Georgic Reformations of the *Vita Activa*:
The Nature of Work in Early Modern English Literature

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by

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This dissertation is an archaeology of a neglected literary mode in England’s post-Reformation literature. The georgic mode takes its name from Virgil’s poem about agriculture. Unlike pastoral and other forms of nature writing that emphasize *otium*, recreation, and the distinction between nature and culture (a binary that appears in alternative forms such as country/city, science/politics, and wilderness/civilization), the georgic mode emphasizes the necessity of work in nature, and the mutual imbrication of the human and non-human world. The Protestant Reformation affirmed and worried over the value of labor, work, and action — the hierarchy of human activity that Hannah Arendt calls the *vita activa*. The troping of all activity as georgic activity is symptomatic of the pressures modernity put on the *vita activa*. Those pressures are due to several related early modern phenomena: 1) the Protestant Reformation, 2) the development of capitalism and the new professional opportunities it spawned, and 3) the
invention of modern political forms, including the nation state, competing modes of parliamentary and monarchical rule, and nation-building through both Old- and New-World imperialism.

The first three chapters explore georgic reformations of labor, work, and action through canonical Early Modern texts. Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*, *The Winter’s Tale*, and *All’s Well That Ends Well* use the georgic mode to stage what Arendt calls the rise of the social by grafting private labor to political action. Shakespeare’s Sonnets use the georgic mode to evaluate two competing career options – making a living as a playwright in a labor society or aspiring to be an artist (“the only ‘worker’ left in a laboring society,” according to Arendt). *The Faerie Queene* and *Paradise Lost* dramatize the process by which epic action was transformed from an externally oriented category of public deeds to an inwardly oriented hermeneutic for navigating the fallen world. The fourth chapter explores how the georgic mode structured Early Modern world-making, and authorized colonial appropriation. The afterword considers how the georgic mode survives in current discourses of the Anthropocene, and considers what an active, georgic education might mean for the humanities in the twenty-first century.
The thesis of Alexandra Kathryn Zobel is approved.

Jonathan F. Post
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2016
Dedicated to the memory of my mother, Kathryn Tunstall, from whom I continue to glean

the dilating meanings of the words “labor of love.”
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INTRODUCTION

New Worlds and Old Worlds:
Astrofarming with Virgil and Arendt

A headline recently grabbed my attention in part because it looked as if it could have been ripped from Ben Jonson’s masque from 1620, *News from the New World Discovered in the Moon*: N.A.S.A. intended to farm the moon. The project will aim to study the germination and growth of cress, basil, and turnips in the low-gravity, high-radiation environment, with the hope that lunar agriculture could someday sustain a colony of long-term moon settlers.¹ I had so many questions. Does this have anything to do with the Anthropocene? That is to say, is the habitability of the earth so doubtful in the near future that we need to start moon-farming? If one were a practitioner of the more mystic veins of biodynamic agriculture, would one sow and reap according to the earth’s phase instead of the moon’s cycle? Is this the Big Bang of world-making or the resigned whimper of world-abandoning? Can lunar agriculture ever be anything but invasive, or am I guilty of importing my woefully terrestrial world-view to an irrelevant context? Is this indeed something new? Is Elon Musk behind this? Why turnips?

For Hannah Arendt, world-abandonment was a feature both of our emergence into modernity and our often literal flight from it. The eclipse of the public realm by private concerns (what she calls “the rise of the social”) spelled the disappearance of the world “between men” at the dawn of modernity, but in its twilight, automation, atomic fission, and space flight portended our departure from the world between *all* of us in the most inclusive, trans-species sense. Though

¹ “LPX First flight of Lunar plant growth experiment,” National Aeronautics and Space
images of the earth from space may have galvanized the environmental movement in the late 60s, space flight in particular posed some very interesting ecological problems in the thought of Arendt. A quote from a newspaper represented the Sputnik achievement as a “step toward escape from men’s imprisonment to the earth.” Dwelling on the quote in 1958, Arendt notes that

What is new is only that one of this country’s most respectable newspapers finally brought to its front page what up to then had been buried in the highly non-respectable literature of science fiction (to which, unfortunately, nobody yet has paid the attention it deserves as a vehicle of mass sentiments and mass desires). The banality of the statement should not make us overlook how extraordinary in fact it was; for although Christians have spoken of the earth as a vale of tears and philosophers have looked upon their body as a prison of mind or soul, nobody in the history of mankind has ever conceived of the earth as a prison for men’s bodies or shown such eagerness to go literally from here to the moon. Should the emancipation and secularization of the modern age, which began with a turning-away, not necessarily from God, but from a god who was the Father of men in heaven, end with an even more fateful repudiation of an Earth who was the Mother of all living creatures under the sky?²

Ursula Heise and other literary critics have started reading science fiction as an inherently ecological genre, and I believe Hamlet would complicate Arendt’s claim that no one has thought of the world as a prison, let alone a goodly one. However, what’s important here is that for

Arendt, modernity ends when humans attempt to bring “action into nature,” which is to say, when humans realize that they were “capable of starting natural processes which would not have come about without human interference,” such as nuclear fission.\(^3\) The “unnatural growth of the natural”\(^4\) replaces the cyclical processes of natural life and labor with semi-natural processes whose consequences reverberate into the future in unpredictable and irrevocable ways. The “unnatural growth of the natural” explains Arendt’s notion of the rise of the social, which produced in modernity a “waste economy, in which things must be almost as quickly devoured and discarded as they have appeared in the world.”\(^5\) It is as though our consumer goods “were the ‘good things’ of nature which spoil uselessly if they are not drawn swiftly in to the never-ending cycle of man’s metabolism with nature.”\(^6\) But the “unnatural growth of the natural” also figures the newfound human desire to transcend the earth, which is “the quintessence of the human condition,” according to Arendt.\(^7\) If we take these words seriously, we must see Arendt not only as an ecological writer, but as a georgic writer in particular. She finds human activity to be literally rooted in the etymology of georgic activity, which is to say, the human condition is rooted in earth-work. When this quintessence of dust aspires to transcend our earth-bound condition — whether we are talking about Eve harvesting the fruits of knowledge, or the research agenda of an astro-farmer — we might agree with her that the modern world, in spite of all its injustices, has indeed been superseded by something new.


\(^5\) Ibid., 133-134.

\(^6\) Ibid., 125-126.

\(^7\) Ibid., 2.
But that something new is not, upon closer inspection, all that new. Even in our attempt to divorce ourselves from the biological and terrestrial imperatives of life, we’ve brought our georgic ethos with us. Like Early Modern colonists, whose portable georgic vision found fertile ground in the New World (more on that in Chapter 4), our scientists and astronauts are attempting to bring farming to the moon in order to create another new world or, in more Arendtian language, to create a space for the appearance of something new which is at the same time something as old as civilization and as rooted in agriculture: a permanent, place-bound culture. Agricultural activity occupies an unstable position in Arendt’s vita activa, and it’s still one of the activities that distinguish the human animal from its environment, even if its an activity that sometimes irreversibly changes that environment. Agriculture’s unstable position is nowhere more evident than in Early Modern literature, wherein agricultural or, as I will refer to them, georgic tropes figure all three categories of the vita activa: labor, work, and action.

This dissertation is an analysis of a neglected literary mode in Early Modern English literature. I argue that the georgic experienced a resurgence in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries before its full-fledged literary revival in the eighteenth century. This archeology situates the mode’s development and complication within the historical conditions that produced such a literary reaction in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Using the taxonomy of human activity that Arendt describes in The Human Condition, I diagnose the troping of all activity as georgic as symptomatic of the immense pressure to which the vita activa was subject in the period. That pressure is the result of several related cultural phenomena: 1) the Protestant Reformation, 2) the development of capitalism and the literary market it spawned, and 3) the

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8 That is not to say that hunter-gatherer and nomadic societies did not have cultures. In the Arendtian framework, a culture is tied to the world-building, permanent work of homo faber who erects buildings that outlive their occupants.
invention of modern political forms, including the nation state, competing modes of parliamentary and monarchical rule, and nation-building through New-World imperialism.

The Protestant Reformation fostered a georgic reformation that simultaneously affirmed and worried over the value of labor, work, and action — the hierarchy of human activity that comprises the *vita activa*. The theological changes ushered in by the Reformation, the peculiar incarnation of the English nation state, changing economic paradigms (such as the rise of merchant and commercial capitalism), and emerging social institutions and the metaphors that adhered to them, meant that by the end of the Early Modern period, the pillars of the classical *vita activa* had become so imbricated as to be virtually indistinguishable. Conceptual figures for understanding political formations, such as the little commonwealth, the body politic, and the *oikos*, make legible the period’s micro-macro thinking, and they point to the appeal of the operating political allegory of the farm-as-state in Virgil’s *Georgics* — an allegory that is repeated, condensed, and embedded in the bee republic of the fourth book. In short, many Early Modern writers struggle with the very same problems we’re still struggling with today — namely the possibility of meaningful labor, work, and action, both for the individual and for the collective, within institutions that date back to Early Modernity (though the palimpsest of the Protestant “hand of god” has been obscured by the enlightenment’s “invisible hand”).

Hannah Arendt provides a useful vocabulary for describing the distinction and dissolution of the *vita activa*’s constituent activities. She reads much of the same cultural material that Early Modern humanists would have used to make sense of their location in history and to chart the possibility of diverging from that history with the intervention of action. In typically deft fashion, she puts the classical archive in conversation with both patristic and modern continental thought. It’s the same kind of transhistorical, originary move that authors
such as Milton would have made, writing as they were in the wake of scholasticism and during a Reformation that sent scholars and clerics back to original sources. Arendt’s historical phenomenology participates in the Hegelian tradition of archaeologies of phenomenal categories. Though it reads more like a meditation than an argument, *The Human Condition* contends that the categories of work have been confused in modernity such that their original classical distinctions are no longer legible. The upshot of this disintegration is the disappearance of the public world where intelligible debate can take place among individuals acting not on behalf of their private interests, but on behalf of what Early Moderns would describe as the *common*, or the condition of politics that Arendt refers to as *plurality*. I want to focalize her broad critique of modernity on Early Modernity, and I argue that the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries saw rapid changes and reformations to the categories of the *vita activa*, and they are changes that still buttress contemporary evaluations of human activity in both the widest sense, and georgic activity in the limited sense of “earth-work.”

Supple as Arendt’s work is, her phenomenology is by no means uncontroversial. She paints her history in broad strokes that note changes in the typologies of human activity from the antique period to modernity, but she rarely delves into the peculiarities of history in the interim. I will focus her theoretical framework on the period between the Reformation and the Restoration of Stuart rule. The Early Modern tendency to figure all activity as georgic activity is due to the immense pressure that the *vita activa* was under in the period. That all work — manual, intellectual, poetic, biological, sexual, scientific, political, and imperial — is as fundamentally uncertain and, at times, as fundamentally collaborative as agricultural labor suggests that these categories were becoming fluid. My readings find that, generally, the rise of the social did eclipse the public, political realm (as Arendt argues), but I also find a few complications to
Arendt’s taxonomy: namely the possibility of a politics rooted in biological labor, which is to say — the possibility of a politics that is not divorced from nature. My revision of her pejorative reading of the rise of the social finds in the eruption of private labor into the public sphere the possibility of a redemptive, inclusive biopolitics. Julia Reinhard Lupton summarizes recent feminist reinterpretations of Arendt’s work (to say nothing of Lupton’s own contributions to these revisions), writing that Arendt’s

emphasis on significant human speech in a polis emancipated both from and by the labor of women, slaves, and beasts of burden is certainly colored by classical heroic concerns. Yet Arendt’s insistence on the relational and responsive dimensions of human action, and her phenomenological accounts of labor in the oikos suit her work to a broader analysis of politics that unfolds in closets, pantries, kitchens, and banqueting houses, as well as battlefields and presence chambers.  

These revisions open up the possibility of action occurring in private spaces that are typically associated with labor.

I have already suggested that Arendt’s notion of earth-work makes her a quintessentially georgic writer, but there are other reasons to unite my analysis of the georgic mode with Arendt’s taxonomy. Arendt’s critique of modernity is aimed at restoring the notion of the common, public world — a world shared by humans and other life, and space for human action. At her most Marxist, she is looking to recover a sphere for political action that is not completely

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dominated by the private interests of individuals or the demands of the market economy. There is some urgency to recovering this kind of discursive common. We lack a shared forum for discussion and debate, as the media is increasingly segmented by ideology and our information streams are determined by algorithms based on our market preferences and what is most likely to garner the more “likes” and clicks. In addition to recovering an inclusive discursive sphere, we also need new ways of thinking about our commitments to the common world we share, especially as humanity ever so slowly begins to tackle the crises of the Anthropocene.

Conceptualizing the common will require moving beyond our interest in the quarterly earnings of transnational corporations, the imperatives of GDP growth, and even our individual tax returns. The georgic mode, especially in its ur-form in Virgil’s Georgics, offers several ways of imagining the common — the first is through the analogy of the farm-as-state where the management of the household estate (oikos) is a microcosm managing the state (polis). Recent work on Arendt in Renaissance studies has brought out the multiple points of contact and overlap between the household and the state, which we can map onto privacy and politics, and labor and action. Lupton’s work comes first to mind, with her interest in “the forms of appearing that occur when the domestic world of objects and bodily care comes into contact with or takes on the character of the political world of significant speech and human action.”10 The other analogy that the Georgics uses to think about the common world is the commonwealth of bees, which dominates the final book of the Georgics and has an afterlife that extends all the way to contemporary discourses of the Anthropocene, both literally as we weigh the agricultural impact of colony collapse disorder on our food system and literarily in texts such as Bill McKibben’s memoire, Oil and Honey.

Bringing Arendt’s political philosophy to bear on work in nature, which is at the heart of the georgic mode, can also help us beging to articulate new ways of thinking about the intersection of nature and politics. Again, this is a task with considerable urgency in the Anthropocene. Bruno Latour is one of many thinkers who have issued a call to re-envision that intersection. He is rarely marshaled in discussions of Arendt, largely because the received reading of Arendt assumes (wrongly, as I’ll show) that politics is a sphere expunged of biological necessity, and Latour’s structural aim is the erasure of the modern line between politics and nature. Deconstructing that binary is the chief project of We Have Never Been Modern, and proposing a new structure — “a new constitution” — is the project of The Politics of Nature. That new constitution is premised on a different conception of political ecology and would bring together science and politics or, to use the terms most favored by ecocritics, nature and culture. Like Arendt, Latour is also interested in recovering a common world, but (given his historical position) he is less interested in issues of totalitarianism than in the ecological challenges of the Anthropocene. 11 Timothy Morton is another such thinker, and though his work is more invested in aesthetics, there are political implications for what he advocates. He suggests that we will need to do away with the idea of nature, which is a conceit that can only hamper the progress of a “genuinely ecological politics, ethics, philosophy, and art.”12

In my reading of Arendt, the fact of natality opens up the possibility of a politics (action) rooted in natural life in general and biological reproduction (labor) in particular. The social cuts two ways — yes, it has contributed to the eclipse of the public realm by private interests, but it


has also created the possibility of a biologically conditioned politics — which is to say, the possibility of biopolitics, which is available to everyone — not just those who have freed themselves from the necessities of labor and biological life.\(^\text{13}\) Working at the intersection of nature and culture is critical, as environmental humanists like to remind us, because the challenges of the Anthropocene are not merely a product of scientific and technological “progress” — they are also a product of culture. If ever there were a discourse equipped to deal with the intersection of nature and culture, it is the georgic mode. Agriculture is the archetypal middle zone between nature and culture, and the georgic mode has been humanity’s preferred tool for imaging that intersection since at least the epic of Gilgamesh.

Finally, I’m using Arendt to read the georgic mode because both validate the possibility of action. As will be clear by now, this project has some affinity with environmental humanities. It’s no coincidence that the humanities are in crisis at the exact moment the public is becoming increasingly aware that the environment is in crisis as well. I believe that the best humanistic inquiry and pedagogy is engaged, and we could go a long way toward solving both crises by putting the humanities to work. I will stop short of calling for outright activism, but humanists should be more willing to use our skills of analysis and critique in the public forum. The humanities have a readership problem because we generally do not engage with and write for the general public beyond the university. Even on campus, we tend to stay within our disciplinary silos (to use a georgic metaphor) and miss the opportunity to do important, synergistic work across fields. Hyperspecialization is perhaps another symptom of the eclipse of the academic

\(^{13}\) This redemptive biopolitical reading of Arendt owes much to Miguel Vatter’s work on natality in *The Republic of the Living: Biopolitics and the Critique of Civil Society* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 127-155. Arendt’s vision of the classical *vita activa* occludes the possibility of women and slaves and others who are bound by necessity from participating in politics.
commons. Arendt’s taxonomy of human activity values political action and speech above all else — it is the height of the human possibility to effect change in the public sphere. Her work is provocative precisely because it does not abandon the possibility of change, even writing in the context of the twentieth century’s darkest moments.

By the same token, the georgic offers what I believe is a hopeful message about the possibilities of human effort. It’s not a saccharine vision — even the farmer who does everything right, who exercises prudence and is attuned to the signs in nature, can still be surprised by disease or storms. But it’s a vision that nonetheless champions human work in nature. Historically ecocritics have focused on nature writing and pastoral, which are modes that avoid work and are often politically under-engaged, sometimes to the point of erasing the human in the landscape. (The politically encoded Renaissance pastoral and hard pastoral offer an interesting counter example, though Annabel Paterson has said, “the entire rationale [of hard pastoral] is georgic.”)¹⁴ At the other end of the Rota Virgilii, the epic is perhaps over-engaged, bound up as it is with the nationalist and colonialist ambitions of nations. The georgic offers a middle space as an alternative to both under-engaged pastoral and over-engaged epic; this is an alternative that validates human action even while suggesting that we never completely control outcomes. This is one feature that the georgic mode shares with Arendt’s vision of action, which she describes as inherently boundless and unpredictable.

Arendt’s work is gaining traction in Renaissance studies, especially among scholars of Renaissance drama. Paul Kottman’s A Politics of the Scene brought her framework for political action to bear on Renaissance drama. He argues that political action and dramatic acting are fundamentally linked in that they both rely on speech, publicity, freedom, and plurality. When

¹⁴Annabel Patterson, Pastoral and Ideology: Virgil to Valéry (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 281.
the actor speaks, there is an “implicit manifestation of the agent and speaker,” and that disclosure convenes the politics of the scene. Kottman’s reading frees action to operate beyond limited, explicitly political contexts and institutions, and he locates action squarely between individuals sharing any “scene.” Working from the perspective of historically oriented political economy, Richard Halpern finds in Renaissance drama (and in Hamlet in particular) eclipse of “the space of action” [by] “the space of production.” Kenneth Gross uses Arendt’s reading of anti-Semitism for understanding Shakespeare’s own investments in Shylock. Arguing against much twentieth-century political theology, Victoria Kahn finds an evolution in Arendt’s thinking about theater: in The Human Condition, Arendt suggests that Early Modern theater shifted away from its classically-derived notion as a scene for politics toward a kind of poesis marked by the interests of homo faber (in yet another symptom of the rise of the social). In her later work, especially in the essay “Crisis in Culture,” Arendt comes around to a recuperative notion of poesis that sees (with some help from Kant) aesthetic judgment as a variety of political judgment. More recently, Theodore Kaouk detects a fundamental irony in the way politics is conceived in Coriolanus: “even as the patricians attempt to deny or ignore the obvious fact that the craftsmen’s political action has radically interrupted and reconstituted the political world they share with them (resulting in the establishment of a new political institution, the tribunes of the


plebeians), these same patricians view the city as if it were a made object that they themselves crafted. He uses Arendt’s categories in the *vita activa* to show the interrelations between work and action in political formations, finding a complex dance between the “radicalism of the doer who begins something new and the comparative stability of those political and legal institutions that enable other-wise ephemeral action to be interpreted, remembered, and re-enacted by a political community.”

Perhaps no one has done more to bring Arendt’s work to bear on Early Modern literature than Lupton, who works in a vein that is more “creative-receptive than critical-cautionary” and suggests that drawing our attention to the “interdependencies and cross-fertilizations” in Arendt’s categories “may be the most productive task for criticism.” Patchen Markel’s work also fits into this new recuperative vein in Arendtian criticism that finds inter-relationships between the categories that open up the possibility of politics emerging out of all three modes of the *vita activa*, rather than just action. Markel suggests that the “architecture” of the *vita activa* is not nearly as rigid as it has been interpreted, and that there are actually significant points of contact between the different rungs of the *vita activa*. These revisions (often feminist and/or Marxist in nature) lend themselves to re-valuing the private sphere, including the labor of women and others who were occluded from the political sphere in the Greek *polis*.

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20 Ibid., 411.


My archive is largely canonical — Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*, the plays and sonnets of Shakespeare, and Milton’s *Paradise Lost* — but I draw particular attention to the agricultural metaphors these texts use. Since Arendt’s taxonomy of human activity will be the structuring principle of most of this dissertation, it’s worth considering where georgic activity fits into that taxonomy at the outset. Arendt categorizes agriculture as labor (rather than work or action) chiefly because it is ephemeral and cyclical, and unlike work, it leaves nothing durable behind it. But it’s a distinction that is by no means simple for her as we can see from the sheer volume of space she devotes to locating agriculture squarely, if uneasily, in the category of labor:

The most necessary and elementary labor of man, the tilling of the soil, seems to be a perfect example of labor transforming itself into work in the process, as it were. This seems so because tilling the soil, its close relation to the biological cycle and its utter dependence upon the larger cycle of nature notwithstanding, leaves some product behind which outlasts its own activity and forms a durable addition to the human artifice: the same task, performed year in and year out, will eventually transform the wilderness into cultivated land. The example figures prominently in all ancient and modern theories of laboring precisely for this reason. Yet, despite an undeniable similarity and although doubtless the time-honored dignity of agriculture arises from the fact that tilling the soil not only procures means of subsistence but in this process prepares the earth for the building of the world, even in this case the distinction remains quite clear: the cultivated land is not, properly speaking a use object, which is there in its own durability and requires for its permanence no more than ordinary care in
preservation; the tilled soil, if it is to remain cultivated, needs to be labored upon time and again. A true reification, in other words, in which the produced thing in its existence is secured once and for all, has never come to pass; it needs to be reproduced again and again in order to remain within the human world at all.  

Agricultural labor seems to always threaten to become agricultural work, and anyone who has seen the permanent undulations left in the landscape from centuries of ridge-and-furrow practices in England would be hard-pressed to deny the durability of Early Modern agricultural activity. Massive draining projects that saw the conversion of fenlands to permanent arable use offer a stark rebuttal to Arendt’s notion of both the use value of agricultural land and the permanence of agricultural work. Indeed, this is the period during which instrumental conceptions of the natural world begin to emerge as a product of both Early Modern science and the de-mystification of the world brought about by the Reformation. Since at least Early Modernity cultivated land has been seen as a use object. By the same token, the timelessness of work is also questionable, and in the long view, all work eventually ends up looking like labor, which has to be endlessly maintained. Alan Weisman, to whom I’ll return in the afterword of this project, has shown that the most impressive products of work — the world-making work of buildings and cities — also have shelf lives. Even New York City will eventually and likely very quickly be overtaken by nature in the absence of, in the case of the subways, daily human maintenance.  

As mere labor, agricultural activity occupies the lowest wrung on the vita activa, but as we can tell from Arendt’s attempt to isolate it there, it’s always aspiring higher to work and, in

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23 Arendt, The Human Condition, 138-139.

the case of Early Modern planter colonialism, action. In the post-Reformation period, the entire \textit{vita activa} underwent profound changes that would result in the rise of the social. In the Early Modern period, the hard line between work and labor ends up looking far more delicate than Arendt’s classical taxonomy. Marvell’s poem “The Mower’s Song” traverses that line all the way to the final stanza, where it’s ultimately ambiguous whether the grass will become work — “the heraldry” carved into the immortal tomb of the georgic mower — or if it will merely grow out of his unmarked grave as natural processes (labor) overtake his body:

\begin{verbatim}
And thus, ye meadows, which have been

Companions of my thoughts more green,

Shall now the heraldry become

With which I shall adorn my tomb;

For Juliana comes, and she

What I do to the grass, does to my thoughts and me. (25-30)\textsuperscript{25}
\end{verbatim}

Permanence would seem to be the mark of work, while maintenance is the mark of labor, but in Marvell’s poem, the meadows he maintains with his bodily labor might one day overcome the artwork of his tomb. It’s not ultimately clear which is more permanent and which requires more labor to maintain: the agricultural landscape or the artful tomb.

In important and at times contradictory ways, agricultural labor supplies a meaningful corrective to work, which threatens to conquer the natural world by using it in the quest to build something permanent and durable. There are ecological implications for overvaluing the work of

homo faber, and we can see it in the innovation economy today that is intent on producing new products with increasingly shorter windows of utility before their planned obsolescence. Planned obsolescence dooms us doubly: it fills our landfills faster while emptying the earth of its natural resources in the quest for more raw materials. The labor of maintenance can be a helpful antidote to the work of capitalism (or, as a friend refers to it, crapitalism). Writing about technology and society, Lee Vinsel and Andrew Russell remind us that “focusing on infrastructure or on old, existing things rather than novel ones reminds us of the absolute centrality of the work that goes into keeping the entire world going. Despite recurring fantasies about the end of work or the automation of everything, the central fact of our industrial civilisation is labor, and most of this work falls far outside the realm of innovation.”

The world that homo faber creates with use objects, such as the plow and scythe, is one that requires more than the initial act of creation; it requires care to maintain it, much like Milton’s garden, which needs the tending of “joint hands” to “keep [Eden] from wilderness” (IX.244-245). For Arendt, agricultural labor is the primordial activity that models care: “The word ‘culture’ derives from colere — to cultivate, to dwell, to take care, to tend and preserve — and it relates primarily to the intercourse of man with nature in the sense of cultivating and tending nature until it becomes fit for human habitation. As such, it indicates an attitude of loving care and stands in sharp contrast to all efforts to subject nature to the domination of man.”

Arendt claims that the Romans’ respect for agriculture (as exemplified


in texts like Virgil’s *Georgics*) led them to see the cultural objects they inherited from other classical civilizations as items to be discussed, cared for, revered, and imitated. In this equation, agriculture models not only care for the world, but building a world fit for human activity in the first place. Again, agricultural labor in Arendt’s taxonomy is always aspiring to higher rungs on the *vita activa*, and in this case it begins to look something like world-creating work.

My project tests and adapts Arendt’s phenomenology because Early Moderns in England saw farming as an already political and discursive practice. Just as pastoral *otium* encodes political critique, georgic labor was already a species of political action — especially as the enclosure debates heated up over the course of the sixteenth century. During the civil war, farming became a political signifier for both sides. The Diggers announced their enfranchisement movement — one that was too radical even for Cromwell — by way of a political manifesto that declared that “true freedom lies where a man receives his nourishment and preservation, and that is in the *use* of the earth.” As I will show in Chapter 4, strategic notions of proper “use” of the earth were imported to the New World context as a justification for colonial expropriation. This looks a lot like a georgic restaging of the opening scenario of Virgil’s *Eclogues*, in which one shepherd laments to another that his land is being seized and given to another. The Diggers’ conception of farmland as a use object elevates farm labor to the status of work, and their harnessing of a common voice elevates agricultural labor to political action — the highest

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activity in Arendt’s *vita activa*. On the other side of the ideological divide, the farm became the *locus amoenus* of Royalist escapism, even if the critical history has regarded such sites as pastoral rather than georgic landscapes.

By focusing on the georgic reformations of the *vita activa*, I’m already situating my reading after the so-called rise of the social. Arendt’s notion of the *polis* (the realm of public action) excludes the private labor of the householder, both on the farm estate and in the domicile, but the Rome that produced the *Georgics* had already wedded those two realms. Arendt locates the rise of the social in the translation of the Greek *zoon politikon* to the Latin *animal socialis*.31 In effect, the *Georgics* is something of an ur-text for the Arendtian rise of the social. The social “is neither private nor public,” which is similar to the farm or *oikos* in the *Georgics*, because the farm serves as a microcosm for the state.32 I see the georgic mode, which in many Early Modern iterations rests on an analogy between the nation and the farm, household, or estate, as a corrective to Arendt’s rather patriarchal schema. If we take seriously Robert Miola’s claim that Renaissance readers practiced a kind of analogical approach to texts, then there can be no doubt that the culture that saw the family as a “little commonwealth” and the body as an analogy for the body politic brought the same reading strategies to Virgil’s *Georgics*.33 Christopher Hill (and others) has shown how the household became “the lowest unit in the hierarchy of discipline” due to the new interest in religious discipline in the wake of the Protestant Reformation.34 For Early

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32 Ibid., 28.

Modern readers, these metaphors politicize the private sphere that Arendt would have distinguished from the public realm of action. Though it strains the antique taxonomy of human activity that Arendt delineates, the georgic mode also offers a literary avenue for valuing the labor of the private sphere and for reading (to misquote the mantra of second wave feminism) the political in the personal.

Arendt detects a shift happening in the *vita activa* during modernity: the private concerns of the *oikos* overtake the public concerns of the *polis*, which becomes more concerned with private issues of labor than with political action. Meanwhile, *homo faber* works in the mode of labor rather than work, producing endless products to drive the economy, which requires the ceaseless labor of production and consumption, rather than the permanence and durability of work.35 Literary representations of agricultural labor in the Early Modern period reveal that these categories weren’t just shifting; they were becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish entirely, as agricultural labor troped all activity, from inglorious household labor to the heights of political action. The rise of the georgic mode and its application to all activity in the *vita activa* is symptomatic of the dissolution of those categories as a result of broader social (I use the term in the Arendtian sense) changes. I have in mind several of the key phenomena that New Historicist and materialist criticism has so fruitfully mined: the Protestant Reformation (specifically its revaluation of work), Early Modern capitalism and the concomitant rise of new professions and industries, and the emergence of the nation state and its colonization of the New World. My

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dissertation will explore how the georgic mode participates in the then contemporary debates over the massive cultural changes that would usher in modernity.

Digging in the Georgic Archive:
Virgil’s English Afterlife and the Critical Heritage

As Alastair Fowler shows, most claims for the belatedness of English georgic are based on a conception of the genre that essentially privileges its eighteenth-century manifestation. In judging all iterations of georgic by its Augustan form (especially Dryden’s 1697 translation) we enforce an anachronistic definition on the mode. This project seeks to uncover the valences and meanings of the georgic in its inchoate, early phase, before it came to be recognized as a fully realized literary genre in the eighteenth century. In this section I want to outline some of the most salient manifestations of the georgic mode in the Early Modern archive and suggest what is missed by the rather isolated and ad hoc treatments they’ve received by literary scholars.

Since the Augustan genre is premised upon the close imitation of Virgil’s poem, I want to show here some of the pre-Augustan forms the georgic assumed. Luther is a strong starting point for a project that begins with the Protestant Reformation. In his attack on works, he nonetheless felt it necessary to address “whether we all ought to be farmers or at least work with our hands.” Reading Adamic labor typologically as the labor in any calling, Luther finds


abandoning one’s vocation to approximate a life closer to the Adamic original an absurd proposition. As the work of Max Weber shows, the Reformation revalued all work as a sphere of Christian obedience, but Luther’s lecture explains how georgic work was generalized from the specific Genesis command to farm the earth into a typology for all human activity. Thomas Wilson’s *The Art of Rhetoric* is a perfect example of the georgic idiom that attached itself to the Reformation idea of a vocation. Wilson writes at the outset of the text that “it behooveth every man to live in his own vocation” by asking rhetorically,

> Who would dig and delve from morn till evening? Who would travail and toils with the sweat of his brows [...] if wit had not so won men that they thought nothing more needful in this world, nor anything whereunto they were more bounded, than here to live in their duty and to train their whole life according to their calling? Therefore whereas men are in many things weakly by nature, and subject to much infirmity, I think in this one point they pass all other creatures living, that they have the gift of speech and reason.

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38 Shakespeare certainly read *The Art of Rhetoric*. As we’ll see in the second chapter, the source for the first movement of the sonnets — the “procreation sequence” — is Erasmus’ “Epistle to perswade a yong Gentleman to marriage,” which Shakespeare likely found excerpted in *The Art of Rhetoric*. Wilson’s preface quoted here demonstrates how fundamental rhetoric is to orienting human activity towards its productive and (in post-Reformation England) godly end in a dutiful vocation. Shakespeare uses the Epistle to advocate for the duty to breed for the sake of beauty, a teleology that Erasmus’ Epistle lacks.

It’s not hard to hear echoes of this passage in Hamlet’s “to be or not to be” soliloquy. Hamlet similarly spends much time thinking the relationship between reason, discourse, and what separates the human from the animal kingdom — “a beast that wants discourse of reason / Would have mourn’d longer” (1.2.150-151) than Gertrude did for his father, Hamlet muses. Later when pondering “what a piece of work is a man” he finds him “noble in reason” and as such, “the paragon of animals” (2.2.301-305). For Hamlet, his calling is to act out his role in a revenge tragedy — he is literally called upon by his father’s ghost to perform this role — but conscience and reason makes him “lose the name of action” (3.1.89).

In light of the typological reading practices the Reformation fostered, it is perhaps unsurprising that Virgil’s poem would have experienced a resurgence in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In Sir John Harrington’s preface to his translation of Orlando Furioso, he writes that he was so enraptured by Virgil’s Georgics that he “could find it in [his] heart to drive the plough.” Indeed, English translators and editors took up the project of vernacularizing Virgil’s poem with gusto. Abraham Fleming translated it in 1589, Nicholas Grimald followed in 1591, and Thomas May in 1628. The Early Modern print market offered a venue for transforming Virgil’s literary poem into vendible handbooks for husbandry. Barnabe Googe’s translation of Rei Rusticae Libri Quatuor (1577) mentions Virgil quite often (Googe also translated part the Georgics Book I), and John Worlidge’s 1669 Systema Agriculturae mentions

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40 I’m grateful to Robert Watson for pointing out this similarity to me.


Others translated select portions of Virgil’s poem, such as John Brinsley’s 1620 and 1633 Virgils Eclogues, with His Booke De Apibus. Richard Crashaw translated part of the Georgics Book II in “Out of Virgil in Praise of Spring” (in Delights of the Muses, 1646) and Henry Vaughan translates part of the Georgics Book IV in The Mount of Olives (1652). Even applying the Augustan definition of the genre — that is, the close imitation of Virgil — there seems to be a wide interest in the georgic well before the eighteenth century.

But once we look beyond mere quotation and imitation of Virgil we find the mode manifesting itself much more broadly. Other ur-texts, especially Hesiod’s Works and Days, appear to signify to the Early Modern reader as georgic. Consider Chapman’s title of his translation, The Georgick’s of Hesiod, which he dedicated to Bacon in 1618. It seems the georgic mode, if it was legible at all to Early Modern writers, was broader than allusions to Virgil’s Georgics and encompassed the works of other agricultural writers such as Hesiod, Cicero, Cato, Columella, Varro, and Palladius. As Chapman notes, the georgic mode (and his translation in particular) contains multitudes: “Here being no dwelling on any one subject but of all human affairs instructively concluded.”

So if the genealogy of georgic was rather copious, so is the content.

Limited definitions of the mode make it easy to miss its pervasiveness in the period. For instance, Anthony Low believes the georgic is merely a celebration of labor, and thus for him the gentry’s contempt for labor explains the paucity of the mode in the seventeenth century (as if the


gentry were the only writers). In 1586 William Webbe attempted to answer the same question about the relative paucity of the georgic in English poetry and came up with a very different answer from Low’s.

One other sorte of Poeticall writers remayneth yet to bee remembred, that is, the precepts of Husbandry learnedly compiled in Heroycall verse. Such were the workes of Hesiodus in Greek, and Virgils Georgickes in Latine. What memorable worke hath beene handled in imitation of these by any English Poet I know not (saue onely one worke of M. Tusser, a peece surely of great wytt and experience, and withal very prettilye handled). And I think the cause why our Poets haue not trauayled in that behalf is, especially, for that there haue been always plenty of other writers that haue handled the same argument very largely. Among whom Master Barnabe Googe, in translating and enlarging the most profitable worke of Heresbachius, hath deserued much commendation, as well for hys faythfull compyling and learned increasing the noble worke as for hys wytty translation of a good part of the Georgickes of Virgill into English verse.

The reason the poets haven’t undertaken the task of writing formal georgic is because the prose writers have already turned the poem into a profitable print commodity. If it really is as broad a mode as I’ve claimed, then the sheer variety of its manifestations in the pre-Augustan era make it almost ubiquituous. Georgic didacticism re-emerged in the Early Modern period in many ways, as


this project will show, such as in gardening and husbandry handbooks, for which, as Rebecca Bushnell has demonstrated, there was a huge market.\textsuperscript{47} It’s not that there is no georgic in the period; it’s just that we’ve been looking for it in the wrong places. I would suggest, along with Fowler, that in addition to looking in the wrong places, we’re also looking for the wrong thing: an anachronistic definition of georgic that only crystallized in the eighteenth century.

Over the course of the sixteenth century, humanist educators would seize upon the \textit{Georgics} as an ideal grammar school text, both because it inspired service to and for the commonwealth and for its variety and versatility in the classroom. In Thomas Elyot’s \textit{The Boke Named the Governour}, a treatise on the education of future statesmen and humanists, he alights on the \textit{Georgics} as a key text for its copiousness and, like Chapman, for its variety.

In his Georgikes lorde what pleasaunt varietie there is: the diuers graynes, herbes, and flowres that be there described, that, reding therin, hit semeth to a man to be in a delectable gardeine or paradise. What ploughe man knoweth so moche of husbandry as there is expressed? who, delitynge in good horsis, shall nat be therto more enflamed, reding there of the bredyng, chesinge, and kepyng, of them? In the declaration whereof Virgile leaueth farre behynde hym all breders, hakneymen, and skosers.\textsuperscript{48}


It’s more than likely that Shakespeare and his contemporaries encountered Virgil’s *Georgics*, certainly second hand through the likes of the other Renaissance humanists and classical writers (such as Ovid), but they were probably also tasked with double translations of the original Virgilian text in the classroom. Early Modern grammar school records indicate that by the middle of the sixteenth century, grammar schools were teaching Virgil’s *Eclogues* and *Georgics* in the fourth year of study (followed by the *Aeneid* in the fifth).\(^49\) T.W. Baldwin’s study of Early Modern grammar school records indicates that humanist pedagogues such as Christopher Johnson, master of Winchester during the 1560s, did not teach the text as merely a celebration of labor (as Anthony Low imagines). Johnson, like many, read the *Georgics* as an analogy for the state where the hive figured the well-run state, where what is bad for the land is a metaphor for what is bad for the state, and when it is not the ‘culture’ of the state, it is the moral ‘culture’ of the boys that the text informs.\(^50\)

In addition to the educational model that is in part responsible for the revival of the classical *Georgics*, an inherited literary tradition from the medieval period saw the *Rota Virgilii* as the model career path for Renaissance authorship and, for some, as a pattern for living the good life. I’ll be claiming Milton as a georgic writer later, but even from the introduction’s aerial perspective we can see him working through the *Rota Virgilii* by announcing his career in the pastoral mode (note the quotation from Virgil’s *Eclogues* that opens *Poems 1645*) and ending


\(^{50}\) As recorded in Margaret Tudeau-Clayton’s *Johnson, Shakespeare, and Early Modern Virgil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 75.
with the epic. Additionally, some scholars have already flagged *Paradise Regained* as georgic.\(^{51}\) Fowler makes a case for reading “L’Allegro” and “Il Penseroso” as georgic in part because they are located within the Happy Man tradition, which can be traced to the “O fortunatos” passage in *Georgics* Book II.\(^{52}\) Milton’s more immediate influence, Edmund Spenser, has been identified as a georgic writer, especially in the *Shepheardes Calendar* and *The Faerie Queene*.\(^{53}\) Bacon styled his own project for empirical and imperial advancement as a “georgics of the mind” and it’s no wonder that the little criticism that exists on Early Modern georgic finds Bacon to be its chief practitioner.\(^{54}\) Michael Drayton (who contributed a verse epistle to Chapman’s *Georgicks of Hesiod*) may have been working out his own *Rota Virgilii* when he wrote *Poly-Olbion* (1612 and 1624).

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1622), which is essentially an extension and relocation of the *laus Italia* passage from the *Georgics* Book II. This iteration of the georgic mode would take off in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with other poets attempting the close description of historical landscapes, such as John Denham’s *Cooper’s Hill* (1642) Charles Cotton’s *Wonders of the Peak* (1681), and Alexander Pope’s *Windsor-Forest* (1704 and 1713). Fowler describes a “second phase” of georgic in which the mode expressed itself in rural odes and short poems on the Happy Man that introduced new models to the georgic repertoire, such as Horace’s second epode (“Beatus ille”).

Herrick’s “The Hock-Cart, or Harvest Home,” and “The Country Life, to the Honoured Master Endimion Porter” are exemplary of this phase, especially in the echoes of the “O fortunatus” passage, which are signaled by lines like “O happy life! If that their good / The Husbandmen but understood,” (70-71) which concludes Herrick’s “The Country Life.” Most country house poems, including Vaughan’s “The Praise and Happinesse of the Countrie-Life” (1651) participate in this vein of georgic. The country house genre and other (often cavalier) poems celebrate rural retreat and the cyclical nature of agricultural activity while providing a withdrawal from the politics of the English Civil Wars, perhaps with the hope that their bad luck was likewise cyclical and would turn soon. Herrick’s “The Hock-Cart, or Harvest Home,” is again exemplary with its final reminder that they will have to get back to work soon: “And know,

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55 Fowler, “The Beginnings of English Georgic,” 120-121. Note this passage from *The Human Condition* in which Arendt slips into an imitation of the Happy Man motif in Early Modern georgic: “The ‘blessing or the joy’ of labor is the human way to experience the sheer bliss of being alive which we share will all living creatures, and it is even the only way men, too, can remain and swing contentedly in nature’s prescribed cycle, toiling and resting, laboring and consuming, with the same happy and purposeless regularity with which day and night and life and death follow each other” (106).

besides, ye must revoke / The patient ox unto the yoke, / And all go back unto the plough / And harrow, though they're hanged up now” (47-50). These conventional examples of the genre emphasize royalist retreat and defend the *status quo* both in terms of their politics and labor practices.

Notable feminist revisions of the genre by the likes of Katherine Philips and Aemilia Lanyer offer alternative georgic takes on the country retreat. Lanyer’s “Description of Cookham” (perhaps the first published country house poem in English) memorializes the female friendship that authorizes the feminine poetic voice, while Philips’ “Country Life” is in many ways a celebration of a pre-fallen paradise that is notably solitary. Philips reminds us that the “happy life” need not only apply to “The Husbandmen” (as Herrick’s poem has it). By revising the article from the definite in Herrick’s poem “The Country Life” to the indefinite in her poem’s title “A Country Life,” Philips suggests that there isn’t just one country life, but many possible iterations available to those of both genders. All of country house poems are georgic by virtue of the fact that they represent rustic landscapes and often celebrate agricultural labor, but some of them borrow directly from Virgil’s *Georgics*. Rosalie Colie has demonstrated that many of Marvell’s Virgilian allusions in “Upon Appleton House” are related to tropes in the *Georgics* Book II such as the flood episode during the harvest, the militarized garden (like Virgil’s heroic bees), the mock epic, and of course the historical context of reconstruction after civil war. Indeed, the Renaissance conception of georgic was loose, and the difficulty of recovering an anterior

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perspective on the mode before it ossified into a genre in the eighteenth century makes it easy to overlook.\textsuperscript{59}

The first chapter of my dissertation begins with Shakespeare, whose own engagement with georgic is frequently masked by his ovidianism and pastoralism. In considering how the georgic mode bears on Shakespeare, we might first turn to the work of James C. Bulman, who has already demonstrated how the organization of the genres in Shakespeare’s First Folio bears the trace of the \textit{Rota Virgilli} in the middle genre: history.\textsuperscript{60} Where scholars have examined the georgic elements in his work, they’ve found the trace of the mode most prominently in his histories. Dermot Cavanagh has shown that \textit{Henry V} in particular uses a georgic idiom, especially Canterbury’s disquisition on the bees, to engage in the Early Modern debate over political sovereignty.\textsuperscript{61} Nearly a century ago, Caroline Spurgeon noted that Shakespeare’s interpretation of the Wars of the Roses rests on an agricultural metaphor.\textsuperscript{62} Bulman’s own contribution builds off the work of Robert Miola, who “seeks not to discover direct sources […] but to penetrate into the deep sources lying below the surface of the text” that may have

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 109.


informed Shakespeare’s evolving conception of Rome. He finds that Virgil’s *Georgics* is in fact the deep source from which Shakespeare derives his conception of history as an agricultural process. He argues that both tetralogies resist “endorsing a simple, schematic, providential view of English history” and that “the agrarian imagery in those plays points clearly to a conception of history that is less secure, in which labour does not guarantee a good harvest, and in which it is the nature of things to speed towards the worst.” Katherine Maynard finds a georgic vein in Shakespeare’s *Henry V* that articulates and assays ethnic notions of English nationalism. The gardening scene in Richard II has obvious georgic overtones that, to my research, have not yet been flagged as such.

Most of the studies listed above and in the footnotes pursue the source material for various writers’ agricultural tropes, and most of them find Virgil’s *Georgics* to be the deep if not immediate source. Very few move beyond a specific text’s or author’s treatment of the georgic to offer a theorization of the mode in the period. I suspect that this is in part due to the critical commonplace that Virgil’s *Georgics* experienced a recession in the literary graces of the sixteenth and seventeenth century. Against the many voices that have argued from that position, there are surprisingly few, but among them is Anthony Low, whose view I share that the *Georgics* experienced something like an ascendency, if not a full blown revolution, in the seventeenth century that preceded the agricultural revolution of the eighteenth century.


65 Ibid., 46.


Reviews of Low’s work almost unanimously praise his project for inaugurating what will likely be a new critical interest in the georgic, though some fault him for too broadly defining what he means by georgic and others fault him for offering too simplified or too literal a definition of georgic. Unlike Low, this project does not insist that “the poem is pre-eminently about the value of hard and incessant labor.” He argues from a theological and class-based perspective that “the Protestant Reformation swept all positive views about work out of England” and that the “great enemy of the georgic spirit was the courtly or aristocratic ideal” and its “fundamental contempt for labor.” To my mind and reading, the georgic ethos is broader than the one Low describes. It transcends reference to georgic texts to encompass a fundamental fact and necessity of the human condition. Attitudes toward the georgic mode are much more complicated, polyvalent, and contradictory than might be expected from passing allusions to farm life. Humanist pedagogies and reading practices led Early Modern readers to see something broader at work in the *Georgics* than mere praise for husbandry. I have already mentioned Christopher Johnson, who read the allegory of farm-as-state as a useful lesson educating young citizens at the Winchester School. The georgic came to be recognized as mode that comprehended more than mere allusions to a single poem.

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72 Ibid., 5-6.
I propose to recover the cultural work that the georgic performs that is often only legible in a dispersed field of allusions. Broadly speaking, my project sees a relationship between literary formalism with emergent understandings of new political forms and methodologies. The changes that ushered in modernity and its radical re-appraisal of the *vita activa* occurred alongside a largely ignored georgic ethos in Early Modern discourses. I’ll propose a rather broad definition for what I consider to be a rather copious mode (recall Elyot’s comment on the “pleasant variety” of the Georgics). Given Early Modern reading practice and its penchant for typological, allegorical, and allusive reading, it’s perhaps inevitable that the georgic mode includes but transcends mere reference to Virgil’s didactic poem. “The habit of analogical thinking,” as Robert Miola points out, “leads always to the mixing of disparate stories and texts.” The point may be illustrated with a comparison to the georgic’s most proximate mode — the pastoral — which need not be restricted merely to allusions to Virgil’s *Eclogues* or Theocritus’ *Bucolics*.

In some ways the long critical history of the pastoral obscures the georgic, which often gets described as a kind of pastoral writing. My first section will address itself to drawing the georgic out of its pastoral guises in Shakespeare’s comedies. The operative difference in the comedies between pastoral and georgic is labor — the labor of service (the downstairs orientation of the comedies to tragedies’ upstairs orientation, which *Romeo and Juliet* captures so well in the persistence of its comic servant scenes), and the biological labor of procreation, which necessitates marriage in the comedies. I use the term “mode” consciously to echo a similar move that was made in criticism on the pastoral by Paul Alpers, who ushered in a paradigm-shift by flagging the pastoral as a mode that activates certain conventions that need not coalesce into a

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genre (in his analysis, the convention is the literal conven-ing of anyone, which is more inclusive than the ur-shepherds that typically define the mode). Like pastoral, the georgic is broader than mere reference to the ur-texts. If the pastoral mode may encompass allusions to pastoral ur-texts, pastoral activities (shepherd ing, piping, leisure/otium, holiday pastimes, golden aging, love games, play, metamorphoses) and pastoral landscapes (green-worlds, pastures, woodlands, etc.), and the thematizing of shepherding and shepherd activities, then I would propose a similar diffusion is happening with the georgic. I define the georgic mode as:

- Allusions to the georgic ur-texts, including Virgil’s Georgics, Hesiod’s Works and Days, Genesis (especially chapters 1-4), agricultural tropes and episodes from the New Testament (including the georgic parables and Paul’s horticultural history) and any of the antique agricultural handbooks by Cicero, Cato, Columella, Varro, Palladius, and others,

- Any references to agricultural activity, discourse, or landscape (fields, vineyards, forests, barns, and pastoral landscapes where work happens — that is to say, pastoral negotium rather than otium),

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74 Paul Alpers, What is Pastoral? (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996) 46. I would suggest that Alpers’ definition of pastoral actually approaches Arendt’s communicative conception of action which Jurgen Habermas defines as “the formation of a common will in a communication directed to reaching agreement.” See “Hannah Arendt’s Communications Concept of Power,” Social Research 44.1 (Spring 1977), 4. Indeed, Alpers notion of convention is quite similar to Paul Kottman’s Arendtian notion of the scene as a political sphere for self-disclosure, testimony, witnessing and action, to which my readings of drama are especially in debt.
Agricultural tropes, metaphors, figures, and vehicles for any variety of tenors and referents.

Agricultural incarnations of the *vita activa* — labor, work, and action — are more proximate to the root of georgic convention, as when the farmer labors in the field, the worker builds the plow, or the gentry mobilizes to enclose pastureland for arable production. But if, *à la* Alpers, you don’t need shepherds in the pastoral mode, then you don’t need farmers in the georgic mode.

Arendt’s hierarchy of activities of the *vita activa* serves as the structuring principle of my analysis. The first three chapters explore labor, work, and action, and the cultural forces that put pressure on those activities in the Early Modern period through the lens of particular texts. Labor, I’ll show, was a vexed category, owing in part to microcosmic conceptions of the *polis* as “the body politic” and macrocosmic conceptions of the household as “a little commonweal.” I read three versions of Shakespearean comedy as Early Modern instances of the rise of the social — the grafting of the private to the political — which is typically achieved through the georgic mode in these plays. I begin with the pastoral in order to tease out the work of the georgic and to distinguish it from its most proximate literary mode. *As You Like It* sidelines the political action of the play in favor of comic *paideia*, cultivation, household and agricultural labor, and the biological concerns of the *oikos*. The first three acts of *The Winter’s Tale* stage the tragic consequences of rejecting the rise of the social, and they do so in a decidedly georgic take on pastoral convention. It’s my contention that the georgic language in *All’s Well That Ends Well* transcends the merely private, familial registers to negotiate new political forms in the social world of the play.
The second chapter on work affords me the opportunity to discuss emerging literary professions and how they were influenced by the sexual politics of patronage and the textual politics of the new print market. The first movement of Shakespeare’s sonnets transition from an argument for biological procreation, or labor, as a means of preserving the subject and his beauty, to an argument for poetic reproduction, or work, as a means of preserving the subject and his beauty. The move from biological reproduction to poetic reproduction functions like agriculture more generally in that it’s a human, “artificial” intervention into a natural process. The graft becomes the ultimate signifier for this intervention into nature. The poet-speaker ultimately articulates a promotion from heterosexual labor to homosocial work, and in doing so he sublimates homoerotic desire into the author-subject relationship. While the typologies of the vita activa seem to follow the Arendtian hierarchy with a promotion from labor to work, the generic typology moves backwards from the heterosexual fall into sexual georgic to the amorous homosocial poetry.

Just as it often hides in pastoral weeds, georgic also often lurks within Early Modern epics. The third chapter on action will deal with the pressures that the Protestant dispensation put on the vita activa and the action of epic heroes in particular. I will show how The Faerie Queene and Paradise Lost dramatize the process by which heroic action is transformed from an externally oriented category of public, political work to an inwardly oriented hermeneutic for navigating the fallen world. Using Barbara Lewalski’s notion of epic paideia, I argue that these epics use a georgic idiom and method to exemplify their didactic instruction. A final chapter on the georgic mode in New World discourses gestures at the legacy of English georgic in the

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earliest Anglo-American literature, and how georgic attitudes to the land authorized colonial appropriation. I close with an afterword that explores how the georgic mode survives in current discourses on the Anthropocene, and consider what a georgic education might mean for the humanities in the twenty-first century.
I. LABOR

Grafting the Private and the Political:

The Rise of the Social in Shakespeare’s Georgic Comedies

There is a vein of feminist criticism of Arendt that sees her as working from a phallocentric conception of the political. My reading of Shakespeare’s pastoral comedies finds in them symptoms of what Arendt would pejoratively term the rise of the social, but I will reorient Arendt’s rather masculinist conception of the social and offer what I hope is a reparative reading of the rise of the social in the context of those plays. Shakespeare’s representation of the social finds a valuable, if qualified, space for women in politics. Politicizing the private sphere certainly paved the way for modernity, but in doing so it also opened up massive possibilities for half the human population.

In focusing on the public world, Arendt’s critique of modernity has a few glaring blind spots — namely the biggest gains of modernity: extension of rights to women, ethnic and economic minorities, and other groups that the state might term “protected classes” in the interest of justice. Habermas famously argued that Arendt neglected a strategic conception of political action, without which the modern polis is full of absurdities:

A state which is relieved of the administrative procession of social problems; a politics which is cleansed of socio-economic issues; an institutionalization of public liberty which is independent of the organization of public wealth; a radical democracy which inhibits its liberating efficacy just at the boundaries where political oppression ceases and social repression begins — this path is unimaginable for any modern society.77

Part of the problem clearly arises from an inability to think about a public without an idea of the social — that is, the inability to think beyond the conditions of modernity (it is the same problem as trying to think about the georgic as a genre before the eighteenth century made it one). That being said, and perhaps in spite of Arendt’s rather hazy (to me) idea of a “right to have rights,” the modern polis must take on issues of justice, which inevitably requires negotiating between the private and the public spheres — and this is especially the case for women and other laborers.78 Arendt has no account for such things. In her view, politics ought to be prior to private issues, and in her system justice is a private issue. In fact, in her view, politics is made possible by privation — that is, by drawing a hard line between the private and the public world. Consider her vision of the Roman farm: it was first and foremost a place of privation, where the slave’s labor allowed the landowner to engage in the public action of politics. In Arendt’s schema, women were not much better off. Their private work in the household was the corollary

77 Habermas, “Hannah Arendt’s Communications Concept of Power,” 220.

to the private work of the slave: they labored to raise children and maintain the domicile, allowing free men the opportunity to engage in politics.

The three plays I analyze in my first chapter stage what Arendt would call the rise of the social whereby the private concerns of the household — labor, production, consumption, and reproduction — erupt into the political sphere. The hybrid produced by the union of these two spheres is the social, whereby the state involves itself in the day-to-day lives of its citizens. Often this is interpreted in light of Foucault’s notion of biopolitics, which finds its ultimate expression in the era of biopower, when states have at their disposal “numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugations of bodies and the control of populations,” which Foucault believes took off sometime in the Early Modern period.79 Biopolitics, according to Colin Gordon, is at once a totalizing and individualizing phenomenon through which “issues of individual sexual and reproductive conduct interconnect with issues of national policy and power.”80 This is certainly true, but the representation of biopolitics and the social in these georgic comedies offer a variety of readings, and at least some of them are more optimistic — or more reparative, to use Sedgwick’s term.81 I would even go so far to say that there is a vision in these plays that celebrates the eruption of the private into the political because it allows for the participation and inclusion of others — namely women — in this new social sphere.

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81 See Eve K. Sedgwick “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading: or, You’re so Paranoid, You Probably Think this Introduction is About You,” *Novel Gazing: Queer Readings in Fiction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997).
What makes these comedies georgic? These plays all use a georgic idiom to stage their grafting of the private and political spheres together into hybrid social realm. As You Like It features the grafting of the biological concerns of the oikos onto the political concerns of the polis in the anti-pastoral literary representation of pastoral labor. The work of herding and the fact of death in the forest add up to a georgic vision of work in nature and in the world. The Winter’s Tale stages the tragic consequences of attempting to sever those grafted realms. Finally, All’s Well is concerned with “unnatural nature” — that is, with the grafting of a non-biological daughter into a family’s tree, the extension of familial formation into the realm of the state, and the organic metaphors that adhere to Early Modern and contemporary political and economic discourses. In addition to the grafting language that’s prominent in all three of these plays, they also employ an organic metaphor for the education of male subjects by female pedagogical figures. The education-as-cultivation metaphor locates these three plays in the didactic tradition of Virgil’s Ge orgics and I’ll suggest that just as there are pedagogical implications for the epic genre, the georgic comedies feature what we might call a kind of comic paideia.

No Escape from the “Working-Day World”:

Society in Arden

Using Paul Kottman’s idea that the dramatic scene presents a politics against which agents can speak, act, and disclose themselves, Julia Lupton in Thinking with Shakespeare has done a masterful job of showing the adjacency of politics and domestic life represented in Shakespearean drama. Her analysis reads Arendt against her “civic super ego.”

82 Lupton, Thinking with Shakespeare, 9.
criticism on the rise of the social attempts to redeem the private sphere by inscribing it within the old feminist saw, “the personal is political.” I also struggle with Arendt’s notion of the social because it seems to suggest an implicitly gendered vision of politics that excludes women — to say nothing of propertyless classes who have no access to the polis. Miguel Vatter has shown that Arendt’s concept of natality usefully deconstructs the nature-politics binary (and the human-animal) binary. I go a step further in this chapter to suggest that one of benefits of the rise of the social is that reproductive and household labor emerged as a new dimension for politics. This chapter uses Arendt’s terminology (if not her connotations) to examine how As You Like It uses the georgic to offer a vision of the social as political. Arendt’s vocabulary provides a helpful taxonomy for understanding the different forms human activity might take in the georgic ethos.

There is a danger in drawing a strict line between labor, work, and action, and between the different spaces where these activities occur — the privacy of the home, the marketplace, and the public forum. Indeed, there has been a persistent vein in Arendt criticism that seeks to show the mutual imbrication of these categories. Perhaps my reading is mired in history, and perhaps like the New Historicists who came before me I should acknowledge my subject position, which is dictated by my historical position: I cannot imagine an ethical political sphere that doesn’t concern itself with matters of justice, which are inevitably “social” matters. Arendt’s modernity ended with automation and space flight, and I have only ever known the ascendancy of the social, marked by the welfare state and the etymologically paradoxical “global economy.”

As You Like It stages the rise of the social in the Early Modern political and economic imagination, and it does so in georgic terms that suggest proximities: the proximity of nature

83 See Patchen Markell’s brilliant re-reading of Arendt’s tendency toward isolated, discrete categories of thought and activity (what he calls her “territorialism”) and the possibilities beyond that territorialism (in “Arendt’s Work: The Architecture of The Human Condition”).
(animal laborans) and the world of human affairs (homo faber and zoon politikon), and the proximity of work and power. The play does this in four ways: by exploiting the oikos analogy which links the private life of the household to the political life of the community, by proposing a sexual solution to the play’s political problems, by displacing scenes of action with scenes of education, and finally by staging the eclipse of the political as the eclipse of the pastoral.

As You Like It has long been taken to be one of Shakespeare’s most pastoral plays, but my reading finds a critique of the pastoral mode and the kind of escapism with which it has come to be associated. In fact, the play stages what we might think of as a critique of the two chief modes of Renaissance pastoral — the hard political pastoral of Spenser and Sidney (that is, political dog-whistling in pastoral weeds), and the escapist pastoral that typifies more Petrarchan approaches where amorous concerns of the pastoral green world represent the absence of politics. As You Like It suggests that these two realms — the private/amorous and the public/political — can never be fully severed. There is neither an escape from the politics of the court nor from the private concerns of the household. The play reveals that pastoral escape is a merely a fantasy. There is no laborless escape. No one here feels not the penalty of Adam, including the play’s Adam. Even the shepherds — lovelorn though they might be — are subject to systemic political and economic forces that leave them propertyless and disenfranchised.

The play puts so much pressure on the unpoetic facts of agricultural existence that I mistrust the pastoral designation of As You Like It and suggest that it might be more productive to read it for its georgic attributes than its pastoralism. Escapism is largely taken to be a key impulse in Shakespearean pastoral (although, as Virgil’s first eclogue suggests, the pastoral is as

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84 I’m not the first to suggest that As You Like It is a deeply georgic play. See Alastair Fowler, “Pastoral Instruction in ‘As You Like It,’” John Coffin Memorial Lecture, University of London, February 18, 1984.
much a mode of exile — so prominent in *As You Like It* — as it is a mode of escape). The matter of escape has taken on moral dimensions in the scholarship. Peter Lindenbaum has suggested the responsible author “insists upon the need to leave Arcadia” and ultimately to undo the pastoral escape.  

Richard Helgerson likewise concludes that “the pastoral world is meant to be left behind.” The criticism suggests that the play *ought* to return to public, active life. Even if we can imagine an afterlife for the play in which most of the court makes its way out of Arden after the end of the action, not everyone returns, which suggests that for some, Arden is not merely an escape. The working shepherds whose world is marked by a fallen vision of animal husbandry that includes the tar of sheep surgery and, in the 2009 RSC production, the on-stage skinning of a rabbit, give the lie to the unctions of pastoral convention, and ultimately the shepherd-laborers remain in Arden.

If the play stages a pastoral escape, it does so only to reinscribe politics within the realities of real agricultural labor. Arden is a radically demystified woodland pastoral (one that nonetheless features a *deus ex machina* in its final scene). As Richard Wilson has shown, this is a play that is deeply engaged with the enclosure debates and the expropriation of the agricultural common.  

Certainly the woodland setting offers its visitors and inhabitants an opportunity to revel in a bit of misrule, but it doesn’t mask some very real problems that would have been plain to an Early Modern audience. In addition to the property issues that render the


87 He has shown that the play’s interest in famine and property point to popular resistance to the enclosure movement. See Richard Wilson, “‘Like the Old Robin Hood’: *As You Like It* and the Enclosure Riots” in *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 43.1 (1992): 1-19.
shepherds wage laborers, the sudden interest of the urban center brings with it a strange influx of capital into Arden.

What the court exiles find in their escape are not the careless shepherds of the *Eclogues*, but shepherds whose lives are ruled by the seasonal calendar (like the ones in Spenser’s *georgic almanac*), shepherds who are their masters’ debtors, and shepherds who work for a wage and an absent landlord. That is to say, the court encounters shepherds who labor in the fallen, *georgic* world. The play sends up a certain brand of political pastoral that erases the human labor that makes political participation possible. Until Rosalind and Celia buy the sheepcote that Corin’s master owns, he is far from the “true laborer” (3.2.69) he decribes to Touchstone. Arden, which signals sonically its relationship to a hardened, fallen Eden, is peopled with shepherds who work for churlish masters rather than for the fruits of their own labor. Corin says,

I am shepherd to another man,

And do not shear the fleeces that I graze.

My master is of churlish disposition,

And little recks to find the way to heaven

By doing deeds of hospitality. (2.4.77-81)

It’s not until the ladies can, in their domestic idiom, “mend [his] wages” (93) that he can claim, “I am a true labourer. I earn that I eat, get that I wear” (3.2.69-70). Only with the influx of courtly capital into the forest is he able to indulge in his pride of ownership and to call his

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88 All references to *As You Like It* are from the Arden Edition, edited by Juliet Dusinberre (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2006). All subsequent citations to line numbers will be noted parenthetically.
livestock his own, with emphasis on the repetition of the possessive pronoun: “The greatest of my pride is to see my ewes graze and my lambs suck.” Of course, the dialogue does not exactly flesh out the details of whatever contract exists between him and the ladies of the court, leaving his status as a “true labourer” in question.

One of Arendt’s major critiques of modernity is that it signals the “loss of the world,” by which she means the gradual reduction of the public sphere due to the ingress of private concerns (often biological and economic). The age of mass society was precipitated by the rise of the social, which emerges out of these previously discrete worlds. As You Like It suggests that all the world is a stage, and that the private concerns of the oikos are always already the public concerns of the polis, even when the polis is thrown out of doors and must survive as what Agamben would call bare life (or what Lupton would call creaturely life). If we attend to the worlds of the play, we see that the old critical convention of viewing the play as split between the amorous, forest world of Arden and the political world of the court is too easy. In fact, the play suggests that there aren’t mutually exclusive realms of politics and privacy. Of the two communities in Arden, only the exiled court feels “not the penalty of Adam.” Indeed, their living need not be provided by the agricultural inheritance of both the Bible’s and play’s Adam. They seem to derive their provender from hunting in what looks an awful lot like a royal forest. Such sustenance is only appropriate for an exiled duke, since in this period forest signified lands protected for royal hunting parties. Though exiled, the hierarchies and privileges of the court are apparently portable. Duke Senior is never seen working. It’s the shepherds who must get their hands dirty with tar, blood, and grease. Even the first lord’s courtly labor is spared by the timely approach of Jacques, whom he was sent to fetch: “He saves my labour by his own approach” (2.7.143).
The play takes great pains to remind us that Duke Frederick’s world and (by analogizing the *polis* and the *oikos*) the household of Oliver are fallen in both biblical and classical senses. Duke Senior’s “golden world” in Arden offers several scenes of action for human actors, but it’s also the scene of many misrecognitions while Oliver’s household is marked by the kind of fratricide that recalls Cain and Abel. The play’s interest in property, articulated most saliently through the shepherds’ plight and the competing claims of the DeBoys and the Dukes, ultimately shifts from a concern with estates to anxieties about the most personal property — the oaths and bodies that are exchanged in marriage. The political plot isn’t sidelined by private concerns; the two fuse such that politics becomes a private concern, and private concerns become politics.

*As You Like It* resists the pastoral *agon* of court vs. country by importing the court to the forest, and through representations of shepherds who are very much influenced by the economic policies of the court. It suggests that there is no pastoral escape from politics and stands as a record of the slow erosion of the walls that once distinguished the public sphere from the private sphere. Another characteristically georgic approach to that dissolution is the operating analogy of the play. Like Virgil’s *Georgics, As You Like It* mobilizes the household estate as the key metaphor for understanding politics. The estate-as-state trope operates in the background of many of the great house and country house poems, and here it operates spatially on the Globe’s stage.

The private and the public under the Greek system were mutually exclusive, according to Arendt’s history; in fact, the private realm was etymologically marked by *priva-*tion from the public realm and the private was for those who were de-*prived* of participation in the public, such as children, women, and slaves. The rise of the social sacrificed the values of *homo faber’s* work (permanence, stability, durability) and the values of the *zoon politikon’s* action (freedom,
plurality, solidarity) in favor of the values of *animal laborans* (productivity, consumption, abundance). The rise of capitalism and the emergence of wage-labor economies accompanied this massive shift in the way work was evaluated in the Reformation and post-Reformation period. In England, the rise of the social was especially marked by the analogous relationship between the well-ordered household and the well-ordered nation, or the idea of the family as a “little commonwealth.” Arendt writes that, “[T]he emergence of the social realm, which is neither private nor public, strictly speaking, is a relatively new phenomenon whose origin coincided with the emergence of the modern age and which found its political form in the nation state.”

Arendt’s perhaps too-clean vision of history sees the rise of the social and its mingling of privacy and politics as a Roman invention, but there are examples of this phenomenon emerging even among the culture of her beloved Greeks. Xenophon’s *Oeconomicus* and Hesiod’s *Works and Days* come to mind. In general her timeline is accurate, and the household-as-commonwealth was the Anglicized version of Rome’s farm-as-state. The *oikos* (house and estate) was the fundamental metaphor for thinking the political. The Greek Xenophon’s *Oeconomicus* articulates an alternative to a *polis* scrubbed of its household accouterments, but the analogy gained the ascendancy in Roman society and caught attention of Early Modern political imaginations. It is precisely that analogy between the private household and the state that gives Virgil’s *Georgics* its political valence.

Though it requires reading Arendt against some of her own rather difficult-to-reconcile statements on the domestic sphere, householding and landholding are laborious activities that provide a space for appearance and disclosure; in short, they provide a venue for politics and

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action that incorporates labor. I follow in the wake of Lupton and Kottman’s work by finding value in a conception of action that need not take place in the *polis* and *fora* of the ideal liberal democracy; indeed, *As You Like It* stages action amid the flora and fauna of Arden’s skirts. Like Lupton (reinterpreting Kottman) I believe there are “strong phenomenological elements in Arendt’s thought that emphasize the *polis* as a recurrent possibility for human action rather than the name of a particular moment in the history of democracy.”

The farmhouse analogy figures a politics that is democratically available to all — not just those with the wealth and free time (or pastime) for politics.

In *As You Like It*, domestic conflict *is* political conflict. Duke Senior’s “golden world” in Arden offers several scenes of action for human actors, but it’s also the scene of many misrecognitiones, while Oliver’s household is marked by the kind of fratricide that recalls the genesis narrative. In a sense, the Cain and Abel story that undergirds so many of the social concerns of the play also serves as an antagonistic figure for the progression from pastoral to georgic. Cain’s fratricide is unnatural in the obvious sense of family violence, but it’s also unnatural in that it marks the death of the pastoral world at the hands of the agricultural. Cain “cultivated the land” and in murdering his shepherding brother he stages the collision of genres.

But unlike the Cain and Abel story, these brothers aren’t fighting over a heavenly Father’s blessing, but over much more mundane, and much more georgic concerns: both households, the DeBoys’ and the Dukes’, battle over primogeniture, which is to say the inheritance of the families’ land. The play sits somewhere in the transition between a feudal conception of manorialism and vassalage, and an emergent modern conception of lease-holding and wage labor. But if the play mobilizes historically divergent conceptions of property and

\[90\] Ibid., 11.
work, its take on inheritance is clear. As Louise Montrose has shown, Oliver and Orlando are clearly subject to the custom of primogeniture. In his analysis of “the place of the brother,” Montrose finds the intrusion of private, household concerns into the political realm: “The compact early scenes expose hostilities on the manor and in the court that threaten to destroy both the family and the state.”91 When Adam warns Orlando that, like the native burghers killed in their own confines of the previous scene, Orlando is likely to be killed by his brother Oliver, his rhetorical move in referring to the house as “but a butchery” (2.3.28) emphasizes the extent to which the productive family farm that is the bedrock of the English economy has been perverted by unnatural hate, as is the case with Scotland under the “butcher” Macbeth.

The comic solutions to the political problems in As You Like It are sexual. The play stages a rejection of pastoralizing impulses through its georgic approach to breeding. The biological concerns of labor (and comedy) become the political occupation of the play. Through disenchanted georgic imagery the play signals its very real and decidedly unpastoral interest in breeding. One thinks of Rosalind’s often bowdlerized line about her child’s father, a line that activates patriarchal anxiety about paternity. It’s a sexual anxiety that comes up again in characteristically georgic terms when Corin tells Touchstone that his greatest pride “is to see my ewes / Graze and my lambs suck” (3.2.72-73). Touchstone feigns puritanical prudishness, and suggests that the kind of animal breeding described in Georgics Book III is a type of licentiousness:

That is another simple sin in you, to bring the ewes and the rams together and to offer to get your living by the copulation of cattle; to be bawd to a bell-wether, and to betray a she-lamb of a twelvemonth to a crooked-pated, old, cuckoldly ram, out of all reasonable match. If thou beest not damned for this, the devil himself will have no shepherds; I cannot see else how thou shouldst ‘scape. (3.2.74-81)

Indeed, Shakespeare’s comedies, especially *As You Like It*, are unpastoral insofar as they reject the rich tradition of homoerotic and idealizing pastoral poetry on their way to their conventional, heterosexual conclusions. The focus on heterosexual breeding propels these plays toward their comic ending, and makes them decidedly more georgic than pastoral. This is precisely the opposite trajectory of the sonnets, and as we’ll see in the next chapter, the economic conditions and formal expectations that produced those texts has a lot to do with their different orientation.

The solutions to the political problems the play proposes are private, sexual, and characteristically comic: the health of the state is ultimately dependent on coupling and copulation. In that sense, the play undercuts what we might think of as political action or even activism. The solution is not a discursive or action-based approach to political change so much as the eclipse of politics by privacy — the private romantic relationships as well as private conversion experiences, such as Jacques’ pledge to become a hermit at the end of the play, and the conversion that nature seems to have effected in Oliver. The play goes to great lengths to stage the final marriage scene not as a private ceremony but as a public process of healing. This quadruple wedding, a *tour de force* in terms of comic convention, stages the whittling away of the public realm by the rise of the social. The marriages of Rosalind and Orlando and Celia and
Oliver thematize the yoking together of the private and public in what Arendt would call the social in bringing the political family (the Dukes’ daughters) together with the private family (the Deboys boys). Ultimately, the play leaves readers aware that we’re no longer dealing with mutually exclusive realms of public and private, but rather with what Arendt calls “society”: “[i]n the modern world, the social and the political realms are much less distinct […] Since the rise of society, that is, the rise of the ‘household’ (oikia) or of economic activities to the public realm, housekeeping and all matters pertaining formerly to the private sphere of the family have become a ‘collective’ concern.”

Where tragedy concerns itself largely with the actions of great men, the comedy turns to the biological concerns of the animal laborans — that is, to the private concerns of people of all social standings. We might chart an historical trajectory toward socializing (in the Arendtian sense of the rise of privacy even in public life) in stage comedies. That trend begins with Shakespearean comedy and becomes even more privatized in the rise of city and citizen comedy in the early Jacobean period, and finally to full-scale domestic tragedy in the eighteenth century, which would ultimately democratize (and socialize) even the most highbrow of theatrical genres. But from the opening insistence on disseminating “the new news of the new court” and Frederick’s political usurpation, to its final moment of collective revelry (contingent in part upon evacuating the court) before a return to the center and the restoration of Duke Senior’s rule, As You Like It asks us to see the condition of animal laborans as the concerns of the common.

In proposing a sexual, biological solution to the political problems of the play, As You Like It goes beyond pastoral and Petrarchan convention to embrace an unvarnished, georgic vision of breeding that elevates labor from the bare business of life to a political tool. The play

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92 Arendt, Human Condition, 28.
tropes its interest in breeding as georgic by likening breeding to crop and livestock cultivation. Such imagery bears class implications (one’s breeding) while also implying the universalism and necessity of reproductive labor; breeding is one of the many things that connects us to other forms of nature. Like all life-forms, animal laborans, must reproduce). Consider Orlando’s opening complaint about being kept like an animal and Touchstone’s cheeky retort to Orlando’s “false gallop of verses”: “They that reap must sheaf and bind, / Then to cart with Rosalind” (3.2.95-95). This is a play that always views the private concerns of the family and household as an appropriate concern for the nation state in late Elizabethan England. The criticism, however, has tended to treat this play as merely pastoral rather than as georgic. As a generic second-son, georgic needs quite a case to avoid being subsumed by the super-genre pastoral, which seems to only be growing as scholars such as Ken Hiltner make the case for an ever broadening definition of pastoral — even in the absence of nature itself. Hiltner argues that pastoral can even be “non-mimetic” and merely “gestural” without actually representing nature to engage with it. For centuries the pastoral has been defined, broadened, criticized, and theorized, and it’s now enjoying a second (sometimes wintery) wind with the emergence of ecocriticism. Like georgic, pastoral contains multitudes — hard pastoral, soft pastoral, radical pastoral, pastoral ideology, pastourelle, pastoral psychology, piscatorial pastoral, pastoral simpliciter, pastoral allegorice, pastoral with and without shepherds, carnival pastoral, pastoral elegy, pastoral parody and even anti-pastoral. The sense is that even what is explicitly not pastoral bears some relation to the pastoral. Why is criticism, which has been so willing to engage in what Linda Woodbridge calls the “pastoral-bashing impulse,” so unwilling to concede the georgic features of these texts.

93 Ken Hiltner, What Else is Pastoral? Renaissance Literature and the Environment (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), 8. We might also think of Alpers’ What is Pastoral?, which argues for a definition that is so broad that it’s no longer a genre but a mode or rhetorical situation (the convening of voices).
We’re comfortable with the list of genre benders that Polonius rattles off—“tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral, pastoral-comical, / Historical-pastoral, tragical-historical, tragical- / Comical-historical-pastoral” and more if we include romance, tragicomedy and the problem plays. But is a georgic greenworld or a georgic comedy so hard to image? Both *As You Like It* and *The Winter’s Tale* deal with variously compromised visions of the pastoral, but in their interrogation of the *agones* of pastoral conventions — court/city-country, art-nature, nature-nurture — they end up articulating the conventions of the georgic mode. The dialectical patterning features shepherds interrogating the conventions of literary pastoral, and they come down squarely on the side of, in Rosalind's ironic formulation, this "working-day world." Woodbridge attempts to redeem pastoral from critical disdain by pointing out that for most critics, “when a pastoral doesn’t fit the stereotype, it doesn’t negate stereotype but becomes evidence of the author’s unhappiness with pastoral.”

94 But instead of leaving our analysis at the affirmation or negation of types, why not look at how the plays function like Shakespeare’s other “mingled yarn[s],” or, to use a high-frequency trope in these plays, grafted hybrids?

Shakespearean pastoral is quite different from the “hard” political pastoral of his immediate predecessors, Sidney and Spencer. Rather than disguising political concerns with the sheep’s clothing of pastoral, this play stages the Arendtian rise of the social by coupling the political sphere with the private interests of households and families. The biological concerns of the *oikos* suspend or — in the case of *As You Like It* — usurp the public, political concerns of the *polis* before emerging as fundamental concerns for the new polis they imagine. The subtle generic modulations that distinguish these plays offer different vantages on how the georgic

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stages the rise of the social. I’ll argue that the tragic beginning of the *The Winter’s Tale* shows the social to be inherently political, and that *All’s Well that Ends Well* is a play that cannot conceive of politics without thinking in terms of familiar social structures. The play’s recourse to horticultural imagery unites its concerns with sacramental and family politics. *As You Like It* features the purest example of Shakespearean pastoral that I’ll examine, but just as the constant presence of labor in the pastoral, green-world of Arden critiques the very notion of pastoral *otium*, the georgic vision of human breeding sends up pastoral romance. The play stages a rejection of pastoral and courtly play in favor of both agricultural and genealogical labor.

Corin and Touchstone ostensibly enact the country vs. court debate typical of pastoral convention when Touchstone interrogates Corin’s prose chiasmus, “Those that are good manners at the court are as ridiculous in the country as the behaviour of the country is most mockable at the court” (3.2.43-45). But over the course of the debate, Corin reveals the unsavory truth of the pastoral life — and it’s one that’s more reminiscent of Virgil’s examination of the reality of breeding stocks than his treatment of bisexual love songs of the *Eclogues*. Touchstone, in a line that neatly sums up classical disdain for the irrelevance of the country to public matters, detests rustic privation from public life and the unpleasant reality of agricultural labor: “but in respect that it is private, it is a very vile life” (3.2.16). The mock fulmination continues as if Touchstone were offering a puritanical gloss on *Georgics* Book III, where Virgil describes animal breeding on the farm and the dangers of unchecked passion. “That is another simple sin in you,” Touchstone warns, to bring the ewes and the rams together, and to offer to get your living by the copulation of cattle; to be bawd to a bellwether, and to betray a she-lamb of a
twelve-month to a crooked-pated old cuckoldly ram, out of all reasonable match.
If thou beest not damned for this, the devil himself will have no shepherds. I
cannot see else how thou shouldst scape. (3.2.74-81)

This is not the pastoral escape with which scholarship on Shakespeare’s greenworld is obsessed. In spite of Touchstone’s take-down of country life as private and laborious, it’s not just the shepherds that fail to return to the court in the end. Celia and Oliver are likely to remain in the woods given Oliver’s declaration to “here live and die a shepherd” (5.2.12), which is a convenient way to remove him from any potential competition for Orlando’s new dukedom. He will likely discover, as Celia did, that being a shepherd is work, not just a way to “waste [one’s] time” (2.4.94). Duke Frederick’s off-stage conversion leaves him an anchorite in the woods. Jaques, not one for wanting to stay for holiday “pastime” (5.4.181) — a false cognate of pastoral delight — lights out for the converted Duke. For at least some of the courtly characters, Arden is not a pastoral escape, but a permanent condition.

From the start Rosalind complicates the pastoralized Petrarchan love dynamics that readers might have come to expect from amorous shepherds. She admits the less chaste kind of love into her desire. Orlando is too busy apostrophizing the chaste and “thrice crowned” (3.2.2) Dian to understand the reproductive function of marriage, but Rosalind shows her wit and easy realism when she counters Touchstone’s parody of Orlando’s verses. Activating a georgic pun on medlar, she embraces and puns on sexuality by describing her task as orchard work, and complicates his earlier (recounted via Jaques) assertion about time ripening and then rotting the human meddlar:
Rosalind: Peace, you dull fool. I found them on a tree.

Touchstone: Truly, the tree yields bad fruit.

Rosalind: I’ll graft it with you, and then I shall graft it with a medlar; then it will be the earliest fruit I’th’country, for you’ll be rotten ere you be half-ripe, and that’s the right virtue of the medlar. (3.2.103-108)

In lines like these Rosalind reveals herself to be of the same stock as The Winter’s Tale’s Perdita, who also is unencumbered by prudish conceptions of romantic love. In the comedies, appropriate breeding comes to be a georgic task akin to animal husbandry, with social class (that is, one’s breeding) adding an additional layer of complexity.

In addition to the private family farm as a model for the polis, As You Like It offers another figure for thinking the private as political: the theatrum mundi trope. The world-stage metaphor suggests that action needs no physical venue or activity beyond the revelatory conversation of unique individuals. Kottman finds the theatrum mundi figure to be less a metaphor that connects two discrete entities and more a statement of ontological parity that reveals action to be “testimonial address[es] between one witness and another.” Such a definition broadens the Arendtian horizons of action to include any stage business that involves a plurality (two or more) of characters revealing themselves in speech and action. As perhaps the first play staged at the Globe, As You Like It stands as a sustained meditation on the theatrum mundi figure, which features so prominently in the name of the new playhouse. Householding

95 Kottman, A Politics of the Scene, 15.

96 Richard Halpern’s work on how the business of theater complicates Arendt’s framework might offer a way to read the collapse of labor and action in light of the play’s concern with playing. See “Eclipse of Action: Hamlet and the Political Economy of Playing,” 450-482.
and landholding were already available metaphors for thinking the relationships and obligations of politics, but Shakespeare adds the playhouse into the mix. If all the world is a stage, then the private concerns of the household are always already the public concerns of the *polis*. It was an available association. For instance, Thomas Heywood argued that theater performs a generative good for the state using a clever revision of the Rape of the Sabine women. His version of the anecdote combines theater and procreation. Upon founding the city of Rome, Romulus had to figure out how to people the same, his traine wholly consisting of Souldiers, who without company of women (they not having any in their Army) could not multiply; but so were likely that their immortall fames should dye issueless with their mortall bodies. Thus therefore Romulus devised; After a parle and attonement made with the neighbor Nations, hee built a Theater, plaine, according to the time; yet large, fit for the entertatinment of so great an Assembly, and these were they whose famous issue peopled the Cittie of Rome, which in after ages grew to such a height…to which all the discovered kingdoms of the earth after became tributaries.\(^97\)

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\(^97\) Thomas Heywood, *An Apology for Actors in 3 Books from the Edition of 1612*. (London: Shakespeare Society, 1841), 23. Elsewhere Heywood defends theater on the grounds of the pedagogical value of mimesis with an anecdote about the use of theater to educate Hercules: “There was in his nonage presented until him by his Tutor in the fashion of a History, acted by the choyse of the nobility of Greece, the worthy and memorable acts of his father Iupiter. Which being personated with livesly and well-spirited action, wrought such impression in his noble thoughts, that in mere emulation of his fathers valor (not at the behest of his stepdame Juno) he perform’d his twelve labors: him valiant *Theseus* followed, and *Achilles, Theseus*” (19). In this version, male theater takes on the childbearing role of women, perhaps replacing them. But in *As You Like It*, the role of the educator falls squarely to the women. Of course, the play offers a
Theater, then, is responsible not just for entertaining the state, but for peopling it as well. It is a distinctly social labor that produces culture in the literary sense as well as in the procreative sense. The next chapter compares the cultural labor that theater performs (as the bread for employees and circuses for the audience), but in Heywood’s account there is the suggestion that theater is a kind of bio-labor that aspires to work (as in the Works of Ben Jonson) and even action. Theater, then, is cultural production that creates lives on multiple levels, and in the Arendtian framework it produces a society that is at once natural (bio-labor) and political (acting as action).

The georgic mode is often deployed in the period to address education, which gets at the heart of the source text. Like Hesiod lecturing Perses in Works and Days, the Georgics is a didactic text that’s aimed at educating the reader. In addition to being about education, the Georgics would have first been encountered by many early moderns in the context of grammar school education. When I teach As You Like It, we often focus on the idea of cultivation and education, and it’s a theme that plays out using georgic imagery of horticulture. Beyond the generic designation of Georgics as didactic literature and its place in humanist pedagogy and in the Renaissance classroom, the poem also thematizes education in scenes of teaching, most saliently in the Aristaeus epyllion, but also by its didactic rhetorical mode. Barbara Lewalski has demonstrated that Milton’s “epic paideia” is an argument for educational reform in Paradise Lost. Early dramatic comedies such as As You Like It, The Winter’s Tale, and All’s Well that

dizzying mis en abyme of female educator is really a boy actor playing a woman playing a boy playing a woman.


*Ends Well* model what we might think of as comic *paideia*. If women rule the roost of Shakespearean comedy, it is in part due to their roles as educators of male characters in the *polis*-cum-society. Rosalind, who describes her own education by alternative pedagogical figures such as magicians and religious uncles, plays the tutor to several characters over the course of the play, including Orlando, Phoebe, and Sylvius. The educational project that I see playing out in these texts suggests to me the possibility of a feminist-friendly, reparative reading of Arendt’s *rise of the social.*

The play examines the goals and tropes of education by exploring the distinctions between the civil sphere and civility, gentility and gentleness, and courtliness and courtesy. More often than not, the play tropes education and civilization as agricultural labor. Oliver’s crime is one against cultivation. The opening orchard scene sets up parallels between Arden, Eden and the classical golden-world parallels throughout the text and that suggests that the DeBoys estate occupies a liminal space between the woods and the court. The very name DeBoys suggests that this family is “of the woods.” Orlando complains of the poor breeding his brother has subjected him to — he has been kept “rustically,” and he likens his upbringing to “the stalling of an ox,” and bemoans being fed “husks” with his brother’s “hinds.” Though “hinds” is glossed as “agricultural laborers,” it’s not his labor but rather inactivity that impedes his education: “I am not taught to make anything,” (1.128) Orlando complains. The complaint here is that Orlando is not even eligible for the work of craftsmanship; he is a mere laborer on the fertility farm, and worse, he isn’t even worthy of the labor of education. His inactivity is helping “to mar that which

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100 There are also implications here for an ecofeminist reading of forest pedagogy in Arden. Duke Senior’s chief educator in this play that wants for mothers is Mother Nature (or “Mother Earth,” as Charles refers to her).
God made, a poor unworthy brother of yours, with idleness” (1.1.30-32). Interestingly, God’s “making” is figured as variety of work rather than labor, but it is qualified in that it clearly needs maintenance in the form of education. The human animal is at once the product of work and labor, a tension that we’ll see in Paradise Lost where there is ambiguity over whether humanity is “a piece of work” (as Hamlet would say) that tends toward right reason or whether we are the product of endless labor that requires relentless tending to stay on the path of virtue. In lines reminiscent of Hamlet’s characterization of the world as “an unweeded garden, / That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature / Possess it merely” (1.2.135-137), Oliver suggests that Orlando is like an invasive plant whose “rankness” begins “to grow upon me” (81-82). Rather than cultivating the younger brother in his family tree, he intends to weed him out.

Orlando is the text’s primary pupil — he must learn that hypermasculine chivalric games like wrestling do not necessarily prove one’s gentility. He must learn as much to become not only a worthy partner, but, in the social world of the play, to become a worthy citizen. This hybridizing of private duties (the lover’s) and public duties (the citizen’s) is characteristic of the ways in which Shakespeare’s comedies stage the rise of the social. In order to fulfill his basic needs as animal laborans and survive as bare life, he must learn to put up his sword and resist “enforc[ing] a thievish living” (2.3.34) in the forest. Such an education not only serves to satisfy his needs as an animal in nature, but also to make him a responsible citizen who, perhaps above all else for a second-son, respects property, both the bodies on stage (which he might harm) and the nourishment that sustains those bodies (which he might steal). He also must learn that they forest offers other teachers — namely female ones — beyond the “tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, / Sermons in stones” (2.1.16-17) that Duke Senior celebrates.
Orlando could stand to learn the sexual facts of marriage from Rosalind, whose vision of love and sex is closer to the georgic mode’s realism than the pastoral petrarchanisms Orlando carves into the trees. But Rosalind also has something to learn. Like the “never schooled, and yet learned” (1.1.155-156) Orlando, Rosalind (whose name, like the DeBoys’ already suggests flora) enters the action complaining in terms of education. She tells her cousin, “Unless you could teach me to forget a banished father you must not learn me how to remember any extraordinary pleasure” (1.2.3-5). Celia picks up this pedagogical language with “I could have taught my love to take thy father for mine” (1.2.10). In the court, gossip and “news” replaces education. Rosalind and Celia joke about their marketability once they have been news-crammed. The comparison is to the practice of cramming fowl before the slaughter, a dark image of animal husbandry and especially so when considered as an analogue for preparing oneself for marriage. This is no pastoral cultivation, and from the vantage of the corrupt court in the first act, the vision of the marriage market is hardly comic.

*As You Like It* suggests that all the world is a stage, and that the private concerns of the *oikos* are always already the public concerns of the *polis*, even when the *polis* is thrown out of doors and must survive as both bare life — or what Lupton would call creaturely life — and political life. It’s not that privacy replaces politics in the play, but that the two fuse together in the play’s articulation of its own social world. Kottman would have us believe that any scene that features the mutual revelation of agents to each other constitutes action. I would like to bring a little more nuance to that reading. What emerges in *As You Like It* is not a new conception of action that emerges from private encounters, but a new way of understanding action’s contingency in post-Reformation society, and in particular its dependence on labor in the form of
education. While there are several remarkable scenes of recognition and revelation, the primary mode of relation in the play is through misrecognition.

These forest misrecognitions problematize Arendt’s notion of consistent action as the bedrock of memory and identity. The multiple misrecognitions and fluidity of identities decouples political action from the ball-and-chain of a stable identity, suggesting that action is contingent, relative, and, most importantly, performative. Arendt’s notion of action as durable behavior that etches itself through the work of writers and historians is suspended in this play that dwells on human changeability. We need not always be haunted by our past demons, the play suggests. In a cynical register the play interprets changeability as treachery, cuckoldry, and the slow march toward senility and death, but it also stages changeability in a kinder light through the georgic education-as-cultivation metaphor.

Moral metamorphoses and transformations follow hard on the heels of misrecognition, as is the case with the conversions of Jaques and Oliver, but the most laborious (and entertaining) transformations are through cultivation. Georgic tropes of pedagogical, domestic, and agricultural labor make this play a celebration of the rise of the social in Early Modern thinking. Consider Orlando at the outset of the action praising Adam for his georgic attempts at cultivating the second-son by activating the arboreal etymology of the De Boys name: “But, poor old man, thou prun’st a rotten tree, / That cannot so much as a blossom yield / In lieu of all thy pains and husbandry” (2.4.64-66).

Productions often find an irresistible redemptive narrative for Adam: he saves the next generation from Cain-like fratricide, and finally Orlando saves him from the “mere oblivion” of Jacques ages of man speech. The play’s onamastics initially point us in this direction. Adam’s longest speech is about his puritanical youth free of “hot and rebellious liquors” (2.3.50) and his
willing “service […] in all [Orlando’s] business and necessities” (55-56). Orlando is touched by Adam’s georgic “constant service” as being more in line with “the antique world, when service sweat for duty, not for meed!” (58-59). The play celebrates Adam for his pre-capitalist work ethic, which registers as labor that releases Oliver (if not Orlando) to participate in the dukedom. When Adam can go no further, we are meant to think Orlando’s jest that Adam is “a mocker of [his] labour” (2.6.12) has some force by the old man’s association with honest service. Jacques, ambitious for a motley coat and perhaps inspired by Touchstones lines detailing how “from hour to hour we ripe and ripe, / And then from hour to hour we rot and rot” (2.7.26-27), launches into his own commentary on the ages of man. But the entrance of “Orlando bearing Adam” speaks to the redemptive possibilities for the role. Though his last speaking lines occur soon thereafter, many productions resurrect Adam for the final marriage scene. Most recently the RSC’s 2013 production by Maria Aberg featured a spritely Adam skipping on stage in the festival garb of the rest of the foresters. Adam’s valediction to his orchard life of sixty-some odd years is reminiscent of the first Adam’s expulsion from the garden, but unlike the first Adam who died his heavenly master’s debtor for that original crime, the play’s Adam is owed a debt by his master.

Objet Petit “Baa”:
Pastoral Thinking & Georgic Realities in The Winter’s Tale

If As You Like It stages the emergence of the social realm out of the collapse of the political sphere into the private sphere, The Winter’s Tale stages what a denial of the social might look like for a king whose duty to his state requires both political activity and the private,
genealogical labor of producing an heir. Like As You Like It, The Winter’s Tale has been
categorized among Shakespeare’s pastorals, but the critique embedded in the play results in a
vision that ultimately looks more georgic than pastoral. In Perdita and Polixenes’ debate over the
merits of naturally occurring flowers versus those that have been engineered, Polixenes
maintains that “art itself is nature.” He articulates a georgic perspective — that there is no useful,
original, untouched and purely natural nature accessible to humans.\(^{101}\) The only experience of
nature that is accessible to humans is a mediated landscape. If anything, the georgic offers us a
middle mode for understanding our mutual allegiances to the natural realm of animal laborans
and the social realm of both homo faber and zoon politikon. This middle ground also provides us
with a space for negotiating our political and private obligations. The play goes to great lengths
to confuse the categories of nature and culture, both explicitly in scenes like the flower debate,
and implicitly in Hermione’s reanimation scene, in which the work of homo faber “beguile[s]
nature of her custom” (5.2.84).\(^{102}\) In the process of imbricating the two, The Winter’s Tale
diagnoses what Robert Watson has described as a late Renaissance tendency to reach for an
original, simple connection to the natural world.\(^{103}\) This is a cautionary tale about the dangers of
pastoral thinking that isolates nature from culture both within the psyche of the individual and in

\(^{101}\) His perspective here is remarkably similar to a major theme in ecocriticism: that nature itself
is a culturally constructed category. See, for instance, Morton’s Ecology without Nature:
Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics, and William Cronon’s argument about the dangers and
delusions inherent in the concept of wilderness in “The Problem with Wilderness; or, Getting
Back to the Wrong Nature,” in Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature. Ed.

\(^{102}\) References to The Winter’s Tale are the Cambridge edition, ed. Susan Snyder and Deborah T.

\(^{103}\) Back to Nature: The Green and the Real in the Late Renaissance, (Philadelphia: University of
the shared geographic imagination. It suggests that even the political actor is first and foremost an animal in his environment, which is to say, *animal socialis.*

The play critiques what we might call “pastoral thinking” in its two most productive Renaissance incarnations — the temporal pastoral, which comprises the golden age or Edenic loss narrative, and the spatial pastoral, or the utopian imagining of an other place. Leontes’ desire for a time before his obligations compelled him to breed and rule leads to an unhealthy vision of politically and genealogically productive activity. The play’s exploration of temporal pastoral focuses on the homosociality associated with the pastoral impulse and Leontes’ longing for an idealized, homosocial bygone time. In doing so, it documents the rise of the social and the dispensation of productivity by attacking the sexual-generic paradigm of the pastoral, where sex in the pastoral mode is, often, homosexual and non-productive. The pastoral’s queerness, especially when it comes to sex, aligns it more closely with play than with work and productivity, which are features of the georgic mode and features of what Arendt would call society. In the play, homosocial relationships are first represented as an obstacle to be overcome on the way to fulfilling the social requirements of a king, specifically the requirement to breed. The persistence of homosocial relationships after initiation into the social sphere is then represented as a cause for rancor and jealousy in socially sanctioned heterosexual relationships.

In *Pastoral Process,* Susan Snyder writes that “most pastorals show one dominant direction or the other” — either exploring spatial pastoral or temporal pastoral.\(^\text{104}\) She brackets spatial pastoral, to which I will return later, and maps psychoanalytic thought onto the temporally-directed pastoral. In *The Winter’s Tale,* the Lacanian *objet petit a* — the unattainable object — is Leontes’ desire for a lost innocence, which he characterizes as a return to nature and

a denial of the social, and with it, the necessity of laboring to breed and maintain the household. The play registers the psychological trauma of the temporal pastoral as it manifests itself as the symptoms of Leontes’ desire to return to a prelapsarian and pre-georgic real. Polixenes’ and Leontes’ boyhood friendship is recalled in terms that trope the social subject as an ecological subject, which allows them to privilege their friendship by denying the rest of the social world — namely their political and sexual responsibilities. The play suggests that denying the social realm, with its dual allegiances to the natural and the social, can have catastrophic effects not only in the private realm but in the public as well.

It’s not a social encounter but rather a horticultural technique that provides the formative intervention in the boys’ development — at least that’s how Camillo recalls it. His figures are reminiscent of the disciplining of vines from the second Georgic. In their youths Polixenes and Leontes were so close that Camillo can liken their co-development to entwining plant bodies that “were train’d together in their childhoods.” He says, “there rooted betwixt them then such an affection, which cannot choose but branch now” (1.1.22-25). “Train’d” activates the conceit by describing the education of princes as a kind of agricultural practice that involves tying saplings together so they grow in a certain direction. “Rooted” and “branch” clinch the conceit. 105 The georgic trope suggests a kind of pre-sexual intimacy that allows them to imagine an unrealistic vision of nature that is scrubbed of mating and reproduction. Their youthful lives are remembered as a kind of laborless animal laborans — a contradiction if ever there were one. Upon their initiation into the symbolic order, political duties and social obligations intervene and their relationship is characterized by absence. Camillo again:

105 I suspect that in addition to signifying the princes’ professional, geographic and reproductive branching, there is also the whisper of a horn joke lurking under “branch,” which would anticipate Leontes obsession with cuckoldry later in the act, as well as the darker, clinical overtones that “affection” will take on.
Since their more mature dignities and royal necessities made separation of their society, their encounters, though not personal, hath been royally attorneyed with interchange of gifts, letters, [and] loving embassies. (1.1.18-27)

The organic embraces of the real can only be accessed through the screen of memory once the boys enter the symbolic realm, which is a realm mediated and “attorneyed” by signifying “letters.” Upon reuniting, Leontes demands a renewed bond in the irrecoverable real with the man he calls “brother” (1.2.15). When he is denied that fantasy, Leontes succumbs to a jealous “affection” which will be rendered in clinical terms that invite a psychoanalytic reading. Camillo’s diction is appropriate to the education of kings. He uses georgic images that link the training of royal heirs to the proper training of plants. These georgic figures liken the well-run nation to the well-ordered farm, and well-educated prince to the well-trained plant.

But when the kings recall their boyhoods, they revert to pastoral language that doesn’t allow for heterosexual love and the conjugal duties of kingship. Polixenes tells Hermione that he and Leontes were “[…] as twinned lambs that did frisk i’th’sun / And bleat the one at th’other.” (1.2.66-68). The unattainable objet petit a is figured here as innocent pastoral lambs who haven’t a thought for the breeding that awaits them on a real farm, let alone the profitable shearing or slaughter. Bleating lambs suggest a pre-linguistic and therefore pre-social past. In expressing his longing to return to that unfallen state, Polixenes insinuates that it was sexual desire that occasioned the princes’ fall. “We knew not,” Polixenes says,

107 Leontes himself refers to his jealousy as that which “communicat’st with dreams” and “infect[s the] brains,” and Camillo tells him that his delusion of infidelity is a “diseased opinion” to be “cured” (1.2.292-293).
The doctrine of ill-doing, nor dreamed
That any did. Had we pursued that life
And our weak spirits ne’er been higher reared
With stronger blood, we should have answered heaven
Boldly, ‘not guilty’ [...] (1.2.68-74)

In the presence of his boyhood friend, Leontes feels similarly nostalgic for a time before his passions had “reared,” a word that at once suggests rearing children and rising sexuality. Nostalgia that would seek to prevent both senses of rearing is dangerous because it will cause Leontes to destroy the record of his sexual maturity — namely his wife and the children he ought to rear with her. “Looking on the lines / Of my boy’s face,” he says,

[...] methoughts I did recoil
Twenty-three years, and saw myself unbreech’d,
In my green velvet coat; my dagger muzzl’d
Lest it should bite its master, and so prove,
As ornaments oft do, too dangerous.
How like, methought, I then was to this kernel,
This squash. (1.2.154-160)

The men have a similar psychological constitution that is mired in nostalgia for pre-sexual innocence. They align sexuality with the superficial, social world of the court in describing the
phallus as a kind of useless, ornamental accessory, and a potentially dangerous one at that. Leontes remembers his youth in familiar vegetative terms that draw a distinction between imagined natural innocence and the dangers of sexual maturity. ¹⁰⁸

Hermione, who understands that part of her role in public life is to be a breeder of princes, has no problem acknowledging the importance of sexuality in the royal family. In her conversation with Polixenes, she picks up on the fact that he figures sexual passion as sinful, and prods him by asking, “By this we gather / You have tripp’d since” (75-76). His response that “Temptations have since then been born to’us” (75) makes the wives out to be satanic Eves in the garden of their husbands’ memories. She beats him to the end of this thread of logic, and tries to cut it short with sarcastic gratitude: “Grace to boot! / Of this make no conclusion, lest you say / Your queen and I are devils” (179-181). Hermione does not echo the revulsion to sexual love that her husband and his boyhood friend have adopted in their trip down memory lane. If sex, especially within marriage, is a sin, she is prepared to accept it: “Th’offences we have made you do we’ll answer, / If you first sinned with us, and that with us / You did continue fault, and that you slipped not / With any but with us” (83-86). Slipped echoes “tripped” in her good-humored challenge, but it’s also yet another description of grafting, or the practice of inserting a slip (or, given the genealogical interest of the play, a scion) — a word that will come up again — from one plant into the stalk of another. Hermione, unlike the men, realizes that sexual love, is not

¹⁰⁸ As Robert Watson pointed out to me, in this regard, Leontes is not unlike Prospero, who stages a georgic marriage masque complete with Ceres and reapers to wish the couple a prosperous marriage while eliding the facts of sexuality and excluding Venus and Cupid from the list of invitees. The masque ends before it can turn to sexualized agriculture (the Third Georgic), with the “sunburned sicklemen” about to “encounter” the “fresh nymphs” with their “country footing” (4.1.134-138). Similarly, the sheep-shearing festival falls apart right at the moment that the herdsman begin their dance of the twelve satyrs, which is “often staged with a prominent display of phallic symbols and horn,” according to Deborah T. Curren-Aquino, “Appendix C,” The Winters Tale. Ed. Susan Snyder and Deborah T. Curren-Aquino (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 273.
only a fact of nature, which requires a “slip” into sexuality for survival, but a social imperative necessary for producing a legitimate scion for the kingdom. The play critiques the disturbing consequences of the temporal pastoral impulse by suggesting that once the subject becomes sexualized and socialized within the family unit, a return to pre-sexual innocence is tantamount to uxoricide and infanticide. The dream of returning to a pre-social existence threatens the family unit and the succession of the realm.

When Camillo resists playing his prescribed Lacanian role in Leontes’ psychodrama, Leontes’ pastoral longings turn to dark scenes of farm slaughter that populate the third georgic. When Camillo refuses to confirm his suspicion, Leontes subjects him to a tirade as violent as the one that awaits Hermione: “[…] thou art a coward, / Which hoxes honesty behind, restraining / From course required; or else thou must be counted / A servant grafted in my serious trust” (1.2.240-243). This is the sort of “acting out” that Lacan describes as the subject’s recourse when his analyst or subject-supposed-to-know resists delivering the desired formulation. “Hoxes” refers to hamstringing, or the practice of cutting the tendons of a cow’s (or in this case, a cow-ard’s) leg, which Leontes has figured here as a kind of georgic backstabbing. He suspects Camillo is complicit in his wife’s infidelity. That his mind immediately turns to the darker sides of husbandry suggests a longing for a prelapsarian or golden age relationship to the natural world — one in which the butchery of husbandry (and perhaps the cuckoldry of husbands) is unheard of.

“Graft” in his tantrum is one point in a network of references that compares the socially mediated development of human subjects to the cultivation of plants. Leontes’ use of a similar botanical metaphor about uniting plant bodies is an indication of just how much has changed. Camillo’s first conceit about tying or “train[ing]” saplings together was an account of a
wholesome relationship that nonetheless encompasses the analogy between the nation and farm\textsuperscript{109}; Camillo’s tropes never lose sight of the social and sexual realities that underlie Early Modern kingship. Leontes’ use of the georgic figure highlights the artificial modification of an otherwise natural subject. For him, the horticultural language is symptomatic of a fall into sexuality — and that’s a fall he is having a hard time squaring with his pastoral longings for his boyhood friend. Thinking his bond with Polixenes has been clipped by his wife’s infidelity, Leontes finds himself further isolated when his subject-supposed-to-know refuses to ratify his jealous suspicions; he figures the encounter as the violent grafting of a hostile social world to the pruned subject.

*The Winter’s Tale* shows the dark underbelly of Renaissance pastoral not just in its temporal mode, but in its spatial mode as well. To my mind, *The Winter’s Tale* complicates Susan Snyder’s claim that pastorals lean towards either spatial or temporal pastoral.\textsuperscript{110} In the temporal and tragic domain the play problematizing Leontes’ longing for an irrecoverable past; in the geopolitical and comic domain, it satirizes what a real-life pastoral retreat might look like in Bohemia. The bucolic landscape of Bohemia gives rise to a dark vision of georgic activity in the form of frank, heterosexual, “productive” sex and agricultural economics. The play suggests that pastoral thinking is an ideological dead-end, at least when it comes to the values of society. The pastoral paradigm can only ever cast the real world of *negotium* as a fallen, georgic world of productive, economic activity, where friendship is interrupted by the obligations of husbands,

\textsuperscript{109} The farm-as-state analogy also underlies and in some ways undermines the Cincinnatus tradition that experienced resurgence on both sides during the Civil War. The rural retreat is not merely escape from the active life of politics, but (at least for Royalists) model for absolutist politics where the master of the house is analogous to the divine-right monarch, with a labor class below him that appears both complacent and natural.

\textsuperscript{110} Snyder, *Pastoral Process*, 4.
and shepherding by commercial husbandry. Royal reproduction is an activity tainted by jealousy, and pastoral Bohemia is already influenced by the sexual and economic imperatives. The play suggests that pastoral thinking is dangerous to a productive society.

The temporal pastoral finds its realization in the tragic mode at the end the third act, but Shakespeare critiques the spatial pastoral in the comic mode by showing that the flight to a more (or perhaps More) utopian other place can only lead to disappointment. The movement to Bohemia replicates the classic Renaissance turn from the court to the countryside, but does so to critique pastoral escapism by holding it up against the fallen, georgic realities of Bohemia’s economy of sex and capital. Aching for a lost state of natural innocence gives way to a brutal state of nature, a place famous for its “creatures / Of prey” (3.3.11-12). Antigonus famously makes his exit from the play by his entry into the food chain, in a grizzly reminder of what a return to nature might actually look like, should we take the kings up on their desires. In this transitional moment, nature’s brazen world is held up against the poet’s golden world, anticipating the comic cautionary tale that is about to unfold. The pursuing bear gives way to the “bairn” the shepherd discovers, linking Perdita to a homonymic network of savage bears and the bearing of various burdens that span the length of the play. Antigonus, whose name might mean “against birth,” is charged with “bearing” a “bairn,” and upon completion, he is devoured by a bear. The bear puns indicate that nature, which Leontes so desperately wants to return to, is not innocent and bloodless, but often savage and inseparable from the social imperative of producing bairns, or children. The play in effect becomes a parable of Arendtian labor in demonstrating

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111 Stephen Booth and Margreta de Grazia have explored how homonymic networks relate to the play’s interest in bearing and breeding — the activity par excellence of feminine domestic labor. See Margreta de Grazia’s “Homonyms before and after lexical standardization,” Shakespeare Jahrbuch (1990), 299-301 and Stephen Booth’s “Exit, Pursued by a Gentleman Born,”
the interdependence of all three legs of the *vita activa*. Though it’s the lowest rung on the hierarchy, labor is just as necessary to the *polis* as great deeds of political action and speech.

It’s not bears, but sheep (and the labor of shepherding and breeding) that pivot the play from domestic tragedy to a georgic vision that mocks pastoral romance. The shepherd who will become Perdita’s surrogate father stumbles upon her while looking for “two of [his] best sheep” (3.3.63). Here the play shifts from its critique of temporal pastoral to a critique of the geographic pastoral, a genre Early Modern readers would have been increasingly familiar with due to the influx of New World narratives, both fictional (such as More’s *Utopia*) and non-fictional (such as Thomas Hariot’s *Brief and True Report*). The Bohemian countryside might be closer to nature than the court of Sicily is, but it’s hardly simple and innocent. The Shepherd is likewise hardly an innocent rustic — he laments that in this pastoral space “there is nothing between” the ages of ten and twenty-three “but getting wenches with child, wronging the ancientry, stealing, and fighting” (60-62). His first thought upon finding Perdita is that there was “sure some scape” or sexual transgression (OED), and what follows is run-down of possible coital scenarios which might have led to the abandoned child. In the insistent focus on heterosexual labor, Bohemia looks more like a fallen agricultural landscape than an unfallen pastoral one.

In following Perdita to Bohemia, the action revises the classical pastoral, which attempts to imagine an un-fallen state of society in opposition to the fallen city or court (Raymond Williams’ definition), in such a way that it looks more georgic than pastoral. This is not the pastoral world of Virgil’s *Eclogues*, but the sometimes brutal, sometimes beautiful world of the third georgic. The third georgic is sometimes referred to as the love and death georgic because it

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deals with the realities of animal slaughter and death, as well as with the dangers and necessities of breeding on the farm. Perdita is uncontaminated by Leontes’ desire to return to nature, and the play puts her forward as a vision of a healthy organism-in-culture who accepts her hybrid allegiances to both nature and culture. Though she enters the play under the sign of loss and nature, Perdita never attains a prelapsarian innocence, nor does she seem to desire it in the first place. Her preference for pure flowers rather than hybrid gillivors seems to have less to do with the art vs. nature distinction, since she’s willing to drop that part of the debate once Polixenes explains that “art itself is nature” (90-93), but more to do with the kind of artificiality and ornamentation she associates with the court. Where her father imagined the sexual organ as ornamental and dangerous to his memory of natural innocence, Perdita believes it is ornamentation itself that threatens an otherwise natural sexuality. She says,

I’ll not put
The dibble in earth to set one slip of them;
No more than, were I painted, I would wish
This youth should say ‘twere well, and only therefore
Desire to breed by me. (4.4.99-103)

113 She isn’t mediated in the way that Leontes is by a screen of self-fashioning and nostalgia. Antigonus, charged with discarding the infant, asks “some powerful spirit” (the complete, coherent Big Other in Lacanian thought) to “instruct the kites and ravens / To be [her] nurse” (185-186) and refers to her as “Blossom,” foreshadowing her relationship with Florizel. Her very name, which the dream vision of Hermione translates as she who “is counted lost forever” suggests the lost relationship to the organic real for which Leontes yearns. That habit of mind is legible earlier, too, as when Leontes figures his wife as both exchangeable property and as organic land. When he thinks she is cheating on him, he likens her to “pond fished by his next neighbor” and as property with “gates opened” by “other men” (1.2193-195), and later he looks “as he had lost some province, and a region loved as he loves himself” (1.2.365-366).
Perdita re-appropriates the landscape-as-woman metaphor, mapping a space for feminine desire and agency within older phallocentric paradigms that define the pastoral landscape as laborless and therefore unproductive, homosocial, and masculine.

In this georgic exchange in pastoral weeds, Polixenes and Perdita articulate positions with regard to culture and nature that are at odds with their motivations in the play. Perdita rejects gillyvors because they are “nature’s bastards” (83), which described her status in the eyes of her father. She argues against the hybridization of flowers and, by extension, classes even though it’s clear that in the case of the prince and herself, she is all for cross-breeding. Using “slips” reactivates the grafting wordplay her mother used to describe Polixenes and Leontes’ fall into sexuality. Perdita, later described as “a peerless piece of earth,” does in fact desire a certain “dibble” to be “slipped” into a certain “piece of earth.” The artful bawdiness of this sexual georgic shoots holes through the innocent rustic maiden type, and her wit and eloquence reveal her to be the daughter of a king. The disguised Polixenes also takes an ironic position in which he unwittingly argues for interclass marriage and defends the choice of his son, who by name and birth is the “gentler scion,” in his analogy: “You see, sweet maid, we marry / A gentler scion to the wildest stock, / And make conceive a bark of baser kind / By bud of nobler race” (4.4.92-95). Even if gillivors are not in Perdita’s garden, hybrid flowers are not inconceivable (even if they cannot reproduce) — indeed, they seem desirable in light of the slippage between horticultural and sexual practice.

The passage focalizes the great Renaissance art vs. nature debate, but does so with the added nuance of class, sex, economics, and genre. When Polixenes claims that “art itself is nature” he is articulating a quintessentially georgic perspective: that there is no accessible purely untouched nature — that our experience of nature is always in some way mediated by culture, if
only by our presence. But the play suggests that Polixenes’ vision of georgic is, as Jennifer Munroe has shown, too patriarchal and domineering. Munroe argues that the education Leontes undergoes is partly toward making him aware that even though human artifice and labor can change nature, that does not entail human superiority over it. In the play, women have a closer connection to and better understanding of the natural world, which undermines the notion of masculine dominance over both nature and the natural world. According to Munroe, the play enacts the terms of the [gillivor] debate to show that Polixenes simply has it wrong. Instead, it seems to side with Perdita (and the other women), whose understanding of the natural world positions them as closer to Nature because they are better informed, better able not to improve the natural world with human art but rather to understand how best to use what Nature creates; the best “husbandry,” in this play, then, may really be that of the housewife.114

Munroe and I both find an opening for a reparative reading of the rise of the social in the Winter’s Tale because. From Paulina’s redemptive educational project, to Hermione’s biological labor, to Perdita’s work of grafting together two families using the language of flowers, women’s work in the play occurs at the intersection of nature and culture and brings together the private world of household and the public world of politics.

This literal and epistemological hybridity marks out the human as an animal in culture, or what the Romans would call animal socialis. Animal socialis occupies a middle space between

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animal laborans, whose allegiances are merely to nature (consuming and reproducing), and zoon politikon, whose allegiances are to the public (action and speech). Arendt makes much of the translation of Aristotle’s zoon politikon to animal socialis which she traces back to at least Seneca through to Thomas Aquinas’s “homo est naturaliter politicus, id est, socialis” (“man is by nature political, that is, social”).  

Arendt believes that,

this unconscious substitution of the social for the political betrays the extent to which the original Greek understanding of politics had been lost. For this, it is significant but not decisive that the word “social” is Roman in origin and has no equivalent in Greek language or thought. […] It is only with the later concept of a societas generis humani, a “society of man-kind,” that the term “social begins to acquire the general meaning of a fundamental human condition. It is not that Plato or Aristotle was ignorant of, or unconcerned with, the fact that man cannot live outside the company of men, but they did not count this condition among the specifically human characteristics; on the contrary, it was something human life had in common with animal life, and for this reason alone it could not be fundamentally human. The natural, merely social companionship of the human species was considered to be a limitation imposed upon us by the needs of biological life, which are the same for the human animal as for other forms of animal life.  

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115 Arendt, The Human Condition, 23.

The Winter’s Tale suggests that we can’t go back and drive the wedge back between the animal and the political realms; we cannot break apart this calcified concept we call the social, in part because our political structures — specifically hereditary monarchy — won’t allow for it. For kings and queens and their offspring, breeding is as much a political activity as it is a private, animal activity.

The history of the staging of the sheep-shearing festival also reveals a pattern influenced by the rise of the social. In some ways I’ve been exploring the Early Modern period as the connective tissue that links the medieval period and the modernity that emerged in the eighteenth century. In drama, this is a (perhaps too linear) trajectory toward domestic tragedy. The priority of the domestic sphere in those plays suggests that the age of society had arrived. We see it rising in the post-Reformation period. The sheep-shearing festival is one of the most famous scenes in all of Shakespeare — it’s easily the longest scene in the play and it’s the second longest in the canon. Shakespeare, notoriously slim on stage directions, provides no scene-setting. But eighteenth-century editors couldn’t resist the setting the festival, which usually is set outdoors in contemporary productions, indoors. Theobald, Hanmer, and Capell all have the scene taking place within the shepherd’s cottage. Some even specify that the scene takes place in a room within. This is not available in the Shakespearean text, but it does suggest the cultural forces at work that sought to domesticate this scene that is so important for mingling the private concerns of the oikos with the public concerns of not one but two different political bodies.

Perdita intuits that she is a character in a pastoral landscape — she knows what’s expected from the genre and from her, and she uses that awareness to lampoon the conventions of pastoral. She rebuffs Camillo’s Petrarchan use of the pastoral when he says “I should leave

\[117\] The Winter’s Tale, 173, n. 4.4.0.
grazing, were I of your flock, / And only live by gazing” (110), and when Florizel plagiarizes lines from Sidney’s *Arcadia* she calls him out on the artificiality of such courtly eloquence, saying, “O Doricles, your praises are too large […] with wisdom I might fear […] You wooed me the false way,” (147-151). Where her father in the first act pushed courtly rhetoric to the point of its collapse under the weight of repressed sexuality, Perdita is happy to speak in frank terms about sex, referring to a “slip” with Florizel explicitly as “breeding.” In embracing sexuality she signals her fitness to bear princes — the social labors expected of a queen. Most unlike her father, she appears prepared to accept and enjoy the facts of nature and sexuality, denuded of chivalric euphemism. 118 When she laments that she lacks the proper flowers to strew over Florizel’s body, he jokes, “What, like a corpse?” Her retort is explicitly sexual, and takes advantage of the etymological link between “corpse” and body: “No, like a bank for love to lie and play on, / Not like a corpse; or if, not to be buried, / But quick, and in mine arms” (130-132).

Again, she sexualizes the landscape, only this time not her own body as feminized landscape, but the male body as feminized landscape. If pastoral logic makes a return to nature desirable, then Perdita is here playing with that logic by offering Florizel an unvarnished, vision of two returns to nature from the third georgic: one as the little death, and one as the big death that literally turns bodies into landscapes.

The sheep-shearing festival typifies the pastoral setting, but only to suggest that this is a comically compromised paradise and one that is in fact closer to a georgic agricultural zone than

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118 As Robert Watson has pointed out to me, Shakespeare was habitually ready to attribute broader sexual understanding to his heroines (as we can say of Rosalind, for instance). Of course, pastoral has a long history with sexuality (and homosexuality in particular), but Shakespeare’s heroines don’t merely pastoralize sexuality. Before the advent of reliable, chemical forms of birth control, sexuality was always more than merely play, and carried the very real possibility of pregnancy and reproductive labor. In referring explicitly to “breeding,” Perdita reveals her understanding that even sexual “play” can result in maternal labor.
pastoral one. In addition to pervasive concerns with breeding, the intervention of capital into the rural economy also undermines the spatial pastoral. The sheep are not just the trappings of literary pastoral, but goods with a specific exchange value. The lone wolf, as Autolycus’ name translates, overhears the clown attempting to calculate the income from his family’s sizeable flock. That he needs “counters” to help him with the arithmetic suggests the wealth of this shepherding family (as well as his clownish stupidity). Indeed 1,500 wethers, as he says they own, would be more on par with the flocks of wealthy sheep-herding estates of the English wool industry than with the literary convention of simple rustics piping on oaten reeds. The arrival of deceit, fast on the heels of capital, also indicates that this is a fallen world. Twice Autolycus, our wolf-in-sheep’s clothing, is told that he need not fear being robbed in Bohemia. He uses that information to capitalize on those naïve expectations, by fleecing the sheep-shearing festival, stealing from the shepherd and clown multiple times, and pulling one past the apparently trustworthy but too trusting Camillo.

Leontes’ yearning for a naturalized and innocent past is impossible to fulfill. He at once longs to be animal laborans, which is to say, free of his political commitments and free to frisk about with his boyhood friend, and yet he denies the fact of sexual reproduction, so key to the activity of animal laborans. This contradiction yields a “diseased” affection and the tragic dissolution of his private life — a dissolution, the play reminds us, that also has ramifications for the public that Leontes rules. Rejecting the georgic imperatives of the court and escaping to a remote pastoral location is likewise held up for critique in both the georgic twists on the pastoral landscape and plot’s return to Sicily, where the work of women takes on public significance in the unveiling of Hermione. The Arcadian world of Bohemia is always-already fallen into sexuality, the economics of capitalism, and the profit-motive. There, public concerns about
princely marriage and succession are played out in Polixenes’ spying on his son’s private affairs. Indeed, the ethos of the sheep-shearing festival is one that privileges the private concerns of the *oikos*, such as the profit of the family estate and family breeding. The play suggests that Leontes’ desire to return to a pure, original nature devoid of the social imperatives to profit and reproduce — either “back then” or “over there” — is impossible, because for the human organism-in-culture, the natural is always-already bound up in social obligations.

But the play goes beyond merely representing a cautionary tale about pastoral thinking; it offers a method for thinking our ways out of that particular dead-end by way of education, procreation, and forgiveness. Paulina is one of many feminine didactic figures in Shakespeare. Women educators are a georgic trope from the Aristeaus Epyllion in *Georgics* Book IV, where Aristeaus loses all his bees and has to regenerate the hive, which is a metonym for the political structure in the wake of Rome’s civil wars. He seeks out his mother, the nymph Cyrene, who instructs him on how to find and surprise Proteus. She even accompanies her son on his field trip, and helps him translate the lessons from the enigmatic shape shifter’s revelations. After Proteus dives back into the sea, she says to her “frightened” son:

‘You may cast your cares away,’
She said, ‘for here is the whole truth of your bees’ sickness
And the death they were dealt by the nymphs with whom Eurydice
Danced in the deep woods. So offer them gifts and make your
Peace with them, and pray to the Gracious Ones of the grove.
They will answer your prayers with forgiveness, they will forget their anger.’
Cyrene is a metapoetic figure for education in general and didactic poetry in particular. She then goes on to explain the process of *bugonia*, or the cultivation of bees from the carcasses of cows. This passage is often read as an analogue for the regeneration of the political structure after the losses of the Roman civil wars. In typically georgic fashion, the regeneration of the state is not a purely public and political process — it is deeply rooted in the private and feminine labor of education and procreation. Even as the Aristeaus epyllion erases maternal labor by way of the ancient practice of *bugonia*, which at essence is a form of spontaneous generation requiring neither male nor female partners, it elevates the role of women as educators that instruct and aid in the regeneration of the political body.

The other key feature of georgic didacticism that the Aristeaus epyllion highlights is the role of forgiveness. For Arendt, action, especially broad political action, is irreversible. Sometimes this is for the best; sometimes it’s for the worse. The only way to maintain stability among actors in the world is through the faculty of forgiving. Of course, these are very Christian ideas, something to which I’ll return in my third chapter on *Paradise Lost*. The major lesson of the Aristeaus epyllion goes beyond the masculine heroic feat of binding Proteus. Aristeaus requires the interpretative help of a Cyrene (a female and specifically maternal education figure) to understand Proteus’ revelations, and to propose a course of action for

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120 For an account of how Renaissance humanism struggled with the gendered implications of education, see Wallace, “Placement and Pedagogy in the *Georgics,*” 123-177.

atonement, to “answer [Aristeaus’s] prayers with forgiveness” (*Georgics*, IV.536). Arendt explains that “Without being forgiven, released from the consequences of what we have done, our capacity to act would, as it were, be confined to one single deed from which we could never recover; we would remain the victims of its consequences forever, not unlike the sorcerer’s apprentice who lacked the magic formula to break the spell.”\(^{122}\)

*The Winter’s Tale* provides a similarly georgic frame for understanding the regeneration of the body politic that involves the private labors of education and procreation, and the difficult work of keeping promises and forgiveness. It involves Paulina’s long, slow re-education of Leontes, and a key component of that education is the labor of forgiveness. Most critics leave their exploration of the relationship between Paulina and the (self-styled) apostle Paul at the Damascus road conversion: Paulina shepherds Leontes conversion. I believe to understand Paulina’s role more fully we need to understand her relationship to Paul as that of a teacher — a teacher who at times rivals Jesus as the New Testaments most prominent teacher. Unlike Paul’s conversion, Paulina’s conversion of Leontes is a slow, didactic task that plays out over the course of sixteen years. It’s not a revelation so much as a daily labor that Leontes works toward.

Act Five opens onto a discussion of the work of forgiveness and the labor of procreation. Cleomenes argues that Leontes has, in the economy of sin and penitence, atoned enough for his sins and should consider a second marriage for the good of the kingdom:

Sir, you have done enough, and have performed
A saint-like sorrow. No fault could you make

\(^{122}\) Ibid.
Which you have not redeemed; indeed, paid down
More penitence than done trespass. At the last,
Do as the heavens have done, forget your evil;
With them, forgive yourself. (5.1.1-6)

By this we learn that Leontes has followed through on the promise he made at the end of the trial scene, an “oath” that Paulina begs the lords to “bear witness to” (5.1.72):

Once a day I’ll visit
The chapel where they lie, and tears shed there
Shall be my recreation. So long as nature
Will bear up with this exercise, so long
I daily vow to use it. (3.2.235-239)

The intervening sixteen years have been filled with the sorts of sacramental practices the Protestant Reformation specifically problematized — masses and prayers for the dead, elaborate penitential ceremonies, and works that seek to actualize forgiveness and remorse. Though Paulina bears much in common with Paul, she is not Pauline in advocating for works over faith, or perhaps a better way of wording it would be works as a way of fortifying faith. Justification by faith rather than works is a key Pauline contribution to the architecture of early Christianity, and would come to be a rally cry for Protestants in the sixteenth century. Paulina wonders at the efficacy of sacramental and penitential practices in light of Leontes’ crime:
Do not repent these things, for they are heavier
Than all thy woes can stir; therefore betake thee
To nothing but despair. A thousand knees
Ten thousand years together, naked, fasting,
Upon a barren mountain and still winter
In storm perpetual, could not move the gods
To look that way thou wert. (3.2.205)

She doesn’t wonder at the efficacy of meriting heaven by working-off one’s sins in general; she
doubts its possible in the particular case of Leontes’ crimes, which we understand to be of a
different order of magnitude. Fasting, mortifications of the flesh, and prayer would not be
enough in this instance in particular, she suggests. The “barren mountain” and “still winter” are
images suggestive of sterility. Dion accuses Paulina of “pity[ing] not the state” (5.1.25) because
she doesn’t consider the very real issues that would accompany “his highness’ fail of issue”
(5.1.27). He argues for “royalty’s repair” (5.1.30), a French pun on fathering (père) that
Shakespeare (as we’ll see) used in the sonnets to argue that the fair youth ought to procreate. But
Leontes views this as part of his punishment and the work of his penitence: in the first, “heirless
[his crime] hath made my kingdom” (5.1.10) and in the second, “[his crime] destroyed the
sweet’st companion that ere man / Bred his hopes out of” (5.1.11). Breeding is always in the
background; he senses that the primary crime here is not against his wife, but against the
reproductive labor they were ordained to perform. The debate over whether or not Leontes has
atoned enough for his crime and whether or not he should seek a new queen for the purpose of
producing an heir is cut off by the entrance of a servant, with Florizel and Perdita fast on his heals. Has Leontes earned forgiveness?

Sarah Beckwith offers a surprising answer that is attuned to the changing nature of sacramental work, and penitential work in particular, in the post-Reformation period. Reformed theology replaced the Catholic term “penance” (with its implied theology of works and performance) with “repentance.” One of the outcomes of the inward turn of radical Protestantism is that external, performed rituals of forgiveness (such as the act of confession in which a believer “confesses” sins to God’s delegated priest) were redirected inward to the dialogue between individual soul and the divine. This turn privatized the negotiation of forgiveness. But Leontes, perhaps as a symptom of his regeneracy, intuits that there is a limit to both the private workings of forgiveness and to the external work of penitence. As Beckwith so elegantly puts it,

Leontes understands enough about the grammar of forgiveness to know that he cannot forgive himself, that the grammar of forgiving yourself is in fact nonsensical. To forgive himself would entail absolving himself, and this would imply that he could, by an act of his will, reclaim his acts and their effects on others back from the lives of those others and order them by dint of that will.


Leontes realizes that forgiving is a communal activity — it requires the participation, presence, and affirmation of others — and it can only happen once the injured party has been resurrected.

The statue scene reinforces the ambiguity in that Hermione does not respond to her husband — instead of granting forgiveness, she merely extends an ambiguous hand to him and addresses her daughter and the miracle of her preservation. We are very right to wonder whether, in the drama of the play, Leontes has earned his wife’s forgiveness and pardon (and we’ll see a similar uncertainty in All’s Well That Ends Well), and whether, in the fragmentary Protestant dispensation of the period, the labor of atoning is effectual toward the end of salvation. This is a culture that is working out these problems for itself and, at least in the script that we have, those questions remain unanswered and are often left to the interpretation of actors and directors. But Leontes has gone a long way toward recognizing the mutual entanglement that is his private duty to wife and child, and his public duty to his kingdom. In the process, he acknowledges that the work of forgiveness is not merely a private performance, but that it takes the involvement of a community. The play imagines a politics that is premised both on both the private labor of the oikos and the public performance of penitence that knits the community back together.

If the play repairs the past divisions in the political sphere through a performance of forgiveness that reunites the private individual with the community (through the figure of resurrection), it suggests a bright future for that political community through a kind of rebirth, or rather, the discovery daughter thought dead, who is reborn to her parents in two separate reunions. Paulina’s very Pauline didactic project corrects Leontes’ pathological longing for a time before he was initiated into the social by offering a redemptive solution through the work of homo faber. That project rehabilitates Leontes over the course of sixteen years and is figured as a georgic educational process that allows Leontes to grow out of his toxic vision of pure,
untouched nature and to accept his obligations to the social world. The play suggests that education is not merely labor, but a kind of world-making. It is a symptom of modernity that labor and work are confused in this play — that education is both labor and work — and the statue of Hermione is the token of that confusion. That’s the human solution. The narrative solution is genealogical and points toward natality: the miraculous return of the missing daughter, Perdita. The miracle, it turns out, is not a statue coming to life so much as the miracle of reproductive labor.\textsuperscript{125} The play celebrates the world-making labor that guarantees the continuity of the social realm through the reproduction and cultivation of future citizens. The play’s genealogical solution pitches the private as political. Those twinned labors — education and procreation (we might add forgiveness) — are represented not as private concerns, but as a public concern: a \textit{res publica}. The georgic mode imagines a middle, “social” space between the private necessities of labor and the ascendancy of politics, but it also helps us imagine a middle ground in our dual allegiances to nature and culture.

Arendt’s concept of natality is a useful way to understand humanity’s position “in-between” nature and culture (or biological life and politics). Natality is the fundamental condition of politics: the ability for free action is “ontologically rooted” in the “fact of natality.”\textsuperscript{126} Throughout her work, and indeed in much of the criticism, Arendt seems to argue that action and politics are not biologically determined — in fact, it often seems as if politics is

\textsuperscript{125} Robert Watson pointed out to me that it’s no accident that Perdita looks like a young Hermione, which is what Leontes was expecting to find in the statue (that is, work that resists change, that is permanent, and that isn’t subject to the life cycle).

\textsuperscript{126} Arendt, \textit{The Human Condition}, 177.
only possible in the absence of biological necessity.\footnote{127} But as Miguel Vatter has shown, Arendt re-forges a connection between essential human freedom and biological life. Her politics, then, is more accurately a biopolitics — a politics of life.\footnote{128} This goes a long way toward recovering the labor of women who are essentially a pre-condition for politics, if politics is rooted in the condition of natality. Reproductive labor is a dimension of politics. What is lost in the rise of the social and the ascendancy of private life is the space where politics occurs “in-between” individuals: “the public realm has lost the power of illumination which was originally part of its very nature […] what is lost is the specific and usually irreplaceable in-between which should have formed between this individual and his fellow men.”\footnote{129} But natality recovers from the realm of privacy the possibility of new life coming into the world, announcing itself, and interaction with other life already on the stage. The genealogical solution to the play is a political solution that unites nature and politics, often using a georgic register that describes biological labor, politics, and culture as a kind of agricultural labor. Paulina intuits that natality is the condition of freedom and that it holds the seeds for a regenerative politics when she describes the birth of Perdita in terms that unite nature and politics: “This child was prisoner to the womb, and is / By law and process of great nature thence / Freed and enfranchised — not a party to / The anger of the king nor guilty of / (If any be) the trespass of the queen” (2.3.59-63). Natality at once captures the paradox that is the unique plurality of the human condition — humans are at once


\footnote{128} Vatter, \textit{The Republic of the Living: Biopolitics and the Critique of Civil Society}.

individuals and a plurality of unique individuals who are born into the world. They are outgrowths of their parents and conditioned by the community into which they are born, but nonetheless they are uniquely enfranchised agents. At the outset of *The Human Condition*, Arendt writes, “Action, the only activity that goes on directly between men without the intermediary of things or matter, corresponds to the human condition of plurality, to the fact that men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world.”

Her politics is rooted not in the separation, isolation, or animalizing of biological labor; her politics is rooted in the biological fact of birth — the fact that a plurality of radically unique individuals is born into the world every day. Arendt rejects the idea that the goal of politics is to manage biological life (this would be to elide her biopolitics with Foucault’s, to acquiesce to the rise of the social, and to pave the way for totalitarianism). Natality marks the “in-between” in two different ways: it introduces unique humans beings to the plurality of humanity, and it marks and complicates the “in-between” of the human-animal and nature-culture binary.

Upon returning to court, nature and culture still resist a discrete binary arrangement, suggesting that the biological necessities of *animal laborans* are properly also the concerns of *homo faber* and the political actor. One of the gentlemen tells the others that the unveiling of Hermione’s statue — a *faber*-ication will involve a confusion of nature and culture, because the Italian sculptor can “beguile nature of her custom, so perfectly he is her ape.” (5.2.80-85). The re-animation scene reframes the culture vs. nature debate by confounding the ontological status of the human animal, *homo faber*, and the durable work that animal produces. No matter who the ape is — nature imitating culture or culture imitating nature — the confusion casts the final events of the narrative in the dubious, but seductive light of a wish fulfillment fantasy, and the

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statue business is finally explained as “magic” and “an old tale” to be “hooted at” (5.3.116-117).
By addressing the stone and saying that the “stone rebuke[s him] for being more stone than it,” Leontes confuses the categories in play — the human animal (Hermione and Leontes), the natural material (stone), and the work that memorializes culture into perpetuity. In the final tally, the play suggests that the human obsession with isolating, purifying and returning to nature is unthinkable because the human organism-in-culture is necessarily hybrid, which is to say, we inhabit the middle georgic landscape, between nature and culture — the social — wherein even the human animal itself comes to look like the stature of Hermione. That is, we start to look like a naturalized matter that has been transformed by the human-making work of homo faber.

Perhaps the entwining of nature and culture that we see in The Winter’s Tale is exactly what we need for both categories to survive. It is not a question of preserving certain landscapes so that the human organism-in-culture can preserve a certain idea of nature. Nor is it about dwelling in pastoral modes that recreate the desire for a pristine, “natural” past. The hope is to find a new paradigm that doesn’t isolate the category of nature in the mythic memories our culture continues to produce. To date, a new discourse has emerged that finds alternative radicalisms and relationships to the world beyond the deep ecologists’ rarified vision of pure nature. Timothy Morton’s Ecology without Nature, Bruno Latour’s Politics of Nature, and William Cronon’s “The Trouble with Wilderness” have challenged us to move beyond dichotomous thinking when it comes to the nature-culture confluence. These are brave new steps toward a new paradigm that will be premised on a kind of symbiotic relationship between nature and culture, much like the one offered in Virgil’s middle mode. The georgic mode sees most of the world operating at the intersection of nature and culture. Agriculture is one of our oldest tropes for understanding that intersection, and The Winter’s Tale elaborates its own family drama
by entwining the evolutionary demands that the human animal procreate with the demands of the political animal, that he produce an heir in a characteristically georgic register.

Georgic Genealogies in *All’s Well That Ends Well:*

The Graft as Political & Familial Formation

I want to conclude my treatment of Shakespearean comedy by considering the georgic cultivars of *All’s Well That Ends Well*, a problem play that, like *As You Like It* and *The Winter’s Tale*, figures its interest in generation through images of agricultural cultivation. Nancy Meckler’s 2013 production of the play at the Royal Shakespeare Company drew attention to how the play tropes the rise of the social as georgic. A mobile, box-shaped terrarium with glass on all sides but the one facing the audience served as a built-in *mise-en-abyme* of theater itself, with its missing fourth wall. This icon was embedded in the center of the proscenium and was brought forward as the action necessitated it. This stage within a stage (or fishbowl within a fishbowl) served as the site that marked the eruption of the private, domestic sphere into the public. The box signaled a kind of transparent domestic space that was always on display for public view and, in a sense, it marked the rise of the social and the permeability of the walls of the *oikos* (transparent on all sides, and open on one) that separate the political sphere from the private sphere. It represented the Widow Capilet and Diana’s inn, where entrepreneurial middle-class women transformed the labor of the household into a business. In the painful scene of marital election, the box signified the domain of politically enforced marriage when a stunned and uneasy Helena and Bertram recede hand-in-hand into the proscenium, practically encoffined within the glass box — a viewing of sorts for the political players at the king’s court and for the
paying theater audience as well. The box also became a living terrarium at the heart of Countess’s domestic life, and the play returned to this setting again and again, suggesting that with the death of the *pater familias*, the Roussillon household has become a headless *oikos* that finds itself grafted to the King. The design brought out the georgic leitmotifs in the play because it served as an indoor gardening plot for the steward, a figure of feudal household service who gardened in the rear of the terrarium throughout the Countess’s scenes. Two production photos show the domestic versatility of the box — the first (Fig. 1.) shows the terrarium-like function it serves in the background of the Countess’s home, and the second (Fig. 2.) shows it morphing into a middle-class *oikos*, which is to say, a mélange of domesticity and economics. I want to dwell on this image at the center of this production because I believe it illuminates the play’s concerns with the genealogical and pedagogical cultivation.
Fig. 1. Nancy Meckler’s 2013 RSC production of *All’s Well that Ends Well*. Act one, scene three, features the terrarium as Countess’s “noble” domestic sphere.\textsuperscript{131}

![Fig. 1. Nancy Meckler’s 2013 RSC production of *All’s Well that Ends Well*. Act one, scene three, features the terrarium as Countess’s “noble” domestic sphere.](image)

Fig. 2. Nancy Meckler’s 2013 RSC production of *All’s Well that Ends Well*. Act four, scene two, features the terrarium as Diana’s and the Widow’s middle-class domestic and economic sphere.\textsuperscript{132}

\textsuperscript{131} Still from Act 1, scene 3 of Nancy Meckler's 2013 production of *All's Well That Ends Well*, accessed December 17, 2013, and now available on the Royal Shakespeare Company’s YouTube channel at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MdRMH8KtULs.

The play is one of the most generically problematic in the Shakespeare canon, but it’s also, alongside the *Taming of the Shrew*, one of the most georgic comedies in that the blocking character — the husband in this case — undergoes a type of husbandry or, if you like, taming. Like the other two comedies I’ve explored in this opening chapter on labor, the play stages a comic *paideia* by which the principal male character undergoes an education over course of the play through feminine pedagogical labor. Like the other plays in this section, *All’s Well* is also overtly concerned with biological and genealogical labor of women from the opening lines of its principal players.\(^{133}\) The Countess begins, “In delivering my son from me, I bury a second husband. (1.1.1). Her pun on “delivering” as being akin to burying her husband again signals the play’s concerns with maternal forms of labor. Romantic love and the happy endings featured in the other *comic paideia* that this section has explored are notably absent, and instead the play leaves us, as Julia Lupton has so persuasively argued, thinking about the “futures of consent.”\(^{134}\)

The methodology of this section mirrors the literary argument: just as the play, which uses the language of grafting to fuse the political and private spheres to form a hybrid called society, my argument is likewise a grafting of two earlier perceptive arguments about the play. Erin Ellerbeck has observed that the horticultural language of the play mediates the realms of nature and culture through a conceit that suggests that nature can be controlled or, at the very least, affected by human will. Her primary focus is the use of horticultural language that creates

\(^{133}\) Sylvan Barnet notes the “language of fertility” in Leontes’ first lines, “Nine changes of the wat’ry star hath been/ The shepherd’s note since we have left our throne/ Without a burden” (1.2.1-3). See Sylvan Barnet, “The Winter’s Tale on Stage and Screen,” *The Winter’s Tale*, ed. Frank Kermode, (Middlesex: Signet Classics, 1988), 231-235, 233. Orlando, recall, opens *As You Like It* with a diatribe about the bad “breed[ing]” (1.1.4) he has received at the hands of his brother.

\(^{134}\) Lupton, *Thinking with Shakespeare*, 97-129.
the possibility for new forms of familial relations that bear the trace of female agency, and her primary example is the Countess, who wills Helena into a quasi-natural parent-child bond through an adoption that she tropes as a graft.\textsuperscript{135} To that argument about the play’s horticultural language and feminine agency I wish to graft Lupton’s Arendtian archaeology of the play’s anatomy of consent in the theaters of politics and sex. This theater of consent plays out in a georgic register that is reminiscent of the second georgics’ instruction on grafting. It’s my contention that the georgic language transcends the merely private, familial registers to negotiate new political forms in the social world of the play.

The key to understanding \textit{All’s Well} is in the genealogy of the source material, which is summarized by Susan Snyder’s \textit{Oxford Shakespeare} edition of the play.\textsuperscript{136} To paraphrase her introduction, the tales of \textit{Decameron}’s Third Day all focus on human initiative and the efforts involved in obtaining something the characters wanted or wanted to recover.\textsuperscript{137} We might do worse than to consider how Shakespeare may have encountered the story, which I’ll argue stages the rise of a Weberian, Protestant middle-class “by policy.”

Giletta, a physician’s daughter of Narbonne, healed the French king of a fistula, for reward whereof she demanded Beltramo, Count of Roussillon, to husband.

\textsuperscript{135} Erin Ellerbeck, “Adoption and the Language of Horticulture in \textit{All’s Well that Ends Well},” \textit{Studies In English Literature} 51.2 (Spring 2011), 305-326.

\textsuperscript{136} I’m partial to Snyder’s work; her book \textit{Pastoral Process} informed much of my thinking about how the pastoral offers a literary idiom for psychoanalytic phenomena in the \textit{The Winter’s Tale}, and some of that thinking is still legible in my previous section on that play. That said, Snyder, a pre-eminent scholar on the pastoral, does not read \textit{All’s Well that Ends Well} as part of that tradition.

\textsuperscript{137} \textit{All’s Well That End’s Well}, ed. Susan Snyder (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) Introduction, 2. All references to the play will be from this edition unless otherwise noted.
The Count, being married against his will, for despite fled to Florence, and loved another. Giletta, his wife, by policy found means to lie with her husband in place of his lover, and was begotten with child of two sons; which known to her husband, he received her again, and afterwards he lived in a great honour and felicity.\textsuperscript{138}

The emerging \textit{bourgeoisie} read the rise of the social to its own advantage, and in so doing, they brought into being a new political form that typifies modernity, which we might call the “policy era.”\textsuperscript{139} They understood that analogies such as the body politic and the little commonwealth were polysemous and multidirectional so that the intrusion of the private into the public occurred alongside an emergence of the public out of the private sphere.

The policy era that I’m describing is one in which the middle-class, through the aspirational logic that Early Modern capitalism fostered, influences government to represent and protect their own private interests, and it is a late expression of the Arendtian rise of the social. Today the social state is protected and maintained through economic policies that make the private \textit{oikos} a matter of political concern and, where it does occur, debate. One of the problems


\textsuperscript{139} Center-right journalist Pete Suderman has referred to the political stagnation in Congress as the surest sign that we’re entering a “post-policy moment.” The achievement or exhaustion of both parties’ political agendas has left them looking rather similar in an Arendtian and Foucaultian light. Both parties have enshrined the rise of the social and a distinctly modern biopolitical arrangement in which Republicans (increasingly Democrats, too) have expanded the surveillance state, crafted economic policies that protect their own private interests, and attempted to control the bodies of women. Democrats, on the other hand, have dilated the welfare state (while Republicans dilate the corporate welfare state) and made the individual’s health a matter of public interest. See Pete Suderman’s “The End of Policy.” Last Updated August 14, 2013, http://reason.com/archives/2013/08/14/the-end-of-policy. Accessed December 18, 2013.
this play frets over is the fragile distinction between private ministration (as in the private, off-
stage treatment of the king’s illness) and public administration. Its vision of divine right kingship
is subtly undermined by the labor of middle-class women, and though there is no parliamentary
option on the horizon of this play, it’s nonetheless haunted by the future of an alternative
political formation that would erupt into the politics of the seventeenth century. Diplomat and
scholar Sir Thomas Smith remarked that the “Absolute King” enjoys most authority in times of
war, but that otherwise the commons must be allowed to express their will:

But as such absolute administration in time of warre when all is in armes, and
when lawes hold their peace because they cannot be heard, is most necessarie: so
in time of peace, the same is verie daungerous, aswell to him that doth use it, and
much more to the people upon whom it is used: whereof the cause is the frailtie of
mans nature, which (as Plato saith) cannot abide or beare long that absolute and
uncontroled authoritie, without swelling into too much pride and insolencie.
And therefore the Romanes did wisely, who woulde not suffer any man to keepe
the Dictatorship above sixe monethes.”

Famously, there is no stated reason for the war to which the French King commits troops. The
closest we get to a raison de guerre is that the young gentry are “sick / For breathing and exploit”
(1.2.16-17). War in All’s Well affirms the traditional values of the gentry while providing the

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140 Thomas Smith, De Republica Anglorum (London: Henrie Midleton for Gregorie Seton, 1583),
http://eebo.chadwyck.com/search/full_rec?SOURCE=var_spell.cfg&ACTION=ByID,ID=9985
2840&ECCO=undefined&FILE=../session/1387399097_28667&HIGHLIGHT_KEYWORD=default.
monarchy with the imperative to rule when both divine right and the body politic analogy is
callenged by the King’s ailing body.

Perhaps it’s hard to suspect an obedient, would-be wife like Helena could pose such a
challenge to sacred sovereignty. After all, she does not aspire to parity with the king, but she
does aspire to a higher station, and to get there she grafts herself, thanks to her ministrations, to
the no-longer private or sacred trunk of the nobility. That the heroine achieves her aspirational
ends “by policy” suggests both an affiliation with the polis (i.e., the king’s court) and a challenge
to it from a middle-class woman who, in Shakespeare’s telling, believes God is on her side when
the King’s divinity cannot save him (in that light, she looks like Joan la Pucelle of the first
tetralogy).

But how does Helena effect the graft and achieve her own agency by pursuing her own
desires? First, she becomes grafted by the Countess (Shakespeare’s brilliant invention, along
with the equally brilliant Paroles), who persuades her to think of her as a mother: “’Tis often
seen / Adoption strives with nature, and choice breeds / A native slip to us from foreign seeds”
(1.3.144-146). Ellerbeck has shown the importance of this moment in setting up feminine agency
throughout the play.¹⁴¹ Then Helena merits the ability to choose her own husband through her
miraculous middle-class vocation and is grafted into the heroic role in a romance. Her private
ministrations are handled off-stage, which has spawned some interesting sexual readings of how
exactly those ministrations might have gone down. By bringing the King into the private realm
of women’s labor, she achieves her own conservative desire to be brought into the private sphere
of marriage. Her hero’s conquest leads her back to maternal labor, if not directly back to the
domicile. In return the King, having been interpolated into the private sphere of feminine labor,

¹⁴¹ Ellerbeck, “Adoption and the Language of Horticulture in All’s Well that Ends Well,” 305-
326.
extends his own influence into the private live of his subjects. The action of the play only reinforces this new and dangerous extension of the King’s powers in the final lines of the play when he offers let Diana choose her own husband (by way of a georgic analogy) “if [she] be’st yet a fresh uncropped flower” (5.3.327).

To describe Helena’s trajectory through the *vita activa*, she charts a course from labor that aspires to action and then back to labor. When she heals the king, she puts the labor of her livelihood to political use, and her reward is an admittedly delayed return to the private sphere in a marriage contract. The Countess and Helena cultivate and propagate the Rossillion family tree by broadening familial relations in the play beyond biological parameters through the graft metaphor. Grafting is the means by which women enact their agency and consent to undertake their own feminine labor. Ultimately the play stages the rise of the social as a sphere for meaningful women’s work with private and political correlates. In controlling her destiny as daughter, wife, and mother, Helena finds in the social a space for the appearance and legibility of women’s labor.

I’ve been suggesting that Shakespearean comedy functions like graft in that it marks the intervention of the social into the realm of politics. The political and the private are ruthlessly grafted together in this play that treats the sexual will of an individual subject as the prerogative of the sovereign, but it also lays out the extent to which the sovereign’s power is dependent upon the labor of an aspiring woman with no title to her name. In reorienting the thematic poles of romance from honor and virtue to descent and consent, Lupton finds the antecedents for the

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142 Ibid., 319.
modern “biopolitical economization of life by the state”\textsuperscript{143} whereby the private concerns of the 
\textit{oikos} become entwined with the public concerns of the \textit{polis}:

Helena has the power to revive the king, but such reanimation also suggests a 
transformation in kingship itself, exposing the monarchy to its mortal dependence 
on middle-class energy and to a form of public housekeeping that will, as one of 
the futures of consent, expand and reorient the domestic projects of the modern 
state. Gone: the Royal Touch. On the horizon: the Office of Public Health.\textsuperscript{144}

The play wavers between a feudal conception of authority and honor, in which descent 
and heroic, martial action determine one’s merit, and a modern or even Machiavellian 
conception in which one’s work in vocational economic labor (that is, strategic “household” 
decisions such as achieving the consent of a social superior in marriage) elevates one’s standing. 
Arendt observes that labor “never ‘produces’ anything but life,”\textsuperscript{145} which is to say that it’s 
incapable of producing a durable world. But in modernity, and especially in Early Modernity, 
labor’s ability to produce a household was increasingly an analogy for producing a state. This 
play also demonstrates the states’s ability to produce a house. Finn Bowring, interpreting 
Arendt’s critique of the worldlessness that accompanied Marx’s privileging of labor over work 
or action, infers that “the willingness of capitalism to destroy this accumulated surplus [of life 
and labor power], to liquidate it in orgies of war and periodic waves of recession, illustrates how

\textsuperscript{143} Lupton, \textit{Thinking with Shakespeare}, 111.
\textsuperscript{144} Ibid., 113.
\textsuperscript{145} Arendt, \textit{The Human Condition}, 88.
worldless is the output of the laborer.” Bertram epitomizes an Early Modern contradiction — he is a young heir who reveres the older traditions of the suzerain that he longs to inherit, but also a minor who chafes against his own subordination under a higher sovereign. His feudal and conservative perspective leads him to pursue the liquidation of his own labor power by seeking honor in a foolish war that merely serves as “a nursery to our gentry” (1.2.16). In his struggle to achieve honor both through his own high birth and mute violence in war, Bertram rejects a communicative model of action in favor of a pre-modern martial code.

Bertram’s conception of honor could use some instruction, but unfortunately the King, who only recently consented to being Helena’s medical and pedagogical subject, is not much of a teacher himself (notoriously, he doesn’t learn from comic paidaeia and re-stages the conditions that nearly produced a tragedy by offering Diana her choice of husband). His own mode of didacticism rests on his authority rather than his successful pedagogy. Unlike Bertram’s epic conception of honor, King’s version of honor is premised not upon deeds but upon speech and humility. When he thinks on honor, he uses georgic imagery to describe the words of Bertram’s as a type of action — as a field for a communicative model of action (i.e., speech) that doesn’t agree with Bertram’s antique notion of action as heroic deeds. The King recalls Bertram’s father as having rhetorical skills that resonated with everyone, including those “who were below him” (1.2.41). “His plausible words / He scattered not in ears,” the King remembers, “but grafted them / To grow there and to bear” (1.2.52-55). Using the propagator’s graft as an analogy for the late Count’s eloquence highlights the extent to which a communicative model of action sutures together actors who occupy disparate social positions in the polis. The Count’s words were not broadcast with the hope that they’d find fertile soil; they were cultivated by means of careful

labor and an advanced horticultural technique that minimizes the risk involved with cultivating a plant from seed. Every word is viable and each word will bear fruit where he grafted it. Bertram’s father seems to have understood action to be a plurality of individuals revealing and disclosing themselves through testimony, whereas Bertram seems to understand it as the individual pursuit of glory in the Homeric tradition.

The King is particularly offended that Bertram’s conception of honor is only available to those born into the nobility. In his poor attempt to educate his ward, the King defends Helena as an appropriate mate because

She is young, wise, fair;
In these to nature she's immediate heir,
And these breed honour: that is honour's scorn,
Which challenges itself as honour's born
And is not like the sire: honours thrive,
When rather from our acts we them derive
Than our foregoers: the mere word's a slave
Debosh'd on every tomb, on every grave
A lying trophy, and as oft is dumb
Where dust and damn'd oblivion is the tomb
Of honour'd bones indeed. (2.3.138-148)

Where the late Count “bowed his eminent top to [the] low ranks” (1.2.43), his heir fails to deliver upon the King’s wish Bertram “inherit” his “father’s moral parts” (1.2.21-22) in scorning to wed
someone whose honor was made rather than born. This vision of honor is “dumb” because it has nothing to do with action (as both great deeds and effective speech). The play’s obsession with breeding becomes a locus for questions about repairing (1.2.30-31), re-père-ing, and fathering, namely in the question of whether he creates his own honor or inherits it from a dead father — be he a king, count, physician, or God. Of course, the King’s ironic appraisal of honor as a category that transcends genealogies undermines his own divine right, to which I’ll return in this chapter.

In his struggle to achieve honor both through his own high birth and mute violence in war, Bertram offers us the opportunity to tease out Arendt’s critique of Marx through his troubled relationship with labor and surplus labor-power. Bertram is a figure for thinking through the silences and aporia that have quietly shifted the modern world view from that of Aristotle who “still knew that men, as long as they talk with each other and act together in the modus of speech, are free”\(^{147}\) to that of Marx who inherited the western philosophical tradition’s basic mistrust of speech. Arendt’s critique of Marx is founded on his reduction of action to making, his elevation of labor to the highest good in the vita activa, and his severing of the ancient connection between action and speech:

> According to Marx, it is not only praxis per se that shows more truth than speech, but the one kind of praxis that has severed all bonds with speech. For violence, in distinction to all other kinds of human action, is mute by definition. Speech on the other hand is not only deemed to partake less of truth than action, but is now

\(^{147}\) Hannah Arendt, “Karl Marx and the Tradition of Western Political Thought,” *Social Research* 69.2 (2002), 298.
conceived to be mere ‘ideological’ talk whose chief function is to conceal the truth.\textsuperscript{148}

Violence is at once uniquely modern and helplessly pre-modern. It typifies the masculinist vision of epic as a story about war and brave deeds while at the same time it is held to be not only an acceptable form of action in the modern worldview, but action that is to be preferred over the democratic virtue of speech. This is the worldview of Bertram: he sees violence as both a link to the past and an older conception of honor, as well as a modern form of serving the state.\textsuperscript{149}

Bertram has a speech problem, and it is allegorized in his perfidious friend Paroles, who may have dictated the awful riddle that Bertram fails to deliver orally in the presence of its addressee. Bertram is uninterested in rhetoric and communicating with others, especially those below him. The idea of disclosing and revealing himself in authentic speech is rather unpalatable to him and instead he aims to prove himself on the field of battle in an egoistical, silent, and hypermasculinist vein. Though Bertram affirms the honor that memory guarantees through speaking agents when he tells the King that his father’s epitaph lives “in your royal speech” (a scene that features Bertram making minimal contributions to his own father’s memory), his louder silence reveals these pleasantries to be merely lip service. The King, realizing the values of the world have changed, longs to join his old friend. He borrows a trope from the fourth georgic that sees sacral sovereignty as a service to the commonwealth of bees:

\textsuperscript{148} Ibid., 291.

\textsuperscript{149} Meckler’s 2013 production suggested the imbrication of state military violence and mute sexual violence (recall that Bertram is told not to speak to his bed partner) in an added scene that staged the near rape of Diana and the other women who gather around the Widow Capilet’s inn. The soldiers are only prevented by shot fired by the Widow from the domestic and economic space of her terrarium-like business (see Fig. 2).
I, after him, do after him wish too,
Since I nor wax nor honey can bring home,
I quickly were dissolved from my hive
To give some labourer’s room. (1.2.65-67)

The King’s conception of sovereignty is one in which everyone works for and speaks on behalf of the good of the whole, rather than Bertram’s conception, in which honor is amassed by isolated individuals in silent competition with others.

Helena’s ministrations and her negotiation with the King dramatize the conflict between divine rule and secular human merit. The scene correlates the “inspired merit” (2.1.146) of her vocation with that of the King, who despite his divine right is unable to perform the rites of his own healing. Following Lupton, I would argue that the King withholds consenting to Helena’s treatment in part because of the political problem Helena’s bourgeois success would pose to the idea of sacred kingship. But in linking her “labouring art” (2.1.116) with the “help of heaven” (2.1.150), Helena also identifies herself as the Weberian Protestant subject who demonstrates Christian obedience through work in a trade. That all work — for Milton, even “stand[ing] and waiting[ing]” (14) — signifies in a theological register poses something of a threat to the sacramental politics on which monopolial government was premised. The language she uses to describe the remedies and receipts her father bequeath to her suggests that her middle-class

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medical training threatens the old feudal hierarchies that are authorized by sacred kingship.\textsuperscript{151}

The prescriptions were collected not just to revive kings, but “for general sovereignty” (1.3.224).

Though Helena is deferential to her mortal father, her Heavenly Father seems to have an invisible hand in her own successful medical practice:

\begin{quote}
There’s something in’t

More than my father’s skill, which was the great’st

Of his profession, that his good receipt

Shall for my legacy be sanctified

By th’luckiest stars in heaven. (1.3.242-246)
\end{quote}

Her faith approaches something like the consumer confidence index, as her language toggles between the sacramental and economic registers. She’s so confident in her practice that she would “venture” her own life to “try success” (247).

The play’s heroine figures the emergence of a Protestant, bourgeois attitude toward work, one in which enterprise rather than inheritance signifies merit. Helena, as many have pointed out, is both radical in the sense that she is a subversive character who, through her help, threatens the very status quo she saves, but also radical in the sense that at root, her motives are conservative. In a negotiation that reveals the King and thus the state’s dependence on the “laboring art” of women, she never overreaches in an attempt to secure her own position among the elite. Rather than “choose from the forth the royal blood of France, [her] low and humble name to propagate /

\textsuperscript{151} As a medical worker who understands the medicinal properties of plants, Helena Helena owes something to Friar Lawrence in \textit{Romeo and Juliet}, who is figured as a georgic gardener, a busy match-maker, and a divine hand who understands the “virtues excellent” and “the powerful grace” that lie “in herbs, plants, stones,” (2.3.14-17).
With any branch of image of thy state” she chooses someone who is not at the height of the political hierarchy, but who is nonetheless above her current station. The georgic analogy highlights the extent to which familial bonds are politicized, and exempts her character from becoming an outright Machiavel who makes a shrewd power-play to elevate herself into the upper echelons of court. Helena’s ambitions are purely bourgeois; she wants a better life than she has, but she doesn’t need to marry a prince. The grafting of a non-biological daughter into a nobleman’s family problematizes while affirming Arendt’s notion of “unnatural nature” in much the same way the gillivor debate (and its analogue for the marriage of Bohemia and Sicilia) did in the Winter’s Tale. In both plays, it is the work of women that affix these grafts.\textsuperscript{152} The play stages alternative modes of family formation through an organic metaphor, but those same metaphors extend monarchial power into the private lives of the King’s subjects. Outraged at Bertram’s disdain, he reminds him that as Bertram’s guardian, “It is in us to plant thine honour where / We please to have it grow” (2.3. 163-164). The extension of familial formations into the realm of the state, and the powers of the state into the realm of familial formation reveal this play to be a document that haunts the transition from feudal conceptions of power to the modern nation state. The vita activa was under immense pressure from those changes, and the organic metaphors that adhere to political and economic discourses during this period show a culture that is coming to terms with the rise of the social and the collapse of labor and action. Georgic metaphors do more than merely “naturalize” power structures; they also reveal the extent to which they are cultural constructed — that is to say, the extent to which we determine through active cultivation and intervention. These changes were perceived as a middle space, like the

\textsuperscript{152} For more on how The Winter’s Tale stages women’s work in proximity to nature, see Jennifer Munroe, “It’s All About the Gillyvors: Engendering Art and Nature in The Winter’s Tale,” 139-154.
agricultural landscape that stands between nature and culture and the georgic mode that stands between pastoral and epic. That the georgic mode often appears in these discourses suggests that the culture was coming to terms with changes that were not quite natural and not quite cultural. As Arendt has shown, this double vision of history as a nature-plus event — something that is made by humans and is also a natural process — is the distinctive inheritance of the modernity, and that double vision can be traced to the literary culture of Early Modernity.
II. WORK

The Work of Art in the Age of Sprezzatura:
“Labouring for Invention” in the Fair Youth Sonnets

The very first time Shakespeare’s work appeared in print his name was not attached to a play; it was attached to a poem. The dedicatory epistle to that poem, *Venus and Adonis* (1593), shares with the sonnets some features that this chapter will explore — notably the fusion of composition and reproduction using a georgic vocabulary. Shakespeare writes that he fears the world’s derision for “choosing so strong a prop to support so weak a burden” which at once registers as the agricultural practice of staking and trellising, while pointing to the reproductive aspects of writing. Composition-as-reproduction is a trope that structures the dedication, as he announces his intention to write a “graver labour” (*Lucrece*, presumably) after “the first heir” of his invention. “Graver” works in multiple registers. It suggests that a more serious endeavor is on the way — perhaps *The Rape of Lucrece*, which certainly tackles serious matter such as rape, nation-formation, and death (graves) in the tragic mode. “Graver” also suggests the labor of writing (engraving).

As I’ll show in my analysis of sonnet 15, engraving also suggests the horticultural technique of grafting. Engraving and engrafting are mutually entwined terms that point to two

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153 *Venus and Adonis* went through ten editions in Shakespeare’s life, and six more before 1636, making it the most popular of Shakespeare’s publications in the Early Modern period. It was also the first Shakespeare publication to be sold outside of London. See Lukas Erne, *Shakespeare and the Book Trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 12-13.


155 Ibid.
ways of memorializing: through the work of writing poetry and through the georgic labor of propagation. Shakespeare thematizes the graft in a self-reflexive usage that performs its function by engrafting the labor of propagation and the work of poetry in a single georgic term. But the georgic implications of “graver” go beyond the usage we’ll see in sonnet 15. Colin Burrow reads “graver” as a nod to the Virgilian career path from pastoral to epic, given that Spenser translates the pseudo-Virgilian Virgil’s Gnat (1591) “posterius grauiore sono tibi musa loquetur / Nostra, dabunt cum securos mihi tempora fructus, / Ut tibi digna tuo poliantur carmina sensu” as “Hereafter, when as season more secure / Shall bring forth fruit, this muse shall speak to thee / In bigger notes, that may thy sense allure.” If Shakespeare has Spenser’s Virgilian usage of graver/grauiore mind, he is invoking the underlining middle step in that career path — the often overlooked georgic step. Spenser’s translation is already georgic with it’s reference to the seasons and fruiting, but Shakespeare throws into relief those georgic elements with an agricultural take on the modesty topos when he promises to “never after ear so barren a land, for fear it yield me still so bad a harvest” if Venus and Adonis (switching back to the human reproductive register) is a “deformed” child of “so noble a godfather.”

I’m opening my chapter on the sonnets by reading the dedicatory epistle from Venus and Adonis because it provides a suggestive context for understanding Shakespeare’s idea of his own literary activity at the beginning of his career and it does so in georgic terms that we will encounter in the sonnets. The dedicatory epistle indicates that, from at least the early 1590s onward, Shakespeare considered a career not just as a playwright in the public theaters, but also as a laureate poet in the patron system. Recent scholarship has cast doubt on the old critical

156 Ibid., 173. n. 12.
157 Ibid., 174.
commonplace that the sonnets were written when the theaters were closed in 1592-1593 due to plague, though some of the sonnets very well may have been written during this period (the same period during which he was writing the narrative poems). It’s more likely that he probably continued to write and revise sonnets beyond the early 1590s and throughout the rest of his career. Katherine Duncan-Jones suggests in her edition of the sonnets that there were “four probably phases of composition: before 1598, 1599-1600, 1603-1604, and August 1608-May 1609.” Elsewhere she suggests that “writing, revising, and re-ordering sonnets was probably a regular activity throughout his adult life.”

Perhaps more than anyone else, Patrick Cheney has shown that Shakespeare’s idea of authorship was that of the poet-playwright, and Shakespeare probably wrote in both forms throughout his active writing career. Cheney is surely right that “the Sonnets’ new history of authorship and authorial character publicizes a cultural clash between printed poetry and the

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161 Lukas Erne has argued along similar lines, but choosing to focus instead on how Shakespeare desired a literary-dramatic career by being a successful playwright in print. This is essentially the premise of his earlier book, according to which Shakespeare was a “privileged playwright” who “could afford to write plays for the stage and the page. See *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 45. *Shakespeare and the Book Trade* overturns the critical commonplace that Shakespeare only enjoyed occasional print success during his own lifetime, claiming that he achieved bibliographic success in his own lifetime.
even newer, more socially compromising medium of staged theater.”

But where Cheney is prone to valorizing the dual modes that Shakespeare worked in — often characterizing him as the confident, literary trailblazer boldly carving out innovative niches (with frequent emphasis on “the new” — as when he describes Shakespeare as “a new type of European author” who writes a “new history of authorship”), I tend to see the sonnets as extremely ambivalent about what in hindsight seems like a tremendous opportunity. I believe the story the sonnets tell — if indeed they tell a story at all — is one of personal conflict and indecision between two potential career paths, rather than the triumphant merging of poet and playwright. As for the story of the sonnets: I am not going to argue that there is a linear narrative, but I’m also not going to go as far as Heather Dubrow in insisting that the sonnets are merely “internalized meditations unconnected to a narrative line.” I’m with Katherine Duncan-Jones who believes that the 1609 edition is likely the order that Shakespeare intended and that there is a general arc with distinct micro-narratives and episodes that are available.

The sonnets weigh two very different career options: The first was throwing his lot in with a growing labor society by “making a living” as a professional playwright producing short-lived entertainments for the public stage. Arendt describes “making a living” as the upshot of the rise of the social and the hallmark of the labor society. She sees a “trend to level down all serious activities to the status of making a living in present-day labor theories, which almost

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163 Cheney, *Shakespeare, National Poet-Playwright*, 211.

unanimously define labor as the opposite of play.”\textsuperscript{165} The second would have elevated him from a laborer — in the idiom of Sonnet 111, a laborer with “dyer’s hands” (7) stained by working in the “public” (4) playhouse — to an artist, or “the only ‘worker’ left in a laboring society,” according to Arendt.\textsuperscript{166} So he could continue to pursue a promising, if middle-class, career as a businessman in the Early Modern theater, or reach for the possibility of laureate status as a patronized poet among the courtly elite. As Richard Helgerson and many others have shown, writing plays was not yet considered a prestigious literary activity in the way that writing sonnets was after the publication of Sir Philip Sidney’s \textit{Astrophil and Stella}. Sonneteers tended to be either amateur poets of means (Sidney) or laureate poets (Spenser); Professional dramatists often wrote poetry, but rarely wrote sonnets sequences, and were generally not thought of as authors (at least not until Jonson elevates his “plays” to “works” the year that Shakespeare died).\textsuperscript{167} The speaker of the sonnets continually encounters two very different literary careers in two very different literary economies, with two very different class associations.\textsuperscript{168}

In the previous chapter I argued for a redemptive reading of the rise of the social in Shakespeare’s georgic comedies. That reading valorizes the labor of women and sees their reproductive and reparative work in the household as a kind of action in the political imagination of the Tudor-Stuart commonwealth. In the very different literary context of writing poetry for a patron instead of plays for the public stage, Shakespeare appears to turn away from the feminizing labor of the \textit{oikos} and embrace the economics of patron-client work between men —

\textsuperscript{165} Arendt, \textit{The Human Condition}, 127.

\textsuperscript{166} Ibid., and William Shakespeare, “Sonnet 111,” in \textit{The Complete Sonnets and Poems}. Ed. Colin Burrow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 173. All references to the Sonnets will be from that edition unless otherwise noted, with line-numbers noted parenthetically.

\textsuperscript{167} Cheney, \textit{Shakespeare, National Poet-Playwright}, 207.
that is to say, Shakespeare turns from a laborer to a worker \((homo faber)\) whose work is both durable and exchangeable in the \(agora\), or marketplace. According to Arendt, the “exchange market” is “where [the worker/homo faber] can show the products of his hand and receive the esteem which is due him.”\(^{169}\) Shakespeare entered that exchange market on June 12, 1593 when Richard Stonley purchased \textit{Venus and Adonis} (making him the first known purchaser of Shakespeare in print); and the “esteem” due to Shakespeare was sixpence, though that esteem has certainly appreciated over the centuries.\(^{170}\)

In the Fair Youth subsequence, the georgic mode mediates the relationship between heterosexual reproductive labor and homosocial poetic work. I’d like to suggest that the homoerotics and economics of the poet-patron relationship account for the speaker privileging poetic work over reproductive labor.\(^{171}\) The georgic mode reveals the imbrication of economic, erotic and literary codes, and their influence on the value of work in a particular Elizabethan moment.\(^{172}\) This chapter argues that the speaker of the sonnets uses the georgic mode to explore

\(^{169}\) Arendt. \textit{The Human Condition}, 160.


\(^{171}\) Patrick Cheney’s work has been immensely helpful for me, but in this minor claim regarding the homoerotics of patronage, I’m arguing the opposite of what he claims in \textit{Shakespeare, National Poet-Playwright} — that “Shakespeare, we might say, countered the large-scale European convention of Petrancharism, through which a male poet addressed a sonnet sequence to a female beloved, \textit{because he was a man of the theatre} […] In his Sonnets, Shakespeare can be seen to transpose the homoerotic gender paradigm from the theatre to the Petrarchan sequence. He is a man of the theatre writing sonnets, and he capitalizes on his unique position in the literary system to present Will precisely as the theatrical man turning his dramatic hand to non-dramatic poetry” (213). I believe, rather, that the sonnet tradition uniquely authorizes an amorous idiom for discussing patronage, and in Shakespeare the Poet’s hand writing to a male patron, that tradition leads to a sequence that explicitly engages with homosexual desire without the screen of cross-dressing and mistaken identity that usually attends it in the plays.

\(^{172}\) I will not hazard any guesses as to the composition and sequencing of the sonnets. The argument that follows is based on the received ordering of the sonnets in the 1609 quarto.
the kind of immortalizing work that sonnets perform in the age of society. The speaker interrogates the work of art by examining the durability, use value, and exchange value of sonnets. In his attempt to elevate the sonnets to georgic work, he has to negotiate sonnet’s position relative to other kinds of work in the vita activa, namely the genealogical labor of the reproduction and the labor of making a living writing ephemeral plays for the public stage. In meditating on the value, purpose, and longevity of poetry, Shakespeare’s speaker attempts to come to terms with what makes poetic work different from other kinds of activity. These sonnets struggle to define what it means to undertake poetic work in a time when the vita activa was radically re-defined in the context of emergent capitalism and the new marketplace for literature — both the vendible artifact we call the printed text, as well as the fleeting experience of theatrical performances. If, as Colin Burrow as argued, the sonnets were “designed to operate more or less exactly on the borderline between the published and the privately concealed,” these are then a key text for understanding how the literary profession changed as the private sphere invaded the public during the rise of the social.  

In the process of presenting the options to the fair youth — namely fragile immortality through human reproduction or through the durable work of poetry — the speaker finds himself articulating two options for his own immortality as an author: through “public means” (Sonnet 111) as a laboring playwright or through writing “immortal lines” (Sonnet 18) as a working poet. But the sequence as a whole bears out a much more complex dilemma, and one that ultimately is not solved. The necessity of economics weighs heavily for both the author and the addressee:

follow Stephen Booth (Shakespeare’s Sonnets, ed. Stephen Booth, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977, xi) and Burrow (The Complete Sonnets and Poems, 103-111) in choosing to work with the best approximation of what a Renaissance reader’s experience of the quarto might have been without delving too far into reader response and affect theory.

The Fair Youth must “repair” his father’s home — the *oikos* by becoming a father himself (or *père* in Sonnet 10’s French pun), while the author must decide between surviving as a playwright, or gaining status by becoming an artist and poet to the aristocracy. The speaker tries to distinguish his poetry as work, differentiating it from the labor of “making a living” on the public stage and the private, genealogical labor of the household. He does so to carve out a durable memorial for the youth, but more importantly to value his own activity as work above the ephemeral and endless labor of both biological reproduction and the labor of making a living in professional theater production.

*Sprezzatura* and Work

There are many things that are unique to Shakespeare’s sequence. Along with their bold homoeroticism and their anti-petrarchanism, I’d add the fact that they advertise themselves as work. The fair youth sequence in particular worries over its status as work, and how relationships are altered by the economics implicit in patronage transactions. Taken as a whole, the these sonnets document the problems of work in a literary marketplace, but the fact that these sonnets are even conscious of themselves as work is remarkable in its own right. Certainly there are examples — Ben Jonson comes to mind later in the Jacobean period — of poets who draw attention to their poetry as work or labor, but by and large, and especially under Elizabeth, *sprezzatura* governed the visibility of the poet’s work. Sidney’s *Astrophil and Stella* was a landmark not only because it marked the elevation of the sonnet in terms of the hierarchies of genres (in effect, authorizing poets to use the mode to articulate their own courtly or literary
ambitions), but also because it’s the quintessential example of English *sprezzatura*. The poet-lover that became the model for all ambitious poets under Elizabeth was just such an enemy to work, and Sidney’s muse performs *sprezzatura* by abjuring labor in opening sonnet of the sequence: “Thus great with child to speak, and helpless in my throes, / Biting my truant pen, beating myself for spite, / 'Fool,' said my muse to me; 'look in thy heart, and write’” (1.12-14).

Again, poetry is both likened to and pitted against reproductive labor. The speaker in Shakespeare’s sequence, however, is hardly a rake-like poet-lover hoping to seize the day with his mistress; he moves through a variety of positions that either advocate for labor — explicitly in the procreation sequence, when he takes the opposite stance of Astrophil by advocating for genealogical reproductive labor — or by assuming a position that highlights his own poetic activity as work with an ambiguous exchange value.

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174 Arthur Marotti, “‘Love is Not Love’: Elizabethan Sonnet Sequences and the Social Order,” *English Literary History* 49, 396-428. Marotti includes didactic in a list of modes that sonnets deployed in the years between the publication of Tottel’s *Miscellany* (1557) and the publication of Sidney’s *Astrophil and Stella* (1591). The sonnet did not gain prestige as a literary form, or as a form for the ambitious, until after the publication of *Astrophil and Stella*.

175 The fusion of human reproduction and poetic production, it should be said, is everywhere in the culture. Critics on Sidney’s parthenogenetic claims (Glimp 39) for his poetry include S.K. Henninger Jr., *Touches of Sweet Harmony: Pythagorean Cosmology and Renaissance Poetics* (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1974), 287-288; D.H. Craig, “A Hybrid Growth: Sidney’s Theory of Poetry in An Apology for Poetry,” *Essential Articles for the Study of Sir Philip Sidney*, ed. Arthur F. Kinney (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1986), 113-134; and in the same volume, John C. Ulreich Jr. “‘The Poets Only Deliver’: Sidney’s Conception of *Mimesis*,” 135-154. E.N. Tigerstedt, “The Poet as Creator: Origins of a Metaphor,” *Comparative Literature Studies* 5.4 (1968): 455-488; and David Glimp, who reads the *Defence* as “an effort to call poets to a sense of reproductive responsibility” (*Increase and Multiply: Governing Cultural Reproduction in Early Modern England* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003], 39). Shakespeare differs from Sidney who, as Glimp writes, insists “on both the obligation of true poets to engage in generative activity” and reinforces “the perception of poets’ vital national importance because of their capacity for the governed cultural reproduction of men for the polity” (40). Shakespeare brief reproductive claim for poetry in the early sonnets entertain no hope for polity; given the speaker’s interest in preserving beauty (he is not, after all, the humanist Erasmus concerned about the commonweal), he is not at all interested in what reproduction means for the polity — only what it means for art.

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The contradictions implicit in *sprezzatura* suggest that poetic production had an unstable place in the imagination of the time. This ambivalence extends not just to the value of work, but to whether poetic labor counts as work at all. Understanding *sprezzatura* goes a long way towards understanding the context in which Shakespeare weighed a laureate career producing poetry under the patronage system or a professional career in playwriting for the public stage. Even in *sprezzatura*’s first articulation, the paradoxical nature of the affect is clear. Baldesar Castiglione describes how a man at court ought to conceal the labor of his invention, but the advice is contradictory at best. It is worth quoting because the affect Castiglione prescribes aims at tempering affectation itself:

> Steer away from affectation at all costs as if it were a rough and dangerous reef and (to use perhaps a novel word for it) to practise in all things a certain nonchalance [*sprezzatura*] which conceals all artistry and makes whatever one says or does seem unconstrived and effortless [...] To labour at what one is doing and, as we say, to makes bones over it, shows an extreme lack of grace and causes everything, whatever its worth, to be discounted.¹⁷⁶

This prescription becomes the arch-dictum for English courtiers as well as for poets in the sixteenth century and it’s often where discussions about the intersection of poetry and work end. That’s a disappointing critical history, given the provocative contradictions inherent in its very purpose. The *sprezzatura* model left poets with an equivocal bequest that made evaluating their labor (and beginning to think about being compensated for it) a difficult proposition in the

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courtly milieu. For Shakespeare, seeking a patron and becoming a poet posed an interesting but incomplete alternative to a professional career as a public playwright — interesting in that it opened up the possibility of a laureate career and an aristocratic reputation as a writer of important, if not immortal, poetry; and incomplete in that, for a middle-class writer with no university education, it wasn’t even legible as work, let alone a livelihood. *Sprezzatura* was a contradiction for poets: necessity forced them to seek compensation for their work but they had to pretend that it’s not work at all. Meanwhile, nobility that would have been patrons of the arts just a few generations ago were increasingly bankrupt in a changing economy that saw competition from a rising merchant class. Indeed, Shakespeare’s own patron, the Earl of Southampton, gained a reputation for being bankrupt, which made a career as his poet-retainer a proposition that was doubtful at best.

Shakespeare’s speaker aligns the fair youth with a certain kind of narcissism that Castiglione finds in courtiers whose *sprezzatura* is excessive. Castiglione begins with a qualification and warning that, though aimed at avoiding affectation, *sprezzatura* “is in fact affectation, since [a courtier] evidently goes to great pains to show that he is not thinking about what he is doing.” ¹⁷⁷ Some courtiers take it too far and, in “carrying a mirror in the fold of one’s cap,” they display a “kind of self-regard and nonchalance [*sprezzatura*] that goes too much to extremes, which is always a fault and the opposite of the pure and agreeable simplicity which appeals to everyone.” ¹⁷⁸ The speaker of the sonnets accuses the fair youth of being too interested in what he sees in his “glass” (3.1), much like Castiglione’s courtier with his glass in his cap. The fair youth’s crime is, like the speaker’s later in the sequence, the “sin of self love” (62.1).

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.
¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 68.
The youth is “contracted to [his] own bright eyes” (1.5) and “traffic[s] with [himself] alone” (4.9) — and it is this kind of narcissism and onanism that the speaker both appeals to and attempts to correct by directing him to “Look in [his] glass and tell the face [he] view[s] / Now is the time that face should form another” (3.1-2). The speaker takes it on himself to correct the onanism he finds in the mirror-carrying youth, and to instruct him using explicitly georgic terms to pursue more (re)productive ends. In this way, the fair youth owes something to Spenser’s Marinell in the Faerie Queene who displays, as James Nohrnberg has shown, an “avarice of seed” that borders on onanism.179

In the subsequence, poet-speaker enjoins a kind of anti-sprezzatura. Indeed, the opening movement of the sonnets, Shakespeare’s speaker essentially asks the fair youth to get to work, to “form another” (3.2), to “make thee another self” (10.13), and to start tilling (3.6). I won’t be speculating on the identity of the fair youth or Mr. W.H., and I certainly won’t go so far as to hazard that he is a young courtier, but I side with many in taking him to be of a higher social rank than the poet-speaker, and a potential patron. The instruction the speaker imparts is similar to what Castiglione urges to those who take sprezzatura too far. The young gentlemen needs to engage in the same kind of “gentle work” that “frame[d]” (5.1) his own entry into the world in order to fulfill his dynastic duty. Far from urging the youth to conceal his labor, he asks him to participate in it.

In addition to urging a kind of anti-sprezzatura, the speaker also practices it in these sonnets. Rather than hiding his work he shines a light on it. In 16, 17, and 18 he identifies himself as a poet, and this meta-moment highlights the work that is implicit in the production of

poetry. He also figures himself as a poet-farmer, working to “engraft” (15.14) the fair youth to immortality and to train him to grow to his “eternal lines” (18.12) as the Virgilian speaker teaches readers how to “train the vine” (1.2, 2.360).

Critics have staked out *sprezzatura* as an easy pronouncement on a complicated and shifting social practice. Perhaps the most thorough and provocative reading is supplied by Stephen Greenblatt in *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, who also cites Keith Thomas on the subject. Greenblatt considers *sprezzatura* as a kind of self-fashioning, which (as typifies the dialectical nature of Greenblatt’s work) also proposes an opposite kind of self-fashioning. The counter to *sprezzatura* is on display in Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*, which is deeply sceptical of the work-concealing aesthetic. In reference to Archimago and Duessa,

Their evil depends upon the ability to mask and forge to conceal their satanic artistry; their defeat depends upon the power to unmask, the strength to turn from magic to strenuous virtue. Keith Thomas notes that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the Protestant ‘emphasis upon the virtues of hard work and application…both reflected and helped to create a frame of mind which spurned the cheap solutions offered by magic, not just because they were wicket, but because they were too easy.’180 *Sprezzatura*, which sets out to efface all signs of ‘hard work and application,’ is a cult of the ‘too easy,’ a kind of aesthetic magic.181

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And though he doesn’t flag Spenser’s explicit use of Virgilian georgic in the proems and other georgic framing devices (as I will in Chapter 3), he does find in the *Faerie Queene* a text that “announces its status as art object at every turn.”182 I side with Greenblatt and Thomas in thinking that *sprezzatura* is actually a much more polyvalent and ambivalent concept in the period than tends to be acknowledged in the criticism. The affect is at best dialectic of work and leisure, and at worst contradictory in its dual ends of affecting naturalism while also seeking to curb affect. *Sprezzatura* is a relic of the cultural transition that would eventually draw a hard line between work and play, which Arendt reads as modernity’s version of the dialectical exchange between necessity and freedom. During the rise of the social, when Early Moderns were becoming a society of laborers and wage-earners, the *Sprezzatura* affect appealed to a class-inflected mentality of freedom-from-necessity while at the same time it was used in the newly fluid social structure as a tool of “making a living” at court. Form and content are also at odds in Castiglione’s very description of *sprezzatura*. Castiglione suggests that labor devalues the work or causes it, “whatever its worth, to be discounted,” but his apian analogy for how one ought to make work and art seem natural in fact highlights the work involved due to the georgic baggage of bee allusions: “Just as in the summer fields the bees wing their way among the plants from one flower to the next, so the courtier must acquire this grace from those who appear to possess it and take from each one the quality that seems most commendable.”183 The deep source is Virgil’s fourth georgic, and it remains the most widely translated passage in the poem. However

182 Ibid., 190.

in the Italian, the more immediate Horacian source becomes clearer: 184 “E come la pecchia ne’verdi prati sempre tra l’erbe va carpendo i fiori” echoes Horace:

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{Ego apis Matinae} \\
&\text{More modoque} \\
&\text{Grata carpentis thyma per laborem} \\
&\text{Plurimum circa nemus uvidique} \\
&\text{Tiburis ripas, oporosa parvus} \\
&\text{Carmina fingo. (Book IV.2. IV.2.25-30)}
\end{align*}
\]

[While I create my verses, in the manner of a humble Matinian bee, that goes gathering pollen from all the pleasant thyme, and labours among the many groves, on the banks of flowing Tiber.] 185

The Horacian and the Virgilian sources of Castiglione’s example point out the labor involved in both courtly sprezzatura and poetic production. The task may be “pleasant,” but the labor is explicit in this model of poetic production. In the Renaissance bees had become synonymous with the fourth georgic, and Castiglione’s use of the busy, industrious bee in his description of sprezzatura suggests an ambivalence at the very source of the affect. On one hand, it’s a style

184 I would not have been able to see this had I not consulted Vittorio Cian’s edition, Il Cortegiano (G.C. Sansoni: Florence, 1894), 54, n. 7.

that abjures labor, but on the other, pulling off the affectation involves the kind of work that had become associated with Virgil’s georgic bees.

Renaissance texts that deal exclusively with poetic production are likewise more ambivalent on the labor of art than critics tend to allow, and by neglecting this complication, we miss the context in which poets understood their work. In *The Art of English Poesie* George Puttenham has difficulty locating poetry in a strictly contemplative life. The work of poetry — both the labor of composition and the political valences it encodes in the courtly context — always threatens to reveal its alliance with the active life, which the courtier (always an abjurer of labor) seeks to avoid. Just as Castiglione falls into a georgic mode that discloses work in the very act of dissuading the courtier from revealing it, Puttenham also finds in agricultural labor an analogue for the poet’s work:

As the good gardener seasons his soil by sundry sorts of compost, as muck or marl, clay or sand, and many times by blood, or lees of oil or wine, or stale, or perchance with more costly drugs; and waters his plants and weeds his herbs and flowers, and prunes his branches, and unleaves his boughs to let in the sun; and twenty other ways cherisheth them, and cureth their infirmities, and so makes that never, or very seldom, any of them miscarry, but bring forth their flowers and fruits in season. And in both these cases it is no small praise for the physician and gardener to be called good and cunning artificers. (3.25.382-383)

The weight of the verbs confirms the laborious task of the poet, and the analogy between the gardener and the dissembling work of the poet inadvertently highlights the degree of work
required. Shakespeare’s speaker seizes upon the same georgic analogy as both an analogue for and alternative to reproduction toward the end of the procreation sonnets. Puttenham is following in the wake of Sidney, who also uses a horticultural vocabulary to describe the “flowers of poetry” and poetry’s georgic ability to “grow in effect into another nature, in making things either better than nature bringeth forth, or quite anew, forms such as never were in nature.”

Like Sidney, art to Puttenham is an “aid and coadjutor to nature” as the gardener by his art will not only make an herb, or flower, or fruit come forth in his season without impediment, but also will embellish the same in virtue, shape, ordor, and taste, that nature of herself would never have done, as to make the single gillyflower, or marigold, or daisy, double, and the white rose, red, yellow, or carnation; a bitter melon, sweet; a sweet apple, sour; a plum or cherry without a stone; a pear without a core or kernel; a gourd or cucumber like to a horn or any other figure he will — any of which things nature could not do without man’s help and art. (3.25.383)

Puttenham’s catalogue (itself a georgic trope from Virgil’s catalogue of trees in the second georgic), could have been taken out of the Georgics or from any number of the agricultural handbooks that were popular in the period. The poet’s innovation betters nature and produces wonders never seen in nature’s brazen world. Again, the poet’s work isn’t obfuscated by the georgic mode of Puttenham’s elaboration; to the contrary, the georgic mode highlights the work involved in poetic production. Catalogues such as these suggest abundance, an agricultural idea

that the speaker of the sonnets takes advantage of. The confusion between *copia* and copy that we find in Sonnet 11 points to the two options for immortality: the abundance of reproduction and of literary art.\(^{187}\)

It’s striking that Shakespeare’s sonnets worry so self-consciously over their status as work given that *sprezzatura* was the governing aesthetic of lyric poetry in this period. *Sprezzatura* aligned most poetry (including Sir Philip Sidney’s sonnet sequence) with a sort of anti-georgic ethos, in which the poet had to hide his work to make his invention seem natural, artless, laborless, and inborn. What accounts for the poet-speaker’s decision to go against the precepts that governed the work of poets and courtiers? *Sprezzatura*, especially the post-Reformation incarnation of the idea in England, ultimately enables social mobility at court by allowing the self-fashioned poet to affect aristocratic privilege. Puttenham in a section entitled “That the good poet or maker ought to dissemble his art,” writes,

> now lately become a courtier, [the poet] show not himself a craftsman, and merit to be disgraced, and with scorn sent back again to the shop or other place of his first faculty and calling, but that so wisely and discreetly he behave himself as he may worthily retain the credit of his place and profession of a very courtier, which is, in plain terms cunningly to be able to dissemble. (3.25.378-379)

The visibility of the poet’s work “disgrade[s]” the poet-courtier, so he must hide his labor and make it seem inbred, rather than a product of education, training, or the “shop.” Class aspiration

underlies the intention of the affect. The poet’s dissembling could gain him a foothold in the favor of the nobility in a society that was transitioning from the old feudal order to a capitalist system based on wage-labor and the promise of education. In Arendtian terms, the poet’s work—a lasting literary object that survives its production and consumption—is on par with the work of the craftsman, who uses tools to build enduring objects. The problem for Puttenham, and for all poets who sought to take advantage of the newly fluid social strata after the shakeup of the Reformation, is to distinguish their work above the work of craftsman, especially if they were to appeal to and profit from aristocratic circles. The solution appears to be the wholesale removal of poetry from the *vita activa* such that it becomes a purely contemplative, playful endeavor.

The dialectics of active and contemplative, of laboring and idling, and work and play operate in Puttenham’s how-to book, revealing his own ambivalence regarding the work of poetry. He admits that, like the overly affected and narcissistic courtier in Castiglione or the fair youth in the procreation sonnets, too much dissimulation can be a bad thing.

Leaving these manner of dissimulations to all base-minded men and of vile nature or mystery, we do allow our courtly poet to be a dissembler only in the subtleties of his art; that is, when he is most artificial so to disguise and cloak it as it may not appear, nor seem to proceed from him by any study or trade of rules, but to be his natural. (3.25.382)

Which is to say, he puts the reader of his didactic manual in the same position as the reader of Castiglione’s handbook in asking him to study the text while pretending to have intuited the lessons—that the lessons come “natural[ly].” The category of natural is up for grabs in these
texts — it is at once essentialized in the “vile nature” of “base-minded men,” but it is also produced by the always-obscured work of the courtier-poet. Aspiring poets had to naturalize what had in fact been learned and practiced in the humanist curriculum. By making their learning seem inherent or even inherited, they could insinuate themselves into the nobility.

*Sprezzatura,* then, is just one example from the aesthetic realm of the far-reaching impact of the collapsing *vita activa.* These sonnets witness neither the invention of modern subjectivity, as Joel Fineman famously claims, nor the invention of a new market-based artistic career. What we see in Shakespeare’s sonnets is a fundamentally conservative reaction to the upheaval in the literary system. The speaker at once seeks, rather naively at times, for the protections and prestige of the older patronage system, while acknowledging the precariousness of the poet in an era of bankrupt nobles. There is the sense that the *sprezzatura* model only worked for amateur poets who were independently wealthy (such as Sidney) or for laureate poets with a relationship to a wealthy patron whose wealth was likewise stable (such as Spenser). Under the new dispensation, literary production was becoming an exchangeable good which allowed for literary authority to be achieved both through the older patronage system as well as through the print market — as a literary-dramatist like Shakespeare would have been well aware (as Lukas Erne reminds us). But that very exchangeability compromises the immortalizing and vatic functions of poetry, and the authenticity of the poet. It’s a transition that’s not unlike the shift that occurred at the same time in European painting. Before the Reformation, paintings of transcendence were patronized by the church, but afterwards there was a shift toward exploring private, ordinary life (still life’s and landscapes, for instance), and increasingly artists were finding patrons and purchasers in aristocrats and middle-class citizens.¹⁸⁸ For the poet who, like all craftsmen, must

¹⁸⁸ I’m grateful to Robert Watson for pointing out this correlation in the visual arts.
work for his living and be compensated for his labor, *sprezzatura* was not a viable affect. In rejecting *sprezzatura* and highlighting the labor involved in writing sonnets with, as I’ll show, his frequent recourse to the georgic mode, Shakespeare reveals poetry’s unstable position within the *vita activa*. These sonnets document the Early Modern struggle to value poetic work as timeless art above both generational labor (the gentleman’s labor) and the continuous labor of “making a living” on the public stage (the dramatist’s labor).

“Everything that Grows”: Grafting Work onto Labor

Shakespeare’s persona in the sonnets rejects *sprezzatura* by using the georgic mode to draw attention to the labor of composition. Instead of presenting poesies that effortlessly spring forth, the poet-gardener shows us the soil under his fingernails in a performative move that belabors his own labor. Georgic tropes organize the imaginative options the speaker of the sonnets offers and combines in the Procreation Subsequence, namely human reproduction and poetic production. He opens in the pose of a georgic interlocutor, very much in the same didactic vein as Virgil’s instructor persona in the *Georgics* or Hesiod’s persona in *Works and Days*, who is full of fraternal advice for Perses. Shakespeare’s speaker is the older, wiser man who, in his attempt to educate the fair youth, moves along the spectrum from pedagogue to pederast.189 As

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189 I’m borrowing the category of the “pederast” from Margreta de Grazia, who sees in Sonnet 144 a choice not between “post-Enlightenment categories of homosexual and heterosexual” but between pederasty and gynerasty. She argues that Shakespeare pulls this typology from Spenser, whose E.K. notes in the *Januarye* eclogue that “paederastice [is] much to be preferred before gynerastic, that is the love that enflameth men with lust toward womankind.” The division I’m seeing is between the didactic speaker and the amorous speaker, because I’m not as interested in the Dark Lady sequence, which makes no mention of poetic immortality and the work of authorship. Margreta De Grazia, “The Scandal of Shakespeare’s Sonnets,” *Shakespeare’s Sonnets: Critical Essays* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1999), 103.
he takes advantage of georgic analogies that link procreation and writing, he ultimately sets aside
the former for the latter in a move that values poetic work above reproductive labor. The speaker
attempts to re-assert the classical hierarchy of activities (work over labor) in order to preserve the
youth and, more importantly for the young writer, to distinguish his own activity as poetic work
in an age that saw the democratization of print and other literary activities.190

My first chapter on Shakespearean georgic comedy suggests that agricultural labor was
increasingly viewed as an analogue for human reproductive labor. As Vin Nardizzi has shown,
sixteenth- and seventeenth-century gardening manuals use the biblical paradigm of increasing
and multiplying to figure the agricultural practices of grafting that structures the transition from a

case for immortality through procreation (which ends up looking just like mortality) to
immortality through poetry in the sonnet sequence.191 Leonard Mascall’s A booke of the Arte and
maner, howe to plant and graffe all sortes of trees ...(1572) concludes its section on grafting with
a prayer that also links the biblical command to reproduce with the agricultural practices he has
elaborated: “Increase and multiplye, and replenishe the earth.”192 The volume concludes with the
following prayer: “O Lord we set, plant, & graffe, desiring that by thy mighty power they maye
encresase, and multiplye upon the earth, in bearing plenty of fruite, to the profite and comfort of
all thy faithfull peaple, thorow Christe or [sic] Lorde. Amen.”193 Gervase Markham’s The

190 It is worth bearing in mind that this is Shakespeare The Poet’s invention, rather than
Shakespeare the Playwright because writing plays was not yet considered a prestigious literary
activity in the way that writing sonnets after Sidney was.

191 Vin Nardizzi, “Shakespeare’s Penknife: Grafting and Seedless Generation in the Procreation

192 Ibid., 88.

193 Ibid.
*English Husbandman* (1613) also uses “multiplying” as a term for grafting plants.\(^{194}\) Prelapsarian biblical georgic links agriculture to reproductive labor. In the Geneva Bible, Adam and Eve are commanded to “increase and multiply,” both through reproductive labor — that is, cultivating the “fruits of the womb” — and by cultivating the fruits of the garden; After the Fall, the command is recast in the pejorative where Eve’s painful reproductive labor is the corollary to Adam’s labor in the ground to feed them.

This same georgic command underlies the speaker’s instruction to the fair youth in the opening sequence, but in revised form: “From fairest creatures we desire increase” (1.1).\(^{195}\) The key difference between Shakespeare’s sonnets and both the biblical and Erasmian source material is the *aesthetic* take on the biblical command, which sees agricultural and reproductive increase as part of the quest for beauty. In the excerpted epistle in Wilson’s *Rhetoric*, Erasmus rebukes the young man as a humanist by invoking religious, civic, and familial obligations to breed (the same obligations that underlie the teleology of the georgic comedies); Shakespeare, however, rebukes the youth as an art preservationist with an eye for the beautiful. Erasmus sees breeding as the natural way to perpetuate the race: “For there is nothing so naturall, not onely

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\(^{194}\) Ibid., 89.

\(^{195}\) All references to the Geneva Bible will be from *The Geneva Bible: The Bible of the Protestant Reformation*, ed. Lloyd E. Berry (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007). After the fall, God offers his own revision of that command that punitively puns on increase as both multiply and as exacerbate. The Geneva version has “I will greatly *increase* thy sorrows, and thy conception.”\(^{195}\) This pun was not missed by the editors of the King James Version, who preserved it with other half of the original command to fill the earth: “I will greatly *multiply* thy sorrow and thy conception.” In both instances the command to “increase and multiply” before the fall becomes the increased and multiplied pains of birth after the fall. When the speaker of the sonnets writes that “men as plants increase” (15.1), he plays on the link between the two punishments of Genesis 3 — the parturitive and the agricultural. Unless otherwise noted, all biblical quotations taken from *The Bible: Authorized King James Version with Apocrypha*, eds. Robert Carrol and Stephen Prickett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). Citations will be parenthetically noted.
Shakespeare’s speaker sees breeding as a means to perpetuate beauty — that “beauty’s rose might never die” — rather than the race. By the time we get to an existential threat to the species in Sonnet 18, the speaker is more concerned with the durability of poetic work than with the end game of reproductive labor — that is to say, what “so long as men can breath and eyes can see” means for the fate of his art than with the perpetuity of the human race. For Shakespeare’s speaker, the goal is not to fill the earth, but to beautify it. Since only the “fairest creatures” are encouraged to “increase,” the sequence seems to be advocating for a turn from the natural to the aesthetic realm, in much the same way gardening manuals would advocate for something akin to Sidney’s golden world over nature’s brazen world.

In attempting to defend the procreative option, the early sonnets re-orient the curses of Genesis, so that rather than agricultural and reproductive labor being a sign of the mortal

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196 In this sense, these sonnets play with georgic mode’s interest in futurity and risk. Risk in the Georgics is primarily the risk that even when one does everything right on the farm, the storms of war and weather can intervene. Sonnet 14 echoes this concern with risk in the nod to prophetic almanacry, which tells “of plagues, of dearths, or season’s quality” and “thunder, rain, and wind.”

197 The most famous treatment of pleasure gardening vs. survivalist agriculture in the Georgics is the Corycian gardener passage (IV.116-148). But this gardener is unique, as Gary B. Miles shows in Virgil’s Georgics: A New Interpretation (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980): 239. His self-sufficiency and patrimony mark his non-membership in the polis and the obsolescence of that ideal in post-war Rome. C.G. Perkell sees this gardener as an image of poetry: “In growing flowers, the epitome of superfluous beauty, the gardener pursues (like the poet) an aesthetic and spiritual ideal which ignores material function or profit” in “On the Corycian Gardener of Vergil's Fourth Georgic,” TAPA III (1981), 168. Certainly Perkell’s reading is consistent with and anticipates the turn the sonnets take toward poetry, but it should be noted that in that turn, the poet-speaker eventually finds that even poetry serves a material function.
consequence of the fall, they become a bulwark against it. Sonnet 3 recodes feminine reproductive labor as masculine agricultural labor. The speaker warns that by refusing to procreate, the youth “unbless[es] some mother,” and that there cannot possibly be a woman “so fair” that her “uneared womb / Disdains the tillage of [the youth’s] husbandry.” Sonnet 16 echoes the advice to get married and start tilling by developing the woman-as-land motif in the context of a garden. The speaker asks the youth to tend to “maidens gardens yet unset” (16.6).

Sonnet 8’s explicit references to husbands, husbandry, and siring recall Virgil’s third georgic — often called the “book of sex and death” because it deals with mating livestock and the fact of death on the Roman farm. Sonnet 6 again recalls Old Testament georgic in which the agricultural penalty is not far from the ultimate price of the fall — the introduction of mortality. Genesis has “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground” (Genesis 3:19). In Sonnet 6, “death’s conquest […] make[s] worms [the youth’s] heir” (14), and signals the youth’s vermicular end at the hands of nature’s own plowers and composters, should he refuse to engage in his own reproductive georgics. The rhetorical move is something akin to a procreative take on a carpe diem poem that, rather than celebrating passing pleasures, advocates for reproduction to make the youth immortal (almost). The “living flowers” (16.7) in the garden-as-woman conceit that Sonnet 16 develops point to the coincidence of agricultural and reproductive labor, a conceit that underlies the procreation sequence as a whole.

Until the speaker discovers poetry as a better alternative to procreation, the sonnets advocate for a cyclical model of agricultural labor, whereby the youth’s life is compared to the farm calendar. The sense is clear enough in Sonnet 3: the youth will reflect the “April” of his mother’s “prime” just as he will see living reminders of his “golden time” if he finds “some mother” (3.4) to bear his child. But that cycle can only continue if he deigns to the reproductive
tillage of the fallen world. This sonnet points the way to the Golden Age sonnets (66-68), which lament a fall from previous “gilded” (66.5) age. More locally, Sonnet 3’s “golden time” points to Sonnet 7’s treatment of the Golden Age and Ages of man by embedding of “or” (or gold) in words such as “orient” (1), “mortal” (7), “adore” (7), and “fore” (11).

But as early as Sonnet 5, the lie has already been given to cyclical assurance of reproductive immortality. The endless labor of Time in Sonnet 5 out-works the regenerative possibilities of procreation. The poem suggests a kind of class-based elitism in that aristocrats don’t engage in reproductive labor but “gentle work,” but ultimately “never-resting Time” and the cyclical calendar take over and ruin that “gentle work.” The ceaseless seasons invariably lead to “bareness everywhere,” where the youth’s beauty is equated to an agricultural landscape in the dead of winter. But even if summer comes around again, it is not the same summer, and even if the youth has children, his own life will still be subject to mortality.

Sonnet 11 uses the georgic mode to make the familiar argument for begetting children, before discovering within that agricultural idiom that poetry and “cop[ies]” can serve as an alternative to biological copia. The poem takes a late turn that anticipates the sequence’s pivot away from procreation and toward poetry, and with it the turn from labor to work. The printing metaphor at first seems to propel the poem out of its rustic idiom and into something more modern and mechanistic: “She carved thee for her seal, and meant thereby / Thou shouldst print more, not let that copy die” (11.13-14). However, repetition of “bounty” and “bounteous” in the last line of the final quatrain claim “copy” for both the mechanics of writing and the copia of

198 Sonnet 66 is “a survey of abstract ills,” as Burrow refers to it, The Complete Sonnets and Poems, 512. n. 1-4. These Golden Age sonnets look back to imagined perfection and claim that the youth hails from that time. In 67, the speaker wonders at the youth’s appearance after the fall now that “Nature [is] bankrupt” (9). Sonnet 68 compares the youth to a Map of days outworn “before the golden tresses of the dead […] were shorn away” (1-6).
agricultural (and rhetorical) abundance. It’s worth noting that this is the same *copia* that underlies Puttenham’s catalogue of poetic innovations, and it’s the copious and “pleasant variety” that Elyot found in Virgil’s *Georgics*.

By the end of Sonnet 11, the aesthetic angle on “increase and multiply” has become a rather unpalatable version of aesthetic Darwinism: “Let those whom Nature hath not made for store, / Harsh, featureless, and rude, barrenly perish.” “Store” and “barren” operate in the agricultural register, and the advice is a reproductive take on the first georgic, which encourages the “stor[ing] of grain” so you’re not left “vainly” eyeing “thy neighbor’s heaped-up harvest” later. By Sonnet 12, the speaker has already tacitly acknowledged that the cyclical model of reproduction that governs the agricultural calendar is an imperfect analogy because it doesn’t guarantee immortality for the individual; it merely passes on his likeness to another individual with the same short lease on life. At the moment that the speaker realizes the flaw in his argument — that “Time’s scythe” falls even on breeders — the sonnets begin to suggest what will become explicit in Sonnet 18: that durable poetic work is the better alternative to biological labor. An heir can’t survive the ravages of time any more than the fair youth can; what’s needed is an artistic representation that will stand as a testament to beauty. Rather than Time the natural decayer of all living things (as we saw in earlier sonnets), however, Time here is figured in the georgic emblem of time as a mower. The poem uses words that are suggestive of literary production to describe the passage of time. The trees are “barren of leaves” (5), and nothing remains as a reminder of their beauty. Perhaps committing beauty to leaves of paper by way of poetic representation would make their memory last longer. Similarly, all greenery of summer is “all girded up in sheaves” (7), which refers to the practice of bundling cereal crops after reaping.

199 The figure probably comes from Isaiah’s restatement of the georgic penalty as “All flesh is grass” (Isaiah 40:6).
Sheaves are the vehicles for capturing and preserving the harvest so that the bounty can be enjoyed throughout the next year, and they also suggest the process of binding the pages of a book, which has the similar function of preserving beauty for perpetuity. The speaker seems to realize Arendt’s point about the need for a cultural world that mediates between men and nature, because “without a world between men and nature, there is eternal movement,” but no permanent home for the human animal. The endless succession of children, played out so literally in Macbeth 4.2, is but a fleeting progress unless the durable work of culture creates a world in which those lives can dwell and be remembered. By the end of the procreation sonnets, an agricultural vision of poetry will emerge as that middle, georgic world, and significantly it is “between men,” which is to say, it cuts out women and their reproductive labors.

In the shift from reproductive labor to poetic work, the sonnets characterize human growth and decay in agricultural terms. In Sonnet 11, the fair youth “grow[s]” like a plant with

200 Arendt, The Human Condition, 137.

201 See Valerie Traub’s provocative argument in “Sex without Issue: Sodomy, Reproduction, and Signification in Shakespeare’s Sonnets” where she shows that “The poet’s adoption of a rhetoric of reproduction does not merely privilege male over female generations, however. A corresponding result of the exclusion of women from a procreative role is a strategic elaboration of heteroeroticism as sodomitical.” She reads Sonnet 129 as just such an elaboration of “the illicit and terrifying figure of woman as sodomite.” See Shakespeare’s Sonnets: Critical Essays, Ed. James Schiffer (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000), 437.

202 In the literary culture more broadly, agricultural labor also served as an analogue for writing, as it does toward the end of the procreation subsequence. Despite many theorists’ apparent embrace of sprezzatura, many theorists of poetry and behavior such as Sidney and Castiglione betrayed an underlying understanding of poetry as work, and as agricultural and horticultural work in particular. Sidney’s favorite analogy for poetry is flowers; indeed, his preferred word links poetry and flowers (“poesy, n.4,” OED Online, March 2016, Oxford University Press). Sidney himself uses poesy in its strict horticultural register in the Arcadia: “Thus poesies of the spring flowers were wrapt vp in a little grene silke and dedicated to Kalas brestes.” (iii. sig. Ii6). The same pun that underlies the Sonnets’ punning use of “engraft” also mingles grafting fruit and engraving letters in William Lawson’s 1618 A New Orchard and Garden (Nardizzi, “Shakespeare’s Penknife: Grafting and Seedless Generation in the Procreation Sonnets,” 93).
the opportunity for bounty and *copia* and copies. Even before the speaker reveals himself as a poet of “barren rhyme” in Sonnet 16, he has already intimated as much as early as Sonnet 12. He surveys a metaphorical landscape that is “barren of leaves,” which suggests infertile literary production and missed opportunity to immortalize the youth. That literary production might serve as an alternate model of cyclical, seasonal change, which is the temporal metric that underlies all georgic activity. Though the *copia* that Sonnet 11 proposes is in the “fresh blood” “in one of thine,” “print” and “copy” in the last line suggest poetic descendants alongside the biological progeny for which the poem explicitly advocates. Vendler senses a structural “back-and-forth” principle in this poem that suggests the turning (or verse/versus) of a plow: waning/growing, as fast/so fast, and from that/from youth. “Barrenly perish” would then anticipate the agriculturally and biologically “barren rhyme” of Sonnet 16, as well as the explicit treatment of “verse” in Sonnet 17, when the sequence departs from its sole focus on reproductive georgic. The poetic project is artificially grafted onto the original project’s georgic goal of reproduction.

Sonnet 15 figures the cycle that inevitably ends with “Time’s scythe,” but finds a georgic solution to this biological fact in the couplet that acts as a hinge that swings the argument of the subsequence from procreation to poetry:

When I consider every thing that grows
Holds in perfection but a little moment;
That this huge stage presenteth naught but shows,

Similarly, Puttenham’s georgic metaphors and catalogues describe the poet’s work in creating an abundance of second natures. The sonnets also make this move in shifting for from human reproduction to poetic production while maintaining the same georgic idiom.
Whereon the stars in secret influence comment;
When I perceive that men as plants increase,
Cheered and checked even by the selfsame sky,
Vaunt in their youthful sap, at height decrease,
And wear their brave state out of memory;
Then the conceit of this inconstant stay
Sets you most rich in youth before my sight,
Where wasteful time debateth with decay
To change your day of youth to sullied night,
And, all in war with Time for love of you,
As he takes from you, I engraft you new.

The sonnet equates the human life cycle with the plant life cycle: “Men as plants increase” and then they “decrease”; “every thing that grows” also must “decay”; “youthful sap” rises in plants as in men, and then falls. In looking to escape that cycle of biological labor, the speaker finds a pun that points the way toward a more durable kind of work. “Engraft” pivots the sequence from an argument for biological reproduction (figured as horticultural grafting) to poetic production with a pun on the Greek word for writing, graphēin. Art-work provides a solution that frees humanity from endless natural cycles, and points the way toward durability and permanence — in a word (and one that has a long history in German thought) art-work creates a world. Just as the georgic landscape marks the grey area between the built environment and nature, the georgic mode is the negotiating ground between different kinds of work in that world. In the sonnets, the
georgic is an entrée to work and permanence, and offers a way to transcend the private and feminizing labor of the reproduction through the homosocial, masculine art-work of poetry.

In suggesting that Shakespeare’s conception of art is tied up in a vision non-procreative activity, I am tracing territory that Richard Halpern has provocatively explored in his argument that “sodomy, from the very inception of the concept, is implicated in certain aesthetic categories, in particular that category known as the sublime.” He points out that “what was unspeakable” for us “(let’s call it sodomy)” is now “perfectly speakable for us, yet what was once speakable […] (let’s call it beauty) has now become somehow unspeakable.” It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to elaborate and problematize aesthetic categories such as art and the beautiful, so for now the beautiful will have to remain underarticulated. Suffice it to say that for Shakespeare’s speaker the fair youth sequence, the work of art is non-procreative and therefore elevated above reproductive labor (which marks the turn from the procreation sequence to the lengthier concern with immortal poetry), and — in the erotic economics of this particular patron-client relationship — between men. While the typologies of the vita activa seem to follow the Arendtian hierarchy with a promotion from procreative labor to poetic work, the generic typology moves backwards from (re)productive georgics to non-procreative pastoral. Generically, the sonnets move backward from the punitive heterosexual georgic labor of Genesis to homosocial pastoral otium of the classical tradition. The fact that they do so in a georgic

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204 Ibid.

205 Most readings that identify the queer nature of pastoral begin with Theocritus and Virgil. See, for instance, Byrne R.S. Fone, “This Other Eden: Arcadia and the Homosexual Imagination,” *Literary Visions of Homosexuality*, ed. Stuart Kellogg (New York: Hayworth Press, 1983);
register serves to re-inscribe non-procreative poetry into literary economy that suggests the possibility of consummation and compensation. Against both pastoral and sprezzatura, the speaker of the sonnets suggests that literary production is work and that it’s a kind of work that proves more durability than the fragile immortality of biological procreation.

That being said, the sonnets, like the great soliloquys, are the record of a mind in thought. They capture the dynamism of cognition, and so any claims and resolutions are only ever provisional. Sonnet 16, something of a palinode, doesn’t outright retract the offer to poetically engrave the fair youth, so much as it represents a wavering between procreation and poetry. The youth stands teetering on “top of happy hours” — a figuration that mirrors what happens in the narrative at this point, when the speaker weighs the new option against the old. That consideration happens in georgic terms that recall and complicate the horticultural pattern that open the sonnets. “Beauty’s rose” (1.2) might last into eternity by becoming “flow’rs distilled” (5.13) that, as Helen Vendler has pointed out, look a lot like poetry “pent in walls of glass” (5.10). But in 16, the speaker suggests that “living flowers” (7) from “maiden gardens yet unset” (6) might still be the better option. “Unset” is often glossed as “not planted,” but it can also reactivate the “graft” that ends the previous sonnet. This is the first sonnet to explicitly identify what the graft pun in Sonnet 15 implies: that the speaker is a poet, even if his verse is “barren”


206 “Set” as graft was available as a definition since Wycliffe’s fifteenth-century bible (“set, n.1,” OED Online, March 2016, Oxford University Press), and one that Shakespeare would re-deploy in the Winter’s Tale, when Perdita refuses to “set one slip” (a scion for grafting) of the hybrid gillyvors in her garden (4.4.100). The “living flowers” (16.7) in the garden-as-woman conceit that Sonnet 16 develops point to the coincidence of agricultural and reproductive labor, a conceit that underlies the procreation sequence as a whole.
(16.4) compared to biological reproduction. And certainly it is “barren” in a strictly biological context, but it offers a more durable form of immortality than biology can provide. The poem bridges Sonnet 15’s suggestion that poetry is itself a kind of horticultural (if artificial) reproduction by grafting and Sonnet 17’s insistence that a child would still be needed to verify the speaker’s verse. Though the sense of the poem is that biological reproduction is to be preferred over poetic progeny, the fact that “graft” symbolizes both writing and reproduction suggests that both options are viable means of immortalization, at least at this point in the sequence.

Just as this sonnet harkens back to and revises earlier horticultural figures, it also anticipates the georgic tropes that later poems develop in the sequence. William Empson so thoroughly and famously noted the extensive possibilities of the phrase “lines of life.”207 “Time’s pencil” and the poet’s “pupil pen” are certainly top contenders, but Sonnet 18 offers an interesting gloss on how “lines of life” might be interpreted. Most critics flag this as the end of procreation sequence, and at this end point, the “lines of life” from Sonnet 16 are reprised in the “eternal lines” to which the fair youth might grow to if he allows himself to be immortalized by the poet. These “lines” recall the grafting and training language that the procreation sonnets have developed from the start. In effect, these georgic tropes graft the poetic project onto the original reproductive goal.

The comedies dwell on (and in many cases dwell in) the household and its discontents before ultimately championing the natural order of labor and the reproduction of households, often, as I’ve shown in the first chapter, using a georgic vocabulary. The sonnets begin in a didactic stance that advocates for the same thing — “repair[ing]” the dynastic household by

becoming a father (fr. *père*) Sonnet 10 has it — before ultimately abandoning reproductive labor as a viable memorial for a more durable form of human production: the immortalizing work of poetry. In the shift from labor to work, the sonnets find an escape from the cyclical growth and decay, and increase and decrease that characterizes nature and “Time’s scythe” (12.13). The “graft” in Sonnet 15 points the way to what Arendt would call that “world between men and nature,” or what I’m calling a middle mode the georgic. The graft here points to the pivot from reproduction (horticultural grafting) to poetic production (*graphē* or writing). The georgic pun also points to that middle space between nature and culture or, in an Arendtian vein, between the biological activity of *animal laborans* and the world- and culture-making activity of *homo faber*.

In the western environmental imagination, the georgic landscape mediates between the wilderness and civilization. In the literary imagination, the georgic mode becomes the mediating ground between household labor and the work of poetry. In the comedies, the georgic championed household labor, but here in the sonnets it represents a middle path out of household labor and the endless cycles of production and consumption that typify natural man. The georgic here represents a total eclipse of the hearth, you might say, whereby masculine homosocial poetry (work) becomes an alternative to the labor of the household. The sonnets dramatize the struggle to evaluate these different kinds of activities, for instance in Sonnet 17 poetry can only be verified by comparison to a living heir but then in Sonnet 18, poetry gives life to that individual. In the negotiation of poetry against a living heir we can see how fluid the categories of were in the period.
Art-Work: The Poet and the Playwright

The theatrical conceit in the poem pivots the sequence from an argument for reproductive labor to an argument for poetic work. In the first stanza of Sonnet 15 the speaker says that “this huge stage presenteth naught but shows, / Whereon the stars in secret influence comment.” If the speaker weighs two methods for keeping “beauty’s rose” alive (opposing reproductive labor and poetic work), he also weighs two career options for a writer in the period. The first option for the youth is reproductive labor, and the first option for the author is the labor of “making a living” by writing plays. It’s telling that the first time the speaker suggests that he is a poet capable of immortal “engrafting” is also the first time he uses a theatrical metaphor. The next time the speaker brings up theater is in the subsequence Sonnets 109-112, when he admits to straying from the youth. Those sonnets combine images of sexual and professional wandering — from philandering, to soliciting new patrons, to a return to the public stage for his livelihood, or what he calls “public means” (111.4), and making himself a “motley to the view” (110.12).

I want to zoom out a bit from the first seventeen sonnets to show how the negotiation of poetic work becomes increasingly vexed over the course of the sonnets and the circumstances they imply. That’s not to say that the sonnets represent a perfect chronology of Shakespeare’s developing views on art-work. I find local sequences that suggest developmental micro-arguments couched within a collection that doesn’t provide a completely coherent narrative trajectory. The various and shifting ways that the sonnets attempt to make sense of their status as work is far more interesting to me than establishing either a chronology of their production or a narrative of Shakespeare’s evolving thought on the value of poetic work vis-à-vis playhouse labor. Both the chronology of composition and a timeline of Shakespeare’s thinking on literary
work are irrecoverable. The rhetorical narrative of the received sequence, however, reveals a
persona who at least for a short while finds himself in a different literary system, writing private
poems for a potential patron rather than plays for the public stage. Exploring this alternate
literary profession, the poet-persona of the sonnets attempts to find an appropriate relationship to
his patron and seeks to understand his role as a producer of a very different kind of literary work.
He is no longer the writer of ephemeral productions on the public stage but of permanent literary
artifacts. At first he tries to strike a didactic pose in arguing for reproductive work, but discovers
that the coded homoerotics of the patron-client relationship are a better course for articulating a
specifically literary (as opposed to professional) ambition for producing poetic work.\textsuperscript{208} The poet
at times seems naïve in celebrating the generational aspect of status (whereby status is literally
generated through inheritance) in the face of the newer marketplace mentality where money is
bred through investment in (to use an example that Shakespeare would have been aware of)
theater properties and human labor on stage. The continued allure of the usury tropes throughout
the procreation sequence reveals a writer contemplating the value of his work in these two
systems. As a playwright, he had benefited (and would continue to benefit) from the new
marketplace mentality, but at least during the first plague-driven lull in the theater market, he
considered literary work in the older patron system, which continued to be an avenue for literary
professionals and laureates. It’s perhaps unsurprising that Shakespeare would be drawn to the
patron system, which brought the poet within the circle of generational status, given his own

\textsuperscript{208} My argument has been influenced by the work of Richard Helgerson, whose anatomization of
the literary system in \textit{The Elizabethan Prodigals} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977)
and \textit{Self-Crowned Laureates} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983) have allowed me
to make the distinction between the activities of Shakespeare the professional playwright and the
Shakespeare plays a small role in his analysis of the literary system, and Helgerson does not
distinguish between his short career as a poet and his long career as a professional playwright.
attempts to win a coat of arms for his father. The narrative of the sonnets, which is only available in the half of the dialogue that we see (the persona-poet’s half), reveals a speaker who is concerned with the durability, exchange value, and authenticity of his work in two different literary systems and economies.

Throughout the course of the sequence, the speaker becomes increasingly skeptical of the uses of literary work. For a playwright, the use is clear — it provides a livelihood in the laboring mode. But in the uncertain economy of patronage, it’s a little less clear. He begins in a didactic mood, which posits a claim for poetry as cultivation in the educational sense, before discovering the amorous vocabulary that, as Arthur Marotti has argued, Sidney’s sonnet sequence popularized as the idiom *par excellence* for expressing courtly and literary ambition. Once he leaves behind the didactic pose of the procreation sonnets, the speaker worries over his relationship with the fair youth, which is neither procreative (20), nor paternal (37), nor economic (21). Sonnet 20 famously rejects procreative sex in championing “love over “love’s use” in a marked shift from the argument in the procreation sonnets. By 21, 23, and 25 he is already skeptical of the patron system, in which flattery compromises the truth of poetry. In Sonnet 26, he tries to find the appropriate relationship to the fair youth, and he rejects public patronage for fear he might be rejected given his social status. In denigrating poets who prostitute their art for the praise of a patron we can see the seeds of the rival poet sequence. As he tries to differentiate himself from the other poets the youth patronizes, he comes down on homosocial love as the distinguishing feature of the relationship: the fair youth will read other poets “for their style” and the speaker’s “for his love” (32.14).

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Though the use of his poetry is undetermined, and the relationship that poetry forges is likewise undetermined, the work involved in poetic production is certain. In 27 and 28 he clearly sees himself as a laborer, but he hasn’t found a way to economize his work, as he is neither the youth’s hired hand by day (poetry for money) nor his lover by night (poetry for sex). In 29 and 30 the poet-speaker is vexed by his social standing, which requires him to “make a living” in the public role, writing entertainments for the masses rather than for the nobility. An economics begins to emerge in Sonnet 34 that has little to do with the exchange value of poetic labor, and everything to do with the economy of shame that binds the fair youth to the poet-speaker. The youth’s tears pay the “ransom” for his “ill deeds” (34.14), which is a somewhat archaic and even feudal register for a sonnet cloaked in a theological discourse. The poem is a perfect poetic snapshot of a society in transition: the feudal register is suggestive of an older model of literary professionalism that is no longer available to the speaker. The vocabulary unites the economics of class (“base clouds”) and the economics salvation (“ransom” and “salve”) as the speaker worries over how he will transcend the business of every day life when neither a lover nor even the exclusive poet of the fair youth. The soteriological discourse brings Protestant theories of the efficacy of work to bear on the situation in the poem, and suggests a certain resignation on the part of the speaker — a sort of contemptus mundi for the unpatroned poet. Sonnets 35-37 are a whirlwind of attempts to qualify the affair through analogies to other kinds of relationships — from a contractual, legal relationship in 35, to the intimacy of a marital relationship in 36. Thirty-seven reprises and revises the procreation sequence by combining generational, agricultural, and literary labor. By likening the poet (rather than the youth) to a father figure that is “engrafted” to the youth’s “store” of “abundance” (37.8-11), the speaker claims that the poet lives in his son’s (the fair youth’s) glory, which is remarkably similar to the advice in Sonnet 3. Ultimately,
though, the relationship between the youth and the speaker is not one of kinship and is built on an incomplete exchange — immortalization for $x$, and $x$ is vexingly undefined for the speaker.

The sonnets seem unable to escape their fate as exchangeable goods, even if their exchange value is uncertain in the poet’s naïve construction of the patron system, and by the midpoint of the sequence, exchangeability starts to look a lot like changeability and inconstancy. When the fair youth cheats on the speaker, perhaps with the dark lady (40-42), the speaker realizes that $x$ is not love, and that even durable work cannot buy him love. By the time we get to 59, the speaker is starting to become aware that the fair youth is perhaps not worthy of immortal poetry, in part because he is not constant and the speaker cannot reconcile writing poetry that lasts into eternity for a subject so changeable. What follows is a subsequence in its own right that uses *Metamorphoses XV* to dwell on constancy and change (53-78), and what change means for a writer of durable, changeless artifacts. These sonnets give literary expression to the fear of natural change, decay, death, and inconstancy, and they wonder what the role of the durable work of poetry is in such a world. The elemental (and often georgic) interests of Ovid’s Pythagorean episode encourage the speaker to think of his work as isolating and preserving only the best parts of the fair youth’s identity — preserving his beauty and his essence for future generations to read about. It’s worth noting that this is precisely the opposite of the plays and the comedies in particular, which dramatize performative identities and show characters not as timeless, fixed entities, but as fluidly constructed (and contingent) personas “trying on” different roles.

The agricultural and seasonal imagery of the procreation sequence returns in these poems, not to suggest that the youth is subject to mortality, but to suggest his inherent changeability. The speaker compares the youth to the “spring and foison of the year” (53.9) and finds in the durable
art of old a suggestion of the youth’s “bounty” (53.11). But the subtext suggests that his beauty, like his heart, is not “constant” (53.12), and that his beauty too will pass. The horticultural pattern re-emerges in these poems as a reminder that beauty and essence are distinct, and even though the youth’s constancy waxes and wanes, the poet’s “verse distills [his] truth.” (54.12). At this point in the sequence, however, distillation carries something of a threat — though the youth “looks fair” like the rose, the poet knows his “truth” and has the power to make that truth into the durable memorial that outlasts the youth. He accuses the fair youth of growing “common” in the “soil” like a “weed” (69.12-14) as a result of being too fond of hearing his own praise from other poets. He admits his poetry has become “barren” (76) and offers the weak excuse that since his love has not changed, how can the fair youth to expect his poetry to be new an innovative? Then in Sonnet 77 he gives the fair youth a book to write his own poetry and that “the vacant leaves” of the book will bear the youth’s “mind’s imprint” (3). The exercise will “profit” and enrich” (14) the youth, with the suggestion that the speaker finds nothing enriching about his work for the fair youth. In addition to the suggestion that the youth enrich himself, there is also the suggestion that this can serve as a surrogate for children in the equation of the poetry the youth writes to “children nursed, delivered from thy brain” (11). This literary but literally empty gift (“these waste blanks” in line 10) is a metonym for the sequence as a whole: a gift that is uncompensated and a record that immortalizes the youth’s inconstancy.

Clearly, $X$ is not money. Fast on the heels of the gift, the youth starts patronizing another poet or poets in the rival poet sequence (78-86). What follows are a series of poems that recall the earlier denigrations of the patronage system and “merchandised” love (102), but the seduction relationship (in which $x$ is bodies) starts to look too much like the patron relationship (in which $x$ is money), and the entire queer economy starts to look like prostitution, which would
practically become a trope for cavalier poets in the seventeenth century. By 109 the speaker is looking for other kinds of support, be they financial, social, or sexual. He admits to returning to the public stage and relying “public means” where he makes himself “a motley to the view” (110). There is some kind of forgiveness, but it looks like the ransom that happened in Sonnet 34, when tears ransomed the fair youth’s deeds (which, like the speaker now, had to do with hanging around “base” “vulgar” crowds, perhaps at theaters).

In a final farewell to the poetic project, the speaker gives away the book that the fair youth presumably filled with his own observations and poetry and returned to the speaker (122). In giving away the fair youth’s poetry, the speaker seems to have given up both on love and on immortal poetry, which is equated in this sonnets with “mere tallies,” or an account of exchanges. He maintains to the end that his labor was only given “free(ly)” (125.10) and not exchangeable for money or proximity to power, but simply for “mutual render” (125.12), which he suggests has been compromised by the economics and erotics of patronage that have plagued the entire sequence. At the conclusion of 125, the speaker breaks with the fair youth and claims to be no longer in his “control” (125.14). Perhaps because of his newfound and cynical freedom, he declines to finish Sonnet 126, a poem that gestures at the inevitability of the fair youth’s death, and he doesn’t mention immortal poetry for the remainder of the sonnets. In fact, the remainder of the sonnets exhibit a cynical attitude not only to immortalizing claims of poetry, but they also articulate a cynical attitude to changeless claims of love that anticipates the attitudes of the cavalier poets later in the seventeenth century.

The publication history of Shakespeare’s work both in his own lifetime and afterward reflects the complicated relationship he had to multiple different literary systems and their differing metrics to value such work. This was a writer who at times worked in the patron system,
at times labored as a public playwright, and at times circulated his work in manuscript, and at
times appeared in the immortalizing medium of print. In the early 1590s he announces himself as
a poet in the patronage system with Richard Field’s publication of *Venus and Adonis* (1593) and
*The Rape of Lucrece* (1594), both of which included dedicatory epistles from the author to his
patron (Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton). Once he was established in the Lord
Chamberlain’s Men (1594), Shakespeare became a name that others could capitalize on. William
Jaggard’s 1599 *Passionate Pilgrim* (the entire collection is attributed to Shakespeare, though
only five of the poems are his) and Robert Chester’s 1601 *Love’s Martyr* both contain poems that
were undoubtedly in manuscript circulation at the time. Finally, there is the 1609 quarto
published by Thomas Thorpe, which gathers the sonnets and *A Lovers Complaint*. This
publication is emblematic of Shakespeare’s ambiguous relationship to his own literary activity.
As Colin Burrow succinctly puts it in his introduction to the sonnets,

> There remain so many unanswered questions about the publication of the Sonnets
> in 1609 that it is impossible to be entirely sure that Shakespeare wished them to
> appear in exactly the form in which they were printed and at exactly that time, and
> whether he saw them as the culmination of his career as a poet.\(^{210}\)

Did he consider himself a poet of work, or a laboring playwright? The answer is irrecoverable,
but the sonnets capture the tensions between those two options, and the different (often class
inflected) attitudes that attended them. Arendt writes that

\(^{210}\) Burrow, *Complete Sonnets and Poems*, 91.
Of all things of thought, poetry is closest to thought, and a poem is less a thing than any other work of art; yet even a poem, no matter how long it existed as a living spoken word in the recollection of the bard and those who listened to him, will eventually be “made,” that is, written down and transformed into a tangible thing among things, because remembrance and the gift of recollection, from which all desire for imperishability springs, need tangible things to remind them, lest they perish themselves. (170)

Poetry immortalizes not only the ephemeral lives of fair youths — committing, as it were, biological life to the durable page of artistic representation — but also the thoughts of what some might call genius. Shakespeare’s collection sequence transforms polyvalent, shifting, and sometimes contradictory thoughts about the value of literary activity into “tangible thing[s] among things” that had a life in circulation both in manuscript and in print. If Arendt is right, that “acting and speaking men need the help of homo faber in his highest capacity, that is, the help of the artist, of poets and historiographers, of monument-builders or writers, because without them the only product of their activity, the story they enact and tell, would not survive at all” (173), then memory and history is largely constructed by the stories that others (homo faber) tell about us. Shakespeare’s sequence tells a story of a writer trying to value his own literary activity during a period of immense flux both for his own career and during a period of radical change for literary systems in general.211 But ultimately it was a different faber-icator who determined

211 Lukas Erne, leaning heavily on David Cressy’s work on literacy, suggests that the jump in literacy had much to do with the radical changes to the literary market in the early 1590s. See Erne, Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist, 40, and David Cressy, Literacy and the Social Order: Reading and Writing in Tudor and Stuart England (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 153.
whether Shakespeare was remembered as a playwright (as Lukas Erne has argued), as a poet (as scholars seem to be noting now), or as both (as Patrick Cheney suggests). That would be left to the great and sometimes dubious project of canon formation undertaken mostly during the eighteenth century, but it began not long after Shakespeare’s death. The posthumous print history largely constructs Shakespeare as a playwright in particular, rather than an author of both poetry and plays, and this begins almost immediately in 1623 with the publication of the first folio by Heminge and Condell, which only included plays. It has only been recently that literary scholars have started looking to “complete” this picture of him by attending to his poetry as well as his plays. 212 That attention must look to the ways Shakespeare’s poetry seeks to establish the value of his many literary activities by grafting the work of poetry onto the labor of writing plays.

212 Paul Cheney’s work makes the strongest bid to complete the picture of Shakespeare as poet-playwright, but the best instance of the new critical turn towards reclaiming Shakespeare’s status as a poet is Jonathan Post’s Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare’s Poetry (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).
III. Action

Pruning Heroes and Planting Seeds:

Action’s Inward Turn in *The Faerie Queene* and *Paradise Lost*

My last chapter showed how Shakespeare attempted to make the leap from a laboring playwright to an author of literary work(s). Using the Arendtian framework, which sees the artist as “the only worker left in a laboring society,”²¹³ we can see what a difficult leap this was, with Shakespeare ultimately deciding to remain in the society of laborers. In this chapter, I want to explore the final category in the Arendtian hierarchy, and this involves an even more ambitious leap for the writers in question. Milton and Spenser understood authorship and authority in an entirely different and entirely more political sense. These authors aspire to be actors on the political stage. But in the post-Reformation context, and even more so in Milton’s post-Restoration context, the political is increasingly marked by private concerns. These epics feature heroes whose actions play out in the shadows of the social. Protestant epics privatize political action at the same time that they give political valence to private choice. Spenser and Milton’s heroes are not exemplars of the post-medieval chivalric code; they are students of a hermeneutic for private action that has ramifications for the publics these authors imagine. In essence, these authors are writing manuals for the salvation of the Protestant state, which ultimately rests on the salvation of individual Protestant souls. *The Faerie Queene* and *Paradise Lost* reveal how the Protestant Reformation and its peculiar entanglement with English nationalism precipitated the rise of the social. This inward trend reflects a tension that gets at the heart of Protestant piety and its political valences in the post-Reformation period. A fundamental symptom of this tension is

that the individual’s calling and election becomes a paramount concern, while at the same time an emergent sense of English nationalism posits the former European backwater as the chosen nation (a nation of individuals whose fundamental anxiety revolves around the epistemological problem of whether or not they are, in fact, chosen). A version of this tension migrates with the Puritans to the New World in the form of American exceptionalism and individualism, which is a nostalgic form of nationalism built on the work ethic that developed as a response to early Protestantism.

Spenser and Milton are two of the last great practitioners of the epic in English; in the twilight of the genre, these epics use education to pivot inward. Spenser transforms the epic and, via the epic genre, action from an outward category of brave deeds to an inward category of personal and spiritual cultivation. Up until this point, the didactic elements of georgic literature have been a sustained minor theme in this dissertation, but here it comes to the forefront. The end of these epics is education: the goal of Spenser’s project is “to fashion a gentleman or noble person in virtuous and gentle discipline” and Milton’s is to “assert eternal providence / And justify the ways of God to men.”

We can see in the residue of Protestant self-fashioning a possibility for self-determination that depends on economics and a newly fluid social structure that allows for mobility. These are post-Reformation developments in which an individual’s work allows for the possibility of self-determination (or at least that is the promise). Indeed, this desire for self-determination in the face of predestinarian dogma is the peculiar soil from which emerged the Protestant work ethic, as described by Weber. Of course, Spenser had higher hopes than merely writing a finishing (if unfinished) manual for the nobility. Milton’s epic likewise has

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been taken as instructional at the level of the individual Protestant reader. Perhaps the most
salient example of this vein in critical approaches to *Paradise Lost* is Stanley Fish’s *Surprised by
Sin*, which reads the epic as a “dialectical experience” (49) that aims at “the reader’s humiliation
and education” (ix).\(^{215}\) That being said, Milton, like Spenser, was also marked by unrealized
political dreams and his interest transcended that of the individual soul.

How do we reconcile the private focus of these epics with the public orientations and
aspirations of their authors? Most criticism of these texts pursues either the private angle by
exploring Protestant response (or in a more literary register, the reader’s response) to these
poems, or the public angle of the politics these poems encode.\(^{216}\) These texts document the rise
of the social in Protestant culture by focalizing public action and interest on the private
individual’s soul. Looking forward to the eighteenth century, the rise of the social takes its most
fully articulated literary form in the novel’s interest in the individual. In the sixteenth and
seventeenth centuries, however, we don’t see a simple reorientation inward so much as a
bidirectional relationship between inward and outward, and private and public. Both Milton and
Spenser had political ambitions, and even when those ambitions were waylaid, they saw personal,
spiritual work as a kind of political work.

Both used the georgic mode as their preferred vocabulary for thinking about the
relationship between private and political work. In these epics, writers turn away from the

\(^{216}\) Susanne Woods, for example, offers up a “public” version of Fish’s argument; hers is
scrubbed of any underlying assumptions about Christianity and focuses on the political concept
of “freedom” rather than Protestant free will. *Milton and the Poetics of Freedom* (Pittsburgh:
Cincinnatus tradition of escaping to the countryside.\textsuperscript{217} That tradition is pastoral masquerading as georgic — a gentleman farmer rather than a tenant laborer, or the rustic retreat that As You Like It parodies. Milton’s vision and critique of Fairfax is marked by the Cincinnatus tradition of withdrawing from politics, but in the georgic iteration, the private country life is political, both economically in terms of providing the state with its agricultural resources and metaphorically in its operating analogy between the farm and the state.\textsuperscript{218} At this point in Milton’s career he was on the margins of the polity; but his decision to undertake a political epic in the georgic vein was an attempt to revalue the private sphere as an inherently political space, and in doing so he unwittingly articulated a vision of the social that sees the reproductive and educational activity of animal laborans as supreme features of society. In the literary field, Milton reduced epic from it’s original concerns about founding nations and heroic actions to a genre largely interested in the interior work of the individual Christian soul. I would hazard that this is the reason we don’t see any great epics after Milton’s; he privatized it and paved the way for a new genre that would focus entirely on the personal lives of characters rather than the political lives of heroes — what would come to be known as the novel in the eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{219}

\textsuperscript{217} Let’s not forget that the Cincinnatus tradition is likewise more complicated than it seems at first blush. Certainly Cincinnatus preferred his country life to politics, but when he was twice called on to serve he did so with such acumen as to recommend farming as preparation for politics. Indeed, Milton in his own treatise on education sees farm work and farm literature as the ideal preparation for citizens.

\textsuperscript{218} What distinguishes Milton’s retreat from the rustic retreat of the Cavalier tradition or the country house poem, is that Milton’s retreat represents the stoic vita bona with its ethical valence and rather than the epicurean vita beata.

\textsuperscript{219} Ian Watt, for instance, links the form of the novel to social and intellectual changes and conditions in the eighteenth century, including the rise of economic individualism (the rise of the social), shifts in the reading public, and “the spread of Protestantism, especially in its Calvinist and Puritan forms” Rise of the Novel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), 60. Bakhtin similarly sees privatization as responsible in part for the novel, though his claim that
In England’s first Protestant epic, the heroic action of nation building is replaced by the georgic labor of ongoing personal and political cultivation. *The Faerie Queene* engages with a georgic ethic of labor in its treatment of genre, hermeneutics and authority. Georgic labor comes to represent the didactic project of educating the individual gentleman-reader, a paradigm for reading the fallen world, and a thematic correlate to the labor of the poet. The predominance of labor in an epic that ought to be concerned with action suggests that when Colin Clout leapt over the middle georgic mode in his ascent from pastoral in the beginning of *The Shepheardes Calendar* to his epic ambitions at the end, he realized that under the Protestant dispensation epics must be driven by activities which have no end in the world (Arendt’s definition of action) — that is to say, epic action is premised largely upon labor in the Protestant tradition. Indeed, in *The Faerie Queene* external foes often turn out to be manifestations of inner flaws. For at least two of the heroes, their success (or lack thereof) is dependent on the georgic labor of re-education over the course of their respective books. The chivalric knight Red Cross has to learn to become an agriculturalist-turned-Christian soldier. Guyon discovers a difficult, laborious hermeneutic over the course of Book II. The georgic mode also mediates the work of the poet, who couches his own work as a version of Virgil’s career path that fuses georgic and epic. Finally, a dark vision of georgic describes political action in the figure of Talus — the flail-carrying iron man in Book V — who figures a “planter’s” take on colonial policies that were essentially a brutal attempt to “civilize” Ireland.

“the novel [especially compared against the epic] is the sole genre that continues to develop, that is as yet uncompleted” doesn’t quite survive comparison to *The Faerie Queene* in particular, which is in many ways an incomplete embrace of mutability. See “Epic and Novel” in *The Dialogic Imagination*. Ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 3.
Milton is certainly a close reader of Spenser, and it’s clear he sees his own Protestant epic in relation to the earlier text. Milton’s epic, like Spenser’s, is profoundly georgic, and like the earlier poet, Milton modeled his own career after Virgil’s. In my reading, *Paradise Lost* represents the final subversion of the *vita activa* in positing that freedom can be actualized through labor, not merely through action. It valorizes private labor in two related ways: first, by suggesting that freedom (even in the broadest political sense) is dependent upon the private labor of education; and second, by making the labor of natality the key to humanity’s salvation in the protoevangelium. Arendt sees the ascendency of labor, especially as it concerns the private necessities of life, as the eclipse of the political, but my reading, which highlights education as labor, finds a new conception of the political as something much more democratic and egalitarian in that it is available to everyone by way of the universal fact of natality (the possibility of beginning and the condition of being born), but only perhaps as long as education is guaranteed. The fall of Adam and Eve is not just a private, domestic tragedy, but also an allegory for the public, political fall of the Protestant commonwealth. Milton’s studied use of the georgic mode turns the epic genre inside out — from a genre interested in exploring the famous acts and deeds of great men, to a genre that entangles and fuses private, domestic concerns with public, political concerns. In stark contrast to the militarism of Spenser’s aborted epic, this Protestant epic marks the completion of the rise of the social and the final fusion of private and public. The fact that there are no great epics after Milton’s suggests that this change broke the genre entirely.²²⁰

²²⁰ This is not the first genre that Milton breaks. “The Masque Presented at Ludlow Castle 1634,” which draws attention to its genre in its title (a fact we miss by using the retrospective title *Comus*), can be said to be an example of Milton breaking both the royal masque and Renaissance pastoral. Milton also put a final nail in the coffin of Renaissance pastoral with “Lycidas.” In “The Masque,” he similarly re-appropriates a mode associated with the court for his own
First I elaborate a reading of *Paradise Lost* as an instance of georgic didacticism by extending Barbara Lewalski’s notion of epic *paideia*. Milton develops Spencer’s georgic hermeneutic into something approaching an educational program if not an entirely new commonwealth. By the time he writes *Paradise Lost* agriculture has become his preferred trope for an arduous political hermeneutic. Milton’s labor-intensive intellectual practice cultivates citizen-believers to be careful readers — like Virgil’s “careful plowman” who reads signs in nature — of biblical and political texts and portents. Milton’s garden is a true anomaly in Renaissance conceptions of Eden. Other Early Modern Edens merely required passivity and obedience, but Milton’s Eden requires active tending, a word that I will delve into at length. The garden is a metonym for the human, which also requires active tending in the form of pruning ambitious outgrowths. This labor-intensive self-cultivation has a political valence as well. Milton’s conception of freedom in both its personal and political forms is not the received idea of right reason inherited from the classical tradition — it is not inborn, but rather it is achieved through the strenuous labor of cultivation, education, and experience. Milton’s suggestive use of “tend,” especially in book IX, is a locus for these two ideas about reason and freedom. The text asks whether reason and freedom (“reason also is a choice”) are inborn “tendencies” or habits that require “tending” and training. Our interpretation of “tend” has ramifications for the first readers of the book of nature, and for future readers of Milton’s book.

Then I examine Milton’s politics of deliverance. For Milton, the corollary to personal salvation is political salvation. The seed, fruit, and plowing language in the soteriological context of the poem underscores that political action, particularly of the sort that the commonwealth...
failed to fully enact, is always on the horizon of possibility. But it takes more than faith — it takes work. I use Arendt’s notion of natality, or the condition of being born and the possibility of novelty, to argue that Milton’s vision of new collective action is bound up in a georgic vision of works premised in part on a private burden of reproductive labor (with *Paradise Lost*’s Eve and *Paradise Regained*’s Mary being the best examples in this vein) and on the public burden of education. The georgic generic and thematic echoes throughout the text suggest that action and labor are in fact mutually imbricated in Arendt’s concept of natality, which makes action possible in the first place.

Labors of Cultivation:
Education, Civilization, and Authority in *The Faerie Queene*

At the prospect of tackling *The Faerie Queene*, students inevitably consider the sheer work of reading (what I think is) the longest poem in the English language. The more sensitive might be drawn to consider the sheer work of writing that poem. The first English Protestant epic is obsessed with work, and this in spite of the Reformation’s depreciation of works as opposed to faith. It anatomizes and problematizes a georgic ethic of work generically, hermeneutically, and thematically. Though it’s often conceived of as an epic, it is perhaps more illuminating to describe *The Faerie Queene* as a hybridization of the Virgilian hierarchy that fuses epic and georgic modes. Spenser’s studied use of georgic intertwines all three senses of the *vita activa*: the georgic mode comes to represent the labor of education in the poem’s didactic projects (both “fashioning a gentleman” and establishing a method for navigating the postlapsarian world), the work of the poet (*homo faber*), and action in the form of political activity under Elizabeth, most
saliently in the form of the colonial project in Ireland and the flail-carrying thresher, Talus, who is sent to do the political dirty-work.

The Education of Georgos

The first book follows the Herculean labors and spiritual education of a georgic hero. Georgos, in Spenser’s onomastics, is the original, earth-working name of St. George (the patron saint of England) and the hero introduced to readers in the first canto as the Red Crosse Knight. (I will be referring to Redcrosse as Georgos throughout this paper to keep the georgic nature of this character at the forefront.) We’ve already seen in Shakespeare’s comedies the residue of the rise of the social in political action’s reliance on the labor of education. The rise of the social, which accelerated during the Early Modern period, mongrelized the vita activa. Perhaps as a symptom of that confusion, genres were mongrel, too: epic and georgic were to some extent mutually imbricated from the start and a glance at the Virgilian ur-texts reveals that Roman epic has always been marked by right action and virtue, that is, by the kind of didacticism that characterizes the georgic mode. Spenser’s attempt “to fashion a gentleman or noble person in virtuous and gentle discipline” is no exception both in the poem as a whole and in Book I in particular. By the same token, epic concerns echo in the georgic mode. Even at the peak of the

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221 English epics retain this peculiar hybrid in their dual generic allegiance to both martial epic and didactic georgic. I’m thinking largely of Milton, whose prelapsarian Eden is surprisingly not laborless.

222 I don’t mean to suggest that Virgil was the father of pastoral, georgic and epic. Theocritus, Hesiod, Homer and probably even the Sumerian(s) responsible for the Epic of Gilgamesh have stronger claims to ur-status, but I’m working within the context of Helgerson’s argument about Renaissance authorship and it’s associations with Virgil in particular. For the aspiring Renaissance author, the ur-text for these genres was always Virgil.
Georgics’ didactic nationalism in Book IV (the politically encoded fable of the bees), readers encounter a digressive epyllion about Aristaeus’ descent into the underworld (an episode that anticipates and is recycled into his fuller experiment with the epic form in the Aeneid). Jonson’s comment that Aeneas was a “pattern of piety, justice, prudence and all other princely virtues” speaks to the Renaissance habit of reading epic in part as an odyssey of the hero’s public and personal development, that is, reading epic in the tradition of didactic georgic that sees and analogy between the cultivation of the land and the cultivation of the human. Indeed, Spenser sees his role as akin to the gardener — a cultivator in the garden of virtue. In the proem to Book VI, he asks Elizabeth:

Reuele to me the sacred noursery
Of vertue, which with you doth there remaine,
Where it in Siluer bowre does hidden ly
From view of men, and wicked worlds disdaine.
Since it at first was by the Gods with paine
Planted in earth, being deriu’d at furst
From heauenly seedes of bounty soueraine,
And by them long with carefull labour nurst,
Till it to ripenesse grew, and forth to honour burst. (VI Proem 3)

The work of the gardener-poet is akin to the work of the original gardener. The God-as-Gardener trope will reappear in Milton’s conception of God as the gardener of Eden. Here the education of

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gentlemen is something like the education that Milton’s Adam and Eve will undergo as they learn to lop and crop the various overgrowths of human ambition. Even in Early Modernity education was a way out of poverty and into the higher echelons of English society. No one would have been more aware of this than Spenser, whose education at the Merchant Taylors’ school brought him into contact with the inner players of the Tudor court. The opportunity for social mobility for an ambitious poet like Spenser was premised on the belief that honor and virtue can be cultivated through education and are not merely inherited (and God-given).

Spenser conceives of his text as being written in the georgic context of civilization’s decline, and in light of that decline, the virtues need to be to “fashion[ed]” and “discipline[d]” (something we’ll return to in the Afterword as this dissertation considers georgics of the Anthropocene). In the proem to Book 5, Spenser makes his clearest statement on why he felt the need to fashion the virtues:

For that which all men then did vertue call,
Is now cald vice; and that which vice was hight,
Is now hight vertue, and so vs’d of all:
Right now is wrong, and wrong that was is right,
As all things else in time are changed quite. (Proem V.4.1-5)

The “then” referred to in the first line is the lost golden age and, like Virgil in his *Georgics*, Spenser imagines his own didactic poem to follow in the tradition of practical guidebooks for the fallen world. The poem returns to consider the possibility of redemption or the further decay of the fallen world in the Mutability Cantos. Nature rejects Mutability’s claim to Saturn’s vacant
throne by determining that things “are not changed from their first [unfallen] estate; / But by their change their being doe dilate; / And turning to themselues at length again, / Doe work their own perfection so by fate” (VIII.vii.58.4-7). 

The pagan-inflection of the Age of Saturn vs. The Nature’s verdict hinges on the word “dilate” which suggest the neo-platonic doctrine of ascending to perfection, and the Pauline idea of sowing a natural body to reap a spiritual body (1 Cor. 15:44). For Paul, redemption is explicitly Georgic: “And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain: But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body” (1 Cor. 15:37-38). His conception of ascending to spiritual perfection in Christ after death is premised upon the joint labors of the Christian servant and the grace of God. Even in subjugating the self to God, the Pauline ego that elsewhere denies the efficacy of the work of will is never far from the equation, and by the same token, redemption requires spiritual labor of both God and the Christian subject: “by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all; yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me” (1 Cor. 15:10).

In concluding the poem with the Mutability Cantos

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224 Spenser’s vision of change is deeply allied with a theologically inflected vision of the sustaining dynamism of biological labor. It is not unlike God’s vision after the second coming, when “golden days, fruitful of golden deeds” will reign and “god shall be all in all” (3.337-341), which anticipates Spinoza’s pantheism. For Milton, as for Spenser, nature moves towards perfectibility, even as it decays “All things proceed and up to” the Almighty since he “created all/such to perfection” (5.470-472). Unsurprisingly, it’s georgic metaphor that illustrates the working (by nature and labor) back to perfection: “So from the root/ Spring lighter the green stalk, from thence the leaves/ More airy, last the bright consummate flower/ Spirits odorous breaths; flowers and their fruit,/ Man’s nourishment, by gradual scale sublimed” (5.479-483). Adam and Eve’s labor in sustaining the species even after the fall has some transcendent value in that it is a form of “tending” creation until the second coming, which is a version of natality and beginning again.
Spenser opts for an ending that privileges labor: biological nature is sustained through a dynamic equilibrium that has some transcendent value. As we’ll see in *Paradise Lost*, the labor of sustaining creation is not unlike Adam and Eve’s labor of sustaining the species until the promised Resurrection. Both Protestant epics find a way to revalue mere labor as transcendent, collective, spiritual action that sustains the world until the “Saboath’s sight” in the *Faerie Queene* (VII.viii.2.9) and the Resurrection in *Paradise Lost*.

The theological correlate to fashioning a gentleman is Georgos’ re-education from narcissistic Knight of chivalric deeds to a laborer of and for the cross. The didacticism of the text aligns it with other Reformation texts (and counter-Reformation texts like Ignatius Loyola’s *Exercitia Spiritualia*) that seek to establish a method for evacuating the will in order to give God’s will full and perfect determination. Georgos must purge himself of the ego that underwrites his heroic work and replace it with the will to do God’s spiritual work; it’s a task that bears some affinity to Luther’s project of re-writing the Catholic Church’s theology of glory as a theology of the cross. In replacing the chivalric code, with its emphasis on seemingly good deeds, with a Christian georgic ethic, Georgos must — like the Augustinians at Heidelberg in 1518 — learn that “although the works of man always seem attractive and good, they are nevertheless likely to be mortal sins.”

Georgos must learn to find a “meane” between a chivalric ethic of heroic deeds and getting caught by temptations to idleness/idolness. Throughout the first Book, Georgos is either denied chivalric victories or the outcomes of those victories undermine the virtue of chivalry. Rushing headlong into the Den of Error, Georgos adds more force rather than, as Una advises,

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228 Martin Luther, “Heidelberg Disputation, 1518,” *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings*, ed. Timothy F. Lull (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005), 48.
adding faith (I.i.19.3). In his dependence on rash and narcissistic knightly deeds, he is denied a heroic victory when Error’s young “devour their dam” and leave him without the victory that should be his: “Now needeth him no lenger labour spend, / His foes haue slaine themselues, with whom he should contend” (I.1.26.3, I.1.26.8-9). Elsewhere martial trial by combat earns him unsavory prizes, as when he defeats the Saracen and wins the false Duessa.

A martial allusion to Virgil’s *arma virumque cano* seems most appropriate precisely at the moment the epic muse is explicitly repudiated:

Fayre Goddesse lay that furious fitt asyde,
Till I of warres and bloody Mars doe sing,
And Bryton fields with Sarazin blood bedyde,
Twixt that great faery Queene and Paynim king,
That with their horror heuen and earth did ring,
A work of labour long, and endlesse prayse:
But now a while lett downe that haughtie string,
And to my tunes thy second tenor rayse,
That I this man of God his godly armes may blaze. (I.xi.7)

Granted, this portion of the text is not so much a Roman foundation myth as a Protestant re-foundation myth, or an Edenic recovery narrative. But from the perspective of a nation that saw itself as an event in a longer Deuteronomic history, it is a moment of salvation in the cycle, with national and (for Spenser writing in Ireland) imperial implications. The episode that sees the
patron saint of England battling the dragon should be fertile ground for epic conventions, and yet it is here explicitly rejected in favor of the “second tenor” — the georgic “meane” between pastoral and epic — to sing of “godly armes” rather than the hero’s arms. The epic string is a fit for nationalist hymns, but the georgic string is likewise ripe for nationalism (especially for a nation whose patron is St. George) with its motivating metaphor of farm as state. Likewise, the georgic string is a fit for a poem about educating Georgos, and for a poem whose meta-goal is the education of gentlemen-readers. The politics the text encodes suggest that labor — in the form of self-cultivation — is the key to success for the Protestant nation. Again, we see the mutual entanglement of private labor (Protestant piety) and political action (Protestant politics) in the wake of the Reformation.

But Georgos’ hard-learned education is not enough to defeat the dragon, and the text is ultimately ambiguous on the efficacy of Georgos’ labor; it suggests that labor is necessary to cultivate a gentleman and to refashion a chivalric knight into a Christian soldier, but not always sufficient. Likewise, it’s a qualified omnia that Virgil elaborates in the Georgics; in neither vehicle nor tenor does labor quite conquer all. Storms and plagues devastate the farm, just as civil wars and crises devastate the state. The Reformation bequeathed to the Anglican Church the project of renegotiating the value of works under the Protestant dispensation. Certainly the work of that kind of negotiation is at the heart of the georgic mode, where georgic negotium is the opposite of pastoral otium. If Spenser tunes his song to the “second tenor” between epic and pastoral, then Elizabethan georgic is likewise a via media between a doctrine of efficient works and providential design. Despite the farmer’s best efforts, plagues and storms can upset years of labor. Despite Georgos’ previous labors and education, it is ultimately an unwilled felix culpa that twice sends him into healing baptismal waters. These passive salvations are providential
boons — like good weather for the Roman farmer (or bad weather for the Spanish Armada) — that the Christian subject is powerless to effect.

The text sets up a critical comparison between a medieval, chivalric vision of action with its focus on externally oriented deeds and an Early Modern, social vision of action, which mingle private Protestant piety and public political action. Action in the post-Reformation context requires the incessant labor of self-cultivation, which may not be a guarantee of individual salvation, but can at least put the nation as a whole back on the path toward recovering Eden. It’s not unlike gardening manuals of the period — the very English descendants of Virgil’s agricultural didactic — which claim that readers will be able to recreate Eden in their own backyards. This logic is at the heart of The Georgics as well. In Book II, though the reign of Zeus made agricultural labor a necessity, such labor can help the nation recover some semblance of Saturn’s Golden Age. In staging an English version of the recovery narrative, Spenser makes the same move. To regain paradise, much work is required, both in the form of instruction (Una’s attempt to educate the somewhat Irish satyrs about proper worship practices and Georgos’ education in the House of Holiness) and in labors of the cross. Ultimately Georgos must resist falling into solipsistic and idle/idol contemplation about the heavenly kingdom and continue his work in the earthly one.

William A. Oram has argued that moments of paralysis in The Faerie Queene are emblematic of both “the weakness of the independent human will” under the Protestant dispensation and of Spenser’s own frustrations over the efficaciousness (or lack thereof) of action in the external world. In light of Book V and VI, I would further limit the external

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230 See Rebecca Bushnell, Green Desire: Imagining Early Modern English Gardens.

231 William A. Oram, “Spenserian Paralysis,” Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900 41.1
world to the policies and courtly rituals of the Elizabethan court. The first “stuck” character in the narrative is Fradubio, and Georgos’ response to him is a perversion of georgic labor. Georgos wounds the tree when he “bends his gentle wit” to fashion a garland for Fidessa/Duessa, which implicates courtly love rituals in the violence of the scene (I.ii.30.5). This is a rejection of the georgic mode: he is not preparing a graft for propagation, or pruning the tree to maintain its health and fertility; he is squarely in the pastoral mode with its courtly/Petrarchan undertones of non-procreativity and non-reproduction. Fradubio poses something of a Protestant riddle to Georgos, in effect asking him to consider his story in an introspective light. Rather than engage in the intellectual labor required to recognize the sins of his own conscience in Fradubio’s story, Georgos hopes another mindless chivalric quest will do the trick. “O how,” he asks in a halting rhythm (and with a forced pun), “mote I that well out find, / That may restore you to your wonted well?” (I.ii.43.6-7). Fradubio’s response denies the efficacy of such courtly works (and, to echo Sarah Plant’s argument, Catholic rituals)

232: “Time and suffised fates to former kind / Shall vs restore, non else from hence may vs unbind” (I.ii.43.6-9). Georgos rejects the invitation to engage in soul-searching labor, and fails to recognize the danger he is in. Reacting with horror to the Protestant message that heroic deeds won’t mitigate the wounded the tree’s punishment, Georgos attempts to purge his conscience in another parody of the georgic labor he refused, by planting the bough in the ground. All suggestions of sowing and planting the broken limb in the ground are undercut by the verb “thrust,” which suggests the martial and sexual ethic of the courtly code Georgos insists on maintaining. If we read in these moments a contest between a theology of glory and a theology of the cross, Georgos unwittingly silences the tradition of the

(Winter, 2001), 52.

speaking cross in stopping the wound with clay. Unlike georgic labor, which is future-oriented, Georgos gardening in this scene has the opposite effect; he is trying to forget his crime by erasing the evidence from the record of his conscience. The opportunity for georgic cultivation, new life, and redemption through recognition instead becomes an abrupt burial.

Georgos also gets stuck in his book, but it’s not until the House of Holiness that he finally submits to the work of rehabilitating his soul at the hands of faith (Fidelia), hope (Speranza), and love or charity (Charissa). After refreshing “their wearie limbes with kindly rest” from their labors, Una asks Fidelia to educate Goergos in “her schoolehouse” so “of her heauenly learning he might taste, / And heare the wisedome of her words diuine” (I.x.19.1-6). Fidela “taught celestiall discipline” (I.x.19.8), and she gives him the arch lesson of reading “her sacred Booke, with bloud ywrit, / That none could read, except she did them teach” (I.x.20.1-2). The intense focus on education unites formal tropes of education from the schoolhouse with exegetical practice of reading a bloody text. That bloody text signifies triply as the violent chivalric romances that someone like Georgos (in Redcrosse Knight mode) would be familiar with, as the bloody body of Christ (by way of a submerged pun on corpus), and as the new testament books that memorialize his sacrifice. Georgos must learn how to trade the life of the knight for the life of the Christian soldier, and that’s a process that requires much education in the House of Holinesse.

The education continues with the other Christian virtues. Speranza “taught him how to take assured hold / Upon her siluer anchor” (the anchora spei or “anchor of hope,” I.x.22.3-4), and later Una asks Charissa “to schoole her knight.” Charity occupies an ambiguous place in the Protestant tradition. Even though it is one of the three theological virtues identified by Paul, but protestants placed more emphasis on faith than on good works (1 Cor. 13:13). James, however,
revalues work, writing “Faith without works is dead” (Jas. 2:26). Spenser resolves this conflict by bringing together faith and work through the work of education. Charissa (charity incarnated) takes great pains to educate Georgos. She,

Gan him instruct in every good behest,
Of loue, and righteousnesse, and well to donne,
And wrath, and hatred warely to shonne,
That drew on men Gods hatred, and his wrath,
And many soules in dolours had fordonne:
In which when him she well instructed hath,
From thence to heauen she teacheth him the ready path. (I.x.33.3-9)

Charissa’s instruction focuses on performing works of faith and things “well […] donne.” In “godly worke of Almes and charitee / She him instructed with great industree” (I.x.45.4-5). At this point in his education he is prepared to shed his chivalric name (Redcrosse) and learn his original, georgic name — a name, we are led to believe, that is more fitting for a Protestant Knight. The holy man, Contemplation, reveals that the Faerie queen brought him to “this Faerie lond”:

And in an heaped furrow did thee hyde,
Where thee a Ploughman all vnweeting fond,
As he his toylesome teme that way did guyde,
And brought thee vp in ploughmans state to byde,
Whereof *Georgos* he thee gaue to name;

Till prickt with courage, and thy forces pryde,

To Faery court thou cam'st to seeke for fame,

And proue thy puissaunt armes, as seemes thee best became. (I.x.66.1-9)

Georgos is a georgic hero whose work is both political (he is first and foremost a soldier and the patron saint of the chosen England) and private (he is a Protestant figure who learns through the private labor of education to cultivate his inner life and prune the outgrowths of his chivalric ambitions). In yoking together the public and the private, he is the quintessential hero of the rise of the social. After revealing his georgic heritage to Georgos, Contemplation cautions him against chivalry’s unnatural brand of georgic that seeks “earthly conquest[s]” on the “bloody field,” which only “sorrows yield” (I.x.60.7-9). But Georgos, echoing the agricultural language that is his birthright, desires to absolve himself entirely of his worldly tasks, “whose ioyes so fruitlesse are” (I.x.63.2), and Contemplation has to urge him to continue the earth work embedded in his name. He learns to find the middle way between action and inaction, and between brave public deeds and private, spiritual practice.

Georgic Hermeneutics

The Fradubio episode anticipates the georgic hermeneutic that the second book explores in greater detail. In many ways, Guyon’s problem is that, like Georgos offering to quest rather than question how he is implicated in Fradubio’s tale, he wants the easy answer, but whereas it takes Georgos an entire book to figure out a middle path between heroic labor and spiritual labor,
Guyon knows from the start that he is looking for a temperate mean. But Guyon applies temperance in such a heavy-handed manner as to suggest that the virtue has been reduced to a mechanized response. In the opening episode temperance is a mathematical operation requiring little intellectual or emotional labor on the part of the user. The book’s chief virtue has become an instrumental rather than intellectual tool, and it’s rendered as such by the Palmer, who describes temperance as a tool: “Temperaunce […] betwixt them both can measure out a meane” (II.1.58.2). The palmer’s pithy platitude offers burial as a “meane” between judging Amavia’s suicide and leaving it to God. But the burial of Amavia also suggests another step in the didactic manual’s progression. Amavia’s interment echoes the burial of Fradubio, though here it’s re-enacted with a difference. Fradubio’s burial was a parody of horticultural labor and the proper planting and tending of trees for future bounty precisely because Georgos was trying to bury the remembrance of the encounter — that is, to wash his hands of the blood he spilled and to occlude any future memory of the event he might have. Amavia’s burial also suggests a version of georgic earth-working. Spenser indulges in the sexual georgic that underpins the earth-as-fertile-mother trope by way of suggesting cyclical rebirth: “The great earthes womb they open to the sky, / And with sad Cypresse seemely it embraue.” (II.i.60.2-3). Guyon pledges a “sacred vow” (II.i.60.9) to avenge the double death of Amavia and her lover by Acrasia. He intuits the power of promising as “the remedy for [action’s] unpredictability, for the chaotic uncertainty of the future,” but he commits himself to the task too blithely, without thought of how difficult it will be to keep that vow. Like Georgos, Guyon will also find that the easy answer the chivalric code offers is not enough to clean the blood off his, or Ruddymane’s, hands. Labor — even in the guise of justice — cannot mitigate the effects of the fall.

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233 Arendt. The Human Condition, 237.
Lauren Silberman reads Book II as a critique of temperance as an exegetical practice for mediating between the external world of sense experience and the inner world of the conscience. When Guyon and the palmer apply temperance, they treat it as a tool to shortcut the intellectual labor of ethical scrupling, rather than as an adjustable paradigm that needs to be altered depending on the context. Reading for the contexts that ought to shape moral responses to a given situation is difficult, and instead of engaging in a georgic hermeneutic that tempers (a verb that suggests the time and activity of *homo faber*) an appropriate response to the moment, Guyon and the palmer displace the labor onto instrumental temperance, which mathematically computes the “meane” response for them. In the final canto, Guyon’s response to the Bower of Blisse is a different kind of mean revealing an altogether different kind of temper than the virtue the book sets out to explore. Added to the critique of a lazy, instrumentalized approach to moral vagaries of the fallen world, the second book (as Silberman also notes) marks the shift from a certain, easy brand of allegory that freezes the flow of the world into two easily split poles. When the allegorical machinery seizes up, temperance becomes a mechanistic operation that pursues a static midpoint between two extremes. The world, Spenser suggest, requires a much subtler response, and determining that response requires time and effort. Finding that mean is not more than just an operation; it requires work.

The first book’s critique of the chivalric code continues into the second as Guyon and the Palmer hone, or fail to hone, their reading skills. In their various failures to chart an appropriate middle path, Guyon struggles to deal with the limits of chivalry. Like Georgos, Guyon is deed-oriented. He must find a middle path between the “gracious deeds” of the Faerie Queene and the “fowle deedes” of Acrasia, but his method is to ignore or destroy his passions by relegating them

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beyond his sphere of possibilities (II.ii.43.6, II.ii.44.7). The chivalric critique the poem develops throughout lends itself to the passion-as-horse trope. Instead of bridling his passions, Guyon ignores or reacts violently to them, and when he loses his horse early in the book, the text suggests that true temperance requires the labor of management, and not merely ignoring the passions. Unlike, Georgos, however, Guyon isn’t trapped in his narcissism; he is sensitive to the suffering of others. Pity — a dangerous passion, according to the palmer — is the locus of the difficulty when it comes to treading the middle space between two extremes. So susceptible to pity in the opening cantos, Guyon undergoes his own tempering, or hardening, over the course of the book. By the midpoint, Guyon has seemingly abandoned the idea of bridling (or even ignoring) the passions. His lack of pity and inability to deal with passions comes to a head in Canto five when Guyon beheads the horse on which Pyrrochles rides.\textsuperscript{235} By the time he gets to the Bower of Bliss, Guyon is so far from curbing his passions that the only available response to the sensual world that he can allow himself is violence.

In a typically modern move that mingles private and public in something that we might call the social, the private virtue of temperance becomes the public virtue of justice over the course of Book II. Indeed, one of the major blind spots of the Arendtian critique of the rise of the social is the fact that without it — without private concerns entering the public domain — it is very difficult for politics to address matters of rights and justice. With the increasing difficulty of determining the right, temperate course of action in the fallen world of Book II, temperance becomes instrumentalized and finally weaponized as a result of its lazy application. Book 5 takes up a similar concept in a similarly fallen world — the “stonie one” as the proem calls it (Proem V.2.2). Both the Books of Temperance and Justice struggle to come to terms with what is a

\textsuperscript{235} Pyrrochles and his brother Cymochles represent a fraternity of extremity, as well as the two elements necessary for tempering steel — fire and water.
quintessentially modern and — for the actors within the text and readers of the text — new problem of justice. As Frank Kermode has shown, Spenser’s argument attempts to naturalize justice using natural law (whereby justice is upheld by the Queen, a prerogative derived by God) rather than a common law conception of what Early Moderns might call equity (which is based on custom). This split understanding of justice as both the product of nature and culture is nowhere more apparent than in the georgic terms Spenser uses to describe the knight of justice as a great mower who cuts the weeds of vice:

Though vertue then were held in highest price,
In those old times of which I doe intreat,
Yet then likewise the wicked seede of vice
Began to spring which shortly grew full great,
And with their boughs the genle plants did beat.
But euermore some of the virtuous race
Rose vp, inspired with heroicke heat,
That cropt the branches of the sient base,
And with strong hand their fruitfull ranckes did deface. (V.i.1.1-9)

Justice is neither completely natural and wild, nor completely domesticated and cultural. It exists in that middle, georgic space where human activity meets natural growth and decay. Determining justice is hard work and requires education “to weigh both right and wrong, / In equall ballance with due recompence, / And equitie to measure out along, / According to the line of conscience”

Guyon wants to interact with justice in the mode of fabrication (that is, as \textit{homo faber} interacts with the work he produces — “under the guidance of a model in accordance with which the object is constructed”).\footnote{Arendt, \textit{The Human Condition}, 140.} He wants to treat it as a tool, rather than as a laborious, process-oriented undertaking that is never complete. But, as we’ve seen, justice is not merely the execution of a plan or blueprint; it involves a certain sensitivity to subtlety and nuance, and to some extent, empathy, which is not available to the mechanistic and instrumentalized approach of \textit{homo faber}.

Artegall’s georgic education earns him a flattering comparison to the labors of Hercules, but when it comes to the dirty work, Artegall doesn’t bloody his hands (V.i.2.6). Underlying the model of fabrication is the reality of violence, because “human productivity was by definition bound to result in a Promethean revolt because it could never erect a man-made world after destroying part of God-created nature.”\footnote{Ibid., 139.} Like Temperance over the course of Book 2, justice becomes a weapon, and the brutality of executing justice is displaced onto the weapon rather than the labors of the knight. The dreaded “club” of justice — the same type of weapon wielded by Orgoglio, Disdaine, Lust and Hatred — mediates between the fallen world and the unstained hero (V.i.2.9). Talus, Artegall’s monstrous groom, performs a similar instrumental function and by his violence he keeps his master’s hands clean. Astraea bequeaths to her son Talus, “an yron man, which did on [Astraea] attend / Alwayes, to execute her stedfast doome,” to “doe what euer thing he did intend” (V.12.2-4). The footnotes to the Longman edition speculate that Artegall’s “Robocop may be regarded as the impersonal power that enforces justice,” but the text allows other knights to kill on behalf of their respective virtues — why not justice? Talus isolates
Artegall from his deeds, providing a barrier between his intention and the execution of his intentions, which tend to be undeniably cruel, especially in the context of Munera’s pleas for mercy. Artegall watches Talus dragging her by the hair “withouten pitty of her goodly hew, / That Artegall him selfe her seemlesse plight did rew” (V.ii.25.8-9). Like Guyon in the later episodes of Book 2, Artegall short-circuits the pathways to pity by instrumentalizing justice as Talus: “for no pitty would he change the course / Of Iustice, which in Talus hand did lye” (V.ii.26.1-2). If the knight is moved by a kind of pity that he’s not prepared to contend with, the implied narrator seems to be as well, given the adverbs he attaches to Talus’ actions, like “rudely” and “fowly” (V.ii.26.3, V.ii.25.7). But Talus’s work is also a kind of brutal georgic threshing, because he holds “an yron flale / with which he thresht out falsood, and did truth unfould” (V.i.12.8-9). The social task of determining and administering justice, then, is figured as agricultural effort. Such is the work of georgic justice in the fallen, “stonie” world.

Talus, the georgic thresher, must perform the dirty work of administering justice, and this has implications for Spenser’s colonial vision for Ireland. Justice in Book V is more complicated (and more modern) than the Aristotelian conception of justice as either distributive (concerning the often unequal distribution of honors or wealth) or commutative (balancing punishments and crimes). It occupies a place between the privacy and politics, and between natural law conceptions of justice and common law conceptions of justice based on custom. Clemency and mercy in the context of these newly socialized conceptions of justice always run the risk of becoming “vain pity” (V.ix.49-50), whereby justice loses its public orientation and becomes mired in the private identification and empathy. Pity is part and parcel of the erosion of the self; agents cease to see themselves as free and independent and instead identify with the other — and this is one of the characteristics that modern conceptions of justice are built upon. In Early
Modernity, at the beginning of the age of society, justice is mitigated by mercy. The Book of Justice is a reaction to this mitigation; Spenser suggests that for justice to do its political work, it needs to be executed mechanistically, without the encumbrances of feeling, emotion, affect and to some extent, nuance. For Spenser, the over-expression of private pathos has political implications for the colonial project, and it’s no surprise that Spenser’s solution to this risk is articulated in georgic form. As an instance of that risk — and of that risk being brutally suppressed — Stephen Greenblatt reads the destruction of the Bower of Bliss as a colonial imperative to prevent the colonizers both in North America and Ireland from “going native.”

In *A View of the Present State of Ireland*, Spenser takes a similarly hardline to government and disciplining the Irish population because he fears that without strong discipline, Ireland will be overrun by forces counter to civilization. He believed that without the strong authority of a reigning monarch, the “moste Salvage Irishe” had grown so uncivilized that “no laws, no penalties can restrain, but that they do in the violence of that fury tread down and trample underfoot all both divine and human things, and the laws themselves they do specially rage at and rend in pieces” (9). In violent terms, he suggests that authority needs to be imposed “by the sword […] I mean the royal power of the prince, which ought to stretch itself forth in her chief strength, to the redressing and cutting off of those evils” (65). The lawlessness of the Irish is often represented as savagery, as in “moste salvage Irish” (46), and this kind of language comes up in *The Faerie Queene* as well. Savagery in the *Faerie Queene* is always allied with a lack of

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In Book VI, the “saluage nation” is typified by their lack of industry and in particular their aversion to agricultural work:

In these wylde deserts, where she now abode,  
There dwelt a saluage nation, which did liue  
Of stealth and spoile, and making nightly rode  
Into their neighbors borders; ne did giue  
Them selues to any trade, as for to driue  
The painfull plough, or cattell for to breed  
Or by aduentrous chardanidze to thrive;  
But on the labors of poore men to feed,  
And serue their owne necessities with outhers need. (Vi.viii.35)

Their land is described as “wylde deserts,” suggesting it is uncultivated and abandoned or deserted, which is part of the colonial logic of *res nullius* that erases other claims to land that is occupied by other people by seeing it as abandoned or underutilized. *Res nullius* also provides a Roman justification for a georgic approach to colonization, whereby English “planters” were encouraged to clear the Irish land and resettle it for English farms. The world “colony” also

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241 There is a sizeable body of research on this topic. See, for instance, Debora Shuger, “Irishmen, Aristocrats, and Other White Barbarians,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 50.2 (Summer, 1997), 501. She argues that the “Tudor/Stuart Irish tracts equate barbarism with a grazing economy predicated on endemic tribal violence” and a disdain of farming.

242 I will return to *res nullius* doctrine and its relationship to New World georgics in the final chapter of this dissertation.
has georgic roots, because it comes from the Latin *colonia*, which meant “A farm, estate in the country; a rural settlement.”

Perhaps no one is a more thorough proponent of the logic of *res nullius* than John Locke, whose *Second Treatise of Civil Government* elaborates a defense of a civil state through an argument about the production of property. Though “God […] hath given the world to men in common” (Sec. 26), private property emerges from the etymology of the word “property” from *proprius* (one’s own). What is one’s own is transformed into such by labor: “The labor of his body, and the work of his hands, we may say, are *properly* his” (Sec 27). Locke uses the georgic for both his vehicle and tenor. Agriculture is provides the metaphorical register for his description of property-producing labor: “As much land as a man tills, plants, improves, cultivates, and can use the product of, so much is his property. He by his labor does, as it were, inclose it from the common” (Sec 32). Especially in the case of America, Agriculture also describes the land that is transformed into property:

There cannot be a clearer demonstration of any thing, than several nations of the Americans are of this, who are rich in land, and poor in all the comforts of life; whom nature having furnished as liberally as any other people, with the materials of plenty, i.e. a fruitful soil, apt to produce in abundance, what might serve for food, raiment, and delight; yet for want of improving it by labour, have not one hundredth part of the conveniencies we enjoy: and a king of a large and fruitful

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243 “*colony, n,*” OED Online, March 2016, Oxford University Press.

territory there, feeds, lodges, and is clad worse than a day-labourer in England.

(Sec 41)

By this logic, land that is deemed underutilized is either “waste” [“land that is left wholly to nature, that hath no improvement of pasturage, tillage, or planting, is called, as indeed it is, waste” (Sec 42)] or is claimable by any party that is will to work it. Of course, “work” is always relative, and the colonial lens rarely recognizes indigenous labor in the landscape, as his rhetorical question suggests: “I ask, whether in the wild woods and uncultivated waste of America, left to nature, without any improvement, tillage or husbandry, a thousand acres yield the needy and wretched inhabitants as many conveniences of life, as ten acres of equally fertile land do in Devonshire, where they are well cultivated?” (Sec 37). This georgic justification allowed anyone who “tilled and reaped” (Sec 38) to claim the land they worked; using the inverse of that logic, any people who were deemed lazy or who weren’t using the land in the proper English way — like the hard-working folks of Devonshire, I suppose — could have their land appropriated by the improving colonizers.

This is the justification Spenser employs to justify English interventions in Ireland, and we can see a version of that in The Faerie Queene. The “saluage nation” is characterized as lazy and greedy, raiding neighboring lands because they refuse to work for their own sustenance. Just as colonial logic erases the labor of native populations and sometimes erases their presence, it also denies any equivalence between a “saluage nation” that seizes its neighbors’ possessions and a civilized, colonial nation that seizes its neighbors land. Later we encounter the “saluage nation” as the “Brigants,” whom Andrew Hadfield identifies as a reference to the Irish, and again
they are identified by the resistance to agricultural labor. “A lawless people, Brigants hight of yore, / That neuer vsde to liue by plough nor spade, / But fed on spoile and booty, which they made / Vpon their neighbours, which did nigh them border” (VI.x39). The colonial logic here is breathtaking. Spenser at once invokes a Roman-era res nullius conception of property, which justifies seizing land that is not being properly utilized (always in the perspective of the colonizer), while criticizing the Irish for seizing their neighbors’ land. We will return to this concept of res nullius and its georgic implications for the colonial project in the New World. Controlling and disciplining the land through English agricultural practices becomes an analogue for keeping and civilizing the Irish. The Brigants or “Saluage nation” need the hard hand of justice — figured as the agriculturalist Talus — in order to keep from sliding back into their savage ways. After the rise of the social, the private, interpersonal virtue of pity and mercy threatens to overwhelm public justice, and Talus represents a Spenserian reaction to this particular incarnation of the social.

Travel and Travail

According to his letter to Raleigh, Spenser professed goal is didactic — to fashion a gentleman. But Spenser was also an ambitious member of the Sidney circle with both poetic and political ambitions. His epic bears the marks of someone who is both trying to carve a name for himself as a poet — that is, as homo faber, the maker of permanent, durable artwork — and as a political agent (zoon politikon) on the side of militant Protestantism. What makes The Faerie

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Queene so unique is that it is a snapshot of the fluidity of the vita activa in the Early Modern period.

In addition to fashioning gentlemen, Spenser was also fashioning himself as a laborer, a maker, and a do-er. He uses two narrative devices to toggle between the georgic mode and the epic mode. The georgic narrator — the travelling narrator — characterizes his poetic work as humble agricultural labor. Versifying returns to its etymological origin as the turning of the plough in moments like the initial ending of the 1590 edition:

But now my teme begins to faint and fayle,
All woxen weary of their iournall toyle:
Therefore I will their sweatie yokes assoyle
At this same furrowes end, till a new day,
And ye faire Swayns, after your long turmoyle,
Now cease your worke, and at your pleasure play
Now cease your worke; to morrow is an holy day. (III.xii.47.3-9)

This goes beyond the modesty topos, though, and suggests a very different teleology of work in the Protestant dispensation, whereby the work of the poet (or the Protestant soul) is never complete. Gone is the preterit logic of completed action that accompanied Catholic sacramental practices, with their focus on performance and fulfillment. Under the new dispensation, vocationalism — the endless labor of pursuing one’s God-given calling — replaces the Catholic progress to heaven, which looks much more like homo faber executing a blueprint for their own salvation. In some sense, the Catholic worldview allowed for the construction of salvation, while
under the Protestant worldview, one had to work without the epistemological certainty that one was going to achieve that salvation. It’s worth pausing over the choice of narrating an epic from a georgic perspective. Such generic hybridity makes sense for a didactic epic, but it’s also suggestive of the pressures Protestantism was putting on all rungs of the *vita activa*, especially work and, in the case of the characters of the poem, epic action.

The other narrator is the epic voyager who often crops up in the narrative at moments of danger, linking him with Aeneas and Odysseus. The travelling narrator is a much more intuitive choice for an epic poem. Both the travailing georgic narrator and epic travelling narrator reflect the condition of their subjects. We first meet the travelling narrator when he describes Una’s misguided relief after having found Georgos, who is in fact Archimago in disguise: ‘Much like, as when the beaten marinere, / That long hath wandred in the Ocean wide, [...] Soone as the port from far he has espied, / His Chearfull whistle merily doth sound” (I.iii.31.1-8). The next time he appears he is also ironically commenting on the fact that, like Una, the character in question thinks his travail has ended, but the danger still lies ahead. Having escaped the House of Pride, Georgos is compared to a sailor who narrowly misses a shipwrecking rock:

As when a ship, that flyes fayre under sayle,
An hidden rocke escaped hath vnwares,
That lay in waite her wrack for to bewaile,
The Marriner yet halfe amazed stares
At peril past, and yet in doubt ne dares
To ioy at his foolhappie oueresight. (I.vi.1.1-6)
The narrator’s foresight lends the irony of these moments an almost cruel aspect, but these moments are suggestive of Spenser’s larger concerns in the context of Protestantism.

Just as the travelling narrator stands as a check on the catholic and chivalric notions of performance and accomplishment, the travelling narrator also complicates epic’s preterit logic of completed action even as he comes from that very tradition. Epics tend to be concerned with destinations, feats, and completed accomplishments, but for the Protestant hero, the journey is never over, and any feeling of relief and closure is, like Archimago’s illusions, false. This is essentially the motivating trope behind George Herbert’s “The Pilgrimage,” where even after much “travail” (1) the destination is always deferred and death is “but a chair” (36) for rest in after life’s journey.246 Likewise, endings are always deferred in the Faerie Queene, both at the level of each individual knight’s quest — knights must carry on or, in the case of Britomart and Una, their return must be awaited — and structurally when considering the incomplete poem as a whole. The labor of travail and travel never ends for these characters, which is commensurate to the work of the soul in the Christian teleology: there is no rest in this life, but in the world to come. The narrator takes up this kind of indeterminacy in concluding Georgos’ tale: “And then again abroad / On the long voyage whereto she is bent: / Well may she speede and fairely finish her intent” (I.xii.427-9). The narrator seems confident of an ending and a “finish[ed] […] intent” in this 1590 portion, but for the narrator, author, and Georgos, the journey continues under the uncertain auspices of the verb “may” in the subjunctive mood.

The Aenean/Odyssean voyage is a metaphor for the narrative throughout the second book, but these are difficult voyages that figure the labors of the hero and poet. One possible etymology for Guyon is guide, and in Spenser’s didactic project, the hero serves as a guide

through the temptations of the external world. The extent to which one should follow this guide or see him as a cautionary tale is less certain. The voyage is linked early and often to labor, where “Guyon guides and uncouth way / […] after his trauell long, and labours manifold” (II.i.24). The ludic orthography Spenser employs suggests visuals puns between travels and travails. When Guyon and Georgos meet, georgic labor and laborious voyages collapse in another suggestive orthographic choice. At their parting Georgos says, “God guide thee, Guyon, well to end thy warke, / And to the wished hauen bring thy weary barke” (II.i.32.8-9). The “wished hauen” is the heaven that will not be achieved until after the physical body is sown, suggesting that Guyon’s “warke” will not end until death. It takes a lot of toil and labor to navigate a world that is so much more nuanced than polarized extremes, which would make temperance much easier to recognize. Guyon thinks separating Huddibras and Sansloy will be a simple solution, so he steps between the two. At first he is emphatically “not like a weary traueilere” but he soon discovers that finding the temperate mean is not as easy as the Palmer’s platitudes suggest, and the voyage imagery likens him to “a tall ship tossed in troublous seas […] Meet[ing] two contrarie billowes,” suggesting the toil of maintaining the middle ground (II.ii.24.1-4).

In addition to seeing the task of the writer as akin to the georgic laborer, whose work is never over, Spenser also sees his poetic production in the tradition of homo faber — the worker who makes permanent, durable objects (in this case, literature) that persist into eternity. Crucial to Spenser’s conception of authorship is the Virgilian career path that Richard Helgerson noted was so common to Renaissance ideas of authorship, or in his word, laureateship.²⁴⁷ In the proem to Book I, Spenser writes from the position of the Virgilian author:

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²⁴⁷ Helgerson, *Self-Crowned Laureates*. 
Lo I the man, whose Muse whylome did maske,
As time her taught, in lowly Shephard’s weeds,
Am now enforst a farre unfitter taske,
For trumpets stern to chaunge mine Oaten reeds:
And sing of Knights and Ladies gentle deeds,
Whose praises having slept in silence long,
Me, all too meane, the sacred Muse areeds
To blazon broade emongst her learned throng:
Fierce warres and faithfull loues shall moralize my song. (Proem, stanza 1)

The narrator claims that he will make the generic leap from pastoral to epic that skips the middle
genre, georgic. But the modesty *topos* also playfully suggests that the author in fact occupies a
generic “middle or intermediary place” between the pastoral *Eclogues* and the epic *Aeneid* that is
“all too meane.”

Subsequent books explore Romance, a courtly version of epic that is more
concerned with “Knights and Ladies gentle deeds” and “blazon[ing]” those deeds (as well as
lovers’ bodies, culminating in the disillusionment of Book VI which finds Pastorella “covered
with confused preasse” of bodies) (xi.20.1). If the poem as a whole claims to tackle epic themes,
the poem ultimately evacuates the court-inflected genre of epic romance of any ethical meaning,
and in the process enacts a *mean-*ing in its georgic inflections. Even if we take the proem of
Book I as a limited introduction only to Book I and not to the poem as a whole (hard to do,

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248 “mean, adj.2,” OED Online, March 2016, Oxford University Press.
considering the first book is largely concerned with the human and textual body’s holiness/whole-ness), the same tension between epic and the georgic middle path predominates.

Spenser sees himself as a laborer even as he is creating in the mode of *homo faber*, and he is aware of this ambitious reach across rungs of the *vita activa* from laboring poet to creator of immortal art. In the proem to Book III he asks “How then shall I, Apprentice of the skill, / That whilome in diuinest wits did rayne, / Presume so high to stretch mine humble quill?” (III Proem 3.1-3). In spite of the modesty *topos*, he sees his own work in relation to other high-culture examples of *homo faber*, such as painters and Daedalean craftsmen:

But liuing art may not least part expresse,
Nor life-resembling pencil it can paynt,
All were it *Zeuxis* or *Praxiteles*:
His Daedale hand would faile, and greatly faynt,
And her perfections with his error taynt:
Ne Poets witt, that passeth Painter farre
In picturing the parts of beauty daynt,
So hard a workemanship aduenutre darre,
For fear through want of words her excellence to marre. (III Proem 2)

Even as he enacts the ineffability *topos*, he includes himself in the company of fabricators of antiquity — Daedalus, and the fifth-century BC painter Zeuxis, and the fourth-century BC sculptor Praxiteles. These are artists in the mold of *homo faber* who have created a world (in the Arendtian sense) that transcends history. He insists on the impossibility of capturing the virtue of
Gloriana/Elizabeth in any art form, he offers that if anyone can do it, it’s his friend and fellow poet Walter Raleigh (III Proem 4), and it’s in this more historically proximate tradition that Spenser sees his own poem operating. Even as he appeals to the workmanship of homo faber, he makes recourse to the georgic mode, with its emphasis on humble labor, asking that “that same delicious Poet [Raleigh] lend / A little leaue vnto a rusticke Muse” (III Proem 5.1-2).

The georgic “rusticke Muse” doesn’t merely transcend agricultural labor to create timeless work in the mode of *homo faber,* it also aspires to political action. As we’ve seen, Spenser’s georgic vision has political implications for the colonial project in Ireland. In the dedicatory sonnet to the Earle of Ormond and Ossory (Thomas Butler, the governor of Munster), Spenser invokes a characteristically georgic take on the nationalist project in Ireland:

Receiue most noble Lord a simple taste
Of the wilde fruit which saluage soyl hath bred,
Which being through long wars left almost waste,
With brutish barbarisme is ouerspredd:
And in so faire a land, as may be redd,
Not one *Parnassus,* nor one *Helicone*
Left for sweete Muses to be harbored,
But where thy selfe hast thy braue mansione;
There in deede dwel faire Graces many one.
And gentle Nymphes, delights of learned wits,
And in thy person without Paragone
All goodly bontie and true honor sits,
Such therefore, as that wasted soyl doth yield,

Receiue dear Lord in worth, the fruit of barren field.249

Spenser leans on agricultural imagery in other dedicatory sonnets, too. For instance, to the Earl of Oxford (who emphatically is not Shakespeare) he refers to the poem as “vnripe fruit” (DS3.2). But in the context of a colonial audience, a georgic conceit controls the entire poem. Written in Ireland, *The Faerie Queene* is described as “the wilde fruit” of “saluage soyl” and “the fruit of barren field” that “wasted soyl doth yield” — formulations that have led many to read the “saluage nation” as an allegory for the Irish. Ireland is characterized as exhausted agricultural land that “left almost waste” by “long wars.” The georgic mode in this colonial sonnet suggests that English culture civilizes and cultivates Ireland. In typical fashion, *res nullius* logic erases the work of earlier poets and artists; it is only from the patronage of both the New and the Old English in Ireland that culture is legible to the colonial overlords. For Spenser, then, the original georgic equation — the farm as state — is still operable in the colonial context. English cultural and agricultural practices civilize Ireland, put it to work, and make it productive. He conceives of his poet project (the work of *homo faber*) as a political project — both a nationalist project of creating a national canon through epic and an imperial project of bringing adjacent lands under control and into civility. Such political aspirations underlie Spenser’s sense of poetry as more than a mere fabrication but as a vector for action in the broadest sense. The micro-macrocosmic thinking that allowed the comedies to explore new social formations — whereby the family is already a political entity, and serves as a model for politics at large — also allows the poet to conceive of his own work not just as the work of *homo faber*, but as the activity of *zoon politikon*.

In some senses, that project was a failure, and the troubles lasted much longer than expected; some might argue, as Edward Said has, that they never ended: “[I]t is generally true that literary historians who study the great sixteenth-century poet Edmund Spenser, for example, do not connect his bloodthirsty plans for Ireland, where he imagined a British [sic] army virtually exterminating the native inhabitants, with his poetic achievement or with the history of British rule over Ireland, which continues today.”

It’s important that we recognize the extent to which Spenser’s political project is bound up in the unsavory polititics of imperialism both because it reveals the complicity of literature in lasting structures of domination and oppression, and because it reveals the extent to which literary activity (the work of homo faber) has been and continues to be implicated in politics (the irreversible actions of zoon politikon, and their unforeseen consequences) after the rise of the social.

In Spenser’s lifetime, the Tudor policy in Ireland was a certain failure. He is not unlike Milton, the other nationalist poet this chapter explores whose literary work aspired to political action, in that both lived to see the failure of their respective visions for the Protestant nation and commonwealth. In 1598, Spenser abandoned his georgic vision of “planting” Ireland. Tyrone’s Rebellion spread and Spenser and many of the New English fled. There are parallels in the text, such as Aretegall’s summoning back before he could “reform that ragged common-weale” (V.xii.26.4). The Mutability Cantos tell the story of two falls — the rise of Mutability (which is akin to the stony age of Zeus) and the loss of a distinctly Irish paradise called Arlo Hill. These two narratives repeat the typology of a georgic fall. As Julia Lupton has shown, Arlo Hill signals doubly as Spenser’s place of exile away from London and as his new home in Ireland. I would add that, in addition to imitating Virgil’s Eclogue I to “frame his political career in pastoral terms, 

while also conceptualizing [his] poetic production in relation to political and domestic economies of desire and displacement,” there is a healthy dose of georgic imitation that links the poetic and agricultural verses.\(^{251}\) The georgic metaphor that sees the farm as a little commonwealth also sees agriculture as the key to civilized (which is a dog whistle for Roman or English) culture. Arlo Hill is where Irish culture and civility used to reside, in Spenser’s version of the fall, where “the Gods then vs’d (for pleasure and for rest) / Oft to resort there-to” (VII.38.4-5) before Diana/Cynthia (or, in the politics of the poem, Elizabeth) abandoned it. Diana can’t save Arlo Hill/Ireland; the curse can only be lifted by Nature.

In Spenser’s vision, Dame Nature is a surrogate for God, and when Mutability presents her case to Dame Nature, all that she typifies as change and disorder is ultimately revealed to be the divine natural order: thus the procession of the seasons toward the decay of winter is an allegory for the ages of the human life (the same metaphor Shakespeare would make so much of in his sonnets). Summer enters “with labor heated sore” (VIII.vii.29.9), while Autumn entred with “his plentious store” and carries “eares of corne” and “a sickle” to “reape the ripened fruits the which the earth had yold” (VII.vii.30.2-9). Then come the procession of the months, which read like a georgic almanac: March carries “a spade” and “a bag of all sorts of seeds” “which on the earth he strowed as he went / And fild her womb with fruitfull hope of nourishment” (VII.vii.32.6-9). April is garnished with “faith fairest flowers and freshest buds / Which th’earth brings forth” (VII.vii.33.7-8). June comes with his “plough-yrongs” (VII.vii.35.4), while July carries “a sithe” and “a cicle” (VII.vii.36.8-9). August, who wears “eares of corne” is associated with Ceres who “liv’d here on earth, and plenty made abound” (VII.vii.375-7). September marks the harvest season at its height, and appropriately he is

Heauy laden with the spoyle
Of haruests riches, which he made his boot,
And him enricht with bounty of the soyle:
In his one hand, as fit for haruests toyle,
He held a knife-hook [...] (VII.vii.38.2-6)

The inebriated October carries his “ploughing share, and coulter” (VII.vii.39.9). November has “browes with sweat” that “did reek and steem” and takes delight in his “planting” labor (VII.vii.40.4-6). All goes dormant during the winter months, but when February comes around he has “by his side / His plough and harnesse fit to till the ground, / And tooles to prune the trees” VII.vii.43.5-7). Mutability’s argument is based on an analogy between all things to the human life-cycle: all things are born and all things must die; such is the progress of the seasons, of the months, the day itself, and all things under Nature, which she claims are in fact under her command. But Dame Nature’s response finds not a steady march toward decay, but endless death and endless renewal in a spiraling, georgic cycle. There is the sense that though we can only perceive decay and disorder that there is a divinely sanctioned order to the events in Nature. It is the same order that brings spring around again on the heels of winter or, in an Arendtian vein, that brings the miracle of birth and natality back into view from the prospect of despair. These are two visions of optimism — one Protestant, and one secular (though, as we’ve seen, with strong Christian inflections) — that hold out hope for restoration and renewal in the face of ostensible tragedy. Spenser’s Nature finds that things “are not changed from their first estate” (VII.vii.58.4). In toggling from change to dilation, the poem re-frames its linear fallen vision and
looks toward a millennial restoration of good beyond the horizon of human vision. But a key difference between this otherworldly vision of rebirth and Arendt’s worldly vision of natality is that Spenser’s is premised in part on Paul’s georgic doctrine of sowing a natural body to raise a spiritual body (Cor. 15.36-44), whereby the hope for renewal will not happen in this world but in a Christian afterlife. The possibility for renewal is always on the horizon through the natural miracle of birth and its analogue in action: natality. Each new generation comes to stand in for the possibility of new action in the world. For Arendt, natality is always an historical possibility; for Spenser, re-birth happens out of time — “that same time when no more Change shall be” (VII.viii.2.2), which is an allusion to Revelations’ “that time shulde be no more’ (Rev. 10.6). It is perhaps the ultimate coup of modernity and the ultimate victory of the rise of the social that, in the post-Reformation period and at the dawn of modernity, the private labors of the Protestant soul for personal salvation finally replaced the public activity of politics for a plurality of agents.

The georgic mode in the Mutability Cantos is strange. It’s the primary mode through which we understand change and the cyclical nature of time, and it’s also aligned with Dame Nature. Spenser allies georgic fertility and decay with the endless cycles of birth and death in Nature, but his vision of Nature is finally a reflection of divine order — it has more in common with the Gaia hypothesis and equilibrium theory than with the chaotic agent that is external to human activity. Rather than engaging the Renaissance habit of pastoralizing the natural world, Spenser’s vision of nature is inflected by a georgic mode that sees nature not as the opposite term in a set of binaries, but rather as a rhizomatic complex that incorporates humanity, God, civilization, and culture. Perhaps more than any other Renaissance writer, Spenser’s work erases the problematic duality and approaches something like what William Cronon and Timothy Morton have argued — that the category of nature or the wilderness needs to disappear if we’re
going to have a worthwhile conversation about guaranteeing the survival of the planet (which includes rather than excludes human activity). Spenser’s vision replaces romanticized (or pastoralized) pure nature, which polarizes nature and culture, and replaces it with the georgic mode, which stitches together nature and culture. The georgic mode in synergistic mode provides a way of thinking about the mutual constructedness of nature and culture and, as I’ll suggest in the afterword, can be a useful paradigm for us when it comes to the hard work of dealing with the messes we’ve made in the Anthropocene, which are inevitably the products of both nature and culture.

In the final stanzas, the poet’s work does not reach its desired end, suggesting that he is operating in the mode of endless labor rather than work, and operating against the labor of time who is, as always, rendered in georgic terms that “shall soon cut down [pride] with his consuming sickle” (VII.viii.1.9). But if it’s a modest move to associate the work of the poet and *homo faber* with endless agricultural labor, the association between the poet’s labor and God’s labor in creation is ambitious to say the least. For, all that moueth, doth in Change delight: / But thence-forth all shall rest eternally / With Him that is the God of Sabbaoth hight: / O that great Sabbaoth God, graunt me that Sabaoths sight” (VII.viii.2.6-9). The hierarchy of the *vita activa* is in complete disarray: *homo faber* is a laborer — he is *animal laborans* — but then again, so is God’s creative work. The Mutability Cantos provides a typological — if artificial — ending by characterizing the entire project as akin to God’s labor of creation, something approaching Spinoza’s *natura naturans*. The georgic labor of the poet, as never-ending as the seasons and the agricultural calendar itself, doesn’t find a final end, but at least finds a temporary sabbatical in the comparison of the creation of the six books of *The Faerie Queene* to the six days it took God to create the world. What we are left with is not a perfect ending, so much as a pause before the
next round of dilating work, whereby all things “doe work their owne perfection” (VII.vii.58.7).

Spenser performs a beautiful sleight of hand here by eliding the question of teleology in the theology of the poem. The end (in both senses) of natural processes (biological labor) is deferred in such a way that mutability and decay will ultimately be subsumed by some kind of imagined perfection in the future. That the end is deferred at the very moment he takes his own Sabbath rest suggests the hope that the author’s work and biological labor work in similar (and similarly mystified) ways.

To dilate this argument only slightly, in some ways contemporary secular ecology has not come much farther than Dame Nature’s argument at the end of this sixteenth-century poem. Secular ecology similarly avoids teleology. Some, such as James Lovelock’s in his Gaia hypothesis, would take the path of mystification. Others pursue a vision of sustainability that aims for dynamic equilibrium, which, many scientists suggest is inaccurate in light of ecological history. The dynamism or stasis of global ecosystems has become politically controversial in the partisan disagreement over climate change, with many conservatives finally coming around to the idea that the climate is in fact changing (as it has in the past), but not to the idea that climate change is a function of human activity. In a move that is both politically brilliant and


\[253\] Daniel Botkin is perhaps the strongest critic of the equilibrium paradigm, writing that “until the past few years, the predominant theories in ecology either presumed or had as a necessary consequence a very strict concept of a highly structured, ordered, and regulated, stead-state ecological system. Scientists know now that this view is wrong at local and regional levels […] Change now appears to be intrinsic and natural at many scales of time and space in the biosphere.” See *Discordant Harmonies: A New Ecology for the Twenty-First Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 9.
intellectually irresponsible, they turn a debate about the teleology of ecosystems (what is the purpose of their maintenance, resilience, and adaptation) into a debate of the etiology of ecosystems (what is the cause of their change). Neither theology, nor ecology, nor partisan politics have attempted to answer the fundamental question — or perhaps fundamentally unanswerable question — of what the end of nature is. The solution that Spenser proposes anticipates Milton’s: that without the epistemological privilege that would grant us insights into a telos for nature (or, in the Protestant register, Creation), we must sustain life until that (ever)lasting meaning or “perfection” arrives. Biological labor — the activity of all nature, including the human animal laborans — then is a microcosmic version of the original creative moment. That originary (and mythical) moment is the first instance of divine work aspiring to action in the form of creation; what Milton proposes is that humans enjoy a version of that originary activity in the day-to-day maintenance of life, where the biological labor of “tending” aspires to action in the highest degree. The form the future “perfection” will take, while still fundamentally unknowable, is nonetheless a version of biological labor aspiring to action by way of a georgic metaphor for natality: the birth of a messiah figure from the “seed” of Adam and Eve.

Tending to Wild, Tending to Reason:
Education as Cultivation in Paradise Lost

Now we turn to the last great practitioner of the epic in English. John Milton is likewise interested in the didactic and hermeneutic possibilities of epic literature, and like Spenser, Milton makes recourse to a georgic idiom to accomplish that didactic project. Just before Milton makes
his famous statement regarding his distaste for “a fugitive and cloister’d virtue” in *Aereopagitica*, he describes the co-incidence and co-mingling of good and evil in an impure world:

Good and evil we know in the field of this World grow up together almost inseparably; and the knowledge of good is so involv'd and interwoven with the knowledge of evil, and in so many cunning resemblances hardly to be discern'd, that those confused seeds which were impos'd on *Psyche* as an incessant labour to cull out, and sort asunder, were not more intermixt. It was from out the rinde of one apple tasted, that the knowledge of good and evil as two twins cleaving together leapt forth into the World. (350)

His georgic analogy compares the world of moral choice to a literal field of options — that is, to a grassland ecosystem populated with diverse species. Quickly another georgic analogy crops up — one in which imposing a taxonomy on the various species in that sward would be comparable to the labor of Psyche, whose mother-in-law Venus forced her to sort wheat, oats, lentils, and seeds. The more often quoted “fugitive and cloister’d virtue” also has agricultural associations. Early Modern readers may have heard an echo of Cain’s condition in the King James Bible, which says, “When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth” (Gen. 4.12).254 As David Harris Sacks has shown, “Fugitive” also has associations that connect it to Protestant vocationalism and work; it

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254 Vagabond also has some interest here, as it referred to fugitive, idle beggars who wandered without a permanent habitation or calling.
originally referred to one who abandoned a monastic life. “Cloistered” then turns this hendiadys into an oxymoron that compares a virtue to something that is akin to Catholic ascetic practice and to abandoning that practice. Such a virtue, then, is fugitive because it neither interacts with the public world (with the vita activa) nor fulfills its private calling (the vita contemplativa). For Milton, a virtue is only worth the intellectual and social labor that tests it, and as I’ll show, his use of the georgic to symbolize that labor approaches a habit of mind.

Freedom is always premised upon moral choice, or what Milton refers to as “right reason” (Lt. recta ratio) in Paradise Lost (11.42, 12.84). In Areopagitica, we encounter that argument in brief: “Many there be that complain of divine providence for suffering Adam to transgress. Foolish tongues! When God gave him reason, he gave him freedom to choose, for reason is but choosing” (356). But the ability to sort through that moral field is difficult and is full of “incessant labor” — a direct borrowing from Virgil’s Georgics “labor omnia vincit / improbus” (I.145-146), which Abraham Fleming translated as “ceaseless labor.” Moral choice (what Milton’s god refers to as “Umpire Conscience” in Paradise Lost [3.195]) does not simply navigate that field by an automated process in which we quickly intuit the right choice, as if we


could send our options through a seed-sorter or, in the twenty-first century, an algorithm.\textsuperscript{257} It’s a laborious process of “culling” right from wrong. Agriculture is Milton’s favorite vocabulary for writing about the arduousness of being a free moral agent in the world. The “fugitive and cloister’d virtue” is meaningless in part because it requires no work and therefore lacks the difficulty of real choice. As Eve puts it, “what is faith, love, virtue unassayed, / Alone, without exterior help sustained?” (9.335-336). She intuits that virtues are only virtuous to the extent that they are tested, but in her hubris she doesn’t recognize the fragility of their state, nor the necessity of external help to maintain that state. The separation colloquy highlights how plurality is to the human condition, which even in its pre-political form requires the effort of more than just one person.

When writing about learning, Milton frequently leans on the georgic mode and its use of agricultural metaphors to signal the difficulty of intellectual labor. Beyond the quotation at the outset of this chapter, \textit{Aereopagitica} also takes a page from both John 4:35 and Francis Bacon’s \textit{Advancement of Learning} in advocating a sort of “georgics of the mind” in its final rousing rhetorical question: “What wants there to such a towardy and pregnant soil but wise and faithful laborers to make a knowing people, a nation of prophets, of sages, and of worthies? We reckon more than five months yet to harvest; there need not be five weeks; had we but eyes to lift up, the fields are white already” (371). \textit{Of Education} uses the same georgic idiom to underline the arduousness of learning and, to use another georgic analogy, the fruits that await the completion of such labors. Milton refers to wisdom as “industrious” (323), and to judiciousness as the acts of “ripest judgment” (323) that stand as “the final work” (323) of a complete education. Similarly,

\textsuperscript{257} Marvell suggests that even “comput[ing]” is work, at least for the “industrious bee” in “The Garden,” who owes his lineage to Virgil’s bees in \textit{Georgics} Book IV; in \textit{Seventeenth-Century British Poetry: 1603-1660}, 553.
forcing students to execute complicated tasks too early is like “the plucking of untimely fruit” (323). Milton’s vision of education moves from georgic exertion to the promise of a pastoral paradise regained, where a “virtuous and noble education” is “laborious indeed at the first ascent” but leads to a “goodly prospect” full of “melodious sounds on every side that the harp of Orpheus was not more charming” (324-325). In comparing students to “stocks and stubs” (325), Milton invokes an image of education as grafting, where both stock and stub refer to the stem of a plant that is ready for the insertion of the scion of learning.

Agriculture is not merely a metaphor for learning in Of Education; it is a large part of the content of the education Milton proposes as well. His syllabus includes classical texts, such as “the rural part of Virgil” and “the authors of agriculture, Cato, Varro, and Columella” (328). He suggests that “if the language be difficult, so much the better: it is not a difficulty above their years. And here will be an occasion of inciting and enabling them hereafter to improve the tillage of their country, to recover the bad soil, and to remedy the waste that is made of good; for this was one of Hercules’ praises” (326). He is referring to Pliny’s reading of Hercules’ fifth labor: cleaning the Augean stables as an allegory for the introduction of manuring to Italy’s soils.

In The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce, Milton moves beyond a georgic understanding of education to articulate a hermeneutic for navigating the fallen world that is not unlike Spenser’s in that it requires work. For Milton, that work is scholarly and verges on scholastic: it requires meticulously combing through scriptural authorities for a comprehensive

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258 The too-early harvest is a recurrent image in Milton’s work. In “Lycidas,” the poet comes to “shatter [the] leaves before the mellowing year” (5) which functions as a modesty topos (the poet is not yet mature enough to do the task justice) and sets the mood for mourning Edward King, who was “dead ere his prime” (8). See “Lycidas” in Milton’s Selected Poetry and Prose, ed. Jason P. Rosenblatt (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2011), 68.

259 All citations to “Of Education” will be from Milton’s Selected Poetry and Prose.
understanding of biblical law. Against the “narrow intellectuals of quotationists and commonplacers” who would merely find the easy answer and neglect the rest of the text, Milton argues that the wisdom of scripture is dispersed “like a master scattering the heavenly grain of his doctrine like pearls here and there, which requires a skillful and laborious gatherer, who must compare the words he finds with other precepts, with the end of every ordinance, and with the general analogy of evangelic doctrine” (304). It’s a difficult, recursive, and laborious intellectual practice that requires more than just seeking a particular quotation from the bible.

As many have pointed out, Milton is deeply interested in education in *Paradise Lost.* If “repair[ing] the ruins of our first parents” (322) is the ultimate goal of education, education plays a large part in the epic about that ruin. Blaine Greteman refers to the “Angelic pedagogy” of Raphael and Michael, and that pedagogical project constitutes the majority of the poem. In books 5-8, Raphael the “divine instructor” (5.546) is sent down to “advise” (5.234). In the final two books, Michael is referred to as “teacher” (11.450), “true opener of my eyes” (11.598), and “heavenly instructor” (11.871). The deeply georgic terms that Milton uses to figure education point to the amount of work required to arrive at “right reason.”

If the principal lesson of *Paradise Lost* for both the main characters and for readers is that freedom is difficult, and the ability to responsibly exercise freedom requires much labor in

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the form of experience and learning, then this is a lesson that sits somewhat uneasily with what Milton’s God says regarding the preparation of Adam and Eve for their trial. In what has become one of the most commented upon passages of the poem Milton’s God insists that he made Adam and Eve “sufficient to stand, though free to fall”:

[W]hose fault?

Whose but his own? ingrate, he had of me
All he could have; I made him just and right,
Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall.
Such I created all th' Ethereal Powers
And Spirits, both them who stood and them who failed;
Freely they stood who stood, and fell who fell.
Not free, what proof could they have given sincere
Of true allegiance, constant Faith or Love,
Where only what they needs must do, appeared,
Not what they would? what praise could they receive?
What pleasure I from such obedience paid,
When Will and Reason (Reason also is choice)
Useless and vain, of freedom both despoiled,
Made passive both, had served necessitie,
Not mee. They therefore as to right belongd,
So were created, nor can justly accuse
Thir maker, or thir making, or thir Fate,
As if predestination over-rul'd
Thir will, dispos'd by absolute Decree
Or high foreknowledge; they themselves decreed
Thir own revolt, not I: if I foreknew,
Foreknowledge had no influence on their fault,
Which had no less prov'd certain unforeknown.
So without least impulse or shadow of Fate,
Or aught by me immutablie foreseen,
They trespass, Authors to themselves in all
Both what they judge and what they choose; for so
I formd them free, and free they must remain,
Till they enthrall themselves: I else must change
Thir nature, and revoke the high Decree
Unchangeable, Eternal, which ordain'd
Thir freedom, they themselves ordain'd thir fall. (3.96-128)

This passage has been read as essential to Milton’s project of “justify[ing] the ways of God to men,” and it gets at the core of a major crux in the poem regarding political freedom and private free will. In short, this crux is an example of the still familiar nature vs. nurture debate: are Adam and Eve endowed with right reason by birth or is it something that has to be learned through experience and education? There are two cultural operations that bear upon this question and make it a particularly vexed one for the post-Reformation Protestant thinker. The first is the humanist interest in the work of education, which was seen as both nurturing to the individual
and as a vector for the formation of citizens and culture production at large. The second is the doctrine of predestination, which is a theology that is somewhat at odds with the humanist educational project in that it casts doubt on the efficaciousness of human effort. Here perhaps Weber is illuminating: perhaps the same cultural operation that devalued work as a way to merit heaven while seeing success in vocational and professional work as a sign of election is functioning in this seeming paradox whereby reason is both pre-determined (or given) and cultivated (or earned).

On the question of whether humanity tends toward reason (nature) or whether it must be tended in them (nurture), Milton’s God at first sounds unequivocal: “I made him just and right.” Then, comparing Adam and Eve to the fallen angels, they were “created” and “form’d free.” And yet, Milton’s God hedges his bets by sending Raphael — the “divine instructor” — to prepare Adam and Eve for their trial, which suggests that freedom and right reason need to be cultivated. I can allow that Milton’s God might say one thing, but evince something quite different, or that God’s analogy between the creation of humanity and the creation of the angelic beings is imperfect. But I’m more drawn to what amounts to question about the temporal correlates of words like “made,” “created” and “form’d.”

The tense is firmly lodged in the preterit, the form we use for completed actions (and, I would add, the tense we most often associate with epic, at least before Spenser dilated the temporality of the genre), but Adam and Eve’s creation narratives suggest that they had to learn right reason. Despite the provocative differences among Raphael’s comments on humanity’s creation in Book 7 (505-516), Adam’s version of their creation in Book 8 (253-511), and Eve’s memory of her creation in Book 4 (449-491), Kristin Pruitt McColgan finds a similar thread across all three — a narrative of growth from self-recognition and self-knowledge, to
recognizing a relationship to an other, and finally to understanding the values of paradise. Adam and Eve are not born ready for their roles in Eden, rather they have to be “warn’d” and “by experience taught” by a God who, at least in Adam’s account, calls himself and is called “Guide.” Adam claims that “Here had new begun / My wandring, had not hee who was my guide / Up hither, from among the Trees appeer’d,” much as Eve might never have accepted Adam had he not “seized” her hand. The entire epic can be read as a process of training them for the more wandering, which is where we leave the couple as they continue on their lonely, errant way through the fallen world. Though there is much intuiting of roles in Paradise, there is also enough education to make the divine activity of forming, creating, and making humanity less of a completed action and more of an ongoing process, which suggests that right reason is not merely inborn in Adam and Eve, but that it’s something that has to be learned. But what of God’s tenses? Milton takes care of that by gesturing at the Augustinian notion that God exists in an eternal presence: “Now had the almighty Father from above, / From the pure empyrean where he sits / High throned above all height, bent down his eye, / His own works and their works at once to view” (3.56-59). That eternal “now” includes his “works” and, we must assume, the process of making those works as well, works that are, given the amount of education that occurs in this poem post-creation, pre-fall, and post-fall, are always works in progress.

Milton’s vision of political freedom — to be “sufficient to stand, though free to fall” — is premised on the labor of education, which is often trooped as agricultural cultivation in the poem. Milton’s major revision to the vita activa is to expand freedom such that it can be actualized through labor, not just through political action. For Arendt, politics is the only activity that actualizes freedom, but Paradise Lost suggests that freedom has to be actively cultivated through

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the labor of education, and though that freedom is the precondition for the public work of politics, it’s part and parcel of the inward turn of political action under Protestantism (a turn that both cavaliers and Puritans would make in light of their defeat). The internalization of Protestant politics that we see in *Paradise Lost* is in part a reflection of the Protestant habit of mind in general, and a reflection of Milton’s mind in particular after the failure of the commonwealth. Barbara Lewalski writes that,

> The educative thrust and method of these dialogues [between Adam and Raphael, though we could include Michael] is broadly Platonic, and their mode is georgic and comedic: they exercise Adam and Eve in the “gardening” their own natures constantly require — pruning to remove excessive or unsightly growth, direction of overreaching tendencies, propping of possible weaknesses, correcting initial misjudgments or mistakes, and thereby learning how to learn. Edenic innocence, these dialogues make clear, is a matter not of stasis in perfection but of continual growth towards greater perfection.\(^{263}\)

Curiously, Lewalski finds books 5-8 georgic in modality, but when it comes to the big challenge to that learning in book 9 (the exam, you could say), she finds no trace of georgic.\(^{264}\) Her chapter on georgic actually features very little analysis of the mode beyond what’s quoted above, and she tends to describe those georgic scenes as comedic. That being said, we share a sense that Milton’s epics are deeply interested in a kind of laborious education that produces freedom.

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\(^{264}\) Ibid., 196-219.
Lewalski highlights how Milton’s post-Restoration epics make education and learning central, representing them in quintessentially Miltonic terms as individual, self-generated, arduous, dialogic processes going beyond the received view of the Homeric and Virgilian epics as paideia, fundamental education in all knowledge, Milton sought to engage his readers actively with the uses of knowledge, exercising them in making the difficult intellectual and moral discriminations that he saw as fundamental to producing good men and women, and free citizens.265

Lewalski’s concept of epic paideia is useful in terms of understanding the educational correlates of epic. The education of the hero has been a feature of epic since its inception. Jonson’s comments on Aeneas that he was a “pattern of piety, justice, prudence and all other princely virtues” speak to the Renaissance habit of reading epic in part as an odyssey of the hero’s public and personal development. I want to suggest that these Spenser and Milton go a step further in their revision of the hierarchy of classical genres. Just as Shakespeare alloyed the lower genre with the middle genre in blending pastoral and georgic in As You Like It, these two practitioners mongrelize the highest genre with the middle in writing epics that feature a strong element of georgic didacticism — that is, epics that see an analogy between the cultivation of the land and the cultivation of the human.266 The goal of cultivation was gentlemanly virtue for Spenser,


writing for a courtly context and during the cult of Elizabeth. For Milton, however, the goal of such a laborious education is the production and maintenance of right reason.

The question of whether or not right reason is naturally endowed or is learned through experience and education — a question that gets to the heart of God’s innocence or culpability in the fall — is thematized in the poem through the ambiguous use of the word tend, especially in Book 9. Milton diverges from the most stringent Calvinist interpretations because he suggests that postlapsarian humanity still has the potential for right reason through the labor of education, or at the very least, he leaves this as an open question. Put in the language of the poem, do Adam and Eve tend toward “right reason” naturally, or does cultivating “right reason” require the labor of tending? Seth Lobis is correct in identifying the georgic framework of book 9. I would add that the entire poem is georgic in orientation, and necessarily so given that the biblical fall story is the Judaic corollary to the classical etiologies of work: the passage from a Golden Age into a Silver Age in the Georgics, and the story of Prometheus and Pandora in Hesiod’s Works and Days (a major source text for the Georgics). Likewise, Lobis is a subtle reader of the two ways Milton deploys the word tend — tend as tendency or disposition, and tend as care and attention. Lobis errs, however, in reading tendency and disposition as georgic work. I would suggest that tendency and disposition are in fact the absence of labor. Arendt has no account for tendency — she doesn’t identify it as a feature of labor, which is essentially bodily and comprises the biological necessities that sustain life, such as reproduction and consumption. One need not have a certain tendency to survive as (what Agamben would call) bare life. In that sense, there is no equivalency between animal naturans and nature conceived in opposition to nurture. I’m sure it will come as a shock to my readers that nature is a slippery term. What’s unusual in Milton’s

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representation is that it neither falls into the Renaissance habit of ecophobia — viewing nature as a chaotic, uncontrollable, and dangerous tendency, something akin to what Mutability suggests in the final cantos of *The Faerie Queene* — nor into seeing nature as divinely ordered (as Dame Nature suggests).²⁶⁸ For Milton, nature inhabits that middle space (a space I have been aligning with a georgic ethos) in that it is divinely created with aspirations to order and perfection, but it tends to wild and requires the work of human cultivation.

In one of the most sustained interrogations of work in the poem, Milton (by way of Eve) elevates the labor tending the garden from a postlapsarian penalty to a prelapsarian duty. Eve suggests that she and Adam part ways to pursue their work more diligently. Intimating something akin to utility and efficiency, she suggests a division of partners and labors:

Adam, well may we labor still to dress
This garden, still to tend plant, herb, and flower,
Our pleasant task enjoined; but, till more hands
Aid us, the work under our labor grows
Luxurious by restraint [...] (9.205-209)

Eve has done a masterful job of integrating earlier lessons. Here she is basically parroting Adam’s earlier georgic argument that what separates man from the animals is labor: the “other creatures all day long / Rove idle unemployed” while “man hath his daily work of body or mind / Appointed, which declares his dignity / And the regard of Heaven on all his ways, / While other animals unactive range.” (4.616-621). Their tasks — both agricultural and procreative (note the

repetition of “more hands” and the pun on *manus* and “manure”) is akin to a Reformation of nature: they “labor to reform / Yon flowery arbors” and “branches overgrown / That mock our scant manuring and require / More hands” (4.625-629). But now Adam argues that they were made “not for irksome toil but to delight” (9.242). Eve, on the other hand, believes their ultimate charge is to tend the garden — that work is an end in its own right; indeed, what makes this moment so unusual in the canon of fall narratives is Eve’s insistence on the primacy of labor before the fall. The received tradition posits work as a consequence of the fall rather than a condition of prelapsarian life. In Diane McColley’s words, Eve provides the world its first demonstration of what a productive and responsible active life before the Fall might be. Cultivating one’s garden is an activity of such universal application that there is scarcely any art, science, emotion, virtue, or ethic for which it cannot stand; and Milton’s mimesis of it is his pattern for a regenerate response to one’s calling to do the work of this world, including his own work of poesie, in response to the divine voice.269

In Milton’s vision of Eden, agricultural labor is a metonym for all work in the world, which points to Milton’s indifference to questions of work’s source. Milton’s revision of the genesis narrative exchanges the genesis version of pre-fallen “dressing and keeping” for a vision of agricultural labor in Eden that looks like the post-fallen version; he offers a vision of Eden in which the prefallen couple’s labors are ceaseless (in Fleming’s translation). Agricultural work, in other words, is not so much the legacy of the primal punishment, but rather the inheritance of our first parents’ innocence.

The same can be said (and Eve intuits as much) for the other human activity that is attributed to the fall in the Judeo-Christian tradition: the labor of bringing forth children, and the ongoing task of tending to them. A submerged pun lurks in these lines, linking the manual labor of Adam and Eve’s hands to the reproductive labor of Eve’s body. “Till” can first be heard as a reference to agricultural tilling, even if the sense is cleared up as the sentence unfolds. “More hands” refers to both the manual task (hands as manus) of tending the garden as well as their procreative charge. “Tend” in these lines suggests nurturing, where the tending of plants reads as an analogy for educating and nurturing the first couple’s children in the ways of maintaining the garden and fulfilling their first tasks.

A few lines later, however, she deploys tend in a different sense — not tend as caretaking or nurturing, but tend as tendency or disposition: “[W]hat we by day / Lop overgrown, or prune, or prop, or bind, / One night or two with wanton growth derides / Tending to wild.” Eve’s second use of “tend” playfully yokes together the two senses of the word — tend as care and tend as tendency. In the first use the line is extrametrical and the verb is transitive: “This garden, still to tend plant herb and flower.” Their labor, like the meter of the line, will have to extend beyond its established limit if they are going to keep up with the growth. In the second use, the verb shifts to the intransitive and the sense changes from tend as care to tend as natural tendency: “Tending to wild.” A trochaic inversion and the primary position of the verb point to the importance of this word and its shifting sense in the passage (the rhetorical device polyptoton). In using the two senses of tend in this passage, Eve underscores the intermingling of disposition and direction, nature and nurture. The tendency of the garden and human generation is towards growth, provided Adam and Eve tend to both.

The remainder of the passage develops a subtle connection between reason and education
that suggests that reason itself requires discipline and tending:

Thou therefore now advise,

Or hear what to my mind first thoughts present:

Let us divide our labors; thou, where choice

Leads thee, or where most needs, whether to wind

The woodbine round this arbor, or direct

The clasping ivy where to climb; while I,

In yonder spring of roses intermixed

With myrtle, find what to redress till noon:

For, while so near each other thus all day

Our task we choose, what wonder if so near

Looks intervene and smiles, or object new

Casual discourse draw on; which intermits

Our day's work, brought to little, though begun

Early, and the hour of supper comes unearned? (9.209-225)

First Eve plays the student asking for Adam’s guidance on the matter: “Thou therefore now advise.” But before Adam gets a chance, she offers “what to [her] mind first thoughts present,” in a free exchange of ideas that equalizes the balance of authority and makes them both co-learners in this scenario. The images of labor she uses are all old allegories for education: “wind[ing] / The woodbine round this arbor” is a figure of training plants to trellises, as is “direct[ing] / The clasping ivy where to climb.” If “reason also is a choice” (3.018), then reason
is present in this passage in the references to choice. Adam may labor “where choice leads” him, but Eve suggests that even if they “choose” their “task,” disposition might allow “looks” and “smiles” to interrupt their work. Reason allows them to follow their choice, but Eve suggests that reason needs discipline and education if it’s going to arrive at the right choice. This is, in effect, what God suggests in sending down “divine instructors” to warn and teach Adam and Eve before their big trial, even after insisting that they are “sufficient to stand” on their own God-given reason. Eve senses that inborn reason is not merely an inborn tendency, and that it needs to be tended with discipline and education to be put to its right use.

The two senses of tend are the poles around which the poem turns. Is Satan driven by a tendency, or has his evil been meticulously cultivated, rationalized, and tended. At the very outset of the poem, Satan says that his sense of “injured merit […] with the mightiest raised me to contend, / And to the fierce contention brought along / Innumerable force of spirits armed / That durst dislike his reign” (1.98-102). “Contend” and its derivatives (as here, contend and contention are used in proximity) overwhelmingly occur with reference to Satan, as when he says to Zepho, “If I must contend […] best with the sender, not the sent” (4.851-852), preferring to battle with God than with one of God’s delegate angels. There is the suggestion that we have tendencies, and that the work of tending also involves choosing between tendencies. But contending with God is not an option, since the created cannot possibly have a will commensurate with the creator. In his temptation of Eve, Satan deploys the verb “tend” ambiguously: “The way which to her ruin now I tend” (9.493). Again, is it a tendency to ruin that

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270 See, for instance, the parliament in hell, where contend occurs frequently (2.687, 2.203, 2.529) or where Satan tries to alter the terms of the debate with Abdiel so that instead of good vs. evil, it’s “servilitie with freedom [that will] contend” (6.169). Indeed, the only time it occurs without reference to Satan is when Adam suggests to Eve, “let us no more contend, nor blame/ each other” (10.958-959) in light of the fallen history that awaits them.
leads Satan this way, or is he tending ruin in all its forms (tend as aphetic form of intend and/or attend). Seth Lobis points out the Latinate *tendo cursum* lurks under these lines. I would add that the phrase also carries epic and heroic connotations that suggest some of Milton’s source texts from Homer and Virgil. *Tendo cursum* is an interesting instance of “tend” that points to the etymology of one word, while suggesting the meaning of the other. The *Oxford English Dictionary* even uses this phrase to illustrate the meaning “to have a motion or disposition to move towards,” which is tend from “*tendēre* to stretch, stretch out, extend, also intransitive for *tendere cursum*.” The same entry has “to have a natural inclination.” But staying the course suggests a “disposition” or “inclination” (what I have called a tendency) toward the course or status quo, as well as a “To turn one's attention, apply oneself to do something” (again, from the aphetic form of attend/intend, which is to say, *not* from *tendēre*). But “apply[ing] oneself to do something” is remarkably similar to the other sense and etymology of bending oneself to a task (tend as *tendēre* or stretch). Milton deliberately complicates these meanings and, in a characteristic move back to origins, points to productive ambiguities in their etymologies.

Milton calls attention to the ambiguous etymology of “tend” throughout book IX. Indeed, exploiting that ambiguity is a linchpin in Satan’s strategy. He tries to catch Eve’s eye and when he does he is “glad / Of her attention gain’d, with Serpent Tongue / Organic, or impulse of vocal Air, / His fraudulent temptation thus began” (9.528-31). Popular linguistics of the seventeenth century link the word “tempt” and “tend” (again, aphetic form of attend, from attention) through a misunderstanding of *tento* (homonymic with *tentum*, the past participle of *tendo* from which we derive “tend”). Seth Lobis has a provocative account of this confusion, wherein he sites Francis Holyoake’s *Dictionarium Etymologicum Latinum*, which defines *tento* as “To assay, prove or try, to handle, or feele often, to tempt one to doe evill" and gave its derivation as follows: "ex teneo
vel tendo, tentum." It’s hard to imagine an esteemed Latinist like Milton getting this wrong. Ockham’s razor suggests that Milton is exploiting a Latin pun. Satan’s problem is that he has more than just a mere tendency toward evil; he actually bends (tendere) himself to the task: in tending to her ruin, he strives to gain her attention (from which the aphetic “tend” is derived) and actively tempts (tendo) her. His active work to achieve the fall suggests a well-tended, cultivated and rationalized evil, rather than a God-given tendency. Adam and Eve’s problem is that they share something in common with God’s earlier creation, Lucifer, in that they tend to be tempted and need to learn to tend to their over-reaching tendencies. They need to learn how to cultivate and prune those outgrowths, in the georgic idiom of the poem.

Like Arendt’s vision of action, tending in the poem is agnostic in that it can be used toward either good or evil ends. Like Satan, we have the choice regarding which tendencies we cultivate, and which we prune. Milton underlines the effort involved in the temptation by highlighting how unnatural it is for Satan to speak through the inadequate instrument of a serpent’s mouth. Satan has to bend the creature away from its natural tendency to speak “with serpent tongue / organic, or impulse of vocal air,” where organic means using the tongue as an


272 They also share something in common with one of Shakespeare’s creations — Iago — who also thinks that “all things [in] nature tend” toward temptation (3.3.237) and that our wills are gardeners that must tend the garden of the self:

Our bodies are our gardens, to the which our wills are gardeners: so that if we will plant nettles, or sow lettuce, set hyssop and weed up thyme, supply it with one gender of herbs, or distract it with many, either to have it sterile with idleness, or manured with industry, why, the power and corrigible authority of this lies in our wills. (1.3.308-314)
instrument, organ, or tool. Eve, of course, recognizes this unnatural tendency and in her amazement she demands an explanation, “for such wonder claims attention due” (9.566). Milton repeats the association between attention (tend) and temptation in the very next line, “To whom the guileful tempter thus replied” (9.567). Milton draws attention to how easily tending to something — trying to bend it in one direction or another (tendere) — can become a temptation — putting it to a test or trial, or in the case of Satan, bending Eve’s will in the wrong direction. We can see the same tension between temptation and tending in the description of Eve’s hair, which she wears

Disheveled, but in wanton ringlets waved
As the vine curls her tendrils, which implied
Subjection, but required with gentle sway
And by her yielded, by him best received,
Yielded with coy submission, modest pride,
And sweet, reluctant, amorous delay. (4.306-211)

Her hair is likened to “tendrils,” which derive from the same root tendere. The comparison to the vine suggests at once temptation (“wanton,” “coy,” and “amorous delay” suggest that we cannot help but look on this sight with fallen eyes) and the need for tending in the form of “subjection,” “yielding,” and “gentle sway.” The georgic lens reveals that anything that can be cultivated is malleable (Spenser might prefer the term mutable). Milton suggests that nothing is either good nor bad, but tending makes it so. In the separation colloquy Adam intuited how easily tending
(attention and intention) can become temptation when he urged Eve “to avoid / Th’ attempt itself, intended by our foe.”

The poem suggests that reason must be tended and nurtured, but — perhaps as a result of this ambiguity — the poem also suggests that reason is pliant to both tending influences and bending, distorting influences. We’ve seen Eve link reason and tending (specifically the labor of education) at the outset of the separation colloquy. Adam picks up on this rhetorical move, and inscribes a new layer of possibility and ambiguity onto the etymological substrate of “tend” that suggests that reason is vulnerable:

But God left free the will; for what obeys
Reason, is free; and Reason he made right,
But bid her well be ware, and still erect;
Lest, by some fair-appearing good surprised,
She dictate false; and misinform the will
To do what God expressly hath forbid.
Not then mistrust, but tender love, enjoins,
That I should mind thee oft; and mind thou me.
Firm we subsist, yet possible to swerve;
Since Reason not impossibly may meet
Some specious object by the foe suborned,
And fall into deception unaware,
Not keeping strictest watch, as she was warned.
Seek not temptation then, which to avoid
Were better, and most likely if from me

Thou sever not: Trial will come unsought. (9.351-366)

Again we see the use of the root “tend” in “tender love” (9.357) and a warning about its false cognate “temptation” (9.364). The false cognate mirrors the impending deceit described in these lines using a constellation of words that point to duplicity: “misinform,” “dictate false,” “fair-appearing,” “mistrust,” “specious,” and “deception.” The idiom “tender love” points to the adjectival “tender” as “soft or delicate in texture or consistence; yielding easily to force or pressure; fragile; easily broken, divided, compressed, or injured,” from Latin tenerum (nominative tener). Vulnerability and malleability are key senses in this usage, but they also point back to the sense of something vulnerable or tender needing “tending,” which, though it comes from a different origin, is nonetheless an active sense here. That is to say, “tender” here may point to both vulnerability (especially in the face of temptation) as well as to the aphetic form of tend (an attender, one who attends, or tends — the role that Adam would like to play as

There is a similarly slippery false cognate when sees Satan wants to “contend” with God (4.851) ostensibly thinking himself to be equal to his creator, but the narrator’s descriptive choice in describing Satan’s “contemptuous brow” (4.885) suggests that the conflict is motivated by the contempt of one party rather than a trial between equals.

“tender, adj.1,” OED Online, March 2016, Oxford University Press.

These senses have georgic correlates as well, in that the word “tender” is often used to describe plants. See OED “tender, adj.1,” sense b: “Delicate, easily injured by severe weather or unfavourable conditions; not hardy; needing protection. tender annual, an annual plant needing the protection of a greenhouse all through its life; cf. hardy annual n. at hardy adj. and n.1 Special uses 2; tender plant (fig.), something needing careful nurture if it is to survive and develop.” This sense of vulnerable plant growth is in play in the description of Eve’s hair: “As the Vine curles her tendrils, which impli’d / Subjection, but requir’d with gentle sway, / And by her yielded, by him best receiv’d” (4.304-306).
Eve’s protector and attender). Against the vulnerability and malleability of “tender” stand words like “firm” and “erect,” which point back to “right reason” (with a submerged pun in Latin which echoes “erect” and *recta ratio*). Reason, it turns out, though “erect,” is “tender.” Adam’s claim that it’s not “mistrust” but “tender love” that moves him to such protectionist impulses rings somewhat hollow. At the very least, it is “mistrust” of “some fair-appearing good,” and in point of fact it’s mistrust of reason, which “not impossibly may meet / Some specious object by the foe suborned, / And fall into deception unaware.” It’s lack of confidence in reason’s ability to make the right choice. Reason’s very ability to be prepared, trained, and educated (in short, its ability to be tended) bespeaks its malleability and, in a word, its tenderness or as the *Oxford English Dictionary* has it, its tendency to yield easily to force or pressure.

All told, Book 9 has forty-three uses of the root tend (including tending, tender, intent, attention, etc.) or tempt (attempt, tempter, temptation). The sheer concentration of these roots provides a slippery vocabulary for the fall. In such a linguistic climate, it is impossible to locate right reason (or evil intent for that matter) in either God-given tendencies or the tending pedagogues, either angelic and Satanic. In *Paradise Lost* reason occupies an unstable position somewhere between tendency and intent, between attempts and attention. Reason emerges as tender in that it is both amenable to education and vulnerable to temptation. The vocabulary is georgic in that “tend” always activates a pun on tending plant and animal life, as Satan does throughout his temptation of Eve, and in that tend suggests the work of stretching and bending (*tendere*). Education is a positive example of stretching and bending the mind toward the right end, of cultivating the right intellectual habits in preparation for the trials of life. But the mind and the will — can be stretched and bent in the wrong direction as well. This cautionary note is at the core of Virgil’s georgic sensibility: the *Georgics* celebrates human achievement in bending
what is natural toward productive human ends, but sounds a note of caution about that very achievement and the possibility of misapplying it.

Reason is at the core of Milton’s basically liberal conception of freedom. But the text deeply undermines any sense of right reason as being inborn by portraying it as reliant upon education and vulnerable to temptation. The vision of freedom the text offers is one that is based on the continuous, ongoing labor of education. In some ways, *Paradise Lost* articulates a vision of freedom that is quintessentially modern in that it has the marks of the social all over it: freedom isn’t possible without the ongoing labor of education, which is deeply personal work with political correlates that shape education theory and policy after the rise of the social (and the Reformation). But there is another vision of freedom in the text that is a leftover from before the social colonized all activity in modernity: freedom that is premised on action that breaks out of the ordinary.

Of course, in the predestinarian world of Milton’s epic, nothing is truly unanticipated, at least from the perspective of an omniscient God. But that’s not the case for the human condition in the story, and that’s ultimately where I find Milton’s vision of freedom and Arendt’s vision falling in line together. Disruptive human action tends to be in Eve’s hands in the poem — we can look to the moment she has finished considering the Serpent’s arguments and bites into the fatal fruit. That mortal bite is the ur-action that rips humanity from their day-to-day routine, which, though pleasant, is hardly free. These are moments of radically free choice because they are the product of reasoning, considering the options, and the alternatives. Robert Hoopes claims
that “Milton stands as the last great literary voice of the concept of right reason, indeed of rational and ethical Christianity itself — a voice in which the voices of classical antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance merge into one.”²⁷⁶ Hoopes has no account for why Milton is the last great writer on the topic of Right Reason. Perhaps it is because his concept of Right Reason is a fundamental departure from the classical tradition in that it’s not inborn or natural, but rather a product of nurture in the forms of education, cultivation, and experience. Milton departs from the standard Puritan line because he allows for human agency in the construction of reason; indeed, he allows for the constructability of right reason not only as a possibility, but as a worthwhile human effort. Human perfectibility might not be possible until the millenarian outcomes of certain Protestant eschatologies, but we show good faith (and signs of our election, perhaps) in striving toward the goal of improving humanity through education and cultivation. In this sense, education and all forms of human striving are part and parcel of our lapsarian obligations to work, in spite of the fact that that work may not be efficacious.

For Arendt, however, just because a decision is the product of reasoning and free choice doesn’t make it freedom. It also has to be new and unexpected, and the consequences have to be unanticipated. Freedom is a break from the banal.²⁷⁷ That’s exactly the vision of freedom that is articulated in Paradise Lost — not sovereignty (the liberal idea that free will and sacred selfhood are the cornerstones of freedom), but action that unleashes unforeseen and uncontrollable


²⁷⁷ This anti-conformist sentiment is typical among Arendt’s contemporaries. For instance, Marcuse writes that “the ‘mechanics of conformity’ spread from the technological to the social order; they govern performance not only in the factories and shops, but also in the offices, schools, assemblies and, finally, in the realm of relaxation and entertainment.” See Herbert Marcuse, “Some Implications of Modern Technology,” Technology, War, and Fascism: Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse vol. 1 (New York: Routledge, 1998), 48.
consequences, that disrupts the automatism of the everyday and heralds the new. Now, it’s true that my reading re-creates the predicament of the Christian reader who is “surprised by sin” and must learn the laborious, meta-cognitive skills of diagnosing and critiquing their own responses to the text. To be clear, in Milton’s worldview, there is choice (and right reason leads to the right choice) and therefore freedom in choosing to be obedient. But an Arendtian frame, in spite of its Christian baggage, also finds the possibility of a very modern and even secular conception of freedom in Eve’s decision to break out of the predictable and ordinary to embrace the unforeseen consequences of her action, which is a radical departure from the banal. This is not a Romantic argument in favor of Satan (in the vein of Blake or Shelley), or a Christian argument in favor of God (in the vein of C.S. Lewis or Stanley Fish), but a political argument that finds a new, emergent kind of action in Eve’s decision to eat the apple.

When Eve eats the apple and then convinces Adam to share in the novelty, she reveals her political freedom, even if it’s not a kind of freedom that would have been legible to Milton’s theodicy. It is an action that is new, unpredictable and irreversible, and perhaps most importantly it creates the possibility for labor to become action in setting up a felix culpa that will ultimately be redeemed through the reproductive labor of a second Eve. Part of the problem with Arendt’s account of action is that she vacillates between an agnostic description that suggests that action can be used towards good or evil ends (or that it has no end at all), and an ethically oriented vision that she cites approvingly — what amounts to the classical ideal of democratic participation. Judging by her examples (which tend to be revolutions and resistances) I tend to see action as generally agnostic, but a powerful possibility nonetheless. Milton, of course, comes from and writes for a Christian context in which there is a moral compass directing us through the morass of satanic rhetoric. Eve’s biting into the apple is a moment that raises interesting
question regarding the legitimacy of actions committed in a context of deception. The Serpent cannot be said to be an agent revealing himself to another because he deceives Eve and misrepresents himself to her. Arendt calls this “mere talk” or merely a “means toward the end, whether it serves to deceive the enemy or to dazzle everybody with propaganda.”

278 Again, Arendt is hard to pin down. Such a description might seem to disqualify “mere talk” from consideration as action, but later she says that “In these instances [mere talk] action has lost the quality through which it transcends mere productive activity” and that it is “meaningless.”

279 Is it still action, or must action have meaning and transcend productive activity?

I’d suggest that Eve’s tasting of the fruit represents the first moment of human action in the poem — even if its not exactly action that Milton would laud. Eating the apple is wholly unexpected (in the human frame), and it unleashes powerful consequences that cannot be anticipated, reversed, or contained. She breaks out of her domestic duty (and, we might argue, misunderstands her divinely ordained obligation), and successfully argues for her independence from Adam; she must do that in order to enter the sphere of action because she has to exercise her own agency and she does that discursively. But leaving the domestic, dependent realm does not mean leaving behind the activity of animal laborans. Freedom in Paradise Lost is both very Arendtian in that it has no relation to sovereignty (man has sovereignty over animals, but God has ultimate sovereignty), and not very Arendtian at all (and in fact offers a corrective to Arendt’s vision) in that freedom is based not just on action, but equally on the long and ongoing labor of education and of reproduction that will span the length of human generations. If the fall creates the possibility of transcendent labor in nature (that is, the labor of maintaining creation

278 Arendt, The Human Condition, 180.

279 Ibid.
until the second coming), it also creates the possibility of transcendent labor in culture through maintaining procreation until the chosen seed is born).

In this sense, *Paradise Lost* is thoroughly modern: action is replaced by the private labor of education, which increasingly becomes the province of the state during the rise of the social. Indeed, Renaissance humanism did much to advance the notion of education as a “public” good. Most of Eve’s education in the preceding books has been toward the end of pruning overreaching tendencies in preparation for the temptation; most of Adam’s education has been about pruning any inordinate desire for Eve — training that allows him to avoid compromising his position as the head of the household. The failure is pronounced. Eve succumbs to the serpent’s arguments that prey on her ambition to rise in the scale of being — if the serpent can attain the human capacity for speech, who is to say she won’t attain the godhead, or at least superiority over Adam and by “keep[ing] the odds of knowledge in [her] power / Without copartner” (9.820-821). Adam isn’t interested in the appeal to ambition; it’s his desire to yoke his fate to Eve’s that leads him to taste the fruit. There are two supremely georgic ironies at work in this passage. The first is that Eve aspires to georgic industriousness in proposing a division of labor, and the second is that Adam is weaving a harvest crown for his harvest queen (instead of working) while she harvests the fatal fruit. These ironies point to a failure of the rather georgic educational project of pruning the first couple’s desires and impulses.

The instrumentalization of action in *Paradise Lost* is another bellwether of modernity. Action is a means to ends for Satan, Adam, and Eve, though the ends differ (in part because these ends are private — there is no clearly defined public as distinct from private in a text that marks out the private life of humanity’s first couple as a universal interest). It’s not hard to imagine how why Milton would represent action as both uncoupled from an ethical orientation
and instrumentalized. Such a cynical view would have been consistent with where Milton was in his public career — which is to say, at the end of it. Action and participatory democracy had revealed itself to be something of a chimera as Parliament elected to restore the Monarchy and turn away from the republican option — electing, as it were, its own manacles.

The Politics of Deliverance and the Labor of Delivery:

Georgic Natality in the Protoevangelium

For Milton, political cultivation grows out of personal cultivation. This was certainly his stance before the failure of Puritan rule. After that political failure and the Restoration of Charles II, Milton retreats from the public world. It is no surprise that his greatest political text works on an archetypal level that uses the private tragedy of the first couple as a lens for understanding the political failure of the Protectorate. In some ways, this is micro-macrocosmic thinking at its zenith and it represents the logical extension of the cultural tendency to view the family as a little commonwealth (discussed in the opening chapter on labor). It is likewise no coincidence that the salvation of mankind is contingent on reproduction — to put it another way, deliverance is contingent upon delivery. Reproductive georgic has a long history as the corollary to agricultural georgic, dating back at least to the Hebraic Fall narrative that Milton revives and revises; Milton’s version, however, rehabilitates the georgic mode by positing the existence of agricultural work before the fall (that is, prelapsarian georgic), and by using the georgic as his favored vocabulary for the protoevangelium, which is always described in terms of seed, fruit, and planting. In Milton’s narrative, this pre-lapsarian labor is most often characterized as
“tending,” a word that means both the natural inclination of something, as well as the external nurturing of it.

The promise of spiritual and political deliverance through reproductive delivery suggests that political action of the sort that the commonwealth failed to enact is always on the horizon of possibility. It has become something of a critical commonplace to read the promise of “a paradise within thee, happier far” (12.587) as Milton’s withdrawal from the public world after the failure of the republican experiment. But at least since the rise of materialist readings in the wake of New Historicism, many scholars have found politics alive and well in Milton’s work well after the Restoration. Sharon Achinstein reads in Paradise Lost and Milton’s other Restoration work his “ongoing commitment to religious radicalism” and reads “his political commitments by means of, not apart from, his theology.” Annabel Patterson claims that “Milton’s involvement [in republican politics] both began earlier and continued longer than is usually allowed.” David Lowenstein sees the mark of many different political interests in Milton’s Satan, including “duplicitous and impenitent Charles I, divisive Laudian prelates, Cromwell and his supposed political hypocrisy, ambitious Army leaders of the Revolution, a prevaricating Presbyterian clergy, or the Irish Catholic rebels of the 1640s.” He argues that politically the text is very much still engaged, and that “the character and significance of Satan’s revolt never need to be confined by any one of these historical identifications.” What I wish to


281 Annabel Patterson, Reading Between the Lines (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), 226.

add to these political readings of Milton’s late work is that in the wake of the Protestant Reformation, private theology had a political valence. The Weberian hypothesis points to the economic correlates of religious belief, which can only signal the ascendancy of the social and the near-eclipse of the public world by private interests, but in the seventeenth century, private activity still had political relevance.

That is nowhere more evident than in the felix culpa of Paradise Lost, which suggests that action in the broadest sense — the salvation of humanity — will be achieved through private, reproductive labor. The coincidence of private labor and public action reveals that the chief structural change initiated by the Protestant Reformation that would ultimately usher in Modernity — the gradual eclipse of the political by the social — was complete by the start of the Restoration. When Adam and Eve make their way out of Eden, hand in hand, in the last moments of the poem, they leave with the promise of future redemption, which for them is a private, qualified redemption. Eve intuits, in the final spoken lines of the poem, that “by [her] the promised seed shall all restore.” With these words, Milton rewrites the Restoration narrative. He can’t unwrite it, but he can manipulate the vocabulary of restoration so that it points toward the future possibility of both religious and political redemption. If there is an analogy between the first human failure and the political failure of the interregnum period, then these felix culpas point toward the potential for a new beginning on the horizon.

Even though Arendt writes in a twentieth-century existential vein — that is to say, she is concerned with worldliness and human affairs, and in some respects is writing against medieval contemptus mundi traditions out of which Protestant asceticism grew — she also struggles to orient action ethically, and when she does, there is often a Christian subtext if not an outright telos. At perhaps her most Christian, Arendt argues that the “redemption from the predicament of
[action’s] irreversibility […] is the faculty of forgiving. The remedy for [action’s]
unpredictability, for the chaotic uncertainty of the future, is contained in the faculty to make and keep promises.²²³ The bulwark — or what Arendt call’s “the redemption” — against action’s irreversibility and unpredictability is nothing more than the redemption narrative itself: the promise of a child who will die for the sins of humanity, thus forgiving humanity for the primal trespass of harvesting fruit. Milton uses a georgic vocabulary of fruit and seeds to describe the promise of future forgiveness almost every time the protoevangelium comes up in the text.

Milton uses reproductive georgic to prefigure the Christian redemption narrative, which is a version — perhaps even the archetype — of what Arendt calls natality. Natality is the possibility of new beginnings, the condition of being born, and the possibility of introducing novelty to the world. It bears quoting Arendt at length to get a sense of how fundamental the Christian redemption narrative is to her concept:

The miracle that saves the world, the realm of human affairs, from its normal, ‘natural’ ruin is ultimately the fact of natality, in which the faculty of action is ontologically rooted. It is, in other words, the birth of new men and the new beginning, the action they are capable of by virtue of being born. Only the full experience of this capacity can bestow upon human affairs faith and hope, those two essential characteristics of human existence, which Greek antiquity ignored altogether, discounting the keeping of faith as a very uncommon and not too

²²³ Arendt, The Human Condition, 237. She is arguably even more Christian in her examples of forgiveness and promising: “The discoverer of the role of forgiveness in the realm of human affairs was Jesus of Nazareth” (Ibid., 238) and she writes that promising, “as the Bible tells it,” revolves around the “passionate drive toward making covenants” (Ibid., 243).
important virtue and counting hope among the evils of illusion in Pandora’s box.

It is this faith in and hope for the world that found perhaps its most glorious and most succinct expression in the few words with which the Gospels announce their ‘glad tidings’: ‘A child has been born unto us.’

Arendt mobilizes the two punitive etiologies of work in the Western tradition and pits them against each other: the Greek myth of Pandora’s box and the Judeo-Christian myth of original sin. Pandora comes to us from Hesiod’s *Works and Days*, perhaps the nearest thing to a source text for Virgil’s *Georgics*. Work and suffering come into the world by way of women. But in the Greek version, hope is the only “evil” that doesn’t fly out of Pandora’s jar. Nietzsche explains that “Zeus did not wish man, however much he might be tormented by the other evils, to fling away his life, but to go on letting himself be tormented again and again. Therefore he gives Man hope, in reality it is the worst of all evils, because it prolongs the torments of Man.”

The Judeo-Christian tradition shares more in common with the Greek tradition than with the Roman in that both the Greeks and the Old Testament lay the blame squarely on humans (but mostly on women). But the Judeo-Christian tradition sees a silver lining that the Greeks find unimaginable, and Milton uses on this material to construct his improbably happy ending.

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284 Ibid., 247.


286 *Georgics* allows for cyclical hope in the seasons — “the hope of the year” (anni spem) — as well as for its analogue in the cycle of human affairs and politics in the Messianic passage that follows on the heels of the portents of Caesar’s assassination with the hope for the “young prince” (Octavian). The Roman tradition (or rather, Virgil’s) has no human etiology — there is no fall or mistake, but rather an intergenerational conflict between the gods and titans that make work a necessity.
Milton’s genius lies in his depiction of prelapsarian Eden which includes representations of work without suffering that nonetheless seems like fallen work to fallen readers (agricultural labor is his big instance in this vein, but reproductive labor as well). Before the fall, this kind of labor is a fulfillment of the body’s proper use rather than a burden (from the Old English byrþ, or birth) on it.\(^{287}\) The savior narrative posits a figure who will re-activate humanity’s pre-fallen condition by taking on the burden of suffering (by being born, by doing work in the world, and dying for our sins) so that our work becomes redemptive once again. Of course, this question over the efficacy of work is at the heart of the Puritan revolution, which would have seemed over by 1663.

It’s worth pausing over this rare moment when Arendt is critical of the Greeks. Her argument is so allied with the classical Greek model that her work is occasionally critiqued through a critique of the Greek tradition. For Arendt, the Greeks represent the last pure separation of public and private — a distinction that would be lost by the time Rome was in the ascendancy due to the rise of the social. The Greek tradition offers an ironic vision of hope — a chimera that keeps humans working, suffering, and spinning away on their hamster wheels — while the Christian tradition gives us what Nietzsche would probably call the naïve version of hope. Arendt seems to want it both ways. She wants a hopeful, regenerative model of human activity — which has its ultimate end in action (the labor of birth being both the absolute precondition of and archetype for natality) — without the doctrinal trappings of sinfulness. This is a tension that she is not able to resolve. She is unable to fully divorce the lowest form of human activity, labor, from its most elevated form in action. In antiquity, labor was fit only for slaves and the animal sides of our own nature. As Patchen Markel has shown, her “architecture” won’t allow for such a strict division of activitis because even the highest form of activity —
action — is premised on natality, which takes its meaning and primary instance from the fact of human reproduction, which she describes as labor. For a philosopher of the world — whose most famous biography is in fact subtitled “For Love of the World” — Arendt is unable to provide a thoroughly worldly vision of redemptive human activity and ultimately makes recourse to the otherworldly and the god-incarnate narrative.

Of course, this is the same analogical move that Milton, at the end of his life, would offer for his own politico-theological epic — and it’s a hopeful move that looks toward new political beginnings by way of a biblical analogy to new beginnings. The grand plan for humanity is characterized by seed and planting language. Satan reveals that god “Intended to create and therein plant / A generation whom his choice regard / Should favor equal to the sons of Heaven” (1.652-654). Jesus, the “redeemer of humanity,” is not only characterized as the seed of humanity, but also as the product of a graft, who takes on the sins of mankind as rootstock takes a new scion. God says to Jesus,

Thou therefore whom thou only canst redeem,
Their nature also to thy nature join
And by thyself man among men on earth,
Made flesh, when time shall be, of virgin seed
By wondrous birth. Be thou in Adam’s room
The head of all mankind thou Adam’s son.
As in him perish all men, so in thee,
As from a second root, shall be restored
As many as are restored; without thee, none.
His crime makes guilty all his sons; thy merit
Imputed shall absolve them who renounce
Their own both righteous and unrighteous deeds
And live in thee transplanted and from thee
Receive new life. (3.281-294)

The image of mortal and godly “nature join[ed]” (3.282) in the son starts to look like a graft that originally springs from a “virgin seed […] as from a second root” (3.284-288). “Transplanted” (3.293) seals the agricultural metaphor. The georgic mode yokes together labor and action not only in the sense that human action of the kind that occupies the highest rung on the vita activa — “both righteous and unrighteous deeds” (3.292) — is “transplanted” to the son with reference to agricultural labor, but also in the sense that the highest form of action possible in the Christian teleology is achieved through feminine reproductive labor troped as lowly agricultural labor. Paul, the greatest deployer of grafting metaphors in the New Testament, is probably at the root of Milton’s idea here. The son takes up the georgic vocabulary when he attempts to intercede on behalf of the contrite couple after the fall:

“See, Father, what first fruits on earth are sprung
From thy implanted grace in man, these sighs
And prayers, which in this golden censer mixed
With incense I, thy priest, before thee bring,
Fruits of more pleasing savor from thy seed
Sown with contrition in his heart than those
Which, his own hand manuring, all the trees
Of Paradise could have produced ere fallen
From innocence.” (11.22-30)

He goes on to ask that “all his works on me, / Good or not good, engraft; my merit those / Shall perfect, and for these my death shall pay” so that “better life shall yield him” (11.34-42). Fruiting, implanting, seeding, sowing, manuring, engrafting, yielding — this georgic conceit figures the care of the soul and the human project itself as a farmer’s careful cultivation. The analogue to a georgic education (tending) is a georgic approach to faith that takes work and constant maintenance.

The word “seed” occurs some thirty times in *Paradise Lost*, and usually in the context of the protoevangelium. Adam is reminded that Eve’s “seed shall bruise our foe” (11.155). God promises to “intermix / my covenant in the woman’s seed renewed” (11.115-116). Michael reveals — or rather, at this point in the narrative, relates — to Adam “that all nations of the earth / Shall in [Abraham’s] seed be blessed. (by that seed / Ss meant thy great deliverer, who shall bruise/ the serpent’s head, whereof to thee anon / Plainlier shall be revealed)” (12.147-151). From “the royal stock/ of David […] shall rise / A son — the woman’s seed to [Adam] foretold.” Adam has a hard time learning the lesson that women will usher in the redemption. Before the fall, reproduction supplies labor for tending the garden — the “more hands” that Eve mentions in the separation colloquy. After the fall, children are required to set humanity on the course to redemption. It’s worth mentioning that for Adam and Eve, agricultural and reproductive labor before the fall does not involve suffering; it is merely fulfilling the uses of the body and world. After the fall, these uses become duties — the twin burdens of both subsistence living and
breeding that we saw in play in comedies such as *The Winter’s Tale*. The Christ narrative unworks the changes wrought by the fall: the “seed” promises to take on the burden of birth into the world and work within that world, and through his suffering he forgives humanity, which opens up the possibility of redemptive works by analogy to the redemptive work of Christ. One of the main intellectual tasks of Protestant thinking was squaring a soteriology that eschewed work with a call to model one’s own life in the mode of Christ’s work. This is what Weber might call vocationalism, whereby sacramental work was no longer an effective means to salvation, even if professional success through work was a sign of it. Milton characterizes both the work of education and the work of salvation in a georgic vocabulary that revalues work in the world at a time when work was a theologically ambiguous idea.
This dissertation has explored how the georgic became the preferred idiom for thinking about the rise of the social in Early Modern England. I want to end this project by looking forward to how the georgic imagination came to the New World, where the political project of Protestant nation building was bound up in the private labor of home-building. As is the case with the georgic in general in the period, it is often overshadowed by pastoral accounts of the New World. John Hammond’s 1656 treatise “Leah and Rachel; or, The Two Fruitfull Sisters Virginia and Mary-land” features many of the conventional rhetorical strategies that Early Modern English writers employed to imagine the New World. As the title indicates, the two territories are gendered female and they’re fertile; this is the sort of sexualized new-world pastoral that Louise Westling has so fruitfully excavated in her landmark book The Green Breast of the New World. But Hammond’s account of the New World balances the pastoral and georgic modes because this is a text aimed at bringing more husbandmen, new Jacobs I presume, to the two sisters. Hammond takes special aim at the pre-labor Edens described in so many New World tracts: “I affirme the country to be wholesome, healthy and fruitful; and a model on which industry may as much improve itself in, as in any habitable part of the world; yet not such a Lubberland as the Fiction of the land of Ease.” There is the suggestion of sexual georgic here — the land is “fruitful” but it requires “industry.” For newcomers, the sexual and agricultural


labor is actualized as an imperialist form of political activity: nation-building abroad. Unlike in Marvell’s “Garden,” there are no handouts in this world, no grapes crushing their wine in the new-comer’s mouth, no trees offering the passerby their fruits, no melons or ensnaring flowers in the walkways. Rather than a land that willfully submits its fruits, “[t]he profit of the country is either by labor, their stocks, or their trades.” All three rungs of the *vita activa* are activated in this description — the country is imagined as the object of sexual and agricultural labor, it is a locus of world-making and inhabitability, and (as we’ll see) it is a form of political action in the form of Protestant nation building abroad.

Labor, in Virginia, cultivates not only the land, but the people as well. Hammond attributes to work the reform of the New World’s seedier inhabitants. “Then were Jayls emptied, youth seduced, infamous women drilled in” and “their labour was almost perpetual, their allowance of victual small, few or no cattle, no use of horses nor oxen to draw or carry, (which labours men supplied themselves.)” For those it didn’t kill, work turns out to be a corrective and a reward for the scoundrels-turned-citizens: “The bondage was taken of, the people set free, and had lands a signed to each of them to live of themselves, and enjoy the benefit of their own industry; men then began to call what they laboured for their own, they fell to making themselves convenient housing to dwell in, to plant corn for their food, to range the wood flesh, the rivers for fowle and fish […]” This brand of imperial Protestantism sees the Reformation of the land as a way of reforming its inhabitants as well. As we saw in Spenser’s oblique treatment of the Irish in *The Faerie Queene*, the civilizing of the people is akin to cultivating the

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291 Ibid., 3.

292 Ibid.
land. The rise of private labor eclipses the political sphere, and the social world that we’ve inherited from the Early Moderns fuses the private improvement of the (Protestant) self with the public improvement of the state. As we saw in Milton, personal cultivation is part and parcel of the same project as political cultivation.

John White defends colonization in *A Planter’s Plea* (1630) by appealing to the Genesis mandate to be fruitful and multiply, but the charge seems to go beyond an endorsement of reproductive labor through the lens of pastoral-colored glasses. Far from idyllic representations of the New World, the Genesis injunction in White’s hands becomes an agriculturalist’s plea for productivity and the value of work (at the same time that it obscures the very real labor of childbearing that it initially calls for), and the “Planter” takes on a pun-ish cast. Answering the objection that there are more fertile lands than New England — lands that will be fruitful without requiring as much labor (his example is the West Indies) — White makes a didactic argument for the spiritual and moral value of work:

> If men desire to have a people degenerate speedily, and to corrupt their mindes and bodies too, and besides to tole-in theeves and spoilers from abroad; let them seeke a rich soile, that brings in much with little labour; but if they desire that Piety and godlinessse should prosper; accompanied with sobriety, justice and love, let them choose a Countrey such as this is; even like France, or England, which may yeeld sufficiency with hard labour and industry: the truth is, there is more cause to feare wealth then poverty in that soyle.²⁹³

²⁹³ John White, *The Planters Plea, Or The grounds of plantations examined, and vsuall objections answered Together with a manifestation of the causes mooving such as have lately
The ideology is Puritan, but rhetorically it is georgic in that its literary genealogy can be traced back to Virgil’s didactic poem, *The Georgics*, which championed work as a means of bettering the individual and the state. For White, the New World is not for the lazy, but for those that are willing to work for the betterment of self, nation, and native. “Men nourished up in idleness […] are no fit members of a Colony” and men chosen to colonize “ought to be willing, constant, [and] industrious.”\(^{294}\) Indeed, one of the reasons England is best positioned to colonize New England is that it has a surplus of men who are not yet engaged in uplifting work: “Many among us live without employment, […] not onely such as delight in idlenesse: but even folke willing to labour.”\(^{295}\) The work of colonization will be good for the surplus workers in England and the natives,

whom wee shall teach providence and industry, for want whereof they perish oftentimes, while they make short provisions for the present, by reason of their idlenesse, and that they have, they spend and wast unnecessarily, without having respect to times to come. Withall, commerce and example of our course of living, cannot but in time breed civility among them, and that by Gods blessing may make way for religion consequently, and for the saving of their soules.\(^{296}\)

\(^{294}\) Ibid., 35.

\(^{295}\) Ibid., 10.

\(^{296}\) Ibid., 27.
The original plea for populating the earth was never really about the labor of childbearing in this pamphlet; it’s about masculine (pro)creation that excludes women in the georgic labor of “breed[ing] civility” and saving souls.

Something happened in the mid-seventeenth-century English mind that redirected labor from a category negatively tinted by classist prejudices (often from the pens of royalists) and the effeminizing role of childbearing, to a positive and masculine category that would later embody the Puritan work ethic.\footnote{Low, The Georgic Revolution, 155.} Admittedly, the georgic isn’t as salient as its opposing impulse to pastoralize the New World experience, but it’s worth exploring the kind of work the georgic imagination performs at the borders of human cultures. Arendt saw the rise of the social as a kind of fall with the public realm being crowded by the incursions of the private sphere. But the rise of the social was a much more polyvalent phenomenon with gains as well as losses. As we saw in my reparative reading of the comedies, the rise of the social revalues the private labor of reproduction and home-making as a political activity, and Early Modern settlers brought that newly privatized conception of politics with them to the New World. As I’ll show, the georgic mode authorized colonial activity in the New World by figuring it as a kind of godly labor that transformed (what was perceived as) underutilized, pagan land into productive, Protestant land. The work of reforming the inhabitants — both the native populations and the English believers who encountered them there — found peculiar expression in a georgic idiom that sought to reform the land as well. Interest in the New World seems to have appealed to the Early Modern mind regardless of factional loyalties. It was a project initiated by courtiers seeking royal favor
like Raleigh and Essex, but found favor with regicides\textsuperscript{298} and, perhaps most obviously Puritans, who found in the New World a political and theological refuge, as well a blank slate for building their vision of a restored Eden. New-World discourses used the georgic in late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as a strategic and practical approach to the reality of New-World colonization. I’ll argue that its reception and use in the New-World project was bolstered by the inroads the mode made into other discourses, specifically in nationalist discourses that posit England as God’s chosen, Protestant nation over and above the other colonial powers, and in legal discourses that defend a policy of land acquisition by \textit{res nullius}. These imbricated discourses cast the labor of the colonizer not only as political action for the Protestant nation-builders, but as a kind of divine work on par with God’s work in redeeming and re-creating nature. It is only through the ascendency of the social that the colonial imagination can make such grand claims for what was once private labor. The rise of the social reconfigured the labor of home-making and sustaining a population through agricultural activity and reproduction as a kind of world-making work and as a variant of political action abroad. The title of Richard Hakluyt’s \textit{Discourse Concerning Western Planting} anticipates the connection this final chapter is trying to forge (or at least make more obvious):\textsuperscript{299} the discourses of colonization in the Early Modern period found a fruitful alliance with a re-burgeoning georgic discourse. Due to its relationship with discourses about science, nationhood, Protestantism and (especially for the Cavalier-\textit{cum}-libertine) erotic enjoyment and sexual reproduction, New-World georgic had

\textsuperscript{298} For a time, Edward Whalley, William Goffe and John Dixwell, all of whom signed the execution warrant for King Charles I, found safe haven in New Haven. The Puritan base in New England is well documented.

\textsuperscript{299} Richard Hakluyt, \textit{Discourse Concerning Western Planting} (Cambridge: John Wilson and Son, 1877).
something that every faction could get behind. This mass appeal may be one of the reasons the georgic experienced such a huge resurgence in the long and lengthening eighteenth century as Puritans and Royalists (and later Whigs and Tories) sought common ground in the aftermath of the Civil War and turned increasingly to a text that obliquely treats Rome’s own civil wars. To be sure, the genre that predominates in discourses concerning the New World is pastoral — the fiction of a new Eden or a land of ease, willingly offering its overabundant fruits to the European male. New-World pastoral is largely responsible for the most successful marketing campaign of the period, but we shouldn’t neglect the opposite approach, which was also used to great effect in promoting settlement in the New World.

The Work of the Chosen Nation

In the dedicatory epistle appended to his sermon to the Virginia Company (1622), John Donne develops an analogy that accords the same physical and financial dangers to print as to New-World ventures: “By your favours, I had some place amongst you, before: but now I am an Adventurer; if not to Virginia, yet for Virginia; for every man, that Prints, Adventures.” Donne mobilizes an idea that Shakespeare may have agreed with: that writing poetry and dipping a toe into the print market was socially presumptuous and potentially even hazardous. John Donne the

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300 This continues up through Nick Carraway’s imagining Dutch sailors seeing in Long Island the “green breast of the New World” in F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby (New York: Penguin Classics, 2000), 171.

301 John Donne, Fiue sermons vpon speciall occasions (Viz.) 1. A sermon preached at Pauls Crosse. 2. To the Honoroble the Virginia Company 3. At the consecration of Lincolnes Inne Chappell. 4. The first sermon preached to K. Charles at St. Iames, 1625. 5. A sermon preached to his Maiestie at White-hall, 24. Febr. 1625, (London: Thomas Jones, 1626), 38.
minister is reprising an analogic move Jack Donne the rake made earlier in a much different context, likening his own project once again to New-World explorers in the Elegy “To His Mistress Going to Bed”: “O, my America, my new-found-land, / My kingdom, safest when with one man mann’d” (27-28).\(^{302}\) In this equation, he is the explorer of the virgin land, his mistress. The woman is the passive land and the man is the active explorer. Crucially, this exploration is figured as sexual work (“Until I labour”) that’s self-conscious of the rhetorical (or sophistic) labor of the poem’s performance and conception (“I in labour lie,” 2). Also underwriting the strategy of the poem is an appeal to single, private ownership. The woman is not res communitis or res publica, but private property that is “safest when with one man mann’d” (28). It’s the same privatizing impulse that was only realized in the age of society, which also finds states that are interested in private reproductive issues. Sexual and rhetorical labor is the only kind of work that appeals to Jack Donne, but sexual georgic, and with it the woman-as-land metaphor, also serves as the locus for claims about Donne’s misogyny. In “Change” Donne casts the female body as dangerously fruitful and resistant to ownership, warning “Who hath a plow-land, casts all his seed come there, / And yet allowes his ground more corne should beare” (17-18).\(^{303}\) He invokes sexual georgic again in “The Comparison” to describe an unsavory act of lovemaking as “when a plough a stony ground doth rent” (48).\(^{304}\) In “The Anagram,” mockingly describing the virtues of marrying an ugly woman who is unlikely to attract extra-marital lovers, Donne’s


speaker punningly quotes the “best husbands” who say that “Beauty is barren” and that “there is best land where there is foulest way” (35-36).\textsuperscript{305} John White’s \textit{Planter’s Plea} suggests that the English nation has the most georgic potential of the competing colonizers, and thus that England has the best claim for New World plantation; and Donne makes a similar move by deploying spiritual georgic to license England’s roving shiphands in the service of God and nation. Donne is still ambivalent about labor as a pure category, but there is something about New-World labor that sanctions it as a godly English venture. I would suggest that for Donne, the erotic, spiritual and imperial correlates of the georgic make labor in the New World an alluring, Protestant English activity.

In his sermon to the Virginia Company, Donne places a nearly Catholic emphasis on works and acts as more efficacious than the word when it comes to colonizing the world with the Christian Gospel: “The book is not called the \textit{Preaching}, but the \textit{Practice}, not the \textit{Words}, but the \textit{Acts of the Apostles}: and the \textit{Acts} of the \textit{Apostles} were to convey the name of Christ Jesus, and to propagate his \textit{Gospel}, over all the world: Beloved, you are \textit{Actors} upon the same Stage too: the uttermost part of the Earth are your Scene.\textsuperscript{306} A certain apostle’s grafting metaphor creeps into Donne’s language here with his use of “propagate”; evangelizing in the Pauline tradition is Godly georgic, and it involves grafting the scion of New-Testament revelation upon the stock of Old Testament teaching. Leaning on a theatrical metaphor, Donne casts the sailors of Virginia Company as “Actors” for God — that is, as workers for God. Donne uses agricultural labor to figure the political activity of expanding the Protestant nation outward in a move that sees political action as private labor.


\textsuperscript{306} Donne, \textit{Fiue sermons}, 39.
But the scaffolding behind the spiritual argument is always just visible in Donne’s sermon: it’s not just a spiritual power alone that propels this voyage, but also “the power you have from the State.”\textsuperscript{307} God’s chosen nation uses a spiritual argument for its imperial ambitions. Anticipating what must have been on the minds of many of his congregation, Donne participates in a little Spain-bashing before quickly recasting the national economic interest as a spiritual mission: “Already [Virginia] is a mark for the envy and for the ambition of our enemies; I speak but of our doctrinal, not national enemies; as they are Papists they are sorry we have this country, and surely twenty lectures in matter of controversy do not so much vex them as one ship that goes and strengthens that plantation.”\textsuperscript{308} The labor of saving souls is in part aligned with the inherent virtue of labor itself. Work, anathema to early Donne (unless it is of the sexual variety), is the redemption the plantation offers to the English against their doctrinal enemies, which, despite his rhetorical maneuvering, are always also national enemies. The work of plantation will purify the nation. It will “sweep your streets, and wash your doors from idle persons, and the children of idle persons, and employ them: and truly, if the whole country were but such a Bridewell to force idle persons to work, it had a good use.”\textsuperscript{309}

Donne’s construction applies \textit{res nullius} to humans. \textit{Res nullius} is the Roman legal concept that describes property or territory not belonging to any party or sovereignty. In practice, \textit{res nullius} described property that was not being used or not being used properly (according to the acquiring party). For instance, \textit{res nullius} is the logic behind the divine territorial claims made by Milton’s God against the “wasteful deep” of Chaos (2.961) and “encroached on”

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\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{307} Ibid., 42.
\item \textsuperscript{308} Ibid., 50.
\item \textsuperscript{309} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
Ancient Night (2.1001) in Paradise Lost, and the policy that sanctions the invading and seizing “wherever the natives have a lot of land left over and uncultivated” in More’s Utopia.\(^3\) What marks these spaces as nullius (or nobody’s) is the absence of labor and art, or rather, the absence of sufficient evidentiary signs of man. Often this meant the erasure of native agricultural practice (a practice that continues in many American environmental discourses that render illegible native American labor and seek to reset the clock to 1492, when the North America was “more natural”). Donne here suggests that res nullius could be extended to people who were deemed idle. Just as res nullius land could be annexed to serve the nationalist and emergent capitalist political projects, res nullius people could likewise be conscripted to serve the various nationalist projects via warfare. We’ve already seen how in All’s Well war is “A nursery to our gentry, who are sick / For breathing and exploit” (1.2.23-24). Similarly in Coriolanus, war is a “means to vent / Our musty superfluity” (1.1.223-224), where the useless commoners are compared to musty corn.\(^4\) In Henry V, Westmoreland wishes “O that we now had here / But one ten thousand of those men in England / That do no work to-day!” (4.3.17-19).\(^5\) The Georgics sets up an early comparison of two visions of imperial strength — one through war, the other through the peaceful arts of agriculture — in the description of “attack[ing] stalks,” “sabotaged fields,” the farmer who “make[s] war on the weeds” and “the armory of the tough countryman” (1.151-160). Westmoreland’s bravado blinds him to the reality that the agriculturalist contributes as much to the project of national strength as the warrior in France (this is the same, georgic logic and

\(^3\) Thomas More, Utopia, trans. Clarence H. Miller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 67. Ownerless property occurs in the sexual sense (à la Donne) in the Faerie Queene at IV.ii.4.9 when Florimell is described as “weft” and again at IV.xii.31.6 when she is described as “waift.” The abandoned Hellenore is similarly described as “wefte” at III.x.36.3.


Burgundy, in a speech drenched with pathos, brings this to light before the two kings of England and France:

[L]et it not disgrace me,
If I demand, before this royal view,
What rub or what impediment there is,
Why that the naked, poor and mangled Peace,
Dear nurse of arts and joyful births,
Should not in this best garden of the world
Our fertile France, put up her lovely visage?
Alas, she hath from France too long been chased,
And all her husbandry doth lie on heaps,
Corrupting in its own fertility.
Her vine, the merry cheerer of the heart,
Unpruned dies; her hedges even-pleach'd,
Like prisoners wildly overgrown with hair,
Put forth disorder'd twigs; her fallow leas
The darnel, hemlock and rank fumitory
Doth root upon, while that the coulter rusts
That should deracinate such savagery;
The even mead, that erst brought sweetly forth
The freckled cowslip, burnet and green clover,
Wanting the scythe, all uncorrected, rank,
Conceives by idleness and nothing teems
But hateful docks, rough thistles, kecksies, burs,
Losing both beauty and utility.
And as our vineyards, fallows, meads and hedges,
Defective in their natures, grow to wildness,
Even so our houses and ourselves and children
Have lost, or do not learn for want of time,
The sciences that should become our country;
But grow like savages, as soldiers will
That nothing do but meditate on blood,
To swearing and stern looks, diffused attire
And every thing that seems unnatural. (5.2.33-63)\(^{313}\)

War has destroyed “fertile France,” the “best garden of the world,” and wasted her “husbandry.” This is georgic elegy at its most plaintive, as he describes the toll that war and neglect has taken on France’s agricultural lands and, by extension, on the culture itself. Indeed, the culture-agriculture analogy is very much in play here, and the lack of tending to the land itself is reflected in the “grow[ing] wildness” of their children who “grow like savages.” An ordered sense of nature emerges from this description, which pairs growing “wild” with what “seems unnatural,” which suggests that agriculture, order, cultivation, work and utility are “natural” to France. This speech serves as the pre-amble to Henry’s stilted courtship of Katharine. The focus

\(^{313}\) Ibid.
shifts from cultural georgic, where France lost cultural production to warfare and idleness, to reproductive georgics as Henry intuits that Katharine will make “a good soldier-breeder” (5.2.198). Henry, striving for approachability, insists that he is “such a plain king that thou wouldst think I had sold my farm to buy my crown” (5.2.23-25). All these tasks, from rehabilitating France’s culture and agriculture in the wake of war, to producing an heir of the two kingdoms of France and England, are part an emergent georgic conception of nation-building, and it’s this same georgic nationalism that underlies the colonial project in the New World. Epic is unquestionably the genre of nation-building, but as my last chapter suggested, the georgic often hides within epic, and in many ways poses a Virgilian alternative to epic-inflections of nation-building, pointing the way toward a strenuous cultivation of culture rather than merely nation-building through violence.

Throughout Donne’s sermon, labor for the plantation is figured in georgic terms. In a bid for patience and the long view, Donne uses a georgic analogy to the seasonal cultivation of corn, “You cannot sow your corn today and say it shall be above ground tomorrow, and in my barn next week. How soon the best husbandman sowed the best seed in the best ground.” Donne cautions against those who would prematurely declare the mission accomplished by likening the timeline of the colonial project to biblical time, figured in images that recall cultivation and biblical georgic:

God cast the promise of a Messiah as the seed of all in Paradise; In semine

mulieris; the seed of the woman shall bruise the serpents head; and yet this plant

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314 Ibid.

315 Donne, Fiue sermons, 47.
was four thousand years after before it appeared; this messiah four thousand years before he came. God showed the ground where that should grow, two thousand years after the promise; in Abraham’s family; in semine tuo, in thy seed all nations shall be blessed. God hedged in this Ground almost one thousand years after that; in Micheas time, et tu Bethlehem, thou Bethlehem shalt be the place; and God watered that, and weeded that, refreshed that dry expectation with a succession of prophets.  

The project is seminal: it’s a new starting point for the English nation and, in a move that reminiscent of Donne’s rakish early days, it’s sexualized georgic. The seminal language suggests that the colonial project is bound up in a georgic conception of natality whereby the very act of birth is a token for the ability to begin new political action. Nascent nation-building in the New World was ripe for this new kind of thinking. The rise of the social brought a particularly georgic idiom to the project of nation-building — a vocabulary that sees reproductive and agricultural labor as a political activity. Of course, the reproductive georgic is more than merely a metaphoric register for the project; nation-building will require the very real labor of bringing forth new English children into the (new) world. Donne asks the aged who won’t survive to see the fruits of English labor in the New World to take comfort in the fact that they “contributed to the beginning of that Common Wealth, of that Church.” The spiritual once again dovetails strategically with the national interests. “Though they live not to see the growth thereof to

316 Ibid.

317 Ibid., 61.
perfection. Apollo watered, but Paul planted; he that begun the work was the greater man." In the final prayer, he closes by focusing once again on the labor from which they’ll reap a “glorious harvest” (63) — a harvest that will buttress the economic interests of a nation competing with Spain. Even the hearts of the inactive are turned, punningly, into hearty action:

Bless them who are the feet of this body, who go thither, and the hands of this body, who labour there, and them who are the heart of this body, all that are heartily affected, and declare actually that heartiness to this action [...] Bless it so with friends now, that it may stand against enemies hereafter; prepare thy self a glorious harvest there, and give us leave to be thy laborers.

The “glorious harvest” is a reprisal of an earlier georgic metaphor for the mainly Protestant gains, but also (as Weber reminds us) economic gains, promised by the colonial project in the New World.

Donne came closest to seeing that New World in August 1597 when he served as a soldier in Essex’s fleet, which was bound for the Azores to engage the Spanish and open up lanes for further exploration of the Atlantic. Waylaid by a storm that prevented the fleet from engaging the Spanish, Raleigh and Essex attempted to convince the Queen to forget the “Spanish Business” (23) and move onto Guiana. (How Guiana is excluded from “Spanish Business,” I don’t

318 Ibid.
319 Ibid., 63.
320 Ibid.
know). In one of the poems to Rowland Woodward, dated from the period of waiting for the Queen’s response to the courtiers’ proposal, Donne describes the imperial hopes (a potent confluence of national, religious, economic and, for the two favorites, personal motives) as a “harvest […] nipped in the spring” (18). The premature loss of Guiana to the Spanish is due to “slowness […] our punishment and sin” (45). Coming on the heels of a reference to the Jews wandering with Moses through the deserts of sin/Zin (“with us, methinks, Fate deals so / As with the Jews’ guide God did: he did show / Him the rich land, but barred his entry in” (19-21). I read sin as submerged pun on the Exodus wildernesses. Slowness and sloth, antithetical to the labor-championing georgic mode, is their fault, and it is punished by further delay. Like Moses and the Israelites gazing into a barred Promised Land, the English are punished for their inertia by watching the Spanish gain advantage by their speed and industriousness. Typical of New-World discourses, another barred paradise lurks behind this description: the Garden of Eden from which Adam and Eve were ejected into a world of labor and agriculture. In the original expulsion, one bad action necessitates work, and work that is sometimes unfruitful at that. In being barred from exploration, inactivity is punished with further painful political stagnation.

Donne’s sermon to the Virginia Company describes labor (in the competition against Spain for empire) as a form of virtuous spiritual georgic. Others were more transparent about their use of New-World georgic to support of imperial goals. In Montaigne’s essay “Of Cannibals,” he paints an idyllic (read: anti-georgic) portrait of native life, and in so doing subtly suggests that expansion is a product of exhausted and infertile soils in the old world. The natives

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322 Ibid.

323 Ibid.
“are not striving to conquer new lands, since without toil or travail they still enjoy that bounteous Nature who furnishes them abundantly with all they need, so that they have no concern to push back their frontiers.”

324 They don’t need to expand to new territories because the earth they occupy is already sustaining them. In a move that is typical of Montaigne’s irony throughout the Essays, he offers a sincere account of the kind of trouble that awaits a nation that abandons georgic labor in the old territory for pastoral New Worlds. To the extent that Montaigne verges on ennobling this native approach to land management, his skeptically inflected Catholicism shares with Protestantism an interest and affirmation of a georgic work ethic. As he does at the end of the essay by way of a parodic dismissal the virtues of the natives because “they wear no breeches,” he undercuts the cautionary tale about the hazards of laborless leisure with another bathetic dismissal that seems to suggest that such a land of ease and plenty belong rightly in myth and the doubtful corpora of pseudo-Aristotle:

The other testimony from antiquity, to which some would make relevant to this discovery of the New World is in Aristotle — if that little book about unheard wonders is really his. He tells how some Carthaginians struck out across the Atlantic beyond the Straits of Gibraltar, sailed for a long time and finally discovered a large fertile island entirely clothed in woodlands and watered by great deep rivers but very far from any mainland; they and others after them, attracted by the richness and fertility of the soil, emigrated with their wives and children and started living there. The Carthaginian lords, seeing that their country was being gradually depopulated, expressly forbade any more to go there on pain

of death and drove out those new settlers, fearing it is said that they would in time increase so greatly that they would supplant them and bring down their state. But that account in Aristotle cannot apply to these new lands either.\textsuperscript{325}

To the manifest contrary, description of the fruitful, fertile, wooded island most certainly “agrees with our new-found lands” and the ironic dismissal only makes the threat more clear: New World pastoral imperils the home country by evacuating and fragmenting the state (the historical irony is hard to miss, for in the eighteenth century the English would find themselves at war with their own colonial project). Citizens will be drawn away from the old world by the lure of fertile soils and relative ease — in short, the pastoral life — in the New World. In time, the fertile soils of the New World will attract so many settlers from the exhausted soils of the old that the colony will become a threat to the mother country. The unspoken alternative to this negative image of New World pastoral seems to be hard, georgic work in the old territory — an ethic of not giving up the ship.

If in Montaigne, pastoral threatens the home nation by drawing too many of its citizens to the colony from the Old World, in Henry Neville’s dystopic \textit{Isle of Pines} (1668) pastoral threatens the integrity of colonizers in the New.\textsuperscript{326} Published only three years after Cotton’s translation of Montaigne’s \textit{Essais}, Neville’s \textit{Isle} articulates nationalist anxieties at the end of the second Anglo-Dutch war, and does so by offering a georgic critique of idleness. Told through Dutch eyes, English are lulled into indolence, sexual degeneracy, and finally civil war (still a

\textsuperscript{325} Ibid., 230-231.

fresh memory for English readers in 1668) all because of the island’s overabundance.327 The moral is clear: without a georgic work ethic, empire fails, and the English race itself degenerates. Like Donne’s erotic lyrics, a certain brand of sexual georgic underpins Neville’s critique of New-World laziness and passivity, but the comparisons to the Dutch explorers makes this a document of England’s nationalist anxieties.

Montaigne and Neville offer negative accounts of the imperial project by offering cautionary tales about seeking lands of ease. Sir Francis Bacon puts forth a similar case by equating national strength with georgic industry. For him, true greatness in kingdoms lies in labor. In the same vein as Neville and Montaigne, he warns King James about the risks of idleness to the state in “Of the True Greatness of Kingdoms and Estates”: “Let states that aim at greatness, take heed how their nobility and gentlemen do multiply too fast. For that maketh the common subject grow to be a peasant and base swain, driven out of the heart, and in effect but the gentleman’s labourer.”328 The ongoing enclosure movement and the transition from a feudal economy to a wage-based economy turned subsistence farmers into “the gentleman’s laborer,” and that coupled with James’s massive increase in coining aristocrats meant that there was a very real risk to the state in that the leisure class might grow so large and require so many servants as to sap the nation of its workforce. In this particular moment of emergent capitalism, that workforce was largely compensated through wages rather than leaseholds and multi-generational land tenures. Throughout the essay, Bacon develops the idea of georgic leadership, describing

327 The *locus amoenus* is a feature of at least one other New World epic, and it is easily mapped onto the pastoral due to its Virgilian parentage in the *Eclogues*. Camões, for example, rewards his Lusiads’ journey to India with a stop at the Island of Love in Canto IX (though there the precedent is probably Homer). See Luis Vaz de Camões, *The Lusiads*, trans. Landeg White (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008): 177-196.

“counselors and governors” as “workmen”: “Be the workmen what they may be, let us speak of the work; that is, the true Greatness of Kingdoms and Estates, and the means thereof.” He offers Henry VII, the first Tudor and the only one to die with the exchequer in the black, as an ideal georgic leader:

And herein the device of king Henry the Seventh (whereof I have spoken largely in the history of his life) was profound and admirable; in making farms and houses of husbandry of a standard; that is maintained with such a proportion of land unto them, as may breed a subject to live in convenient plenty and no servile condition; and to keep the plough in the hands of the owners, and not mere hirelings. And thus indeed you shall attain to Virgil’s character which he gives to ancient Italy: *Terra potens armis atque ubere glebae* (a land strong in arms and in fertility of soil). The “hirelings” Bacon warns of are a direct product of enclosing common ground and shifting traditional, land-based work and living arrangements toward a pure wage-labor economy. The passage quoted is not from Virgil’s *Georgics*, but from the *Aeneid*. Bacon strategically uses the epic because labor for its own sake — or *labor omnia vincit improbus* — is not enough; labor as a means to nationalist ends was the more alluring argument. By using a rather georgic line from the *Aeneid* (which itself is full of references to the earlier *Georgics*, as Ward W. Briggs, Jr. has

329 Ibid., 397.
330 Ibid., 399.
shown\(^{331}\) Bacon is able to insinuate that taking up the mantle of Rome and westward expansion of empire lies not just in taking up arms, but taking up the plow as well. In “Of Plantations” he cautions against sending “condemned men” to the colonies because they will “not fall to work, but be lazy.”\(^{332}\) The ideal colony is peopled with willing workers, and at the front of the list are those who engage in specifically georgic arts and labor: “The people wherewith you plant ought to be gardeners, ploughmen, laborers, smiths, carpenters, joiners, fishermen, fowlers, with some few apothecaries, surgeons, cooks, and bakers.”\(^{333}\)

Bacon glances at Spain as an anti-georgic colonial competitor. He warns “moil not too much under ground; for the hope of mines is very uncertain and useth to make the planters lazy in other things.”\(^{334}\) Mines were nearly synonymous with Spanish extraction projects in Peru and Bolivia and, like Anthony Low, I read this as a veiled reference to the Spanish colonial project.\(^{335}\) He returns again to a latent imperialist argument for New-World georgic in “Of Riches.” The analogy in the opening lines likens and problematizes material wealth and martial valor, while foreshadowing the imperial concerns later in the essay: “I cannot call riches better than the baggage of virtue. The Roman word is better, impedimenta. For as the baggage is to an army, so is riches to virtue. It cannot be spared nor left behind, but it hindereth the march; yea,  


\(^{333}\) Ibid., 408.  

\(^{334}\) Ibid.  

\(^{335}\) Low, *The Georgic Revolution*, 134.
and the care of it sometimes loseth or disturbeth the victory.”336 Throughout Bacon counsels against quick wealth — the kind that the European world was pinning on Spain in the Black Legend discourse, and the kind that Donne cautioned against in his sermon. “Riches,” Bacon argues, “gotten by good means and just labor pace slowly.”337 As a counterpoint to the Spanish who use mining to extract wealth from the land, Bacon proposes agricultural improvement: “the improvement of the ground is the most natural obtaining of riches; for it is our great mother’s blessing, the earth’s; but it is slow.”338 The best alternative to single-minded pursuit of mines is a diversified approach to the land because it sustainably provides “perpetual importation”:

And yet where men of great wealth do stoop to husbandry, it multiplieth riches exceedingly. I knew a nobleman in England, that had the greatest audits of any man in my time; a great grazier, a great sheep-master, a great timber man, a great collier, a great corn-master, a great lead-man, and so of iron, and a number of the like points of husbandry. So as the earth seemed a sea to him, in respect of the perpetual importation.339

By contrast usury is “one of the worst” because it is a perversion of Biblical georgic found in Genesis. A usurer is “a man [that] doth eat his bread in sudore vultus alieni [in the sweat of


337 Ibid., 410.

338 Ibid.

339 Ibid., 410-411.
and this aptly describes those wealthy gentlemen, gentry and even wealthy yeomen who hired the first iteration of peripatetic agricultural “hirelings” — the social ancestors of today’s migrant farm workers. In the era of wage-labor, agricultural labor becomes exploitative in a different way because the farm laborers no longer have a stake in the land they farm. As Patricia Fumerton has shown, the rise of wage labor produced radically dislocated social identities in the period as the poor were increasingly force into unsettled and vagrant lifestyles.341

Spenser makes a similar case against mining wealth by describing it as a satanic version of georgic work in the earth that violates the principle of “right use.” “Right use” undergirds res nullius justifications for land seizure, and it’s the principle that authorizes Britain’s claim to land belonging to the native Celts in the chronicle of Canto x: “The land, which warlike Britons now possesse, / And therein haue their mighty empire raysd, / In antique times was saluage wilderness, / Vnpeopled, vnmannurd, vnpround, vnpraysd […]” (II.x.5.1-4). Temperance — finding the georgic mean — is ultimately is about “right vsaunce,” for Guyon, and in Mammon’s cave Guyon is tempted by improper use of the georgic spirit.342 Here “men swinck and sweat incessantly” for wealth (II.vii.8.7). By recasting the biblical georgic, Mammon makes the end of labor greed and wealth: “Thou that doest liue in later times, must wage / Thy workes for wealth, and life for gold engage” (II.vii.18.4-5). The temptation involves a twisting of two different biblical passages — the georgic punishment of Genesis 3:19 (“In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread […]”) and the Pauline economy of grace in Romans 6:23 (“For the wages of sin is

340 Ibid., 411.

death; but the gift of God is eternal life [...]”). The Satanic labor in Mammon’s cave tempts Guyon to work for riches, but Guyon rejects Mammon’s wicked brand of “offred grace” (II.vii.35.33); “Suffise it then, thou Money God (quoth hee) / That all thine ydle offers I refuse. / All that I need I have; what needeth mee / To couet more, then I haue cause to vse?” (II.vii.39.1-4). The principle of right use (in the Legend of Justice becomes equity) directs Guyon to invest his labor in spiritual work rather than in the hellish forge, though it may yield earthly riches.

For Bacon, scientific georgic is the better alternative to the satanic georgic that the mines offer. He sees science as the way to regain man’s imperium over nature and metaphors and allusion to empire abound in his science writing. For example, in the closing lines of the *Novum Organum*:

> For man, by the fall, lost at once his state of innocence, and his empire over creation, both of which can be partially recovered even in this life, the first by religion and faith, the second by the arts and sciences. For creation did not become entirely and utterly rebellious by the curse, but in consequence of the Divine decree, ‘in the sweat of thy brow shall thou eat bread,’ she is compelled by our labors (not assuredly by our disputes or magical ceremonies), at length, to afford mankind in some degree his bread, that is to say, to supply man’s daily wants.343

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Earlier he writes that “the empire of man over things is founded on the arts and sciences alone” (106). He uses empire analogically to refer to man’s dominion over nature, but the screen of analogy gives way to the reality of seventeenth-century land-grabbing and nationalism in Bacon’s unfinished utopia.

From Chaos: God’s Work and Res Nullius

Sir Thomas More’s Utopia is an inherently political text that imagines, as the full title of the English Translation indicates, “the Best State of a Republic.” That republic thrives because it is built on a georgic ideology of hard work. Unlike the classical Arendtian conception of the vita activa whereby political activity is only possible if someone else (a slave, a wife) takes care of private activities of production and consumption, at this point in modernity private agricultural and reproductive labor was considered vital to political activity in the newly opened North American continent. “Idleness,” in this state, is “the mother of thieves,” but the real criminals are the idle gentlemen who live “off that which others have laboured for” (another perversion of biblical georgic) and keep “idle and loitering serving men, which never learned any craft whereby to get their livings.” Rather than take the Baconian tactic of equating georgic labor with martial superiority, More takes the opposite approach and reckons that “between soldiers and thieves” there is “small diversity.” But in both More and Bacon’s account, a georgic ethic, either allied with a martial ethic (Bacon) or standing on its own (More), is the bedrock of a

344 Ibid., 106.


346 Ibid., 20.
strong nation. The famous attack on the social dislocations caused by enclosures is rendered in *Utopia* as a pastoral landscape vitiated by capital greed pitted against the honest georgic spirit of the Utopians. The gentlemen shepherds are not content “that they live in rest and pleasure, nothing profiting, yea, much annoying the weal-public, [and] leave no ground for tillage.” The enclosure land-grabs turn the plowman’s good soil to a sheepcote and the church back to its etymological relationship to biblical pastoral. Instead of housing a pastor and his Christian flock, the church is spared only “to be made a sheep-house.” The pastoral is both explicitly juxtaposed against the georgic throughout the text, and is the cause of many of England’s problems. From driving up the price of wool and victuals to idle unemployment that, as we saw earlier leads to vagabondage and thievery in the Utopian moral economy, the commercial incarnation of the pastoral debases both the currency and the moral integrity of the nation.

“For one shepherd or herdman is enough to eat up that ground with cattle, to the occupying whereof about husbandry many hands were requisite,” writes More. Husbandry is so important to the utopians that every house has an adjoining garden plot wherein the citizens find a productive outlet for competition: “Their study and diligence herein cometh not only of pleasure, but also of a certain strife and contention that is between street and street concerning the trimming, husbanding, and furnishing of their gardens.” The marginal notes link these passages specifically to the *Georgics*: “The commodity of gardens is commended also of

347 Ibid., 22.
348 Ibid.
349 Ibid., 23.
350 Ibid.
351 Ibid., 54.
Virgil.\textsuperscript{352} \textit{Utopia} finds many contemporary champions for its communitarian ideas, but for the seemingly progressive nature of the text, it still supports a certain brand (certainly one of the oldest brands) of colonial ideology based on the georgic ethos of land-use and work.

Though the Utopians don’t “desire to enlarge the bounds and limits of their shires” because “they count themselves rather the good husbands than the owners of their lands,” neighboring lands become seizable under \textit{res nullius} if the Utopians deem that they aren’t being subjected to good georgic cultivation:\textsuperscript{353}

But if so be that the multitude throughout the whole island pass and exceed the due number, then they choose out of every city certain citizens, and build up a town under their own laws in the next land where the inhabitants have much waste and unoccupied ground, receiving also of the same country people to them, if they will join and dwell with them. They thus joining and dwelling together do easily agree in one fashion of living and that to the great wealth of both the people. For they so bring the matter about by their laws, that the ground which before was neither good nor profitable for the one nor for the other is now sufficient and fruitful enough for them both. But if the inhabitants of that land will not dwell with them to be ordered by their laws, then they drive them out of those bounds, which they have limited and appointed out for themselves. And if they resist and

\textsuperscript{352} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{353} Ibid., 51.
rebels, then they make war against them. For they count this the most just cause of war.\textsuperscript{354}

The rhetorically convincing if/then structure makes it seem like the inhabitants who the Utopians offer to absorb are responsible for the “just” war. More’s exposition makes available the obvious post-colonial critique: the actions of the colonized are only reactions to the primary cause — Utopian incursion onto their lands. The rationale of the Utopian occupation depends on determining what land is being used properly and land is currently “neither good nor profitable.” Res nullius might underpin “their laws,” but a georgic doctrine of right land use not only allows for, but necessitates a colonial solution.

Res nullius was commonly invoked as a justification for Anglo-Dutch colonialism in the Early Modern period, and it appeared in contemporary domestic debates. Enclosure, for instance, was essentially a move that divested common lands of their res nullius status and made them private property. But how was res nullius, a concept that finds little biblical backing, translated into the Christian colonial project? This is one of the more fascinating questions, to my mind, about the project as a whole. In the Christian tradition, there was no chaos or useless territory in the created world; the book of nature is brimming with the signs of the Creator, not chaos. This is the point that Donne makes in his sermon of August 25, 1622. After leaving the rakish life behind, the man who disdained country ants and their harvest offices uses the georgic mode in its macrocosmic form to see “the world, the work” and to see “God in that work.”\textsuperscript{355} He turns the

\textsuperscript{354} Ibid., 63.

\textsuperscript{355} John Donne, “From a sermon preached at Hanworth (21 August 1622)” in John Donne, 314-315.
Book of Nature figure into a conceit that looks back to “the volumes of this Author,” God. Then he turns to the *Georgics* in particular and suggests that the macrocosmic vision of the *Georgics* as a book about earth (*geo*), then shows that earth is the work of God, then zooms in closer and closer, until finally it’s only the consideration of a grave-sized amount of earth. Even that is God’s work he suggests: “the *Georgiques*, the consideration of the *Earth*, a farme, a garden, nay seven foot of earth, a grave, and that will be book enough” to see the work of the creator.\(^{356}\) Even Paul rhapsodized on the theme of immanence in the designed world in Romans 1:20. But sin and the fall introduced an element of chaos into the created world that interferes with human sense perception such that signals of divine immanence are veiled in nature and evil lurks in the same guise as good. So how, then, can a Protestant nation justify a *res nullius* policy when the entire dominion of earth was either already something (God’s *ex nihilo* creation) and somebody’s (God’s lease to man)? Was it claimed from the “wasteful deep” of Chaos and deeded to man at the creation (deeded and later forfeited after the fall in Milton’s anti-*ex nihilo* vision of *Paradise Lost*, 3.708-713)? Perhaps the signs of God’s work and presence can’t be perceived by postlapsarian sense perceptions, but with the revival of skepticism all signs became problems for the fallen senses of the human. Cultural difference also made slippery what was seemingly stable ground. Determining what was *nullius*, then, had as much to do with determining the criterion of knowledge as with determining the criterion for proper work. The epistemological problem posed by skepticism made it even more difficult to determine which evidence signaled God’s work (or man’s work for God), and which land-use practices were *nullius* because they fell

\(^{356}\) Ibid.
beyond the English definition of right or proper use.\textsuperscript{357} In taking on the labor of civilization, the chosen colonists performed their own little Genesis by analogy. So, as Mircea Eliade posited, “Settlement in a new, unknown, uncultivated country is equivalent to an act of Creation,” but an act of Creation in an already created world.\textsuperscript{358} What appears to be outright hubris on the part of man, if not Promethean heresy, was described as God’s work to reverse the effects of the fall and claim creation back from sin and chaos. So while Bacon quietly elides the empire of God, knowledge, and England in the sphere of science, a similar, georgic spirit motivated colonialism in the literary sphere.

Beyond the literary sphere, Colonists claimed land by working it (using the same logic as the diggers, who reclaimed enclosed pastures by digging and saw that kind of georgic radicalism as an extension of their own vision of radical Protestantism). George Percy’s 1606 account of the first days of the Jamestown occupation describes the initial business that made the land their own: “The Thirteenth day, we came to our seeing place in Paspiha’s country. The fourteenth day we landed all our men which were set to work.”\textsuperscript{359} Work is evidence of ownership — of

\textsuperscript{357} Doctrines of right use appear in the literary tradition, as well. In the \textit{Faerie Queene} (II.vii) Mammon’s underworld is characterized as a kind of unholy forge where fiends engage in a kind of hellish labor for the improper use of nature. Milton will echo this description in his own version of unholy georgic artisanry in \textit{Paradise Lost}, when Mammon (also figured as a miner) and Mulciber construct Pandaemonium. Pandaemonium is described as “the high capital” (1.756) of hell’s “sovereign power” (1.753), which sets up the fallen angels as something akin to a colonial power with their eyes on God’s creation. In an earlier episode in his career, Milton has Comus and the Lady arguing over right “usance” of Nature (“The Masque Presented at Ludlow Castle 1634,” 690-800).


civilizing what is wild and making it English. In her book on the different imperial rites that enact possession in the New World, Patricia Seed identifies the uniquely English ceremony as a specific kind of labor: house-building and hedge-planting. Altering the landscape by building a dwelling against the outside and marking land as separate from the surrounding wilderness enacts a claim in labor on the landscape. In John Rastell’s early sixteenth-century play (c.1520) A New Interlude and a Mery of the Nature of the IIII Elements the English tendency to claim possession by planting homes is already a commonplace:

O, what a thynge had be than,
Yf that they that be englyshe men
Myght have ben the furst of all
That there shulde have take possession
And made furst buyldynge and habytacion,
A memory perpetuall!  

Constructing dwellings and altering the landscape bring together the tradition dating back at least to Xenophon’s Oeconomicus of husbandry as care of house and land (and thus the shared

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361 A version of this western logic underlies the rhetorical use of “facts on the ground” as a euphemism and justification for land grabs. As Rashid Khalidi has written, “facts on the ground” were “a tactic used by the Zionist movement for over a century in order to obtain control over more and more of Palestine.” See “Bad Faith in the Holy City,” Foreign Affairs. April 15 2010. https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2010-04-15/bad-faith-holy-city

362 Ibid., 17.
heritage of economics and ecology as the sciences of the household and the study of the house respectively). This is one of many examples of the triumph of the social, which sees the private labor of home-making and home-building as a constituent in political action of nation-building. In one popular sixteenth-century translation of Xenophon’s work, husbandry and housekeeping take on ethical correlates:

For it is not in husbandry as it is in other craftes that they, the whiche do not worke, may excuse them selfes, and sey that they can not skyyl to do it: but every man knoweth, that if the grounde be wel tyelled and husbandly handled, it sheweth vs pleasure agayne for it. And surely husbandry is it that best proueth a mans vnlustye corage and sluggishe disposition. For there is no man can parswade hym selfe, that a man can lyue without suche thynges as be necessary. But he that hath no science wherby he may gette his lyuynge, nor wyl not fall to husbandry: it is clere he is eyther a starte foole orels he purposeth to gette his lyuynge by robbinge and stelyng orels by begging.363

The alternative to georgic labor is sloth, cowardice and theft. Building houses and working the newly claimed fields becomes a moral, political, and (in a system that equates such a seizure with Creation) religious weight on the shoulders of settlers. Even the Loeb translation preserves

the soteriology of work that underlies this Early Modern translation: “Husbandry is the clear
accuser of the recreant soul.”

The Anglo-Dutch *res nullius* policy of dispossession was not the only operating theory of
international relations out there. The Spanish and Portuguese, for instance, claimed a right of
possession by discovery, which Hugo Grotius argued against in the foundational *Freedom of the
Seas*:

> Discovery *per se* gives no legal rights over things unless before the alleged
discovery they were *res nullius*. Now these Indians of the East, on the arrival of
the Portuguese, although some of them were idolaters, and some Mohammedans,
and therefore sunk in grievous sin, had none the less perfect public and private
ownership of their goods and possessions, from which they could not be
dispossessed without just cause.\(^{365}\)

Of course, this rather chauvinistic disregard for native agricultural practices is not confined to the
Early Modern period. In the twentieth century we would exchange religious language for
scientific (and the conservatism of conservation discourse) and use similar logic to expel native
populations from the newly designated national parks. For Grotius neither European discovery
nor wayward religious beliefs of the inhabitants sanction the seizure of land from a pre-existing
group’s possession; only land that can be deemed *res nullius* can be seized with apparent “just


\(^{365}\) Hugo Grotius, *The Freedom of the Seas*, trans. Ralph Van Deman Magoffin (Ontario:
cause.” In practice that often meant that *res nullius* was not just land that didn’t evidence the work of civilization, but land that didn’t evidence the work of Protestant civilization. Both acquisition by discovery and by *res nullius* relied on symbols and signs, and for both, the signs were to be read in alterations and demarcations of the landscape. F.S. Ruddy shows how Roman policies of acquisition carried forward into the age of discovery had to be delimited; huge swaths of land couldn’t be claimed merely through a speech act or document. The claimed land had to show signs of possession:

The symbol was a reasonable way of demonstrating present or future control over an area, either actual or intended. […] This was more than simple viewing of the land, or disembarkation. It (the symbolic gesture) was a sign to the entire world that certain land was to be appropriated. It involved therefore a setting aside of the land which was capable of being appropriated, i.e. there was a demarcation between the land being appropriated and the rest of the world. Thus, the symbolically acquired land was only that defined land over which he, the acquirer, could reasonably expect to exert influence.366

Influence, then, had to be marked and for the English hedge and home-builders marking influence came down to leaving signs of cultivation, construction, and carpentry. Human arts and inventions like these belong to the georgic mode, and in claiming space by changing it, the colonists were playing god by creating inhabitable space and by saving it from the godless

natives. The Protestant colonists could possess the New World by claiming a re-Created space from the unexplored wildernesses of the fallen world. The process is not unlike Giorgio Agamben’s observations about the identity between creation and salvation in the Judaic, Islamic and Christian tradition: “Redemption is nothing other than a potentiality to create that remains pending, that turns on itself and ‘saves’ itself.”

Ostensibly Protestantism (especially Calvinism) vitiated the doctrine of salvation by works, but as Weber has shown, merit, effort, and work found its way back into the Protestant dispensation, and we can see vestiges of salvation through work in English thinking about and in the New World. The fantasy of achieving one’s own private salvation through work was displaced into the political realm and became the fantasy of reproducing an Edenic landscape in a garden (on a small scale) or (on a large scale) creating a city on the hill in the geopolitical and theopolitical register.

Public debate over the practice of dispossessing natives through policies like res nullius was carried out at the pulpit. On Easter 1627 John Donne addressed the topic at St. Paul’s:

The infidel hath no pretense upon the next world, none at all; No nor so clear a title to anything in this world, but that we dispute in the school, whether infidels have any true dominion, any true propriety in anything which they possess here; And whether there be not an inherent right in the Christians, to plant Christianity in any part of the dominions of the infidels, and consequently, to despoil them even of their possession, if they oppose such plantations, so established, and such propagations of the Christian religion. For though we may not begin at the

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dispossessing, and displanting of the native and natural inhabitant, (for so we proceed but as men against men, and upon such equal terms we have no right to take any men’s possessions from them) yet, when pursuing that right, which resides in the Christian, we have established such a plantation, if they supplant that, we may supplant them, say our schools, and our casuists; For in that case, we proceed not as men against men; not by God’s Common Law, which is equal to all men; that is, the Law of Nature; but we proceed by his higher Law, by his prerogative, as Christians against infidels, and then, it is God that proceeds against them, by men, and not those men, of themselves, to serve their other own ambitions, or their other secular ends. All things are yours [1 Cor. 3:21], says the apostle; By what right? You are Christ’s, says he, And Christ is God’s; Thus is a title conveyed to us, All things are God’s, God hath put all things under Christ’s feet; And he under ours, as we are Christians.368

Donne dispenses with Grotius’ argument. For him, as with Edward Coke,369 there is just cause in dispossessing natives provided the settlers act as agents of God against infidels. Two slippages are worth highlighting in this sermon. Note first how the subject shifts from English “plantations” to “propagations of the Christian religion.” Plantations may be the conventional term for a colony or settlement, or it may be a literal agricultural plantation. One wonders if plantation as

368 Donne, John Donne, 378.

369 In 1608, Coke determined that after conquest of an infidel country their laws automatically ceased to exist because they were “not only against Christianity, but against the law of God and of nature.” Cited in Native Claims: Indigenous Law Against Empire 1500-1920, ed. Saliha Belmessous (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 95.
settlement comes out of the Roman agriculturalist argument for res nullius, as our word colonist came out of the Roman colon sense as “tiller, farmer, cultivator, planter, settler in a new country.”

“Propagations of the Christian religion,” refers to the advancement of the Christianity, but it does so by deploying Paul’s georgic analogy to plant cultivation. By spiritualizing agricultural practice, propagating the Christian religion becomes a kind of plantation labor (not for the last time in American history). The other slippage to note is that between English work and God’s work. If the English can call evangelizing a kind of labor that, in the legal heritage, legitimizes adverse possession, they can claim the spiritual upper hand by making it the work of God. Through logic such as this, res nullius comes to signify land in which God’s work is not evident and land that was lost at the fall that needs to be (re)made His. In practice, it is land that has not yet been altered by the georgic efforts of a chosen Protestant nation.

370 “colony, n,” OED Online, March 2016, Oxford University Press.
I hope at the very least that I’ve shown that the Early Modern imagination had more than one way of interacting with the natural world — that we have been capable of much subtler thinking than the pastoral mode generally allows and that, at least generically, we are equipped to talk about work in the world at the intersection of nature and culture.\(^{371}\) At the close of this dissertation I want to consider the ways in which the georgic mode persists in discourses of the Anthropocene, and how the georgic continues to provide a durable framework for understanding human activity in the world.

The Anthropocene is a proposed epoch that marks the period during which human activity began to have a significant impact on earth systems.\(^{372}\) Paul Crutzen and his colleague Eugene F. Stoermer popularized the term when they suggested that the Holocene (the geological epoch that marked the 10,000 year heyday of humanity) had given way to the Anthropocene. By and large, the work georgic performs in discourses of the Anthropocene is Miltonic: we work with the hope of sustaining the planet until some hoped-for deliverance — be it in the form of global political action and collaboration to save the planet, technological salvation, or the fantasy escaping the planet and terraforming Mars. The Anthropocene is already georgic, at least in the popular discourse. If the georgic was partially obscured in Early Modern literature by proximate


modes such as pastoral and epic, the georgic survives today even though we don’t often flag it as such. In what follows, I will link some of the key topics and tensions in discourses of the Anthropocene and their relationship to the georgic mode. Those topics and tensions include: 1) nature’s decline vs. hope for a better environmental future, 2) management strategies (which often involve toeing the line between techno-optimism and worry over the unintended consequences of such technology), and 3) thinking beyond the human (including post-humanism and multispecies assemblies).

Discourses of the Anthropocene are caught between lamentations for nature’s decline and hope for a better (or at least, less worse) environmental future. The Anthropocene already participates in a georgic narrative of decline that parallels the fall narrative in Genesis (with its associated ecological impacts in Paradise Lost), even as it suggests that human labor has the potential to improve the world. “There is a fall coming,” Paul Kingsnorth reminds us, in his manifesto. The mindless economic activity of humanity has occasioned something akin to a second, slow fall — if we can adapt Rob Nixon’s term “slow violence” — but a slow fall that

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373 These topics and tensions are largely culled from various comments and presentations made by Ursula Heise during the Mellon-funded Sawyer Seminars in the Environmental Humanities, which she organized along with Jon Christensen and Michelle Niemann. This was a year-long series of interdisciplinary seminars hosted by UCLA during academic year 2014-2015, and the Anthropocene was a key paradigm for our discussions.


is nonetheless accelerating, as it has been since the Great Acceleration.\footnote{The Great Acceleration describes the second half of the twentieth century when, according to graphs originally published in 2004 (and since updated) by the International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme (IGBP), global economic activity and earth-system changes underwent a period of rapid acceleration. The graphs document the rise in human activity from the start of the industrial revolution in 1750 to 2010, and the subsequent changes in the Earth System — greenhouse gas levels, ocean acidification, deforestation and biodiversity deterioration — using a set of 24 indicators. See Will Steffen, Wendy Broadgate, Lisa Deutsch, Owen Gaffney, and Cornelia Ludwig, “The Trajectory of the Anthropocene: The Great Acceleration,” The Anthropocene Review 2 (April 2015): 81-98.} There are opportunities for resilience, but resilience in the face of a general downward trajectory. The fall narrative that typifies biblical and classical georgic is very much in play in discourses of the Anthropocene, those fall narratives look forward to a brighter future — in the Judeo-Christian tradition it is a coming or a second coming (for Protestants, it was the opportunity to remake the world in the New World); for Romans it was the promise of a strong state, with its analogue in the well-managed farm.

Management is another issue that vexes discourses of the Anthropocene, which forces us to come to terms with both the unintended consequences of our activity and optimism that technology will produce a savior-like solution (even as our current problems are the unintended consequences of earlier technologies). In the georgic narrative it is the hard age of Zeus that drives innovation and technology, though there are promethean versions of the same fall — notably in Hesiod’s \textit{Works and Days}, a source text for Virgil’s \textit{Georgics} that suggest that technology (such as fire) occassioned the fall in the first place (in the Judeo-Christian version of the georgic fall, it’s the aspiration for knowledge, which Bacon allies with science and technology, that leads to the fall). There is the persistent hope in discourses of the Anthropocene that human innovation and ingenuity will similarly rise to the task and avert a second, ecological fall. The twentieth century brought what once seemed like massive innovations and progress in
the field of agriculture, including turning factories that once produced ammonium nitrate for
bomb fuel into factories that produced industrial fertilizers. As Vandana Shiva likes to say (and
Michael Pollan likes to quote), “We’re still eating the leftovers of World War II.” In a very
real way, we have literalized Virgil’s “armory of the farmer” passage (Georgics, I.160-176),
turning our instruments of war into so-called agricultural innovations. Of course, we now realize
that an approach to land management that only pays attention to the NPK values so that we can
produce thousands of monocultural acres using synthetic pesticides is a risky strategy.

Of course, the Georgics is in some ways the archetypal text of management, using the
Roman farm estate as an analogy for managing the state. As I outlined in the opening chapter on
Shakespeare’s comedies, it’s the same analogy that underlies the connection between the home
(oikos) and the economy. One of the particularly destructive outcomes of the eclipse of the
public realm by economic concerns is that “work is now performed in the mode of laboring, and
the products of work, objects for use, are consumed as though they were mere consumer goods in
order to power the endless movement of the economy.” The Great Pacific Garbage patch is
one of the many outcomes of this endless production and consumption of goods in the mode of
labor. We might also include the mountains of garbage we have accumulated in our landfills and
the recycling we send halfway around the world to China to process. But the embodied energy
the carbon it takes to produce and distribute those goods that end up in the waste heap has had
the unforeseen consequences of gradually raising the earth’s temperature. Again and again, our
management strategies and technological innovations reveal themselves to be not our saving
grace and but another Pandora’s box.

377 Quoted, to take once instance, in Michael Pollan, Omnivore’s Dilemma (New York: Penguin,
2007), 41.

The innovations of capitalism have spawned continuous economic activity in the mode of labor that has had the kind of uncontrollable and unforseen consequences that we associate with action, as the engines of our economy dump tons of CO₂ into the atmosphere. We are still only beginning to understand those consequences. The day I first starting drafting this afterword, the New York Times warned that the melting West Antarctic ice sheet could flood coastal cities before 2100 — much sooner than previously thought.³⁷⁹ As we consider management strategies that balance techno-optimism with skepticism regarding the unintended consequences of such technologies, we must consider the unpredictability of action-into-nature while the debate about nuclear energy continues, but we must also consider the unintended consequences of labor-into-nature (the endless cycle of economic and industrial growth) that drives anthropogenic climate change. With the ascendency of the individual consumer as the measure of national success (a consequence of the rise of the social), the possibility of mobilizing political action on the scale required to mitigate climate change seems like a diminishing possibility.

Management is at the core of the georgic mode, but it’s always conditional management; because nature is never fully under our control. In addition to pursuing more resilient and adaptable management strategies, we need to think beyond the human in the Anthropocene. That means engaging with issues of posthumanism and multi-species assemblages. The georgic mode is already post-human in that it erodes the nature-culture, human-animal boundary — indeed, one of the reasons management is never fully accomplished in the georgic mode is that it sees work as the imbrication of these binaries, where neither term fully controls the other. The state of the farm (and in the political analogy of the Georgics, the state of the state) is always bound up

in practices of mutuality that extend across species to encompass plants, livestock, political animals, and insects (the fable of the bees is perhaps the best example here). Finally, as Heise has shown, science fiction is perhaps the most salient genre of the Anthropocene in part due to its interest in a certain variety of management. Terraforming is the practice of transforming planets into Earth-like systems that can sustain life. Terraforming is literally earth-work (the etymology of georgic) that extends the georgic management into new theaters. This fantasy of control is certainly in play in naive versions of georgic, but any close reader of Virgil knows that dominion over the natural world — even over agricultural landscapes — is a chimera at best.

The georgic is with us as we think about ourselves in the Anthropocene, but it is rarely identified as such. It is part of a shadowy cultural heritage in “nature writing” that often goes unnamed. Perhaps it has become hard to see it because we have become so alienated from agricultural labor we have a hard time recognizing its re-articulation in the literary realm. Agricultural practices (like agricultural writing) have become virtually illegible to most Americans. It’s either relegated to nostalgic, obsolete visions of the family farm (most legible in pick-up advertisements and what Michael Pollan calls “supermarket pastoral”) or the realities of industrial farming are hidden from us by carefully locating CAFOs away from enfranchised populations where their invisibility is maintained by ag-gag laws. Like the georgic mode, the Anthropocene is also working on a name. Arendt’s historical analysis “trace[s] back modern world alienation, its twofold flight from the earth into the universe and from the world into the self, to its origins” to understand “the nature of society as it had deveoped and presented itself at the very moment when it was overcome by the advent of a new and yet unknown age.”

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380 Pollan, *The Omnivore’s Dilemma*, 137.

Pending the approval of the Anthropocene Working Group, that new and previously unknown age that followed so inexorably on the heels of the modern age will have a name. But humanity has been altering the planet since its early, stumbling appearances on the world stage, and in some ways the Anthropocene is simply the result of the intensification of our georgic activities — altering the landscape, making it produce for us, and, sometimes in spite of our best planning and preparation, being caught off-guard by a nature that is never fully separate from us, but never fully under our control either. If the Anthropocene is the dark side of the intersection of nature and culture, we already have a literary structure for imagining that vexed intersection in the georgic mode.

The Protestant Reformation has a complex relationship with world-alienation. The world was slowly demystified of its pagan and Catholic magic. As Max Weber (who lurks behind much of this dissertation) has shown, Early Modern Protestants dismissed the asceticism that accompanied *contemps mundi* tradition in the spiritual domain while at the same time finding

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an outlet for human striving, effort and work in the economic domain. That work ethic found its way back into a modified vision of salvation by works not as a direct catalyst for salvation, but as a sign of election. We still see the residue of this logic in the televangelists who preach the “prosperity gospel.” Something similar is happening today. We know that the kind of broad-based — global — political action needed to stem the very literal tides of climate change is unlikely. But even the most pessimistic activists are still activists; their work is based on hope and the tenacious belief that change is possible. They act as if they could merit ecological salvation. Natality and the possibility of action is the fundamental assumption of the activist, and it’s a fundamentally optimistic worldview that co-exists with the din of alarmism.

Most writer-activists who engage with the Anthropocene leave room for hope, and such is the case with Bill McKibben, Jared Diamond, and Jedidiah Purdy. Purdy’s After Nature: A Politics for the Anthropocene takes direct aim at a certain variety of fatalism that is a “sort of suggestive but, upon scrutiny, meaningless gesture that makes talk of ‘responsibility’ feel self-important and ineffective.” Purdy makes an Arendtian argument for fortifying the public and turning to the “responsible” work of democracy for solutions to surviving in the Anthropocene. Along the way, he finds an essentially georgic ethos at the heart of America’s relationship to the

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384 There are many more explicit examples of the georgic mode in popular literature of the Anthropocene right now, including the back-to-the-land movement, the farm-to-table movement, the deification of farmers like Joel Salatin by the likes of Michael Pollan, the deification of Michael Pollan, and the glorification of agricultural labor as political action (occupy the farm, guerilla gardening, etc.) in what can only be a georgic incarnation of the rise of the social, and Vandana Shiva’s work and activism at the intersection ecology, agriculture, and social justice.

natural world. He divides American environmental history into four stages. First, there was a providential phase (my last chapter explored the earliest part of what Purdy would call the providential phase) which is georgic in spirit: “[T]he world was a potential garden that existed to serve human needs, but only if people developed it with labor and settlement.”386 From the Romantic phase he rescues Thoreau, who strikes him as an early voice from the Anthropocene. Unsurprisingly, what makes Thoreau a touchstone for the Anthropocene is his georgic activity (and activism):

His [Thoreau’s] Concord is full of the artifacts of old and new settlement, down to the soil itself, seeded with stone tools and potsherds that tinkle against the hoe as he works his bean-field. There is nothing pristine in this place, no basis for a fantasy of original and permanent nature. There is only a choice among relationships with and attitudes toward ever-changed places. These do not just accommodate the damage and ruptures of the landscape: they begin from and depend on them.387

The georgic mode here highlights the fact that this landscape is not a pre-fallen Eden; it has seen many generations of work over the course of human history. The landscape is mutually constructed by forces of nature and culture, and those two forces collide in the form of human labor. The utilitarian phase prioritized “right use” and management, which I’ve suggested shares

386 Ibid., 23.
387 Ibid., 127.
much in common with the *res nullius* policies that justified our original occupation of the land.  

Finally, we entered an ecological phase, which emerged with the conviction that “sustainable work can be a source of personal satisfaction.”

This new approach takes work — primarily the hard cultural and economic work of transforming our agricultural practices. That work is both the means and the end: “The ecological ideal that I have been describing makes knowledgeable, sustainable work, with natural processes, into a freestanding value, a reason to pursue a food economy that fosters such work.”

In some ways, this is a radical revision of the category of Arendtian labor; this revised version of labor aims to create durable, sustainable change, and contains elements of political action. Writers like Jedediah Purdy present us with a call to work in spite of the difficulty and dubiousness of our endeavors. For Purdy, that work is agricultural and political, and often uses one to figure the other, which is the fundamental analogy that governs the *Georgics*.

Alan Weisman’s *The World Without Us* is a thought experiment that takes us to the morning after the second fall, and traces how long it would take for the built environment to disappear after we disappear. Cities, neighborhoods, and other monuments of the man-made world would rather quickly be overcome by nature and natural processes in our absence of

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388 I would add that this thinking is still very much active in certain political disputes, such as the Bundy’s occupation of the Malheur Reserve in Oregon, which was fundamentally a seizure on the grounds of perceived underutilization and mismanagement. Even using *res nullius* logic, their claims erase or willfully ignore the other kinds of work that happen on public lands — both the work of native populations and the work of conservationists and ecologists.

389 Ibid., 233.

390 Ibid., 234.
human maintenance. He even devotes an entire chapter to “The World Without Farms.” But underlying this thought experiment is the question: can all this re-seeding, this restoration of nature happen with us? This isn’t a fantasy of a return to nature — that’s the fantasy that underlies human extinction scenarios, often celebrated in grandiose and self-abnegating terms by some deep ecologists. Learning to make human culture sustainable at the intersection of the human and non-human world is a quintessentially georgic proposition, and it’s a pragmatic one.

If Weisman’s interest in doomsdays is oriented toward the (perhaps) near future, Jared Diamond’s is historically articulated. The opening scene of Collapse is a rather georgic “Tale of Two Farms.” After a carefully constructed description of the shared strengths and vulnerabilities of the two farms Diamond orchestrates the big reveal — that while one of the farms is currently thriving in Montana, the other was abandoned in Greenland some five hundred years ago: “When Gardar Farm and Norse Greenland were at their peak, their decline seemed as inconceivable as does the decline of Huls Farm and the U.S. today.” Such narratives of decline are the archetypal georgic situation — nature declining from either an Edenic paradise or a classical golden age or, in the Anthropocene scenario, from the long summer of civilization. The final comparison of the defunct farm and the U.S. activates the farm-as-state analogy that animates the original Georgics. Hardly an optimist, Diamond nonetheless believes there are

391 In some ways, the (built) world is too much with us. Homo faber’s quest for durability has left us with a crowded civilization that is full of products, materials, buildings, and chemicals that just won’t go away. The obsession (both Arendt’s and our own) with the permanent work of homo faber is choking the world that pre-exists the built one. One of the projects of the Anthropocene must be a reorientation from durability and permanence toward adaptability and resilience — something akin to a compostable culture that needs neither “marble, nor the gilded monuments,” that will “wear this world out to the ending doom,” to misquote Shakespeare (Sonnet 55.1, 12).

lessons to be learned, which suggests the possibility of putting those lessons to use. The prologue to *Collapse* ends with typically qualified optimism: “Perhaps we can still learn from the past, but only if we think carefully about its lessons.” The allegory serves a didactic purpose that, characteristic of the georgic mode, unites agricultural tropes with a pedagogical purpose that is ultimately oriented toward future action. Each tale of decline and collapse in the book is a cautionary tale that re-enacts the archetypal fall that is at the heart of the georgic mode.

Perhaps more than anyone else, Bill McKibben has brought climate change and the Anthropocene to the attention of a general audience. His memoir, *Oil and Honey: The Education of an Unlikely Activist*, traces two different plots: his campaign to stop Keystone XL with his organization 350.org and the story of his bees and his beekeeper back on his homestead in Vermont. The text is a georgic exploration of the intersection of private labor in the *oikos* and the public, political action of ecological activism. Typical of literature after the rise of the social, it links the private world with politics on the largest scale. The fundamental analogy is, again, deeply georgic: the bees, taken straight from the fourth book of the *Georgics*, symbolize the state. In Virgil’s hands, the bees illustrate the relationship between re-newing the hive and restoring Rome in the wake of the Civil Wars. In McKibben’s, the bees are a parable of political and environmental activism and resilience that ultimately aims to motivate large-scale political action to stop the fossil fuel industry and as well as influence the small, private decisions we make every day. Unlike the deep ecologists, McKibben does not think that we can go backwards, but he believes that the way forward can be achieved both through global political action *and* by making the personal choice to hunker down, invest in local farm economies and, to some extent,

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393 Ibid., 8.

re-baptize yourself in the sweat of American self-reliance (which was an early expression of privacy as political in the history of American ideas). It will, however, take more than personal virtue (which is one of the reasons that half the book is about the 350.org campaign) to make the kind of change that’s necessary to stave off the worst effects of climate change. The entwining of the personal and the political, and the private and the public is deeply georgic, and to the extent that it seeks to mobilize political action through activism, it’s also deeply Arendtian.

*The End of Nature* is the quintessential fall narrative of the Anthropocene, but McKibben sees the damage as being beyond human thought or intention, which suggests anthropogenic climate change has something in common with the boundlessness and unpredictability of action-into-nature in Arendt’s taxonomy.\(^\text{395}\) The products of labor — the things that we thought had no meaning, no consequence, no permanence, and no lasting effects on the world, such as the ignoble labor of turning the key in the ignition to go to a dead-end job — turn out to have a huge, lasting, and potentially catastrophic impacts on the planet. Arendt did not live to see this collective epiphany (if we can even claim that kind of success in the age of climate denial). She wrote that “the modern world [...] was born with the first atomic explosions,” and those explosions represented action-into-nature that released unintended consequences.\(^\text{396}\) In the post-modern world, however, it’s climate change that represents the biggest threat, not as action-into-nature and the associated unintended consequences, but as labor-into-nature, which is a


\(^{396}\) Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 6. The modern and post-modern centuries are rife with historical irony. Nuclear technology was developed to deliver us from endless war in the twentieth century, but we’re still dealing with the threat of nuclear proliferation more than a decade into the twenty-first century. Though Arendt didn’t live to see it, one of the other unintended consequences of nuclearization was to catalyze the environmental movement. And in a major historical irony, nuclear power may soon be the favored alternative to fossil fuels.
perversion and inversion of what labor has always been: the lowest rung on the ladder of activities in the human condition — the activities that we share with nature, namely reproduction and consumption. In the age of capitalism, work is performed in the mode of labor, and the consequence of that economic rhythm upon which global capitalism relies is anthropogenic (if unwilled) climate change. If one of the hallmarks of modernity is work in the mode of labor, the hallmark of the Anthropocene isn’t action-into-nature on the grand scale of nuclearization, but the banality of labor-into-nature; unforeseen consequences aren’t nuclear fallout, but the overpopulation, the overproduction of CO₂, and the disruption of the nitrogen cycle — which lead to the catastrophic catalogues that McKibben marshalls across his work. The economic argument against potentially world-saving measures such as carbon caps points directly to the triumph of labor in the age of society: we cannot stop because our continuous labor is the engine that drives our economy, and private economic success is the criterion for politics in modernity.

When McKibben discusses a rupture with nature it is often in deeply georgic terms. Rhetorically he wonders “Why celebrate the harvest when you harvest every week with a shopping cart?” He laments the monocultures of industrial agriculture: “I can drive past hundreds of miles of fields without ever being able to figure out what’s growing in them, unless it’s corn.” Finally he makes recourse to that most georgic of twentieth-century environmental writers, Wendell Berry, who mocks advertisements for modern tractors that hawk their superior interiors as isolated from the noise and fumes of the outside world.

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398 Ibid., 70.
At face value Virgil’s *Georgics* seems to advocate for subduing nature; it might seem to be a celebration of the triumph of human effort over nature. However, the *Georgics* is finally ambivalent about the efficaciousness of human work in nature, just as Protestantism is ambivalent about human work in general. The “plague of Noricum” passage (III.478-566) underscores that even the most prudential farmer cannot avoid the vagaries of disease and weather, but they must plan for success and work hard nonetheless. If agriculture teaches anything, it is that nature is not ours to subdue and in spite of our best efforts — in light of our most highly built and managed landscapes, nature always finds a way to thwart our intentions, be it through soil exhaustion, drought, flooding, pests or any other number of agricultural risks, which only increase as weather patterns become increasingly unpredictable in the Anthropocene. Similarly, the Protestant condition requires believers to act as if their works were efficacious even while knowing that their election has been pre-determined. Agricultural risk and Protestant predestination are epistemological problems; for McKibben, the georgic mode emerges as the best way to express that uncertainty. “[H]arvests and other common motifs of the Bible are not just metaphors; they are also the old reality of the earth, a place where people depend for both life and meaning on the nature they found around them.”399 Part of the tragedy of world-alienation for the Protestant in the Anthropocene is losing a fundamental “way to recognize God.”400 He ends his meditation on Job with a georgic hymn that could just as easily apply the invisible hand of the economy that rewards elected Protestants with success in their vocations:

“\[W\]e plow the fields and scatter the good seed on the land, But it is fed and watered by God's almighty hand. He sends the snow in winter, The warmth to swell the grain, The breezes and the

399 Ibid., 77.

400 Ibid.
sunshine, And soft refreshing rain. All good gifts around us Are sent from heaven above.”

The outcome is not in the plower’s hands, but they must work hard anyway as if they could merit God’s grace.

In the two decades that elapsed between the publication of The End of Nature and Eaarth, hope has certainly been mitigated by political inaction. The book attempts to adjust the received temporality of climate change by suggesting that it’s no longer a matter of protecting the planet for the often invoked “children” and “grandchildren.” The generational trope invoked by politicians and climate activists is a standard move after the rise of the social, when reproductive labor is already politically charged. But McKibben suggests that in the Anthropocene (if we choose to accept that word) we are already post-Earth, we’ve already fallen (again), we’re living in a second hard age, and we need to get to work. As he put it in similar call to arms (or perhaps, call to small, local farms) “it’s time to get mad, and then busy.” Like double-predestined Calvinists, we know that we’re doomed, but we must continue to work for something better.

Unsurprisingly, the solutions McKibben has in mind are the agriculturalist’s solutions: smaller farms with more local production.

I have made a case for recognizing georgic thinking in Early Modern literature in part because I believe it is still active in our contemporary discourse. This has partly been an archeology of a mode, but I want to close by suggesting that the georgic is not merely a relic to be excavated; it continues to do important environmental work even if it doesn’t fit in our

401 Ibid.
contemporary generic taxonomies. The georgic mode offers a way of interacting with the world that doesn’t suppose mutually exclusive realms. There are many binaries that modern thinking has imposed on our worldview, but the georgic (where it survives) offers ways of thinking beyond those oppositions. The georgic mode supposes the mutual imbrication of nature and culture, city and wilderness, human and non-human, and ultimately politics and nature. The georgic offers us a way out of our nostalgic longing for a pre-fallen world; it deals with the world we actually live in, whether you call it Creation, Earth or Eaarth. It also offers us a realistic vision of both the power and impotence of human action by showing us the middle space between the fantasy of complete agency and control, and the Calvinist despair in the face of determinism. Emerging out of and in some ways alongside the Protestant ethic, our work in the world is necessary even if it might not be sufficient or even efficient. The Anthropocene demands that we take responsibility for the massive changes we have wrought upon the planet while at the same time it demands that we have the humility to acknowledge that we may not be able to stop or reverse the changes we’ve put into play. It is a mode of qualified optimism in the face of decline.

Finally, the georgic mode is essentially didactic, seeking the improvement not just of the soil but of the political hive as well. As many of the discourses of the Anthropocene exhort us, we must learn from our mistakes. The best work of culture, then, is learning from these lessons, and transmitting them to future generations. This is also the work of georgic in perhaps its most familiar and most lasting form — the work of education, which arguably predated agriculture in the training of offspring to be hunters and gatherers. Transmitting practical and ethical lessons from one generation to another allowed the authoring generation to work towards the survival of the species beyond the individual. The work of culture — and, by extention, the work of the
humanities — starts to look akin to the work of cultivation. Critique is something like a tool for pruning and training our higher-level outgrowths, and the fruits of critical thinking can be political action. We need to reconsider culture perhaps in light of the georgic roots of the word: culture as an ongoing labor of growing, pruning, cultivating, and harvesting.

In that sense, I’m making a georgic argument for education and the humanities, which may have neither the sexiness of the new “maker” economy, nor the earning potential of the coder, programmer, and engineer in the tech world. The georgic education I’m envisioning finds a middle space between considering our students to be future producers in a labor economy and considering them to be scholars pursuing the lonely life of the mind in their ivory towers. In the shift away from producers to cultivators, I hope we can also rethink education’s engagement with the “real world.” I’m not suggesting a retreat to the strictly contemplative life and other nineteenth-century conceptions of the education that define its good by the fact that it does not get its hands dirty. Rather, I’m suggesting a more active, Baconian approach to education that sends students out into the community. I’m suggesting a “georgics of the mind” that goes back to the Renaissance humanism idea of a civic education that prepares students for an active life of contributing to the public and treats them as more than merely future combustion engines that will drive GDP growth (which is what “contributing member of society” tends to mean after the rise of the social). We need to start thinking of economy of something broader than a market paradigm, and get back to its original definition as the house we all share and (as ecology teaches us) as the planet we depend on. A georgic education would ask students to make connections between the texts they read and the problems they encounter in the world they inhabit, and would also ask them to learn lessons out in that world, beyond the classroom, whether it be through fieldwork, research, internships or service-learning. If the humanities are going to remain
relevant, they have to better bridge the life of the mind and the \textit{vita activa}, and that’s going to take work.
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