ROY, DEVJANI. “Joyning my Labour to my Pain”: Andrew Marvell and the Georgic Mode. (Under the direction of John Morillo.)

In terms of genre, the larger part of Andrew Marvell’s poetical works has been categorized as pastoral. Critical scholarship tends to focus on the ideas of “retreat from the world, resignation of ambition, enjoyment of rural ease and beauty, celebration of innocence and young love, and the quest for the renewal of the Golden Age” (Low 275). A pantheon of luminary scholars, including Frank Kermode, J. B. Fleishman, Donald M. Friedman, Ann E. Berthoff and William Empson, have claimed that Marvell’s poetry is characterized by the pastoral mode. In this study of six of Marvell’s allegedly pastoral poems, I argue that Marvell uses the georgic mode, albeit subversively, expanding and redefining the genre itself. The six poems I study are the “Mower” poems: “The Mower against Gardens,” “Damon the Mower,” “The Mower to the Glo-Worms,” “The Mower’s Song”; “Upon Appleton House”; and “The Garden.” The existing critical literature dwells on Marvell’s pastoral art; apart from Anthony Low’s brief section on Andrew Marvell and the Civil War in The Georgic Revolution (274-95), there has been no georgic interpretation of these poems. For this study, I read Marvell’s poems against Virgil’s Georgics, focusing attention on inter-textuality, lyrical and verbal nuances, and layers of meaning that emerge through a comparative reading. The aim is to find in Marvell’s poetry evidence of a georgic mode that results in a lyrical purpose unifying all six poems. The larger aim of the study is to elucidate the genre of the georgic, reading it as a genre that is appropriate for encompassing a broad sweep of themes, from agriculture to social purpose to the idea of the “self” amidst political change. Tracing Marvell’s skillful redefinition of this genre is what makes this study challenging and useful.
“Joyning my Labour to my Pain”: Andrew Marvell and the Georgic Mode

by

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DEDICATION

For my parents: that I may do you proud.

For my sister: you give me eyes, you give me ears.

For my committee, Professors Hooker, Joffe and Morillo: you inspire me by example.
BIOGRAPHY

Devjani Roy grew up in India where she graduated from the University of Delhi. Currently, she lives in Raleigh, North Carolina.
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INTRODUCTION

“the sweet Fields [that] lye forgot”

“The Garden,” the quadripartite “Mower” poems and “Upon Appleton House, to my Lord Fairfax” constitute the most celebrated part of Andrew Marvell’s poetic opus. At the same time, they have eluded easy categorization, read most often as pastorals, poems of repose and retreat, and in the case of “Upon Appleton House” as a country-house poem. Marvell’s poetic roots are complex: Spenser, Donne, Jonson, as well as such contemporaries as Carew and Lovelace. But as in life, so in art: Marvell defies categorization. He has no precursors, no direct inheritors of his poetic legacy. And, as Harold Bloom declares, “Nor are there Marvellian poets after Marvell” (1). In this study of the georgic mode, I examine these six poems. Through an intra-textual analysis with Virgil’s *Georgics*, I read and find in them the clear evidence of the genre of the georgic. I begin with “The Garden’s” “skilful Gardner,” moving on to the figure of Damon the Mower in the Mower poems, and finally to Lord Thomas Fairfax, Marvell’s one-time employer and respected commander of Oliver Cromwell’s parliamentary forces. My reading reveals that the figures speak with a unified voice and that the six poems function conterminously. In the study that follows, I examine and find evidence of Marvell’s use of the georgic mode: a rhetorical voice that articulates the importance of labor, especially agricultural, in maintaining social coherence within human civilization.

In what is surely a proclamation of rhetorical intention, Virgil declares in the Second Georgic:

Hoist your sails to fly over the salt-sea.
No, I can’t hope to embrace the whole world in my verses,
no, not though I had a hundred tongues, a hundred mouths,
and a voice made of iron. Be with me, sail down the coastline –
land lies in sight. Nor shall I hold you back with impromptu
songs, untoward wandering, and windy introductions. (Georgics II.41-46)

In this very expansiveness, the act of “embrac[ing] the whole world in [its] verses,” the
georgic becomes a genre for every period in history. From society to politics to the human
body, where there is organic change, the georgic offers the perfect mode for commentary.
The four books of the Georgics offer advice on reading astronomical signs (Book I),
viticulture (Book II), livestock rearing (Book III), and the art of bee-keeping (Book IV). This
mélange of subject matter coheres, nonetheless, into a syncretic message on productive living
in a fallen world. Amidst the didacticism and the warnings, the talk of soil and climate,
ripening and decay, energy and entropy, the georgic becomes a genre for all time.

Like the genre he works with so adeptly, Marvell’s life is capacious, embracing
multiple identities within one lifetime. The time-period of composition of his works is at best
conjectured at, which often makes it hard to deduce a unified political stance. The speaker of
“The Garden”, for instance, spurns the public life – “How vainly men themselves amaze / To
win the Palm, the Oke, or Bayes” (1-2) – but the poet himself led a life that was characterized
by extensive travels. His satirical poem, “Fleckno, an English Priest at Rome” tells us that he
would have encountered Richard Flecknoe in Rome in 1645 or 1646 since Flecknoe was in
Rome in those years. Kermode and Walker state that between the years 1642/3 – 47, Marvell
traveled within Holland, France, Italy, and Spain (vii). The speaker of “The Garden”
commends the virtues of solitary reclusion, stating that “When we have run our Passions heat
"Love hither makes his best retreat" (25-26). However, prose works such as The Rehearsal Transprosed (1672-73) and An Account of the Growth of Popery (1677) make it evident that the poet’s “Passions heat” was very much in evidence in his life as in his art. Embroiled in partisan politics, a defender of liberty and of Cromwell, with tints of the royalist, Marvell’s poetic and personal selves are fragmented and bewilderingly paradoxical. As Thomas Wheeler suggests:

he was so deeply embroiled in partisan politics that one must be cautious about accepting the truth of any statements made by his enemies or his friends … for anyone familiar with his lyric verse, his status as the ardent champion of political liberty is so at odds with the retiring lover of privacy that it creates a special problem: can both versions of Andrew Marvell be true? (1)

Wheeler’s analysis leads to the central rhetorical challenge in reading Marvell: the adaptability that comes from playing with “two versions” means that the didacticism of the georgic mode is often veiled. The bees, the smallest creatures in the georgic world, paradoxically succeed in creating the Golden Age that is lost to humankind. Curiously, they achieve this through labor. The bees’ synthesis of work with social harmony becomes an ideal of civic virtue. To the growing economic world of seventeenth-century England, they offer suggestions on the proper conduct of commerce:

aware of winter to come, they spend the warm weather hard at work and, among themselves, put aside the profits.

(Georgics IV.156-57).

By enunciating a new work ethic for the growing commercial world, the georgic becomes “an appropriate mode for expressing the energies of trade and colonization” (Fairer 275). It
becomes the spirit of an ergonomic society, one characterized by an absence of waste. The bees, like humans, suffer decline, but choose to ignore it; members of the community that are sluggish are killed lest they prove to be a wasteful impediment. Like humans, they too are faced with sloth and an unstable social organization. As Virgil tells us, the hive has “two kinds of kings [of which one is] uncouth / with idleness and shamefully dragging his belly” (Georgics IV.92-94). Virgil’s advice for such entropy is strikingly political:

But when the swarms fly without purpose and make sport aloft,

disdaining their honeycombs and leaving their houses cold,

keep these erratic spirits from engaging in useless play.

It’s not much work to keep the bees down: rip off the royal wings (Georgics IV.103-06)

“Rip[ping] off the royal wings” becomes the clarion call for revolution, one that Marvell knew only too well. Thomas Wheeler proposes that:

During this ten-year period [1650-1660] England went through an enormous upheaval – a civil war that changed a centuries-old monarchy into a republic, destroyed the Episcopal organization of the state church, and released a torrent of radical thought and opinion. Wherever Marvell was while his country was being turned upside down, his poetry is scarcely touched by the revolution. (2)

However, the idea of Marvell as a poet working inside an ivory tower of isolation is far from correct. There is evidence of historical epiphany all through his poetry: in the glowworms that are “Country Comets” (“The Mower to the Glo-Worms”), in the “Society [that is] rude” and the “busie Companies of Men” (“The Garden”), in the “scatter’d Sibyls Leaves [that
weave] Strange Prophecies” (“Upon Appleton House”). Marvell, like Virgil, was well aware of the venality and intrigue of contemporary politics. In the didactic maxims that are so characteristic of the georgic mode, we see evidence of the poetry of revolution, not agriculture. Both poets use the adaptability of the genre to articulate civic change and political augury. In the Fourth Georgic, the mob fury in the bee hive emblematizes developments from Caesar’s assassination in 44 B.C. that Virgil lived through; the “two kings” could be Octavian and his former ally Mark Antony who was defeated at the Battle of Actium in 31 B.C.:

But if they have flown forth to battle – for often discord
accompanied by great agitation befalls two kings,
right then, from a distance, you may discern the mob’s
temper and the feelings stirred by war ... (Georgics IV.67-70)

In what is surely an interesting twist on the metaphor of “two kings,” Octavian is said to have ordered the death of potential rival Ptolemy Caesar in 30 B.C., using the words “two Caesars is one too many” (Green 697). To counter this argument, Brooks and Warren would propose that reading poetry as the facsimile of history can be erroneous: “We promptly get into trouble if we say: ‘This is sound history, therefore it is good poetry.’” Nonetheless, with Marvell and Virgil, the georgic mode becomes a vehicle for great history and great poetry.

Perhaps the best argument is that great history provides a rich vein of material for the great poet. Both Virgil and Marvell seem to know, at an instinctive level, that their poetry is rooted in the land and in its history; it is the “Work of no Forrain Architect” (“Upon Appleton House” I.2). The georgic mode in their poetry is characterized by a deep patriotism and an abiding concern for the rapacity of man. Virgil experienced the dispossession that was
a consequence of the Roman civil wars: Octavian’s allotment of land to triumvirate veteran soldiers to implement and maintain the *Pax Romana*. L.P. Wilkinson comments:

… the end of each phase of civil war brought fresh misery and chaos through evictions in favor of released veterans. Freeholding peasants as well as prescribed landlords were dispossessed. Horace lost his father’s hard-earned plot. If the new owner did not want to farm (and if he were a professional soldier he might not know how to), he could leave his predecessor to cultivate it and pay him in kind or in money, like Moeris in the *Eclogues* … But that was the most that could be hoped for. (51)

Against this backdrop of hopelessness, the patron becomes a savior, and there is evidence in both poets that the works are aimed to honor the patrons. Wilkinson states that, “The *Eclogues* were composed in 42-39 BC … By the time they were finished Virgil was a member of Maecenas’ circle” (49). One necessity of retaining this membership meant the pressure to placate. There is direct evidence of this in the proem to the Third Georgic:

Meanwhile, Maecenas, let us seek to attain the Dryads’ woods and untried glades, in accord with your not so easy command.

Without you my mind attempts no serious thought. (*Georgics* III.41-43)

The patron may proffer the opportunity, but the desire to “attain the … untried glades” is intrinsic to the georgic mode. The reader can trace in the work of both poets a longing for patriotic revival. Thus, Thomas Fairfax’s retreat to Appleton House comes to represent death in life – a symbolic death from his political life and identity – *and* the triumphant life out of death – in the vivification that Nun Appleton experiences at the hands of its returning owner. It is a “lesser *World*” that becomes “*Heaven's Center, Nature's Lap*” (“Upon Appleton
The bugonia, or the spontaneous regeneration of bees from the carcass of oxen, in the Fourth Georgic becomes a symbol of humankind's ability for rebirth amidst displacement and loss:

Here, a sudden omen, plain to see, almost incredible
to tell: out of the putrefying bovine guts, out
of the bellies and burst sides, bees, buzzing, swarming,
then streaming upward in huge clouds (Georgics IV.554-57)

The georgic mode allows for articulation of this “upward” movement, wherein Nature is restored its perfect state, or what Damon the mower calls “A wild and fragrant Innocence” (“The Mower against Gardens” 34).

The georgic mode suggests that death in life can only be countered by life out of death. Dispossession can be resolved only by a return to farming; political death can be countered only by a rebirth of man’s true nature, the “Flowrs eternal, and divine, / That in the Crowns of Saints do shine” (“Upon Appleton House” XLI.359-60). The combination of work and Nature forms a perfect synthesis into a higher unity. The mowers, the gardeners, the farmers, the bees – the assorted collection of workers in the georgic world – counter sloth and dispossession through productive work, working with Nature in a relationship of mutual productivity. The georgic mode disdains the imposition of artifice, or as Damon complains, “Tis all enforc'd; the Fountain and the Grot; / While the sweet Fields do lye forgot” (“The Mower against Gardens” 31-32).

The abandonment of these “sweet Fields” is integral to understanding Virgil’s rhetorical motivation in the Georgics. With farm labor diverted into the war effort, agriculture declined during the civil wars:
It seems that the tenant _coloni_ might even be taken overseas to fight in feudal fashion with their landlords; Caesar speaks of a squadron of seven ships holding Massilia for Pompey in 49 [B.C.] with crews raised by Dominitius from his slaves, freedmen and tenants. And in general the unavailability of the normal source of hired labor at busy times such as harvest would be sufficient to disrupt agriculture. (Wilkinson 52)

Landlessness and homelessness were the consequences of two hundred years of internecine wars, and Virgil’s metaphor of choice is the plague. It infects the countryside; it is irreversible. The decline seeps down from nature into the animal and then the human population. There are images of inevitable atrophy: “In the first days these are the signs of approaching death / but as the sickness progresses, it begins to rage” (Georgics III.503-04). The dark cast of a countryside going slowly to ruin permeates the Third Georgic: “The sorrowing plowman goes, unyoking the ox that mourns its brother’s death, / and in the midst of the job leaves the plow idle” (Georgics III.517-18).

Do not “leave the plow idle” appears to be the lesson of the georgic mode. It becomes then, at its apogee, an exposition on the theology of work. The land is a spiritual entity, both poets seem to say, and the neglect of the land is the start of godlessness. Ignored, often abused, by humankind, it contains nonetheless the lesson for survival in the midst of chaos; as Damon the mower reminds us “howso'ere the Figures do excel, / The Gods themselves with us do dwell” (“The Mower against Gardens” 39-40). This idea of godliness in a fallen world is what confers upon the georgic mode its universality, as Wilkinson goes on to explain: “Even if he began with the idea of following Hesiod, Virgil soon came to realize that he was engaged in something larger and warmer, a panorama of rural life in Italy, with all its
social and philosophical implications” (60). As Virgil himself declares: “I must try for a new path on which I / may rise from the earth, and soar triumphant from the lips of men” (Georgics III.8-9). Fallen humankind may be limited by an ambit of opportunity, but redemption, or “ris[ing] from the earth,” is available to all. From Aristaeus in the Fourth Georgic to Thomas Fairfax in “Upon Appleton House,” the threat to human possibility is overcome by faith and patient reconstruction. The georgic mode emphasizes that while war may bring sterility, the results of prolonged mourning are worse. Orpheus’ lament for the dead Eurydice (Georgic IV) and Damon’s involvement of Nature “in one common Ruine” (“The Mower’s Song”) carry inherent warnings.

These warnings point to what R.D. Williams terms “the larger poetic symbolism of man’s emotional involvement with nature” (16). Nature, in the georgic mode, is a spiritual entity and living creatures who maintain ties with Nature draw from this spirituality. This rhetorical stance of the georgic mode has often confused literary scholarship. Despite their extensive agricultural advice, the Georgics are not a mere didactic tract. For one, Virgil was a poet by profession, not a farmer or even a laborer; secondly, there is a clear implication that the social and philosophical implications of farming are what interest him. R.D. Williams writes:

We may begin with a consideration of the Georgics with Seneca’s famous comment nec agricolas docere voluit, sed legentes delectare (“he did not intend to instruct farmers, but to delight his readers”). We may call the precepts the “ostensible” subject, and ask what is the relationship of these precepts to the general rhetorical and poetic intention. (15)
This “rhetorical and poetic intention” is impossible to pinpoint; to call Virgil a rural poet would be as incorrect as labeling “Upon Appleton House” a generic country-house poem. The georgic mode defies easy categorization; there are no clear boundaries between systematic instruction and social commentary. “Upon Appleton House” is unlike other poems in the country-house genre (Jonson’s “To Penshurst” and Carew’s “To Saxham” come to mind) in that it does not extol the values of retreat; it celebrates industriousness within the context of this retreat. The shadows of war may darken the world of Nun Appleton, but Thomas Fairfax, like his ancestor William, takes the estate under his benign control. Nature reciprocates endearingly, drawing our attention to its anthropomorphic character:

Then, to conclude these pleasant Acts,

Denton sets ope its Cataracts;

…………………………………..

For, jealous of its Lords long stay,

It try’s t’invite him thus away. (“Upon Appleton House” LIX.465-70).

Composing in the absence of human characters is difficult, but Virgil and Marvell prove worthy of their métier. Both poets seem to circumvent this rhetorical challenge by creating a character in Nature itself, one that lives, breathes, and acts. And at times, Nature is at war with its human subjects. The Georgics are replete with vivid battle metaphors: the farmer “keep[s] his fields under control” (I.99); “having sown the seed, [he] tends the fields / hands on and vigorously levels piles of barren sand” (I.104-05); Virgil recommends that the viticulturist “exercise firm control and prune the rambunctious vines” (II.370).
In their use of the georgic mode, Virgil and Marvell practice the same act of pruning. We see the confident voice of the beginnings of a new genre shorn of excess. As Virgil tells us:

Other poems, which may have beguiled idle minds with song, present worn themes: who does not know of the king who set Hercules’ labors or the altars of the man-slaying king whom Hercules killed? (Georgics III.3-5)

Both poets thus come to reify the genre of the georgic; theirs is not poetry for “idle minds” or lovers of “worn themes”. As we move into the green world of “The Garden,” we are “prepar'd for longer flight” into an examination of the active life.
CHAPTER 1

The Georgic in “The Garden”

“The Garden” has most frequently been read as a poem about the dismissal of the active life, of ambition, and of sexual love. It is tempting to find in Marvell’s lush verse a celebration of the contemplative garden, hinting equally at the Garden of Eden as well as the garden of the mind of classical philosophy. The usual inference is that the poem is a sort of modified pastoral: on the boundaries of the genre, but a pastoral nonetheless. Generations of literary scholars have read “The Garden” in “the long tradition of ancient and Renaissance pastoral” (Kermode and Walker xii). Marvell also wrote several other poems that are related to the genre of the pastoral: the “Nun Appleton” poems and the series of the “Mower” poems. As Frank Kermode and Keith Walker point out:

These are distinctive not only because mowers were unusual pastoral subjects, being considered lower than shepherds … but also because there are so many differences between the poems themselves. All, however, are beautifully fashioned, and all extend the scope of the genres and sub-genres to which they can be assigned. (xi)

Kermode and Walker’s comment brings out the onomastic problem that “The Garden” poses; we could call it a pastoral and read it as one, and certainly that has been the most common reading. But to do so would mean being unconsciously schooled by the framework and the conventions of this genre: the luxuriance and abundance of an enclosed space, the possibility of repose far from the seat of power and commerce. This, I see, as the central problem of “The Garden,” and it is a problem that I intend to explicate in the essay that follows. Given
Marvell’s predilection for poetic sleight of hand (“Tom May’s Death” and “Horatian Ode” being notable examples), it may be time to revise the accepted exegesis.

I propose to read “The Garden” as a georgic. This reading is conducted against Books I and II of Virgil’s *Georgics*; the focus remains however on Marvell’s poem. The garden that I see in the poem is not so much a *hortus conclusus* or the enclosed garden of medieval theology but a commentary on the blurring of aristocratic, country and civic boundaries due to the Civil War, a difficulty from which work, not retirement, is the best escape. Significant to this explication is my argument that there are two speakers in this poem. The first is the speaker who seeks refuge in the garden, ostensibly for spiritual repose and elevation; him, I term, the pastoral speaker. The second speaker is the gardener of the last verse (lines 65-72), who speaks in the stance of the georgic; he is our georgic gardener. The duality of voices pushes the boundaries of genre; this sense of double status and double voices makes these boundaries permeate into one another in a way that has proved to be puzzling. In my reading, I see the poem’s last two verses resolving some of these hermeneutical problems.

The “crisis of the poem is in the middle,” argues William Empson (124). But that would not explain the sudden shift in voice in the last two verses. From walking mate-less in “that happy Garden-State” (57), the poem now speaks of “the skilful Gardener” with his sundial made “of flow’rs and herbes” (72). Critics have shared this sense of bewilderment, among them the redoubttable Empson: “I am not sure what arrangement of flower-beds is described in the last verse … It is a graceful finale to the all-in-one theme, but not, I think, very important …” (124). The description of the “fragrant” sundial (line 68) is explained thus by Nicholas Salerno:
During the last half of the [seventeenth] century, more imaginative gardeners frequently planted living sundials … With the knowledge that certain varieties of flowers opened at the same time each day, a gardener could even create a sundial which indicated the time merely by which blossoms were open. (117) Marvell’s “skilful Gardener” gardener appears to do just that; anticipating Emily Dickinson two centuries later, he “dwell[s] in Possibility.” This is the possibility that the flowers and herbs will bloom to create exactly the pattern of a sundial, by which he can then tell what time of the day it is. This sense of possibility is unlikely to occur in the world of the pastoral; neither is this sense of time. The pastoral speaker sees in time a destructive principle (as befitting the word’s etymological root in the Latin tempus, “to cut.”), the transience of earthly things, and the irreversibility of events. From these and from the “busie Companies of Men” (12), the pastoral speaker seeks flight and isolation. “Casting the Bodies Vest aside” (51) (as he yearns to do) would be ideal, but in the real world there is a work to be done. If the pastoral speaker who seeks refuge in the garden has abjured sexual love, the georgic gardener channels his energies into the sensuality of labor: after all, what could be more sensually-gratifying than growing “herbs and flow’rs”? In verse eight (57-64), the pastoral speaker reminisces about Paradise “a Place so pure, and sweet” (59), a “Garden-state” (57) that is both isolated and peopled only by men. From here to verse nine (65-72), the poetic movement is jarring, marked by a lyrical flow outward, instead of inward. The misanthropic and misogynistic world of the speaker has been replaced by the sun-filled world of the garden. This is an earthly garden, as the movement of the sun through the zodiac reveals, but it is marked not by penury, limitation and loss but by the fruits of labor. The world of the pastoral has been exchanged for the world of the georgic.
There is no sense of tragic loss here; this is not the garden of the mind. The georgic gardener does not think “green Thought[s]” (48); unlike the pastoral speaker, he does not need to “withdraw into [his] happiness” (42). The fruits of the imagination have been replaced by the fruits of labor. Literary critics have often seen “the highest sublimation of garden experience” (Bushnell 104) in verses five and six which describe the “Garden-state” of the heavenly paradise. Here, our pastoral speaker, Rebecca Bushnell tells us need not lift a finger … even to gather the fruit, because the apples “drop about his head,” the grapes “crush their wine” on his mouth, and the nectarine and peach “into my hands themselves do reach,” for his work lies purely in creating “green thoughts,” the pattern of the garden of the mind. In effect, it returns us to Puttenham’s analogy between the poet and the gardener who produce the fruits of the imagination. (104)

But “the fruits of the imagination” will make for starvation in the georgic world, as Virgil cautions:

So, unless you pursue the weeds with a relentless hoe,

Scare off the birds with shouting, remove the shade from

Over-shadowed farmland with a pruning hook, and call down rain with

Prayers,

In vain, alas, you’ll stare at someone else’s heaps of grain

And relieve your hunger by shaking oak trees in the woods.

(Georgics I.155-59)
The green “Paradise” that Marvell’s pastoral speaker longs for is also a fool’s paradise, an illusory space. In the real world, the work of reaping and sowing (or gardening) is continual, with no excuses, as Virgil reminds us:

In fact, even on holy days, the laws of god and men
Permit some work. No piety forbids bringing down
Irrigation water, fencing in crops with a hedge,
Setting snares for birds, burning up tangles of briars,
And dipping a bleating flock in a health-promoting stream.

*(Georgics I.268-72)*

Echoing Virgil, work has become the new deity in the world of Marvell’s georgic gardener; the work of gardening is both physical and spiritual, “whereby body and mind are refreshed and freed to contemplate God and self” (Bushnell 105). The central idea of the *Georgics* is that only labor will counter the inevitable and steady deterioration of a society, a concept that David Fairer terms “the energy that counters the entropy” (278). Virgil states this directly in Book I:

Relentless work conquered
All difficulties – work and urgent need when times were hard.

*(Georgics I.145-46)*

Through a rich vein of didacticism, the idea is created of a model Augustan Rome; here, agricultural labor is the thread integrating the economy and politics. It is what holds together civilization and keeps civic communities from disintegrating. This idea of a society in the throes of entropy resonates with Marvell’s georgic gardener. He concludes that the idea of
the “happy Garden-state” is a fantasy; it is “beyond a Mortal’s share,” just as is the idyllic age of Saturn that Virgil describes:

Before Jove took power, no settlers broke the fields with their plows:
It was impious then to mark off the land and divide it
With boundaries; people sought land in common, and Earth herself
Gave everything more freely when no one made demands.

\[(Georgics \text{ I.125-28})\]

But now, it is necessary for humankind to labor for a living, as the animal kingdom has always been doing. Human ingenuity (a floral sundial, for example) can only flourish in a society held together by work. The traditional duality of Art and Nature – the focus of the traditional pastoral – has been transfigured. The Civil War, growing trade and mercantilism, imperialistic energies in foreign lands: Marvell gathers this explosion of politics and economics in the figure of the gardener.

Read in the context of the English Civil War and the subsequent Commonwealth, this deification of work affirms “the existence of God through knowledge of His work” (Wallerstein 188). It also affirms another theme of the \text{Georgics}, namely resilience in the face of tumult. As Virgil tells us repeatedly in Book I, the farmer is forever at the mercy of providential vagaries. Storms strike, drought destroys arable land, insects infest granaries. Only work can indemnify the farmer. The political environment that stimulated the writing of “The Garden” is strikingly analogous to that of the \text{Georgics}. The civil wars ended in 31 B.C., when Virgil was thirty-nine years old. The end was occasioned by Octavian’s decisive defeat of Antony in a naval battle at Actium. In 23 B.C. Octavian’s rule was given official recognition, when he became the founder of the Roman Republic and began an era of
imperial greatness that history calls the *pax romana*. For the first time in two hundred years, there was peace. Janet Lembke tells us that “Virgil’s coming of age was filled with dispiriting, chaotic events – widespread political power grabs, corruption, civil wars, assassinations – which he was helpless to counter except in the singing of his poems” (xiii). Marvell experienced the same sense of helplessness; almost two decades after the Civil War, his prose work *The Rehearsal Transprosed* (1672-73) was published, in which he writes:

> Whether it be a war of religion or of liberty, it is not worth the labour to inquire. Whichsoever was at the top, the other was at the bottom; but upon considering all, I think the cause was too good to have been fought for. Men ought to have trusted God—they ought to have trusted the King with that whole matter. The “arms of the Church are prayers and tears;” the arms of the subject are patience and petitions. The King himself being of so accurate and piercing a judgment would soon have felt it where it stuck. For men may spare their pains when Nature is at work, and the world will not go the faster for our driving. Even as his present Majesty’s happy Restoration did itself, so all things else happen in their best and proper time, without any heed of our officiousness. (Kermode and Walker 265)

But from the audacious praise of Cromwell in the “Horatian Ode” to *The Rehearsal Transprosed* in which he exhorts his readers “to have trusted the King,” it is nearly impossible to tell which mask Marvell is wearing at any given time: Republican, Royalist, Puritan, Protestant (and according to William Empson, homosexual but clandestinely married). Kermode and Walker state that he “had a hot temper, yet he was on occasion devious and often wrote anonymously … It would seem then that the ambiguities, the
uncommitedness, of the poems reflected some of the same qualities in Marvell’s life”
(Kermode and Walker xii-xiii). The dual speakers that I read into the poem – one pastoral,
the other georgic -- may be, not antinomic, but a mirroring of Marvell’s own dispersed sense
of self.

This sense of self was immersed in and motivated most strongly by contemporary
politics; in fact, there is speculation that, in the last years of his life, he was under
government surveillance. These political motivations have a worthy predecessor in Virgil.
The *Georgics* are replete with sense of alertness to political reality. In a near-perfect
intersection of botanical detail with political detail, Virgil reminds us that military threat can
come from foreign shores:

> Or, nearer the ocean, the banyan jungles that India
> Supports, that tract at earth’s far end where no flights of arrows
> Can gain the upper air above the canopy?
> Mind you, those people aren’t slow at handling a quiver. (II.122-25)

Janet Lembke tells us:

> Along with many others, [Virgil’s] own family is said to have lost its acreage
near Mantua when the property was awarded in 42 B.C., after the battle of
Philippi, as compensation to some of Antony’s veterans; Virgil supposedly
regained it through the influence of acquaintances who were well-connected
to Octavian. … The *Georgics*, ignited by deeply-felt personal experiences, is
in many respects a heartfelt cry for homecoming, for returning landlords and
their families to the fields and pastures they had lost through no fault of their
own. (xvi)
This sense of “homecoming” permeates the lyrical movement towards the end of “The Garden.” We began with the pastoral speaker moving, through space and in time, to a pre-Christian world of Greek lovers; then to a garden at the height of its efflorescence and fecundity; and finally, to the *hortus conclusus* where his soul “prepare[s] for longer flight” (55). At the end however, he elects to come back to the earthly garden, the home of commerce and labor. The heavenly garden may provide him his *otium*, but he is alert to the impermanence (“beyond a Mortal’s share”) of this state of repose.

At the center of this outward movement is the gardener with his floral sundial. Gardening flowers (or pollinating them, as does “th’industrious Bee”) requires labor, the central theme of the *Georgics*:

Plainly, everything requires work, every last plant

Mustered into furrows and, with great effort, tamed. (II.61-62)

But the necessity of unremitting hard work produces economic as well as sensory gratification, recalling Milton. In Book IV of *Paradise Lost*, Adam and Eve’s gardening recalls recreation more than work:

no more toil

Of their sweet Gard’ning labor then suffic’d

To recommend cool Zephyr and made ease

More easy, wholesome thirst and appetite

More grateful, to their Supper fruits they fell … (IV.325-31)

“Falling” to their “Supper fruits” recalls the orgiastic abundance that greets Marvell’s speaker in verse five (33-40) at the end of which “Insnar’d with Flow’rs, [he falls] on grass]”
But, in Milton, the sensory enjoyment is short-lived when Adam advises Eve that on the morrow:

we must be risen
And at our pleasant labor, to reform
Yon flowery Arbours, yonder Alleys green
Our walk at noon, with branches overgrown,
That mock our scant manuring, and require
More hands than ours to lop their wanton growth. (IV.624-29)

Rebecca Bushnell notes that “the language of ‘reformation’ is applied to their gardening, lending it a Protestant moral odor … Gardening is necessary to control the ‘wantonness’ of Eden and its rampant sexuality” (95-96).

It is this very idea of gardening as “control” that distinguishes the last two verses of “The Garden”; in a world of changing political reality, gardening is perhaps the only means to wrest control, to impose order in nature. It is here that the poem moves into a double status – pastoral and georgic – as the world of sensuality and (paradoxically) spirituality gives way to the world of work. In this poetic movement agglomerate all the characteristics of the georgic – enclosure versus freedom; innocence lost and mortality gained; the lack of a home and the longing to find one. The pastoral speaker finds that the world of the Edenic garden is, ultimately, not his home; it is illusory, fleeting, and encloses but also excludes. He is transfigured into the georgic gardener and finds this home in the earthly garden, planting not only fragrant herbs and flowers, but also the seeds of the political future.

The nearly-jarring transition from the penultimate verse of the poem, in which the speaker proclaims his wish to live in Paradise alone, to the industry of the “skilful Gardener”
in the next verse, supports my claim that while the speaker may wish ostensibly to celebrate the pastoral life, the lyrical movement at the end of the poem suggests that retreat is not an option he prefers. Even though the language of the poem may appear to be at the brink of spiritual allegory, the sudden shift suggests Marvell’s awareness that human potential can only be realized by an immersion in the world of men. The “skilful Gardener” and the “industrious bee” make the poetic argument that human potential lies not in retreat but in the world. If the *Georgics*’ central imaginative idea is the virtuous Roman farmer who comes to represent the health at the heart of Roman life, so is Marvell’s georig gardener. This makes “The Garden” an unqualified endorsement of virtuous labor, not a wistfulness for the unattainable state of prelapsarian innocence that a pastoral reading would suggest.

The gardener is aware that he lives in the post-lapsarian world; the emphasis on the sun running through the twelve signs of the zodiac illustrates, above all, the temporality of his world, with its changing seasons, corruption, and death. The expulsion from Eden is now reality: “So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken” (*Genesis* 3:23). But in the midst of exile lies opportunity; there are “sweet and wholesome Hours” (71) to be “reckon’d.” Labor may be the permanent condition of human experience, but the attitude of the gardener is one of joyous celebration of this labor, not of bereavement or impoverishment. It is this redefinition of attitude that keeps Marvell’s poem from being just a pastoral. The georig gardener depends, like the bee, on industry not escape. The pastoral idea of flight occurs many times, but at the end the poetic movement returns to the here and the now.

The georig gardener does not seek assurance that he will return to a world that dwells “in a green Shade” (48); indeed no such assurance is visible. He does not indulge, like
the pastoral speaker, in mythomania; he is aware that repose and responsibility – as embodied by the pastoral and by the georgic – do not have to be antinomies. Most significantly, he knows that in the real world, there is work to be done.
CHAPTER 2  
“Joyning my Labour to my Pain”: Work in the Mower poems

Virgil ends the First Georgic lamenting that agriculture has suffered the imprecation of long and needless war:

Here the good and evil have changed places: so many
wars in the world, so many forms of wickedness, no honor
for the plow, farmers conscripted, the mournful fields untilled,
and curved pruning hooks are beaten into unbending swords.

(Georgics I.505-08)

Damon the Mower takes up Virgil’s exhortation, and leads us through a celebration of labor. In Marvell’s entire opus, he is truly an unabashed georgic figure.

The Mower poems form a quadripartite sequence, and were first published in 1681 in the collection titled Miscellaneous Poems. The sequence is: “The Mower against Gardens,” “Damon the Mower,” “The Mower to the Glo-Worms,” and “The Mower’s Song;” this is the order in which they are usually published. Each poem is linked integrally to its predecessor. As we reach the culmination of the sequence, we are able to discern a rhetorical and intellectual progression with a unified theme: unremitting work and its potential to transcend humankind’s fallen condition.

In terms of the period of composition, Kermode and Walker suggest that

The chronology of Marvell’s poems is far from certain … It would be difficult to deny that it was during his Nun Appleton period that Marvell wrote the Bilbrough and Appleton House poems, and it is usually assumed, though there
is no direct evidence, that in those years he also wrote “The Garden” and the series of Mower poems. (x-xi)

Twentieth-century commentators are wont to read the poems as pastorals. Kermode and Walker write:

[The Mower poems] are distinctive not only because mowers were unusual pastoral subjects, being considered lower than shepherds (a point contested by Marvell’s mower) … [the poems also] extend the scope of the genres and sub-genres to which they can be assigned. They are works of extraordinary refinement, with the long tradition of ancient and Renaissance pastoral behind them …. (xi)

However, the choice of the central figure of a mower complicates such a pastoral reading. Where Virgil’s Tityrus sings of sheep and otium, “[lying] in the beech-tree shade, / Brooding over your music for the Muse” (Eclogues I.1-2), Damon characterizes himself through professional accoutrements. The scythe becomes the lens through which we view him; it reifies his mental and emotional state: “Sharp like his Sythe his Sorrow was, / And wither’d like his Hopes the Grass” (“Damon the Mower” I.7-8). Without his labor, he is adrift and without identity: “But now I all the day complain, / Joyning my Labour to my Pain” (“Damon the Mower” IX.67-68). The poems are underpinned by a rich tapestry of Scriptural references. The reference to “Labour” and “Pain” depict Damon as the original Adam, forced to reckon with the inevitability of labor in a fallen world: “By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken” (Genesis 3:19). Death has traditionally been depicted as the Grim Reaper with a scythe, the mower that all humankind must ultimately face. Damon himself is mowed down metaphorically at
the end of the poem ("What I do to the Grass, [Juliana] does to my Thoughts and Me"); yet his sanguine, almost enthusiastic attitude towards his profession, reminds the reader of the Scriptural statement "All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field" (Isaiah 40:6). He knows that he lives in a fallen world of corruption and death, where "Luxurious Man, to bring his Vice to use, / Did after him the World seduce" ("The Mower against Gardens" 1-2); but unlike the pastoral figure of the shepherd, he turns to labor, not escape, in the face of this knowledge.

While the Scriptural reasons for the choice of a mower are strong, the poetic reasons are beguiling. As H.M. Margoliouth writes, "Not only was the mower practically ignored by the poets, he also suffered social contempt, as witnessed by the proverbial saying ‘no meat for mowers,’ i.e., ‘unsuitable to, or unobtainable by, people of low degree’” (264). A pastoral reading is further complicated by the fact that Damon sets himself up in direct opposition to the shepherd. Even more complex, the basis of this rivalry is professional, not amorous. He claims that “this Sithe of mine discovers wide / More ground than all his Sheep do hide” ("Damon the Mower" VII.51-52). His argument that “the piping Shepherd stock[s] / The plains with an unnum’red Flock” ("Damon the Mower" VII.49-50), has clear undertones of censure. Damon is even willing to overstep into the profession of sheep husbandry: “With this [Sithe] the golden fleece I shear.” With every breath, he vaunts his intimacy with the land, making him a georgic not a pastoral figure.

As in the Georgics, the hint of war and death impinge upon Damon’s world; there is no pretence to a perfect and insulated existence. The figure of the mower is the simulacrum of the soldier; the trope of mowing as warfare recurs in Marvell’s œuvre. In “Upon Appleton House, to My Lord Fairfax,” the “tawny mowers enter” (XLIX.388); they “Massacre the
Grass along” (L.394); they kill a defenseless bird: “The Edge all bloody from its Breast / He draws, and does his stroke detest (L.397-98).” A.D. Cousins observes:

Perhaps, then, another and not entirely discontinuous way of reading the long account of the mowers would be to see the military perspective on them at work as offering, if not the allegory of the Civil War, yet a twofold perspective to it. First, the military perspective seems to suggest that the mowers’ labor parodies warfare: their work is violently energetic, organized and brings death … On the other hand, however, the apparently parodic, military perspective seems also to suggest that the mowers’ labor – harmless or not – is unavoidably overshadowed by recent history. (71)

These glimpses into recent history can be found in references scattered through the poem sequence. The glowworms are “Country Comets, that portend / No War, nor Princes funeral” (“The Mower to the Glo-Worms” 5-6), but the very absence of these divine portents draws attention to them. The appearance of a comet has traditionally augured disasters such as war, plague, or the fall of kings. The references to “War” and the “Princes funeral” gain contemporary relevance: the English Civil War and the death of Charles I. Depending on the poem’s time of composition, the royal execution is hinted at in the reference to “presag[ing] the Grasses fall,” the allusion also suggesting impending catastrophe; at the same time, “the … fall” that is predicted could equally be that of the Parliamentary forces. The natural world may seem benign, but this is clearly no Saturnian golden age. Nature’s “officious[ness]” disguises its capacity for soothsaying. The First Georgic details these auguries at length, and Virgil reminds us:

that we can learn from known signs about these
matters –

summer’s heat and hard rains and winds that blow in the cold –
the Father himself decreed what the moon warns every month,
by what signs the winds abate, and what frequent sight
makes the farmer keep his cattle closer to the barn. (Georgics I.351-55)

The glowworms show the way to “wandring Mowers” but this capacity for “courtesy” is
forever vulnerable to the threat of self-aggrandizing humankind.

This threat emerges most clearly in the first poem of the sequence, “The Mower
against Gardens.” Kermode and Walker write that

The theme of complaint against gardens as wanton human perversion of
nature is ancient. There is a rhetorical exercise reported by Seneca the Elder
which complains that great houses include streams and woods – mentita
nemora, fake or ‘enforced’ … groves – within the buildings; that their owners
prefer imitations to the real thing and hate what is natural. (294)

A superficial reading would suggest that Damon sets himself against the very locus of
his livelihood, the garden. However, the poem makes it clear that he is against a very specific
type of garden, one in which “Nature … most plain and pure” has been “enforc’d” into a
spurious type of ornamentation. His jeremiad is against humankind’s inclination to shape
Nature into that which is unnatural; his complaint is not “‘let us leave gardens altogether and
resort to ‘the sweet fields’,” as Margoliouth believes (261). The contrast here is between
Nature, orderly in itself, and humankind’s attempts to ameliorate, and paradoxically impose
disorder on, Nature. These endeavors are exemplified by the roses that are “tainted” with
“strange perfumes” and the tulip that resorts to cosmetic enhancement (“interline its cheek”).
A strong Protestant voice emerges, yet whether this is Damon’s or the poet’s we are not sure. Margoliouth insists that “this proscription reflects only a mood of the poet’s, yet it agrees well with the puritan distrust of ornament” (261).

Damon voices this distrust of ornament, attacking the contemporary fashion for landscape gardening. This was to reach a height in the eighteenth century with such celebrated practitioners as Lancelot “Capability” Brown, but it is evident that the trend had started during the poet’s own lifetime. As Kermode and Walker write, “The art of gardening (grafting, budding, etc.) could be represented as encouraging a sort of botanical adultery” (261). It is this “art of gardening” that Damon opposes since it is not, as in the Second Georgic, intended to increase productivity; it is the pursuit of “artfulness” to produce a gaudy, hyperbolic version of Nature.

The hybrid that results from this artfulness makes for an asexual, un-natural Nature: “His green Seraglio has its Eunuchs too; / Lest any Tyrant him out-doe” (“The Mower against Gardens” 27-28). Damon picks up on Virgil’s cry in the First Georgic, “with me feel compassion for country people unaware of their way” (41-42), and asks for the same return to agriculture that Virgil exhorts: “‘Tis all enforc’d; the Fountain and the Grot; / While the sweet Fields do lye forgot” (“The Mower against Gardens” 31-32). That which is “enforc’d” has supplanted, literally, that which is natural. The cultivation of new varieties has confused and “vex[ed]” Nature: “And in the Cherry he does Nature vex, / To procreate without a Sex” (“The Mower against Gardens” 29-30). The traditional duality between Nature and Art is reified in the luxurious but useless gardens. In fact, Damon displays a great deal of animus against luxury in any form, a term that in the seventeenth century had connotations of voluptuousness or lechery:
Luxurious Man, to bring his Vice in use,

Did after him the World seduce:

And from the fields the Flow'rs and Plants allure,

Where Nature was most plain and pure. ("The Mower against Gardens" 1-4)

As Low points out, because he is so detached from ownership, he ends up, paradoxically, possessing the land in a truly meaningful way (277).

It is this stance towards the land, the implicit belief that agriculture is the underpinning of civilization, which makes Damon a truly georgic figure. In this he replicates the Georgics' full-hearted praise of the land and all that it provides:

Instead, bountiful crops and Campanian wine fulfill the land; olives possess it, and grass-fattened herds.

Spring is eternal here, and summer lasts more than three months.

Twice a year, the cows bear calves, twice the trees yield fruits.

(Georgics II.144-50)

With ties as strong as these, it is no surprise that dispossession, whether physical or mental is accompanied by a high state of anxiety. Virgil experienced dispossession when his family lost much of its native land in Mantua following Octavian’s settlement to decommissioned soldiers after the Roman civil wars. The trope of dispossession recurs in both the Georgics and in the Eclogues; the Eclogues open with the shepherd Meliboeus uttering a heart-wrenching lament:

we have to leave our homes and go far away

Some to the thirsty deserts of Africa,
Some to Scythia .................
Utterly cut off from all the world.

so that some godless barbarous soldier will enjoy it?

This is what civil war has brought down upon us. (Eclogue I.78-91)

This anxiety about displacement becomes, in Marvell, a mental angst. On one level, the Mower poems appear to illustrate Proverbs 27:8: “Like a bird that strays from its nest is a man who strays from his home.” “Home” for Damon is the land; it is literally his “place” in the world, one that he has lost (“displac’d”) because of his love for Juliana. She is the capricious Eve-figure, one who will lead to his fall from Eden of Nature. As the sequence of the poems progresses, Damon comes to emblematize the consequences of moving away from this Eden; as he recognizes, he is literally astray: “For [Juliana] my Mind hath so displac’d / That I shall never find my home” (“The Mower to the Glo-Worms” IV.15-16). Through Damon’s confession emerges the truth that he recognizes his real “home” as Nature. His anxiety also recreates the original Fall: he is displaced from the innocent pre-Juliana world where his labors connected him to Nature in a perfect symbiosis. Out of his proper place in a rational universe, he seeks release in Death.

Death, of course is the original mower, the Grim Reaper that all humankind will ultimately face. In the eponymous poem “Damon the Mower,” Damon cuts grass but also himself when “the edged Stele by careless chance / Did into his own Ankle glance” (“Damon the Mower” X.77-78). Human mortality and natural mortality are conflated in the act of mowing; as Damon cruelly reminds himself, and us, “Death thou art a Mower too” (“Damon
the Mower” XI.88). The cyclical nature in Nature means that death is always a part of the georgic world. Nor is this an event to be feared, for as Virgil declares:

god invests everything –

from him, flocks, herds, men, all species of wild animals –

each gains for itself at birth its little life;

doubtless, afterward, all return to him and, released, are

made new; death has no place … (Georgics IV.221-26)

Or, as Wilkinson argues, “the whole universe is permeated with ‘deus,’ and that all living creatures derive their life from this, returning it on death to the stars of heaven” (122).

Echoing the tragic violence in recent contemporary history, death becomes the burden of Damon’s “song”: “What I do to the Grass, [Juliana] does to my Thoughts and Me.” Damon becomes in a sense the original Adam, mowed down, yet also mowing down, exemplifying the Biblical statement: "All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field.” (Isaiah 40:6)

Recognizing that this glory is transient, Damon turns to work to create his version of an ideal human society: “Where Nature was most plain and pure” (“The Mower against Gardens” 4). He lives in Nature; in turn, Nature thinks, feels, and acts for him. Again and again, we encounter Nature in its many anthropomorphisms: “Sun-burn’d Meadows fear;” “hamstring’d Frogs can dance no more;” after a hard day’s work of mowing, being tended to by “the Ev’ning sweet [that] in cowslip-water bathes my feet” (“Damon the Mower” 47-48). Unceasing industry seems to be only way to guarantee human success in the natural world. In the First Georgic we learn of Jupiter’s introduction of agriculture and the consequent labor
that has been the lot of humankind. The golden age that preceded this has been the stock
trope of much of pastoral poetry:

    Before Jove took power, no settlers broke the fields with their
    plows:
    it was impious then to mark off the land and divide it
    with boundaries; people sought land in common, and Earth
    herself
    gave everything more freely when no one made demands. (Georgics I.124-29).

Damon is aware, however, that the Earth no longer gives everything freely; spiritual
enlightenment and immortality are both to be found only in hard work.

    The celebration of work, the central theme of the Georgics, runs through the Mower
poems. The bees in the Fourth Georgic illustrate the virtues of work:
    aware of winter to come, they spend the warm weather
    hard at work and, among themselves, put aside the profits.
    For, some are vigilant to gather food and by fixed agreement keep busy in the
    fields. (Georgics IV.156-59).

Nature shows her appreciation of this commitment by increased productivity: “So, too, with
alternating crops, the fields may rest, / nor is gratitude lacking in the unplowed earth.
(Georgic I.82-83). This fellowship between man and Nature is a characteristic of the georgic
mode. Damon characterizes himself through his profession: the meadows, the grass, the
flowers are, to him, kindred spirits. It is significant that in his state of lovelorn dispossessio,
Nature is his only comrade: “And Flow’rs, and Grass, and I and all / Will in one common Ruine fall” (“The Mower’s Song” IV.21-22).

Much of pastoral poetry favors a return to the Saturnian golden age, with its ever-temperate climate, as Virgil reminds us:

The same sunlight, no other, shone in the world’s first days
and never, not once, changed its direction. ...
Spring was there, the whole world celebrated
spring, and the East Winds kept their wintry breath in check,
while the first cattle drank in the light, and earth’s primal crop
of men lifted its head from the stony fields,
with game abounding in the woods, and stars, in the heavens. (Georgics II.336-42)

Damon recognizes that such bounty and such temperate climes are gone, and that he must live by the fruits of his labor. The “golden fleece” becomes a symbol of the compensation for this labor; unlike the mythical goal pursued by Jason and his Argonauts, in the georgic world, the rewards are concrete: “And though in Wooll more poor then they, / Yet am I richer far in Hay” (“Damon the Mower” 55-6). In the face of a broken heart, Damon finds retreat in work:

But these, while I with Sorrow pine,
Grew more luxuriant still and fine;
That not one Blade of Grass you spy’d,
But had a Flower on either side; (“The Mower’s Song” II.7-10)

Ultimately, a georgic reading would suggest that order within Nature is the basis of human existence. Work promotes this order; in the absence of human energy, Nature declines
The Third Georgic is replete with examples of this degeneration: the lioness abandons her cubs in order to search for a new mate; lust-filled animals turn savage; ultimately, all Nature is afflicted by the plague:

> Here, at one time, from an afflicted sky a season
to lament broke out and glowed with the full heat of autumn.
It brought death to all domestic animals, all wild beasts, and it tainted their water, poisoned their fodder with sickness.

*(Georgic III.478-81)*

Virgil has his strongest censure reserved for reckless passion. Those who succumb to it, usually suffer retribution, as the Aristaeus-Orpheus epyllion at the end of the Fourth Georgic exemplifies. Orpheus’ predicament carries a tacit warning:

> Thracian women, riled by his heedlessness
invading their nocturnal rites, their god-drunken revels,
ripped his young body to pieces and flung them hither and yon.

*(Georgics IV.520-22)*.

Aristaeus learns his lesson and learns it well; he re-dedicates himself to farming. In bringing the bees back to life, we see Nature resurrected and the natural order restored. Eva Stehle concludes:

> the recall of the bees becomes a symbol for what man can accomplish. … To regenerate the bees is to recall nature from destruction back to creativity. It is the final *ars* because it symbolizes man’s complete understanding of and control over nature, hence ability to maintain nature at a level of productive activity that can become an inspiration to man himself, as the bees are. (369)
Through the four-poem sequence, Marvell illustrates the significance of maintaining this level of productive activity. Disorder within Nature comes to affect ("displace") humankind’s own equilibrium. Through this common theme, each poem in the sequence is thus linked to the next. Starting with "The Mower against Gardens," we witness man’s attempts to improve Nature through an exercise in vanity ("Man, that sov’raign thing and proud"); in the last poem of the sequence, "The Mower’s Song," this vanity, exemplified and executed by the Lilith-figure of Juliana, leads to Nature’s “Revenge” and “one common Ruine.” As "The Mower against Gardens," Damon is in harmony with Nature and with the land that he mows; at the conclusion of the sequence, he has alienated himself from it. The only escape, as Damon poignantly recognizes, is in death:

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. ("The Mower’s Song" V.25-28)

The bees in the Fourth Georgic, however, would have Damon rise above the fear of death. They make no attempt to flee, preferring that the hive remain safe:

Therefore, though a short life limits each individual bee, for it never lasts longer than the seventh summer,
the species remains immortal …. (Georgic IV.206-08)

The bees, the smallest creatures in the georgic world, end the Georgics imparting the biggest lesson of all: immortality, not material riches, is the lasting legacy of labor. Social cohesiveness and communal harmony, both destroyed by the internecine wars experienced by Virgil and Marvell, are upheld by a selfless love for work and for the land that supports this
work. The “Cure” that Damon seeks for his “Wounds” may ultimately be found in Virgil’s exulted declaration: “May I, unrecognized, love its woods and waters!” (Georgic II.486).
CHAPTER 3

“Paradice’s Only Map”: Cultivation in “Upon Appleton House, to my Lord Fairfax”

The title draws us immediately into the land and its history; it is not “To my Lord Fairfax, Upon Appleton House” or even “To my Lord Fairfax.” The man and the land are one. Thomas, third Baron Fairfax may have distinguished himself as commander-in-chief of Cromwell’s Parliamentary forces, but it is his land that gives him his true identity. The conflation of land and man, the land that remains a constant while men fight wars, draws us back to Virgil’s Fourth Georgic:

This I sang over and above the care of the fields and herds,
over and above the care of trees, while great Caesar’s lightning
struck in war by the deep Euphrates (Georgics IV.559-61)

Marvell’s poem visits the history of two generations of Fairfaxes, Lord Thomas Fairfax and his wife Anne Vere, and Fairfax’s great-great-grandfather Sir William Fairfax and his wife Isabel Thwaites of Denton. Both generations are united by the land on which “the Fairfacian Oak does grow” (LXXXIII.740). In this variation of a country-house poem, Thomas Fairfax’s estates at Nun Appleton become the site for moral regeneration that is based on work not retreat; this, we learn, is where Fairfax “did, with his utmost Skill, / Ambition, but Conscience Till” (XLV.354).

Thomas Fairfax was appointed commander-in-chief of the parliamentary forces in England and Ireland in 1649. In the summer of 1650, war with Scotland was imminent and the Council of State wanted to invade Scotland. Fairfax was unwilling, and resigned his
position on June 25, 1650 (Ray 69). Clements Markham, Fairfax’s nineteenth-century biographer writes in *A Life of the Great Lord Fairfax*.

> It was finally resolved to make war upon Scotland, but Fairfax demurred to the justice of such a measure, and hesitated to conduct a campaign which appeared to him to be unjustifiable. He said that if the Scots invaded England, he was ready to lay down his life in opposing them, but he refused to march into Scotland and make war upon a people between whom and the English there still existed a Solemn League and Covenant. (qtd. in Wilding 140)

Resigning his position, Thomas Fairfax retires to his Yorkshire estates at Nun Appleton and it is here that Andrew Marvell arrived, hired as a tutor for Fairfax’s daughter, Mary.

> Despite these epoch-making developments, Marvell leaves out nearly all the details that precipitated Fairfax’s retirement. Instead, his focus is on the house; Nun Appleton is the lens through which we view Fairfax. The man, despite his achievements, is known to have been a political greenhorn. His biographer Markham reveals that he was

> A consummate general, a cultivated gentleman, the very soul of honour and straightforward dealing, yet he had no talent for politics. The wordy contention and finesse of a statesman’s life were distasteful to him, and to engage in any intrigue or in any business which was not as open as noonday was to him an impossibility. (Markham qtd. in Wilding 144)

Appleton House’s architectural design reflects these principles of its resident; the reader registers Fairfax’s presence through the reaction of the house. Fairfax’s generosity is seen through “A Stately Frontispice of Poor / [that] adorns without the open Door” (IX.65-66). His greatness as well as his “Humility” is reflected in the house’s “design”: 
Humility alone designs

Those short but admirable Lines,

By which, ungirt and unconstrain'd,

Things greater are in less contain'd. (VI.41-44)

Religious references abound; these are spiritual environs that we find ourselves in, not a mere country house:

And surely when the after Age

Shall hither come in Pilgrimage,

These sacred Places to adore,

By Vere and Fairfax trod before (V.33-36)

We learn that “The House was built … Only as for a Mark of Grace” (IX.69-70). The word “Grace” takes the reader back to the estate’s history as a Cistercian nunnery. The first Nun Appleton House was built on the lands of the Cistercian priory of Appleton (founded c. 1150), which passed on to the Fairfaxes on its dissolution in 1542 (Margoliouth 279). The estate’s former incarnation as a nunnery allows Marvell to bring in the history of the Fairfaxes. He chooses the account of the immurement of Isabel Thwaites within the nunnery at Nun Appleton, by her guardian, Lady Anna Langton, the prioress, and her rescue by William Fairfax:

But the glad Youth away her bears,

And to the Nuns bequeaths her Tears:

Who guiltily their Prize bemoan,

Like Gipsies that a Child hath stoln. (XXXIII.265-68)
The nunnery was acquired after the Reformation by the Fairfaxes and became the estate on which Appleton House was built.

Scholarship has tended to ignore this turbulent past, viewing the poem as an alleged hybrid of the genres country-house poem and the pastoral. However, “Upon Appleton House” is an anomaly in both categories. The poet himself alludes to this “Paradox” (LX.473), and hints at a world in which things are removed from their natural order:

How Boats can over Bridges sail;
And Fishes do the Stables scale.
How Salmons trespassing are found;
And Pikes are taken in the Pound. (LX.477-80)

Given the contemporary context of a state in the throes of a political revolution, these thoughts of upheaval are unsurprising. As always, the poet is tantalizingly obscure, denying the reader a fixed, or easy, point of view. He prefers, instead, to take “Sanctuary in the Wood[s]” (LXI.482) of the Nun Appleton estate. This conflation of war and retreat is, in turn, typical of the georgic mode. The land “nourishes” the dispossessed, as Virgil reminds us at the close of the Georgics:

In those days, sweet Naples nourished me – Virgil –
who flourished at leisure in undistinguished efforts,
I who played with shepherds’ songs and, as a bold youth, sang
You, Tityrus, under the leafy crown of a spreading beech. (IV.563-66)

Marvell may speak of retreat as “retiring from the Flood” (LXI.481), but this is no pastoral escape. Virgil’s Tityrus sings “under the leafy crown of a spreading beech” (Georgics IV.565), but the reader knows, from the First Eclogue, that this otium is supported by work:
Many a beast I took to town for slaughter,
And carried many a rich cheese there to sell (Eclogues I.40-41)

It is a similar work ethic that keeps the sylvan world of Nun Appleton a going concern, the poet reminds us:

And, while it lasts, my self imbark
In this yet green, yet growing Ark;
Where the first Carpenter might best
Fit Timber for his Keel have Prest. (LXI.483-86)

Clearly, this is no world of sloth or economic parasitism. The pun on “imbark” suggests the poet embeds himself into the milieu (“bark”) of Nun Appleton, becoming one with his green surroundings. But the words of “carpentry” and “timber” and “keel” constitute the language of industry, and the poet’s “self imbark[ing]” could refer equally to the act of embarking on a way of life that supports such fruitful industry.

Fruitfulness, in the form of pruning and grafting, also finds its way into this world where,

The double Wood of ancient Stocks
Link’d in so thick, an Union locks,
It like two Pedigrees appears,
On one hand Fairfax, th’other Veres: (LXII.489-92)

Sir Thomas Fairfax and his wife Lady Anne Vere are responsible for continuing the work of the world, by bringing forth progeny who will unite their best characteristics in a synthesis of “Pedigrees.” This endorsement of fruitful grafting that produces a stronger progeny is purely Virgilian:
For, when the buds thrust out of the bark and burst
their scaly coverings, we make a mere slit in the heart
of a node; here, inserting a bud from another
species, we teach it to grow into the sap-filled rootstock. (Georgics II.74-77)

In a careful compliment to both student and patron, Marvell declares that:

Hence *She* with Graces more divine
Supplies beyond her *Sex* the *Line*;
And like a *sprig of Mistletoe*,
On the *Fairfacian Oak* does grow; (LXXXIII.737-40)

The land and the people who live on it come together in a synthesis of purpose: the progeny
is only as strong as its parentage. Nun Appleton is the microcosm of England, a “lesser
*World* [that] contains the same” (LXXXVI.765); Thomas Fairfax is its georgic gardener
who:

… with his utmost Skill,

*Ambition* weed, but *Conscience* till.

*Conscience*, that Heaven-nursed Plant,
Which most our Earthly Gardens want. (XLV.354-56)

The allusions to “*Ambition*” and “*Conscience*” are carefully-generalized yet topical
references. On 24 June 1650, Fairfax had announced the grounds of his refusal to undertake
the campaign against Scotland to the Council of State using these words:

“What my conscience yields unto as just and lawful,” he concluded, “I shall
follow, and what seems to me otherwise I will not do. My conscience is not
satisfied, and therefore I must desire to be excused.” (Markham qtd. in Wilding 142)

Marvell incorporates the conditions behind Fairfax’s resignation in terms that are both a compliment to his patron as well as a veiled political reference. The microcosm of Nun Appleton, the suggestion seems to be, is far stronger for the exercise of “Conscience” than the macrocosm of Parliamentary politics (the “Earthly Gardens”) that are found deficient (“want[ing]”). Michael Wilding explains, “Fairfax is allowed praise for an undeniable spiritual virtue; but the material circumstances in which he exercised that conscience are excluded from mention. Politics are displaced into emblematic gardening” (142).

Against the backdrop of this political *legerdemain*, Appleton House becomes Fairfax’s haven. He spurns the “Gardens” of England for those of Nun Appleton:

> And yet their walks one on the Sod
> Who, had it pleased him and God,
> Might once have made our Gardens spring
> Fresh as his own and flourishing.
> But he preferr'd to the *Cinque Ports*
> These five imaginary Forts: (XLIV.345-50)

Twentieth-century commentators, who see in the poem an escapist, if verdant, fantasy, miss the fact that the estate at Nun Appleton is “Fresh … and flourishing” *because* of Fairfax’s retreat. Marvell makes it clear that the estate did not always have this flourishing past:

> But sure those Buildings last not long,
> Founded by Folly, kept by Wrong.
> I know what Fruit their Gardens yield,
When they it think by Night conceal'd. (XXVIII.217-20)

This physical regeneration wrought by Fairfax that reflects and parallels the moral regeneration within him has an immediate parallel in the Aristaeus-Orpheus epyllion of Virgil’s Fourth Georgic. The definitive lesson the epyllion provides is that nature is tractable only when man is capable. When Aristaeus reaffirms his control over nature, his bees come back to life:

Here, a sudden omen, plain to see, almost incredible
to tell: out of the putrefying bovine guts, out
of the bellies and burst sides, bees, buzzing, swarming (Georgics IV.554-56)

The “wasting Cloister” (XXXIII.271) of Nun Appleton, once cleared out by Thomas Fairfax’s ancestor Sir William, draws attention to the need for a similar rejuvenation, politically and agriculturally. In this call to vivification, the move is reminiscent of Virgil’s cry in the First Georgic: “with me feel compassion for country people unaware of their way” (I.41-42). True patriotism, Marvell appears to say, lies not in pointless bloodshed and the war against Scotland that Fairfax has abjured. A return to his ancestral roots becomes a proof, not an escape from his patriotic duties, because it is at Nun Appleton where “Pleasure Piety doth meet” (XXII.171). The house becomes a reification of its owner:

Yet thus the laden House does sweat,
And scarce indures the Master great:
But where he comes the swelling Hall
Stirs, and the Square grows Spherical; (VII.49-52)
Fairfax’s patriotism finds reflection in his house; it is the “Work of no Forrain Architect” (I.2). The Saturnine Golden Age, so favored a trope of pastoral poetry, is to be found on Fairfax’s ancestral land, not in the city:

Those Virtues to us all so dear,

Will Straight grow Sanctity when here:

And that, once sprung, increase so fast

Till Miracles work it at last. (XXI.165-68)

The emphasis on “work” in the last line is surely not coincidence; genuine patriotism, in both Marvell and in Virgil, lies not in court and battlefield but in the land. This land will not respond to cajoling or political machinations; hard work is the only answer, as Virgil reminds us:

I have seen seeds long gathered and carefully inspected

lose quality if human effort has not sorted out the largest every year.

(Georgics I.197-98)

This reaping and sowing that is integral to the cycle of fertility depends, of course, on timely and judicious procreation. References to reproduction abound through the Third Georgic, where the ravages of mindless passion in the animal kingdom are juxtaposed with the stark reality of mortality: “But meanwhile time flies, it flies beyond recovery / while, captive to each fact, to each fact, we are carried away by love” (Georgics III.284-85). The solution against mindless sensuality – of which the Third Georgic is littered with examples – appears to be the rationality of prudent mating. In Marvell, this is represented by the marriage of Lord Fairfax’s daughter, Maria: “Whence, for some universal good, / The Priest shall cut the sacred Bud” (LXXXIII.741-42). While Virgil’s natural world is devoid of the
presence of women, Marvell merges Nature with the feminine; Maria is identified with the line of her great-great grandmother, Isabella Thwaites: “Till Fate her worthily translates / And find a Fairfax for our Thwaites” (LXXXIV.747-48). Her presence commands Nature into silence: “Maria such, and so doth hush / The World, and through the Ev'ning rush” (LXXXVI.681-82). Like the georgic gardener, it is she who allows Nature to express its latent energies; she is the agent for organic change:

’Tis She that to these Gardens gave
That wondrous Beauty which they have;
She streightness on the Woods bestows;
To Her the Meadow sweetness owes; (LXXXVII.689-92)

Such topographical conceits, in which Nature thinks, feels, and often acts, run through the poem. The Fairfax estate at Denton “sets ope its Cataracts” (LIX.466); it is “jealous of its Lords long stay” and “try’s to invite him” (LIX.469-70), because “the Cromwellian general had been born at Denton but chose Nun Appleton as his main residence” (Barnard 311). This emotive Nature can provide a true sense of religious sanctuary; both Marvell and Virgil are cynical about the capacity of conventional piety to do so. Virgil emphasizes, in a stark departure from his predecessor Hesiod, that the farmer is expected to work even on holy days:

In fact, even on holy days, the laws of god and men
permit some work. No piety forbids bringing down
irrigation water, fencing in crops with a hedge (Georgic I.268-70)

Marvell is even more trenchant. Nun Appleton’s history as a pre-dissolution era Cistercian nunnery provides him with a rich ore of anti-Catholic propaganda. The nunnery is a “prison”
In a clever twist, Marvell sets up an opposition between rightful and unlawful religion. Thomas Fairfax’s ancestor, Sir William Fairfax is not daunted by the nuns’ attempts to keep his future bride Isabella from him:

He would respect

Religion, but not Right neglect:

For first Religion taught him Right,

And dazzled not but clear’d his sight. (XXIX.225-28).

The opposition clearly is set up between a Catholicism that is ornamental and obfuscates (misleads?) (“dazzle[s]”) its followers, and the Protestant faith that has the ability to “clear [one’s] sight.” In his strongest attack on Catholicism, Marvell states that:

Though many a Nun there made her Vow,

’Twas no Religious-House till Now. (XXXV.279-80)

Here is Marvell’s unqualified tribute to Nun Appleton and the family that it houses.

Providing what Michael Wilding terms as “the militant Protestant satiric account of sensual misbehavior in the nunnery” (148), Marvell reveals that the religion of the former nuns rests on “superstitions vainly fear’d” and “Relicks false” (XXXIII.261). Anthony Low explains the use of the rhetorical device of religion by both Milton and Marvell:

The nunnery was especially apt … because, during the century following the dissolution, the English had grown accustomed to think of convents and monasteries as hotbeds of vice, and especially of laziness and economic parasitism. When new sects or forms of behavior arise, they often define themselves partly by attacks on their predecessors. (167-68)
In this excerpt from his anti-Catholic tract titled “An Account of the Growth of Popery and Arbitrary Government in England” (1677), Marvell engages in an no-holds-barred attack:

The wisdom of this fifth Religion, this last and insolentest attempt upon the credulity of Mankind seems to me … principally to have consisted in their owning the Scriptures to be The Word of God, and the Rule of Faith and Manners, but in prohibiting at the same time their common use, or the reading of them in publick Churches but in a Latin Translation to the vulgar …. (227)

Despite the apparent limitations of the genre, the georgic mode allows the poet to include contemporary realities, from society to religion to politics. It becomes, in the right hands, a genre with infinite capaciousness. Appleton House may “exclude the World” (XLI.325), but war and death are forever knocking at the gates of this “Garden of the World” (XLI.322), and Marvell acknowledges these realities. Flowers are “Garrisons,” roses bear “Arms,” and tulips are “the Switzers of our Guard” (XLII.336). The estate of Nun Appleton becomes a scene where the bloody history of the recent Civil War reenacts itself in Nature. In a strange case of intertextuality, Marvell uses the trope of “the tawny Mowers” (XLIX.388) who walk through the “green Sea” of the meadows at Nun Appleton, “seem[ing] like Israelites to be,” in their walk through the Red Sea. Reminiscent of the Parliamentary forces, they carry the promise of a new life to a society torn by internecine warfare. They bring the hints of bloodshed and war into the sylvan world of Nun Appleton, especially when we learn that the mowers “Massacre the Grass along” (L.394), and that one of them “unknowing, carves the Rail” (L.395). The woodpecker (“Holt-felsters”) “mines” through “the tainted Side” of the “hollow Oak” (LXIX.548-50). The “hollow Oak” invites the political
background of Charles I’s execution when the poet questions: “Who could have thought the
_tallest Oak / Should fall by such a _feeble Strok!” (LXIX.551-52).

But if “the _tallest Oak” is Charles I, whose execution had already taken place when Marvell
was composing this poem, the reference provides a teasing glimpse into the future, presaging
that power could return to the monarchy. Because after all, “the Oake seems to fall content, /
Viewing the Treason’s Punishment” (LXX.559-60).

In the midst of such political upheaval, the implication appears to be that “_Natures
mystick Book” (LXXXIII.584) provides lessons that human society would be hard-pressed to
ignore. The reminder, as we move towards the poem’s conclusion, comes in the form of the
snake metaphor. The metaphor’s primary source is Biblical, but there is an earlier antecedent
in the Third Georgic. Snakes represents a serious threat to the farmer and his work; Virgil
recommends that they should be dealt with seriously:

> Learn, as well, to burn fragrant cedar in your folds and drive out
> the foul-smelling water snake with fumes of resinous sap.
> Often underneath neglected pens a viper, deadly
> to the touch, lies hidden and fearfully avoids the daylight ….

_(Georgics III.414-17)_

The idea of the potential evil that lurks at the heart of Nature permeates the _Georgics_; for
labor to bring about true fruitfulness, this destructiveness must be controlled and harnessed.
The threat that the snake represents seems, however, to have departed the Nun Appleton
estate with its “wanton harmless folds” (LXXX.633):

> No _Serpent_ new nor _Crocodile_
> Remains behind our little Nile;
Unless it self you will mistake,

Among these Meads the only Snake. (LXXIX.629-32)

“Upon Appleton House, to my Lord Fairfax” ends, then, as a victory of private morality over the public achievement. It concludes as a poem of celebration, not of retreat or even of retirement, but of the art of judicious cultivation. Fairfax’s “lesser World” becomes, in the end one that is greater than the “rude heap” of court and city. The poet’s concluding encomium, “You Heaven’s Center, Nature’s Lap / And Paradice’s only Map” (LXXXVII.767-68), becomes a celebration of both the house and its famous resident.
CONCLUSION

In the Second Georgic, Virgil declares the definitive stance of the georgic mode that this study has sought to examine:

O farmers, abounding in good fortune, should they only  
come to know their luck! For them, far from battle’s din, the land  
in its perfect fullness pours forth spontaneous nourishment.  

(Georgics II.458-60)

The central argument through these chapters has been to define the georgic mode as what Anthony Low calls the “unpossessive enjoyment of the landscape” (279). The georgic mode stresses that true ownership lies in free appreciation of the land. As opposed to the pastoral, it is the more “natural” genre. It is also the more organic genre, providing room for incorporating new subject matter for a new time. Economics, politics, trade, commerce, can all be incorporated into the genre of the georgic. As compared to the pastoral, it is the more inclusive genre, incorporating as it does the traditional duality between Nature and Art into its realm.

Paradoxically, it is a genre that can extend itself limitlessly, because the duality between energy and entropy is one that is relevant for civilization in every historical time-period. Outwardly lacking the rhetorical flourish of the pastoral, it is the more “realistic” genre. From the figure of Damon the mower, who takes genuine pride in his profession to the figure of the “th’industrious Bee” in “The Garden,” Marvell’s use of georgic mode is characterized by reconfiguring the traditional poetic stance towards Nature. Low argues: “By doing so, Marvell engineers something of a reversal on the usual contrast between pastoral
and georgic. Although pastoral ordinarily stresses the natural landscape and georgic the human, in terms of literary sophistication and social purpose, pastoral is really the more artificial mode” (279).

At its apogee, the georgic mode examines the nature of ownership. In so doing, Marvell and Virgil establish a new paradigm of ownership: a true landowner is one who works the land, not one who enjoys the fruits of another’s labor. The bees in the Fourth Georgic establish the archetype:

Some are vigilant to gather food and by fixed
Agreement keep busy in the fields;

The work glows, and fragrant honey releases the scent of thyme.

(Georgics IV.158-69)

Both poets are aware that there is a dichotomy between possession and ownership. Thomas Fairfax in “Upon Appleton House” is a perfect example of this paradigm. He acquires true ownership of his estates at Nun Appleton only after relinquishing the anxieties of a political career. He may have inherited the estate, but he becomes an owner in the real sense only when he tends to the land of his birth. Marvell and Virgil are emphatic in their assertion that ownership does not come from dissipated wastefulness. Those who fight wars on the land and burn its fields are merely profligate politicians. Marvell’s Damon has no legal rights over the land he mows, but in his free appreciation of it, he becomes its real owner.

Like its examination of ownership, the georgic mode also examines the consequences of profligacy, especially the profligacy of meaningless war. Using the genre for its allegorical capability is what R.D. Williams calls a “shifting of basic experience by means of a special
kind of diction and imagery into another area of significance” (15). Both poets use the genre, not to provide systematic instruction, but in its capacity for poetic symbolism: agriculture, farming and mowing function as veiled metaphors. As Williams argues: “Unlike some of the eighteenth-century rural writers, Virgil knew well enough what he was talking about; but he does not talk about it in a farmer’s terms” (15). The didacticism itself is part of the rhetorical strategy; “the poet is always distancing, generalizing, elevating the farmer’s real world of spade and clod, cattle and dung, into a universal and stylized world” (15).

This universality means that the georgic mode tells the story of civilization through time, or what Virgil refers to as “cours[ing] in our race over a vast plain” (Georgics II.541). The Georgics look back on three successive stages of civilization: first to the Sabines, then to their predecessors Romulus and Remus, and finally to the Saturnian Golden Age that existed before Ceres introduced agriculture, and thereby work, into civilization. As opposed to the pastoral’s stance of wistfulness for this life, the georgic mode combines regret with realism. Amidst the flashback to the past (“before Jupiter picked up his scepter, / before an ungodly people gorged themselves on slaughtered steers,” Georgics II.536-37), the voice of the present intrudes, bringing in post-civil war Italy with its “battle call[s]” and the “sword’s clatter”: “No one had then heard the trumpet’s blurted battle call / nor the sword’s clatter when forged on an unyielding anvil” (Georgics II.539-40).

“Forging on an unyielding anvil” may well be metaphor for humankind’s relationship with work: it is a pragmatic necessity. The central argument of the georgic mode is that work is all that keeps civic communities in existence. The protection offered by the gods is itself tenuous. But with a practical approach to work, the pastoral’s favored land of milk and honey can be recreated in the georgic world:
Trivial the work, but hardly trivial the glory if

unlucky powers so permit and Apollo heeds one’s prayers. (Georgics IV.6-7)

A celebration of labor, this unabashed, is a bold poetic move for Marvell. In the seventeenth century, using the georgic mode was in direct opposition to the contemporary derision of manual labor:

paradoxically, once [the landed gentry] reached a certain level of prominence they discovered that manual work was from then on forbidden to them. Society was prepared to extend the title of gentleman to scholars, lawyers, and divines, whatever their family origins, as well as to successful yeomen and tenant farmers; but, as Barnabe Rich noted in Roome for a Gentleman (1609), the two ineluctable requirements which those who aspired to gentility had to satisfy were, first, a sufficient income to keep up appearances according to their station and, second, a style of life that allowed them to “live without manuell labour” (13). (Low 355)

Long before the British Romantic movement, Marvell and Virgil take on the challenge of dissociating productiveness from one’s social station. The upward movement of society, they emphasize, will come with a return to industry, as does Thomas Fairfax:

Who, had it pleased him and God,

Might once have made our Gardens spring

Fresh as his own and flourishing. (“Upon Appleton House” XLIV.346-48).

The georgic mode takes God’s angry declaration, “Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken” (Genesis 3:23), and
finds opportunity in the midst of this providential curse. Remaining close to the land ensures the existence of a harmonious cosmos and social cohesion.

Both poets lived in times when this cohesion was threatened, be it Augustan Rome or Civil War England. Their georgic figures find stability in the midst of this upheaval through sagacious introspection: “For he did, with his most utmost Skill, / Ambition weed, but Conscience till” (“Upon Appleton House” XLV.353-54). The fate of the individual, in the georgic mode, is tied to the land, the locus of “weed[ing]” and “till[ing]”: both are entities characterized by birth and death, growth and decay, change and seasonality. The georgic mode takes on the advice in the Scriptural verse, “Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:5): true georgic figures are empowered in their very powerlessness. Thomas Fairfax finds true power away from the intrigue of parliamentary politics. In the sylvan environs of the land that nurtured him, he rediscovers, in a sense, his “Conscience, that Heaven-nursed Plant, / Which most our Earthly Gardens want” (“Upon Appleton House” XLV.355-56).

This advice on cultivating one’s conscience was just as ignored by Virgil’s age as it was by seventeenth-century England. Anthony Low observes:

Virgil did not live to see the failure of the dream he projected in the Georgics. The Roman Empire, instead of combining the enlightened political stability of an Augustus with the ancient republican virtues of a sturdy agricultural society, combined constant (if long-lived) political instability with an economic system of large estates worked by slaves and heavy dependence on grain imported from North Africa. (357)
During the generations following Marvell, growing mercantilism in Walpole’s England meant that rural labor began to migrate to the cities; the use of natural resources that the georgic commends became the exploitation of the human population. Misguided patriotism became the impetus for colonization of far-flung countries, in both Virgil’s Italy as well as Marvell’s England. Both poets lived in an age of transition; at one level, the genre of the georgic is the best genre to embody this transition.

The transition was also from societies heavily dependent on religion to those with secular values. Mirroring this change, the georgic mode displays an ambiguous relationship with religion. Despite the Georgics’ frequent references to the gods, the allusions tend to be placatory not devotional. In contrast with his predecessor Hesiod, Virgil offers a practical, even cynical, approach to the limits of piety. Low observes that “scholars are sharply divided on the question of whether Virgil believed in the gods who appear so prominently in his poetry. In any event, he lived in an age of transition between religious faith and materialistic skepticism that was rather similar to the seventeenth century” (356). The idea, at all times, is that worship and prayer are useful, but it is work that ensures a community’s future.

Like Virgil, Marvell places his religious affiliation within the context of a secular world. He seeks to use religion to promote reform, be this agricultural or political. In his prose tract An Account of the Growth of Popery (1677), he argues against the use of land for religious purposes:

For the Lands that were formerly given to superstitious uses, having first been applied to the Publick Revenue, and afterward by severall Alienations and Contracts distributed into private possession, the alteration of Religion would necessarily introduce a change of Property. *Nullum tempus occurit Ecclesiae*
[“time does not bar the church’s right”], it would make a general Earth-quake over the Nation, and even now the Romish Clergy on the other side of the water, snuffe up the savoury odour of so many rich Abbies and Monasteries that belonged to their Predecessors. (237)

In “Upon Appleton House,” for instance, Marvell defends the idea of the land-grab, or the forcible acquisition of land from monasteries, which are “Founded by Folly, kept by Wrong” (XXVIII.218). Motivated though the defense is by the poet’s Protestantism, the argument is that a separation is necessary between politics and religion, if only to ensure that the interests of the land remain independent from the interests of politicians.

The genre of the georgic celebrates this independence. Damon the mower uses the Biblical symbol of the snake, reifying every aspect of temptation: “To Thee [Juliana] the harmless Snake I bring, / Disarmed of its teeth and sting” (“Damon the Mower” V.35-36). In the georgic world, however, the snake, like religion, has been ‘de-fanged,’ literally and metaphorically. It no longer possesses the sting of its Biblical past: it is shorn of its association with evil. As Damon notes, it has literally acquired a “second skin”: “Only the Snake, that kept within, / Now glitters in its second skin” (“Damon the Mower” II.15-16).

This capacity for renewal makes the georgic a genre that cultivates new varieties, both agricultural and poetic, amidst old traditions. It is a genre qualified by a concurrence of the old and the new, a genre of its time, but also of every historical time. The Georgics were written during an epoch-making period in Roman history (36 - 29 B.C.), when the Empire was making the transition from civil war to the pax romana. The Battle of Actium (31 B.C.) and the resultant deaths of Mark Antony and Cleopatra led to Augustus Caesar’s ascension to power. Also known as Octavian, he reintroduced old customs and traditions and expanded
Italy’s colonial territories. This juxtaposition of change and tradition makes the Augustan age perfect for the genre of the georgic. David Fairer writes:

> Understanding the new project, in 29 B.C. Virgil read his completed work to Octavius, ending Book I by recalling “a world in ruins” – “everywhere / So many wars, so many shapes of crime / Confront us; no due honor attends the plough, / The fields, bereft of tillers, are all unkempt” (I.505-7); then in the following book on the cultivation of trees and vines he considers how to encourage new growth by sowing and propagating, but also engrafting: “often we observe how one tree’s branches / Can turn, with no harm done, into another’s” (II.32-3). (278)

The possibility of development amidst depredation that Fairer alludes to makes the georgic a perfect vehicle for the anxieties of Marvell’s age. The vocabulary of action and industry permeates “The Garden”: “uncessant Labours” (3); “weave” (8); “grow” (14); “run” (25). In “Upon Appleton House,” the land is sanctified, not by the existence of a nunnery, but by the inheritance of William Fairfax: “And what both Nuns and Founders will’d / ‘Tis likely better thus fulfil’d” (275-76). The genre thus becomes an exposition on the theology of work; all nature is imbued with divinity, or what Marvell terms “sacred Plants” (“The Garden” 13). The bees, the smallest creatures in the georgic world, partake of this divinity. In an argument that could well be construed as heretical, Virgil asserts that it is their incessant industriousness that assures them a place in the heavenly firmament:

> Having followed these signs and these habits, some say
> that bees own a share of the divine soul and drink in the ether of space;
they fly up, each
to be counted as a star and ascend into heaven above. (Georgics II.219-27)

This fact is lost to human society in its pursuit of sophistication: “Mistaken long, I sought
you then / In busie Companies of Men” (“The Garden” 11-12). By engaging in fruitful labor,
humankind absorbs a little of this divinity, a point that Damon makes explicit: “The Gods
themselves with us do dwell” (“The Mower against Gardens” 40).

The expansiveness of the georgic mode ensures, always, that “while a general
reference is apparent, attempts to make specific identification are always thwarted” (Wilding
159). Thus, the religious allusions in “Upon Appleton House” could suggest Marvell’s
attempt to legitimize property away from the clutches of religion, just as William Fairfax
seizes his future bride Isabella Thwaites from the control of the nuns who constitute the
“wasting Cloister.” At the same time, however, the references may be less an explicit
endorsement of Protestantism and simply an attempt to placate a politically-connected
patron. Or as Michael Wilding believes, “The need to justify the appropriation of the former
nunnery suggests an anxiety” (149). The inchoate boundaries of the genre mean that there is
always place for commentary, sometimes direct, often veiled.

This social commentary forms an underlying subtext of the georgic mode, in Virgil
and in Marvell. The pruning and grafting references in the Second Georgic could refer
equally to viticulture as to the need to heal the wounds left behind by civil war:

we make a mere slit in the heart of a node

In no time at all, a great
tree, amazed by unusual leaves and fruit not its own,
tickles the belly of heaven with its laden boughs. (Georgics II.75-82)

The main impetus for the georgic’s use of religion seems to be to clear society of misguided religious fervor, or as Marvell asserts in An Account of the Growth of Popery:

For having thus a book [the Vulgate] which is universally avowed to be of Divine Authority, but sequestering it only into such hands as were intrusted in the cheat, they had the opportunity to vitiate, suppress or interpret to their own profit those Records by which the poor People hold their Salvation. … The Idolatry … of adoring and praying to Saints and Angels, of worshipping Pictures, Images and Reliques, Incredible Miracles and palpable Fables to promote that veneration. (228)

In the georgic world, the place of religion is now accorded to landed property. Property and work share a steady connection in the georgic mode. “Upon Appleton House” is imbued by the presence of the rural workforce; but this is no ordinary country-house poem:

The tawny Mowers enter next,

………………………………

With whistling Sithe, and Elbow strong

(“Upon Appleton House” XLIX.388-93)

The language of property, the mainstay of the country-house poem, is infused, even charged, with the language of aggressive industry: the “Scene turns with Engines strange” (385); the mowers “Massacre the Grass” (394). The language of war enters the economic world; in an act of poetic augury, we see the dawn of the labor struggles that are to see their zenith in the Chartist and Socialist movements:
The Mower now commands the field:

..................................................

A Camp of Battail newly fought:

..................................................

And now the careless Victors play,
Dancing the Triumphs of the Hay

(“Upon Appleton House” LIII 418-26)

The world of the country house is no longer isolated from the consequences of social reform.

It is work alone that will keep this world going, or as Virgil affirms:

Plainly, everything requires work, every last plant
mustered into furrows and, with great effort, tamed. (Georgics II.61-62)

The georgic’s endorsement of reform is, of course, only hinted at. Given its infinite layers of symbolism, infinite readings are possible. Wilding believes that Marvell’s “interest is not in the details of [the mowers’] labor or in their social relationships. [His] interest in the mowing scenes is in their artistic and emblematic significance” (158). The act of mowing, taken to another level, becomes the clarion call for revolution and an allegorical hint towards the victory of the Roundheads in the Civil War, “careless Victors” who “[dance] the Triumphs of the Hay.” Of course, since there are no universally-accepted dates of composition, reading such signs in Marvell’s poetry may well be the empty soothsaying of enthusiastic literary scholars.

Despite the potential problem of misreading, the relationship between history and poetry is important to our understanding of the genre. Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren convey this relationship as follows:
We know that poems arise out of the process of history - that they are written by men who live in that process - and the temptation is strong to see the poem merely as a historical document or to allow our reading of it as a historical document to settle for us the whole question of the failure or success of the poem. Moreover, if one protests against so simple a view, he may seem to be denying the importance of history and historical contexts altogether.

(Brooks and Warren)

While Brooks and Warren state that “it is necessary to distinguish between the poem as poem and the poem as historical document,” the fluid boundaries of the georgic enable the reader to discern intriguing contemporary allusions in the poets’ use of metaphor. One such metaphor is that of labor. The “black whirlwind” of the First Georgic with its thunderstorms, unceasing rains and hard gales suggest the Final War of the Roman Republic with its decisive victory for Octavian. Virgil witnessed this war, fought in the two decisive years between 32 B.C. and 30 B.C.:

I have seen the winds rush together in battle,
which everywhere tore heavy grain up from its deepest roots and forced it skyward; just so, in a black whirlwind.

(Georgics I.318-20)

The implication here is that war infects all nature, destroying the land’s productivity, and upsetting the natural balance with the elements: “the winds rush[ing] together in battle.” The language of war is never far from the georgic world:

And I must speak of militant farmers’ weapons,
without which the crops could not be sown or sprouted:
first, the plow and the curved share’s heavy hardwood frame.

(\textit{Georgics} I.160-62)

The question that arises is why farmers would need to be “militant” or require “weapons” at all. The georgic mode stresses that nature is truly free. Those who work the land own its resources by virtue of this relationship; as Low points out “they belong to him because he does not try to hedge them or own them” (279). These rewards are given freely by Nature, and hence do not need protection in the form of “militant farmers’ weapons”:

They have woods, the retreat of game,

early years seasoned by work and sparse rations,

and reverence toward gods and forefathers. Among them, Justice,

abandoning the earth, made her final footprints. (\textit{Georgics} II.471-74)

The “final footprints” that the georgic mode leaves us with is the question of “Justice” or social reform. It imparts the wisdom of dealing with the possessions and the ambitions that are attendant on modern life. It is a vehicle on religion, philosophy and morality, teaching human society how to survive in times of social upheaval and the necessity of reform during these times.

The \textit{Georgics}’ story of change amidst the remnants of loss is the story of every generation in history. In the Second Georgic, Virgil draws back his readers to his native Mantua, wistfully alluding to “a plain like that unfortunate Mantua lost, / where a river full of water grasses feeds snow-white swans” (II.198-99). Virgilian scholar L.P. Wilkinson reminds us that, “The effect of the civil wars on agriculture could not fail to be [appreciated]. It was no so much crops and property that were damaged, as in modern warfare; rather that weeds and decay got the upper hand …” (52). This story of decay in the wake of war is the story of
human society in the two millennia since the *Georgics*. With family farms being acquired by
large corporations and rural land being encroached by commercial properties, modern-day
audiences would do well to heed Virgil’s argument for farming. Janet Lembke correctly
points out to the sharp psychological portrait in the *Georgics* when she claims that, “In his
nostalgia for the lost golden age, Virgil shows an intuitive grasp of the havoc wrought in
human life by urbanization and warfare, which appeared – and still appears – to be unending”
(xix). The Second Georgic’s concept of pruning – when to hold back, when to cut – is a
lesson for contemporary governments. The themes of pantheistic and anthropomorphic
Nature would be taken up by the British Romantic movement in the century after Marvell.
But their roots are in the georgic mode.

In the Fourth Georgic, Virgil reminds us that “everything comes to the seer – all that is,
all that has been, and that shall come to pass” (IV.392-93). Through their use of the
georgic mode, Virgil and Marvell act as seers for future generations, telling us how to live in
changeable times. Through Marvell’s figures of Damon the Mower and Appleton House’s
Sir Thomas Fairfax, we realize that that Virgil’s thesis is just as relevant in seventeenth-
century England: agriculture is what binds a society together. War against the otiose –
society, government, the individual – is the final lesson of the georgic mode.
Works Cited


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