind the vandalism of the Danby Gate had a significant impact on how the garden was planted at the outset. With the Garden’s funds having been lavished on the building of the garden, particularly the walls and gate, Bobart the Elder had to cover the costs of running the garden by using it as a nursery and by selling fruit and other produce grown there. The ability to produce fruit out of season, for instance, was a prized and potentially profitable skill. Thus the Bobarts’ choice of plants reflects a pragmatism that should not be forgotten while considering other dimensions and meanings the garden might have had.

The best idea of what was grown in the garden is provided by the garden catalogues and herbaria, a rich resource which requires expert botanical knowledge to analyse. Stephen Harris, curator of the Oxford University Herbaria, has compared the contents of the two printed catalogues of 1648 and 1658, and a manuscript catalogue by Bobart the Younger from 1676, with the three herbaria associated with the Bobarts. As the catalogues were updated reflections of the living collections, they provide a rare glimpse into how the focus of the garden changed over almost three decades. By comparing the collections with contemporary publications on medical plants, Harris argues that the garden was not as medically oriented as some of its counterparts, and that this reflects an increasing interest in classification and experimentation.

The distinctive feature of the garden setting it apart from other forms of architectural monument, of course, is the plants. There are no surviving records of how the plants were arranged in the quadrants, which would otherwise provide clues as to how the garden was conceived of as an ordered space. However, we can gain an idea of possible arrangements from contemporary gardens. As Gregory Grämiger

28Gunther, Oxford Gardens, p. 189.
29In this and other respects, Evans’s poetic account resembles Francis Vernon’s earlier description of the Garden in Oxonium poema (1667). Within the regal, splendid walls (‘regalibus Hortus, Splendida quadrati jactat munimina muri’), he describes a wide range of fruits, trees and flowers (which like the stars are too many to count) and celebrates the garden as a source of healing for weakened nature and sickness.
30Stephen A. Harris, ‘Seventeenth-Century Plant Lists and Herbarium Collections: A Case Study from the Oxford Physic Garden’, Journal of the History of Collections, published electronically 8 June 2017, p. 5 of 14.
31As Robert Sharrock notes, Francis Bacon particularly valued the ‘Acceleration of Plants in their Germination and Maturity’. Robert Sharrock, The History of the Propagation & Improvement of Vegetables (Oxford, 1660), p. 129.
32Harris, ‘Seventeenth-Century Plant Lists’.
has shown in his analysis of the planting of the Leiden University Hortus Botanicus at the end of the sixteenth century, at least four ordering principles were used: alphabetical, medical, morphological/taxonomical and aesthetic.\textsuperscript{33} To some extent these represented competing agendas, and the plants were rearranged repeatedly. Grämiger raises the possibility of an arrangement ‘according to their natural habitat or geographical origins’, but does not discuss it further on the grounds that ‘[a]t least, such orders have not yet been found’.\textsuperscript{34} However, the content of collections such as those of the Oxford Physick Garden would have required at least some arrangement according to geographic provenance, in order for specialized plants such as ‘exoticks’ or marsh plants to survive.

Evans emphasizes the vast scope of the collection – ‘All Plants which Europe’s Fields contain;/ For Health, for Pleasure, or for Pain’ – and their orderly arrangement:

Trees, Shrubs, and Plants in Order rang’d;
Stock’d it, with such excessive Store,
Only the spacious Earth has more:\textsuperscript{35}

This hyperbole was to some extent a poetic convention – commendatory poems in herbals such as John Parkinson’s (and John Gerard’s) praise the collections as surpassing predecessors in scope and accuracy, often comparing the author to Biblical models such as Adam, Noah and Solomon.\textsuperscript{36} Similar tropes are found in the commendatory poems to the second catalogue published for the Oxford Garden in 1658 by Philip Stephens and William Browne (the 1648 catalogue was a smaller and more modest volume). One of the poems conflates the catalogue with a garden and Noah’s Ark: ‘Thus as the species of all creatures were gathered together into the Arke, comprehended as in an Epitome, so you have the plants of most parts of the world, contained in this garden where they are preserved for thy inspection’. Rather like the Danby Gate through which the visitor entered the garden, the preface and poems in the beginning of the 1658 catalogue declared the importance and legitimacy of the botanical content within. Both enforced visible order (through the enclosed geometric space or through alphabetical lists) that does not require learning in botany to be recognized as such.\textsuperscript{37} The patronage, symbolism, and ornament were celebrations of the order within.

\textsuperscript{33}Gregory Grämiger, ‘Reconstructing Order: The Spatial Arrangements of Plants in the Hortus Botanicus of Leiden University in Its First Years’, in Gardens, Knowledge and the Sciences in the Early Modern Period, ed. by Volker R. Remmert, Hubertus Fischer and Joachim Wolschke-Bulmahn (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2016).

\textsuperscript{34}Ibid., p. 249.

\textsuperscript{35}Evans, Vertumnus.

\textsuperscript{36}Jack Arthur Walter Bennett and Scott Mandelbrote, The Garden, the Ark, the Tower, the Temple: Biblical Metaphors of Knowledge in Early Modern Europe (Oxford: Museum of the History of Science in association with the Bodleian Library, 1998).

\textsuperscript{37}The prefatory poem as a porch was a common conceit. See for instance the mystic Jane Leade’s, A fountain of gardens watered by the rivers of divine pleasure, and springing up in all variety of spiritual plants, blown up by the pure breath into a paradise: to which is prefixed a poem, introductory to the Philadelphian Age, called Solomons porch, or The beautiful gate to wisdoms temple.
While *Vertumnus* describes the architecture of the garden as a tribute to Danby, the collection of plants are Bobart’s domain, evidence of his knowledge and skill. He is presented as a model monarch for the way in which he rules his vegetable subjects, rendering him worthy of the ‘Botanick throne’. Bobart takes great care in protecting his botanical subjects from both the enemies of winter and some intruder who might ‘With Impious Steel to wound the Wood’, ‘Prophanely’ defoliate or steal them.

There ’tis we see Thee, BOBART, tend
Thy fav’rite Greens; from Harms defend
Exotick Plants, which finely Bred
In softer Soils, Thy succour need

Against both the enemies of winter and intruders, protection is provided by the closed protective structures of the conservatory and the garden walls. Thus, both in its architecture and in Bobart’s role as Keeper, the Garden reflects the integrated roles of power, protection and order.

Ev’n THOU! tho’ that’s thy meanest Praise,
Nor Fruits, nor Flow’rs cou’dst hope to raise;
*(Howe’er thou may’st in Order place,*
Of Both, the Latter, Earlier Race;
In Glasses, or in Sheds confin’d,
To shield them from the Wintry Wind;
Or, in the Spring, with skilful Care,
Place ’em his influence best to share;)
Did not the SUn, their Genial Sire,
The Vegetative Soul inspire

Bobart’s care was spatially oriented: placing the plants in the right order in the confined space of the greenhouse, protecting them from the wind, and placing them in sunlight. He was well respected as an authority on exotic plants, as in the following discourse in the Royal Society’s *Philosophical Transactions*: ‘A Discourse Concerning the Effects of the Great Frost, on Trees and Other Plants Anno 1683. Drawn from the Answers to Some Queries Sent into Divers Countries by Dr. Rob. Plot S. R. S. and from Several Observations Made at Oxford, by the Skilful Botanist Mr. Jacob Bobart’.40 Robert Plot was the first Keeper of the Ashmolean Museum, where he was the driving force behind the Oxford Philosophical Society, and he served as both secretary of the Royal Society and joint secretary of the *Philosophical Transactions*.41 The ‘Discourse’ itself follows the two parts described in the title, so it is

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38Evans, *Vertumnus*.
39Ibid., p. 11 (Bold emphasis added.)
40Robert Plot and Jacob Bobart, ‘A Discourse Concerning the Effects of the Great Frost, on Trees and Other Plants Anno 1683’, *Philosophical Transactions* (1684). The winters were particularly harsh in the mid-17th century.
41Plot sent out these queries as part of an investigation initiated at one of the newly formed Oxford Philosophical Society’s early meetings, held in the Ashmolean Museum of which he was the first Keeper. See Robert T. Gunther, *Oxford Colleges and Their Men of Science*, vol. 11 of *Early Science in Oxford* (Oxford, 1937), pp. 209–10.
quite clear that the second half concerning gardens is to be attributed to Bobart. He says of gardens that they ‘generally are Nurseries of Exoticks, and from warm Countries’, which matches the focus on exotic plants in *Ver- tumnus*. The gardener’s measures against the cold winters are described in terms of defences against an enemy, and the struggling plants as patients that need special treatments:

… Spring, when the prudence and care of the Gardener is especially tried, gradually to help and recover his sick Patients, sometimes by due trimming, earthing with fresh sustenance, loosening the strait bound earth, and sometimes with the help of a warm bed, and gentle watering and shadowing and the like, patiently and carefully waiting till the return of the bounty of the Heavens to help his endeavors.42

Whether or not Evans was familiar with this text, they share a focus on exotics and shielding plants with ‘skill, care and due management’ through the winter with the help of ‘Pots and Cases for the convenience of removing them into Green-houses and conservatories’.43

As this publication in the *Philosophical Transactions* reflects, the gardener could speak from a position of authority on matters of natural philosophy. In Fischer’s analysis of the gardens in the utopia *Christianopolis*, in which the well-stocked and ordered beds “represent a living herbarium”, the author ‘ascribes the decisive authority to the gardener – as a botanist (with knowledge of flora) and designer.’44 Bobart’s skill was largely gained through experience and experimentation, a central characteristic of Baconian science and of Salomon’s House. Robert Sharrock, a Fellow and Librarian of New College, conducted experiments on plants himself described in *The history of the propogation and improvement of vegetables by the concurrence of art and nature* (1660). Sharrock was a proponent of the experimental method, which is clear in the dedication to Robert Boyle, and the consistent references to his own experience as opposed to relying blindly on printed authorities (like the Royal Society motto: *nullius in verba*, not on the authority of words).45 Sharrock repeatedly refers to the authority of Bobart the Elder (occasionally alongside his son). Having quoted Virgil, ‘All Grounds can’t all things bear’ (135), he describes ‘how to make an artificial bog’ (136): ‘Of this sort, in our Physick Garden here in Oxford, we have one artificially made by Mr. Bobart, for the preservation of Boggy Plants, where being sometimes watered, they thrive as well as in their natural places’.46 Similarly, in *Ver- tumnus*, exoticks thrive under Bobart’s care, ‘Grow strong, increase, their Verdure hold,/ As dwelling in their native Mold’. In their rooted nature,

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42Ibid., p. 787.
43Ibid., p. 786.
44Fischer, ‘Utopia, Science and Garden Art’, p. 174.
45This was suggested by John Evelyn, who was working on a monumental universal treatise on gardening, *Elysium Britannicum*, that was never published.
46Robert Sharrock, *The History of the Propagation & Improvement of Vegetables* (Oxford, 1660), p. 136.
plants were particularly connected to place, formed by the soil and other environmental conditions in which they grew.47

The idea of extending the growing season and acclimatising plants from tropical climates was not only a pragmatic approach, but was a logical pursuit when considered in light of the belief held by some in the second half of the seventeenth century that the world was initially created in a state of perpetual spring disrupted by the flood. In this sense raising the ground to prevent flooding and creating tropical microclimates in the Physick Garden was in a material sense a recreation of Eden. The garden was a space in which to examine big questions vexing natural historians, such as what a species is, and what the relationship is between a species and its environment or ‘climate’. On the one hand, this relationship was understood to be stable reflecting geographic and climatic conditions as regionally specific and fixed, yet as Lydia Barnett argues, the idea that the world and its inhabitants had degenerated since their original creation entailed that climate could change as a punishment for sin.48 By extension, in the microcosm of the garden, this degeneration could be reversed. At the same time, gardeners did not only reproduce the growing conditions of a plant’s ‘native Mold’, but actively manipulated plants in order to create new and ever more curious varieties: double flowers, striped or variegated petals, and larger plants. What were the limits of human creation? John Ray was very clear on this point: species were created according to divine wisdom at the dawn of time, emerging with fixed limits from what he called ‘seminal principles’. Any changes humans could achieve by, for instance, manipulating the soil and other growing conditions were limited and could only ever produce varieties.49 Ray’s insistence on human limitations also applied to classification, as he believed that the infinite variety of creation could only be fully known to the divine and infinite Creator. In studying creation as an expression of God’s providential wisdom and power – God’s other book – Ray argued against epicurean ideas about nature as emerging from chaos by chance. This approach was shared by his contemporaries Thomas Browne, John Evelyn and Robert Sharrock.50 Thus studying the garden raised questions about the very nature of the universe and man’s role in it.

47Bobart’s equivalent in Uppsala, Olof Rudbeck the Elder, gives a clear expression of the sheer hard work and perseverance needed to grow plants ‘from all parts of the world’ (‘ifrån alla werdsens delar’) is found in the letter to the reader in the garden catalogue, Catalogus Plantarum… (Uppsala, 1685). Rudbeck goes on to list several pages worth of the diversity of specific requirements of different plants. Rudbeck is an important figure in the intersection of botany and utopia, as he argued in the four volume long Atlantica (1677–1702) that Sweden was the lost Atlantis and Swedish the original Edenic language.

48Lydia Barnett, ‘The Theology of Climate Change: Sin as Agency in the Enlightenment’s Anthropocene’, Environmental History 20, no. 2 (2015).

49John Ray, ‘A Discourse on the Particular Differences of Plants’, Letter read to the Royal Society in 1674. For Ray and his contemporaries’ debates about the creation of the world, see William Poole, The World Makers: Scientists of the Restoration and the Search for the Origins of the Earth (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010).

50For a discussion on John Evelyn conflicted interest in neo-Epicurianism, see Michael Leslie, ‘“Without Design, or Fate, or Force”: Why Couldn’t John Evelyn Complete the Elysium Britannicum?’, in Gardens, Knowledge and the Sciences in the Early Modern Period, ed. by Volker R. Remmert, Hubertus Fischer and Joachim Wolschke-Bulmahn (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2016).
3. *Hortus Siccus* and the legible garden

While the previous section focused on the spatial arrangement of the living plants in the garden, this section focuses on the *hortus siccus* (an early modern bound herbarium) and linguistic order. Unlike the garden or indeed the catalogues, which both had public roles, the *hortus siccus* was very much an internal collection with limited access. It appears that the *hortus siccus* was not well known outside botanical circles, as Evans includes a footnote explaining: ‘A Hortus Siccus is a Collection of Plants, pasted upon Paper, and kept Dry in a Book’.\(^{51}\) When Evans describes the garden as an ordered space, he focuses on the performativity of order in the survival of the plants rather than the legibility of ordered nature. He does not compare Bobart to Adam the name-giver, or employ the common trope of the book of nature. However, he does emphasize the importance of the *hortus siccus*, a considerable undertaking in labour, cost and sheer size. It is described as a sort of cemetery of exotic plants that do not survive the English climate (for Bobart’s skill and care are to no avail without the help of the sun):

> Of these, at least, since Nature more,  
> Denies t’encease thy living Store,-  
> Their Barks, or Roots, their Flow’rs, or Leaves,  
> Thy Hortus Siccus still receives:  
> In Tomes twice Ten, that Work immense!  
> By Thee compil’d at vast Expence;  
> With utmost Diligence amass’d,  
> And shall as many Ages last.\(^{52}\)

Unlike the vulnerability of the plants growing in the garden, the dried plants are fixed in time – another instance of Bobart’s care and skill in preserving plants, whether dried or alive. Thus even plants whose death could be seen as a form of rebellion are incorporated into a more permanent collection.

To testify to the permanence of this collection, there are three surviving herbaria connected to the Jacob Bobarts.\(^{53}\) These connect the Bobarts (notably the Younger) to the most prominent pre-Linnaean botanical classification projects in England, particularly the competition between John Ray and Robert Morison. Bobart the Younger’s role in Morison’s publications makes clear that he was not confined to the practical or experimental study of plants. When Morison took up the post as the first Professor of Botany at the Physick Garden, he was attracted to the University publishing house where he intended to publish his ambitious herbal, *Plantarum historiae Universalis*

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\(^{51}\) However, it should be noted that the variety of surviving seventeenth-century herbaria (in quality, size, accuracy and aesthetic appeal) suggests a wide range of reasons for creating and circulating *hortus siccus* collections. This includes presentation copies to royalty, souvenirs bought on the Grand Tour and a pedagogical tool mastered by medical students.

\(^{52}\) Evans, *Vertumnus*, p. 29.

\(^{53}\) See Stephen Harris’s analysis of the catalogues against the herbaria, ‘Seventeenth-Century Plant Lists’.
Oxoniensis. When Morison died suddenly with only Part II (1680) published, Bobart undertook the considerable task of finishing Part III (1699) according to Morison’s system, although this is not reflected in the publication. Morison grandly promised a universal taxonomical system for the kingdom of plants, based on a morphological comparison of the fruits and seeds and developed for the Umbelliferae (carrot) family. However, he was criticised for claiming it a natural system, the result of studying nature directly, as it bore a heavy and unacknowledged debt to the earlier Italian botanist Andrea Cesalpino. Bobart arranged what is known as the Morisonian Herbarium according to Morison’s system (unlike his father’s herbarium which was ordered alphabetically). According to Sydney Howard Vines, the most complete idea of Morison’s system is in the Historiae Naturalis Sciagraphia, attributing it to Bobart although published after his death:

The tract is anonymous, but the matter that it contains is Bobart’s work, whether it was written by himself or by some one who had access to his papers. This classification may be accepted as being essentially that of Morison, though somewhat modified by Bobart, who had undoubtedly been influenced by Ray’s systematic writings which had appeared meanwhile.

Morison and John Ray were rivals, an enmity that began with John Wilkin’s universal language addressed to the Royal Society, An Essay towards a Real Character, and a Philosophical Language (London, 1668), to which Ray (somewhat reluctantly, see below) contributed the section on plants. Ray’s tables are significant as the ‘first systematic work published in England’ and helped shape his system which was the most prominent in England before the Linnaean.

There is a direct link between Ray’s contribution to Wilkins’ universal project and Bobart the Younger. Ray spent a lot of time in Oxford, and the herbaria include annotations in his hand which suggests privileged access through Bobart. However, it appears that Bobart was more than a facilitator in relation to Ray, from the books listed in his library after his death in 1719. Not only does it include several of Ray’s works, but the entry ‘Wilkins’ table of plants’. This is a condensed version of Ray’s tables in Bobart’s hand. That Bobart appears to have worked closely with both men suggests that he was deeply engaged in botany on a more theoretical level, although he did not produce a system of his own.

54See Scott Mandelbrote on the complicated publication history of the Plantarum. Scott Mandelbrote, ‘The Publication and Illustration of Robert Morison’s Plantarum Historiae Universalis Oxoniensis’, Huntington Library Quarterly 78, no. 2 (2015).
55Sydney Howard Vines, ‘Robert Morison 1620–1683 and John Ray 1627–1705’, in Makers of British Botany: A Collection of Biographies by Living Botanists, ed. by Francis Wall Oliver (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1913).
56Morison, however, was openly antagonistic towards it, although it has been suggested that Wilkins initially approached Morison to do the section on plants but that he turned it down. Ibid., p. 32.
57See Stephen Harris and Peter Anstey for John Locke’s botanical activities in relation to the Bobarts. Peter R. Anstey and Stephen A. Harris, ‘Locke and Botany’, Studies in History and Philosophy of Science Part C 37, no. 2 (2006); Stephen A. Harris and Peter R. Anstey, ‘John Locke’s Seed Lists: A Case Study in Botanical Exchange’, Studies in History and Philosophy of Science Part C: Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences 40, no. 4 (2009).
According to Vines, Bobart was influenced by Ray’s system in the third volume of *Plantarum historiae*, but concludes that the increasing similarities between the systems of Ray and Morison is due to their common dependence on Cesalpino, making it difficult to compare them in any meaningful way.58

This raises the possibility that the similarities are not only to be attributed to common sources, but to the active involvement of Bobart. That Bobart’s more philosophical activities have not been given more weight could be explained by a number of factors, such as his practical knowledge and skill in growing plants for which he was most well-known, and in which he was perhaps more interested. It certainly corresponds with Bobart’s activities described in *Vertumnus*. It is also possible that his role was more like that of other intelligencers who were key to the circulation and development of knowledge but did not publish for themselves, such as John Aubrey and the botanist William Sherard.59 This fits in with the depiction of Bobart as a stork in the frontispiece, anonymous yet very present, acting within but not beyond his station. Ultimately, Bobart’s different activities were all part of ordering the plants under his care, and the distinction between the ordering in the Garden and in the library should not be overstated.

Universal languages and language reform were closely associated with contemporary utopias in order, as Wilkins puts it, to counteract the ‘Curse of Confusion’ and ‘contribute much to the clearing of some of our Modern differences in Religion’.60 Wilkins believed that words occlude a stable meaning, ‘the nature of things’, which could be restored if the philosophical relations between all things were mapped out and given a real character. Wilkins’ project required that plants behave as model law-abiding subjects, rather like Bobart’s (mostly) obedient hosts in *Vertumnus*. Quite the opposite proved to be true, however, as Ray struggled under the artificial constraints of Wilkins’ tables.

… Plants, the several kinds of which are so exceedingly numerous, as must needs render it a very difficult task for any man who is most versed in the study of them, either to enumerate them so fully or to order them so accurately, as will not be liable to many exceptions; especially considering the straining and force that must sometimes be used, to make things comply with the institution of these tables into which they are to be reduced.61

In the case of Wilkins’ attempt at creating a universal language, the sheer number and diversity of plants and their names resisted the constrained spaces of the utopian project. At the same time, this overlap between a universal language project and botanical classification marks a possible point of origin in the search for a universal, globally applicable language of plants.

58Vines, ‘Robert Morison 1620–1683 and John Ray 1627–1705’, p. 35.
59Harris suggests that Sherard may also have had a key role in acting as a go-between, being a good friend of Ray’s (personal communication).
60See Rhodri Lewis, *Language, Mind and Nature: Artificial Languages in England from Bacon to Locke* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
61John Wilkins, *An Essay Towards a Real Character and a Philosophical Language* (London: The Royal Society, 1668).
The animosity between Morison and Ray is only one instance of heated debates between proponents of different taxonomic solutions to ordering the chaotic world of plants in the seventeenth century. As Staffan Müller-Wille has shown, Linnaeus would distance himself from these debates in the following century, both because he considered them all to be artificial systems, and because he connected them to more literal war and disruption:

The imagery of war and divisiveness that Linnaeus employed in looking back at the debate between Rivinus, Ray and Tournefort suggests that he associated their contributions to natural history with the religious rifts and imperial ambitions that had tumbled Europe into decades of war in the seventeenth century, the consequences of which he was still feeling in his youth.62

The political metaphor for botanical classification was also applied to Linnaeus himself. Richard Pulteney, in his *Historical and biographical sketches of the progress of botany in England* ... (1790), celebrated Linnaeus’s system as giving him ‘a literary dominion over the vegetable kingdom; which, in the rapidity of its extension, and the strength of its influence, had not perhaps been paralleled in the annals of science’.63 The late-nineteenth-century historian of botany Julius von Sachs described Linnaeus as collecting from the work of his fore-runners ‘with the power of a master’:

But that which gave Linnaeus so overwhelming an importance for his own time was the skilful way in which he gathered up all that had been done before him; this fusing together of the scattered acquisitions of the past is the great and characteristic merit of Linnaeus.64

Linnaeus was not only an astute observer of nature, but a compiler and synthesizer of taxonomical systems who standardized binomial nomenclature. While his system was also artificial, a composite order, he nonetheless pursued it as a functional alternative until a natural system could be found.

The contrast between Bobart and Linnaeus as king of plants is striking. While both had a university botanic garden in their care, Bobart was never formally assigned the professorial position, although Evans calls him ‘Mr. Jacob Bobart, Professor to the University of Oxford, and Keeper of the Physick Garden’, and he acted as such after the death of Morison in 1683. Bobart applied his time and expertise to furthering the publications of others, revealing a sophisticated grasp of different taxonomical systems. Yet like Linnaeus, he managed to not only teach but inspire a fascination of botany in others, most notably in the influential and well-regarded botanist

62Staffan Müller-Wille, ‘Systems and How Linnaeus Looked at Them in Retrospect’, *Annals of Science* 70, no. 3 (2013), 317.
63Richard Pulteney, *Historical and Biographical Sketches of the Progress of Botany in England from its Origin to the Introduction of the Linnaean System*, 2 vols (London: printed for T. Cadell …., 1790), p. 352.
64Julius von Sachs, *History of Botany* (1530–1860), trans. by Henry E. F. Garnsey, rev. Isaac Bayley Balfour (New York: Russell and Russell, 1967), p. 81.
William Sherard, and established a network of correspondence and exchange, if on a smaller scale.

4. The Botanick throne

Evans depicts Bobart as ‘Horticulture’s Sapient King’ and ‘Sovereign Planter’, ruling on a ‘Botanick throne’. The metaphor of the state as a garden was a common one in the seventeenth century. For instance, Shakespeare repeatedly represented the state of health or decay of the kingdom through that of the natural world, notably in King Lear and Hamlet. Indeed, the Stuart throne was celebrated as an ordered garden in the early years of the dynasty, in Francis Bacon’s Masque of Flowers performed in 1613. It was a lavish and triumphant display in which a quadripartite garden painted in perspective dominated the masque. The players in this masque, as in Vertumnus, are also botanical subjects which begin as flowers and metamorphose into men in order to enact the tribute to King James I as their sun. Almost one hundred years later, Evans’s use of the garden – and specifically, the Physick Garden – as a model kingdom has been shaped both by the turmoil of the previous century and the specific context of Bobart as a historical actor, as discussed above.

The cultivated garden is such an apt ordering metaphor because plants, like human subjects, must be ruled and tended. It accounts for a sublunary existence in which knowledge, language and subjects – human and vegetable – are all, like More’s Utopians, ‘mutable and frail’, and therefore not only subject to disease and death but open to the possibility of reformation and civilising improvement. The garden – particularly the utopian garden – is a mirror for the human condition and a spiritual lesson in God’s providential care. This is explicit in Johann Valentin Andreae’s Christianopolis (1619):

We are born, we grow up, we are in our prime, we droop, and pine away. … Let us lament the lost paradise and long for its restoration. For though we look upon natural objects now with faulty vision, when our sight has been restored through the cross, we will behold all things not on the surface, but in their inmost depths.

Gardens were widely associated with transience and mutability, which were perhaps most clearly expressed in the physician Thomas Browne’s Urn Burial which he published with The Garden of Cyrus in 1658. He argued that seeking permanence in this earthly life was folly, as even our monuments will not last, seeking permanence instead in the spiritual realm. Life in the body is limited to the short span between two enclosed spaces, the womb and the tomb.

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65 Harris, ‘Seventeenth-Century Plant Lists’ (p. 5 of 14).
66 Christine Adams, Francis Bacon’s Wedding Gift of “A Garden of a Glorious and Strange Beauty” for the Earl and Countess of Somerset, Garden History 36, no. 1 (2008), 38–39.
67 For a thorough analysis of cultivation and acclimatisation in the context of the French Revolution, see Spary, Utopia’s Garden.
68 Quoted in Fischer, ‘Utopia, Science and Garden Art’, p. 175.
Robert Burton’s brief utopia in the encyclopaedic Anatomy of Melancholy presents a pessimistic view of the reformability of society and its subjects; in his diagnosis, the madness of the world is all-pervasive and can at best be restrained.69 ‘I will not have a barren acre in all my Territories, not so much as the tops of mountains: where nature fails, it shall be supplied by art’.70 Appropriately, the frontispiece includes an ordered walled garden, as well as borage and hellebore, which the poetic ‘Argument of the Frontispiece’ describe as ‘The best medicine that God e’er made/For this malady’.

As we have seen, the Physick Garden was not simply oriented towards the study of medicine, yet this element was very important in the symbolic power of the Garden outwardly. One of the prefatory poems in the 1658 catalogue describes the catalogue as counteracting the disease and death brought on by the fall, when Adam ‘the great Simpler … lost/His skill in Herbs when he it needed most’. While Evans does not call Bobart a second Adam explicitly, it is suggested in ‘Learn’d Judicious Sage’ and ‘Venerable patriarch wise’. Bobart’s medical knowledge is taken as given:

Then tell us, as Thou best dost know,  
Where perfect Happiness does grow.  
What Herbs, our Bodies will sustain  
Secure from Sickness, and from Pain:  
What Plants, protect us from the Rage  
Of blighting Time, and blasting Age;

Thus in following some of the conventions of portraying a garden as a recreated Eden, Evans is not gesturing towards prelapsarian Eden, but a restored version offering healing and bringing order to a fallen world.

A recurring theme in the prefatory material in seventeenth-century herbals and the catalogues is that furthering and disseminating the medicinal knowledge of plants was a service to the state. The inclusion of the state in the inscription on the Danby gate is echoed in a poem by William Hawkins in the 1658 catalogue:

Tis State employment: You a book compile  
That musters all the Natives of this Isle.  
And forein herbs surpiz’d in English ground  
Are taken Prisoners and together Bound.  
…

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69 J. C. Davis notes that ‘… this extension of social discipline until it embraced the whole of men’s lives involved an almost complete loss of liberty. To Burton this was rather illusory than lamentable. ‘Servitude, loss of liberty, punishment, are no such miseries as they are held to be: we are slaves and servants the best of all …’ ‘Freedom from disorder and sloth, the twin causes of social melancholy, might well be paid for in the coin of personal liberty’. J. C. Davis, Utopia and the Ideal Society: A Study of English Utopian Writing 1516–1700, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

70 Burton, Robert, The anatomy of melancholy: What it is, with all the kinds causes, symptomes, prognostickes, & severall cures of it. In three partitions, with their severall sections, members & subsections. Philosophically, medicinally, historically, opened & cut up. By. Democritus iunior. With a satyricall preface, conducing to the following discourse., The fifth edition, corrected and augmented by the author. Printed [by Robert Young, Edinburgh, 1635?], by Miles Flesher, London, 1638, and by Leonard Lichfield and William Turner, Oxford] for Henry Cripps, Oxford, 1638.
When Garden Plants shall dye, yours most shall thrive
And shall preserve, themselves, and you alive.

The king is ultimately responsible for the well-being of his subjects, whether in response to disease threatening the body of an individual subject, or unrest threatening the health of the body politic of which he is the head. In *Basilikon Doron* (1599), James I published instructions for his young son, describing the model king as a physician who heals the diseases of the state. Yet his younger son Charles I failed in this role, leading to his own execution and decades of political unrest and upheaval that was still evident in Anne’s inability to resolve the wars of party. It is in this context that Evans’s emphasis on Bobart’s capacity to thwart the possible rebellion of his (otherwise ideal) vegetable subjects must be understood.

By the early eighteenth century when *Vertumnus* was published, the political landscape was riven between the Tories who advocated for the traditional structures of Crown and Mitre, and the Whigs, whom Tories such as Evans saw as agents of strife and disorder. He disparagingly refers to ‘Atheist Fools, who Freedom boast; /Themselves to Slav’ry fetter’d most’. This conservative adherence to social hierarchies becomes clearer when *Vertumnus* is read alongside another poem by Evans, *The Apparition*. It recounts how an Oxford scholar is visited by the Devil and the two plot mischief and disorder in an inversion of the ordered garden kingdom of *Vertumnus*: ‘The Toleration to my wish proceeds/Neglected gardens must be cloak’d with weeds’. They are motivated by the belief that the ‘Distinctions’ such as the monarchy and the Church are ‘meer fantastic things’ that moreover abuse the freedom of the subjects: ‘Nor Priests nor Monarchs shall in fetters bind/Much longer any free-born Briton’s mind’. Ultimately, the Bishops and Queen Anne thwart their disruptive plans to crown the scholar ‘Mischief’s Monkey King’, again a warped image of the legitimacy of Bobart’s ‘Botanick throne’.

Evans must be read in relation to the poetic conventions of the previous century. Although on opposite ends of the political spectrum, Evans was deeply influenced by John Milton’s poetry, particularly *Paradise Lost*, which can be seen in verbal echoes, and more broadly in the emphasis on liberty and constraint, right rule, proportionate laws and the treatment of rebellion. If Eden represented the site of original divine order and harmony, it was also the site of the rebellion against what John Milton calls God’s ‘one restraint’ (*Paradise Lost*, Book 11.32). The garden was both the curse and the cure. References to Eden were necessarily political in this period, particularly after the publication of Milton’s epic *Paradise Lost* in 1667, only seven years after the Restoration. An outspoken republican, Milton’s poetic retelling of Satan’s rebellion and war against Heaven, the creation and fall of Adam and Eve could not be read without the recent wars in mind. In this context, even rhyme became a politically charged form, with each line a collection of words/language to be
enclosed and ordered. *Paradise Lost* was itself a poetic rebellion, written in blank verse as an explicit rejection of the constraints of rhyme, particularly the tight rhyming couplets favoured by the royalist Cavalier Poets. Debates about rhyme stemmed from the contrast between Latin verse, a ‘fixed’ language with a steady quantitative metre, and the mutability of the vernacular. Enclosing language through rhyme and in universal tables, as in John Wilkins’ discussed above, both reflect an anxiety that the vernacular was degenerate or fallen and was inferior to Latin. Yet the stability of Latin to some degree depended on it being largely obsolete outside scholarly and religious circles. In this way, the ordered collection of words in the lines of a poem merged with the ordered subjects in the body politic.

The king as composite body was a recurring trope in the early modern period. There were several examples of anamorphic art in which the heads of conquered nations or the virtues merged optically to form a single portrait of the king when seen through a looking-glass with a multifaceted lens. It has been argued that Hobbes was inspired by it for the frontispiece to *Leviathan* (1651), perhaps the most iconic depiction of the King’s relationship to his subjects, although here explicitly expressing artificial rather than natural rule (Figure 3).71 Another famous continental example which suggests parallels with *Vertumnus* is the painting of the same name by Giuseppe Arcimboldo at the end of the sixteenth century, a composite portrait made of fruits, vegetables and flowers representing his patron the Holy Roman Emperor Rudolf II (Figure 4).72 Although access to the painting itself would have been limited, it is possible that poetic and other accounts would have reached Evans. Evans was evidently interested in the power of the collective body, as in the following lines of *The Apparition*:

In that Britannia’s Church collected stands
A giant with two heads, three hundred hands.
Bodies united terrible appear;
Which separate no single man would fear.

The role Evans gives Queen Anne in *Vertumnus* reflects the vulnerability of the monarchy as her life and reign neared their end. She is honoured in the first part of the poem, yet it is Bobart rather than Anne who is presented as the paragon sovereign in the rest of the poem dealing with the Garden. In other garden kingdom portrayals, the monarch is given the role of the sun, as in The Masque of Flowers and celebrations of the ‘Sun King’ in France.73 Evans gives the sun a prominent place in the poem, but turns instead to classical poetic convention to describe the God of Day travelling across the sky, as ‘Light and Heat, which on our World,/From his gay Chariot Wheels is hurl’d’. Evans

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71 Noel Malcolm, ‘The Titlepage of *Leviathan*, Seen in a Curious Perspective’, in *Aspects of Hobbes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002).

72 *Vertumnus is one of a series of composite portraits by Arcimboldo.* See for instance Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, *Arcimboldo: Visual Jokes, Natural History, and Still-Life Painting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

73 See for instance, Mukerji, ‘The Power of the Sun-King’.
does call upon Anne to ‘Unbind the frosts, dissolve the snows’, as though assigning her the role of sun, but the imperative form suggests she has yet to fulfil it. As a model monarch, Bobart’s power and skill is nonetheless limited by and fully dependent on the benign influence of the sun; he is not an absolute monarch. Whether this should be read as a prompt to Anne to extend her influence, or as a more general depiction of the role of monarch as limited rather than...
absolute, it is a striking contrast to the confident shows of power depicted in French uses of the same imagery, and to the celebratory tone of its application in Bacon’s *Masque of Flowers* 100 years earlier.

Whatever political point Evans was making by presenting Bobart as a model monarch, this should not eclipse *Vertumnus* as a tribute to Bobart himself, his knowledge and skill, his garden, and *Hortus siccus*. It is difficult to know how much understanding Evans had of Bobart’s botanical activities, and to what extent his portrayal of Bobart is shaped by poetic convention. Equally, it is difficult to establish exactly how the Bobarts conceived of their own work in the garden, and to what extent their practical, pragmatic and adaptable characteristics were influenced by theological, political and emerging scientific ideas. What is clear, however, is how widely debates about order – particularly ordering parts into a unified whole – permeated across political, botanical,
architectural and poetic spheres, and that many of these align to shape the early history of the Oxford Physick Garden and its collections.

5. Conclusion

This paper has looked back at the first century of the Physick Garden’s history through the lens of utopia suggested by Able Evans’s *Vertumnus*, linked to different aspects of the garden as an ordered collection space: the built structures, the living collections, the herbarium with associated classification schemes, and finally the monarch as the composite body of its subjects. When Evans praises Bobart’s Garden as a model monarchy, he explicitly aligns natural and political order in the context of recent war and continued uncertainty. The significance of the emphatically royal order Evans describes can be seen if compared to Emma Spary’s conclusion about the role of the French Revolution in the history of the Jardin du Roi:

Thus one major shift in the institution’s function, which arguably predated the Revolution, was its re-creation as a body answerable to a modern abstraction, the nation, rather than as a mirror for an early modern manifestation of power, the absolute monarch.\(^74\)

In contrast to this French context, the English Civil War and – crucially – the Restoration made the monarchy a visible category that was reinforced in the often retrospective association with the garden as a model of not only order, but specifically monarchical order. At the same time, the tone of *Vertumnus* is not triumphant but restrained, written under a dying queen without an heir. The depiction of the Physick Garden as a utopian kingdom in *Vertumnus* celebrates the order and proportion of the space, the model monarch who rules with just laws, and the obedient subjects. While the Garden and Bobart could be said to fulfil the first two, plants however proved to be far from ideal subjects, and would give taxonomists trouble for centuries to come. The walls, gate and quadrants of the garden were central to it being understood as an ordered space, enforced by the catalogues. The focus on practical skill and the absence of the trope of the legibility of nature in *Vertumnus* corresponds well with Bobart’s relatively humble position. However, Bobart was also skilled as a law-maker, actively engaged in the search for a universal language of plants through Morison and Ray’s taxonomical systems. Thus utopia, along with the belief in original prelapsarian order, was central not only to the ways in which the garden was perceived and its potential to serve as a political model in its day, but was also central to the foundation of the first scientific institutions and efforts at plant systematics in England.

The Garden was not a constant; the way it was interpreted and put to use varied, and these meanings shifted between its foundation in 1621 and the

\(^{74}\)Spary, *Utopia’s Garden*, p. 257.
writing of Vertumnus in 1713. The public role of the Garden as a model of order, which was to some degree reinterpreted as a royalist monument, can be traced through prefatory poems and ballads, and placed within conventional portrayals of the kingdom, through metaphors of Edenic order, cultivation and healing. However, the extent to which these permeated within the garden walls to inspire or shape Bobart’s role in emerging botanical practices such as classification and experimentation is more difficult to establish.

Ultimately, the affinity between utopia and botanical collecting in seventeenth-century England goes beyond the alignment of political and natural order. In Vertumnus, constraint and order are not only a question of power or control, but a source of protection and preservation of life and memory in the face of chaos, disease, death, wars and winter. Through Bobart’s knowledge, plants are a protection against ‘blighting Time, and blasting Age’. The walls keep out human intruders, the glasshouses keep out the winter, and both are enforced by Bobart’s skill and vigilance. Preserved in the herbarium, the plants will ‘as many Ages last’, to the benefit of the historian and botanist alike. Like an architectural monument, Vertumnus commemorates Danby and Bobart the Elder, and ends with a promise to the aging Bobart the Younger: ‘Take the Just Praise Thy friend does give,/And in my Verse forever Live’.

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