

## Landscape and Property in Seventeenth-Century Poetry

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The vogue for rural poetry in seventeenth-century England is an established fact of literary history. In a vital cultural movement, stimulated by continental developments in landscape painting and coloured by traditions of pastoral literature, poets consistently represented their native countryside as an untroubled site of rural pleasures. But the poetic celebrations of the land were in fact forged out of a period of accelerated social and economic change in rural England. Rapid increases in rates of population and inflation, throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, placed intensifying pressures on both the land and the vast majority of the English people still directly dependent upon it. As contemporary farmers, social commentators and poets sought to comprehend these often confusing processes, they formulated rival discourses of rural order, which articulated widely divergent values at a time when agrarian practice was inexorably being wrenched towards capitalism. Traditional codes of moral economics were confronted by a new ethos of 'improvement'; the myth of organic community within the manorial estate was ruptured by the relentless market forces of economic competition; and the doctrine that a landlord is a mere steward of God's bounty gave way in the face of an emergent conception of absolute property in land. In the early seventeenth century, as English poets discovered their native landscape, the meaning of rural England had never before been so problematic.

My contextual analysis of seventeenth-century rural poetics, which I will introduce by considering general trends and then develop in a reading of the work of Ben Jonson and Robert Herrick, will also engage with ongoing critical debates about the literary modes of pastoral and georgic. Raymond Williams, in his ground-breaking study *The Country and the City*, decried a conspiracy in Renaissance pastoral. The 'enamelled world' of pastoral poetry, he claims, depicts a

land freed of the 'living tensions' of agrarian process; in the course of the seventeenth century pastoral increasingly gathered the dressing of rural detail in order to reinforce an oppressive socio-economic ideology.<sup>1</sup> In basic agreement with Williams is James Turner, who identifies a central impetus towards a mode of 'topographia', that asserted a new level of engagement with rural conditions while maintaining the celebratory purpose of pastoral.<sup>2</sup> Alastair Fowler, by comparison, argues that the development of a descriptive, non-fictional mode overtly concerned with country life evidences a paradigm shift in Stuart literary culture from pastoral to georgic.<sup>3</sup> His arguments are supported, at greater length, by Anthony Low's delineation of the effects of a 'georgic revolution' upon the poetics of the land.<sup>4</sup>

Such divergence of opinion illustrates the dangers – yet perhaps also the necessity – of a selective critical approach to the array of material at hand. By concentrating specifically on the representation of agrarian conditions, the current study will analyse the consolidation of certain predominant movements in rural poetics. The often disparate range of literature, I will argue, is characterized by a fundamental commitment to the interests of property. Property was clearly assuming a new significance in English culture, in a movement shaped by legal developments, political initiatives and the sheer force of economic pressures.<sup>5</sup> Within this

1 *The Country and the City* (London, 1985 edn), esp. ch. 3.

2 *Politics of Landscape: Rural Scenery and Society in English Poetry 1630-1660* (Oxford, 1979).

3 'Georgic and Pastoral: Laws of Genre in the Seventeenth Century', in *Culture and Cultivation in Early Modern England: Writing and the Land*, ed. Michael Leslie and Timothy Raylor (Leicester, 1992), p. 86.

4 *The Georgic Revolution* (Princeton, 1985), ch. 6.

5 The emergence of a modern conception of property in the seventeenth century remains a much-debated (and not uncontentious) issue. See esp. C.B. Macpherson, 'Capitalism and the Changing Concept of Property', in *Feudalism, Capitalism and Beyond*, ed. Eugene Kamenka and R.S. Neale (London, 1975), pp. 104-24; J.P. Sommerville, *Politics and Ideology in England, 1603-1640* (London, 1986), pp. 145-60; and G.E. Aylmer, 'The Meaning and Definition of "Property" in Seventeenth-Century England', *Past and Present*, 86 (1980), 87-97. I

context the poets of the land consistently dwell upon the shifting status of the propertied. The result is a complex mix of tradition and innovation, pastoral and georgic, otium and negotium. The poetry is rarely committed either to the ideals of a traditional moral economy or to the cause of the improvers; its interest, in the current context, lies rather in the underlying sense it provides of the landed reassessing the ethics and aesthetics of rural property.

I

The artistic concept which served to galvanize seventeenth-century initiatives towards a native poetry of the land was that of landscape. The idea of landscape, imported into England from the continent, helped to redirect encomiastic conventions of Elizabethan pastoral towards a coherent movement of rural and proprietorial panegyric. As Turner writes,

There is an increasing readiness to discover pleasant pictures in Nature; in the seventeenth century this impulse takes an *organized* form. Contemporary landscape began to be constructed according to clearly-defined principles, guided by a body of theory whose influence can be traced in literature as much as in art.<sup>6</sup>

The concept is clarified further in Leah Marcus's application of artistic theories of *seigneurial* landscape, in which an organizing point of perspective is provided by a country house: a strategy which allows poet and painter alike to structure representations of the land around the interests of its owners.<sup>7</sup> Landscape thus offered a view of the countryside unfettered by the oppressive claims of moral economy and manorial society; it provided a site within which poets could

investigate the impact of developments in estate surveying upon ideas of property in "'To Know One's Own": Estate Surveying and the Representation of the Land in Early Modern England', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 57 (1994).

6 *Politics of Landscape*, p. 10.

7 'Politics and Pastoral: Writing the Court on the Countryside', in *Culture and Politics in Early Stuart England*, ed. Kevin Sharpe and P. Leslie (London, 1994), p. 142.

freshly examine the role and duties of the landed gentry and nobility.

This reassessment of rural ethics is nowhere more apparent than in the poetic treatment of the enclosure of common fields. Throughout the previous century, enclosure was perceived as the quintessential manifestation of the collapse – for better or worse – of a traditional social and economic order in the English countryside. While poets of the seigneurial landscape in the seventeenth century typically endorse the authority of custom against the threat of change, the driving purpose of panegyric frequently reduces their opposition to enclosure to the status of glib platitudes.<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile the idea of landscape in fact promoted a very different notion of the relation between lord and land than that maintained by the sixteenth-century proponents of moral economics and the doctrine of stewardship. It strips away the previously accepted manorial matrix of duties and responsibilities in order to celebrate the power of the propertied; it turns bonds of moral responsibility into becoming acts of manorial charity. The very concept of landscape is thus peculiarly attuned to the logic of enclosure, which asserts the primacy of individual rights over ties of community. Therefore contemporary arguments which linked enclosed fields to ideals of order and freedom might be seen to underpin the basic assumptions of landscape.<sup>9</sup> In a poem by Richard Fanshawe, Nature asks, ‘what avails my store Heapt in a common field?’; while for Henry More the principal beauties of the land are ‘Fair Fields and rich Enclosures’.<sup>10</sup> Although the poets characteristically look to a stable order of landownership fixed in time by long lines of

8 Turner, *Politics of Landscape*, p. 126. Cf. Don Wayne’s comments on strategies of negative description in the country house poem, in *Penshurst: The Semiotics of Place and the Poetics of History* (London, 1984), pp. 38-44.

9 See further McRae, *God Speed the Plough: The Representation of Agrarian England, 1500-1660* (forthcoming, 1995), ch. 5.

10 *Shorter Poems and Translations*, ed. N.W. Bawcutt (Liverpool, 1964), p. 21; *Complete Poems*, ed. Alexander B. Grosart (Hildesheim, 1878), p. 177; quoted in Turner, *Politics of Landscape*, p. 127.

inheritance, their representations of the propertied landscape are none the less complicit in a shift towards a radically new appreciation of property.

This complex emergent ideology of the land was impelled, from the early years of the century, by a renewed Stuart attention to the duties of the country gentry. James, Felicity Heal writes, 'used the language of the "country" and its values with a passion that suggests conviction'.<sup>11</sup> But what *was* this language and what were its values? Was James reactivating the ideals of the vociferous Tudor social commentators, or was he rather refashioning malleable ideas of rural order and prosperity? Historians typically interpret the Jacobean rhetoric as a despairing complaint in the face of incipient commercialism and individualism. James calls upon

all Noblemen, and Gentlemen whatsoever, to live in the steps and examples of their worthy Ancestors, by keeping and entertaining Hospitality, and charitable relieving of the poore according to their estate and meanes, not thinking themselves borne for themselves, and their families alone, but for the publique good and comfort of their Country.<sup>12</sup>

But James consistently links such arguments of manorial stewardship to eminently practical concerns of rural government and economics. In his Star Chamber speech of 1616 he raised the spectre of 'Levellers gathering together' (to challenge at once the order of property and the hierarchies of political power), and argued that the interests of 'the good government of the countrey' would best be served by the rural residence of the gentry. The traditional insistence upon social justice thus gives way to an equally pressing focus on social order. He claims, further, that 'the Gentlemen lose their owne thrift for lacke of their owne presence, in seeing to their owne busines at home':<sup>13</sup> a statement which modifies the ideal of a moral economy in an

11 *Hospitality in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1990), p. 118.

12 *Stuart Royal Proclamations*, ed. James F. Larkin and Paul L. Hughes (2 vols., Oxford, 1973-83), vol. 1, p. 357.

13 *His Majesties Speech in the Starre-Chamber* (1616), sig. H2<sup>b</sup>.

attempt to incorporate the landowners' interests of 'thrift'. The Tudor moralist would have decried concerns of individual profit as antithetical to the doctrine of stewardship; James rather endorses the strengths, as proclaimed by Francis Bacon, of a land in which 'the plough' is kept 'in the hands of the owners'.<sup>14</sup>

James reaffirms his position in a Horatian elegy on his policy. He tells the gentry:

The cuntrey is your Orbe and proper Spheare  
Thence your Revenues rise bestowe them there  
Convert your coach horse to the thrifty plough  
Take knowledge of your sheepe, your corne your cowe  
And thinke it noe disparagement or taxe  
To acquaint your fingers with the wooll & flaxe.<sup>15</sup>

Though committed to 'Aristotelian notions of harmony and order in the commonwealth',<sup>16</sup> the poem is also interwoven with the language of agrarian improvement. James is concerned that existing ranks of the gentry should reinforce their strength in the countryside by taking full control over the business of their estates. His catalogue of rural riches in the line, 'your sheepe, your corne your cowe', compounds with every personal pronoun the poem's interest in a strict order of rural property. The idle shepherd of Elizabethan pastoral is replaced by a thoroughly georgic exemplar fully acquainted with the labours – and profits – of husbandry. A divergent manuscript text of the poem noted in Craigie's edition yields a telling reminder of the logic of improvement: 'Take knowledge of your sheepe ...' is transfigured, 'make mony of your sheepe ...' (p. 181).

James's attempt to refashion the image of the country gentleman was supported by an upsurge of interest in

14 Bacon, *The Essays*, ed. John Pitcher (London, 1985), p. 150.

15 *The Poems of James VI of Scotland*, ed. James Craigie (2 vols, Edinburgh and London, 1955-8), vol. 2, p. 180.

16 Heal, *Hospitality*, p. 119.

classical poetry of the happy rural life.<sup>17</sup> At the heart of this movement stood Horace's second epode ('*Beatus ille*'), which reflects longingly upon the life of a man of rural property:

*Happie* is he, that from all *Businesse* cleere,  
As the old race of Mankind were,  
With his owne Oxen tills his Sire's left lands,  
And is not in the Usurers bands.<sup>18</sup>

Maren-Sofie Rostvig erects a questionable dichotomy between fact and fiction when she claims that in this tradition the shepherd of Elizabethan pastoral 'becomes metamorphosed into a farmer, and steps out of an imaginary landscape into a real countryside'.<sup>19</sup> This poem, one might counter, is as much an idyllic dream as an Elizabethan lyric of love in the shade. (It is, moreover, framed as a speech of a city usurer fantasizing about his future prosperity.) But the idealized representations of the country life fostered by the widespread dissemination, translation and imitation of such poetry nonetheless depart from pastoral in their explicit endorsements of rural property and productivity. 'Happy is he' who 'With his own oxen tills his sire's left lands'. In this period, observes Annabel Patterson, 'the cultural history of pastoral becomes truly inseparable from georgic'.<sup>20</sup>

The seventeenth-century landscape, in accordance with these various cultural forces, recalls the classical ethos of 'profit and pleasure'. In the seventeenth century this ethos epitomizes the controlled georgic energy instilled into the gentry's controlling ideology (reinforced, among royalists, by the prevailing political turmoil) of stable rural retreat. Thus William Chamberlayne's survey of 'lovely Landskips' incorporates within a predominantly pastoralized

17 See Maren-Sofie Rostvig, *The Happy Man: Studies in the Metamorphoses of a Classical Ideal 1600-1700* (Oslo, 1954).

18 Ben Jonson's translation (*Ben Jonson*, ed. C. H. Herford, Percy and Evelyn Simpson (11 vols, Oxford, 1954-70), vol. 8, p. 289.

19 *Happy Man*, p. 103.

20 *Pastoral and Ideology: Virgil to Valéry* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1987), p. 134.

environment of 'fresh cool shade' and piping shepherds a striking figure of rural labour and energy:

The painful Husbandman, whose Labour steeld  
 With fruitful hopes, in a deep study how  
 T'improve the Earth, follows his slow-pac'd Plow.<sup>21</sup>

On a broader scale, Sir John Denham surveys from Cooper's Hill a prospect of 'wealth and beauty' nourished by the Thames:<sup>22</sup>

No unexpected inundations spoyl  
 The mowers hopes, nor mock the plowmans toyl:  
 But God-like his unwearied Bounty flows;  
 First loves to do, then loves the Good he does.  
 Nor are his Blessings to his banks confin'd,  
 But free, and common, as the Sea or Wind;  
 When he to boast, or to disperse his stores  
 Full of the tributes of his grateful shores,  
 Visits the world, and in his flying towers  
 Brings home to us, and makes both *Indies* ours;  
 Finds wealth where 'tis, bestows it where it wants  
 Cities in deserts, woods in Cities plants.  
 So that to us no thing, no place is strange,  
 While his fair bosom is the worlds exchange. (ll. 175-88)

The 'God-like' flow of 'unwearied Bounty' evokes literary dreams of a land of Cockaigne, bursting with milk and honey. (This, of course, is a recurrent motif of pastoral.) But equally important to Denham's poem are the 'mowers hopes' and 'plowmans toyl'. The endorsement of labour is immediately undercut by the insistence on *natural* bounty, yet these subtle georgic modulations none the less contribute to the poem's mood of an expansive energy harnessed and

21 *Pharonnida* (1659); quoted in James Turner, 'Topographia and Topographical Poetry in English, 1640-1660', unpublished DPhil dissertation (Oxford, 1976), pp. 48-9.

22 *Coopers Hill* (1642); *Expans'd Hieroglyphicks: A Critical Edition of Sir John Denham's Coopers Hill*, ed. Brendan O Hehir (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1969), B Text, l. 226.

directed.<sup>23</sup> It is this sense of an English spirit of labour and improvement that underpins the poem's subsequent vision of international trade and economic expansion, which places the rural order of profits and pleasures within a developing national mythology of social stability and economic prosperity.

Denham's poem, like so much of the rural poetry of the century, was written against the backdrop of impending social and political upheaval; and this helps to explain the constraints placed upon representations of rural labour and labourers. While Denham can gesture towards commercial activity, the decorum of rural poetics will not admit depiction of the various chapmen, artisans and merchants who would generate a market-based prosperity. Most notably, the poetry consistently occludes the energies and aspirations of the rural middling sorts. (Yeomen, as the pragmatic Elizabethan William Harrison observed, 'with grazing, frequenting of markets and keeping of servants ... doe come to great wealth, insomuch that many of them are able and doe buy landes of unthrifty gentlemen, & ... doe make theyr ... sonnes ... to become gentlemen'.)<sup>24</sup> This places seventeenth-century rural poetics in the tradition of Elizabethan pastoral, and also sets it apart from the more vigorous georgic strains apparent in the period.<sup>25</sup> The poem of the rural landscape typically polarizes rural society into the landed and the labourers, and thus effectively fractures traditional notions of community, dividing the rural population between those with property in land and those with property in their own labour.<sup>26</sup> The otherness of the labourers thus serves to legitimize and

23 John Chalker claims the poem as georgic, in *The English Georgic: A Study in the Development of a Form* (London, 1969), pp. 67-70.

24 'Historicall Description of the Islande of Britayne', published with Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles* (1577), f. 105<sup>b</sup>.

25 See Low, *Georgic Revolution*; McRae, *God Speed the Plough*, ch. 7.

26 Wayne notes that in the latter seventeenth century John Locke 'would justify the institution of private property and its unequal distribution by deriving property in things from labor, but only after having defined labor as a thing, a form of property, a commodity equivalent to land and money' (*Penshurst*, p. 24).

stabilize the power of the landed throughout a period actually marked by troubling conditions of uncertainty and flux.

This strategy may be illustrated by consideration of two further seventeenth-century representations of the ploughman. In Thomas Bancroft's address 'To Swarston' the ploughman provides a vital index of rural productivity:

*Swarston*, when I behold thy pleasant sight,  
Whose River runs a progresse of Delight,  
Joy'd with the beauties of fresh flowery plaines,  
And bounteous fields, that crowne the Plow-mans paines:  
I sigh (that see my native home estrang'd)  
For Heaven, whose Lord and tenure's never changed.<sup>27</sup>

Thomas Stanley, in his 1651 encomium on 'The Spring', observes:

Now in their new robes of green  
Are the Plowmans labours seen:  
Now the lusty teeming Earth  
Springs each hour with a new birth.<sup>28</sup>

Bancroft and Stanley are utterly conventional in their insistence on the worker's 'paines' and 'labours'; the significance of the ploughman, in accordance with a rich textual tradition, depends upon his labour. Consequently the quintessential English labourer is enlisted to evoke the economic vigour of a structure of property, and generally also a system of monarchy.<sup>29</sup> The ploughman is also associated with a certain type of labour. His position within an arable farming system suggests a form of rural production

27 *Two Bookes of Epigrammes and Epitaphs* (1639), sig. C3<sup>a</sup>.

28 *Poems and Translations*, ed. Galbraith Miller Crump (Oxford, 1962), p. 91.

29 One might note, in Bancroft's poem, the river's 'progresse of Delight' and the fields that 'crowne the Plow-mans paines'. The language of royalism recalls Leah Marcus's insights about the poetic imprinting of royal power on the countryside. (*The Politics of Mirth: Jonson, Herrick, Milton, Marvell, and the Defense of Old Holiday Pastimes* (Chicago and London, 1986), p. 19.)

characterized by relatively stable structures of social hierarchy. The forest and pasture regions, which tended to harbour societies at once 'more individualistic' and 'less circumscribed by ancient custom', are scarcely touched upon by landscape poets.<sup>30</sup> Rather, the poets are concerned to reinforce the mythology of a stable order rooted in the past, in the face of pressing realities of socio-economic flux. The seigneurial landscape is thus shaped around the gentry's ideals of economic productivity and social control.

II

At this point, after the preceding consideration of broad patterns discerned throughout a wide range of texts, I wish to offer a more detailed analysis of two of the most prominent and influential seventeenth-century poets of the land, Ben Jonson and Robert Herrick. Jonson's 'To Penshurst' initiated the form of the country house poem, which fashioned idealized representations of rural estates in agreement with both Stuart social policy and classical ideals of the country life.<sup>31</sup> The socio-economic politics of the texts, however, have prompted critical disagreement. Country house poems have variously been read as reactionary pastoral, progressive georgic, and a subtle espousal of values 'indicative of the rise of capitalism'.<sup>32</sup> Against this diverse

30 Joan Thirsk, 'The Farming Regions of England', in *Agrarian History of England and Wales, Volume IV 1500-1640*, ed. Thirsk (Cambridge, 1967), pp. 1-15; David Underdown, *Revel, Riot, and Rebellion: Popular Politics and Culture in England 1603-1660* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 4-8.

31 The country house poem has stimulated an extraordinary volume of critical commentary. Among the most notable contributions are: Paul M. Cubeta, 'A Jonsonian Ideal: "To Penshurst"', *Philological Quarterly*, 42 (1963), 14-24; G.R. Hibbard, 'The Country House Poem of the Seventeenth Century', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 19 (1956), 159-74; and Charles Molesworth, 'Property and Virtue: The Genre of the Country-House Poem in the Seventeenth Century', *Genre*, 1 (1968), 141-57.

32 See esp. Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 28; Alastair Fowler, 'The Beginnings of English Georgic', in *Renaissance Genres*, ed. Barbara K. Lewalski (Cambridge, Mass., 1986), p. 122; and Wayne, *Penshurst*, p. 19.

backdrop of critical opinion, I want to consider the place of 'To Penshurst' within the developing patterns of rural poetics which have been the subject of the current investigation. I wish to focus in particular on Jonson's reappraisal of certain fundamental values of socio-economic order, as he attempts to negotiate a position between traditional ideas of rural society and 'the pressures of a new age'.<sup>33</sup>

Jonson's poem begins with a strategy of definition by negatives, which contrasts the conditions of Sir Robert Sidney's estate with those obtaining elsewhere:<sup>34</sup>

Thou art not, PENSURST, built to envious show,  
Of touch, or marble; nor canst boast a row  
Of polish'd pillars, or a roofof gold:  
Thou hast no lantherne, whereof tales are told;  
Or stayre, or courts; but stand'st an ancient pile,  
And these grudg'd at, art reverenc'd the while. (ll. 1-6)

Through the isolation of Penshurst as a rural ideal the poem admits a tone of social criticism familiar from Jonson's satiric drama, aimed here at landlords who have succumbed to the moral and economic corruption which he consistently identifies in society. His specific target in the opening lines is the ostentatious 'prodigy houses' popular among the aristocracy from the late sixteenth century.<sup>35</sup> Later in the poem he expands the range of his criticism to encompass the moral economy of the manorial estate, through an oblique reference to rural exploitation:

And though thy walls be of the country stone,  
They're rear'd with no mans ruine, no mans grone,  
There's none, that dwell about them, wish them downe.  
(ll. 45-7)

33 My formulation is adapted from Williams's argument that 'To Penshurst' celebrates 'an idea of rural society, as against the pressures of a new age' (*The Country and the City*, p. 28).

34 References are to *Ben Jonson*, vol. 8, pp. 93-6.

35 Hibbard, 'The Country House Poem', p. 160; William A. McClung, *The Country House in English Renaissance Poetry* (Berkeley, 1977), pp. 100-103.

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The comment gestures towards agrarian complaint, with a tone of despair in its appreciation of the nation as a whole. The succession of negatives, however, reinforces the overriding panegyric purpose of the poem, drawing the reader into the confined, ideal world of Penshurst.

As the opening passage turns away from the grotesque abuses of human culture, Jonson constructs Penshurst and its owners as physical manifestations of a fundamentally natural social and economic order.<sup>36</sup>

Thou joy'st in better markes, of soyle, of ayre  
Of wood, of water: therein thou art faire. (ll. 7-8)

The 'better markes' are the essential raw materials of life on a country estate, rooted in the elements of the natural world. From this basis 'To Penshurst' describes the estate's abundance of natural produce:

The lower land, that to the river bends,  
Thy sheepe, thy bullocks, kine, and calves doe feed:  
The middle grounds thy mares, and horses breed.  
Each banke doth yeeld thee coneyes; and the topps  
Fertile of wood, ASHORE, and SYDNEY's copp's,  
To crowne thy open table, doth provide  
The purpled pheasant, with the speckled side:  
The painted partrich lyes in every field,  
And, for thy messe, is willing to be kill'd.  
And if the high-swolne *Medway* faile thy dish,  
Thou hast thy ponds, that pay thee tribute fish,  
Fat, aged carps, that runne into thy net.

.....

Then hath thy orchard fruit, thy garden flowers,  
Fresh as the ayre, and new as are the houres.  
The earely cherry, with the later plum,  
Fig, grape, and quince, each in his time doth come:  
The blushing apricot, and woolly peach  
Hang on thy walls, that every child may reach. (ll. 22-44)

Jonson fashions a carefully organized landscape which combines ideals of profit and pleasure. While one of the

36 On the sustained opposition between nature and culture in the poem, see further Wayne, *Penshurst*, pp. 41-3.

classical models for the poem, Martial's Epigram iii 58, describes a significantly more busy and confused farm, Jonson's Penshurst is a self-sufficient estate characterized by a rich and beautiful order. Not only does the land 'yield' and 'provide', but the 'painted partrich ... is willing to be kill'd' and fish 'runne into thy net'. In the orchard the fruits observe an orderly 'time-sequence of ripening' which requires no more labour than the grasp of a child.<sup>37</sup>

Tenants and labourers are also incorporated into the controlling vision of natural abundance. Jonson makes no attempt to depict the physical performance of agrarian labour; rather, the inhabitants of the manor are represented in a procession to the country house:

all come in, the farmer, and the clowne:  
And no one empty-handed, to salute  
Thy lord, and lady, though they have no sute.  
Some bring a capon, some a rurall cake,  
Some nuts, some apples; some that thinke they make  
The better cheeses, bring 'hem; or else send  
By their ripe daughters, whom they would commend  
This way to husbands; and whose baskets beare  
An embleme of themselves, in plum, or pear.  
But what can this (more than expresse their love)  
Adde to thy free provisions, farre above  
The neede of such? (ll. 48-59)

On their visit, tenants and labourers 'salute' their lord and lady, yet bring no business – the only significant bond between the lord and the lower orders is that of love. But just as the poem emphasizes the traditional values of manorial community, it might be seen to write over manifestations of 'an emergent system of commodity exchange in which human relationships have ... begun to take on a commodity form'.<sup>38</sup> Thus the underlying economic bonds of tenure or employment are transfigured in the offerings of rural produce for the communal board. The depiction of their gifts as unnecessary additions to the 'free provisions' already

37 Cubeta, 'A Jonsonian Ideal', pp. 17, 21.

38 Wayne, *Penshurst*, p. 76.

on offer, and the associated suggestion of a relationship of dependence rather than reciprocity, serve to isolate the man of property through a contrast of comic otherness. 'The farmer', 'the clowne', and their 'ripe daughters' signal the poem's deft appropriation and containment of a georgic energy to characterize the productive estate owned and controlled by the poet's patron.

These lines further serve to define Penshurst as property. Under the doctrine of stewardship the labour of the lower orders is counterbalanced by the paternal responsibilities of the landlord. In Jonson's revision of this doctrine, the estate is eulogized as the home of the Sidney family, which the tenants and labourers approach as humble guests; the commodification of labour which accompanies this reification of property is aptly encoded in the image of women carrying 'An embleme of themselves, in plum, or peare'.<sup>39</sup> This reorientation of a powerful discourse of rural order is confirmed in the central scene of a feast. In the dining hall Penshurst's

liberall boord doth flow,  
 With all, that hospitalitie doth know!  
 Where comes no guest, but is allow'd to eate,  
 Without his feare, and of thy lords owne meat. (ll. 59-62)

The image provides a fitting climax to the preceding description of natural abundance. The community of the estate is depicted as 'not only well ordered, but powerfully integrated in the shared ritual of eating, and so in harmony with itself and its environment'.<sup>40</sup> Yet the scene also allows Jonson to focus briefly on the landlord and to assert his central importance within the manor. For while a concern for the land as property underpins the entire poem, Jonson consistently displaces this focus through the strategy of metonymy. Hence the repetitive use of 'thy' ostensibly refers to the land, rather than its owner; and the 'tribute fish' paid by the pond to the estate carries only a distant,

39 On the significance of 'home' in the poem, see Wayne, esp. pp. 23-8.

40 Heal, *Hospitality*, pp. 110-11.

pastoralized allusion to the economic power of the lord. At the meal, however, the food which has tumbled on to the table is clearly identified as 'thy lords owne', and Jonson's panegyric carries the implication that tenant, labourer and poet are allowed by their patron to 'eate, / Without ... feare'. In 'To Penshurst', as in much subsequent topographical verse, the vision of rural order revolves around a landlord whose power is accentuated by his generous decision to observe customs of hospitality.

The cultural moment of the country house poem was sustained into the following generation, when Jacobean anxiety about rural order was validated by the impending collapse of the country into civil war. Marcus, however, perceives in the later poems an intensifying tendency to inscribe the arts and values of the court upon the rural estate; 'the country house itself came unmoored from surrounding landscape, from its rootedness in a larger rural topography'.<sup>41</sup> Her argument accords with suggestions that in the shadow of revolution pastoral became ever more bound to royalist myths of peace and prosperity, while a georgic tradition was maintained rather in discourses of scientific and political reform.<sup>42</sup> But perceptions of a polarization between pastoral and georgic, as the armies formed for battle, surely belies the cultural complexity of a period of unprecedented turbulence. Indeed the rural poetry of the mid-century evidences a rich blend of pastoral and georgic strains.<sup>43</sup> As I have argued throughout this chapter, the long-term trend in the literature of the land was for the idyllic stasis of pastoral to be invigorated by a controlled infusion of expansive georgic energy. Although the vast majority of rural poetry from this period was shaped by the immediate anxieties of the royalist authors, we might

41 'Politics and Pastoral', p. 146. A similar argument has been made by Mary Ann C. McGuire, 'The Cavalier Country-House Poem: Mutations on a Jonsonian Tradition', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 19 (1979), 93-108.

42 Patterson reviews these arguments in *Pastoral and Ideology*, p. 138.

43 I am in agreement, here, with Low's conclusion to his long chapter on 'Georgic and Civil War' (*Georgic Revolution*, p. 294).

nonetheless trace a major literary trend which continued just below the surface of politicized topographical panegyric.

Some of the most important rural verse of this period was written by the royalist Robert Herrick, who slouched into a gloomy retirement as a Devon clergyman during the Interregnum.<sup>44</sup> In spite of his apparent personal preference for the city, Herrick's poetry has widely been associated with the construction – in the face of social, economic and political upheaval – of an idealized 'post-feudal agrarian image of "Merry England"'.<sup>45</sup> His poems of rural festivities, in particular, revive 'the notion of the "emerald isle," the enclosed garden, the second Eden in which mirth will flourish as it did before the Fall'.<sup>46</sup> But for all the innocence and idyllic beauty of Herrick's rural world, his is also a somewhat unsettled – and unsettling – version of English pastoral. His tendency to weave a strand of tough economic pragmatism into the enveloping fabric of rural celebration is epitomized by his closing direction to the rural labourers as they enjoy the lord's bounty in 'The Hock-cart, or Harvest home':

And, you must know, your Lords word's true,  
Feed him ye must, whose food fills you.  
And that this pleasure is like raine,  
Not sent ye for to drowne your paine,  
But for to make it spring againe. (p. 102)

The crude tone of 'man-management' that Raymond Williams discerns in these lines has consistently attracted the attention of critics concerned with Herrick's representation of a festive merry England.<sup>47</sup> As Peter Stallybrass writes, 'The lines are so radically ambivalent that they threaten to subvert the ethic of "communal reciprocity" which is central

44 References are to *Poetical Works*, ed. L.C. Martin (Oxford, 1956).

45 Marcus, 'Politics and Pastoral', p. 140; see further Marcus, *Politics of Mirth*, ch. 5.

46 Peter Stallybrass, "'Wee feaste in our Defense": Patrician Carnival in Early Modern England and Robert Herrick's "Hesperides"', *English Literary Renaissance*, 16 (1986), 239.

47 *The Country and the City*, p. 33.

to the rural idyll'.<sup>48</sup> Yet I would suggest that, far from being exceptional, this glance towards the socio-economic machinery which sustained the vision of pastoral delight is in many respects paradigmatic of Herrick's representation of agrarian England. For as one reads through his weighty 1648 collection *Hesperides*, a subdued but consistent strain of earthy materialism may be seen to agitate the enamelled pastoral veneer of his rural poems. In accordance with the literary trend observed throughout the present chapter, Herrick admits a controlled appreciation of georgic economics into his environment of rural profits and pleasures.<sup>49</sup>

*Hesperides* announces its intentions from the frontispiece.<sup>50</sup> The imagery of mythologized rural festivity which offsets the central bust of the author establishes a mood of pastoral delight in keeping with the evocative title; while the wreaths of poetic glory prepared for the poet give way on the facing title-page to a large woodcut illustration of a crown, signalling the book's commitment to the Stuarts. The subsequent 'Argument' of the collection fixes this visual imagery upon the English countryside:

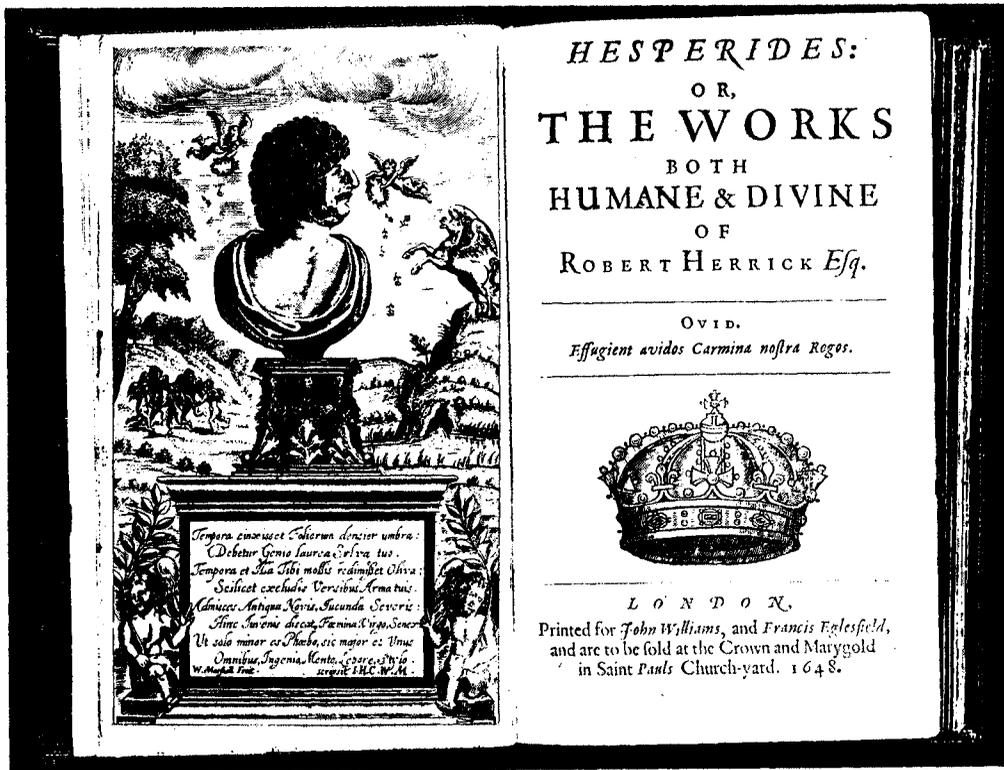
I SING of *Brooks*, of *Blossomes*, *Birds*, and *Bowers*  
Of *April*, *May*, of *June*, and *July-Flowers*.  
I sing of *May-poles*, *Hock-carts*, *Wassails*, *Wakes*,  
Of *Bride-grooms*, *Brides*, and of their *Bridall-cakes*. (p. 5)

48 "'Wee feaste in our Defense'", p. 247; see also Marcus, *Politics of Mirth*, p. 149.

49 Anthony Low argues, similarly, that Herrick adapted georgic for his poetry of rural delights. 'Herrick's georgic is significant not only because it is embodied in some of his finest poetry, but because it represents, at a surprisingly early period, some of the elements that would go into the georgic of the late Restoration and the eighteenth century. That georgic represents something of a compromise between Puritan enthusiasm for and Royalist rejection of the georgic mode – just as Whig politics represented something of a compromise between Puritan and Royalist ideologies' (*Georgic Revolution*, p. 273). The substance of my argument here is in agreement with that of Low; I have also been drawn, irresistibly, to several of the vibrant poems of rural activities that he considers.

50 Figure 1.

Figure 1



The introductory statement undoubtedly overstates the consistency of a miscellaneous collection of verse; yet it aptly describes the volume's predominant concern to pastoralize rural England.<sup>51</sup> The attention to the ephemeral beauties of native flowers heralds a chain of deftly-touched descriptive epigrams interspersed throughout the book. Herrick's espousal of the festive, in the subsequent lines, extends the governing tone of pastoral into the representation of rural labour and society: a strategy Herrick pursues throughout a number of longer poems, such as 'Corinna's going a Maying', 'The Wake' and 'The Wassaile'. In their immediate cultural context these poems endorse the 'politics of mirth' promoted in the cause of political and religious order by the Jacobean *Book of Sports* and the Caroline policies of Archbishop Laud.<sup>52</sup> Within the course of literary history traced here, meanwhile, Herrick's poetry of rural celebration may be seen to both confirm and extend the principal achievements of seventeenth-century rural poetics. Marcus claims that Herrick's 'economics of festival' effectively 'defuses newer ideas about how profit and labour are related by reintegrating commercial language into a larger structure in which profit is not measured primarily through money'.<sup>53</sup> Read in the contexts provided at once by the collection as a whole and the tradition of rural poetics, I would suggest further that Herrick's poetry indicates a cautious espousal of a dynamic georgic ethos, contained within a frame of pastoralized order. This interpretation might link the apparently discordant lesson at the conclusion of 'The Hock-cart' with a recurrent strand of georgic economics which runs throughout *Hesperides*. Rather than

51 The unity of the collection, compiled throughout a career which took Herrick from the periphery of the Stuart court to the rural parish of Dean Prior, remains a point of critical conjecture. Ann Baynes Coiro, in the face of centuries of Herrick criticism, argues convincingly for the 'integrity' of the volume in her recent study, *Robert Herrick's 'Hesperides' and the Epigram Book Tradition* (Baltimore and London, 1988), ch. 1.

52 This context – and the literature it nurtured – is perceptively explored by Marcus in *The Politics of Mirth*.

53 *Politics of Mirth*, p. 150; emphasis added.

insisting upon the authority of a fading socio-economic ideal, Herrick might then be seen to accommodate within his rural verse the interests of seventeenth-century landowners – royalist and puritan alike – in the improvement of their estates. I intend now to consider the significance of this strategy, first in a series of short poems which boldly counter the otherwise pervasive pastoralism of the volume, and then as it modifies the argument of the longer verse epistle, ‘The Country life’.

Nestled amidst the lyrics of love and celebrations of pastoral pleasures, *Hesperides* offers a subdued yet sustained argument of rural labour and improvement.<sup>54</sup> ‘A good Husband’ depicts a figure familiar from the tradition of husbandry writing developed over the preceding hundred years:

A Master of a house (as I have read)  
Must be the first man up, and last in bed:  
With the sun rising he must walk his grounds;  
See this, View that, and all the other bounds:  
Shut every gate; mend every hedge that’s torne,  
Either with old, or plant therein new thorne:  
Tread ore his gleab, but with such care, that where  
He sets his foot, he leaves rich *compost* there. (p. 259)

As Anthony Low observes, the poem begins with an allusion to a Horatian epigram, thus evoking a classicized mode of ‘gentlemanly georgic’.<sup>55</sup> But Low fails to recognize the poem’s place within a flourishing discourse of agrarian improvement. In the final line Herrick adapts the axiom introduced to English farmers in the sixteenth century by Conrad Heresbach’s *Foure Bookes of Husbandry*, that ‘the best dounge for the feelde is the maisters foote’.<sup>56</sup> He thus endorses an ethos of controlled improvement under the vigilant eye of the established landlord, who is vicariously

54 Cf. James S. Tillman’s more selective discussion of two verse epistles, in ‘Herrick’s Georgic Encomia’, in *Trust to Good Verses: Herrick Tercentenary Essays* (Pittsburg, 1978), pp. 149-57.

55 *Georgic Revolution*, p. 264.

56 Trans. Barnabe Googe (1577), f. 3<sup>a</sup>.

involved in the labour of agricultural production through his daily rounds of supervision. The particular concerns of this 'good husband', moreover, are determined by an ideal of personal property rather than communal subsistence. His 'view' scrupulously encompasses the 'bounds' of his estate: the poem's particular attention to gates and hedges reinforces the predominant concern for the physical enclosure of the master's property.<sup>57</sup>

Several shorter epigrams extend the volume's concern for profitably directed rural labour. Like the georgic poetry of the puritan George Wither, these poems often invite moral and religious applications; however their placement within the rural frame of *Hesperides* fixes them immediately in the native fields.<sup>58</sup> The taskmaster's tone is compressed into pithy moral aphorisms:

'Nothing Free-cost'

Nothing comes Free-cost here; *Jove* will not let  
His gifts go from him; if not bought with sweat. (p. 177)

'Labour'

Labour we must, and labour hard  
I' th *Forum* here, or *Vineyard*. (p. 380)

'No Paines, no Gaines'

If little labour, little are our gaines:  
Mans fortunes are according to his paines. (p. 253)

'First work, then wages'

Prepost'rous is that order, when we run  
To ask our wages, e're our work be done. (p. 241)

The verses combine a vital georgic energy with traces of a patrician detachment consistent with the closing lines of 'The Hock-cart'. If the play of religious metaphor in a poem such as 'First work, then wages' points towards the labour in faith of an Anglican gentleman, the economic signification suggests rather the doctrine of a commercially-oriented

57 Low similarly notes the importance of 'ownership and enclosure' in the poem (*Georgic Revolution*, p. 265).

58 On Wither, see Low, *Georgic Revolution*, pp. 201-15; McRae, *God Speed the Plough*, ch. 7.

producer. In line with seventeenth-century discourses of rural property and agrarian improvement, Herrick pursues the practical economics which underpin the prosperity of the 'good husband' in the English countryside.

Turning from these neglected epigrams to the verse epistle 'The Country life', Herrick's characteristic blend of pastoral and georgic, stasis and improvement, becomes fully apparent. As a paean to the 'Sweet Country life' of profits and pleasures the poem is in fact erected on a curious deceit, addressed to the courtier Endymion Porter rather than an established farmer. None the less Herrick's depiction of the rural landlord's life accords with the doctrine of 'A good Husband':

No, thy Ambition's Master-piece  
 Flies no thought higher than a fleece:  
 Or how to pay thy Hinds, and cleere  
 All scores; and so to end the yeere:  
 But walk'st about thine own dear bounds,  
 Not envying others larger grounds:  
 For well thou know'st, *'tis not th'extent  
 Of Land makes life, but sweet content.*  
 When now the Cock (the Plow-mans Horne)  
 Calls forth the lilly-wristed Morne;  
 Then to thy corn-fields thou dost goe,  
 Which though well soyl'd, yet thou dost know,  
 That the best compost for the Lands  
 Is the wise Masters Feet, and Hands.  
 There at the Plough thou find'st thy Teame,  
 With a Hind whistling there to them:  
 And cheer'st them up, by singing how  
 The Kingdoms portion *is the Plow.*  
 This done, then to th'enameld Meads  
 Thou go'st; and as thy foot there treads,  
 Thou seest a present God-like Power  
 Imprinted in each Herbe and Flower:  
 And smell'st the breath of great-ey'd Kine,  
 Sweet as the blossomes of the Vine. (pp. 229-30)

The exhortation to the courtier to suppress his ambition and draw solace from 'th'enameld Meads' is fundamentally pastoral, and prepares the reader for a subsequent catalogue

of rural festivities which will entertain with their 'Nut-browne mirth' (p. 231). Another version of Heresbach's aphorism about 'the best dounge for the feelde', however, highlights the poem's persistent assertion of a contained georgic vigour. Herrick's attention to the plough and ploughman, most notably, appropriates for rural poetics established icons from centuries of agrarian complaint. With the ploughman, here, fixed in a position of employment on Porter's estate, his activities lend a suitable vitality to the celebration of both the English fields and the political structure they are seen to sustain. 'The Kingdoms portion is the Plow.'

As 'The Country life' accumulates its rich catalogue of rural produce and activities, it gathers a momentum grounded in concerns of property. Herrick notes '*thine* own dear bounds', '*thy* corn-fields' and '*thy* Hinds'. Rural festivities are also figured as manifestations of the lord's power and bounty: '*Thy* Wakes', '*Thy* May-poles', '*Thy* Morris-dance', '*thy* Whitsun-ale', '*Thy* Sheering-feast', '*Thy* Harvest home', '*thy* Wassaile bowle' (pp. 230-1; emphasis added). In the wake of this oppressive coddling of the aristocratic addressee, the final turn in the poem towards those lower in the socio-economic hierarchy is arresting:

O happy life! if that their good  
 The Husbandmen but understood!  
 Who all the day themselves doe please,  
 And Younglings, with such sports as these. (p. 231)

The lines – not unlike the troublesome conclusion to festivities in 'The Hock-cart' – remind the reader of the labour-discipline which must underpin the profits and pleasures of the lord's life. Throughout 'The Country-life' the courtier had been depicted as himself a husbandman, whose rounds of supervision integrated him within the working life of his estate. But Herrick's final shift into a guarded authoritarian third-person signals his underlying concern with the business ethics of rural property. The true husbandmen – '*thy* Hinds' – must accept not only the festivities provided by the lord, but also the need to maintain his property through the curse of labour. In a manner which

foregrounds the ideology of property out of which seventeenth-century rural poetics were framed, Herrick yokes the celebration of rural life to a pointed reminder of the place of the unpropertied. As James Turner demonstrates in his study of contemporary topographical poetry, 'aesthetic conceptions of the countryside' were 'sustained by a coherent ideology of Nature and Place ... "Land" and "place" are equivalent to "propriety" – meaning in seventeenth-century English both *property* and *knowing one's place*.'<sup>59</sup>

### III

Herrick's enamelled fields of rural property have their roots as much in literary traditions as in English topography. The central cohesive force in the development of a native poetics of the land was the pastoral mode, consolidated in the age of Elizabeth around a mood of otium and a celebration of the idyllic beauties and pleasures of the country. But whereas sixteenth-century pastoral at best admitted occasional gestures towards the native countryside, by the mid-seventeenth century the pastoral mode itself was subsumed by consistent poetic attention to naturalistic detail and sustained topographical representation. In the wealth of rural poetry written in the first half of the century, I have argued, poets reassessed previously dominant ideals of moral economy. The result is a lively mix of literary modes. Pastoral consistently provides a frame with its associations of beauty, bounty and natural order; while the driving imperative of rural property admits at once a concern for local particularity and a georgic spirit of labour and improvement.

The Civil War undoubtedly effected a certain polarization in rural poetics, as royalists retreated to the order and stasis of pastoral while parliamentarians seized upon the reformist discourse of georgic. But while this perhaps retarded the apparent trends in poetry of the land, the writings of Herrick indicate some of the ways in which a committed royalist

<sup>59</sup> *Politics of Landscape*, p. 5.

might still incorporate within his work a muted tenor of improvement. In this respect his work also presages the new strains of rural poetics generated after the Restoration. For the dual victories of the interests of constitutional monarchy in 1660 and 1688 signalled a fresh affirmation of the cultural significance of property as a political and socio-economic force. The power of the propertied over the king was enshrined in the wake of the Glorious Revolution; new laws enforced the principle of primogeniture, so as to ensure the maintenance of large estates; while another series of laws proclaimed a whole catalogue of new capital offences in the cause of protecting rights of property.<sup>60</sup> The chief apologist of the new order was John Locke, who argued 'that the unfettered accumulation of money, goods and land was sanctioned by Nature and, implicitly, by God. ... "Government," declared Locke, "has no other end but the preservation of property."' <sup>61</sup>

Indicative of the development of rural poetry into the Restoration is the work of Abraham Cowley, a royalist whose poetry of the 1650s proffers an uneasy accommodation with the Protectorate. On the Restoration, as the landed turned with renewed attention to rural profits as well as pleasures, Cowley helped to define the revised ethics and aesthetics of rural property. In 1661 he proposed the foundation of an agricultural college structured according to the divisions of Virgil's *Georgics*; and three years later he was rewarded, in part, by his election to the 'Georgical Committee' of the Royal Society. His *Essays*, published from this position of cultural orthodoxy in 1667, look back upon the uncertain decades through which his generation had lived at the same time that they look forward to a buoyant and prosperous future. The miscellaneous collection of prose and verse

60 On primogeniture laws, see Tom Williamson and Liz Bellamy, *Property and Landscape: A Social History of Land Ownership and the English Countryside* (London, 1987), p. 122; on crimes against property, Douglas Hay, 'Property, Authority and the Criminal Law', in *Albion's Fatal Tree: Crime and Society in Eighteenth-Century England*, ed. Hay and others (London, 1975), pp. 17-63.

61 Hay, 'Property, Authority and the Criminal Law', p. 18.

includes Cowley's own arguments alongside translations of the principal classical sources which had influenced ideals of rural living throughout the seventeenth century.<sup>62</sup> The book deftly blends concerns of retirement and improvement, gardens of pleasure and fields of profit, as it surveys 'the *employments* of a Country life' (p. 401; emphasis added) – its driving spirit captured in the axiom that the 'pleasantest work of Human Industry [is] the Improvement of something which we call ... Our Own' (p. 421). At the dawn of a new era in English history, this ingenuous conflation of pastoral and property, classicized poetics and practical economics, highlights at once the complexity and fundamental momentum of rural poetics. As the propertied looked towards an age of sustained political stability, they were freed to revive and reinforce the subdued georgic vigour which had characterized the overtly pastoralized rural poetics of the previous decades.

62 In a cluster of passages devoted to rural concerns, Cowley moves from a prose essay 'Of Agriculture', through five verse translations from Virgil and Horace, to a poem on 'The Garden' (*Essays, Plays and Sundry Verses*, ed. A.R. Waller (Cambridge, 1906), pp. 400-28).