Editorial 12.2

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In light of the Anthropocene's industrial agriculture based on petroleum products, toxic chemicals, deforestation, and factory farms, one might be tempted to describe human cultivation primarily as destructive. There are, of course, many other ways of practicing agriculture and of thinking about the human being's food systems ecologically, and other strategies for interactions with our living world beyond anthropocentric exploitation, dominance, or efforts to control while all-too-often wreaking havoc. In particular, I note Robin Wall Kimmerer's discussion of Indigenous practices in her 2013 book, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*, which combines the insights of Native Americans with scientific botany in order to describe long-term and productive *collaborations* among human, plants, and the non-human or more-than human broadly. Kimmerer makes clear that the titular sweetgrass best thrives when interacting with human beings, a fact in direct contrast to the expected scientific assumption that any human interference would be negative. She found the opposite to be true: the scientists' "predictions for sweetgrass were consistent with their Western science worldview, which sets human beings outside of 'nature' and judges their interactions with other species as largely negative. They had been schooled that the best way to protect a dwindling species was to leave it alone and keep people away. But the grassy meadows tell us that for sweetgrass, human beings are part of the system, a vital part" (Kimmerer 163). Indeed, Kimmerer uses the fact of human-sweetgrass collaboration such that both species best survive together as the framework for the entire book, which nevertheless does not shy away from documenting extreme pollution, extinctions, and misunderstandings of other living things. Collaboration is a possibility, she writes, and not just for bees and flowers: "With a long, long history of cultural use, sweetgrass has apparently become dependent on humans to create the "disturbance" that stimulates its compensatory growth. Humans participate in a symbiosis in which sweetgrass provides its fragrant blades to the people and people" (Kimmerer 164). Active collaboration is the basis of such relationships, as we see in so many plant-animal or plant-human interactions such as fruit production and dissemination, and even in the face of the struggle and labor necessary to maintain these living relationships. Other recent authors similarly consider agricultural methods that are not based on short-term profit and the neglect of our own ecological dependency, seeking especially sustainable options that produce at the large-scale now necessary to feed our current human population. Mark Bittmann, journalist and cookbook author extraordinaire, for example, writes in his 2021 book, *Animal, Vegetable, Junk: A History of Food from Sustainable to Suicidal*, of

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"agroecology" as another kind of collaboration that simultaneously enriches humans, the living soil, and the other living things dependent on the land around farms. He writes: "The word 'agroecology' was first used about a hundred years ago, and it remains the best descriptor for the movements that are rebuilding our relationship with food" (Bittmann 314). In his definition, Bittmann emphasizes the ecological health of this system: "agroecology is a set of practices that integrates ecological principles into agriculture. As a scientific approach to farming that works with all of nature's power and gifts, rather than seeing nature as something to be conquered, it stands in opposition to industrial agriculture. It is more serious and comprehensive than 'organic,' and not constrained by USDA definitions" (Bittmann 315). Such a practice emphasizes social justice, cuts back on use of toxic chemicals in fertilizer and pesticides, and focuses on sustaining people, soil, and plants: "Agroecology regenerates the ecology of the soil instead of depleting it, reduces carbon emissions, and sustains local food cultures, businesses, farms, jobs, seeds, and people instead of diminishing or destroying them" (Bittmann 317). Bittmann's book offers a broad ranging history of human agriculture with horrific descriptions of its use to dominate. and enslave, and its destruction of ecological systems, yet he ends with hopeful documentation of actual farms now undertaking successful efforts at agroecology with the potential for large-scale production.

The quest for literary expressions of such efforts describing more sustainable and collaborative agricultural practices in the Anthropocene reveals a wide array of options, not all good. For example, in the early Anthropocene—if we accept the industrial revolution as this era's starting point—Johann Wolfgang Goethe's famously idyllic sense of farms fill his 1796-97 epic, *Hermann and Dorothea*, in which lavish fields, lovely gardens, and ripening fruit trees exist in peaceful and luxurious contrast to the violence of the French Revolution, or his best-selling international hit of sentimental literature from 1774, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, in which Werther declares his wish to be like a maybug flitting joyously among the peaceful plants. Yet those texts both express primarily the longing for a kind of pastoral harmony without much sense of the actual labor of working with the land despite the massive floods. The Austrian Adalbert Stifter's mid-nineteenth-century novella *Brigitte* from 1844, in contrast, dedicates extensive attention specifically to the never-ending work necessary for farming in the steppes of Eastern Europe, part of what is now Hungary, but the narrative primarily concentrates on the anthropocentric control and re-shaping of the land by draining swamps and cutting trees to improve it for human use. In the twentieth century, many postcolonial novels present farm labor instead as a means of attaining freedom and independence from colonial rule such as Bessie Head's exemplary 1968 novel, *When Rain Clouds Gather*, that takes place in Botswana and celebrates the potential of cash crops. Despite the compelling story of hope and the promise of intense labor for farmers, even female farmers, to make their own way, cash crops tend to immerse farmers in the large-scale banking-heavy equipment-pesticides-seeds-cycles of debt including starvation, as explained at length in both Bittmann's book and Vandana Shiva's works, *Stolen Harvest* (2000) and *Soil Not Oil* (2009).

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In contrast to these works written during the Anthropocene, the special section in this volume of *Ecozon@* turns quite productively to a much older literary tradition from antiquity as inspiration for reconsidering historical agricultural practices that feature actual labour instead of idylls or future dreams: the georgic mode. Inspired especially by Virgil's *Georgics* (29 BC), our guest editors of *Eco-Georgic: From Antiquity to the Anthropocene*, Philipp Erchinger, Sue Edney, and Pippa Marland, describe both ancient and new forms of the georgic in which grappling with nature in order to develop agriculture involves serious, ongoing work and, potentially, a less anthropocentric perspective. Growing food means engaging with the natural world and thus struggling with storms, pests, and predators, rather than the idyllic peace of pastoral fields or the nineteenth- and twentieth-century sense of human control and profit. Above all, the editors promote the georgic mode as a frame positing the ongoing labour as inherently ecological if not necessarily environmentally positive: "the georgic world is always in excess of, or out of tune with, people's endeavours to work in consonance with it. This georgic imbalance of human labour and its surrounding medium entails an ecology, according to which forms of disequilibrium and inadequacy are an unavoidable part of all our efforts to make ourselves at home in the earthly world." Finding labour, the work of care, to be at the core of the many depictions of Virgil's work, the editors suggest that new forms of georgic from many eras up through contemporary texts provide promising models of human interactions—even collaborations—with the natural world. These perspectives are especially pertinent in the many crises and ambiguities of human-non-human interactions in the Anthropocene: "The georgic is relevant today, we want to suggest, because it shows us that such local care for and about the earth can take various, often contradictory forms. Being about 'intervening in nature' rather than 'about admiring nature,' as Laura Sayre points out, the georgic is deeply aware of the compromises and mistakes that are an inevitable part of all such intervention." The eight essays in the section demonstrate a wide array of possible forms of the "New" or "Eco" Georgic, exploring examples ranging from Virgil's idea of land, Mushrooms in Irish poetry, Wendell Berry's "Mad Farmer," a Victorian Eco-Georgic, Georgian Georgic in the Modernist Moment and Beyond, an Ecofeminist Revolution of the Georgics from Suzanne Verdier to Anna Barbauld, to Cynan Jones's twenty-first century portrayal of Welsh farming. Besides inspiring new readings of texts from antiquity through today, Erchinger's, Edney's and Marland's introduction and the essays in the special section offer important insights into existing examples of alternative human-non-human interactions for producing food, as well as an exemplary demonstration of how literary works and non-fiction both can broaden and historicize current cultural discussions of land-use in the Anthropocene.

The general section of this volume includes three essays which also highlight old and new approaches to ecological practices, but here in terms of different media. These essays nicely complement the special section's attention to the challenge and labour of revising perspectives on human-non-human relations by expanding the type of texts considered, including an eco-noir television crime series, gaming, and new nature writing utilizing the new materialisms. The first essay, Helen Mäntymäki's essay, "Polar Bear in *Fortitude*. Affective Aesthetics and Politics of Climate Change" insightfully dismantles

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simplistic responses to the challenge of changing human actions and attitudes about non-human lives. Studying the first season of the television Eco Noir crime series *Fortitude* (2015) and its depiction of the polar bear so typically associated with images of global warming, Mäntymäki addresses two discourses relating to the bears: "The first one relates to violence, essentially present in crime narratives, and how the human and nonhuman animal are positioned in relation to global warming, violence and each other." But the second discourse, she notes, is a more complex process in which "human animals looking at photographs of bears both constructs and deconstructs the subject-object relation, hierarchy and agency." In other words, the bears become "sticky objects" as violent predators and, simultaneously, as victims of human violence, and the "charged representation of the polar bear evokes ambiguous affective responses in viewers" as per affect theory. The complexity and ambiguity, Mäntymäki asserts, have more of an impact towards understanding human-animal interactions than, say, simpler images evoking merely pity or fear. Indeed, her essay's focus on portrayals of the iconic polar bear, like the Eco-Georgic work in the special section, offers noteworthy emphasis of art's and narrative's ability to produce affect in more complex and impactful ways than simple environmental messaging.

In "Materality, Responsibility and Anthropocene: Thought in Robert Macfarlane's and Kathleen Jamie's Nature Writing," Iris Zechner, like the special section on the Eco Georgic, also productively discusses updates of older forms, in this case of nature writing. She contextualizes her study of the "New Nature Writing" in terms of the Anthropocene debate regarding the extreme impact of human beings on the earthly ecosystems in contrast to the new materialisms' "post-humanist" focus on placing human agency in the context of other, larger agential forces both living and geological. Zechner defends the new materialisms against Clive Hamilton's critique of posthumanism that diminishes, in his view, the significance of human power thus possibly overlooking our responsibility. In contrast to Hamilton, Zechner suggests "a reading of the new materialisms as a way of endorsing respect for the Earth System that we co-inhabit with various other matters, a respect that implies an invitation to act with caution and care. It is exactly this invitation that we can find in the NNW, too." Of Robert Macfarlane's *Underland* and its treatment, for example, of fungal networks, Zechner therefore sees an "intimacy towards nonhuman matters that emphatically illustrates their intrinsic value." The second part of the essay considers the new materialist stance of Kathleen Jamie's collections of naturalist essays, and reveals how Jamie "nevertheless question[s] the implications of this ontological framework, in particular with regard to ethics and human responsibility in times of the Anthropocene." That is, Jamie raises the highly relevant question of the precise actions we could and would actually undertake in the Anthropocene that could truly make a difference on the scale necessary to shift climate change.

Finally, Lykke Guanio-Uluru's "Embodying Environmental Relationship: A Comparative Ecocritical Analysis of *Journey* and *Unravel*" studies the ecological aspects of the games *Journey* and *Unravel*, with particular attention to the player's experience of embodiment in vibrant landscapes that combine natural and cultural features as puzzles to navigate. Building on John Parham's ground-breaking work in *Green Media and Popular*

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Culture: An Introduction (2016), Guanio-Uluru highlights how the player is confronted with an agential landscape in *Journey* while existing as a figure without hands to manipulate its world so that it can only sense it: "Since the avatar lacks arms, the player can only interact with the landscape by moving through it, feeling and seeing the effects of the wind, sand and sun," which means that the player functions less as an agent than as "the receiver of an at times agential landscape." Of *Unravel*, Guanio-Uluru describes a similar "bodily" and immersive experience such that: "A lot of the enjoyment in *Unravel* comes from moving around in and experiencing the beautifully rendered landscapes of the game world, which are naturalistic representations of the Swedish countryside, from Yarny's perspective." In other words, playing these games engages a new kind of awareness that is ecological in its altered sense of labour necessary to proceed through the active and forceful energy of either the Swedish landscape or the sand and wind actively shaping the player's progress.

This issue's Creative Writing and Arts section then provides inspiring examples of the New, or Eco Georgic with its vibrant poetry and art works. As the section editor, Damiano Benvegnù opens the section with a brief foray into messy, untended North Eastern United States forests that still show the massive human impact from previous years in contrast to well-tended forests of Italy, that are "agro-pastoral cultures" which "are accustomed to view and interact with forests in terms of intergenerational obligation." Benvegnù thus leads us into the stunning, post-pastoral images and poetry of the section with intense focus on responsible interactions through ongoing labour, or to borrow again from Kimmerer, collaborations.

Finally, the seven book reviews in this volume address some of the major threads in the environmental humanities today, including postcolonial ecocriticism of the Global South and of Indigenous voices; reconsiderations of Nature Writing and Nature Essays; Climate-Change poetics and aesthetics; Ecosemiotics; and Famine Studies.

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Eco-Georgic: From Antiquity to the Anthropocene
An Introduction

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Towards Care: Georgic Ecology

Georgic literature, which reaches back to Hesiod's *Works and Days* (700 BC) and Virgil's *Georgics* (29 BC) and has remained influential ever since, used to be specifically about farm labour and husbandry, about growing crops and keeping animals. In the modern world, its focus widened to include the production and trade of goods more generally. But, whatever its specific theme, throughout its long and varied history, georgic writing has always been concerned with a question that continues to be at the heart of our human existence: How should we work to cultivate a fertile and sustainable relationship with our physical and social environment? How, in other words, are we supposed to live well? All the answers that georgic writing, whether it is meant to be didactic or not, gives to this question are typically premised on the assumption that the struggle with recalcitrant matters and unforeseeable adversities is an inescapable part of human life. Rather than offering fictions of a golden world, as its concomitant genre, pastoral is often said to do, georgic responds to an experience of living in what the eighteenth-century poet James Thomson, in *The Seasons* (1730), called "iron times" (10, l.274). These are times, as he specifies, when "Nature disturbed / Is deemed, vindictive, to have changed her course", being no longer perceived as peaceful and fecund but as tumultuous and unpredictable (11, ll. 307-8). As the ambiguity in Thomson's line-break suggests, the disturbance of nature mentioned here is as much a condition of the physical world as it is a product of human thought or feeling: of a "distempered mind", as the speaker says a little earlier, that "Has lost that concord of harmonious powers / Which forms the soul of happiness" (10, ll.275-7).

The "iron times" with which the georgic has always engaged, then, are characterised by "a crisis of nature" that, as David Fairer puts it in a seminal article on

georgic ecology, is "a symptom of a more fundamental crisis of humanity" ("Where Fuming" 201). In georgic literature, more specifically, the human way of being tends to run into difficulties because it is both part of and different from the natural world. Simultaneously dependent on and abstracted from the earthly ground of their existence, human beings, the georgic suggests, constantly have to make decisions about which life they prefer to lead (Plessner 287). They must learn to subsist in the midst of a material world that does not necessarily (or naturally) accord with their wishes and needs. One key concern of georgic writing, therefore, is the experience of living in an environment that is not, as William Wordsworth imagines it, "exquisitely [...] fitted to the mind" (198, ll.1009-11). Rather, the georgic world is always potentially in excess of, or out of tune with, people's work of making it habitable and fruitful.

This georgic imbalance of human labour and its surrounding medium entails an ecology, according to which forms of disequilibrium and inadequacy are an unavoidable part of all our efforts to make ourselves at home in the earthly world. In a georgic landscape, inhabitants are continually challenged to adjust their behaviour to changes in the weather, the soil, or other circumstantial affairs. In Virgil's *Georgics*, for example, human activities of cultivation and construction are repeatedly threatened with being overrun or swept away by the very elements and forces, such as storms or pests, through and with which they exist. This is "the way it is", as Virgil's speaker emphasises in a famous passage:

> world forces all things to the bad, to founder and to fall,
> just as a paddler in his cot struggling to make headway up a river,
> if he lets up a minute, will find himself
> rushed headlong back between the banks. (1:299-303, Fallon)

To sustain our existence, this comparison suggests, we humans have to work as much with nature as we are compelled to emancipate ourselves from it. We can use its powers and resources only if we know how to direct and cooperate with them.

Deeply interested in this art or skill of adapting natural resources to human purposes, georgic writing may easily be dismissed as being complicit in anthropocentric ideologies of cultural advancement that rely on the (often ruthless) mastery and exploitation of the earth. No doubt, it is likely that the resurgence of georgic in modern literature owed something to such ideologies. In the seventeenth- and eighteenth-centuries georgic superseded the "youthful innocence" of pastoral, gaining prevalence as "a grown-up poetry for an age that was becoming busier and wealthier, and a nation that was concerned with how to handle progress" (Fairer, "Georgic" 466; Fowler 84). But although many georgic texts certainly participated in the consolidation of a global market for consumer goods, they often emphasise that we humans will improve (in all senses of the term) our relationship with the natural world only if we learn how to take care of and attend to its various local peculiarities, too. In John Dyer's *The Fleece*, for example, a georgic poem about sheep farming and wool industry, the speaker advises the "gentle shepherd", who faces the task of looking after a newly born lamb, that his "care" should

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be "lenient" and tender (25, ll.410-12). "O guard his meek sweet innocence from all / Th' innum'rous ills, that rush around his life", he cries emphatically:

> Mark the quick kite, with beak and talons prone
> Circling the skies to snatch him from the plain;
> Observe the lurking crows; beware the brake,
> There the sly fox the careless minute waits;
> Nor trust thy neighbour's dog, nor earth, nor sky:
> Thy bosom to a thousand cares divide. (26, ll.418-25)

In the environment of the georgic every detail must be watched and cared about because nothing, not even earth or sky, can be trusted to conform to our expectations and desires. In such an environment, the mutual correspondence between humans and the material world that sustains them cannot be taken for granted. Instead, that correspondence must be actively and persistently, often laboriously created and maintained: by following or resisting the currents of physical power, or by tending to certain vegetables or animals while warding off (or even combating) others.

We have already mentioned that this necessity to be vigilant and attentive implies an ecology of the human that calculates with the incalculable and contingent as inherent to the way we lead our lives. We can now add that the georgic also suggests a concomitant anthropology: a conception of the human as a kind of being that can exist in or focus on a single place only by potentially thinking, as Dyer's shepherd, of multiple others at the same time. In this view, human beings are, at every moment of their lives, divided "to a thousand" possible "cares" or concerns, lacking a natural centre or ground. Hence the constant pressure to weigh options and make choices, each of which could be made otherwise. It is the art or skill of making such choices, with which the georgic has traditionally been concerned: the practical knowledge of when, where and how to sow which grains, how to prevent sheep from catching diseases, or to remove a twig from one tree and engraft it upon another.

Being an eminently practical genre, georgic does not, therefore, typically represent or invoke Nature as an ideal of wholeness, equivalent, as in much Romantic literature, to a quasi-divine agency or spirit, "something far more deeply interfused" that, to quote Wordsworth again, "rolls through all things", including the human mind ("Lines" 196, ll.97-103). In georgic writing, nature rather features as a "mixed economy" (Fairer, "Where Fuming" 205), a gathering of multiple, changeable forces, materials, species, and types of growth, each of which exerts different demands on the farmer or worker. Unlike a pastoral idyll, moreover, nature, in such writing, does not primarily function as a source of comfort and healing, or a place of sentimental longing representative of what a person or society feels to be lacking or lost. Instead, georgic nature exists as a series of useful tasks, a field of practical experience and trial, in which established wisdom remains subject to being corrected or modified in response to disruptive incidents or unforeseen events. Knowledge, in this field, is provisional and tentative, a matter of incremental steps, unable to supply final answers or guiding visions of a future world.

But are such final answers or guiding visions not exactly what we now need in order to come to grips with an environmental crisis that is becoming increasingly urgent? Or why else should readers want to turn to the ancient genre of the georgic today? As

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Richard Kerridge has pointed out, the idea of a single "revelatory, unifying and saving" insight, may certainly seem attractive in the face of a massive, convoluted problem such as global warming, in which physical, geographical, economic, political, and cultural issues are inextricably tangled up with each other (5). But to implement practically this sort of insight in people's day-to-day lives would require a jump of scale that, as Timothy Clark and Bruno Latour have shown, is impossible to conceive. Noone can save the planet by buying an energy-saving washing machine (Clark, Latour). Kerridge therefore suggests that a more promising and realistic way to approach the contemporary climate crisis is to deal with and think about it not in terms of a global revolution but in terms of locally exercised "care" (5). According to the OED, "care" encompasses feelings of concern or interest as well as acts of nurture, protection, or attention. The more people care about something, the more likely they are to care for, or take care of it too.

The georgic is relevant today, we want to suggest, because it shows us that such local care for and about the earth can take various, often contradictory forms. Being about "intervening in nature" rather than "about admiring nature", as Laura Sayre points out, the georgic is deeply aware of the compromises and mistakes that are an inevitable part of all such intervention (195). Therefore, the genre constantly emphasises the necessity of being mindful and circumspect. A shepherd, as the example from Dyer's *The Fleece* suggests, cares as much about the lamb he seeks to rear as he cares about the fox that he hopes to keep at bay. Indeed, the shepherd or farmer with his multiple daily concerns is perhaps not the worst model for a way of caring that is not, in Kerridge's words, limited to particular social and psychological spheres, but "spreads throughout our working lives, home lives, recreational lives and political lives, making a difference" (6). Those who, in one way or another, care about the animate and inanimate world that sustains their lives, one may hope, will sooner or later behave differently towards that world too, even if their thinking has not been converted radically or absolutely. Having established prudent action and practical care as central components of a georgic ecology, we can now take a more detailed look at the most influential foundational text of the georgic tradition: Virgil's *Georgics*. A final section of this introduction will then show how recent writers have taken up the georgic tradition in the context of the Anthropocene.

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Virgil's *Georgics*

It might be asked why Virgil's *Georgics* offer any kind of a model for sustainable engagement with land, given that the period and the circumstances in which they were written are some 2000 years distanced from our own. Virgil's patron, Gaius Maecenas was an advisor to Emperor Octavian, later Augustus, and a powerful influence at court and in the working lives of Rome's artists; he commissioned the *Georgics* on behalf of Octavian in 37 BCE, completed eight years later. This renders the poem a political as well as an artistic gift for the emperor. Virgil's own province, Mantua had its lands redistributed among war veterans, like so many estates in Northern Italy, after Mark Antony's victory over Julius Caesar's enemies at Philippi. Octavian faced resistance for what was, in effect, a way of keeping military leaders quiet during a transition period from civil war to relative

stability under Augustus, and Virgil's discomfort with the resulting land grab underlies his writing, in the *Eclogues* as well as the *Georgics.* There are nagging questions at the heart of each book: is it possible to manage nature, an active, living, fluctuating thing? Are the results of unrelenting effort worthwhile, when poverty and disease are as likely outcomes as "the best of olives spilling from the mills" (2: 519, Fallon)? And the difference between cultivating land that is owned and land that is worked by others creates further questions, about appropriation, for example, and alienation from participating in the benefits of working with and alongside the nonhuman—who is permitted to 'enjoy' the land; who benefits from its gifts? Yet between Virgil's paeans to Octavian—whom he reveres not just as an arbiter of his own destiny but someone who can manipulate the world's fortunes—and grim tales of plague, extreme weather, war and human recklessness we find stories of kinship and reciprocity that redeem human and nonhuman misery. Italian landscapes from centuries past are recreated together with their vines, olive groves, sheep and oxen, horses, dogs, trees and herbs. Although we now know that neither Virgil nor any of the courtiers in the emperor's favour did any planting, ploughing, shearing or milking themselves, we are charmed by Virgil's eloquence and his vivid depictions of rural life into suspending disbelief. We believe we can plant vines just like he did, his instructions are so persuasive. Like Virgil, or at least the farmer he impersonates, we want the best food and comfort for sheep and goats—"spread armfuls of straw and ferns beneath them / so neither chills nor colds afflict your tender care" (3: 297-8, Fallon); we appreciate his concern for the welfare of the flocks and herds. This makes the ensuing shock of disease, the collapse of prized plough-oxen all the more distressing.

> All the work he did, all he contributed—and to what end?
> What came of it,
> his turning of the heavy acres? His like was never once in thrall
> to wines
> transported from Campania, nor did they ever do
> damage to themselves by indulgence, feast after feast. (3: 525-8, Fallon)

While the reader is encouraged to assume that virtuous labour is its own reward in georgic writing, Virgil is consistent in recognising that hard work is relentless for the worker, who "cleaves the earth with his crooked plough. Such is the labour / of his life … / All go and no let up" (2: 498, 513-16, Fallon).

From the ending of Book 3, with its prescient doom of seas filled with dead fish, rivers run dry, air polluted and "rank contagion" (3: 566) stalking those left alive, Virgil moves to the redemption of disorder through a mythic organisation of decay and new life in the form of bees. The bees have a political symbolism: they are suggestive of an ideal republic, a communal society, determined that all shall work for the queen (or king as it was originally thought), in order that all shall benefit. But there is a magic to this description, living power conjured out of slaughter; farmer Aristaeus finally appeasing the curse of poet Orpheus through strange alchemical sacrifice. And bees have thereby "supped a draught divine" (4: 220); the offspring of sacrifice, they cannot die: "to him all things return in time, dissolved / and reabsorbed; there is no place for death—instead they soar, / still alive—to take their rightful place among the stars" (4: 225-7, Fallon).

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Their apparent self-sacrifice takes on a religious quality, useful to later versions of English georgic in which the Christian model is attached to the virtue of labour. "For the *Georgics* is situated firmly in the world of work by necessity", writes Kimberly Johnson, "as a consequence of the earth's fall from the idyllic age of the reign of Saturn to the demands of the reign of Jupiter" (xviii). Hesiod's *Works and Days*, one of Virgil's bases for his own work, claims the iron age as a punishment for human stupidity and hubris: "I wish / I had nothing to do with this fifth generation, / Wish I had died before or been born after / … Not a day goes by / A man doesn't have some kind of trouble" (lines 201-06). Hesiod's persistent grumbling, however, removes his "work" from the virtuous struggle exhorted by Virgil's *Georgics*. Virgil associates the "iron" directly with war and its implements, before Jupiter took over from his father, Saturn, and removed humankind from its easy ways, when the land gave up its fruits spontaneously; "the earth herself, /unbidden, was lavish in all she produced" (1: 127-8, Fallon).

> In the days before a Cretan king held sway, times
> when sacrilegious races fed on sacrificial oxen,
> that was the life enjoyed on earth by splendid Saturn,
> when they were yet to hear the flare of battle trumpets
> and the battering out of swords upon an anvil. (2: 536-40, Fallon)

Iron has its uses, though, and Virgil has Jupiter making human life one of constant hard labour in order to test human ingenuity; not as a result of sin, however committed, but "to sharpen wits of men and so prevent his own domain being buried / in bone idleness" (1: 124-5, Fallon). Virgil uses the connections between swords and ploughshares to demonstrate his ambivalent and sometimes contradictory assessment of the damage violence does.

There is a persistent and long-held link between war and agriculture, in the language, the imagery and in the facts of slash-and-burn tactics by armies over centuries. And farming itself can be brutal in the exercise of might over natural right. Virgil has no qualms in taking over land already cleared of undisturbed woodland, wrecking "the ancient habitats of birds"; he justifies the destruction by showing how productive the ground has become for human food: "but those once straggly acres blossom now behind your team" (2: 209-11, Fallon). Grafting, layering and training wild trees, for vines or for fruit, requires control, so that they "toe the line" (2: 52, Fallon). Of course, Virgil is not the man behind the plough or carrying the pruning knife; slaves do the work under the watchful eyes of stewards; men, women and children who must also toe the line. Even here, the imagery is military—vines "aligned and at the ready" (2: 281, Fallon)—but he drifts off into the consequences of battle: "the clash of conflict still not started, / though the god of war roams edgily, in and out among battalions" (2: 282-3).

His poem is a "work of art" as Johnson points out, a poetic reiteration of many other literary ventures; its agricultural information is partial at best and fairly unreliable when compared to some of its prose models such as Varro's *Res Rusticae* and Aratus' *Phaenomena*. Yet, in fact, it is an intricate web of instruction and lyric, which contains a supreme art that conceals and reveals the work; one of confusion surrounding human and nonhuman entanglement, how hard it is to survive, whether a bird, tree or herdsman. "By bringing together elements that would seem to be in opposition", explains Johnson, "the

Georgics emphasizes variegation and experimentation … promoting ambiguity and uncertainty in place of didactic conviction" (xv). In refusing to come down on one side or the other, however, Virgil has left an interpretative conundrum for future generations.

However legible the land becomes to its workers, scurrying like ants on its disinterested surface, the environment will always have a trick up its sleeve. A careless spark can become a wildfire and destroy everything in its path: "its rowdy roar as it chases sideways on and up, / lording it over every branch" (2: 306-7, Fallon). For Virgil, the threat of destruction by the gods was of less concern than actual destruction by troops, looting and raping as they trampled the farms. It was not a circumstance he could get out of his head, even if he had been fortunate to avoid the worst, and his knowledge of fortune's fickle nature kept him facing both ways. Richard Thomas notes the sense of loss of Virgil's own pastoral world of the earlier *Eclogues*, sharpening the difference between what could be and what actually is taking place in the stressful environment Virgil finds himself depicting. In *Georgics* book 3, line 326 "and dew on tender grass is sweetest for the flock" is taken from Eclogue 8 (15, Lee), and is inserted into an idyllic section on ensuring the sheep have fresh forage and cool water from early morning until sunset.

> This evocation is to have a far from superficial significance a little later in the book, when the heat associated with the pastoral existence becomes excessive and turns into the parched setting of the snake and of plague, as the pastoral world, no longer a functioning world for Virgil, meets its destruction. (Thomas 234)

Virgil's interpretation of his sources results in distortions, falsifications and augmentations that have created the "myth" of georgic farming; this is how you grow vines, tend sheep and so on. Many of the instructions as written are patently misleading. Yet, there is another kind of message that we now receive from the *Georgics*, uncannily close to the anxiety we feel as "nature" seems to retaliate at humankind's presumptive and wanton disregard of environmental reciprocity. If we take some of Virgil's "instructions" for grafting, for example, derived from Varro, the trees Virgil describes are ridiculous: plane trees producing apples, mountain ash trees pears and elms acorns (2: 70-2, Fallon)—he knew this was not possible; agriculture had a more scientific basis in Virgil's Italy than his myths allow for. Virgil's sources, including Varro, were mostly sound if prosaic in more ways than one. That is partially the point—this is a work of art—but it is also a way of drawing attention to what is monstrous in the supposed "natural" world, a world that can no longer be trusted to produce what labour intends it to do. Moreover, that labour is itself distorted, as the examples of extreme grafting in the *Georgics* demonstrate: humans can do this; they think little of disturbing the natural order. There had always been a suspicion about grafting, one that Andrew Marvell knew was familiar to his more Puritan seventeenth-century audience, whatever his own views on the period's gardening crazes:

> No plant now knew the stock from which it came;
> He grafts upon the wild the tame,
> That the uncertain and adult'rate fruit
> Might put the palate in dispute. ("The Mower against Gardens" 23-6)

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However, there is another side to these anomalous trees, one more closely aligned with the divine and industrious bees: that of celebration of what human skill can do when working in cooperation with nonhuman entities. In Virgil's Rome, there was an aversion to and a fascination for the monstrous, as there is in any period, yet grafting demonstrated exactly what Jupiter had commanded, as far as Virgil could tell, for "it was he who first, through human skill, broke open land, at pains / to sharpen wits of men" (1: 123-4, Fallon). "Virgil seems to have been the first author to portray grafters exploring the limits of possibility, rather than applying inherited knowledge in tried and tested ways", writes Dunstan Lowe, "to graft is to explore, but it had always been an everyday miracle, like any other form of planting" (469).

The paradox of violence in these poems of celebration is designed as an encouragement to appreciation for the farmer's labour, "all go and no let up" (2: 498, 513-16, Fallon), and is in contrast with the actual aggression of war, even when martial imagery is employed. "In the same passages in which we find the language of burdening and wounding," notes Lowe, "there are often descriptions of sweetening and mellowing, as well as non-violent personification imagery such as teaching, adoption, and *hospitium*" (473). Kimberly Johnson's translation emphasises the motherly aspect of Virgil's discussion of vines, showing how valuable it is to consider different interpretations of the original. Thus it is that the young vines "learn to climb, to scoff at winds, / to course to the elm-tops limb by limb" like so many small children (2: 360-1, Johnson). Present-day literary criticism has shied away from perceived anthropomorphic and zoomorphic equivalents that allow the nonhuman to say something to humankind that is only what humans want to say anyway. Virgil would not have been troubled by these scruples, and in his context we should recognise the benefits of his extended metaphors that carry meaning way beyond the thing itself. When we see these vine-youngsters in their field of reference—of birth, of "their mother-soil … so powerfully runs habit in the tender stems" (2: 268-72, Johnson)—then we feel the shock of their curbing more acutely.

> Later, when they've thrived, circling the elms
> with lusty bine, *then* clip their tresses, *then* dock their arms
> (earlier, and they'll shrink from the knife), then last install
> an iron command and curb the streaming branches. (2: 367-70, Johnson; emphasis in original)

Georgic is not "anti-pastoral" in its insistence that life is hard and then we die—it is sympathetic to the humans, animals and plants that endure and enjoy their tough lives. This is important, as stewardship can be misunderstood as command and control, when perseverance is the only way through. The *Georgics* celebrate human skill, not just control, dominance or oppression, terms that have often been laid at their didactic door. Working the land requires technique not force, persuasion not coercion. Every turn of Virgil's *versus*, his ploughed line, leads round to this truth. There is much that is violent, brutal and disruptive in these ancient poems; there is also passion, love, sorrow and a desperate longing for a harmonious world.

So we return to the main theme of georgic as a mode or genre—hard work: hard to write, hard to interpret, whose theme is one of miracles of achievement amid constant

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setbacks. In the Anthropocene, the concept of "labour" has become considerably more freighted with ideology, yet modern farmers in industrial societies still emphasise the combined benefits of hard work and immersion in the living landscape with all its nonhuman and human inhabitants. Surely now is the time for assessing how this poetic triumph supports our current realities, through literature certainly, but also through a pragmatic yet determined resistance to despair in the face of supreme environmental challenges.

New Georgic / Anthropocene Georgic

It is a moot point, however, as to whether this pragmatic resistance can still be articulated through the language of agriculture. The georgic has been reworked over the centuries in order to speak to the different challenges of each era, and sometimes, following in Virgil's footsteps, it has been specifically oriented towards agrarian matters, as the essays included in this special issue demonstrate. British literature of the early decades of the 20th century, for example, was full of farms and farmers. Raymond Williams notes how even as the population became increasingly urbanised, the ideas enshrined in rural and agriculturally-themed literature concerning how to live well persisted, such that "there [was] almost an inverse proportion … between the relative importance of the working rural economy and the cultural importance of rural ideas" (356). At this time, the language of farming still possessed its didactic authority as a language for life. However, the progressive intensification of agriculture post-World War II dented its credentials as a source of didacticism almost beyond repair.

The onset of the Anthropocene, of course, renews with great urgency the question, with which we began our Introduction, of how we are supposed to live well in relation to our environment. In recent decades the world of farming might have seemed the last place one would search for an answer. The industrialised agriculture that arose in the second part of the 20th century and still persists in the mega-farms and factory farms of our age is for many an image of exactly how not to live well. This perhaps explains why ecocriticism has been a little slow to take up the challenge laid down by Fairer in 2011 to investigate the possibility of an "eco-georgic" mode, the whole notion of georgic tainted by its association with destructive anthropogenic practices including those of industrialised agriculture. However, there are now signs of a georgic renaissance in the environmental humanities, heralded by a flurry of recent georgic-related activity.

One element of this renewed interest in the georgic is the growing number of books emanating from the agricultural world itself, which are suggesting new possibilities for the georgic mode. As yet, these works have predominantly taken the form of memoirs, and, in the UK, include the bestsellers *Wilding* by Isabella Tree and James Rebanks' *English Pastoral* (which, notwithstanding Rebanks' choice of title, is a profoundly georgic work). Both books model new approaches to agricultural stewardship (see also Terry Gifford's essay in this special issue) that involve a growing orientation towards nature itself, combining traditional agrarian wisdom with a new awareness of species decline, and actively adopting practices that encourage renewed biodiversity. Tree's book recounts

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the decision she and her husband took to retreat from what she calls "in-hand farming" (40), having realised that their intensive mixed farm was not financially viable. Instead they focused on rewilding their land through replacing their dairy herd and crops with (almost) free-roaming ungulates such as pigs, deer, ponies and cattle—animals whose foraging encourages the growth of habitat-rich thorny scrub—and as a result have seen an extraordinary resurgence of wildlife. Rebanks' book details elements of regenerative farming (though he himself rarely uses that term) such as "re-wiggling" a beck [small stream] on his land and widening and restoring hedgerows, and he professes his commitment to becoming "a good steward of this land" (213) in specifically environmental terms. This recalibrated relationship with the land has been identified as a "new georgic" in contemporary farm-themed writing, in which "farming can be understood as involving not only the production of food but the production of nature itself" (Marland 3). In other words, the kind of georgic "care" discussed earlier in this Introduction, which relates to efforts to protect the well-being of crops and domestic animals, is here simultaneously extended to the natural world and its wild creatures.

Tree and Rebanks both self-consciously examine the place of their writing in the georgic tradition, referencing Virgil and seeing the *Georgics* as both a work of art and as a text inextricably connected with the practicalities of agriculture. Rebanks takes as his epigraph a passage from the *Georgics* that speaks very eloquently to his own relationship with the land he farms:

> But before our iron carves an unknown plain, let our
> study be to learn its winds and fickle sky, the local
> tricks, the temper of the land, what each zone yields,
> what each refuses. (Johnson's translation, qtd. in Rebanks 7)

The age in which we now live requires more than ever this need for "study" that involves interpreting the signs that the land offers rather than simply trying to impose human will upon it. Such a framing positions the land itself as having didactic powers, and indeed much of Rebanks narrative concerns the various forms of learning (about both farming and life) that he experiences in the context of his farm. He also sees himself and his family as connected with the world Virgil described: "I read the Roman philosopher poet Virgil and realised that my people belonged to an ancient farming tradition" (33).

An inevitable part of this reassertion of georgic themes has been an acknowledgement by the farmer-writers themselves of the environmental damage farming has wrought since its intensification in Europe post-World War 2 (although as Adrian Tait points out in his essay in this volume, radical changes in farming methods were already underway in the Victorian period). There was no chance for the farmers of the late 20th century to dig up, metaphorically speaking, the spears and helmets of past wars as Virgil's farmers did; these weapons had already been repurposed into the arsenal of farming itself, to appalling effect on the landscape and its biodiversity. As Rebanks explains: "Over thirty or so years, the poet Virgil's farming tools for waging 'war' evolved from being the battlefield equivalent of spears and swords to something more comparable to tanks, jet fighters and chemic and nuclear weapon systems" (158). In Rebanks' view, this intensification of agricultural weaponry has the dubious distinction of having sparked

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the environmentalist movement, the use of DDT [Dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane]and its effects in particular giving impetus to Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, which Rebanks cites as a major influence on his own thinking (91).

In practical terms farming (and by extension, interactions with the environment in our new age of iron) is still in some respects a battle. Rebanks writes of the difficulty of working with nature, remembering fields of newly sprung barley devastated by wild rabbits. He notes that Virgil's farming philosophy "was that we had to take things from nature by using our wisdom and our tools, because the alternative was defeat and starvation" (33). The martial language remains, but in the context of an understanding of the implication of intensive farming in massive environmental damage, and it is counterbalanced by an evident love of the "wild things" (148) that co-inhabit the farm. This is a feeling that Rebanks shares with his friend and mentor, American farmer-poet Wendell Berry, whose radically environmental agrarian practices can be seen as anticipating and inspiring the "new georgic" of the 21st century (see also Andrew Andermatt's essay in this volume).

Tree also references Virgil, evoking his famous image of the bees emerging from a carcass. As she encounters the rapidly expanding biodiversity on her farm in the wake of rewilding she comments:

> To us, unattuned, as yet, to the explosive reactions of nature, it seemed this fluttering, flopping, hopping, buzzing phenomenon was coming from nowhere – like Virgil's bees from the belly of a rotting ox. But the truth was perhaps even more miraculous. Somehow, nature had found us, homing in on our tiny patch of land from unseen distances, the moment these few acres had become hospitable again. (44)

Here, as for Virgil, the bees and their unlikely appearance from a dead ox symbolise new life arising from death. But in Tree's case, the bees are specifically a metaphor for *ecological* renewal in the face of species loss. The episode hints at the way in which allusions to Virgil's *Georgics* are being subtly woven into the language and symbolism of contemporary literary works addressing agrarian matters. It also gestures towards the hopefulness with which these new georgic texts are imbued: the idea that, offered care and hospitality, nature will find us again.

What emerges from these texts is a self-reflexive georgic that is learning to deal with the vital production of food for a growing global population while at the same time farming with, and for, nature to the largest possible degree. The authors recognise their participation in a tradition that stretches back to classical antiquity, but they also situate themselves in the midst of a specific crisis to which farming itself has contributed. This new understanding of georgic is comparable with recent accounts of the flexibility of the pastoral. For example, Deborah Lilley's "new pastoral" "provides a framework within which to explore the themes of economic, environmental, and cultural change, and the burgeoning awareness of ecological damage" (8). But, of course, the new georgic additionally involves direct, hands-on involvement in attempts to mitigate environmental damage. As such, its narratives offer the possibility that the language of farming may yet be restored to the language of life. In a recent interview, Patrick Laurie, farmer and author of *Native* expresses his hope for this kind of restoration when he says:

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> The physical act of farming feeds a certain mindset and approach to life which is often founded on patience, steadiness and a fair measure of grit. […] I'm starting to think about how it might be possible to express something useful through a distinctively rural blend of language, tone and character. (n.p.)

For Laurie, then, the very challenges of farming in our time can give rise to qualities that, articulated in a literary medium, can contribute models of resilience and even wisdom in the face of the environmental challenges with which we are now faced. His words hint that the georgic mode expressed through the language of farming might once again legitimately take up its didactic role, and offer, as Laurie hopes for his own writing, some assistance when it comes to the broader question of how we are supposed to live well.

Contributing Articles

Nation-building was an underlying theme of Virgil's *Georgics* and was more overtly employed in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English versions. Georgic as a mode did not die out at the end of the eighteenth century, rather it became transformed and entangled in a much wider range of technical and literary texts and practices, influenced by Virgil's original. Even the notional inclusion of nation-building, or at least nation-commiserating seeped into early twentieth-century texts such as Vita Sackville West's *The Land*, written after WW1, and *The Garden* in WW2. The problem of feeding a battered nation, and of giving the hard-pressed and weary British reader something to cheer them (that might also give them a spur to growing their own plants) was at the heart of much national newspaper and journal output. Matthew Griffiths, in his contribution to this collection, considers how successful Sackville-West was in her georgic labours, in comparison with what might be called the anti-pastoral of T. S. Eliot. Both authors wrote in the aftermath of destruction, as did Virgil; their reactions might have been in line with those of the majority of artists and writers attempting some assessment of their rapidly overturned, re-built and then newly destroyed towns and landscapes, yet their poetic response was very different. In *The Land*, Sackville-West seems to struggle with Virgil's discursive form so that her own, supremely English byways only serve to emphasise how distant she is from land workers and their labours. Yet Griffiths argues that this is more of a strategy than a mistake: "her work emphasizes a different kind of difficulty" from Eliot's modernist compression and fragmentation, "that of the 'monotony' (*Land* 3) of accompanying her in her account of working the land". "Whether by design or not," notes Griffiths, "she reminds us of the effort involved to sustain agricultural enterprise, and in turn, sustain human society. If it means that the poetry of the land can be hard work, then reading it now is suggestive of the effort through which we must put ourselves if we want to sustain the planet". Griffiths finds her determination to create a positive aesthetic of working the land is more successful in *The Garden*, where her "descriptive line" is used to uncover the detail of horticultural delight. By contrast, Eliot is parsimonious in description, yet the intellectual effort required to read his landscape is considerable. "Both Sackville-West and Eliot are responding, in their different modes, to the way modernity encroaches on the imaginative spaces of land and garden" writes Griffiths; both

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poets offer debates on the need to negotiate with land and labour in redeeming anthropogenic environmental damage.

Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English georgic was much more focused on the multiple benefits to society brought by methodical and "scientific" agriculture; in the nineteenth century, the benefits of Victorian "high farming" were equally urgent after a sustained period of famine and agricultural unrest in the early nineteenth century. Adrian Tait argues in his essay that the capitalisation of farming during the mid to late Victorian period might have had its origins in improvement, yet often resulted in extreme exploitation of land and worker alike in order to make a profit out of poor yields. Thomas Hardy, conscious of the poverty of Dorset land and labour, is aware of how economic squeezes impacted women's lives especially harshly in *Tess of the D'Urberville*s. Machines were one answer to human and economic harm, for labourer and farmer alike; the threshing-machine among them "constituted a decisive moment for Victorian agriculture"; even while they were "shattering the ecological balance of earlier, self-contained forms of farming" (Tait). Yet there were other literary models, as Tait discusses, such as Richard Jefferies' more elegiac depiction of farming in *Amaryllis at the Fair*: "Iden has made his peace with a stubborn natural world … and accustomed himself to the struggle its cultivation entails" (Tait). He has the magical qualities exhibited by Virgil's elderly gardener whose plants seem oblivious of seasons and weathers, flourishing at his every touch. This idyll does not pay, however, and Jefferies acknowledges the inevitable demise of smallholdings such as these. Tait considers the possibility that an "eco-georgic necessarily highlights the difficulties (perhaps even the impossibility) of situating and sustaining such a way of life in a modern, industrialised world, driven by capitalist economies". The other side of small farming is that seen in Hubert Crackanthorpe's short story of hill farming, "Anthony Garstin's courtship", in which isolation and immobility can result from a refusal to adapt; to external economic pressures and to the emotional costs of perpetual struggle as a result.

At the extreme end of this aspect of small farming is Cynan Jones's portrayal of Welsh farming in the twenty-first century: there seems to be little change through the centuries to this moment, where myths and monsters are as prevalent in Welsh ponds and woods as they were in Virgil's Italy. In Angelo Monaco's essay, he discusses the dark side of Virgil's *Georgics* in Book 3—disease, drought, the loss of prized animals—as well as the close relationship between not only human and nonhuman, but more-than-human Others who may or may not be influencing the lives and labours of Jones's characters. Monaco also argues that the landscape and its beings are active agents in the agricultural story; places and animals have personalities unrelated to their supposed purpose as subordinates in the georgic imperative. They are cared for; they have memories, even dreams, they are part of the land worker's emotional as well as practical life, as is the plough-ox in Book 3, dropping dead in the field. "Jones' works can be approached from a georgic perspective that reminds readers of who they are and of their enmeshment with the world", writes Monaco, a much bigger field than the little worlds in Mantua, Kent, Dorset and Wales.

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As we have variously seen, georgic is as much about the harmful effects of crisis and war as it is about the slow, gradual, often difficult process of rebuilding and reforming what has been damaged or destroyed. As Jessica Bundschuh argues in her contribution to this issue, moments of devastation and disruption are therefore not extraneous to the georgic spirit. Rather, such moments motivate the farmer to engage in the peaceable, though also frequently combative, work of cultivation in the first place. Working from that premise, Bundschuh's article investigates, in a series of close readings, how Irish poets from Derek Mahon through Paul Muldoon to Padraig Regan use the theme of growing mushrooms to reflect on the ground and fertility of their poetic labour as well as to engage with the troubled history of Ireland. Although Virgil does not specifically mention the cultivation of mushrooms in the *Georgics*, his text resonates with a concern that, as Bundschuh shows, can be traced through all the Irish poems that she examines: the capacity of mushrooms to transform waste into nutritious matter, and to engender networks of connections out of difference and division.

Like Bundschuh, Andrew Andermatt's article also engages with the peacemaking aspect of the georgic, though in an American context. Reading Wendell Berry's "Mad Farmer" poems against the backdrop of the Vietnam War, Andermatt argues that the ambiguously 'mad' persona through whom Berry, himself a farmer, speaks in those poems represents a peculiar way of caring for the environment. More specifically, Andermatt demonstrates that the Mad Farmer poems, read in conjunction with some of Berry's expository works, suggest a variety of revolutionary environmentalism that must be distinguished from other kinds of ecological practice current at the same time. In Berry's writing, as in Virgil's *Georgics*, the farmer emerges as a figure of peaceful reformation and restorative change.

Typically, this farmer, in both Berry's and Virgil's work, appears as male. Caroline Dauphin's article, by contrast, explores how Suzanne Verdier and Anna Letitia Barbauld, two Romantic-era poets from Britain and France, respond to the georgic tradition in specifically female, even feminist ways. Concentrating mainly on the suggestive theme of sericulture, the breeding of silkworms, Dauphin compares Verdier's French *Géorgiques du Midi* (*Georgics of Southern France*) with Barbauld's English language poem "The Caterpillar". Both authors, as Dauphin's historically informed readings show, use the georgic mode to further, in subtle ways, the cause of female emancipation and empowerment. Weaving threads of connection between Britain and France, moreover, the writings of Verdier and Barbauld underscore yet again the close relation between agriculture, poetry, and the work of making peace.

The special issue draws to a close with two essays that signal the future-facing dimensions of georgic. Ethan Mannon argues the case for a concept of "georgic marvel", while Terry Gifford, in an expansive survey of agrarian literature in Britain and Ireland, reveals the extent of the contemporary georgic resurgence. Mannon draws on affect theory and affective ecocriticism to explore human emotional response to places of work (or indeed, to working in those places). His understanding of "georgic marvel" brings together ideas of enchantment and wonder that arise in the context of georgic labour, especially from the experience of "1) uncovering human-made relics, often associated

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with an epic past, and 2) observing biotic events". The former, Mannon argues, can result in deeper feelings of emplacement in a landscape, while the latter brings home to us the everyday miracle of the growth and fruiting of plants in an agrarian setting. Mannon devolps his discussion through a narrative scholarship approach, recounting his own experience of both sources of marvel: uncovering a "tooth from a sickle-bar mower" in his Pennsylvania backyard—a relic of its former role as agricultural land—and experiencing the challenges and joys of his own attempt to grow sweet potatoes. He concludes that "working the earth creates encounters, including marvelous ones that help us love the world".

Gifford too, advocates for the ability of georgic activity and literature to enchant, and like Mannon, outlines the potential of the georgic for fostering an enworlded sense of "a radical mutual agency that has a continuity with past knowledge". His analysis of a range of primary texts gives a helpful sense of the kinds of themes with which georgic writing in the Anthropocene is grappling. Both fictional and non-fictional forms reflect the hard work, sorrows and rewards of life on the land. Having said this, Gifford also shows how novels such as Melissa Harrison's *All Among the Barley* (2018) bring to light the danger of an idealising georgic nostalgia, and its vulnerability to becoming enmeshed with reactionary politics, as it did in the time Harrison's story is set. However, in Gifford's view, georgic at its best, particularly in creative non-fiction writing, has a self-reflexivity and an ability to bring out the georgic qualities of attentiveness and sensitivity to the nonhuman. He particularly highlights the ecological potential of what he calls "future-oriented georgic", such as that of the aforementioned Tree and Rebanks.

In this *Ecozon@* special issue we have taken up Fairer's suggestion of an eco-georgic in order to explore its possibilities—as a mode of careful, sometimes arduous, writing and reading, and, more broadly, as an attitude informing the effort to live more sustainably on our beleaguered planet. The essays featured here show georgic being deployed and refashioned in a number of valuable ways: it can help us to better understand our enmeshment with the world; it warns us to anticipate difficulty and disruption; and it encourages our resolve to work towards different forms of restoration. These essays and the literary texts they investigate participate in a georgic literary ecology that runs from classical antiquity to the present, but they also point tentatively towards a way forward through the social, economic, political and, above all, environmental challenges of life in the iron times of the Anthropocene.

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Reclaiming *The Land*, Restoring *The Garden*? Georgic in the Modernist Moment and Beyond[1]

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Abstract

To scrutinize georgic's position between progress and tradition, this article will focus on the way those forces become legible in poems composed between the end of the First and Second World Wars. I will examine Vita Sackville-West's long georgics *The Land* (1926) and *The Garden* (1946) to argue that they indicate the scope of what is possible in the genre given the challenges of both modernity and modernism. Her poems demonstrate that, in seeking to navigate the changing material and cultural landscapes, the labour of maintaining an imaginative tradition can be both productive and problematic. The article will assess the way Sackville-West positions herself as a writer in relation to the figures of the agricultural labourer and gardener and to the classical tradition, as well as her claims about the language in which georgic can and should be written. Each poem will also be compared to the poetry and criticism of her modernist contemporary T.S. Eliot, with particular reference to *The Waste Land*, *Four Quartets* and his essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent." Engaged in a struggle on both agricultural and cultural fronts, *The Land* and *The Garden* are prone to inconsistency and, even by their own standards, failure. But in these failures as well as their successes both poems are committed to finding a way of writing human engagement with the land and literature. As such, they can be instructively read in the present moment to prompt questions about the way we engage with land and language in the Anthropocene, negotiating between competing modes of writing and more broadly between natural and human agency.

Keywords: Sackville-West, tradition, labour, T.S. Eliot, modernism.

Resumen

Para examinar la posición geórgica entre el progreso y la tradición, este artículo se centrará en cómo esas fuerzas se hacen legibles en poemas compuestos entre el final de la Primera y la Segunda Guerra Mundial. Examinaré los largos geórgicos de Vita Sackville-West, *The Land* (1926) y *The Garden* (1946) para argumentar su lugar en el género ante los desafíos, tanto de la modernidad como del modernismo. Sus poemas demuestran que, al navegar por un paisaje cambiante, tanto material como cultural, la labor de mantener una tradición imaginativa es a la vez productiva y problemática. El artículo evaluará cómo Sackville-West se posiciona como escritora en relación con las figuras del trabajador agrícola y el jardinero y con la tradición clásica, así como sus declaraciones sobre el lenguaje en el que el geórgico puede y debe escribirse. Cada poema se comparará también con la poesía y la crítica de su contemporáneo modernista T.S. Eliot, con especial referencia a *The Waste Land*, *Four Quartets* y su ensayo "Tradition and the Individual Talent". Comprometidos en un doble frente, agrícola y cultural, *The Land* and *The Garden* tienden a la inconsistencia e, incluso para sus propios estándares, al fracaso. Pero tanto en estos fracasos como en sus éxitos, ambos poemas se comprometen a encontrar una forma de escribir el compromiso humano con la tierra y la literatura. Como tales, pueden leerse de manera instructiva en el momento presente para plantear preguntas sobre cómo nos relacionamos con la tierra y el lenguaje en el Antropoceno, negociando entre modos de escritura que compiten entre sí y, más ampliamente, entre la agencialidad natural y la humana.

Palabras clave: Sackville-West, tradición, trabajo, T.S. Eliot, modernismo.

[1] I am grateful to the agency Curtis Brown for permission to quote from Vita Sackville-West's poetry. I am also grateful to the anonymous reviewers of this article, who provided invaluable direction and comments. Thanks, too, to Clara Bleda Megias for her translation of my abstract.

In advocating that ecocritics reconsider the genre of georgic, David Fairer refutes the view that "its fascination with mastering nature and exploiting the earth's resources for human ends makes it appear at best an innocent trailer for the terrifying global depredations that concern us today" (203). A contrasting danger, though, is that a genre concentrating on agriculture is likely to be more backward- than forward-looking; as Raymond Williams puts it, "English attitudes to the country, and to ideas of rural life, [have] persisted with extraordinary power, so that even after the society was predominantly urban[,] its literature was […] still predominantly rural" (2).

Because it attends to the detail of agricultural labour, however, georgic is poised between these two tendencies. At its best, the genre may even offer instructive, practical accommodations between human and natural agency, and could today enable us to imagine "the potential of alternative epistemologies to get out of the predicament of fatalistic dystopias often revolving around the Anthropocene debate," which Maria Paula Diogo et al. find in the notion and practice of the garden (6).

Just as Virgil's original *Georgics* were written in response to conflict, Vita Sackville-West composed her long poem *The Land* (1926) following the First World War, and *The Garden* (1946) during the Second. Her georgics seek a mode of writing that aligns with agriculture and horticulture, conscious of but often resistant to advances in technology and society, and to the avant-garde aesthetics of modernism as exemplified by T.S. Eliot. In this article, I will assess how Sackville-West situates her poems, both in the longer tradition of georgic and in relation to manual labour, as well as contrasting her mode of writing with that of Eliot. Insofar as her poems engage with global crisis, in the form of the World Wars, they can also serve as a test case for what the georgic might now do in the Anthropocene.

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Back to *The Land*

The inclusion of labour in the rural imaginary is the characteristic quality of georgic, and in the opening lines of *The Land*, Sackville-West aims to establish a commonality between this labour and literary endeavour, writing of a "Classic monotony, that modes and wars / Leave undisturbed, unbettered" (3). She uses the artifice of iambic pentameter, albeit a rough one, to announce the artlessness of the poem, envisaging a continuous tradition that is to be honoured by dutiful adherence. More specifically, she aligns the traditions of agriculture and poetry with classical models: "Homer and Hesiod and Virgil knew / The ploughshare in its reasonable shape [...] never bettered though man's cunning grew" (*Land* 89).

Already, however, this presents a problem: it cannot suggest that the work of these classical poets was *itself* monotonous (with due deference to the experience of generations of schoolchildren), so it perhaps instead suggests that "monotony" is the way to continue the georgic tradition into the 20th century. In declaring her own work to be a "mild continuous epic of the soil" (*Land* 3), Sackville-West collapses distinctions between her work and nature's, between her own poem and the classics, and between present and antiquity, asserting a timeless continuity. But the phrase "epic of the soil" also conflates

the genres of Homer and Hesiod, of Virgil's *Aeneid* with his *Georgics*. By expanding the subject of agriculture into the scope of the epic, she tacitly overwrites the latter's common preoccupation with conflict.

Sackville-West is working from a tradition of thought that read "Virgil's path from pastoral [*Eclogues*] through didactic [*Georgics*] to epic [*Aeneid*]" as Denis Feeney puts it; in this analysis, the "*Georgics* become the middle term, bonded with the *Eclogues* as poetry of the country, and with the *Aeneid* as poetry [...] concern[ing] the order that humans strive to impose on the intransigency of their world". Sackville-West's own middle course in *The Land* recognizes the effort of rural life without explicitly acknowledging its historical context. What references there are to war are themselves put to work as metaphor, such as the "*regiments*" and "*brigade*[s]" of "*battlemented*" flowers (*Land* 46; author's italics). The poem is an attempt to plough on through and beyond the war. As with Virgil, "[w]e may infer [... the] belief that the farmer's existence is an embodiment of the idea of 'swords into ploughshares': in other words, the moral life is peaceful"," in R.O.A.M. Lyne's words (*Georgics* xxvi). Like the original *Georgics, The Land*, "fell upon a time of war weariness and country-longing, combined with disturbing social changes" (282), Elizabeth W. Pomeroy points out; furthermore, Ian Blyth asserts that the "lack of modernity" in *The Land* "would have been a significant contributing factor to the poem's popularity at the time it was published" (19).

However, while Virgil's career was regarded as "a poetic instantiation of rhetorical theory's division of style into the low, middle and high" (Feeney), in her self-declared "mild epic" Sackville-West is consciously working against this trajectory. She conceives of her poetry not as an art but a craft, in the line with agricultural trades—the artisan's "plain particular poetry" that uses "language, smithied at the common fire" (*Land* 81). It is as though she is turning words from ploughshares: rather than elevate agriculture to an epic tone, she instead seeks an earthly level and a corresponding register.

In this much, she is working against a particular traditional conception of the genre expressed in Joseph Addison's late-17th-century "An Essay on Virgil's *Georgics*," which maintains that "[t]he precepts of husbandry are not to be delivered with the simplicity of a ploughman, but with the simplicity of a poet" (154); "much less ought the low phrases and terms of art that are adapted to husbandry, have any place in such a work as the Georgic, which is not to appear in the natural simplicity and nakedness of its subject, but in the pleasantest dress that poetry can bestow on it" (158). Instead, Sackville-West chooses to acknowledge the hardship of rural life, because she regards her own verse valuable insofar as it resembles that effort.

As if to affirm her acquaintance with the labour of farming, Sackville-West repeatedly stresses the work-like qualities of her verse: her "pedestrian measure gently plods," corresponding with the fieldsman who "Trudges with steady and unchanging gait" (*Land* 4); or, because "Nothing but toil shall serve" in the practice of farming, she will "sing / Without illusion" (*Land* 8). Consequently, moments of the poem that might be too poetic are subverted, as though literary style is itself suspect; for instance, the moment that "Some snatch of song [is] born" and a youth makes vows to his lover is put literally beyond

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bounds, where "Only the moon shall look behind the hedge [... and] hear the whispered pledge," (*Land* 72, 73).

For all her attention to agricultural labour, Sackville-West did not herself participate; indeed, "[m]uch of her agricultural information came from an encyclopaedia of farming given to her by her husband Harold Nicolson (for she possessed little knowledge of farming)," Pomeroy explains (277). In asserting the value of rural work, she is also setting herself a goal, to try to honour the rural labourer's toil through her poetics. Her concern is with preserving and sustaining an earlier mode of writing to record conventional agricultural practices: the expression of traditional work *in* a traditional work.

The Tradition of Labour and the Labour of Tradition

In a 2011 lecture on *The Land*, Molly Hite maintains that the book "carries on a Victorian tradition of competent, readable and vaguely patriotic poems." So even while Sackville-West does not seek to poeticize the experience of the rural worker as Addison prescribes, she still sought continuity with poetry of a previous generation. That continuity is conscious: Pomeroy observes that *The Land* "was written partly in reply to [T.S.] Eliot's *The Waste Land"* of 1922 (281), and Sackville-West herself remarks in a 1928 article on "The Formidable Mr. Eliot" that "[w]hen this poem first appeared [...] I admit that I was completely baffled by it. [...] I said 'If this is modern poetry, then give me the old.'" (589).

The contrast between the poets' respective visions is clear in Sackville-West's choice of title, which disposes of "waste" to favour the productive and patriotic associations of what thereby remains. Further allusions to Eliot's poem throughout *The Land* suggest the relationship she conceives between the two works: when she invokes the "Makers of land, one of the nameless line / That fenced, and tilled, and overcame the waste" (*Land* 23), she not only refers to the effort that agriculture requires but hints that the same effort is needed to overcome Eliot's vision. Even the fritillaries "staining the waste / With foreign colour" (*Land* 49) may be a glance at Eliot's poem and its range of quotations from outside the Western European canon.

Sackville-West thus works against Eliot's vision of post-war cultural collapse, instead seeking to draw strength from a tradition imagined as unbroken and unfragmented, a "nameless line". In casting the English farmer as "Rome's inheritor" (*Land* 106), she also seeks continued value in exemplars from antiquity; whereas Eliot's classical allusions in *The Waste Land* to the Sibyl (*Poems* 53) or the rapist Tereus (63) are of a grimmer kind. In particular, Sackville-West's determination to work the land—and indeed make the land work—after a period of conflict are reminiscent of Fairer's account of Virgil: "[a]t the opening of the *Georgics* the 'exhausted land' [...] and 'consumed earth' [...] are recovering from years of neglect and the depredations of a bitter Civil War. The encouragement of new life, however small, is a georgic priority" (211).

Sackville-West's privileging of effort—"I have refused / The easier uses of made poetry" (*Land* 4)—does nevertheless bring her into surprising proximity with Eliot in one

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respect. In his essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919), Eliot maintains that tradition "cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour"; neither can it consist "in following the ways of the immediate generation before us in a blind or timid adherence to its successes" (*Prose* 38). That is, a poet must devote effort to understanding the tradition, and cannot assume a ready continuity from past into present. Although *The Land* does make such an assumption, choosing to instead to match literary effort with that of the agricultural labourer, Sackville-West is still sympathetic to Eliot's understanding of tradition. In her article on him, she writes that:

> many people seem to hold a theory that poets today strive to repudiate and destroy what is called tradition; this is not quite true[. ...] They strive on the contrary to enrich the poetic tradition, by adding something to it—something which is of today, something which shall reflect our own very difficult and experimental age. (628)

Her engagement with Eliot acknowledges the rationale for his practice, even though she does not share his bleak outlook. If, reflexively, these remarks also apply to *The Land*, then she has to imagine her poem "strive[s] [...] to enrich the poetic tradition" in a different way.

The distinction is clear in the two poets' uses of Virgil, who is central to both of their literary traditions. Even if Sackville-West "knew no Latin", she did read the *Georgics* "in translation [when] she was halfway through *The Land*", her son Nigel Nicolson explains (*Garden* n.p.). Meanwhile In "What is a Classic?", a 1944 address to the Virgil Society, Eliot insists that the definition of a classic "cannot be one which excludes Virgil," and, more significantly, "it needed that particular poet, and a lifetime of labour on the part of that poet, to make the classic out of his material" (*Prose* 115–16). Eliot thus implicitly subscribes to the view that the *Georgics* are part of Virgil's labour toward the epic *Aeneid*; whereas *The Land*, as I have noted, hybridizes the genres in "the mild continuous epic of the soil" (3). For Sackville-West, agricultural and artistic labour are alike ongoing processes, rather than culminating in a final achievement, and tradition is not "modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art," as it is for Eliot (*Prose* 38). In her view, progress is only admissible if in the "nameless line" of agricultural practice.

This continuity of tradition into the present necessarily means that it acquires "something which is of today". So Sackville-West observes a yeoman farmer "By urgency and competition driven" to use a tractor where horses "were wont to serve" (*Land* 24). As Blyth points out, "some of the changes to the rural world portrayed in *The Land* were only just starting to take effect at the time Sackville-West was writing her poem. Tractors, for instance, were introduced during the First World War, but did not enter into widespread use until a decade or so later" (27–28). But—perhaps because of the association between war and technological development— Sackville-West only reluctantly admits the tractor into the poem, being largely resistant to change on a scale that could disrupt the continuity of practice she envisages.

The poem similarly repudiates the value of book-learning in favour of practical understanding:

> nature still defeats
> The frowsty science of the cloistered men,
> Their theory, their conceits;

> The faith within [the farmer] still derides the pen,
> Experience his text-book. (24–25)

Given her reliance on an agricultural encyclopaedia in composing the poem, it is perhaps a little disingenuous of Sackville-West to disavow the "frowsty science of the cloistered men" and claim "[e]xperience" as a "text-book". But it also speaks to the ground she wants to make up between her literary practice and the work of the farmer, finding terms of art that respect the agricultural tradition rather than seeking to aestheticize it.

Her position seems all the more conservative in the light of another of her articles from 1928. Introducing her series on "Poetry of Today", Sackville-West writes:

> within the last twenty or thirty years [...] machinery and science, ceasing to be the preoccupation of a comparatively few specialists, have become an absolutely dominating and unescapable influence in the lives of all. And it is impossible that poetry, and the thought of poets, and the general shape of their mind, should have remained unaffected by so extraordinary a change taking place over nearly the whole face of the globe, and in the mind of thinking man. (290)

The contrast between the views expressed in this article and those in *The Land*, which insists on remaining "unaffected" by these developments, may be due to the two years' difference between them; or it may be that while Sackville-West could reconcile herself intellectually to scientific change, she could not accommodate it to her poetics. Likewise, she understands that "modern poetry is difficult because it is highly experimental" ("Today" 289), but elected not to undertake such experiment in *The Land*. Indeed, in implicitly rejecting Eliot's modernist aesthetics, her work emphasizes a different kind of difficulty—that of the "monotony" (*Land* 3) of accompanying her in her account of working the land.

In places, it requires sustained effort on the part of the 21st-century reader to plough on with what Hite calls a "banal" poem: even allowing for Sackville-West's own disclaimers, she is given to archaisms, inversions and digressions, as for example when she recapitulates a shepherd's "unpublished vow" about his vocation, including a parenthesis inside what is already a digression (*Land* 65). The difficulty lies not so much with the digression itself—Fairer allows the georgic's capacity for "attention [being] paid, sometimes digressively, to what seems trivial or inconsequential" (205)—but in the strain of trying to identify with the worker, in this case a shepherd, when his thought is "Unknown to its maker" and "only known / To [...] God" (*Land* 65). In her attempts to integrate her omniscient position with that of the shepherd, she is in fact revealing the distance between them.

Her attempt to make such connections poetically is again usefully contrasted with her criticism. In her article on Eliot, she writes: "life is becoming more and more complicated; our knowledge is increasing, and our problems are increasing with our knowledge; poetry, trying to keep pace, resorts inevitably to methods which many people consider illegitimate" (628). But she writes that Eliot's employment of such methods, "is intentional [. ...] is deliberate", and "[e]verything became clear" to her when she read one of the closing lines of *The Waste Land*: "These fragments I have shored against my ruins"

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("Formidable" 589, *Poems* 71). Because "[e]verything is tottering", Eliot is making "a desperate last attempt to shore it up" as "a man loaded with the weight and richness of culture; loving it, hating it; trying to throw it off, trying to break it down into fresh patterns; trying to dissolve something in order to re-create" ("Formidable" 589).

Rather than attempt such experimentation to meet the modern world in *The Land*, however, Sackville-West relies on the georgic tradition's "mixed character" (Fairer 205) to supply the connections between the different elements of her poem, with mixed results. Whether by design or not, she reminds us of the effort involved to sustain agricultural enterprise, and in turn, sustain human society. If it means that the poetry of the land can be hard work, then reading it now is suggestive of the effort through which we must put ourselves if we want to sustain the planet.

The Avant-Garden?

"[A]cknowledging that human activities have altered the most basic life processes at a planetary level necessarily entails that conservancy and environmentalism must radically change their methods and objectives," write Diogo et al. (4), proposing that the garden, "as a crossover platform between nature, science and technology" (6), offers a means of envisaging such radical change. By the same token, Sackville-West's *The Garden* (1946) can offer a corresponding opportunity to imagine what Nicolson calls "the alternating conflict and collaboration between [hu]man[ity] and nature" (n.p.), even if that opportunity is one the poet is sometimes reluctant or unable to exploit.

Diogo et al. see "the potential of alternative epistemologies to get out of the predicament of fatalistic dystopias often revolving around the Anthropocene debate" (6). *The Garden* certainly eschews what we might call the "fatalistic dystopia" of *The Waste Land*, and like *The Land* seeks a practical means of engagement with nature and the landscape as a way of addressing the complexity of the contemporary. As Diogo et al. put it, "an environmental ethics that has gardening as its central metaphor and model allows for an open and frank discussion regarding the aim and methods of environmental interventions" (3).

The Garden's interventions are cultural as well as environmental, being concerned not only with how to garden but how to *write* the garden, horticulture serving as both the vehicle and tenor of metaphor. The poem follows *The Land* in that Sackville-West concentrates there as much on the practice of georgic as on farming; but whereas that poem seeks a "pedestrian measure" (4) common to field and page, literature and horticulture in *The Garden* correspond insofar as Sackville-West is preoccupied by her skill in both—or rather, her lack of skill.

In the dedication, she announces that she will "scrawl down / Rubbish of verses fit for fire, / Gardener, poet, on [a] single pyre" (*Garden* 9). At such an early stage of the poem this may only signify the formal deference of a poet to her dedicatee rather than actual inferiority; yet her two identities are linked recurrently in the poem, as for example when she declares: "I, poor poet, I / Am likewise a poor practised gardener" (29). The insistence

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on the point is so mannered that it scarcely seems confessional, and given the renown Sackville-West was acquiring as a gardener would seem to be begging the compliment.[2]

However, her increased self-consciousness could be explained by the change of mode that the transition from land to garden necessitates. The later poem concerns a much smaller space than the land as a whole, while the labour it involves is more aesthetic than arable: indeed, she opens the poem proper by describing gardening as "agriculture's little brother," calling for "the pretty treble" rather than "Notes of the bass" (13). This modal distinction is one Virgil observes when he comments in the *Georgics* that he formerly "*dallied* with pastoral verse" (128, my emphasis) in the *Eclogues*. In the move from *The Land* to *The Garden* Sackville-West was effectively working in the other direction, from labour to leisure—that is, reversing the traditionally conceived trajectory of the poet's career from low style to high, and this may account for her heightened concern about the poem's worth. When it does not share in the productive labour of farming then the literary may be a compromise in itself, about which Sackville-West actively expresses suspicion; for instance, she reflects that seed "catalogues misled us, as a poem / Misleads us" (*Garden* 33).

When gardening flips from being the subject of the poem to the terms in which its writing is conceived, Sackville-West effectively offers a modest manifesto for her poetics:

> Weave the poor poet all his ablest words
> Into a poacher's snare, a springle set,
> Making a mesh of pretty nouns his string
> With knots of adjective and epithet[.] (67)

The lines run the risk of being trite—those "pretty nouns" chiming with the "pretty treble" that is the poem's clef—and excessive "adjective *and* epithet" (my emphasis).

As Pomeroy remarks, Sackville-West "does not hesitate to gild a lily" (281), perhaps in concession to Addison's pronouncement that georgics represent "the science of husbandry put into a pleasing dress, and set off with all the beauties and embellishments of poetry" (155). However, two lines later the "finch of beauty struggles through the net" (*Land* 67). Is this another admission of failure on the poet's part—or a suggestion that, for the fleeting duration of that struggle, such beauty is caught? It is also possible to read the passage as a tacit acknowledgement that the "pretty" nouns, adjectives and epithets constitute a kind of poetry that will fail to achieve its objectives—a recognition of the limits of her poetics, compared to the experiments she allowed in her 1928 articles as being necessary to the modern age.

Once the poetic is imagined as the horticultural, though, what had been a tension between literature and labour—can verse be as productive as farming or gardening?—becomes entangled with nature in the process of artistic creation, given that the gardener and environment are together collaborating, and on occasion competing, to bring the plot to life. *The Garden* returns to this quandary throughout, assaying the value of poetry against natural agency. The closing section, "Autumn", for instance, contains the image of

[2] *The Garden* was written at Sackville-West's estate at Sissinghurst, where, as Rebecca Nagel points out, the poet "enjoyed sharing her garden with visitors and advertised her pleasure in a note originally written for the *New Statesman and Nation*" (22)—among many other horticultural writings.

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spiderwebs as "Somnambulistic poems, fine and light [...] that never might a poet write" (*Garden* 129–30). This puts the truly creative, the truly aesthetic, beyond what is possible for the poet; or perhaps at least the poet Sackville-West thinks herself to be.

The image follows a nocturnal encounter with a frog, who, the narrator reflects, "had his right to's life as I to mine; / I had my right to my descriptive line" (129). This assertion of her vocation is uncharacteristic in *The Garden*; however, Sackville-West only stakes a claim for the "descriptive line" of which she makes plentiful use, rather than for a "fine and light" composition of the kind the spider produces, much as she put the "lyric liar" of the moon beyond the bounds of *The Land* (73). Like the earlier poem, *The Garden* makes working the soil congruent with poetry, but does not, or cannot always, abide by the analogy, as though in recognition that the plain, working language at which she laboured to write of agriculture is not what horticulture demands.

Fairer reflects on the "the compromised, and compromising, georgic, whose interest in mixture, alteration, contingency, and various kinds of trial-and-error, hinders it from the big vision, the saving answer" (209), and *The Garden* is successful on these terms where it works with rather than against nature and embraces the possibilities of compromise and improvisation, rather than striving, as she tried in *The Land*, to make a poem "uniform and agreeable in all its parts" as Addison requires (157). This is not the place for "craftsmen [... who] have held / Reality down fluttering to a bench [...] And out of need made inadvertent art" (*Land* 81).

For instance, "The gardener half artist must depend / On that slight chance, that touch beyond control / Which all his paper planning will transcend" (*Garden* 17)—lines that both enact and resist the principle they express through a constructive, if likely unintended, ambiguity over which subject takes the verb "will transcend." If the "touch beyond control" transcends "the planning" then the effect is emergent rather than programmatic, a co-creation of garden and gardener, precisely because the seed catalogue can mislead. This reading does depend, however, on the contrived separation of subject and verb by object to achieve the "~end" rhyme, when the syntax might more prosaically read "that touch beyond control will transcend all paper planning."

We *could* therefore understand that the planning itself "will transcend" what is otherwise beyond control, a reading that in turn has alternative implications: to give it a positive inflection, we may read the skill of the artist as incorporating what is emergent into an overall vision; yet, negatively, it could mean that the "paper planning" puts pay to any floral spontaneity. As we have seen from *The Land*, the integration of material into a comprehensive aesthetic vision is not always possible in georgic, while the imposition of total order conjures the "fascination with mastering nature" that Fairer says provokes suspicion of the genre.

The fact that the site of the garden is so fertile with potentially contradictory readings makes *The Garden* a productive means of thinking through the mutual responsiveness of the human and the natural in the 21st century. Serenella Iovino advises that "thinking the garden and the Anthropocene *through* one another does not mean equating them with one another [...] despite all its contradictions, the garden also discloses unexpected resources" (20; emphasis in original). In fact, it is these

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contradictions that *make* the garden so valuable. Diogo et al. remark that, in our historic moment, "the choice is not whether to intervene or not, but to be able to distinguish different degrees, methods and objectives of intervention, just as gardeners do [... . G]ardens foster a 'give-and-take' and adaptable approach" (3).

The constant labour of managing such give-and-take means that poetry and gardening for Sackville-West again align in the credo that "difficult art must difficult skill conceal" (*Garden* 55). At cursory glance, this recalls the commonplace that skill can make certain accomplishments, particularly those in the arts, look easier than they actually are; but what Sackville-West in fact declares is that one kind of difficulty is concealed by another. In this context, we may think how the deliberate difficulties she faces in writing traditional georgic conceal *but simultaneously express* the difficulty of manual labour.

In the preliminary, pre-seasonal section of the poem, this is formally encoded in the verse. In its five-line stanzas, the ABAAB rhyme scheme reflects a sustained effort of control:

> The Morning Glory climbs towards the sun
> As we by nature [are] sadly born to strive
> And our unending race of search to run,
> Forever started, never to be won,
> —And might be disappointed to arrive. (*Garden* 18)

The double A rhyme before the second B enacts the extra work both poet and reader need to put in to "resolve[...] The broken pattern of the universe" (*Garden* 17), while the lines themselves affirm the notion of continuous rather than culminating labour I have identified in *The Land*. But this is also a "difficult art" because it is hard to get right—a probably unintended meaning that, like the struggle between planning and transcendence, plays out in Sackville-West's responsiveness to chance and difficulty.

Her difficulty lies in gauging how much effort is needed. When her "descriptive line" seeks to be exhaustive, it closes down opportunities for compromise and improvisation. For instance, in a Wordsworthian moment Sackville-West bids her poet/gardener "live, / Instead of speaking; leave his desk," but fails to heed her own advice, staying at her desk to enumerate the detail of "books, [...] foolscap, and the blue-black ink" (67). The effort of communicating these images expresses no actual effort on the part of the gardener. Crucially, Sackville-West's tendency for digression is a danger to which Virgil is alert. At a point where he runs the risk of self-indulgence, he admonishes himself: "But time is on the move still, time that will not return / While we go cruising around this subject whose lore delights us" (*Georgics* 98); indeed, Addison exhorts that the georgic "avoids all manner of digressions" (158).

Sackville-West's "swarming detail has a cumulative effect," Nicolson remarks (*Garden* n.p.), and her descriptive line is more effective when used to narrow attention toward natural detail that may otherwise be lost, "Daring to find a world in a lost world, / A little world, a little perfect world" that she recounts in "modest lines, almost demure (*Garden* 14). This is modesty with purpose rather than an affectation, allowing the narrator to concentrate, for instance, on a wasp, from whom she "sought / The rosy

rondure of the moonlit peach" (101)—lines that also observe the georgic's "commitment to the minuter readjustments and qualifications that allow life to continue" (Fairer 207).

By directing her focus so precisely, the poet is also, paradoxically, sensitive to the war taking place around the garden. The ecocritic Timothy Clark writes of "derangement of scales" prompted by environmental crisis that "collaps[e] the trivial and catastrophic into each other" (136), in their insistent and counterintuitive connection of the global and local; in the site of the garden, Sackville-West is attentive to similar disruptions caused by the Second World War. Searchlights direct attention away from the garden, for example, and though Sackville-West "Expected sound, to match so grave a scale," the spectacle is "mute" (*Garden* 96). The discrepancy between scales points again to effort out of proportion to effect. Still more affectingly, the same effect is employed to elegize a bird destroyed in an air-raid: "*It took a ton of iron to kill this lark, / This weightless freeman of the day*" (92, author's italics). She exercises a tendency Feeney identifies in Virgil, the way "perspective can shift from one level of scale to another". Rather than striving to maintain a common vision as she did in *The Land* and have it disrupted by the advent of, say, a tractor, *The Garden* acknowledges such disruption in identifying the uncanny quality of military technology. As poem and plot, the garden is what Feeney calls "a variegated project", its size and design allowing it to provide the sense of scale and effort against which the war can be seen.

This is because the work advocated in both *The Land* and *The Garden* succeeds or fails at the scale of the human, struggling with the natural on its own terms, the give-and-take advocated by Diogo et al. Gardening is conceived of as a means to "keep civility" (*Garden* 15),

> with the state of war [to]
> Aptly contrast, a miniature endeavour
> To hold the graces and the courtesies
> Against a horrid wilderness. (14)

Nevertheless the images in which decorum is defended throughout *The Garden* are themselves martial—more so than the *battlemented* flowers of *The Land*—and Sackville-West declares that "the gardener in little way / Maintain[s] the bastion of his opposition" against war (*Garden* 15). Perhaps this is not as telling as the collision of worlds that we witness with, say, Septimus Smith's death in *Mrs Dalloway*; but Rebecca Nagel observes that the poem could have been

> about a fantasy garden with endless space and time and willing labo[u]r. Instead, she writes about hard work and cheap dreams in catalogues. The garden is not an escape from World War II as it first appears, but a translation of the war's energy into the timeless setting of every garden: endless effort and failure with the odd unpredictable and temporary victory. (27)

In drawing on military language, Sackville-West juxtaposes the scales of war and garden, making the experience of conflict legible in relation to an enclosed space. So long as *The Garden* is georgic, it exhibits what Fairer calls the genre's "fascination with resistant and indecorous, even obstinately unpoetic, elements" (205). The poem more successfully

accommodates them than does *The Land* by not trying to imagine a seamless continuity between them.

"The land and not the waste land"

In 1926 *The Land* made some sideswipes at its near namesake *The Waste Land*, but by the time she composed *The Garden* in the 1940s Sackville-West explicitly took up arms against Eliot's poem. Clearly remaining troubled by its bleakness, she quotes the first four lines of "The Burial of the Dead" at the start of "Spring" (*Garden* 63):

> April is the cruellest month, breeding
> Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
> Memory and desire, stirring
> Dull roots with spring rain. (*Poems* 55)

She then mounts a sustained rebuttal to its vision; or at least what she understands that vision to be. She declares:

> Would that my pen like a blue bayonet
> Might skewer all such cats'-meat of defeat;
> No buttoned foil, but killing blade in hand.
> The land and not the waste land celebrate,
> The rich and hopeful land, the solvent land,
> Not some poor desert strewn with nibbled bones,
> A land of death, sterility, and stones. (*Garden* 63)

Alexandra Harris maintains that Sackville West's "poetic weaponry looks vulnerable when compared with Eliot's" (244); we might for instance contrast his direct, declarative syntax with Sackville-West's inversions, restatements and subordinate clauses. Moreover, in conflating the germinations at the start of *The Waste Land* with the "land of death" at its end, she misses that Eliot's true object of horror here is the irrepressible return of life during spring. It is the fact, if not the sentiment, of "The rich and hopeful land" that gives Eliot's own verse momentum—his first three lines all end in enjambing participles that dramatize natural renewal, "breeding," "mixing," "stirring" (*Poems* 55, *Garden* 63), driving the reader forward—whereas Sackville-West's lines circle around themselves as though trying to arrest this life force. In resisting Eliot's vision, she also works against the principle of continuity that informed *The Land*.

Her poetry becomes stronger when it seeks accommodation with Eliot's technique, if not his outlook, as it likewise does when she recognizes the mutual agency of gardener and garden. It is telling, for instance, that her argument is advanced more clearly by a loosening of metrics, as though allowing herself the experimentation she affords to the "Poetry of Today", as well as by adopting some of Eliot's themes and cadences. When for instance she writes "We know that the ultimate vex is the same for all: / The discrepancy / Between the vision and the reality" (63), we might as easily append "Falls the Shadow," to think of Eliot's *The Hollow Men* (*Poems* 83–84), as recall suspect seed catalogues. Similarly, the lines "There is nothing to add but the fact we had the vision, / And this was a grace in itself, the decision / We took between hope and despond" (*Garden* 63) echo the

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"hundred indecisions, / And [...] a hundred visions and revisions" of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (*Poems* 6).

Beyond this, the poems share more ground than Sackville-West's combative tone would suggest, so her earlier claim that "difficult art must difficult skill conceal" (*Garden* 55) might also read as an endorsement of the kind of "difficult art" that Eliot's modernism presented and with which she engaged in her criticism. *The Garden* and *The Waste Land* both note, for instance, that snow does not so much smother as mother the emergence of life come spring—Sackville-West's farmer "knows that underground his plants are safe / Since snow is warm not cold; and thinks with relish / Of little Alpines in accustomed cot" (*Garden* 50), which echoes both the mountainous setting and the "forgetful snow" that "kept us warm" in *The Waste Land* (*Poems* 55).

While Sackville-West was still grappling with *The Waste Land* in composing *The Garden*, Eliot had gone some way since 1922 to accommodate the land and modernity in the form of his *Four Quartets*, a sequence which moves into *The Land*'s rural imaginary and cultivates a kind of garden there. As Harris puts it, "[m]odernism had declared its allegiance to the waste land, not to the herbaceous border, and to confirm this Eliot began *The Waste Land* with a nightmare inversion of gardening [. ...] By the mid-1930s, however, [he] himself was returning to more verdant territory" (227). She writes that Eliot "did so ambivalently at first, tentatively imagining in 'Burnt Norton' [...] a version of Eden [. ...] A great inheritance of garden and nature poetry is gathered and revised in this strange patch of bare concrete" (227).

If *The Land* refers tacitly and *The Garden* explicitly to *The Waste Land*, Eliot may in turn be alluding to Sackville-West in parts of the *Quartets*. Her "fieldsman" who "Trudges with steady and unchanging gait / Being born to clays" (*Land* 4) may find an analogue in the figures of "East Coker" with their "heavy feet in clumsy shoes, / Earth feet, loam feet" (*Poems* 186). Eliot's attention to the seasons also yields such observations as the "Midwinter spring" that opens "Little Gidding" (*Poems* 201), which bears comparison with Sackville-West's "spurious spring" (*Garden* 51) or her description of *Viburnum fragrans* "in roseate surprise / That in December hints at apple-blossom" (42).

In his references to "The time of the seasons" and "the time of milking and the time of harvest" (*Poems* 186), Eliot also gestures toward the seasonal advice to farmer and gardener offered by *The Land* and *The Garden*; but, as in his critical writings, his true labour is directed toward the practice and philosophy of writing. The remark in "Burnt Norton" that "Words strain, / Crack and sometimes break, under the burden" (*Poems* 183–84) could easily be applied to Sackville-West's more effortful passages. Eliot's is also a poem that reminds itself "That was a way of putting it—not very satisfactory: / A periphrastic study in worn-out poetical fashion" (187), exhibiting a lighter touch with its self-reflection than the more laboured, artificial poses Sackville-West is apt to strike.

In the *Four Quartets*, Eliot is conscious, as in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," of what has to change to ensure continuity between past and present. His suggestion in "Little Gidding" that "history is a pattern / Of timeless moments" (*Poems* 208) articulates an understanding of time closer to that implicit to *The Land*, while in proposing that "last

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year's words belong to last year's language" (204), he gainsays Sackville-West's less reflective attempts to plough the same furrow as the georgic of the past.

Nonetheless, Sackville-West can in *The Garden* anticipate "Some poet [...] Breaking untrammelled, from convention free, / [to] Speak the large language that we still deserve" (54), echoing her more sympathetic engagement with "The Formidable Mr. Eliot". Her poem is indeed more successful when engaging directly with his poetics than when hothousing *The Land*'s tendency toward the conservative.

Georgics as Anthropocene Aesthetics

Both Sackville-West and Eliot are responding, in their different modes, to the way modernity encroaches on the imaginative spaces of land and garden. As georgics, *The Land* and especially *The Garden* exemplify "the mixed character" that Fairer sees in the genre (205), using the practical language of agriculture and horticulture to engage with the world rather than in the intellectual endeavour Eliot pursues.

The labour that Sackville-West records, and which she incidentally requires of the reader, can be redeemed provided we don't indulge ourselves in a "pleasing moment" that is "unduly / Prolonged" (*Garden* 76). We need to meet the forces of nature with a proportionate, measured response; which will seem effortful, but as Diogo et al. advise, "[i]f there is no wild nature to which to return, the only option is to move forward and aim for a 'Good Anthropocene'," deploying a "renewed and pragmatic environmentalism" with a view to making nature into a practical, rather than Edenic, garden (5). The failures that the poet recognizes and those she doesn't are alike salutary, because after each she resumes her labour: "Fail if you must [...] But gloriously fail: the dream, the brag, / No prudent prose, but lyric rhetoric" (*Garden* 111) offer a reflection on the poem. They are a joyous and fearless imperative to work and carry on working through failure—as we now find ourselves having to do.

Sackville-West's acknowledgement in *The Garden* of the need to do what Clark advises in response to derangement of scales, to "think on several scales at once" (136), means that her poem remains open to reading the Anthropocene, its complexities and contradictions. Like war in *The Garden*, "the Anthropocene as an 'aesthetic event' [...] sharpens and desensitizes our sensorium all at once. It enables us to see more, feel more, perceive more, and makes us blind and insensitive at the same time" (Iovino 17). As such, it is a site in which the tensions between human and natural agency, labour and leisure, conviction and compromise, failure and success, can be read and re-read—and the more so when those tensions are expressed rather than suppressed.

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"[F]earful Hard Work": The Possibilities and Pitfalls of a Victorian Eco-Georgic

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Abstract

As a form of literature that engages with the lived realities of farming life, the Georgic offers an insight into the close working relationship that is possible between humans and nature, a relationship that may in turn be described as ecological in its concern with adaptation and sustainability. This essay focuses on three examples of a Victorian Georgic literature that highlight both the possibilities and pitfalls of making this association: Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891), which illustrates life at Talbothays Dairy, and later, on a marginal sheep/corn farm on the uplands at Flintcomb-Ash; Richard Jefferies's *Amaryllis at the Fair* (1887), which depicts a struggling Wiltshire smallholding; and Hubert Crackanthorpe's short story, "Anthony Garstin's Courtship" (1896), which focuses on Garstin's life in a hill farming community. All three narratives were set during a period when innovations in "high farming" effected a shift away from self-sufficient and potentially sustainable forms of farming to a modern, mechanized, and systematically exploitative approach to the land; the forms of farming these texts describe are, by contrast, survivals of an earlier period. As these narratives illustrate, more traditional alternatives to high farming nevertheless involved back-breaking and often poorly paid work. Moreover, and while these farms were passed over in the move to high farming, they were still exposed to the vagaries of a now globalised market, and the periodic depressions that were a result: whatever ecological balance these alternative forms of farming embodied, it was threatened by these socio-economic pressures. Nevertheless, these narratives offer an insight into what an eco-Georgic might mean, as a form of writing properly attentive to the challenges of reconciling human and nonhuman needs, and accommodating both within a global, capitalist framework. These works are, furthermore, alert to the difficulty of how best to (re)present those challenges; each marks a shift away from conventional realism and towards new literary modes better able to confront the idealising, pastoral expectations of an urban readership. As such, these works emerge as prototypical forms of a modern, self-reflexive form of (eco-)Georgic mindful of the practical difficulties of sustainable living, and flexible enough to find innovative ways of representing them.

Keywords: Hardy, Jefferies, Crackanthorpe, high farming, sustainable.

Resumen

Como forma de literatura comprometida con las realidades vividas en la agricultura, el geórgico ofrece un entendimiento de la cercana relación de trabajo que es posible entre humanos y naturaleza, una relación que puede describirse posteriormente como ecológica en cuanto a su preocupación por la adaptación y la sostenibilidad. Este ensayo se centra en tres ejemplos de la literatura geórgica victoriana que destacan tanto las posibilidades como las dificultades de llevar a cabo dicha asociación: *Tess, la de los d'Uberville* (1891) de Thomas Hardy, que ilustra la vida en Talbothays Dairy y, después en una granja marginal de ovejas y maíz en las tierras altas en Flintcomb-Ash; *Amaryllis at the Fair* de Richard Jefferies (1887), que describe una parcela de Wiltshire en apuros; y el relato corto de Hubert Crackanthorpe "Anthony Garstin's Courtship" (1896), que habla de la vida de Garstin en una comunidad agricultora en una colina. Las tres narrativas se desarrollan en un periodo en el que las innovaciones por una agricultura más eficiente resultaron en pasar de una agricultura autosuficiente y potencialmente sostenible, a un enfoque hacia la tierra moderno, mecanizado y sistemáticamente explotador. Los métodos de agricultura que describen estos textos son, en contraste, supervivientes de un periodo anterior. Tal y como ilustran estas obras, las alternativas más tradicionales en agricultura conllevaban, sin embargo, un trabajo más agotador y a menudo mal pagado. Además, y mientras que estas granjas adoptaban métodos más modernos, aún

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estaban expuestas a los antojoso de un mercado ya globalizado, y a las depresiones periódicas que de él resultaban: cualquier equilibrio ecológico que estas formas de agricultura encarnaran se veía amenazado por estas presiones socioeconómicas. No obstante, estas narraciones ofrecen un conocimiento de lo que podría significar el eco-geórgico como una forma de escribir adecuadamente atenta a los desafíos de reconciliar las necesidades humanas y las no humanas, y de acomodar ambas dentro de un marco global capitalista. Además, estas obras alertan sobre la dificultad de cómo (re)presentar esos desafíos mejor: cada una marca un cambio al alejarse del realismo convencional hacia nuevos modos literarios mejores a la hora de afrontar las expectativas pastoriles idealizadas de unos lectores urbanos. Como tales, estos textos surgen como formas prototípicas de un tipo de (eco-) geórgico moderno y autorreflexivo que es consciente de las dificultades prácticas de la vida sostenible, y lo suficientemente flexible para encontrar maneras innovadoras de representarlas.

Palabras clave: Hardy, Jefferies, Crackanthorpe, agricultura eficiente, sostenible.

According to David Fairer, the Georgic embodies a "mutual respect between man and nature" (202), rooted in the lived reality of farming life, a respect that points to the possibility of an *eco*-Georgic. Might the Georgic, a literary genre that focuses on agricultural life and labour, help us understand how best "to dwell on the earth in a relation of duty and responsibility" (Garrard 117)? Unlike other literary modes, such as the "time-suspended pastoral" (205), Fairer argues that "[i]t is Georgic that really struggles with nature, recognises diversity, tries to understand how an interdependent system can be *sustained* and properly *exploited* (and knows how the two go together)" (212; emphasis in original). In other words, Georgic literature recognises that human beings must learn from nature to get the best from nature. Cultivation involves care; it requires respect (Fairer 202) and it implies responsibility (205); as such, Fairer claims, the Georgic has "something to contribute" (214) to "any truly committed ecology" (215).

As Fairer also observes, there is a long tradition of Georgic writing, reaching back to Hesiod and Virgil—and in particular, to Virgil's *Georgics*, his "great poem of husbandry and cultivation" (Fairer 202)—and extending into the eighteenth-century verse whose ecocritical re-evaluation is Fairer's focus. In the looser sense of writing about agricultural life, the Georgic tradition was no less a part of nineteenth-century literature, at a time when the Victorians had created a system of "high farming" that was (according to James Winter) both productive *and* sustainable (16): while industry inflicted "horrific injuries" on the land, argues Winter (17), high farming developed a "dynamic balance" with it (18). Indeed, Colin Duncan contends that this form of farming was "perhaps the most ecologically benign among all the highly productive farming systems the world has seen" (54). In turn, high farming was celebrated in poems such as Alfred Lord Tennyson's "Northern Farmer, New Style" (1896), and in the novels of R. S. Surtees, such as *Hillingdon Hall* (1844) (Perry, "Prospect and Retrospect" 157–158), pointing to the possibility that their work might form the basis of a Victorian eco-Georgic.

If we look more closely, however, it is clear that high farming was by no means as sustainable and benign as Winter and Duncan suggest. High farming is usually associated with a so-called "Golden Age" of British agriculture dating from about 1840 to 1880; it marked the transition to a highly-capitalized and intensive form of farming that was, as

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Tom Williamson points out, "high-input, high-output" (139). Whereas the "improved" farming of the previous century was "essentially self-sufficient" (Williamson 139), high farming required access to distant markets for the materials (such as artificial fertilizers) on which it depended (Fussell 87). High farming was, like contemporaneous developments across Europe, "land saving and labour saving" (Van Zanden 230); it used a range of innovations such as a subsoil ploughing and better drainage (Fussell 83–85) to reclaim land and improve productivity, and new and improved forms of tools, such as cultivators, rollers, and harrows (Fussell 91), to reduce its dependency on the rural workforce. Increasingly, it also resorted to mechanisation.

Consequently, high farming required high levels of investment and borrowing (Perry, "Prospect and Retrospect" 156, 160). By extension, it also required a "transition to thoroughgoing capitalism" (157), which "implied a complete reversal of [...] traditional attitudes towards land" (Moore 550). These improvements notwithstanding, however, high farming was still relatively labour-intensive (Perry, "Prospect and Retrospect" 160), and while the situation amongst the labour force was slowly improving, the age of high farming was also one of "undoubted poverty" among farm-workers (165). Moreover, high farming did not stand apart from industry. The arrival of the railway underpinned its success, since it opened up new regional and national markets (Schwartz 231) while allowing the import of products like the new fertilizers. Those fertilizers were themselves dependent on industry and industrial innovations such as the steamship: for example, superphosphate required manufacture, while guano was sourced from South America (Fussell 87). In addition, while earlier, interlocking and self-supporting forms of mixed farming constituted "a closed circuit"—and "this was its whole beauty and symmetry"—high farming marked a shift to an open one, itself akin (argues F. M. L. Thompson) to a "manufacturing industry" (64).

Finally, high farming was part of a "globalisation of agricultural commodities" (Schwartz 234) and a much larger change in the "spatial relations of production and consumption" (236). This would have crucial consequences for British high farmers later in the century. Railways made high farming profitable, but it was the railways that, a few decades later, helped open up the American and Canadian prairies, leading to "dramatic price declines" (Schwartz 229) and engendering a European wide agricultural depression (230). In Britain, that depression was further sharpened by the capital-intensive nature of high farming; as P. J. Perry notes, much of the capital that had been invested in agriculture was written off "before it had paid for itself" ("Financial Foundations" 365).

As this brief discussion underlines, high farming was analogous to, interlinked with, and might even be described as an extension of industrial capitalism and a scientific modernity (Wilkinson 139). While Duncan therefore describes it as "at least one example of modern agriculture successfully embedded in nature" (Duncan 55), high farming in fact marked a decisive shift away "from a less profit oriented outlook" to a much more systematically exploitative and instrumentalized approach to the land (Perry, "Prospect and Retrospect" 157). There was nothing in and of itself ecologically sensitive or environmentally mindful about the process. For example, Winter argues that high farming "tended to preserve many of the hedgerows inherited from the past" (16); in fact, land

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reclamation often involved "grubbing out" hedgerows (Perry "Prospect and Retrospect" 164), substituting plantations for woods (165), and bringing areas of peat bog (untouched for millennia) under cultivation. "The totality of such activities transformed the landscape of rural England" (Perry "Prospect and Retrospect" 165), but not necessarily in a way that signalled an early appreciation of what we now think of as "the environment."

However, high farming did not entirely supplant earlier forms of farming, as writers such as Thomas Hardy, Richard Jefferies, and Hubert Crackanthorpe recorded. The aim of this essay is, therefore, to explore their work and, from it, construct an alternate Victorian Georgic focusing on the forgotten or orphaned approaches to the land they described and on their own problematic relationship to the moment of high farming—and its aftermath. Might their work form the basis of an eco-Georgic? In the first section of this essay, I examine Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891), a novel set in the midst of an agricultural depression, which highlights the "fearful hard work" (289–90) that Victorian women experienced labouring in the fields. In the essay's second section, I turn to Richard Jefferies's *Amaryllis at the Fair* (1887), which is by contrast set during the mid-Victorian "Golden Age." *Amaryllis* focuses on the relatively privileged life of a small farm-owner: here, in the character of Iden, Jefferies's expresses his conviction that "the keystone of English country life [is] a master whose heart is in the land" (*Amateur Poacher* 141). Iden is deeply familiar with and invested in his farm, and profoundly mindful of the human and nonhuman life entangled with it, suggesting an environmentally sustainable way of life at odds with high farming; yet Iden is also in debt, and "wore the raggedest coat ever seen on a respectable back" (*Amaryllis* 4). As Jefferies underlines, even the most attentive relationship to the land is no safeguard against the depredations of a corrosive capitalism.

I conclude the essay with a reading of "Anthony Garstin's Courtship" (1896), a neglected short story by Hubert Crackanthorpe (1870–1896). Here, Crackanthorpe uses naturalist techniques to achieve a singularly brutal and emphatic reading of the Georgic in which he probes the psychological impact of the situation sketched in Jefferies's novel: what happens to a hill-farming family when its very existence is and always has been economically and socially marginal? Even if this form of farming is "sustainable," what is the human cost of its maintenance?

As I argue, the work of these three Victorian writers deepens our understanding of the Georgic—and problematizes its reconstruction as an eco-Georgic—in three main ways. Firstly, it reminds us of the harsh and complex realities of farming life for those who were engaged in it. At the same time, and secondly, it casts the contention that any form of farming is inherently ecological or environmentally-minded into doubt: the very arduousness of farming life underlines the reasons why the farming community was already seeking to industrialize its processes, collapsing the arguably illusory "balance" on which it its sustainability depended. Thirdly, the work of these writers subverts any reading of the Georgic as itself a simplification or idealisation of farming life. To the contrary, their work challenged the expectations of a largely urban readership, a challenge that was embodied in the form that work took; as I argue, it reflects the recognition that the conventional realist mode was too obviously focused on more

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privileged, middle-class characters and too little interested in the complex, constitutive, and perhaps even deterministic entanglements of people and place. One response entailed a shift toward naturalism, a literary mode that deliberately engaged with difficult and controversial subject-matter, and that approach can be felt in both Hardy's depiction of Tess's fate at the hands of "the President of the Immortals" (*Tess* 397), and in Crackanthorpe's fin-de-siècle short story. Another, quite different response lay in the kind of literary impressionism on which Jefferies drew, eschewing "the pedestrian progress" of the conventional plot (Keith 139) for a series of vignettes that give the reader real insight into the continuities of farming life, and Iden's predicament.

As I conclude, the willingness of these authors to depict the drawbacks and difficulties as well as the pleasures and possibilities of a farming life has important consequences for an understanding of the eco-Georgic and its potential, not as the literary idealisation of an existence which is self-evidently sustainable and ecologically benign, but as a literary mode which responds to and wrestles with the problematic process of remaking the non-human world to serve fundamental human needs. Only with that reality in mind can an eco-Georgic can make a meaningful contribution to the question of how best to live upon this earth.

Hardy, Tess, and Hard Labour

The work of Thomas Hardy has always been associated with his depiction of rural Wessex, loosely centred on Dorset, and of lives lived in close connection to the land. Here, I focus on *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, and on three moments when the novel's eponymous central figure is shown in a Georgic context.

The first of these is at "green, sunny, romantic" Talbothays Dairy (*Tess* 286), where, Tess forms a contented and integral part of "Dairyman Crick's household of maids and men" (128). Small but prosperous and apparently self-contained, Talbothays Dairy has been overlooked in the move to high farming, which focused on wheat (for bread) and livestock (for the new urban markets in meat) (Hoppen 14). Nonetheless, Talbothay's prosperity depends in part on the same transport infrastructure that made high farming possible and (at first) prosperous. As Robert Schwartz shows, Dorset was astonishingly well served by railways (239–40)—a function of the intense and often inefficient competition between private companies (236)—and "proximate rail transport favoured [...] dairy farming" (241). Thus, Crick can take advantage of the expanding urban market for milk, as Tess sees for herself when she helps Angel deliver milk to a railway station (186), bewildered by the thought that it will be drunk by Londoners the very next morning (187; see also Martell 77–78, 85–86). Moreover, and since milk production could not be supplanted by foreign competition, Crick's dairy has survived the agricultural depression of the later Victorian period, when the novel is set. Protected by that prosperity, there is a sense of "communal ownership" at Talbothays (Ebbatson 135), and while the work is (as the Georgic insists) often hard, Tess is happy, and happily lost in what she does. As the narrator carefully explains, most milkers "dug their foreheads into the cows"; "a few—mainly the younger ones—rested their heads sideways" (150).

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> This was Tess Durbeyfield's habit, her temple pressing the milcher's flank, her eyes fixed on the far end of the meadow with the gaze of one lost in meditation [....] Nothing in the picture moved but Old Pretty's tail and Tess's pink hands, the latter so gently as to be a rhythmic pulsation only, as if they were obeying a reflex stimulus, like a beating heart. (150)

Here at Talbothays, Tess falls in love with Angel Clare. In this novel, however, Hardy pursues the naturalist impulse he discussed in "Candour in English Fiction" (1890), with its demand that "the position of man and woman in nature [...] be taken up and treated frankly" (133). Angel and Tess marry, but separate almost immediately, a disaster precipitated by the revelation of Tess's earlier, unwanted relationship with Alec (*Tess* 225). Tess feels she cannot return to Talbothays, where she "had never in her recent life been so happy" (129), and eventually finds a winter's work on the exposed chalk uplands around Flintcomb-Ash (281). It is part of Hardy's purpose to emphasise that Wessex is not one, but several "intrinsically different" landforms (102), each of which is worked in a different way; the "stubborn soil" (282) around Flintcomb-Ash is particularly demanding, and fit (Marian insists) only for corn and turnip-like swedes, the latter used as animal fodder. It is, in marked contrast to Talbothays, "a starve-acre place" (284), cut off from the infrastructure that enables Crick's diary to thrive and, in the midst of a depression, survive; for farms such as Flintcomb, the effects of depression were felt much more severely (Schwartz 242–3).

This drives the farm's use of cheap labour, often hired on a short-term basis. "Women's labour," Hardy wrote in his article on "The Dorsetshire Labourer" (1883), "fills the place of a man at half the wages" (186): their cheapness, as the narrator insists in *Tess*, makes their labour profitable (284)—no matter how hard the work. Swede-hacking in "desolate drab" fields (285), Tess and her fellow field-women "slaved in the morning frosts and afternoon rains" (287). "It was so high a situation," observes the narrator, "that the rains had no occasion to fall, but raced along horizontally upon the yelling wind, sticking to them like glass splinters till they were wet through. Tess had not known till now what was really meant by that" (286). As the narrator adds, such work "demands a distinct modicum of stoicism, even of valour" (286). The work is no less arduous when, later in the season, heavy snow forces the women inside to carry on with reed-drawing, whereby reeds are prepared for thatching; it is "fearful hard work—worse than swede-hacking" (289–90).

As it becomes clear, what these tasks have in common is that they are all given to women. As Hardy also points out in "The Dorsetshire Labourer" (1883), women were considered better suited to them because tasks such as these required less strength, more thought, or greater dexterity (186–87). As Tess's experience underlines, the reality is somewhat different. When Tess is unable to finish the reed-drawing work allotted to her, Izz and Marian help out, but first Tess and then Izz break down (*Tess* 293): "Marian alone, thanks to her bottle of liquor and her stoutness of build, stood the strain upon the back and arms without suffering" (293). The work is, in other words, brutally hard, and so hard that Marian is not alone in her recourse to alcohol as a source of temporary solace.

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Tess's unrelenting master at the farm, Groby, has his own reasons for being entirely unsympathetic towards her. The farm's financial difficulties are, nevertheless, very real, which drives its unrelenting exploitation of cheap "female field-labour" (*Tess* 284). Not only were farms like this one passed by in the "Golden Age," and therefore unable to secure investment and hence generate improvement, but they were caught up in the depression that followed, their predicament made still more acute because many of the farmers were themselves tenants, whose income was in part lost to rent. For Tess, Izz, and Marian, argues Roger Ebbatson, the effect is that "exchange-value dominates," and they are reduced to and regarded as assets, valuable only to the extent that they are capable of producing so much labour in a day (135).[1]

Two points follow. The first relates to Fairer's contention that the Georgic embodies a "mutual respect between man and nature" (202), a respect that flows from a hard-working and intimate relationship with the land, with "its reading of the signs, its temporal responsibility" (212). In the working world that Hardy describes, however, that "mutual respect" and sense of "temporal responsibility" has been supplanted by the much simpler imperative to get by and where possible turn a profit: consequently, the narrator notes, "the tenant-farmers [are] the natural enemies of tree, bush, and brake [underbrush]" (*Tess* 281), all of which interfere with the opening out of the landscape into larger fields that might maximise yield. Hardy's description of Flintcomb-Ash as "the remains of a village" (281) further emphasises what this marginal way of life entails; it is a village "uncared for either by itself or by its lord" (285). The second, related point is that a life of hard work struggling with "a recalcitrant, fallen nature" (Fairer 205) sets its own agenda for a farmer like Groby: how best to minimise the labour it entails, and reduce costs. Machinery is the obvious answer, and come March, Tess encounters a daunting manifestation of it in the form of a steam-threshing machine (*Tess* 324–25).

Once again, argued Hardy in "The Dorsetshire Labourer," it was women who were co-opted to work with and feed this kind of machine (187); once again, the reason (notes the narrator in *Tess*) is "probably economical" (327); and once again, it is Tess who finds herself given this most unpleasant of tasks, driven to keep up with "the red tyrant that the women had come to serve" (325). "It was the ceaselessness of the work which tried her so severely," notes the narrator (326); "for Tess there was no respite" (327). As Hardy observed in "The Dorsetshire Labourer," "[n]ot a woman in the county but hates the threshing machine. The dust, the din, the sustained exertion demanded to keep up with the steam tyrant, are distasteful to all women" (187).

For the farmer, however, the advantages were obvious: a long and protracted process could be accomplished more cheaply and speedily. Arguably, the appearance of machinery such as this constituted a decisive moment for Victorian agriculture, when "the logic of renewal [was] overwritten by an industrial logic of expansion" (Martell 73), shattering the ecological balance of earlier, self-contained forms of farming; and here, at least, Flintcomb-Ash has participated in that wider shift towards a more efficient use of

[1] In one respect, at least, the farm might have been fortunate; depression was later deepened where high farming had taken a hold, because high farming meant high rents (Perry, "An Agricultural Journalist" 130).

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the land. But the general point is that the very nature of farming—as a working encounter with a self-willed, non-human reality—predisposes it to seek labour-saving efficiencies. As Timothy Morton argues, the intrusion of the steam-threshing machine into Tess's world (3–5) does not mark some decisive break between ecologically sound and unsound forms of farming, threatening, as Ronald D. Morrison contends, "the ongoing imbrication of humans into their environment" (209); it is simply the continuation of what Morton describes as a twelve-thousand-year old agro-logistical system of exploitation "that seems so real we call it Nature" (5).

This also has important implications for our understanding of the Georgic, and the ecological uses to which it might be put. "[G]eorgic's concern with harnessing nature to human use" (Fairer 204) is also, almost by definition, a concern with finding new, more efficient, and easier ways to exploit the soil. "Georgic's interest in new industrial processes and machinery," Fairer acknowledges, "would seem to render futile any attempt to locate ecological principles in georgic writing" (203–4). Yet this may, in fact, be the value of the Georgic: as the Georgic mode emphasises, humans need to eat, and Georgic literature is important precisely because it does not avoid that reality. Perhaps we should not therefore regard the Georgic as the literary expression of a mode of being that is inherently sustainable, but as an expression of an embodied existence, and everything that it entails, including the inevitable and problematic process of remaking the non-human world without compromising the needs of future generations. New machinery might well make it easier to farm; but it need not mark the end of a relationship predicated on the desire to establish and maintain a dynamic but enduring balance between humans and nature.

Such a relationship depends, nevertheless, on its maintenance over time: it requires lived experience as well as (if not more than) technological expertise. As Hardy's story underlines, there was another threat to an "intimate and kindly relation with the land" ("Dorsetshire Labourer" 181), a threat encapsulated in the perambulations of Tess, Marian, and Izz, all sometime members of Crick's household: the increasingly "nomadic habit of the labourer" ("Dorsetshire Labourer" 181), which was itself a function of economic uncertainty (174). "[I]t must be remembered [wrote Hardy] that melancholy among the rural poor arises primarily from a sense of incertitude and precariousness of their position" ("Dorsetshire Labourer" 174). "In the Wessex of the major novels," observes Jeremy Hooker, "long-settled communities are disintegrating and the protagonists [like Tess and her family] are migrants;" "in Hardy's Wessex, history drives out myth" (Hooker 109). This shift towards a more mobile workforce and more precarious terms of employment eroded the relationship between labourers and the land they worked, as "the character of natural guardian" was sunk "in that of hireling" ("Dorsetshire Labourer" 181): "they have lost touch [wrote Hardy] with their environment" (182).

There were gains, nevertheless, as Hardy was at pains to point out: often, mobility enabled labourers to earn more, while "widening the range of their ideas" ("Dorsetshire Labourer" 181). To Hardy, this opening out of horizons itself constituted a form of progress, an antidote to parochialism and provinciality, and sometimes a "remedy" to "the

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evils of oppression and poverty" (182) that Tess herself experiences so graphically. (It is her family's poverty which, at the novel's outset, drives the young Tess to seek out the affluent Alec, with fateful, and ultimately fatal consequences for both.)

What Hardy's bleak and naturalistic Georgic underlines, therefore, are the human costs of a close relationship to the land, costs that, in a modern and enlightened age ("Dorsetshire Labourer" 181), problematize the idea of "long local participancy" (182), and by extension, the adaptive, reflexive, and above all sustainable relationship to the land that an eco-Georgic implies. But as Hardy's description of Tess's experiences also underlines, the main reason why such a relationship was fragile at best and at worst increasingly untenable lay in the conditions created by capitalism itself. Money is the root of the problem, as Richard Jefferies was also, and perhaps particularly aware. While Jefferies's final novel, *Amaryllis at the Fair*, acknowledges the inevitability of capitalism's intrusion into a settled relationship with the land, however, it also casts that relationship in ways that are themselves decidedly more positive. Here, we can see more fully a working out of the Georgic as a creative engagement with farming life, a working out that embodies a sense of that life as constructive and productive and not solely as arduous or oppressive.

Jefferies, Iden, and the Life of the Small Farm

The work of Richard Jefferies overlaps with Hardy's; the two writers were contemporaries, met briefly, and were similarly concerned with labouring life (Keith 140–41). Although scholarly interest in Jefferies has tended to focus on his nature writing, ecocritical attention is now being paid to other aspects of his journalism, such as his writings about agricultural labour and rural life. As Morrison reminds us, the word "ecology" (first coined in 1866) derives its meaning from the Greek terms for the study of the home or household, and Jefferies's non-fiction also explores the fate of the farming homestead (205) against the broader questions of British agriculture's sustainability (217). Yet Jefferies' novels remain more or less neglected, although they too offer an important insight into the nature of Victorian farming, the question of its sustainability, and of (eco-)Georgic's relationship to it; they too embody a sense of "ecology as the study of the homestead" (Morrison 205), and in so doing, they anticipate a modern, eco-Georgic (216). Here, I explore *Amaryllis at the Fair*, the culmination of Jefferies's attempts to reconcile "rural reality and literary art" (Keith 138).

Jefferies's solution to that representational challenge is suggested by Amaryllis' own name, which Jefferies took from Virgil's *Eclogues*. In the *Eclogues*, Virgil extends and deepens the pastoral, bucolic poetry of his Greek predecessor Theocritus by introducing a new note of transformation, upheaval, and even "catastrophic loss" to the depiction of rural life (Davis ix). In this way, the *Eclogues* give witness to both continuity and change, vividly realised through a series of ten scenes or vignettes. So, in *Amaryllis*, Jefferies combines two narrative threads, and sets them against a background of rural and seasonal continuity. On the one hand, there is the story of Amaryllis herself, Virgil's shepherdess in the *Eclogues*, who is shown growing into womanhood and falling in love. On the other,

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there is the story of Iden, the most recent (and perhaps the last) in a long line of small farmers at the fictional Coombe Oak, a figure who, beset by debt, cannot (or will not) accommodate the changes that modern society demands of him. Both stories take their place within a narrative structure that constantly emphasises the rituals and routines of farming life, its pleasures, its difficulties, its challenges, captured through scenes and in conversations that echo Virgil's ten eclogues.

Amaryllis is set during the time of Jefferies's own childhood—that "Golden Age" of relative agricultural prosperity—and closely modelled on his own experience growing up on a "struggling smallholding" (Williams 193) at Coate Farm in Wiltshire, a dairy farm where his father owned the freehold (Drew 182). For Jefferies's family, these were lean years. Evolving farming practices favoured larger farms, not family owned small ones (Williamson 17); Coate Farm stretched to "about forty acres, all of it grass, feeding about eight cows" (Thomas 35), and by the time Jefferies wrote his novel, his father had been forced to sell up the land his family had worked for generations (Keith 16–17). (Ironically, and as we have seen in the case of Hardy's depiction of Talbothays, dairy farmers fared comparatively well during the later depression; see also Perry "An Agricultural Journalist" 128.) As the novel suggests, small farmers such as Iden were being supplanted by proprietors without a living interest in the land, figures who were better suited to business, and better able to make the land pay. Iden, by contrast, is "hopelessly impractical" (Keith 140) in matters of finance—and "[t]here are no wolves like those debt sends against a house" (*Amaryllis* 156).

Work Iden therefore must; but work is in the nature of the Georgic. As Fairer argues, the Georgic reflects both the dynamism and the "stubborn materiality" (206) of the "ever-changing" world (209), and the ceaseless labour demanded by "a struggle with the entropic principle" (204). "Hard labour conquered all," Virgil insists in the *Georgics*, "and poverty's oppression in harsh times" (Book I, ll. 145–46). "Always at work," thinks Amaryllis as she watches Iden, "and he could talk so cleverly, too, and knew everything" (*Amaryllis* 10). Like the citizen-farmer in the *Georgics*, Iden embodies "[i]ngenuity, effort, vigilance, experience, respect, and above all *care* in husbandry (Virgil's *curas*)" (Fairer 205). "In truth Iden built for all time, and not for the little circumstance of the hour" (*Amaryllis* 257). Thus, when he has new gate made, it is "meant to last for years, rain and shine, to endure any amount of usage" (257). This "was at once his strength and his folly," the narrator declares; "he made too much of little things" (257). Yet this attentiveness is very much the point. Within the "non-hierarchical, practical, functioning system" that the Georgic valorises, "attention is paid, sometimes digressively, to what seems trivial or inconsequential" (Fairer 205). Iden is himself minutely attentive to the life around him. He is in turn rewarded by the plenitude that (as Virgil put it in the *Georgics*) the "Earth unprompted, supreme in justice, pours out" (Book II, l. 459). "Flowers, and trees, and grass, seemed to spring up wherever Iden set down his foot: fruit and flowers fell from the air down upon him" (*Amaryllis* 190). "It was his genius to make things grow—like sunshine and shower; a sort of Pan, a half-god of leaves and boughs, and reeds and streams, a sort of Nature in human shape, moving about and sowing Plenty and Beauty" (190). So "[i]n summer time," notes the narrator, the farmstead "was a glory to see: a place

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for a poet, a spot for a painter, loved and resorted to by every bird of the air. Of a bare old farmhouse he had made a beautiful home" (163). It is, as Jefferies elsewhere wrote, the "epitome of human economy" ("Future of Farming" 687). "And all this," the narrator later adds, "had dropped out of the pocket of Iden's ragged old coat" (*Amaryllis* 201).

Iden is, observed Edward Thomas, "a part of the creative power of the world, at one with earth and wind and sea" (277), a figure who embodies the reciprocal respect which Virgil celebrates in Book II of the *Georgics* and Fairer identifies as a defining feature of the form: Iden has made his peace with a stubborn natural world (Fairer 205), and accustomed himself to the struggle its cultivation entails; he has learnt how best to realise "a rich livelihood from her soil" (Virgil, *Georgics* Book II, l. 460); and he does so in a way that respects and sustains the equally rich diversity of nonhuman life that congregates at Coombe Oak. But as the frustrated Amaryllis recognises, the very act of cultivating the soil with such comprehensive care fatally compromises the family's ability to make the farm pay. Even as Iden carries on a tradition that extends ten generations back into the past, an imperious world is demanding that he make modern, commercial sense of it. As Jefferies wrote in "The Future of Farming," farms were "no longer entirely self-supporting"; it was necessary to "make a 'profit'"; "to keep account books, a thing never done before" (688). "[T]he farm," he wrote, "must become a business" ("Future of Farming" 688). For Iden, the problem is compounded by the small scale of his holding: "only those who have lived in the country," notes the narrator, "could fully comprehend the hopelessness of working a small farm" (*Amaryllis* 177). Perhaps the future did indeed lie in large estates that were better able to weather economic variations and more effectively exploit the land, as Jefferies elsewhere conceded (Keith 27, 137). In this sense, *Amaryllis at the Fair* is a frank acknowledgement that a way of life such as Iden's is doomed.

Here, readers might also have detected a parallel with Virgil's *Georgics*, with its celebration of the smallholder, bulwark of the republic, a figure who was nevertheless disappearing from the Roman landscape as great estates (frequently worked by slaves) took over. Yet Jefferies himself is not prepared to allow his own, modern world its triumph over Iden. *Amaryllis at the Fair* concludes with an "Interlude in Heaven" (*Amaryllis* 260). Amaryllis is allowed to love (no matter how hopelessly) the infirm Amadis, and Iden is allowed to hold on to his farm for a little longer, in spite of "the procession of creditors" (169) gathering at his door. Behind Jefferies's decision to defer the apparently inevitable outcomes of his two narrative threads lies a refusal to allow a cash-nexus to be substituted for the intrinsic value of the relationships (both human and non-human) that criss-cross the farm.

As Fairer emphasises, "Georgic never underplays" the difficulties of the farming life, the responsibilities it imposes, or the qualities it demands of those who undertake it (205). In the same way that the Georgic emphasises the challenges of farming itself, so an eco-Georgic necessarily highlights the difficulties (perhaps even the impossibility) of situating and sustaining such a way of life in a modern, industrialised world, driven by capitalist economies. Thus, and while Jefferies's depiction of Iden and his working life corresponds to the kind of Georgic that Fairer describes, it also illustrates the impossibility of ever separating out that life from the capitalist forces with which it is

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caught up. "Anthony Garstin's Courtship" takes up these themes, but transposes them from Jefferies's Wiltshire to the Cumberland (today Cumbria) of Crackanthorpe's own family home, where the difficulties of making a farm pay and the true costs of such an existence are still more acute.

Crackanthorpe, Garstin, and (Human) Nature

Collected posthumously in Crackanthorpe's *Last Studies* (1897), "Anthony Garstin's Courtship" shares a focus on the lived realities of farming life with *Tess* and *Amaryllis*; like *Tess*, it embodies "a realist-naturalist literature of 'disagreeable details'" (Greenslade 8); like *Amaryllis*, it brings to bear a proto-modernist literary impressionism; more so than either, it offers a singularly acute understanding of (human) nature. These features of the story come together in a compelling dissection of a hill-farmer's unlikely and ultimately self-deceiving pursuit of love. However, the story is equally important for its insistence on the difficulties of raising sheep in a remote fell, the customs and beliefs of those who live there, and their own, inextricable entanglement in a wider network of socio-economic relations: hill-farming may have been passed by in the race to develop high farming, but it is nevertheless a part of an increasingly networked, globalised system of agriculture. Moreover, there is nothing necessarily environmentally mindful about this form of farming, which tends to denude hillsides, and produce a kind of pastoral monoculture; memorably, one British environmentalist has described the result as "sheepwrecked" (Monbiot 158).

As Crackenthorpe's story underlines, hill-farming is physically demanding work, made still harder by the upland environment, but that work must nevertheless be made to pay; yet "of late years the price of stock had been steadily falling; and the hay harvests had drifted from bad to worse" (Crackanthorpe 280–81). The story opens with a description of Garstin gathering sheep on the fell-top, a prose-poem that captures his lonely isolation in the midst of a "great, grey, desolate [and] treeless country" (272); the only other "sign of life" is a "streak of white smoke from a toiling train [...] creeping silently across the distance" (272), ominous symbol of a modern world and its own intrusive demands. Like the land itself, Garstin is "spare and angular" (272), and weathered by long days and nights on the hilltops (272). His widowed mother, owner of the farm, is no less "hard and taciturn" (272): "[h]er face was gaunt and sallow; deep wrinkles accentuated the hardness of her features" (273).

Mother and son are, the narrative explains, the most recent representatives of a long line of hill-farmers: "generation after generation had tramped the grey stretch of upland" (279–80), "a race of few words, 'keeping themselves to themselves,' as the phrase goes; beholden to no man, filled with a dogged, churlish pride" (280). Pride is in their nature: it is that pride which has sustained Garstin through adversity, including the loss of his own father, who "died one night upon the fell-top, he and his shepherd, engulfed in the great snowstorm of 1849" (280). It is pride that sustained his mother, who, when her brother mishandled the farm's finances, took over its management, and "cleared off every penny" of debt "within six weeks" (280). It is pride which, in turn, will be the architect of

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their own downfall. Nearing middle-age, Garstin contrives a marriage to the young and beautiful Rosa Blencarn, who, pregnant out of wedlock by a man she now detests, is forced to accept Garstin's proposal. "[G]rimly exultant" at his success in securing Rosa's hand, and aglow with "stolid pride" (289), the deluded Garstin pictures a future in which he will spoil his young wife with luxuries and hill-farming itself will flourish (292). He then perjures himself before his mother (293–94), who in "a bitterly ironic denouement" (Ettorre 53), tells him bluntly that, "from this day forward, [...] ye're na son o' mine" (Crackanthorpe 294), and disinherits him.

Garstin's mother is convinced that God Himself—the same God whose hand Garstin sees at work in helping him contrive his marriage—will punish him for what he has done. She assumes, nonetheless, that Rosa will be grateful for the marriage, and content with it. Like her son, she does not see the more likely outcome: that the marriage will never be a success. "[T]oughened by long habit of a bleak, unruly climate" (283), Garstin seems so perfectly suited to the lived realities of hill-farming that it is almost as if he has evolved with it. But the reality is also that this same solitary and unrelenting way of life makes him a poor choice for Rosa, just as her own relatively privileged, outgoing, and sociable upbringing in the city has made her supremely ill-suited to be the wife of a hill-farmer; "the marriage between Anthony and Rosa is," Ettorre observes, "simply a bargain, a convenient choice in the face of the censorious attitudes and narrow horizons of a rural community" (54).

As Crackanthorpe's story highlights, a life of lived intimacy with the land can come at a cost, a cost which is still more apparent if we compare the Garstins to Iden, who combines more educated and enlightened attitudes with his own intimate understanding of the land and its workings. That difference is signalled by speech itself: Garstin and his mother share a dialect form of speech, but seem trapped within it. Iden can and does shift in and out of dialect (*Amaryllis* 7)—as does Tess (*Tess* 21)—signifying that opening out of horizons to which Hardy referred in "The Dorsetshire Labourer." The Garstins are, by contrast, trapped within the horizon imposed on them by their long imbrication in the valley, a horizon emphatically embodied in the fell-side that, like "a monstrous, mysterious curtain" (Crackanthorpe 273), overshadows the farm; in this "stolidly immobile" community (277), life carries on as it has always done.

Crackanthorpe's grimly persuasive short story underlines the problem to which Greg Garrard draws attention in his own discussion of the Georgic: that a stultifying, even inescapable "social conservatism" (Garrard 122) may be the result of the kind of intimate involvement between people and place that the Georgic describes. Yet even the remotest communities cannot abstract themselves from the socio-economic shifts to which Rosa's education and the distant glimpse of a steam train both testify. Even as this little community turns inward, scorning returning natives like Rosa for their "airs an' graces" (Crackanthorpe 281), it remains connected to the wider world. Garstin may believe that "the succession of bad seasons, the slow ruination of the farmers throughout the country, were but punishment meted out [by God] for the accumulated wickedness of the world" (285), but the workings of the market are as much a factor here as they are in *Amaryllis*

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and in *Tess*. In the worlds of all three stories, "a capitalist rural order" is in place, and good times and bad are alike "filtered through this dominant system" (Williams 188).

Conclusion: Towards a Victorian Eco-Georgic

Georgic literature is concerned with "adaptation and co-ordination," Fairer argues (205); it recognises that "natural needs and human ones are interdependent" (210); and it insists that "human beings can 'learn from' nature in the very act of 'imposing on' it" (208). As such, he maintains, the Georgic encodes an inherently ecological awareness: "the underlying georgic premise that we are living in nature's context, not vice versa," embodies an "ecological commitment" (Fairer 209), that points to the practical possibility of creating a sustainable existence.

But as Fairer also acknowledges, the Georgic's concern with the lived particularity of daily life complicates any tendency to idealise the life it describes: it makes the Georgic self-aware and self-critical, minded to find new ways to express itself that better record or reflect the problematic realities of dwelling. "It is this complexity that georgic negotiates" (Fairer 209). This is no less true of the instances of Victorian Georgic discussed in this essay. Each reflects the diversity of the Victorian farming scene, and the survival of older, alternative forms of farming into the era of high farming (Perry "Prospect and Retrospect" 159). Yet even these survivals were affected by the developments that made high farming possible, not least the development of transport infrastructure that opened up British agriculture more fully to a global market. Sometimes, those developments were fortuitous; Talbothays Dairy benefits from the railways; the farm at Flintcomb-Ash can at least call on a steam-threshing machine to speed up an otherwise protracted process. Often, however, the advent of high farming created new difficulties, even for those farms which did not participate directly in the move toward it. In the highly capitalised climate created by high farming, Combe Oak is too small to survive, even as a dairy, and even in a "Golden Age" of agricultural prosperity; farming at Flintcomb-Ash has simply been made more marginal both because it is less profitable (sheep/corn rather than wheat/ cattle) and geographically distinct from the infrastructure that might have opened it to new markets and made it attractive to investors; Garstin's hill farm is even more isolated and marginal, yet itself exposed to fluctuations in a market now increasingly driven by foreign competition. For these farms, survivals of an earlier era, competition becomes the common problem, as British agriculture came under pressure from "the agricultures of other self-consciously modern (or modernizing) societies" that were (still) more tractable for capitalism (Duncan 55).

As these narratives also underline, the alternatives to high farming were not necessarily more ecologically mindful. On the credit side, we might point to the pastoral plenitude of Talbothays, or Iden's proto-ecological investment in a deep future that meets human and nonhuman needs; on the debit side, Flintcomb-Ash is shaped by the need to secure some kind of profit at any cost to hedgerow or woodland, while Garstin's sheep have stripped the valley and ecologically impoverished the uplands. Furthermore, and whether sustainable or otherwise, each of these forms of farming entails a life of

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dauntingly hard work. "Look at the arm of a woman labouring in the field," wrote Jefferies in "One of the New Voters"; "it tells of continual strain" (244). The reality of rural life, he added, "is labour" ("One of the New Voters" 244), and this too was a reason why an increasingly mobile labour-force abandoned a rural life entirely, and why, in turn, farmers everywhere sought out new forms of innovation and mechanisation to save on labour.

As these fictional depictions of farming life underline, Victorian writers were mindful of the myriad difficulties that beset the farming community of their time, as well as the more positive possibilities that a farming life might involve. As their work highlights, farming communities were often exploitative, and themselves exploited by larger, capitalist forces that prioritized "economic expansion over ecological renewal" (Martell 87); in their engagement with what Garrard calls "the uneven terrain of real work" (145), these narratives challenge any idealised notion that a life of (hard) labour in the fields is necessarily desirable or enlightening, or that contemporary "English agronomic customs" (Duncan 54) were of themselves "ecological" (in the sense of sustainable). Furthermore, these narratives constitute a dynamic and evolving literary response to the representational challenge of their subject matter: all three writers enact a shift in literary mode away from realism as they seek a more effective means of capturing the difficult realities of an agricultural existence, in turn challenging and taxing their readers. But as such, their work also points to the possibility—and the possible benefits—of an eco-Georgic, as a mode of thinking and writing whose concern with the specific, actual, and particular operates as a productive, deconstructive challenge to unhelpful idealisations and abstractions. As Fairer himself contends, the Georgic's interest in compromise and contingency "hinders it from the big vision, the saving answer" (209); with this in mind, it is possible to glimpse more positive possibilities at work within these texts, texts that with their hard-headed reading of rural life point to a more effective and responsible realisation of what ecological awareness must mean.

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Georgic Echoes in *The Long Dry* and *The Dig* by Cynan Jones

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Abstract

From his debut novel, *The Long Dry* (2006), to his most recent, *Stillicide* (2019), the non-human has played a prominent role in Cynan Jones' fiction. Of Jones' texts, *The Long Dry* and *The Dig* (2014) specifically engage with cultivation, farming, and raising livestock in a Welsh rustic setting. Both novels present a rural world that resists idealised forms of representing nature as some kind of idyll, thus calling into question the separation between human and non-human. Starting from this premise, my working hypothesis is that the relationship between human and non-human constitutes a relevant trope in Jones' fiction since they are both caught in the very same moment of crisis, change and transformation. To this end, I would like to read *The Long Dry* and *The Dig* through Timothy Morton's idea of the mesh that connects human to non-human. Firstly, I will discuss the generic features of the novels, such as shifting focalisation and temporal disorientation which can be said to favour an encounter between storytelling and material reality. Secondly, I will address Jones' interest in the erosion of the border between human and non-human, illustrating the affective bonds and sensory ties that connect both dimensions. Taken together, Jones' novels entail a deep eco-georgic stance in that rural life is recast in terms of a thematic and material space that brings together human and non-human, conflating change and crisis, failure and success.

Keywords: Cynan Jones, eco-georgic, narrative form, human, non-human.

Resumen

Desde su primera novela, *The Long Dry* (2006), hasta su más reciente, *Stillicide* (2019), lo no humano ha jugado un papel prominente en la ficción de Cynan Jones. De entre todos los textos de Jones, *The Long Dry* y *The Dig* (2014) versan específicamente sobre el cultivo, la agricultura y la cría de ganado en un entorno rústico galés. Ambas novelas presentan un mundo rural que se resiste a las formas idealizadas de representación de la naturaleza como algo idílico, poniendo en tela de juicio la separación entre lo humano y lo no humano. Partiendo de esta premisa, mi hipótesis de trabajo es que la relación entre lo humano y lo no humano constituye un tropo relevante en la ficción de Jones, ya que ambos están atrapados en el mismo momento de crisis, cambio y transformación. Con este propósito, me propongo leer *The Long Dry* y *The Dig* a partir de la idea de Timothy Morton de la malla ("the mesh") que conecta lo humano con lo no humano. En primer lugar, analizaré rasgos genéricos de las novelas tales como el cambio de focalización y la desorientación temporal, que podría decirse que favorecen el encuentro entre ficción narrativa y realidad material. En segundo lugar, abordaré el interés de Jones por erosionar las fronteras entre lo humano y lo no-humano, ilustrando los vínculos afectivos y sensoriales que conectan ambas dimensiones. Consideradas en su conjunto, las novelas de Jones conllevan una profunda postura eco-geórgica en el sentido de que remodelan la vida rural como un espacio que aúna lo humano y lo no-humano, amalgamando cambio y crisis, éxito y fracaso.

Palabras clave: Cynan Jones, eco-geórgico, forma narrativa, humano, no-humano.

In an interview with *Wales Art Review* (2017), Welsh author Cynan Jones, born and raised in Aberaeron (Ceredigion, West Wales), describes his body of work as concerned with the "tangible relationships" (Lavin) between human and non-human:

> I've been near the sea, this sea, the majority of my life. I wanted to write a story which had none of the things my other books call heavily on. Certain sense of place; integration into that place; tangible relationships. To cast a person out onto the water seemed the right way to tell a story like that. My own experiences over the years informed the physical action of the novel. The landscape delivered the possibility of the story. (Lavin)

While the above quoted passage specifically refers to Jones' fourth novel, *Cove* (2016), the non-human is of paramount importance in his entire *oeuvre*. In the very same interview, Jones says of his writing that he needs "to understand the place, and what is possible there, in order to draw the story from it" (Lavin). Jones' attention to the human/non-human dynamic interaction discloses the inextricable nature of the bond between material earth and inhabited world. In Jones' works, readers can find that hope and failure, hard work and natural hazards coexist, reminding us of the entanglements with the more-than-human world. Take, for instance, Jones' latest novel, *Stillicide* (2019). With its "dense web of connections between characters and stories" (Allan), *Stillicide* engages with the disastrous impact of climate change on water resources in a near future, as an uncanny feeling of unhomeliness connects human to non-human. While *Stillicide* grapples with the sense of precariousness that equally impinges on humans, insects, and natural resources in a metropolitan area, *The Long Dry* (2006) and *The Dig* (2014) specifically get to grips with cultivation, farming and raising livestock (cows, pigs and lambs) in a Welsh rustic setting. Both novels present a rural and georgic world where everything has to be worked for, making readers aware that the countryside, with its lambs, ewes, cows, calves, pigs, badgers, bogs, flowers and ponds, is as central as humans. To some extent, Jones can be said to fit within an English rural tradition that reaches back to Thomas Hardy, among others; a literary tradition that insists on the "unconventional use of the pastoral codes" (Head 12). As Dominic Head explains, Hardy's modernity arises from his exploration of "the connection between different periods of agricultural decline, rather than celebrating an earlier rural heyday" (12). Likewise, Jones represents woes and difficulties of country life, since "human and animal tragedy provides a foundation" (Bernhard) for his stories. While the reference here is to *The Dig* and to the fact that "there is 'no bucolic pastoral'" (Bernhard), this lack of idealisation is typical of Jones' works in which joys and woes are closely intertwined.

In Jones' novels, the mutual imbrication between human and non-human, care and decay, technical skills and disruptive forces forms the basis for the argument in my paper. *The Long Dry* and *The Dig* bring to the fore a shared condition of change and transformation in an echo of Virgil's *Georgics.* As William Batstone contends, the debate on the nature of Virgil's poem has yielded "a diversity of compelling interpretations" (Batstone 125). On the one hand, scholars, like L.P. Wilkinson, see the *Georgics* as a didactic treatise on agriculture and technical skills, where country life is depicted as "a way of life" (Wilkinson 12) with its merits and attractions. On the other, critics have called special attention to the "tragic and pessimistic aspects" (Batstone 143) of the poem.

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Michael Putnam, for instance, understands the *Georgics* not as essentially didactic but as a gloomy meditation on self-fulfilment where "nature's negative indifference to man's situation can only be partially altered by man who, with continuous effort and the constant imposition of order on her chaos, can expand her rhythms to embrace growth as well as decay" (Putnam 7). For Batstone, however, "the gathering of the discrepancies and harmonies of our presence in the world into word and thought" (Batstone 128) reflects the true strength of the *Georgics*. In this respect, Jones' narratives express the same georgic emphasis on skills, care and responsibility. To a certain extent, *The Long Dry* and *The Dig* call up Virgil's description of physical and intellectual labour in Book I (ll. 145-46) of the *Georgics*, "[r]elentless work conquered / all difficulties—work and urgent need when times were hard" (8). This quote illustrates, as Batstone points out, that *labor* ("work") in Virgil can entail failure or success in that it conveys a divergent and discordant meaning, "simultaneously victory and defeat, effort and the need for effort, artifice and the failure of artifice" (Batstone 137). These lines can then be read as an example of the polyphonic universe of the poem, thereby calling into question the divide between human and non-human, failure and success. In their ability to intermingle human with non-human, joys with woes, Jones' works can be approached from a georgic perspective that reminds readers of who they are and of their enmeshment with the world around, pointing to what Timothy Morton calls "the mesh", a total interconnectedness without absolute centres, where "everything is interconnected, there is no definite background and therefore no definite foreground" (*The Ecological Thought* 28). In "the mesh," care and lingering sense of failure, rootedness and alienation coexist.

Similarly, Jones' novels challenge binary oppositions, reminding us of the ever-changing modes of the human/non-human interaction. *The Long Dry* opens with the description of a farm where a pregnant cow is missing, while secrets and silences impinge on the lives of the characters, disclosing a feeling of aching melancholy. In Jones' debut novel, Gareth, a farmer who has inherited an almost unproductive farm in the Welsh countryside, has to cope with a series of financial and personal problems affecting his own family. With a temporal dislocation, straddling the borders of past, present and future, *The Long Dry* portrays the pervading sense of loss that affects human and non-human alike. In the same lyrical vein, *The Dig* combines two narrative strands: the grieving lamentation of a recently-widowed Welsh farmer, Daniel, with the illegal activity of an unnamed badger-baiter, known as "big man." In this novel, mournful and elegiac tones are intertwined with images of brutality, such as in the birth of malformed lambs or in the scenes where dogs and badgers savagely fight. Moreover, Jones' novels emphasise that everything has the potential for growth but is also subject to decay without practical application and care. The attention to details and the potential exhaustion of natural resources is possibly indebted to Virgil. As Janet Lembke argues in the "Introduction" to her translation of the *Georgics*, Virgil's poem suggests that despite hard work, "the world in which we live has never been made perfect" (xiii). This is what makes Virgil's *Georgics*, Lembke explains, a "poem for our time" (xiii) as it strikes to find a balance between the anxieties that pervade societies and the hope that a new birth might be possible.

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As alluded to before, farming and raising livestock are crucial themes in *The Long Dry* and *The Dig*. Consistent with the spirit of Virgil's *Georgics*, Jones' vivid picture of the hard conditions of farming life provides a way to examine the relationship between writing and material reality, human and non-human. The rural world we find in Jones' works is not an idyll, a naïf product of the Golden Age. It instead evinces what Jakob C. Heller calls a "proto-ecological perspective" (250) on the imbrication between human and non-human because of its attention to details that makes the idyll "itself produced" (250). As David Fairer argues, the georgic mode does not lay emphasis on the healing and contemplative effects of nature but on "the minuter readjustments and qualifications that allow life to continue" (207). Unlike the pastoral, a trope which typically entails "the perspective of the aesthetic tourist" (Garrard 108), a kind of retreat that "obscures the realities of labour and hardship" (33), the georgic presents a world demanding pressure and physical toil. Whereas it is true, as Terry Gifford contends, that the pastoral tradition can be described as "a roller coaster ride" (159) with all its variants, the georgic unveils the quotidian and ordinary connections between intellectual and physical efforts. The georgic mode, Laura Sayre claims, combines "emotion and technical detail, hope and despair, drudgery and delight, feeling and intellect, observation and lore—and that therein lies its appeal" (194).

Starting from this premise, in this article I want to read *The Long Dry* and *The Dig* through Morton's idea of the "mesh." Firstly, I will discuss the generic features of the novels, such as shifting focalisation and temporal disorientation which can be said to favour an encounter between storytelling and material reality. Secondly, I will address Jones' interest in the erosion of the border between human and non-human, illustrating the affective bonds and sensory ties that connect both dimensions. Taken together, Jones' novels entail a deep eco-georgic stance in that rural life is recast in terms of a thematic and material space that brings together human and non-human, conflating change and crisis, failure and success.

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Generic Features

In the aforementioned interview with *Wales Art Review*, Jones points to the elemental nature of his prose as an indication of how his style is "instinctual, and […] determined by the narrative, the story. It's about the surface, the meniscus – that's the language" (Lavin). As Jones' words suggest, his narrative technique is aimed at conveying the free flow of human thoughts but also the tangible experiences of the physical world as if "seeing it for real" (Lavin). So, I want to reflect here on the generic features of *The Long Dry* and *The Dig* in which a set of negotiations between human and non-human arise in terms of care, responsibility and alterity. This enmeshment discloses changes, gaps and transformations that highlight the sense of "strange strangeness" (*The Ecological Thought* 15) in the encounter between human and non-human. Morton's ecological stance admits the notion of "the mesh" as "a sprawling network of interconnection without center or edge" (*Dark Ecology* 81) where human centrality is questioned. Morton imagines that the interconnectedness between human and non-human is both alien and intimate, a paradox

that emerges when we realize that we can never be acquainted with another entity completely. This meets up with the idea of georgic dwelling as a "long-term imbrication of humans in a landscape of memory, ancestry and death, of ritual, life and work" (Garrard 108). Greg Garrard, referencing Martin Heidegger as one aspect of georgic, sees georgic dwelling as a set of rural and agricultural practices that result in a figurative "marriage of man and place, culture and nature" (113). However, in *The Ecological Thought*, Morton criticises the Heideggerian idea of dwelling, specifically the German philosopher's human-centred understanding of *Dasein* as "being-in-the world" (*Being and Time* 32). According to Morton, the encounter between human and non-human displaces human centrality, generating a "vast mesh of interconnection" (*The Ecological Thought* 38). In narrating this enmeshment, Jones' novels show how georgic dwelling is not fixed. *The Long Dry* and *The Dig* orient our understanding in the direction of multiplicity. To a certain extent, Jones' fiction recuperates the "simultaneous sense of continuity, discontinuity and interdependence" (Batstone 129) that informs the georgic mode in Virgil. Specifically, in *The Long Dry* and *The Dig* varying focalisation and temporal shifts contribute to a generic form characterised by dialogism and interaction, that metaphorically opens up to others' life forms. Moreover, the paragraphs of the novels are separated by white spacing that makes for shifting focalisation and temporal ellipses, while dialogues, as usual in Jones' fiction, are bereft of speech marks to let thoughts flow freely.

The Long Dry can be read as a polyphonic narrative where human voices, non-human traces and the memoirs of Gareth's ancestors are inextricably interconnected. Winner of the Betty Trask Award, *The Long Dry* hinges around a farm located somewhere in Wales, "on a low slope a few miles inland from the sea" (3), where Gareth lives with his wife Kate, their children, Dylan and Emmy, and their ailing dog Curly. Gareth has inherited the farm from his father, who left his job as a bank clerk in the aftermath of World War II. This information is imparted to readers fragmentarily through Gareth's reading of his father's memories. Gareth turns to his father's diary to find consolation, reading the manuscript at night "to help himself sleep. To bring some sound into the stillness" (27). The metafictional incorporation of the manuscript adds a further narrative layer to the polyphonic organisation of the novel. *The Long Dry* comprises ten chapters, with the omniscient narrative voice darting in and out of the various points of view. Each chapter is structured in short and fragmented sections and the titles bear the names of characters, animals, places or objects, such as "the Vegetable Patch" (13-14), "the Ducks" (19-28), "Emmy" (37), "the Mole" (39-41), or "the Tractor Wheel" (49-52). In readers, this gives rise to a multifaceted and fractured vision: through impersonalisation and personification, both human and non-human are hence endowed with a narrative voice. Similarly, *The Dig* orchestrates smells and sounds of georgic life and the result is an intrinsic dialogism reflected, for instance, in the ways the tale is structured. The five sections of the novel are divided into short chapters where Daniel's viewpoint is juxtaposed to the perspective of the "big man." More importantly, animals, places and objects, "The Horse" (7-50), "The Dig" (53-76), "The Cloth" (79-100), "The Sea" (103-28) and "The Shard" (131-54) are employed as tiles of the sections and are thus placed in an agential position. The narrative, then, stems from these intra-actions that allow human

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and non-human bodies and meanings to converge. This dialogic structure is evocative of the vibrant agency of material things. It reminds us, as Jane Bennett contends, that "a source of action […] can be either human or nonhuman" (viii). Matter, Karen Barad argues, is "a dynamic intra-active becoming that never sits still" (170). This implies that there is no privileged position from which knowledge is produced and that we can find agency in different forms, such as in things and animals. From a material ecocritical perspective, such an object-oriented reformulation of agency produces knowledge in the very terms of the encounter between human and non-human, thus in their coming together as in the mesh. New materialism recognises the porosity of things; that objects and sentient beings have a more intimate entanglement than might be expected. Environmental writing should be, as Morton argues, "a way of registering the feeling of being surrounded by others, or more abstractly, by an otherness, something that is not the self" (*Dark Ecology* 17). Thus, object-oriented ontology entails that meaning and matter are connected and this finds in Jones' use of places, animals and objects as titles of the chapters a direct and linguistic attention to the non-human.

Contrasts emerge in *The Long Dry* through the juxtaposition of fertility and sterility at the same time. On the one hand, the calving season is a symbol of birth. And yet, the landscape around Gareth's farm discloses areas of symbolic darkness. I am thinking in particular of the bogs where the intertwining of earth and water work as a vehicle for strange encounters that destabilise reality. In *The Long Dry*, the bog is described as an unsettling place of green weeds and trees whose branches "lifted up like a man standing on somebody's shoulders" (68). The personification of the bog promotes the landscape to the status of an actant. An actant, Bennett writes, "is neither object nor a subject but an 'intervener'" (9) and, in *The Long Dry*, the bog becomes increasingly attractive to cows which usually go there "to think" (68), thereby pointing to the place as one where consciousness and awareness are raised. Still, many cows have died in the bog as thick mud clogs up the soil and readers gradually discover that Gareth's missing cow has moved towards the bog. This place, as local people say, is inhabited by a chimeric beast. The beast is like a kangaroo, with the legs of an elephant and the face of a rabbit and it obviously feeds on children. This monstrous creature is endowed with human qualities as it shows a grimace on its face and "its teeth could give away emotion" (86). When the cow reaches the bog, readers are allowed to enter into the mind of the animal that feels "watched" (73). The pregnant cow is tormented by heat and by the weight of her calf, its breath rasping (85), while it thinks of doing "crazy things" (95).

The transspecies dimension of Jones' georgic world is predicated on a shared condition of crisis that affects also the objects in the farm. Take, for instance, the old tractor that has been in the farm since Gareth's family moved there in the aftermath of World War II. The presence of rust and corrosion, together with the faded colour, illustrates the georgic motif of *labor*. In spite of its corroded surface, the tractor "still had a personality" (94). While children would use it as a kind of toy, pretending to drive it, the tractor displays signs of human resilience. Its engine recalls a human heart, in that it works "like a person who is strong" (94). The parallel between the tractor and a strong human being lays emphasis on the exhausting nature of georgic *labor* which symbolically

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makes the borders between human and non-human permeable. The self-reflexive stance promoted by Jones' fiction chimes with Morton's human/non-human concatenation consisting of "infinite connections and infinitesimal differences" (*The Ecological Thought* 30).

However, Morton's ecological perspective does not point to a sense of familiarity. It conjures up "the uncanny, the strangely familiar or familiarly strange" (50) which can be argued is not only anti-pastoral but anti-georgic as well. However georgic writing does exhibit uncanny encounters in which human and non-human converge, as Virgil depicts them. In this respect, *The Dig* constructs a cluster of destabilising meaning around the motif of digging. Daniel, for instance, removes a shard from the earth. Daniel sees the metal object as a "*mark*" (*The Dig* 39; emphasis in the original), a mythological element belonging to the place. To a certain extent, the shard exemplifies the vitality of the soil and its removal deprives the landscape of its familiar qualities. With the material traces inscribed on its surface, the shard embodies a more-than-human history, testifying to the entanglement of human and non-human. Daniel, at some point, restores the shard in the open ground, noticing "a strange part-familiar lettering" (141), an "ogam" that should never be removed. Like an obscure ancient alphabet, which summons up the archaic inscriptions on wood and stone, the shard with its linguistic power consolidates the material presence the landscape.

Moreover, the scene of digging contains indirect allusions to the farmer's digging up the war remains in the soil in Book 1 (ll. 494-97) of Virgil's poem: "the farmer working the soil with his curved plow shall discover javelins corroded and scabrous with rust or clank on empty helmets with his heavy hoe and wonder at the huge bones found in uncovered graves" (19). Material remains, related to the civil wars that plagued the Roman Empire before the rule of Augustus, striate the soil in Virgil's poem. Just as the *Georgics* signals that regeneration is possible through violence, so *The Dig* underscores the signifying potential of the non-human. However, on that very soil, where crops grow and animals are raised, Daniel's wife was killed in an accident, her head crushed by a horse; in a similar violent fashion, badgers and rats are hunted by the "big man", their heads smashed by his terriers, their "flurried clatter of killing" (*The Dig* 34) producing a solid and terrible noise. Alternating between these multiple instances of gain and loss, Jones performs a choral narrative where a common sense of struggle looms large. The novel then continuously interrupts human perspectives: by embedding non-human imagination, the narrative thematises the deep imbrication between human and non-human that participate in a broader dialogue. This interaction is also represented by a fragmented temporality, an estranged sense of passing time where shifting perspectives converge.

The temporal structure of *The Dig* refers to a single day, from dawn to sunset, though flashbacks and recollections, at times represented in italicised paragraphs, continuously disrupt the chronological linearity of the narrative. Various echoes of the past are also conveyed by the figure of digging. The action of digging evokes a way to explore the unconscious mind, thus illustrating the persistence of a past that lies hidden and is not easily accessible. The trope of digging gives visual, tactile and olfactory

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substance to this kind of temporal rifts. We can almost hear the spades "cutting through the thread roots" (67), see the ground "sodden with rain and sticky" (67) or feel "the smell of rotted leaves" (67) on the dug-up soil. Like the various holes that mark the Welsh rural landscape, so the narrative displays a fragmentary form, ridden with holes where contradictions, gaps and ambiguities overlap. Through the recollections of people, animals and objects buried underground, Jones tries to unbury the most visceral feelings of the georgic world. The polyphony of Jones' writing is evocative, in my view, of Seamus Heaney's famous lines in "Digging" where the Irish poet draws a parallel between the ways farmers used to dig the soil and how a poet can explore a human mind, which establishes connections that cross the borders of time and space. The "cold smell of potatoes" (1 Heaney) that Heaney evokes in the penultimate stanza of his famous poem testifies to the synesthetic qualities of memory as it straddles the temporal boundaries "through the living roots" (1), thereby unearthing hidden connections among sounds, smells and time.

The temporality of *The Long Dry* is similar to that of *The Dig*. Here, Jones disrupts the chronological linearity of Gareth's narrative strand by interspersing his search for the cow with flashbacks and flashforwards that bring to the fore the thematic unity of a looming sense of crisis. Analeptic incursions stretch chronological time to the limit, instilling the idea of a long-term imbrication between human and non-human. This is suggested, for instance, by Gareth's constant recollection of his father's memoirs that overlap with the level of the story. The manuscript is written in Welsh, a language that Gareth sometimes fails to fully understand, forcing him to "make bridges of meaning here and there" (27). The memoirs reconstruct his father's life before the purchase of the farm, while local tales of folklore are mingled with historical facts, like World War II and the diseases that affected pigs in the 1950s. Gareth is particularly fascinated by the story of a child who had once seen an angel in the waterfall (28). Years later, the same child, by then a young man, sees the angelic figure again while he lies dying in a bomb crater and a man runs past "with a shard of metal, blast-whitened in his back, ripped and shaped like wings" (29). In these memoirs, Gareth seeks comfort and inspiration but what he eventually finds out is a common condition of crisis, discovering that a similar condition of disorientation affects the present. The embedding of various narrative strands echo the correlation among the chaos of the civil wars, political instability and contagious diseases in the *Georgics*. In a similar vein, Gareth's quest for the missing cow symbolically alludes to a much broader quest for meaning. In this respect, the convergence of various plotlines creates a mosaic-like frame where legends and facts are intertwined. Significantly, this feeling of change and crisis is not only refracted in the uncertainties of the present; it also informs the future. In the sixth chapter, readers learn that Gareth's child, Emma, will die "nine days from now" (69). Here, Jones shifts to the future tense, immersing readers in a proleptic scenario: Emma will go into the woods, pick up a mushroom and die of *Amanita virosa*, the so-called "Destroying Angel" (71). The poison will percolate through the organs of the child and cause death. As these quotes illustrate, the non-linear temporality of *The Long Dry* suggests that narratives can favour attentiveness to a shared condition of change and crisis, mixing up facts and fiction.

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In formal terms, then, the combination of scenes of birth and death, savage brutality and caring tenderness showcases the impossibility of separating these dynamic tensions in the georgic world where, in Fairer's words, "stringent and often uncomfortable" ("Where Fuming Trees Refresh" 212) feelings arise. As Fairer makes clear, georgic writing exhibits a fascination with "resistant and indecorous, even obstinately unpoetic, elements" (205) that serve as physical reminders of the frustrations and negotiations that characterise human and non-human. In Jones's novels, the ever-changing natural forces testify to the importance of humble details and common struggles, invoking, as Fairer argues, "a sense of being tested through time" ("The Pastoral-Georgic Tradition" 114). Jones' fiction can be read as a celebration of man's care for agriculture and raising livestock which however problematises the trope of agricultural success, revealing how, as Richard Thomas argues, "resurgent nature destroys man's efforts to subjugate nature through cultivation, and the ways in which man's success in subduing and transforming nature carries along with it the seeds of a spiritual loss or failure as it sets him outside of and against the natural world" (121). Jones' treatment of georgic dwelling takes the form of a peculiarly charged encounter between human and non-human. In my view, his novels present a world that retains, in Kevis Goodman's words, a "sensory discomfort" (Goodman 3), exhibiting an interplay between emotional responses and the material world of smells, sounds, space and time. By varying the focal perspective, Jones brings attention to the relevance of the non-human which asks to be disclosed in its own language. In depicting a world in a state of flux, the georgic mode in Jones' fictional world raises crucial concerns about the way we perceive our relationship to the rural world, reminding us of the contingency of our existence.

A Symbiotic Relationship: Sensorial Continuity Between Human and Non-Human

Jones writes about the rural Welsh landscape as a space that is inhabited, sensed, smelled, imagined and crossed by fears and hard work. To this end, he employs a wide range of nouns, adjectives, and past and present participles that portray the georgic spirit of growth, hard labour and decline. A good example of the procreative force of nature can be found, for instance, in the following quote from *The Long Dry* where the landscape is poetically depicted:

> The view is stunning, with the land going gently away and the sea before you, silk and blue above a line of thick gorse, bursting into yellow. In this weather, in this heat, the gorse sometimes smells of coconut and honey, and you can hear the seed pods exploding in the sun with sharp snaps. (43)

Here, the extradiegetic narrator describes the view from the farm where *The Long Dry* is set, with a focus on the colours and smells that permeate the area, in an echo of pastoral idyll. With strongly lyrical tones, the place is infused with the varying shades and hues of the gorge, its perfume reverberating through the landscape. In formal terms, Jones tries to convey this symphony of smells and colours with the alliteration of the jarring sound "b" ("before," "blue," "above," "bursting") and the sibilant "s" ("stunning," "sea," "silk," "smells," "seeds," "sun," "sharp," "snaps"). Moreover, the rhyme "blue"/ "you" creates a

rhythmic pattern that, in a symbolic way, scatters the smell of honey and coconut, while the image of the pods popping in the sun is made manifest with the alliteration of the implosive sound "p," thereby achieving a great acoustic effect. Before his father's purchase, the farm had belonged to an eccentric widow who had lost her husband and sons during the war and had eventually gone insane. The earth was once covered with bracken and bramble that, when cleared, became "full and hungry" (13). Gareth then planted potatoes, cabbages, onions, beetroots, carrots and parsnips, while gorse flowers, celandines, daffodils, dandelions, primroses, dog violets and bluebells fill in the hedges with their scent. Albeit this vivid emphasis on the reproductive power of nature, *The Long Dry* is also a dramatic representation of the destructive force of nature. Early in the morning, Gareth goes into the barn and finds one of his cows "kneeling beside […] lowing sadly and gently" (2) its stillborn calf. Then, Gareth discovers that one of his calving cows is missing. The search for the pregnant cow covers the entire novel, a quest that reflects the characters' fears and anxieties for the future. *The Long Dry* is filled with apprehensions in a way that calls to mind "a certain anxiety" (Head 201) that things may succumb to death and disease as in the *Georgics*.

The narrative is set during the calving season, in a moment of the year marked by unusual heat, a harsh climatic condition that intensifies the hardship of georgic labour. This allusion to heat brings to my mind the "full heat of autumn" in Book 3 (ll. 479-80) of the *Georgics* which "brought death to all domestic animals, all wild beasts" (56). Moreover, the very same ominous impression conveyed by the dead calf in the opening scene can be found after a few pages when Gareth discovers that another cow has given birth to twin calves, one of which is born dead. The cows, mostly Friesians, a cattle bred originating from the northern Dutch provinces, are one of Gareth's primary occupations requiring intense labour. Besides, financial troubles and family tensions are as burdensome responsibilities as his farming work. As the title itself suggests, the unusual searing heat of the summer pushes the landscape to the verge of dryness, thereby entailing a metaphoric erosion of the natural capacity to procreate. In spite of Gareth's *labor*, the "dried land" (*The Long Dry* 1) of his farm is a foreboding presence that evokes Virgil's depiction of the scorching heat in Book 1 (ll. 107-08) "when the soil dries up, its sprouted grain burnt, in summer's heat" (6).

Like the cows, also the pigs suffer from natural afflictions and economic necessities. From Gareth's father's diary, we learn that, in the late 1950s, the traditional Welsh pig, a "strong, long pig with long wide ears and a long jowl" (31), came gradually to be replaced by the Landrace pig, a bred imported from Denmark and potentially more economic to raise and, especially, to breed from. In Gareth's farm, these pigs later "developed raised lesions, had broken hooves, died easily of pneumonia" (32) and were eventually diagnosed with *Dermatosis vegetans*, a hereditary disease that caused lameness and heart attacks. Gareth's pigs become "recognisably 'depressed'" (33) and, on a symbolic level, the animals are presented as vulnerable and subject to diseases, a condition that blurs the boundary between human and animal. This depiction of pain and suffering, shared both by humans and beasts, resembles that of Virgil when, for instance, the Roman poet describes the death of an ox in Book 3 (l. 518): "[t]he sorrowing plowman

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goes, unyoking the ox that mourns its brother's death" (58). In general terms, Jones' account of the diseases that affected the pigs parallels Virgil's depiction of the Noric plague at the end of Book 3 (ll. 556-57) that "wreaks carnage and piles up rotted bodies, foul and stinking, in the barns themselves" (59). Here, as in Jones' novel, Virgil explores the suffering of animals as analogous as the condition of humans. The close bond between humans and animals is highlighted by the common subjection to age and disease and by an anthropomorphic language that elicits the reader's empathy. As Virgil warns us in Book 3 (ll. 67-68), "sickness comes in stealth, with graceless old age and suffering, and death's relentless rigor seizes us" (42).

In *The Long Dry*, the threat of complete dissolution is not only suggested by the heat that torments the countryside, by the stillbirth of calves or by the disease that affects the pigs. This condition of crisis also extends to human beings, having some hold over the characters' lives. As the narrative progresses, we learn that Gareth's wife, Kate, has had a series of miscarriages between her adult son Dylan and her much younger daughter Emmy. These tragic events intensify the collisions between Gareth and Kate, leading them to emotional distance, silence and evasive behaviour. Kate experiences a severe sense of loss and frustration because her body is getting old and plump. As the narrator observes, she was "damp like autumn, not wet in the way young women are, like spring" (*The Long Dry* 36). Here, a parallel is drawn between Kate's body and a humid fruitless season. This reading is further complicated by the fact that Kate's dysfunction arises from her husband's work in the farm. Gareth has contracted chlamydia, "transferred in fluid from handling the sheep" (49) and has infected his wife. Kate, who was not born in the countryside, symbolically represents a foreign body that comes to be contaminated by the fluids of georgic labour. In other words, Jones depicts Kate's disease as a further connotation of decay, albeit in an unconsciously misogynistic way. Jones' novel can be said to bring to light Virgil's connection among *labor*, *amor* and disease. While *labor* is important to control the forces that might imperil the animals, *amor* is fundamental to farming but it can also become destructive. Both in Virgil and Jones, *amor* and disease can be seen as afflictions causing victims. As in the *Georgics*, here readers can find a continuous movement of hard work, hope, failure and guilt. Emotional scars are inseparable from physical changes and they find in the georgic mode a way to refract economic pressures, labour and the search for material and affective care, recalling the intricate web in which human and non-human are interwoven. By the end of the novel, the cow is returned to Gareth by Bill, a neighbour and the drought that plagues rural Wales gives space to pouring rain, producing "a slightest change in the air" (105) that symbolically compensates for the sense of loss and pain. The rain, a symbol for rebirth, embodies the cyclical process of growth and decay in line with the tenets of the georgic mode.

In *The Dig*, a certain georgic orientation is similarly at the heart of the narrative, though the interface of human and non-human is depicted with bleaker tones. Jones' fourth novel is a stark account of two lonely men, Daniel and the "big man." As in *The Long Dry*, so in *The Dig* the story is set during a moment of rebirth, "lambing time" (*The Dig* 1), while everywhere in the valley "farms were involved in their own private processes" (1).

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In a georgic fashion, *The Dig* pays homage to the typical values of industriousness and hard work. In the opening scene, Daniel is putting gel on his hands, ready to help his ewes to lamb. The animals, which belong to Beulah breed, a Welsh native species with a distinctive speckled black and white face, are one of Daniel's main concerns. Readers can almost feel and visualise the smell of the "grease of birth" (12) and the "fluids and motherly efforts" (9) in the barn as Daniel's arms draw the lamb from the ewe. This image of birth however clashes with Daniel's emotional turmoil. As readers gradually enter Daniel's mind, it becomes clear that sounds and smells continuously flow in his consciousness. The smell of piss in the barn is intertwined to other animal smells. This chain of sensory associations brings to Daniel's mind the scent of his wife's skin, thus revealing a kind of "mammalian power" (16) that relates humans and animals. Despite this vivid evocation, it is only at the end of the first chapter, however, that we realise that Daniel was recently widowed.

Notably, the landscape around Daniel's farm is imbued with fragments of noise and other sensory perceptions that create a "strange ventriloquy of sounds" (12): the sucking and clapping of the cattle, a barking fox, the wind coming over the trees, the sound of the tides coming from the coast, the sigh of the sheep, the clap of the cattle's feet in the mud, the chains of the dog (11-13) are the various materialisations of human *labor* and animal life. By foregrounding the sounds and smells of *labor*, *The Dig* illustrates the relevance of agricultural tasks in a georgic fashion. The sounds and smells that permeate the Welsh countryside carry several echoes of Virgil's "scent of heat at bay" (47) in Book 3 (l. 210) or "the smell of muck" (61) in Book 4 (l. 49). However, Jones complicates the sonic texture of the rural landscape that, as Daniel states, can be said to perform "some measureless whiteness in the air" (*The Dig* 13). These sounds produce "some primitive hushed whisper of the performance of vast things" (13), disclosing hidden connections between the rural landscape and the desolation that characterises the lives of the characters. The sounds and smells that reverberate through the air seem to be timeless, carrying an ancientness reflected also on Daniel himself who "could be a man of any age" (9). This impression of sensory interconnection chimes with Goodman's reading of the georgic mode as motif infused with an "*unpleasurable* feeling" (3; emphasis in original) where the noise of living conveys a sense of "disturbance in affect and related phenomena that we variously term perceptive, sensorial or affective" (3-4). Affective bonds are then established between the sounds of the landscape and the emotional uncomfortableness of the characters. Daniel, for instance, "was convinced he could sense illness in the air" (*The Dig* 28). While his perceptions here are related to the animals in the farm, this uncanny feeling is eventually juxtaposed to a disturbance "in relation to his own body and his personal understanding of his health" (28). The lurking fear of disease contributes to a create a mood of despair in a suggestive language reminiscent of Virgil's words of warning in Book 3 (ll. 454-56): "the harm is nourished and lives by concealment when the shepherd refuses to lay healing hands on the sore and just sits there imploring the gods for better omens" (55). Here, Virgil reminds us that diseases are natural phenomena and that humans must learn how to deal with them.

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As a wounded character, because of the loss of his wife, Daniel becomes aware of his own vulnerability in the encounter with fragile others and he strives to keep them safe from harm. In *The Dig*, the theme of *preservation* carries a double meaning. On the one hand, it entails *care*. In the course of the narrative, a strong relationship between humans and animals makes Daniel inseparable from the landscape where he dwells. He witnesses the birth of a malformed lamb, a brutal image that elicits "hopeless anger" (120), and he feels protective towards a small weak black lamb that does not seem to put on weight. He rubs the animal, "trying to bring some warmth into its muscles" (80), like a caring parent. While his father would have killed the lamb, Daniel lacks his father's pragmatism, preferring instead to nurture the lamb. Daniel's caring for animals recalls Virgil's invocation of *cura* which is used several times in the poem. In Book 1 (ll. 3 and 26), for instance, it is evoked as "what care the cattle need" (3) and as "care for our lands" (4), thus entailing a link among humans, animals and land. However, Daniel feels pity for the weak lamb. His compassion and his *amor* then contrast with Virgil's invitation, in Book 3 (ll. 96-7 and 390), to reject an old or imperfect animal: not to pity "his sorry old age" (43) and "look for another in your abounding flock" (53). In *The Dig*, this feeling of anxiety extends also to the landscape. As Daniel notes, the countryside was changing "into a thing he didn't know intimately any more" (*The Dig* 37) because of the fires and the devastation caused by illegal hunting of badgers. Both Daniel and the "big man" search beneath the ground: Daniel thinking to his dead wife buried in the country churchyard and the man exterminating rats for local farms and hunting badgers for money. Digging, hence, discloses different ways of seeing the non-human world. If Daniel's attachment to the land is connoted by nurturing and caring attitudes, the cruel hunting of badgers by the "big man" does equally represent, as Evie Wyld suggests in *The New York Times*, "violence clearly born of the desire to belong" (Wyld). A "forgotten outcast rejected by society" (*The Dig* 122), the "big man" is a perpetrator and a victim at the same time, his dwelling in the georgic world entailing a state of displacement. However, when badgers confront dogs in cruel fights, the "big man" experiences a similar emotional sense of entrapment, recalling the period he spent in the jail, feeling dizzy as badgers feel disoriented in the cage. By contrast, Daniel's protective touch with land and animals is hence completely different from the cruel and illicit ways of the "big man." This shows how human imbrication with non-human is not always based on mutual respect and how dwelling can be precluded.

On the other hand, *preservation* carries the meaning of keeping memories alive. This is the case, as already discussed before, of the sensory associations with lingering smell that connects animals to humans. The evocative power of sensory elements is also made manifest in objects and places which are endowed with the sentient power of preserving memory. The reader of *The Dig* encounters mnemonic residues that mirror the fragmentary mechanisms of human memory, emphasising how the cycles of life and death are more like a continuum than two opposite worlds. Sentience, like intelligence and consciousness are considered "necessary components of the measuring device" (Barad 336). However, as Barad notes, the recognition of our entanglements leads us to reconsider the correlations between human and non-human. The malformed lamb, for instance, with his monstrous head, conjures up Daniel's wife, whose head had been

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smashed by a horse in the fatal accident. Daniel decides to throw the corpse of the lamb in the wood, in the place where his wife died. Under a heavy rain, "some combination of things about him balled into another memory" (*The Dig* 126): here, the loop of memory discloses a sign of relationality in which the recollection of the departed remains alive. From the perspective of material agency, memory becomes agential and recreates the past when it is evoked. The land does not only have a language of its own, such as the cries of the birds, the bleating of the lambs or the whiffs of wind through the wood. As Daniel muses, a place "can remember" (113) or, as he specifies, a place "has to remember" (114). The fragments of the past are encoded in the very landscape where a looming sense of crisis joins humans, animals and places. The non-human thus becomes text and through the motif of digging Jones metaphorically unearths the common vulnerability between human and non-human.

Conclusion

Care, fears and attention to details lie at the core of Jones' georgic world. To a certain extent, *The Long Dry* and *The Dig* resonate with Virgil's georgic allusions, suggesting that technical skills, devotion, and experience are crucial to farming and agriculture. As Batstone argues, the value of Virgil's poem is that it reminds us of our limitations and that our understanding is "larger than these pressing necessities and that the contingencies of life have already implicated us in failure and greatness" (143). In Fairer's words, the georgic mode refracts a crisis in nature can be understood as "a more fundamental crisis of humanity" ("Where Fuming Trees Refresh" 201) and this common crisis informs Jones' literary aesthetics. In certain respects, Jones juxtaposes divergent forms of dwelling, edging towards what Head calls a sense of duty that entails "an interrogation of the continuing relevance of what might be preserved" (17).

In conclusion, loss and crisis abound in *The Long Dry* and in *The Dig*. Memories, sounds and scents permeate the georgic world of Jones' works, establishing a dialogue with other's life forms that transcend human life and human temporal scales. Through metaphoric, synesthetic and figurative language, the novels I have explored here blur the border between human and non-human, promoting a deep sense of care and relationality. Shifting focalisation and temporal dislocation participate in a process that unveils the entanglements of human and non-human, with vivid evocations of the material force of the georgic mode. Moreover, by making past and present impinge on the lives of humans, animals and places, the narratives lay emphasis on the persistence of memory and on a sense of community that emerges from a shared condition of loss. I would then argue that Jones' georgic fiction reminds us that there is a sprawling mesh of interconnection between human and non-human and, more importantly, that the seeds of our emotions are to be found in the very moments of crisis. Through its generic instability and by alerting readers to the sensory connections between human and non-human, Jones' fiction sheds some light on an ethically-oriented way to practice solidarity, specifically in our contemporary world where ecological questions require immediate attention.

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The 'Interrupted *Georgics*' of Mushrooms in Contemporary Irish Poetry

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Abstract

The vitality of the georgic mode operates counter to inertia and disorder, driven by the initiative of dynamic labor. Still, Edna Longley, in coining the term "interrupted georgics," argues that the rupture of war disrupting an agricultural scene defines the georgic. Accordingly, the precariousness of Ireland and Northern Ireland during the Troubles and the EU Referendum in a (pre/post-)Brexit context acts as a felicitous starting point for a generic revival of the georgic mode. Through a selection of contemporary mushroom poems that meditate on this contested history over a 45-year period—Derek Mahon, "A Disused Shed in Co. Wexford" (1973), Paul Muldoon, "Gathering Mushrooms" (1983), Ruth Carr, "Mushroom" (1995), Chris Agee, "Mushrooming" (2003), Padraig Regan, "Rehydrating Mushrooms" (2018), and Ailbhe Darcy, "Mushrooms" (2018)—this paper considers how mushrooms embody the georgic mode for the purpose of ecological remediation. These lyric explorations of the Anthropocene under discussion replicate a symbiotic relationship between the human and nonhuman world as situated within a georgic trajectory. While Virgil does not mention in the *Georgics* cultivating, foraging, and gathering of mushrooms, these activities, like beekeeping and farming, embody enduring georgic values of rugged curiosity and dogged resilience. As the fruit of mycelial networks, lyrical mushrooms (re)distribute violence across agricultural interconnection, to span specificity and outward scope. As a result, the mushroom becomes a 'companion species' capable of assuming the role of co-teacher and co-imparter of knowledge to a poet-as-observer in awe of its ingenuity.

Keywords: Fungi, companion species, georgic, Anthropocene, Ireland / Northern Ireland.

Resumen

La vitalidad del modo geórgico, impulsada por la iniciativa del trabajo dinámico, contrarresta la inercia y el desorden. Sin embargo, Edna Longley, al acuñar el término de las "geórgicas interrumpidas", sostiene que la ruptura creada por una guerra que interrumpe un escenario agrario es lo que define la poesía geórgica. Por consiguiente, la precariedad de Irlanda y de Irlanda del Norte durante el conflicto norirlandés y el referéndum sobre la Unión Europea en un contexto (pre/post-)Brexit funcionan como un punto de partida oportuno para un resurgimiento genérico del modo geórgico. A través de una selección de poesía contemporánea sobre las setas que refleja la historia violenta de Irlanda e Irlanda del Norte—Derek Mahon, "A Disused Shed in Co. Wexford" (1973), Paul Muldoon, "Gathering Mushrooms" (1983), Ruth Carr, "Mushroom" (1995), Chris Agee, "Mushrooming" (2003), y Padraig Regan, Rehydrating Mushrooms" (2018)—este artículo considerará cómo las setas personifican el modo geórgico por el propósito de remediación ecológica. Estas exploraciones líricas del Antropoceno reproducen una relación simbiótica entre los mundos humano y no humano al situarse en una trayectoria geórgica. Aunque Virgilio no menciona en las *Geórgicas* el cultivo y la búsqueda de setas, estas actividades representan los valores geórgicos de una fuerte curiosidad y una resiliencia persistente. Siendo fruto de las redes miceliales, los hongos (re)distribuyen la violencia a través de la interconexión agraria, para abarcar especificidad y alcance exterior. Como resultado, la seta se convierte en una 'especie de compañía' capaz de asumir el rol de co-maestro impartiendo conocimiento a un poeta-observador impresionado por su ingenuidad.

Palabras clave: Fungi, especie de compañía, geórgico, Antropoceno, Irlanda /Irlanda del Norte.

Reviving the Georgic Mode in an Irish and Northern Irish Context

In *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (2015), Anna Tsing establishes disturbance and precarity as the triggers for environmental transformation: "disturbance is always in the middle of things," wherein one disturbance perpetually "follows other disturbances" (160). Such a "sensorial phenomenon" of the Anthropocene marks the "experience of living in an increasingly diminished and toxic world" (Davis and Turpin 3). Herein, the cultivating work of the poet follows a trajectory begun with the agricultural labor of the farmer and the organic growth of the mushroom, which may flourish in the absence of a farmer. In particular, mushrooms in contemporary Irish and Northern Irish poetry emerge *in medias res*: midway through an interaction with, and an attempted rejuvenating of, a landscape in crisis. Thus, readers in search of scientifically-responsive literary enterprises may find a receptive partner in this agent of bioconversion: the humble mushroom.

In "Mushrooms" (2018), Dublin poet Ailbhe Darcy takes on the Polar Vortex and climate change in an address to her newborn child, the next generation:

> Mushrooms could grow on a person all the same.
> The body is a vertical farm […]
> They say the way to fix this mess
> is to cultivate one's mushrooms and take up very little space. (28-29)

Darcy meets the seriousness of the environmental crisis with down-to-earth clarity: mushrooms deserve our attention as models of interconnectivity within a larger ecosystem, and as reminders of the fallacy of human exceptionalism. Further, Darcy directs this urgency toward the future, since the speaker's attempt to "fix this mess" is for the benefit of the child addressee: "Your father and I have begun a new generation […] We've handed on the weather, the body vulnerable and brief, / and the fact of mushroom farmers" (28). A corresponding note clarifies that Darcy's mushroom farm refers to a particularized agricultural setting, since she wrote the poem while residing for a duration in the American Rust Belt and while visiting "the home of Rachel Swenie, who farms mushrooms in Chicago" (69). Thus, this lyric from an Irish poet, written while in an overseas landscape of heightened vulnerability—"Nights we lay awake in fear, expecting visitors with firearms / and unfamiliar turns of phrase"—embeds both the speaker and her child in a global ecological "apocalypse" (28). Within this animated locality, Darcy's tercets of persistent motion "flitter about" with an "insects' whirr" "to whirligig in a pocket" (28-9). They push readers swiftly from one line to the next, while maintaining a vaster and outward-looking georgic gaze from which to consider the Anthropocene and "ask if there might be some way back / to what we wanted when we first came" (28-9). Darcy cultivates, here, a productive alliance between humans and nonhumans by employing georgic poetics across a series of open-ended disturbances. Ultimately, Darcy resumes the labors of the farmer through her textual mushroom production.

Speaking of mushroom champions, for the last decade and a half, the mycologist Paul Stamets has become a leading advocate of fungi's ability to remove toxins from the environment. In his 2008 Ted Talk, Stamets refers to this process as "mycoremediation,"

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calling mushrooms "soil magicians" and "the grand molecular disassemblers of nature" (00:046), due to their ability to transform organic waste into nutrition. Operating within a similar interspecies frame, Tsing claims that "fungi are indicator species for the human condition," since "fungi are always companions to other species" ("Unruly" 144). From this point of view, we may recognize the mushroom's contribution in a literary context as a co-teacher and co-imparter of knowledge to a poet-as-observer in awe of its ingenuity.

Admittedly, the shift from acknowledging the mushroom as a "soil magician" to a "lyric magician" requires a nimble poetic genre. In a 2003 lecture delivered to the Royal Irish Academy, Seamus Heaney describes his search for a genre that would remain robust in the midst of the Troubles in Northern Ireland, without becoming "vulnerable to accusations of artificiality" ("Eclogue" 1). Certainly, one of the great strengths of the didactic and down-to-earth georgic mode is its ability to sidestep artificiality through a timely recognition of "changes in weather, economic pressures" and "physical toil" (Fairer "Eco" 116). In this way, the genre responds with immediacy to the ongoing human-engineered environmental crisis.

As this argument intends to demonstrate, the precariousness of Ireland and Northern Ireland during the Troubles and the EU Referendum in a (pre/post-)Brexit context acts as a felicitous starting point for a generic embrace of the georgic mode. Although 2021 marks the 100-year anniversary of the Irish border and the birth of Northern Ireland, this border zone remains a site of fragility and erupting violence. Still, "mushrooms flourish" precisely here: "in agrarian seams: between fields and forest, and at the margins of zones of cultivation" (Tsing, "Unruly" 151). As active representatives of the georgic mode, mushrooms—capable of living and growing anywhere—may prompt both an acknowledgment of environmental crisis, and a georgic optimism for environmental rejuvenation. This argument contends that an encounter with the Anthropocene benefits from borders allowed to remain blurred, messy, and symbiotic. Through a selection of mushroom poems spanning a 45-year-period—Derek Mahon, "A Disused Shed in Co. Wexford" (1973), Paul Muldoon, "Gathering Mushrooms" (1983), Ruth Carr, "Mushroom" (1995), Chris Agee, "Mushrooming" (2003), Padraig Regan, "Rehydrating Mushrooms" (2018), and Ailbhe Darcy, "Mushrooms" (2018)—this paper proposes a georgic revival as a means to facilitate ecological remediation along these "agrarian seams." Such a remediation is critical, not only amid the precarity of peace in Ireland and Northern Ireland, but as a necessary response to it.

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Marking the Interruption(s) Embedded in the *Georgics*

While Virgil does not mention in the *Georgics* the cultivating, foraging, and gathering of mushrooms, these activities embody enduring georgic values of rugged curiosity and dogged resilience, like beekeeping and farming. As David Fairer explains, the georgic mode proceeds "through dissolution and loss to see renewal and fruition, and to locate something 'grateful' […] in the hard labour of the fields" ("Eco" 112). Similarly, the "positive thrust" of georgic dynamicism "won against inertia and disorder" acts with "persistence, adaption, problem-solving," and "initiative" (Fairer "Georgic" 464). Here,

akin to a mycelial network of microscopic threads and its fruiting bodies of mushrooms, the productively "resistant energy" of "recalcitrance" embedded in georgic contexts is "forever on the move," while remaining responsive to local environments in "a world in process whose rewards are hard won," fleeting, and "full of tension" (Fairer, "Eco" 111). As Fairer's characterization attests, the georgic mode is well-suited to the wearying demands of a long-winded path to reconciliation among communities and the farmlands they cultivate in the renewed and ongoing border conflict between Ireland and Northern Ireland.

In choosing which English translation of Virgil's the *Georgics* from which to quote, my choice of Peter Fallon is quite deliberate. Aside from the beauty of his translation, Fallon is a poet and the founder of The Gallery Press in County Meath, the pre-eminent publisher of contemporary Irish poetry since 1970, having published, early in their careers, both Mahon and Muldoon. Taking into account the translator's biography, Fallon's sensitivity to Virgil's representation of an agricultural land embroiled in civil war is helpful. Indeed, Fallon explains in his "Translator's Note" that his "partiality towards the *Georgics*" arises out of his own coming of age "in the tender aftermath of 'Troubles'" where "Virgil's delineation of the griefs and glories of a land in which people tried to found their lives, while their days were adumbrated by a civil war, was a touchstone" (xxxiv). Thus, a personal stake in the historical context of Virgil's epic acts as a point of entry. Herein, the genre of the georgic straddles a diverse set of historical contexts, reinforcing its validity as a genre worthy of revival.

Focusing on both the material conditions of the original Latin text and an English translation highlights the transhistorical connection between the disturbances of civil war (then and now), and the "new landscape assemblages" that Tsing suggests may emerge from a "layering of global- and-local, expert-and-vernacular knowledge layers" ("Mushroom" 160-1). It is here that we locate sites of joint "livability" where "[p]recarious living is always an adventure" (Tsing, "Mushroom" 163). So, too, in the midst of a fraught history, the georgic mode remains "collaborative and progressive" and "organic, adaptive, ingenious, skillful, and useful," even if war, or other tragedies, halt these "constructive works of peace" (Fairer, "Georgic" 459). From this dual perspective of living, then, the poems under consideration may actively participate in a larger Irish and Northern Irish history, while nonetheless burdened by an immediate tragedy.

Indeed, an interruption in the form of a violent suspension of agricultural labors concludes Book 1 of Virgil's the *Georgics*:

> For right and wrong are mixed up here, there's so much warring everywhere,
> evil has so many faces, and there is no regard for the labours
> of the plough. Bereft of farmers, fields have run to a riot of weeds.
> Scythes and sickles have been hammered into weapons of war. (1.504-8)

Here, Virgil offers readers an example of "interrupted georgics," a term Edna Longley coins to describe a poem in which war "infiltrates an agricultural scenario" (466). Longley even claims that "the interruption may define the georgic" (468). Thus, the skill set of ingenuity and problem-solving traditionally the particular purview of hard-won

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agricultural expertise and hands-on experience can, likewise, guide other multispecies interactions born out of interruption, like that of literary enterprises.

The interruption in georgic productivity may additionally be precisely what facilitates a singleminded drive to rebound after trauma, like that of Virgil's rural Italy recovering from civil war. Virgil transfers this drive into his four-part structure of the *Georgics*, which establishes a recuperative pattern through the proximity of endings and beginnings: from the pestilence of "a fester of pustules" "gnawing" "on cursed limbs" (3.564-6), to the sweetness of bees: "Which brings me to heaven's gift of honey, or manna, if you will" (4.1). So goes the swift shift of tonality between Books 3 and 4. The latter of which cushions, "far from the ways of the wind" (4.9), the prior intrusion of tragedy with its reassuringly formal address: Virgil's narrator directs readers (and the addressee) to a protected alcove that evades, for a short term, the incessant "wind" of destruction. Here, the reader and addressee may recharge in preparation for the possibility of an unforeseen event characteristic to any agricultural endeavor.

Practicing Verbal Mediation: The 'Arts of Noticing'

Poems about ecological vulnerability that attempt to facilitate remediation—rather than a nostalgic sigh for times gone by—nonetheless need the hopeful expansiveness of the georgic. The didactic georgic mode values persistence and adaptability as skills learned through a careful *observation* of an environment's potent rejuvenation. In this context, nuance and texture emerge. Sam Solnick contends that poems suited to the Anthropocene should teach readers how to sharpen their ability to perceive the "dynamic and emergent," which is "contingent on shifting conditions" (211). In this regard, Tsing's celebration of the "arts of noticing" ("Mushroom" 39) resonates well with Solnick's call to readers. Thankfully, Tsing is not deterred by those who deem the practice of noticing "archaic," since a slow and steady observation is precisely what draws out the authentically messy stories of "interrupting geographies and tempos" ("Mushroom" 37) that productively challenge scientific research questions through their literary digressions, like those on display in this selection of mushroom poems.

The "arts of noticing" ("Mushroom" 39) within a mushroom context may productively start with what biologist Merlin Sheldrake, in *Entangled Life: How Fungi Make Our Worlds, Change Our Minds, and Shape Our Futures* (2020), explains as the omnipresent "master concept" of the "'web of life' [that] underpins modern scientific conceptions of nature," namely, "the idea that all things are interconnected." He regrets that it may have "collapsed into a cliché." Despite its overuse as a concept, however, it cannot be denied that mycelial fungi are the very shapes they inhabit; in other words, "[t]hey *are* flexible networks that ceaselessly remodel themselves" (76). Do note that my intention throughout this paper is not to sloppily conflate fungal structures (mushrooms and mycelia), but to acknowledge their vital interconnection, mirroring the very shape of fungi themselves. Further, my privileging of mushrooms—the fruiting bodies of fungi—responds not only to a similar focus in the poetic texts themselves. It is also a nod to the

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unseen and below-ground manifestations only hinted at by the presence of their above-ground counterparts.

To better establish a thread between what is seen and unseen, above ground and below, it is useful to describe how fungi inhabit space. To do so, though, one must assume a position anterior to that of the human: Fungi feed by digesting "the world where it is," to "absorb it into their bodies." That is, while humans and animals put food into their bodies, "fungi put their bodies in food." Further, the more of the world fungi come in contact with—their long and branched 'bodies' composed of a single cell wall—"the more they can consume" (Sheldrake 57). Evocatively, mycelium "decants itself into its surroundings," like water, constantly shapeshifting as a "living, growing opportunistic investigation—speculation in bodily form" (Sheldrake 58). Through this unpredictable expansion, fungi employ pressure to break through barriers, speedily and stealthily entering a new territory.

In tracking this discursive nonhuman history, as above, it is possible to remain open to an object-relations approach characterized by "multi-layered portraits of ecological relationality in the Anthropocene" (Ronda 341), where positions remain "non-linear" and "recursive, rather than developmentally teleological," fostering "ongoing practices rather than singular experiences" (Ronda 340). Margaret Ronda, in adopting this approach in her work on ecological affect, aligns her argument both with the textured georgic encounter of farming the land day-after-day, and with Tsing's encouragement to frankly acknowledge our joint human and nonhuman ecological precarity, a result of unavoidable interdependence. Above all, Tsing's declaration that "human nature is an interspecies relationship" ("Unruly" 144) remains central to the lyrical investigations to follow.

A poem's remedial value relies on its ability to make connections experientially palpable for the reader, like the shapeshifting movement of mycelium. A poet's material, after all, is language, not soil, as Kevis Goodman reminds us: the *Georgics* is a "work of verbal mediation" that highlights "the relationship between words and things" and "linguistic control" (42-3). Granted, while some linguistic limitations inherent to ecological mediation remain intact, those experiments situated within a georgic trajectory are frequently unsettled, knotty, and vulnerable, yet engaged and future-looking. As a result, the poetic strategies under discussion here of juxtaposition, metaphor, and intertextuality, among others, serve the larger objectives of a mediated poetic engagement with the nonhuman, rooted in humility and observation. In a nutshell, these individual strategies work in tandem to (re)create a formal experience for the reader, a sum greater than its parts.

To better contextualize this verbal mediation in the *Georgics*, let us revisit an example discussed above in which Virgil interrupts the labor in the fields, at the end of Book 1, with mention of "hostilities in Germany" and "Neighboring cities [that] renege on what they pledged and launch attacks" (1.509-10). From this image of terror, in which "scythes and sickles" have been repurposed into "weapons of war," Virgil propels himself forward with the famous simile of the chariot driver, Octavian, out of control:

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> the whole world's at loggerheads, a blasphemous battle,
> *as* when, right from the ready, steady, go, chariots quicken on a track
> until the driver hasn't a hope of holding the reins and he's carried away
> by a team that pays heed to nothing, wildly away and no control.
> (1.511-14; my emphasis)

Some 450 lines earlier in Book 1, Octavian harnesses this same chariot-plough to create order (not disorder) in his agricultural landscape; therein, Virgil, ever the pedagogical poet, offers instructions of how to assemble a chariot-plough from an "eight-foot pole" of "pliant elm," "for the tiller a length of beech to steer" (1.170-75).

Virgil's decision to merge the chariot and the plough is politically motivated, despite the agricultural context. This hybrid "unites in one image the deeply rooted Roman myth" (218) of the quest for structure, as Virgil scholar Robert McKay Wilhelm claims: "field and forum, vines and civilization, horses and men, ploughman and chariot-statesman who, in unity, struggle to quiet the unbridled forces threatening both the georgic and the political worlds" (218). The seminal image of the chariot-plough unites the above listed "network of associations […] all striving for control" (McKay Wilhelm 230). As a result, the careening chariot at the end of Book 1 acts both as a simile for the state following the assassination of Caesar—the chariot-statesman—and for the deteriorating condition of the agricultural world, against which Octavian and the poet both struggle when a sword replaces a plough. Significantly, Virgil's metaphor remains expansive, while still valuing the local, such that Virgil does not rob the scene of its actuality; in this regard, the *Georgics* is a model for the Irish lyrics at hand, which assiduously evoke the entangled movements of fungi slipping through barriers, to span specificity and scope.

Echoing Outward: Derek Mahon's "A Disused Shed in Co. Wexford"

As the initial stopping-off point in our Irish and Northern Irish mushroom trajectory, the bifurcated scope of Derek Mahon's much-discussed "A Disused Shed *in Co. Wexford*" (emphasis added) becomes immediately clear in the title. Mahon commits himself to a *particularized* portrait of "lime crevices behind rippling rain barrels, / dog corners of dog burials" (34). The outward expansion, thereafter, begins with an otherworldly opening of the "creaking lock / and creak of hinges; magi, moonmen, / powdery prisoners of the old regime" (35). Thus, Mahon's mushroom metaphor functions within two distinct frameworks: a mycelial network, on the one hand, and the sectarian violence in Northern Ireland, on the other.

Adrian Frazier contends that there are few post-Yeats Irish poems on which all anthologies of contemporary Irish poetry agree as canonical expect one: Derek Mahon's "A Disused Shed in Co. Wexford," written shortly after Bloody Sunday in 1972. Frazier argues that Mahon's poem has been granted this honor because of its ability to absorb whatever historical conflict a reader chooses to invoke, and thus gives back "a full, complex understanding of history, of the weak, the voiceless, the sentient" (200). Indeed, Mahon dedicates the poem to his friend and novelist J.G. Farrell, author of the ironic Big

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House novel, *Troubles* (published in 1970 and belatedly awarded the Lost Man Booker Prize in 2010), set in the midst of the 1922-3 Irish Civil War at the Majestic Hotel with its abandoned sheds and burned-down buildings, the setting for Mahon's poem.

Mahon's "voiceless" representatives of history—the "lost people of Treblinka and Pompeii"—are a shed of abandoned mushrooms, rediscovered 50 years later in the midst of the Troubles:

> deep in the grounds of a burnt-out hotel,
> among the bathtubs and the washbasins
> a thousand mushrooms crowd to a keyhole […]
> What should they do there but desire? (34)

Mahon's mushrooms, their "pale flesh flaking / into the earth" as they "lift frail heads," "are begging us" "to speak on their behalf" (35). Mahon's desire in this poem to find a literary response adequate to the demands of a fraught historical correlative is not new to Ireland. Consider how hesitant W.B. Yeats had been to publish his now ubiquitous "Easter, 1916," waiting four years beyond the events of the Easter Rising, out of concern for which parties, among many contenders, he was bound to insult.

Mahon explains in a 2000 interview with poet Eamon Grennan that when he "write[s] about the dead of Treblinka and Pompeii […] included in that are the dead of Dungiven and Magherafelt," referencing sites in County Derry of sectarian violence. To uphold his conviction that "you couldn't take sides," Mahon thus avoids "writ[ing] directly" about the Troubles by instead grounding his mushroom colony, abandoned by "the gravel-crunching, interminable departure / of the expropriated mycologist," in a larger community of a "flash-bulb firing squad" beyond their narrow "trickle of masonry" (34-5). In this indirect meditation on the Northern Ireland conflict, then, Mahon returns to the abandoned scene drawn by the calls of "a thousand mushrooms," "'Save us, save us,' they seem to say" (34-5), in contrast to a dispossessed mycologist who "never came back" (34).

Mahon's poem is a testament to reciprocal and responsive interactions between humans and nonhumans. The opening line, "Even now there are places where a thought might grow," immediately establishes the potentiality for communication and expansion, "a kind of panorama of panoramas, an ecstatic dilation which vibrates with distant voices" (Redmond 433). Thus, the poem establishes a corridor for growth, beginning with an "echo" that might have been "trapped for ever," but "even now" relinquishes the "ghost of a scream," despite having long been "racked by drought" (34-5). In essence, the georgic emblem of the mushroom has the power to resonate with those outside of its closed society, expanding a formerly cut-off network through Mahon's mushrooms poignantly ventriloquized in the final line, "'let not our naive labours have been in vain!'" (35). This final echo of mushroom-speak prevents readers from leaving Mahon's poetic frame without first pausing and noticing, as Tsing insists is important. In an essay on the nuclear catastrophe following Hiroshima (a setting of import in Carr's poem), Jean-Luc Nancy urges us to "remain exposed," like Mahon's mushrooms, amid environmental crises, "think[ing] about what is happening" (8), while acknowledging those in a state of either arrival or departure.

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Questioning Inheritance: Paul Muldoon's "Gathering Mushrooms"

The historical reach of Paul Muldoon's "Gathering Mushrooms," like Mahon's "A Disused Shed in Co. Wexford," is expansive, described as "a landmark for younger Irish writers," and an "essential equipment for living" (Frazier 200). Reaching backward in time, Muldoon acknowledges an ancient relationship between farming and combat. Here, he follows Virgil, who arranges vines like soldiers in formation in Book 2 of the *Georgics*. That is, Muldoon refers to his mushroom-farmer father as an "ancient warrior / before the rising tide," who will work steadily, "without breaking rhythm" (106). He, like a soldier, wears a general-issue uniform: "the same old donkey-jacket / and the sawn-off waders" with a "peaked cap," and commands regulation gear: "a knife, two punnets, a bucket" (105). As Fran Brearton explains, Muldoon's

> father becomes both a symbol of the past and a trustworthy starting point for the leap into an unknown future. Patrick Muldoon stands as representative of a particular way of life—not the academic or intellectual life, but a more instinctive rural stability: mushrooms, but not magic mushrooms. (48)

This representative mushroom farmer heralds from a distant age: a warrior from long ago who "has opened the gates of Troy" (105). Intertextually, then, Muldoon's father opens the gates in Mahon's elegy for the "wordless" mushroom collective, "begging us" "not to close the door again" (Mahon 35). Muldoon's speaker, too, assists the agricultural efforts of the father: "We have taken our pitchforks to the wind" (105). Working in tandem, together they embody georgic labors of physical toil and dynamic motion:

> The mushroom shed is windowless, wide,
> its high-stacked wooden trays
> hosed down with formaldehyde [...]
> to that first load of horse manure.
> Barley straw. Gypsum. Dried blood. Ammonia. (105)

In this description, Muldoon revels in the uncomfortable details of a food product that rises from a grave of "formaldehyde," "horse manure," "dried blood," and "ammonia." This "windowless" "shed," in which the father tirelessly works, "so on and so forth till kingdom come," transmogrifies, in the final stanza, into the dirty protests of IRA prisoners in Long Kesh. Across these five interconnected sonnets, the father spans a historical divide, from ancient Troy, to the H-Block of Long Kesh prison and its 1981 Irish hunger strike. Interposed mid-way into this trajectory, in the second sonnet, is another georgic interruption of "the fire bomb / that sent Malone House sky-high" (105), a reference to the 1972 IRA firebomb in Belfast, which destroyed the entire collection the Ulster Museum's textile collection. An assault on woven textiles is an assault on networked structures already "sodden with rain" in the first sonnet, in the form of the mother's "hand-embroidered" "tablecloth" "flapping through the yard" (105), like a white handkerchief of reconciliation, ignored for now.

Muldoon reclaims the handkerchief image in the final sonnet, vocalized by the speaker's friend hallucinating on magic mushrooms, who urges appeasement: "*let straw and dung give a spring to your step,*" "*lie down with us now,*" and "*wrap / yourself in the*

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soiled grey blanket of Irish rain / that will, one day, bleach itself white" (108). Just as Virgil transforms Octavian's plough into a war chariot and then back into a tool of agriculture, so, too, Muldoon's linen—part of Belfast's heralded past—re-establishes a mycelial connection of conciliation, despite its violent manifestations earlier in the poem. That is, initially, the linen is merely a soggy mess on the mother's line; then it becomes political as the destroyed treasure in a cultural archive—leaving the Keeper of Applied Art at the Ulster Museum in anguish: "We might have wept with Elizabeth McCrum" (105). Lastly, the linen transforms into another object of precarity, as a blanket garb to replace the displaced Long Kesh prison uniform. Reconstituted in these final lines, the tablecloth regains its earlier "whiteness" in georgic perseverance, despite the "Irish rain": "*Lie down and wait*." Here, it is linguistically webbed together by the heroic couplet off-rhyme of "white" and "wait" (106).

Granted, Muldoon, in his speaker's interlude into drug use—"we were thinking only of psilocybin" (105)—refuses to directly accept the patriarchal line of mushroom farming. Still, the Trojan horse from the first stanza, a mythical stand-in for the sneaky ability to outwit a nemesis in war, becomes absorbed into the speaker's psychedelic trip on magic mushrooms, now cut free from the horse's limbs of motion: "my head had grown into the head of a horse" (106). Thus, like the image of the Trojan horse, one moment and one object/subject embeds itself in another: the speaker has imaginatively *become* the father's tool, a device for intrusion into enemy territory. And, thus, the power of the mycelial web is as active as ever, overcoming rupture to reinstate georgic values of order and hope for the future:

> […] *Your only hope*
> *is to come back. If sing you must, let your song*
> *tell of treading your own dung.* (106)

The final message balances solitary aesthetic efforts of "*your song*" against a recollection of multiple communal memories of tragedy. Ultimately, Muldoon affirms his own identifications amid Northern Ireland's conflicting alliances; thus, the mushrooms that initiate the journey never become universally static materializations.

"Gathering Mushrooms" is, ultimately, Muldoon's linguistic equivalent to his father's art of "coaxing" (106) mushrooms from wooden trays, to buckets and punnets; in this regard, it is similar to how "Digging"—positioned as the first poem in *Selected Poems 1966-1987*—is Seamus Heaney's verbal response to both his father's soil plotting and his grandfather's turf cutting. Consider Heaney's infamous comparison in "Digging" of a spade to a "squat pen" that "rests" "snug as a gun" (3), a dangerous parallel in Northern Ireland in 1964. Both Muldoon and Heaney salute the natural world through their emotional adjacency to an agricultural lineage that grounds their poetic projects. As a result, they may straddle material and generational divides, much like the mushroom and its mycelial parentage, above ground and below.

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Oscillating Genres: Chris Agee's "Mushrooming"

One path to simultaneously negotiate both topographic and literary inheritance is through genre. That is, an engagement with inherited genres, like georgic and pastoral, affords the poet an opportunity to bring them into kinetic interaction, as Chris Agee does in "Mushrooming." Herein, Agee embraces Tsing's charge to practice the art of noticing by both temporally speeding up and slowing down the landscape under observation. Agee, as a result, provides a response for how *form* can function as a site to negotiate an Anthropocene aesthetics that fosters "forms of cooperation that escape" a "self-destructive logic" (Horn and Bergthaller 8). Without evading the underlying awareness of occupying a damaged planet (explored by Tsing et al. in *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet: Ghosts of the Anthropocene*), Agee immediately initiates an escape in the first stanza. Here, the speaker witnesses a pastoral slowing down of time: "Nothing stills the woods to silence / like the aftermath of rains," and then continues with "the meadow-crickets quenched, / the boughs and saplings of birch and pine […] shining / here and there with sunshafts from parted cloud." In this atemporal space, "time inspired," readers enter the grandness of mythology: "The Greeks felt the mystery of Zeus, / the lightning's muse" (51). The arrival of Zeus's lightning bolts, however, signals an oncoming shift in genre and temporality.

Once we arrive at Agee's fourth tercet, the "dark labour of fungi" ensues and the scene becomes more accelerated. That is, Agee replaces the "mottle[d]" light and "desultory *plops*" of rain from the first and second stanzas with the dynamic action of fungi: "Vicarious as the uprush / of poetry, the delicate caps of mushrooms / thrust through the earth's rot" (51). The georgic mode, in this instance, powerfully aligns with the represented fungi, such that the "meandering wall" on which lichen and Indian pipe mushroom sprout is a real-world stand-in for "Frost's art" (51), recalling Robert Frost's "Mending Wall," another North American equivalency. Over the course of the poem, readers crisscross mycelial-like from "the Eden of amateur mycology," listing Adam-like the many lyrical names of mushrooms, "*Chanterelle, Thimble-cap, Velvet-footed Pax*" and "*Voluminous Milky*," to the ghosts of ecological destruction: "fishstink and profusion of latex" (51). In both modes, Agee freely shows readers his cards: he is a poet looking at mushrooms as a poet would, through the wide lens of indirection, roping together semblance and actuality.

By doubling the genres on hand, Agee expands his poem's potentiality for ecological regeneration: "half-masked by a layer of leaves, / by mossy vestiges of treetrunks" (51). Further, he seeks a language of mushrooming, "a language all of its own / neither prose nor song, / not animal, yet not quite plant" (52). Let us recall Mahon's mushrooms that similarly seek to be heard in their own language. Both poets, practicing the object-relations approach of noticing, provide a space in which companion species may define the auditory textures of their own narratives.

Over the course of his twelve tercets—and two sets of pastoral/georgic oscillations—readers witness Agee teasing out whether genre or genus defines the language of fungi. In his attempt to classify "their svelte ethereal flesh" (52), he ultimately

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lands on fungi's speed and adaptive capacity. That is, in the final tercet, the mushrooms, "one-day miracles of the world's design" (52), transform under the poet's gaze. Agee structures the final line as a simile, contending that mushrooms are "like haikus in the woodland epic of birth and decay" (52). In this final gesture, the poem calls for balance between genres at two ends of the length spectrum: the haiku and the epic. By challenging genre boundaries, Agee, likewise, challenges the traditional separation between agricultural processes and literary practices, and between the sciences and the humanities, which is critical to a serious engagement with the Anthropocene.

Connecting Strangers: Padraig Regan's "Rehydrating Mushrooms"

Just as Agee underpins his poem's argument across mycelial interconnection, so, too, does Padraig Regan establish a formal structure to replicate the nonhuman world. Regan begins "Rehydrating Mushrooms" by literally 'decanting' (in Sheldrake's terminology) the mushroom into the poetic space. In other words, the movements of the mushroom (and its mycelial parentage) track the poem's development, advancing stealthily underground and underfoot, from stanza to stanza. The first couplet begins with a concession in continuous present that directs readers to a future moment, "I'm thinking of how mushrooms will haunt a wet log." Here, the speaker employs an admission as a wedge into a simile: "like bulbous ghosts; / of how a mushroom may be considered a travesty of a flower / in a way that a wolf may be a travesty of a grandmother" (81). This first observation, then, enables the speaker to productively consider the equivalence, or "travesty" thereof, between things: mushrooms to ghosts and then flowers, and wolves to grandmothers.

Regan's initial simile establishes a pattern of movement the rest of "Rehydrating Mushrooms" will continue to sustain. Two stanzas after their natural appearance on a log, Regan returns to the literal act of "adding water to mushrooms," rejuvenating the mushroom's potential for reverie. It is here that readers encounter another simile, "like dull confetti," and so begins the transformation from edible mushrooms, to a non-edible object in the poet's toolkit, namely paper. Significantly, the paper is shredded. Thus, when the "swirling" mushrooms "begin to *print* / themselves onto the water, their flavor" (81; emphasis added), the word "print" gains an additional resonance. In effect, it can now "imprint" itself, or leave its mark. In this fashion, the shredded paper reconstitutes itself, like the rehydrated mushrooms, to become a site for "printing" and merging, similar to the mushrooms that leech their taste into the water. Herein, both objects shapeshift. Thereafter, the paper simile appears once more, reinforced yet again by water, in the form of rain for which the speaker has long awaited and now "greets" "in a tracing-paper-thin dress, no tights." With tights absent, the rain "falls on [the speaker's] head" and "seeps into" "undisclosed locations" (81).

An oscillation between the mediating work of the poet—composing by hand on paper—and the powerful infusion of the reconstituted mushrooms is suited to Regan's long-lined couplets of paired and elongated interaction. This is the crux of the georgic genre: Virgil's agricultural project, if we recall Goodman's claim above, is a mediation of

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the physical work of a poet who constructs an interspecies frame (akin to Regan's grandmother and wet log). Further, Goodman explains that the *Georgics*

> are as much about the tending of words as they are about agriculture and other forms of terriculture: they are concerned not only with words (*verba*) as bearers of things (*res*) but also with words *as* things, exerting friction within representation and requiring labor and care. (Goodman 11)

In this regard, taking nature seriously entails taking language seriously, as well. Words literally are carriers, *imprinted* things, engaged in mycelial sprawl in this lyric selection in which mushrooms prominently feature. Ultimately, Regan's work commits to intertwining species, images, and moods to simulate a mycelial footprint of expansion.

After signaling a vastness in the first line in which the mushroom appears in Regan's poetic space, it reconfigures itself. That is, it transitions from peaceful observation to "bulbous ghosts." In this 'decanted' image, *the speaker*—the human agent and source of responsibility—becomes the point of interconnection:

> [...] Personally, I don't
> believe in ghosts, but it has been three months since a man was shot
>
> in a street just next to where I live & now it seems the ghosts are everywhere:
> in clouds that stay around the fringes of the sky, in a blur in a photograph
>
> when the camera jerked away, in a thumbprint smudge on my glasses lens. (81)

The preponderance of mushrooms cropping up on the "wet log" relies, additionally, on the presence of water, already engaged in transformative work. Let us recall Tsing's claim (expanding on Donna Haraway's *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Others*, 2003) that mushrooms are a 'companion species.' Indeed, companionship guides the series of peripheral sightings that follow, from a "thumbprint smudge," "a blur" in a photograph, a fringy "cloud" in the sky about to rain, to the ghosts "everywhere," even though the speaker claims to not believe in their existence. Further, the shooting to which the poem refers is that of Stephen Carson, murdered on February 25th, 2016 in the bathroom of his Walmer Street apartment in Belfast (Regan interview).

Once violence enters the poetic space, it hovers like a mycelial underpresence across the couplets, observed by the speaker in even the smallest distractions. In each of these instances, readers encounter a point of contact between two ancillary forces or objects along an "agrarian seam," observable in a blur or a smudge. Thus, the murder of a stranger in Belfast occupies the poem's metaphorical plane, like a mushroom spore print and lurking tragedy. Finally, in the final image, the rain falls, its long-awaited arrival recalling the last section of T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" (1922), since a "week without rain is enough to set" the speaker's "skin ticking." As we have come to expect in a poem of interspecies parallels, Regan compares the rain's falling to a human product, namely, "a bolt of gauze." Thus, rain arrives both as a "bolt" of thunder *and* as a bundle of "gauze" meant for tending to wounds; the latter reference returns readers to Stephen Carson shot "three months since," still hovering after his introduction five couplets earlier (81).

Above all, "Rehydrating Mushrooms" honors interconnection between strangers, human and nonhuman. In the overlapping space between those strangers, an intimacy of

compassion flourishes, since as the rain reaches the speaker's body, so, too, it "seeps into the water table," passing through other "bodies," we are told. The mushroom, therefore, effectively proposes a means of remediation across an interruption of violence by channeling water to hydrate the mushroom both for human consumption and for a nonhuman reconstitution of its earlier natural form. Despite this nonhuman remediation, though, the poet cannot erase that Stephen Carson was needlessly shot while dialing 999 in the presence of his partner and son by those driven by criminal vengeance (McDonald). The poem's memorialization and linguistic reconstitution of this dead stranger—Regan's neighbor and fellow resident of Belfast—becomes even more important for its ability to step across distance. Further, the resulting georgic elegy is not for Carson alone, as the last grounding sentence suggests: "It is the first Monday of June 2016," recalling the last grounding line in Elizabeth Bishop's "In the Waiting Room" (1976), an example of North American expansion: "and it was still the fifth / of February, 1918" when the child speaker suddenly remembers "The War was on / Outside" (161). For Regan's speaker, similarly, the month is significant because it conjoins another 'war,' the shooting of 49 far-off individuals, yet interlinked in mycelial fashion, at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida on June 12th, 2016. This tragedy is also set against the backdrop of the EU Referendum on June 24th, 2016 in which Northern Ireland voted, to no avail, to remain in Europe, hoping to stay connected to a larger whole (Regan interview). However, within the dramatic context of the poetic frame, the speaker alludes to these interconnections on the "first Monday of June 2016" (81), that is, on June 6th; thus, the speaker still stands before all that is to follow in that tragic month, establishing another point of intersection across temporalities, as Regan has also done across spatiality and species. In the end, readers are left with a strong sense of "language consciously *at work*," since, as Fairer explains, "the decorum of georgic is the opposite of easy and refined." In Regan's frame, likewise, "progress is won through resistance" ("Georgic" 467) and the dogged work of poetic mediation.

Embedded Tragedies: Ruth Carr's "Mushrooms"

Ruth Carr, like Padraig Regan, begins "Mushrooms" in the act of tending to, and establishing a relationship with, the mushroom as a material manifestation of both violence and remediation. Once again, verbal meditation begins as the mushroom comes in contact with its sustaining companion of water: "I am rising milk white mushrooms / under the tap" (54). The mushroom in Regan's fashioning begins in its natural landscape, only to enter the domestic space once the poet transports it there (and, once ingested by the speaker, the mushroom later returns indirectly to the rain). In contrast, in Carr's poetic arc, the mushroom begins in the domestic space, as an agricultural product being prepped for a meal (like Regan's), to then return to its agricultural habitat in the penultimate line: "I visualize a mushroom field at dawn." Over the course of the poem, Carr's mushroom, yet again in parallel to Regan, ruptures the domestic scene. As a result, the poet accommodates a grounded georgic expansiveness, like Mahon who links "Treblinka" *and* "Pompeii" (35) on the same line.

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If we track the network of associations that intersect Carr's "Mushroom," it begins with the *whiteness* of the mushroom the speaker cleans. This color, likewise of import for Muldoon's trajectory, reminds the speaker of a nearby infant, the addressee of the poem, whose "mouth opens *birdlike* / To gulp all the world it can" (54; emphasis added). Here is an animal reversal of Sylvia Plath's infant in "Morning Song," whose "mouth opens clean as a *cat's*" (157; emphasis added). This bears mentioning since Plath's 1959 poem, "Mushrooms"—"So many of us!" (139)—is the North American prologue that initiates this Irish poetic mushroom trajectory, as a comparison of it against Mahon's poem, published over a decade thereafter, bears out. In this way, Mahon establishes a transatlantic expansiveness, like Darcy's poem at the outset, echoing across a jumbled temporal and spatial interconnectivity. (Indeed, both David Kennedy [*Irish Studies Review,* 2010] and James McElroy [*An Irish Quarterly Review,* 2018] establish Plath as Mahon's textual antecedent.) From the open mouth of the child (Plath's and Carr's), the speaker witnesses another white object: "A sliver of white in all that pink— / The first tooth is through" (54); next, she leaps to another vulnerable subject, the "girl's voice on the airwaves," speaking, "Fifty years on," about the after-effects of Hiroshima, "Shocked by the hole / Where her sister's cheek should be, / She can see right through to the teeth" (54). This startling image breaks the poem apart, forcing readers to pause 'exposed' and implicated in a way that Nancy would honor. Similarly, Karen Barad contends that a connection between "terrestrial and atmospheric mushrooms" exists in an "uncanny material topology" in which each inhabits the other, like that of "radiotrophic mushrooms thriv[ing] in nuclear contaminated areas" (116).

Georgic-like in its precision and specificity, the white of the mushroom—aligned initially with the goodness of milk—introduces its very (embedded) interruption. That is, Carr transposes the mushroom into an image of horrific violence, specifically a nuclear mushroom cloud: "I am watching skin peel like paint / Plants recoil into themselves / Seeking their own shadow" (55). This hole in the sister's cheek, the speaker declares, "Fragments everything," such that "Thousands of splinters mosaic her child form, / This is the nuclear act embedded in flesh" (54). Here, Regan's "dull confetti" turns maliciously into a "mosaic" of "splinters."

Yet again, the vocation (and intervention) of the poet becomes significant when the poet "visualizes" directly onto "the blank white space that is a mushroom" in the final stanza. This "blank white space," like the page on which the poem is printed, follows the piercing description of the girl on the airwaves. In her attempt to regain equilibrium, the poet, thereby, overlays her literary labors on top of agricultural labors: "I *visualize* a mushroom field at dawn. / I drop one and it's gone" (55; my emphasis). Now, the mushroom returns to its natural ecosystem and preferred time of day. And, yet, there is violence embedded in the word "drop" and its connection to a bomber jet that "drops" a bomb before "it's gone." In the Irish context, "drop" echoes back to the famous last line of Yeats's 1928 poem, "Leda and the Swan": "Before the indifferent beak could let her *drop*?" (215; emphasis added). Yeats's Leda is forever caught in Zeus's beak, since the poetic frame closes with her mid-air. Thus, Yeats displaces Leda's post-rape tragedy to hold off

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the wars that he knows will come from this "engendering": "The broken wall, the burning room and tower / And Agamemnon dead" (214), and the sonnet, thereby, cannot close.

The Troubles Archive (http://www.troublesarchive.com/) catalogues Carr's poem alongside other sectarian poems, a reminder that the localized violence of the Troubles remains the backdrop to the WWII violence fifty years past. In contrast to Yeats, Carr does indeed *drop* her single mushroom, but she does *not* see it land; it merely disappears into the early morning. As a result, following Barad's description of nuclear contamination, the poem's "uncanny material topology" (116) embeds *three* simultaneous present moments into each other, all of which remain open. First, the speaker-mother prepares a meal in the presence of her child, the addressee of the poem. Secondly, the voice of the girl on the radio—an incisive object of mycelial interconnection if there ever was one—recounts her sister's death. Lastly, the speaker simulates the actions of an aircraft whose target is obscured by cloud cover, yet still drops its load "at dawn" (55), like the case of Kokura which set off the tragedy in Nagasaki. In each instance, the threat of future disturbance and disaster looms, both nearby (as sectarian violence in Northern Ireland) and distant (as nuclear aftermath in Japan). Still, Carr's poem, like Darcy's, avoids a dystopian vision by turning toward the future, nurturing, georgic-like, next season's 'crop.'

Responding to the Anthropocene: The Resonance of Virgil's Georgic Aesthetic

Each poem in this paper, by Mahon, Muldoon, Carr, Agee, Regan, and Darcy, poignantly demonstrates the lasting value of Virgil's georgic mode. As a didactic poem, the *Georgics* honors the nonhuman world for its scalability; from its atomic, to its cosmic structure, it holds multiple points of view simultaneously. Across wide-spread interactions, the genre deflects abstraction, in favor of immersion. Further, the georgic mode predicates that—despite the intrusion of violence upon the agricultural scene—a collaborative survival relies on the resilience of both humans and nonhumans. Indeed, Fairer refers to Virgil's epic as "Janus-faced," since "progress" co-exists with the precarity of potential "anarchy and conflict" ("Georgic" 462). Arising out of precariousness, then, the georgic poet channels a language of energetic engagement; thereby, the act of composing a poetic text mirrors the labors of the farmer (and the mushroom, itself).

As this paper has argued, these lyrical mushrooms hailing from Ireland and Northern Ireland offer readers particularly evocative examples of interrupted georgics that are both self-annihilating and self-rejuvenating. Herein, we witness an Anthropocene aesthetics of entanglement characterized not only by rupture, but also by symbiosis and dependency, where proximity balances distance. Additionally, this project along the fragile Irish border requires both a spatial sensitivity and a heightened sense of empathy, tasks well-suited to a poet. For instance, Ailbhe Darcy's embedded landscape in "Mushrooms," "bunkered down" and "snug on the deck" in "this cuckoo winter," full of news "dread-heavy with vortex," is more than a megaphone about environmental awareness. Rather, it mediates a landscape of blurred boundaries through its employment of georgic scalability: the human and the nonhuman embed in one another, such that mushrooms "grow on a person," making the human into "a vertical farm" (28-9). Thus,

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Darcy's lyric establishes an interspecies companionship amid precarity, "shifting attention from crisis to care" (Reynolds 19). As a result, along with the other lyrics assembled here, it harmonizes with recent scholarship in *The New Irish Studies* (2020) that privileges interconnection between sites of solitary cultivation.

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Invoking a 'Calamity of Peace': The Private Revolution of Wendell Berry's 'Mad Farmer'

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Abstract

Building on evolving theories and criticism of post-Vietnam War environmentalism, this essay places Wendell Berry's agrarian essays and "Mad Farmer Poems" at the cusp of significant ideological change in twenty-first century ecocritical thought. The semi-fictional mad farmer developed in Berry's poetry collection illustrates how the rural farmer serves as a catalyst for revolutionary environmental change that peacefully marries the private and public uses of wilderness. My analysis of Berry's poems demonstrates how the poet's use of symbolism, metaphor, and peaceful protest positions the farmer as the most qualified person to lead us away from mainstream and radical environmentalism and toward a movement indicative of deep-rooted social change.

Keywords: Environmentalism, Wendell Berry, agrarian poetry.

Resumen

Basándose en la evolución de las teorías y la crítica del ecologismo posterior a la guerra de Vietnam, este ensayo sitúa los ensayos agrarios de Wendell Berry y los "Poemas del granjero loco" en la cúspide de un cambio ideológico significativo en el pensamiento ecocrítico del siglo XXI. El granjero loco semi-ficticio desarrollado en la colección de poesía de Berry ilustra cómo el agricultor rural sirve como catalizador para un cambio medioambiental revolucionario que casa pacíficamente con los usos privados y públicos de la naturaleza. Mi análisis de los poemas de Berry demuestra cómo el uso del simbolismo, la metáfora y la protesta pacífica por parte del poeta posicionan al agricultor como la persona más cualificada para alejarnos del ecologismo dominante y radical y hacia un movimiento indicativo de un cambio social profundamente arraigado.

Palabras clave: Ecologismo, Wendell Berry, poesía agraria.

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Wendell Berry's poetic alter-ego, the "mad farmer," seeks the truth. He considers his relationship with nature, his reliance on capitalist ideology, his duties to his community, and lastly, his loyalty to the American government. Many of Berry's post-Vietnam essays and poems depict the American farmer's frustration with urban growth, the destruction of the environment, and the empty governmental promises of agricultural support following the turmoil of the late 1960s. Berry's post-war agrarian essays and "mad farmer" poems narrate an environmental movement from the perspective of the rural farmer under a corporate-driven government.[1] The search for "truth" leads Berry, and his mad farmer persona, to denounce public forms of environmentalism in the context

[1] The "Mad Farmer Poems" were originally published in the 1970 poetry collection, *Farming: A Handbook.*

of large-scale industrial farms. Berry's farmer invokes a movement to peacefully reclaim the land and reassert a community-based farming existence.[2]

Berry's mad farmer poems encourage small-community farmers to return to their fields and families for spiritual renewal as a peaceful response to the political, economic, and environmental atrocities created by the Vietnam War. Reminiscent of Virgil's *Georgics*, a poetic celebration of the peacemaking characteristics of agricultural life, Berry's poems advocate caring for the land, crops, animals, and most importantly, each other.[3] In the introduction to her translated text of *Virgil's Georgics*, Janet Lembke describes the poem as "a heartfelt cry for homecoming, for returning landholders and their families to the fields and pastures they had lost through no fault of their own" (xvi) during a time of political and civil war caused by Roman expansion throughout the Mediterranean. The conflict to which Virgil was responding was marked by the "power struggle between conservative aristocrats and the "nouveau-rich" made wealthy by trade, agribusiness, and war" (xiv). Similarly, in the wake of the Vietnam War, Berry interprets the shift from small to corporate farms as a spiritual and physical attack on rural communities. Many of these larger farms are designed to engage in faster, safer, environmentally friendly agricultural practices, but economically and spiritually, they destroy small farms. The selfish, prideful, greedy behaviors that Berry attributes to fueling the war are also the attitudes that destroy small rural communities once dependent on family farms; he labels these behaviors "a deadly illness of mankind" (*The Long-Legged House* 66)[4]. The issues perpetuating the Vietnam War and post-war environmental thought, suggests Berry, are based on an inability to address how we treat each other and the world. Despite promises to practice non-violence against each other and the environment, communities continue to foster violence by endorsing a *want* rather than a *need* culture.

Berry's argument is not new, and readers may ask why we should dredge up the complaints of Berry's farmer decades after their publication. The answer is glaring. "The machine economy has set afire / the household of the human soul, / and all the creatures are burning within it," he asserts in his poem "Some Further Words" (*The Mad Farmer Poems* 33). Berry's essays and mad-farmer poems build on the Vietnam war-time mentality by addressing the machine and technology-driven environmental movements of the post-Carson era[5]. The same movement that championed the protection of America's communities and wilderness by creating an environment that is safe from chemical hazards and long-term global threats is equally responsible for the erasure of the small-town farmer from the American landscape. Berry's environmentalism, as evidenced by

[2] Bron Taylor's forward to *Igniting a Revolution: Voices in Defense of the Earth,* asserts that, "it is only through "experiments with truth" (to borrow a phrase from Gandhi's autobiography) during concrete political struggles that we have a chance to discover or recover viable solutions" (5).

[3] Virgil's *Georgics* was his second major work, after *The Eclogues* and before *The Aeneid,* published between 37 and 30 B. C.

[4] Berry makes this assertion in "A Statement Against the War in Vietnam," a speech presented to the Kentucky Conference on the War and the Draft at the University of Kentucky in 1968. The speech is included in Berry's *The Long-Legged House.*

[5] Rachel Carson's groundbreaking 1962 work, *Silent Spring,* is credited as the catalyst for the modern environmental movement discussed at length in this essay.

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his 'mad farmer,' begins privately, on his own farm, in his own community, for his and his neighbor's own good. The "mad farmer" persona is created to embody the personal responsibility of nurturing an intimate relationship with the earth and those we call our neighbors. The term "mad" may be used in two ways: It may refer to the anger that the farmer feels toward the disappearance of small farms, but it could also be used as his perceived mental state for wanting to distance himself from the rewards that capitalism promises. The poems underscore Berry's theories discussed in his many essays and allow readers to experience firsthand the American farmer's anguish. The loss of small family farms is more than just an economic problem: it is a loss of identity, culture, and family. "The first casualties of the exploitive revolution are character and community," he argues (*The Unsettling of America* 11). The farmer is still capable of adopting a private environmentalism, but only if he divorces himself from the commercialization of agriculture.

The farmer's suitability to model future environmental movements and reestablish the small, rural farm requires attention to two discussions I present in this essay. First, I examine how recent scholarship on the post-Vietnam era environmental movement, in the context of small farming communities presented in Berry's essays, is counterintuitive to fostering healthy farming communities.[6] Second, I demonstrate how Berry's "mad farmer" and post -Vietnam industrial growth and misguided environmentalism provide significant political struggles in response to the wilderness degradation that early movements failed to prevent. By focusing on Berry's "mad farmer" poems and his portrait of the farmer as a peacemaker and nurturer, intimately tied to the land, I argue that the farmer reveals to the reader the urgency needed to escalate a deep, social ideological change that formal movements neglect.[7]

Post-Vietnam Mainstream and Radical Environmentalism

In the context of Berry's agrarian essays and poetry, post-Vietnam War environmentalism, characterized by economic, technological, and industrial growth for the sake of human comfort, drives / has driven / is driving? small farming communities to extinction.[8] This growth strips the farmer of his character and identity, provokes violent ideology against the farmer, and leads to an increase in abandoned farms. Growing farming commercialization leads families to live less on their own products than in prewar times. Vegetable crops and meat are primarily produced for resale outside the community, which is forcing the farmers to purchase food for their families from larger, more industrious suppliers. Farming since the 1960s relies on agricultural technology to

[6] Morris Allen Grubbs's edited collection of interviews, *Conversations with Wendell Berry,* provides excellent context for many of Berry's essays and poems.

[7] This line of thought is synonymous with what Mark Somma calls "Revolutionary Environmentalism," which I will discuss at length later in the essay.

[8] The essays in Best and Nocella's *Igniting an Environmental Revolution* refer to this movement as "mainstream environmentalism."

make the farmer's work more efficient for large-scale production.[9] However, the connection between modernization of agricultural techniques and, as Berry asserts, "the disintegration of the culture and the communities of farming" has not been adequately recognized. Berry explains in "The Agricultural Crisis as a Crisis of Culture" that reliance on quantity over quality is a central issue facing small farm communities (*The Unsettling of America* 45).[10] To increase quantity, he argues, many technological advancements in machinery replace the work of American farmers, thus all their discipline and know-how is sacrificed. This statement underlines a concern expressed in several essays and poems addressed later in this essay. "What is the effect on quantity of persuading a producer to produce an inferior product? What, in other words, is the relation of pride and craftsmanship to abundance?" (46). Berry asks these fundamental questions to underscore the loss of the unique skills that build the character of the American farmer.

For a comprehensive historical analysis of post-Vietnam environmentalism, I turn to Hal Rothman's book *The Greening of a Nation? Environmentalism in the United States Since 1945.* Rothman points to the late 1960s as a crucial time in the development of United States environmentalism. American culture embraced a utopian vision by the late 1960s (83). Concerns for the physical environment and the effects of human activities on the landscape became part of everyday environmental discourse. Instead of efficiency that dominated the scientific conservation at the turn of the century, Rothman asserts that Americans developed a new ethic that emphasized the concerns of an affluent, optimistic society that envisioned no limits to its possibilities (84). Moreover, Rothman asserts that Americans became obsessed with individualism, individual rights and personal entitlement, rather than focusing on the collective rights and personal obligations that the nation's founders envisioned (85). Due to this ideology, the notion of "community" and healthy environments got lost.

The mainstream environmental movement born out of the 1960s and 1970s political conflict focuses on rectifying the destruction of nature for purely anthropocentric uses which fuels a movement of violence and a revenge mentality that leads us even further away from Berry's ideals. Mainstream environmentalism, according to Mark Somma, is described as "a reform oriented, technocratic outlook that seeks accommodation with the existing corporate economic and interest-group political system" (37).[11] Activists disgruntled with mainstream environmentalism turn to radical forms of action to educate the public about the atrocities of environmental degradation. Perhaps the most well-known of these groups is Earth First!, established in 1980 by Dave Forman. In "A Spark that Ignited a Flame: The Evolution of the Earth Liberation Front" Noel Molland discusses the popularity of Earth First! in the United States and its influence throughout Europe. While the movement is characterized and popularized by protests,

[9] Paul Conkin's A *Revolution Down on the Farm* traces the history of American agriculture from the times of the early English settlers through the Twenty-first century. His book examines the changes to small farm communities, federal policies impacting the farmer, and technological advances in agricultural techniques.
[10] In the same essay, Berry compares communist countries forcing populations out of their villages to politicians in Washington forcing small farmers out of business (45).
[11] Somma compares "mainstream environmentalism" to philosopher Arne Naess's "shallow ecology." Some scholarship refers to this movement as "traditional environmentalism."

civil disobedience, and ecotage (Molland 47), its radical offshoot, the Earth Liberation Front (ELF) is perhaps even more well known for violence. Meant to target exploiters of nature, the ELF asserts that its actions are to destroy the properties of those who profit from exploiting the environment. The ELF members argue that the law will support those individuals and industries that are directly harming nature. Paul Joosse in "Antiglobalization and Radical Environmentalism: An Exchange on Ethical Grounds" presents revealing data about this behavior. He argues that since 1997, "[the ELF] has committed over 600 acts of sabotage and arson in North America, causing over $100 million in damages to biomedical research centres, logging companies, ski resorts, and SUV dealerships" (34). The problem here is that the radical protests are targeting those in power to get revenge for a perceived wrong. Matthew Hall, in "Beyond the Human: Extending Ecological Anarchism" provides an accurate assessment when he asserts that "anarchist thinkers recognise that 'power is everywhere', but they focus their criticisms on political and social power which uses force and compulsion to execute actions against the will of others" (376). The problem with mainstream and radical environmental movements is that they are contradictions, as Berry predicts and as we have seen.

Our actions toward achieving post-war community and environmental harmony are steeped in irony. Berry points out that we preserve peace by waging war, advance freedom by supporting dictatorships, or "win the hearts and minds of the people by poisoning their crops and burning their villages and confining them in concentration camps" (*Long-Legged House* 68). These contradictions are at the heart of some of the more recent criticisms of radical actions.[12] Property destruction detracts from the seriousness of protests, encourages police brutality, promotes militarization of protest management, and leads environmental activists to question the effectiveness of protests (Joosse 43). The ELF's (and similar group's) attempt to disable profit motive through violent attacks does more harm than good to the environment. Joosse argues that property destruction and protests undermine the aims of the movement and do little "to encourage practical, local, and sustained action in the service of global justice" (34-5), and his argument is precisely the reason that Berry calls to make our actions more private than public.

In his 1970 essay, "Think Little," Berry addresses the natural rise and fall of political movements in America.[13] He is particularly concerned with the possibility of the environmental movement becoming a "[. . .] public cause, served by organizations that will self-righteously criticize and condemn other organizations, inflated for a while by a lot of public talk in the media, only to be replaced in its turn by another fashionable crisis" (*The Art of the Commonplace* 81-82).[14] The main issue here is that people do not engage in

[12] Hall, for example, argues that anarchism is "a promising political philosophy for undermining the human hierarchy and domination of the natural world and exploring the exclusion and subjugation of the non-human" (375). He further argues that we need to establish a non-hierarchical relationship with non-humans. Milstein et al, in "Make Love, Not War?" argue that radical movements become stronger and more nuanced as time progresses, but that the violence associated by direct action appeals to media outlets can be framed in more effective and inclusive ways.

[13] Berry specifically points to the Civil Rights and Peace Movements.

[14] Joosse argues that continually addressing environmental problems with technological solutions clouds our vision of what the true environmental issues are, namely "global capitalism's inherent pursuit of unfettered economic growth" (33-4).

environmentalism as a private cause; the messages at the heart of protests, peaceful or otherwise, are lost in the public sphere. The media attention is centered on actions rather than message. Berry asks that we regard the environmental movement as an extension of the Civil Rights and Peace movements and argues that the same mentality in exploiting the environment exists in the fostering of racism and militarism. The problems remain public and institutionalized with the blame being placed on others (government). Rather, we should assume these issues on a much more private, personal level and without violence. There may be some immediate benefits to the ELF's challenge of corporate operations, but their actions are still very different from the inclusive, continual, local, political involvement that is lacking in the anti-globalization movement (Joosse 44).

Measures taken by mainstream and radical environmentalists, we may conclude, are more symbolic than impactful, and they neglect the real issue facing our communities. William Major underscores one of the more significant points made by Berry when he asserts that, "marriage of violence and American identity is perhaps best exemplified less by the brutality of our streets—which, in essence, is a political problem—than it is by the machinations of our economic life and their effects on the land" (27). These issues continue to plague our communities in the post-Vietnam era because they are rooted in the consumerism that increasingly takes over the natural and social world (Best and Nocella 8). Best and Nocella point to two specific issues that are responsible for the war on the environment: overpopulation and mass production. A careful read through Roderick Nash's classic text *Wilderness and the American Mind* underscores the conclusion that western culture, from the pioneer era, through nineteenth-century romanticism, and into the preservationist and conservationist twenty-first century has pushed the limits of what it means to civilize the wilderness.[15]

The loss of nature and small-town farming communities to twentieth century consumerism may be recovered by receding from the public environmental battle and practicing a more personal approach. This movement begins in our own home communities on family farms. Berry's argument that a healthy culture is "a communal order of memory, insight, value, work, conviviality, reverence, aspiration" begins to address this issue (*The Unsettling of America* 47). He continues that a healthy farm culture is based on familiarity with the land thus promoting an intelligence that "no amount of technology can satisfactorily replace" (47). The key issue here is, as Berry states, that if we allow generations to pass without invoking the possibilities of farm communities, all will be lost. "And then we will not only invoke calamity—we will deserve it" (47).

Now, over two decades into the new millennium, neither mainstream nor radical environmentalism truly rectify damage to the environment. Rather, we must consider Mark Somma's call for "revolutionary environmentalism." In "Revolutionary Environmentalism: An Introduction," Somma argues that mainstream and radical

[15] Ralph Pite's "How Green were the Romantics?" provides a necessary evaluation for how we interpret ecological problems. He asserts that ecological science is relatively new and that how we define and perceive environmental issues is a matter of personal interpretation. Turning to poets and essayists such as William Wordsworth, Percy B. Shelley, and Aldo Leopold, Pite argues, helps us understand how we should react to the scientific data with which we are presented.

environmentalism do very little to establish a "qualitatively new social system" (38). These acts of environmentalism embrace actions and behaviors over significant changes in ideology. Somma asserts that we need to move to an entirely new, positive social society which does not yet exist. Revolutionary environmentalism, according to Somma, promotes the need for deep ecological change integrated into the practical social and economic life of ordinary citizens. The three main components that define this movement are having a spiritual awakening, promoting ecological education and fundamental political and economic change. At first glance, Somma's proposition for a revolutionary environmentalism seems unattainable. As Bron Taylor aptly states in his forward to *Igniting a Revolution: Voices in Defense of the Earth, "*the term "revolutionary" is concerned primarily with making lasting, systemic change" (4). He argues that many supporters of revolutionary environmentalism believe that their ideologies cannot be realized without abolishing the current forms of environmentalism that exist.

It is not that late-twentieth century environmentalism is not necessary and well-intentioned. Best and Nocella emphasize that environmentalism is a necessary movement "toward healing the pathologies of a destructive and domineering society" (9). However, post-Vietnam movements have done more to temporarily *rectify* the destruction of the environment for instrumental purposes rather than *prevent* damage to the environment to preserve its intrinsic qualities. While the movement protects nature, it does so in concert with corporate, economic, and political motivation. The decisions made for environmental protection depend on the individual leadership and special interest groups. Therefore, the movement embraces an anthropocentric view of nature promoted by white, privileged males.[16]

The Farmer is Not without Blame

The idea of sharing in land ownership and being bound to it by immediate economic interest (survival from the food we produce), investing love and work, family loyalty, and memory and tradition is promising. "It has the power to turn each person away from the big-time promising and planning of government, to confront in himself, in the immediacy of his own circumstances and whereabouts, the question of what methods and ways are best" (Berry, *The Unsettling of America* 16). It proposes an economy of necessity requiring the adoption of a private environmentalism on our own land.

Before praising Berry's farmer as a natural "revolutionary" leader, it is important to note that Berry does not believe that the farmer is innocent of violent acts. We need to consider Firas A. Nsaif Al Jumaili's argument in his essay, "Wendell Berry: Mediating Between Culture and Nature," that there is a mixed message associated with the farmer. In one respect, the farmer must destroy nature, by removing forests and destroying wildlife to provide room to grow crops. However, Al Jumaili points out Berry's argument

[16] The "Wilderness Act of 1964" places specific definitions on how "wilderness" is defined and enforces protection based on human perceived value of wild areas. These criteria consist of land size, whether human-made structures or alterations are deemed necessary, or if resources in each area are essential to human use.

that wilderness and civilization can co-exist with "enlightened farmers" who find space for the wilderness on their farms (120).

The American farmer, however, is not born "enlightened." Berry would likely not agree that abolishing current environmental thought is necessary for sustained, systematic change. Rather, he argues that we need to look at history to reshape our ideals. The first half of Berry's essay, "The Unsettling of America" presents the similarities between the foreign and domestic colonialism responsible for the destruction of productive farms and forests. "Now, as then, we see the abstract values of an industrial economy preying upon a native productivity of land and people" (9). Berry's essay provides a historical overview of white America and how it has been both a catalyst for and victim of exploitation. He first asserts that the historical discussion documents how exploitation is deeply rooted in our past. Europeans exploited the land by civilizing it and running natives off the land. However, white settlers, too, have always been victims of exploitation and invasion from generation to generation. Modern industrialization continues to buy out individuals for land. The exploitation is as much a modern problem as a historical one. "[. . .] These conquerors have fragmented and demolished traditional communities, the beginnings of domestic cultures," Berry argues, and these conquerors have argued that what they destroyed was outdated, provincial, and contemptible. Victims, especially those who were also white, often believed them. He asserts, "[. . .] the class of independent small farmers who fought the war of independence has been exploited by, and recruited into, the industrial society until by now it is almost extinct" (6).

Semblances of the period of industrial growth are highlighted further when Berry mentions white Europeans trading items such as knives, tools, cloth, weapons, ornaments, novelties, and alcohol. These materials changed the Indian way of life because they made life easier. Handicrafts became obsolete. Modes of hunting changed. "The Indians acquired commercial values and developed business cults. They became more mobile [. . .]" (7-8). While the Indians experienced movements in population, their "place was based upon old usage and association, upon inherited memory, tradition, veneration" (6). Berry refers to the exploitation of the Indians as a parable. He argues that it was not a loss in battle that made them "redskin," but rather accepting dependence on traders "that made necessities of industrial goods" (8). A farmer's existence under a post-war corporate environmentalism is one that will not thrive. Not only does environmentalism vis a vis corporate and industrial growth threaten the farmer's economic well-being, but it also threatens his own physical existence.

Additionally, the historical overview illustrates how revolutionary the idea of exploitation is over time, and it shows how our relationship to the land is integral to our history. The founding of America (and its conquest) rarely occurred on purpose as it was the result of our ancestors' rush to clear the way to get to some other fertile land or area where gold was promised. Some North American settlers, however, saw promise in the land and opted to establish a "home." They created agricultural settlements rather than continue the quest for gold. Other settlers, however, failed to see the continent as a

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"home," and thus failed to understand that the wild, howling wilderness of North America was "home" to native Americans.

The Mad Farmer as Political Pacifist

Berry's "mad farmer" poems advance the discourse on revolutionary environmentalism because they illustrate how the rural farmer serves as a catalyst for deep-rooted change by peacefully engaging in private measures that evoke peace, community, and the health of the land. In "The Contrariness of the Mad Farmer" the persona says, "I am done with apologies," and he goes on to assert that if he prefers to do the opposite of what is expected then so be it. The rest of the poem provides examples of his "contrariness," defined as deliberate unruliness and disobedience. He plants by the stars [not the experts] and puts faith in God that he would have a crop. He laughs at funerals and cringes at weddings, gives money when enough has been collected, and only joins in activity when it was on his own accord. These actions demonstrate rebellion, but in a non-violent yet meaningful (to the farmer) way.

The first overtly political blow comes when the persona says, "Well, then, 'they said' / go and organize the International Brotherhood / of Contraries" (*The Mad Farmer Poems* 8). At the request, the persona asks, "Did you finish killing / everybody who was against peace?" While a discussion of the poem's commentary on the war is outside the scope of this analysis, it is important to note that "The violence of the domestic economy, seen here in scarred lands, acidic streams, polluted wells, and the loss of natural and human habitat is strategically juxtaposed with Vietnam to emphasize their commonality under governmental and corporate complicity" (Major 34). The persona concludes the poem by offering his overall lesson: going against "men," the representation of established environmentalism discussed earlier in this essay, has given him a sense of "deep harmony" and truth. Berry's farmer does not ignore the political ramifications that previous movements instill, nor does he advance his cause by advocating the violence that these political actions provoke. Berry, a pacifist, combats a violent capitalist society by turning to his own domestic reality: his own farm. In his own private space, the farmer does as he pleases, answering only to nature and the crops he has cultivated.[17]

For a more serious political commentary, I turn to "The Mad Farmer, Flying the Flag of Rough Branch, Secedes from the Union." The poem denotes the farmer's attempt to remedy mainstream environmentalism. Written from a third-person perspective, the poem overviews the mad farmer's desire to distance himself from a commercialized society. The opening stanza identifies all the promises from which the farmer is walking away: power and money, power and secrecy, government and science, government and art, science and money, ambition and ignorance, genius and war, and outer space and

[17] The essay "Conservation and the Local Economy" in *The Art of the Commonplace* provides an excellent overview of how environmental conditions shape Berry's call for increased awareness and support of small, community-based agriculture. Berry also provides personal accounts of hardships facing the rural farmer in his home of Port Royal, Kentucky.

inner vacuity (*The Mad Farmer Poems* 27). To change his thinking, he must remove himself from these economic-driven vices.

It is important to first examine the act of "secession" as it is being used in this poem. Berry chooses a politically charged act, often one that is accompanied by violence or military aggression, to place his persona in a war. His secession, however, is not wrought in violence; it is peaceful, and the metaphor is being used to demonstrate the drastic measure the farmer is willing to employ to preserve his farming community. After the "secession" from the ills of war and violence, the farmer "returns to the small country he calls home" (27). This country is his farm, and the second stanza illustrates the close loyalty and connections that the farmer has with his land and his neighbors [sharing potluck dinners with them]. These homes that the farmer describes present a close bond, a "togetherness" that the "Union" ironically fails to provide. In a key passage the persona states:

> Come all ye conservatives and liberals
> who want to conserve the good things and be free,
> come away from the merchants of big answers,
> whose hands are metalled with power;
> from the union of anywhere and everywhere
> by the purchase of everything from everybody at the lowest price
> and the sale of anything to anybody at the highest price;
> from the union of work and debt, work and despair;
> from the wage-slavery of the helplessly well-employed.
> From the union of self-gratification and self-annihilation,
> Secede into care for one another
> and for the good gifts of Heaven and Earth. (28)

This stanza is not politically divisive despite the threat of secession; the farmer calls for both conservatives and liberals to come together. The peaceful secession is the act of turning away from the corporations, or "merchants of big answers." Further, Berry places the blame of war on consumerism when he says that the merchants' hands are "metalled with power," as if they are armed and easily overpower consumers. The power to purchase goods cheap and resell them at a higher price demonstrates Berry's concern with exploitation, "wage-slavery of the helplessly well-employed." Finally, the persona re-asserts his peaceful protest by asking his fellow community members to join him in separating from a country of greed and profit and return to a country (his community) that cares for one another.

Berry's persona furthers this movement in the second stanza when he asks people to embrace the economy of the body, daily work, and replenishment at mealtime and at night (freedom through severing political ties). The persona then invites the reader to join in the farmer's world:

> Come into the dance of the community, joined
> in a circle, hand in hand, the dance of the eternal
> love of women and men for one another
> and of neighbors and friends for one another. (28)

Berry's poem illustrates both the need for and the capability of communities to unite. However, a figurative interpretation yields another outlook. For the community to unite, Berry's farmer has had to secede from the "union," suggesting a brazen political move that

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was made considering previous efforts not being successful. The political metaphor is strong; the union is the larger, corporate world that governs all economies and communities. For the farmer and his neighbors to get out from under the hold of corporate America, they must remove themselves and create their own community [or union] of farmers. While co-existence is certainly a theme derived from this poem, the blatant separation the farmer experiences from the corporate world is clear.

Politicians and bureaucrats base success on the economic prosperity of industrial interests and not on the success or failure of small local economies. David Robinson, in "Wilderness and the Agrarian Principle: Gary Snyder, Wendell Berry, and the Ethical Definition of the 'Wild'" contends that wild and human interactions in the late twentieth century are often associated with antisocial acts that show "disregard for and domination of others that characterizes the structure of our social relationships, and in extremes, the violence, perpetrated by both individuals and nation-states, which haunts our ordered and regulated lives (16). The farmer's commentary that we receive in "Prayers and Sayings of the Mad Farmer" and "The Satisfactions of the Mad Farmer" are typical. A wish for a good crop, a healthy environment, and a moral existence are all that he wants. In these poems we find Berry and his persona as farmer and theorist, both of whom exhibit a significant degree of pacifism that fosters their agrarian commitments (Major 29).

Berry's essay "Think Little" points to the American farmer's hard work with fewer economic returns. "As a class," Berry argues, "farmers are one of the despised minorities. So far as I can see, farming is considered marginal or incidental to the economy of the country, and farmers, when they are thought of at all, are thought of as hicks and yokels whose lives do not fit into the modern scene" (*The Art of the Commonplace* 85).[18] As generations pass, the farmer's knowledge and intimate connection with the land is lost. Corporations and machines are not bound to the land like the farmer—big farms think in terms of volume and efficiency as opposed to care for the crops and the land. Berry argues that to repair the damage, we need to go further than public protests and political action. "We are going to have to rebuild the substance and the integrity of private life in this country" (Berry, *The Art of the Commonplace* 86). William Major's "Other Kinds of Violence: Wendell Berry, Industrialism, and Agrarian Pacifism" asserts that once the individual is carrying out the foundations of true change, conscience, morality, and local knowledge, he "is no longer tethered to anything fundamental" (33). Being part of the economic barrier that is the "union," only serves to distract the farmer from finding true change.

The Mad Farmer as Nurturer

The second part of Berry's essay "The Unsettling of America" distinguishes between the characteristics of the exploiter and the nurturer. In short, the exploiter is concerned with efficiency and profit, whereas the nurturer is concerned with health and

[18] In "Sex, Economy, Freedom, and Community," Berry argues that rural communities are often regarded as backward, unprogressive, unmodern and in need of new advancement and technology (*The Art of the Commonplace* 165).

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long-term dependability. Berry identifies the farmer as the nurturer. In other words, the exploiter thinks in terms of numbers, quantities, "hard facts" while the nurturer thinks in terms of character, condition, quality, and kind.

The nurturing farmer presented in Berry's poems is divine and mythical. He introduces the farmer as a nurturer, who crosses the boundaries of sexual roles, to seed, plant, nurse, and repeat. He says, "[. . .] the farmer crosses back and forth from one zone of spousehood to another, first as planter and then as gatherer" (*The Unsettling of America* 10). The farmer has a divine hold over nature. "The Man Born to Farming," the first poem in Berry's collection, offers a third-person observation of a farmer's supernatural relationship with the land. The persona tells us that to the farmer the "soil is a divine drug," and he is the one who "enters into death / yearly, and comes back rejoicing" (3). The death referenced here is the harvest: once the vegetation dies off the farmer reaps the rewards. There is a life-cycle metaphor that permeates the poem, however. From death, as previously referenced, comes life when his hands reach "into the ground and sprout." Furthermore, he sees the sun set in the "dung heap," a reference to early planting when the fields have been fertilized and rise again "in the corn" when the crops are completed (3).

The farmer as a mythical character has the power to influence nature without the help of machines. The persona asks, "What miraculous seed has he swallowed / that the unending sentence of his love flows out of his mouth / like a vine clinging in the sunlight, and like water / descending in the dark?" (*The Mad Farmer Poems* 3). Symbolically, the farmer has the power and the understanding of the land that is highly unique. It is not a far-reaching idea to call upon the farmer to lead the march into the fundamental changes that revolutionary environmentalism demands. "Berry's discursive attack on modernity— faith-based or no—helps us to re-think the private/public dichotomy he so readily summons as essential to environmental and cultural renewal" (Major 30). The farmer, in this instance, is not influenced by modern advances in agriculture. He relies on the relationship with his own private farm to understand his relationship with nature.

Despite the effects of misguided environmental protection of the twentieth century, the "mythical" farmer has the power to save the environment with his own hands. Robinson makes an interesting argument when he says that the farm is "in many ways an entity based on order and control, dedicated to the use of the land for ends decided by the farmer, usually economic ends. The farm, that is, can be seen as the first step in the denial of the wild" (17). However, Berry's farmer represents an individual descending directly from the wild. Berry illustrates that the farmer, despite order and control and potential profits, is the man who is most in tune with the wild. In "The Mad Farmer Revolution," the first poem in the collection to provide a call to action, Berry again presents a third person observation that paints the farmer as a mythical creature, "dancing at night in the oak shades / with goddesses" (*The Mad Farmer Poems* 5). His power has made a bountiful crop of corn, pumpkins, plums, peaches, and flowers.

But what really makes the farmer a divine nurturer? In "People, Land, and Community" Berry suggests that to work at a farm and make it successful, it takes time and community. Berry states that "human continuity is virtually synonymous with good

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farming, and good farming obviously must outlast the life of any good farmer" (*The Art of the Commonplace* 189). For good farming to last it must occur in a farming community, a neighborhood where people know each other and place proper value on good farming. He asserts that, "A healthy culture holds preserving knowledge in *place* for a *long* time. That is, the essential wisdom accumulates in the community much as fertility builds in the soil" (189).[19] We become victim to industrial farming the minute we purchase machinery. Farm and farmer both become resources. "It is running out for the farm built on the industrial pattern; the industrial farm burns fertility as it burns fuel. For the farm built into the pattern of living things, as an analogue of forest or prairie, time is a bringer of gifts" (192).

In "Some Further Words," Berry's persona crafts a succinct philosophy statement for the farmer:

> The farmer
> is worthy of the harvest made
> in time, but he must leave the light
> by which he planted, grew, and reaped,
> the seed immortal in mortality,
> freely to the time to come. The land
> too he keeps by giving it up,
> as the thinker receives and gives a thought,
> as the singer sings in the common air. (33)

This passage allows readers to see the balance and give-and-take relationship that the farmer fosters with the land. The land is his to nurture and cultivate, but it is not truly his in the sense of ownership. He may own the farm but is not entitled to the ownership of the land, much like a singer cannot own the air where her song is carried. William Major's essay sheds light on why we should look to Berry's writings to understand the division between these public and private environmental spheres. Major's essay asserts that pacifism and environmentalism work with one another. Berry's environmentalism captures the pacifism he practices individually, which, as an agrarian environmentalism, speaks directly against the violence associated with capitalistic ideology. As Major argues, Berry presents scenarios that suggest a disconnect between the peaceable agrarian domestic life and the violent public sphere. "Berry's writings target both mainstream environmentalism and industrial militarism, a critique that is often lacking in most "shallow" environmental discourse" (29). Berry's writing provides an understanding for how purpose and meaning are shaped by the ethical values developed out of relationships fostered between individuals, families, and the landscape (Robinson 17). However, these ideas are in stark contrast to the foundations of mainstream environmentalism.

As Somma asserts, the revolutionary environmental movement is most effective when every day citizens are called upon for action rather than law makers and entrepreneurs who are removed from nature. Berry's poems are from the perspective of

[19] Berry discusses how the Old Order Amish's longevity in farming is based on their reliance on horses and manual labor as opposed to machine-operated equipment. These farmers have run out millions of mechanized farmers (190).

the very individual that Somma describes. This mad farmer is not the privileged individual who embraces the mainstream. Rather, he is the working individual most in tune with the earth. Al Jumaili points out that Berry's "relationship with the earth, woods, lakes, mountains and streams is dominated by a developed deep understanding and experience rather than being dominated by the requirements of science, technology, and profit" (121). His experience of intimately cultivating the land as a farmer allows him a perspective rarely seen by non-farmers. As Major reminds us, Berry believes that practice and security are meaningless when not immersed in land stewardship (29). However, revisiting poems such as those that celebrate the American farmer could lend a new interpretation of how we can begin moving toward this way of viewing our relationship with the land and society.

Conclusion

Berry argues that our lack of imagination to envision our future world is a "failure to perceive a relation between our ideals and our lives" (*Long-Legged House* 67). To live fully and free it is important to embrace American ideals, but these ideals cannot be achieved through violence. Our involvement in violence and war demonstrates that we have lost our faith in our ideals and that we know we have not lived up to them. "We do these things because we have forsaken our principles and abandoned ourselves in the inertia of power" (68). We seek to uphold the "truth" with lies and answer dissent with force and intimidation. Berry asserts that "this involves us in a sort of official madness, in which, while following what seems to be a perfect logic of self-defense and deterrence, we commit one absurdity after another" (68). The ultimate madness, Berry contends, is that to destroy our enemies we are willing to build and keep weapons that will destroy ourselves and the world. He contends, "The revolution that interests me and that I believe in is not the revolution by which men change governments, but that by which they change themselves" (74).

Berry's 1988 essay, "Economy and Pleasure" presents the most glaring dichotomy that exists in modern agriculture: On the one hand industrial farming relies on constant change and technology and on the other hand the small, community farm thrives off stability and balance. Berry makes clear how those who hold small farming communities dear to their heart should respond to cultural movements that threaten that way of life. However, no essay or poem on its own is going to change those actions. Rather, Berry's works create an action plan that embrace the pacifist ideals of a revolutionary environmentalism

To carry out this peaceful "revolution," Berry's farmer offers important guidelines. In "Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front" the persona issues a warning: If you embrace quick profit, all things ready-made, instant gratification and so forth, your mind will be owned by the government. The government will tell you what to buy and when and your future will be determined by these individuals. To resist this influence, the farmer asks readers to do something that does not automatically translate to profit. He asks readers to love the Lord, love someone who does not deserve it, denounce the

government and so forthBasically, do anything that cannot be bought or sold. Embrace nature by calling a forest your crop (knowing you will never harvest it) and call the leaves that fall from the tree and rot your harvest. The persona asks his readers to "Put your faith in the two inches of humus / that will build under the trees / every thousand years" (*The Mad Farmer Poems* 20). As soon as the government figures out the moves you are making, you need to throw them off the trail—the way a fox does when he makes unnecessary tracks to lure prey in a different direction.

Does the American farmer successfully carry the flag for a twenty-first century revolution for the protection of small farms? That remains to be seen. What we can conclude, however, is that Berry makes compelling arguments for why we should follow the "mad farmer" into peaceful battle. In "Some Further Words" the persona states, "My purpose is a language that can make us whole, though mortal, ignorant, and small" (32). It is tempting to view this poem as a commentary or preface directly from Berry, but its position in the text (late among the poems) suggests that the poem serves as an aside from the mad farmer himself. Al Jumaili concludes that Berry's "intense interest in the natural world was not inward toward transcendental awareness but outward toward membership, family, and human cohesion" (125). Al Jumaili's point is further substantiated by Major who argues that Berry's theories are "connected foremost in the private domestic world where the work of peace and stewardship has its moral center. Even if peace doesn't come, at least the individual lives with the certitude of a clear conscience, free of the public stain that too easily soils the person of character" (32).

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Wilderness Act of 1964.

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From Suzanne Verdier to Anna Barbauld: An Ecofeminist Revolution of the Georgics?

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Abstract

This article explores how the tradition of georgic writing in the early 19th century is reinvented through ecofeminist standpoints in France and in England. It focuses on the works of two poets: Suzanne Verdier's *Géorgiques du Midi* (*Georgics of Southern France*, 1799-1812) and Anna Barbauld's English poem "The Caterpillar" (1815). Through a comparative analysis, this article will question the connections between French and English traditions of the georgic and observe how female voices emerge at the dawn of Romanticism, with specific ecopolitical claims and poetic representations. Indeed, Verdier dedicates the first canto of her French georgics, "The Silkworm", to sericulture, an exclusively female practice, which is initially denounced as a form of repressive biopolitics, but later becomes a model of female empowerment and ecological awareness. As for Barbauld, she was a friend of Erasmus Darwin, whose essay *Phytologia*, though not openly political, was connected to radicalism. Both Darwin's and Barbauld's work imply, as Verdier's poem does, that reforming agriculture would lead to social and political change. Barbauld prolonged this reflection by questioning the place of women in this new world in a context of political turmoil with the Napoleonic wars. Yet, despite the hostility between France and England during this period, this inaugural ecological reflection may also be seen to constitute a social and poetical network propitious to the inter-fertilization of revolutionary ideas, knitting secret silk threads of peace between the two countries, and the promise of a fertile future.

Keywords: Suzanne Verdier, Anna Barbauld, georgic, sericulture, ecofeminism.

Resumen

Este artículo explora cómo la tradición de la escritura de las geórgicas a principios del siglo XIX se reinventa a través de puntos de vista ecofeministas en Francia e Inglaterra. Se centra en las obras de dos poetas: las *Géorgiques du Midi* (*Geórgicas del Sur de Francia*, 1799-1812) de Suzanne Verdier y el poema en inglés de Anna Barbauld "The Caterpillar" ("La Oruga", 1815). A través de un análisis comparativo, este artículo cuestionará las conexiones entre las tradiciones francesa e inglesa de las geórgicas y observará cómo emergen las voces femeninas en los albores del Romanticismo, con reclamos ecopolíticos específicos y nuevas representaciones poéticas. De hecho, Verdier dedica el primer canto de sus geórgicas francesas, "El gusano de seda", a la sericultura, una práctica exclusivamente femenina, que inicialmente se presenta como una forma de biopolítica represiva, pero luego se convierte en un modelo de empoderamiento femenino y conciencia ecológica. En cuanto a Barbauld, era amiga de Erasmus Darwin, cuyo ensayo *Phytologia*, aunque no abiertamente político, estaba relacionado con el radicalismo. El trabajo de Darwin y Barbauld implica, así como lo hace el poema de Verdier, que reformar la agricultura conduciría a un cambio social y político. Barbauld prolongó esta reflexión para cuestionar el lugar de las mujeres en este nuevo mundo en un contexto de agitación política con las guerras napoleónicas. Sin embargo, a pesar de la hostilidad entre Francia e Inglaterra durante este período, esta reflexión ecológica inaugural también puede constituir una red social y poética propicia para el intercambio de ideas revolucionarias, tejiendo hilos secretos de paz entre los dos países, y la promesa de un futuro fértil.

Palabras clave: Suzanne Verdier, Anna Barbauld, geórgicas, sericultura, ecofeminismo.

The long eighteenth century was the golden age of the georgic revival on both sides of the Channel. John Dryden's English translation of Virgil's poem in 1697 paved the way for the development of British georgics. These texts often played with the codes of the Virgilian tradition, shifting to descriptive poetry. French georgics were more classical. Indeed, they were closer to the original *Georgicon* and always followed the same structure: four cantos, in French alexandrines,[1] praising French farming and gardening in didactic terms. The most famous example was Jacques Delille's *French Georgics* (1804).[2] Delille was also the author of a 1770 versified translation of Virgil's poetical works. Even though his works were undeniably a milestone in the conception of French georgics, there were many other georgic rewritings *à la française* before them: François-Etienne Gouge de Cessières's *The Ornamental Gardens* (1758), *The Four Seasons* (1763) by the Cardinal of Bernis, or Pierre-Fulcrand de Rosset's *Agriculture* (1777).

Did women writers also play a role in this eighteenth-century reshaping of Virgilian georgics? Though Kevis Goodman and Rachel Crawford's works opened new perspectives in the study of modern georgics, all the most prominent writers of modern georgics in the 18th century seem to be men. However, some women also took part in the reinvention of the genre. An interesting theory of the origins of georgics was proposed by Anna Barbauld in her 1794 preface to Mark Akenside's *Pleasures of Imagination*, which was echoed in her later poem "The Caterpillar" in 1815. In France, only one female poet, Suzanne Verdier, seems to have written French georgics. Both Barbauld and Verdier wrote during a period of political turmoil which mirrored Virgil's troubled times of fallen powers and rising empires; both knew the joys of literary success and the pain of marginalization. Was their conception of the georgic also revolutionary, or did they exemplify a tradition of English or French georgic poetry?

Anna Laetitia Barbauld, née Aikin (1743-1825) is better known than Suzanne Verdier today. Born in a family of Dissenters, she received a nonconformist education which encouraged her to develop her literary talents, as well as a taste for natural history which she shared with her brother John. Her *Lessons for Children* were popular until Barbauld fell into disgrace after having criticized the role of Britain in the Napoleonic wars in her poem "Eighteen Hundred and Eleven". A few years later, in 1815, Barbauld wrote her poem "The Caterpillar", which is often seen as the perfect example of the Romantic notion of interconnectedness between man and nature (Nichols 74). More recently, it has also been analyzed as heroicomic and satirical (Smith 551) and related to Barbauld's political commitment (Den Otter 209). Analyzing it in the light of the georgic model may reveal new perspectives about this poem but also on the evolution of Barbauld's poetic and political choices.

[1] Alexandrines are lines of twelve syllables; they are the most common line in French poetry and are considered as the "noblest". The tragedies of Racine were written in alexandrines.

[2] The original title in French is: *L'Homme des Champs ou les Géorgiques Françaises*. Hughes Marchal provides more details on the popularity of Delille in France and in England, where the poet lived as an *émigré* during the French Revolution (Marchal 1). His editorial success contributed to the ever-increasing popularity of the georgic on both sides of the Channel.

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Suzanne Verdier, née Allut (1745-1813) was born in Montpellier. She was an accomplished woman of the Enlightenment: having received the same education as her brother, she was fluent in Greek, Latin, English and Italian, and Virgil was one of her favourite poets. She saw the effects of the French Revolution, but also the dreadful aftermath of the Terror, with civil war, conspiracy, and mass executions (her brother died on the scaffold). After 1794, a lonely, broken-hearted woman, she took a keener interest in farming and wrote her own georgics, *Georgics of Southern France* (*Géorgiques du Midi*) between 1799 and 1812. Verdier's poetic talents were officially acknowledged and celebrated in her times: she was appointed "Maître des Jeux Floraux" in 1809.[3] However, her names and works are largely forgotten now despite the efforts of her grandson, Gustave Fornier de Clausonne, who republished most of her poems in his 1862 edition. There is little scholarly criticism on them, except a few demeaning pages in a French literary journal in 1989. Her name is also mentioned in a list of "forgotten female writers" (Slama 91), which is sadly indicative of the work that still has to be done by teachers and academics to rehabilitate such authors.

By comparing Barbauld's poem "The Caterpillar" and Verdier's first canto on silkworms, which bear similarities in their themes and sociopolitical issues, this paper will analyze both poems in the light of their possible connections with the georgic literary tradition, to see if they could be defined as instances of an "eco-Georgic" or not (Fairer 201).[4] Silkworms and caterpillars indeed seem to be used to subvert the didacticism of the georgic on agricultural practices, by adding specific bioethical and political concerns. This article will also question the possibility of early iterations of ecofeminism in the georgic model, as it would be defined later by Carolyn Merchant: Verdier's poems and Barbauld's show that women and nonhuman nature are both marginalized and exploited, and this situation is precisely what raises questions about the socio-cultural structures of power. New connections may then appear in a broken Europe to "reweave the world"[5] through a silken fabric of words, and a nature provided with an agency of its own.[6]

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The Virgilian Model

"If Virgil really designed to instruct the farmer by his Georgics, he might have done it much more effectually in plain prose" (Aikin 58): John Aikin's view on the *Georgics* in his 1777 *Essay on the Application of Natural History to Poetry* may sound a bit harsh. Though Aikin was a true lover of Virgilian poetry, his criticism on the *Georgics* is unusually

[3] "Maître des Jeux Floraux" (literally "Master of the Games of Flora") was a highly honorific national distinction in French poetic writing, the modern equivalent of which could be the status of Poet Laureate.
[4] David Fairer indeed suggested to analyze Wordsworthian poetry in terms of "eco-Georgic" rather than pastoral.
[5] The expression "reweave the world" is used by Irene Diamond and Glorian Feman Orenstein in the title of their pioneering essay on ecofeminism (1990).
[6] For more information on ecofeminism and new materialism, especially regarding the notion of "agency", see Esther Rey Torrijos's article on the history of ecofeminism (Torrijos 24-28) and Serpil Oppermann's chapter on the same subject (Oppermann 19-36).

scathing: "we may lament that he pursued a plan that necessarily threw so much of his work into details which even his versification cannot render pleasing" (Aikin 59). He firmly stands against the danger of writing poetry for exclusively didactic purposes, to the detriment of sensibility. He praises Thomson's *Seasons* but despises authors who "shackle themselves with teaching an art, or inculcating a system" (59).

His sister Anna may have changed his mind about didactic literature in general, and more particularly the georgic. Her volume of children's stories, *Evenings at Home*, which she wrote together with her brother in 1792-1796, may be read in the continuity of her former educational works, including *Lessons for Children*. While she was publishing the first collections of their *Evenings at Home*, she also wrote a preface to the 1794 edition of *The Pleasures of Imagination* by Mark Akenside, in which she defended didactic poetry, as if to reply to her brother: "didactic, or preceptive poetry, seems to include a solecism, for the end of Poetry is to please, and of Didactic precept the object is instruction. It is however a species of poetry which has been cultivated from the earliest stages of society" (Akenside 1). The terms "species" and "cultivated", at the crossroads between biology and literature, suggest a natural harmony between the poetry of nature and the nature of poetry.[7]

This fertile metaphor becomes clearer as Barbauld quickly shifts to the georgic, which she regards as one of the earliest forms of didactic poetry and poetry in general. It was invented "at first, probably, for the very simple purpose of retaining, by means of the regularity of measure and the charms of harmony, the precepts of agricultural wisdom" (Akenside 1). Then, poetry became an art, and the very purpose of this early didactic poetry became different: the aim of poetry was not directly to instruct, but to help the reader remember instructive lessons, while enjoying the pleasure of reading. Barbauld makes it clear that the reader must have at least some previous knowledge on the subject and mentions the example of Erasmus Darwin's *Botanic Garden* published in 1792. Georgics must educate, but also please and move the reader: *docere, placere, movere*, according to the famous Horatian principle. Contrary to her brother John, Anna Barbauld praises Virgil's *Georgics* and their pleasant descriptions of Italy (Akenside 5).

Suzanne Verdier agrees with the principles of modern georgics defined by Barbauld. A certain sense of didacticism is also present in her *Georgics of Southern France*, but she is always careful to maintain the fragile balance between technicality and accessibility, so that her readers learn about technical details of farming in an accessible yet elegant style. She follows the main precepts of the genre, moving "between praxis and poesis" (Fairer 22).[8] She uses imperative forms, just as Virgil would do, to describe the different steps in the process of wine-harvest, and she gives her readers advice by using some of her characters as mouthpieces for instructive lessons. However, poetry prevails over pedagogy, and her work is not strictly didactic.

[7] Though the term "species" can be used as a synonym for "kind", it may be understood metaphorically too. The first use of "species" related to natural history dates back to the early seventeenth century according to the Oxford English Dictionary. Its specific association with the verb "to cultivate" suggests a metaphorical use, in keeping with Barbauld's claims on georgic poetry.

[8] David Fairer defines the georgic poet as "trapped between the pragmatic critic and the idealist critic", "forced to compromise between praxis and poesis" (Fairer 20).

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Verdier is not as critical as John Aikin on Virgil's *Georgics* and she wants her own poem to follow the tradition of Virgil. She pays tribute to the author of the *Aeneid*, "who sang the tragedy of Troy", and the *Georgics*, in which he "praise[d] the dances of the playful bee", when she introduces her first subject, sericulture, in an address to the silkworm:

> If he who sang the tragedy of Troy,
> The immortal voice of Dido's grief and joy,
> Finally tuned his lyre
> To praise the dances of the playful bee,
> Who could refuse to pay tribute to thee? (Verdier 33-34)[9]

She draws a parallel between Virgil's topic (the bee) and her own (the silkworm): Virgil ended his *Georgics* on an insect; she shall begin hers with another. In each case, the products of these insects, honey and silk, are metaphors of the sweetness of poetry, characteristic of the *placere-docere* mission of the georgics, and closely connected to the poetic recreation of rustic life. Verdier wants to mirror Virgil and give a faithful transposition of his *Georgics* in modern France.

Moreover, Virgil's *Georgics* provide a stylistic pattern for Verdier's own georgics. They were written in a style which was half-way between the low style of the *Eclogues* and the high style of the *Aeneid*. Verdier chooses to represent this intermediate style in her prosodic choices, with an alternation of alexandrines, the "noble" line, and octosyllabics, the "lower" line. She also insists on her lines being humble, modest: "down to earth", "as humble as my song, my flight, from high to low, / Shall explore the hamlets, the hills and the meadows" (Verdier 30).[10] The structure of Verdier's poem is also a reflection of Virgil's *Georgics*. Both poems are divided into four cantos. Virgil's *Georgics* are based on the following structure: Canto I is on harvest; Canto II, on grape-harvest and olive-trees; Canto III, on cattle; Canto IV, on beekeeping. Verdier follows a similar pattern, replacing beekeeping with silkworm breeding: Canto I is on silkworms; Canto II, on harvest; Canto III, on grape-harvest and nut-picking; Canto IV, on olive-Trees.

Finally, the political context in which both Barbauld and Verdier write bears similarities with Virgil's. When Virgil wrote his *Georgics*, the Roman Empire had just started to rise after years of civil war and the fall of the Roman Republic and Triumvirate, with the advent of Octavius who became Emperor Augustus. At the time when Barbauld wrote her later poems and Verdier published her georgics, France had also come out of a civil war, with the Terror, and the Republic led by the Directoire had fallen with the crowning of Bonaparte who became Emperor Napoleon. In each case, it was a time of political turmoil and deep uncertainty.

Virgil did not say a word on the political context in his *Georgics*—at least, not directly.[11] Barbauld and Verdier took a stand against an increasingly oppressive system:

[9] « Si le chantre immortel des restes d'Ilion / Voulut bien consacrer à l'abeille volage / Cette lyre qui d'âge en âge / Eternisa l'amour et les pleurs de Didon, / Qui pourrait de sa voix te refuser l'hommage ? »

[10] The quotes from Verdier in English are my personal translation (no English translation has ever been published). The original French text will be inserted as footnotes in the present article: «Terre à terre mon vol, humble comme mes chants, / Parcourra les hameaux, la colline, la plaine.»

[11] The idea of considering Virgil's *Georgics* as part of the Augustan propaganda has been widely debated by scholars, as the position of Virgil remains resolutely ambiguous. His *Eclogues* are more telling. For recent scholarship on paradoxical politics in Virgil's *Georgics*, see Fiachra Mac Góráin's 2014 article. See also Greg

Barbauld openly criticized the consequences of the British warlike policy in "Eighteen Hundred and Eleven". Verdier used the traditional model of georgic writing to articulate a reflection on the radical political changes of her times. Moreover, she rewrote Virgil's *Georgics* to think about the place of women in this changing world, and to conceive ethical farming as a key to social harmony. In this way, she replaced politics (from *polis*, the town) with georgics (from *georgos*, farmer), which then are turned into an unexpected manifesto for post-1794 France.

Paradoxically, the similarity of the political situation between Virgil, Barbauld and Verdier brings those two women closer to Virgil than anyone has possibly ever been before them, with the climate of civil war and the rise of a new empire. At the same time, their attempt to blend the georgic with radical republican and proto-feminist reflections also leads them away from their model.

Suzanne Verdier's Revolutionary *Georgics*

The first canto of the *Georgics of Southern France*, "The Silkworm", is dedicated to sericulture (the cultivation of silkworms to produce silk). This choice is original for two reasons: first, sericulture did not exist in Europe before the 13th century. No Greek or Roman poet from the ancient times, no Hesiod, no Virgil had ever praised its virtues. Second, sericulture in France and in England was generally a female practice. It was mostly developed in the South of France where mulberry trees would grow. Male poets of the 18th century generally described activities like ploughing or harvesting which were shared by men and women.

In the late 18th century, sericulture was mainly an indoors activity: the eggs of silk moths (*bombyx mori*) were found on the leaves of mulberry trees, the branches of which were cut and moved inside the house where they were maintained at an even temperature. The eggs hatched and became larvae, or pupae. Pupae fed on mulberry leaves and then secreted a cocoon of fine silk with their salivary glands, as a caterpillar forms a chrysalis before its final transformation into a butterfly. However, in sericulture, pupae were not given the opportunity to change into moths: indeed, the silken envelope they had spun was taken out from them very quickly to be chemically preserved; otherwise, the silk becomes rough after a few days. As for the pupae, they were doomed to an untimely death, and were generally burnt, or boiled.

Sericulture was, then, a female activity because it conveniently fitted in the daily routine of the farmers' wives who sometimes had to stay at home to take care of their youngest children. It also involved a lot of caring, which was considered as one of the cardinal female virtues according to Rousseau in *Emile*. Verdier's poem is naturally addressed to women. It first seems to be didactic, using the second person plural ("you") and imperatives to describe the first steps of sericulture, with women tending the larvae of the silk moth:

> Ah! Work again, and work e'en more!

Garrard's comment on the "overt politicisation" of Virgil's *Georgics* and their posterity in 19th century literature and politics (Garrard 119).

> And let your care, both day and night,
> Keep them enclosed in clean delight;
> Preserve their avid mouths from hunger,
> And feed them well: the more, the better! (Verdier, 41-42)[12]

Verdier then describes the almost motherly "care" ("soin" in French) of the female cultivator of silkworms (which are called "nourrissons" in French, that is "babies"). Verdier does not neglect any details about the transformations of the larvae and the conditions of their survival (light, temperature, feeding), closely following the Virgilian model in her technical precision. Women working in sericulture are identified as devoted mothers. Thus, the reader first supposes that a traditional role of caregivers is attributed to those women, a role which Carolyn Merchant, in her essay *Earthcare: Women and the Environment*, connects with an influential representation of nature as female.

However, when she reaches the last stage of sericulture, Verdier strategically changes her focalization: the addressee is not human anymore but becomes the silkworm which is fatally destroyed by its cultivators, who keep only the silk and burn the animal and mulberry leaves. The Virgilian model of the georgic is subverted in favour of the epic model, as Verdier describes the flames burning the palace of the silkworm, like the walls of Troy burning down in the *Aeneid*:

> I can still see that cruel hand,
> Tearing from every leafy tree
> Thy silken treasures: shameful end!
> In these obscure rooms, still I see
> Thy vaults and walls consumed with fire,
> The ruined halls and countless dead;
> The choking smoke, rising higher,
> Soon finds the place where thou hast fled,
> And, slowly creeping to thy bed,
> Changes at last with poisonous breath
> Thy troubled sleep into sharp death. (Verdier 45-46)[13]

Through this epic depiction, the "animaux" are reduced to "maux", or pain, according to Jacques Derrida's terminology, but the anthropomorphic depiction paradoxically goes against anthropocentrism, as the agony of the silkworm, described in epic terms, arouses the reader's empathy, thus breaking up the boundaries between human and animal. This is not a movement of vain tenderness, nor a mock-heroic parody of the *Aeneid*, but an acknowledgment of a tyrannical biopolitical regime founded upon utility. "So it was taken care of, so it was destroyed": « l'intérêt en prit soin, l'intérêt le proscrit » (Verdier 46). Verdier delights in hypotyposis and dramatic reversals: the unexpected turn from motherly care to utter destruction could be read as an "anti-pastoral" move (Gifford 42) criticizing the hypocrisy of a strictly mercantile system.

[12] « Ah! Redoublez d'activité ! / La nuit comme le jour, que votre vigilance, / Entretienne autour d'eux l'ordre et la propreté, / Et de leur faim surtout, servant l'avidité, / Sur eux à pleines mains répandez l'abondance. »
[13] « Je la vois, cette main cruelle, / Arracher à chaque rameau / Les trésors confiés à sa garde infidèle ; / Je vois, dans ces réduits obscurs. / Dont la flamme a rougi les voûtes et les murs, / Habitants et palais amoncelés par elle. / L'étouffante vapeur qui pénètre soudain / Au fond du lieu qui te recèle / Passe bientôt jusqu'à ton sein / Et te fait rencontrer enfin / Dans ta mort apparente une mort trop réelle. »

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Indeed, Verdier is not shocked only because innocent creatures are being murdered, but because an individual life is being reduced to a commercial value. She denounces the dangers of blind pragmatism over ecological awareness which leads to the banalization of violence. What follows the address to the silkworm is a striking depiction of Bellona, the goddess of war, spreading terror over the country:

> Such are the deeds of dreadful War,
> Barbaric Goddess! Won't you cease
> To ban the Arts from France's shore,
> The fearful children of our peace. (Verdier 48)[14]

The allusions to the climate of the civil war of 1794 are transparent: the "Arts" are "banned" from the shores of France, as Delille, among many other poets belonging to the Church or aristocracy, had to emigrate to England, far away from the French guillotine. The original French poem mentions "les arts et l'industrie", implying that technical knowledge on agriculture and manufacture is also under threat: industry is here subservient to the productions of war. The criticism of violence done to animals is thus hinged to political violence. In warfare, soldiers lose their individuality; they are not recognized as individuals but merely as parts of a greater force, just as silkworms are not recognized as individuals but merely as elements of the silk production.

"The Caterpillar": from Bioethics to Politics

Verdier's poem bears similarities to Barbauld's better-known poem "The Caterpillar", written in 1815, even though Barbauld seems to step away from the principles of the georgic genre. Barbauld describes the banalization of violence and an ecological awakening made possible through an acknowledgment of individual life, as one caterpillar hangs around her finger. This poem is probably not about sericulture, though. Rather, it is about the Lackey caterpillar, as the specific description makes clear (Den Otter 209),[15] a moth caterpillar. Known as a notorious pest, this variety of caterpillar was not used as a silkworm, though technically it is one.

An ingenuous reader dazzled by the beauty of the description (azure and orange sides, silvery back, velvet skin) might think that Barbauld indeed is sparing an innocent life and that the caterpillar should be saved. However, the lackey moth can be deadly to an orchard, causing devastating damage to trees and vegetables. Realizing how deadly this specific kind of caterpillar can be is the only way to understand the last line: "'tis not virtue, / 'Tis the weakness of a virtuous mind" (Barbauld 280). It would be a "virtue" for the good farmer of the georgic to kill the last caterpillar. In a georgic poem, the author would describe the different ways of struggling against the most notorious pests to protect the young crops from certain devastation. Instead of following that convention,

[14] « Des fureurs de Bellone infaillibles effets ! / C'est elle dont la barbarie / Exile de nos bords les arts et l'industrie, / Timides enfants de la paix… »

[15] Den Otter identifies the Lackey Caterpillar which indeed perfectly matches Barbauld's specific and colourful description: "For I have scanned thy form with curious eye, / Noted the silver line that streaks thy back, / The azure and the orange that divide / Thy velvet sides…" (Barbauld 279).

Barbauld describes the violence of pest control and sides with the caterpillar, turning the criminal into a victim:

> I have sought
> With sharpened eye and persecuting zeal,
> Where, folded in their silken webs they lay
> Thriving and happy; swept them from the tree
> And crushed whole families beneath my foot;
> Or, sudden, poured on their devoted heads
> The vials of destruction. (Barbauld 279)

What "vials" is Barbauld talking about? In the early 19th century, there were several possibilities to control pests. Some of them were very innovative and were changing the practices of gardening. They are described in *Phytologia*, a treatise on gardening and agriculture written by Erasmus Darwin, who suggests using chemical solutions. Erasmus Darwin conducted experiments with saturated solutions of lead and water to test the resistance of the aphis (Darwin 365). It was an early form of pest control through chemicals.[16]

Erasmus Darwin was a friend of the Aikins (Aikin L. 26). Barbauld admired the pleasant quality of his didactic poetry, as much as Darwin revered Barbauld's educational writings which he recommended in his 1797 essay on female education.[17] It is therefore rather likely that he advised Barbauld and she, being interested in science, may have reproduced Darwin's agricultural experiments. If so, "The Caterpillar" would be one of the first ecological works against the use of pesticides.

However, this poem is not only about pest control. Barbauld, just like Verdier, is keenly aware that what is at stake is not merely spontaneous sympathy but attitudes which are conditioning radical social and political changes. The maxim according to which what is dangerous must be systematically destroyed potentially leads to the tyranny of a biopolitical regime, involving different kinds of pests. Her comparison is the same as Verdier's:

> So the storm
> Of horrid war, o'erwhelming cities, fields,
> And peaceful villages, rolls dreadful on:
> The victor shouts triumphant
> [...] Yet should one,
> A single sufferer from the field escaped,
> Panting and pale, and bleeding at his feet,
> Lift his imploring eyes, –the hero weeps;
> He is grown human. (Barbauld 279)

Moving from cruelty against animals to human cruelty and warfare was not uncommon. A person who beats his horse will soon beat his wife and kill his neighbour:

[16] "There must be great difficulty in destroying the larvae, or grubs, or caterpillars, of many insects, which are injurious to the fruits and kernels, as well as to the foliage of plants, by any chemical mixtures [...] I remember putting a worm [...] into a saturated solution of sugar of lead in water." (Darwin 365)

[17] Darwin, Erasmus, *A Plan for the Conduct of Female Education in Boarding Schools*, Derby and London, Drewry and Johnson, 1797. *Evenings at Home* is said to "join amusement with instruction" (13) and several works of Barbauld (*Hymns, Spelling-Books, Lessons*) are quoted in Darwin's educational catalogue at the end of his essay.

such was the morality of Hogarth's engravings in *The Four Stages of Cruelty*. The argument of violence against animals encouraging human cruelty had already been used by Immanuel Kant. Other defenders of animals' rights would use it: William Wilberforce in England, and the Vicomte de Grammont in France.[18] Barbauld's poem goes beyond the strict didacticism of the georgic tradition, and even against it, by paradoxically siding with pests and parasites.

Barbauld's thoughts on the subject can be connected not only with Erasmus Darwin's reflections on agriculture in *Phytologia* but also with a wider anti-authoritarian and scientifically minded tradition, including the work of Joseph Priestley, who was another friend of Erasmus Darwin's and a member of the Lunar Society of Birmingham. However, though Joseph Priestley was a radical thinker, he did not stand for animal rights: Anna Barbauld tried to convince him to stop animal testing by writing "The Mouse's Petition" (1772), in which she lends a voice to a mouse trapped by the scientist for his experiments. The ecological concerns of that text resonate with her later poem "The Caterpillar".

Thus, bioethics are closely connected with the political: paradoxically, the georgic (from *georgos,* farmer) is blended with politics (from *polis*, the city), which makes this poem truly satirical–satire being, etymologically, *satura,* blending. It is not a satire of the georgic, though, but rather of the violence inherent in agricultural practices. Barbauld steps away from georgic culture to create a counterculture against the arts of cultivation. Town and country, animals and humans, struggle for life and national conflicts are unexpectedly reunited in Verdier's and Barbauld's silkworm poems. Across borders both poets seem to be in dialogue with each other, knitting secret threads between the orchard garden and the political field, farming and warfare, France and England.

Verdier: Using the Georgic as an Ecofeminist Plea

Verdier, bearing in mind that sericulture is a female practice, addresses women in the final part of her first canto, as silkworm breeders who hold life and death in their hands. She rejects gender stereotypes with a subtle irony:

> You I address, fair sex among mankind,
> You, whom by Fate were probably designed
> To please, e'en though the sweet business of passion
> Must never be women's sole occupation… (Verdier 49)[19]

By showing that women may have been created to please men, Verdier pretends to comply with a flat, conventional vision of femininity, and her euphemism–pleasing must not be a woman's sole business–is tinged with a biting irony ("e'en though the sweet

[18] The anthropocentric argument often prevailed in the first parliamentary debates against animal abuse: mistreating an animal was thought to encourage violence against one's wife or servants. For more details, see *Romanticism and Animal Rights*, by David Perkins.

[19] «C'est à vous d'y veiller et je m'adresse à vous, / Sexe que le destin fit sans doute pour plaire, / Mais dont ce soin, quoique bien doux, / Ne doit pas toutefois être l'unique affaire…»

business of passion", "quoique bien doux"). Verdier thus shows that she is perfectly aware of patriarchal gender stereotypes, but plays with them the better to distort them:

> To the moth's school, come and look,
> Learn a page from love's handbook,
> And do observe with great attention
> The worms to whom you owe all your lessons of fashion. (Verdier 50)[20]

From a rustic cliché on feminine elegance in light octosyllabic lines, Verdier shifts to a solemn reminder with the gravitas of the alexandrine. The usual comparison between women and butterflies, reducing women to ephemeral elegance and vanity, is here subverted by the harsh reality of silk produced by "worms". Indeed, the fashionable silk dresses worn by women can be made only by the sacrifice of the silk moth. Women are then expected by Verdier to remember the real cost of this elegance by keeping in mind the tragedy of the pupae's death, and to be aware of the shared materiality of human clothes and silk threads spun by nonhuman animals. By encouraging women to learn from the tragic fate of the silkworm, she draws a comparison between the condition of women in the late 18th century and the nonhuman forms of life exploited by mankind for profit, which may be read in the wake of Merchant's modern approach to ecofeminism. Indeed, according to Carolyn Merchant, women and nonhuman nature have both been marginalized and instrumentalized by patriarchal structures of power. This provides a basis for ecological as well as political action.

Verdier recommends different practices: keeping the larvae alive until the end, even though the silk is less beautiful afterwards. Moreover, she advises her readers not to destroy the whole silken fabric but to spin it: it is not as good as silk, but it is still better than to burn it all down. This practice goes against the laws of the market, as the silk will not be as beautiful and solid and will probably be sold cheaper; its commercial value will be diminished. Here Verdier stands against the tradition of georgic writing which, by virtue of its anthropocentric didacticism, only aims at increasing agricultural production. She creates a breach in this tradition to question its values and suggest different methods, refusing the commercial totalitarianism of the late 18th century and the tyranny of production and efficiency. She chooses to apply utilitarianism on a wider scale: that of nature, to make it the sum of general happiness in a non-anthropocentric way, including animals.

Yet, this nature is deeply interconnected with culture, a female culture, which is both physical and intellectual, *cultus* meaning both culture and cultivation. The occurrences of "nature" in Verdier's text reveal a more shifting definition which paradoxically moves toward aporia, or the impossibility of a strict definition of nature, paving the way for more complex and radical questionings of this notion, such as Timothy Morton's, who will later criticize "nature" as an anthropomorphic construct secretly subservient to man's fantasies of domination. Nature is first personified as a generous goddess (the word "nature" is feminine in French), but then becomes an ungraspable power with "impenetrable secrets" (Verdier 130).

[20] « À l'école d'un papillon, / Venez apprendre comme on aime, / Et surtout discernez avec un soin extrême / Ceux à qui vous devez cette aimable leçon ».

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Women thus have the power to make change happen on a local and global scale, encouraging social cohesion through ecological awareness and new practices. The first canto ends on a very Virgilian eulogy of country life which is similar to Virgil's last canto on beekeeping:

> If somewhere in our climes there is a sanctuary
> Where quiet peace may hide,
> It must be in a hamlet, peaceful and solitary
> [...] There the factions' madding trance,
> The furious shouts and parties' pride,
> Never breaks up our silence. (Verdier 56-57)[21]

The "parties" and "factions" are explicit references to the political dissensions which had emerged from the revolutionary period: such lines would have been less powerful before 1789, because there was no such thing as party politics in France yet. Though Verdier rejects the political fights which led the country to civil war, her praise of women's power in the first canto may also remind the reader of the fact that women could participate in the political debates during the French Revolution. Verdier certainly hoped to see further advances in the rights of women and may have been disappointed by the limited opportunities left to them by the Empire.

Barbauld: Refusing the Georgic Mode to Denounce a Biopolitical Tyranny

Barbauld's poem could also be seen as an ecofeminist work in its own way. In Barbauld's time, gardening was considered a proper activity for women, just like sericulture. Agricultural production had become crucially important, for several reasons. First, during the Enlightenment, thinkers such as Erasmus Darwin would think that a better agriculture, with better yields, would be intricately connected to moral and intellectual progress. That was his first motivation when he wrote *Phytologia*. Second, agriculture had become especially important after the Napoleonic wars and Napoleon's attempt to organize a continental blockade against the United Kindgom. The British government needed agricultural production to be increased for the troops, as Barbauld bitterly notices in another of her poems, "Eighteen Hundred and Eleven", written just a few years before "The Caterpillar":

> The tramp of marching hosts disturbs the plough,
> The sword, not sickle, reaps the harvest now,
> And where the Soldier gleans the scant supply,
> The helpless Peasant but retires to die… (Barbauld 233)

As Barbauld precisely compares pest-killing with warfare, her gesture is eminently political in "The Caterpillar": she refuses to obey the government's demands for more agricultural supply. This is not sabotage, as only one caterpillar is removed whereas all the others have been eliminated, but it may be an inaugural gesture of resistance, an embryo-revolution, to echo the "embryo nations" (Barbauld 279). By refusing to be on the

[21] « Ah ! Si sous nos climats il existe un asile / Où la paix puisse se cacher, / C'est au sein d'un hameau solitaire et tranquille [...] La fureur des partis, les cris des factieux / Jamais de nos échos ne troublent le silence ».

side of mass agricultural production, dictated by a patriarchal regime based upon biopolitical control, Barbauld acts as a rebel. She does not only commune with the parasite, but she is herself seen as such a one after the publication of "Eighteen Hundred and Eleven", a pamphlet against Britain's commitment in the Napoleonic war.[22]

One question remains: does Barbauld suggest alternative solutions for pest control, as Verdier does? Such solutions already existed, but only for trees, not for cabbages, for instance, or any other vegetable which would have been the caterpillar's favourite meal. Once again, such solutions could be found in Darwin's *Phytologia*: one option was, in autumn, to take the fallen leaves of the trees and make a heap of them with the addition of lime and other vegetable components, cover with soil, wait for fermentation and then use it as manure (Darwin 248).

Barbauld could have chosen to expatiate on harmless solutions for pest controls in a georgic fashion. After all, it would have matched her reputation as a didactic writer, and it would have provided a nice morality to her poem. It would have made it fit for children and become an optimistic educational fable. It would also have become a nice eco-friendly poem for readers of the 21st century concerned with global environmental crisis and looking for more respectful agricultural practices.

But Barbauld chose not to do so. Contrary to Suzanne Verdier or Charlotte Smith who subtly play with Virgilian intertextuality,[23] she refused the georgic mode, precisely because she refused the didactic value which is correlated with the imperative of better yields, as well as economic and military power. Virgil would be elusive on politics in his *Georgics* because he was the protégé of the Emperor. Barbauld said nothing (at least explicitly) on politics for the opposite reason: because she was on the other side, and she refused to bring help to a system of biopolitical oppression which crushed female writers and poor peasants the same way a gardener would crush an insect.

Instead, she ended her poem with "Tis not Virtue, / Yet 'tis the weakness of a virtuous mind", which contributed to re-asserting her reputation as a virtuous thinker, even though many considered "Eighteen Hundred and Eleven" as a political betrayal. The true morality may be that this weakness is strength, because a tiny weakness, a soft spot in the silken fabric of political power is enough to tear up the whole piece. Weakness in a highly patriarchal, bellicose system means the ability to escape control. The weakness of the lyrical persona contrasts with the "*virtus*" in Virgilian poetry, an ideal of manhood based on strength, reason and temperance, embodied by the male heroes of the *Aeneid.* It is also an echo of the "Roman virtue" mentioned in "Eighteen Hundred and Eleven", in a passage ridiculed by the *Quarterly Review*. It is finally the last remnant of her own reflection on the georgic in her preface of Akenside's *Pleasures of Imagination*, where didactic poetry was supposed to "breathe the love of virtue" (Akenside 3). The weakness in Barbauld's poem is not a virtue from a conventional point of view, but it is, in itself, an alternative: the way of parasites (biologically and metaphorically), the road not taken by farming: one that goes far, very far into the undergrowth, beyond the rich fields and the closed meadows of the georgic.

[22] See the scathing criticism published in the *Quarterly Review* in June 1812.
[23] See Juan Pellicer's article for more details on Charlotte Smith's connections with the Virgilian hypotext.

Conclusion

Using or not using the georgic mode in the 18th century could be a significant choice, poetically as well as politically. Suzanne Verdier closely followed the Virgilian tradition in her poem which may be considered as an early manifestation of the ecofeminist mindset. Anna Barbauld, on the contrary, refused to follow the georgic tradition, despite its poetic elegance and didacticism which are often to be found in her previous works. Both women used what was considered as a female quality ("care" for Verdier and "weakness" for Barbauld) to turn it against traditional social and poetical representations and criticize the violence inherent in agricultural practices, as well as the tyranny of productivity. Thus, they opened the georgic genre to the ecophilosophical questionings of the age of sensibility. However, because of Verdier's late publication, and Barbauld's choice of tacit resistance, this ecofeminist turn remained silent for a long time.

Nevertheless, the fact that the georgic model is used and subverted by female authors to reflect upon the condition of women makes it outstanding in the long tradition of georgic writing. Verdier's and Barbauld's poems are gendered critiques on agricultural practices on a male-dominated field of writing. The slow, vegetative growth of such poems finally revealed a female radicalism, the term "radicalism" itself being understood as a dynamic border-crossing force. This radicalism shows that their poems, and the political ambitions that they carry, do not belong to a human culture which is apart from nature: on the contrary, politics must be firmly rooted in the ground, in the earthly world from which they have sprung. They carry a biopolitical strength closely linked to the earth (as "radix" originally means "root"), cultivating an agricultural as well as intellectual soil in which seeds of feminist revolutions may grow in the vast field of literature, and keep blossoming in the vast field of georgics, among butterflies, silk-moths and mulberry-trees.

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Georgic Marvel: Agriculture and Affect

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Abstract

How do humans respond, emotionally and psychologically, to georgic spaces and places? What do we think and feel when we encounter "working landscapes"—those rural places (primarily farms, but also mines and working forests) where labor produces goods that meet our material and metabolic needs? Despite increasing attention to the georgic literary tradition, these questions remain unsettled. In fact, much of the growing body of georgic scholarship disagrees about the kinds of responses generated by georgic landscapes. One task that remains, then, is to map the current scholarly terrain and synthesize, if possible, a theory of georgic affect. A related, equally important task is to ground such a theory as much as possible in the realities of soil and sun and water. Without attention to such fundamentals, the georgic mode will likely remain solely the property of academics or, equally unfortunate, become as steeped in myth and therefore as untethered from the material world as the pastoral mode. Thus, in "Georgic Marvel" I derive from scholarship and experience a nuanced but intelligible concept describing the human response to georgic places. In short, my intention is to begin to do for working landscapes what the concept of the *sublime* has done for wilderness. I argue that the experience of georgic places generates marvel and humility. At least two different kinds of catalysts initiate this reaction: encounters with either an epic past or with some kind of biotic mystery trigger marvel—a kind of negative hubris that tears down anthropocentrism by reminding us of the past and of other actors and agents. In its challenge to our self-centeredness, georgic marvel approximates the sublime, but relates to a different land use category and represents a distinct response. Whereas terror is integral to the experience of the sublime, georgic marvel creates intrigue and curiosity rather than fear. Marvel leads us deeper. The article concludes with an exploration of the ways in which a theory of georgic affect rooted in marvel would productively reorient our understanding of the human place in the world.

Keywords: Georgic, affect, marvel, sublime, agriculture.

Resumen

¿Cómo responden afectiva y psicológicamente los seres humanos a los espacios geórgicos? ¿Qué se piensa y se siente cuando uno se encuentra con "entornos laborales", esos espacios rurales (principalmente granjas, pero también minas y bosques) donde el trabajo humano produce los bienes satisfacen nuestras necesidades materiales y metabólicas? A pesar de un creciente interés por la tradición literaria geórgica, estas cuestiones siguen sin respuesta. De hecho, mucha de la investigación sobre este asunto no está de acuerdo con las respuestas humanas generadas por los paisajes geórgicos. Una tarea pendiente, entonces, es esquematizar la investigación actual y luego sintetizar, si es posible, una teoría del afecto geórgico. Otra tarea igualmente importante es fundamentar dicha teoría en las realidades de la tierra, el sol y el agua tanto como sea posible. Sin prestar atención a estos principios básicos, el modo geórgico quedará vinculado únicamente a la esfera académica o, de forma igualmente desafortunada, se volverá lleno de aspectos míticos y, por lo tanto, desconectado del mundo físico como por ejemplo el género pastoral. En este artículo exploro la investigación y la experiencia, y de ellas obtengo conceptos matizados pero inteligibles que describen la respuesta humana a los lugares geórgicos. En resumen, mi intención es empezar a hacer por los entornos laborales lo que el concepto de lo *sublime* ha hecho por los territorios salvajes. Defiendo que la experiencia de los lugares geórgicos provoca asombro tanto como humildad. Hay por lo menos dos catalizadores que inician esta reacción: un encuentro con vestigios de un pasado épico o con algún tipo de "misterio biótico" que desencadena el asombro, algo como una arrogancia negativa que destruye el antropocentrismo al recordarnos el pasado y otros actores y agentes. En este desafío a nuestro

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egocentrismo, el asombro geórgico se parece a lo sublime, pero se relaciona con otra categoría de uso de la tierra y representa una respuesta diferente. Mientras que el terror es fundamental en la experiencia de lo sublime, el asombro geórgico produce intriga y curiosidad más que temor. El asombro nos lleva más a lo profundo. Este artículo concluye explorando las maneras en las que una teoría del afecto geórgico basada en el asombro nos reorientaría de forma productiva hacia una nueva comprensión de nuestro lugar en el mundo.

Palabras clave: Geórgico, afecto, asombro, sublime, agricultura.

> Wonder is a feeling that is endangered, which puts me in a luckless position, since I am perhaps addicted to it. I get to jonesing for wonder. I have measured my life in its moments, and I have defined the quality of my life by its presence. When it happens, I am.
>
> --Janisse Ray, *Drifting into Darien*

> *enchantment* entails a state of wonder, and one of the distinctions of this state is the temporary suspension of chronological time and bodily movement. To be enchanted, then, is to participate in a momentarily immobilizing encounter; it is to be transfixed, spellbound.
>
> --Jane Bennett, *The Enchantment of Modern Life*

How do humans respond, emotionally and psychologically, to georgic spaces and places? What do we think and feel when we encounter "working landscapes"—those rural places (primarily farms, but also mines and working forests) where labor produces goods that meet our material and metabolic needs?[1] Despite increasing attention to the georgic literary tradition,[2] critics have not directly addressed questions regarding the emotional impact of georgic places. One task that remains, then, is to map the current scholarly terrain and synthesize, if possible, a theory of georgic affect. A related, equally important task is to ground such a theory as much as possible in the realities of soil and sun and water. Without attention to such fundamentals, the georgic mode will likely remain solely the property of academics or, equally unfortunate, become as steeped in myth and therefore as untethered from the literal world as the pastoral mode. Thus, my goal in this article is to derive from scholarship and experience a nuanced but intelligible concept describing the human response to georgic places. In short, I aim to begin to do for working landscapes what the concept of the *sublime* has done for wilderness.

This article's exploration of human responses to georgic places aligns with affect theory (in broad terms) and Jane Bennett's work on enchantment in particular. Regarding affect, I share with Kyle Bladow and Jennifer Ladino—the editors of *Affective Ecocriticism*—the premise that "place profoundly shapes our emotional lives" (2). Because affect theory de-emphasizes discourse and instead focuses on "reactions" that begin with "the senses, the personal and the body," ecocritics who value embodied experience can draw upon affect theory as one way to articulate the power certain places

[1] Cannavo defines "working landscapes" as "agricultural lands characterized by a long-standing balance between human and natural forces" (220). See also Conlogue, whose focus on the anthracite coal region of Eastern Pennsylvania expands the definition of *working landscape* beyond farms.

[2] Along with the publications I go on to cite in the next section, see note 32 in my 2016 article for a fuller accounting of the scholarly engagements with the georgic mode.

have to elicit a (human) response (Berberich, Campbell, and Hudson 1). My own reflections have suggested to me that the way I respond to place aligns with the branch of affect theory that "understands affect as asignifying, precognitive bodily experience" (Bladow and Ladino 5).[3] As Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth put it, "affect is persistent proof of a body's never less than ongoing immersion in and among the world's obstinacies and rhythms, its refusals as much as invitations" (1). As I discuss below, place has the power to interrupt intellectual reverie and to overwhelm rationality and, in the process, to produce captivating experiences.

Jane Bennett, in *The Enchantment of Modern Life*, describes such experiences (or "encounters") with striking language. For Bennett, "enchantment" is an "odd combination of somatic effects" wherein a person is "simultaneously transfixed in wonder and transported by sense" (5). The tension between being "both caught up and carried away" produces the state of spellbinding immobilization mentioned in the second epigraph. Bennett also uses "wonder" to describe this condition. I use *marvel* in this article to signify a form of *wonder* or *enchantment* generated by working landscapes and especially by being at work in such places. Defined narrowly, *marvel* is wonder or enchantment that manifests in a georgic context; put another way, georgic labor makes marvel. Thus, marvel has much in common with the states described by Ray and Bennett in the epigraphs, but using a unique term—and, importantly for me, the term used most often in the translation of Virgil's *Georgics* completed by H. Rushton Fairclough and subsequently revised by G. P. Goold[4]—enables one to recognize not only the connections between georgic marvel and related scholarship, but also some subtle distinctions.

Order in a Fallow Field: Georgic Literary Criticism

Critics regularly define the georgic and distinguish it from the pastoral and epic modes by focusing on humans' physical response to georgic places. Scholars of the georgic mode agree that humans respond to agricultural land with labor; in fact, one could go so far as to say that the labor requisite to farming serves as the organizing principle of the georgic mode.[5] Such work yields crops, certainly, but just as important to Thomas L. Altherr, also the satisfaction that comes from completing a task and earning one's rest: "the farmer must work hard and rejoice in weariness as a worthwhile recompense" (110). Over a period of years or perhaps generations, this pattern of work and rest produces an intense knowledge of the land. In a 2016 article, I argue that in georgics this kind of intimate knowledge manifests as a deep sense of place that I call "georgic environmentalism."

[3] Bladow and Ladino follow this "vein" of affect theory through Brian Massumi and Kathleen Stewart back to Gilles Deleuze's work on Baruch Spinoza. For more on this tradition of Affect Theory, see Melissa Gregg's and Gregory J. Seigworth's *The Affect Theory Reader*, pages 5-6.

[4] Though questions of translation from the Latin are valid and perhaps compelling, they are well beyond the abilities of this writer.

[5] In his definitive *The Georgic Revolution*, Anthony Low explains that *The Georgics* "is preeminently about the value of hard and incessant labor" (8). Low uses the centrality of this characteristic to delineate between the pastoral mode that "celebrates play and leisure" and the georgic mode that "celebrates work" (4).

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Writing in 1989, Alan Liu also indicates that work defines georgic, but he argues that an important consequence of agricultural labor is the repression of the past. In his oft-quoted formulation, Liu says that "georgic is the supreme mediational form in which to bury history in nature . . . it is the form in which history turns into the background, the manure, of landscape" (18). Liu thus contends that humans respond to georgic places by focusing on the present and the future as well as the landscape itself. However, his manure metaphor betrays a fundamental lack of agricultural experience. However much one might like for piled manure to fade into the background, its aroma and the buzzing flies drawn by the same tend to attract attention. Further, even after a farmer spreads or tills in manure, a discerning eye can sense its presence. Indeed, the visible effect of manure—improved plant growth and vigor—is the point. Manure provides, then, a poor analogy for the deliberate repression of the past Liu has in mind; rather, manure more accurately represents the constant cycling of past, present, and future inevitably involved in farming.

The work of both Kevis Goodman and of Karen O'Brien also challenges Liu's argument. Goodman actually cites Liu before going on to argue in her 2004 monograph that a vital function of georgic poetry is to turn up the past. She points to the passage towards the end of Virgil's *First Georgic* wherein an unnamed farmer's plowing unearths the remnants of a forgotten war: "javelins eaten up with rusty mould," as well as "empty helms" and "giant bones" (I. 493-97). Recognizing the incongruity between this kind of dis-covering and Liu's claims, Goodman argues that this passage highlights the inevitable surfacing of history in the georgic mode, and that the farmer represents the "sensory discomfort" that always accompanies such an encounter (3). Such moments, she says, generate "*unpleasurable* feeling" and "cognitive dissonance"—mental and emotional states that she finds integral to the experience of georgic places (3, 8). For Goodman, then, farmers respond to georgic places with difficulty; confronting the past seems to generate a kind of existential crisis. Goodman's argument reaches a confluence with the work of O'Brien insofar as they agree about history informing the georgic mode. However, O'Brien associates no shame, guilt, or "cognitive dissonance" with the farmer's encounter with history. Instead, she argues that georgic texts serve an imperialist function and designedly express the "elation of empire" (162). Humans respond to farms and farming, she suggests, by implicitly celebrating the battles that opened land for cultivation or that protect it from invasion.

Taken together, the last thirty years of scholarship on the georgic mode presents a frustrating tangle of human responses to georgic places. Working landscapes require labor, which produces weariness and satisfaction as well as, eventually, a sense of place (Altherr; Mannon). However, that same labor can also generate, depending on the critic you read, obfuscation of the past (Liu), an unpleasant encounter with history (Goodman), or a kind of national pride rooted in imperialism, past and present (O'Brien). The human figure on the land, then, plays a variety of roles: denizen of the local practicing a nascent deep ecology, patriotic citizen of the nation-state, lay historian in crisis over agricultural imperialism, or a simple earth worker with a gift for repressing the past altogether. How can one account for such multitudinous and divergent accounts of responses to georgic landscapes? Is there order to be found within a field that appears so overgrown? I contend

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that the experience of marvel offers a promising beginning. Though scholarship on the georgic mode does not reach a consensus, each of the literary critics discussed above suggests that georgic experiences lead to encounters that humble; humans come up against something outside of themselves—whether a relic from a prior epoch, a sense of one's connection to an imperialist nation-state, or an awareness of natural cycles that predate and will outlast a lifetime of work—that stifles the ego. At least two kinds of catalysts prompt such moments of marvel: 1) uncovering human-made relics, often associated with an epic past, and 2) observing biotic events. A thorough accounting of these triggers suggests that marvel belongs on the list of things produced by georgic landscapes and by the labor that occurs upon them.

Uncovering the Past: Georgic Archaeology

Because georgic landscapes are often seeded with artifacts, working the earth can lead to the discovery of relics that, in turn, prompt marvel. Indeed, Virgil models this sequence of events in the passage already mentioned. Having uncovered signifiers of an epic past, the farmer in *The Georgics* reacts with "marvel"—a word coding the sudden appearance of javelins and helmets as *miraculous*. Goodman reads the farmer's marvel as an initial stage leading to discomfort.[6] While provocative and even possible—*farmer* is no monolithic category and Virgil's fictional *agricola* could have had any number of thoughts and feelings, including unpleasurable ones—I find Goodman's approach narrow and restrictive. In particular, her reading doesn't apply very well to the farmers I have known—thoughtful and intelligent men and women for whom marvel and miracles would be more likely to generate curiosity and fascination than an existential crisis. Maybe Goodman and I know very different sets of farmers. More likely, I think, is the possibility that I am focusing here on the farmer's experience, while Goodman is also considering the poet's or scholar's imagination. While she and I agree that a georgic context provides an opportunity for history to break into human consciousness and demand consideration, I view this passage in *The Georgics* as a moment when the past functions as a positive or at least a neutral disruption—troubling perhaps, but maybe also amazing. Though surprise certainly confounds the farmer, he need not emerge from the experience feeling only cognitive dissonance. Indeed, affect scholar Brian Massumi suggests that this kind of "shock" eventually transforms into a "positive" feeling because it help's one perceive "one's own vitality, one's sense of aliveness, of changeability" (36). Jane Bennett's formulation of enchantment as a blend of pleasure and the uncanny (*unheimlich*) that creates "childlike excitement" applies here as well: what begins as a neutral or negative feeling might later emerge as joy (5). Other encounters with relics—epic or not—in a georgic context underscore the potentially positive resonance of marvel.

My own mundane version of a discovery made while working the earth occurred in the backyard of a rental property on Puddintown Road in State College, Pennsylvania.

[6] For Goodman, the farmer's sense of his place on the land and in its history becomes complicated. Confronted by the bones of giants, she implies that the farmer realizes that his fields were once a battleground, and may have even been home to a different people than his ancestors.

I offer this narrative not because it provides any kind of final and absolute proof (it does not), but because my experience informs my perception and shapes this argument in a way sharing much in common with other scholars who have employed narrative scholarship.[7] Weeks after tilling up the backyard sod to install a garden,[8] my hoe clinked against another piece of metal. Reaching down into the soil, I found and lifted out a triangular piece of rusted metal, not much bigger than a silver dollar coin. Sharpened along two edges and blunt on the third, I had enough agriculture in my biography to recognize the tooth from a sickle-bar mower. Though I was at work on a dissertation exploring twentieth-century American literature and the georgic mode, I think I would have reacted with marvel anyway. I was, after all, holding tangible proof of the crop-field or pasture that preceded suburbia on this piece of earth. Though this tooth was designed to sever blades of grass and other plants, it connected me to a remote past—perhaps to the era of horse power and ground-driven implements; more likely to the more recent epoch of fossil fuel and power-take-offs. Either way, I thought harder about where I was and when I was. I looked around and imagined the textures of the landscape before the crop of single-family homes sprouted in the 1960s. That thinking resulted in deeper enplacement—situated in the same space but now being confronted by something from its history and the succession of human cultures upon it.[9] On the one hand I had stumbled upon a forgotten, rusted, useless chunk of metal; on the other hand, I felt lucky. I still have that tooth and remember the marvelous surprise that accompanied its appearance.

A scene from a 1992 book by Peter Svenson titled *Battlefield: Farming a Civil War Battleground* also recalls Virgil's accidental archaeologist, but Svenson's account contains no ambiguity about the positivity of the moment. As one might predict from the title, Svenson fills his book with discoveries that flatten time; his own historical moment constantly intersects with the past. There is, though, an element of predictability to these encounters, especially given that relic hunters often set out to find artifacts on his property. As Svenson explains, "the creek that ran through the woods at the bottom of the ravine was a favorite wading place for children because of the cannonballs that turned up in the mud" (17). Clearly, the discoveries in Svenson's book are of a different kind than those of Virgil's farmer or my own. First, the cannonballs are not uncovered by plowing or by some other agricultural work; Svenson's grammar suggests that they do the turning themselves. Also, the appearance of the cannonballs does not interrupt the children; they are not transported out of their work into a different time and landscape. Instead, the children operate with expectation—their wading is an active seeking of the past.

Ron Rash's 2006 novel *The World Made Straight* also features Civil War relic hunting, and directly relates the manifestation of epic artifacts to other agricultural uncoverings. The characters in the novel return, repeatedly, to the site of the Shelton Laurel Massacre in Madison County, North Carolina, where in the winter of 1862-63,

[7] See Slovic 28; Marshall 7, 8, 147; and Tallmadge 36.
[8] I had a lenient landlord; we agreed that if the next tenant wanted lawn, I would seed the garden to grass.
[9] I discovered the tooth from the sickle-bar mower before reading *Affective Landscapes in Literature, Art, and Everyday Life*; however, my experience closely aligns with the affect "chain reaction" described by the editors. They write that "what affect . . . achieves is to . . . make us think" (2). From that thinking, the affected moves outward from self toward an engagement with the land and its history.

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Confederate troops summarily executed thirteen prisoners.[10] When the characters in *The World Made Straight* visit the site of the killings, their use of a metal detector helps them discover a pair of eyeglasses that they believe must have belonged to David Shelton, only twelve years old in 1863, the youngest of the victims. Though they are already awed by the place because it "feels more real than [they] are," the appearance of the glasses prompts even greater reverence (86). They marvel about "the glasses literally rising up out of the past" (170).

Rash emphasizes the unearthing of the eyeglasses by including other moments when the past bursts into the present. The central character in the novel, Travis Shelton, seems born to contemplate the past. Arriving at the site of the massacre for the first time, he is struck by the gravitas of the place, but remembers feeling a similar sensation more than once before:

> that was what he felt, not just now but over the years when he'd turned up arrowheads while plowing. Rubbing off the layers of dirt, he'd always had the bothersome notion the arrowheads were alive, like caddis flies inside their thick casings. He'd tried to make sense of the notion that time didn't so much pass as *layer over things*, as if under the world's surface the past was still occurring. Travis had never spoken of this feeling because it was something you couldn't explain or show, . . . But just because it was inside you didn't mean it wasn't real. (86; emphasis in original)

Like the metal detector he later uses, Travis seems to be an instrument particularly sensitive to the temporal dimensions of a place. Instinctually understanding himself as only the most recent layer of human culture, he notices or seeks evidence of the past, and marvels at his discoveries. His gift for historical thinking is nurtured by Leonard Shuler, a former history teacher aware of the connection between the Shelton Laurel site and other blood-soaked grounds. As Shuler and Travis undertake a kind of independent study together, the older man is surprised to see Travis linking Civil War atrocities to similar, international events, like the persistent unearthing of "cartloads of bones . . . planted outside Stalingrad in the winter of 1942" (Rash 272). Rash's novel provides, then, an insistent fusing of working landscapes and history; because the past refuses to remain buried, turning the ground and working the earth provide frequent opportunities for artifacts to appear and, in the process, to generate marvel.

Rash's novel also equates the deliberate search for relics with the kind of agricultural activities that inadvertently reveal them. Travis Shelton makes no distinction between the use of a metal detector at the site of the Shelton Laurel massacre and the plowing that uncovers arrowheads. Each activity generates a marvelous encounter with the past.

There are, of course, notable differences between the experience of the relic hunters in Rash's and Svenson's texts on the one hand and the earth worker in the *Georgics* on the other; however, they all arrive, finally, at marvel. The sweat-soaked plowman is interrupted by the intrusion of an epic past that demands consideration. He is wrenched out of the present and, in Virgil's description, his concentration on his work

[10] Rash cites an account of the massacre in a July 1863 issue of the *New York Times* and acknowledges Paludan's book. See also Williams 178-79.

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is replaced by marvel. Conversely, Civil War relic hunters operate with expectation; they explore a landscape with a known epic past in search of relics. Thus, their discoveries surprise them less than the unexpected appearance of javelin points and human bones. However, operating with expectation does not eliminate the possibility of marvel. Some might even argue that the act of searching builds anticipation, and thus heightens the emotional response to a discovery. Those who have walked a cultivated field after a sprinkling of rain in search of arrowheads would agree, I think, that the actual discovery remains marvelous. In short, surprise and delight can find even the deliberate seeker. Wading in a creek hoping to find cannonballs and wielding a metal detector in search of relics are linked to the moments when working the earth uncovers mementos: all these encounters involve bodies moving across the land and bumping into some kind of affective object that transports one's mind to an earlier era and prompts one to reflect on the succession of land use. The next section builds upon the idea that georgic affect includes more than the unexpected occurrence of marvel: the mode also models the search for and *cultivation* of marvel. Marvel results not only from accidental discoveries that interrupt farming; marvel also blooms forth from deliberate action.

Studying the Present: Georgic Agro-Ecology

In *The Georgics*, the uncovering of epic artifacts that transport one to a prior epoch provides only a single moment of marvel. Far more often, marvel results from the behavior of nonhuman actors common to agricultural landscapes. Though a farmer or horticulturalist works with a particular end in mind, the arrival of that moment, as well as the several stages leading up to it, nevertheless produces amazement and wonder that force one into an intense consciousness of the present. Virgil's account of grafting provides an example. After listing instructions, Virgil imagines what will result from a successful graft: "in a little while, lo! a mighty tree shoots up skyward with joyous boughs, and marvels at its strange leafage and fruits not its own" (II. 80–82). These lines reverberate with excitement: along with "marvels" as a verb, the word *joyous* and the interjection with its exclamation point underscore the surprise generated by a successful graft. In Virgil's poem, the surprise belongs to the plant itself due to its own production of "strange" leaves and fruit. How much more remarkable should the growth and fruiting of plants be to humans? Though utterly commonplace, germination and growth are marvelous.

For me, a bountiful tuber harvest exemplifies a biotic source of marvel. Uncovering full hills of Purple Vikings from the same garden where I unearthed the sickle-bar-mower tooth created joy. Though I had planted the chunks of seed potato and watched the plants grow, bloom, and wither, I did not know what the soil held. Finding those potatoes—orbs of sunlight in the form of carbohydrates—provided a sensation that we routinely undermine with words like *fruition* that make a metaphor out of something so solid and real.

My initial experience with growing sweet potatoes led to an even greater sense of gratitude. First-time homeowners since April 8, my wife and I spent our first month

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cleaning, painting, and hauling furniture while we both also pulled the long shifts that accompany the end of the semester. The time we spent creating a triage garden felt like thievery—time stolen from piles of papers and exams, or from drop cloths, rollers, and brushes. This meant that many things went into the garden late. I was particularly skeptical about the sweet potatoes' chances. The young plants were so past their prime that the garden center had dropped their price, drastically, and I wondered if they were called "slips" because they were rapidly sliding toward compost. High temperatures, lack of rainfall, and our soil composition meant that the empty portion of our back yard garden patch had baked to a consistency more suited to tennis than tilling. Nevertheless, I socked in a double row using the best plants and wished them well. I didn't bother with the sorriest slips (many had lost all their leaves), but, as an experiment, potted them in a single quart sized container. After a week's time and occasional watering, I beheld the marvel of regeneration. What to do now? The garden was full, and dry. Hating not to reward these plants' determination, we set them out between the front walkway and a retaining wall. And they grew! (Proximity to a spigot certainly helped). When frost threatened, I bagged the best of the greens for the crisper drawer, and forked through the soil. Digging potatoes requires a meditative focus on the present; if the mind wanders into the past or the future, the digger is more likely to overlook or pierce a potato. Thus, I was living moment-to-moment as I turned the soil in search of tubers. The total harvest was nothing impressive, and none of the individual tubers were larger than a softball. Still, I was glad for each one: in part because the garden sweet potatoes all but failed, but also because even though the odds were stacked against these plants, they produced. Marvelous and tasty tenacity.

Though Virgil makes clear the marvels of plant life, the clear title-holders in *The Georgics* are honey bees. Especially in their remarkable unknowability honey bees embody marvel. In his description of swarming, Virgil refers to the "strange joy" felt by the hive as its numbers grow (IV. 51-66). Just as the Roman poet imagined a grafted tree would marvel at its own growth and production, here Virgil imagines that the bees and the hive experience a kind of delight. When the swarm emerges, humans are able to participate in the "joy" that is literally spilling out of the hive: Virgil notes that observers will instinctively "marvel at the dark cloud trailing down the wind" (51-66). Virgil's use of marvel to describe the human reaction to the sight of a traveling swarm likely grows out of the sheer number of unknowns involved in the apiculture of his time. Thus, Virgil suggests marvel as a response to the manifold mysteries of beekeeping.

In *The Queen Must Die* (1985), William Longgood echoes and expands on Virgil's association between honey bees and marvel. In fact, Longgood focuses on the "commonplace biological miracle[s]" he routinely witnesses among his bees that nevertheless leave him with unanswered questions (19). As he explains, many of their characteristics and behaviors present "profound mysteries" to the human observer (15). For example, apiculturists understand the mechanics of swarming and can even take steps to prevent it, but the specifics continue to confound: "who decides to swarm and when? Who goes and who stays? How is the selection made? . . . Who is in charge of logistics? . . . Efforts to resolve some of the mystery surrounding swarming have brought more

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questions than answers" (130). Similarly, though scientists have described the "biological timetable" of individual worker bees—how they progress from one task to another over the course of their lives—and how they can abandon or reverse the progression when necessary, much less is known about how the culture that informs these tasks is transferred from one generation to the next (Longgood 15, 86-87; Gould and Gould 29-40). As Longgood points out, the bees that prepare the hive for winter have never seen or experienced that season before. And, thinking more broadly, the worker assumes each of her different vocations "without training or prior knowledge" and, just as remarkable, she is the offspring of "parents who have never performed the chores expected of her, neither having the organs nor the requisite intelligence for what is required of their offspring" (89). Rather than attempt to imagine the long course of evolution which could have selected the genetic coding for such wide-ranging yet precise instincts, Longgood prefers to revel in his befuddlement. He stresses that we just do not know—that the mechanisms or intelligence at work are beyond our comprehension.

The unknowability that Longgood associates with honeybees helps excuse errant theories about their biology. Without any way to discern the truth, writers, including Virgil, have generated and circulated some interesting myths about honeybees. The Roman poet, we now know, got a lot wrong about honeybees. He insisted, for example, that bees could be generated from the decaying carcass of a bull, and provided careful instructions in the *Fourth Georgic* for how to carry out this marvel (281-310). In the same book he wrote about the marvels of their reproduction: "You will also marvel that this custom has found favour with bees, that they indulge not in conjugal embraces, nor idly unnerve their bodies in love, or bring forth young with travail, but of themselves gather their children in their mouths from leaves and sweet herbs" (IV. 206-08). Part of Virgil's wonder, then, comes from the bees' total devotion to labor. Wasting no time on romance and sex, Virgil imagines that the bees devote themselves entirely to their work.

The Georgics thus persistently couples marvel to biotic events and agents. As much as Virgil and his contemporaries knew about the techniques involved in horticulture and apiculture, the actual mechanisms by which a grafted tree grew or a hive prospered were shrouded in mystery. Indeed, the degree of uncertainty is made clear by the instructions and theories (ridiculous by today's standards) Virgil provided about some aspects of beekeeping.

Even an incorrect theory, though, illustrates the stance toward working landscapes that Virgil modeled in *The Georgics*. A farm was a space for labor, certainly, but it was also layered in mysteries that astonished and rendered one passive. Even casual observers would be confronted by something unexpected or something that exceeded their knowledge and understanding. Encountering the unanticipated and the unexplained, for Virgil and for us, invites one of two responses. We can fall back on rationality and seek a theory that explains a mystery. We will also, as Virgil frequently reminds us, be affected by the surprise of the unknown. Catching us off guard, at the moment it arrives marvel slips past our rationality and stirs the soul. To marvel—at a swarm of bees or a grafted pear—carries us out of ourselves. We are perhaps never more fully occupying the present than in a moment of marvel. It is only in the aftermath of marvel that we contemplate the

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history of events and agents that produced the moment we just occupied. Initially, we do not take the time to think: we are taken out of time and placed in the now and the right here.

Conclusion: Marvel as Negative Hubris

Although I have treated epic and biotic triggers for marvel separately above, they can coalesce. In fact, on the Ohio farm of Louis Bromfield—a Pulitzer-Prize winning novelist who spent the final decade of his life developing a program of restorative agriculture[11]—the remnants of an epic past created a horticultural curiosity. As Bromfield explains in the four works of nonfiction he published after World War II about his return to farming, much of the land he purchased was in a sorry state. Decades of careless agriculture had eroded much of the topsoil and exhausted most of what did remain. In *Out of the Earth* (1948), Bromfield describes his observations of one particular field that "looked yellow and miserable . . . except in irregularly placed large circular areas resembling gigantic polka dots" (100). Puzzled by these islands of "rich and rank . . . dark green" growth in an otherwise poor field, Bromfield searches for an explanation. "By the end of the summer, after much reflection," he says,

> I hit upon the reason for the handsome, healthy green polka dots. At some time, certainly generations earlier, perhaps a century, when the forest had been cleared away, the brush and logs had been piled and burned, and where this had occurred there had been created great residues of potash . . . so great that they showed up generations later in a field where otherwise the potash had been used up[.] (101)

Bromfield's marvel prompts him to reconstruct a timeline linking the pioneers' epic work clearing the "wilderness" to his own era. His careful observation of his land lead him to notice, and puzzle over, the "green polka dots." Contemplating them further, he imagined the history of human succession on the land. His marvel transported him back through the era of exhaustive agriculture and deposited him at the moment when pioneers cleared and burned the forests.

Whether epic or biotic or some combination—gigantic bones or germination, cannonballs or swarming honeybees, or burn-pile shaped green polka dots of lush growth—what all these triggers for marvel have in common is the response: an altered state of mind valued by generations of American nature writers. Virgil's farmer becomes "awake" in the sense that Thoreau had in mind in *Walden*. Already "awake enough for physical labor," the plowman becomes further roused into, if not "a poetic or divine life," then at least "effective intellectual exertion" (Thoreau 134). Similarly shaken out of themselves, William Longgood and others who have watched bees swarm "uncenter [their] minds from [themselves]"; they escape from their own anthropocentrism and

[11] For an introduction to Bromfield, begin with Beeman's and Pritchard's chapter in *A Green and Permanent Land*.

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perceive a world not ruled by "Lord Man," but one in which they are "plain member and citizen" of a vast and ancient biotic network.[12]

The experience of georgic marvel, then, functions as a kind of negative hubris that undermines anthropocentrism by reminding us of the past and by calling our attention to other actors and agents. As Louis Bromfield contemplated the plants in his field and the pioneers who cleared, piled, and burned the forests that preceded his farm, he recognized his place within a succession on the land. He understood—along with others who experience marvel—that his own role is part of a far broader context and situated at the end of a long history.

In its challenge to our self-centeredness, georgic marvel parallels the sublime, but relates to a different land use category and represents a distinct response. First, two of its best known theorists—Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant—describe the experience of the sublime as an altered state of mind.[13] Burke, in his 1757 *Enquiry*, says that the sublime experience occurs when "the mind is hurried out of itself" (57). According to Philip Shaw, Kant points to a similar mental failure occurring when the sublime frustrates or shuts down "our ability to discern boundaries or spatial or temporal limitations" (78). Kant's emphasis of an "*unboundedness*" that overwhelms the mind and Burke's description of a mind that has abandoned itself sound, to me, like different ways of describing the altered states of mind outlined by Thoreau, Muir, Jeffers, and Leopold. And it may be that the sublime, as described by Burke, Kant, and others, found its way to these American writers. The sublime was, after all, integral to the nineteenth-century "Nature Writing" of the British Romantics and the Transcendentalists and has, consequently, continued to inform writing about the nonhuman world.

Tracing out etymology reveals another connection between the marvel described by georgic writers and the experience of the sublime. The OED provides *astonishment* as a synonym for *marvel*, and in the former word's description of a person being transformed into a stone, we approach the feeling of being frozen in place—"a momentary inhibition of the vital forces"—that Kant labeled a first stage of an experience of the sublime (98). Reading further into the OED definition of *marvel*, we encounter the words *bewilder* and *terrify*. Burke insisted on the centrality of terror to the sublime; he argued that the "source of the sublime" is "whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror" (36). Burke goes on to say, however, that the

[12] I quote from Robinson Jeffers's "Carmel Point", l. 13; John Muir's *A Thousand Mile Walk to the Gulf* (69 and 75), and Aldo Leopold's "The Land Ethic" (204). Muir, writing in 1867, repeatedly derides human arrogance and insists that humankind should not "value himself as more than a small part of the one great unit of creation" and, therefore, should view other life forms as our "earth-born companions and our fellow mortals" (78-79). Jeffers echoes this sentiment throughout his poetry. He concludes "Carmel Point," for example, by insisting that "We must unhumanize our views a little, and become confident / As the rock and ocean that we are made from" (ll. 14-15). Finally, Aldo Leopold delivered his best known articulation of humankind's connectedness with the rest of life in "The Land Ethic," but elsewhere in *A Sand County Almanac* he makes a similar point: "men are only fellow-voyagers with other creatures in the odyssey of evolution" (109).

[13] Rather than enumerating the subtle distinctions between Burke's and Kant's theories of the sublime, my goal is to highlight the basic tenets upon which they agree. Those interested in a more detailed discussion of Burke's and Kant's formulations—as well as the work of their predecessors and successors—should consult Shaw's *The Sublime*.

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sublime can also include delight, so long as "danger or pain" maintain "certain distances" and do not, therefore, "press too nearly" (36-37)—an idea Kant echoes when he calls the "feeling of the sublime" a "negative pleasure" because the mind is alternately "attracted by the object" but also "always repelled" (98). Together, Burke and Kant formulate the sublime experience as a state of being frozen between fear and attraction, awe and terror.

The role of terror marks some of the schisms between the sublime, Jane Bennett's idea of "enchantment," and georgic marvel—central to the first, involved in the second, virtually nonexistent in the third. Bennett situates "enchantment" as related to the sublime. She writes that "[f]ear . . . also plays a role in enchantment" (5). However, that role must be very minimal given that enchantment is "a state of interactive fascination, not fall-to-your-knees awe." Thus, "enchantment" sits between the terrifying impact of a sublime experience and an encounter with georgic marvel. Returning one last time to the farmer in Book I of *The Georgics*, note that fear is completely extraneous from the scene. He is surprised, certainly, and maybe even experiencing "cognitive dissonance," but he is neither threatened nor in danger. The date of publication for Virgil's *Georgics* also indicates that his work represents either a predecessor to Burke and Kant, or a separate inheritance. The other examples of georgic marvel I discuss make even clearer the absence of sheer terror. Georgic marvel, then, generally involves intrigue and curiosity rather than fear. Furthermore, any common ground is largely metaphorical since the places we associate with the sublime and the georgic mode tend to be distinct. The highest altitudes of the Alps are not a georgic landscape, and even scholarship on the "Swamp sublime" places us off the farm.[14]

The value of georgic marvel adheres, finally, in the places where it most readily manifests: those working landscapes that we do not typically associate with the sublime, and with which twenty-first century Americans struggle to relate. Due in part to theories of the sublime and the centuries of literature it inspired, more and more of us have been coached and coerced towards delighting in wild, rugged, and pristine landscapes. In 2016, nearly 331 million recreation visits to parks supervised by the National Parks Service set a new record.[15] There are, however, a whole suite of landscapes—some of them terrifying—in which we do not delight and that we prefer not to visit (the factory farms and fields of monocultures that produce the bulk of our calories, pine plantations in the Southeast, mountaintop removal sites in West Virginia), as well as places we do not regard as places (the interstate highways that carry us to National Parks, for example). These agribusiness sites, managed forests, mines, and roadways are, however, among the places where we need to invest more of our attention, according to a small cadre of ecocritics and environmental historians.[16] If we deplete and degrade the places we use, National Parks and Wilderness Areas will not remain protected for long.

The "ordinary" landscapes of our lives are also sites that have attracted attention from practitioners of affect theory. Writing in 2011, Lauren Berlant describes the

[14] See Monique Allewaert's 2008 article.
[15] The National Park Service website indicates that 330,971,689 recreation visits were made in 2016. See https://www.nps.gov/aboutus/visitation-numbers.htm.
[16] See the article by Hess, and the essays by White and by Cronon.

"ordinary as a zone of convergence of many histories" (10). Christine Berberich, Neil Campbell, and Robert Hudson—who cite Berlant in the introduction to their collection of essays on affect—refer to the common places where we live and work as a "landscape of relations" that provides fertile ground for affect: such places foster "the intersection between ordinary life and extraordinary encounters and exchanges with the world around us" (10).

In large swaths of the United States, private woodlands are the kind of ordinary landscapes where extraordinary encounters can occur. I grew up in a rural county where forested acres outnumbered cleared. One of my first jobs was as a logger's apprentice. During this time, my "exchanges with the world" were sometimes quite literal. I would drip sweat onto the earth; pine resin would coat my skin and splinters and briars would pierce it. In short, the work was dependably dirty, difficult, and dangerous. It was also occasionally marvelous. Forests are full of wonders and, fortunately for me, my teacher was a logger who thought more about what he could leave in the forest than what he could remove. The trees we felled and skidded and sold were primarily those senescing toward death. One such tree illustrated the "convergence of many histories" described by Berlant. The tree, a white oak more than 150 years old, forked into multiple trunks about thirty feet above the ground. Even after the tree had been felled, it was difficult to tell just where the trunk divided. My aim was to cut the tree just below the forks, but my first attempt revealed twin sets of concentric growth rings. Between the two forks, I saw something unexpected, and it took me several moments to determine what I was seeing. Over the course of the tree's life, its forks had created a kind of pocket between them. Apparently a squirrel or a succession of squirrels had hoarded acorns in the pocket. Over time, leaves and some of the acorns had rotted into dark, nearly black humus. Other acorns, perhaps of a more recent vintage, were still intact. When the chain of my saw had cut through this cache, it created a vivid kaleidoscope of transected acorns held in place by the humus. I marveled at the sight. Thinking that this wonder would make a one-of-a-kind table, I began another cut in the trunk—this one many inches from the first one. When the tip of my saw neared the rocky ground, I saw sparks fly. I swore, assuming that I had dulled and perhaps ruined my chain. After finishing the cut, I turned off the saw and inspected the chain. Here was another marvel: the chain was not dulled. How could this be? My teacher had a theory. "Could be a bullet," he said. Rolling the section of log out for a better view, we spotted a bright metallic shine revealing that my chain had cut through a bullet along its long axis. Wonder of wonders! We spent minutes discussing the odds. Had I made the cut a quarter of an inch in either direction, I would have missed the bullet. If the tree had not grown as it did and collected the acorns, I would have never made the cut. The bullet's size indicated that someone fired it from a high-caliber rifle; how did that bullet lodge thirty feet up in a tree? That bullet and the story of its discovery symbolize the way that working landscapes are "landscapes of relations." The interplay of tree and soil, squirrel and tree, hunter and woods, logger and forest all tangled together to produce affect.

Embracing the idea of georgic marvel could revise the terms of our personal relationships with private woodlands as well as lawns and backyards, but also has the potential to yield much larger change. What if we began actively seeking marvel at home?

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Georgic marvel, like Bennett's "enchantment," is "a comportment that can be fostered through deliberate strategies" (4). Pursuing outdoor re-creation within walking distance from the places we live would elevate the esteem of gardening, horticulture, and forest management. Thinking about our home ground (however we define it) in georgic terms would enrich our lives. We would see the land around homes as more than "the grounds" and more than accents that add "curb appeal": any patch of earth could become a space for physical labor that could generate exercise and food. Occasionally encountering marvel would transform that physical labor from "drudgery" into a potential pathway to intellectual invigoration, enlightenment, and joy.

Jane Bennett argues that "it is too hard to love a disenchanted world" (12). Part of the value of enchantment—or wonder or marvel—is that it provides "a fleeting return to childlike excitement about life" (5). Bennett argues that such moments of joy can "propel ethics" (4). For her, the formula is simple: "presumptive generosity, as well as the will to social justice, are sustained by periodic bouts of being enamored with existence" (12). Georgic marvel, like enchantment, invites one to revel in living and, if Bennett is correct, also helps to cultivate ethics. Marveling in even the mundane patches of earth helps us recognize that every place has an ecology and a history as well as ethical standing. Exactly what that would mean for the most extreme working landscapes is hard to say. Factory farms and mountain-top-removal sites that are too terrifying to be sublime also seem designed to stifle marvel. But for the places situated between protected wilderness and National Parks on the one hand and the most blasted and desecrated working landscapes on the other, georgic marvel offers one path towards an affective relationship with the nonhuman world. Working the earth creates encounters, including marvelous ones that help us love the world.

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Contemporary British Georgic Writing

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Abstract

Do we need the modish term "eco-georgic" to help us discover the unsentimental, holistic, healing qualities in the best georgic writing of the Anthropocene? When were georgics not "eco"? Is there a "post-georgic" in forms of contemporary literature that seem to reject husbandry altogether, such as rewilding texts? Do such categories serve any purpose to readers and critics in the Anthropocene? This essay argues that such careful distinctions do, indeed, matter more than ever now as we reconsider our sustainable options in husbandry, land-management and what sustainability might look like, as it is represented and explored in our fiction and non-fiction georgic literature in Britain at the present. One might expect contemporary georgic writing to exemplify the environmental engagement implied in the term "eco-georgic". In fact, contemporary georgic can be environmentally radical or apparently indirect in its implications for sustainability. It remains as diverse, hybrid and composted in the past as Virgil's original text. This essay begins by considering definitions, with reference to Virgil's founding Latin text, begun in the third decade BCE, the *Georgics*. It recognises Laura Sayre's complaint that ecocriticism has neglected georgic writing, and argues that this is certainly true for contemporary British georgic texts. This essay focuses on contemporary georgic fiction and non-fiction in relation to Virgil's founding text. The novels of Cynan Jones, Tom Bullough, Marie-Elsa Bragg and Tim Pears are discussed and contrasted with one by Melissa Harrison that might mistakenly be thought of as georgic. Three categories of non-fiction are identified and discussed with examples: instructional georgic, personal memoir and future-oriented georgic. Consideration of the latter leads to conclusions about their inevitable overlaps and a final call for a radical mutual agency to embed animism and enchantment into contemporary georgic writing.

Keywords: Virgil, eco-georgic**,** instructional georgic, personal memoir, future-oriented georgic.

Resumen

¿Necesitamos el término de moda "eco-geórgico" para ayudarnos a descubrir las cualidades no sentimentales, holísticas y curativas en la mejor escritura geórgica del Antropoceno? ¿Cuándo no eran "eco" las geórgicas? ¿Hay un "post-geórgico" en las formas de literatura contemporánea que parecen rechazar por completo la agricultura, como los textos de retorno a la vida silvestre? ¿Sirven tales categorías para los lectores y críticos en el Antropoceno? Este ensayo argumenta que tales distinciones cuidadosas, de hecho, importan más que nunca ahora que reconsideramos nuestras opciones sostenibles en la agricultura, la gestión de la tierra y cómo podría ser la sostenibilidad, tal y como está representada y desarrollada en la literatura de ficción y no ficción en Gran Bretaña en la actualidad. Uno podría esperar que la escritura geórgica contemporánea ejemplifique el compromiso ambiental implícito en el término "eco-geórgico". De hecho, la geórgica contemporánea puede ser ambientalmente radical o aparentemente indirecta en sus implicaciones para la sostenibilidad. Sigue siendo tan diverso, híbrido y compostado en el pasado como lo es el texto original de Virgilio. Este ensayo comienza considerando las definiciones, con referencia al texto fundacional en latín de Virgilio, comenzado en la tercera década a. C., las Geórgicas. Reconoce la queja de Laura Sayre de que la ecocrítica ha descuidado la escritura geórgica, y argumenta que esto es indisputablemente cierto para los textos geórgicos británicos contemporáneos. Este ensayo se centra en la ficción contemporánea y la no ficción en relación con el texto fundacional de Virgilio. Las novelas de Cynan Jones, Tom Bullough, Marie-Elsa Bragg y Tim Pears se analizan y contrastan con una de Melissa Harrison que erróneamente podría considerarse como geórgica. Tres categorías de no ficción se identifican y son

analizadas con ejemplos: geórgico instructivo, memorias personales y geórgico orientado al futuro. La consideración de estos últimos lleva a conclusiones sobre sus inevitables superposiciones y a un llamamiento final a una agencia mutua radical para integrar el animismo y el encantamiento en la escritura contemporánea.

Palabras clave: Virgilio, eco-geórgico**,** geórgico instructivo, memorias personales, geórgico orientado al futuro.

Definitions

One of Seamus Heaney's late essays was titled "Eclogues 'In Extremis': On the Staying Power of Pastoral" (2003). The Northern Irish poet saw himself as continuing a tradition of pastoral that began in the fourth decade BCE with Virgil's *Eclogues*, and a growing body of Irish literary scholarship confirms that Heaney's poetic innovations form a part of that tradition (Burris, *Pastoral Tradition*; Fawley 138-148; O'Donoghue 111-119; Potts 45-74). But Heaney might just as well have written an essay with the title "On the Staying Power of Georgics", a different Virgilian tradition begun in the third decade BCE with the *Georgics*, with which he was also well acquainted, and to which he could lay equal claim as a contributor. The teaching of Latin in schools persisted longer in Ireland than in the grammar schools of England, and Virgil's *Georgics* has always been a text popular with teachers, partly because of both its detailed familiarity with agricultural practices, and its engagement with the unpredictability of the natural environment. In the *Georgics* hard work is a virtue, but so is an alertness to nature and an adaptability in working with it sustainably. Michael Longley, Bernard O'Donoghue and Peter Fallon have outlived Heaney as the last generation of Irish poets to have been schooled in Latin. When Heaney's friend and sometime publisher at The Gallery Press, Peter Fallon, made a new translation of the *Georgics* (2004), Heaney immediately made a point of endorsing Fallon's authenticity as "a poet who has not only lived on a farm but has done the work of a farmer" ("Glory of the world"). In georgic literature, authenticity matters, and the potential consequence of inaccuracy or inattention is that farmers and their consumers go hungry. "It is this combination of truth to the words Virgil wrote, natural vernacular speech and a general at-homeness on the land that make Fallon's an inspired translation," Heaney wrote in his review for *The Irish Times* ("Glory of the World"). For Heaney, the challenge that Virgil set himself to explore poetically, that of working in harmony with the land, was significant because it constituted a necessary way of recovering from the discord of civil war in Virgil's Italy. The parallel for Heaney with the discord in the North of Ireland hardly needs pointing out. The conclusion of Heaney's review suggests that the qualities of Virgil's *Georgics* he enumerates resound with contemporary relevance:

> Unsentimental, holistic, as careful of the gods in the heavens as of the Italian ground, it was Virgil's dream of how his hurt country might start to heal. After two millennia of technical improvements in agriculture and no improvements whatever in the war-mongering activities of the species, it doesn't sound old. ("Glory of the world")

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Heaney's recognition of the continuing relevance of the *Georgics* here is double-edged. Our war against each other and the soil ("technical improvements" we now know to have warred against ecology) continues. We thus need, more than ever, Virgil's "dream" of healing, although it might be only a dream. So, if this is true, does the modish term "eco-georgic" help us rediscover those "unsentimental", "holistic", "healing qualities" as we read georgic writing in the Anthropocene? When were georgics not "eco"? Are there "uneco-georgics"? Indeed, is there a "post-georgic" in some forms of contemporary literature about husbandry, such as rewilding texts? Has an uneasy distinction between georgic and pastoral collapsed in contemporary rural writing? Has the recognition of the "post-pastoral" rendered "eco-georgic" redundant? Do such categories serve any purpose to readers and critics in the Anthropocene? My argument in this essay is that such careful distinctions do, indeed, matter as we reconsider the sustainability of our options in husbandry and land-management, as that husbandry is represented and explored in our poetry, fiction and non-fiction literature. One might expect contemporary georgic writing to exemplify the environmental engagement implied in the term "eco-georgic". In fact, contemporary georgic can be environmentally radical or apparently indirect in its implications for sustainability. It remains as diverse, hybrid and caught between past traditions and present dilemmas as Virgil's original text.

David Fairer introduced the term "eco-georgic" in order to make a case for the kind of eighteenth century georgic that British ecocritics had conspicuously ignored in favour of the Romantic pastoral discussed in Jonathan Bate's pioneering book *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (1991). Inadvertently inviting the same criticism of his own new term, Fairer wrote: "'Green Romanticism' seems almost tautological" ("Where fuming trees" 203). In the course of his argument Fairer establishes a useful distinction between pastoral myth and georgic authenticity: "The spiritual dynamic of Romantic ecocriticism, founded on pastoral ideals, remains inspirational; but georgic's grappling with the possible death of Nature and the breakdown of its infinitely various life-sustaining systems, has something to contribute too" ("Where fuming trees" 214). Elsewhere Fairer has expressed that distinction in more stark terms:

> In being a stereotype, pastoral could be inverted, turned round, parodied and played with; but in order for all this to work it had to remain a stereotype. Georgic, on the other hand, was at home with notions of growth, development, variety, digression, and mixture, and had a natural tendency to absorb the old into the new, and find fresh directions. Pastoral's limitations and georgic's capaciousness, were, in other words, equally fruitful; but they marked out different kinds of poetry. (*English Poetry of the Eighteenth Century* 80)

One could argue with the reductiveness of "stereotype" here and with pastoral conventions as "limitations," but the combination of direct, practical "grappling" with nature's unpredictability and the capacity for language and forms to represent adaption with "capaciousness" offers a definition of georgic to take forward into a reading of contemporary literature concerned with husbandry. There is more to be said about georgic's relationship with pastoral (see Gifford *Pastoral* and Gifford 2022 forthcoming), but for present purposes the central feature of georgic is its practical dialogue with the organic – "where nature is drawn into culture and culture leaks into nature" as Paul Evans put it recently ("Country Diary").

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In reading contemporary georgic it will be important to recognise the genre's own literary "variety, digression and mixture" and its "capaciousness" in creating hybridity that were a feature of Virgil's foundational text. This is evident in the different historical approaches to the *Georgics* as a didactic genre, for example, or as an allegorical one, or as one concerned with labour of any kind, or with any kind of rural activity, such as "piscatorial georgic." Virgil's Book Four begins with didactics about the siting of bee hives before idealising their landscape setting. This develops into a political allegory about how to deal with rival leaders, which later becomes explicit commentary on the "commonwealth" of bees, and ends with a formal short epic, an *aition*, explaining the origin of the custom for dealing with loss, through the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice. Juan Christian Pellicer has noted six examples of "errors" in the *Georgics*, one of which, advocating the spontaneous creation of bees from the carcass of a young bullock, illustrates the importance of making distinctions ("Georgic as Genre"). As a didactic passage it is clearly in error, but as an allegory of sweetness emerging from death it is still present on Tate and Lyle syrup bottles (now Abram Lyle and Sons) which carry the dead lion and bees icon, with the endorsement of a Biblical text. This image of life emerging from death is an ancient symbol recognised by Simon Armitage, in *Still* (2016), who used it as his final passage of translations from the *Georgics* in response to photographs of the Somme Battlefield.

Armitage prefers to call his versions of the *Georgics* "manipulations" ("Reading"), but his work follows the five major new translations which Laura Sayre lists as having been published in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Whilst recognising a renewed publishing interest in the *Georgics*, Sayre complains that ecocriticism has neglected georgic writing, and this is certainly true for contemporary georgic texts. "The fact that the *Georgics* and the georgic continue to be so frequently overlooked suggests the stubborn narrowness of our understanding of the human-environment dilemma," Sayre writes in her essay, "Ecocritical Lessons from the History of Virgil's *Georgics* in Translation" (in Christopher Schliephake's *Ecocriticism, Ecology, and the Cultures of Antiquity* 194). Such narrowness might be exemplified by the attention given to British New Nature Writing, attention that often fails to recognise the extent to which it also focuses on the georgic. This observation echoes Mark Cocker's argument, in *Our Place: Can We Save Britain's Wildlife Before It Is Too Late?* (2018), that whilst Britain has seen a rise in interest in wildlife organisations and nature reserves, it has allowed industrial agriculture to denature the countryside upon which wildlife depends. Never before have bees and other pollinators, for example, been under such threat, and their appearance in our literature more significant (Rigby 110). Suddenly, Virgil's *Georgics* seem more relevant than ever; at least one of the contemporary writers under consideration in this essay actually consults Virgil's *Georgics* for advice.

Fiction

"So the story goes […]". With this phrase, towards the end of Book Four, Virgil begins a mythic narrative which, in turn, contains another mythic narrative as the story

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of Aristaeus leads into the Orpheus story. In Book Four what begins as advice on bee-keeping turns into an allegory for social choices as the community of bees comes to represent human social and political dramas. But contemporary fictional narratives have rarely been read through the frame of their georgic challenges, that is the choices and dilemmas of farming, as creating and reflecting the human dramas associated with this way of life. David Fairer's term was intended to make a claim for eighteenth century georgic, but would the reading of contemporary fiction be enhanced, extended and enriched by the term "eco-georgic"? Five contemporary novels stand out as conspicuously georgic in their detailed concern with what Laura Sayre calls "the human-environment dilemma" (194) of how to relate to land and animals. Two are set in Wales, one tracing a single day, and the other seventy years of human engagement with land, animals, and occasionally bees. Close attention to these texts might demonstrate how a good georgic novel integrates, inseparably, tensions of concern for land, animals and humans.

Cynan Jones' *The Long Dry* (2006) charts a day during which a pregnant cow wanders off and has to be found, an event that raises, in the farming family, memories and anxieties which are neglected but unavoidable. The prose immediately establishes a knowing and poetic quality, despite its simplicity, in describing the family's first moving into the farmhouse: "When the house started to live around its new people, things seemed to find a more comfortable place for themselves – like earth settling – haphazard and somehow right, like the mixture of things in a hedge" (4). The farmer, Gareth, as he searches his fields for the cow, muses on his wife's anxiety about ageing, her feeling that her body is no longer attractive to him, and the aftereffects of her miscarriages. "When, years later, they found that Gareth had chlamydia and this was why she lost the babies – it had transferred in fluids from handling the sheep – Gareth was relieved. It fell on him […] After losing the babies, she felt every death" (49). Which is why, before he sets out on his search, Gareth disposes of a stillborn calf down an old well. The author thus demonstrates his georgic authenticity on the third page, dead farm animals having been traditionally disposed of cheaply and conveniently by hiding them in old wells, old shafts, or limestone "slockers" (swallets) in the Mendips Hills of England. Cumbrian sheep farmer and author James Rebanks calls such a place the farm's "dead hole" (194).

The farming rhythms of lows and highs, of death and beauty, of depression and insight, continue through the novel as the cow wanders aimlessly into a bog and the vet arrives to put down the old dog, Curly, whilst the mother sleeps off a headache and only the little girl is in the yard to watch the vet. Gareth "believed in dignity though, that this was a right in life not just human. He knew that having Curly put down was about dignity" (87). Gareth hears his son driving the Transit back to the farm after reluctantly doing a job. "Looking out over the sea he thinks of his son; he does not want to farm, but he'll know one day what a wonderful place this is" (43). The vet, after he arrived, was thinking, with wonder, about the remarkable life of a bee searching purposefully around a corner of the yard. There is a passage in this novel about beetles eating fly maggots in a dead mole the cat has brought in. These passages contribute to the sense of the rhythms of what the mother in her sleep calls "the farm turning," which eases her pain (88). But what lends Gareth dignity is his belief in caring: "He thinks, if we have tragedy then we have to face

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care" (78). Indeed, he goes on to think about his farming family, "That perhaps a crisis would cure them too – would push away the tiny problems that were damaging them like splinters" (78). The problem is that attempts to express that love and care by both himself and his wife get misunderstood and end in another row. However, the cow is found and brought back by a neighbour to whom Gareth has generously lent some land, and as Gareth is burying the dog, it finally begins to rain.

The complex overlapping matrix of concerns and caring in farming family life is explored with great subtlety in spite of the book's spare prose, or perhaps most poignantly because of its spare prose. Published ten years later, the more loquacious prose of Tom Bullough's *Addlands* (2016) achieves an equally moving account of a farming family's various responses and adjustments to new technologies that overtake the traditions which have come to be associated with important values. At the centre of this Welsh farming family is the mother, Etty, who negotiates these tensions with an eye to the long-term survival of the farm. Bullough savours the vernacular formulations of English spoken by the Welsh and further inflected by their farming vocabulary. (This linguistic humour extends to Bullough's mentioning a poetry collection, *The Drought*, which some unnamed critic has pompously described as "one of the formative books in post-pastoral poetry" (248). It seems likely that Bullough is referencing the original definition of "post-pastoral" in Gifford, *Pastoral*, 167-200.) The chapters of *Addlands* are titled by dates, beginning in 1941, with Idris reluctantly horse-ploughing meadowland for the war effort and for wartime payments, his defiance expressed by doing it well, unlike his neighbours' more desultory compliance. In 2001, with the farm near bankruptcy, Etty decides to infect the farm's own flock with foot-and-mouth in order to get compensation payments. By 2011, with the land sold, Etty is pleased that her grandson, after he has travelled the world post-university as a computer programmer, has returned to live in the run-down cottage that he now owns, the place that was occasionally lived in for "his grandfather's weekends" (283), where the farming family could never have afforded to have electricity installed. "It brought Etty a warm, enveloping pleasure to think that, after everywhere he had been, Cefin should choose to come and live here" (283). Bullough's novel suggests that it takes generations of hard work to build deep family ties to place. But the irony is that the grandson will not be farming in this place where he grew up, but living from the internet.

This hard work is detailed in Marie-Elsa Bragg's novel *Towards Mellbreak* (2017) in which a Cumbrian sheep farmer is reluctant to accept that the very work on the land he loves is ultimately responsible for breaking him. Again, change produces its uncomfortable challenges, one of which concerns chemical pesticides having a tragic effect on sheep farmers. In this novel the church plays a role in the rhythms of the year and in connecting with the wider world through missionary work, which is no surprise since the author, who is the daughter of the Cumbrian novelist and broadcaster, Melvin Bragg, is a Duty Chaplain at Westminster Abbey. By contrast, Jim Crace's novel *Harvest* (2013) has a distinctly pagan atmosphere and an allegorical quality. It is about the historical period when enclosure brought in the sheep and dispossessed the peasant population. But Crace wants this novel to be read as engaging with contemporary concerns rather than as a historical novel, "Which is the problem when you write books

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that are, in your mind anyway, metaphors" ("Interview"). However, Crace's georgic specificity and knowledge of the land itself constructs this novel less as political metaphor than as agricultural allegory, bringing to mind, for example, the selling off of allotments for housing developments, or the post-war decimation of neighbourly small mixed farms for the large-scale industrial monocultures of the twenty-first century. Rob Nixon, reviewing the novel for *The New York Times*, read the novel as an instance of his notion of "slow violence": "the new enclosures brought about by merciless globalization and the widening chasm between the mega-wealthy and the dispossessed" (8 February 2013). Of course, this does describe what has happened to farming in Britain, as elsewhere in the world, and only serves to demonstrate the reach that can be achieved by a contemporary georgic allegorical novel such as *Harvest*.

The first of the two novels discussed so far—*The Long Dry* and *Addlands*—carry dust-jacket endorsements from Tim Pears, which suggests something of his own reputation as a writer of contemporary rural fiction. Pears grew up on the edge of Dartmoor and first worked as a farm labourer before writing eight rural novels, and then beginning the first of what have since been promoted as "The West Country Trilogy": *The Horseman* (2017), *The Wanderers* (2018) and *The Redeemed* (2019). These are fastidiously georgic novels, detailing working practices and vocabulary and insistently claiming authenticity. The first novel opens in 1911, when the central character, Leo, is aged twelve. His father is a carter, working with horses, and as the novel begins Leo is breaking a colt for his father, watched by Miss Charlotte, known as Lottie, who is the Master's young daughter. Their shared love of horses brings Leo and Lottie together, but class dominates their relationship as it is traced through the trilogy up until 1929. From the opening page the period details and the use of language earnestly make their mark on the reader, as here, where the smith fixes a metal tyre on a new wheel for a waggon. "The stocks" of the waggon, we are told, "had been shaped from oak logs and rested in the seasoning chamber five years. The wheels and their parts were carved from oak and stored another three. The dates were nicked in the wood by the wheelwright next-door" (1).

Georgic research, as indicated Pears' Acknowledgements, was never more transparent, and the emphasis on such detail might be considered overwhelming, even nostalgic, by some readers. But one of the ways Pears avoids sentimentality is to focus on simple descriptions of action rather than feeling. It helps that Leo is taciturn (nor does he smile much). Thus, the narrative is plot-led, with Leo learning to observe the world around him to find his place in it. But actually he is displaced, as the young horseman of the first book turns into the wanderer of the second. Lottie lives a parallel life as the daughter of Lord Prideaux until, in the third book, when Leo has survived the First World War and Lottie is now a vet's assistant, they return together to a changed rural life. Lottie is the now manager of her father's estate, and uses a motorcycle to get around it, whilst Leo rents a small plot of land nearby, and works the horses for his landowner until a tractor arrives. They are eventually reconciled through Leo's patience and persistence in curing Lottie's horse of its violent fear of the dark. Then, together they use contact with horses as therapy for disturbed people of all ages. In the Epilogue an elderly Leo is turning

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a bowl of wood for their granddaughter. This reads like an instruction manual for wood turning, including the qualities of different kinds of wood, and in the trilogy's final pages we are treated to an example of what can only be called georgic fastidiousness: "Leo folded over a sheet of one-hundred-and-eighty-grit sandpaper and smoothed the bowl further, then did so again with a two-hundred-and-forty-grit paper, finely abrading the wood still more" (376). Only in the final paragraph of the trilogy is Pears tempted into explicit georgic metaphor, as Leo's use of the turning lathe rather clumsily becomes the turning of horses in the dust as a metaphor for human life: "hooves prancing, bodies steaming in the morning light, their muscled flanks rippling, revelling in their freedom" (377).

Some of the potential limitations of georgic fiction are revealed by a comparison of Tim Pears' trilogy with a non-georgic rural novel set in East Anglia in the period following the end of Pears' final book. Melissa Harrison's *All Among the Barley* (2018) is narrated by the adolescent Edie Mather, born just after the First World War to a farming family. She is befriended by a visitor to the village from London, Constance FitzAllen. Constance is collecting material for an article on the traditional rural way of life, "country ways: folklore, cottage crafts, dialect words, recipes – that kind of thing" (20), rather than agricultural work practices. Certainly Edie is aware of georgic practices; her discourse on a good barley crop, "it is so exact in its requirements" (41), suggest this, together with her explicit reflection on the need for husbandry in the case of the neighbouring Hullet family's unmown meadow: "Hullets was proof that nature needed husbandry: that if it wasn't put to work, it went to ruin" (22). But Harrison's novel is not about work in the sense that Pears' characters express themselves through their attention to the details of their work. Constance's interests give Harrison's novel a pastoral focus on passing traditions, alive and just remembered in 1933. Despite Constance's rejection of rural nostalgia, saying that "the English are already far too much in love with the past", she wants to paradoxically "remake the country entirely" based upon those traditions in order to "set it back on the right course" (21). Constance's view of georgic activity tends towards a mode of pastoral that pretends to reject nostalgia whilst actually idealising traditional practices. In Harrison's exposure of this the author is clearly taking a different stance. *All Among the Barley* is a post-pastoral novel in that the ultimate revelation that Constance is an activist for a rural fascist group called the Order of English Yeomanry demonstrates one of the dangers of pastoral idealisation of traditional ruralism. This revelation may have come as a shock to readers who have empathised with Edie's interest in her supportive friend, the ironically named Constance.

Such complications in a richly textured rural historical novel offer more to the reader than Pears' rather limited plot-driven trilogy. Harrison's prose is more lyrical, expressive of emotion, and her characters are more self-aware of their relationships. The reader has actually been given accumulating evidence of Constance's political agenda which finally invites reflection on the uses of georgic activity for pastoral-political purposes. Edie's intelligent curiosity, her sincerity and vulnerability, her slight mental instability, draw the reader with lyrical prose into what might have appeared to be a pastoral novel of the 1930s. The novel's ending offers a final sad contradiction to any such assumptions. A fire in the hayricks – which may have been started by her father to pay off

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the debts of the farm with insurance money – is remembered by the seventy-year old Edie, who seems to have been institutionalised since that trauma. Georgic fiction such as that of Jones and Bullough can achieve the complexities and ironies of Harrison's work if it is not overwhelmed by the very detail and narrative context that makes it georgic in the first place. Indeed, Dominic Head argues that immersion in "a sustained focus on farming" would have given readers the impression that Harrison endorsed Constance's idealisation of farming, compromising her ability to finally achieve "bringing them up short" ("The Farming Community Revisited"). But the evidence of Jones' and Bullough's novels demonstrates that georgic detail need not necessarily lead to idealisation and can just as easily be regarded as anti-pastoral in effect. Jennifer Ladino has argued for a more nuanced reading of nostalgia that allows it sometimes to represent continuity with values that deserve defending in the present, suggested by what might be called "progressive nostalgia" (13). Idealised nostalgia is always a danger in georgic writing, as Harrison's novel points out, but it is rarely present in contemporary georgic non-fiction, partly because it is often anchored in a culture of continuity. What does seem clear is that a discussion of the subtleties of these narratives and their positioning between georgic authenticity and pastoral idealisation would hardly have been clarified by recourse to the term "eco-georgic".

Non-Fiction

There are at least three kinds of contemporary georgic non-fiction writing, although there is some degree of overlap between them, and their literary quality may be variable. They range from traditional instructional georgic to the georgic of personal memoir, to a future-oriented georgic that might appear to run counter to husbandry altogether. There is no reason why these three categories cannot also be found in georgic poetry and fiction, but in georgic non-fiction they are more prominent in their distinctiveness, which, in turn, enables one to observe aspects of their hybridity. Personal memoir may naturally lead to future-oriented georgic, as in the urban bee-keeping of Helen Jukes. In the case of James Rebanks and Isabella Tree, personal memoir and future-oriented georgic, respectively, each strongly refer back to traditionally learned practices that might have appeared in instructional georgic writing.

In the first category, accounts of the georgic year for gardeners and agriculturalists continue a tradition that includes sixteenth century herbalists and eighteenth century books of the seasons. The seasonally-focussed *The River Cottage Year* (2003), by cook Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall, might be taken as representative of the cottage garden strand of georgic gardening books that remain as popular as ever in the twenty-first century, especially in a time of home-focussed activity during a pandemic. The BBC TV programme *Countryfile*, with an average audience of six million viewers, is the UK's most popular weekly factual series. Each week it features an update from the Cotswold farmer Adam Henson, whose book *Countryfile: Adam's Farm: My Life on the Land* (2011), is one of his six books about aspects of his life on an extensive mixed farm. This is a personalised, readable book which gives a strong sense of the way modern mixed farming is dominated

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by market prices and changes in regulation. Practicalities dominate, rather than personal family details, bar Henson's celebration of his father's passion, inherited by his son, for saving rare breeds and training sheepdogs.

A much more troubled tone dominates John Connell's *The Cow Book: A Story of Life on a Family Farm* (2018), a georgic memoir that is both an immediate record and an account of the historical role of the cow in human culture. It is a hybrid of history and myth coupled with an account of present tensions between father and son, raising cows in County Longford, two hours from Dublin. It opens with the author, twenty-nine years old and returned from two failed careers in Canada and Australia, delivering a calf for the first time alone on his family farm, needing to prove himself to his father, and to himself. The uncertain masculinities of son and father, in their obstinacy and their recurrent anger, are a theme of the narrative. As a failed emigrant Connell's musings on the place of the cow in world history consider its role in changing human diet and motivating migration, whilst in the present he consults the world-wide web on symptoms of cow disease. Meanwhile his mother runs a Montessori play-school on the farm for parents who commute to Dublin, and further in the background sits his grandmother, the last woman in Ireland to receive the IRA widow's war pension. Layers of history, as in the *Georgics*, have a presence in the contemporary tensions of this Irish farming family. Connell came home to write a novel, but, drawn into earning his keep as a cattle farmer, produced a richly georgic hybrid of a book.

There are no uncertain masculinities in the macho and rather combative memoir of Cumbrian sheep farmer James Rebanks. He opens his book, *The Shepherd's Life* (2015), by delighting in characterising his school life as attempting to reduce teachers to tears. "One maths lesson was improved for me by a fist-fight between a pupil and the teacher" (xiii). Without regret, or further comment, he writes, "One boy who we bullied killed himself a few years later in his car" (xiii). He models himself on his father and grandfather who seek the respect of other sheep farmers. Of his grandfather, Rebanks declares without subtlety, "until his dying day, I thought the sun shone out of his backside" (3). But by the time he is twenty his disagreements with his father could turn violent: "On odd occasions we were dragged off each other, fists flying" (133). Actual shepherding, which is described in such loving georgic detail in the first half of the book, has become work over which he ultimately has little "control" when his father inherits the farm and has become his "boss". Adult education for A-levels gives him options and "something that I could control" (137). A History degree at Oxford is followed by work experience in a magazine's London office, from the windows of which nothing green can be seen. Rebanks returns to the family farm, which he had never really left, Oxford terms being only eight weeks long, where he realises that making judgements about breeding sheep "was more intellectually challenging than anything I had done [at Oxford]" (157). His conclusion exemplifies the rebarbative case this book is making for the "nobodies" (6) who work the landscape of the Lake District: "Shepherds are not thick. We are tuned to a different channel" (158).

Rebanks provides plenty of evidence for the way shepherds' knowledge and judgements are tuned to their fields and fells. "Grass is everything. We see a thousand

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shades of green, like the Inuit sees different kinds of snow" (226). During lambing time, with sheep needing attention over a wide area, Rebanks must prioritise their needs: "I have a mental map of the sheep lambing at different places, and when I need to check again on each of them. It is like having a series of egg-timers in my brain for a number of ewes around the farm at different stages of giving birth" (250). This writing is graphic and imaginative in conveying a mode of working with a landscape and its challenges. Rebanks argues that losing such depth of knowledge, judgement and practices, especially in the face of the uncertainties of climate change, would be foolish. "It took traditional communities often thousands of years to learn by trial and error how to live and farm within the constraints of tough environments like ours" (228). Here Rebanks is speaking from the perspective of the part-time job he eventually found after Oxford as a farming adviser to UNESCO which takes him to "historic landscapes" (228) around the world that face similar challenges to his own. At the same time he has grown a family of his own and the love of land that permeates the first half of the book extends to his father and his own wife and children towards the end of the book, which has evolved into a complex georgic text graphically representing a particular British rural culture, even if it is one which does not actually feed his family fully. Rebanks' life as a shepherd is only made possible by Rebanks Consulting Ltd.

Perhaps there could be no greater contrast with *The Shepherd's Life* than Helen Jukes' *A Honeybee Heart has Five Openings: A Year of Keeping Bees* (2018). Lacking in self-confidence, entering her thirties, and frustrated by office work, temporary addresses and no sign of a love-life, Jukes decides to keep bees in the garden of the terraced house in Oxford that she has just moved into to share with her friend, Becky. This memoir is about learning urban bee-keeping, but it is also an understated narrative about gaining trust and overcoming vulnerability in relationships, including, ultimately, in love. At every tentative stage of learning about honeybees and their husbandry, there is a quietly growing confidence in her relationship with Luke, her bee-keeping mentor who lives in London. Indeed, the whole book is about learning through relationships: "beekeeping is about more than gaining proximity to a hive: it's about entering into a *relationship* with a colony" (33). The therapeutic aspects of this, as propounded by the British Beekeeping Association, are recognised by Jukes: "It seems you can't get anywhere near bees without some mention of healing" (33). But Jukes is full of uncertainties. She actually consults and quotes the *Georgics* Book Four on the siting of her hive, although "Virgil doesn't have much to say about terraced houses or rush-hour traffic" (31).

The research is handled lightly and always has implications for Jukes' own thoughts and practices. She is in London for research and invites friends round for a meal, none of whom can make it, so she resorts to inviting a friend of a friend she's not met who she thinks is a beekeeper. Pat turns out not to be one. But his bones close to his skin reminds her of "the brittle chitin of bee wings" (194). It is an observation made in passing and he fades from the narrative until Jukes visits him in London, wanting to tell him "what's been happening with the bees. But I don't tell him about the bees just then. I tell him I want to kiss him" (232). In the pause that follows this she is "immensely

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uncomfortable" (232). So the honey harvest at the end of the year is accompanied by another kind of emotional harvest. Only on the final page of the book is this reflected upon:

> How to shake the feeling I have when I look at him sometimes that he is not separate from the hive? That through this experience of beekeeping, of learning about and listening to the colony, I might have called something up – might have begun to articulate and name a capacity I was missing, a connection I needed? (282)

Jukes calls this "a particular kind of sensitivity, a quality of attention" (282) and it is what the memoir mode of contemporary georgic writing at its best can evoke when inner nature grows through the husbandry of outer nature.

A third mode of contemporary georgic writing might be called "radically future-oriented georgic", and it is named in James Rebanks' list of threats to small family farms suggesting "that we, small farmers, were yesterday's people; the future of our landscape would be tourism and wildlife and trees and wilding" (120). Of course, georgic is always future-orientated, making its best guesses based upon past experience about what will work, but a radical break with past practices such as "wilding" is clearly "future-orientated georgic". The literature of "regenerative agriculture", of which Rebanks' work might be considered a part, together with books on rewilding, is obviously very much future-orientated with varying degrees of radicalism. What Rebanks has in mind is George Monbiot's provocatively radical book *Feral: Searching for Enchantment on the Frontiers of Rewilding* (2015). Trees and wildlife are precisely what Monbiot argues have been repressed by what he calls the "sheepwrecking" of much of Britain's uplands, uplands that he characterises as an ecological "desert" (154-166). Rebanks' tone may well have been prompted by Monbiot's positioning of farmers, as opposed to non-farming rural people, who make up 95 per cent of the rural population of Wales, for example, as a "small minority" (166). Whilst acknowledging that "Hill farmers are trying only to survive, and theirs is a tough, thankless and precarious occupation" (158), Monbiot completely fails to comprehend the argument of farmers like Rebanks that this is much more than an "occupation," but a deeply georgic commitment to land and family tradition that goes back thousands of years. Actually, Monbiot's book is not strictly georgic, but a polemical intervention in European land-use, farming and conservation debates. His personal engagements with specific places read like either traditional pastoral moments of epiphany, as in "I was at that moment transported by the thought […]" (33), or as visions of a "pure" pastoral ideal without humans: "I pictured trees returning to the bare slopes, fish and whales returning to the bay" (268).

Of course, Monbiot is right to point out that British farming practices and upland land-use have, for centuries, resulted in an ecological disaster that has contributed to what has been recognised by Elizabeth Kolbert (2015) as the sixth extinction. That this has been intensified in Britain by contemporary forms of husbandry has been demonstrated by Mark Cocker in *Our Place: Can We Save Britain's Wildlife Before It Is Too Late?* (2018), by Ian Newton in *Farming and Birds* (2017), and in relation to the husbandry required for the monoculture of grouse shooting on upland moors by Mark Avery's *Inglorious: Conflict in the Uplands* (2015). The book which offers a georgic response to these debates is Isabella Tree's *Wilding: The Return of Nature to a British Farm* (2018).

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Whilst Monbiot dreams of reintroducing wolves, elk and even elephants, with no georgic strategies for new stages of human co-occupation, in 2001 Isabella Tree and her husband Charlie Burrell simply wanted to abandon intensive agriculture on their unprofitable mixed farm on the Knepp Estate in West Sussex and initially see what reintroduced itself. Whilst Monbiot's book is in the idealised pastoral mode, Tree's is georgic in its practical compromises. Although her book is titled *Wilding*, Tree herself uses the term "rewilding" from the beginning, as in, "When we began rewilding our estate seventeen years ago […]" (9), whilst recognising that it is a "contentious word" for neighbouring farmers (97).[1] Charlie Burrell is a trustee of the organisation Monbiot established in 2015, Rewilding Britain. The second of this organisation's six aims places an emphasis on the role of humans: "Rewilding can empower rural communities to diversify their economies, and plan for a future with new opportunities and minimal reliance on grants and subsidies" (Rewilding Britain). Tree's story of the decisions taken on the Knepp Estate demonstrates that rewilding is husbandry, one form of what are known as "nature-based economies." Apart from wildlife tourism, Rewilding Britain suggests that there are two further forms of income for such economies: "i) sustainable hunting and fishing, forestry, and the harvesting of wild natural products in buffer areas and ii) payments for ecosystem services (e.g. for peatland restoration, woodland regeneration, flood mitigation and carbon sequestration)." Some of these activities require skills that Virgil would recognise, although "eco-tourism" safari trips might have confused him.

The basis of Knepp's change of land management was to rediscover ancient georgic knowledge that was thought to have been largely lost in the British countryside. The first was that a mix of herbivores is mutually beneficial, as different feeding habits by different animals provide different grazing niches for different kinds of mouths: "facilitation grazing" (159). The second was that, since this prevented closed-canopy tree cover, wood pasture is created which is the most species-rich form of habitat. Introducing a mixture of free-roaming wild ponies, pigs, fallow deer and old English longhorn cattle provided for the dynamic of facilitation grazing. One of the striking georgic qualities of Tree's book is the way nature and context forced her to compromise what she thought of as her ideal practices. Even on a large estate, some free-roaming had to be curtailed, and not just to preserve the polo pitch(!). If some income was to be derived from "the harvesting of wild natural products" in the form of free-range beef, DEFRA required calves to be tagged after birth. But knowing exactly where on the estate a cow had chosen for her birthing spot at any time of year, and exactly how many were calving at any one time, led to the bulls being given access to the cows at restricted times of year so that a calving period was created to facilitate tagging. The very choice of the breed of cattle to be longhorns, that tend to be more docile, was a consequence of the estate having rights of way across it, and the need to avoid confrontations between dog-walkers and cattle.

What has become well-known about this project is that the habitat that emerged provided unexpected homes for purple emperor butterflies, nightingales, turtle doves and twenty-three species of dung beetles in a single cow pat (114). It has also enabled several

[1] See Fenton for a rather different Scottish view on rewilding.

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reintroductions, the latest of which is the first successful breeding by wild white storks in Britain since the English civil war. This challenging form of husbandry (the storks ignored platforms provided for them and evaded cameras put up at their previous year's unsuccessful nest) only increases the potential income from Knepp's wildlife safaris and tourism business. Isabella Tree documents all this in her book with a grace that can verge on idealised pastoral. In the final paragraph of her chapter on the turtle dove, which was nearly shot to extinction, Tree might be forgiven for a lyrical reflection on its call: "The gentle mournfulness of its call seemed to plead for a change of heart. A lament from the wild. An unrequited love song. A swansong" (208). But she also offers a plea for a return to ancient knowledge in what amounts to her proposal for a future georgic: "Rather than redesign the future, we could heed the accumulated wisdom of the past. We could eat less meat, and return to traditional methods of rearing animals" (252).

This is clearly not "post-georgic" since it is actually a form of husbandry that, whilst making the necessary compromises demanded by its contemporary British context, returns to a grazing regime that Virgil describes in the *Georgics*. For the same reason it would be a distortion of these traditions to categorise *Wilding* as a work of "eco-georgic", despite the way that the book has itself drawn visitors to the estate for what some would call "eco-tourism". Wildlife tourism is a by-product of the future-oriented georgic work of managing rewilded land. What *Wilding* does is to invite speculation on how future-oriented georgic writing might add new dimensions to contemporary georgic fiction and non-fiction by rediscovering ancient traditions of human relations with land, sea, creatures, plants and weather. For example, maybe what is needed for a future-oriented georgic is a kind of radical twenty-first century animism to embed enchantment into contemporary georgic writing (see Deer 2021). James Rebanks knows the personality of each of his sheep and their modes of agency. He would argue that this is not a "new-age" sensibility, but one developed from georgic knowledge gained by attentive lived experience over generations. Monbiot's "search for enchantment" in his sub-title can be gained through the new sense of agency that is now being recognised in trees, for example, as popularised by Peter Wohlleben in *The Hidden Life of Trees* (2017). As Rebanks and Tree might argue, some of this has been intuited and handed down by centuries of traditional knowledge. "Trees know various ways of propagation," wrote Virgil in Wilkinson's translation (77), recognising their agency. In Peter Fallon's Irish farmer's translation, Virgil exhorts his readers, "So, come on, countrymen, and learn the character of every species" (Fallon 40). Learning and intuiting what nature knows and working with it has always been at the heart of georgic writing. Georgic writing has always been an act of biosemiotics, that of reading the signs in the environment and its inhabitants to adjust behaviour and best practices. A contemporary georgic sense of a radical mutual agency that has a continuity with past knowledge is perhaps alive but implicit in underpinning some of texts that have been discussed here as representative of contemporary georgic literature.

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The Polar Bear in *Fortitude*. Affective Aesthetics and Politics of Climate Change

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Abstract

In the first season of the television Eco Noir crime series *Fortitude* (2015) the polar bear appears as a sticky object that embodies an ambiguous affective charge as an icon of global warming. This article discusses the ways in which the polar bear evokes viewer affect in the series through two discourses. The first one relates to violence, essentially present in crime narratives, and how the human and nonhuman animal are positioned in relation to global warming, violence and each other. It raises questions of place and belonging in a local and global context and examines how the polar bear is constructed in terms of stranger danger and victimization in relation to human animals and the threat of global warming. The second one targets the ways in which the polar bear is rendered sticky as the object of the human gaze and how this process of human animals looking at photographs of bears both constructs and deconstructs the subject-object relation, hierarchy and agency. Methodologically, the article draws on "close looking" and the main theoretical starting points are ecocriticism and affect theory. The article argues that the representation of the polar bear contributes in essential ways to the socially and environmentally critical emphasis essential in contemporary crime narratives including *Fortitude*: the distracting and emotionally charged representation of the polar bear evokes ambiguous affective responses in viewers. Thus, as the article further argues, a representation of this kind is capable of—and liable to— inducing a heightened awareness of the present environmental crisis than a more straightforward, less affectively charged representation.

Keywords: Polar bear, global warming, affect, crime fiction, *Fortitude.*

Resumen

En la primera temporada de *Fortitude* (2015), la serie policial de televisión Eco Noir, el oso polar aparece como una figura recurrente que representa una carga afectiva ambigua como símbolo del calentamiento global. Este artículo analiza las formas en las que el oso polar provoca el afecto del espectador en la serie, a través de dos discursos. El primero se identifica con la violencia, fundamentalmente presente en las narrativas del crimen, y en cómo se posicionan los seres humanos y no humanos en relación con el calentamiento global, la violencia y entre sí. Suscita cuestiones de lugar y pertenencia en un contexto local y global e identifica cómo se construye la figura del oso polar en términos del peligro del extraño y la victimización en relación con la humanidad y con la amenaza del calentamiento global. El segundo se centra en las formas en las que el oso polar se vuelve complicado como objeto de la mirada humana y cómo este proceso de personas que miran fotos artísticas de osos construye y deconstruye la relación sujeto-objeto, la jerarquía y la agecialidad. Metodológicamente, el artículo se basa en un "análisis detallado" y los principales puntos de partida teóricos son la ecocrítica y la teoría del afecto. El artículo sostiene que la representación del oso polar contribuye de manera esencial al énfasis social y medioambientalmente crítico, esencial en las narrativas criminales contemporáneas, incluida *Fortitude*: la representación del oso polar que distrae y con carga emocional evoca respuestas afectivas ambiguas en los espectadores. Por lo tanto, como se argumenta además en el artículo, una representación de este tipo es capaz —y propensa a— inducir una mayor conciencia de la actual crisis ambiental que una representación más directa y con menos carga afectiva.

Palabras clave: Oso polar, calentamiento global, afecto, novela negra, *Fortitude*.

Introduction

The opening scene of the UK-produced Noir television crime series *Fortitude* (2015) shows a polar bear tearing a man to pieces on the seashore among blocks of ice. The man is screaming in pain, a shot is fired, and a red spot appears on his forehead. The bear disappears from the scene, leaving behind the remains of the half-eaten man. After this violent first encounter, polar bears appear explicitly in the images or spoken discourse more than seventy times during the first season: a motionless stuffed bear greets passengers in the arrivals hall of the airport; a dead bear lies on a dissection table waiting to be cut open by scalpels for scientific purposes; a friendly polar bear talks with other animals in a TV cartoon; a child's drawing of a cute polar bear is pinned to the wall in a house; artistic photos of wild bears are displayed and discussed as well as used as props; moreover, the danger of bear attacks is constantly talked about. The polar bear is omnipresent in *Fortitude*. Dead or alive, it occupies—and haunts—the minds of the inhabitants on the island and enters the minds of the viewers, at the same time calling for affective responses.

In this article, I investigate the ways in which the polar bear becomes affectively charged in the first season of *Fortitude* as an indicator of the human-nature relationship and of climate change. Images of polar bears circulate in different media as icons of global warming whose habitat is gradually melting away as temperatures in the polar regions are rising (see Manzo). The more the news of declining populations and shocking images of starving bears circulate, the more directly they are associated with environmental crises and the stronger their affective charge becomes. Further, beautiful images of healthy mother bears nursing their playful cubs surrounded by icebergs in sunshine also provide disturbing reminders that the polar bear is no longer safe in its natural habitat. The affective charge of the bear is ambiguous since all these images evoke affect mixed with both anxiety and pleasure. This ambiguity is also visible at a symbolic level: in the world of melting icebergs, the previous symbol of cold has turned into a symbol of warmth (Garfield) that still carries with it the reminder of the world as it should be and as it was before melting glaciers.

Emphasizing the social and cultural significance of affective engagement, Mike Hulme points out that the "power of the polar bear icon to represent climate change in the minds of the public rests on its emotional appeal" (242). Other scholars have also recently paid attention to the ways in which climate change is communicated in the media and argue that affectively or emotionally engaging narratives, including the ones circulating in the media and popular culture, may actually generate action for combating climate change (Weik von Mossner; Koistinen and Mäntymäki). I firmly believe that speaking through affect may indeed be a more efficient way of raising awareness as opposed to the rationally motivated knowledge of tables and statistics. For example Deborah Gould has

argued that emotions are an important force in activism. Even though Donna Haraway cautions that the sorrow evoked by dystopian visions of the future might not necessarily move people to action (3), psychologist Panu Pihkala has claimed that the complex emotions, including anxiety, raised by the threat of changing climate can serve as catalysts for climate action. Hyvärinen, Koistinen and Koivunen have indeed argued that tackling the pressing questions of climate and the environment requires accepting the difficult affects or emotions that influence the capability to generate the knowledge required to answer those questions. Art or the media are clearly platforms for dealing with these emotions.

In what follows, I discuss two examples from *Fortitude* that highlight the ways in which the representation of the polar bear evokes affective engagement in relation to global warming in the first season of *Fortitude*. In both of these examples, the relationship between the human and nonhuman animal and their vulnerability in the face of the threatening ecological catastrophe is visible through a negotiation of their relationship as inhabitants of the isolated eponymous island up north. In the examples below I first elaborate the relationship between the human and nonhuman animal in the context of violence in which the vulnerability of both is highlighted in the face of global warming. I show how the bear is constructed as a stranger trespassing on the human domain while alive, but occupies the same space with human animals when lying dead on a dissection table. Second, I target the representation of the polar bear by focusing on how the bear's affective "stickiness" (Ahmed *Cultural*) is generated through the gazes of both the human animal looking at the nonhuman animal and the nonhuman animal looking at the human animal in a scene where bear images by photographer Henry Tyson (Michael Gambon) are displayed. While the first discussion thematizes issues such as space, place and belonging and not belonging, the second one challenges questions of hierarchy, subject-object relation and, further, agency. I argue that the representation of the polar bear remains highly ambiguous throughout the first season of the series, and this volatility is precisely the source of the affective charge experienced by viewers.

In their editorial to a special issue of *Green Letters* on crime fiction and ecology, Jo Lindsay Walton and Samantha Walton point out the role of crime fiction as a form of specialist knowledge "with its own distinct contributions to make to cultural understandings of human-nature relations and environmental crisis" (2). While contemporary crime fiction—and particularly contemporary Nordic Noir—has become known for its sociocritical concerns that have also attracted intense scholarly interest (e.g. Arvas and Nestingen; Forshaw; Bergman), it is no surprise that in a time when the climate is warming at an alarming rate, this mobile genre is increasingly tackling questions related to ecology with the same critical grasp. Marta Puxan-Oliva points out "crime fiction's tendency to address conflicts from a global perspective" (363) and, referring to ecocritic Ursula Heise, pays attention to the capability of crime fiction to address global concerns through narratives of local phenomena. Ecological catastrophes do not confine themselves to national borders, and this trend is detectable for example in recent television crime series that address the cross-national connections and impacts of ecology-related crimes from a local vantage point. A number of television series such as

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the Swedish-Danish *Bron/Broen* (*The Bridge*, 2011–2018), the Finnish *Tellus* (2014), the Swedish *Jordskott* (2015–2017), the Finnish *Karppi* (2018), the Danish *Bedraeg* (*Follow the Money*, 2016) and the Swedish *Thin Ice* (2020) target ecological crimes with cross-national impacts and address ethical questions in the contexts of ecoterrorism, normative humanity and ruthless profit-seeking in the energy business.

Methodological Concerns

Methodologically, I rely on contextualising close reading—or close looking (Paasonen "Disturbing"; Salovaara)—which entails careful and detailed watching of the television series and awareness of how our watching experience combines with the text in the cultural context and frames of interpretation. Although the affects evoked by fiction are always uncertain (Tomkins 74), I assume that the circulation of images and discourses, whether in ecological crime fiction (Eco Noir) such as *Fortitude* or other fiction, mobilizes and calls into question conceptions of collective values. Because representations not only reflect culture but also actively take part in processes of meaning production and the construction of emotions (e.g. Ahmed *Strange*; *Cultural*; Butler; Helle; Pitkämäki; Koistinen), interpreting them is equally culturally embedded.

Moreover, Cristopher Breu argues that certain genres do "take shape as a specific affective mood or atmosphere" (244) through which their effect is created (see also Isomaa 71; Lyytikäinen 55). Detecting the particular affect of Noir crime fiction, Breu pays attention to how the Noir affect is governed by overall negativity and the discomfort of proximity as a cause of anxiety (247-248; see also Oliver and Trigo). Noir, according to Breu, represents "the artistic engagement with forms of affect and their narrativisation [that] pushes its audience to confront uncomfortable truths about themselves and the world they live in" (249). Global warming undoubtedly is an uncomfortable truth and a source of constantly spreading climate anxiety (or eco-anxiety), a topic regularly taken up in the media (e.g. Taylor and Murray). Moreover, in his discussion of two British noir series, *Hinterland* and *Southcliffe*, Les Roberts pays attention to how "the stories can be said to have grown out of the landscape" (375). Human geographer Tim Cresswell defines landscape in terms of dependence of place (12); in *Fortitude* place, characterized by human presence in the harsh climate, becomes inherently intertwined with the cold, snowy landscape that participates in the mental-emotional processes of meaning construction that form the particular affective mood of the series. Christiana Gregoriu further describes the crime genre as a carnivalesque genre because of the pleasure it assumes in the affective: violence, the marginal and the irrational (100, 101). The violence typically contained in crime fiction, including *Fortitude*, based on disgust and pleasure adds to the volatility of affect produced by the narrative (Bacon 7-11; Koistinen and Mäntymäki).

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Affect and the Polar Bear

The image of the polar bear is what in affect scholar Sara Ahmed's terms can be described as a "sticky object". According to Ahmed, sticky objects are "produced as effects of circulation" within sociocultural and ideological contexts that allow and call for saturation with affect (*Cultural* 8). The more these images circulate in culture, the stickier they grow and the stronger their affective charge becomes. The polar bear is saturated with affect as perhaps the stickiest icon of global warming. This fascination with the large predator stems partly from the special cultural roles of bears—brown, black or white—among the peoples of the northern hemisphere: bears have traditionally been feared and worshipped because of their size (the polar bear is the largest land predator with a weight of up to 700 kilograms), strength and the danger they represent, and stories of them have circulated in cultures for thousands of years, rendering them sticky with mystery, respect and fear (e.g. Ruponen). With the advent of ecological crime fiction, the polar bear enters a new context as part of the socioecological criticism of the genre.

When it comes to the polar bear and affect, it is crucial to take into account the cultural embeddedness of affect. Instead of regarding affect as a precognitive bodily sensation and emotion as a culturally processed, explained or understood phenomenon, I see both affect and emotion, following Ahmed and Paasonen, as referring to a relationship with the world. As Ahmed writes, it is impossible to separate immediate emotional intensities such as fear or loathing from cultural contexts, values or memories, which means that the immediate physical reaction is always already connected to cognitive processes (*Cultural*; Paasonen "Affekti" 42). The recognition of "*somebody* as a stranger" (Ahmed *Cultural* 21; italics in original) and a fearsome object—for example if we encounter a polar bear in our home street—is intertwined and simultaneous with the bodily reactions that indicate fear. Interestingly, Ahmed actually uses the bear as an example while explaining how fear is shaped by "cultural histories and memories" (*Cultural* 7). The circulation of affect in *Fortitude* thus takes part in the formation of affective histories and memories connected to the bear as a fearsome animal—and as a symbol of the present climate crisis. For a viewer of a crime television series also the previous knowledge of the genre forms a part of the affective ambience. Below I use affect as the overall term when discussing viewer affect; I use emotion when I refer to the representations of emotions of single characters thus holding on to the embodiedness of affect as possible only with real, living viewers and the representations of the emotions of the characters on the screen through different markers discernible by the viewers.

Fortitude as Eco Noir Crime Fiction

Season One of *Fortitude* starts off as a crime narrative governed by the basic crime formula: a murder is committed, a detective arrives from the outside and eventually the murder mystery is solved. This, however, is only a starting point for a story with an abundance of subnarratives, murders and fake murders, and several official and unofficial investigators, in which the mysterious deaths are not always causes of personal or social

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evil but are tied in various ways to the consequences of melting glaciers and climate change.

After the violent initial encounter with the polar bear, the viewer is introduced to a multinational community living on a fictional secluded island in "a cold climate" (Forshaw) somewhere off the Norwegian coast, populated by 713 people and 3,000 polar bears, as Governor Hildur Odegard (Sofie Gråbøl) states in Episode One of the first season. When an inhabitant of the small town, Dr Stoddart (Christopher Eccleston), is found dead in his home with his rib cage torn open, the first suspect in fact is a polar bear. However, it is soon discovered that the violent attacks on Stoddart and the later victims are committed by human animals invaded and contaminated by parasite wasps, whose procreative behaviour of drilling into the bodies of large animals to lay their eggs is transferred to humans through genome-changing poison that compels them to drill into the bodies of other humans, using any sharp objects at hand. These wasps originate from mammoth carcasses now emerging from under the melting glacier after having been buried in the permafrost for 30,000 years. In addition to the two main narrative strands of solving the initial murder and coping with the wasp threat, the first season of *Fortitude* weaves several other narrative strands into the story. These range from the consequences of unrequited love and adulterous relationships to a glacier hotel project to save the economy of the island when the coal mines are becoming depleted.

Fortitude can be described as an Eco Noir crime story faithful to Nordic Noir. The environmental theme is a central constituent of the narrative and, through the incorporation of the threat of global warming into a murder narrative, the critical gaze of the series goes beyond an analysis of injustice and violence in human societies only. Besides the social and societal critique typical of Nordic Noir, the series embodies its ecological critique in the frame of a popular crime narrative. "Gloomy, pensive and pessimistic in tone" (Arvas and Nestingen 2), it features alienated characters in a cold and harsh environment, struggling with social and emotional problems (see Forshaw). Kerstin Bergman has paid attention to the semantic significance of the environment, particularly the rural settings in Swedish crime fiction (*Swedish*); the significance of the northern environment is indeed extremely pronounced in *Fortitude*, because the story is essentially bound within its specific cold and harsh setting. Jacob Stougaard-Nilsen's characterization of Nordic Noir as featuring "dark, dystopian and excessively violent narratives" (9) is true of *Fortitude*: the series can be read as an environmental dystopia embedded in a crime story format. A narrative like this, with the polar bear emerging as an ambiguous expression of the complexity of the threatening environmental crisis, can only be told where both human and bear inhabitants are rendered vulnerable.

Polar Bears in Crime Television Series

Although Nordic landscapes may play central roles in Nordic Eco Noir narratives, the roles of animals in contemporary crime series seldom go beyond being mere props or, alternatively, animals tend to feature as anthropomorphic references to human characteristics in solving the crime case. We tend to interpret animals in relation to

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humanity, human identity and subjectivity (McHugh, "Animal" 24), and animals are often represented as flat prototypes of humans. In the French crime TV series *La fôret* (2017) for example, a white wolf appears in this kind of role as a fleeting metaphor of the female protagonist's trauma and intuition that leads her to the roots of the murder mystery buried in the fearsome forest. In these cases, "animals are present but the question of the animal is not" (Bolongaro 109). In the above mentioned crime television series *Thin Ice*, the polar bear features as a prop that also embodies metaphorical and referential meanings as an icon of global warming. The big predator is not as omnipresent as in *Fortitude* but its presence is explicitly linked with melting glaciers. However, despite its less prominent role, it embodies an affective charge that draws from both its fearsome and strange otherness (see Ahmed *Strange*) and its victim status which it shares with all inhabitants, human and nonhuman, of the Arctic areas and beyond.

The Ambiguous Place of the Fearsome Stranger

A constant negotiation between in- and outsiderness is notable in *Fortitude* and links with the ways in which the polar bear is constructed in terms of affect as a sticky object. The inside refers to the town and human presence on the island and the outside to the environment inhabited by the polar bears. Referring to cultural critic Raymond Williams's classic work *The Country and the City* (1973), Marta Puxan-Oliva pays attention to the ways in which environmental crime fiction constantly renegotiates the previously alleged difference between the country as a rural idyll preserving morality and the city as its opposite, an environment prone to encourage criminality (364). In *Fortitude*, the town is indeed depicted as a place of characters with dodgy backgrounds and suspect intentions. However, the overall setting in the series does not rely on a juxtaposition of town vs. country as a marker of different moral attitudes visible in environmental crime fiction as described by Puxan-Oliva, but is based on a more radical negotiation between the inside, where the small human population resides, and the outside that is constantly infiltrating and questioning its existence; the inside is never constant but continuously fragmented by the wild and disturbing outside, inhabited by dangerous polar bears. As Richard C. Stedman argues, place is a complicated compilation of the physical environment and socially constructed factors, including myths and memories (Urry; Marcus). In Sheriff Dan Anderssen's (Richard Dormer) speech to a group of miners in the local pub, the town has more or less been swallowed by the outside; the speech constructs the place on the narrative—or myth—of the natural environment: "When people think of this place, they think of the ice, bears, mountains" (Episode 7). How the place accentuates particularly the polar bear is further indicated by a poster on the pub wall with a text that urges people to respect them and leave them alone to roam their natural habitat (Episode 2).

For the inhabitants of the town of Fortitude and the viewer, the polar bear is constructed in terms of difference and outsiderness as a dangerous stranger that haunts and scares through its fearsome potential. Sara Ahmed has paid attention to the omnipresence of the stranger and points out how "strangers are read as posing danger

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wherever they are" (*Strange* 32). The polar bear carries its fearsomeness as a potential that can be realized at any time; in that sense the bear is always there as a known prospect although it remains to be defined through its belonging to the outside. It is precisely this paradox of proximity and the recognition of "*not belonging*, … being out of place" that Ahmed further regards as essential in the construction of the stranger (*Strange* 21; emphasis in original). This paradox leads to the question who actually is out of place, the polar bears "in their natural habitat" or the human animals who, ironically, are responsible for destructive potential far more dangerous from the perspective of the global ecosystem.

Sheriff Dan's line about "this place" as not including the town is descriptive of how the outside has infiltrated what normally would be seen as the human sphere, as home. Stedman's definition of place as encompassing "the physical setting, as well as human experience and interpretation" (672) is relevant here. When discussing the stranger and the danger it poses, Ahmed points out that defining the stranger as dangerous makes possible the definition of home as a safe place (*Strange* 32). She writes: "Such a recognition of those who are out of place allows both the demarcation and enforcement of the boundaries of 'this place', as where 'we' dwell. The enforcement of boundaries requires that some-body—here locatable in the dirty figure of the stranger—has already crossed the line, has already come too close" (*Strange* 21-22).

In *Fortitude*, however, the viewer is repeatedly reminded of how the polar bear shatters this feeling of safety by constantly coming emotionally too near and breaking the boundary between in- and outsiderness. The police advise Detective Inspector Morton (Stanley Tucci), a newcomer to the town, to carry a large gun in case he meets a polar bear because a small one will not stop it, and shows as evidence images of the savaged body of Billy Pettigrew (Tam Dean Burn), maimed by a polar bear in the beginning (Episode 1). For the viewer, this way of describing the polar bear in terms of its generating extreme fear, as an automaton that attacks with intention to kill whenever met, represents a dichotomous view between human animals and non-human animals. However, in the context of global warming that the series explicitly deals with, the viewer is informed about the reasons why the bears may trespass over the town and hunt what they normally would not hunt. Because of this knowledge, the viewer's affective response is not only based on the fear caused by the fearsomeness of the great predator but also on sympathy towards the nonhuman animal struggling for its existence in the changing environment.

Moreover, the danger to the bears' survival caused by global warming and melting glaciers and their occasional trespassing on the human domain are also presented in another light by Governor Odegard who exploits the commercial potential of the exotic animal in her speech to a group of prospective investors in a large-scale hotel project: "'Sometimes a bear comes to town and then the police have to carefully usher him out again'" (Episode 2). In her description the bear is no longer a fearsome stranger; instead, it has turned into an animal lost in the strange and scary human environment that requires human help to find its way back to its own habitat. However, through a humorous anthropomorphization of the island bears she expresses an inherent stranger fear: referring to the number of bears (3,000) in relation to humans (713), she jokes about what

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would happen if the bears were to get organized and thereby resorts to a rhetoric through which the bear is again labelled a fearsome stranger. Here the viewer is moved between empathy and fear.

It can be deduced from the above that affective circulation of imagery constructs a negotiation through which the relationship between the human and the nonhuman animal is both distanced and brought together. This negotiation is launched from the very first images of Pettigrew's death and continues throughout the first season. Rosi Braidotti has paid attention to how dominant humanity is negotiated in relation to "those who are other-than-human … along the axes of devalorized difference" (1). For the dominant human subject the other-than-human is a source of anxiety because of its capacities to "illuminate the asymmetry of power relations that work in the constitution of the dominant subject" (Braidotti, *Posthuman* 1) and to fragment the story about dominance on which the subjectivity is based. These questions of dominance become clear in human-bear relations, where both have the potential to cause each other harm. Koistinen and Mäntymäki establish that the killing of scientist Charlie Stoddart in the first episode is an example of how the human/bear boundary is negotiated in the intersection of different forms of violence, including the objectification of both human and nonhuman bodies in scientific examination. Because of the "inhuman savagery" (Episode 6) of the killing, the obvious suspect is a bear who "shouldn't come here" (Episode 1). However, quite soon it becomes evident that the victim's wounds cannot have been inflicted by a bear, and when the killing is revealed to be committed by a 10-year-old boy, detective Eugene Morton from Scotland Yard, originally sent to investigate the death of Billy Pettigrew, begins to wonder about the source of this "savagery" (Episode 6). The moment when the killing turns into murder highlights the animal and human animal distinction. Christoffer Pittard's point that "The animal cannot be murdered (only killed)" (8) also applies when turned around: the nonhuman animal cannot murder because the moral code on non-violence is traditionally only applicable to human animals (e.g. Aaltola 16-19). However, when it is later found out that the murderers' violent behaviour actually originates from parasite wasps released from under the melting permafrost, the critique of the anthropocentric notions of traditional humanism that associate responsibility, guilt and moral consciousness essentially with humanity becomes relevant. By claiming that in the end, all of the killings either by polar bears or human animals come down to humanity's destructive activity that has caused the permafrost to melt with inconceivable consequences, the series delivers a political argument: human agency on the planet is in stark contrast with the idea of morality as the guiding principle of human animals. Delivered effectively through many scenes of graphic violence that connect to and emphasize the yet unknown dangers of global warming, this argument invites emotional responses that engage the viewer affectively.

In addition, the violence of the murders brings human and nonhuman violence together in another way, namely by showing that human and nonhuman animals are on a par when it comes to gruesome violence. The moment when the viewers are forced to acknowledge that the violent acts have been committed not by a polar bear but by a human being, cultural histories and memories that produce the viewer's emotional

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response to the polar bear as a fearsome other are displaced and relocated in the human, in the viewers themselves, in "us." This further resonates with the undertone of human violence towards what is outside humanity, including polar bears, that pervades the series.

Yet another example of the blurring of the dichotomy between human and nonhuman takes place later in the series (Episode 9), when the carcass of a polar bear that had behaved abnormally is examined by two biologists, Vincent Rattrey (Luke Treadaway) and Natalie Yelburton (Sienna Guillory), at the Fortitude Arctic Research Center. The scene opens with an image of a large polar bear in a fridge, covered with plastic. The next image shows the bear lying on its side on the dissection table with its front covered with blood from having attacked, killed and eaten another full-grown male. The high camera angle shows Vincent on his knees on the table next to the bear and Natalie standing behind it, both admiring the magnificent animal. The whole bear is visible and its size is further emphasized with the camera angle, showing all three from the front. Later, Vincent cuts off the bear's head and begins to examine its brain. In the following scene the two biologists, Sheriff Dan and Governor Odegard are gathered around the same dissection table with the headless bear still lying on it. Because of the similarities between the bear and the human killer's behaviour, Vincent wants to run the same tests on the brain of the now dead murderer Shirley Allerdyce (Jessica Gunning) in order to find out whether both were affected by the same toxins because, like the bear, '"Shirley Allerdyce was an apex predator [...] at the top of the food chain"' (Episode 9). Dan and Hildur look very concerned when the biologists explain that if the toxins are identical, the island is too dangerous '"for any animal"' (Episode 9). The camera pans from the dead bear to the worried faces of Dan, Hildur, Vincent and Natalie, making explicit the connection between "any animal" and their shared vulnerability. This becomes even more explicit when Shirley's lover Markus Huseklepp (Darren Boyd) later arrives to see her at the Arctic Research Center to which she has been moved from the morgue to be tested (Episode 10). Devastated by the move, Markus' comment "This place is for animals," introduces a hierarchy based on the difference between human and nonhuman animals. The viewer is here caught in an emotional swing. At one end, a realization of what could be described as Rosi Braidotti's idea of *zoe* as life itself, an inclusive and "generative power that flows across all species" (103) and makes them equally vulnerable in life and death. That is juxtaposed at the other end with the belief in human specificity built on separation, estrangement, and the denial of interconnectedness in traditional humanism that is criticized by Braidotti. At the end of the scene yet another reminder of the common vulnerability of human and nonhuman animals is presented to the viewer through an emphatic concluding image: the bear, covered in plastic, and back in the fridge next to Shirley's body, reminds the viewer of how they both are victims that end up on the operating table for autopsy.

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The Polar Bear as the Object of the Gaze and the One Who Looks Back

A visual—filmic or photographic—representation of a polar bear is not a mirror image of the original but constructed through complex processes of meaning-making dependent on viewer and culture (Lehtonen 107–127). The photographs of polar bears discussed here are embedded in an audiovisual crime narrative, which means that more than one representational layer is added to the meaning-making process, as the narrative and the narrative context provide a frame within which the photographs are to be interpreted. Photographer Henry Tyson's art photos of polar bears, embedded in an audiovisual narrative discussing ecological themes, embody the potential to highlight the ways in which the relationship between the human and nonhuman animal is constructed and deconstructed.

The prominent themes in the series, such as global warming and anxiety before inexplicable violence "set in a landscape that humans cannot possibly take on and win" because of the "hulking presence of nature" (Bramley qtd. in Saunders 215), are constituents that govern the way in which the polar bear is made the object of the gazes of the characters in the narrative and the viewers and represented as a fearsome other also in Tyson's artistic photos. These photos are looked at and talked about by Governor Odegaard and DI Morton when they visit Tyson's studio. Both Odegard and Morton visit Tyson in order to threaten him; in the intimidating atmosphere of the confrontations, the photographs question and set in motion violence and agency while the bear appropriates a role as a product of culture and an ironic comment on power assumed by humans.

John Berger emphasizes how people's ways of looking at artistic images are "affected by … learnt assumptions about art" (*Ways* 11) regarding for example beauty, truth, genius and civilization, many of which are distanced from the everyday world. Odegard comments on Tyson's photos as artwork, emphasizing their cultural significance without which "… this place would be just a nameless block of ice in the middle of nowhere…" (Episode 3). However, since the polar bear is "the most *salient*, the most eye-catching element" (Kress and van Leeuwen 176, italics in original) in the images, not only because of its size but also because the way in which the gaze of the polar bear as a represented participant "directly addresses the viewer and establishes a relationship between them" (89), the bear becomes accentuated in Odegard's comment. She transforms the polar bear into an art object of aesthetic pleasure achieved through the artist's ingenious work whereby the relationship between the object of the gaze and the viewer is constructed on distancing; seeing the bear as an aesthetic object strips the bear of its actuality, its "bearness," and translates it into a work of art filtered through culture. Although Odegard does not mention the fearsome potential of polar bears, it is immanent in the representation and evokes viewer affect based on anticipation and uncertainty. John Berger writes that "images were first made to conjure up the appearance of something that was absent" (*Ways* 10). The absence of explicit threat notwithstanding, the fearsomeness of the polar bear finds expression in this scene through the cultural embeddedness of affect: viewers are affected by fear, while simultaneously knowing that the images merely represent danger in the absence of the actual threat.

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The question of distance and fearsomeness is returned to by DI Morton when he is looking at one of Tyson's images already familiar to the viewer, the one of the bears eating a seal carcass (this is never confirmed; it could be a human victim). The camera angle on Morton is from back left, and what the viewer sees of the photo is only a corner with red fleshy mush. Morton asks explicitly: "How close do you have to be to take something like that?" Tyson's answer "I used a camera with a very long lens" confirms Morton's assumption of potential danger and marks the bear as a fearful object. When writing about the affective politics of fear, Sara Ahmed emphasizes the repetition of stereotypes as a constituent of fear. Bodies become fearsome when they are repeatedly constructed as such through selection and simplification in cultural processes (*Cultural* 63). It is true that polar bears are predators who kill other animals for their food, and typically in Western representation, polar bears, other bears and particularly wolves have through centuries been depicted primarily through their predatory habits of hunting and killing their prey, often emphasizing graphic and grotesque elements. The trope of killing is accentuated in stories of predators even today, and predators appear as emblems of fearsomeness in cultural discourses. So the production of the polar bear primarily as an object of fear, like any other object of fear, depends on "past histories of association" (Ahmed, *Cultural* 66) with fearsomeness. In addition to pre-knowledge, fear, according to Ahmed, is linked to the "passing by" of an object; fear is "*being produced by the object's approach*" (*Cultural* 64-66; emphasis in original). This means that in order for the polar bear to be fearsome, it must not be present but rather dwell in futurity because fear according to Ahmed is anticipation of pain some time in future (*Cultural* 64-65). This anticipation, I argue, is experienced by the viewer when the camera places Odegard and later Morton in the same frame with a photo of a polar bear.

When Odegard comes to visit Tyson in his studio, the camera shows her standing under the photo of the polar bear eating the carcass. The photo is sticky with affect because of the familiarity of similar images from other sources. Wearing a parka with a sizeable arctic fox collar that provides an immediate association with a utilitarian attitude towards animals, Odegard walks over to another photo of a bear standing in the red light of the setting sun that the viewer associates with the blood in the previous photo, the blood-stained bear eating Pettigrew at the beginning of the series, and the bear carcass earlier on the dissection table. Having praised Tyson's art, Odegard is again placed in the same frame with the first photo of the feeding bear. The allusion to what is not present but an object possibly approaching is made concrete through these images. To the viewer, the images evoke the anticipation of future pain and they do so via visual means without words. However, in this representation the polar bear's stickiness derives from ambiguity for not only is the polar bear a dangerous animal other, it is, at the same time, in an alliance with human animals as victims of global warming.

The polar bear's ambiguous charge becomes stronger in the scene in which DI Morton visits Tyson's studio and, acting like the detective he is as he walks from image to image, he makes observations and asks analytical questions. The menace in his probing questions about the murder case alternate with his comments on associations with violence in the photos hanging on the walls. Morton enters into a dialogue with the images

where the human animal's moral agency is juxtaposed with the nonhuman animal's ironic reply, delivered through the gaze of the animals depicted in the images. Despite being observers, human animals may also be observed by nonhuman animals (Berger, *Why*; Derrida, *Animal*). This is what the bear in the photo with the red sunset seems to do; the image is not visible to the viewer when Morton stops before it and states simply: "This bear was in a fight" (Episode 3). Having placed the bear in the context of aggression, Morton turns towards Tyson (and the viewer); the photo is now behind him with the mouth of the bear right above his head as if the bear were about to eat him. From the viewer's perspective, the image points towards imminent danger although it is also ironic in humorously pointing out that Morton, too, can be targeted despite his job as a detective. It is also noteworthy that all of the photos in the room are looked at from a low angle by the characters, thus placing the bear in a position of power from the perspective of both the characters in the narrative and the viewer (cf. Kress and van Leeuwen 140). When discussing the nonhuman and human animal seeing each other, Berger emphasises the power "comparable with human power" of the nonhuman animal, but stresses also a difference in their qualities (*Why* 5).

The power constructed through the gazes of the human and nonhuman animal do not *coincide* (the verb used by Berger) in this scene because the ambiguity and irony contained in the representations of both the human and nonhuman animal set in motion meaning and blur the viewers' recognition of the bear as a dangerous stranger or an animal in danger. The animal manifests its presence in a disconcerting way (Berger, *About* 19) and when the bear becomes ambiguous, a creature constructed on fear, irony, power and myth, the viewers are brought to the fringe of truth about "bearness". Ecocritic Timothy Morton underlines how ambiguity is in fact the only possible certainty ("All"). The representation of the polar bear in terms of ambiguity also seems to undermine DI Morton's self-conscious definitions of the bears. The photo that DI Morton looks at last in the scene is not shown to the viewer, and his generalizing comment on the photo, "They're very big, polar bears," leaves the viewer in uncertainty as to what he is looking at. The only certainty communicated to the viewer is an ambiguity that leaves the viewer emotionally in midair.

Conclusions

I have argued above that in *Fortitude* the polar bear assumes a central position as an ambiguous locus of the threat of global warming. *Fortitude* associates the polar bear explicitly with violence in contexts where both violence and its perpetrators are not univocal. In a speculative narrative asking the question What if? and promoting an "expanded concept of generic identity" (Gill 82) beyond the normative anticipation of the readers' and viewers' awareness of the contemporary sociocritical, realism-based crime narrative, the polar bear embodies fears and expectations in the face of environmental change. *Fortitude*, like crime narratives in general, draws on violence but instead of pointing out a single case of murder or assault in a setting limited by social, national, geographical or temporal constraints, the series engages the viewers in an affective

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vicious circle of fear, anxiety and anticipation based on uncertainty and indefinability: the ambiguity of the representation of the polar bear calls for a renegotiation of the dichotomies of perpetrator, victim, agent and object. In addition, because of the ubiquitousness of the presence of the polar bear in contexts of global warming as a sticky object, the series links with dystopic cautionary discourse that draws on the viewers' recognizing and re-experiencing the affect associated with the representation of the polar bear.

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Materiality, Responsibility and Anthropocene Thought in Robert Macfarlane's and Kathleen Jamie's Nature Writing

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Abstract

The concept of the Anthropocene, denoting humans as geological agents, severely complicates traditional Western distinctions between culture and nature, the human and the nonhuman world. Contrary to anthropocentric accounts, the new materialisms have established a post-humanist reading of the Anthropocene that destabilises such dichotomies, placing human beings on par with the world they encounter. This approach can also be found in the New Nature Writing (NNW), a body of creative nonfiction that seeks to reconnect the "human animal" to nature, with the ever-open question of the nature of nature itself. A reading of Robert Macfarlane's work with a focus on his recent *Underland* shows the ways in which the growing awareness of the Anthropocene has influenced contemporary nature writing, allowing Macfarlane to establish a non-anthropocentric perspective following the new materialisms. While likewise adopting a new materialist stance, Kathleen Jamie's collections of naturalist essays nevertheless question the implications of this ontological framework, in particular with regard to ethics and human responsibility in times of the Anthropocene.

Keywords: Anthropocene, New Nature Writing, ecocriticism, new materialisms, environmental ethics.

Resumen

El concepto del Antropoceno, que denota a los seres humanos como agentes geológicos, complica seriamente las distinciones occidentales tradicionales entre cultura y naturaleza, el mundo humano y el no humano. Contrariamente a los relatos antropocéntricos, los nuevos materialismos han establecido una interpretación posthumanista del Antropoceno que desestabiliza esas dicotomías, situando a los seres humanos a la par del mundo con el que se encuentran. Este enfoque también se puede encontrar en la *New Nature Writing* (nueva escritura de la naturaleza), una creciente colección de literatura que busca reconectar el "animal humano" con la naturaleza, con la pregunta siempre abierta sobre la naturaleza de la propia naturaleza. La lectura de la obra de Robert Macfarlane, con el foco en su reciente libro *Underland*, revela las maneras en las que la conciencia creciente del Antropoceno ha influido en la escritura de la naturaleza contemporánea, permitiendo a Macfarlane establecer una perspectiva no antropocéntrica, de acuerdo con los nuevos materialismos. Mientras que Kathleen Jamie también adopta una posición materialista, sus colecciones de ensayos naturalistas, sin embargo, cuestionan las implicaciones de este marco ontológico, particularmente respecto a la ética y a las responsabilidades humanas en tiempos del Antropoceno.

Palabras clave: Antropoceno, *New Nature Writing*, ecocrítica, nuevos materialismos, ética medioambiental.

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Introduction

The past two decades have seen a growing awareness of anthropogenic impact on the Earth's geology and ecology, increasingly imbuing public consciousness through news reports as well as through various forms of art.[1] This thesis of the Anthropocene, i.e., the proposed current geological age that denotes humankind as "a global geophysical force," severely complicates traditional Western distinctions between culture and nature, the human and the nonhuman world (Steffen et al. 614). As the historian Dipesh Chakrabarty has influentially argued, the denotation of humans as "geological agents" implies the collapse of a differentiation between natural history and human history ("The Climate of History" 207). The latter, traditionally focused on the social, or the cultural, now emerges to be inextricably entangled with the history of the planet itself, with the human species having become "a force of nature in the geological sense" (Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History" 207). The recognition of such unprecedented agency, of humankind as "the dominant species on the planet," invariably poses ethical questions of responsibility towards the Earth and its inhabitants (Chakrabarty, "Climate and Capital" 14). Following the philosopher Clive Hamilton, the Anthropocene's acknowledgment of humankind's dominant role implies an anthropocentric perspective, which should be embraced as a means to meet this responsibility. The new materialisms, however, have established an alternative reading of the Anthropocene: a post-humanist reading that places human beings on a par with the world they encounter.[2] The present essay aims to locate such an alternative view in the New Nature Writing (NNW), a movement that seeks to reconnect the "human animal" to nature, with the ever-open question of the nature of "nature" itself (Cowley par. 11 of 11). Readings of Robert Macfarlane's and Kathleen Jamie's works will illuminate possibilities of re-interrogating the human condition and the ensuing ethical implications in times of the Anthropocene. A focus on Macfarlane's recent book *Underland* (2019), already counting amongst the most successful works of NNW, will demonstrate the ways in which the growing awareness of the Anthropocene has influenced contemporary nature writing. Whereas *Underland* manages to leave Macfarlane's early anthropocentric tendencies behind, it is in Jamie's work where the ethics of a new materialist perspective is more carefully contemplated and problematised.

First, however, a more thorough discussion of the indeed debated concept of the Anthropocene is needed. It was first mentioned by meteorologist and Nobel prize winner Paul Crutzen in 2000 and reasserted in a short article two years later, which proposed "to assign the term 'Anthropocene' to the present, in many ways human-dominated, geological epoch" (Crutzen 23). This sweeping proclamation soon entered academic discourse, with a newly formed interdisciplinary Working Group on the "Anthropocene" (AWG) now calling for a formalisation of the epoch, suggesting the 1950s as its starting point (Zalasiewicz et al. 58). In the humanities, responses are more diverse. In particular

[1] For example, Trexler identifies a growing body of so-called climate fiction, which started to be recognised around 2009 (7).
[2] See, for example, Cohen (xxiv-xxv) for such a post-humanist reading of the Anthropocene.

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the etymology of the term "Anthropocene" has caused a certain uneasiness amongst predominantly Marxist scholars, since its root, *anthropos*, seems to imply the creation of a unity of all human beings that ignores social and cultural diversities.[3] Chakrabarty, however, insists that the impalpable scope of the Anthropocene effectively demands such a thinking in terms of species, arguing that "the analytics of capital (or of the market)" are necessary but "insufficient instruments in helping us come to grips with anthropogenic climate change" ("The Climate of History" 4). Hamilton, although favouring the term "humankind" over "the human species", seizes this point: "[i]f the Anthropocene is a rupture of the history of the Earth as a whole," he contends, "then it is also a rupture in the history of humans as a whole" (61-62; 34). Signposting the diminishing economic differences between the North and the South, he remarks that "[b]y 2050 at the latest the objections to 'Anthropocene' will seem very dated" (30-31). China, with India hard on its heels, still increases its fossil fuel emissions, justified (following Chakrabarty) as an instrument to lift the poor out of poverty ("Climate and Capital" 12-13). This attempt to advance equality concurrently advances global warming, complicating historical accounts that propose a "Capitalocene" with the North as its primary actor (Malm 391). The Anthropocene hence appears to me as indeed the more suitable term; in any case, it has already been accepted by the natural sciences and as such, Hamilton notes, "it is here to stay" (28). Accordingly, the present essay will use the Anthropocene as a denotation for the current geological epoch that marks humankind as responsible for anthropogenic changes in the Earth System. However, I consider it necessary to highlight that albeit it seems unlikely that the term will be changed, it remains the role of the humanities to critically discuss its possible implications, specifically in regard to the role of humankind itself when meeting this new responsibility.

If we proceed on the assumption, then, that humankind as a whole has indeed "imprinted an indelible mark on the planet" (Zalasiewicz et al. 59), we need to ask the (in Hamilton's words) "epochal question: what is this being who has changed the course of the Earth itself?" (35) The answer to this question profoundly varies, from radically ecomodernist approaches, elevating humankind to the "creator" of nature (Ellis 321), to absolutist post-humanist accounts that define "human nature" as "an interspecies relationship" (Tsing 141). Whilst endorsing the conviction of a "special" position of human beings revealed by the Anthropocene, Hamilton warns against the *hubris* implied by ecomodernist thought: the unintended creation of the Anthropocene also tells us, he argues, that humans are inseparably embedded in natural processes (52). With human agency being "immersed in an Earth-world built by us out of nature but constrained by it," Hamilton maintains that "the worlds we make are never solely our creations, and the Modern dreams of infinite world-creation are always subject to the centripetal pull of Earth" (52; 63). The rhetoric discloses that in his "new anthropocentrism", humankind's newly recognised collective agency on a geological level still raises us to "the world-making creature" (again, the exceptional status of human beings is emphasised by the

[3] See Malm for an influential argumentation against the use of the term "Anthropocene". In Moore's "The Capitalocene Part I" and "The Capitalocene Part II", the argument goes one step further, seeking to contest 'social as well as environmental reductionism' ("The Capitalocene Part II" 240).

definite article), albeit straitened by natural forces (Hamilton 58). The new materialisms, describing "a theoretical turn away from the persistent dualisms in modern and humanist traditions" (Sanzo par. 1 of 11), allow to consider the Anthropocene as signalling "the ultimate failure of the modernist project of domination," as Hamilton puts it (89). The predominant argument emphasises the interdependence of human and nonhuman beings, acknowledged through the Anthropocene as an unintended consequence that lies beyond our control. In stark contrast to Hamilton's new anthropocentrism, new materialists use this acknowledgment to affirm their strong rejection of any special status being conferred on human beings. As Jeffrey J. Cohen has argued, the lack of intention behind the creation of the Anthropocene separates agency from willpower, giving way to new definitions of agency that equally include nonhuman matters (xxiv-xxv).[4] By rendering human beings as one amongst many "knots in a vast network of agencies" (Iovino and Oppermann 1), this alternative reading of the Anthropocene advances a post-humanist approach where humans are not "the" special creature, do not "stand out from nature as a whole" but are part of it (Hamilton 99). Hamilton cautions against such post-humanist perspectives, contending that through the way it "*deflates* the significance and power of humans on the planet," "anti-anthropocentrism has the perverse effect of *denying* our responsibility for the damage we have caused" (89; 98). I would instead suggest a reading of the new materialisms as a way of endorsing respect for the Earth System that we co-inhabit with various other matters, a respect that implies an invitation to act with caution and care. It is exactly this invitation that we can find in the NNW, too.

As identified by Jason Cowley in 2008, British NNW represents a growing body of creative nonfiction that is united by the aspiration to re-imagine "nature", and human (inter-)relationships with it in a time of ecological crisis. Some of its key practitioners were and are, following Joe Moran, Mark Cocker, Roger Deakin, Kathleen Jamie, Richard Mabey, and Robert Macfarlane, all sharing the endeavour to find "the extraordinary in the ordinary" (Cowley par. 7 of 11), focusing on everyday encounters with the nonhuman natural world. As we will see, however, the global nature of the Anthropocene seems to have encouraged a widening of scale (see, for example, Jamie's essay "Aurora" in her essay collection *Sightlines*), which acts not as a replacement of, but rather as an addition to the microscale of everyday spaces. What has remained a key feature of the NNW, regardless of the scale adopted, is its expression of an urgent need to reconnect human beings to the nonhuman natural world, embracing an attitude of regarding the nonhuman world "with wonder, but also with care" (Cowley par. 2 of 11). Alongside this evident parallel to ecocritical thought, the NNW similarly has its roots in the early 1970s, when growing environmental concern demanded a re-interrogation of the meanings of nature and culture (Smith 4). Its much later proclamation by Cowley has caused some discontent amongst critics and so-called New Nature Writers themselves, as the term itself seems to ignore the movement's concern with cultural processes: "'nature'," Smith remarks, "tends

[4] For an influential theorisation of such "*distributive* agency", building upon Bruno Latour's conceptualisation of *actants* as "a source of action that can be either human or nonhuman," see Bennett (quotations taken from iii-ix, italics author's own).

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to convey an evacuation of politics and ethics" (14). I still find it useful to mark the break from what Cowley calls "old" nature writing (par. 6 of 11), a break that involves incorporating traditionally unconventional settings for encountering "nature" and re-interpreting modes of the pastoral in ways that speak to a world marked by anthropogenic environmental damage (see Lilley, *The New Pastoral*). The present essay will hence continue to deploy the term NWW to refer to this body of writing, asking the reader to keep in mind that the "nature" in NNW is far from seeking to reproduce the old nature-culture binary.

In an attempt to bring the theory discussed above together, the present essay will use Robert Macfarlane's and Kathleen Jamie's nature writing to locate new understandings of "nature", as well as the very nature of human beings itself, that reflect the complications and challenges posed by the Anthropocene. A focus on Macfarlane's *Underland* will illustrate the influence of the growing awareness of the Anthropocene on contemporary nature writing, and demonstrate how the resulting changes in style and settings, combined with the persisting attentiveness to everyday matters that is typical of the NNW, allow to establish a non-anthropocentric perspective following the new materialisms. While Jamie's essay collections bear evident similarities to Macfarlane's recent work, likewise adopting a new materialist stance, I will show how her more tentative and sceptical approach nevertheless questions the implications of this ontological framework, in particular with regard to ethics and human responsibility in times of the Anthropocene.

Robert Macfarlane: Towards Interspecies Discourse and Multi-Species Being

Arguably the most prominent figure in the NNW, Robert Macfarlane has produced a number of critically acclaimed nonfiction books over the past two decades that feature various journeys to, and into near and remote places, driven by an urgent need to rediscover and redefine ideas of the "wild", or the "natural" in times of environmental crisis. In tandem with his literal journeys and discoveries, Macfarlane's writing has travelled, too. While his thematic focus on "the ways in which nature and culture are intricately interwoven with one another" (Alexander 8) continues to be woven into his texts, connecting them as a clearly identifiable golden thread, his methodological approach has set out on new paths—paths that have changed the very nature of the human-nonhuman relationship conveyed through his work. So has his early book *The Wild Places* (2007) been criticised for a resumption of conventional tropes of nature writing, perhaps most trenchantly by fellow writer Jamie in her tellingly titled review "A Lone Enraptured Male". Alongside a critical reading of the enactments of class and gender performed by *The Wild Places*, Jamie scarifies Macfarlane's proclivity for what David Matless identifies as a "foregrounding of the authorial voice" (178): "If there is a lot of 'I'," she argues, "(and there is, in *The Wild Places*) then it won't be the wild places we behold, but the author" ("A Lone Enraptured Male" par. 12 of 24). Neal Alexander seizes this point, contending that "[s]uch an emphasis upon voice and selfhood implies the persistence of anthropocentrism" and, at the same time, "a lingering Romantic attachment to the

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authority of the solitary individual" (3). These anthropocentric tendencies are, as I would argue, amplified by repeated descriptions of enchantment through the "wild" (see, for example, *WP* 234), endorsing a "weak" anthropocentrism that seeks to respect and protect nonhuman matters for their importance for human flourishing.[5] However, as Deborah Lilley notes, Macfarlane already begins "to refocus his interpretation of nature in all forms" (*The New Pastoral* 94): his initial understanding of wildness as something "outside history" is profoundly challenged when he realises that "[e]very islet and mountain-top, every secret valley or woodland, [has] been visited, dwelled in, worked, or marked at some point," a realisation that leads him to conclude that "[t]he human and the wild cannot be partitioned" (*WP* 127). Whereas *The Wild Places* does not yet manage to translate this idea of "the intersection of humans and nature" (Lilley, *The New Pastoral* 95) unambiguously into language, Lilley locates a growing "sensitivity towards ways of looking at and interpreting the features and experiences of different landscapes, and the human-nature relations that they signify" (*The New Pastoral* 228) in Macfarlane's later work *The Old Ways* (2012). The author's "formula or set of coordinates by which the landscape might be understood or discerned," Lilley writes, "is understood to be one of many" (*The New Pastoral* 229), suggesting an emerging parting of a univocal rendering of the land and its inhabitants. This attentiveness to the multiplicity of ways of exploring a particular place or landscape, indicating a necessity to allow for multiple perspectives, is further pronounced in *Underland* (2019).

Being Macfarlane's most recent and so-far most celebrated single-authored work, *Underland* deals also most explicitly with the looming presence of the Anthropocene and its implications for human-nonhuman relationships, ultimately taking a new materialist approach that is enhanced by stylistic features. In what the book's blurb describes as "an epic exploration of the Earth's underworlds," the author travels to both literal and metaphorical underground spaces, embarking on "a deep time journey" (as the subheading proclaims) that encompasses Greenland's glaciers as well as the city catacombs of Paris, "starless" river systems as well as a laboratory studying dark matter, Bronze Age burial chambers as well as a contemporary burial place for nuclear waste. Albeit not fully able to uncouple itself from what Phil Hubbard and Eleanor Wilkinson call "the conventional masculinist trope of the male wanderer who boldly strides into the wilderness" (3), *Underland* represents a refined version of exploring the interrelations between human and nonhuman matters that goes beyond the integration of traditionally unconventional settings for nature writing. It is a version that focuses less on the author himself but rather gives space to accounts from various experts in their own fields, an exchange of knowledge often rendered in dialogical form. In further contrast to Macfarlane's earlier works, *Underland* incorporates a number of women's voices, still outnumbered by male contributors but slowly surfacing in his writing, alleviating the gender bias criticised by Jamie (see "A Lone Enraptured Male") and opening up new perspectives. Advancing his continuing quest to find a language for our "more-than-human world" (see Abram), Macfarlane's attempt to deploy what he calls, after Robin Wall

[5] See Norton for a first discussion of this concept.

Kimmerer, a "grammar of animacy" (*Underland* 112) also gives more agency to nonhuman matters through consciously coupling them with action verbs, such as in the beginning section of the book: "[i]ce breathes. Rock has tides. Mountains ebb and flow. Stone pulses" (*Underland* 16). These changes in style allow for a more clearly and consistently articulated understanding of the world in materialistic terms, compounded of "networks of mutual relation" (*Underland* 418) that, as we will see, are most tangible on the microscale associated with the NNW, creating an intimacy towards nonhuman matters that emphatically illustrates their intrinsic value.

The struggle of coming to terms with the age of the Anthropocene is more decidedly discussed on a macroscale, in particular in the chapters "The Blue of Time" and "Meltwater", where the influence of the current environmental crisis on contemporary British nature writing comes patently into view. Covering Macfarlane's travels around Kulusuk Island in Greenland, these two chapters open up a global space going far beyond the British Isles. The literal and metaphorical explorations of the local glaciers and bergs, slowly melting into the ocean, intensify this globality through their symbolism for an all-pervasive climate change, using a specific locale to create the "sense of planet" Ursula Heise urgently demands (see *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet*). At the same time, they epitomise the tension between humankind's simultaneous significance and insignificance in this global, "more-than-human" world. Amidst "[t]he immensity and the vibrancy of the ice," Macfarlane feels hugely aware of the smallness and ephemerality of humans as a species when viewed "in deep time, even in the relatively shallow time since the last glaciation – the notion of human dominance over the planet," he writes, "seems greedy, delusory" (*Underland* 362). While the reference to "deep time" illustrates a thinking that goes beyond conventional timescales, the "vibrancy" Macfarlane bestows on the ice evokes Jane Bennett's *Vibrant Matters* (2010) and its theory of distributive agency, outlining agentic power as "a power possessed by nonhuman bodies too" (32). As his descriptions of, and reflections on ice as a substance show, Macfarlane acknowledges this inclusive definition of agency: "ice is a shape-shifter and a state-shifter," he muses a few pages later. "It flies, it swims and it flows. […] Ice erases mountain ranges, but preserves air bubbles for millennia" (*Underland* 379). In finding this epiphanic realisation of "the vibrancy of the ice" in seemingly untouched nature, far from human civilisation, the journey through Greenland bears resemblance to a traditional motif of pastoral escape in the sense of "expectations of relief and restoration", as Lilley describes it (*The New Pastoral* 8). However, the moment of "relief and restoration" is severely qualified by a sense of ecological crisis. "Looking out from that summit, I no longer feel awed and exhilarated, but instead faintly sick," Macfarlane writes shortly after his revelation, remembering "the melt that is happening, that has happened, that *is hastening*": he feels "[s]ick at Greenland's scale – but also by our ability to encompass it. […] The ice seems a 'thing' that is beyond our comprehension to know but within our capacity to destroy" (*Underland* 362-3). What we encounter here is the deployment of what Lilley calls the "new" pastoral, namely a reformed version of traditional pastoral conventions emerging in contemporary British writing, caused by "the impact of contemporary environmental conditions" (*The New Pastoral* 7). Instead of finding retreat and relief in the nonhuman

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natural world, the awareness of anthropogenic climate change, induced by the melting landscape, seems to pose only more questions to Macfarlane, charging ice, as a metonymy for the Anthropocene, as "a 'thing' that is beyond our comprehension to know". This moment shows quite plainly how any contemporary attempt at reinvigorating the pastoral escape into "nature" will invariably, and inexorably serve as a reminder of human influence on the nonhuman natural world; of an influence that appears both unavoidable and unfathomable.

In a sense, however, this acknowledgment of the limits of human knowledge can be read as a new understanding, too. Through imagining "our capacity to destroy" together with human incomprehension of their own doings, with ice as "ungraspable to human habits of meaning making" (*Underland* 379), the distributive nature of Bennett's model of agency becomes more visible, signifying an attempt "to counter the narcissism of humans in charge of the world" (Bennett xvi) while still recognising the extent of anthropogenic environmental damage. His depiction of the interaction of glacial agency, reaching back millennia, with contemporary human doings allows Macfarlane to achieve what Chakrabarty sees as so crucial when imagining the Anthropocene: "to think about different scales simultaneously" ("The Climate of History" 3), both spatially and temporally. In *Underland*'s chapter "The Understorey", we will see the scale narrowing again, moving the inherent value of nonhuman matters closer into focus and, in this process, extending this new understanding of the world as composed through human and nonhuman interactions.

As I have adumbrated, the "networks of mutual relation" between human and nonhuman beings (Underland 418)—the "big picture", so to say—materialise most tangibly on the microscale adopted in "The Understorey". In her essay "Unruly Edges", Anna Tsing draws on the "interspecies companionship" between "fungi and plant roots" (143) to envision human nature as an "interspecies relationship", too (144); in his impassioned exploration of what he calls, after forest ecologist Suzanne Simard, the "wood wide web"—a forest's underground network composed of roots, soil, and thread-like fungi filaments—Macfarlane arrives at a very similar conclusion. Building on biological research, he describes it as a "mysterious buried network, joining single trees into forest communities," forming a "subtle mutualism with plants" that allows them "to communicate with each other," in "ways we have scarcely begun to understand" (*Underland* 88, 96). The "mysterious" character of this "interspecies aid-giving" (*Underland* 88), lying just as the vast agencies of Greenland's glacial landscape beyond human comprehension, is pronounced more emphatically in a later scene, helping to recognise its inherent value. Spending a night in London's Epping Forest as part of a larger group of people, talking and music-making, Macfarlane finds himself within "[d]rums, songs, stories. The trees shifting, speaking, busy making meaning that I cannot hear" (*Underland* 115). These trees, figured as meaning-making actants, and with them the entire subterranean web connecting them, emerge as what Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann describe as "storied matter": "a material 'mesh' of meanings," interlocking human and nonhuman matters "in networks that produce undeniable signifying forces" (1-2). This notion is further intensified by the reference to "stories" that may be produced

through the singing humans, the shifting trees, or both. By imagining the trees as meaning-makers through "speaking" to other matters, speech and meaningful communication lose their Cartesian status of being solely reserved for human beings, recognising meaning in Karen Barad's terms as "an ongoing performance of the world in its differential intelligibility" (335) and, at the same time, emphasising the integrity of nonhuman matters. But while Macfarlane "cannot hear," cannot fully apprehend the more-than-human communication humming beneath and around him, it does, in a vibrant example of interspecies discourse, influence the way in which he experiences the nonhuman natural world, and the very nature of human beings. So he writes that "nature seems increasingly better understood in fungal terms: […] as an assemblage of entanglement of which we are messily part. We are coming to understand our bodies as habitats for hundreds of species of which *Homo sapiens* is only one, our guts as jungles of bacterial flora, our skins as blooming fantastically with fungi" (*Underland* 103-104). Here, Macfarlane zooms in even further, deep into the human body, and the human condition itself. As Tsing, he perceives fungi, so small and often-overlooked, as "indicator species for the human condition" (Tsing 144); as Tsing, he begins to understand humans "as multi-species beings" (*Underland* 104) through fungi and their symbiotic networks.

By "high[lighting] what is typically cast in the shadow," as we have seen, namely "the material agency or effectivity of nonhuman or not-quite-human things" (Bennett ix), Macfarlane adopts what Bennett calls an "*ecological sensibility*" (xi, italics author's own), contemplating these symbiotic networks as a model for new ways of living in the spirit of Albrecht's "Symbiocene". Albrecht, to whom Macfarlane directly refers (see *Underland* 113), suggests letting the Anthropocene and its oppressive social (and ecological) systems "become redundant as soon as possible" (13). Instead, he urges us to enter a new epoch that he names the "Symbiocene", marked by "symbiotic and mutually reinforcing life-reproducing forms and processes" (14). In Macfarlane's writing, a similar appreciation of, and desire for such alternative and all-inclusive reciprocal systems is inspired by the wood wide web. "Recent studies suggest that well-developed fungal networks will enable forests to adapt faster at larger scales to the changing conditions of the Anthropocene," he notes, already adumbrating that such mutually beneficial networks may allow humans to "adapt faster at larger scales," too (*Underland* 103). A few pages later, this idea of embracing "mutualism", "a prolonged relationship that is interdependent and reciprocally beneficial," is stated more explicitly (*Underland* 97): "[i]f there is human meaning to be made of the wood wide web, it is surely that what might save us as we move forwards into the precarious, unsettled centuries ahead is collaboration: mutualism, symbiosis, the inclusive human work of collective decision-making extended to more-than-human communities" (*Underland* 113). Animated by both the "mysterious buried network" of the forest (*Underland* 88) and Albrecht's reflections on the Anthropocene, the formulation of this vision of "collaboration", "extended to more than human communities," illustrates once more an example of interspecies discourse, of how "human and nonhuman players are interlocked in networks that produce undeniable signifying forces," to quote Iovino and Oppermann again (2). And it is a vision that lasts, for it returns in "Surfacing", the very last section of the book (curiously titled identically as Jamie's latest essay collection). Here

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we accompany Macfarlane and his youngest son on a walk through Nine Wells Wood, Cambridge. "Lumps of white chalk lie among the ivy," Macfarlane observes, "glowing in the day-dusk of the wood. Dragonflies hunt the spring stream where it flows away from us. Beneath and around us, invisibly, the fungal network connects tree to tree. […] My son and I talk quietly about nothing much. We feel small in the universe, and together" (*Underland* 425). Such as his early work *The Wild Places*, Macfarlane's *Underland* ends with a return to "nature" that is only a few miles from his home, following the common thread in NNW of finding meaning "not in the rare or exotic but in our everyday connections with the non-human natural world" (Moran 50). Quite in contrast to *The Wild Places*, however, where such connections are elevated as evoking emotions like "hope, joy, wonder, grace, tranquillity and others" (*WP* 236), Macfarlane now merely describes the glowing white chalk, the dragonflies, the fungal networks, without attempting any valuation. Through his engagement with different modes of living, and different ways of imagining such modes, he has arrived at a point where he can "simply all[ow] nonhumans to be what they are" for their own sake (Morton par. 14 of 17): at Bennett's ecological sensibility. While the final scene reaches its climax with Macfarlane's realisation "that [his son] will die," emphatically representing a more or less covert plea to consider "the generations that succeed us," the self-evident presence of nonhuman matters, co-inhabiting and co-forming the universe with nonhuman beings, underscores how his urgent question (after Jonas Salk) whether we are "being good ancestors" refers to "the epochs and species that will come after ours," too (*Underland* 425, 410). The intricacies of translating such an all-inclusive ethos into action, or, even before that, into a consistent ethical framework, are weighed more nuancedly in Jamie's work.

Kathleen Jamie: Complicating Matters

Perhaps not as widely known as Macfarlane, the Scottish poet and essayist Kathleen Jamie nevertheless counts amongst the leading voices of the NNW, having published a number of award-winning collections of both poetry and essays that seek "to capture a sense of nature as the interweaving of human and non-human relationships" ("Rethinking" 17). While Macfarlane's early work remains somewhat conservative in both style and settings, Laura Severin contends that Jamie already starts "to escape the centripetal force of past environmental narratives" with *Findings* (2005), her first collection of naturalist essays (101). Indeed, several critics have commented on her incorporation of a "plurality of perspectives" (Marland, 9; also see "Rethinking" and Dziok) that helps "to form a universal image of nature," including nonhuman as well as human beings, the inside as well as the outside of human bodies (Dziok 18). So contemplates Jamie upon her visit of the "Surgeon's Hall" in Edinburgh's Royal College of Surgeons, where she examines human specimens and body parts in glass jars, most of them marked by disease: "[w]e consider the natural world as 'out there', an 'environment', but these objects in their jars show us the forms concealed inside, the intimate unknown" (*Findings* 141). But "[i]n explaining our innate sameness with the rest of nature," Lilley argues, Jamie still "takes care to maintain attention to our difference," recognising our

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concurrent sameness with, and otherness to the nonhuman natural world ("Rethinking" 22; also see Severin). This is a recognition reminiscent of Barad's "difference amidst relationality," to borrow Adrian Tait's term, and in fact, Jamie's exploration of "the porous margins between culture and nature, human and non-human worlds," as Alexander puts it (10), has explicitly been linked to the new materialisms.[6] Following Pippa Marland, Jamie's work, and the NNW in general show, in their imaginative, non-apocalyptic engagement with "nature", a potentiality to articulate new materialist thought (3)—a potentiality that we have already seen fulfilled in Macfarlane's *Underland*.

Jamie's and Macfarlane's approaches have, despite their initial differences, effectively moved closer towards each other, in particular with their respective 2019 books *Underland* and *Surfacing*, Jamie's third collection of naturalist essays after *Findings* and *Sightlines* (2012). Of course, differences in tone remain; Macfarlane's prose continues to be "less guarded" and "more expansive" (Moran 56), while Jamie's is self-conscious and often ironic: "in the great scheme of things," she writes in *Surfacing*, "we're living through a warm bank holiday weekend," contrasting Macfarlane's impassioned reflections on anthropogenic global warming with dry wit and a matter-of-fact attitude that is typical of her writing (3). Still, it seems nearly uncanny *how* close the two authors have converged with their recent books: both make explicit references to the Anthropocene; both engage with Inuit cultures; both explore Neolithic cave paintings; and both even end with a nearly identical setting: a walk through a local wood. However, considering that both *Underland* and *Surfacing* have been published in a time where the concept of the Anthropocene continues to seep into public consciousness, the apparent uncanniness of these similarities slowly dissolves into thin, carbon-rich air. They can much rather be read as a more general, and perhaps even unavoidable response of nature writing to the omnipresence of the Anthropocene; a response that involves a widening of scales, both spatially and temporally, but nevertheless maintains the endeavour to "[pick] out the hidden detail in the everyday, to illuminate what is overlooked" ("Rethinking" 18), not fully abandoning but rather broadening Cowley's initial conceptualisation of the NNW.

And yet Jamie's interpretation of our entanglement with the nonhuman world differs from Macfarlane's in other ways than simply matters of style, particularly regarding the negotiation of the ethical implications of the new materialist perspective they have begun to share. As I have already touched upon, and as has been noted by several critics, Jamie recognises the human body, "our own intimate, inner natural world" (*Sightlines* 24), as an integral part of "nature" (Alexander 10; Dziok 18; "Rethinking" 21; Severin 103). With this recognition comes an awareness of the natural ephemerality of our own being; of the human body's continuous exposure to death and disease, a theme that is woven into all three of Jamie's collections of naturalist essays (see "Fever" and "Surgeon's Hall" in *Findings*; "Pathologies" in *Sightlines*; "Surfacing", "A Tibetan Dog", and "Elders" in *Surfacing*). It is in her essay "Pathologies", involving her visit to a pathology lab after the death of her mother, where she moves closest to the very nature of human disease: examining tumours and infections, "colons and livers and hearts," Jamie observes

[6] See Barad's chapter on what she terms "agential realism" (pp. 132-185).

"the bacteria that can pull the rug from under us" – the "[n]ature we'd rather do without" (*Sightlines* 40; 24; 36). Referring to "our guts as jungles of bacterial flora, our skins as blooming fantastically with fungi," Macfarlane similarly points out that encountering ourselves as multi-species beings happens "not always comfortably or pleasantly" (*Underland* 104). But while he quickly goes on to speak of humans as "collaborative compound organisms," foreshadowing his sympathy towards the idea of a mutually beneficial Symbiocene (*Underland* 104), Jamie halts at this inclusive definition of nature. If all organic matters are part of the nature "we [are] exhorted to reconnect with," as she repines after attending a conference "about humanity's relationship with other species," what about the intrinsic value of bacteria and viruses, then? (*Sightlines* 23, 22) "What are vaccinations for," Jamie ponders, "if not to make a formal disconnection from some of these wondrous other species?" (*Sightlines* 23) What are these "other species," what is this "nature" we seek to protect? What, exactly, counts worthy of so-called protection and reconnection? "I wondered," Jamie writes, "if there was a distinction somewhere I simply failed to understand" (*Sightlines* 24). Her feeling of forlornness, of helplessness, in a way, poignantly illustrates the difficulty of putting a non-anthropocentric approach, dismissing human superiority and hence their entitlement to greater ethical consideration, into a consistent ethical framework. "[T]he becoming of the world is a deeply ethical matter," Barad writes (185), but then concludes "with an all too brief discussion" (in Tait's words) what an ensuing ethical approach, including both human and nonhuman beings, could entail. As Bergthaller notes, the new materialisms tend to "merely [beg] the question how exactly […] human value and human agency are to be weighed on the onto-ethical scales," without providing a clear answer. Jamie's essay "Pathologies" joins the ongoing search for a cogent resolution, alluding that the multi-species relationships Macfarlane imagines may likely struggle to fulfil their aspiration to be "reciprocally beneficial" (*Underland* 97).

In her more recent essay "In Quinhagak", published in *Surfacing*, Jamie shifts her focus to human lives and traditions, bringing forward a version of Val Plumwood's conceptual vegetarianism that could perhaps be read as a more general model for life in tune with the nonhuman natural world. Upon her visit of a Yup'ik excavation site in Alaska, she comes to know the contemporary Yup'ik culture, too. "Living off the land," as Darren, one of the natives, puts it, the lives of the indigenous people are still entangled with the land and its nonhuman inhabitants; their "culinary year" is organised through the natural cycles of "the land and sea and river," through hunting and fishing and berry picking according to the seasons (*Surfacing* 22, 63). But as the Anthropocene has invariably changed the landscapes of Kulusuk Island, where Macfarlane experiences age-old traditions like hunting "under threat of erasure" (*Underland* 335), climate change is similarly felt in the lives of the Yup'ik people: "winter was bad," Darren recalls. "Same last year too. And then April, May, June were too hot" (*Surfacing* 22). What shimmers through the text is a certain nostalgia for a time before anthropogenic climate change, for "a time when the Yup'ik were hunter-gatherers and fended for themselves, when they did just fine" (*Surfacing* 18). How does this fit in a new materialist perspective, when their "doing-just-fine" involves the killing of nonhuman animal beings, lifting the wellbeing of the human species above that of others? Not an explicitly materialist theorist herself (likely

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because her writings appeared before the rise of the new materialisms), Plumwood argues that, while continuing to "[reject] human-centered assumptions of mastery over animals," "we can still justify well-contextualized forms of vegetarianism" – forms that include, perhaps somewhat counter-intuitively, a contextually justified consumption of animals as well (298). She contends that "the successful human occupation of many places and ecological situations in the world has required the use of at least some of their animals for food and other purposes," naming "places like the high Arctic regions, where for much of the year few vegetable resources are available," as "[t]he most obvious examples" (305). Rather than shipping or flying in resources from other parts in the world and, in the process, further stressing the Earth's ecological system, the use of locally available foods appears as the "more" ethical choice in Plumwood's model, even if it includes the harming of some of this system's participants. Jamie links this "use" to tradition and, above all, to subsistence, as opposed to, for example, "sports fishing" that is associated with "anglers from the southern USA" (*Surfacing* 44). It is hence a model that allows the sacrifice of individual beings for the sake of the survival of a species, putting the value of a whole species and, by extension, the ecosystem, of which we are all integrally part, above that of the individual. In this way, Jamie's take holds evident similarities to an ecocentric perspective, which foregrounds "the intrinsic value in ecosystems" rather than that of individual entities (Gray, Whyte and Curry 130). Thinking back to Barad's account of the world in its "ongoing reconfiguring," arguing that "[e]xistence is not an individual affair" but emerges through "entangled intra-relating," it is a take that appears very much in line with new materialist thought (338, ix).

But the all-pervasive human impact through ongoing globalisation processes that are part of the Anthropocene affects such subsistence cultures, too, as Jamie's experiences in Quinhagak show, underscoring once more the intricacies of integrating this ecocentric, and new materialist perspective into an ethical framework. While still "living off the land" to a certain extent, the Yup'ik people have not been spared from modernisation; they have become "[h]unter-gatherers with a grocery store," as Jamie ironically puts it (*Surfacing* 32), smoking Marlboro (79) and watching Netflix (90). Such implications of a globalised world reach deep into age-old tradition, for instance changing the preparation of Yup'ik food. When a local girl tells Jamie that she will make *akutaq*—"eskimo ice cream," as she explains—Jamie asks what kind of fat is used to prepare it: "'Seal fat?' [The girl] pulled a face. 'No, something we buy from the store' (*Surfacing* 43). This example touches upon an important point raised by Tait, namely that an ecocentric perspective "requires us to identify what humans themselves need (as opposed to want or demand), and how those needs might be balanced against the earth's needs." If there are alternative resources available, the question arises whether it can truly be justified to hunt animals for food, and because it is tradition; after all, the locals do not "need" the hunted animals to survive, and traditions "need" to be adapted "to take account of new contexts," as Plumwood herself has argued (306). But demanding of an indigenous culture that is part of "the precariat of a volatile, fast warping planet," to put it in Macfarlane's words (*Underland* 335), to give up on age-old traditions while the Western world continues to emit a much larger amount of greenhouse gases, picking at their not-even-vegan meals, clearly appears

too short-sighted. "We can't go on like this," Jamie states in a later chapter of *Surfacing*, adding: "but we wouldn't go back either" (156). Reinvigorating hunter-gatherer traditions is no more an option than continuing to disrupt the Earth System at the unprecedented pace that is happening today, producing agential forces that lie far beyond human control. Contemporary nature writing shows that these ubiquitous implications of the Anthropocene have made it virtually inevitable to imagine this interdependent system as fundamentally material and co-constitutive. Now it is high time to imagine new, more inclusive ways of living, as Macfarlane has already begun to do, and to formulate a clear ethical framework that helps to make such "new ways" possible, as Jamie's work urgently expresses.

Conclusion

We have seen how the immeasurable scale of the Anthropocene with its enormous implications has influenced contemporary nature writing, too, namely in a way that seeks to do justice to both the interplay of human and nonhuman agencies, and to the immensity of this scale itself. And still, zooming in on everyday encounters with "nature" in all its forms, with that what often remains overlooked, seems necessary to comprehend our entanglement in this more-than-human world; to create an intimacy towards nonhuman matters that emphasises their intrinsic value. Bennett has argued that such "moments of sensuous enchantment with the everyday world" (referring to "that strange combination of delight and disturbance" rather than moments of rapture) may provide the necessary motivational force that leads humans "to the actual practice of ethical behaviors" (xi). Macfarlane's engagement with fungal networks shows how this "sensuous enchantment" may encourage an envisioning of new, more inclusive forms of living; Jamie's work portends that it remains unclear what, and whom "the actual practice of ethical behaviors" could effectively entail. Perhaps this is the reason why she is, outside an academic circle, not *quite* as often referred to as Macfarlane: because, just as the new materialisms themselves, she "offers no single, obvious, commanding answer," to put it into Tait's words; "no new dogma, no straightforward rallying cry around which to gather a new form of radical environmental activism". But instead of lapsing into resignation at the sight of all those unanswered questions, she urges us to go on, to keep looking—"because if you don't look, you don't see" (*Surfacing* 95). Or, as Jamie puts it in *Surfacing*'s last chapter, where she finds herself "lost in the wood": "[t]he path is at your feet, see? Now carry on" (245). Similarly, we need to carry on along the path towards new understandings of this ever-changing world; of this web of relations we are intricately part of. Both Macfarlane and Jamie spur us on to move towards such new ways of thinking, even if these ways are sometimes not pleasant or comfortable, and this is what makes their work so necessary in these uncertain times of the Anthropocene.

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Embodying Environmental Relationship: A Comparative Ecocritical Analysis of *Journey* and *Unravel*

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Abstract

Departing from Jane Suzanne Carroll's contention that "Landscapes are at once geographical and historical, natural and cultural, experienced and represented, and present a spatial interface between human culture and physical terrain" (2), this article draws on game studies (Aarseth; Sicart; Yee; Isbister) and on discussions of game design (Schell; Chen; Sahlin) to analyse the landscape and avatar design of *Journey* and *Unravel*. Developing the term *semiotic register* as an analytical lens, the article seeks to pin-point the means by which the two games move the player to adopt distinctly different attitudes and relationships to the games' natural scenes. The article starts by positioning the study in relation to previous ecocritical analyses of games (Backe; Bianchi; Bohunicky; Chang; Lehner; Parham) and by discussing some aspects of indirect player management before analysing and comparing the two games in more detail.

Keywords: Ecocritical game analysis, game design, semiotic register, player-to-landscape relationship, embodiment.

Resumen

Alejándose de la afirmación de Suzanne Carroll de que "Los paisajes son al mismo tiempo geográficos e históricos, naturales y culturales, experimentados y representados, y presentan una interfaz espacial entre la cultura humana y el terreno físico" (2), este artículo se basa en los estudios sobre videojuegos (Aarseth; Sicart; Yee; Isbister) y en los debates sobre el diseño de videojuegos (Schell; Chen; Sahlin) para anlizar el diseño de los paisajes y de los avatares de *Journey* y *Unravel.* Desarrollando el término *registro semiótico* como lente analítica, el artículo busca precisar los medios por los que ambos juegos llevan al jugador a adoptar actitudes y relaciones con las escenas naturales de los juegos claramente diferentes. El artículo comienza posicionando el estudio en relación con análisis ecocríticos ya existentes de juegos (Backe; Bianchi; Bohunicky; Chang; Lehner; Parham) y discutiendo algunos aspectos de la gestión indirecta del jugador antes de analizar y comparar los dos juegos en más detalle.

Palabras clave: Análisis ecocrítico del juego, diseño de juego, registro semiótico, relación jugador-paisaje, personificación.

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Alenda Y. Chang, who has done ground-breaking work on adapting ecocritical thinking to the study of games, has found that many games treat game environments and the representation of natural habitats in an instrumentalist fashion, as is the case in most resource management games (*Playing Nature, The Virtual 9*), where the player, via the avatar, harvests and modifies the environment in accordance with player needs. This design is in alignment with the Western cultural tendency to privilege the human over

other life forms (anthropocentrism), a principle well known from ecocritical discussions of artistic and mediated representations of natural landscapes and the environment in other media. However, some videogames display the potential of games to invite play that questions the habitual anthropocentric player-to-environment perspective, as does for instance Thatgamecompany's *Flower* (2009), which effectively positions the player as the wind on which multi-coloured flower petals dance. As Chang notes: "Unlike most games, that offer players human, or at least humanoid avatars, *Flower* destabilizes not only player corporeality but also player agency and perspective" (*Playing Nature*: *Ecology* 33). The novel player perspective in *Flower* is part of a deliberate and long-term strategy by Thatgamecompany's lead designer Jenova Chen to broaden the emotional palette available through gaming ("Designing *Journey*", "From *Journey*").

Calling for new kinds of gameplay challenges that are more ecologically aware, Chang holds that game designers "tend to lean heavily on clichéd landscapes, abandoning any attempts at regional specificity for pre-patterned and ultimately generic scenes" and that game design more generally "have yet to develop more sophisticated rules for interaction between players and game environments" ("Playing Nature" 9). Both *Journey* (Thatgamecompany) and *Unravel* (Coldwood Interactive) are interesting objects of analysis in this regard, since they undermine the habitual anthropocentric orientation of the gameplay[1] by reconfiguring the relationship between player and landscape in novel ways. Both games also foreground natural landscapes in the games' design. The games' landscapes differ in style and dimensions, but both games rely on the representation of natural features to manage player emotion, while exerting narrative control over the player's perspective to orient the player in a specific relationship to the games' natural scenes.

Departing from Jane Suzanne Carroll's contention that "Landscapes are at once geographical and historical, natural and cultural, experienced and represented, and present a spatial interface between human culture and physical terrain" (2), this article draws on game studies (Aarseth; Sicart; Yee; Isbister) and on discussions of game design (Schell; Chen; Sahlin) to analyse the landscape and avatar design of *Journey* and *Unravel*. Developing the term *semiotic register* as an analytical lens, the article seeks to pin-point the means by which the two games move the player to adopt distinctly different attitudes and relationships to the games' natural scenes. The article starts by positioning the study in relation to previous ecocritical analyses of games (Backe; Bianchi; Bohunicky; Chang; Lehner; Parham) and by discussing some aspects of indirect player management before analysing and comparing the two games in more detail.

Ecocritical Game Design

There is a long-honed understanding within the field of ecocriticism that artistic representations of nature and the environment are mediated expressions coloured by

[1] Gameplay here refers to "the game dynamics emerging from the interplay between rules and game geography" (Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al. 127).

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human interests and mental figures. From an initial, literary emphasis on nature writing and romantic poetry, the field has developed to include a broader engagement with all types of artworks and environments, including urban and artificial landscapes (Slovic). In 2012, Greg Garrard offered "the widest definition of the subject of ecocriticism [as] the study of the relationship of the human and the non-human, throughout cultural history and entailing critical analysis of the term 'human' itself" (5), thus including the theoretical advances of the posthuman debate in his conception of ecocriticism. More recently, Donna Haraway's arguments for an understanding of interspecies relationships as entangled forms of becoming through kinship (*When Species*; *Staying with*) has further refined the material orientation of the field.

Ecocritical perspectives have transference value to game studies, providing that they are appropriately framed in media specific ways. Drawing on Haraway, Melissa Bianchi has argued for instance, that the play mechanics of *Octodad: Dadliest Catch* (Young horses) and Nintendo's *Splatoon*, which require that the player navigates as cephaloid characters, enable players "to not only think alternative kinships, but also enact making them" (141). She further suggests that the challenge of working the unfamiliar controls of *Octodad*, which forces the player to control one or two of his tentacles at once, with a constant need to switch between tentacles to accomplish what to humans are simple tasks, "simulates the challenge of understanding the non-human" (63).

While interesting work has been done, there is still a need for ecocritically informed game analysis. As noted by Chang and Parham in 2017, "environmental criticism has been little represented in game studies thus far," offering as their explanation both an alleged humanist scepticism towards technology and a perceived "fetishism" of the player and the act of play on the part of games scholars "in a way that inevitably denigrates game content and context" (11). Benjamin Abraham and Darshana Jayemanne have additionally called for an engagement with climate change in the industry, arguing that "Even a passing familiarity with the cultural output of the mainstream game industry reveals the startling omission of the issue – with very few games telling stories that engage with climate change and the unfolding ecological crisis" (74).[2] A further reason for the dearth of environmental engagement within game studies is implicit in Yosef Nguyen's remark that such engagement requires a critical awareness of the material conditions of gaming that potentially interferes with a sense of fun: "If digital games are to contribute to ecological sustainability, they must be self-reflexive of their participation in ecological harm and signal to players their complicity in that harm as part of the cost of playing and having fun" (20).[3]

Hans-Joachim Backe has commented that "Ecocriticism of digital games has so far engaged with a rather small corpus of examples, often prescriptively and with a quite limited methodological toolkit" (39). Arguably, these shortcomings are rather a result of the scarcity of the research rather than an indication of the quality of the work undertaken. According to Backe, attention has clustered at either ends of a spectrum,

[2] *Phone story* (2011) and *Little inferno* (2012) as discussed by Nguyen are evidence of such engagement.
[3] Arguably, this challenge extends to multiple consumerist practices, not only that of playing digital games.

focussing either on "overtly ecocritical games" or on "negative extremes in the depiction of the natural environment" (41). How overtly ecocritical a game is may to some extent be an interpretive issue, as well as a factor of the interpreter's familiarity with the field of ecocriticism. While Backe holds that "a certain degree of accuracy in depicting and simulating the natural environment is essential for games to seriously reflect ecological issues" (48), Chang contends that "games need not be explicitly environmental to have important environmental implications" (*Playing Nature*, *The Virtual* viii). Backe's assertion that an ecocritical study of a game would be pointless if there is no engagement with the natural environment in the game also seems at odds with the third ecocritical wave that includes urban landscapes in its field of study. Still, analysing games that simulate natural environments is an obvious ecocritical starting point and the two games analysed here both engage with representations of natural landscapes, foregrounding natural features in the player experience.

The emotional effects of game design have so far been sparingly discussed in the ecocritical study of games, even as Backe has touched on the ecocritical potential of designing for complex emotional player experiences. Drawing on Sicart's (*The Ethics*) discussion of ethical game design, Backe locates the ecocritical potential of games in "dissonances between gameplay and [representational] semiotics" and in the "tension between game goals and player morals" (46) and argues that games become ethically and ecologically relevant "if they provoke conflict in players by implementing game goals that may clash with a player's extra-ludic values and beliefs" (46).

Without reference to Sicart, Alexander Lehner has demonstrated the ethical and ecocritical potential of designing for dissonances between gameplay goals and player ethics in his discussion of the adventure-quest game *Shadow of the Colossus* (Team Ico), which opens the possibility for ethical gameplay through the inversion of the trope of the heroic protagonist as the player becomes complicit in the destruction of the natural environment, represented in the game in the form of a series of giants, or colossi (66). While the slaying of the colossi satisfies the game dynamics of heroic play invited by the game, the lingering depiction of the giants' demise mixes player triumph over mastering the requirements of the game with emotions of guilt and regret. Lehner argues that the "hybrid materiality of fur, stones, and ruins also renders them [the colossi] representatives of the environment", so that "the player becomes an invader disturbing the creatures' natural habitats and those habitats' perfectly content inhabitants to fulfil the narrative premise (i. e. saving the girl)" (67). The game's undermining of the heroic reward thus creates an emotionally complex gaming experience, which for some players takes on an ecocritical dimension.

The configuration of the game environment as hybrid giants of stone that are ultimately conquered by the player introduces the conception of an agential environment, that actively resists human appropriation. Kyle Matthew Bohunicky has used the term agential landscape in an ecocritical analysis of *Minecraft* (Mojang, 2011), albeit in a different sense. Discussing the crafting interface in the game, he argues that "the entire space of *Minecraft* is a writing technology" and thus that *Minecraft* models ecocomposisiton, also in the sense that the game system displays the effects on the in-

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game landscape of the players' building activities. "Minecraft models an agential nature that, unlike many digital games, challenges players to develop practices that enable them to survive within [it]," he holds (226). As will become clear, both *Journey* and *Unravel* engage the player in the experience of moving through agential nature, albeit in a sense different from that suggested by Bohunicky.

The present article is interested in how *Journey* and *Unravel* build meaning semiotically through the configuration of the player-to-landscape relationship. Sicart's distinction between a game's procedural "core" and its *semiotic domain* is useful in unravelling this significance (*Beyond Choices*). According to Sicart, a game's semiotic domain unites "all the metaphors, contexts, and cultural practices that wraps around a game's procedural core" and that engages the player by means of "metaphors, audio-visual elements, and the design and incorporation of interpersonal dynamics into the activity of play" (*Beyond Choices* 45). Making Sicart's term analytically usable, this article coins the term *semiotic register*—a term denoting the process by which semiotic signs in games (including the game mechanics and game interface) compile procedurally to represent (clusters of) thematic and cultural meaning to the player.

In its analysis of *Unravel* and *Journey*, this article further uses the terms "game space" and "landscape" to denote subcomponents of what Chang calls the "game environment", which refers somewhat comprehensively to "the apparent virtual worlds presented by art and programming, and specifically to those worlds' ecological implications" (*Playing Nature*, *The Virtual* vi). The more specific terms of game space and landscape are useful here since the emphasis is on the features of the game landscape both as representations in the semiotic domain and in the ludic topography "presented by art and programming" that the player engages with. On the level of programming, this notion of "game space" builds on Aarseth's narrative theory of games that discusses game worlds in terms of the structures: single room, linear corridor, multicursal labyrinth, hub-shaped quest landscape and open landscape ("A Narrative" 5). In the semiotic domain, landscape is here considered specifically as the representation of natural topographies in the game by aid of metaphors and audio-visual elements, combined with the range of ludic activities the player is invited to engage in within that landscape, all of which suggest that the mediated landscapes are also carriers of cultural and symbolic meanings. What the article seeks to demonstrate is that the player-to-landscape relationship in the two games is comprised of both thematic and cultural semiotic registers that combine to position the player in a specific relationship to, and with a particular attitude towards, the games' landscape features. Before moving on to the analysis of landscape and avatar design in *Journey* and *Unravel*, a brief discussion of game design is helpful.

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Player Management Through Indirect Control

In a Game UX Summit'19 keynote, Chen argues that while the film industry offers a wide range of emotional experiences through established genres, the output of the game industry has so far tended to offer its players a limited emotional spectrum of vicarious experience and one that is dominated by what Chen terms "strong and primal" emotions

("From *Journey*"). The game industry would be emotionally healthier if it could develop games that cater to a wider emotional bandwidth, he argues, such as genuinely romantic games, family games, and games with significant dramas developed through gameplay. Focusing on providing their players with feelings of empowerment, designers have catered in particular to the emotional desires of juvenile players, whose power and influence may be restricted in real life, Chen notes. The design of *Journey* grew from Chen's own search for games that might provide different, and more mature, kinds of emotional experience, of which he found very few ("Designing *Journey*").

In line with Chen, Katherine Isbister (2017) argues that games are "intentionally designed emotional experience" and discusses the "building blocks" of such emotional design (1). She emphasises meaningful choices, flow, social emotions, avatars, non-player characters and character customization, but surprisingly does not discuss the potential of sound and music to emotionally affect the player as one of her "building blocks" of emotional design (even if she intermittently comments on the effects of music in individual games). Suzanne K. Langer has argued that "music is the morphology of feeling" (8) and Chen remarks that *Journey* was moulded around the musical theme composed by Austin Wintory and that he generally develops his games by first prototyping music because "music is the most effective and powerful medium that can create emotions" ("Designing *Journey*"). The lead designer of *Unravel*, Martin Sahlin (2019), also cites a piece of music as the inspirational starting point for the game, namely Björk's "Unravel", which has the following opening lines: "While you are away my heart comes undone, slowly unravels in a ball of yarn, I will collect it with a grin"– a line representative of the game's mechanics.

Both games were designed with the emotional quality of the game experience in mind. According to Chen, with *Journey* he aimed to "induce positive emotion between two strangers online", causing genuine social bonding, while making sure the game could still be played as a single-player game ("Designing *Journey*"). Sahlin notes that *Unravel* was designed to create a feeling of "genuine, deep joy", after he realised that his games were reaching an extensive audience and started thinking more deeply about the meaning and impact he wanted his games to have.

Videogames, which typically position the player as agent by way of the playable avatar, and which often are mediations of competitive activities, like sports or war, thus featuring scores and competitive conditions, lend themselves well to facilitating the emotion of empowerment (for those who master the game mechanics). Understanding the emotional rhetoric of empowerment-as-domination as a kind of gaming default-position helps explain Chang's observation (*Playing Nature*: *Ecology* 9) that the configuration of the relationship between player and game environment most often is one where the player is positioned to "master" both the game and the in-game landscape. In search of a different emotional gaming register, both *Journey* and *Unravel* modify this habitual logic of environmental conquest.

A significant trait of games, as suggested by Espen Aarseth's term cybertext, is that they are dynamic "text-machines", the experience and ordering of which unfolds in relationship to player input (*Cybertext*). This means that the player exerts influence over

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the unfolding of game events. From a designer perspective, game experiences are equally constituted by the range of player options the designer orchestrates for the player. As Jesse Schell points out, the designer has multiple tools with which to suggest and constrain player behaviour, using both direct (or "forced") and more indirect (cognitive and psychological) means:

> If a clever designer can make a player feel free, when really the player has very few choices, or even no choice at all, then suddenly we have the best of both worlds, the player has the wonderful feeling of freedom, and the designer has managed to economically create an experience with an ideal interest curve and an ideal set of events. (343)

The "clever designer" might accomplish this through the use of what Schell terms "indirect control methods", such as limiting player choice, establishing goals that directs player activity, or through visual design that directs the players' line of sight, carefully guiding them through the level without seemingly exerting any form of control. As in film, music and sound may powerfully affect players' emotions, but only in games can they affect the player's movement and action. Unique to gaming is also the design of the virtual interface, which is another such indirect control method: "If a player controls a human adventurer, they will try to do certain things. If they control a dragonfly, an elephant, or a Sherman tank, they will try to do very different things" (346). Thus, indirect control works mainly by suggesting certain things to the player, that the player, often subconsciously, accepts.

Positioning the Player as Avatar

The player avatar determines the player's modes of interaction with the game environment. It positions the player in a specific relationship to this environment, not least through the range of actions and interactions it permits the player to engage in. Avatar design thus comes with ecocritical implications. Rune Klevjer has discussed how the player becomes intuitively attuned to the environment through which the playable avatar moves.

> When we play, because the avatar extends the body rather than pure agency or subjectivity, screen space becomes a world that we are subjected to, a place we inhabit and where we struggle for survival. We learn to intuitively judge, like we do in the real world, the opportunities and dangers of the environment. (13)

As the embodiment of the player's agency in the game world, the avatar positions the player in that world, not only kinaesthetically but also psychologically. The avatar is the player's environmental stand-in.

Both *Journey* and *Unravel* make use of other-than-human avatars to reshape the habitual gaming rhetoric of anthropocentric mastery. The avatar in *Unravel* is a robed figure with a head band and luminous eyes. Its orange robes and long flowing scarf are suggestive of a Tibetan monk (an interpretation strengthened by the gongs and chanting in the opening soundtrack). While the figure is humanoid, its shape is highly stylised. Significantly, it has no arms and thus cannot grab or hold onto anything. Consequently, the player cannot make use of the landscape in any common, human way, excepting the

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avatar's ability to walk. The avatar has no power of speech but communicates through sounding a musical note that may activate in-game information and rewards.

The avatar in *Unravel*, Yarny, is a tiny stick figure wrapped in red yarn, reminiscent of a child's toy. Much of its expressiveness comes from its ability to blink. Sahlin notes that the designer team worked to convey emotion through movement and body language rather than speech, and the absence of spoken language is a design feature shared by the two games. In both games, the avatars apparently have few biological requirements and consequently do not need to harvest the landscape in any materialist sense. In *Journey,* some biological constraints are signalled by the fact that the avatar can perish in the snow, while in *Unravel*, the need to breathe is simulated since Yarny may drown. These biological features are significant in that they cause potential interruptions in the player's advancement in the game. Both avatars are, in principle, gender neutral.

Additionally, both games modify the habitual player-to-landscape relationship by making the avatar small in relation to the natural environment: according to Chen, he was going for "a sense of small" like the feeling of an astronaut in space ("Designing *Journey*"). Yarny is even smaller. The core of the art direction in *Unravel*, Sahlin says, was pursuing the idea that there is beauty in everything if you just look closely enough at ordinary things in a mindful way. The small scale of Yarny and its slow pace facilitate this mindfulness since the avatar comes up very close to things and linger by them. Isbister notes that the technique of shooting at close range creates the illusion of intimacy between the character and viewer and will "amplify identification with the virtual people and situations" (7). Yarny's tiny size brings the player close to the naturalistic scenery in the game and position her in a different relationship to ordinary objects.

According to Isbister, immersion happens as players project themselves into playable avatars on four levels: the visceral, cognitive, social and fantasy levels (11). On the visceral level, the strength and skill accumulated by the player in the game is reflected in the virtual body of the avatar. Undercutting the rhetoric of dominance, both *Journey* and *Unravel* downplay the visceral level of player experience. In *Journey*, the most readily visible token of avatar experience is that the avatar's scarf grows longer and can hold more energy as the player progresses through the game. In *Unravel*, the avatar unravels as it moves through the game world and constantly must collect new bundles of yarn along the way. Other than that, the avatar does not viscerally change in the course of gameplay (apart from turning white in the snow). Player experience and progress is marked by Yarny's collection of a series of crocheted yarn figures, representing old memories, that it sticks on the cover of an old photo album. Both games thus de-emphasize the rhetoric of competition that usually makes the visceral level significant to the gaming experience.

On the cognitive level of gameplay, certain strategies and actions are rewarded over others (Isbister 11). *Unravel*, as a physics-based puzzle platformer, rewards cognitive puzzle solving, where the player makes use of physical objects in the game world. For instance, in an early puzzle the player-as-Yarny must collect apples to drop in an empty well, before pulling a lever to fill the well with water, in order to ride across the watery expanse on the floating apples. Each stage in the procedural logic of this sequence

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must be figured out by the player. *Journey* tasks the player with landscape traversal, exploration, and the collection of luminous pieces of cloth. The reward of collecting the cloth is the ability to fly rather than walk across the landscape. In places, flying is necessary for player advancement.

The social level of avatar projection is inhabiting the avatar's social persona to try out social qualities the player may not normally possess (11). In *Unravel*, this social level consists of encounters Yarny has along the way with various insects and animals, such as being carried through the air in the beak of a magpie and chased underground by a lemming – all "social encounters" than a human would not be able to have except vicariously through Yarny. *Unravel* thus explicitly encourages encounters with flora and fauna in ways that depart from a habitual human viewpoint.

In the game's online mode, the players of *Journey* can sound their notes to each other and boost each other's energy through proximity, thus making progression through the game easier for both – a dynamic that for many players facilitate deeply touching experiences of community, cast against the austere and sometimes forbidding desert environment. These three design levels work together to "allow the player to explore alternate fantasy selves though actual in-game performance", providing a "fantasy level" of experience (13). In both *Journey* and *Unravel*, this "fantasy level" allows the player to experience a (compressed) life-journey, from a perspective where the avatar is dwarfed by the landscape.

Chang has touched on how sprawling game worlds may render the player character a negligible entity, noting that in terms of player relationship to the environment "it matters whether we play as small, middling, or large entities" (*Playing Nature*: *Ecology* 69). However, she says little about the psychological mechanisms underpinning the effects of avatar scale, which may be explained with reference to experimental studies conducted by Nick Yee into the psychological effect of avatar appearance. In a study, conducted with Bateson, testing whether a taller avatar made players more confident, they found that players with such avatars tended to make higher bids in their own favour, indicating a sense of self confidence (and also, perhaps, an impulse of greed unchecked by humility) (Yee 151). Yee holds that even "subtle manipulations in avatar appearance have dramatic effects on how people interact with each other in virtual worlds. And these effects occur rapidly, fewer than sixty seconds after being in a new digital body" (152). Yee and Bateson further found that the effect of the avatar identification was carried forward into the participants' subsequent real-world choices (153), even if they fail to say anything about the duration of the effect.

Based on this research, the design choice of dwarfing the avatar in relationship to the natural landscape and thus to situate the player in a humbler position relative to it, potentially induces a sense of respect for the natural world that is absent from more anthropocentric game design. Arguably, the device of dwarfing the avatar is also used to great effect in *Shadow of the Colossus*, where the landscape is represented by the colossi that the player participates in destroying. Because *Shadow of the Colossus* simultaneously retains the drive towards dominance common to battle games, there is a clash of emotional registers that the player experiences as unease.

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Given the powerful psychological effects of changes in avatar appearance, the design choice in both *Journey* and *Unravel* of not allowing for avatar customisation consequently enables the designers to retain a tighter emotional control over the game experience – a degree of control that is important as both games aim to shape player emotion through design. Yee and Bateson's findings indicate that when players "learn to intuitively judge" the opportunities and dangers of the in-game environment (Klevjer 13) through virtual embodiment, they are simultaneously shaped by their experiences in the game in a manner that may not be conscious.

However, while both games dwarf their avatars to foreground natural landscapes in the gaming experience, the gameplay of the two games requires the player to adopt widely different attitudes towards, and relationships with, these natural environments. One difference lies along the axis of aesthetic engagement, since both games invite aesthetic experiences of landscape: where, due to the scale and barrenness of the environment, *Journey* leans towards the sublime,[4] *Unravel*, given its attention to tiny natural detail and picturesque vistas, rather deals in the beautiful (Burke). More significantly, the games invite the player to embody different relationships to landscape in an agential sense, that is, in terms of the range of actions they afford the player through the playable avatar. Thus, the games' construction of landscape relies on what I here term their semiotic registers, made up of the procedural compilation of semiotic signs into clusters of cultural meaning. I will exemplify what is meant by the concept of semiotic registers in the following.

Journey—Landscape as Abstraction

The ludo-topographic structure of *Journey* is close to Aarseth's unicursal labyrinth (Farca 5), since the game has a linear route to a final destination (Aarseth's linear corridor, "A Narrative") but includes "larger multicursal areas for exploration and task fulfilment" (Farca 11). This narrative structure invites the player to alternately linger in the landscape and progress toward the "destination": the top of a distant mountain. The player is guided in her navigation through visual cues in the landscape, where the traversal of sand dunes and the exploration of half-buried ruins provide points of interest. Thus, the game smoothly guides player attention through seamless visual design, accomplished in large part by stripping the game environment of visual distractions so that the game's landscape features implicitly guide and direct player attention.

In the design of *Journey*, Chen sought to instil environmental awe in the player by pitting the avatar in a vast, barren desert landscape. He also modelled the game experience to replicate the emotional curve of what Joseph Campbell terms the archetypal hero's journey ("Designing *Journey*"). In the game, this emotional curve is created by

[4] In a discussion of *Journey*, Parham describes the game as "a genuine and complex green representation" and as "Encapsulating just about all of the elements by which [Timothy] Morton describes the ambience of dark ecology," albeit combined with "the tempering influence of the sublime" (228).

managing player emotion so that, from the mellow beginning, there is a rise of intensity towards the game's end, giving the player a sense of catharsis through transformation. Player emotion is managed both through visual design, through navigational flow and not least by aid of sound effects and visual symbolism.

The opening cut-scene of the game presents several of these semiotically significant elements. The game environment is first introduced through the sound of a whistling wind. As the image gradually dissolves into a vista of glittering desert sand, the sound of gongs and a brief chord of vocals blend with a wistful cello, which accompanies a cut to a pyramidal sand dune, the sun visible behind it. A close-up of the hazy sun blends into a camera pan across a series of tomb-like structures emerging amidst the wind-swept desert sand. As a luminous object falls from the sky, there is a musical crescendo following the luminous object as it races across the sand, before the point of view comes to an abrupt halt and the avatar rises into the frame in the open desert landscape. From that moment, the player is in control of the avatar, which may be moved in any direction in the vast landscape, where the eerie half-buried ruins attract player attention. At game's end, the avatar merges back into the light, suggesting that its life cycle is complete—a narrative arc underscoring the game's spiritual symbolism: the avatar returns into the light—only to begin the journey again.

Making use of stripped-down and stylised landscape features, *Journey* leads its player to continuously engage with a series of archetypal symbols, several of which are introduced in the opening cut-scene: the sun, the stars, the desert, temples, light, and a towering mountain. The gameplay repetitively sends the player avatar though narrow passages, over tall bridges and though gates, all symbolising initiation. At times, the player perspective is locked, in cut scenes, as the avatar rushes though narrow tracts in the landscape. The lack of any in-world flora or fauna underlines the abstract nature of the scenery.

The "spiritual" quality of the game reported by many players is semiotically developed both through the soundtrack (featuring gongs and chanting), the visuals (where light guides player advancement) and though the walking and gliding movement of the avatar in the deliberate staging of an archetypal journey, embodied as a series of symbolic acts. At intervals, cut scenes show the avatar assuming a meditational pose to receive "guidance" from taller, higher order beings that enable advancement in the game. The spiritual or otherworldly quality of the gameplay is enhanced by the avatar's ability to lift off the ground and fly, powered by light accumulated in its scarf, further underlining the disembodied and symbolic nature of the journey. The luminous "codes" or glyphs collected by the avatar to "power" its scarf contributes to the mood of "mystery and awe" that Chen was seeking to convey. Thus, the player of *Journey* is invited to "soar above" the landscape and, being unable to physically touch anything, engages in what is at times an other-than-human embodied experience, given that humans are physically unable to fly.

In this manner, a range of evocative semiotic elements combine in suggestive ways into a semiotic register that denotes a spiritual journey—a unity of meaning accentuated through the archetypal natural forms of the game and the game's sublime aesthetics, as well as through the explorative nature of the gameplay, revolving around the mysterious

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and "alien" ruins encountered in the landscape. Thus, while the game's natural forms are predominantly represented as cross-cultural, archetypal symbols, contributing to the game's thematic semiotic register, which hints that the gamer is undertaking an inner journey, the semiotic signs representing the journey's spiritual quality combines into a register suggestive of Asian culture: the robe clad monk, the chanting, the "prayer flags" dispersed in the landscape, the avatar's meditational pose, the temple gates at journey's end and the cyclical pattern of the journey itself, alluding to the Buddhist concept of reincarnation.

While *Journey*'s opening scene indicates the cosmic scope of the game's implied space, it also introduces the concept of death and ruin; a series of murals that the player activates while progressing through the game tells the story of the rise and fall of a great civilisation now buried under the desert sand, the ruins of which the player encounters in the landscape. The murals depict a civilizational trajectory of increasing mechanisation, followed by an overuse of available resources that eventually leads to the civilisation's downfall. This environmental backstory lies hidden and must be excavated by the player through the pleasurable, flowing gameplay, thus exemplifying the kind of ecocritical awareness called for by Ngyen (2017), since embedded in the pleasure of gameplay there lies hidden a message of player complicity (given the resource requirements of gaming hardware use and production) in an energy- demanding practice that in the long run contributes to ecological harm.

While there is a degree of verisimilitude in the mediation of the avatar's movements in the desert landscape in that the game controls give the player a kinaesthetic sense of its movement through the sand, the avatar's momentum in the game world does not comply with the laws of physics: When the avatar moves uphill, the controller vibrates with resistance and movement is slower and more grinding, while sliding downhill induces a sense of flow, but this is not how sand naturally behaves, as it would arrest downward movement. Thus, the flowing movement of the sand is part of the game's "fantasy level" (Isbister) of experience. "We tried to capture realism" Chen says, "but we tried to capture the realism that we wished" ("Designing *Journey*").

The meditative, flowing state of the gameplay is encouraged through the soothing music, the sounds of the avatar's flapping robe and the rushing sounds of sand and wind, kinaesthetically combined with the walking, sliding or floating progression of the avatar through the visually "clean" landscape. Since the avatar lacks arms, the player can only interact with the landscape by moving through it, feeling and seeing the effects of the wind, sand and sun. The natural landscape does not respond to the note sounded by the avatar, as do fellow travellers and the temple structures (by lighting up). The game thus positions the player as the receiver of an at times agential landscape, where, in places, showers of cascading sand or fierce winds prevent player advancement, suggesting the immensity of natural forces, while at the same time acting as barriers of avatar advancement, directing the player along the game's linear corridor of game narration. The game's strict narrative control, enforced not least through the game's environmental elements, imbues the player with a sense of ultimately not having any genuine control

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over the "destiny" the game portrays, but of being moved along by forces greater than her own—an at times humbling environmental experience.

Unravel—A Sustainable Work Ethic

Unravel too has a backstory that the player must piece together by navigating the game space as an obstacle course, while gathering mnemonic clues in the game environment. Dispersed in the various locations in the game are photographic memories of a Swedish childhood that the player must collect and assemble in a photo album belonging to an old woman. Player experience and progress is marked by Yarny's collection of crocheted yarn figures, and by the compilation and "activation" of the photographs in the photo album, as they are retrieved from various locations.

Unravel's opening cut-scene positions the player inside a living room, a camera tracking towards a grey-haired woman sitting by the dining table in her small cottage. The soundtrack is a melancholy violin, mixed with the sound of chirping birds. Rising to walk upstairs, the woman stops to straighten a photograph of a small child on the wall. A ball of red yarn drops from her knitting basket and rolls under the table, from whence, after a short fade, Yarny emerges. The tiny yarn-wrapped stick figure climbs unto the table, passing an embroidered cushion with a Swedish motto that translates: "Happiness grows from small, simple things". The cut-scene ends, and the player gains control over Yarny and may explore the, at first, empty photo album. Following a trajectory through the living room, the player-as-Yarny then makes her way outside the house through the "portal" of a photograph and into the woman's garden. A series of signs connoting childhood makes up the game's main thematic register: Yarny's tiny scale, as well as his shape as a toy, are indicative of this. Furthermore, the gameplay follows a trajectory where Yarny leaves the childhood garden, riding a tricycle, to explore the wider landscape, engaging in childhood activities like flying a kite.

As Yarny, the player moves along a 2D plane, traversing a "linear corridor" type of game architecture, while the game's non-ludic space (Aarseth, "A Narrative" 4) is a 3D perspectival rendition of beautiful scenery that is not static but alive with wind, waves, insects, and animal life. This verisimilitude counteracts the games' 2D movement options that allow for strict narrative control of player movement. Furthermore, it presents an environment that is alive, agential, and changing, going through its own (also seasonal) processes irrespective of Yarny's individual project. The effect is achieved through the simulation of a macro photographic perspective, where the depth of field is reduced so that Yarny stays focussed in the foreground of scenes while the background is slightly blurred to indicate its remoter position. Thanks to the layering operation of digital media software (Manovich), the in-game milieu in *Unravel* is composed of layers that move independently of each other, providing the natural scenery with an agency seemingly independent of Yarny's movements within it.

Yarny's diminutive size, and his domestic origin, signals a more earth-bound perspective that *Journey*'s archetypal and cosmic drama and brings the player close to the naturalistic settings in the game, as Yarny orients the player in a novel relationship to

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ordinary objects. A lot of the enjoyment in *Unravel* comes from moving around in and experiencing the beautifully rendered landscapes of the game world, which are naturalistic representations of the Swedish countryside, from Yarny's perspective. The elaborate construction of the game space, composed of the independent movement of flora and fauna in different image layers, experienced from Yarny's close-to-the-ground perspective, calls attention to minute details, such as strands of wafting grass, the iridescent petals of flowers, and the cups of individual stems of lichen. Creating the game, Sahlin made an actual yarn figure using sticks from a Swedish forest that he carried around and photographed in various natural settings. The musical soundtrack sets the mood of the different scenes with folk musical motifs that are blended with natural sounds from the landscapes Yarny moves in and through, such as buzzing insects, running water and bird calls, contributing to the game's sense of environmental realism.

In contrast to the actions of the armless avatar in *Journey*, who must activate changes in the game environment through sounding its musical note or by moving close to objects, Yarny's interaction with the landscape is highly physical and kinaesthetic. The player must control and time Yarny's movements as it walks, runs and climbs through the landscape, frequently pushing or pulling objects to stand on or use as leverage, often lassoing branches or other types of levers to swing across obstacles along its way. Leaving few traces in the landscape due to its diminutive size, Yarny thus enacts a kind of self-sufficiency ethic, drawing on natural resources without using them up. Through this working relationship with the natural elements, as Yarny traverses the landscape, the game space shifts for the player from being a represented *space*, in Buell's sense, to becoming a *place*, imbued with meaning derived from the player's engagement with varied landscape features, like trees, dams, caves, hills, the seashore, rivers, and marshes, all with their unique flora and fauna. The scenery is picturesque, but also treacherous: Yarny is nearly stepped on by an elk and run over by a car and has its raft crushed by a giant fish. While natural beauty is celebrated, Yarny also moves through human debris - a contrast apt to trigger ecocritical reflection on the human uses and abuses of the natural environment.

Where *Journey*'s avatar is framed as a cosmic "alien" journeying through a barren space, Yarny is quite literally "locally grown", its organic form derived from the branch of a tree. Even as the landscapes of both games hold specific cultural memories that the player must uncover, the player's activities seem more "at one" with the local environment in *Unravel*, since its relation to the landscape is more varied and intimate. Yarny's landscape exploration also leads the player through a series of activities grounded in Scandinavian culture, thus building the game's cultural semiotic register. From its early antics in a homely garden, via its forest trekking, fishing and tobogganing, Yarny engages in a series of typical Scandinavian activities in a series of typically Scandinavian settings. The local flavour and significance of Yarny's landscape traversal is underlined by its many close encounters with local flora and fauna as well as by the cyclical seasonal changes that are a pronounced feature of Nordic natural landscapes—a signifying of the in-game landscape that perhaps is most keenly felt by Scandinavian players.

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Yarny's cultural ties are further highlighted in the gameplay, for instance in the chapter in which the player must navigate a berry mire, where the game invokes the practice of cloudberry picking - a rather strenuous exercise, as anyone having undertaken it will know. The practice underscores the game's embeddedness in a specific, local context, since in Scandinavian culture, cloudberries are a treasure so rare they are served up as a special Christmas treat, not least due to the labour-intensive process of wading through mosquito infested mires that is required to collect them—a struggle recognizably replicated in the gameplay of *Unravel*.

While the avatar in *Journey* enables the player to see but not touch, *Unravel* develops a different semiotic register that places the player in a working relationship to the game's natural scenes. This orientation is partly a result of genre, as the player must work to solve a series of physical puzzles, drawing on natural resources along the way, but is also developed by way of the game's settings, which include several (derelict) work locations, like a mine, a factory, an office, a farm and a garage. Thus, while natural beauty abounds in *Unravel*, human culture is represented through human subsistence industries—all of which are perilous to Yarny's progression but also significant aspects of the gameplay.

Concluding Observations

As the article has hoped to demonstrate, emotional game design has led the creators of both *Journey* and *Unravel* to reconfigure the "clichéd landscapes" and "generic scenes" of commercial game environments, making use of the games' landscape features as signs that guide and direct player experience and compile through play into semiotic registers imbuing the game experience with cultural meaning and significance. While *Journey* and *Unravel* both overall seek to instil pleasant rather than complex emotional experiences, both games problematize idyllic player-to-nature relationships through the incorporation of scenes and game mechanics that question the human use, abuse, and control of natural resources. On a structural level, the natural landscapes in both games feature as obstacle courses, directing player traversal and attention, while the cultural nuances of the in-game landscapes are configured as different semiotic registers. In both games, natural landscape structures function as a form of cultural repository, imbuing the player's obstacle traversal with layers of connotative meaning.

As the in-game landscapes are experienced by the player, the represented natural elements also become emotional signifiers in the game experience: On a semiotic level it matters that the forms and structures constituting the game environment invokes non-human nature. The stylized, archetypal forms making up *Journey*'s in-game environment connote an inner journey *because of* the long-standing human relationship to these forms and their cumulative cultural significance: the sun, the desert, the wind, and the mountain, while the intimately detailed natural scenes of *Unravel* have resonance and poignancy, perhaps particularly to Scandinavian players, *because* they are anchored in a specifically Scandinavian landscape.

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From an ecocritical perspective, the games succeed in re-orienting the players' relationship to the in-game landscapes, not least by stripping their avatars of human characteristics, and, significantly, of most of their biological needs. Thus, while *Journey* leaves the player humbled in relation to the agential forces of the in-game landscape and *Unravel* succeeds in creating a genuinely localized gaming experience, they both manage this emotional reorientation by silencing human biological requirements. In that sense, both games represent environmental conduct that the player may not easily adopt in real life.

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Editorial
Creative Writing and Arts

Eco-Georgic: From Antiquity to the Anthropocene

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I was born in the Italian Alps but currently live in a rather remote county in the northeastern region of the USA known as New England. When I walk through forests here, their apparent state of abandonment surprises me, as they appear to have been left to themselves, untended by human labor. Yet, this territory has a long history of human intervention on the environment: for instance, indigenous communities used to periodically burn parts of the forest, especially those near water, to manage their growth. More dramatically, those northern Europeans who, famously and likely falsely, landed on Plymouth Rock in 1620 initiated the westward invasion of America that brought, along with the genocide of indigenous people, those radical changes in the land so movingly recounted by William Cronon (Cronon). The new settler-colonial communities imported a different practice of dwelling that sought to forcefully transform the land into an agro-pastoral utopia, with very few trees and large pastures (cfr. Wessels). Yet, most of New England today resembles neither the pre-colonial landscape nor the colonial one, as forests have reclaimed most of the land and only scattered signs remind us that these lands were once tended by communities of humans. The forest floor of contemporary forests is thus often left in a state of disarray, with a clutter of fallen trees and branches that does not allow for rapid regrowth. This condition cannot but confound those who, like myself, come from agro-pastoral cultures and are accustomed to view and interact with forests in terms of intergenerational obligation: if the forest floor is not tended and new trees do not have an ideal growing ground, how will the next generation of humans be able to benefit from the land?

This question about responsibility toward future generations and their "right" to benefit from trees prompts an inquiry into the potential ecological value of different human interventions into seemingly abandoned landscapes and interlocks with the theme of this issue of *Ecozon@* devoted to *Eco-Georgic: From Antiquity to the Anthropocene*. Even though my confoundment came from encountering the combination of historical violence, human labor, and environmental growth that characterizes the American northeastern landscape, the concern about the relationship between the nonhuman world and human efforts to master it is not only geographically ubiquitous (at least within European societies), but also as ancient as at least Hesiod's *Works and Days*, the farmer's almanac written around 700 BC. As the guest editors of this issue of our

journal remind us, though, it is in Virgil's *Georgics* that the anxiety over human activities of cultivation and construction as repeatedly threatened to be overrun or swept away by the life of the more-than-human world finds its classic culmination and the beginning of a literary mode. Interestingly, Virgil is also often considered one of the classic fathers of the mode that is allegedly antithetical to the georgic, i.e. the pastoral (with the *Eclogue*s): while the former regards nature in terms of necessary labor, the latter usually describes human/nonhuman relationships in a state of harmonious idleness. Yet, both modes – in their classic form as well in their historic revivals—can be also read as the two-fold reaction toward a change in the material (economic, technological, political) relationships between a certain community and its surrounding environment, a change that inevitably concerns the future of this relationship, who is the position of mastering it, and what such mastery would entail. From this perspective, the georgic can indeed be part of an "usufructuary ethos" that, as Erin Drew pointed out in his recent eponymous volume, provides "a framework for determining the best uses of the nonhuman world, not in terms of what sort of use was most productive, but in terms of what sort of use would best fulfill the user's responsibilities to others, both human and nonhuman, in the present and future" (Drew 2-3). It is thus somehow unsurprising that the georgic has been recently described by scholars as an alternative not to the pastoral and its reincarnations, but to anthropocentrism. According to Christopher Loar, the georgic mode does not, in fact, reflect an ideology of human mastery over the nonhuman world, but focuses instead "its attention on the way that humans collaborate with nonhuman materials. In the process, it assembles a social world that includes both human and nonhuman actors" (Loar 242).

Most of the contributions in the Art and Creative Writing section of this issue of *Ecozon@* engage with a similar understanding of the georgic mode. For instance, the cover image belongs to a series of paintings entitled *Postpastoral*, by Patti Trimble. Trimble, a poet and visual artist based in California and Italy, tackles the merging and intersections of human-made and natural worlds through works in which the boundaries between the organic and the artificial are somehow blurred or overlapped. For example, in the cover image, what appears to be a tablecloth with a neatly symmetric and vegetable-themed ornamental design is superimposed on a desert landscape in which no order appears to be recognizable. Similarly, in the painting entitled "Postpastoral #4," the tension between the pastoral sense of harmony and the more georgic labor over the land is exemplified by the contrast between the white lace figure and the green background: while the former is a common example of human craftsmanship and order, the latter looks like a wild entanglement of vegetable life. Yet, the holes in the lace allow the green to come forward and give life to the otherwise aseptic lace, as if environmental energy and human mastery intersect, creating a jewel-like image, an ecological diplopia in which the two realms become one.

The poem that opens the second contribution, "Mowing" by Matthew Griffiths, tackles the issue of human labor and the environment from a perspective of a daily activity that is considered less artistic than lace making and yet belongs more to our contemporary imaginary. Here, the technological and the bellicose collide in the image of the mowers who, nonetheless, are meant to shape the urban landscape according to our

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dreams of harmonic city-dwellings, where the grass exists but it is perfectly manicured. Griffiths, a poet and literary critic who is also the author of a volume on *The New Poetics of Climate Change*, engages with such a georgic tension between who manages the land and who benefits from it in other poems anthologized in this section of *Ecozon@*. For instance, in "Common," the poet deals with what he calls "the difficulty of / common land," and readers are invited to pay attention to the political, social, and environment features of agricultural practices in a contemporary world drastically altered by climate change.

The next contribution comes from Katharina Maria Kalinowski, a Marie-Curie fellow at the a.r.t.e.s. Graduate School for the Humanities in Cologne and at the University of Kent, where she is pursuing a PhD in English Philology and Creative Writing. In her experimental poetry, the industrial and technological matter of our everyday life and labor (tags, roads, chemicals, WiFi) represents the reality of humanity in the Anthropocene and interacts with a language at the playful edge of symbolic saturation. The outcome is a series of poems that depicts an original but scattered sense of dwelling encompassing human and nonhuman actants, a material world—or rather, "a giant landing strip floating on water," as she writes in "Home is where the WiFi connects automatically"—that is at once alien and intimate, ordinary and full of wonders. Through linguistic labor, Kalinowski thus produces an original eco-georgic poetry that does not oppose our urban and industrial environment but works through it, perhaps cultivating such polluted land for the growth of future *flowers of evil*.

With the next contributor, the poet Jack Thacker, we instead encounter some of the common topoi of the georgic tradition, what we would expect to find in rural context: barns, cattle, farmers. Thacker was brought up on a farm in the West Midlands of England and he has been the writer in residence at the Museum of English Rural Life in Reading. It is thus unsurprising that his work engages often with the ancient relationship between poetry and agriculture. Yet, the poems anthologized here are neither the celebration of human mastery, nor a naïve and nostalgic depiction of "the good old days." Instead, they portray the labor of farming, the physical work that pins humans and nonhumans to their land, to their life, and to their function. Through these poems, writing itself becomes a material kind of labor: not the abstract work of someone ecologically detached, but a proper handling—as Thacker's 2018 debut poetic collection titles—of the material world, an artisanal effort without illusion about the future and death, but that does not rush, choosing instead to "work at the pace of hands."

The two final contributions to this section of *Ecozon@* are not directly tied to the main theme of the issue, but they nonetheless add two fresh perspectives to the question of literature, labor, and the natural world encoded in the georgic mode. The first one is a few excerpts from "Seeds," a long poetry sequence that, as stated by the poet, "thinks about forms of resistance, survival, and emergence in the context of the sixth mass extinction." The author, Kim Trainor, is a faculty at Douglas College, where she teaches classes on poetry, ecopoetics, climate justice, science fiction, and world literature. As a writer, she published two volumes of poetry, the last of which is entitled *Ledi* (Book Hug). As Trainor writes in her introductory statement, the two "seeds" anthologized here function as blueprints, "whether simple human-made tool or complex organism driven by

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its DNA to adapt to and respond to our current existential threat, each showing a different way of being in the world." The last contribution is instead three poems by Rowan Kilduff, a mountain-runner, writer, activist, photographer, and musician who currently lives in the Czech Republic. Working within the tradition of American eco-poetry but intersecting it with Eastern religiosity, Kilduff's poems bring a spiritual dimension to our encounter with the nonhuman world as well as a call to be "wildly awake" to that encounter, somehow embracing it with an affirmative "yes."

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Postpastoral

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Postpastoral #2

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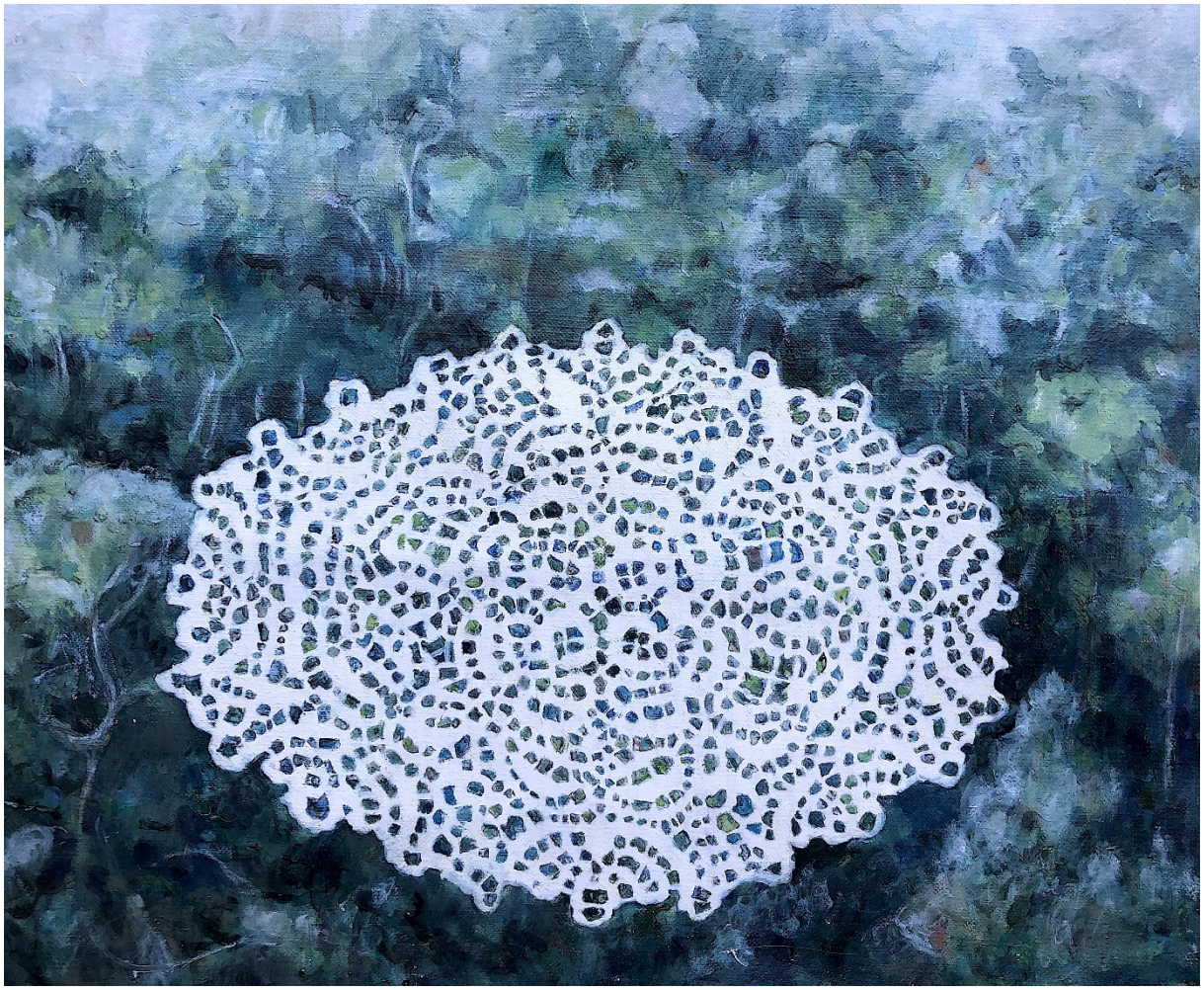
Postpastoral #4



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Postpastoral #6

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Five Neo-Georgics

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Mowing

They had waited the winter out, and the week
the clouds cleared they arrived,

blades that chilled under tarpaulins now ready
with the new sun to descend on us.

From the municipal garage they took
to the streets, their undeployed limbs

buzzing with the motors that moved them.
At each verge, each reservation, each park

the mowers lowered their rotors to grass –
the drivers, with silence clamped to their ears,

scanned street through their visors, pulled
spindly levers with canvas-gloved hands,

crawled across civic green on thick tyres.
The drone of the fleet was heard high

in the town. They sprayed cuttings
inside themselves, but the smell

of chlorophyll's shrapnel mingled with diesel
to bring tenants onto their balconies.

One vehicle hovered near a fire escape
that rang with the shared vibration, the rise

and fall of mechanical noise as the mower turned.
The yellow bricks glared. Dry leaves,

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caked in gutters by the last rain, broke
and shook as workmen began walking the roofs.

Offset

Now the heavy tread in the balance
Lightens tomorrow's load
Turns tilt into an
Upward step—

Grassroots grasp the earth they break
Draw down the life of
Sky in which they
Bury blades—

So read the field and tell me how the green
Pricks the sole to
Keep us on
Our toes—

The ground's collective gesture to horizon
Is a broadcast that discloses coded
Abundance in each
Scaled seed.

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Crown estate

ballot the forest floor
to find red/amber/green accounted for
leaving blue to the levelled sky
all cloud cumulus
each modelled cell contributes

we will raise stakes
for green nimbus, yellow cirrus
furnish air with its waxed replacement
the toy nerves of fresh shade
nightbreathers that haunt low sleep

stock falls, samara money we collect
& broadcast at arms' length

axes line trunks
for the landscape's graph
pollarded to plot
the earthed negative
of growth

let them palisade chalk shores
never silhouette for swarms,
spreading hollowed hearts
for tables

& then cracked hands can gesture
to catch the last of sky

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from **Application**

Common

and, increasingly, the environment
manorial system, which can
commoners, or between
years ago, but which
has just been implemented
These benefit only the holding
and currently cover only nine English counties
a problem; namely, the difficulty of
common land.
Act, replacing the
need to obtain consent
works include those which prevent or impede
authority, while commoners
Act, however, any person
respects this is good, because it removes
when it can simply say it is open
land. Such land is seen
to try to correct
to apply to remove
applications, where land is removed

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Aeration

too long, but
hot topic—and rightly so as, whether
influenced by previous uses, and these alter
Comparisons can thus be instructive.
estates that are keen to reverse
and from those scores a total is derived for
classification: you cannot alter this, but it has
valued on the scale
Their minimum levels need to be held
the speed at which soils warm
options indicate the investment
tool can be of significant help
applications of phosphorous,
on local and management
intervals, but is
increases that can be achieved
of earthworm biomass
to sequester carbon
the answer, as well as a technique

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Poems

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tags

bones like wings have failed to grow for so long / stay intouch with the Idiocene, Econocene, Technocene, Anthrocene, Capitalocene, Democene, Aerocene, Romanthropocene, Growthocene, Polocene, Mediacene, Betacene, Eremocene, Neganthropocene, Anthropscene, Eurocene, Aquatocene, Chimpocene, Anthroposeen, Thalassocene, Astycene, Urbicene, Metropocene, Cosmopolocene, Meropocene, Sustainocene, White Supremacy Scene, Homogocene, Christocene, Planthropocene, Noocene, Polemocene, Necrocene, Robocene, Simulocene, Gynecene, Entrepocene, Chthulucene, Hellocene, Anthropo-not-seen, Prometheocene, Machinocene, Northropocene, Congocene, Phagocene, AnthropoOcean, Narcisscene, Trumpocene, Euclideocene, Manthropocene, Ananthropocene, Myxocene, Oligarchocene, Black Anthropocene, Sinocene, Naufragocene, Goracene, Jolyoncene, Agnotocene, Misanthropocene, Paleanthropocene, Betacene, Vulcanocene, Thalassocene, Papiocene, Exploitocene, Phronocene, Translationocene, Anthroposcene, Plasticocene, Wasteocene, Corporatocene, Symbiocene, Sociocene, Plantationocene, Atomicocene, Thermocene, ~~Anthropocene~~, Obscene, Solar-cene, Soterocene, Cyanocene, Platocene, Plutocene, Pyrocene, Ecocene, Urbanocene, Anglocene, Megalocene, Neologismcene, Covidocene, welcome.

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View from the N59 road

under right conditions
double ending colour phenomena form
coordinate-less non-minable
LGTBridges between salt walls and plastic charm
Connemara Culture
Postcard with rain
resistant sheep dabs: lanoline, isopropyl, benzine
with sprayed on red squared fish, tree, soil
photogenic heather at the edge of asphalt scratch

Blick von der N59

Unter den richtigen Bedingungen entstehen hier
Doppelt endende Farbphänomene im LGTB-Format
koordinatenlose, nicht abbaubare
Lichtbrücken zwischen Salzwänden und quietschbuntem Plastikcharme
Connemara-Culture
Postkarte mit regen
festen Schaftupfern: Lanolin, Isopropanol, Benzine
Besprüht mit rot umrandetem Viereckbaum
ein rücklings fallender fisch am fluss rand
der asphaltschramme
blüht Heidekraut

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Free-range

flies
in crops birthing
heat, yellow
lichened field
stones feather-widths ahead
buttercups, marguerites
pressed rosehips, soft-boiled life

awaits scarcely
baked into
airy records
thinning height sends
fried / scrambled singularity

one-
legged wind-owners, makers, partakers
sewing sun crowns, spiking
stripes of chance,

hatching this,
mono-monument of muted earth rotation
pause forward. rep
fast eat

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New definitions

[after Dorothee Sölle]

workinginaway
results light up the process
at any time
lovinginaway
results, at any time
even in pain,
shine seeing
the morning star who
doesn't always hide
knowing happiness not
only by hearsay
touching
with hands burnt

Sölle, Dorothee. "Definitionen des erwachsenseins". *Fliegen lernen. Gedichte*. Wolfgang Fietkau Verlag, 1979. p. 71.

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Home is where the WiFi connects automatically

everything measures its value
by its adaptiveness to
small and portable
shooting on your first day I heard.
Fb advises to pack an umbrella. scroll down
to see what's next

with
all those rainbows here it's easy
to lose sight of the ground
when walking wobbly milk teeth cobblestones
stretch long-distance
from within one calling code to two nodes of
the world

is only a giant landing strip floating on water.

days of peppermint. less paracetamol.
wishes change owners via email.
1,50 gets you everything you want
and a liquorice stained copy of "acid pollution"

sand mirror
for the flying sky.
malty sweetness spirals upwards where eyeprints look easier.
echo of the wind in relation to everything else dismantles all remainders
write until fingers winter-branch-stiff it's notenough.

jersey dries quicker
than petrol pools in alien green
if this is friendship I
don't want to be shipping

everything measures its value
in relation to landing strips lines
into mucosa like dental floss

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Poems

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Nightshift

I follow the beam of torch
across the silent yard. I touch

the outhouse switch: the barn
hangs bright like a lantern.

All the ewes are lying down
content to wait till dawn –

in the candlelight of straw
lamb and mother stir. Before

I sleep, I wander up the road
in the dark without the aid

of the torch and watch stars
bleed into their full brightness –

I cannot measure their depth
nor detect the turn of the earth.

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Cattle in Rain

The gateway's a washed out festival site
    where cattle sink to hocks –
their knees are caked in clay and shite,
    are crusting into rock

and look like the knot of a burr of oak
    where the tree's been cropped
or grown around a wire. They stand stock
    still, unmoved, looking up,

waiting for the end. Until they're co-opted
    into the warm barn, where
through the dark of winter they'll be kept
    safe in the knowledge of their

return to grass. A promise made of air.
    A promise we'll break
this time next year. We'll think it clear
    but the outlook is bleak.

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The Ring

Rows of cattle pens –
each one containing the care
and vulnerable life's work
of a farmer.

First lot in –
the calves are confused by the circular
empty space and the wall
of people looking.

One of the hands –
his tobacco rollie cigarette
a smouldering twig
in his mouth –

taps with a cane
each calf in order.
The auctioneer reads everything –
the quality of a calf,

the slightest expression
on the face of a buyer;
this one a stranger, this one
he knows well.

The pen is empty.
Time for the auction ring
to move. The auctioneer
gives the order –

each farmer, dealer,
takes hold of the rails
and all the men and women
walk in unison

and the whole
huge rig of galvanised steel
is moved the few meters
to the next pen.

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Out back are stalls –
second-hand books, DVDs, cakes,
and in the middle
an old man

selling watches,
surrounded by trays of cogs and lenses.
He says he can fix
anything that's dead.

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Lines

Starting from scratch, resting on the surface,
begin your line. Don't rush, work at the pace
of hands, whispering your words, in touch
with each arc and dip. Don't think too much.

Let your mind drift – memories of a valley,
footsteps, stories the length of a field. Finally,
turn and look back over what you've drawn.
Ask yourself: how curved or straight is my line?

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An Excerpt from "Seeds"

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Poet's Statement: "Seeds" is a long poetry sequence that thinks about forms of resistance, survival, and emergence in the context of the sixth mass extinction. Each 'seed' functions as blueprint, whether simple human-made tool or complex organism driven by its DNA to adapt to and respond to our current existential threat, each showing a different way of being in the world: lentil, snowdrop, chinook salmon, codex, tardigrade, honeybee, "the beautiful cell," among others. The *Vespa orientalis*, for example, as noted by Robert Bringhurst in *Learning to Die,* has evolved a band of the obscure pigment Xanthopterin to draw sunlight out of air and generate a small voltage. The endangered chinook salmon travel thousands of miles to their spawning grounds in the Fraser river and feed the rich coastal ecosystem. Tiny houses, mobile wood frame cabins outfitted with solar panels, are being built by the Tiny House Warriors in unceded Secwepemc Territory in the interior of BC to challenge the construction of the Trans Mountain pipeline. This excerpt consists of Seed 8, *Elysia chlorotica* and Seed 19, Gaia.

Seed 8. *ELYSIA CHLOROTICA* (CHLOROPLAST, ENDOSYMBIONT)

The light reactions, the dark reactions, leaf unfurling, the light—
eastern emerald Elysia, clade Sacoglossa, *Elysia chlorotica*
littoral, in the salt marshes, the tidal marshes, small pools and shallow creeks,
leaf unfurling, the light—the pigment chlorophyll absorbs the blues
the reds, the spectral blues, absorb a photon, lose electron flows
to pheophytin to a quinone, flow electrons flow the light reactions.
In the salt marshes of Texas among the blue crabs and the mud crabs.
In the tidal marshes of Nova Scotia. Vanishing. Cryptic green
algal endosymbiont. Seaweed. Sea green. Chloroplasts
sucked out and stitched to tubules like leaf veins.
Shifting genes. Diverticula. Radula. Algal plastids. The lumen,
the lumen. A leaf unfurling. Pale green χλωρός khloros, seagreen, moss and
pickle. Emerald. Pistachio and pesto. Chlorophyll. Love for this.
The light—absorb the blues, absorb a photon, lose electron flow
to phenophytin flow to quinone flow electrons, gathering. Illumined.
A drop of water split. Regain electron. A molecule, dioxygen.
The light reactions, the dark reactions, leaf unfurling, the dark—

realm of the dead, the fields of bliss, Elysium. The dark
reactions. Flow electrons, chain reactions, break down carbon.
Break down carbon, sweet conversion in the dark and
in the light. Endosymbiont who puts the light together.
χλωρός πλάστης. Chloroplast. The one who forms.

Seed 19. GAIA (BIOSPHERE, THE CARNAL FIELD)

> This intertwined web of experience is, of course, the 'life-world' to which Husserl alluded in his final writings, yet now the life-world has been disclosed as a profoundly *carnal* field, as this very dimension of smells and tastes and chirping rhythms warmed by the sun and shivering with seeds. It is, indeed, nothing other than the biosphere—the matrix of earthly life in which we ourselves are embedded.
>
> [ ]
>
> My body is a sort of open circuit that completes itself only in things, in others, in the encompassing earth…
>
> —David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous*

A. sends me a screenshot of *Elysia* in response to my poem—
So beautiful an ornament to this world and most likely will move
to another soon, an underworld…Robert Macfarlane mentions
the Saami belief that the dead live in an underworld that mirrors
our own..Could our mirror world be populated by extinct creatures?
Yes, I think, how many have gone through. The Elysia unfurls
its wings. Emerald chloroplasts stitch sunlight to carbon. In the salt
marshes of Texas. The blue crabs. The mud crabs. Stitch calcium.
Form chitin. Chilean tarweed and sea kale. Sea angel. Sea salp.
The chaotic nanostructure of *espajitos*, little mirrors tangle the light.
Sea kelp. Salal. Stitch carbon to hydrogen. The assembly of
light-gathering machinery. Paper birch. Nootka rose. Western swordfern.
Capture light in narrow wave-length windows. Salmonberry.
Thimbleberry. Release oxygen. The rare bright elements, the soft,
the clear, the blue. Hydrogen joins helium. The fusion ash of stars
seeded through the universe. Calcium. Cobalt. Copper. Carbon.
Stitch carbon to hydrogen. Release oxygen. Dandelions.
Meadowrue. The honeybee. The bumble bee. Sip nectar.
Gather pollen. Spiracles of oxygen. Sweet burn and hover.
Western pasqueflower. Yellow glacier lily. Heathers. Sunlight.
Carbon. The engineers. Make honeypots. Make paper cells. The obscure yellow
pigment *xanthopterin* of *Vespa orientalis*. Harvest solar energy. Dig nests.
Dig lily bulbs. Fix nitrates in subalpine meadows. Remember the hum

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of bees in white rhododendrons at Illal. See this tiny snail, *Angostopila dominika* in the limestone cliffs of Guangxi, China? See how it fits in the eye of a sewing needle. Take notes—*Carbon (C) is a non-metal which easily links to itself and other elements. Life is dependent upon the chemical qualities of carbon.* Gaia is *an emergent property of interactions among organisms.* Our neuron cells include the basket, the cartwheel, the chandelier, starburst, spindle, pyramidal, stellate, granule, and double bouquet. A "back of the envelope calculation" in 1972 estimated our microbiome outnumbers our own cells by ten to one. This assembly of light-gathering machinery. Luca, our last universal common ancestor, root of the tree of life, rooted in metallic darkness. Noctiluca. Sitka spruce. Dark-eyed junco. Remember the soot-coloured moth at Semaphore, alight on the page. Write, *Cobalt (Co) is a rare, bright, whitish-blue metal,* magnetic, needed for root function. Write, blue thinks itself within me, *I surrender a part of my body, even my whole body, to this particular moment of vibrating and filling space known as blue…*Blue gentian, penstemon, stickseed, the blue-eyed grass. The light reactions. Remember the night before we climbed Desolation? We stood on the dark shore at Lightning Creek. We stood on the earth, on the Orion arm. We stood in time, looking into the galactic centre, looking into ourselves, these temporary sentient forms, bodies of fusion ash and starlight.

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From "New Songs" and "Camino del Viento"

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continuing the arrow, cloud mantras, to climbers

slide-rasp carabiner fast,
— what are we doing up here?

vertical,
the clouded world
drops away.
(Cloud Mantra 21 times)

Rivers tracing back / so many lifelines.

Rock-lines always moving,

thunder claps my heart,
rain on my face.

The arrow disappears,

in connection with it all.

New songs; We are this arc / Fire songs, sky songs, mountain songs

no sutras needed

we open them all up

repairing hearts for a couple thousand years

now we get to hear

songs of future-bursting-light

no guides here

nothing extra

so runs the free river

''brings us across to the other shore…''

borders, so-called, and given strength —
so easily transcended
by breath, by spirit;
wild song.

Fire songs, sky songs, mountain songs —

becoming mountain

becoming sky

becoming song

becoming —

the creek
splashes my face

the trail crosses over.

The planet carries us —

I go out to talk to the fire at night,
it whips 'round to me.
sun energy sounds
in air — in wood — in earth

brings dreams;

and we look ever to the skies.

fire-stars /
desert flowers, everywhere

The brightest stars,

my tracks.

The bright edge cuts across,

leaves only the sound of wind

pure songs come clearer

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no brighter moment than when
we look right in the eye
of another

horizons where hearts meet

Earth-maker's lifelines

mountains and rivers,

great thunder ways,

trails, tracks way out behind,

kenshō flashes of our ancestors:

more highways than we could ever need,

this blue star still shining.

new days call

every part of me and you —

we are this arc

as far as we can see,

contains all of us.

kestrel swoops and swerves back around for another pass,
he's too fast for them, but they're so many!
kestrel call wakes me.

I take a breath at dawn

an arrow
let fly by the bow of the sky,

sunrise fires — out on mountaintops.

I hold this fire in my two hands

and it doesn't burn me —

my heart beats a-blaze,

this, like all the gifts we carry comes without even asking.

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We do the best we can.

For peace, we reach higher.

For peace, we listen.

Sep. '20
****
(''brings us across to the other shore…'' (/Heart Sutra/); ken: 'seeing', shō: 'nature' or 'essence')

****

I climbed, 'wildly awake'

I climbed
— the same spruce, the same snow —
where the real wild spirits are said to go
'You gotta find out where wolves go when they die',
he called back to me and he went out the door
in a dream that woke me,
and said 'remember — remember why that woke you.'
remember —
running on, running bright
Wildly awake
real dreamtime.
life-song in
your bright shining heart,
your bright shining mind.
Full-color desert sky!
Can't look away, can't even try
when all the animal spirits come to look you straight in the eye.
'Light in the eye…'
Yet to learn,
so much to learn.
San Bushmen say you've got to wake twice every morning,
once with body, once with heart.
Wake up body!
Wake up heart!
Open up, ways closed for the longest time,
fighting against Spirit.

June 2020

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*****

note:

''Light in the eye…'' Gary Lawless (Caribou Planet, 2015) sent me a poem with the line ''when the time is right / the spirit of the wolf returns'' by email, which fit right with the dream I'd just had. He surprised me by sending me two books from Maine to here. "Wildly awake" is from Tim McNulty, read it that morning (from "Night, Sourdough Mountain Lookout," in *Ascendance*, 2013). He wrote me back from Lost Mountain, with a 'Yes!' in answer to the Bushmen quote. I don't really remember where I heard that, but maybe.

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David Farrier, *Anthropocene Poetics: Deep Time, Sacrifice Zones and Extinction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019), 164 pp.

Matthew Griffiths, *The New Poetics of Climate Change: Modernist Aesthetics for a Warming World* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 211 pp.

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On 17 May 2019, *The Guardian* announced changes to its style guide to "introduce terms that more accurately describe the environmental crises facing the world" (Carrington). According to Editor-in-Chief Katharine Viner, "The phrase 'climate change' […] sounds rather passive and gentle when what scientists are talking about is a catastrophe for humanity." Henceforth, *The Guardian* would therefore opt for "climate emergency, crisis or breakdown" in lieu of "climate change" and instead of "global warming" would use the term "global heating." The new language is part of *The Guardian*'s ongoing efforts to increase public awareness and understanding of the severity of anthropogenic climate change, which, in our post-400 ppm world, poses an immediate threat to the continuance of our own and many other species.

Attention to language and precise wording lies at the heart of many vocations, not only climate science and journalism but also, of course, poetry. Two recent ecocritical books—David Farrier's *Anthropocene Poetics* and Matthew Griffiths's *The New Poetics of Climate Change*—address the intersection of poetry and environmental crisis, exploring how poetry can enact tensions that both call into question and help concretize the provocations and complexities of our times.

David Farrier's *Anthropocene Poetics* is a small and weighty book that opens with a definition and brief discussion of the term "Anthropocene" that, over the past two decades, has risen to prominence as the term for an era in which our shifting human identity requires us to "think differently about the poem" (5). As the book's title suggests, questions about deep time are central to the Anthropocene, which has profoundly unsettled human notions of time; while on one hand "our dependence on fossil fuels, rare earth minerals, and plastics puts us in intimate contact with far-distant pasts," on the other, the "ruptures that these dependencies have created—such as changes in atmospheric, soil, and oceanic chemistry and the depletion of biodiversity—also highlight our intimate relationship with the very deep future" (6). Farrier argues that the reconstruction of the earth in service of "our desires and priorities" necessitates adjusting not only "our perception of deep time," but also "our relation to it" (7).

Deep time is a unifying thread throughout the book but forms the central topic of the first of the book's three chapters, each of which take up one of three "rubrics for understanding environmental crisis in the humanities" (8). Chapter one examines the concept of *thick time*, here defined as the capacity of the lyric to collapse deep time into a digestible representation that contains a lively awareness of multiple temporalities. Here Farrier explores the work of Elizabeth Bishop, whose figurings of slow time and geologic intimacies have "much to offer [...] to a study of Anthropocene poetics," (23) and Seamus Heaney's poetic encounters with geology. The second chapter examines "sacrifice zones," specifically the Plantationocene pine plantations of Philip Larkin's poetry and the "eclectic mix of registers" in Evelyn Reilly's *Styrofoam*, which probes at plastic's "volatile, unstable materiality" (74).

The third and final chapter centres on Donna Haraway's "more playful and multispecies-focused Chthulucene" (Farrier 9) which asserts that "cultivating a sense of kinship with multispecies familiars is the most pressing obligation in an era of hemorrhaging biodiversity" (89). It explores "a range of literary figures that can provide us with shapes for thinking about what a *poetics* of kin-making might look like" (90). Here, Farrier considers how such familiar literary devices as metaphor, apostrophe, and citation "can provide frameworks for thinking about an intentional turn toward the nonhuman life that is also a turn back to the (newly strange) self" (91). Specifically, he centres on extinction that "perhaps more than any other environmental crisis [...] pitches us into deep time: into awareness of the richness of our inheritance from the deep past, and the depleted legacy we will leave to the deep future" (92).

These chapters consider both poets familiar to ecocritics and those whose work has yet to be thoroughly examined from an ecocritical perspective. In all cases, Farrier's approach is original, stimulating and highly readable. Perhaps most compelling is the book's central argument that poetry *means differently* as a result of the Anthropocene; in these difficult times, meaning must be reconfigured and poetry of all kinds figures prominently in this process. In enabling "the intrusion of other times and places in the given moment," lyric poetry has the capacity "to draw vastly distant temporalities within the compass of intimate experience" and in doing so can show us that "geologic intimacy is a condition of being human" (127). At the same time that relationships with deep time implicate us "in relations of violence," poets call on us to establish new relationships—"collaborative rather than exploitative" —with the species around us. The making and remaking of meaning, Farrier concludes, is central to life, which is itself "an ongoing process of multispecies *poeisis*" (128).

Like Farrier, Matthew Griffiths contends that the climatic instability of our contemporary world—and the questions it raises and civilizational uncertainty that it portends—not only demands new approaches to poetry, but also highlights a new role for poetry in helping us grapple with uncertainty and change. The book focuses on the poetic genre it deems most suited to the task, i.e., Modernist poetry of the early- to mid-twentieth century, and in particular the works of Ezra Pound, Wallace Stevens, Basil Bunting and David Jones. These poets all lived through a period of profound social and artistic upheaval, and their strategies for making sense of change "make them distinctively

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valuable to the comprehension of climate change" (30). Griffiths argues that several particular features of Modernist poetry, particularly "ironies of representation and a resistance to received ideas of 'Nature'; transnational or global scales; hybridization of natural change with cultural and social…change…; a new problematics of environmental selfhood; [and] language's vexed attempt to engage with the world and, reflexively, with its own materialism" (30) make it particularly suited to our troubled times.

While chapters one through five offer insightful discussions on the Modernist poets under consideration, I felt that *New Poetics* truly finds its stride in its final chapter, "The Poems of Our Climate Change," which is dedicated to poems produced since the emergence of climate science that take up climate change as their central concern. To highlight one example, Griffiths touches on the series of twenty-one poems on climate change, overseen by then-UK Poet Laureate Carol Ann Duffy, "that appeared on the *Guardian'*s website in the months leading up to COP21" (158). Griffiths is critical of this and similar poetic projects that directly address climate change; in "making available audio of the poems as read by well-known actors, with the option of viewing the text next to portraits of the performers" and choosing "established contemporary poets" he notes that "the project is mainstream in its aim" and is "largely more conventional than experimental as a result." Instead, he favours contemporary poets that follow in the Modernist vein of "refusing to be absolute or definitive" and instead articulating the "uncertainty" that accompanies the climate crisis (154).

The poetry in the vein emphasized in *New Poetics* opens important avenues for grappling with humanity's place in an unstable and increasingly unpredictable world in which the boundary between nature and culture must increasingly be called into question. *New Poetics* makes an important contribution in this regard. At the same time, the book's insistence on the value of experimental, unconventional and challenging Modernist poetry to the exclusion of other literary forms—including those with broad popular appeal—is not always convincing. For example, the book opens with a lengthy critique of Andrew Motion's climate poem "The Sorcerer's Mirror" commissioned as part of the *Guardian*'s 10:10 Climate Change series. The poem is criticized for its "outdated" and "pastoralist" aesthetic, which allegedly is insufficient to unsettle received notions of the environment and our place in it. Apart from this questionable claim (other scholars have argued that lyric poetry plays a similar role to that ascribed solely to Modernist poetry in this volume), I couldn't help feeling that Motion's poem was unfairly represented in the critiques of it that surfaced throughout the book. Contrary to implying that "'getting outside' would only work if we could go to the calving face of the [arctic] ice itself" as Griffiths claims (4), Motion makes clear that the arctic ice and other climate-damaged landscapes are symbolically present in his small, flooded corner of London:

> Already my patch of lawn
> is awash, and when I look from my shelter down
> to the stippled surface, it opens like the miraculous
> O of a sorcerer's mirror. *Here* are the rising tides
> overflowing their slack estuaries and river basins,
> the Arctic shore, Shanghai, Florida and Alaska.
> *Here* are the baffled species taking to high ground,

> the already famously lonely polar bear and caribou. (Motion; my emphasis)

Through the "sorcerer's mirror" of his lawn, Motion sees the global calamity and sense of human responsibility that both extend from and affect his backyard (and by extension our own) which is not removed from world events but is very much part of them. While repeated critiques of Motion's occupy considerable space in the book, the other climate poems in the Guardian's 10:10 series—including those by literary heavyweights Kathleen Jamie, Margaret Atwood, Alice Oswald, and Carol Rumens—aren't mentioned in *New Poetics* at all.

As Farrier argues, "the environmental crisis is also a crisis of meaning" (4). *The Guardian*'s conscientious discussion of its choice of terms makes clear that how we articulate the environmental crises of our times, how we make meaning of them through language, is fundamentally important. Language can clarify or obfuscate humanity's shifting relationship with the world around us and the gravity of our current situation. As both Farrier and Griffiths agree, the climate and environmental breakdown of the Anthropocene require us to revisit the very ways in which we make meaning, including our understanding of what poetry is and what it does. Importantly, regardless of how we think about or frame them, contemporary environmental crises are not merely ideas, they are material realities with devastating consequences for life on our planet. As these books make clear, how we talk about the Anthropocene matters. What we do about it matters even more.

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Scott Slovic, Swarnalatha Rangarajan, and Vidya Sarveswaran, editors. *Ecocriticism of the Global South* (London: Lexington Books, 2015), viii+272 pp.

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Ecocriticism of the Global South (2015) is a timely and multifaceted contribution to the rapidly growing field of the environmental humanities and provides a necessary and relevant intervention into international ecocritical discourse. It stands out among other, more widely circulated essay collections that focus on ecocritical practices beyond the North American context by including voices from, rather than about, the Global South. Aware of the discursive baggage of the term "Global South," the editors redefine it along its emancipatory and geopolitical quality and stress its potential to encompass the "manywheres" of global economic and political imbalances. Although their argument fails to address the common criticism of obscuring historical specificities by lumping diverse geographies together, using the term Global South convinces as the pragmatic solution for collecting the volume's wide range of essays.

The second volume of two (with the collection *Ecoambiguity, Community, and Development: Toward a Politicized Ecocriticism*, 2014), the present collection comprises fifteen essays, each exploring unique localised practices and modes of expression of the intersections of culture and nature. Including works by junior scholars as well as established ecocritics from the USA, Belize, Ireland, Cameroon, South Africa, Iran, Pakistan, India, China, and Aotearoa/New Zealand, the collection presents a wide variety of ecocritical approaches and perspectives, applied to contemporary and canonical texts alike, and covering a broad geographical range. Doing justice to fifteen very diverse chapters on only six pages is undoubtedly hard and so the collection's introduction provides very concise and, at times, cursory summaries of the individual essays. Instead of repeating a sequential summary for each of the contributions, I organised this review according to the essays' thematic foci and theoretical approaches. This was challenging due to the diversity of topics, reading methods and primary texts genres. Nonetheless, I would like to suggest the following four broad topical and/or methodological clusters:

The first cluster comprises essays that underscore indigenous epistemologies in their primary texts. Most compelling in this section is Dawson's "*Wai tangi*, Waters of Grief, *wai ora*, Waters of Life" (Ch. 5). As the only contribution that looks beyond literary texts, Dawson's case study of the Whanganui River traces the indigenous struggle that lead to the river officially attaining legal personality status, turning indigenous representatives into key figures in river management. It powerfully shows how the inclusion of indigenous knowledge into New Zealand's resource (river) management

policies can be considered a successful form of restitution. In "Literary Isomorphism and the Malayan and Caribbean Archipelagos" (Ch. 4), De Shield debates productive differences between Malayan nusanterism and Caribbean tidalectics, while criticising comparative postcolonial reading practices' reduction of geographic complexities and appropriation of the indigenous for ideological ends. El Dessouky's "Fish, Coconut, and Ocean People" (Ch. 6) looks at cyclicality as a form of healing in Pacific narratives about nuclear industrialization. Narrative and cyclicality are both seen as rooting the indigenous person in place and expediting healing. Another essay that stresses situated indigenous knowledge is Blend's "Intimate Kinships" (Ch. 7). Like Dessouky's, Blend's analysis emphasises the role of people's connectedness with the land in Native American women's writing and the relevance of spirituality, indigeneity, and history to indigenous environmentalism. Blend's concluding notion of a universal bond between women "both North and South" (129) seems more wishful than concretely emergent from the texts.

The second cluster combines essays criticising global capitalism. Here, Deckard's exploratory essay "The Land Was Wounded" (Ch. 2), which positions itself clearly in the tradition of Marxist literary criticism, stands out for its thorough literary analysis. Deckard argues that the regime of 19th-century plantation ecology stretches into contemporary times and structures the ecologies of the Sri Lankan civil war (1983-2009). Consequently, the motif of the plantation becomes a ubiquitous theme and aesthetic structuring principle in Sri Lankan literature of the 1990s and 2000s, fictionalising the simultaneous hauntings of capitalist exploitation and the civil war. Flannery employs a similar perspective on Irish colonial history in "Decline and Fall" (Ch. 10). After providing a brief but useful history of the Irish 'big house' novel that relates it to Irish Gothic, Flannery highlights the historical and ecological dimensions of themes such as land use, inheritance, class conflict and economic disparity from a Marxist ecocritical perspective. While the Gothic aesthetic of the novels is linked conclusively to the capitalist transformation of cultures and their environments, her analysis is less persuasive for missing a concrete ecological dimension. Zhou, in "Scenes from the Global South in China" (Ch. 3), links environmental justice concerns, like a safe work environment, to globalization and the world market. Through close readings, Zhou deconstructs how Southern Chinese migrant workers' environmental justice poetry makes visible the exploitation, marginalisation, and plight of industrial migrant workers in China's large-scale factory complexes, along with the concurrent social, cultural, and environmental degradation they experience. She highlights especially gendered forms of exploitation and emphasises the potential of writing as a form of resistance that gives (female) migrant workers agency. Yaqoob's "Environmental Consciousness in Contemporary Pakistani Fiction" (Ch. 15) is a survey of environmentally oriented themes in six 21st century Pakistani novels. These novels' criticism of the adverse effects of modernisation, industrialisation, urbanisation, and the degradation of natural surroundings and resources is stronger when linking these to global capitalism and its detrimental environmental effects. Noting that these novels challenge Pakistan's grand narrative of progress, Yaqoob suggests that they can be read as "a site of resistance against imperialistic policies of globalized commerce and industry" (261).

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The third thematic area comprises essays that scrutinise notions of modernity and their relation to the environment. In "Ecocriticism, Globalized Cities, and African Narrative, with a Focus on K. Sello Duiker's *Thirteen Cents*" (Ch. 13), Vital suggests urban ecocriticism can be a multidisciplinary method to read African literary texts that represent urban reality while at the same time pointing to the risks of disavowing the interconnectedness of humans and the natural world. Exploring the narratives' expression of the ecosocial life of modern urban centres allows Vital to carve out their imaginative, ethical, and political power. Kane's "Redefining Modernity in Latin American Fiction" (Ch. 8) is one of two essays along with Zhou's, that look at non-English language texts. Employing a deep ecology approach, Kane reads what he terms the "Latin American environmental novel" (135) as a counter discourse to hegemonic modernity, development discourses and neo-colonial globalisation. His two case studies use the metaphor of addiction (to foreign capital) to criticize an ecologically devastating North-South-dynamic. Simultaneously, the texts also manage to redefine modernity in specifically local and sustainable terms. Parsapoor's innovative "Environmental and Cultural Entropy in Bozorg Alavi's 'Gilemard'" (Ch. 14) analyses a famous Iranian short story that engages with environmental and cultural changes tied to, in this case, Iran's modernisation and industrialisation. While she rejects a simple reading of rising chaos in nature as mimetic of growing social disorder, Parsapoor nevertheless suggests that natural and social entropy go hand in hand in Bozorg's text. By highlighting how the narrative envisions the mutual relationship between nature and society, her ecocritical approach provides a new perspective to the commonly socio-political criticism of the text.

The last cluster comprises contributions that focus on the postcolonial quality of the primary texts. In "The Environmentalism of *The Hungry Tide*" (Ch. 1), Kumar provides a close reading of Amitav Ghosh's novel that aims to consolidate first wave ecocriticism's focus on place with postcolonial ecocriticism's emphasis on the effects of displacement and slow violence. Kumar's claim that the novel is specifically ecocentric because the landscape becomes a central character in Ghosh's text, however, is not fully convincing. Rather, the narrative's "ecocentric ethical orientation" (22) becomes obvious in how it presents the tension between local communities, whose livelihoods depend on the Sundarbans' flora and fauna, and foreign conservation initiatives. In his contribution "Northern Ireland <-> Global South" (Ch. 9), McElroy posits Northern Ireland "as Ireland's real Global South" (152). Connecting Ireland's environmental history to its colonial experience, McElroy diagnoses a sectarian division of approaches to nature and the environment between a Protestant colonial class and a native Catholic population. This becomes visible in Irish poetry. Northern Protestant poets tend not to write about the country's partition and present Northern Ireland's environment ahistorically. In contrast, Catholic poets thematise the eco-colonial history of the North and thereby tie the Catholic Northern experience to environmental experiences in the Global South. With "Landscape and Animal Tragedy in Nsahlai Nsambu Athanasius's *The Buffalo Rider*" (Ch. 11), Nchoujie contributes an essay about literary production in Cameroon. The chapter discusses a text that raises awareness for habitat and species loss, both phenomena tied to the country's postcolonial experience. Although parts of the essay seem to essentialize historic animism

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and somewhat romanticise the pre-colonial relationship between animals and humans (184), the essay closes with a valuable call to action and for the revival of indigenous knowledge. Olaoluwa's "Ecocriticism beyond Animist Intimations in *Things Fall Apart*" (Ch. 12) offers a new perspective on Achebe's classical text, diverging from the common appreciation for Achebe's representation of traditional animist beliefs and practices. Instead, Olaoluwa includes Christian ideologies to disclose the text's ecocritical values, which are largely tied to eco-social justice.

Undoubtedly, fifteen essays cannot present a comprehensive overview of ecocriticism from the Global South. However, the volume's remarkable achievement is displaying the broad range of themes, foci, and approaches that constitute ecocritical practice of the Global South. Providing a platform for practitioners from all over the world, the editors surely succeed in making previously unheard voices heard.

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Angela Roothaan, *Indigenous, Modern and Postcolonial Relations to Nature: Negotiating the Environment* (London and New York: Routledge 2019), 180 pp.

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Recently, ecocriticism has witnessed a growing number of publications that strive to accommodate the diversity of epistemological claims on the environment made by different communities across the globe. To name a few examples, Elisabeth DeLoughrey et al.'s *Global Ecologies and the Environmental Humanities* (2015), Scott Slovic et al.'s *Ecocriticism from the Global South* (2015), and, more recently, Stuart Cooke's and Peter Denney's *Transcultural Ecocriticism* (2021) bring together global literary and, more broadly, cultural perspectives by intersecting the discourse of environmental studies with postcolonial and Indigenous perspectives. Angela Roothaan's study *Indigenous, Modern and Postcolonial relations to Nature: Negotiating the Environment* contributes to this body of scholarship by filling a gap in ecocritical literature as it aims to create an international philosophical framework to negotiate different environmental epistemologies. By considering Indigenous relations to the natural world as they are expressed in shamanistic and spirit ontologies, Roothaan takes different ways of living on this earth to the level of a politics of epistemology, uncovering in the process the inherently political nature of Western philosophy and science and their exclusive materialist and empiricist claim to knowledge production.

From the outset, Roothaan states that it is not her aim to devise "a single generalized 'shamanistic' or 'indigenous' worldview or way of life" which would romantically counter the "evil of modernity" (15). Instead, she seeks to investigate where these 'spirited' realities and the realities of modernity clash, with respect to both their historical and existential situatedness. The first chapter points out that spirit ontologies are historical and locally varying ways of relating to the natural world, foregrounding the diversity of Indigenous perspectives from across the globe. At the same time, however, it also refuses a singular idea of 'modernity' by emphasising that rejection of spirits from the Western history of ideas has been contested by a variety of Western thinkers.

In this respect, chapter two looks at the work of anthropologists who have challenged modernism from within by inventing ways of reversing the ancient vs. modern dualism and adopting non-dualistic approaches to the natural world. Eduardo Kohn's work, for example, is presented as "a process of reconstruction that does not necessarily aim at a 'true' representation of 'animist' ways of being in the world" (34). Still, Roothaan contends that the work of Kohn and other thinkers, such as Val Plumwood, for example,

is inevitably limited by the untranslatability of discourses articulating different ways of being in the world and by reducing Indigenous ontologies to "functional analyses of material life" (36). The true challenge, according to her, involves taking seriously the possibility that shamanistic practices express a set of relations to the world that entail criticism of modernist dualism.

The third chapter examines how the modern demarcation of scientific rationalism was accompanied by an exclusion of spirits from Western epistemology. It provides a discussion of Immanuel Kant's critique of Emanuel Swedenborg's work in which Swedenborg dealt with realities excluded from the empirical worldview. Kant's epistemology is shown to have emerged from the banishment of a spirit ontology. Though Kantian morality is commonly considered 'autonomous', that is free from 'natural' impulses, Roothaan points out that in his writing, Kant embraced the idea of free will, even though "theoretical reason cannot accept such a thing to exist in the world as science knows it" (58). However, while morality was saved in this way within the confines of the rational, it was detached from the spiritual and enabled the suppression of beings that it declared to be not fully reasonable or human.

Chapters four and five shift the focus to Western thinkers who became frustrated by the limits imposed upon knowledge by Kantian rationalism. William James, Carl-Gustav Jung and Jacques Derrida are discussed with respect to how their approaches to epistemology enable an opening up of Western thought to a return of the spiritual. Scholars of postcolonial and critical animal studies will be familiar with most of the terms introduced in chapter five as it is concerned with how these approaches problematise the othering of animals and the way they overlap with the animalistic nature of human beings. Roothaan points out that the predominant focus on continental philosophy in the West explains why the recent attempts to accommodate shamanism philosophically in Western academic discourse have come from anthropologists of the ontological turn rather than philosophers by training who have been confined by the straitjacket of the philosophical canon. The work of Stephen Muecke also comes to mind here, particularly his *Ancient & Modern: Time, Culture and Indigenous Philosophy* (2004), in which he attempted to create the possibility of an academic field of Australian Indigenous philosophy. As he more recently stated elsewhere, "one of the reasons why the door to departments of philosophy has remained closed is that the dominant philosophical tradition is analytic" ("Indigenous" 3).

Examples of spirited approaches to the natural world in the context of postcolonial economy and politics are at the heart of the last three chapters. Chapter six discusses Placide Tempels's work *Bantu Philosophy* (1956), considered to have set the ground for the ontological turn in anthropology. Roothaan explains that Tempels approached the experience of the spirited world of people in Congo without dehumanizing them by changing the framework of and 'Africanizing' both theology and philosophy, treating different systems of thought as epistemologically equal. Chapters seven and eight address the clash between global nature conservation policies and local, embodied relations to the environment. Roothaan proposes an approach to different epistemologies that foregrounds knowledge as perspectival and adopts the condition of possibility based on

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relation and life-enhancement, as well as what matters in a particular situation, rather than the Kantian condition derived from causality, space and time.

Through its recurrent critiques of what Bruno Latour calls modernist practices of "purification" (*Never* 10), as well as its emphasis on epistemological pluralism, the book shows that countering the exclusion of spirits and questioning the definition of the human and the non-human go hand-in-hand in raising awareness of what precludes truly open intercultural communication in philosophy across the world. Though Roothaan presents an understanding of the 'postcolonial' primarily in terms of critiques of racism in modern philosophy (Césaire, Fanon and Said), it is also extended to a critique of technologically-driven philosophy, as well as 'othering' of Indigenous knowledge in academia and beyond. In this context, Indigenous approaches to the natural world and Indigeneity more broadly are understood as embracing spirited realities, providing a different sense of the human to the one articulated by the majority of Western philosophical discourse. Even though Roothaan emphasizes that there is a great variety of Indigenous approaches to the world, her approach is necessarily limited by a somewhat generalized treatment of 'nature' and Indigenous philosophies, foregrounding notions of 'spirits' and the human and the non-human. As such, it does not examine how 'Indigeneity' reframes and rearticulates other relevant notions such as those of place, space, belonging and movement. Despite this drawback, the study is an engaging and complex exploration of the current epistemological claims on the natural world, pointing out that the Western philosophy and science are but one way of dealing with life and death.

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Ayesha Mukherjee, editor. *A Cultural History of Famine: Food Security and the Environment in India and Britain* (London and New York: Routledge, 2019), 227pp.

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Ancient Rome, dawn of the republican age. A group of emaciated citizens, enraged and desperate from hunger, heads towards the Capitol. Violent plans take shape. Nevertheless, just then, the starving citizens meet Senator Menenius Agrippa, who manages to coax and placate them with ambiguous words, exonerating the Roman authorities of all responsibility, and laying the blame for the famine not on the politics of the Senate, but on the unfathomable and inclement (gods-made) climatic conditions:

> For your wants,
> Your suffering in this dearth, you may as well
> Strike at the heaven with your staves as lift them
> Against the Roman state (Shakespeare 215)

Senator Agrippa tempts the rioters, with a story that he defines as a bit stale: an apologue of the relationship between the stomach and other parts of the body. If the confrontation had actually taken place in ancient Rome, the story would probably have seemed quite original. However, due to the circumstances in which this text was staged for the first time, it was undoubtedly true that the public had already heard it many times, as the author (William Shakespeare) ironically reported. In fact, the passage is taken from *Coriolanus*, one of the Shakespearean Roman tragedies, written when the Midland Risings, caused by the enclosures and scarcity of 1607, had recently quelled. This typical connection between ideology and climatically extreme events is discussed in one of the essays presented in this complex and interdisciplinary collection: Julie Hudson ("Are we performing dearth or is dearth performing us?", pp. 185-198) analyzes the works of Shakespeare that deal with the theme of famine (in particular *Coriolanus*), and the way in which these works were represented in the subsequent theatrical history. The theme of hunger in Shakespeare is explored by Hudson in ecocritical terms, conveying the idea that famine and dearth are epiphanic moments, moments which make it dramatically clear that the environment is internal to human beings and shapes everything they do.

This approach is recurrent in this collection of essays, edited by Ayesha Mukherjee. The subject here is food security in England and India, with a special, but not exclusive, focus on the period between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The literary sources examined in the book range from Shakespeare's plays that describe situations of

famine to the analysis of books written by and for mid-twentieth-century British farmers, up to the comparative analysis of Bengali novels on the theme of famine. Alongside these analyses, we also find interesting essays on environmental history and economic history, also referring to both the English and Indian contexts. The volume is characterized by frequent internal references (explicit and implicit) between one essay and another. This aspect of the book sometimes gives the impression of reading a collection of essays by a single author with an unusually extensive and diversified background, and not a compilation of essays by several authors belonging to different specialist areas.

In many contexts, a book on the topic of food security, written from such an openly historical-humanistic perspective, can be considered surprising. It can be expected that a controversial issue such as political ecology (food security) will be pertinent to an ecological scientific approach, or perhaps to a sociological or purely economic one. However, the point of many of the analyses presented in this collection is that the processes that make us define a given situation as famine, or dearth, as well as the processes that determine the emergence of subsistence crises, are both extremely complex cultural phenomena. Surely, they often have a close relationship with unusual climatic events (of the kind evoked by Agrippa while trying to appease his Shakespearean crowd). Nevertheless, climate is usually not sufficient to explain the rise and the worsening of the subsistence crises that can lead to severe conditions of famine, and to millions of deaths (such as happened in Bengal starting in 1787). Most often, climatic reasons, if considered on their own, can serve no more than as excellent alibis. They can hide the political and social reasons, which caused similar climatic events to have a highly diversified impact in adjacent territories, but with different socio-political outcomes.

A further surprising aspect of this collection of essays is the subject's peculiar carving: why India *and* England together? The eerie connection between periods of scarcity and famine in these two distant countries is precisely one of the themes analyzed from several perspectives in some of these essays. Mukherjee had already considered the late-Elizabethan representation of dearth and hunger in the English context, as well as the socio-economic reasons that underpin them, in her book *Penury into Plenty: Dearth and the Making of Knowledge in Early Modern England* (2014). However, in *Cultural History of Famine* England and India are linked from the very beginning. In the first pages of her introduction, Mukherjee provides a table that accurately illustrates the repeated and troubling parallels of the subsistence crises in the two countries, at the beginning of the modern age. Even more disturbing is the sudden interruption of the series in England in the mid-eighteenth century. Disturbing, if we consider that, in the same years, the series continued without significant changes in India, up to the devastating Bengal famine of 1787–1793.

The temptation to justify the first part of this series with a climatic explanation is strong. This theory experienced a period of great popularity a few years ago, after the publication of Parker's seminal book, *Global Crisis: War, Climate Change and Catastrophe*

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in the Seventeenth Century (2013) on the global effects of climate change and Little Ice Age (LIA) on seventeenth-century politics. Parker's theses are explicitly discussed in some essays in this book, and they are not entirely rejected. Damodaran, Hamilton and Allan, the authors of the essay "Climate Signals, environment and livelihoods in the long seventeenth-century India" (pp. 52-70), after careful analysis, only ask for supplemental investigation, a greater and more significant collection of data, especially for the eastern part of the thesis. They only contend that, in the current state of research, the climatic theory does not function as an adequate explanatory tool to understand the developments of Indian history in the period in question. In fact, at that time in India there were no relevant political upheavals, in correspondence to the negative peaks of the LIA or at least the levels of conflict were not too different from what is usual in that area.

The impression one gets from reading these analyses is that the theories which provide climatic causes to explain Indian famines are contested also for political reasons. In Shakespeare's Rome, as in the country administered by the East India Company, or in the England of the Stuarts, blaming the climate is one way of exempting rulers from their responsibilities. These responsibilities usually began long before the crisis, for example with the interruption or sabotage of the networks of mutual aid, at a local and district level, which had often allowed the inhabitants —both in England and in India—to cope with subsistence crises. In all these cases, supply and demand do not reconcile because, in adverse climatic situations, the structures of economic and social privilege distinctly emerge. The problem is less a question of supply than entitlement (Amartya Sen's theory of entitlement is a frequent reference in many essays of this anthology): "Starvation is the characteristic of some people not *having* enough food to eat. It is not the characteristic of there *being* not enough to eat. While the latter can be a cause of the former, it is but one of many possible causes" (Sen 1).

Ultimately, the fact that the subsistence crises ceased altogether in eighteenth-century imperial and industrial England while continuing at the same time in India, is better explained by the colonial asymmetry between the two countries than by a sudden improvement in the British weather.

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Simone Schröder, *The Nature Essay. Ecocritical Explorations* (Leiden/Boston: Brill Rodopi, 2019) 230pp.

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In the last years, ecocritical debates have been increasingly focused on the question of how literary representations of nature are shaped by aspects of genre, narrative, and poetological form. Against the backdrop of this fruitful debate, Simone Schröder's monograph gives a detailed account of the nature essay and its historical development from the late eighteenth century to the current surge in ecologically oriented essay writing. She makes a convincing argument for the nature essay as a distinct subgenre of nature writing that has not received the appropriate amount of critical attention. Benefiting from a well-informed comparative perspective, Schröder acknowledges the importance of European literature, especially the sometimes overlooked tradition of German nature writing, and thereby analyses a broader and more heterogeneous body of texts than the canon of North-American literature that is often considered synonymous with nature writing.

Alongside this wide perspective on different literary traditions and languages, the particular strength of the study lies in its ability to analyse the close connection between formal literary features and heightened attentiveness to the phenomena and processes of nonhuman nature. Tracing its origins back to Montaigne, the essay is characterized as an open, digressive, and reflexive form of writing in which the process of personal reflection and the formation of thought is more important than its possible result. Instead of providing a totalizing worldview, the position of the writer is constantly questioned and destabilized. As a hybrid and flexible genre that lies between objective knowledge and subjective reflection, the essay is able to incorporate and mediate different materials, perceptions, and ways of meaning-making. This mobility of thought and the ensuing nonlinear temporality, Schröder argues, is of central importance with regard to the nature essay's main topic. Freed from the narrative drive of the novel, the requirements of a linear plot, and coherent characters, the essay writer is able to widen their attention, bringing the phenomena and processes of nature into play: "Liberated from the necessities of story-telling, essayists are more likely to turn their attention fully towards the natural world" (22).

Having elaborated on this structural argument in the first chapter, *The Nature Essay and Genre*, the main part of the study is divided into three systematic chapters, each of which examines a different aspect in the history of the nature essay. In reference to

Foucault's archaeological classification of historical a prioris of knowledge systems, these are termed *epistemes*. The first part in this three-part structure, the encyclopaedic-scientific episteme, highlights the ambiguous role of empirical knowledge in the essay and focuses on authors such as Alexander von Humboldt, Henry David Thoreau, Ernst Jünger, and David Foster Wallace. Here, the scientific approach towards the understanding of natural phenomena becomes manifest in encyclopaedic narrative forms. Detailed and extensive descriptions, taxonomic lists, or enumerations work as the linguistic counterpart for practices and institutions of ordering and collecting. At the same time, Schröder argues, these textual attempts of organisation and mapping are never definite and maintain a certain playfulness. In fact, the inclusion of empirical data often enough leads to such an abundance of information that, instead of giving clear definitions and providing for a distant worldview, creates moments of disorientation and ambiguity. The second part, the metaphysical-spiritual episteme, focuses on personal encounters with the natural world, especially with animals, which are stylized as epiphanies and intense moments of revelation. In the texts of Thoreau, Virginia Woolf, Robert Musil, and J.A. Baker the engagement with forms of nonhuman nature is pictured as a process of personal transformation that oftentimes takes on a spiritual or religious meaning. Finally, and under the heading of "the ethical episteme", the last and shortest part considers the essay as a form of open ethical reflection with regard to normative ecological questions such as animal welfare. Furthermore, this chapter analyses influential narrative patterns in ecological discourses, such as stories of natural decline. Taken together, the three chapters provide a clear and detailed set of concepts for the analysis of the nature essay.

One of the main qualities of the study lies in its close attention to formal aspects and its ability to link the distinct poetics and aesthetics of the essay with an increased awareness towards nonhuman phenomena. At times, however, the concentration on this particular form of writing could in fact have profited from a broader perspective. In particular, the possible interrelationship between the essay and other literary representations of nature, such as in the novel or in poetry, remains unclear. Formal features that Schröder attributes to the essay, such as the disregard for linear plots, the open dynamics of association, and the inclusion of encyclopaedic writing, extensive descriptions and lists, can be found in literary texts as well. Therefore the examples she considers appear at times a bit isolated from their historical context. For instance, the chapter on Alexander v. Humboldt could have profited from a comparison with contemporary shifts in literary representations of nature in e.g. Adalbert Stifter's work. In a similar manner, it is not evident why Robert Musil's short narrative *The Flypaper* [*Das Fliegenpapier*] is included as an essay and not a fictional text. While this does not mean that the categorizations suggested by Schröder are less useful, it could mean that some of the aesthetic characteristics of the nature essay are actually those of literary texts with a strong propensity towards nature. All in all, however, *The Nature Essay* is a strong contribution to current ecocritical debates, covering a vast terrain, extremely well researched and giving careful attention to the interrelation between aesthetic and narrative aspects and natural phenomena.

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Lorraine Kerslake, *The Voice of Nature in Ted Hughes's Writing for Children*: *Correcting Culture's Error* (Routledge, 2018), 192 pp.

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Surprising as it may sound, this is the first book entirely dedicated to Ted Hughes as a children's writer. Over the past few decades, limited scholarly attention has been paid to Hughes's work for young people in both areas of children's literature and ecocritical studies. Now is the right time to revisit Hughes's children's writing; the context of a world that has lost its balance is ever so relevant today as environmental degradation intersects with the rapid digitalisation of human interactions. There is the common concern about the decline of children's outdoor activity in urban areas and the consequent alienation from the natural world. Such "extinction of experience," to use Robert Pyle's term, has a devastating impact on children's wellbeing as well as their attitudes towards the environment. Lorraine Kerslake's *The Voice of Nature in Ted Hughes's Writing for Children* can therefore be read as a response to the urgent call for reconnecting children (and adults) with nature, based on Hughes's conviction that "Every new child is nature's chance to correct culture's error" (*Winter Pollen* 149). It is a timely study that raises questions about the role of children's literature in relation to the environmental crisis, crediting Hughes's legacy with the power to revive what Rachel Carson calls a "sense of wonder" towards the environment.

Kerslake's in-depth discussion of a representative selection of Hughes's writing for children unravels the healing agenda that runs through his whole body of work. In the introduction, Kerslake puts forward a two-fold notion of Hughes's healing quest: one related to his own fractured self and the other to the wider ecological crisis. This frame clarifies her choice of dividing the book into two parts that appear to be of complementary importance. The parts titled "Speaking through the Voice of Nature" and "Correcting Culture's Error" directly refer to Hughes's vision of his poetry. It takes root in the natural world and aims "to direct readers (listeners) towards certain faculties – inner concentration, inner listening and dependence on the spontaneous mind rather than on the calculating and remembering mind" as Hughes writes in a letter to Lissa Paul (*Letters* 483).

With the aid of such letters and other archival material, Kerslake elaborately elucidates how Hughes's personal healing quest informed his ecopoetics. It seems difficult for Kerslake to separate Hughes's biography from his creative work, especially in the light of Timothy Clark's definition of ecopoetry which she quotes: "a space of subjective

redefinition and rediscovery through encounters with the non-human" (Clark 139). Many scholars have attempted to study Hughes's work through the lens of his personal experiences, most notably Neil Roberts's *Ted Hughes: A Literary Life* (2006) and recently Yvonne Reddick's *Ted Hughes: Environmentalist and Ecopoet* (2017). Kerslake's book, however, sheds light on Hughes's 'inner self that was often masked in his writing for adults' but revealed and embodied in his children's writing (1). Accordingly, she reads "Orpheus" (1971) and *Ffangs* (1986) as the most "redemptive" of all his children's plays and stories in dealing with his own traumatic experience.

Kerslake sets out to trace Hughes's sense of ecological healing through his children's writing and work, bringing to the fore Hughes as an eco-educator. The transition from Hughes's biographical background to the detailed readings of children's works goes through "Hughes's cauldron of ideas" about childhood and education. The close examination of his handbook *Poetry in the Making* (1967) and the "Myth and Education" essays (1970, 1976) highlights the therapeutic power of the creative process. Kerslake makes invaluable links between his critical and imaginative writings, clearly articulating Hughes's philosophy of holistic education which emphasizes the role of imagination in reuniting our inner and outer worlds.

How could the rift between the two worlds be healed in the realm of children's literature? To answer this question, Kerslake follows the strands of the healing quest as manifested in the development of Hughes's own environmental consciousness across the different genres of drama, poetry and prose. Within the parameters of "ecodrama," Kerslake shows how environmental ethics is developed alongside his play characters through which he criticises the dualities of science/education and culture/nature. Yet it is in his packed poetic oeuvre that Hughes takes the healing quest a step further by reconnecting those binaries set up in his plays. Kerslake argues that Hughes's children's poetry is "where the connection between the human/animal is perhaps clearest and where the adult/child reader can also be reconnected" (131). The tracing of animal representations along the course of his children's collections suggests the role of the ecopoet in redefining the human-animal relationship, recovering the reader's "sense of wonder," and raising ecological awareness. As change becomes urgently needed, narratives like *The Iron Man* (1968) and *The Iron Woman* (1993) voice an active sense of environmental responsibility related to pollution. In her ecocritical reading, Kerslake makes a compelling point about the complex connection between the psychological, the social and the ecological in Hughes's healing quest.

This broad exploration of Hughes's children's writing suggests an accessible route to recover our lost sense of wonder through the appreciation of nature and imagination. It opens up new areas of enquiry for scholars interested in Hughes studies, children's literary criticism, environmental humanities and education alike. While the therapeutic effect for Hughes has been magnified, the developmental impact of Hughes's work on children is yet to be examined in sufficient depth and detail. To find out how young readers engage with and interpret Hughes's voice, it might be useful to ground discussions about his children's literature in some kind of empirical research. Hughes's educational/environmental projects also present an important area for further research;

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they provide blueprints for reforms in education as discussed by Kerslake in a subsequent paper (2020) that is worth adding to the book. Kerslake's *The Voice of Nature* is a reference to which one will return again and again for its insights into Hughes's children's work and environmental education.

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David Farrier, *Anthropocene Poetics: Deep Time, Sacrifice Zones and Extinction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019), 164 pp.

Matthew Griffiths, *The New Poetics of Climate Change: Modernist Aesthetics for a Warming World* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 211 pp.

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On 17 May 2019, *The Guardian* announced changes to its style guide to "introduce terms that more accurately describe the environmental crises facing the world" (Carrington). According to Editor-in-Chief Katharine Viner, "The phrase 'climate change' […] sounds rather passive and gentle when what scientists are talking about is a catastrophe for humanity." Henceforth, *The Guardian* would therefore opt for "climate emergency, crisis or breakdown" in lieu of "climate change" and instead of "global warming" would use the term "global heating." The new language is part of *The Guardian*'s ongoing efforts to increase public awareness and understanding of the severity of anthropogenic climate change, which, in our post-400 ppm world, poses an immediate threat to the continuance of our own and many other species.

Attention to language and precise wording lies at the heart of many vocations, not only climate science and journalism but also, of course, poetry. Two recent ecocritical books—David Farrier's *Anthropocene Poetics* and Matthew Griffiths's *The New Poetics of Climate Change*—address the intersection of poetry and environmental crisis, exploring how poetry can enact tensions that both call into question and help concretize the provocations and complexities of our times.

David Farrier's *Anthropocene Poetics* is a small and weighty book that opens with a definition and brief discussion of the term "Anthropocene" that, over the past two decades, has risen to prominence as the term for an era in which our shifting human identity requires us to "think differently about the poem" (5). As the book's title suggests, questions about deep time are central to the Anthropocene, which has profoundly unsettled human notions of time; while on one hand "our dependence on fossil fuels, rare earth minerals, and plastics puts us in intimate contact with far-distant pasts," on the other, the "ruptures that these dependencies have created—such as changes in atmospheric, soil, and oceanic chemistry and the depletion of biodiversity—also highlight our intimate relationship with the very deep future" (6). Farrier argues that the reconstruction of the earth in service of "our desires and priorities" necessitates adjusting not only "our perception of deep time," but also "our relation to it" (7).

Deep time is a unifying thread throughout the book but forms the central topic of the first of the book's three chapters, each of which take up one of three "rubrics for understanding environmental crisis in the humanities" (8). Chapter one examines the concept of *thick time*, here defined as the capacity of the lyric to collapse deep time into a digestible representation that contains a lively awareness of multiple temporalities. Here Farrier explores the work of Elizabeth Bishop, whose figurings of slow time and geologic intimacies have "much to offer [...] to a study of Anthropocene poetics," (23) and Seamus Heaney's poetic encounters with geology. The second chapter examines "sacrifice zones," specifically the Plantationocene pine plantations of Philip Larkin's poetry and the "eclectic mix of registers" in Evelyn Reilly's *Styrofoam*, which probes at plastic's "volatile, unstable materiality" (74).

The third and final chapter centres on Donna Haraway's "more playful and multispecies-focused Chthulucene" (Farrier 9) which asserts that "cultivating a sense of kinship with multispecies familiars is the most pressing obligation in an era of hemorrhaging biodiversity" (89). It explores "a range of literary figures that can provide us with shapes for thinking about what a *poetics* of kin-making might look like" (90). Here, Farrier considers how such familiar literary devices as metaphor, apostrophe, and citation "can provide frameworks for thinking about an intentional turn toward the nonhuman life that is also a turn back to the (newly strange) self" (91). Specifically, he centres on extinction that "perhaps more than any other environmental crisis [...] pitches us into deep time: into awareness of the richness of our inheritance from the deep past, and the depleted legacy we will leave to the deep future" (92).

These chapters consider both poets familiar to ecocritics and those whose work has yet to be thoroughly examined from an ecocritical perspective. In all cases, Farrier's approach is original, stimulating and highly readable. Perhaps most compelling is the book's central argument that poetry *means differently* as a result of the Anthropocene; in these difficult times, meaning must be reconfigured and poetry of all kinds figures prominently in this process. In enabling "the intrusion of other times and places in the given moment," lyric poetry has the capacity "to draw vastly distant temporalities within the compass of intimate experience" and in doing so can show us that "geologic intimacy is a condition of being human" (127). At the same time that relationships with deep time implicate us "in relations of violence," poets call on us to establish new relationships—"collaborative rather than exploitative" —with the species around us. The making and remaking of meaning, Farrier concludes, is central to life, which is itself "an ongoing process of multispecies *poeisis*" (128).

Like Farrier, Matthew Griffiths contends that the climatic instability of our contemporary world—and the questions it raises and civilizational uncertainty that it portends—not only demands new approaches to poetry, but also highlights a new role for poetry in helping us grapple with uncertainty and change. The book focuses on the poetic genre it deems most suited to the task, i.e., Modernist poetry of the early- to mid-twentieth century, and in particular the works of Ezra Pound, Wallace Stevens, Basil Bunting and David Jones. These poets all lived through a period of profound social and artistic upheaval, and their strategies for making sense of change "make them distinctively

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valuable to the comprehension of climate change" (30). Griffiths argues that several particular features of Modernist poetry, particularly "ironies of representation and a resistance to received ideas of 'Nature'; transnational or global scales; hybridization of natural change with cultural and social…change…; a new problematics of environmental selfhood; [and] language's vexed attempt to engage with the world and, reflexively, with its own materialism" (30) make it particularly suited to our troubled times.

While chapters one through five offer insightful discussions on the Modernist poets under consideration, I felt that *New Poetics* truly finds its stride in its final chapter, "The Poems of Our Climate Change," which is dedicated to poems produced since the emergence of climate science that take up climate change as their central concern. To highlight one example, Griffiths touches on the series of twenty-one poems on climate change, overseen by then-UK Poet Laureate Carol Ann Duffy, "that appeared on the *Guardian'*s website in the months leading up to COP21" (158). Griffiths is critical of this and similar poetic projects that directly address climate change; in "making available audio of the poems as read by well-known actors, with the option of viewing the text next to portraits of the performers" and choosing "established contemporary poets" he notes that "the project is mainstream in its aim" and is "largely more conventional than experimental as a result." Instead, he favours contemporary poets that follow in the Modernist vein of "refusing to be absolute or definitive" and instead articulating the "uncertainty" that accompanies the climate crisis (154).

The poetry in the vein emphasized in *New Poetics* opens important avenues for grappling with humanity's place in an unstable and increasingly unpredictable world in which the boundary between nature and culture must increasingly be called into question. *New Poetics* makes an important contribution in this regard. At the same time, the book's insistence on the value of experimental, unconventional and challenging Modernist poetry to the exclusion of other literary forms—including those with broad popular appeal—is not always convincing. For example, the book opens with a lengthy critique of Andrew Motion's climate poem "The Sorcerer's Mirror" commissioned as part of the *Guardian*'s 10:10 Climate Change series. The poem is criticized for its "outdated" and "pastoralist" aesthetic, which allegedly is insufficient to unsettle received notions of the environment and our place in it. Apart from this questionable claim (other scholars have argued that lyric poetry plays a similar role to that ascribed solely to Modernist poetry in this volume), I couldn't help feeling that Motion's poem was unfairly represented in the critiques of it that surfaced throughout the book. Contrary to implying that "'getting outside' would only work if we could go to the calving face of the [arctic] ice itself" as Griffiths claims (4), Motion makes clear that the arctic ice and other climate-damaged landscapes are symbolically present in his small, flooded corner of London:

> Already my patch of lawn
> is awash, and when I look from my shelter down
> to the stippled surface, it opens like the miraculous
> O of a sorcerer's mirror. *Here* are the rising tides
> overflowing their slack estuaries and river basins,
> the Arctic shore, Shanghai, Florida and Alaska.
> *Here* are the baffled species taking to high ground,

> the already famously lonely polar bear and caribou. (Motion; my emphasis)

Through the "sorcerer's mirror" of his lawn, Motion sees the global calamity and sense of human responsibility that both extend from and affect his backyard (and by extension our own) which is not removed from world events but is very much part of them. While repeated critiques of Motion's occupy considerable space in the book, the other climate poems in the Guardian's 10:10 series—including those by literary heavyweights Kathleen Jamie, Margaret Atwood, Alice Oswald, and Carol Rumens—aren't mentioned in *New Poetics* at all.

As Farrier argues, "the environmental crisis is also a crisis of meaning" (4). *The Guardian*'s conscientious discussion of its choice of terms makes clear that how we articulate the environmental crises of our times, how we make meaning of them through language, is fundamentally important. Language can clarify or obfuscate humanity's shifting relationship with the world around us and the gravity of our current situation. As both Farrier and Griffiths agree, the climate and environmental breakdown of the Anthropocene require us to revisit the very ways in which we make meaning, including our understanding of what poetry is and what it does. Importantly, regardless of how we think about or frame them, contemporary environmental crises are not merely ideas, they are material realities with devastating consequences for life on our planet. As these books make clear, how we talk about the Anthropocene matters. What we do about it matters even more.

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Timo Maran, *Ecosemiotics: The Study of Signs in Changing Ecologies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 70 pp.

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Stemming from the work of Peirce and Saussure in the early 20th century, the modern discipline of semiotics, or the "doctrine of signs," has always been on the fringes of literary criticism and theory. Cultural semioticians like Charles Morris, Juri Lotman, Algirdas Julien Greimas, Umberto Eco, and others, were often engaged in research that was central to the development of structuralist and poststructuralist theory, while at the same time being sidelined from the broader debates that these developments inspired throughout the humanities and the social sciences. Something similar happened after semioticians, under the guidance of Thomas Sebeok, widened their scope beyond human symbolic meaning-making and began to study all the different signs and sign systems found in nature. Since then, new fields of semiotic research, such as zoosemiotics, biosemiotics, phytosemiotics, and so on, have been advancing far-reaching ideas and concepts, which have nonetheless remained marginal to the general conversation in the environmental humanities, and particularly within the field of ecocriticism. This book by Timo Maran, a short—alas, too short!—introduction to the key contributions and insights of ecosemiotics, might well correct this ostracism and help to put semiotic research back at the center of environmental criticism and theory.

A Professor of Ecosemiotics and Environmental Humanities at the University of Tartu, the author is no outsider to this conversation. It is perhaps no exaggeration to describe the small Estonian city of Tartu as the spiritual, or at least intellectual, home of semiotics. It was in this same university that Jakob von Uexküll carried out most of his research on the *Umwelten* of nonhuman animals, one of the foundations of modern biosemiotics. And it was also here, right after the Second World War, that Juri Lotman and his colleagues developed what came to be known as the Tartu-Moscow school of cultural semiotics. The Department of Semiotics in Tartu, led in turn by Igor Černov, Peeter Torop, and Kalevi Kull, has continued this tradition, establishing itself as the foremost research center for cultural semiotics and biosemiotics in Europe. Having worked during the best part of his academic career in such an environment, where he carried out pathbreaking research on the semiotics of mimicry and played an active role as editor and contributor to some of the most significant publications in zoosemiotics of the past decades, Timo Maran became the head of the Department of Semiotics in 2018 and is now one of the leading advocates for a wider and more inclusive form of ecosemiotics.

This book, which is part of the Cambridge University Press series Elements in Environmental Humanities, co-edited by Maran himself, is an attempt to present in the most synthetic but also comprehensive way the foundations, scope, and ambition of current research in ecosemiotics. This transdisciplinary field is defined at the outset as the "branch of semiotics [that] emerged in the mid 1990s to scrutinize semiosic or sign-mediated aspects of ecology (including relations between human culture and ecosystems)" (Maran 1). The book is divided into three main sections. The first section lays out the foundations of ecosemiotics, by outlining some of the key contributions that have allowed semioticians to conceive ecosystems as complex interactions between organisms which are bound, not just by exchanges of matter and energy, but also of meaningful signs. The second section develops the implications of this semiotic understanding of ecosystems for the analysis of the problematic relations between human culture and nonhuman nature. The argument is further elaborated in the final section of the book, where Modelling Systems Theory (MST) is used to advance an original interpretation of the forest ecosystem, as one possible ground for the semiotic modelling of what posthumanists would call the culturenature continuum.

As a synthesis of some of the key ideas that have emerged in the past few years in the field, including contributions by the author himself, the book is clear and accessible, not assuming any familiarity with semiotic scholarship on the part of the reader. Throughout the book, there is a constant effort to bring semiotic tools and concepts, which elsewhere are often articulated in a parochial and technical manner, beyond the confines of semiotics, highlighting their relevance for researchers working in other areas of the environmental humanities, and most especially in literary ecocriticism. In a book so brief, however, such an ecumenical ambition means that many of the ideas brought up are treated somewhat superficially, without engaging in the kind of close discussion that semioticians or other scholars familiar with semiotic literature might appreciate.

In sum, this book is a good place to gain a first and up-to-date understanding of the field, which is no doubt the purpose of the series where it is published. Leaving aside its value as an accessible introduction to ecosemiotics, the aspect of the book that might be more appealing to ecocritics is perhaps its ethical ambition. Throughout its pages runs an optimistic undertone, the conviction that the looming ecological catastrophe brought about by the progressive distancing of humans from their environment is not inevitable. Maran recognizes that the "causes for this Anthropocenic condition are largely semiotic—based on our striving toward symbolic hegemony and preference of closed semiotic systems" (59). But he also believes that there is a semiotic path that could allow us to overcome the nature/culture dualism and by engaging in mutually respectful dialog with all the other species with whom we share the earth.

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Mission Statement

This journal of ecocriticism, founded in 2010, is a joint initiative of GIECO (Ecocritical Research Group in Spain) and EASLCE (European Association for the Study of Literature, Culture and Environment) and is published by the University of Alcalá as of 2014. Its principal aim is to further the study, knowledge and public awareness of the connections and relationship between literature, culture and the environment. As a virtual space, it provides a site for dialogue between researchers, theorists, creative writers and artists concerned with and by the environment and its degradation. Its pages are open to contributions on all literatures and cultures, but its special mission is to reflect the cultural, linguistic and natural richness and diversity of the European continent.

Contributions, which are subject to double-blind peer review, are accepted in five languages, in order to increase visibility and broaden the participation of scholars who are not part of the English-speaking world. *Ecozon@* publishes original research articles, in addition to creative writing, visual arts and book reviews. Publication is open to scholars interested in ecocriticism from around the world. We recommend membership of EASLCE to our contributors and readers, but it is not a requirement for either.

Ecozon@ is currently indexed in MLA, OAI, DOAJ, ERIH PLUS, Latindex, Dialnet, ISOC and EBUAH, the institutional repository of the University of Alcalá.

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