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# ROBERT BLOOMFIELD

Lyric, Class, and the Romantic Canon

Edited by

Simon White, John Goodridge,  
and Bridget Keegan



Figure 1. Portrait of Robert Bloomfield by W. Ridley, stipple (after S. Drummond); reproduced in *The Monthly Mirror* (1800).



Lewisburg

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Collection of Clare's Library. Clare probably received his copy some time in 1824 and he lent his copy to Fanny Knowlton in August 1825 (Clare, *Natural History Prose Writings*, 253). He mentions the volume in a letter to Weston of March 7, 1825; referring to the "Poetical tributes," he writes "I was not aware that his 'Remains' would have had such insertions or I should have sent them to his daughter" (*Letters of John Clare*, 322). The word "them" refers to his three sonnets to Bloomfield.

31. *Remains of Robert Bloomfield*, 1:51, lines 11-17.
32. G. F. Graham, *A Book about Words* (London, 1869), 159.
33. John Lucas, "Introduction," in Robert Bloomfield, *Selected Poems*, eds. John Goodridge and John Lucas (Nottingham, UK: Trent Editions, 1998), x-xi
34. Hazlitt, "Lecture on Thomson and Cowper," 5:95.
35. Jacqueline Pearson, *Women's Reading in Britain, 1730-1835: A Dangerous Recreation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 189.
36. MS A37: 49, Peterborough Museum.
37. See John Clare, *Poems of the Middle Period, 1822-1837*, eds. Eric Robinson, David Powell and P. M. S. Dawson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 130-34
38. Northampton Central Library, manuscript 3: 194, lines 159-66.
39. MS A40: 131, lines 136-44, Peterborough Museum.
40. *Ibid.*, lines 145-47, 150-52.
41. Manuscript 1:20, lines 41-56, Northampton Central Library.
42. MS A54: 400, lines 4-5, Peterborough Museum.
43. *Ibid.*, 399, lines 15-18.

## Georgic Ecology

Donna Landry

A peasant becomes fond of his pig and is glad to salt away its pork. What is significant, and is so difficult for the urban stranger to understand, is that the two statements in that sentence are connected by an and not by a but.

—John Berger, *About Looking* (1991)

I WISH TO MAKE A CASE FOR THE PARTICULAR USEFULNESS OF A GEORGIC frame in analyzing the writing of the English rural laboring classes. Especially when the history of ecological thinking is on the agenda, these writers show us a rather different side of agrarian capitalism from that represented by the imperial georgic of Thomson, Somerville, Dyer, Grainger, et al.<sup>1</sup> Their innovations can best be grasped by looking at their work as attempting to hold, not without considerable tension, both pastoral and antipastoral moments together within the georgic.

Although the georgic and the pastoral are closely related genres, the georgic lens apprehends human relations with the natural world differently from the pastoral. Within the georgic ethos, both nature and humans are going to be used, and to be used up. John Berger's peasant exemplifies a certain georgic pragmatism usually absent from the relations between shepherds and their flocks idealized by the eclogue.

The distinction between georgic and pastoral, however, is by no means a hard and fast one. The georgic and pastoral may modulate into one another within the same work. Within the georgic ethos, individuals are decidedly mortal. But unless prevented by overweening human ambition and intervention, we are assured by georgic poets, natural processes will prevail and species renew themselves—a pastoral sentiment. "The rich manure that drenching winter made, / Which pl'd near home, grows green with many a weed," makes "A promis'd nutriment for Autumn's seed."<sup>2</sup> Robert Bloomfield's Giles will delight in his frolicking lambs as wholeheart-

fellow-feeling will not prevent him from delivering them to the butcher. For a georgic worker within the agrarian economy of eighteenth-century verse, "Compassion" for one's animal companions may have tempered instrumentality with kindness, but it remained an insufficient argument against necessity, including the sordid business of producing meat for the table:

Clos'd are their eyes, their fleeces drench'd in gore;  
Nor can Compassion, with her softest notes,  
Withhold the knife that plunges through their throats.  
("Spring," 350-52)

Giles's tenderness toward the animals he tends recalls pastoral harmony. He does not merely feed but always "pats the jolly sides of those he loves" ("Winter," 148). But however animally minded and compassionate he may be, Giles cannot prevent his animals from working, suffering, dying, being eaten by humans, or being fed to fox hounds. Truly, "The Farmer's life displays in every part / A moral lesson to the sensual heart" ("Summer," 1-2), and it is a lesson in how economic and ecological necessity must continually override "sensual" feeling. The georgic ethos rewrites the pastoral as fantasy, and itself as pragmatic reality, but it cannot exist without feeding on the very pastoral it repudiates.

This intrinsic generic modulation and even instability have been reflected in critical disagreement over how to describe such mixed works as Bloomfield's *The Farmer's Boy* (1800), Stephen Duck's *The Thresher's Labour* (1730), Mary Collier's *The Woman's Labour* (1739), and much of the verse of John Clare. What I have chosen to term "plebeian georgic" has been described as "proletarian anti-pastoral" by John Goodridge.<sup>3</sup> The names point to different emphases within our approaches. Emphasizing the georgic as the containing genre enables us most acutely, I think, to perceive the difference that performance of manual labor—and the tasks of traditional husbandry above all—may have made to the deployment of ideological and aesthetic conventions for representing country life.

Whether deep, social, historical, or bioregional ecology is being professed,<sup>4</sup> most ecological theorists today agree that a critique of Enlightenment thinking with regard to the instrumental use of nature by humanity is now urgently called for. Some new form of human responsibility toward ecological imperatives, some new mode of reciprocity, is needed. Exactly what shape this should take varies, from deep ecologist Dave Foreman's call for "a return to the Pleistocene," to the socialist Ted Benton's conclusion that a prop-

erty social ecology would recognize the human species as one species among others, at once subject to ecological constraints but, equally, responsible for devising solutions to globally destructive—maladaptive—behavior.<sup>5</sup>

The literary-critical response to the challenge of ecological criticism has most often been generically pastoral, not georgic.<sup>6</sup> Everything natural, at least everything in the countryside, is meant to be lovely, and, incidentally, the earth might be saved by a change of heart. If we are all more or less tourists now in relation to the countryside, as John Barrell has argued, we are also all more or less urban pastoralists, more accustomed to looking at nature than to hunting and gathering, and often not quite sure what we are looking at.<sup>7</sup> The georgic ethos of a necessary, but not purely instrumental, *consumption* of nature—not just a reverent contemplation of it—depends upon a sensibility now alien to most citizens of the metropolis. Yet this very georgic ethos of conservationist stewardship and use is one with which we shall need to come to terms once more if we are to negotiate a more realistic—or ecologically sustainable, to use the buzzword—relation to the natural world than our present one.<sup>8</sup> Our present relation is unthinkingly instrumental and unthinkingly pastoral at the same time.

So accustomed are we to this contradiction that we no longer even notice it, an effect which literary historian Michael McKeon describes as a product of early nineteenth-century Romanticism, "the profound assimilation of pastoral inquiry through its deliberate and increasingly imperceptible application to all experience."<sup>9</sup> Surrounded by landscapes of urban decay and sprawl, industrial factory farms, and monocultural prairies of petrochemically fertilized and pesticide-protected crops, we fabricate a myth of unspoiled greenness in which humans have never found, and need not ever find, cause to intervene.<sup>10</sup>

The agrarian sociologist Howard Newby has rightly targeted a certain pastoral mindset as responsible for much urban misunderstanding of social relations and economic imperatives within rural communities, with the result that government policies have studiously ignored the views and aesthetic preferences of the rural working classes. As Newby notes, today's farmers and farm workers "maintain a functional aesthetic which is totally at variance with the prevailing urban view."<sup>11</sup> Instead of appreciating romantically picturesque countryside characterized by scraggly hedgerows, rutted lanes, and weatherworn and tumbledown barns and cottages, all features beloved of urban visitors since the days of William Gilpin, farmers and workers regard "a 'clean' weed-free field as an ob-



ject of consummate beauty," are "impatient with the disfiguring clutter of useless hedgerows and trees," and approve "the hygienic design of modern farm buildings."<sup>12</sup>

In this respect, at least, today's farmers and farmworkers would seem to inhabit a rather different, more instrumental, less aesthetically-minded, world from their early-modern counterparts. Who can forget Clare's critique of the instrumentalism of capitalist agricultural improvement—"And muse and marvel where we may / Gain mars the landscape every day?"<sup>13</sup> Clare can be read as attempting to imagine precisely the kind of reciprocity envisaged by ecocritics when he spoke on behalf of nature in the voice of a piece of land, Swordy Well. This piece of common land knows itself in terms recognizable from Goldsmith's georgic lament in "The Deserted Village" (1770): "There was a time my bit of ground / Made freemen of the slave" (177-78).<sup>14</sup> Clare's appropriation of the voice of the common is not a pastoral fantasy, but a georgic one. Human and nonhuman nature are mutually imbricated, for good or ill, and benevolent stewardship is a social good.

Clare characterizes the land as not entirely other—not an instance of a nonhuman nature, from which signs of human activity or intervention are excluded. From Clare's perspective as an agricultural laborer, it is abundantly clear, as it might not be from a metropolitan intellectual vantage point, that there is no such thing as "pristine" nature, and that "No spot on the earth is unaffected by humans," as the historical ecologist Carole L. Crumley puts it.<sup>15</sup> For Clare, Swordy Well is both natural and social. The land recognizes that it and humans are bound together in necessary use and possible mutual benefit. Swordy Well does not seek to become wilderness, the ultimate space of wish fulfillment for modern urban society, but to remain a wild common, traditionally used by humans and other animals for grazing, botanizing, gathering fuel, and general foraging.

However, the land's hopes for a continuing sustainable relationship with human society, though vividly figured, prove unsustainable. The triumph of rural capitalism is assured, necessitating the common's lament. The moment of human excess, of maximal extraction that exceeds any sense of reciprocity or sustainability, has arrived. And that is what will deprive Swordy Well of all past identity as a wild common, as commoners' grazing land, as a place of leisure and amenity for both humans and animals, of everything but a name.

Though Im no man yet any wrong

And I am glad if een a song  
Gives me the room to speak  
Ive got among such grubbling geer  
And such a hungry pack  
If I brought harvests twice a year  
They'd bring me nothing back

My mossy hills gains greedy hand  
And more then greedy mind  
Levels into a russet land  
Nor leaves a bent behind  
In summers gone I bloomed in pride  
Folks came for miles to prize  
My flowers that bloomed no where beside  
And scarce believed their eyes

Yet worried with a greedy pack  
They rend and delve and tear  
The very grass from off my back  
Ive scarce a rag to wear  
Gain takes my freedom all away  
Since its dull suit I wore  
And yet scorn vows I never pay  
And hurts me more and more

And if I could but find a friend  
with no delect to sham  
Who'd send me some few sheep to tend  
And leave me as I am  
To keep my hills from cart and plough  
And strife of mongerel men  
And as spring found me find me now  
I should look up agen

And save his Lordships woods that past  
The day of danger dwell  
Of all the fields I am the last  
That my own face can tell  
Yet what with stone pits delvying holes  
And strife to buy and sell  
My name will quickly be the whole  
Thats left of swordy well

(41-44, 129-144, 193-208)

Gain, the bane of Clare's existence in that it mars the landscape in which he lives and moves and has his being, reappears here precisely as maximal extraction of productivity from the land. This ex-



traction is achieved through enclosure, to be sure, and in the wider sense of the term that Barrell has in mind when he notes how the parish of Helpston was opened up and its roads straightened out as well as its open fields divided into square parcels, newly fenced and hedged.<sup>16</sup> The cart of rationalized transport, taking stones from the quarry, very likely for road building, figures alongside the plough in the pains of Swordy Well. But more directly the land protests not so much enclosure per se, as its accompanying phenomena: the grubbing up of the local ecosystem as a habitat and food supply for indigenous animals, plants, and humans, and the elimination of common rights of grazing, botanizing, fuel gathering, camping, tramping, aesthetic appreciating, and wandering by the way.

Clare laments in the voice of Swordy Well, but the land in turn laments in the voice of a fox torn apart by a "hungry" and "greedy" "pack" who "worry" and "rend" and "tear," as well as "delve" the very grass from off the common's back. Not a pack of hounds, we notice, but a "mongerel" pack of curs figures the improvers. With the exception of "his Lordships woods," all surrounding land will now have been improved. The only uncultivated land will be this residue of the old sporting culture. His Lordship's woods will very likely continue to harbor beasts of chase as well as game—foxes as well as pheasants. In 1825, Clare wrote, "Went to see the Fox cover in Etton field sown with furze some years ago which now present a novel appearance & thrive better then on their native heath tho the place is low ground."<sup>17</sup> Gorse covers please the squirrelarchy, but also the laborer whose pastime is natural history, who finds an "amenity value" in the rural landscape as well as a livelihood.<sup>18</sup> Bloomfield celebrated in his "Hunting-Song" (1802) how fox hunting opened up the workday agricultural landscape to an enactment of human liberty through the music and speed of the chase:

3

Ye Meadows, hail the coming throng;  
Ye peaceful Streams that wind along,

Repeat the Hark-away:

Far o'er the Downs, ye Gales that sweep,  
The daring Oak that crowns the steep,

The roaring peal convey.

4

The chiming notes of chearful Hounds,  
Hark! how the hollow Dale resounds;  
The sunny Hills how gay.<sup>19</sup>

Even laborers might exult in this outbreak of sport that reclaimed the landscape as a place not of labor solely, but of recreation too.

In its early modern form as a "Country Contentment," to use Gervase Markham's phrase, hunting as represented by treatises such as George Gascoigne's *Noble Arte of Venerie or Hunting* (1575), depended, like sustainable agriculture, upon human stewardship of renewable resources and conservation of habitats and food supplies for particular species, requiring knowledge of the whole ecosystem.<sup>20</sup> Hunting, like georgic notions of cultivation as requiring conservation and stewardship rather than maximal extraction for the market, required both the consumption of resources and their safeguarding and replenishment. Hunting uses up individual animals, but coupled with conservationist practice, including attending to other species with which one particular species is ecologically networked, hunting can help protect the ecosystem of a place.

Clare did not write on behalf of sporting culture but he could not shift it from his mind. The language, even the rhythms of the chase, were intrinsic to his sense of song and verse making, and images from the field often haunted his imagination.<sup>21</sup> In his best natural history poems, Clare empathized with the animals, birds, and plants he described. But he imagined them in a social relation with humans determined by necessity, in which hunting and shooting and poaching were facts of life. Hence Clare described the fox—who escaped from the shepherd, his dog, and the ploughman, by playing dead and then finding a badger's den to hole up in, "safe from dangers way"—as living "to chase the hounds another day," turning the ritual of hunting upside down.<sup>22</sup> And when Clare characterized a hare's life as anxious, the anxiety stemmed not from the hare's being hunted, but from fear of the harvesting scythe:

While from the rustling scythe the haunted hare

Scampers circuitous with startled ears

Prickt up then squat—as bye

She brushes to the woods<sup>23</sup>

The hare is "haunted" by human activities, but not so much "hunted" as terrified by the sharp blade's rustle in the corn. The scarcity of hares in Britain today can be attributed more to agricultural methods, especially the use of the combine harvester, which kills hundreds of young hares, than to hare hunting.<sup>24</sup> Predicting with uncanny accuracy the hare's historical fate, Clare gives us the hare's escape from the scythe, not from hounds.

In a book which Jonathan Bate heralded in 1995 as the "most important work of literary criticism yet published in the 1990s,"

Robert Pogue Harrison represented Clare as both scandalously undervalued by the literary establishment and as "to this day the most authentic and inalienable voice of modern literature."<sup>25</sup> Bate himself attributes the undervaluation of Clare to "politically-conscious Romantic criticism," typified by Jerome McGann's critique of "the Romantic ideology."<sup>26</sup> I would attribute it, rather more as Harrison would, to the urban pastoralism of most metropolitan citizens. This very formation has assured both the undervaluation of Clare's verse and the popular denigration of hunting and other field sports.

Given the endangered status of many wild animals and birds in Britain today, dislike of killing for sport is understandable on the part of a wildlife-revering public. Conservation and Killing ("culling") are in contradiction when a species is struggling for survival, as many species of wildlife now are, that struggle itself a consequence of loss of habitats and food supplies achieved by a maximally extractive and chemically dependent agriculture. This development has obscured what would still have been apparent to Clare's generation, as it had been to Gilbert White's—the longstanding relation between field sports and natural history.<sup>27</sup> The georgic ethic of stewardship, of responsible and sustainable agriculture, consumption, and conservation, which so preoccupied early modern writers, informed early natural history writing such as White's field work at Selborne, and was inseparable from Clare's vision of Swordy Well, has much to teach us.<sup>28</sup>

But there comes a moment in the plebeian georgic, as in the proletarian antipastoral, when not all losses can be recouped. Some excess or rupture brings the notion of perpetually renewable cycles to crisis. One instance of unrecuperable loss is "lovely Poll's" madness in Bloomfield's *The Farmer's Boy*, a form of social wastage about which nothing can be done except to mourn it ("Autumn," 109–76). This episode echoes uncannily the description of mad "Louisa" in "Clifton Hill," the ambitious topographical poem that closes Ann Yearsley's first volume of verse, *Poems, on Several Occasions* (1785), as well as Cowper's "craz'd" Kate in book 1 of *The Task*, published in the same year.<sup>29</sup>

Clifton Hill in January is the Bristol Milkwoman's Cooper's or Grongar Hill, her Windsor-Forest. It is an unimproved agricultural landscape providing rough common grazing, with craggy St. Vincent's Rocks and Leigh Wood, a dense dark wood containing venerable trees, for contrast. Yearsley's Clifton Hill offers solitude to the rambler, and civic and maritime-commercial prospect views, not views of castles or great country houses. However high the climb,

Lactilla, Yearsley's cowkeeping and milkselling persona, identifies herself with the low, though not the unindustrious or the vulgar.

Like Clare's, Yearsley's was a story of the dispossession of yeomen and cottagers through economic and agricultural change.<sup>30</sup> Mary Waldron presumes that to be "thoughtful and intellectual," as Yearsley was, made her "in the rural community but not of it."<sup>31</sup> Certainly writing verse rendered her exceptional, as Clare was exceptional, among the industrious and respectable who lived by their labors, not wholly dependent upon a wage. In "Clifton Hill," Lactilla self-deprecatingly represents herself as a performer of the monotonous manual tasks of small-scale husbandry in harsh conditions, in sympathy with her favorite cow and with small creeping creatures in the undergrowth. She expects to be condescended to by middle- and upper-class readers, and resents it. Hers is the voice of neither a sportswoman nor a "rough clown"—the chap of "ruthless soul" "whose gun destroys" when he shoots a "beauiteous red-breast" (23–29).

The poem combines pastoral gratitude to the landscape for recreating the poet—not least through the eventual return of spring's "spontaneous flowers" (38), which will "wake the frozen soul again to love" (44)—with an anti-field sports rhetoric familiar from James Beattie's *The Minstrel* of 1772:

Lo! where the stripling, wrapt in wonder, roves  
Beneath the precipice o'er hung with pine;  
And sees, on high, amidst th' encircling groves,  
From cliff to cliff the foaming torrents shine:  
While waters, woods, and winds, in concert join,  
And Echo swells the chorus to the skies.  
Would Edwin this majestic scene resign  
For aught the huntsman's puny craft supplies?  
Ah! no: he better knows great Nature's charms to prize.<sup>32</sup>

Already in the early 1770s, the proper prizing of nature's charms was to be had through hill walking, an activity directly counterposed to hunting and shooting.

Yearsley counterposes herself to nearly everything except animals, some landscapes, and mad "Louisa" (206), fending off anticipated criticism from uncomprehending audiences, both "Grosean"—wealthy, satirical—and "clumsy"—rough and vulgar (93, 97, 191, 192). St. Vincent's Rocks are her escape from georgic necessity. She can soothe the sheep up there without responsibility or guilt since cows provide her livelihood:

Here nibbling flocks of scanty herbage gain  
 A meal penurious from the barren plain;  
 Crop the low niggard bush; and, patient, try  
 The distant walk, and every hillock nigh:  
 Some bask, some bound, nor terrors ever know,  
 Save from the human form, their only foe.  
 Ye bleating innocents! dispel your fears,  
 My woe-struck soul in all your troubles shares;  
 'Tis but Lactilla—fly not from the green:  
 Long have I shar'd with you this guiltless scene.  
 'Tis mine to wander o'er the dewy lawn,  
 And mark the pallid streak of early dawn;  
 Lo! the grey dusk that fill'd the vacant space,  
 Now fleets, and infant light pursues the chace;

(100-114)

Leigh Wood similarly offers the poet a refuge in its wildness, its resistance to agricultural improvement: the wood "scorns the hand of Toil," boasting what conservationists now seek to protect as veteran trees:

Its lovely verdure scorns the hand of Toil.  
 Here the deep green, and here the lively plays,  
 The russet birch, and ever blooming bays;  
 The vengeful black-thorn, of wild beauties proud,  
 Blooms beauteous in the gloomy-chequer'd crowd:  
 The barren elm, the useful seeding oak,  
 Whose hamadryad ne'er should feel the stroke  
 Of axe relentless, 'till twice fifty years  
 Have crown'd her woodland joys, and fruitful cares.

(157-65)

Observed at ground level, Yearsley's vision of animal nature consists of the skulking, the poisonous, and the low:

The pois'nous reptiles here their mischiefs bring,  
 And thro' the helpless sleeper dart the sting;  
 The toad evenom'd, hating human eyes,  
 Here springs to light, lives long, and aged dies.  
 The harmless snail, slow-journeying, creeps away,  
 Sucks the young dew, but shuns the bolder day.  
 (Alas! if transmigration should prevail,  
 I fear Lactilla's soul must house in snail.)  
 The long-nosed mouse, the woodland rat is here,  
 The sightless mole, with nicely-pointed ear;

The timid rabbit hails th' impervious gloom,  
 Eludes the dog's keen scent, and shuns her doom.

(166-77)

As Waldron observes, "These are the animals least likely to be perceived by urban readers; Yearsley is their messenger."<sup>33</sup> What then might Yearsley mean by "The sightless mole, with nicely pointed ear" at line 175? Moles *have* no external ears. Shrews do, and voles do—though neither is "sightless" in the way that a mole might seem to be, because its eyes are buried in protective fur.<sup>34</sup> Yearsley is fully immersed in rural folk culture rather than scientific vocabulary. Aggressive snakes or adders and poisonous toads are the stuff of folklore. But expressing the mole's sensitivity to vibrations as "pointed" hearing is nearer the mark. This is how moles are *rurally* popularly understood to cope with their limited vision and living underground. As Kenneth Mellanby observes, "There are several authentic accounts of captive moles being taught to come to feed when called by the human voice or by ringing a bell, and alarm can be caused by various and not very loud noises."<sup>35</sup> Notice too we have here not the gentlemanly hare, but the commoner's rabbit, who evades being coursed and killed by a dog doubtless belonging to yet another "rough clown."

Yearsley identifies with animals as needy and desiring fellow creatures, fellow subjects, if you will, but close scrutiny of the naturalistic sort fails to hold her attention for long, and she is constantly fighting off depression. "The hoarded hay-stack shall your woes assuage," she says to the cattle at line 203, implying, "if only it were so simple to assuage mine!" The closest she had come to finding actual solace occurred during the contemplation of the "lovely meads" at line 196:

Ah, lovely meads! my bosom lighter grows,  
 Shakes off her huge oppressive weight of woes,  
 And swells in guiltless rapture; ever hail,  
 The tufted grove, and the low-winding vale!

(196-99)

And that glimpse of rural beauty in passing led to her telling the cattle to shut up, "Low not, ye herds, your lusty Masters bring / The crop of summer" (200-201), which in turn reminded her of mad Louisa, who dwelt in that hay-stack for three years. Yearsley keeps turning from Clifton Hill as it is to the human stories and reflections each scene generates in her memory—memories of her

mother, of the fugitive foreigner Louisa, and possibly, Waldron speculates, of her own lost love.<sup>36</sup>

Louisa's story of thwarted passion, incarceration in a convent by a vengeful father, escape, and madness that can only find relief in wandering out of doors—a kind of intimation of Wordsworthian Ruined Cottageism—is excessive, exorbitant. It overwhelms the topography of Clifton Hill, enacting the disintegration Lacilla cannot afford to have happen to herself, and typifying the perils for women in what she has observed of polite society at the Hotwells. The cause of the female invalidism that drives so many to a spa cure is the "Indolence" (140) produced by following the dictates of "Fashion." "Thine, Fashion, is the crime, / Fell Dissipation does the work of time" (154–55). If Lacilla's life is full of hardship and oppressive woes, at least she does not suffer from the diseases of the idle rich. Her daily trudging over Clifton Hill provides a cottager's traditional insurance against such ills.

Louisa has suffered from paternal tyranny and erotic deprivation as a woman of the propertied elite, but her dispossession—of her liberty and her rationality—has had a leveling effect. Louisa and the poet are equally haunted by "Memory," which "'tis a strain, / Which fills my soul with sympathetic pain," Lacilla laments, then banishes "Remembrance": "Remembrance, hence, give thy vain struggles o'er, / Nor swell the line with forms that live no more" (293–96). The "strain" or internal struggle imposed by remembering, by filling the mind with "forms that live no more," as opposed to dwelling on present necessities, has proved too much. The poem ends. It appears that the "strain" of memory was also poetry itself, Lacilla's voice.

There is a spectre haunting Clifton Hill, and it both is and is not Lacilla, industrious cowkeeper and milk-seller. Louisa is Lacilla's dysfunctional alternative, the social wastage and disabling melancholy that she resolutely banishes.

Yearsley's social and moral view of Clifton Hill belongs more to Raymond Williams's definition of "the green language" as the mark of social alienation than to modern ecological accounts of habitats and bioregions, particularized and scrutinized for their own sake.<sup>37</sup> Yearsley is no field naturalist in the manner of White or Clare. Nor does she give social historical evidence of agricultural practice from a laborer's point of view in the manner of Bloomfield, Duck, or Collier. John Goodridge has sensibly criticized as reductive the preoccupation with authentic testimony in the study of laboring-class writers, reminding us not to neglect the literariness of their work.<sup>38</sup> What we cannot help but learn from this poem, however, is that

from Lacilla's vantage point, the georgic binding together through stewardship and reciprocity of humans and animals, and indeed of humans and humans, is constantly under threat of human violation. Yearsley exposes how the georgic ethos was always precariously balanced between necessity and thoughtless violence, between sustainable needs and greed. That is no reason for neglecting it. The consolations of pastoral are no less fugitive.

#### NOTES

Berger, *About Looking* (New York: Vintage, 1991), 7.

1. See Karen O'Brien, "Imperial Georgic, 1660–1789," in *The Country and the City Revisited: England and the Politics of Culture, 1550–1850*, eds. Gerald MacLean, Donna Landry, and Joseph P. Ward (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 160–79. Dryden's translations had helped transform seventeenth-century Virgilian conventions and topoi into a national kind of poetry; see Gerald MacLean, *Time's Witness: Historical Representation in English Poetry, 1603–1660* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 64–73.

2. *The Farmer's Boy: A Rural Poem*, in *Four Books* (London: Printed by T. Bensley for Vernor and Hood, et al, 1800), in Robert Bloomfield, *Collected Poems, 1800–1822*, ed. Jonathan N. Lawson (Gainesville, FL: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1971), "Spring," 188–90.

3. John Goodridge remarks that Duck and Collier "participated in the georgic tradition," but emphasizes that "theirs was effectively a counter-movement, refusing not only the idealisation of labour in the georgic, but the whole edifice of pastoral verse and pastoral attitudes." He concludes that a "satisfactory title for their genre has not been formulated." *Rural Life in Eighteenth-Century English Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 6.

4. A "bioregion" may be identified "by its mountain ranges and rivers, its vegetation, weather patterns or soil types, or its patterns of animal habitats, whether birds, ground mammals, or humans." Brian Tokar, *The Green Alternative: Creating an Ecological Future* (San Pedro, CA: R. & E. Miles, 1987), 27.

5. For Foreman, see Steve Chase, "Introduction: Whither the Radical Ecology Movement?" in Murray Bookchin and Dave Foreman, *Defending the Earth: A Dialogue Between Murray Bookchin and Dave Foreman* (Boston: South End Press, 1991), 7–24; this passage on 21. Ted Benton, *Natural Relations: Ecology, Animal Rights and Social Justice* (London: Verso, 1993), 194–221.

6. Jonathan Bate's *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1991) and *The Song of the Earth* (London: Picador, 2000) are exemplary in this respect.

7. John Barrell, *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place, 1730–1840: An Approach to the Poetry of John Clare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 187.

8. Richard Pickard has recently argued for what he calls "Augustan ecology," a contradictory discourse derived on the one hand from eighteenth-century "georgic ecology," a "land ethic that seeks to accommodate society's need to consume natural resources with nature's need not to be consumed," and from contemporary protests against this very "attitude of compromise" on the other. "Augustan



Ecology: Environmental Attitudes in Eighteenth-Century Poetry" (PhD diss., University of Alberta, 1998), 16-17.

9. Michael McKeon, "The Pastoral Revolution" in *Refiguring Revolutions: Aesthetics and Politics from the English Revolution to the Romantic Revolution*, eds. Kevin Sharpe and Steven N. Zwicker (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998), 267-89; this passage on 289.

10. On the destruction of the English countryside by modern farming, see Marion Shoard, *The Theft of the Countryside* (London: Temple Smith, 1980), which has often been compared to Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1963) as a groundbreaking text of environmentalism, and most recently, Graham Harvey, *The Killing of the Countryside* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1997).

11. Howard Newby, *Green and Pleasant Land? Social Change in Rural England* (1979; London: Wildwood House, 1985), 17-18.

12. See, for example, William Gilpin, *Three Essays: on Picturesque Beauty, on Picturesque Travel, and on Sketching Landscape: to which is added a poem, on Pleasant Land?* (London: Printed for R. Blamire, 1792). Newby, *Green and Pleasant Land?*, 17.

13. John Clare, "The Fens," in *John Clare, Selected Poetry and Prose*, eds. Merlyn and Raymond Williams (London: Methuen, 1986), 152-53, lines 84-85.

14. John Clare, "The Lament of Swordy Well," in *Selected Poetry and Prose*, 93-99. Goldsmith had written of the engrossment of land and amalgamation of estates in the later eighteenth century: "A time there was, ere England's griefs began, / When every rood of ground maintained its man." ("The Deserted Village," 57-58) in *The Poems of Thomas Gray, William Collins, Oliver Goldsmith*, ed. Roger Lonsdale (London: Longmans, 1969).

15. Carole L. Crumley, "Epilogue," in *Historical Ecology: Cultural Knowledge and Changing Landscapes*, ed. Carole L. Crumley (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 1994), 239-41; this passage on 239.

16. Barrell, *Idea of Landscape*, 106-9.

17. Clare, Journal entry for Saturday, March 5, 1825, in *The Natural History Prose Writings of John Clare*, ed. Margaret Grainger (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 226-27.

18. The geographer Michael Bunce argues that in the making of the English rural landscape in previous centuries "agrarian objectives were often subordinate to the requirements of gentrification", often countering the drive for maximum agricultural productivity and profit was the desire to enhance "the amenity value of the rural landscape," which for the gentry meant "the sporting pleasures of hunting, shooting and fishing" and "a life of genteel ease in carefully landscaped surroundings." *The Countryside Ideal: Anglo-American Images of Landscape* (London: Routledge, 1994), 34, 8.

19. Robert Bloomfield, "Hunting-Song," 13-21, in *Rural Tales, Ballads and Songs* (London: Printed for Vernor and Hood and Longman and Rees, 1802) in *Collected Poems*.

20. Gervase M[arkham], *Countray Contentments*. In *Two Books: The first, containing the whole art of riding great Horses in very short time, with the breeding, breaking, dyeting and ordering of them, and of running, hunting and ambling Horses, with the manner how to use them in their travel. Likewise in two newe Treatises the arts of hunting, hawking, coursing of Grey-hounds with the lawes of the leash, Shooting, Bowling, Tennis, Balloone &c. The Second intituled, The English Huswife . . .* (London: Printed by J. B. for R. Jackson, 1615) and [George Gascoigne], *The Noble Arte Of Venerie or Hunting* (London: Printed by

Henry Bynnmann for Christopher Barker, 1575), reprinted as *Turberville's Booke of Hunting* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908).

21. See, for example, "To Day the Fox Must Dye: A Hunting Song" (1818) in *The Early Poems of John Clare, 1804-1822*, eds. Eric Robinson, David Powell, and Margaret Grainger (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 1:400-401; "Sports of the Field" (1819-20), *Early Poems*, 1:378-79; "The Milton Hunt" (1819-20, revised 1821), *Early Poems*, 2:198-99; and "Hunting Song," in *The Later Poems of John Clare, 1837-1864*, eds. Eric Robinson, David Powell, and Margaret Grainger (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 1:434-35. David Perkins recognizes ambivalence in Clare's attitude toward blood sports in "Sweet Helpston! John Clare on Badger Baiting," *Studies in Romanticism* 38, no. 3 (Fall 1999): 387-407.

22. John Clare, "The Fox," 27-28, *Selected Poetry and Prose*, 160.

23. "Autumn" ("Syeen of sullen moods & fading hues"), 73-76 in *The Rural Muse, Poems by John Clare*, ed. R. K. R. Thornton (Manchester, UK: Carcanet and Mid-Northumberland Arts Group, 1982), 43-46.

24. Because hares have their young above ground, "Mechanization on the farm struck the hare much more severely than the rabbit which had its young beneath ground." John Sheail, *Rabbits and Their History* (Newton Abbot, UK: David and Charles, 1971), 29-30.

25. Jonathan Bate, "The Rights of Nature," *The John Clare Society Journal* 14 (July 1995) (special issue on "Clare and Ecology"), 7-15; this passage on 7; and Robert Pogue Harrison, *Forests: The Shadow of Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 212.

26. Bate, "Rights of Nature," 7-8.

27. Gilbert White was both a naturalist and a sportsman, as is evident in his *The Natural History and Antiquities of Selborne, in the County of Southampton* (London: Printed by T. Bensley for B. White and Son, 1789; Menston, UK: Scolar Press, 1970).

28. I take heart from Joan Thirk's *Alternative Agriculture: A History from the Black Death to the Present Day* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), which finds especially striking parallels between the period 1650-1750 and the last twenty years.

29. I shall be quoting from the edition I happen to possess: *Poems, on Several Occasions, by Ann Yearsley, a Milkwoman of Bristol*, 4th ed. (London: Printed for G. G. J. and J. Robinson, 1786). William Cowper, *The Task, A Poem, in Six Books* (London: J. Johnson, 1785) in *The Poems of William Cowper*, eds. John D. Baird and Charles Ryskamp (Oxford: Clarendon, 1981-95), 2: 130-31, book 1, lines 534-56.

30. I cannot agree with Mary Waldron that Yearsley should be classified by the anachronistic, indeed Thatcherite, category of "the self-employed" because she was a milkwoman married to a former yeoman. See Waldron, *Lactilla, Milkwoman of Clifton: The Life and Writings of Ann Yearsley, 1753-1806* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 13-18.

31. *Ibid.*, 112.

32. James Beattie, *The Minstrel; or, The Progress Of Genius: A Poem. The First Book*, 3rd ed. (London: Printed for Edward and Charles Dilly; and A. Kincaid and W. Creech, Edinburgh, 1772), 11.

33. Waldron, *Lactilla*, 113.

34. On moles: "There is no external ear"; "The eyes are minute, completely hidden in the fur." Ronald M. Nowalk and John L. Paradiso, *Walker's Mammals of the World*, 4th ed., 2 vols. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983).

1.157. Nonaquatic northern European moles "have short, rounded ears that are nearly concealed by the pelage," 2:664. Kenneth Mellanby observes that, "It has already been noted that the mole has no pinna or external ear; this is presumably an adaptation to life underground. . . . The structure of the internal ear is not such as to suggest particularly acute hearing. . . . However, there is no doubt that a mole can hear." *The Mole* (New York: Taplinger, 1973), 38.

35. Mellanby, *Mole*, 38.

36. Waldron, *Lactilla*, 116.

37. For Williams, Clare's "language which is ever green," the thirteenth line in "Pastoral Poesy" (a poem from an unpublished manuscript of 1827–1831; see *The Midsummer Cushion*, eds. R. K. R. Thornton and Anne Tibble [Manchester: Carcanet, 1979; 1990], 291–94), was a form of writing that properly belonged not to Gilbert White, with his emergent scientific sense of the physical facts of nature from which human observers were necessarily separated by their difference as a species from all others, but to Clare and Wordsworth, who represented a different form of separation, a "human separation," "a separation that is mediated by a projection of personal feeling into a subjectively particularised and objectively generalised Nature." *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 134.

38. Goodridge, *Rural Life*, 16–22.

"Domestic Happiness, thou only bliss":

## Common and Divided Ground in William Cowper and Robert Bloomfield

Hugh Underhill

EDWARD THOMAS SAID OF WILLIAM COWPER THAT "IF A PLACE HAD TO be found for him, it would be hard to better Olney in Buckinghamshire."<sup>1</sup> Cowper had settled there with his intimate friend Mary Unwin at the instigation of the evangelist John Newton, with whom Cowper collaborated on the *Olney Hymns*, and they lived there and at nearby Weston from 1767 to 1795. To the east, in Bedfordshire, is Shefford, where Robert Bloomfield moved in 1812 after thirty years in London as shoemaker and, for a time at least, celebrated poet, and near where he is buried in Campton churchyard. Thus Cowper and Bloomfield spent significant periods of their lives in places not many miles removed that for each represented a much desired, not to say psychologically imperative, rural and domestic retirement. If the proximity is a chance one, I think these two roughly contemporary poets (Cowper, born in 1731, was the senior by thirty-five years, but their lives overlapped from 1766 till 1800 when Cowper died) do stand on much common ground.

"A bond of anity and social love," expressing itself in shared labor and its domestic recompenses—"With kindred pleasures mov'd, and cares oppress, / Sharing alike our weariness and rest"—is what Robert Bloomfield, in *The Farmer's Boy*, celebrates about the rural life he remembers from his boyhood.<sup>2</sup> This opening paragraph of "Winter" formulates, in effect, an ideal of community and "kindly intercourse." A lexicon of "kindness," the perception of kindness binding together and stabilizing domestic and social units, recurs in his writing as it does in Cowper's. Cowper speaks of "the natural bond" and in book 3 of *The Task* he addresses "Domestic happiness," which he conceives of as the only remaining trace of Edenic bliss—"thou only bliss / Of Paradise that has surviv'd the fall!"<sup>3</sup> They were both poets who localized in the rural and the do-