

The Pastoral Field: Local Ecologies in Early Modern Literature

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
under the Executive Committee
of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

2021

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Abstract

The Pastoral Field: Local Ecologies in Early Modern Literature

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“The Pastoral Field: Local Ecologies in Early Modern Literature” excavates the ways in which pastoral literature registers the role nature-human interaction played in shaping protracted struggles over land use and ownership, and in the degradation and improvement of natural landscapes. Revising a longstanding critical tradition that understands early modern pastoral as primarily allegorical, the project instead insists that the form can also accommodate topical thinking about regional ecologies. Shifting the emphasis away from the Elizabethan court towards local agricultural politics, it unearths the ways in which natural crises such as flooding, famine, sheep rot, and soil degradation hastened processes of agricultural improvement and enclosure—and how those processes were in turn mediated, counter-factually imagined, and actively promoted within the literary devices of pastoral. Each of my four chapters locates pastoral plays, poems, romances, and country-house entertainments in the particular landscapes that shaped their development—landscapes that were, in turn, reconfigured by the literary and political concerns of Elizabethan authors.

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Acknowledgements

First, thank you to Julie Crawford, Jean Howard, and Alan Stewart. I can't express the fullness of my gratitude to this dissertation committee, for so many things. To Julie, for sharing books and bracing ideas with abandon; and for generosity of mentorship so marvelous that it not only transformed my scholarship and teaching but attuned me to new ways of being in the world. To Jean, for keeping me on track through every obstacle, however daunting; for extending opportunity my way at every turn; and for embodying for me what it means to live out a career that is personally fulfilling and publicly responsible. And to Alan, for unwavering wit and kindness, and a scholarly acuity that has supplied my dissertation with so many of its best insights.

Thank you also to Columbia's Early Modern Dissertation Seminar, for wading through, and responding generously to, many bad drafts. Special thanks to Seth Stewart Williams, Gabriel Bloomfield, Ben VanWagoner, Andy Crow, Alexander Lash, and Kevin Windhauser for their invaluable feedback and advice. And to Rachel Eisendrath for her unwavering kindness and insight throughout my time in graduate school.

Particular thanks to Bernadette Myers, Tim Lundy, Meadhbh McHugh, Jenna Schoen, and Katherine Bergevin for their friendship.

Finally, I am so grateful to my family for their love and support.

Dedication

To my father, Mark McIntosh

Introduction

A famous literary account of natural disruption in Elizabethan England appears in William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595-1596), when the fairy queen Titania is describing a set of related and ongoing environmental disasters for Oberon and their assembled court:

Contagious fogs, which, falling in the land,
Hath every pelting river made so proud
That they have overborne their continents.
The ox hath therefore stretched his yoke in vain,
The ploughman lost his sweat, and the green corn
Hath rotted ere his youth attained a beard.
The fold stands empty in the drowned field,
And crows are fatted with the murrain flock.¹

This account of flooded fields, failed harvests, and sickened sheep attests to an early modern awareness of natural disaster. More than that—as the longest speech in the play—it suggests a need to make *sense* of disaster:² what causes it; who does it most afflict; and how are its damaging effects distributed across time and space? That such questions should be asked in the 1590s, during a spate of particularly bad weather and harvests, is not surprising.³ How—and where—they are asked, however, is unexpected, and important:

¹ William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, ed. Sukanta Chaudhuri, The Arden Shakespeare. Third Series (London ; New York, NY: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2017). 2.1.81-117, pp. 152-155.

² At 36 lines, Titania's speech is longer than any other in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Robin Goodfellow's speech about Titania's love for Bottom is close, at 30 lines (3.2.5-35), as is Helena's speech about her childhood friendship with Hermia, at 26 lines (3.2.193-219).

³ For primary source accounts of the intense climatic upheaval in 1594-1596, see John Stow's *Annals*, which describe “many great stormes of winde”, “great water flouds”, and “sodaine showres of haile and raine”; or Simon Forman's autobiography, which describes a “wonderfull cold like winter. Simon Forman, *The Autobiography and Personal Diary of Dr. Simon Forman, 1552 to 1602*, ed. J.O. Halliwell, 1849, 6-7. Secondary accounts can be found in William Shakespeare, *A*

Titania prefaces her tale of natural disruption with an accusation of pastoral pretense, charging Oberon with bringing on the late calamities by dressing up like a shepherd. She warns him that she knows when he has “stolen away...and in the shape of Corin, sat all day / Playing on pipes of corn, and versing love / To amorous Phillida.”⁴ And she levies this complaint of idyllic delay from a setting that has, itself, explicitly been marked as pastoral in its remove from the city and its court, and in the verdant abundance of its scenery: a “green plot” “quite over-canopied with luscious woodbine / with sweet musk roses and with eglantine.”⁵ In *Midsummer*, then, the pastoral setting is inseparable from natural disruption. Pastoral prefaces disaster, and is the place where it happens, offering a framework within which inscrutable natural events, too sizeable and systemic for easy comprehension, can be interpreted. This project is about such early modern uses of pastoral, as a form—perhaps the form— through which to make sense of environmental disturbance and change.

As a rule, pastoral can be said to constitute itself against threats to its ideal of unstinting abundance freely offered to humans living in harmony with nature. These threats have taken many shapes since the Sicilian poet Theocritus (c. 316-260 BCE) first detailed the troubles of rural life in his *Idylls*, or the Roman poet Virgil (70-19 BCE) elaborated on its difficulties in his *Eclogues*.⁶ Threats to idealized pastoral ease in Elizabethan literature

Midsummer Night's Dream, ed. Sukanta Chaudhuri, 228; Sidney Thomas, “The Bad Weather in a Midsummer-Night's Dream,” *Modern Language Notes* 64, no. 5 (1949): 319–22.

⁴ William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 2.1.64-67, pp. 150-151.

⁵ This “green plot” is where the rustics rehearse at 3.1, and Oberon imagines Titania sleeping in these flowers at 2.1. 250-253. For discussion of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as a pastoral comedy see Thomas McFarland's “And All Things Shall Be Peace,” *Shakespeare's Pastoral Comedy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1972), 78-97, and Northrop Frye, “The Mythos of Spring: Comedy”, Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism : Four Essays* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1971).

⁶ For a short account of pastoral's origins in Greek and Roman poetry see Terry Gifford, *Pastoral* (London: Routledge, 1999).

(1558-1603 CE) typically include the debased politics of a court, the abuses of corrupt clerics, and the unrequited passion of a poet for a beloved who may variously stand in for a patron, a public, or a political figure or cause. Turning away from such tropes, “The Pastoral Field: Local Ecologies in Early Modern Literature” instead focuses on scenes in pastoral plays, poems, romances, and country-house entertainments that eschew allegorical double-speak—what the rhetorician George Puttenham describes as “glanc[ing] at greater matters” “under the veil of homely persons and in rude speeches”—in order to represent nature itself as the primary obstacle to conventional pastoral ease.⁷ Rather than assuming that texts treat rural landscapes as surfaces on which to project analyses of and advice on court politics, I show how they can also topically allude to nearby natural disruptions, dramatizing the event of disaster itself, and parsing its long-term ramifications across local political ecologies.⁸ The very temporality of pastoral suits this *longue-durée* thinking; if the form promises an unchanging golden age of unstinting plenty in the future, it also resists that promise by engaging, often in detail, with the troubles of agrarian practice in the immediate present.

⁷ George Puttenham, *The Art of English Poesy*, ed. Frank Whigman and Wayne Rebhorn, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007). 128.

⁸ New materialists like Jane Bennett and Bruno Latour coined the term “political ecology” in order to imagine a more-than-human politics. See Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 2010) and Bruno Latour, *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2004). Work by environmental humanists such as Rob Nixon and Jennifer Wenzel has used the term to characterize the kind of politics transacted around our understandings of nature (i.e. how narratives determine interactions with nature, who gets to use it and how etc.) See Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2011). and Jennifer Wenzel, *The Disposition of Nature: Environmental Crisis and World Literature*, First edition (New York: Fordham University Press, 2020). “The Pastoral Field” draws on both these senses in elucidating how nature could, on one hand, act as an agent in early modern politics and culture; and on the other, how early modern social and cultural trends shaped nature into the forms recognizable to us today.

The texts I examine register discomforts of rural life in late Elizabethan England, which was a bad time to be a small farmer. What scholars call the Little Ice Age (1350-1850 CE) gripped Europe and England, depressing average temperatures by 1-2 °C;⁹ colder weather correlated with an increase in natural disasters such as floods, landslides, and storms. Coastal inundations, failed harvests, exhausted soil, and unseasonable storms regularly drove commoners from their customary lands, even as elites enclosed them. The early modern chronicler John Stow closely observed such natural disruptions, recalling of one town, Saint Edes, that it “was ouerflowen sodainely in the night, when al men were at rest, y^e waters brake in with suche a force, and the town was almost al defased, the swans swam down the Market place, & al the town about the boats did floate.”¹⁰ Flooding along England’s eastern coastline did submerge entire villages, driving their residents to seek shelter and sustenance further inland, away from the fenland agriculture their families had practiced for centuries. Such temporary displacements were quickly codified into lasting dispossessions, as landowners enclosed and improved drowned, exhausted, or unwilling earth with the stated aim of recuperating it from nature’s depredations, for the profit of all.

“The Pastoral Field: Local Ecologies in Early Modern Literature” excavates the ways in which pastoral literature registers the role nature-human interaction played in shaping

⁹ For useful summaries of this paleo-climatic phenomenon see Susan Mayhew, “Little Ice Age,” in *A Dictionary of Geography* (Oxford University Press, 2015), <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199680856.001.0001/acref-9780199680856-e-1881> and B. A. Haggart, “Little Ice Age,” in *The Oxford Companion to the Earth* (Oxford University Press, 2000), <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780198540397.001.0001/acref-9780198540397-e-528>.

¹⁰ John Stow, *The Chronicles of England from Brute Vnto This Present Yeare of Christ. 1580. Collected by Iohn Stow Citizen of London*. Printed at London : By [Henry Bynneman for] Ralphe Newberie, at the assignement of Henrie Bynneman. Cum priuilegio Regiae Maiestatis, [1580], 1580. Print. Early English Books, 1475-1640 / 1009:15.

protracted struggles over land use and ownership, and in the degradation and improvement of natural landscapes. Revising a longstanding critical tradition that understands early modern pastoral as primarily allegorical, the project instead insists that the form can also accommodate topical thinking about regional ecologies. Shifting the emphasis away from the Elizabethan court towards local agricultural politics, it unearths the ways in which natural crises such as flooding, famine, sheep rot, and soil degradation hastened processes of agricultural improvement and enclosure—and how those processes were in turn mediated, counter-factually imagined, and actively promoted within the literary devices of pastoral. Each of my four chapters locates pastoral plays, poems, romances, and country-house entertainments in the particular landscapes that shaped their development— landscapes that were, in turn, reconfigured by the literary and political concerns of Elizabethan authors.

Elizabethan Golden Age: Why Pastoral?

Rather than rehashing pastoral's appeal to humanists interested in reviving classical poetry and philosophy, this dissertation aims to offer new answers to the question of the form's extraordinary flourishing in early modern England. Between Elizabeth I's accession in 1558 and her death in 1603, Theocritus' *Idylls* and Virgil's *Eclogues* were translated in dozens of publications; ambitious poets emulated these ancient models, as well as more recent continental pastorals including Mantuan's *Eclogues* (1498), and Jacopo Sannazaro's *Arcadia* (1502), adapting the pastoral form's broadest conventions to the particulars of

English life and experience.¹¹ Playwrights inserted pastoral set-pieces into their dramas, and choreographers described actual rural landscapes through comparisons with idealized pastoral ones in their natural histories. This flowering has been explained as part and parcel of the Renaissance's renewed interest in antiquity, but I argue that Elizabethan writers also turned to pastoral because of its conventional setting: its scene unfolds in a golden age removed from present troubles, a distanced perspective that accommodates thinking over extended timescales; and in an idealized countryside, whose hazy features can nonetheless absorb recognizable aspects of their real landscapes. Pastoral's conventions, that is, enabled early modern writers to attend to, parse out, and engage with accelerating changes to land use and ownership, even cultural paradigms for making sense of those changes had yet been developed.

With few exceptions, pastoral scenes are set either in the distant past, in a bygone golden age, or in the far-off future, in an anticipated, end-times Arcadian idyll. This convention of temporal remove enabled early moderns to think in extended timescales, and to show change—or a lack thereof—over time. Edmund Spenser's *Shepheardes Calender*, (1579), for instance, begins by recalling the delights of a past spring, and then proceeds to describe the shortcomings of the present by comparison:

You naked trees, whose shady leaues are lost,
Wherein the byrds were wont build their bowre:
And now are clothd with mosse and hoary frost,
Insteade of bloosmes, wherewith your buds did flower:
I see your teares, that from your boughs doe raine,

¹¹ For a representative selection, see Sukanta Chaudhuri, ed., *Pastoral Poetry of the English Renaissance: An Anthology*, The Manchester Spenser (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016).

Whose drops in dreary ysicles remaine.¹²

Here, Spenser's poetic alter-ego Colin Clout illustrates his romantic trials in terms of seasonal change. Just as winter's frost replaces spring's flowers, Colin's disaffection follows on his loving devotion. Spenser's straightforward allegory of passion's vicissitudes also contains a more opaque, and critical, comparison to Elizabeth I's own romances, specifically her proposed substitution of the Catholic, French Duc d'Alençon for a Protestant English suitor.¹³ So, pastoral's comparative timescales could express changes to court politics from one year to the next, as in this passage from Spenser's "Januarye" eclogue. They could also, I suggest, underscore the alteration of agriculture practice over long periods of time. I show in my third chapter, for example, how Philip Sidney's *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia* (1593) evokes the gradual degradation of one country's landscape, through ongoing warfare and infighting, by comparing it with the verdant pastoral fields of its neighbor. While the contrast certainly invites political comparisons between the Laconians and Arcadians, it also presents a view of the effects of different regimes of husbandry—Laconian profit-oriented improvement versus Arcadian stewardship—and how they affect political stability and human flourishing over the *longue-durée*.¹⁴

Even as the temporality of pastoral enabled poets to explore changes to landscapes over time, it also allowed them to displace concerns about the present onto the past or the future. A spate of early modern translations of Virgil's fourth eclogue and Ovid's

¹² Edmund Spenser, "Januarye", *The Shepheardes Calendar, The Shorter Poems*, ed. Richard A McCabe (New York: Penguin Books, 1999). 36.

¹³ See "Notes to Januarye", *The Shepheardes Calendar, The Shorter Poems*, 520.

¹⁴ Philip Sidney, *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*, ed. Maurice Evans (Harmondsworth ; New York: Penguin Classics, 1977). 70.

Metamorphoses, for instance, emphasizes features of the poems that speak to the tribulations of harvest failure and death, elucidating the challenges those natural disruptions presented to trade. In the golden age of Arthur Golding's 1567 translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* "which of its self maintained, / The truth and right of everything unforst and unconstrained," commerce is obviated and "the loftie Pynetree" is "not hewen from mountains where it stood, / In seeking straunge and ferren landes to rove upon the flood."¹⁵ Golding tailors the ideals underpinning his golden age—uncut forests and untraveled seas—to suit the problems of his own moment, deploying images of past universal prosperity as an implicit indictment of current deforestation and trade. In focusing on the perfections of the past—and by implication creating a contrast with present dilemmas—Golding and his contemporaries offer a gloss on their own moment.

In addition to registering a range of temporal scales, pastoral poetry also expressed complex spatial relationships between local and national seats of power. Facing off against a centralizing monarchy eager to consolidate authority, Elizabethan writers represented local agrarian concerns in ways both dialogic and resistant. They plotted relations between diverse interests in a shared field of operation, configuring power dynamics between classes, local and national interests, and colonizer and colonized within the formal affordances of dialogic eclogues. When Elizabeth I toured her realm on progress, for example, she was frequently welcomed with pastoral entertainments whose dramatic structure invited—or coerced—her into dialogue with local representatives.¹⁶ As "Sylvanus" in the Kenilworth Entertainment

¹⁵ Ovid, *Ovid's Metamorphoses: The Arthur Golding Translation, 1567*, ed. Jonathan Bate, trans. Arthur Golding (Paul Dry Books, 2000). 6.

¹⁶ Elizabeth I went out on progress nearly every summer she was not prevented from doing so by plague or political instability. On twenty-three of the summers of her forty-four-year reign, she

says, entreating the Queen to repair to the estate after falling out with its owner, “if your highnesse did vnderstand what pleasures haue been for you prepared...I thinke it would be sufficient to drawe your resolute determination for euer to abide in this Countrey, and neuer to wander any further by the direction and aduice of these Peeres and Councillers .¹⁷ The satyr delays his sovereign’s departure long enough to secure her return, and consequently, her goodwill, counsel, and support in regional politics going forward.

All the literary works I write about all appeared in the final decades of Elizabeth’s I reign: John Lyly’s *Galatea* in 1585, following years of severe coastal flooding; the Sudeley and Bisham Entertainments in 1592, in the midst of dearth and grain riots; Philip Sidney’s *The Countess of Pembroke’s Arcadia* in 1593, at the height of Elizabethan enclosures; and Edmund Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* (1595) and *A View of the Present State of Ireland* (1596), during the mega-event of environmental devastation wrecked on the Irish landscape by English colonizers. Each of these texts deploys pastoral to engage the most pressing ecological questions of its moment, including the effects of natural disruption across time (from Albion to 1585 Lincolnshire) and space (from the banks of the River Severn to London’s Leadenhall grain market).¹⁸

In the context of this interest in local experiences of natural disruption, it is significant that each of these writers held a position of administrative authority in city or

traveled from county to county, asserting her authority and strengthening relations with regional deputies. See Mary Hill Cole, “Monarchy in Motion: An Overview of Elizabethan Progress,” in *The Progresses, Pageants, and Entertainments of Queen Elizabeth I*, ed. Jayne Elisabeth Archer, Elizabeth Goldring, and Sarah Knight (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 27.

¹⁷ John Nichols, “Queen Elizabeth’s Entertainment at Kenilworth, 9-27 July 1574,” *The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth I: A New Edition of the Early Modern Sources, Vol. 3: 1579–1595: 1579–1595*, ed. Elizabeth Goldring et al., vol. Volume 2: 1572-1578 (Oxford University Press, 2014),

¹⁸ See Serina Patterson and Can Zheng, “Leadenhall” (The Map of Early Modern London, 2016).

county government; such commitments, I argue, supported a close and vital relationship between poetry and policy. John Lyly, for example, sat in Parliament for three terms, and served as an agent between a major Lincolnshire landholder and Elizabeth I's chief advisor, Lord Burghley.¹⁹ Edmund Spenser held an astonishing variety of government positions during his tenure in Ireland, ranging from private secretary to the Lord Deputy of Ireland, to owner and improver of a large estate in County Cork. The authors of the country house entertainments, Lady Elizabeth Russell, and Giles and Frances Brydges were members of a landowning class whose interests remained rooted in the agricultural politics of their estates. Even Philip Sidney, noted for his influence abroad, served as a member of Parliament for Kent and Shrewsbury, and his sister Mary Sidney Herbert, as a fulltime manager of multiple estates with interests in local parliamentary elections and clerical appointments.²⁰ The administrative responsibilities of these authors informed the locally-inflected, environmentally-interested tenor of their compositions with the logics of regulatory concern and policy advice. "The Pastoral Field" excavates their concern for environmental issues at a county level, recovering literature's participation in dynamic regional ecologies from the neglect of a critical tradition that has tended to abstract writers from their local contexts.

¹⁹ Matthew Harrison, and G.K Hunter, eds. "John Lyly." *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

²⁰ Julie Crawford, *Mediatix : Women, Politics, and Literary Production in Early Modern England*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. 18.

Early Modern Land Use & Ownership: Waste, Enclosure, and Improvement

Disputes over land use and ownership characterize early modernity. The historian and topographer William Harrison closely attended to these struggles over agrarian custom in his *Description of England* (1587), where he describes at length changes to property rights at the average English estate:

Where in times past many large and wealthy occupiers were dwelling within the compass of some one park, and thereby great plenty of corn and cattle seen and to be had among them, beside a more copious procreation of human issue...now there is almost nothing kept but a sort of wild and savage beast...and yet some owners, still desirous to enlarge those grounds as either for the breed and feeding of cattle, do not let daily to take in more, not sparing the very commons whereupon many townships now and then do live...²¹

In describing, and objecting to, the process of enclosure—“the action of surrounding or marking off land with a fence or boundary...thus converting pieces of common land into private property”—Harrison marks it as an Elizabethan trauma happening “now”.²²

Landowners initially enclosed common land with the aim of raising profits by pasturing sheep, a motive Harrison decries in his criticism of “wealthy occupiers” who “enlarge” their grounds to keep livestock at the expense of “the very commons whereupon many townships...do live.” But, by the late sixteenth century, their objectives were more wide-ranging: enclosures were made in the name of reclaiming degraded soil, draining drowned lands, or recovering wasteland from disuse. Profits, more than ever, motivated property-owners, but their means of achieving them varied with the introduction of new practices of

²¹ William Harrison, *The Description of England* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Published for the Folger Shakespeare Library by Cornell University Press, 1968). 256.

²² "enclosure, n.". OED Online. March 2021. Oxford University Press.

husbandry aimed at increasing the productivity of the land.²³ Harrison's own account of this revolution in agrarian experience—every sentence turning on one trope or other of bucolic literature—presents the tragedy of enclosure as itself a kind of pastoral story. A bygone golden age, replete with plenteous “corn and cattle” and “copious procreation of human issue,” gives way before a new regime of avaricious profiteering.

Economic and cultural histories of early modern England frequently point to demographic growth and inflation as the driving forces behind agrarian change in the early modern period; an expanding population caused long-term inflation across the sixteenth century, nearly tripling the price of household goods from 1500 to 1570.²⁴ Inflation, in turn, imperiled the systems of rents through which landlords secured their income; prices rose, but rents remained fixed, under the terms of renter-favorable leases drawn up in the late fifteenth century. Short on cash, landlords could either attempt to farm a greater share of their land directly, using manuring and draining to render wasteland arable; or they could try to revise the terms of use for copyhold tenures and customary common lands. This might involve the exchange of customary tenures for more flexible leases (allowing higher rents), or it might simply lead to enclosure.²⁵ These, in short, were the conditions of Elizabethan land use.

²³ I come to this agricultural history of England through Joan Thirsk's *Tudor Enclosures* (1959) as well as her *The Rural Economy of England* (1984), Eric Kerridge, *The Common Fields of England* (1992), Andrew McRae, *God Speed the Plough: The Representation of Agrarian England, 1500-1660* (1996), Garrett A. Sullivan, *The Drama of Landscape: Land, Property, and Social Relations on the Early Modern Stage* (1998), Keith Wrightson, *Earthly Necessities: Economic Lives in Early Modern Britain* (2000), Randall Martin, *Shakespeare and Ecology* (2015), and Saskia Cornes' dissertation, *Literature of Landscape: The Enclosure Movement in the Seventeenth Century English Imagination* (2015).

²⁴ Wrightson, 116.

²⁵ For accounts of the role of population growth and inflation in agrarian change see Wrightson, 116-158, Thirsk, *Tudor Enclosures*, 8-10, and Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System* :

Prices certainly increased over the sixteenth century as the result of population growth, but they also responded to natural disruptions such as soil degradation, coastal flooding, and harvest failure and dearth. When harvests failed, the price of food and other commodities inevitably increased, triggering or accelerating the revision of rent structures, or the enclosure and privatization of formerly common lands. While economic and cultural accounts of early modern agrarian change stress the effects of population growth and inflation, pastoral literary texts, I argue, offer insights into nature's influence over human conceptions of land use. Pastoral poems, plays, and romances mediate the shaping role that natural disruption played in the transformation of early modern agrarian life, reimagining well-known pastoral tropes and timescales in accounting for the losses and promises of a revolutionary moment in agricultural practice.

It can be hard to detect the part that natural disruption played in early modern agricultural change. In the *Chronicles* of Raphael Holinshed, or the *Annals* of John Stow, rarely if ever does nature appear to play a precipitating role in enclosure and improvement. Relatively invisible in histories and topographies, its hastening influence on agrarian change emerges in pastoral. Why? I argue that pastoral's generic commitment to dialogic contrast—its eclogues always turning on oppositional debates between shepherds — affords the inclusion of a range of perspectives that other genres erase. In particular, I show, the debates of shepherds dramatize dissent over agricultural practice between class groups, or dramatize the competing interests of geographical regions, playing, local needs off against national standards.

Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century (1976).

Pastoral and the Environmental Humanities

Ecocritical scholarship has traditionally located early modernity's environmentalist insights in pastoral literature's idealization of and apparent desire for a return to a golden age, or at least an older agricultural system.²⁶ Nostalgia for the collective agriculture of feudalism, some have argued, animates representations of a pastoral plenitude equal to, but undamaged by, human want. Others have noted how depictions of an Edenic golden age serve up a critique of the commodification of land in commercial agriculture. More recently, ecocritics have argued that the pastoral fantasy of essential order and abundance ignores the ways in which nature acts formatively in ecologies small and large.²⁷

Insisting on the complex vitality of environments, the field today seeks to comprehend nature as an actor in and of itself. As Jeffrey Jerome Cohen has argued, it "is necessary to trace the impress and interspaces created by ecologies that cannot be easily accommodated within the bucolic expanses of green readings, or at least within those that possess a utopian emphasis on homeostasis, order, and the implicit benevolence of an unexamined force labeled Nature."²⁸ Cohen summarizes ecocriticism's move toward a more comprehensive representation of nature, which attends as much to its disruptive and excessive aspects as to its balanced and harmonious ones. If "bucolic" or pastoral literature only depicts orderly, abundant nature, the genre may lack the grounds for new insights.

²⁶ Ken Hiltner, *What Else Is Pastoral? : Renaissance Literature and the Environment*. Cornell University Press, 2011. Watson, Robert N. *Back to Nature : The Green and the Real in the Late Renaissance*. University of Pennsylvania Press, c2006. Borlik, Todd Andrew. *Ecocriticism and Early Modern English Literature : Green Pastures*. Routledge, 2011.

²⁷ See, for example, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's arguments in his Introduction to *Prismatic Ecology: Ecotheory beyond Green*, University of Minnesota Press, 2013; Martin, Randall. *Shakespeare and Ecology*. Oxford University Press, 2015; and Forman, Richard T. T. *Land Mosaics : The Ecology of Landscapes and Regions*. Cambridge University Press, 1999.

²⁸ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, "Ecology's Rainbow." p. xxii.

Leaning into nostalgic idealizations of lost agrarian pasts, pastoral might appear to offer little scope for the study of a nature that shapes, and is not only shaped by, human culture. Reading both well-studied texts (Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene*) and less-known works (The Bisham and Sudeley entertainments), "The Pastoral Field" instead argues that pastoral represents a key site for early modern thinking about natural disruption, and the part it played in the dissolution of the commons.

Early Modern Pastoral in Literary Criticism

In *The Country and the City* (1973), Raymond Williams finds that Virgil's Roman countryside is "not yet abstracted from the whole of a working country life", but that rather that it is only with "the Renaissance adaptation of just these classical modes that, step by step, living tensions are excised, until there is nothing countervailing, and selected images stand as themselves: not in a living but in an enameled world."²⁹ Even as they contradict this statement's oversimplification of the complex literary strategies of courtly pastoral, more recent scholars of Renaissance pastoral have supported and extended the position that the mode has little to do with "working country life," arguing for its close imbrication with city and court politics. Annabel Patterson, Louis Montrose, and Paul Alpers, for example, distrust accounts of pastoral that ask questions about the relationship between humans and nature, instead illuminating the ways in which the conventional tropes of pastoral can act as allegories of and extended commentaries on political or cultural movements.³⁰ The effect of

²⁹ Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1975. 18.

³⁰ See Annabel M. Patterson, *Pastoral and Ideology: Virgil to Valéry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, c1987); Louis Adrian Montrose, "Of Gentlemen and Shepherds: The Politics of

this kind of reading can be to evacuate the local features and concerns of many Elizabethan pastorals. While capturing authors' concern for court politics, such analyses can omit the influence of their county-level commitments and regional allegiances on their literary production.

Most pastoral criticism has understandably privileged George Puttenham's characterization of pastoral as a mode that "under the veil of homely persons and in rude speeches," "glance[s] at greater matters," as the definitive account of Renaissance attitudes;³¹ however, pastoral is not always as strictly allegorical as the rhetorician would have it. Take, for example, naturalist William Turner's comment on the practical uses of beech trees in his 1568 herbal: "Virgill in his Egloges maketh beche tree to haue a great and a broade toppe whiche maketh suche a greate shadowe that bothe men and bestes maye be defended therbye frome the heate of the sonne whiche thinge *we see to be true by daylye experience* and specyallye in greate olde Beches."³² This might be characterized as simply a bad interpretation of Virgil, a literalistic reading that fails to comprehend the long and dominant practice of Servian commentary that related the incidents of Virgilian eclogues to the imperial politics of Rome. It might, however, represent a *different* pastoral tradition, which, if not always as literal-minded as William Turner's note on Virgil's concern with beech trees, nonetheless insists on its situation in local ecologies, and presents natural

Elizabethan Pastoral Form," *ELH* 50, no. 3 (1983): 415–59; Paul J. Alpers, "Pastoral Convention," in *What Is Pastoral?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

³¹ George Puttenham, *The Art of English Poesy*. 127-128.

³² William Turner, *The First and Seconde Partes of the Herbal of William Turner Doctor in Phisick, Set Furth by William Turner Doctor in Phisick. God Saue the Quene*. Imprinted at Collen : By [the heirs of] Arnold Birckman, in the yeare of our Lorde M.D.LXVIII. [1568], 1568. Print. Early English Books, 1475-1640 / 363:04.

disturbances of agrarian life as both political and practical. “The Pastoral Field” seeks to trace the outlines of this tradition as it unfolds in the works of locally interested poets and playwrights, for whom pastoral offers an opportunity to explore the problem of environmental disruption. It takes literally Philip Sidney’s suggestion that “the pretty tales of wolves and sheep...can include the whole considerations of wrong-doing and patience,” exploring pastoral’s investment in questions debates about right—and “wrong”—regional agricultural practice.³³

Chapter Summaries

Each chapter of *The Pastoral Field* centers on a particular region in England or Ireland, teasing out the connections between a writer’s local investments and their use of the pastoral convention as a framework from which to mediate local and national agrarian change. My first chapter begins with coastal flooding in Lincolnshire, unpacking the ways in which plays like John Lyly’s *Galatea* represent—and even influence—the repercussions of natural disasters in the long-term, as they unfold in the everyday lives of local citizens. Who, it asks, finally benefitted from the re-arrangement of lands necessitated by catastrophic flooding along England’s eastern coastline in the 1570s, 80s, and 90s? And which demographics suffered the most from such natural disruptions, especially as they influenced local and national environmental policy over time? “Lincolnshire: Pastoral, Flooding & Agricultural Improvement in John Lyly’s *Galatea*” explores the ways in which *Galatea* narratively envisions policies of drainage and enclosure as they were pursued by

³³ Philip Sidney, “The Defense of Poesy.” *Sir Philip Sidney: The Major Works*, edited by Katherine Duncan-Jones, Oxford World Classics, 2002, 229.

Lincolnshire landowners—and contested by the dispossessed—in the aftermath of late-sixteenth-century flooding.

In 1586, over five hundred unemployed cloth workers converged on a grain barge with the aim of preventing the removal of local Gloucestershire grain along the Severn River into Wales. My second chapter considers the local politics of such uprisings alongside the sudden efflorescence of translations and adaptations of Virgil's fourth eclogue. It argues that the strange resemblance between the early modern politics of dearth—insisting on local self-sufficiency—and the poetics of Virgil's fourth eclogue—celebrating it—is not coincidental. In its thematic capacity to elide the effects of dearth by making them appear as just one side of an Elizabethan golden age, Virgilian pastoral appealed to poets and politicians eager to involve themselves in the early modern policy response to environmental distress. Ongoing legislative endeavors such as the oft-reissued Book of Orders and Poor Laws were adjudicated in part within the formal affordances of pastoral Arcadias. The politics of crop failure occasioned a legislative insistence on local self-sufficiency, which was Arcadian in its insistence on finding what you need where you are.

Chapter 3 contradicts truisms about the double-speaking political allegories of Sir Philip Sidney's *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*. Instead of centering the pastoral romance's interest in practical dimensions of cultivation, it outlines an as-yet unexplored strand of Arcadian agricultural politics, one concerned to describe and evaluate the changing structures of land use and ownership in Elizabethan England. It shows how the text records differences of cultivation and landscape as narrative conflicts, in order to reflect on rural innovation and influence it going forward, in the very moment that England's transition toward agrarian capitalism was playing out in the estates of Sidney's relatives. Despite its

bucolic charm, the *Arcadia* takes positions on the treatment of tenants, the allocation of water sources, and the introduction of controversial agricultural improvements. In particular, it concerns itself with the theory and practice of soil: how, theoretically, impoverished soil might negatively inflect the political disposition of a country, or invite or resist the processes of enclosure and improvement; but also, how, practically, it could be enriched or accounted for through estate design, and what the romance calls the “well-dunging of a field”.³⁴ In the *Arcadia*, soil makes history as a political force, its exhaustion inviting enclosure, and even providing the preconditions for political dissent. This chapter demonstrates how the *Arcadia* dramatizes the ways that the genres of pastoral and husbandry can shape views of, and interactions with, nature; but it also shows how the text reflects on the ways in which nature itself can disrupt and revise the genres that humans deploy in making sense of the landscapes they inhabit.

My final chapter “County Cork: Waste in Edmund Spenser’s Pastoral Elegies” turns from England to Ireland. Reading *The Faerie Queene* in tandem with *Colin Clouts Come Againe* and *A View of the Present State of Ireland*, I argue that Spenser’s pastoral elegies disguise the ravages of imperialist mismanagement on the Irish landscape as natural disruptions. Intent on realizing the land’s arcadian potential and incorporating it as part of a protected English identity, Spenser designs a pastoral which addresses the problems of agricultural life in a colonized Ireland, rather than the politics of a distant Elizabethan court.

³⁴ Philip Sidney, *The Countess of Pembroke’s Arcadia*, ed. Maurice Evans (Harmondsworth ; New York: Penguin Classics, 1977). 234-235.

Chapter 1:

Lincolnshire: Pastoral, Flooding & Agricultural Improvement in John Lyly's *Galatea*

Introduction: Literal Pastoral

Virgill in his Egloges maketh the beche tree to haue a great and a broade toppe whiche maketh suche a greate shadowe that bothe men and bestes maye be defended therbye frome the heate of the sonne whiche thinge *we see to be true by daylye experience* and specyallye in greate olde Beches.¹ –William Turner, *The First and Seconde Partes of the Herbal* (1568)

And as for Herbes, Trees, with their berries and fruities, and all such like thinges, truly they may be by them intoxicated, which that notable saying of *Virgil, proceeding from dayly experience*, sheweth in the viii. *Ecloge*.² –Lambert Daneau, *A Dialogue of Witches* (1575)

The above epigraphs read Virgil's *Eclogues* as a repository of practical knowledge about the natural world, even encouraging the verification of pastoral insights against the proof of "dayly experience." Readers, they suggest, may test out the use of a "broade toppe" "beche" against "the heate of the sonne," and should take care to avoid the "intoxicated" plants warned against in the *Eclogues*. They imply both that Virgil carefully studied and described nature in crafting his pastorals, and that the knowledge he catalogued can be usefully certified and employed in the everyday interactions of early modern reader and nature. In their shared insistence on pastoral literature's interest in a rural landscape, they depart from an influential interpretive tradition that understands the mode as primarily

¹ William Turner, *The First and Seconde Partes of the Herbal of William Turner*, Early English Books Online, 363:04 (London: 1568).

² Lambert Daneau, *A Dialogue of Witches*, Early English Books, 283:10 (London: 1575).

allegorical, concerned to wield bucolic imagery as comment on political incident. This tradition, dating from the 4th century commentaries of Servius and Donatus, indispensably shaped Renaissance accounts of pastoral, and remains a popular heuristic in early modern criticism today.³

Certainly, early moderns did deploy pastoral to expound on political events and strategies. George Puttenham's famous characterization of pastoral in his *Art of English Poesy* (1589) as a mode that "under the veil of homely persons and in rude speeches," "glance[s] at greater matters," usefully defines this way of reading as a translation of the actions and speeches of shepherds into courtly political commentary.⁴ A facility for political doublespeak did not entirely preclude pastoral's availability to other interpretive registers or discourses, however. Early modern pastoral could also serve as a repository for colloquial knowledge about nature, and, as we'll see, even as an extended evaluation of nature's shaping force on culture. It could allegorize political injustice at the same time that it dramatized concerns about the effects of an unpredictable and disruptive nature on rural life. If pastoral constitutes itself against threats to its ideal of unstinting abundance freely offered to humans living in harmony with nature, then natural as well as political vicissitudes disrupt its framing tropes of abundance and harmony.

³ See, for example, David Scott Wilson-Okamura, *Virgil in the Renaissance* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010) and Annabel M. Patterson, *Pastoral and Ideology: Virgil to Valéry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, c1987)

⁴ George Puttenham, *The Art of English Poesy*, 127-128.

Virgil's first Eclogue has long served as the interpretive centerpiece of arguments for pastoral as a mode of veiled political critique.⁵ It is equally representative of pastoral's capacity to attend to nature's disrupting influence on a realistically sketched rural scene. The poem features a dialogue between two shepherds: Melibeous, recently dispossessed by an imperial decree, and Tityrus, who has managed to retain control of his land through the patronage of a "god", commonly glossed as Octavian himself. Lamenting his own eviction, Melibeous seems to remind Tityrus of his good fortune in keeping his lands:

Oh luck, old man, then (there's no doubt) thy ground shall still abide
And large enough for thy behoove, though all mens lands beside
Bare stones, and fennes with muddy weedes, do cover farre and wide.
The wonted fodder shall not harme thyne old ones great with young,
Nor lothsome scabbe of neighours flocke thy Cattell come among,
Thou happier, here shalt thou syt, where rivers ebbe and flowe.
By holy springes in cooling shades where as the wynde doth blowe.
(Eclogue I, ll. 4-51, trans. Abraham Fleming, 1575)⁶

Classical and early modern critics alike have read this passage as part of Eclogue I's broader commentary on the political vicissitudes that resulted in Melibeous's displacement, and as proof that pastoral is a mode more interested in the business of empires and courts than in life in the country. Their emphasis on the political center, however, undervalues the ironic contrast Melibeous draws between barren pastures and pastoral ease. How can Tityrus repose "by holy springes in cooling shades" when the pastures that surround him are both stony and flooded, their fodder non-existent and inedible? Melibeous is powerless to resist

⁵ For a discussion of Eclogue's I primacy in this interpretive tradition see Nancy Lindheim, *The Virgilian Pastoral Tradition: From the Renaissance to the Modern Era*, Medieval & Renaissance Literary Studies (Pittsburgh, Pa: Duquesne University Press, 2005).

⁶ Virgil, *The Bucolikes of Publius Virgilius Maro*, trans. Abraham Fleming, Early English Books Online (London, England, 1575).

the political forces that dispossess him, but he suggests that Tityrus's problems are no less intractably beyond a shepherd's control. Put another way, the pasture Meliboeus describes faces two vulnerable borders: one that separates it from Rome, and the other from the encroaching "bare stones", "muddy weedes", and "lothsome scabbe" that doom the pastoral ideal of unstinting abundance as surely as the imperial decree that evicts Meliboeus from his land.⁷ Politics and nature appear equally able to deprive a shepherd of his property, and disruptive nature seems all the more threatening insofar as it is juxtaposed with conventional bucolic ease.

Virgil places idealized nature alongside the realistically textured difficulties of rural life across his pastorals. Throughout the *Eclogues*, shepherds fret about starving sheep, snakes in the grass, and swelling rivers that threaten their flocks. They luxuriate in conventional repose on the banks of geographically real rivers, such as the Mincius in Mantua, familiar to Virgil from his childhood in the region. As Raymond Williams observes in *The Country and the City*, Virgil's Roman countryside is "not yet abstracted from the whole of a working country life"; his pastorals, that is to say, index verifiable details about the natural world, something the authors of my opening epigraphs understood when they mined the *Eclogues* for practical wisdom about trees and plants.⁸ In juxtaposing idealized nature with its more realistically-sketched disruptive elements, Virgilian pastoral collects colloquial natural knowledge, and explores nature's shaping force on culture by

⁷ I borrow this "two borders" insight from Leo Marx's discussion of Virgil's influence on the romantic pastoralism of Wordsworth and Emerson, but arguments about an early modern doomed pastoral ideal are my own. Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*, Thirty-fifth anniversary edition (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). 22.

⁸ Williams, *The Country and the City*. 18.

underscoring the ways in which hardships such as floods and poisoned fodder can dispossess a shepherd.

I argue that early modern writers seized on pastoral's facility for literal interest in the details of a rural landscape as a means of thinking through, and at times relating, changing conceptions of nature and land. John Lyly's *Galatea* (1585) in many ways exemplifies the reception of such a naturally-concerned strain of Virgilian pastoral in the period. The play embeds a realistically described landscape within a generic pastoral frame, and disrupts the mode's usual tropes of harmony and abundance by insisting on the constitutive significance of threatening nature to its scene.

Scholarly accounts of *Galatea* typically begin by acknowledging its superficial debt to Virgil's first eclogue. They remark that the play derives its opening line from the eclogue's (Virgil's "thou Tityre lying at thine ease, under the broad beech shade," becomes Lyly's "sit down under this faire Oake"), and sometimes point out that Lyly imports the character names Tityrus and Melibeous for his own shepherds.⁹ I argue, however, that the relation runs deeper than trivial borrowing. Transforming Eclogue I into a dramatization of the effects of recent flooding in Lincolnshire, Lyly capitalizes on the capacity of Virgilian pastoral to appraise nature's shaping influence on a topically resonant local scene. Tityrus and Melibeous are not only nominally related to their classical models, but are in fact motivated by similar anxieties around the loss of property. Indeed, *Galatea*'s plot turns on questions of dispossession, remaking Eclogue I's ruminations on lost land into an evaluation

⁹ See, for example, Michael Pincombe's note on Tityrus and Melibeous in *The Plays of John Lyly: Eros and Eliza* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988). 129-130.

of flooding's influence on shifting structures of land use and ownership in coastal Lincolnshire.

Galatea's plot separates into three strands. The first revolves around the pastoral misadventures of Tityrus and Melibeous, who attempt to protect their daughters Galatea and Phillida from Neptune's monster, the Agar, by disguising them as boys. In so doing, the pair violates truisms about common obligations within a system of collective agriculture by defrauding a larger Lincolnshire community populated by a token public official, the Augur, and "members of the public".¹⁰ The second plot, which critics have understood as Lyly's interpretation of Ovid's Iphis and Ianthe, follows the unfolding romance between Galatea and Phillida, as they join Diana's retinue, which has come under attack by Cupid's disorienting influence.¹¹ A third plot features three brothers, Robin, Rafe, and Dick, who speak like London apprentices out of city comedy, and struggle to find suitable employment in flooded Lincolnshire.

Recent criticism of *Galatea* has productively foregrounded the influence of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* on the play, especially as it affords new insights around questions of gender and sexuality. In pursuing *Galatea's* relationship to Ovid, however, critics have tended to follow the Galatea/Phillida plotline more or less exclusively, in the process eliding the

¹⁰ Lincolnshire "members of the public" are invoked on pages 29 and 80 of John Lyly, *Galatea ; Midas*, ed. G. K. Hunter and David Bevington (New York, NY, USA: Distributed exclusively in the USA by St. Martin's Press, 2000).

¹¹ For a representative sampling of readings of Ovid's influence on Lyly see Mark Dooley, "Inversion, Metamorphosis, and Sexual Difference: Female Same-Sex Desire in Ovid and Lyly," in *Ovid and the Renaissance Body*, ed. Goran V. Stanivukovic (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 59–77. Laurie Shannon, "Nature's Bias: Renaissance Homonormativity and Elizabethan Comic Likeness," *Modern Philology* 98, no. 2 (2000): 183–210. Leah Scragg, "Shakespeare, Lyly and Ovid: The Influence of 'Gallathea' on 'A Midsummer Night's Dream,'" *Shakespeare Survey* 30 (1977).

strangeness of the play's particular fusion of classical mythology with geographical realism. Classical deities including Neptune, Diana, and Venus congregate alongside shepherds and would-be apprentices in a landscape that constantly announces and defines itself as coastal Lincolnshire. What dramatic logic yokes the interests and associations of myth, pastoral, and economic and geographic realism?

My reading of *Galatea* unites these three strands through their common exploration of nature's power to alter cultural norms around property and employment. Put another way: the seemingly disparate logics of Virgilian pastoral, Ovidian metamorphosis, and proto-city comedy converge in their shared interest in the effects of Lincolnshire flooding on the faltering structures of collective agriculture within the system of the commons. *Galatea* wields pastoral to adumbrate the appeal of agricultural improvement, casting uncultivated landscape as an impediment to economic progress and a source of insecurity in the face of nature's unpredictable assaults. It thus, I argue, points to the ways in which nature acts as a precipitating factor in the transition to commercial agriculture. Whereas economic and cultural histories of early modern England typically cite demographic growth and inflation as the driving forces behind economic change in the period, literary readings of pastoral plays such as *Galatea*, we'll see, access insights about nature's influence over human conceptions of land use.¹²

¹² For accounts of the role of population growth and inflation in enclosure, see Thirsk, *Tudor Enclosures*. 8-10. Wrightson, *Earthly Necessities*, 115-158.

“Humber floods”: Local pastoral

Galatea opens by descriptively insisting on its setting in the marshy fenlands and pastoral fields of Lincolnshire. “The sun doth beat upon the plain field,” observes Tityrus, “wherefore let us sit down, Galatea, under this fair oak, by whose broad leaves being defended from the warm beams we may enjoy the fresh air, which softly breathes from Humber floods.”¹³ Here, the pastoral convention of shady repose meets an interest in geographical specificity. Tityrus situates his “fair oak” and “fresh air” along the “Humber floods”, the river which separates northern Lincolnshire from the East Riding of Yorkshire.¹⁴ The shepherd colors in more local detail when he warns Galatea about a monster sent by Neptune, “called the Agar.”¹⁵ The “Agar”, in fact, is no sea creature but a natural phenomenon identifiable to sixteenth century audiences as the tidal eagre, which the *OED* defines as “a tidal wave of unusual height, caused by the rushing of the tide up a narrowing estuary; chiefly with reference to the Humber, Trent, and Severn.”¹⁶ Thus, when Tityrus dreads the imminent arrival of this monster, “against whose coming the waters roar, the fowls fly away, and the cattle for terror shun the banks,” he describes a regularly observable, if nevertheless frightening, coastal occurrence that inevitably produced minor damages to local property and wildlife in Lincolnshire.

Audiences unfamiliar with England’s waterways still locate themselves without difficulty several scenes later when a Mariner tells the shipwrecked brothers Robin, Rafe,

¹³ Lyly, *Galatea ; Midas*. 32.

¹⁴ Michael Drayton, *The Second Part, or a Continuance of Poly-Olbion from the Eighteenth Song Containing All the Tracts, Riwers, Mountaines, and Forrests*, Early English Books Online, (London, England, 1622),

¹⁵ Lyly, *Galatea ; Midas*. 34.

¹⁶ “Eagre, N.” *OED Online*. *Oxford English Dictionary*.

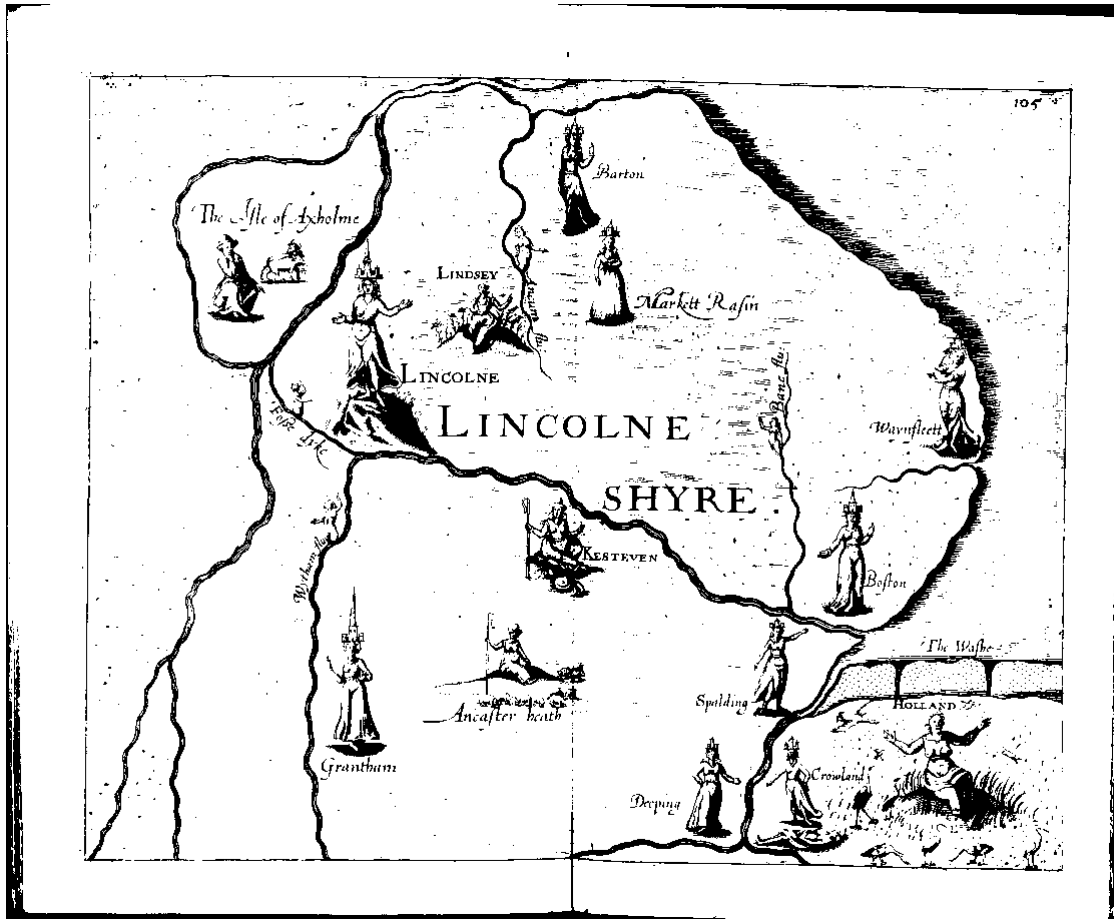


Figure I: Map of Lincolnshire, Michael Drayton, *Poly-Olbion* (1622)

and Dick that they “are now in Lincolnshire.” He also offers more specific information about what being in that county means: it’s “where you can want no fowl if you can devise to catch them. There be woods hard by, and ay every mile’s end, houses, so that if you seek on land you shall speed better than on the sea.”¹⁷ The Mariner’s description of a well-settled, abundantly birded, sea-adjacent county is an accurate picture of early modern Lincolnshire, known to Lyly through his family’s property along the upper reaches of the Humber.¹⁸ Lyly, often—and as I argue here, wrongly—figured as a court poet by critics, was personally

¹⁷ Lyly, *Galatea ; Midas*. 40.

¹⁸ G. K. Hunter, “Lyly, John (1554–1606), Writer and Playwright,” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

familiar with the county's landscape through the regional alliances of his mother, Jane Burgh, and wife, Beatrice Brown.¹⁹ Members of a tightly-bound group of landowners in southern Yorkshire and northern Lincolnshire, Burgh and Browne not only possessed property in the region, but also boasted close ties to the family of William Cecil, Lord Burghley, powerful Elizabethan minister and major Lincolnshire landowner.²⁰

Preeminent chorographer of the early modern English landscape, Michael Drayton, echoes the Mariner's account of the region in his *Poly-Oblion* (1622). He begins by praising Lincolnshire's "sundry sorts of fowl" (25.25)—everywhere in evidence in the accompanying map (Figure I)—and then allows the county prosopoetically to describe itself:

To the north, great Humber's swelling mouth
Encircles me, twixt which in length I bravely lie:
Nor Britain in her bounds, scarce such a tract can show,
Whose shore like to the back of a well-bended bow,
The Ocean beareth out, and everywhere so thick,
The villages and dorps upon my bosom stick,
That it is very hard for any to define,
Whether up-land most I be, or most am maritime.²¹

Girded on one side by the Humber, and on another by the ocean, Drayton's Lincolnshire characterizes itself as not strictly either land or sea, but rather as the point of their marshy confluence. Villages and small towns "stick" upon a "bosom" of muddy substrate made half of water and half of earth. To be a resident of Lincolnshire, *Poly-Olbion* and *Galatea* agree, is to face the sea as much as to dwell in the "plain." It is to live, as Drayton concludes,

¹⁹ For a representative sampling of readings which figure Lyly as a court poet, see G. K. Hunter, *John Lyly: The Humanist as Courtier* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1962), Peter Saccio, *The Court Comedies of John Lyly: A Study in Allegorical Dramaturgy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1969), and Andy Kesson, *John Lyly and Early Modern Authorship* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

²⁰ John Dover Wilson, "John Lyly's Relations by Marriage," *The Modern Language Review* 5, no. 4 (1910): 495–97.

²¹ Drayton, *The Second Part, or a Continuance of Poly-Olbion* 25.292-330.

Where Neptune every day doth powerfully invade
When from wrathful tides the foaming surges sweep,
The sands which lay all nak'd, to the wide heaven before,
And turneth all to sea, which was but lately shore."²²

The “every day” “invasion” of the “shore” by the “sea” was a fact of life in Lincolnshire; in *Galatea*, as in *Poly-Olbion*, Neptune constantly menaces Lincolnshire’s “plain fields,” “fair oaks”, and “flocks” that “roam up and down pleasant greens.” Lyly’s play, one might reasonably conclude, follows Virgil in uniting generic pastoral gestures with a detailed picture of a local environment, in this case, one susceptible to structural marshiness and frequent flooding.

Galatea details the regular incidents of flooding characteristic of Lincolnshire, but it also dwells on the memory of a cataclysmic inundation capable of inverting land and sea.

“In times past,” Tityrus explains to Galatea at the beginning of Act I,

might you see ships sail where sheep fed, anchors cast where ploughs go, fishermen throw their nets where husbandmen sow their corn, and fishes throw their scales where fowls do breed their quills. Then might you gather froth where now is dew, rotten weeds for sweet roses, and take view of monstrous mermaids instead of passing fair maids (I.I.15-39).

Tityrus describes a flood of apocalyptic proportions, which transforms land into sea, converting “sheep” into “ships”, “ploughs” into “anchors”, and “sweet roses” into “rotten weeds”. In this, *Galatea* reimagines recent incidents of severe flooding across England’s eastern coastline in a pastoral idiom, emphasizing nature’s power to disrupt the mode’s framing tropes of harmony and abundance. Conventional pastoral ease disintegrates before the onslaught of real, historical natural disaster.

²² Ibid, 25.14-20.

Entered in the Stationers' Register in April 1585, but not performed at court until January 1588, *Galatea* was written in the wake of a decade of inundation across eastern England.²³ The years 1571 and 1575 witnessed cataclysm on an unprecedented scale: towns across eastern England vanished beneath the waters of the North Sea, along with their infrastructure, animals, and inhabitants. Holinshed's *Chronicles* (1587) record the effects of one storm on the town of Mumby Chapel on the Lincolnshire coast:

This year [1571] the fifth of October chanced a terrible wind and rain both by sea and land ...in *Mumbie chappell*, the whole town was lost, except three houses. A ship was driven upon a house, the sailors thinking they had been upon a rock, committed themselves to God: and three of the mariners leapt out of the ship, and chanced to take hold on the house top, and so saved themselves...Likewise, the church was wholly overthrown except the steeple...Master Pelham lost eleven hundred sheep at *Mumbie chappell*.²⁴

Holinshed describes grievous destruction of property and life under conditions that notably confuse distinctions between land and sea. Houses become "rocks" and churches underwater grottoes as flocks of sheep disappear beneath the waters that cover the pastures where they once grazed. John Stow's *Chronicles of England* (1580) also tropes on the inversion of land and sea in order to convey the chaos experienced along England's eastern coastline in the autumn of 1575:

In the moneth of September & October, fell great winds and raging floudes in sundry places of this Realme, where through many men, cattel and houses were drowned. In the towne of *Newport* the cotages were borne downe, the corne lost, pasture grounde ouerwhelmed, and cattayle drowned. In the towne of *Bedford* the water came vp to the Market place, where Cupbords, Chestes, stooles and formes swam about the houses, their fewel, corne and hey was wrackt & borne away. Also the towne of *Saint Edes* in *Huntingtonshire* was ouerflowen sodainely in the night, when al men were at rest, y^e waters brake in with suche a force, and the town was almost al

²³ Lyly, *Galatea*; *Midas*, 3-5.

²⁴ Raphael Holinshed, *The Firste Volume of the Chronicles of England, Scotlande, and Irelande Conteyning, the Description and Chronicles of England*, Early English Books Online, (London, England, 1587).

defased, the swans swam down the Market place, & al the town about the boats did floate.²⁵

Stow witnesses an Eastern coastline succumbing to the unpredictable storm surges.

Commerce halts as rising waters deprive market shops of their wares and yeoman farmers drown alongside their livestock. The future accumulation, or even conservation, of property appears increasingly uncertain for coastal dwellers who witness the inundations of the late 16th century.

That these floods posed problems within the early modern imagination requiring a literary working-through is attested to in works other than *Galatea*. The aspiring clown and comic actor Richard Tarlton, for example, published a broadsheet ballad bewailing the destruction wrought by the storms, entitled, “A very lamentable and woful discourse of the fierce fluds, whiche lately flowed in Bedfordshire, in Lincolnshire, and in many other places, with the great losses of sheep and other Cattel.”²⁶ Dating the event to the “v. of October. Anno Domini 1570,” Tarlton writes of “waters fierce and fel, / And fluds both huge and hie,” and how, “the sheep in marshe or feeld/ The river was so stout/ They knew not where to shield.”²⁷ Interestingly, Tarlton, like Lyly, associates this catastrophic flooding with “Monsters very rare... which dooth at large declare, /We lives as men forlorne.”²⁸ In correlating the arrival of “monsters” with terrible inundation, Tarlton perhaps lays down the kind of local legend that Lyly elaborated on in constructing his “Agar.” As Julie Sanders has

²⁵ John Stow, *The Chronicles of England from Brute Vnto This Present Yeare of Christ. 1580. Collected by Iohn Stow Citizen of London*, Early English Books Online (London, England, 1580).

²⁶ Peter Thomson, “Tarlton, Richard (d. 1588), Actor and Clown,” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

²⁷ Richard Tarlton, *A Very Lamentable and Woful Discours of the Fierce Fluds, Whiche Lately Flowed in Bedford Shire, in Lincoln Shire, and Iu [Sic] Many Other Places with the Great Losses of Sheep and Other Cattel*, Early English Books, (London: 1570).

²⁸ *Ibid.*

pointed out, the “monster is never seen by the onstage community.” “Are the virgins merely swept away by floods and this has been the explanatory local story woven around such events?”²⁹ Such speculation helps illuminate the position of Galatea and Phillida within a setting that constantly confuses Ovidian myth with local legend.

“Paying such a rent”: From commons to commercial agriculture

Galatea indexes nature’s shaping force on the Lincolnshire countryside not only in terms of the inundations of the 1570s, but also in the context of their aftermath, during which storm surges compounded the effects of the minor flooding habitual to the coastal landscape. As Drayton indicates, the county was characteristically vulnerable to the drowning of productive agricultural sites; his Lincolnshire personified muses, “it is very hard for any to define,/Whether up-land most I be, or most am maritime (25.229-330)”.³⁰ Indeed, of Lincolnshire’s three distinct farming regions, which can be usefully characterized as upland, marshland, and fenland, the uplands alone were secure against unpredictable incidents of flooding that could convert pasturage and arable land to waste overnight. Common lands designated for grazing assorted geese, sheep, cattle, and horses were rendered inaccessible by fluctuating tides and seasonal weather patterns.³¹ These continuous changes to the agricultural function of land confused land ownership considerably. Lawyers employed by the crown were inspired to assert royal prerogative over coastal land

²⁹ Julie Sanders, “Staging the River: From Thames to Trent,” in *The Cultural Geography of Early Modern Drama, 1620-1650* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 18–65. 18–65.

³⁰ Michael Drayton, *The Second Part, or a Continuance of Poly-Olbion*. 25.14-20.

³¹ Eric Kerridge, “The Farming Countries of England: Fen Country,” in *The Agricultural Revolution* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1967), 138–44, and Joan Thirsk, *Fenland Farming in the Sixteenth Century* (Leicester: University College, 1953).

abandoned by the sea as means of enlarging the exchequer. Local landowners put up the requisite capital for reclaiming drowned commons in exchange for the right to enclose them.³²

The problematic status of land use and ownership in Lincolnshire guaranteed the region's involvement in national and local debates about agricultural improvement and enclosure. The terms of this debate as it unfolded in the Elizabethan period were largely shaped by the social polemics of Edward VI's reign. Preachers and pamphleteers of the 1540s and early 1550s vociferously attacked what they saw as the encroachment of covetous programs of improvement and enclosure on a moral economy centered in the manorial commons. At the crux of their complaint was the charge that improvers preferred private gain to common good.³³ Hugh Latimer summarizes the substance of this accusation in his influential 1548 "Sermon of the Plough." "What man," he laments, "will let go or diminish his private commodity, for a commune wealth? And who will sustain any damage for the respect of a publique commodity?"³⁴ For Latimer, the inability to look beyond "private commodity" goes hand in hand with a neglect of "commune wealth". Economic individualism, in other words, results in a relaxed moral relationship to community land rights. Such appeals to moral economy directly informed the terms of the enclosure debate in Elizabethan Lincolnshire as well. The Lincolnshire minister Francis Trigge, for instance, reproduced Latimer's argument in his 1604 "Humble petition of two sisters the Church and

³² Joan Thirsk, *English Peasant Farming: The Agrarian History of Lincolnshire from Tudor to Recent Times* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1957).

³³ Andrew McRae, "Covetousness in the Countryside: Agrarian Complaint and Mid-Tudor Reform." *God Speed the Plough: The Representation of Agrarian England, 1500-1660* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 23–58.

³⁴ Hugh Latimer, *27 Sermons Preached*, Early English Books Online, (London: 1562), 31.

Common-wealth: for the restoring of their ancient commons and liberties, which late inclosure with depopulation, vncharitably hath taken away”.³⁵ Holding together church and commonwealth, Trigge calls for a renewed emphasis on the common good within a moral economy that does not separate social order from Christian doctrine.

Even as reformers marshaled the language of moral economy against enclosers and improvers, the landlords they targeted appropriated their watchwords of common good and private gain. Writing in the same year as Trigge, John Dod and Robert Cleaver decried the hypocritical perversion of these terms by property-owners eager to claim their projects of agricultural improvements for the public interest. “O this will be for the good of the common-weale, and of its inhabitants, this will prevent much strife and contention, when things be parted, and every man knows his owne, & they lye not in common thus,” Dod and Cleaver write in imitation of a covetous landlord’s justifications. They conclude that, “thus under pretence of a common good, they bring to passe a common evill by getting all to themselves.”³⁶ In this reply to contemporary defenses of enclosure, Dod and Cleaver track the slippage of the “common good” from a moral to an economic imperative. As the alleged end of reformers and enclosers alike, the phrase poses something of an intellectual problem within the early modern agrarian imagination.

Ever attentive to its Lincolnshire setting, *Galatea* dramatizes this debate over the meaning of the “common good” within the context of its agricultural scene. Lyly places

³⁵ Francis Trigge. *To the Kings Most Excellent Maiestie. The Humble Petition of Two Sisters the Church and Common-Wealth*: Early English Books, (London: 1604).

³⁶ John Dod, *A Plaine and Familiar Exposition of the Ten*. Early English Books, (London: 1606), as quoted in McRae, Andrew. “Covetousness in the Coutryside: Agrarian Complaint and Mid-Tudor Reform.” *God Speed the Plough : The Representation of Agrarian England, 1500-1660*. 66.

allegations of private gain held above common good at the center of each of the play's subplots, exposing the futility of committing to the public interest in a world already overrun with economic individualism. Even the play's mythological register is implicated: Venus and Diana belie their ecological situatedness when they face Neptune's censure for preferring "a *private grudge* before a *common grief*" as they wreck havoc in one another's trains, battling over custody of Cupid.³⁷

Galatea weighs common versus individual goods at the greatest length, however, in the pastoral misadventures of Tityrus and Melibeous. When the shepherds dress their daughters as boys in order to exempt them from sacrifice to Neptune's "Agar," they essentially abstain from contribution to public interest in favor of personal concern. Of course, as we've seen, the "Agar" they fear represents the tidal eagle that plagued property owners along the Humber, damaging the sea-walls that enabled pasture and farming, and generally contributing to the confused state of land use and ownership distinctive of early modern Lincolnshire. The play's central action revolves around the threatened coming of this monster, a creature that problematizes the continued utility of shared commitments to common lands by obliging Lincolnshire citizens to contribute to the shared defenses that insure the countryside against Neptune's wrath.

The Lincolnshire Augur, *Galatea*'s token public official, responds to the Agar crisis by deploying the language of moral economy in terms of practices unique to collective agriculture in Lincolnshire. The name "Augur" invokes the Roman religious official who offered counsel based on the reading of natural signs, but in the strange amalgam of classical

³⁷ Lyly, *Galatea ; Midas*, 102.

and local characteristic of *Galatea*, his character more closely reflects the function of elected “reeves” who supervised the maintenance of sea-walls and the drainage of flooded commons. These officials were empowered to summon the public to deliberate about needed repairs, and when necessary, collect levies and marshal teams of commoners for day labor.³⁸ He predicts cataclysm if Tityrus, Melibeus, and their fellow shepherds fail in their duty to contribute to the shared offering. “To this tree,” he tells the assembled public:

must the beautifullest be bound until the monster Agar carry her away, and if the monster come not, then assure yourselves that the fairest is concealed. And then your country shall be destroyed. Therefore consult with yourselves, not as fathers of children, but as favorers of your country. Let Neptune have his right if you will have your quiet. Thus have I warned you to be careful, and would wish you to be wise, knowing that whoso hath the fairest daughter hath the greatest fortune, in losing one to save all.³⁹

The Augur reminds his listeners that the common good is the greatest good, begging them to act “not as fathers of children, but as favorers of your country.” He argues for the fruitlessness of planning for the prospects of a child in a “country” (here implicating both county and nation) that has no future. Tityrus and Melibeus will save their daughters today, but see them drowned tomorrow, along with everything and everyone else. In so dramatizing the consequence of a single contribution—“whoso hath the fairest daughter hath the greatest fortune, in losing one to save all”—the Augur might seem to undermine the logic of collective involvement (only *one* daughter is needed); but the real influence of this reasoning is to valorize the importance of each contribution. He encourages his listeners to feel how absolutely essential *their* support to public welfare will be; the country stands or sinks because of it! In uniting questions of common good and religious obligation, the Augur

³⁸ Kerridge, “The Farming Countries of England: Fen Country,” 138–44.

³⁹ Lyly, *Galatea ; Midas*, 80.

deploys the logic of moral economy as a corrective to creeping self-interest and he makes the “country”—both the region of Lincolnshire and the land itself—the focus of his protective logic.

Tityrus and Melibeus, of course, remain unmoved by invocations of the common good. Both shepherds hope that the other’s sacrifice will compensate for his own lack of contribution. Melibeus turns to his friend in accusation and Tityrus replies with equal hypocrisy:

MELIBEUS: They say, Tityrus, that you have a fair daughter. If it be so, dissemble not, for you shall be a fortunate father. *It is a thing holy to preserve one’s country, and honorable to be the cause.*

TITYRUS: Oh, Melibeus, dissemble you may with men; deceive the gods you cannot. Did not I see (and very lately see) your daughter in your arms? You have conveyed her away that you might cast us all away, bereaving her the honor of her beauty and us the benefit, *preferring a common inconvenience before a private mischief.*⁴⁰

The play would seem to promote the logic of common over individual good through the mouths of men guilty of undermining the system that they would have themselves seen to advocate. Tityrus and Melibeus self-interestedly prefer a “common inconvenience” over a “private mischief,” claiming that it is better to “preserve one’s country” even as they refuse to be “the cause.” They both recognize the reason of an arrangement in which every man contributes to maintenance of a truce with Neptune, but neither is willing to pay. Their hypocritical appeals to the public good only serve to underscore their self-interested pursuit of private gain.

This picture of deteriorated communal commitment would have suited Lincolnshire landowners in the aftermath of the floods of the 1570s, as they sought to convince

⁴⁰ Ibid, 81.

commoners and smallholders to submit to revised rent structures and drainage projects that often resulted in enclosures. In 1585, the year of *Galatea*'s composition, Lincolnshire magnate Lord Burghley put forward a motion "for the recovery and inning of drowned and surrounded grounds and the draining dry of water marshes, fens, bogs, moors, and other grounds of like nature." The proposal seems to have lacked the support it needed, and Burghley submitted a revised version in March of 1593, this time as an act of Parliament on the advice of Dutch engineer Humphrey Bradley. Bradley urged: "Considering the diversity of the tenures and leases of the fens, and the opinions of men, the most expedient way will be by Act of Parliament... His Lordship, by favouring of it during the present Parliament, may eternize his renown, and increase his revenue 2,000*l.* or 3,000*l.* a year."⁴¹ The unspoken implication is that by fronting the political and economic capital necessary for drainage, Burghley would reap the sizable benefits of enclosing newly arable lands.

Burghley's substantial Lincolnshire properties encouraged his vested interest in the problem of draining the fens, but he faced bitter objections from the "diverse" "opinions" of commoners of a class represented in *Galatea* by characters like Tityrus and Melibeus. Lord Willoughby summarized the substance of this resistance in a letter to the Earl of Ancaster. "A pore man," he speculated,

Will easelye get 16s. a weeke by cutting down of three or four loads of reede for thacke and fewell to bake brew withal...and likewise three or four shilling a weeke in fishe and foule...where it will be some moneths ether by kyne, milke, or grasing, paying such a rent as the Lord and engineer must let his land for, eer he can recover so good means and commodities as it is sade he hath weekly by the other...I have

⁴¹ "Queen Elizabeth – Volume 244: March 1593." *Calendar of State Papers Domestic: Elizabeth, 1591-94*. Ed. Mary Anne Everett Green. London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1867. 324-339. *British History Online*.

heard many cry out ‘that thear families and the most part of that country [should be] overthrowne.’⁴²

The Lincolnshire “pore,” as Willoughby designates them, remain satisfied with the current agricultural model, which depends on small-scale fuel and fowl sales. They fight to retain the living offered them by marshes unfit for farming or systematic pasturage. With an eye to long-term profits, however, larger landowners prefer drainage that would render these wetlands dry, suitable for large-scale agriculture and pasturage⁴³. The problem is that their scheme relies on the cooperation, or at least quiescence, of landless commoners and smallholders in the form of labor and “paying such a rent as the Lord and engineer must let his land for.” Thus when *Galatea* shows Tityrus and Melibeous mouthing platitudes about common obligation, even as they act to protect their private interests, the play is not merely making a joke of their hypocrisy. It is rather disputing the continued utility of a commons undone by failures in shared responsibility, and overrun by passion for personal gain. Pitching the cultural structures of the commons as defunct, the play argues for agricultural improvement and subsequent enclosure on both economic and moral grounds. The “paying such a rent as the Lord and engineer must let his land for” appears preferable to the outright thievery and corruption practiced by the conniving shepherds.

Lyly’s connections to Lincolnshire are rarely emphasized by his biographers and critics, but the playwright was doubly implicated in this debate over regional drainage

⁴² HMC Report, Earl of Ancaster, 1907, 337-8. As cited in Gerald Augustus John Hodgett, *Tudor Lincolnshire*, History of Lincolnshire, v. 6 (Lincoln: History of Lincolnshire Committee, 1975).

⁴³ For a full discussion of the class politics around reclamation as they developed later in the seventeenth century, see Hillary Caroline Eklund, ed., *Ground-Work: English Renaissance Literature and Soil Science*, Medieval & Renaissance Literary Studies (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, 2017), 129-170.

projects through his mother, Jane Burgh, and wife Beatrice Brown, whose family owned lands north of the Humber, and was closely related to the Burghley clan.⁴⁴ Indeed, Lyly himself served Burghley in various capacities and applied for his patronage on multiple occasions: in 1574, he wrote to obtain letters for a fellowship at Magdalen College, Oxford; in 1579, he begged Burghley's protection from the fallout of a disagreement with his current employer, Edward de Vere, the earl of Oxford; and in 1584, he adjudicated a dispute between Burghley and the earl, possibly regarding the earl's treatment of his wife, who was Burghley's daughter.⁴⁵ Thus, *Galatea*'s interest in presenting acquiescence to drainage efforts as a rational good stems in part from the regional and national political commitments of its author. When Lyly's Augur urges Tityrus and Melibeus to "consult with yourselves, not as fathers of children, but as favorers of your country," he raises the stakes of participation to the preservation or destruction of England. The deluges of the 1570s become the alleged motivation for the drainage and enclosure projects of the 1580s and 90s. Playgoers learn a new "civic duty:" the forfeiture of common holdings in favor of the more nebulous productivity of commercial agriculture, enabled by the eviction of the water from the land.

Thus in performing *Galatea* before Queen Elizabeth I at Greenwich on January 1, 1588, Lyly and his company, Paul's Boys, rather vocally entered into an already active conversation about national and local responses to flooding.⁴⁶ Lyly scholarship has long imagined Elizabeth I as the intended addressee and desired patron of Lyly's work, but this

⁴⁴ Wilson, "John Lyly's Relations by Marriage," 495–97.

⁴⁵ Hunter, "Lyly, John (1554–1606), Writer and Playwright."

⁴⁶ Lyly, *Galatea ; Midas*, 5.

play places Burghley's interests at the heart of its concern.⁴⁷ Lincolnshire improvements are preferred to the court in compelling terms. Joan Thirsk has argued for the role of Elizabethan government in advocating for such wide-scale enclosure in the Lincolnshire fens. "It was the policy of crown commissioners to encourage enclosures," she explains, and

to drive home the financial benefits of enclosure to the crown, and practical advantage to the inhabitants. By the end of the sixteenth century in some parishes all the so-called marsh was enclosed...In most places manorial lords were augmenting their revenues by selling off pieces of the high marsh. Ownership became concentrated in a few hands...⁴⁸

Thirsk describes a system of agricultural governance calculated to benefit Elizabeth's ministers and her state generally, but advertised as of "practical advantage to all."

Nevertheless, concentrated land ownership necessarily dispossessed formerly landed Lincolnshire residents, who now found themselves in need of new forms of employment.

"Getting a master": The dispossessed seek work

These anxieties about property, labor, and the common good resurface in a seemingly unconnected subplot involving three brothers, Robin, Rafe, and Dick. Having escaped drowning in a shipwreck off the Lincolnshire coastline, the would-be apprentices resolve to forsake the sailor's perilous living and seek their fortunes on land. By their own estimation, they have "neither lands nor wit nor masters nor honesty," and they boast, at

⁴⁷ See Andy Kesson, "'It Is a Pity You Are Not a Woman': John Lyly and the Creation of Woman," *Shakespeare Bulletin* 33, no. 1 (March 10, 2015): 33–47, Hunter, *John Lyly: The Humanist as Courtier*, Saccio, *The Court Comedies of John Lyly: A Study in Allegorical Dramaturgy*, and Derek B. Alwes, "'I Would Faine Serve': John Lyly's Career at Court," *Comparative Drama* 34, no. 4 (2000): 399–421.

⁴⁸ Thirsk, *Fenland Farming in the Sixteenth Century*, 18–19.

best, a speculative relationship to inheritable family property.⁴⁹ Robin, for one, crows, “I will live to see my father hanged and both my brothers beg. So I conclude the mill shall be mine and I live by imagination still.”⁵⁰ This suggestion that it is only Robin’s status as the youngest brother that impedes his inheritance is contradicted during a sportive discussion of his brother Dick’s new apprenticeship:

PETER: [Dick] hath gotten a master now that will teach him to make you both his younger brothers...He will teach him to cozen you both and so get the mill to himself.

RAFE: Nay, if he be both our cozens I will be his great grandfather, and Robin shall be his uncle.⁵¹

Dick, Peter implies, will inherit not because he is the oldest brother, but because he is a skilled trickster; he will “cozen” his brothers into turning over their share of the inheritance. Playfully substituting the familial noun “cozen” for the verb connoting fraud, Rafe turns his brother into his cousin and deprives him of his property by inserting a prior claim as a “great-grandfather.” Jokes aside, age becomes a meaningless factor in this picture of a property system gamed by those who excel in prosecuting their ends through conspiracy. Inheritance is rendered uncertain as major landholders and their parliamentary representatives seek to realize their economic and agricultural objectives by enclosing land and revising rent structures. In the logic of inevitable enclosure, all commoners become younger brothers.

Acknowledging the effect of upheavals in property rights on the brothers, *Galatea* interests itself primarily in their status as members of a new labor force detached from

⁴⁹ Lyly, *Galatea ; Midas*. 41.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 91.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 94.

traditional ties to land. As the brothers seek their fortunes, their success or failure becomes a referendum on the viability of commons. Tellingly, the play constructs the unimproved Lincolnshire landscape as an impediment to their economic success. Having set off on his own to seek a new apprenticeship, for instance, Rafe stumbles through a watery morass empty of employment opportunities:

Call you this seeking for fortunes, when one can find nothing but birds' nests?
Would I were out of these woods, for I shall have but wooden luck. Here's nothing
but the skreeking of owls, croaking of frogs, hissing of adders, barking of foxes,
walking of hags.⁵²

Here, the characteristic wildlife and vegetation of the un-drained Lincolnshire fen appear to impede the making of a young man's "fortune." Insofar as Rafe's search for work is frustrated by a landscape inhospitable to the newly dispossessed labor force, he stands as a foil to shepherds like Tityrus and Melibeous whose hypocritical calls for shared obligations to common land hinder Rafe in his quest for economic security.

When Rafe and his brothers do light upon apprenticeships, they find them uninstructional and unprofitable. Various employment by an alchemist, an astronomer, and a fortune-teller, the trio learn from masters who appear to be fundamentally misguided in their shared ambition to predict the future. Having escaped the astronomer, Rafe resolves:

No more masters now, but a mistress if I can light on her. An astronomer! Of all the occupations that's the worst. Yet well fare the Alchemist, for he keeps good fires though he gets no gold; the other stands warming himself by staring on the stars, which I think he can as soon number as know their virtues. He told me a long tale of *octogesimus octavus*, and the meaning of the conjunctions and planets, and in the meantime he fell backward himself into a pond. I asked him why he foresaw not that by the stars.⁵³

⁵² Ibid, 50.

⁵³ Ibid, 90.

These seemingly scientific professions are doubly vexed: evidently, they “get no gold”, but worse still, their pretensions to detect “the meaning of the conjunctions and planets” appear to occlude a basic understanding of immediate environment. Although the astronomer asserts his ability to foresee “what weather shall be between this and *octogesimus octavus mirabilis annus*,” and boasts that he “can set a trap for the sun, catch the moon with lime-twigs, and go-abatfowling for stars,” his predictions draw on the vocabulary of bird-catching rather than the mysteries of divination.⁵⁴ The only things the Astronomer “traps,” “catches,” and “abatfowls” in the sky are the birds that are so famously abundant in Lincolnshire.⁵⁵ His “weather” predictions prove inadequate even to the job of keeping him dry, and out of the “ponds” that dot the undrained fenland. Revealingly, he subsists not by his astronomy, but through the same system of small fuel and fowl sales clung to by Lincolnshire commoners. The commons, the play suggests, fail to support the kind of ambitious business that supports or even requires apprenticeships.

That scenes featuring Robin, Rafe, and Dick bear resemblance to passages from city comedy over a decade before that genre’s heyday underscores the extent to which the language of private interest permeates *Galatea*. Rafe’s talk of cozening, for example, anticipates Witgood’s observation in Thomas Middleton’s *A Trick to Catch the Old One* (1605) that “we’ll ne’er trust the conscience of our kin, since cozenage brings that title in.”⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Ibid, 71.

⁵⁵ “Lime twigs” are branches coated with “sticky lime to catch birds.” See notes to *Galatea*, p. 71. “Bat-fowling” is the practice of catching “birds at night by dazing them with a light, and knocking them down or netting them.” See “bat-fowl, v.” *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, January 2018, www.oed.com/view/Entry/16141. Accessed 29 January 2018.

⁵⁶ As quoted in in McRae, “The rural vision of Renaissance satire.” *God Speed the Plough : The Representation of Agrarian England, 1500-1660*, 104-106.

More pertinently, the struggles of the three brothers in the unimproved Lincolnshire landscape gesture ahead to the projects of agricultural improvement that supply the main con of Ben Jonson's *The Devil is an Ass* (1616).⁵⁷ In this play, "the great projector" Meercraft devises a proposal for the recovery of "drowned land" or fenland as a means of gulling the landowning Fitzdottrel out of his inherited property. Fitzdottrel imagines Meercraft employing "winged ploughes that goe with sailes...mills will spout you water, ten miles off...and the fens, from us, in Norfolk, to the utmost bound of Lincolnshire!" Meercraft confirms Fitzdotterel in his enthusiasms, observing, "we see those changes, daily: the faire lands, that were the clyents, are the lawyers, now...nature hathe these vicissitudes. She makes no man a state of perpetuity."⁵⁸ Meercraft points to the transformation of land from a community to commodity, as "lawyers" supplant "clyent" farmers. Changes in the uses and ownership of land are attributed to the "vicissitudes" of "nature." In *The Devil is an Ass*, nature's fluctuations stand in for the market forces of dispossession. In *Galatea*, the relation is more direct: nature's vicissitudes really do confuse structures of use and ownership.

"He foresaw not that by the stars": Human agency and early modern nature

Somewhat paradoxically, Lyly's play imagines natural disruption as beyond human ability to predict or avert, even as it advocates for wide-ranging changes to the natural conditions of watery Lincolnshire. If we follow the logic of the fortune-teller/apprentice plot, for example, we're led to believe that any attempt to comprehend nature is ludicrous.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 103.

⁵⁸ Ben Jonson, *The Devil Is an Ass* (New York: Distributed exclusively in the USA and Canada by St. Martin's Press, 1994).

How can a soothsayer unable to foresee the “pond” behind him hope to divine the “conjunctions” of the “planets”? In this sense, *Galatea* treats nature as essentially unknowable, its floods beyond the influence of mortal agency. If we emphasize the pastoral misadventures of Tityrus and Melibeous, however, we’re led to favor large-scale drainage and enclosure projects as a necessary antidote to a system of common agriculture undermined by members unwilling to observe the laws of shared obligation. Here, human agency appears directly correlated to impending natural disaster; Tityrus and Melibeous invite the watery ravages of the Agar by refusing their commitments. And since catastrophe seems to result from human mismanagement and immorality, the implication is that it might be averted by more coherent and prescient governance.

This deliberation over nature’s responsiveness to human action animates scenes in several of Lyly’s other court comedies, as well as in contemporary literature concerned with flooding in Lincolnshire. In *Campaspe*, first performed at court in 1584, assorted philosophers debate whether nature obeys a god, or instead, is sovereign in itself.

Contradicting Plato’s assessment of nature as essentially formed and moved by God (and therefore reactive to human morality or lack thereof), Cleanthes asserts,

that first mover, which you term God, is the instrument of all moving which we attribute to nature. The earth, which is mass, swimmeth on the sea, seasons divided in themselves, fruits growing in themselves, the majesty of the sky, the whole firmament of the world and whatsoever else appeareth miraculous—what man almost of mean capacity but can prove it natural?⁵⁹

Proclaiming nature the maker of its own laws, Cleanthes describes elements disposing themselves according to their essential qualities. Even what “appeareth miraculous” is

⁵⁹ John Lyly, *Campaspe ; Sappho and Phao*, ed. G. K. Hunter and David Bevington (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1991), 67.

“proved natural” in this rejection of a nature moved by divine response to human action. Richard Tarlton’s “Very lamentable and woful discourse of the fierce fluds” similarly problematizes causation. The ballad initially extends the possibility that the flooding is providentially motivated: “What need I more to say, / Of vice and wordly facts?” Tarlton asks. But, as the ballad progresses, human vice satisfies the clown less and less as an explanation for the suffering caused by flooding. Recalling God’s covenant with Noah, Tarlton reassures himself that God “promis made.. the world should never vade, / By water’s force again.” “O Lord this flud was straunge, / and non occation why,” he concludes, leaving the question of causation wholly unsettled.⁶⁰

Galatea develops this problem of human agency over nature even in its resolution. The Agar’s watery coming appears inevitable given the repudiated commitments of Tityrus and Melibeous. The play’s cast faces drowning and dispossession as the necessary desert of broken covenants with Neptune. Unexpectedly, however, the sea-god forgives Tityrus’s and Melibeous’s debt, dismissing fears of impending catastrophe with the baffling pronouncement that the shepherds’ “deserts have not gotten pardon but these goddesses’ jars.”⁶¹ Neptune pardons the shepherds not on their own merits but rather, inexplicably, as a side-effect of his mediation of the quarrel between Diana and Venus. Neptune’s ruling remains unexplained throughout the remainder of the play, and in a way, justification lies beside the point; insofar as it remains arbitrary, his intervention devalues human agency as a force to cause or prevent natural disruption. The quarrels of Diana and Venus allegorize the disputations of elemental forces, whose outcomes unpredictably influence mortals’

⁶⁰ Tarlton, *A Very Lamentable and Woful Discours of the Fierce Fluds*.

⁶¹ John Lyly, *Galatea ; Midas*. p. 104.

destinies.⁶² As in the astronomer's failed predictions, nature acts according to its own whims, which lie beyond human capacity to anticipate or placate. Environmental disturbance is represented as normative, a fact distinct from human interference.

This ending in no way dislodges the play's critique of the continued utility of a commons undone by failures in shared responsibility. Tityrus's and Melibeous's hypocrisy stands. Even Venus and Diana are rebuked by Neptune for preferring "a private grudge before a common grief."⁶³ Not only, then, have the commons failed to protect its members from nature's vagaries, but they also offer scant proof against human infirmity. Thus innately chaotic nature becomes the grounds for improvement and enclosure. On one hand, the play implies that nature's future movements evade human prediction and control. On the other, it suggests that the rational project of enclosure offers an answer to corruption and growing unemployment in Lincolnshire. (Rafe, Robin, and Dick, for example, will find work when they are no longer encumbered by an uncultivated landscape and those who glean an existence from it.) If nature's irregularities threaten the pastoral ideal of humans living in harmony with a nature that precisely supplies want, then audiences are invited to take comfort in a changing economic and agricultural system, in which nature's vagaries cease to be a matter of life and death.

⁶² As in Gabriel Harvey's "Three Proper and Witty Familiar Letters" (1580), in which he describes the mechanisms of an earthquake as the battles of "the sons and daughters of Mars & Bellona, that nourish civil debates and contrary factions amongst themselves...and such a monstrous cruel shaking of one another's forts and castles that the whole earth again...is terrible hoised.... *Three Proper And Witty - Three_Proper_Witty_Familiar.pdf*. http://www.oxford-shakespeare.com/Nashe/Three_Proper_Witty_Familiar.pdf.

⁶³ Lyly, *Galatea ; Midas*, 102.

Not by “desert” but by “goddesses’ jars”: Connecting changing conceptions of nature and land

Galatea, then, could seem to leave its audience in a morally vexed and economically insecure position. Nature’s movements appear unpredictable, and essentially unconnected to human action; flooding occurs irrespective of shepherds’ choices, and lies beyond the art of astronomers. At the same time, the system of the commons appears to founder as self-interest wins out over mutual obligation. In light of this double bind, the improving projects of commercial agriculture emerges as a timely solution. Embedding prices and wages in economies larger than the local marketplace, they render natural disaster a hardship to be survived, rather than an insurmountable end to livelihood and life.

Here, at what so many economic historians have called the beginning of capitalist agriculture, does natural disruption serve as a convenient excuse for the projects of drainage and enclosure that evicted peasants from their common livelihood and destined them to wage labor on farms that did not belong to them, or in cities they did not know?⁶⁴ The historical record indicates that flooding played just such a part in the transition between common and commercial models of agriculture in early modern Lincolnshire. The region’s watery landscape necessitated drainage and reclamation projects requiring investments that exceeded the pockets of commoners. Joan Thirsk stresses the importance of capital to such projects in her *Agrarian History of Lincolnshire*. “If there had ever been a time when reclamation of the marsh was customarily carried out as a village undertaking,” she explains, that time had been passed and forgotten. Reclamation in the sixteenth century was regarded as a matter for private enterprise. The individuals mainly responsible were

⁶⁴ Joan Thirsk, *Economic Policy and Projects : The Development of a Consumer Society in Early Modern England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

the gentry of the country, who let or sub-let to tenants. Capital was clearly all-important, for reclamation was expensive and beset with many hazards...Reclamation, of course, meant enclosure.⁶⁵

Thirsk describes a process of enclosure through capital investments made by landlords like Lord Burghley or his relation Richard Browne, John Lyly's father-in-law.⁶⁶ Mumby Chapel, for instance—the same town noted in Holinshed's *Chronicles* as having been utterly destroyed in 1571, "except three houses"—witnessed a variety of new drainage and embankment projects on the former site of common pasture.⁶⁷ Thus land reserved to common use entered the hands of those capable of securing it against nature's unpredictable onslaughts.

Natural disruption's hastening influence on agricultural change in the early modern period has perhaps gone unremarked because it remains invisible in the chronicles of Holinshed and Stow, or in topographies such as William Harrison's *Description of England*. It emerges, however indistinctly, in early modern pastoral. Why? I argue that pastoral's generic commitment to dialogic opposition affords the inclusion of classed opinions that other genres erase. In *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, Rob Nixon has argued that we need to pay more attention to violence that "is relatively invisible", being "neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive," with "calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales."⁶⁸ In its capacity to render laboring voices audible, pastoral exposes the action of such accretive violence in the

⁶⁵ Thirsk, *English Peasant Farming: The Agrarian History of Lincolnshire from Tudor to Recent Times*, 68.

⁶⁶ Wilson, "John Lyly's Relations by Marriage."

⁶⁷ A.E.B. Owen, "Coastal Erosion in East Lincolnshire," *Lincolnshire Historian* 9 (Spring 1952): 336. And Holinshed, *The Firste Volume of the Chronicles of England, Scotlande, and Irelande*.

⁶⁸ Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, 2.

early modern period, enabling a re-reading of the period's understanding of itself. In *Galatea*, for example, the effects of slow violence become the unspoken subtext of Tityrus's and Melibeous's self-destructive pursuit of self-interest. In seeking to protect what is theirs, they hasten their own dispossession. In this light, Lyly's reliance on Virgil appears doubly appropriate; if the characters are spared within the capacious happiness of the play's comic ending, many of their real-life commoner-counterparts faced dispossession.

Chapter 2:

Gloucestershire & Berkshire: Dearth in the Elizabethan Golden Age

Then hereupon soone after that thy yeares and settled age
Hath made thee be a man, the merchant he shall leave the sea,
The ship of pine tree shall not change hir merchandize and wares.
All kind of ground all kind of things shall carrie yield and beare,
The earth shall bide no rake, the wine no hedgebill shall abide,
The plowman now shall loose the yokes from strong and sturdy buls.
The wooll shall learne to counterfeit colours of divers kinds,
But in the meadows shall the ram his woollen fleeces change
Now into purple sweetly red, now yellow saffron hew:
A colour bright and flaming red shall of its owne accord
Cloth and adorne the lambs a-feeding in the pasture field.¹

–Virgil’s Eclogue IV, trans. Abraham Fleming (1589)

Introduction

A peerless ruler presides over unprecedented natural and human flourishing. War and commerce diminish, obviated by an abundance so unstinting and comprehensive that it excludes no one from the pleasures of restful satiation. This is the story told by Virgil’s fourth eclogue, a poem copiously translated and adapted in Elizabethan England. Writers of the period, scholars have long assumed, turned to Virgil’s golden age because it offered an encomiastic model well-suited to the circumstances of Elizabeth I’s rule; it handily formulated the successes of the Queen’s reign as divinely appointed and universally enjoyed.² I contend, however, that the eclogue appealed to early modern writers and

¹ All quotations of Abraham Fleming’s translation of Eclogue IV are taken from *Pastoral Poetry of the English Renaissance: An Anthology*, ed. Sukanta Chaudhuri (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 14-16.

² For a representative sampling see Louis Montrose, “‘Eliza, Queene of Shepheardes,’ and the Pastoral of Power,” *English Literary Renaissance* 10.2 (1980), 153–82; also by Montrose, “The

politicians as much for its accommodation of a positive political ecology, as for its capacity to celebrate any individual ruler. The eclogue, that is, lays out a theory of general prosperity grounded in the principle of local production and consumption. It predicates its promises of political harmony on the notion that what is needed is always near. In detailing the pleasures of a new golden age, it delineates a political ideal rooted in a prosperous local agricultural scene.

Early modern fascination with the fourth eclogue's abundant political vision stems, paradoxically, from the stresses of dearth. For all the literary pageant that attended them, the final decades of Elizabeth I's reign witnessed recurring crop failures and heightened social upheaval.³ The failed harvests of 1585-1586 and 1594-1597 affected almost all of England and produced widespread economic depression and social disorder. Hungry protesters gathered to demand a halt to interregional and international trade that removed the fruits of local harvests from local bellies. Hastening to quiet their complaints, the Crown issued frequent revisions to the Book of Orders (1587, 1594, 1595, 1596), and the Acts for the Relief of the Poor (1597, 1601), each time with a new mandate that local markets retain locally cultivated produce in times of scarcity.⁴ One effect of early modern dearth, then, was to problematize commerce that separated the sites of production and consumption. Dearth, that is, created a set of circumstances that called for something like an ecological and

Elizabethan Subject and the Spenserian Text" in *Literary Theory/Renaissance Texts*, ed. Patricia A. Parker and David Quint, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 309-328; John King "Queen Elizabeth I: Representations of the Virgin Queen," *Renaissance Quarterly* 43.1 (1990), 30-74; Susan Doran, "Virginity, Divinity and Power: The Portraits of Elizabeth I" in *The Myth of Elizabeth*, ed. Susan Doran and Thomas Freeman, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) 171-200.

³ Paul Slack, "Dearth and Social Policy in Early Modern England," *Social History of Medicine* 5, no. 1 (April 1, 1992): 1-17.

⁴ Buchanan Sharp, *In Contempt of All Authority: Rural Artisans and Riot in the West of England, 1586-1660* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980). 50-51.

economic golden age which would yoke reaping and enjoying. The politics of crop failure occasioned a legislative insistence on local self-sufficiency, which was Arcadian in its insistence on finding what you need where you are.⁵

This strange resemblance between the politics of dearth—insisting on local self-sufficiency—and the poetics of Virgil’s golden age—celebrating it—is not, I argue, coincidental. In its thematic capacity to elide the effects of dearth by making them appear as just one side of an Elizabethan golden age, Virgilian pastoral appealed to poets and politicians eager to involve themselves in the early modern policy response to environmental distress. Ongoing legislative endeavors such as the oft-reissued Book of Orders and Poor Laws were adjudicated in part within the formal affordances of pastoral Arcadias.

Convening national and regional authorities outdoors in the English countryside, pastoral country house entertainments were a principal forum for the negotiation of local environmental policy in the Elizabethan period. The genre conventionally featured several days of short performances, a succession of gifts to the monarch, and spectacles such as fireworks and bull- and bear-baiting. Because these entertainments took the form of a highly ritualized exchange between the nobility and the Crown, they have invited studies by scholars interested in the minutiae of court politics. Questions of political appointment and royal favor, for instance, dog readings that recur insistently to the Queen’s biography.⁶ I

⁵ Of the downsides of this kind of policy, Slack argues that “by insisting on sales in the local market, the dearth regulations reinforced local chauvinism in areas with corn, and were of no use to those without it.” (“Dearth and Social Policy in Early Modern England” 11).

⁶ Peter Davidson and Jane Stevenson, for instance, argue that the Bisham entertainment was crafted with the intention of getting Elizabeth and Anne Russell “appointed Maids of Honour, since this would give them power and influence in their own right to enhance the claims for marriageability,” even as they critique dislocation between the entertainment’s vernal pastoral form and the aging monarch it fetes. See “Elizabeth I’s Reception at Bisham (1592): Elite Women as Writers and

agree that entertainments supported the political fabric of the Elizabethan court, but I want to shift toward an ecocritical consideration of *longue durée*, reciprocal exchanges between pastoral literature and England's changing landscape. Elizabethan entertainments, I argue, were at once shaped by natural disturbances and formatively involved with conceptual and legal responses to those disturbances. Forcing the Crown to confront the effects of national mandates on local landscapes in a period of recurring harvest failure, they functioned as administrative laboratories in which policies could be dramatically weighed and evaluated.

The Bisham and Sudeley entertainments capture the mechanism by which country house entertainments deployed the pastoral mode as a discursive presentation of the politics of local agrarian life. Respectively devised by Lady Elizabeth Russell and Giles and Frances Brydges in August and September of 1592, they rewrite Virgil's fourth eclogue in order to dramatize the effects of dearth on local agriculture. In so doing, they also seek to shape the terms of the government response to scarcity: Bisham dramatizes the dangers of food riot by way of justifying careful regulation of the grain trade; Sudeley stages the impoverishing effects of national legislation on local cloth production and the landscape that supports it. Performed just days apart and later printed in a single volume, these entertainments share underlying concerns about dearth and civil disorder, but differ in their understanding of how to respond to these challenges. If the Crown's attempts to coordinate regional and national responses to scarcity through proclamation and legislation attracted the support of some landowners interested in maintaining order, it also inspired resistance from others intent on preserving their feudal privileges. Bisham's encomiastic rendering of Virgil's golden age

Devisers," *The Progresses, Pageants, and Entertainments of Queen Elizabeth I*, ed. Jayne Elisabeth Archer et al., (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), 207-227.

acknowledges the necessity of nationally coordinated local self-sufficiency in times of dearth; by contrast, Sudeley's ironizing version advocates for a more radical local autonomy, tinged with a sense of baronial prerogative, and intent on relieving the Crown of its function as a superintendent of environmental policy.

In performance, the Bisham and Sudeley entertainments by turn address the challenges posed by crop failure and slumps in cloth production without significant reflection on the relationship between the problems they stage. In print, however, the literary and political correspondences between the texts appear clearly. Joseph Barnes, an Oxford printer, synthesizes their related interests for a regional readership in his 1592 *Speeches Delivered to Her Maiestie this Last Progresse*. Appearing side-by-side on the printed page, Bisham's and Sudeley's shared reliance on Virgil's fourth eclogue becomes a coherent discourse around the politics of dearth, as transacted through the poetics of golden-age local self-sufficiency. While it is difficult to know the exact composition of *Speeches Delivered's* readership, it likely comprised an educated readership in Oxford and across the south and west of England—a region, I'll show, which was undergoing alterations in structures of land use and employment that exacerbated the effects of dearth on an emerging class of artisans.⁷ While representations of an Elizabethan golden age proliferated beyond count in the final years of the Queen's reign, their frequent delineation in printed country house entertainments affords insight into the close relationship between literature and the regimes of environmental regulation that shaped agricultural life until the dismantling of the

⁷ For a more comprehensive discussion of *Speeches Delivered's* readership see Elizabeth Zeman Kolkovich's *The Elizabethan Country House Entertainment: Print, Performance, and Gender*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2016), 142-155.

Elizabethan poor laws at the end of the eighteenth century.⁸ Elizabethan writers and readers, that is to say, preferred pastoral as a mode well-suited to systematic thinking about environmental disturbances and effective policy responses to them.

“All kind of ground all kind of things shall carrie yield and beare:” Elizabethan Dearth and Eclogue IV

Harvests in early modern England succeeded more often than they failed, but the specter of dearth haunted the period’s literary and legislative imaginary. Abraham Fleming’s 1589 translation of Virgil’s fourth eclogue typifies the period’s interest in a political ecology rooted in local production and consumption. As Fleming has it, the earth, abiding “no rake” produces grain absent the farmer’s cultivation, and rams learning “to counterfeit colours of divers kinds,” make fine cloth without imported dyes. In this picture of a nature that everywhere satisfies human need and even anticipates preference, trade becomes superfluous; the “ship of pine tree” is no longer compelled to “change hir merchandize and wares.” Commerce accedes to a comprehensive abundance in which “all kind of ground all kind of things carrie yield and beare.” Fleming’s translation here is particularly telling; it multiplies the single activity of the Latin verb *feret*, will bear, into three distinct actions. The ground not only “beares” and “yields” crops, but also “carries” them, a verb that, in early modern usage, frequently denoted the practice of transporting grain to places of storage and

⁸ See John Miller’s “The Ruling Elite.” *The Oxford Handbook of the English Revolution*, ed. Michael Braddick, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2015), 500-515.

sale.⁹ Conflating cultivation and trade, the redundancy insists that nature accommodates every want. Put another way: Fleming's golden age unites the occasion of harvest with that of consumption in a gesture that necessarily limits the scene of agricultural production and exchange to the immanently at-hand. Natural and human flourishing are achieved in a political ecology enabled by localized self-sufficiency.

This abundant vision resonated with an early modern England beset by dearth, and its central images circulated widely as symbolic markers of scarcity. Take, for instance, Titania's canonical speech to Oberon in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. "The seasons alter," chides the Fairy Queen:

The ox hath therefore stretched his yoke in vain,
the ploughman lost his sweat and the green corn
hath rotted ere his youth attained a beard.
The fold stands empty in the drowned field,
and crows are fattened on the murrain flock.¹⁰

Titania almost precisely reverses the terms of Virgil's golden age: the ox remains bound to the plowman who labors fruitlessly while sheep lie dead in flooded fields. She regrets the "green corn," "rotten ere his youth attained a beard", and the empty fold in the "drowned field." Her speech highlights the dominance of golden age imagery in Elizabethan expressions of anxiety about dearth and natural disorder; it also points to the centrality of the interrelated industries of grain and cloth production to that anxiety. In its most pressing articulations of environmental distress, that is, early modern literature consistently unites the problems of failed crops and dead sheep. Titania laments the ploughman's "lost sweat" and

⁹ As in "to carry corn from the harvest field to the stackyard," *OED Online* (Oxford: Oxford UP, February 2019) "carry, v." 1c.

¹⁰ William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Ed. Sukanta Chaudhuri, (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2017), 152-155 or 2.1.81-2.1.117.

the crows fattened on “the murrain flock.” Abraham Fleming’s translated golden age pictures plowmen who “loose the yokes from strong and sturdy bulls” and “lambs a-feeding in the pasture field” in “colours of divers kinds.” The Bisham and Sudeley entertainments, I’ll argue, respectively address concerns around grain supply and cloth sales.

This repeated coincidence invites a generic explanation: pastoral herd and georgic plow together comprise the symbolic field of agricultural poetry. But the pairing also speaks to the unique economic and ecological overlap of the two industries in a region of England inching towards fully capitalist forms of employment, as well as to the poetic appeal of Virgil’s golden age in that region as it sought to make sense of the problem of dearth.

By 1586, the south and west of England—encompassing both Bisham in Berkshire and Sudeley in Gloucestershire—supported a clothmaking economy that depended on landless weavers, spinners, and fullers.¹¹ In turn relying on markets for food, these workers suffered disproportionately during harvest failures that raised the price of grain prohibitively. Unable to secure sustenance, they resorted to riot. These interludes followed a recognizable pattern: first, harvest failure coincided with a slump in cloth production, leaving artisans short of the wages needed to purchase grain made expensive by scarcity; second, those same artisans convened to halt the shipment of grain away from local markets where its absence would exacerbate shortages; and third, the Crown circulated amended regulations, typically with specifications for keeping local produce in local markets.¹² When

¹¹ For a full discussion of this emerging industry see David Rollinson’s *The Local Origins of Modern Society: Gloucestershire 1500-1800*. (London: Routledge, 1992), esp. 1-21; also Sharp, *In Contempt of All Authority*, 1-9.

¹² Sharp, *In Contempt of All Authority*, 43-81; also Slack, “Dearth and Social Policy in Early Modern England,” 1-2.

harvests failed, then, regions boasting an active clothmaking economy tended to incur the most frequent and aggressive outbreaks of civil unrest. Thus the unusual force of the sheep and plow in literary and legal imaginings of dearth; these intertwined supports of agricultural life were at once continually vulnerable to nature's vicissitudes, and casual to widespread social disorder.

As I'll show, pastoral entertainments like Bisham and Sudeley, served as vital forums for the negotiation of the unsteady relationship between a nature that consistently challenged fictions of human control and new capitalist forms of employment. Dramatizing the effects of environmental disturbance on realistically pictured agricultural scenes, they also stage solutions to the problem of dearth. They resolve scarcity's challenge to social order in the promise of an Elizabethan golden age predicated on local production and consumption.

"The Lady of the farme": Corn Policy at Bisham (August 11-13 1592)

Recent scholarship on the Bisham entertainment has dispelled questions of authorship, making a convincing case for Elizabeth Russell as the organizer of its spectacles and writer of its scenes. These studies demonstrate the ways in which Russell's ambitions as a courtier inform Bisham's arrangement, but they omit any analysis of Russell's situation as an local actor. Elizabeth Kolkovich, for instance, has argued that Russell promotes a definition of courtiership predicated on cooperation between Protestant monarch and subject, by way of urging Elizabeth I to welcome her daughters to court as learned and

virtuous counselors.¹³ Though this kind of reading acknowledges Russell's sophistication as a politician and a humanist, it nevertheless retreats from a concerted analysis of her generically inventive engagement with pastoral as a mode eloquent about local lands and the politics of their cultivation. Peter Davidson and Jane Stevenson have even claimed that "the most significant problem that [Russell] confronts is not generated by the apparently bold innovation of women's speech, but by the dislocations of pastoral and mythological discourses forced upon the deviser(s) by the need to accommodate, within the structure of pastoral, appropriate tropes of praise for a 59-year old Virgin Queen."¹⁴ Such analysis assumes that, in employing the pastoral mode, Lady Russell adheres uncreatively to convention. Her strained use of a tired formula even results in the "dislocation" of place and person. I argue, rather, that Russell treats pastoral as an expressive literary form, remaking the fourth eclogue's promise of an immanent golden age into a measured assessment of the regional consequences of Elizabeth I's response to sustained dearth. Far from dislocating Russell from the specifics of her geographical and political situation, pastoral enables her to open a dialogue with the Queen around the effect of Crown policies on the health of her Berkshire household.

The Bisham entertainment consists of three short scenes that mark Elizabeth I's passage from a hilltop above the estate to its manor house along the Thames. In each, the Queen meets with mythological figures who initially contest the terms of her sovereignty, before bowing to the Arcadian abundance and harmony that that sovereignty seemingly

¹³ Kolkovich, *The Elizabethan Country House Entertainment*, 51–87.

¹⁴ Peter Davidson and Jane Stevenson, "Elizabeth I's Reception at Bisham (1592): Elite Women as Writers and Devisers." 219.

ushers in. Addressed first by a “wilde man”, second by Pan and the shepherdesses Sybil and Isabel, and lastly by the goddess Ceres, Elizabeth I is welcomed to Bisham by acts that appear to announce a new golden age, but actually vibrate with paradoxical insinuations of human violence and natural disruption.

First to greet Elizabeth is the “wilde man” who introduces himself to the Queen by way of submitting himself to her authority, an image of nature civilized and pliant before royal prerogative. Strangely, though, his capitulation brings not peace but rather the promise of imminent hostility: “your majesty on my knees I will follow,” he pledges, “bearing this Club, not as a Salvage, but to beate downe those that are.”¹⁵ The editors of John Nichols’s *Progresses and Public Processions* gloss the usage of “salvage” as a simple misspelling of savage. In this sense, the wild man renounces his formerly uncivilized state, and pledges violently to subdue other brutes. “Salvage”, however, also connoted the practice of recovering another’s property from perilous circumstances—typically storms at sea, though also in cases of fire and flood—and claiming it as one’s own.¹⁶ In this second sense, the wild man separates himself from those who take advantage of natural disruption to seize the property of others, and promises to suppress the practice by force. Either usage is troubling: who are these “salvagers” capable of threatening the ease of Elizabethan government, supposedly flowering under the influence of what the wild man describes as the Queen’s “infinite” “vertue”?

Violence also tinges the entertainment’s final scene, in which the destruction of a “harvest Cart” forces the submission of the harvest goddess Ceres to Cynthia, goddess of the

¹⁵ John Nichols, *The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth I*, 604.

¹⁶*OED Online* (Oxford: Oxford UP, February 2019) “salvage” n. 2b.

moon. Ceres at first celebrates her own primacy: touting her “Crowne of wheat-ears,” she mounts a large grain wagon and declares herself the “only Queene of heaven”, adding, “Cynthia that shineth, is not so cleare, Cynthia declineth, when I appeare.” She then immediately reverses this stance, announcing that, after all, “Cynthia shall be Ceres Mistres.” What is strangest about Ceres’s change of heart is its predication on the destruction of her “Carre”; the vehicle “rive[s] asunder”, knocking Ceres down from her perch and forcing her concession to “soveraigne” Cynthia.¹⁷ The scene invokes the same pastoral power dynamics of high and low that animate many of Edmund Spenser’s eclogues in his *Shepherdes Calendar*, as for instance in “July,” when Thomalin and Morrell debate ecclesiastical responsibility on the slope of a hill.¹⁸ Beyond these metaphors of authority, though, lies the fact that the Queen would have witnessed an actor dressed as the goddess of bounty sprawled amidst the scattered “wheat-ears” of Bisham’s harvest. Considering that Cynthia was a frequent mythological stand-in for Elizabeth I herself, this moment presents a significant interpretive problem: why stage the destruction of a vehicle designed to store and transport harvest plenty in an entertainment purportedly celebrating the prosperity enabled by Elizabethan government? And why implicate Elizabeth-as-Cynthia in the representation of regular agricultural order disrupted?

Both the wild man’s club and Ceres’s destroyed cart become legible symbols in the context of the tradition of riot emerging across the south and west of England during this period. Protests tended to erupt in poor harvest years, and targeted vehicles carrying grain

¹⁷ John Nichols, *The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth I*, 608-609.

¹⁸ Edmund Spenser, *The Shorter Poems*, ed. Richard A McCabe (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), 95-107.

away from local markets. Russell's Berkshire holdings appear to have been the object of several such minor uprisings. In 1601 letter to her nephew Secretary of State Robert Cecil, for instance, Russell deplored a "horrible riot" on another nearby property in Eure, Berkshire, in which "a hundredth coming upon my land, and reaped and carried away ten acres of wheat, thirty well-weaponed persons with pikestaves and bills standing to guard the workmen, where two of my men were hurt and the rest cast down and not suffered to carry any of my corn out of the field."¹⁹ She wrote again a week later "to complain to the Throne of Justice—from whence shall I receive no recompense for my corn, worth about 100 marks."²⁰ Another incident involving at least "17" men, who "for their weapons, they had swords and other weapons of offense" caused Russell to charge the Earl of Nottingham with inciting riot in a dramatic 1606 meeting of the Star Chamber.²¹ These violent interludes have been interpreted as salvos in ongoing property disputes between the Berkshire aristocracy, but it is telling that they also coincide with intervals of dearth. Two shepherds in Samuel Daniel's 1606 *The Queenes Arcadia*, for example, complain that "the very aire is changed/our wholesome climate grown more maladive."²² These shepherds' frustration with their native climate accords with other accounts of unseasonable weather and scarcity across England in 1605 and 1608.²³ Bad weather and the hunger that attended it, then, may have

¹⁹ All quotations from Elizabeth Russell's letters are taken from *The Letters of Lady Elizabeth Russell (1540-1609)*, ed. Elizabeth Farber, (New York, 1977), 296-298.

²⁰ *The Letters of Lady Elizabeth Russell*, 300-301.

²¹ See "Appendix XVII- Lady Russell v. The Earl of Nottingham Note." *Les Reportes Del Cases in Camera Stellata 1593 to 1609 from the Original Ms. of John Hawarde of the Inner Temple Esquire Barrister-at-Law* (vol. 1, 1894), 434-35.

²² Samuel Daniel's *Complete Works in Verse and Prose, Vol. III: The Dramatic Works*, ed. Alexander Grosart, (The Spenser Society, 1885) 218.

²³ Sharp, *In Contempt of All Authority*, 10-43.

contributed to the seizure of grain from its regular places of storage and sale, as much as did aristocratic disagreement. The “salvagers” despised by the “wilde man” underscore riot’s threat to the steady functioning of Tudor government, even as Ceres’s broken grain cart invites Elizabeth to consider herself implicated in the violence of that threat.

If the Bisham entertainment dramatizes the violent side-effects of scarcity, it also stages potential political and legislative solutions to those side-effects in its rewriting of Virgil’s fourth eclogue. Lady Russell engages with the poem both superficially and structurally as she plays to influence the terms of the government response to dearth and disorder. This borrowing sometimes takes the form of simple compliment: Eclogue IV, for example, opens by proclaiming that with the birth of a new ruler: “now is the last age come whereof Sibyllas verse foretold”; at Bisham “Sybil” herself announces the Queen’s coming and elaborates on the golden age that attends her. Virgil’s poem foresees that its ruler will “with heavenly gods mingl[e] in company,” a prediction that Sybil translates into a vocabulary suited to Elizabeth I’s gender and chastity. “One” will come, she warns Pan, “that will make Iupiter blush as guilty of his unchast jugglings, and Juno dismaide as wounded at her Majesty.”²⁴ Augustus walks among the gods; Elizabeth I amazes those same hedonistic pagans with her chaste Protestant virtue.

Beyond this borrowing of formulaic compliment, though, Bisham expounds on the eclogue’s vision of a golden age in which natural abundance obviates the need for commerce that separates a harvest from the place of its reaping. In the entertainment’s central scene, the Queen’s retinue pauses at “the middle of the Hill” where sit “Pan and two

²⁴ Abraham Fleming, *Pastoral Poetry of the English Renaissance*, 14-16; and John Nichols, *The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth I*, 608-609.

Virgins keeping sheepe.” This scene, critics have argued, showcases the chaste virtue of Sybil and Isabel—likely played by Russell’s daughters Elizabeth and Anne—as they undercut Pan’s gendered resistance to Elizabethan rule and apply for positions at court.²⁵ While its dialogue does engage with the problem of gender, it also argues for coordination between landowners and the Crown by threatening natural and civil disorder as an alternative to Elizabeth’s golden age regime of peace and plenty.

Virgil’s eclogue constructs its Arcadia by describing what imperils it: “herds of cattell,” for example, “shall not feare the lions great and terrible”, and “the serpent perish shall and dy, the herbe of poison too.”²⁶ Similarly, Sybil illustrates England’s golden age by contrast with the threat of continental dearth. “By her it is (Pan) that all our Carttes that thou seest, are laden with Corne,” she announces,

when in other countries they are filled with Harneys, that our horses are ledde with a whip; theirs with a Launce, that our Rivers flow with fish, theirs with bloode: our cattel feede on pastures, they feede on pastures like cattel... This is she... on whom God hath laide all his blessings, & for we ioy clappe our hands, heedlesse treason goeth hedlesse; and close treachery restlesse: Daunger looketh pale to beholde her Maiesty; & tyranny blusheth to heare of her mercy... We upon our knees, wil entreat her to come into the valley, that our houses may be blessed with her presence, whose hartes are filled with quietness by her gouernment. To her wee wish as many yeares as our fields have eares of corne, both infinite...²⁷

Sybil depicts an England enjoying a golden age grounded in the seeming wisdom of Elizabethan trade regulations. Kolkovich has suggested that Sybil’s special emphasis on

²⁵ Kolkovich, *The Elizabethan Country House Entertainment*, 51–87; and Peter Davidson and Jane Stevenson, “Elizabeth I’s Reception at Bisham (1592): Elite Women as Writers and Devisers.” 207–227.

²⁶ Abraham Fleming, *Pastoral Poetry of the English Renaissance*, 14–16

²⁷ John Nichols, *The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth I*, 608–609.

“corne” (an early modern catch-all term for grain²⁸) actually functions as an endorsement of militant Protestantism, through allusion to a recently instated Crown embargo on commerce with Spain.²⁹ I agree, adding that the passage not only affirms international religious commitments, but actively seeks to shape the terms of commercial grain sales both at home and abroad by encouraging coordination between national and local government in times of dearth. “We upon our knees, wil entreat her to come into the valley,” Sybil urges, “that our houses may be blessed with her presence, whose hartes are filled with quietness by her gouernment. To her wee wish as many yeares as our fields have eares of corne, both infinite.” The interlocking euphuisms of Sybil’s welcome underscore her plea for a mutually beneficial partnership between Elizabeth I and the Russell family’s Berkshire estate. The “infinite” years of the Queen’s “gouernment” correspond to “infinite” “eares of corne,” and “close treachery”—recall the Wild Man’s club and Ceres’s cart— “goes restless.”

In pointing out to Pan what is manifestly before him (“all our Carttes that thou seest, are laden with Corne”), Sybil accurately characterizes the disposition of agrarian Berkshire, and invites the audience to attend to the harvest abundance filling the fields around them. It would be easy to read her assertion of cereal plenty as a conventional, albeit politically motivated, pastoral gesture. In fact, however, Sybil’s claims find corroboration in contemporary accounts of the county’s system of mixed husbandry. Possessed of both chalk downs suited to the plow and heavy clay soil that resisted it, the region relied on a combination of dairy production and cereal cultivation to feed its inhabitants. By some

²⁸ As in: “a seed of one of the cereals, as of wheat, rye, barley, etc.” *OED Online (Oxford: Oxford UP, February 2019)* “corn, n.1.”

²⁹ Kolkovich, *The Elizabethan Country House Entertainment : Print, Performance, and Gender*, 68.

estimates, between 67 and 90 percent of the land was arable, with the remainder reserved for common use and livestock. While dairy products were primarily set aside for consumption by their makers, Berkshire grain appeared to circulate in national and even international markets. Farmer Robert Loder of Harwell, Berkshire estimated that wheat and barley malt represented his most profitable crops, an indication that corn crops reached markets where they could be valued.³⁰

The region's cultivation of grain for market left it particularly vulnerable to abuses by traders scheming after monopoly prices. The topographer William Harrison lamented this kind of abuse in corn distribution in his 1587 *Description of England*. Ostensibly treating the organization of "Fairs and Markets", Harrison dilates almost exclusively on grain shortages, especially emphasizing the market system's prejudice against "the poor artificer and householder which tilleth no land but, laboring all the week to buy a bushel or two of grain on the market day, can there have none for his money, because bodgers, lodgers, and common carriers of corn do not only buy up all but give the price to be served of great quantities."³¹ Here, Harrison describes the practice of engrossing, in which merchants "buy up the whole stock, or as much as possible, of a commodity for the purpose of retailing it at a monopoly price."³² As repellent as Harrison finds this custom when undertaken domestically, he saves special venom for those merchants who engross in order to trade abroad. "Of the common carriage of corn," he writes, "over unto parts beyond the seas I

³⁰ For a complete account of agriculture in early modern Berkshire see Joan Thirsk's "The Farming Regions of England," *The Agrarian History of England and Wales*, vol. IV (Cambridge U.P., 1967), 66–71.

³¹ William Harrison, *The Description of England*. (Folger Shakespeare Library: Cornell University Press, 1968), 247-248.

³² *OED Online* (Oxford: Oxford UP, September 2018), "engross," v. 2a.

speaking not; or at leastwise, if I should, I could not touch it alone but needs must make other provision withal, whereby not only our friends abroad but also many of our adversaries...the papists, are abundantly relieved,” this at the expense of “the poor man” in England who “sleeps with a hungry belly.”³³ To Harrison, the export of English corn to Catholic Spain for the “relief” of “papists” was an almost unspeakable abuse. The Crown and its deputies agreed: as part of a broader wartime embargo, Elizabeth I issued an edict criminalizing maritime transactions that would introduce English corn to Spanish markets.³⁴ Domestic hoarding and engrossing received an even more comprehensive curtailing in the frequently reissued Book Orders, distributed in 1587, 1594, 1595 and 1596.³⁵

The Bisham entertainment dramatizes the importance of proscriptions on both domestic and international trade. When Sybil, for example, juxtaposes the “infinite” “eares of corne” which surround abundant Bisham with dearth on the continent (“our cattel feede on pastures, they feede on pastures like cattel”), she underscores her family’s prudence as stewards of Berkshire. She also connects the success of their stewardship to Crown policies that prevented needed grain from escaping English fields into foreign mouths. As Sybil tells it, the Russells’ religious and agricultural commitments appear to align: the Crown’s grain embargo against Catholic Spain at least partially undermines the attempts of “bodgers, lodgers, and common carriers of corn” to deprive the poor of grain at local markets. The Russells endorse the embargo not only because of their Protestant allegiances, but also because it facilitates their responsibilities as managers of households across Berkshire,

³³ William Harrison, *The Description of England*. 249.

³⁴ See Richard Wernham’s *After the Armada : Elizabethan England and the Struggle for Western Europe, 1588-1595*. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1984), 251.

³⁵ Sharp, *In Contempt of All Authority*, 50.

undercutting as it does temptations to riot in its judicious reservation of local produce for local markets.

Bisham stages the advantages of national regulations as they play out locally; it also underscores Lady Russell's abilities as a regional deputy to whom Elizabeth can trust the enforcement of those regulations. Lady Russell's letters to her brother-in-law William Cecil, Lord Burghley and nephew Sir Robert Cecil reveal the extent of her political commitments in Berkshire. She writes to them frequently from the Hoby seat at Bisham, as well as the nearby stronghold, Donnington Castle, in order to raise concerns about perceived miscarriages in regional justice, or administrative decisions such as the appointment of a qualified neighbor to local office.³⁶ She also issues repeated requests for the Cecils' assistance in increasing her properties in Berkshire. Russell's letters indicate, for example, that she occupied the regional stronghold Donnington Castle as early as 1584, and in 1590—just one year before Elizabeth I's visit to Bisham— she succeeded in winning the provisional lifetime use and income of the estate, probably at least in part through the Cecils' intervention. This grant established Russell as a major landholder in Berkshire in her own right, a position involving responsibilities of hospitality and stewardship that Russell took seriously.

One 1596 royal proclamation recalled these oft-shirked responsibilities of hospitality and stewardship to the attention of Elizabethan magnates, asserting their special importance to the steady functioning of government during death. Condemning those who left “their

³⁶ See, for example, her attempts to see her neighbor John Borlase appointed to the shirvalty of Buckhahmshire in Elizabeth Russell, *The Letters of Lady Elizabeth Russell (1540-1609)*, 79; or her legal disputes over grain riots with Justice of the Peace Richard Lovelace in *The Letters of Lady Elizabeth Russell (1540-1609)*, 54.

said hospitalities” “to come to the city of London and other cities and towns corporate, thereby leaving the relief of their poor neighbors as well as for food as for good rule,” the proclamation charged landholders “not to break up their households” “during this time of dearth.”³⁷ Russell followed the Queen’s command diligently, maintaining residence in Berkshire and attending to the “relief of [her] poor neighbors.” During a failed harvest in 1597, for instance, she urged Robert Cecil to support a “Bill for the relief of the hundred of Beynhurst,” also in Berkshire. “Heartiest thanks,” she exclaimed, “for your kindness this day showed in the bill...touching hue and cry for which you are like to have no other reward but the prayers of the poor, which pierceth heaven.”³⁸ With Cecil’s help, the legislation was attached to a larger, relatively progressive piece of legislation for “the relief of the aged and indigent poor”, which passed Parliament in January 1598.³⁹ Russell’s favored Bill follows Bisham’s logic in proposing coordination between local and national governments. Taking on the practice of hue-and-cry, the legislation shifted the center of justice away from local communities by requiring travelers to meet a series of conditions in national courts before collecting damages.

On one level, Russell’s concerted efforts to extend her authority in Berkshire both in life and in death bespeak her stake in the county’s political and agricultural health, and add a new dimension to our understanding of a figure usually read in terms of her interest in the more minute transactions of court politics. In the Bisham entertainment, that is, Lady Russell advocates not only, as critics have argued, for the installment of her daughters at

³⁷ As quoted in Kolkovich, *The Elizabethan Country House Entertainment : Print, Performance, and Gender*, 88.

³⁸ Elizabeth Russell, *The Letters of Lady Elizabeth Russell (1540-1609)*, 223-225.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 225-228.

court, but for herself as a local administrator capable of realizing an Elizabethan golden age for the people of Berkshire. On another, the Bisham entertainment partakes in the shaping of broader changes in early modern understandings of landscape. It resolves tensions between a fundamentally unpredictable nature and landless workers prone to riot in times of scarcity, eliding them in its picture of a golden age built on cooperation between national and regional authority. The threat of dearth lurks in Bisham's evocations of civil disorder, but the entertainment subdues it with Arcadian promises of self-sufficiency.

"This lock wool, Cotsholdes best fruite": The Woolen Industry at Sudeley (September 9-12 1592)

In an influential 1980 essay on the Sudeley entertainment, Louis Montrose defines Elizabethan pastoral in terms of an apocryphal story about Elizabeth I's time under house arrest at Woodstock (1554-1555). While imprisoned at the country estate, the Princess, "hearing...a certeine milkmaid singing pleasantlie, wished hir selfe to be a milkmaid as she was, saieng that hir case was better, and life more merrier than was hers in that state as she was." Here, Elizabeth characterizes her own political precarity by contrasting it with an imagined, alternative life in the country. Montrose takes this impulse to trade stations with a romanticized pastoral figure as exemplary of Elizabethan pastoral generally, contending that the mode's distinguishing mechanism is the artificial importation of a courtly person into an idealized country context.⁴⁰ The essential action of early modern pastoral, put simply,

⁴⁰ Montrose, "Eliza, Queene of Shepheardes," 153-82.

unfolds when courtiers and monarchs imagine themselves as shepherds, thereby transforming rural life into a dramatization of elevated political discourse.

In the Sudeley entertainment, however, the usual relation reverses; shepherds and sheep-shearers assume the guise of courtly ladies and gentleman, indeed even of kings and queens. “Cut the Cake, who hath the beane; shalbe King, and where the peaze is, shee shalbe Queene,” declares one shepherd, even as he is “clothed all in sheepes-skins, face & all.”⁴¹ This strange inversion of generic convention is characteristic of the entertainment, which insistently invokes a range of idealizing pastoral tropes only to juxtapose them with realistic pictures of agricultural life in rural Gloucestershire. Throughout the entertainment, that is, devisers and participants unabashedly forsake the complex conventions of courtly pastoral doublespeak for a straightforward emphasis on real shepherds and the unsatisfactory conditions that characterized their livelihood in 1592. Far from depicting, as Montrose contends, “a world of unalienated labor synchronized with the orderly cycles of nature,” Sudeley, I argue, subverts pastoral tropes in order to depict a nature that is fundamentally unpredictable; the entertainment’s shepherds are beset by the inconveniences and dangers of an environment that disrupts idealizing fictions of order and control.⁴²

Dividing into three distinct acts over as many days, the Sudeley entertainment cleaves close to pastoral matter in relying on a different shepherd to narrate each scene. On the first day of the entertainment, probably September 9, 1592, an “olde Shepheard”, welcomes Elizabeth into the Castle with a short speech:

Vouchsafe to heare, a simple Shephard, shephards and simplicity cannot part, your highnes is come into Cotshold, an vneuen country, but a people, that carry their

⁴¹ John Nichols, *The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth I*, 612-613.

⁴² Montrose, ““Eliza, Queene of Shepheardes”, 155.

thoughtes leuell with their fortunes, lowe spirites, but true harts, vsing plaine dealinge, once counted a Iewell nowe beggery, these hills afoorde nothing but cottages, and nothing can we present to your highnes, but shephards. The country healthy, and harmeles, a fresh aier, where there are noe dampes, and where a black sheepe is a perilous beast, no monsters, we carry our harts, at our tongues ends, being as farre from dissembling, as our sheepe from fiercenesse, and if in any thing, we shall chance to discouer our leudnes, it wilbe in ouer boldnesse, in gazinge at you, who fils our harts with ioye, and our eies with wonder... this lock of wooll Cotsholdes best fruite, and my poore gift, I offer to your highnes, in which nothing is to be esteemed, but the whitenes, virginities colour, nor to be expected but duetye, shepards religion.⁴³

Here the old shepherd rejects the abundant, vernal prospect of pastoral convention, instead inviting Elizabeth I to enjoy a realistically pictured “Costshold, an uneven country, but a people, that carry their thoughtes level with their fortunes, lowe spirits” and “hilles” that “afforde nothing but cottages and shephards.” The shepherd foregrounds his diminished situation, emphasizing its current poverty; his countryside boasts “cottages and shepherds”, but does not support the very sheep that indispensably sustain Gloucestershire’s primary industry, cloth-making. Strangely, however, the shepherd follows this opening description with a contradictory assessment of the countryside as, rather, “healthy, and harmless, a fresh aier, where there are noe dampes.” In this, he juxtaposes a pastoral ideal with the visible reality that contradicts it, effectively subverting the basis of the Sudeley Entertainment’s chosen mode. “Dampe” was normal in the region; a third day of performances was even canceled due to “the weather [being] so vnfit”, a circumstance that the entertainment’s publisher, Joseph Barnes, found worthy of including in his otherwise distinctly unmediated account of proceedings— the implication being that it represented a point of literary and material importance to his readers.⁴⁴

⁴³ John Nichols, *The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth I*, 610.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 612.

Perhaps most emblematic of the shepherd's speech's subversive relation to conventional pastoral tropes, however, is its choice of gift to the Queen. In offering Elizabeth "a lock of wooll Cotsholdes best fruite", Sudeley departs dramatically both from the norms of country house entertainment hospitality and from the allegorizing mechanisms of conventional pastoral, at least as they have been characterized by recent critics. Throughout her reign, Elizabeth I received gifts of significant value while on progress, and the trend towards lavish expenditure accelerated in the final decade of her life. While towns and cities tended to present cash gifts, nobles preferred jewels for their visibility and symbolic purchase. Indeed, jewelry became such a common offering to the Queen that Burghley's friend and biographer John Clapham could reflect that "in times of Progress there was no person who entertained her but...he bestowed a jewel on her."⁴⁵ These presents were costly; Elizabeth Russell, for instance, disbursed upwards of £100 in gifts to the Queen at Bisham and on other occasions, and her contemporaries were scarcely less generous. Sir William Cornwallis spent £200 entertaining the Queen at his father's estate at Highgate in 1594, and the Egertons presented over £1000 worth of jewelry to the Queen when she visited them in 1602 at Harefield. Patricia Fumerton has helpfully characterized this gift economy as a kind of social contract in which monarch and aristocracy maintain peaceful relations through the exchange of ornamental presents. With greater wealth, came the expectation of gifts of increasing value. Quoting the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski, Fumerton explains: "to possess is to give...A man who owns a thing is naturally expected to

⁴⁵ As quoted in Felicity Heal's "Giving and Receiving on Royal Progress," *The Progresses, Pageants, and Entertainments of Queen Elizabeth I*, ed. Jayne Elisabeth Archer et al. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), 57.

share it, to distribute it, to be its trustee and dispenser. And the higher the rank the greater the obligation.”⁴⁶ If to have is to be obliged to give, then, the literally “poore gift” of wool rather than precious stones pointedly underscores the supposedly reduced circumstances of the Brydges family. “Once counted a Jewell, now beggary, [their] hills afoorde nothing but cottages” and “nothing can” the Brydges “present to [their] highness but shephards.”

Nor does the gift of wool comport with the allegorizing procedure of many other Elizabethan pastorals. At one typical 1602 entertainment at Harefield, for instance, a dairymaid presented Elizabeth with a jeweled rake and a fork. Glossing this incident, Montrose argues that “the pert dairymaid’s allegorical gifts make a striking emblem for Elizabethan pastoral itself: objects and relations in the material world of peasant labor are sublimated into forms of lordly splendor.”⁴⁷ Montrose means that the transformation of the everyday implements of rural life into ornamental expressions of praise for Elizabeth epitomizes the allegorizing function of pastoral literature. Countryside tools and activities become the symbolic materials of courtly discourse. Rather than return its encomium to the person of the queen, however, the Sudeley entertainment insists on the central interest of the actual material production of the Sudeley pasture, which really would have produced “undyed and unfinished ‘white’ cloth” for sale overseas.⁴⁸ In casting courtly virtues specifically in terms of local agriculture (“whitenes, virginities colour,” “duetye, shepards religion”), rather than the other way around, the entertainment denies the characteristic

⁴⁶ Patricia Fumerton, *Cultural Aesthetics : Renaissance Literature and the Practice of Social Ornament*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 31-32.

⁴⁷ Montrose, ““Eliza, Queene of Shepheardes”, 160.

⁴⁸ David Rollinson, *The Local Origins of Modern Society: Gloucestershire, 1500-1800*, 26.

proceeding of pastoral symbolism, reducing allegorical doublespeak to a more literal appraisal of the material environment in which shepherds labor.

The entertainment's material and literary insistence on regional poverty partly dramatizes the effects of environmental instability on pastoral life in rural Gloucestershire, and partly works to ameliorate those effects by shifting crown policies. For over half a millennium, from about 1300 to 1840, cloth brought more revenue to Gloucestershire than any other product.⁴⁹ In 1592, however, the industry was in crisis.⁵⁰ Unseasonably cold summers and heavy rain resulted in crop failures throughout the late sixteenth century, which, when combined with botched government attempts to regulate the woolen industry, meant that cloth production had largely halted in Gloucestershire by the time of Elizabeth's visit in September 1592.

Excessively rainy summers portended crop failures that reduced the cloth production in Gloucester by restricting the working population's access to materials essential for their trade. As David Rollinson explains, "husbandry [in the region] was oriented towards providing the manufacturing workforce with grains, vegetables, meat, cheese, leather, wood, woad, and a wide range of necessities and raw materials."⁵¹ Without these basics, clothmaking inevitably slowed, resulting in unemployment that only compounded the effects of a bad harvest. In the 1570s, for instance, "unemployment in the clothmaking trade caused a series of increasingly devastating mortality crises to sweep through the band of settlements under the Cotswold Edge... finally resulting, in 1578-9, in the death of a third of the

⁴⁹ Rollison, *The Local Origins of Modern Society: Gloucestershire, 1500-1800*, 27.

⁵⁰ R. Perry, "The Gloucestershire Woolen Industry, 1100-1690." *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society* 66 (1945): 49-137.

⁵¹ Rollison, *The Local Origins of Modern Society: Gloucestershire, 1500-1800*, 27.

inhabitants in the borough of Cirencester.”⁵² The 1580-90s were troubled by similar reports of regional poverty and starvation, conditions exacerbated by pieces of legislation such as the 1558 Cloth Act, which limited work opportunities by setting strict guidelines around size and weight, and requiring clothiers to be licensed by justices of the peace.⁵³ Regional scarcity on this scale occasioned the usual calls for a return to local self-sufficiency. In 1586, for instance, between 500 and 600 unemployed cloth workers converged on a grain barge with the aim of preventing the removal of local Gloucestershire cereal along the Severn River into Wales. Justices sent to investigate the disruption discovered that the rioters were starving. “So great was their necessity” wrote one lawman, that “dyvers of them justyfie they were driven to feede their children with oattes dogges [dog-grass] and rootes of nettles with such other like things as they could come by.”⁵⁴ The hungry rioters characterized their object in inciting disorder as an attempt to frustrate trade that would separate the sites of agricultural production and consumption. Entrapped in a feedback loop in which failed harvests aggravated the effects of unemployment in the cloth industry, and vice-versa, the citizens of Gloucestershire sought an environmental policy that would restore local prosperity.

Why, then, in the face of the wool industry’s seeming decline, did Sudeley entertainment devisers Giles and Frances Brydges recur so concertedly to a pastoral framework?⁵⁵ Certainly, their attention to the conditions of rural life does not necessarily

⁵² Ibid, 76-77.

⁵³ John Oldland, “The Clothiers’ Century, 1450–1550.” *Rural History*, 29.1, (2018), 1–22.

⁵⁴ For a full description of this particular riot, see Buchanan Sharp, *In Contempt of All Authority* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1980), 13-16.

⁵⁵ Kolkovich, *The Elizabethan Country House Entertainment : Print, Performance, and Gender*, 51-87.

indicate genuine care for the working life of shepherds. In his *Crisis of the Aristocracy*, Laurence Stone describes Giles Brydges as a rapacious landlord intent on preserving the sovereignty of his station against the nationalizing tendencies of Elizabethan government. Brydges, Stone claims, even “protected servants of his who robbed men on the highway near Sudeley Castle, so that the inhabitants dared not arrest the thieves nor the victims prosecute their assailants...and put in a high constable of the Shire who used his office to levy blackmail on the peasantry.”⁵⁶ Other felonious incidents corroborate this account of Brydges’s negligence; Privy Council records, for example, indicate that he was rebuked in 1578 for his failure to pass on the names of suspected pirates in Gloucestershire. Nevertheless, as the county’s leading nobleman, Brydges did participate actively on commissions of inquiry into local disorder and grain shortages, and concerned himself with the region’s autonomy in relation to the encroaching national government.⁵⁷ As Elizabeth Kolkovich points out, the Sudeley entertainment takes an ambivalent attitude toward Crown prerogative, emphasizing regional character, which as she explains, “was often a more crucial aspect of individual experience than was nationalism in the early modern period.”⁵⁸ By emphasizing realistic local texture, then, the Sudeley entertainment argues for the Brydges’ expanded control over Gloucestershire industry, as gentleman clothiers free to profit independent of constricting regulations. And it doubles down on this descriptive

⁵⁶ Lawrence Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy, 1558-1641*. (London: Clarendon Press, 1979) 229-30.

⁵⁷ MacMahon, Luke. *Brydges, Edmund, Second Baron Chandos (d. 1573), Soldier* | *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, also *Brydges, Giles (1548-94), of Sudeley, Glos.* | *History of Parliament Online*.

⁵⁸ Kolkovich, *The Elizabethan Country House Entertainment : Print, Performance, and Gender*, 154.

devaluation of Elizabeth's national government as a superintendent of environmental policy, rewriting Virgil's golden age as an argument for good rule rooted in local self-sufficiency.

Like the Bisham entertainment, Sudeley revises the encomiastic concept of the fourth eclogue both to suit its intended addressee, Elizabeth I, and to highlight certain aspects of local pastoral production. Instead of Sybil predicting an imminent golden age, at Sudeley, it is an "Almanacke" that announces the good news of Elizabethan rule. "Let us attend that, which we most expect, the starr, that direct us hither, who hath in Almanacke?" enjoins the shepherd Nisus, to his companions Melibeous and "the Cutter of Cotsholde," who is notably clothed all in "sheepes-skins, face & all." The Cutter returns: "What meane you, a starmonger, the quipper of the firmament, here is one. I ever carrie it, to knowe the hye waies, to everie good towne, the faires, and the faire weather." Taking the book, it is Melibeous who finally explains:

Let me see it. The seventh of September, happiness was borne into the world, it many be the eleventh is some wonder. The moone at the ful, tis true, for Cynthia never shined so bright, the twelfth the weather inclined to moisture & shepherds devised to dryeness, the thirteenth, soomer, goeth from hence, the signe in *virgo*, *vivat clarrissima virgo*. The diseases shallbe melancholies, some proceeding of necessitie, some of superfluity, many shallbe studying how to spend what they have, more, beating their braines to get what they want. Malice shallbe more infectious then the pestilence, and Drones more favoured then Ants, as for Bees, they shal have but their laboure for their paines, and when their combes be ful, they shallbe stilde; the warre shal be twixt hemlock and honie. At foure of the clocke this day, shal appeare the worldes wonder that leades England into every land, and brings all lands into England.⁵⁹

This radical rewriting of the fourth eclogue almost precisely inverts the terms of the original poem. Melibeous does retain Virgil's correlation of a monarch's ascendance with a golden age realized; Virgil's Arcadia coincides with the "settled age" of an unnamed ruler, and

⁵⁹ John Nichols, *The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth I*, 615-616.

Sudeley's is similarly bracketed by Elizabeth's birthday, "the seventh of September", and the dates of her visit, "the eleventh", "twelfth" and "thirteenth". But the essential premise of the poem—its guarantee of universally shared abundance that obviates labor and commerce—reverses in the augury of Melibeous's almanac. As Adam Smyth notes, early modern printed almanacs "included a detailed monthly calendar; descriptions of local fair routes between towns, and chronologies of history; astrological, medical and agricultural notes...and predictions of weather and strange events."⁶⁰ Though the dates in this prophecy are specific to Elizabeth I, its other details are insistently local. The Cutter claims to use his Almanac to know "the hye waies, to everie good towne, the faires, and the faire weather," details which would have been of material importance to a shepherd concerned to keep his flock dry and to deliver its wool to regional fairs. Further, in indicating that "the weather inclined to moisture" despite the fact that "shepherds devised to dryeness", the Almanac rehearses the entertainment's larger commitment to subverting the conventional pastoral prescription of unwavering of natural order. Excessive rain was more than simply a point of literary concern; early modern shepherds insisted on its causal relation to sickness in flocks. William Harrison summarizes this contemporary tendency to correlate bad weather and dead sheep in his *Description of England*:

The hindrance by rot is...to be ascribed to the unseasonableness and moisture of the weather in summer, also [the sheeps'] licking in of mildews, gossamer, rowty fogs, and rank grass, full of superfluous juice; but specially (I say) to overmoist weather, whereby the continual rain piercing into their hollow fells soaketh forwith into their flesh, which bringeth them to their banes [deaths]."⁶¹

⁶⁰ Adam Smyth, "Almanacs, Annotators, and Life-Writing in Early Modern England." *English Literary Renaissance*, 38.2 (2008): 200–44.

⁶¹ William Harrison, *The Description of England*, 249.

Harrison endorses an understanding of weather that sees environmental conditions as inextricably interwoven with pastoral livelihood. When the Almanac indicates that “weather inclined to moisture & shepherds devised to dryness,” then, it engages not only with literary convention, but also foregrounds the problems facing the cloth-making industry in a decade marked by unseasonably cold and wet summers.

Beyond its decidedly non-golden age picture of natural *disorder*, that is, lies the Almanac’s prediction of subsequent inequality, fruitless labor, and expansive commerce. The book chases its forecast of “weather inclined to moisture,” with the warning that the “diseases” to come “shallbe melancholies, some proceeding of necessitie, some of superfluity, many shalbe studying how to spend what they have, more, beating their braines to get what they want.” The effect of this euphuistic formulation is to correlate universal unhappiness with systemic inequality; “necessitie” drives some to beat “their braines to get what they want,” even as “superfluity” causes others to study “how to spend what they have.” In such an environment, the Almanac advises, “Drones” are “more favored then Ants,” and “as for Bees, they shal have but their labour for their paines, and when their combes be ful, they shalbe stilde.” Non-working honey-bees, “Drones,” frequently symbolized the lazy idler in the early modern imagination. In his *Anatomie of Melancholie*, for example, Robert Burton laments the fate of the “country colon” who “toil[s] and moil[s], till[s] and drudge[s] for a prodigal idle drone, that devours all the gain.”⁶² Burton’s use accords with the Almanac’s in suggesting that the idle luxury of some relies on the

⁶² Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, (Proquest Literature Online 2013), 37.

unrewarded hard work of others. Loafing, rather than labor, meets its reward in this anti-golden age where scarcity goes hand-in-hand with fruitless labor. Whereas Virgil's eclogue and the Bisham entertainment picture an universalized plenty in which "all kind of ground all kind of things shall carrie yield and beare," Sudeley describes the opposite: a landscape in which dearth and unevenly distributed resources necessitate labor, but do not reward it. The natural corollary to this deeply un-Arcadian state of affairs is expansive, even imperialistic trade; the Almanac promises that soon "shal appeare the worldes wonder that leades England into every land, and brings all lands into England."

The politics of dearth as transacted by the alterations to the Books of Orders and Poor Laws insist on nationally regulated local self-sufficiency. Criminalizing trade that removes local produce from local markets, such legislation seeks to instill widespread social order by ensuring the equitable distribution of resources. Bisham, likewise, dramatizes the benefits of trade that reserves regional produce for regional consumption. Playing on the golden age promise of finding what you need where you are, the entertainment follows the fourth eclogue in correlating good rule with an end to labor and commerce. Sudeley, by contrast, resists encroaching national regulations. Its rewriting of Virgil's eclogue preserves the poem's encomiastic tenor, but ironizes it by severing pronouncements of good rule from any promise of abundance sufficient to obviate labor and commerce. Rather, Elizabeth-as-Cynthia's ascendancy only serves to preside over environmental disorder resulting in fruitless labor and dramatic inequality. Even as "Cynthia never shined so bright," it rains in an England beset by dearth and reliant on international commerce.

Sudeley's staged complaints about dearth-time regulation are, on one hand, aristocratic plays to consolidate capital and authority through control of the cloth industry.

On the other, in adhering so closely to the pastoral convention of dialogic exchange, the entertainment's speakers disclose the effects of that industry on the landless artisans it employed. The inclusion of the "Cutter of the Cotsholdes" alongside canonical pastoral names like Nisus and Melibeous, admits in a nominal sense to the specialization of labor involved cloth production. The *OED* suggests that "cutter" served as an early modern synonym to a "tailor", or more specifically, "the person employed in a tailoring or similar establishment to take measurements and cut cloth."⁶³ On a structural level, too, the Cutter introduces a realistic, rather than idiomatic perspective to the debate. "Taylers craftte," he warns his companions, "a knocke on the knuckles, wil make one faste a fortnight, my belly and back shall not be retainers to my fingers." Offering this characterization of his craft by way of refusing the invitation to sing, the Cutter insists on the necessity of laboring in the present moment to forestall future hunger. "Sing," enjoins Nisus; to which the Cutter replies "I have forsworne that since cuckow-time, for I heard, one sing all sommer, and in the winter was all balde." In declining to perform in order to work, the Cutter denies pastoral's usual affordance of art enabled by abundance. He bows out of the mode's characteristic proceeding so as to alleviate the effects of a scarcity that might render his "belly and back" "retainers to [his] fingers."

Further underscoring the Cutter of Cotsholdes's precarity is the extraordinary integration of shepherd and sheep in his person. Not only does he appear before the audience "clothed all in sheepes-skins, face & all", but he also requires an "interpreter", for "he speaks no language, but the Rammish tongue," and "can say no more to a messenger

⁶³ *OED Online* (Oxford: Oxford UP, March 2019) "cutter" *n.* 2c.

then...Bea [bah].” In likening the shepherd and sheep, these stage directions underscore the symbiotic interdependencies of pastoral life. In *Animal Skins and the Reading Self*, Sarah Kay has argued that “conceptions of likeness and the processes of recognition involve intellectual and spiritual work, but they are nonetheless anchored in the sense of sight and touch and focused on the skin.” In literally taking on the “skins” of “sheepes” then, the Cutter inevitably emphasizes the resemblance between himself and his woolly charges, and invites his audience to participate in the drama of that intimacy. The implication here is that shepherds and sheep resemble each other in their shared fate. The vagaries of bad weather, escaping the predictive apparatus of the “Almanacke”, leave shepherd, sheep, and shearer equally vulnerable, especially when unhealthy conditions are intensified by national cloth-making policies that ignore the differences in local production; recall, for example, that an “interpreter” is needed to render the “Cutter of Cotsholdes” language comprehensible to the Queen.

In *Some Versions of Pastoral*, William Empson remarks that “the essential trick of...pastoral” is to “imply a beautiful relation between rich and poor”, with the effect of “in some degree combining in the reader or author the merits of the two sorts.”⁶⁴ To put this well-known summation in slightly different terms: pastoral’s formal tendency towards dialogic opposition affords the inclusion of classed opinions that other genres erase. The mode, that is, makes visible the effects of dearth on the early modern poor, even as it also co-opts those effects as persuasive material in aristocratic plays to shape Elizabethan

⁶⁴William Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral* (Connecticut: New Directions, 1950), 11.

environmental policy. Hungry salvagers threaten Bisham's pastoral mythology with riot, and Sudeley's unemployed sheep-shearers interrupt idyll art in order to find food. These figures of dearth represent nature's power to shape literary forms—disrupting pastoral promises of an immanent golden age— as well as to shape legislative agendas.

Bisham and Sudeley participate, with varying degrees of moral circumspection, in the writing of legislation that governed responses to dearth in Elizabeth's reign and far beyond. Bisham adapts Virgil's golden age discourse of finding what you need where you are to discourage commerce that would incite local instability. Sudeley ironizes and reverses the same golden age in order to criticize government regulation of local industry. Paradoxically, Sudeley's comparative disinterest in the conditions of the poor renders their plight more visible than Bisham's managed staging of hunger and instability; the real precarity of Gloucestershire cloth workers is practically rendered a persuasive attribute in the Brydges' play for increased regional autonomy, whereas the deprivation of Berkshire's farmers is sublimated to the threat of disorder. In both cases, though, these entertainments work discursively to determine the legal rights of England's landless class as they evolved within the stresses of the Little Ice Age.

Chapter 3:

Wiltshire:

Soiled Enclosures: Pastoral Husbandry in *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*

Is it then the Pastoral poem which is misliked? (For perchance where the hedge is lowest they will soonest leap over.) Is the poor pipe disdained, which sometime out of Meliboeus' mouth can show the misery of people under hard lords or ravening soldiers? And again, by Tityrus, what blessedness is derived to them that lie lowest from the goodness of them that sit highest; sometimes, under the pretty tales of wolves and sheep, can include the whole considerations of wrong-doing and patience...

–Sir Philip Sidney, “The Defense of Poesy” (1579)¹

What did Sir Philip Sidney (1554-1586) consider to be the purpose of pastoral? How did he think the mode should be used? It is usual, in answering this question to turn to his definition in *The Defense of Poesy* (1579). Here Sidney asks, “Is it then the Pastoral poem which misliked? (For perchance where the hedge is lowest they will soonest leap over).” Or, he wonders, continuing, “is the poor pipe disdained, which sometime out of Meliboeus' mouth can show the misery of people under hard lords or ravening soldiers? And again, by Tityrus, what blessedness is derived to them that lie lowest from the goodness of them that sit highest; sometimes, under the pretty tales of wolves and sheep, can include the whole considerations of wrong-doing and patience.” Critics read this passage as an argument for pastoral's allegorical function: it is through fable and allusion that writers may most freely evaluate theoretical questions of political justice and injustice under censorious regimes.² And yet, to pair Sidney's definition of pastoral with his own attempt in the mode in *The*

¹ Philip Sidney, “The Defense of Poesy.” *Sir Philip Sidney: The Major Works*, edited by Katherine Duncan-Jones, Oxford World Classics, 2002, 229.

² For a good account of this metaphorical procedure, see Annabel M. Patterson, “‘Under... Pretty Tales’: Intention in Sidney's ‘Arcadia,’” *Studies in the Literary Imagination; Atlanta, Ga.* 15, no. 1 (Spring 1982), especially page 7.

Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia (1593) is to be confronted by the practical interest of the works in the question of how to accommodate humans and livestock within a finite nature, and a landscape disposed according to suddenly changing customs. In the *Defense's* short account of the form alone, Sidney invites his readers to consider the problem of enclosure (the action of converting pieces of common land into private property, often for grazing) from at least three angles: first, in his invocation of the shepherds Melibeous and Tityrus, who detail the hardships of losing one's land in Virgil's first Eclogue; second, in his parenthetical speculation on the ability of "hedges" (which enclosers planted to mark the privatization of land) to keep out the "mislike" of pastoral poetry; and third, in his imagery of "wolves and sheep", language directly consonant with contemporary descriptions of the violent enclosure of common land at Wilton, the Wiltshire estate where Sidney likely penned large portions of the *Arcadia*.³

If enclosure is inseparable from Sidney's understanding of pastoral literature—is indeed encoded in his definition of the mode—then I argue that it is also constitutive of the landscape and politics of the *Arcadia*. This means, at least in part, that the *Arcadia* deploys the pastoral mode as a frame for the agricultural debates that naturally arose as a result of the changing status and use of land in Elizabethan England. These debates received their fullest treatment in the early modern period in husbandry manuals, which offered practical advice on gardening and farming alongside theoretical guidance on the ethics of estate management. Husbandry manuals can be usefully categorized in terms of their evolution across the 1500s: manuals published in the mid-century emphasize an ethic of stewardship,

³ "enclosure, n." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, June 2020.

which calls for the maintenance of a static natural order, while manuals published closer to the century's end focus on how changes to an estate could maximize its profitability.⁴ In theory, these values might be reconciled— after all, wouldn't landlords extract more value from a property whose infrastructure and inhabitants they'd carefully maintained?

Practically speaking, however, the two approaches produce conflicting outcomes, with advocates for stewardship calling for the conservation of traditional property arrangements, and would-be profiteers underscoring the benefits of enclosure and improvement.

The *Arcadia* gives voice to these opposing perspectives in two ongoing narrative conflicts: first, in the Laconian civil war, waged between the peasant Helots and their Lacedaemonian overlords; and second, in the contrasting council offered to the Arcadian king Basilius by his advisors, the herdsman Dametas, and the landowning nobleman Kalander. In so doing, it also maps them onto class on complex ways, paradoxically positioning the preservation of the existing order, with its unimproved commons, as a landowning ethic espoused by the nobility, while displacing arguments for enclosure onto lower-class manual laborers. Throughout, the *Arcadia*'s protagonists, the princes Pyrocles and Musiodorus, serve as arbiters of the debate, measuring the ideologies of stewardship or profit against their own sense of how a landscape should appear—an understanding they derive from the idealizing conventions of literary pastoral. To the extent that landscapes in the *Arcadia* fall short of their idealizing standards, the methods of cultivation that shaped them are made available to critical evaluation. Agrarian analysis, that is to say, is a central

⁴ I'm indebted here to Andrew McRae's work on husbandry manuals in "Husbandry Manuals and Agrarian Improvement," in *God Speed the Plough: The Representation of Agrarian England, 1500-1660* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 135–97.

concern of the *Arcadia*'s politics, alongside its militant Protestantism, its concern for Elizabeth I's marriage prospects, or its adumbration of a critique of tyranny.⁵ In this chapter, I trace this unexplored strand of Arcadian agricultural politics, one concerned to describe and evaluate the changing structures of land use and ownership in Elizabethan England. Recording differences of cultivation and landscape as narrative conflicts, it both reflects on rural innovation and attempts to influence it going forward, in the very moment that England's transition toward agrarian capitalism was playing out in the estates of Sidney's relatives.

This transition dovetailed with rise of the related processes of enclosure and improvement. As early as the fifteenth century, and with increasing frequency in the sixteenth, landlords erected fences and planted hedges in order to signal the conversion of common ground into private property. If, for instance, a field had offered firewood to one commoner, pasture to another, and bird-catching to a third, it might now be reserved for exclusively for use by a landlord. Certainly, this was the story of enclosure at Wilton House, which Mary Sidney Herbert's father-in-law erected in a park formed by dispossessing a village's worth of tenants.⁶ Enclosure included the process of improvement, in which landlords altered customs of land use and cultivation with the aim of increasing profits from

⁵ This conversation spans over four centuries, but for representative arguments by contemporary scholars about Sidney's use of allegory to code critical political commentary see especially: Annabel Patterson's "'Under pretty tales...': Intention in Sidney's *Arcadia*" in *Censorship and Interpretation* (24-43); David Norbrook's "Sidney and Political Pastoral" in *Poetry and Politics the English Renaissance* (82-97); Joel B. Davis's *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia and the Invention of English Literature*; Blair Worden, *The Sound of Virtue: Philip Sidney's Arcadia and Elizabethan Politics*; and Julie Crawford's *Mediatrice*, which offers a comprehensive history of the tradition in "Female Constancy and *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*" (30).

⁶ I discuss this point at length later in the chapter but for its details see HMC, *Rutland*, I, 36. As quoted by Andy Wood, *The 1549 Rebellions and the Making of Early Modern England*, 49.

a property. The *OED* even conjoins the two terms, defining “improvement” as the decision to “enclose and cultivate (wasteland or unoccupied land) in order to make it profitable; to make (land) more valuable or productive, esp. by bringing it into cultivation or development.”⁷ The *Arcadia*, I suggest, often sequences agrarian change in just this way, as it vivifies agricultural debates waging in England broadly, and at the Sidney estates specifically.

In 1593, Philip Sidney’s sister, Mary Sidney Herbert, published *The Countess of Pembroke’s Arcadia* in composite form, joining together the cancelled manuscripts of the 1570s with the revisions that Sidney undertook in 1580s.⁸ It was probably also at her Wiltshire estate, Wilton House, that Sidney penned these iterations of his pastoral romance, during visits between 1577 and 1580.⁹ Wilton was added to the cluster of estates managed by Sidney Herbert after her 1577 marriage to Henry Herbert, 2nd earl of Pembroke, who was one of England’s largest landowners, with extensive properties in both Wiltshire and Wales. Together with the Sidney family holdings in Sussex, Surrey, and Kent, and Philip’s own expectations of inheritance from his uncle Robert Dudley, 1st earl of Leicester, the siblings formed the epicenter of a family possessed of massive properties across England. That the realm’s leading landholders would express interest in debates over changing structures of land use and ownership is hardly surprising, and the *Arcadia*’s concern for

⁷ “improve, v. 2b”. *OED Online*.

⁸ For full discussions of Mary Sidney Herbert’s role as an editor and political champion of the *Arcadia*, see Julie Crawford’s discussion of her politics in *Mediatrice*, “Introduction” (1-30) and Chapter 1: Female Constancy and *The Countess of Pembroke’s Arcadia* (30-86).

⁹ Alan Stewart, “Fancy, Toy, and Fiction,” *Philip Sidney: A Double Life* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2000). 223-245. And H. R. Woudhuysen, *Sidney, Sir Philip (1554–1586), Author and Courtier* (Oxford University Press, 2014), <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/25522>.

these questions is attested to in its frequent asides on points of agricultural practice. Seeming flourishes of setting become occasions to intervene in active conversations around estate use and management. Apparently dilating on bucolic charm, the pastoral romance, I argue, takes positions on the treatment of tenants, the allocation of water sources, or the introduction of controversial agricultural improvements.

In the manner of the period's husbandry manuals, the *Arcadia's* consideration of agricultural politics is both theoretical (should a landlord steward an estate or expand its profits?) and practical (offering specific instructions on how "to make a hedge" or how "to cary out donge or mucke").¹⁰ Especially, it concerns itself with the theory and practice of soil: how, theoretically, soil might influence the political disposition of a country, or invite or resist the processes of enclosure and improvement; but also how, practically, it could be enriched or accounted for through estate design and manuring. Countries with "barren soil" appear predisposed to descend into civil war, whereas those enjoying a more abundant nature are shown as peaceful (70). And even in states that do boast a fertile countryside, steps are taken to "consider" "the nature of ground" or to see to its "well-dunging", either in order to maintain the soil's health, or to maximize its profitability (71, 235).¹¹ Soil appears, again and again in the *Arcadia*, as a disruptive force, one requiring attention or accommodation. New Materialist scholars have grown more attentive to the ways in which

¹⁰ John Fitzherbert, "The table," *The Booke of Husbandry* (London, In fletestrete in the house of Thomas Berthelet, nere to the condite at the sygne of Lucrece., 1540).

¹¹ In this, the text vivifies the complaints of the Sidneys' own tenants about the challenges of cultivating unwilling ground, as, for instance, the charge of a Welsh merchant that he found the "groundes" they let to him "rune with breres and thornes, and were full of bogges and myres". As quoted in by Margaret Hannay in *Philip's Phoenix: Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990) 203.

nature itself can act as a historical agent.¹² In the *Arcadia*, soil makes history as a political force, its exhaustion inviting enclosure, and even providing the preconditions for political dissent. This chapter will demonstrate how the *Arcadia* dramatizes the way that the genres of pastoral and husbandry can shape views of, and interactions with, nature; but it will also show how the text reflects on the ways in which nature itself can disrupt and revise the genres that humans deploy in making sense of the landscapes they inhabit. The *Arcadia*, I'll show, traces how the exhaustion of soil maps onto the early modern discourse of husbandry, as it shifts away from an emphasis on stewardship towards a focus on profit.

"Of old, freemen and possessioners": The Sidney-Herberts Enclose

Literary critics have long remarked on the fact that Sidney composed the *Arcadia* at an estate built within an enclosure. "It is not easy to forget," Raymond Williams wrote in *The Country and the City* (1975), "that Sidney's *Arcadia*, which gives a continuing title to English neo-pastoral, was written in a park which had been made by enclosing a whole village and evicting the tenants."¹³ The presentation of this information as peripheral context, I argue, has elided its structural significance to the *Arcadia*. Sidney himself describes pastoral as a form that "can show the misery of people under hard lords or

¹² See Bruno Latour, Michael Serres, and particularly Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 2010).

¹³ Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 22. In his introduction to *Shakespeare and the Politics of Commoners: Digesting the New Social History*, Chris Fitter sidelines this information similarly, some forty years after Williams in his "Even the sensitive and idealist Philip Sidney," he writes, "(composing his courtly *Arcadia* in a park created by destroying a village and expelling its inhabitants) sought to portray the knightly severing of rebellious peasants' hands and heads...as simple hilarity." "Introduction: Rethinking Shakespeare in the Social Depth of Politics," 5.

ravening soldiers.”¹⁴ If we understand the *Arcadia* as a text self-consciously situated in that tradition, then the Laconian civil war of Book 1, featuring a dispute over customary land rights that unfolds along class lines, becomes a centrally important episode. Dramatizing the wrongs weathered by common people under “unjust lords”, it accomplishes the primary objective of pastoral as Sidney understands it—even as it troublingly evokes the violence, enacted by members of Sidney’s own family, which made way for the place of the *Arcadia*’s composition.

Questions of stewardship versus profit instigate the violent conflict.¹⁵ Two factions, the Helots and the Lacedaemonians, war for control of the Laconian countryside. Their dispute unfolds along the hierarchies of class, with the “peasant” Helots conceiving such “hate...against all gentlemen” that they take “divers towns and castles with the slaughter of many of the gentry, for whom no sex or age could be accepted for an excuse” (86-95).

Violence directed at the gentry was both a real occurrence and an imagined threat in early modern England. Between 1525 and 1649, an approximate 50,000 commoners revolted

¹⁴ Philip Sidney, “The Defense of Poesy,” 229.

¹⁵ Most of the comparative politics in the *Arcadia* unfolds in the past tense, as a story related for an audience’s instruction. The princes Pyrocles and Musiodorus entertain the princesses Philoclea and Pamela with tales of their adventures abroad, recounting battles with exiled giants, appetitive tyrants, and scheming younger sons. Their stories index the ways in which political systems fail, contrasting paranoid rulers with greedy ones, and duplicitous subjects with subjects who protest injured merit.¹⁵ What unites these scenes is their situation in the plot’s past. Their conflicts now resolved through the princes’ efforts, they serve as instructive guards against certain kinds of political error—warnings of what to avoid—and rarely creep into the scope of present action. The one type of political debacle that bucks this textual preference for past-tense politics: enclosure riot and environmental degradation, which the *Arcadia* constructs as its inevitable corollary. That these questions of landscape and property erupt into narrative present is significant. Jeff Dolven suggests in his reading of the *Arcadia* that the romance wields the present tense to indicate a “moment in which the self may be asserted in action.”¹⁵ The *Arcadia*, I argue, treats problems of enclosure and land management as requiring such imminent self-assertion, depicting them with an urgency that exceeds theoretical abstraction in demanding concrete resolution in the present moment.

against their government.¹⁶ These rebellions responded to a myriad of specific grievances ranging from illegal enclosures to exorbitant food prices, but they shared a broadly conservative agenda, pursuing the restoration of rights and customs that had been eroded during the Reformation, and as a result of the landowning reaction to inflation and demographic growth. The insurrections explicitly targeted England's nobility. Participants in Kett's Rebellion (1549), for instance, complained that "their miserable condition had become a laughing stock" to the country's "most proud and insolent men"; and the leader of the Oxfordshire Rising of 1596 reported his "intention to kill the gentleman [sic] of that countrie, and to take spoile of them."¹⁷ That this latter threat repeats the language of the *Arcadia's* Helots decades after the book's composition attests to the reach and continuity of anxiety around popular revolt. As Chris Fitter notes, "elite fear of mass political alienation—a *secessio plebis* of the kind imputed to Rome's downfall" burgeoned "into paranoia" "as impoverishment visibly extended its ragged sway in England."¹⁸

Fears of peasant rebellion spreading from fractious counties to peaceable ones frame the *Arcadia's* treatment of the Laconian conflict. The dispute first comes to readers' attention by way of the entangled marriage politics of the Arcadian gentry: seeking revenge on a rival suitor, the knight Argalus has attacked the Helots' leader; and when the Helots capture him, his foster-child Clitophon (notably "before the day of his near marriage") rides

¹⁶ Chris Fitter, "Introduction: Rethinking Shakespeare in the Social Depth of Politics," in *Shakespeare and the Politics of Commoners: Digesting the New Social History* (Oxford University Press), 1.

¹⁷ As quoted by Andy Wood in "Brave Minds and Hard Hands: Work, Drama, and Social Relations in the Hungry 1590s," in *Shakespeare and the Politics of Commoners: Digesting the New Social History*, ed. Chris Fitter (Oxford University Press, 2017), 93; and by Andrew McRae, "The Green Marvell," in *The Cambridge Companion to Andrew Marvell*, ed. Derek Hirst and Steven N. Zwicker, Cambridge Companions to Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 122.

¹⁸ Fitter, 4.

to his rescue only to be imprisoned himself (86). Clitophon, as it turns out, is Kalander's son, and so the Arcadian nobleman marshals his supporters, among them his houseguest the prince Musiodorus, and hastens to the Laconian frontier prepared for battle. Seemingly localized conflict, the *Arcadia* indicates here, rarely stays contained within the region in which it originates. Family ties and friendships swiftly render it the concern of responsible governors and landholders elsewhere. Misrule, it appears, produces contagious violence that soon implicates all members of a deeply interallied aristocratic class.

While the Arcadians' involvement in the Laconian conflict can be explained in terms of kinship obligations, the actual origins of the civil war are harder to discern. Two possible explanations for the violence are offered. The first theory, submitted by one of Kalander's advisors, a "man well acquainted with the affairs of Laconia," is that the war arose as a result of a property dispute. The Helots, he explains,

were a kind of people who, having been of old freemen and possessioners, the Lacedaemonians had conquered them and laid not only tribute, but bondage upon them; which they had long borne, till of late, the Lacedaemonians through greediness growing more heavy than they could bear, and through contempt less careful how to make them bear, they had with a general consent (rather springing by the generalness of the cause than of any artificial practice) set themselves in arms (94).

The second theory, advanced by the shepherd Claius, recognizes the involvement of nature itself. Laconia, he recalls, is

Not so poor by the barrenness of the soil (though in itself not passing fertile) as by a civil war, which being these two years within the bowels of that estate between the gentlemen and the peasants...hath in this sort as it were disfigured the face of nature, and made is so unhospital as now you have found it (70).

In holding these two theories side-by-side, we begin to complete the origin story of the civil war. The first offers a history of changing customs around property use and ownership. The Helots, it explains were not always impoverished peasants. "Of old" (that is, customarily)

they enjoyed the rights of “freemen”, that is, they were both “personally” and “politically free,” “enjoying the rights and liberties of a city, borough, company, or guild.” This rights-orientated definition of a freeman was still gathering its significance in the sixteenth century, but Sidney draws its most capacious meaning here, invoking the sense of commanding political entitlements within a community, and in return, bearing responsibility for that community’s well-being.¹⁹ While such political agency might seem like a granted achievement of the early modern period, in fact, it was constantly threatened by landlords eager to revive serfdom. In 1528, for instance, the commoner John Sylk charged his lord Thomas Boleyn with an unlawful re-imposition of bondsmanship in a Star Chamber proceeding. He was, he asserted, “a Freeman of Free condicyon and no bondeman.”²⁰ In going to war to defend the same limited political agency, the Helots dramatize the struggle of the early modern poor to preserve, and perhaps expand upon, their customary rights.

In a loss connected with the withdrawal of their status as freemen, the Helots have also been dispossessed. Once “possessioners” (people who “possess something; an owner, a proprietor, an occupier”), they now owe the fruits of their labors to the “greedy” and “contemptuous” Lacedaemonians.²¹ This expropriation, with its simultaneous reduction in economic and political status, was unfolding across England as Sidney penned the *Arcadia*.

¹⁹ “freeman, n.”. OED Online. In the sense of:
c1503 R. Arnold *Chron.* f. lxxxij^v/1 A free man shal not be amerced for a litel trespace but after y^e maner off the trespace Saue his contenment.

1654 T. Fuller *Ephemeris Parliamentaria* 459 No Free-man shall be imprisoned without due processe of the Law.

1571 in W. H. Turner *Select. Rec. Oxf.* (1880) 339 Noe freman of the Cytie..shall grynde from the said milles any kynd of grayne.

²⁰ Quoted in Andy Wood, *The 1549 Rebellions and the Making of Early Modern England*, Cambridge Studies in Early Modern British History (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 57.

²¹ “possessioner, n.”. OED Online.

It was the very signature of enclosure, which separated peasants from their customary holdings and rights in order to engage them as wage laborers. Protesting such illegal dispossessions, Kett's rebels lamented their changed condition, deploring that they were "almost killed with labor and watching, [and] doe nothing all their life long but sweate, mourne, hunger, and thirst ... the Pastures are inclosed, and we shut out ... we in the meane time, eat herbs and roots, and languish with continuall labour."²²

The agony voiced here, as well as in the account of Kalander's advisor, would suffice to justify the Helots' revolt against their Lacedaemonian lords. Yet the *Arcadia* insists on a second explanation in Claius's ascription of unrest to faults in the Laconian landscape itself. He regrets that the country's soil, which even in the past, was "not passing fertile," is now utterly "wasted." This litotic formulation, negating the pastoral convention of fertility, works to emphasize the innate limitations of Laconian soil, and to critique the practices that have further despoiled it. In Claius's analysis, the relative barrenness of the Laconian soil both testifies to the country's strife and exacerbates it. Breeding scarcity, the unyielding earth intensifies the very struggles to own more of it, which, circularly, degrade it.

Stories like this one, of nature's determining force over agrarian change, can be found in abundance in early modern accounts of enclosure. Typical narratives of enclosure start by emphasizing how soil in certain common lands was unfruitful to begin with; next they regret that small farmers have further exhausted it through overuse in subsistence grazing; then they expound on the advantages of a new system of convertible husbandry to

²² As quoted by Andy Wood in "Brave Minds and Hard Hands: Work, Drama, and Social Relations in the Hungry 1590s," 91.

repair that damage; and finally, they reluctantly declare the necessity of enclosure, so that a landlord can supervise the allegedly reparative improvement. Thomas Tusser's *Five hundred pointes of good husbandrie* (1573) offers this case for enclosure. Describing convertible husbandry as the practice of enclosing common lands so they could regain fertility by lying fallow, or by the judicious rotation of crops, he asserts a landlord's place in overseeing nature's restoration and consequent bounty:

More plentie of mutton and beefe,
corne butter, and cheese of the best,
More wealth any where (to be breefe)
More people more handsome and prest,
Where fine ye? (go search any coast:)
than there, where enclosure is most?²³

Here Tusser celebrates enclosure as the surest way to increase communal wealth. Nature's fallibility, following the logic of his argument, conveniently excuses the processes of enclosure and improvement that dispossess smaller farmers. The tendency of soil to be exhausted by common use becomes an argument for its annexation by a landowning elite who, paradoxically, cast profit as a benefit more freely available to all within a system of private property.

The Sidneys themselves pointed to infertile soil as a justification for enclosure. The family invested in and promoted the installation of water meadows around their Wiltshire estates, rerouting chalky local streams to fields in need of moisture and mineral nutrients.²⁴ The extent to which these improvements relied upon the autonomous agricultural practice

²³ As quoted by Randall Martin in *Shakespeare and Ecology*, (OUP Oxford, 2015). 74.

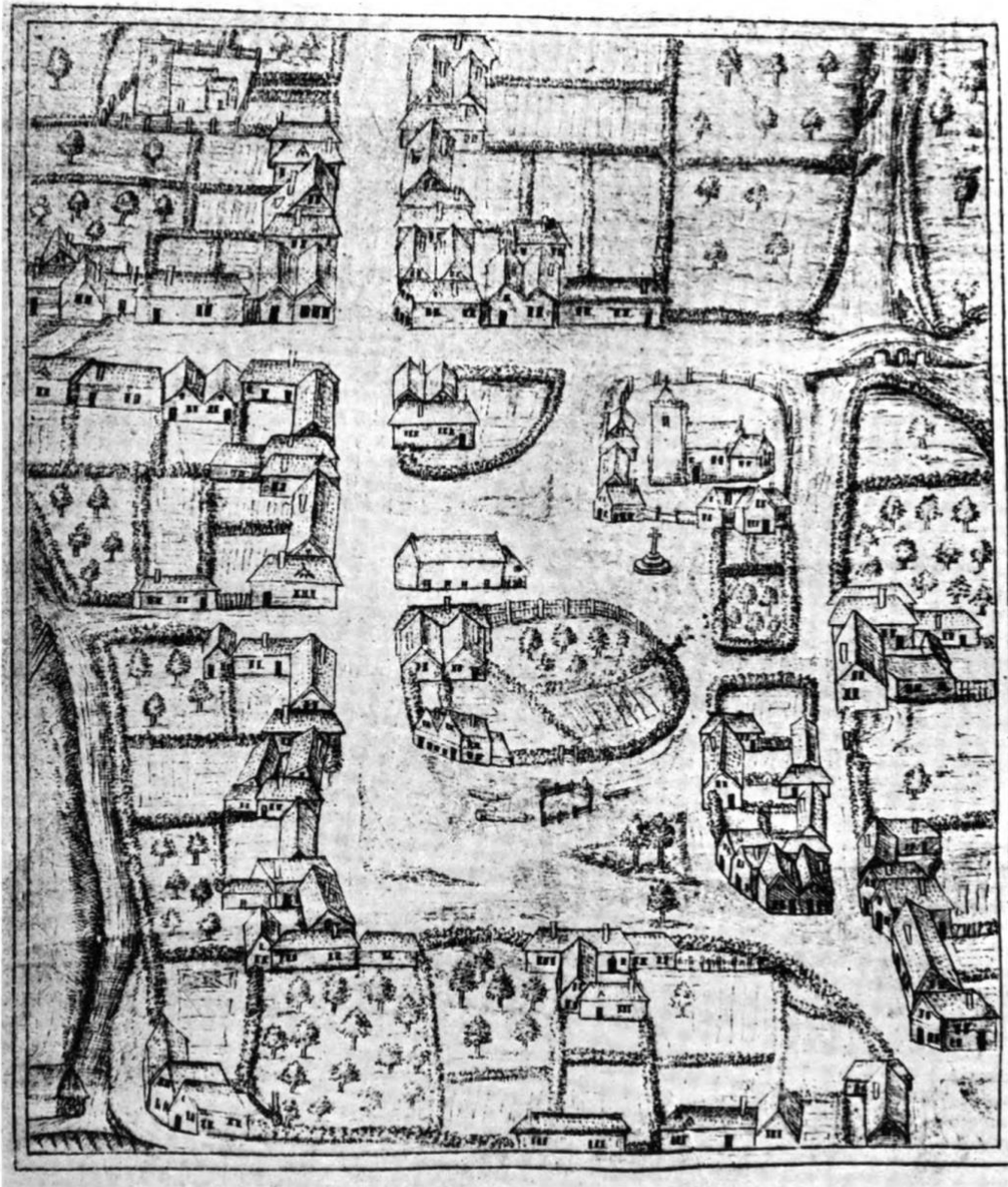
²⁴ See Louise Noble, "Wilton House and the Art of Floating Meadows," *The intellectual culture of the English country house, 1500-1700*, ed. Matthew Dimmock, Andrew Hadfield and Margaret Healy, 232-247.

offered by enclosure is attested to in the antiquarian John Aubrey's interviews with elderly Wiltshire residents, who look back on the late sixteenth century as the heyday of enclosure in the region. His *Wiltshire: Topographical Collections* (1659) features one subject recalling how his "Grandfather Lyte did remember" how "this country was then a lovely campania" with "very few enclosures unlesse near howses," though since "much hath been enclosed."²⁵ Grandfather Lyte's story of encroaching enclosure accords with more official records of agrarian change in Wiltshire under Sidney's in-laws, the Herberts.

The borough of Wilton was granted to the family in 1541 by Henry VIII, and they came into possession of Wilton Abbey and the bulk of its properties shortly after, in 1544 (Figure 2):²⁶

²⁵ John Aubrey, *Wiltshire. The Topographical Collections of John Aubrey, F. R. S., A. D. 1659-70, with Illustrations.*, ed. John Edward Jackson (Devizes : London: Printed and sold for the Society by H. Bull; Longman & co., 1862), 8-10.

²⁶ D. A. Crowley et al., "The Borough of Wilton," in *A History of Wiltshire*, Col. IV, History of the County of Wiltshire (London: Published for the Institute of Historical Research by Oxford University Press, 1953), 1-35.



WILTON FROM A DRAWING OF *c.* 1568

Figure 2: A Drawing of Wilton from 1568

Upon receiving these lands, Sir William Herbert destroyed the abbey and enclosed the fields surrounding it in order to construct his mansion house and its associated parklands. Violence erupted intermittently throughout the sixteenth century, as the Herberts secured their claims to formerly common lands against the Wilton townspeople's attempts to restore their use-rights. The borough was an epicenter of unrest during the rebellions of 1549, which Sir William Herbert instrumentally subdued across the county, and particularly in his own borough of Wilton. Sometime in May 1549, Herbert took the preemptive move of quelling enclosure-related unrest by confiscating the town's weapons. The precaution drove the commons to rise against Herbert, destroying the fences of his park. Herbert's response was vicious and ineffective. On May 24, he came with 200 men "who by his order attacked the commons and slaughtered them like *wolves among sheep*." Instead of quelling the unrest, Herbert's brutality incited widespread rioting. Just a day later, there were "a grete number of the commonse uppe abowte Salyssebery in Wylleshere," who:

pluckyd downe Sir Wyllyam Harberde's parke that ys abowte hys newehowse, and dyverse other parkysse and commonse that be inclosyd in that cuntr[y]e, but harme they doo too...[nobody]. Thay saye thay wylle obaye the Kyngs maiste[r] and my lord Protector with alle the counselle, but thay saye thaye wyll nat have ther commonse and ther growendes to be inclosyd and soo taken from them.²⁷

In the echoes traveling between this event, the Laconian civil war, and Sidney's definition of pastoral—in their shared recursion to the figures of "wolves" and "sheep" as allegories of oppressor and oppressed—it is difficult not to detect Sidney's critical analysis of his own family's imbrication in enclosure violence. Notably, the *Arcadia* treats the Helots' revolt

²⁷ HMC, *Rutland*, I, 36. As quoted by Andy Wood, *The 1549 Rebellions and the Making of Early Modern England*, 49.

with far greater sympathy than any other popular uprising in the text. A riot in Book II, for instance features “an unruly sort of clowns,” who when they do begin to “talk of their griefs,” make a “confused humming...the town dwellers demanding putting down of imposts; the country fellows, laying out of commons...for the artisans, they would have corn and wine set at a lower price...the ploughman, vine-laborers and farmers would have none of that.” Soon falling to “direct contraries,” these petty rebels serve to demonstrate the necessity of elite central authority in adjudicating between the competing interest of commoners (379-385). By contrast, as we’ve seen, the Helots’ terms are reasonable and shared, arising from “general consent, and “rather springing by the generalness of the cause than of any artificial practice” (94).

It is worth pausing here to note that both accounts of the Laconian civil war—either as a property dispute, or as a consequence of nature’s frailty—are directed at the princes Musiodorus and Pyrocles. The audience and judge of the competing narratives, the princes ultimately reconcile their different emphases on property and nature in the peace that they broker between the gentlemen and peasants of Laconia. Recognizing the reciprocal working of natural vicissitude and human greed in the country’s unrest, and finding the remedy to these ills in the elevation of the common good, they propose the following settlement to the Helots:

The distinction of names between Helots and Lacedaemonians to be quite taken away, and all indifferently to enjoy both names and privileges of Laconians. Your children to be brought up with theirs in the Spartan discipline; and so you framing yourselves to be good members of that estate, to be hereafter fellows and no longer servants. Which conditions you see carry in themselves no more contention than assurance; for this is not a peace which is made with them, but this is a peace by which you are made of them...and as you hated them before as oppressors, so now to love them as brothers; to take care of their estate because it is yours (102).

This resolution appears liberal-minded in its cancellation of the differences between the Helots and the Lacedaemonians. Certainly, it promises to unite the factions in their care for a shared estate. Notably, however, the two conceptions of landscape that are actually in conflict—earth as a common resource versus earth as a private one suitable for improvement and increase— cannot be reconciled, only elided within the princes’ rhetoric of common purpose. The text never even affords the rebels a platform from which to narrate their grievances directly. Instead their complaints are relayed as hearsay between members of the gentry. The entire civil war unfolds, second-hand, in the conversation of Arcadian noblemen and their advisors. Formally, one might say, the text is enacting a consolidation of political control among an elite. “I with your commissioners,” deliver unto you the conclusion between the kings, with the nobility of Lacedaemon, and you,” Pyrocles says to the Helots, by way of announcing the terms of the peace (102). Such “commissions” really did adjudicate enclosure disputes in sixteenth century England. In 1548, the Crown established one, but drew its members from the very country gentry whose actions it was meant to constrain. Unsurprisingly, these arbiters tended to side with enclosers rather than commoners. Bishop Hugh Latimer summarized one proceeding: “a great man...sat in commission about such matters; and when the townsmen should bring in what had been inclosed, frowned and chafed...and threatened the poor men, that they durst not ask their right.”²⁸ By 1597, the Crown abandoned the pretense of impartiality, and passed an act explicitly authorizing enclosures made with the goal of increasing soil fertility—and consequently profits—through convertible husbandry.²⁹

²⁸ Quote from Andy Wood, *The 1549 Rebellions and the Making of Early Modern England*, 39.

²⁹ Randall Martin, *Shakespeare and Ecology*, 66-77.

The *Arcadia*, then, frames the Laconian conflict as a question of husbandry, a discursive clash between stewardship and profit. This way of conceptualizing differences in the understanding of land-use effectively limits the debate to the Elizabethan elite, whether they be established gentry or improving profiteers. It occludes commoner notions of land predicated on custom and memory, as for instance, the practice of “beating the bounds” in order to demarcate borders, or the consultation of “stayers”, old men and women with a strong recollection of use-rights in their locality. (These rituals could result in entirely opposed conceptions of property; in 1589, the poor people of Walberswick described the town common as their “freehold”, contradicting suggestions by their lord that the field had degenerated into a waste.).³⁰ So while the Laconian civil war might seem to unfold along the opposed viewpoints of peasants and noblemen, it in fact dramatizes the differences within an elite discourse of land management. The conservative husbandry-as-stewardship of Kalandar and the princes, emphasizing common care for a shared estate, triumphs over the newer husbandry of improvement and profit, espoused by the “greedy” and “contemptuous” Lacedaemonians and (as we’ll see) the upstart Dametas. The victory is temporary; we learn in Book 5 that the Lacedaemonians have reneged on the bargain, unable to resist the temptation to profit off the Helots’ labor. In the end, stewardship seems less like a permanent solution and more like an outdated ideology, obsolescing before a new regime of profit.

³⁰ Andy Wood, *The Memory of the People: Custom And Popular Senses Of The Past In Early Modern England*, (Cambridge, United Kingdom ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013) 187.

“The nature of the ground” or the “well-dunging of a field” : Kalander & Stewardship versus Dametas & Profit

Far from considering this discourse of agrarian improvement uniquely casual to the Laconian civil war, the *Arcadia* continues to explore its implications for a country’s political life in the kinds of counsel received by the Arcadian King Basilius. On the one hand, the nobleman Kalander speaks for an earlier tradition of husbandry manual, which advises landowners that they pursue the common good by acting as stewards of their estates and tenants. On the other, the erstwhile herdsman turned counselor to the King, Dametas, represents the position of later manuals, which advocate for agrarian improvement aimed at maximizing the profitability of a property. The complication arises in casting Dametas—one of the only manual laborers to appear in the *Arcadia*—as the agent of enclosure. Why position a commoner as the actor of destabilizing agricultural change that directly benefits aristocratic landowners? The decision distances the *Arcadia*’s protagonists from the enclosure process, as well as the violence and political instability that often attended it, instead allowing that tumult to return to a more theoretical register, in the discourse of husbandry manuals.

Early modern England supported a sizeable market for husbandry manuals. Classical texts such as Columella’s *De Re Rustica* , Cato’s *De Agri Cultura*, Pliny’s *Naturalis Historia* and Xenophon’s *Oeconomicus* circulated in print on the continent as early as 1470, and were translated into English beginning in 1532.³¹ A new tradition of English manuals

³¹ For further discussion of early modern publication of classical farming texts see G. E. Fussell’s “The Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries” in *The Classical Tradition in West European Farming*, 82-114; and particularly, Andrew McRae’s “Husbandry Manuals and Agrarian Improvement,” in *God Speed the Plough : The Representation of Agrarian England, 1500-1660*, 135-168.

also emerged at this time, preserving the formal features and overarching philosophies of classical texts alongside a sharpened interest in the particularities of local cultivation. Copies of many of these books were housed in the Sidney family library's extensive collection, including John Fitzherbert's *Boke of Husbandrye* (1540).³² Early manuals like this one retained the traditional address to an established landowner whose primary activity was estate management, rather than physical labor, but additionally included new developments in English agricultural practice. Thus chapters titled "a shorte information for a yonge gentyll man that entendeth to thryve" appear alongside ones devoted to "how forkes and rakes shuld be made" or "howe all maner of corne shulde be sowen."³³ Similarly, Barnabe Googe's English translation of Conrad Heresbach's *Four Bookes of Husbandry* (1577) cites Xenophon in specifying that its contents address not "ordinarie husbandmen, the fonde and ignorant sort...but renowned men which have loved and caused to flourish the life and exercises of the cuntrye house"³⁴; at the same time, it includes "Olde English rules for purchasing land."³⁵ This fusion of classical precedent with national and local natural knowledge characterizes the first generation of English husbandry manuals, which commend conservative ideals of stewardship, and incorporate advancements in agricultural practice only in order to shore up existing structures of use. They envision above all an established

³² Joseph Black, Germaine Warkentin, and William R. Bowen, *The Library of the Sidneys of Penshurst Place Circa 1665* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, Scholarly Publishing Division, 2013), 153.

³³ John Fitzherbert, "The table" in *The boke of husbandrye*. London, 1540. *Early English Books Online*.

³⁴ Cited in McRae's "Husbandry Manuals and Agrarian Improvement," in *God Speed the Plough: The Representation of Agrarian England, 1500-1660*, 139.

³⁵ Barnabe Googe, *Foure books of husbandry, collected by M. Condradus Heresbachius, counsellor to the high an mighty prince, the Duke of Cleue*. London, 1577. *Early English Books Online*.

nobility extending authority out from a productively ordered estate into the surrounding English countryside.

Formally, these early husbandry manuals were organized in two ways: either by topic, in which case, they functioned as a kind of reference book that landowners could consult with questions like “how a manne shulde plowe all maner of lands all tymes of the yere”; or else as a dialogue, occasioned by the movement of speakers to different sites across an estate.³⁶ This latter format typically features one speaker representing a well-informed landowner, and a second playing the part of a visiting courtier requiring instruction. As they tour the estate together, they pause to dilate on topics suggested by the landscape they walk through. Each place stopped at invites a meditation on the principle of husbandry that informed its construction or design. Theme, in this kind of manual, becomes a stylistic function of place. In Heresbach’s *Foure Bookes*, for instance, the noblemen Cono and Rigo stop at the front of the house to remark on its judicious placement. “Surely,” Rigo says, “eyther you, or your ancestors have both commodiously and handsomely placed this house.” Cono agrees, and takes his friend’s compliment as an incitement to expand on the process of situating such a dwelling. As with Kalander’s estate, “Ayre” is a chief consideration; builders should avoid “marshes or a great River” for “in the heate of the yeere” they “doo send forth pestilent and deadly dampes.” Prospect is not neglected; Cono notes that his house “lyeth South” “so that it receiveth the coole windes in Sommer, and is not subject to the bitter blastes in Winter.” The nature of the ground also concerns those who cannot easily “shunne the neighborhoods of the River or the Sea.” Such constructions must

³⁶ John Fitzherbert, “The table” in *The boke of husbandrye*.

take special care to “mount” the house on high banks and surround it with “great trees” lest it “feel the discomoditie of the rising flooddes.”³⁷ Manuals abound with such realistic formulations, continually reminding their readers of the ways that nature can both accommodate and disrupt human projects of dwelling and cultivation. If some locations encourage soliloquy on nature’s delimiting force on construction, others prompt conversations on more overtly political problems. Later in Heresbach’s dialogues, the noblemen Marius and Thrasybulus wander through the “gardens, orchards, and wooddes,” of the estate before sitting down to rest in a “herber”, that is, a “bower or shady retreat, of which the sides and roof are formed by trees and shrubs closely planted or intertwined.”³⁸ Here, they address potentially sensitive questions such as the role of a monarch, or the obligation of a landlord to his neighbors. Seclusion on a country estate affords the courtiers the privacy required to reflect candidly about the imperfections of government and court, and their bearing on the retreat offered by country life.

Kalander’s character is motivated by this first generation of English husbandry manuals both formally and thematically. Certainly, he orders his estate in deference to their values. The manuals recommend constructions that “turne away the discommodities of nature”; Kalander’s house accounts for such natural vicissitudes in its “fit consideration of the air, the prospect, and the nature of the ground” (71). They commend diligent oversight as a means to thrift; Kalander knows that “thrift is the fuel of magnificence.”³⁹ They prize

³⁷ Barnabe Googe, “The first Booke of husbandry, entreating of earable ground, tillage, and pasture,” *Four books of husbandry, collected by M. Condradus Heresbachius, counsellor to the high an mighty prince, the Duke of Cleue*. London, 1577. *Early English Books Online*.

³⁸ “Arbour”, n. 5a. *OED*.

³⁹ Early English husbandry manuals connected landowners’ duty to oversee their estate with their desire to reduce unnecessary expense, framing regular practices of supervision as integral to a

hospitality; Kalander's tenants describe him as a "man who for his hospitality is much haunted that no news stirs but comes to his ears; for his upright dealing so beloved of his neighbors that he hath many ever ready to do him their utmost service." This congruence between Kalander's understanding and that of the manuals is not superficial. It affects the *Arcadia*'s plot consequentially. Importantly, it is Kalander's generically-informed sense of landscape as an occasion for conversation—his predisposition to suit topic to place—that inaugurates the pastoral romance's central storyline. Soon after Musiodorus's arrival, Kalander takes him on a tour of the estate, leading him abroad to "a well-arrayed ground he had behind his house," where they view the fields and orchards before they are "suddenly stept into a delicate green; of each side the green a thicket and...which being under trees, the trees were to them a pavilion" (73). It is here in the seclusion of the bower that Kalander discloses the current disorder of the Arcadian state. The admission centers Dametas in its analysis of the country's political troubles, condemning the herdsman for misleading King Basilius with imprudent and flattering counsel.⁴⁰

flourishing manorial community. Fitzherbert writes that the master of the estate should "go about his closes, pastures, feeldes, and specially by the hedges, and to have in his purse a payre of tables, and whan he seeth anythyng that wolde be amended, to wryte it in the tables...And than let hym call his bayly...and to shewe hym the defautes, that they may be amended..."³⁹ Habitual oversight, Fitzherbert, suggests, will reward landowners in its excision of needless expenditure or inefficient practice. Kalendar models the dual imperative to supervision and thrift; his "skill of coasting the country," Musiodorus observes, "might well show Kalander knew that provision is the foundation of hospitality and thrift the fuel of magnificence."³⁹ Circuiting his property, "coasting" along its confines, Kalendar apprises himself of its wants and inefficiencies. Intimate familiarity begets the thrift required for the capacious hospitality on which stand notions of government by husbandry.⁴⁰ Throughout these adventures, the princes frequently consult Kalander's authority on questions of Arcadian politics, again following the pattern customary to manuals, in which the first speaker typically represents an informed landowner educating the second speaker, who is a courtier unfamiliar with the ways of the country, or the perspective of country people on courtly politics. (As when Musiodorus calls Kalander so that Pyrocles might "hear the full story which before he had recounted...and to see the letter" (108). Or when they recall Kalander's statements in private discussions as a way of holding them in memory as guiding principles (140).

Notably, Dametas is the only character in the *Arcadia* to attempt to move between pastoral's class registers—from comic clown to courtly statesman—and the failure of his character to add one mode to another underscores the text's pessimism about the potential for two different ideologies to comprehend each other. "Am not I Dametas? Why, am not I Dametas?" he asks Pyrocles (142). Less a presentation of self, than a request for somebody else to affirm his identity for him, Dametas's introduction seems to admonish readers against attempting impossible elevations between generic registers or social identities. The *Arcadia* takes great pains to discredit Dametas's point of view, rendering him as comic and bumbling. At the same time, the text cannot imagine a rural scene from which he is absent. Why invent a character only to lob ridicule his way? What is at stake for the *Arcadia* in dramatizing, and then devaluing, the perspective of the husbandman? The text's nobility appears to object to Dametas solely on the basis of his class aspirations, but I would argue that their resistance extends to a broader set of concerns around destabilizing agricultural change. Dametas's ascendance symbolizes the rise of a new regime of agrarian capitalism, intent on enclosure and improvement. Carrying dung to enrich the earth enclosed by hedges that his cutters maintain, Dametas represents novel profit-based attitudes toward nature, which threaten to interrupt and displace the older, feudal values of moral economy to which characters like the princes and Kalander still subscribe. Dametas's character thus exemplifies the correlation between generic and agrarian change that this chapter is concerned to explore. A newcomer to the landowning aristocracy, the husbandman speaks the discourse of improvement, which the ruling class, for the time being, marks as incoherent social pretension.

His communications with the princes are particularly vexed. Approaching Pyrocles “with a hedging bill in his hand, chafing and swearing by the pantable of Pallas and such other oaths as his rustical bravery could imagine,” Dametas appears as an object of ridicule to Pyrocles, who finds that his “thoughts would not descend so much as to make him answer, but continued on inward discourses” (143). The disjuncture is repeated in every scene that Dametas enters. A whole book later, neither he nor the princes have learned to communicate with each other. “Dametas (who came whistling and counting upon his fingers how many loads of hay his seventeen fat oxen eat up in a year)” regales Pyrocles “with a wild method to run over all the art of husbandry, especially...the well dunging of a field.” Pyrocles “yields” his “ears to those tedious strokes, not warding them so much as with any one answer” (234-235).⁴¹ Silence is the princes’ preferred method of evading Dametas’s conversation, for when they do speak to the herdsman, a mutual failure in understanding ensues. The allusive speech of princes relies heavily on pastoral metaphors; but Dametas reads their symbolic language as a kind of madness.⁴² His speech is literal in the extreme, and when it manages to avoid the malapropisms of courtly imitation, it derives its terms from the discourses of husbandry, although of a different strain than that subscribed to by Kalandar. In an argument about Orlando’s trajectory in *As You Like It*, Randall Martin

⁴¹ In scenes like this one, the *Arcadia* would seem to condemn the use of pastoral literature to reflect on the art of husbandry. Sidney’s contemporaries, it appears to posit, abuse or cheapen pastoral’s expressive potential as a political discourse when they employ it to describe the challenges of local agriculture. On the other, these efforts by the *Arcadia* to define metaphorical pastoral in relation to a more literal iteration mark the latter’s prevalence as an early modern mode of interpretation. In finding rural musings worthy of critique and even satire in the person of Dametas, the text admits their tradition among early modern readers and writers.

⁴² For example: O my only pearl,” sobs Pyrocles, “that so vile an oyster should keep you” (143). The prince casts Dametas as the “oyster” unfit to keep the princess Pamela, “a pearl.” Unfailingly literal-minded, Dametas fears for Pyrocles’s sanity. “This woman is mad,” he exclaims. “Oysters and pearls! Dost thou think I will buy oysters?” (143).

argues that the young lord “resents being forced to cultivate the brown life of a husbandman instead of the golden one of a gentleman...that is, one in which the physical labor of husbandry is elided and abstracted as the social ideal of pastoral retirement.”⁴³ This distinction between experiential and literary knowledge usefully characterizes one way in which Dametas’s earthy style of husbandry differs from Kalander’s theoretical one. Another involves the orientation of these characters around different iterations of the English husbandry manual. Kalander’s manuals date to the middle of the sixteenth century and emphasize stewardship. Dametas’s appear closer to the century’s end, with the publication of Thomas Tusser’s *Five hundred good pointes of husbandrie* (1573), and they emphasize profit and improvement over continuity and preservation. One might object that Dametas hardly appears capable of reading such books, but in fact, the *Arcadia* goes out of its way to suggest his literacy, if only to scoff at it. “The clown Dametas,” Kalander remarks with uncharacteristic venom, “will stumble sometimes upon some songs that might become a better brain” (84).

Presented as ludicrous, Dametas’s interest in agricultural minutiae nevertheless sits uneasily beside the princes’ notions of an endlessly abundant nature, or even Kalander’s sense of landscape as something planned from above. Acknowledging the ways in which nature is both excessive and finite, Dametas’s concern for the “well-dunging of a field”, his habit of carrying a “hedging-bill”, trouble idealizing literary fictions about pastoral abundance, and estates that require only organization, and not labor, to prosper. That a field

⁴³ Randall Martin, “Fertility versus Firepower: Shakespeare’s Contested Ecologies,” in *Ground-Work: English Renaissance Literature and Soil Science*, ed. Hillary Caroline Eklund (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, 2017), 132.

requires dung indicates that its soil has diminished in fertility. That an estate needs a hedging-bill means that its enclosing hedges require maintenance.⁴⁴ Natural growth, in Dametas's reckoning, must both be encouraged and restrained. His landscape grows where it should be still, and is exhausted when it should be endlessly fertile.

In addition to marking the ways in which nature disrupts the pastoral ideal, Dametas's accessories share a function as supports of agricultural change. Tools "used in cutting and trimming hedges," hedging-bills figured in the early modern imagination as symbols of enclosure, both because they were used as implements in cutting back the growth of the hedges that delimited enclosed land, and because they served as weapons deployed against commoners protesting the erection of fences around newly private property.⁴⁵ It is striking, then, that the first person Pyrocles meets in entering Basilius's Arcadian retreat should carry such an implement. What is a hedging-bill doing in the supposed "desert" where the King has recently constructed "fine lodges" (77)? What need would there be for such a tool, in a landscape that is supposedly empty of inhabitants and infinitely abundant? Managing King Basilius's enclosures and associated agricultural improvements, Dametas attracts the ire of all the *Arcadia*'s nobility. The princess Pamela accuses him of giving her

⁴⁴ Hedges, of course, were the plants of enclosers. Heresbach writes in his *Four Bookes* (1577) that "the fyrst and natural" method of enclosure is "the quickset hedge, being set of young Thornes, which once well growen, regardeth neyther fyre nor other hurt."

⁴⁵ "hedging-bill", n. *OED*. In *Maison Rustique, or The Countrey Farme* (1616) Charles Estienne describes the uses of hedging-bills in trimming hedges: "a great hedging bill, a little hedging bill, to crop and cut off the wood, and to make young branches." But in *The morall philosophie of Doni drawne of auncient writers* (1570), Henry Denham describes the tool's use as a weapon. He imagines a herdsman throwing "his hedging bill" a rampaging bull, "and hitting hym full on the knee he cutte him such a gashe." And Henry Clapham expands on the hedging-bill's valances as an instrument of war in his *Three Partes of Salomon His Song of Songs*, in which he urges his readers to arm themselves "(as *Dauid* speaketh) be defended with yron (for hedging mittens) and with the shaft of a speare, as with an hedging bill."

father the King the “rules of a herdsman though he pretend to make him a shepherd,” a charge that directly speaks to Dametas’s function as an agent of enclosure in its evocation of the argument that enclosers evicted people in order to make way for sheep (246).⁴⁶ Dung, similarly, indicates a disruption in traditional agricultural practice. While husbandmen had manured their estates for time immemorial, the “dunging” of fields was a dimension of the practice new to English agriculture discourse.⁴⁷ John Fitzherbert’s *Boke of Husbandry* (1540) was the first manual to treat the subject in print. Fitzherbert compares the relative efficacy of different types of dung (“horse dung is the worst dong that is” but “the donge of doves is best”), and stresses the importance of dunging in increasing the productivity of a field: “It shall medle the donge and the erthe togyther, the whiche shall cause the corne moche etter to growe and increase.” Here, soil appears to the husbandman not as endlessly fertile source of abundance, but rather as a commodity that can be improved upon in order to generate more revenue.⁴⁸ Insofar as the *Arcadia*’s nobility blame Dametas for the disorder of their state, they also censure the agrarian change he enacts. The implication is that enclosure

⁴⁶ Recall, for instance, how in the *Utopia* (1516), Thomas More regrets that the sheep of his country have grown “so voracious and fierce that they devour even the people themselves; they destroy and despoil fields, houses, towns.” Thomas More, *Utopia*, trans. Clarence Miller (London: Yale University Press, 2014), 22.

⁴⁷ For discussions of the evolution of the word “manure” in the early modern period, see Saskia Cornes, “Milton’s Manuring: Paradise Lost, Husbandry, and the Possibilities of Waste,” *Milton Studies* 61, no. 1 (2019): 65–85; as well as David Goldstein, “Manuring Eden: Biological Conversions in Paradise Lost,” in *Ground-Work: English Renaissance Literature and Soil Science*, ed. Hillary Caroline Eklund (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, 2017), 171–93. And Donald Woodward, “An Essay on Manures”: Changing Attitudes to Fertilization in England, 1500-1800,” in *English Rural Society, 1500-1800: Essays in Honour of Joan Thirsk*, ed. John Chartres and David Hey, 251-78.

⁴⁸ See Randall Martin, “Fertility versus Firepower: Shakespeare’s Contested Ecologies,” in *Ground-Work: English Renaissance Literature and Soil Science*, for a discussion of this emerging view of soil in *As You Like It*, 130-136.

and improvement can destabilize a country as easily as any other form of political mismanagement.

“A pleasant valley”: The Princes’ Version of Pastoral

The princes’ outlook on agrarian change is more difficult to trace. Often, their idealizing pastoralism serves as a measuring stick for the uses and limitations of husbandry’s ideologies of stewardship versus profit. They assess the agriculture of the Laconians and Arcadia in relation to the literary conventions of the bucolic idyll. Whether Musiodorus and Pyrocles take any positive stance on questions of enclosure and improvement may even seem an unnecessary question, given the endless abundance they describe in the landscapes they pass through. Idealized nature surely neither needs nor admits alteration. And yet the princes do not turn away from the *Arcadia*’s broader project of agrarian analysis. Rather, I argue, the tropes and figures of the pastoral mode become evaluative frames and entry points into an exploration of the way nature itself can inform or disrupt the ideologies of cultivation.

At an early stage of their adventures, the princes reside temporarily at the country house of the nobleman Kalander. Despite its situation in the Arcadian countryside, the estate, as we’ve seen, has been designed with a certain amount of deference to natural variation and imperfection. Located amidst what appears to Musiodorus as an idealized landscape of “humble valleys” refreshed by “silver rivers” and “meadows enameled with all sorts of eye-pleasing flowers” (69), the house nevertheless cannot be constructed without “fit consideration both of the air, the prospect, and the nature of the ground” (71). The thoughtfulness of Kalander’s estate-planning, its attention to the fact that nature can limit

human habitation, as well as support it, belies the princes' vision of landscape as idyll. Is their perceived ideal made possible by Kalander's efforts? Have they simply failed to look closely enough? Or has Kalander's proximity to the estate led him to lose sight of the larger perfections of the country in which his estate rests? How is it that the Arcadian landscape can be simultaneously ideal and imperfect? The answer lies, I argue, in the slightly different generic orientations of the princes and Kalander. As we've seen, Kalander's terminology is that of a landowner versed in the stewardship of his estates. Musiodorus and Pyrocles, however much they appear aligned with that agricultural politics, operate in a slightly different literary mode. They comport themselves as characters in pastoral romance, and they borrow their language of description from the vocabulary of that generic framework.

For the princes Musiodorus and Pyrocles, nature assumes an aspect defined by the idealizing conventions of pastoral, appearing as an innately abundant setting for intellectual reflection. It is, to them, "a pleasant valley" in which they are,

invited to light from their horses; and pulling off their bits that they might something refresh their mouths upon the grass (which plentifully grew, brought up under the care of those well-shading trees) themselves laid down hard by the murmuring music of certain waters which spouted out of the side of the hills, and in the bottom of the valley made of many springs a pretty brook, like a commonwealth of many families (118-119).⁴⁹

The syntactic interlockings of this passage suggest what they picture: the perfect integration of nature's parts into a generative whole. "Well-shading" trees protect soft grasses that line

⁴⁹ Another typical description appears on 122, where Pyrocles asks his cousin, "Do you not see the grass, how in colour they excel the emeralds, ever one striving to pass his fellows, and yet they are all kept of an equal height? And see you not the rest of these beautiful flowers, each of which would require a man's wit to know and his life to express? Do not these stately trees seem to maintain their flourishing old age with the only happiness of their seat, being clothed with a continual spring, because no beauty here should ever fade?"

pretty streams converging to produce a “murmuring music.” Harmonic interconnection is emphasized, both between nature’s constituent aspects, and between humans and nature. This ecology conceives of nature as self-sufficient, replenishing itself and the humans who move through it. An endlessly abundant backdrop to musing debate, its primary interest for the princes appears to lie in its supply of raw material for their metaphorical double-speaking.

When they comment on nature in a way that touches on its real shape, or on actual questions of its use and improvement, the princes subordinate their insights to the rhetorical artifices and ends of pastoral. *Prosopopoeia*, in which “an inanimate or abstract thing is represented as having personal characteristics,” is the figure through which Pyrocles offers an oblique description of Wiltshire’s rivers and the water-use rights conflicts they inspired:⁵⁰

O happy Ladon which art now an unperfect mirror of all perfection, canst thou ever forget the blessedness of this impression? If thou do, then let thy bed be turned from fine gravel to weeds and mud. If thou do, let some unjust niggards make weirs to spoil thy beauty. If thou do, let some greater river fall into thee to take away the name of Ladon. O Ladon, happy Ladon, rather slide than run by her lest thou shouldst make legs slip from her; and then O, happy Ladon, who would then call thee but the most cursed Ladon?

The prince addresses the Ladon as if it were a sentient entity whose moods—“happy” and “most cursed”—respond to the presence of the Princess Philoclea. From her beauty flows the river’s delight and her injury spells its despair and ruination. Notably, however, that ruination, is conceived of in incongruently realistic terms. The prince imagines how the stream would turn from “fine gravel to weeds and mud”, and how “some greater river” would “fall into” it “to take away the name of Ladon.” On one hand, these threats reproduce

⁵⁰ “*prosopopoeia*” n. 2a. *OED*.

images of nature disrupting an idyll, which are conventional to pastoral. On the other, descriptions of “fine gravel” concretely evoke the chalk beds of the rivers Wylve, Nadder, and Ebbe, which converge near Wilton (Figure 3):

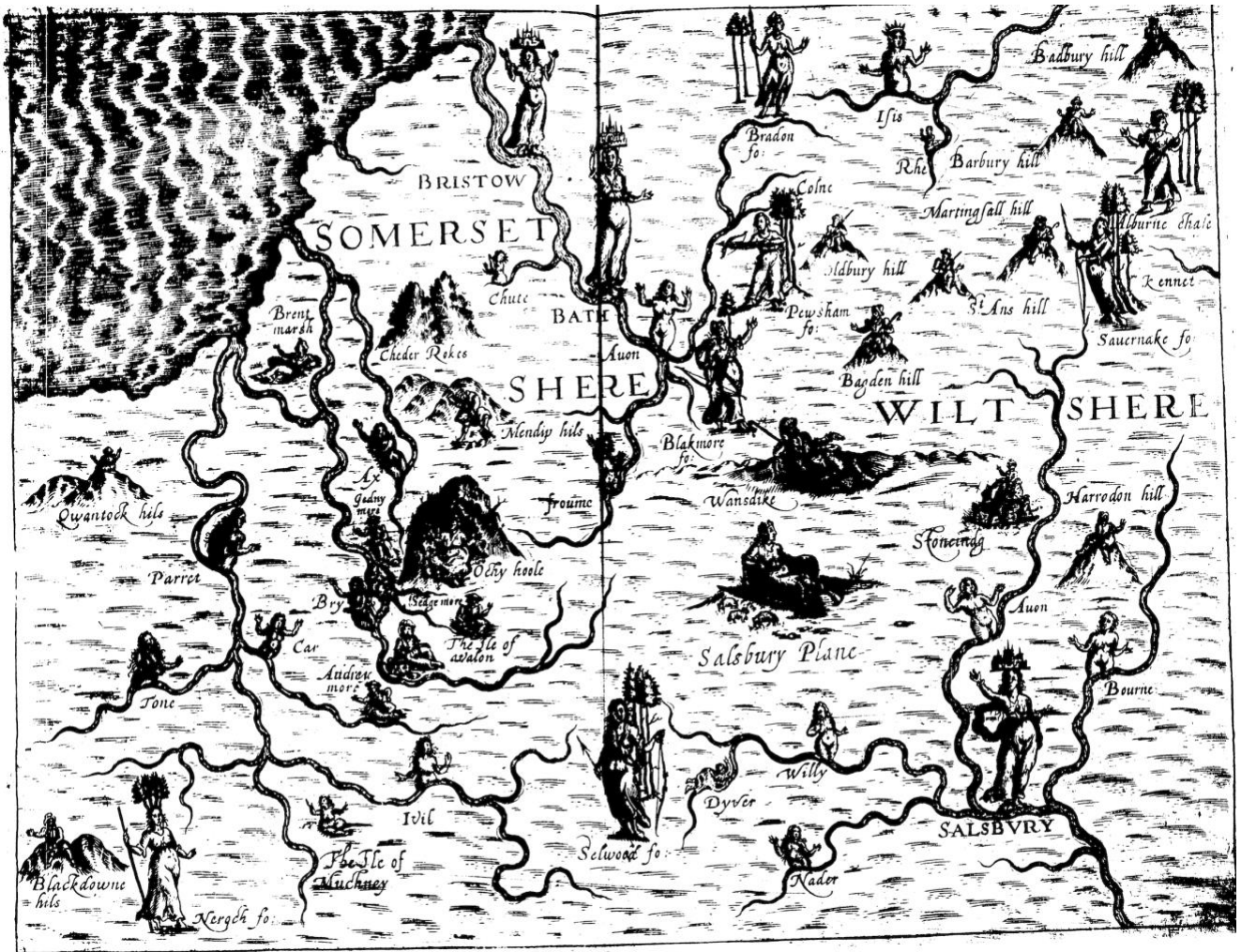


Figure 3: Map of Wiltshire, Michael Drayton, *Poly-Olbion* (1622)

Imagining those clear streams turning muddy and weedy, or subsumed by some greater body of water, Pyrocles does draw on real changes to agricultural practice afoot in early modern Wiltshire. His threat to “let some unjust niggards make weirs to spoil thy beauty” refers to debates over water-use and distribution, which arose in the region primarily as a result of the

Sidney-Herberts' own attempts to restore fertility to the soil of their estates through agricultural improvements. Specifically, his injunction that "some greater river" should "take away the name of Ladon" displays an informed understanding of the legal procedures of those debates, in which the name of a body of water might make all the difference in determining prior claims to its use and control, within the operant system of custom and common law.⁵¹

Wiltshire's mineral-rich chalklands encouraged cultivation using a system of irrigation known to early modern farmers as floating water meadows. This type of improvement relied on a system of channels, drains, and "weirs"—barriers or dams used to restrain water—in order to flood and drain fields at strategic moments during planting and harvesting.⁵² Water meadows enriched exhausted soil with sheep dung and other nutrients carried from mineral-rich rivers through controlled flooding, thereby enabling farmers to reap several harvests a year from fields that had formerly been too exhausted to produce even one.⁵³ In a 1610 treatise on the practice, notably dedicated to Sidney's cousin William Herbert, the poet and landowner Rowland Vaughan promised that "the drowning of Meadow and Pasture, by advantage of the least River, Brooke, Fount, or Watermill adjacent" would "make those grounds (especially if they be drye) more Fertile Ten for One."⁵⁴ With

⁵¹ Laura Lehua Yim, "A Watercourse 'in Variance': Re-Situating a Sixteenth-Century Legal Map from Ashbourne, Derbyshire," *Imago Mundi* 68, no. 2 (2016): 147–63.

⁵² "weir" n. 1a. *OED*. A barrier or dam to restrain water, *esp.* one placed across a river or canal in order to raise or divert the water for driving a mill-wheel; also, the body of water retained by this means, a mill-dam; now gen., a dam, of which there are various forms, constructed on the reaches of a canal or navigable river, to retain the water and regulate its flow.

⁵³ A spring crop could be used for summer grazing, and a fall one for winter hay.

⁵⁴ Rowland Vaughan, *Most Approued, and Long Experienced Vvater-Vvorkes* (London: George Eid, 1610).

increased fertility came a rise in profitability. Wiltshire manorial surveys from as early as 1605 record the advantages of water meadows siphoning off the Wylde, Nadder, and Ebble, and a 1632 Court Roll from the Manor of Wylde attests at length to the real financial benefits attached to the new practice. As Louise Noble has shown, the Roll reveals a longstanding communal commitment to a system of water meadows deployed for the apparent enrichment of all involved parties:

It is ordered, concluded, and agreed at this court between...freeholders within this manor, and others the tenants of the residue of the freeholders, and customary tenants and others of this manor now present, and with the consent and approbacion of the...steward of this manor...for and concerning the watering and floting of the groundes within this manor called the Marshe, Nettlemeade and the Moores, for the better improvement of them in yerely value. ⁵⁵

The agreement is careful to name participants according to their particular property claims; “freeholders” are distinguished from “tenants of the residue of the freeholders”, “customary tenants,” and the “steward of the manor.” More than elaborate legal precision, these specifications speak to the tenuous nature of a water-allocation system in which inequitable flooding could result in a failed crop. Mutual “consent” and “approbacion” underpin a community commitment to develop and maintain water meadows for the benefit of all stakeholders. Noble observes, “here we see an example of the old custom of communal

⁵⁵ Eric Kerridge, *Survey of the Manors of Philip, First Earl of Pembroke and Montgomery, 1631-1* (London: Headley Brothers, 1953), 138. And for a full discussion of this passage in connection with Wilton House circle and its patronage of Rowland Vaughan, especially in regard to his advocacy for floating water meadows in his 1610 treatise *Most Approved and Long Experienced Water-workes*, see Louise Noble, “Wilton House and the Art of Floating Meadows,” *The intellectual culture of the English country house, 1500-1700*, ed. Matthew Dimmock, Andrew Hadfield and Margaret Healy, 232-247.

decision-making rubbing up against the introduction of the new technologies of agrarian reform.”⁵⁶

Critics since Raymond Williams and Don Wayne have noted that this tension between common custom and agricultural change runs through the literature and letters of the Sidney family. The more open question of Philip Sidney’s personal familiarity with changing agrarian practice is answered by the *Arcadia*’s repeated interest in the mechanics of water power.⁵⁷ The King Basilius’s banqueting-house, for instance, features “an excellent water-work”, a “table...which being fast to the floor whereon we sat, and that divided from the rest of the buildings, with a turning vice...did all turn round by means of water which ran under and carried it about a mill” (148). This invention appears to employ the same systems of “weirs”— used to divert water for the purpose of turning a mill—with which Pyrocles threatens the Ladon. Its mechanism also resonates with one imagined by in Vaughan’s *Most Approued, and Long Experienced Vvater-Vvorkes* (1610) some twenty years after the *Arcadia*’s publication (Figure 4):

⁵⁶ Noble, “Wilton House and the Art of Floating Meadows,” 243.

⁵⁷ See Raymond Williams’s discussion of “To Penshurst” as an idealization of precapitalist relations that rubs up against the requirements of new capitalist agriculture in *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 30. And Don E. Wayne’s more developed arguments on the same theme in *Penshurst : The Semiotics of Place and the Poetics of History* (Madison, Wis: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), 16-21.

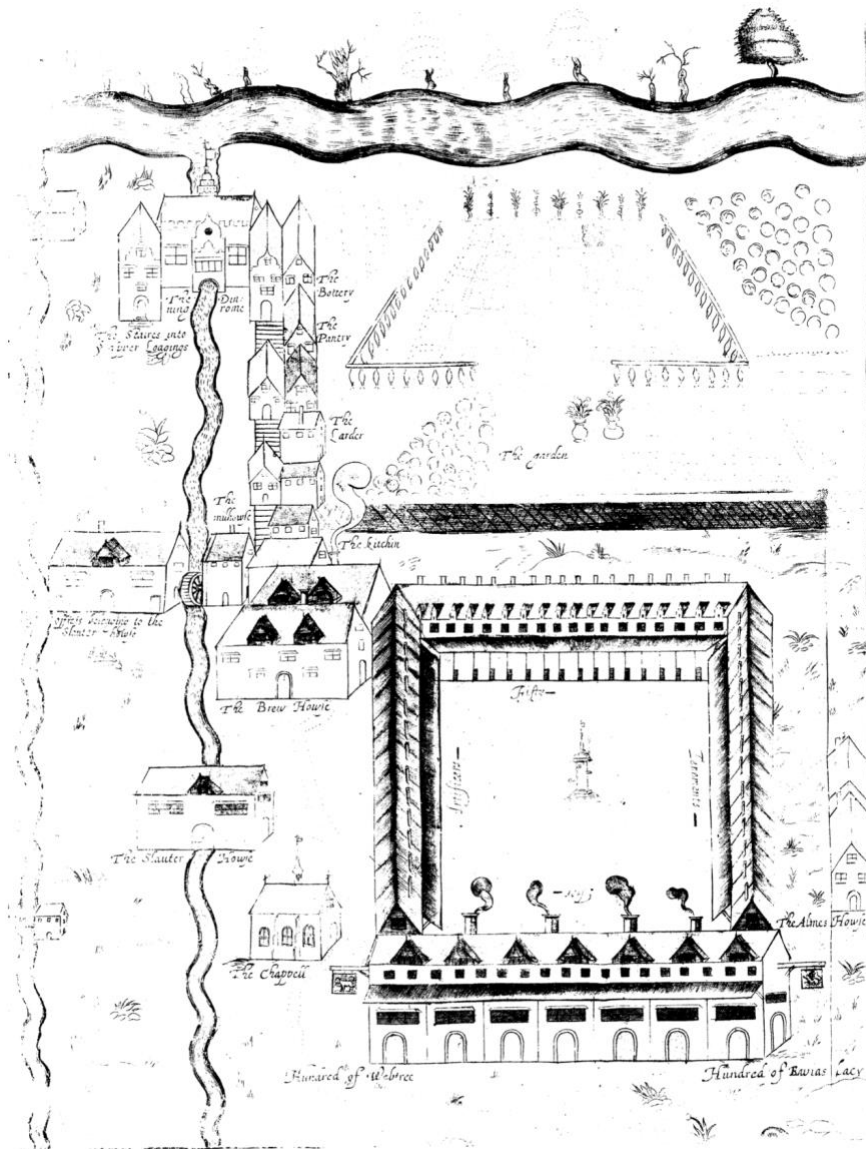


Figure 4: Detail of water-power scheme from Rowland Vaughan’s *Most Approved, and Long Experienced Vwater-Vvorkes* (1610)

Envisaging a politics improved by agricultural change, Vaughan describes a kind of utopia in which floating meadows extend the growing season sufficiently to eliminate entrenched problems of seasonal hunger and unemployment. Symbolically central to this utopian political ecology is Vaughan’s reimagination of King Arthur’s “Table round” at which sit

“Mechanicalls” who enjoy the bounty offered by “weares”, which bring “bring some fewe of your *Salmons* in season to your Table: and a hundred thousand bee serued vnseasonably.”⁵⁸ If the purposes of these “water-workes” differ—Basilius’s represents solipsistic artifice of the kind which Pyrocles obliquely criticizes in threatening the Ladon, while Vaughan’s imagines the potentiality of agricultural change to enhance the common good—their mechanical shapes both correspond to that offered by the scientific and agricultural innovation flourishing under the patronage of the Sidney-Herbert family, as it sought to manage its landholdings and expand their profitability.

In threatening the Ladon, then, Pyrocles first violates his generic premise as a character—namely, that the pastoral landscape exists at a safe remove from natural disaster or human spoilage; and second, he speaks the language of the improver, obliquely invoking something like Sidney’s own anxieties around his family’s treatment of the land that they own.⁵⁹ It is not the case, we begin to see, that the *Arcadia* detaches from verifiable details about nature—even in its most artificial moments of prosopopoeitic address. Rather it is that those insights are framed by the rhetorical approaches of literary pastoral. In observing the world around them, the princes proceed as pastoral poets, diligent in their observance of Sidney’s law that “nature never set forth the earth in so rich a tapestry as divers poets have done; neither with so pleasant rivers, fruitful trees, sweet-smelling flowers, not whatsoever

⁵⁸ Rowland Vaughan, *Most Approued, and Long Experienced Vwater-Vvorkes*.

⁵⁹ Water meadows as “improvements” required significant capital investment and permanently altered not just customary property rights but the very function of the land itself, and the relationship between people and place. See *The Rural Economy of England* 189-190. (Princes and Musiodorus subscribe to a traditional notion of husbandry that elevates notions of stewardship and the common good, even as it abstracts those principles from the specifics of agricultural work; whereas Dametas’s husbandry values improvement and profit in a way that is nonetheless roots itself in the everyday considerations of agrarian practice.)

else may make the too much loved earth more lovely. Her world is brazen, the poets only deliver a golden.”⁶⁰ The two imperatives of pastoral—to present a golden world, and to expose wrongdoing—are thus reconciled in the princes, as they imagine into being gorgeous landscapes from which they also seek to expunge injustice.

“Sir Philip was wont, as he was hunting on our pleasant plaines, to take his Table booke out of his pocket, and write down his notions as they came into his head, when he was writing his *Arcadia*.” —John Aubrey, *Brief Lives*⁶¹

John Aubrey’s biography of Philip Sidney (1669-1696) emphasizes the inspirational influence of Wiltshire’s “pleasant plaines” on the *Arcadia*. Apocryphal as Aubrey’s account may be, its details accord with the recommendations of early modern husbandry manuals and with the methods of the *Arcadia* itself. In taking out “his Table booke” to “write down notions” suggested to him during perambulations of Wilton, Sidney embodies the advice for landowners set forth by Fitzherbert, whose *Boke of Husbandrye*, as we’ve seen, appeared in the Sidney family library. Fitzherbert enjoins his gentleman reader to “go about his closes, pastures, feeldes, and specially by the hedges, and to have in his purse a payre of tables, and whan he set anythyng that wolde be amended, to wryte it in his tables.”⁶² Sidney’s process in composing the *Arcadia*—his jotting in his “Table booke”—is indistinguishable from the responsibilities of the steward of an estate. If Sidney’s writing process resembles the habits of a dutiful landlord, the resultant text also transmits the landlord’s findings. At every turn, the *Arcadia* pays sustained attention to the ways in which nature demands accommodation. Exhausted soil requires the attention of a gentleman; it also troubles the pastoral poet. The

⁶⁰ Sidney, “The Defense of Poesy.” 216.

⁶¹ Aubrey, *Brief Lives*, 297-298.

⁶² As quoted by Andrew McRae, in “Hubandry Manuals and Agrarian Improvement,” in *God Speed the Plough: The Representation of Agrarian England, 1500-1660*, 138.

Arcadia senses the influence of nature itself on literary forms and the politics they seek to inspire.

Chapter 4:

County Cork:
“Woods, hills, and rivers, now are desolate” :
Waste in Edmund Spenser’s Pastoral Elegies

Introduction

In Book 6 of *The Faerie Queene* the knight Calidore stumbles upon a pastoral convocation of luminous symmetry: piped on by the shepherd Colin Clout, a “hundred naked maidens lilly white” dance circles around a “spacious plaine”, set off by “a gentle flud,” and shadowed by a “wood of matchlesse hight.”⁶³ Calidore watches, rapt, before he is seized by the desire to join in the spectacle himself. As he steps into the ring of dancers, they vanish. Their departure understandably disturbs Calidore, who wonders, “but why when I them saw, fled they away from me?”⁶⁴ His question is a reasonable one. Why should the scene of pastoral retreat from the knight, already identified by the romance as the champion of the virtue Courtesy? If “of Court it seemes, men Courtesie doe call”—if courtesy is the virtue of courts— then it should contain nothing offensive to pastoral, the form usually identified in the Renaissance as the court’s primary literary mode.⁶⁵ Calidore both longs for, and chases away the scene of pastoral. The allegorical representative of the English court, he drives out pastoral ways of living, even as he ushers in pastoral conventions of writing.

The episode is characteristic of Edmund Spenser (1552-1599)’s late literary production, which returns to pastoral—and I will argue, to pastoral elegy in particular—as the form best suited to exploring the paradoxes and traumas of English colonial rule in

⁶³ Edmund Spenser, *Spenser: The Faerie Queene, 2nd Edition*, ed. A. C. Hamilton, Hiroshi Yamashita, and Toshiyuki Suzuki, 2nd edition (London New York: Longman, 2006). 6.10.6-11.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 6.10.19.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 6.Proem

Ireland.⁶⁶ Specifically, the environmentally disastrous attempts of English settlers to eradicate Irish pastoral agriculture give rise to contradictions that Spenser can only parse within the metaphors of pastoral literature. The form's conventional tropes (the changing seasons, the convocation of mourners, the metamorphosis of the deceased into a feature of the landscape, to name only a few) by turns elide, dramatize, mourn, and promote the damaging effects of settlement on the landscape of the Munster Plantation.

The history of the English occupation of Ireland begins as early as the twelfth century, but it was the Tudor policies of the late sixteenth century that established irreversible patterns of colonial rule. A swelling English military presence in the Irish midlands throughout the mid-1550s enabled and indeed relied upon the founding of large plantations across the south of Ireland. In the past, English experiments in settlement had taken the form of private speculative enterprise, but the new plantations operated on a different political, demographic, and geographic order. These ventures reported directly to the English government in London (as opposed to its representative branch in Dublin), called for large-scale transfer of workers and administrators from England to Ireland, and involved, in the case of the Munster plantation, the seizure of an estimated 700,000 acres by right of attainder, and by other mechanisms of appropriation and dispossession.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ The problem is that the literary form Spenser employs in Book 6—pastoral—is in fact the lifestyle he's charged with eliminating as a colonial administrator. That is, Spenser is specifically tasked with, concerned with eradicating itinerant forms of Irish agriculture such as droving and grazing—even as he returns to the pastoral form in his literary work.

⁶⁷ As in Attainder: "The action or process of attainting; *orig.* as in attain *v.* 3; in later usage, the legal consequences of judgement of death or outlawry, in respect of treason or felony, viz. forfeiture of estate real and personal, corruption of blood, so that the condemned could neither inherit nor transmit by descent, and generally, extinction of all civil rights and capacities. "attainder, n." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press. Discussed in: Ciaran Brady, "Spenser, Plantation, and Government Policy," in *The Oxford Handbook of Edmund Spenser*, ed. Richard A. McCabe, Oxford Handbooks of Literature (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 86–105.

Changes in the scale of the English settler colonial project necessitated a range of adjustments to government policy. The “Old English” (those who arrived in Ireland with the Anglo-Normans in the twelfth century) preferred traditional strategies of conquest and dispossession.⁶⁸ Their “New English” successors (for the most part, upwardly-mobile members of the Tudor administrative class) resorted to innovative policies of diplomacy, education, and expanded legal and administrative operations across Ireland. If the “Old English” aimed for control by military might, the “New English” intended a more hegemonic form of domination, one which appreciated the value of political, cultural and environmental transformation.⁶⁹

As the private secretary of Arthur, Lord Grey de Wilton, the Lord Deputy of Ireland, Spenser not only belonged to this latter group, but acted on behalf of one of its most important political leaders. Spenser arrived in Ireland with Grey in August 1580, where he remained, excepting brief visits to London, until his death in 1599. During this period, he held an astonishing variety of government positions and vigorously prosecuted a rise in his social and material worth by acquiring properties made vacant by the widespread dispossession of Old English and Irish landholders. It is likely that Spenser attended Grey on his military excursions, notably the November 1580 Smerwick massacre of 600 Spanish and Italian mercenaries, and certain that he played a role in crafting policy surrounding the eradication of itinerant forms of Irish agriculture such as droving and grazing.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Andrew Hadfield, *Spenser's Irish Experience: "Wilde Fruit and Savage Soyl"* (Oxford [England] : New York: Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press, 1997).5.

⁶⁹ Brady, “Spenser, Plantation, and Government Policy.” 86–105.

⁷⁰ “Spenser, Edmund (1552?–1599), Poet and Administrator in Ireland,” Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.

Even as he was occupied with political offices and land management, Spenser was writing. In 1595, a year before the completion of the *Faerie Queene*, Spenser published a much smaller book of occasional verse. Containing the long pastoral narrative poem *Colin Clouts come home againe*, as well as two shorter pastoral elegies mourning Philip Sidney, the volume begins the return to bucolic topics and forms that characterizes Spenser's literary production across the late 1590s; Book 6 of the *Faerie Queene* (1596), the last finished in the romance, also frames its concerns in terms of pastoral tropes. Superficially, these poems seem to bear scant relation to each other beyond their pastoral frames. *Colin Clout* features a comparison of English and Irish landscapes and literary scenes; "Astrophel" and the "Dolefull Lay of Clorinda" center around the death of Sidney after Zutphen; and Book 6 treats the adventures of Calidore, the knight of Courtesy, in Faerie Land. So what convenes these disparate concerns in the pastoral landscape? Another way of asking this is to speculate on the reasons for Spenser's return to the pastoral form in the last years of his career, despite his announced intention in *The Shepheardes Calender* (1579) of following Virgil in his progression towards epic. Why does Sidney revisit the questions and problems foregrounded by the pastoral form in the later 1590s? What topics and interests does the form support, which epic does not? I argue that Spenser doubles back on pastoral as a way of accessing its unique affordances as a site for mourning. Pastoral elegy, rather than pastoral recreation or contest, or indeed epic conquest, accommodates Spenser's ambivalent sense of the traumas of enforcing English colonial order on the Irish landscape and people.

Colin Clouts come home againe is not normally read as an elegy. The *Spenser Encyclopedia*, for instance, describes the poem as an “an autobiographical eclogue.”⁷¹ Catherine Nicolson argues that it “tells the story of Spenser’s friendship with Sir Walter Raleigh and of their journey together from Ireland to England.”⁷² Andrew Hadfield suggests that it “can be read to mean, quite simply, that the poet considered himself no longer straightforwardly English, but a loyal (?) servant of the queen in a land where her authority counted for little.”⁷³ These assessments capture the ways in which the poem feels uniquely transparent to the events of Spenser’s own life. It relates actions taken by the poet, which can be verified against the historical record: his friendship with and courting of Raleigh as a patron; his visits to England in 1589 and 1592 ; the death of his first wife, Maccabaeus Childe, sometime between 1590 and 1593, and his subsequent marriage to Elizabeth Boyle in 1594; his ascension in the English colonial administration in Ireland from 1580 to 1598; and the unfolding devastation of the Irish landscape, its “waste”, by the English.

Even as (and perhaps because) the narrative events of *Colin Clout* run alongside Spenser’s actual life, they assume diverse formal guises. The poem proceeds rapidly from one convention of pastoral elegy to another: beginning with an account of the seasonal change attached to Colin’s absence (lines 16-32), it includes an etiology of Irish rivers (lines 104-155), a fearful representation of drowning (lines 195-275), a convocation of shepherds for a commemorative song (lines 375-590), and the association of a remembered person

⁷¹ A. C. Hamilton, ed., *The Spenser Encyclopedia* (Toronto ; Buffalo : London: University of Toronto Press ; Routledge, 1990), 173

⁷² Catherine Nicolson, *Reading and Not Reading the Faerie Queene: Spenser and the Making of Literary Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020). 148.

⁷³ Hadfield, *Edmund Spenser’s Irish Experience*” 15.

with a permanent aspect of nature (lines 628-644). Rhythmically, the poem ducks and weaves from start to finish, stretching and curtailing the quatrain unpredictably to stress the movement from one elegiac convention to the next. Throughout, the object of Spenser's commemoration remains just out of focus. Who—or what—is being elegized?

One good answer to this question of mourning's object is Philip Sidney. Although the courtier and poet died in 1586, nine years previous to the publication of *Colin Clout*, Spenser commemorates him in "Astrophell. A Pastorall Elegie on the death of the most Noble and valorous Knight, Sir Philip Sidney" and in the "Dolefull Lay of Clorinda." These two poems follow *Colin Clout* in the 1595 volume of occasional verse, making it reasonable to suspect some relationship between their subject matter. "Astrophel" recounts the story of Sidney's life, rehearsing his birth, marriage, literary achievements, fall at Zutphen, and metamorphosis into a flower. The "Dolefull Lay", related from the perspective of Sidney's sister Mary Sidney Herbert, takes up the question of Sidney's legacy. It compares the English literary scene, now bereft of Sidney's flowering talent, to a devastated natural environment. "Woods, hills and rivers now are desolate," declares the titular Clorinda. Her pathetic fallacy unites praise for Sidney's unique contributions to English writing in his pastoral romance, *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*, with the suggestion that his death leaves that landscape empty—a vacancy that the poem then positions Spenser to fill. "Another swaine", her elegy concludes, "of gentle wit and daintie sweet deuce: /whome Astrophel full deare did entertaine...began his mournfull tourne."⁷⁴ In taking up his "mournfull tourne"—in mourning Sidney—Spenser is also claiming the right to succeed

⁷⁴ Edmund Spenser, *The Shorter Poems*, ed. Richard A McCabe (New York: Penguin Books, 1999). 384.

him. Embraced by “Clorinda,” which is to say by Mary Sidney Herbert, Philip Sidney’s literary executor, “Colin” or Spenser inherits the title of England’s leading pastoral poet. It is a designation that carries both literary and political responsibilities; and their delineation connects the seemingly autobiographical narrative of *Colin Clout* with the elegiac stylings of “Astrophel” and “Clorinda.” With Colin’s return in *Colin Clout*, “both woods and fields, and flood revive.”⁷⁵

“Dry up all the water” : Rivers and Property-Lines in *Colin Clout*, “Astrophel” and Book 6

Spenser sets all three poems in a pastoral landscape that wavers between convention and specificity. Colin’s friend Hobbinol, to take one example, contemplates “fields with faded flowers”, even as Colin describes “the greene alders by the Mullaes shore.”⁷⁶ Wherever the continuity between Sidney’s and Spenser’s literary and political projects solidifies, however, the pastoral landscape being described loses the hazy generality of convention. Tropes—fair flowers and gurgling brooks—harden into topographies. The Mole mountain-range and Mulla, Bregog, and Allo rivers, for instance, come into view in one etiological fable that dresses the ecological devastation wrecked on the Irish landscape by generations of English colonizers—first, Sir Henry Sidney, Philip’s father, and then his successor, and Spenser’s employer Arthur, Lord Grey de Wilton—in the guise of natural disaster. In the tale, the mountain Mole arranges a marriage for his daughter, the river Mulla, with a neighboring stream, the Allo. Mulla, however, has already pledged her love to the Bregog river. When they unite in secret, Mole is enraged:

⁷⁵ Ibid, 345.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 346.

Old Father *Mole* (*Mole* high that mountain gray)
 That walls the Northside of *Arnulla* dale
 He had a daughter fresh as floure of May...
 Mulla...that springing out of *Mole*, doth run downe right
 To *Butteuant*, where spreading forth at large,
 It giueth name unto that auncient Citty
 Which *Kilnemullah* cleped is of old:
 Whose ragged ruines breed great ruth and pittie,
 To trauielers, which it from far behold.
 Full faine she lou'd, and was belou'd full faine,
 Of her owne brother riuer, *Bregog* hight...
 The wily louer did devise this slight:
 First into many parts his streame he shar'd,
 That whilest the one was watch, the other might
 Passe vnespide to meete her by the way...
 So secretly did he his loue enjoy:
 Yet not so secret, but it was descried,
 And tolde her father by a shepherds boy.
 Who wondrous wroth for that so foule despight,
 In great auenge did roll downe from his hill
 Huge mightie stones, the which encumber might
 His passage, and his water-courses spill.
 So of a River, which he was of old,
 He none was made, but scattred all to nought,
 Did lose his name: so deare his loue he bought.⁷⁷

Here Colin offers an environmental history of the waterways surrounding Spenser's household at Kilcolman. Renaming the Ballyhoura Hills that overlooked the estate the Mole mountains, and the Awbeg River the Mulla, the shepherd renders them as the protagonists in a fable that simultaneously accounts for recent changes to the Irish landscape—"to Butteuant" "whose ragged ruines breed great ruth and pittie"—and naturalizes them within the deep time of Irish folklore. The story, he boasts, is no "leasing new, not Grandams fable stale / But auncient truth confirm'd with credence old."⁷⁸ As Andrew Hadfield has argued, "in celebrating the Irish rivers on his land in this manner, Spenser is engaging in an act of

⁷⁷ Ibid, 348-349.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 347.

substitution in which he plays the part of a rival Irish bard, replacing the natives he criticized so forcefully in *A View of the Present State of Ireland*. In representing his close connection to his land—albeit with a certain amount of ambivalence—he is stating his right to be considered a local, a poet who can speak for the Ireland where he lives.”⁷⁹ Spenser’s appropriation here extends beyond literary borrowing to a revision of local geography. He renegotiates the terms on which environmental damage gets debated, casting the diversion and drying up of the Bregog as a question of natural disaster and not of human interference. It is the Mole’s “great auenge” that causes the Bregog to be “scattred all to nought,” rather than the projects of drainage Spenser undertook on the bogs surrounding his estate.⁸⁰

Notably, discussions of the narrative itself unfold in terms of property and redirected waterways. Colin describes his fable as “no leasing new”, and when Cuddy interrupts the story, he apologizes lest he has its “readie course restraine[d].”⁸¹ In its earliest sense, “lease” meant “pasture; pasturage; meadow-land; common.” John Fitzherbert’s *Boke of Husbandry* (1523), for instance, advises its reader to “take thy horse and go tedure hym vpon thyne owne lees.”⁸² At the same time, lease could indicate an “untruth, falsehood, lying.”⁸³ While these earlier senses of the word were falling out of use in the late sixteenth century, a third was coming into currency: “a contract between parties by which the one who conveys lands or tenements to the other for life, for years, or at will, usually in consideration of rent or

⁷⁹ Andrew Hadfield, *Edmund Spenser: A Life*, 1st ed (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). 223-224.

⁸⁰ Edmund Spenser, *The Shorter Poems*, 349.

⁸¹ Edmund Spenser, *The Shorter Poems*, 347

⁸² “lease | leaze, n.1.” *OED Online*, Oxford University Press.

⁸³ “lease, adj. and n.2.” *OED Online*, Oxford University Press.

other periodical compensation.”⁸⁴ The word’s evolution tracks, in many ways, the changes that Spenser was enacting as a landlord and administrator, and mediating as a poet.

Triangulating notions of pasture, fiction, and land-ownership, “lease” calls attention to the shifting, tenuous relationship between the pastoral form in which Spenser writes and the pastoral fields whose use he is charged with converting to arable farmland on behalf of Elizabeth I.

This spilling over of the fable’s metaphorical tenor into its narrative frame signals the ways in which Spenser’s stories work to import metaphorical fictions into the actual accounts of colonial government. Colin Clout abstracts natural change by allegorizing it, but his metaphors become more real as they serve to negotiate the enduring transformation of property structures at the Munster Plantation. When, for instance, Cuddy worries that his queries have “restrained” the “readie course” of Spenser’s narrative, he is mediating the literary question of a story’s end in terms of a landownership problem: what happens when an estate’s borders are defined by rivers whose paths vary seasonally, or as a consequence of human interference? The question applies to Spenser’s own estate, whose boundaries were fixed by waterways and contested in terms of their changing courses. Stretching down from the Ballyhoura Hills to the Awbeg River along its eastern and southern sides, and separated from the Synan family estate on its western side by the Castlepook and Bregog, river-bound Kilcolman was the subject of protracted border disputes with neighboring families.

⁸⁴ "lease, n.3." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press. A lease could also suggest the activity of weaving, as in “a certain. quality of thread” or “the crossing of the warp-threads in a loom; the place at which the warp-threads cross.” "lease, n.4." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press.

This question of how a varying waterway can indicate a fixed property line is dramatized in one strange, topical episode in Book 6. While lost in the woods, the knight Calepine meets a weeping lady who complains to him of her childless condition and embattled local position. “I am the th’vunfortunate Matilde,” she tells Calepine, “wife of Bold Sir Bruin, who is Lord / Of all this land, late conquer’d by his sword / From a great Gyant, called Cormoraunt; / Whom he did ouerthrow by yonder foord.” Despite this recent victory against the Giant over the river-crossing, Matilde worries that Sir Bruin’s hold on his property remains tenuous:

But my Lord is grieved herewithall,
 And makes exceeding mone, when he does thinke
 That all this land vnto his foe shall fall,
 For which he longe in vaine did sweat and swinke,
 That now the same he greatly doth forthinke.
 Yet was it sayd, there should to him a sonne
Be gotten, not begotten, which should drinke
 And dry vp all the water, which doth ronne
 In the next brooke, by whom that feend shold be fordonne.⁸⁵

The *Faerie Queene*’s allegories tend to operate not by directly reproducing recognizable events or policies, but by transforming those events and policies into narratives that parse their consequences. This allegory, however, seems on some levels more transparent than usual, matching the particulars of Matilde’s story with Spenser’s own: Sir Bruin fights for his land at a river-crossing; Spenser’s husbandman William Hiernan launched a formal complaint against the Synan family in 1596 for attempting to extend their property over its lines along the Bregog and Castlepook rivers. Bruin faces a “a great Gyant”; the Synans were legendarily protected by the giant Phooka, who helped the family cultivate their land,

⁸⁵Edmund Spenser, *Spenser: The Faerie Queene*, 6.4.29-32.

grinding corn for them at night.⁸⁶ These obvious parallels frame the episode's more allusive exploration of the challenges inherent in basing permanent property divisions on mutable natural features. Matilde's prophecy, foretelling her son's defeat of the "feend," attributes his final victory not to skilled fighting, but strangely, to comprehensive draining. When he "drys vp all the water, which doth ronne / In the next brooke," he eliminates any challenge to the secure extension of his father's estate. With the drying up of the river comes a new certainty in established, unvarying borders, as well as the potential for them to be inherited across generations of colonizers.

Calepine's encounter with Matilde, then, seems to argue for the calcification of New English landholdings through processes of improvement that reduce the confusion inherent in defining property in terms of variable landscape features. The feasibility of such stringent regulation, however, is called into question by the episode's narrative position—Calepine is lost—and its oddly apocalyptic temporality—Matilde cites the book of Revelation. Calepine finds Matilde while he is wandering in the woods (he "ne could tell / Which way to take"⁸⁷), a condition that in *The Faerie Queene* dependably signals a hero's moral error.⁸⁸ In Book 1, for instance, Redcrosse loses track of the road and encounters a monster literally named Error, who symbolizes his swollen pride; if Calepine is unsure of his way, he is likely in the wrong. Matilde, meanwhile, hedges her prophecies about an heir skilled at drainage in allusions to the final drying of the earth augured in Revelations. She looks forward to a son who will "drinke" and "dry vp" all water, an outcome the scripture anticipates in its vision

⁸⁶ Hadfield, 212.

⁸⁷ Spenser, Edmund. *The Faerie Queene*. New York: Penguin, 1978. 922.

⁸⁸ In Book 1, the Redcrosse knight literally fights a monster named "Error" while lost in the woods after displaying the sin of Pride in his ability to complete his quest successfully.

of a renewed world in which “the sea was no more.”⁸⁹ The dialogue between Calepine and Matilde celebrates the regulation of colonial landholding; but allegorical patterns in which the conversation is embedded acknowledge the dubiousness of an attempt to subdue the Irish landscape without apocalyptic consequences.

“Into that waste” : The Problem of Waste in Spenser’s Pastorals

Even as rivers defined the extent of Spenser’s property, they also served as an important means of conveyance between colonial outposts, connecting his remote estate at Kilcolman with the centers of government at Younghal and Cork. The crucial importance of waterways to the colonial enterprise is clear from a 1586 rough map of the Munster, now housed in the National Archives:

⁸⁹ Michael David Coogan et al., eds., “The Revelation to John,” in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: With the Apocrypha*, Fully rev. 4th ed (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

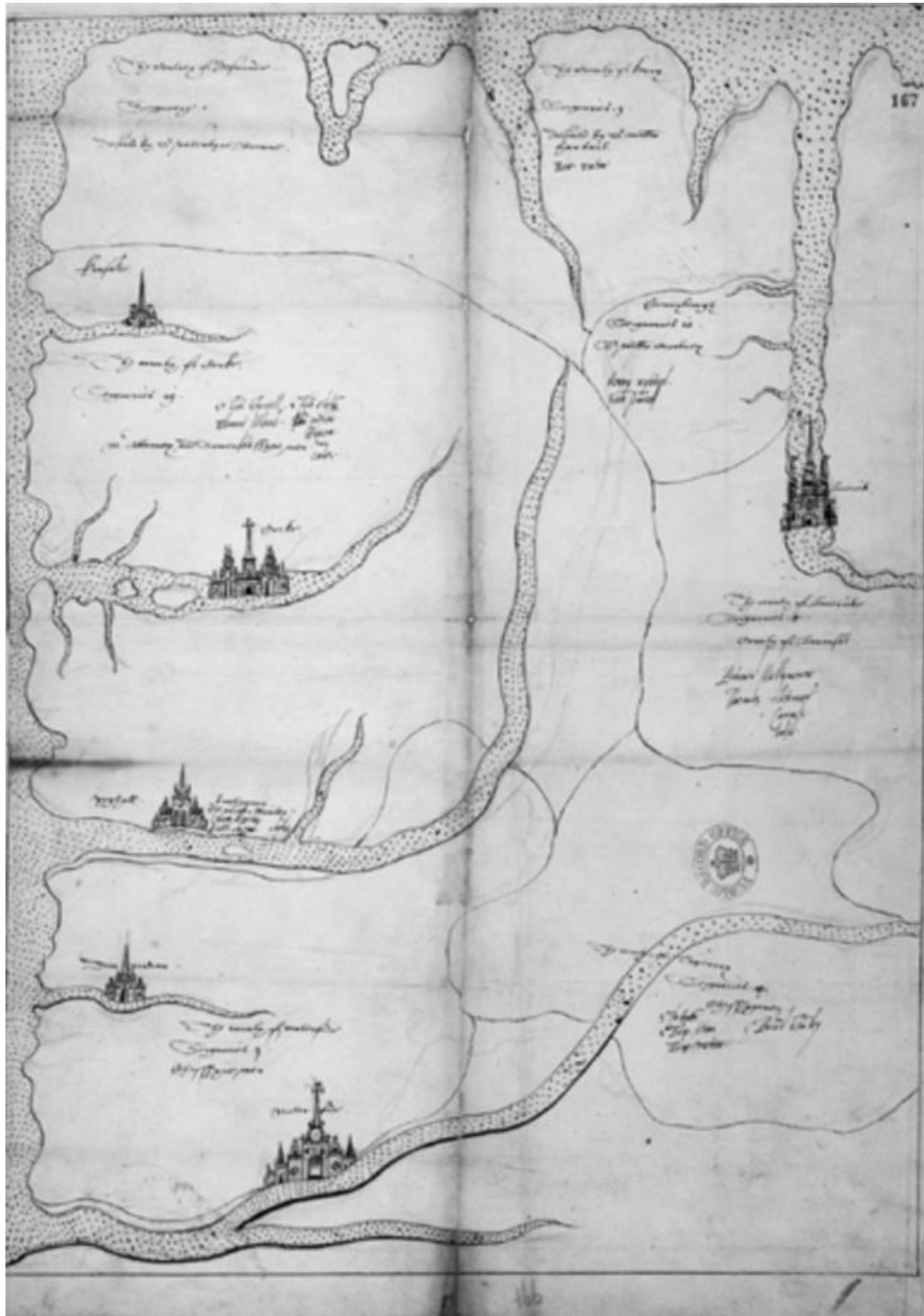


Figure 6: 'Rough' map of Munster annotated by Lord Burghley (1586)

Annotated by Lord Burghley, the map depicts the Munster Plantation in terms of its waterways, which it renders in an outsize scale as the defining feature of the Irish landscape. The map reflects the extent to which rivers connected and facilitated communication between isolated colonial outposts set in a countryside hostile to English planters. At the beginning of *Colin Clout*, Colin reflects on this isolation, complaining that he has “in a desart chose to dwell.”⁹⁰ And later, he complains of his “luckless lot” “that banisht had my self, like wight forlore, / into that waste, where I was quite forgot.”⁹¹ Here, Colin uses waste as a noun to mean “uninhabited (or sparsely inhabited) and uncultivated country, a wild and desolate region, a desert, wilderness.”⁹² Waste also functioned as a verb in the period, in the sense of “to destroy, injure, impair, damage (property); to cause to deteriorate in value; to suffer to fall into decay.”⁹³

Spenser, I will show, engaged with the problem of laying waste legally, in his capacity as a landowning administrator; but he explores with it at greater length, and with more ambivalence in his poetry.⁹⁴ Many characters in his verse, including Colin Clout, Astrophel, and Calidore encounter “waste,” either in its noun form, as a perilous setting; or as a verb, in the sense of the narrative challenge presented by a rampaging foe. Colin, as we’ve already seen, complains loudly of his exile in the “desart” or “waste” of Ireland.⁹⁵

⁹⁰ Spenser, *The Shorter Poems*, 347.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 350.

⁹² “waste, n.” *OED Online*, Oxford University Press.

⁹³ “waste, v.” *OED Online*, Oxford University Press.

⁹⁴ As Andrew Hadfield has shown, Spenser’s legal response dodges Roche’s accusations of waste, instead levying against Roche the charge of treason: “the Lord Roche in July 1586 and at sundry tymes before & after relieved & maynteyned one Kedagh Okelly a proclaimed Traitour being his foster brother...” *Edmund Spenser: A Life*. 203.

⁹⁵ Spenser, *The Shorter Poems*, 347-350.

Astrophel, though nominally a figure based on Philip Sidney, wanders through a nearly identical scene:

In forreine soyle pursued far away:
Into a forest wide, and waste he came
Where store he heard to be of saluage pray.
So wide a forest and so waste as this,
Not famous *Ardeyn*, nor fowle *Arlo* is.⁹⁶

Since Sidney died at Zutphen, in the densely-populated Netherlands, “waste” feels like a less than apposite descriptor for the setting of his elegy. But topographical accuracy isn’t the point here, or least not the topography of the Dutch landscape. The suggestion rather appears to be that simply to journey abroad is to encounter the uncultivated; Astrophel’s displacement from the English center chimes with Colin’s in its emphasis on waste as the defining characteristic of foreign soil. And it is not only that non-English soil is defined as waste, but that waste is defined in terms of Ireland. “Fowle Arlo”, for instance, is the highest peak in the Galty mountain range that runs along the north of the Munster Planation, and is visible from Spenser’s Kilcolman estate.⁹⁷ The mountain features in Irenius’s survey of Irish geography, where it is singled out as a formerly fertile English holding, now “repossesste” and “shortlie displanted” by Irish outlaws who live by herding and banditry instead of farming.⁹⁸ In emphasizing the disorder and lawlessness of wasteland, then, “Astrophel” and *Colin Clout* characterize it as more or less anywhere that an Englishman is exposed to attack. Waste the noun converges with waste the verb as the problems of uncultivated land and ungoverned land are revealed to be one and the same.

⁹⁶ Spenser, *The Shorter Poems*, 376.

⁹⁷ William Keach, *The Spenser Encyclopedia*. 60.

⁹⁸ Edmund Spenser, *A View of the Present State of Ireland*, ed. W. L. Renwick (London: E. Partridge, at the Scholartis Press, 1934).

The adventures of Calidore in Book 6 of the *Faerie Queene* dramatically stage the convergence of these two definitions. Calidore begins his quest with the aim of “pursew[ing]” and subdew[ing]the Blattant Beast” across a “saluage Island,” a mission notably indistinguishable from Astrophel’s goal of subduing a “brutish nation” “where saluage beasts do most abound.”⁹⁹ The highly digressive narrative of Book 6 centers on Calidore’s encounters with members of this “saluage nation,” who terrorize Faerie Land’s inhabitants and lay waste to its landscape. The standoff between the knight and the salvage nation finally comes to a head when a party of savages abducts Pastorella, Calidore’s lady, and devastates the pastures she tends with her father Melibee:

It was fortun'd one day, when Calidore
Was hunting in the woods (as was his trade)
A lawlesse people, *Brigants* hight of yore,
That neuer vsde to live by plough nor spade,
But fed on spoile and booty which they made
Vpon their neighbors, which nigh them border,
The dwelling of these Shepheardes did inuade,
And spoyld their houses, and them selues did murder;
And droue away their flockes, with other much disorder.¹⁰⁰

When Calidore returns,

Ne wight he found, to whom he might complaine,
Ne wight he found, of whom he might inquire;
That more increast the anguish of his paine.
He sought the woods; but no man could see there:
He sought the plaines; but could no tydings heare.
The woods did nought but echoes vaine rebound;
The playnes all waste and emptie did appear:
Where wont the shepheards oft their pypes resound,
And feed an hundred flockes, there now not one he found.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Edmund Spenser, *Spenser: The Faerie Queene*, 6.1.6-9.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 6.10.39.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, 6.11.26.

In these stanzas, Calidore confronts the problem of waste in its convergent noun-verb form. The “Brigants” have laid waste, and in doing so, have left a waste. “Murdering” the shepherds, “spoiling” their homes, and dispersing their flocks, they disrupt not only local agricultural production, but also the civil order that oversees and defends it. The exaggerated anaphora (“Ne wight...Ne wight...He sought...He sought”) renders all this destruction poetically, making Calidore’s “echoes vaine rebound” not only across the “waste and emptie” “playnes” and “forest” but also across the stanza. Readers are effectively forced to partake in the frustrated tedium of seeking justice in a depopulated landscape where civil “inquiry” and legal “complaint” face indifferent silence.

This picture of wasted cultivation and civil order pointedly targets native Irish forms of agriculture, or at least their stereotypical characterization by New English settlers. The Brigants’ means of supporting themselves, by “spoile and booty” rather than “plough” or “spade”, accords with stereotypes of Irish reluctance to progress from itinerant droving to large-scale farming. In the *View*, for example, Irenius laments the perceived Irish preference for living “the most parte of the yeare in Bollyes pasturing upon the mountain and waste wilde places and removing still to freshe lands as they have depastured the former.”¹⁰² Such criticisms of nomadism circulated widely in New English assessments of Irish agriculture, and formed part of a broader anti-pastoral discourse interested in converting land used for peripatetic droving into arable tenant farms. Reflecting on his long service in Ireland in 1610, Sir John Davies summarized the typical complaint:

For if themselves were suffered to possess the whole country, as their septs have done for many hundred of years past, they would never, to the end of the world, build houses, make townships or villages, or manure or improve the land as it ought

¹⁰² Spenser, *A View of the Present State of Ireland*.

to be; therefore it stands neither with Christian policy nor conscience to suffer so good and fruitful a country to lie waste like a wilderness, when His Majesty may lawfully dispose it to such persons as will make a civil plantation thereupon.¹⁰³

Davies justifies the English occupation of Ireland by highlighting the ways in which Irish customs leave the landscape underused (“they suffer so good and fruitful a country to lie waste”) and underpopulated (they never “build houses” or “make townships or villages”). These forms of waste, he suggests, necessarily give way to “civil plantation” under English colonial rule. This way of thinking stems from and shapes Spenser’s own narratives of settlement. Correlating lawlessness and unused land, the Brigants episode allegorizes the problem of waste in a way that effectively locates it in the habits of native Irish itinerant herders. If the “salvage nation” of Book 6 despoils Calidore’s pastoral idyll, their fictional crimes join in the gathering field of evidence against the Irish, and become yet another cause of English elimination of Irish pastoralism.

As Benjamin Myers has shown, this anti-pastoral discourse shaped actual policy at the Munster plantation, with the rules of settlement, “specifically laid out to effect the transition from the native Irish nomadic and pastoral emphasis to a more diversified agrarian economy.”¹⁰⁴ English settlers, including Spenser, were required to allot minimums of their new lands to large-scale tenant farming, and they did: Kilcolman boasted wheat, barley, oat, and rye crops, as well as a newly constructed mill to process them. Settler discourse, then, emphasized the Irish habit of waste because it justified the systemic dispossession required for the settlement and expansion of the Munster Plantation. If the Irish lacked the ambition

¹⁰³ As quoted by Benjamin P. Myers, “The Green and Golden World: Spenser’s Rewriting of the Munster Plantation,” *ELH* 76, no. 2 (2009): 476.

¹⁰⁴ Myers, 477.

to order the earth and coax plenty from it, then the English were only enacting “Christian policy” and “conscience” in wresting it away from them, and converting wasteful pastures into farmed fields.

The historical record, along with Spenser’s own poetry, acknowledges the fictions underpinning such widespread dispossession. Spenser did increase the land under regular cultivation at Kilcolman through process of improvement, such as drainage; but he also continued to pasture sheep. Recent archeological excavations of the estate have yielded early modern remains of English long-wool and Irish hair-sheep breeds, suggesting that sheep were not only kept by Spenser’s tenants, but were in fact the most common animal on the estate. Sheep were bred for range of purposes, and not just for their wool; their hides, meat, and milk for cheese fed and clothed the estate’s inhabitants, or could be exported when superfluous.¹⁰⁵

Even as New English settlers like Spenser continued to raise sheep, doing little to eliminate the problem of waste (the noun) they alleged was inherent to pastoralism, they also incurred accusations of wasting (the verb) the lands they sought to obtain. Spenser was embroiled in a career-long legal challenge around this latter crime, of “laying waste.” Briefly owned by Sir Henry Sidney in 1568, Spenser’s estate at Kilcolman had originally been the property of the Roches, an Old English family with Irish ties that had been expropriated by ambitious members of the Elizabethan civil service, the New English. Lord Maurice Roche (d. 1600) protested the dispossession for most of his life, filing numerous suits against the Sidneys, and against Spenser once he assumed ownership of Kilcolman.

¹⁰⁵ Hadfield, 218.

Roche even applied directly to the Queen, charging Spenser with the waste of his property and abuse of his tenants. “Edmund Spenser,” he wrote,

falsely pretending title to certain castles and 16 ploughlands, hath taken possession thereof. Also, by threatening and menacing said Lord Roche’s tenants, and by seizing their cattle, and beating Lord Roche’s servants and bailiffs he has wasted 6 ploughlands of his Lordship’s lands.¹⁰⁶

In concentrating his complaint on the crime of waste, Roche is invoking standard colonialist descriptions of the Irish landscape as a former waste only lately improved by English planters.¹⁰⁷ Roche engages this colonialist discourse on its own terms, acceding to its aversion to waste but rejecting the idea that the New English are remedying the situation. Rather, he suggests, New English civil servants like the Sidneys and Spenser are the ones who lay waste, wrecking the well-ordered and abundant landscape previously cultivated by the Old English and Irish.

In charging the New English with the crime of waste, Roche not only deploys their own arguments for settlement against them; he also suggestively connects the problem of waste with the environmental devastation that resulted from the colonial conflict. Roche offers one specific instance of this violence—Spenser has beaten his servants and wasted his ploughlands—but the abuse extended beyond Kilcolman, across the Munster Plantation. While serving as secretary to Arthur, Lord Grey de Wilton, Spenser witnessed a major campaign aimed at dispossessing the Irish, and eradicating their resistance to English rule. In the *View*, Irenius, like Roche, notes the environmental ruin attendant on the campaign but

¹⁰⁶ Quoted in Hadfield’s *Edmund Spenser: A Life*. 202.

¹⁰⁷ Spenser himself, in his *View of the Present State of Ireland*, describes the country as historically uncultivated and sporadically ravaged by its own inhabitants. Irenius and Eudoxus frequently regret Ireland’s past as “a waste...weakie inhabited” and condescendingly lament how its warlords “utterlie wasted and consumed whatsoever they had before left unspoiled.”

blames the Irish rather than the New English. He details its harrowing consequences for the country's landscape and people:

Although there should none of them fall by the sword, nor be slaine by the soldier, yet thus beinge kepte from manurance, and their cattle from runinge abroad, by this hard restraint, they would quicklye consume themselves, and devoure one another. The proof whereof I saw sufficientely ensampled in those late wars in Mounster; for notwithstandinge that the same was most rich and plentyfull country, full of corne and cattell, that you would have thought they could have beene hable to stande longe yet eare one yeare and a half they weare brought to such wretchedness, as that anye stonye herte would have rewed the same... Theare weare non allmoste lefte and a moste populous and plentifull Countrye sodenlye lefte voide of man or beaste, yeat sure in al that war theare perished not manie by the sworde but al by the extremitye of famine which they themselves had wrought.¹⁰⁸

In Book 6, the “Brigants” of the Salvage Nation wreck the easy abundance of the pastoral scene, leaving Calidore alone in a landscape stripped of its people and plenty. Irenius repeats the charge here in the *View*, acknowledging the role of conflict in devastating “a moste populous and plentifull” country, but blaming the famine primarily on the nomadic and rebellious Irish. “They themselves” he concludes, in failing to keep “their cattle from runinge abroad” wreaked havoc on the landscape until, “voide of man or beaste,” it could no longer support them.

Irenius' assessment reaches the heart of the problem of waste as it was constructed and experienced by the English. On one hand, English settlers are charged with eradicating it; on the other, the transformation that they believed necessary to eradicate it—from Irish pastoralism into English arable farming—produced environmental waste on a scale impossible to ignore. As we've seen, Spenser and lesser English poets writing from Ireland could (and did) displace responsibility for the unfolding disaster onto the Irish. As they told

¹⁰⁸ Spenser, *A View of the Present State of Ireland*.

it, herder-bandits descended from the mountains to pillage farms and challenge civil order, disabling both cultivation and government. Spenser's most straightforward allegorical sequences establish this narrative of waste clearly. In places where his allegories grow elliptical, however, the narrative linking a pastoral lifestyle to waste trembles and dissolves, revealing the bare rhetorical apparatus underpinning colonial fictions of dispossession. Pastoral as a form, in other words, struggles to accommodate comfortably the tension between its metaphorical framework of shepherds and sheep, and its shadowed meaning: that wasteful pastoralism in Ireland should obsolesce before the abundance of farming.

What results when a metaphorical framework directly contradicts its content? We've already seen how Spenser pushes metaphors closer to reality, slipping them out of his river fable and into its narrative frame. With the Brigants episode, the process inverts, as figurative language becomes untenably estranged from its grounds. The pastoral form withdraws from the task of dismantling and critiquing the pastoral lifestyle. Spenser repairs this schism between tenor and vehicle, I argue, by retreating from the polemic of pastoral eclogue, as in *The Shepherdes Calender*, to the regrets of pastoral elegy. His elegies—"Astrophel", the "Dolefull Lay of Clorinda", *Colin Clouts*, even Book 6—as I've shown, mourn Sir Philip Sidney. But the courtier-poet's death only serves as a suitable focus around which a broader field of lost objects—the Irish landscape and the pastoral form itself—can congregate, unfolding their dramas within the tropes of bucolic commemoration.

"Things passed none may now restore": Pastoral Elegy and Environmental Degradation

In order to understand precisely what the form of pastoral elegy afforded Spenser, it is worth pausing over its history and conventions. Since Theocritus' *Idylls* (310-250 BCE),

and Virgil's *Eclogues* (42-37 BCE) elegy has been an important subgenre of pastoral poetry. As a rule, it asks how we come to terms with losses experienced in the past, and how we use those past losses in the present to imagine the future. A range of standard tropes aid in answering these difficult questions: the changing seasons, the convocation of mourners, the decoration of a monument, the faintly-heard echo of the deceased, or the likening of the deceased to a permanent feature of the landscape.¹⁰⁹ These tropes allow Spenser to manage—and even to mourn—the effects of waste as they unfold not only in the moment of colonial conflict but over time, as they settle into and permanently alter the landscape. And in commemorating the passing of the pastoral lifestyle, pastoral elegy also remediates the opposition of metaphorical tenor and vehicle, suturing them together again in the poet's grief over what has been lost.

If Book 6, as we've seen, contains straightforward allegories of the Irish as herder-bandits intent on waste, it also holds more elusive allegories that explore the problem of waste within the conventional affordances of pastoral elegy. The knight Calidore finds himself distracted from his pursuit of the Salvage Nation by one such entrancing elaboration of the form, on Mount Acidale:

One day as he did raunge the fields abroad,
Whilest his fair Pastorella was elsewhere,
He chaunst to come, far from all people troad,
Vnto a place whose pleasaunce did appere
To passe all others, on the earth which were:
For all that euer was by natures skill

¹⁰⁹ For a useful introduction see Melissa Zeiger, "Elegy," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of British Literature* (Oxford University Press, 2006), <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195169218.001.0001/acref-9780195169218-e-0153>. Or for a longer discussion Paul J. Alpers, "Pastoral Convention," in *What Is Pastoral?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

Deuized to worke delight, was gathered there,
And there by her were poured forth at fill,
As if this to adorne, she all the rest did pill.¹¹⁰

Calidore appears to have stumbled upon the pastoral ideal realized: a place removed from the bustle of worldly affairs and adorned with nature's fairest blessings. The scene is surpassingly beautiful, replete with every imaginable delight. But it is also troubled; each detail of Acidale raises some new question about use and waste. Its "pleasaune" does seem to "passe all others," but nature has achieved perfection here only by violence elsewhere, as if she were "pilling" "all the rest."¹¹¹ Spenser's simile here likens nature's growth to the act of plunder, imagining the organic flowering of Mount Acidale as a vicious act of theft from other places. The zero-sum logic of the simile, along with its suggestion of banditry, center the problem of waste from the outset of the scene. Beauty, as much as arable land, exists in limited quantities that can be stolen or defended, but not expanded limitlessly. Acidale's other essential pastoral features, such as its remote location, "far from all peoples trod", inveigle further problems of waste into the bucolic scenery; pastoral isolation and the depopulation characteristic of waste are two sides of the same coin. Similarly, the Mount's "wood of matchlesse hight, that seem'd th'earth to disdaine" is surpassingly beautiful; but it is also an uncut forest. Wooded areas around the Munster Plantation, on the sides of the Ballyhouras and Galees and in the Vale Aherlow, would have been scrupulously avoided,

¹¹⁰ Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, 6.10.5.

¹¹¹ As in "to take, seize, or carry off (property) as booty, esp. by force; to appropriate wrongfully; to steal." "pillage, v.". OED Online. March 2021. Oxford University Press.

and cut back when possible, in order to build ships and settlements, and to flush out bandits from their hiding places.¹¹²

To summarize: nowhere could be more beautiful than Mount Acidale, and nowhere could be more wasteful. The place unites the idealizing conventions of the pastoral form with the wastefulness of the Irish pastoral lifestyle that English settlers committed themselves to eliminating. Spenser dramatically allegorizes the effects of this argued-for eradication in the arrival of Calidore to the scene. The English court's agent, the "Elfin Knight", approaches the Mount, where "him seemed that the merry sound / Of a shrill pipe he playing heard on hight, / And many feete fast thumping th'hollow ground, / That through the woods their Eccho did rebound."¹¹³ As he comes closer, he sees dancers, arrayed like "the stares" "now placed in the firmament." The echo of the revelers, and this glimpse of their astral formation, however, is all that Calidore ever experiences of the pastoral convocation. As soon as he reaches the edge of their circle, "they vanish all away out of his sight."¹¹⁴ Here, pastoral in its very fullest sense—a fleeting union of literary form and lifestyle—retreats before the representative of English administration, leaving in its wake only the faint echoes and starry traces that are the hallmarks of elegy.

Echoes are not always included on lists of pastoral elegy's standard tropes, but they are essential to Spenser's version of the form. Calidore hears pastoral before and after he sees it; its echoes "rebound" "through the woods" that encircle him. In her "Dolefull Lay",

¹¹² See Hadfield, 198. And William J. Smyth, *Map-Making, Landscapes and Memory: A Geography of Colonial and Early Modern Ireland c.1530-1750* (Cork, Ireland: Cork University Press in association with Field Day, 2006).

¹¹³ Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, 6.10.10.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, 6.10.18.

Clorinda pledges to mourn so loudly and so long that her grief will return to her, back across the landscape into which she sends it:

Then to my selfe will I my sorrow mourne,
Sith none aliue like sorrowfull remains:
And to myself my plaints shall back retourne,
To pay their vsury with doubled paines.
The woods, the hills, the rivers shall resound
The mournfull accent of my sorrowes ground.¹¹⁵

To hear an echo in a Spenser poem is to perceive both an amplification and a dilution of an original form. It is meaning dispersed and changed by the bodies that receive and repeat it, a trace note or “mournfull accent” of something that no longer exists, except in its proliferating reverberations across the affected emotional and actual landscape. Clorinda’s grief transforms the nature it encounters: “woods, hills and rivers, now are desolate,” and “all the fields do waile their widow state.”¹¹⁶ An echo, then, is a form that changes and is changed by the landscape it crosses. It alters nature’s features progressively over time, as a small grief that is felt locally ramifies, shaping the characteristics of more distant places.

The transformation of the lost object into a flower or a constellation is a variation on this theme. When, in “Astrophel,” Sidney unites with his beloved Stella “into one flower that is both red and blew,” “that herbe of some, Starlight is cald,” he sheds his original form for another, which is related but not identical to the first. He leaves behind a sign or distillation of his former self, in this case a plant named for his famous sonnet sequence, *Astrophil and Stella*. To take Clorinda’s words for the process in her “Dolefull Lay”, “what

¹¹⁵ Spenser, *The Shorter Poems*, 381.

¹¹⁶ Pastoral elegy here captures the flipside of waste, the Irish counter-argument: that it’s the English who lay waste and leave the landscape desolate, mourning its former pastoral glories even as they cause them.

is become of him whose flower here left / Is but the shadow of his likenesse gone.”¹¹⁷ As time passes, then, nature is utterly transformed by one small loss—even as it preserves the trace impression of what has been lost. Now whenever Sidney’s flower grows, “shepherds” “do pluck it softly” for his sake.¹¹⁸ Minor disturbances in the past have major implications in the future.

Crucially, at the heart of the crime of waste is the question of the land’s future. The legal encyclopedia *Les Termes de La Ley* (ed. 1624) defines waste as an act that alters the potential of the land going forward, as when,

a tenant by curtesie, or Gardein in chivalrie doth make wast or destruction upon the land that is to say, pulleth down the house, or cutteth down timber, or suffreth the house willingly to fall, or diggeth the ground.¹¹⁹

The definition looks ahead to the future ramifications of environmental destruction. As Andrew Zurcher has argued, “the crime of waste is basically one committed by the temporary custodian of an estate against its future possessor(s), and amounts to the stripping of that estate of its capital assets—timber, soil, mineral or metal deposits, and any buildings.”¹²⁰

Spenser builds a strong sense of this definition of waste into the elegy that he composes for himself at the end of *Colin Clout*. Colin envisions his legacy as an inscription of Elizabeth I’s name into the Irish landscape:

Her name in every tree I will endosse,
That as the trees do grow, her name may grow:

¹¹⁷ Spenser, *The Shorter Poems*, 382.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 380.

¹¹⁹ John Rastell, *Les Termes de La Ley: Or, Certaine Difficult and Obscure Vvords and Termes of the Common Lawes of This Realme Expounded* (London, England, 1624). 310.

¹²⁰ Andrew Zurcher, “Wasting Time: Conditionality and Prosperity in *As You Like It*,” in *Shakespeare and the Law*, *The Arden Critical Companions* (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2010). 83.

And in the ground each where will it engrosse,
And fill with stones, that all men may it know.
The speaking woods and murmuring waters fall,
Her name Ile teach in knowen termes to frame:
And eke my lambs when for their dams they call,
Ile teach to call for Cynthia by name.
And long while after I am dead and rotten:
Amongst the dancing Shepherdes daughters dancing rownd,
My layes made of her shall not be forgotten,
But sung by them with flowry gyrlonds cownd.¹²¹

Colin fantasizes about carving his sovereign's name in the bark of a tree, so that its letters will enlarge year by year on a climbing branch; he looks forward to scratching it deeply in the earth, to "engrossing" it there; he imagines teaching the word to his sheep; and immortalizing it so that shepherds will sing it loudly after his passing. These are elegiac tropes but ones that press closely against the realities of colonial administration and the expropriative landownership of New English settlers. To "engrosse" Elizabeth I's name is to "write" it "in large letters", in the "peculiar character appropriate to legal documents"; and it is also to "gain or keep exclusive possession of" it, to "concentrate property in one's own possession," "often with the notion of unfairness or injury to others."¹²² The word suggests the ways in which Spenser imagines his legacy not just in poetic terms, but equally in legal or administrative ones. In writing Elizabeth I's name, he immortalizes it in verse, and also extends its reach politically, "engrossing" new lands to the growing English nation. Carrying the connotation of unjust machinations in the accrual of property, however, the act that Spenser undertakes in Elizabeth's name is ambivalently positioned vis-à-vis questions of waste. He transforms the landscape into a reflection or shadow of her glory (and by

¹²¹ Spenser, *The Shorter Poems*, 362.

¹²² "Engross, v.". *OED Online*. Oxford University Press.

extension, of course, his own as her self-appointed poet laureate); but in so doing, he modifies it in ways that reverberate unpredictably over time. As the trees, earth, woods, and water grow and alter they carry the signature of his use. The landscape testifies to Spenser's presence there, but what is left of it for future generations is uncertain.

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