# The Ecology of Reform: Land and Labor from *Piers Plowman* to Edmund Spenser

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## Abstract

*The Ecology of Reform* offers a new literary history of English vernacular reformism from William Langland to Edmund Spenser, uncovering a deep genealogy of political ecological thought in the *Piers Plowman* tradition, English Reformation literature, and Irish colonial writings. I argue that the figure of the agrarian worker emerged as a key figure in this period for imagining processes of social change in terms of humanity's relationship to the earth. Departing from generic categories like the pastoral, and crossing the medieval-modern divide, I consider a range of texts from Middle English husbandry manuals to Reformation-era polemical tracts and Elizabethan colonial literature in order to demonstrate the variety of ways in which agrarian laborers, landscapes, and economies mediate the role of nature in shaping human societies. *The Ecology of Reform* traces a distinct canon of reformist poetry that uses allegory, alliteration, and stylistic roughness to imagine and affect the complex process of cultural change as it unfolds within specific historical ecologies from the aftermath of the Black Plague to the early modern colonization of Ireland.

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## Introduction

## The Ecology of Reform: Literature, Labor, and Political Ecology

Sometime in the latter half of the fourteenth century, an English poet tried to understand the relationship between work and waste within prevailing moral, legal, and economic frameworks. How could these two seemingly opposed activities depend upon one another within a functioning economy? The poet thought the best way to tease apart these intertwined aspects of social life was through a personification allegory, pitting a figure representing productive work, Wynnere, against a figure representing leisured consumption, Wastoure. As these two prosopopoetic creations argue and insult each other, it becomes clear that any separation between the production of wealth and the destruction of wealth is nearly impossible. This effectively makes Wastoure the winner of the debate, but his argument insists that these two figures need one another. When Wastoure asks, "What scholde worthe of that wele if no waste come?" (253), he effectively concedes that winning "wele" is necessary, but it is also worthless if it remains unused and unconsumed. In Wastoure's words, "Whoso wel schal wyn a wastour moste he fynde" (390).[1]

What *Wynnere and Wastoure* articulates is the need for models of thought and art capable of grasping the relational dimension of social reality, where fixed labels like producer and consumer or worker and waster are not adequate to the complex, social circulatory system of cyclical agrarian production. This need for such models of thought and art was particularly acute thanks to changing market relations in the aftermath of the Black Plague (Breen 217; Barr, *Socioliterary Practice* 11). *Wynnere and Wastoure* meets this need, paradoxically, through an allegory that grants such labels separate ontological

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[1] All my quotations of *Wynnere and Wastoure* are drawn from Stephanie Trigg's edition.

status, only to reveal their mutual constitution in conflict.[2] In so doing, the poem explores the order and movement of goods and energy within human communities: the *oikos*, or household arrangement, of the court, city, and country – in other words, England's political economy.[3] As *Wynnere and Wastoure* discovers, however, tracing these relationships is impossible without addressing the land and labor from which wealth and its waste spring, pushing the investigation towards the *oikos* of human and non-human communities, forms of life, and forces of nature – in other words England's political ecology. Wynnere shows this when he describes the environmental effects of Wastoure's laxness: "His londes liggen alle ley, his lomes aren solde, / Downn bene his dowfehowses, drye bene his poles […] This wikkede weryed thefe that Wastoure men calles, / That if he life may longe this lande will he stroye" (234-43). Like Wynnere and Wastoure's relationship with each other, these personified agents have a mutually affecting relationship with their land, animals, infrastructure, and the people that live and work within this assemblage. Understanding waste and leisure means defining it against labor, which for the poet of *Wynnere and Wastoure*, among the many others studied here, meant the world-shaping, landscape-altering, community-defining task of manual toil. The neglect of this toil is vividly reflected in the landscape that bears the marks of its absence. This turn from economic morality to agrarian ecology as the framework for describing the consequences of Wastoure's actions (or inactions) crystallizes the mode of thought that is the subject of *The Ecology of Reform*, just as the poem's form as an alliterative

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[2] For a description of this phenomenon in another tradition of personification allegory, see Masha Raskolnikov, *Body Against Soul*.

[3] As Katharine Breen puts it, "the poem's personifications are at once literary devices and instruments of thought that enable readers to define, manipulate, and evaluate new economic concepts" (187).

personification allegory characterizes many of the works it studies. These poetic and intellectual modes together create a tradition of reformist writing that understands work as a mediator between nature and culture, situating institutional religion and political organization within a broad agrarian ecology that is at once the symbol and the site of enacting general cultural reformation.

This turn to the agrarian landscape and community in *Wynnere and Wastoure* also presages the appearance of another personification of waste in William Langland's *Piers Plowman*. If, as Katherine Breen argues, *Wynnere and Wastoure* "bequeaths to *Piers Plowman* […] a recognizable form of personification allegory" (222-3), then the appearance of Wastour in passus 6 represents Langland's attempt to situate the problem of economic interdependence within broader problems of embodiment, agency, and human need. *Piers Plowman* explores the spiritual consequences of human entanglement within the economic and ecological relationships represented in *Wynnere and Wastoure*, inaugurating a poetic mode of writing religious reform that attends to the relations among land, labor, theological concepts, and institutional power structures (especially the manor and the church) that would continue to find strong adherents for the next two centuries and beyond. These two closely related poems, in their twinned approach to elucidating economic problems through allegory, reveal the extent to which thinking economically also means thinking ecologically.

As Eleanor Johnson argues, these two poems represent a form of "medieval ecocriticism" that "aesthetically renders the undeniable connectedness of all people" (472) through discourses of waste inflected by anxieties around economic, environmental, and political changes. Such a poetic instrument would appeal just as much to writers

confronting the dissolution of the monasteries, rampant inflation, and uncertain colonial ventures two centuries later. The poetic attempt to account for human social relations in terms of labor and land necessarily involves thinking about forms of interdependence that link human social relations to more-than-human ecosystems via the practice of agrarian husbandry. The mutual enmeshment of these visions of social reality – the economic and the ecological – within discourses of religious and cultural reform constitutes what I will call the political ecology of reformist writing in this dissertation.[4] *The Ecology of Reform* traces the ways in which vernacular poets tried to make visible complex processes of cultural change through allegories and histories of agrarian political ecology.

As many critics have noted since Helen C. White's study of *Social Criticism in Popular Religious Literature of the Sixteenth Century* (1944), figures of agrarian labor, especially plowmen, are scattered thickly throughout medieval and early modern English literary history.[5] These figures appear in diverse texts for diverse purposes, but they are often taken to be plainspoken rebukes to the overeducated and the wealthy, idealized versions of a hierarchical social order's foundation, or the butts of jokes about uneducated yokels.[6] The larger ecology which rural labor evokes, however, rarely inflects the interpretation of agrarian workers in medieval and early modern literature.[7] But these literary laborers exist within agrarian landscapes, describe economic conditions inseparable from agrarian production, and live among a built environment defined by agrarian infrastructure and wealth. Poetic attempts to capture these dynamic interactions

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[4] My use of this term, as I will explain below, is indebted to Bruno Latour's actor-network theory.

[5] For more recent overviews, see the work of King; Low; Hill; McRae; Jones; Little.

[6] For surveys of these treatments of the rural worker, see Jones "Introduction" and chapter 3, and for a wider European context, see Freedman.

[7] A few notable exceptions can be found in the work of Rudd and others, discussed below.

through the figure of the laborer allow reformist writers to imagine complex social processes in flux through the intellectual resources afforded by the ecological interaction inherent in the practice of agrarian husbandry. This is a potent image for reformist activism, at once registering the agency of the reformer and its limitations by broader networks and forces. More than an image, however, agrarian husbandry allows these writers to present reform as a process that involves not only changes in religious doctrine or institutional practice, but a grand movement that involves fundamental changes in the way humans relate to the earth through regimes of labor, land ownership, and land use. None of these poets could imagine religious reform as a project separable from various interrelated forms of life and forces of nature in which the vulnerable bodies and souls of the Atlantic Isles existed.

**Reform and Literary History: from Langland to Spenser via the English Reformation**

This embodied approach to religious controversy underlies my use of the term "reformist" in order to describe writers as temporally diverse as William Langland, the lollard poets of *Pierce the Ploughman's Crede* and *Mum and the Sothsegger*, John Skelton, Robert Crowley, and Edmund Spenser. As will become clear, I am less concerned with "reform" as a term having strictly to do with the Henrician and Edwardian Reformations, with the blurry line between lollardy and intramural reformism, or with the distinction between radical heterodoxy and orthodox incrementalism enshrined in the title of James Simpson's *Reform and Cultural Revolution*. Instead, I identify the poetry of reform with a sharply critical stance towards the interaction of religious practices, political institutions, and material relations. These criticisms find

voice within a vernacular poetic tradition marked by alliterative patterns, allegorical techniques, anti-courtly, vernacular aesthetics, and popular ballad forms. As the history of Reformation Literature and the *Piers Plowman* tradition attests, the (often ambiguous) confessional or theological stances of the poets in each tradition are incommensurate with the formal poetic characteristics that unite them. By placing a diminished importance on orthodoxy, heterodoxy, and confessionalization in identifying reformist poetry, an ostensibly orthodox priest and poet like John Skelton, for example, can take his place in the tradition of Reformation literature, upon which he had a great influence through his ribald, ballad- and alliteration-rich satires that "stylistically and formally […] were most closely congruent with contemporary writings that combined social with doctrinal radicalism" (Carlson 227). Each of the poems I consider employs some or all of these formal strategies to wrestle with the problem of cultural change: how can writing encompass society, in its vast and complex interactivity, let alone help to bring about its total reformation? Especially since, as these writers continually discover, the place of the poet within society's political economy and ecology is marginal, at best, and parasitic, at worst?

By ranging from the monumental late-fourteenth-century dream vision of *Piers Plowman* to the Irish writings of Edmund Spenser, *The Ecology of Reform* outlines a canon that, while lesser known than the sequence that runs from Chaucer to Spenser through Wyatt, Surrey, and continental poets like Ariosto, Tasso, and Marot, has been established thanks to the work of critics like Helen White, David Norbrook, John King, Judith Anderson, Helen Cooper, Andrew McRae, Mike Rodman Jones, and Katherine Little. These scholars, despite their different starting points, end points, and frames of

reference, all describe an alternative poetic current feeding into the mainstream of English Renaissance literature that continues what Anne Middleton calls the "public poetry" of the late fourteenth century,[8] and that resonates in the persistent alliterative forms and ballad measures of English poetry through and beyond the sixteenth century, even as a courtly, Chaucerian, aureate, continental, and classicizing aesthetic gained the ascendancy for both Elizabethan critics like George Puttenham and modern literary historians (represented most famously by C.S. Lewis's distinction between the "drab" and "golden" ages of Tudor poetry).

This current flows through Langland, the writer of *Wynnere and Wastoure*, lollard and orthodox vernacular theologians, Skelton, Luke Shepherd, Crowley, Thomas Churchyard, George Gascoigne, and Spenser, to name a few of its masters. Spenser's stylistic singularity can in large part be traced to his sometimes fluid, sometimes jarring synthesis of the reformist visionary and satirical mode exemplified by these poets with prestigious Latin, French, and Italian models.[9] *The Ecology of Reform* argues that this stylistic genealogy allows Spenser to reflect on the nature of historical change in the very texture of his verse, adopting stylistic variation and archaism as a way of addressing the interplay of place, time, and manual and intellectual labor, making Ireland the site of an unexpected convergence of Langlandian allegory, mid-Tudor poetics, agrarian ecology, and Elizabethan colonial policy. In this reconsideration of Reformation literature's influence on Spenser's career, I join the project of Spenserians from King to Anthea

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[8] Middleton, focusing primarily on Langland and Gower, describes the "voice" of public poetry as "vernacular, practical, worldly, plain, public-spirited, and peace-loving - in a word, 'common,' rather than courtly or clerical, in its professed values and social allegiances" (96).

[9] Dolven 397; Stephens 372; Heale; King, *Spenser's Poetry* 22-4; Wilson-Okamura; Norbrook 53

Hume to Joseph Campana of recognizing the formative impact, or even the traumatic residue, of the Reformation on Spenser's poetry, but I do so less in terms of altered liturgies and doctrinal positions and more in terms of the Reformation's literary archive of responses to the dissolution of the monasteries and the economic and ecological upheavals of the mid-Tudor period, responses that represented social change as a dialectical interplay of material forces and inspired visions.

Accordingly, this project occasionally overlaps with histories of genres like pastoral and georgic, but it only does so incidentally, since my aim is not to revise accounts of the emergence of Renaissance pastoral, recently achieved by Katherine Little, or to group literary representations of agrarian labor in the period under the classicizing rubric of the georgic, as Anthony Low has done. While I draw from the important surveys of the pastoral by Helen Cooper and Little's necessary revision of that project, my exploration of the ecological dimension of reformist thought in late medieval and early modern vernacular poetry does not aim at any particular modal or generic history, focusing instead on a collection of formal and thematic elements that characterize a vital current of agrarian reformism. Sometimes, this current flows into exemplars of a continuous pastoral tradition, as in Spenser's *The Shepheardes Calender* and *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe*, but such confluences do not define the literary history I am presenting here. Low, for example, captures an essential element of the medieval and early modern vernacular English poetry I study, but he does so under the limiting rubric of a Virgilian mode: "It so happens that Virgilian georgic, with its stress on obscure private individuals who perform small tasks the cumulative effect of which is to transform society, is an especially apt mode for a poetry that reflects on the making of

history" (6). This crucial insight about the relationship between the poetry of work and the thought of historical change need not, as I will show, be confined to the parameters of classical georgic and its tenuous influence on late medieval and Reformation-era writing.

Situated alongside recent debates in Reformation historiography, *The Ecology of Reform* benefits from the ways critics and historians of the period have broken a monolithic notion of "the English Reformation" into many "reformations" that contain a multitude of chronological boundaries and overlapping and divergent theological, political, economic, and discursive projects and registers.[10] For similar reasons, recent debates about orthodoxy and dissent in late medieval reformism, stirred by Nicholas Watson's essays on vernacular theology, have been salutary for my thinking about reform as a process and a mode of thought that is not easily tied to stable doctrinal or political identities, existing both within and without mainstream religious and intellectual institutions.[11] Vernacular reform, as I study it here, denotes an expansive and provocative intervention in the relationships among religious institutions, manorial and market economies, environmental conditions, political structures, and literary traditions.

**Ecocriticism, Political Ecology, and Periodization**

As these reformist agrarian poets recognize, changing a religious culture involves changes in the basic relationships between and among humans and non-humans that

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[10] For a recent overview of these issues and the vast literature attached to them, see Shannon Gayk's review essay "Early English Orthodoxies." The work of Bryan Cummings, and the revisionist histories of Eamon Duffy, James Simpson, and the response to them by the authors in *English Reformations*, a special issue of the *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, have been most influential for my approach in this project.

[11] See especially the collection edited by Vincent Gillespie and Kantik Ghosh, *After Arundel: Religious Writing in Fifteenth Century England*, which largely responds to Watson's pathbreaking essay "Censorship and Cultural Change in Late Medieval England."

ensure the physical survival of the community or nation, since religious practices and institutions are inseparable from the land, labor, and food that sustain them. The dissolution of the monasteries is perhaps the most vivid example in support of this assertion. But in the fourteenth century, *Piers Plowman* established a mode of thought and a form of poetic engagement with the problem of religious culture as an embodied relation to a material ecology that would define subsequent attempts to write about religious change before, during, and after the dissolution. In this way, *The Ecology of Reform* integrates the well-documented literary history of *Piers Plowman*'s influence on Reformation literature and Elizabethan poetry into a larger, new history of ecological thought from the aftermath of the Black Plague to the Elizabethan colonization of Ireland.

Because these works basically lack any environmentalist valuations of nature as an autonomous good, an account of works by Langland, Skelton, Simon Fish, John Bale, or Spenser in terms of ecology will provoke skepticism in some. Even for leading theorists of ecocriticism, it might appear anachronistic. After all, as Timothy Morton declares, "The ecological thought in its full richness and depth was unavailable to nonmodern humans" (*Ecological Thought* 5).[12] As this line of thinking goes, if premodern religious poets or writers of agrarian husbandry manuals do occasionally ruminate on the nature of their relationship to non-human beings, it might only be as a subspecies of theology or as a practical lesson for exploiting an inert material storehouse, not as ecological thought, because ecological consciousness only emerges in reaction to

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[12] It should be noted that Morton later revised his position on the periodization of ecological thought in his essay "The Oedipal Logic of Ecological Awareness," where he identifies in *Oedipus Rex* the environmentality of the "miasma" that threatens the agrarian community. In this essay, it is agriculture, and not industrialization, that activates a troubled and troubling awareness of human-nature relations.

the crises of technological modernity. In this view, ecological thought should only be available to moderns who have experienced the nightmarish interconnections made visible by industrial disasters and climate change. By contrast, preindustrial thought about the natural world could not be ecological, because the threat of destruction by industrial development was not yet spurring the thought of dynamic, ecosystemic interaction and the reflexive need to protect such systems from harm.

Ken Hiltner, the ecocritic of early modern literature, gives a familiar version of this narrative in his introduction to *Ecocriticism: The Essential Reader* (xii-xvi). Until the late Renaissance in England, wilderness was undesirable and threatening, and nature was something to be controlled and used. It was only with the first beginnings of industrialism and coal pollution in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that writers began to "gesture" towards what was disappearing in genres like pastoral (an argument Hiltner makes in *What Else is Pastoral?*). When industrialization accelerated in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Romantic poets began to celebrate the rural idylls they saw being destroyed, a response matched by Thoreau across the Atlantic, starting a trend that eventually gives us John Muir and Rachel Carson. This is the master narrative of modern environmentalism, and it informs the assumptions of much ecocritical work: ecological thought is a reaction to the frightening interactions of technological change, Western cultural hegemony, and the progressive destruction of the biosphere. Modern science enabled this destruction, yet also allows us to perceive how the destruction takes place, and may be the means to halt it (Garrard 9). This means that pre-modern environmental consciousness is either non-existent (Hoffman 86), mostly limited to a philosophical tradition (Epstein), the root condition leading to modern environmental destruction

(White), or contained in organic models of the cosmos (Merchant). According to Lynn White, Jr. in his seminal 1967 paper, "The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis," modernity intensifies a fundamentally non-ecological and anthropocentric form of thought about the non-human world that was codified in medieval Christianity (which said, "We are superior to nature, contemptuous of it, willing to use it for our slightest whim" [45]); but in doing so, modernity also makes deep ecological interaction thinkable for the first time. Even where premodern views of the natural world are valorized against modern, Baconian science, as in Carolyn Merchant's landmark 1980 work *Death of Nature*, ecological thought is difficult to discern. In many of Merchant's examples from ancient, medieval, and early modern literary and philosophical culture, the "organic" image of nature taken from high philosophical and literary canons treats the non-human world as "a designed hierarchical order" or as a balanced "unity of opposites" (6), representing a kind of intuitive proto-environmentalism that does not match the complex, modern thought of ecosystemic interaction as it is described in the periodizing accounts of Hiltner and Morton.

In these influential accounts of modern environmentalism and environmental destruction, modernity, observational knowledge about ecosystems, and environmental exploitation and awareness emerge together in the crucible of late-Renaissance Europe. More specifically for Merchant, White, and Hiltner, England is the crucial setting for this narrative due to the towering figure of Francis Bacon and the relatively early emergence of industrialism there. By focusing on works of English vernacular reformism, *The Ecology of Reform* considers an alternative genealogy of ecological thought in relation to England's early modern economy by going further into England's preindustrial past. It

thus challenges this periodization narrative of the conjoined emergence of modernity and ecological thought by tracing its deep history in agrarian and reformist writing. This project also resists ecocritical engagements with premodern thought that see it as either a consistent edifice supporting the exploitation and domination of nature, or as an archive of intuitive proto-environmentalisms characterized by nonanthropocentric values. Instead, I find that ecological interdependence and systemic complexity define and activate the medieval and early modern English literature of reform and its poetic manifestations in agrarian allegory, allowing poets to imagine and represent the totalizing process of changing social and ecological relations, and to fantasize about directing that process through the violent control of an ostensibly disordered, or "unnatural," political ecology.

Missing from the stories of the twinned emergence of modernity and ecological awareness is any account of the quotidian experience of ecological insight, the "traditional ecological knowledge," exemplified by the practice and discourse of agrarian husbandry (Winiwarter 96). Nor are these accounts attentive to the complexities and nuances of premodern engagements with the physical world beyond the confines of academic and high cultural treatments of nature. Thanks to the work of premodern ecological literary critics and historians like Gillian Rudd, Alfred Siewers, Jeffrey Cohen, Charlotte Scott, Gabriel Egan, Vin Nardizzi, and Steve Mentz, we now have accounts of medieval and early modern ecological thought and environmental aesthetics that, taken together, undermine the narrative of the reactive emergence of ecological consciousness in modernity, and that consider broad literary, historical, legal, and archaeological archives. Building on such work, I hope to intensify the ecocritical focus on the specific,

material conditions of human-nature relations, going beyond older (or "first wave")[13] ecocritical concerns with pastoral, non-anthropocentric valuations of nature, and phenomenological accounts of being-in-the-world (on which see Garrard 117-42). Such concerns take us further from the laborious immersion in the agrarian ecology that inspired a great deal of complex thought about conflictual, unpredictable, and constantly shifting ecosystemic relations. Grounding the terms of ecocriticism with a constant focus on labor provides a way to elucidate the gritty, "dark ecology" in which medieval and early modern populations lived, and which is in no way a strictly modern, industrialized phenomenon.[14] The early ecocritical norms of conservationism and non-anthropocentrism are often not the best ways through which to understand the practice, meaning, and cultural poetics of agrarian labor, which combines cooperation and conflict with the care and exploitation of the nonhuman.[15] Instead, the less normative discourse of political ecology, as it emerges from Bruno Latour's actor-network theory, is more congenial to the body of reformist texts I deal with here. Latour's undermining of periodization narratives in his account of "nature-culture" also avoids the pitfalls of the periodization of

[13] For a general explanation of the characteristics of first and second wave ecocriticism, see Hiltner, *Ecocriticism: The Essential Reader*. Basically, first wave ecocriticism was largely concerned with Romanticism and American nature writing, reflecting first-world environmentalist and conservationist values; second wave ecocriticism turns towards urban environments, global perspectives, environmental justice, and economic and political concerns.

[14] "Dark ecology" is Morton's phrase for a form of ecological thought and environmental aesthetics that embraces the exploited, polluted, conflicted, ugly, and used-up world, rather than fetishizing an unspoiled, natural golden age of wilderness before history to which we should strive to return (*Ecology* 184-188).

[15] In this sense, my project responds to the recent trend in environmental ethics identified by Willis Jenkins, where "arguments from pragmatists, urbanists, and agrarians attempt to move the field away from focusing on anthropocentrism and nature's value in order to shift discussion toward the political possibilities of civic experience" (284).

ecological thought outlined above, and is most welcome for a project like this one that freely crosses the medieval-modern divide.

Latourian political ecology offers a more capacious vision of ecology than one that is more restrictively tied to representations of nature. Encompassing not just plants, animals, and climate as parts of an ecosystem to which humans belong, Latour also includes economic relations and institutional, political, and cultural forms of life that, he argues, are just as real and ecologically effective as a thunderstorm or an internal combustion engine. This also serves to release ecological thought from the historical and geographical confines of industrialization and modern environmentalism. As he claims bluntly, "political ecology cannot be inserted into the various niches of modernity. On the contrary, it requires to be understood as an alternative to modernisation. To do so one has to abandon the false conceit that ecology has anything to do with nature as such" ("To Modernize?" 221). Further on, he elaborates this claim: "Political ecology does not and has never attempted to talk about nature. It bears on complicated forms of associations between beings: regulations, equipment, consumers, institutions, habits, calves, cows, pigs and broods that it is completely superfluous to include in an inhuman and ahistorical nature. Nature is not in question in ecology; on the contrary, ecology dissolves boundaries and redistributes agents and thus resembles premodern anthropology more than it thinks" ("To Modernize?" 229). This perspective allows us to see the intricate ecological thought at play in the literature of agrarian reformism and its varieties of economic, social, and political complaint, where the ecology of growing food includes religious foundations, ecclesiological debates, political structures, and literary traditions. Allegory, too, "dissolves boundaries and redistributes agents," and the personifications of

*Piers Plowman* and its imitators make visible political ecological relations by embodying otherwise invisible interactions. The challenge of religious reform, particularly as it is articulated in vernacular critiques of established religion, is a primary spur to ecological thought and environmental art in pre- and early modernity.

The perspective of political ecology also recasts the periodization of ecological thinking, decoupling it from technological modernity as its enabling condition. To deny ecological thought to premoderns seems especially curious, since, as Latour shows, it is the "modern constitution" (which need not be historically limited to post-Enlightenment thought) that attempts to divide phenomena into separate spheres of "nature, politics, or discourse," while "nonmoderns" (which need not be limited to premodern or non-Western subjects) are comfortable thinking with the collectives and hybrids that always cross such modern disciplinary boundaries (3). To be sure, from the vantage point afforded by the archive of medieval and early modern academic discussion, which is the one adopted by White, Merchant, and Steven Epstein, a modern act of "purification" – i.e. the disciplinary separation of culture from nature – is in effect. But to read Langlandian allegory, Crowley's satires, Fish's polemics, or Spenser's historical anthropology of Ireland is to encounter writers who trace assemblages and networks, recomposing nature and culture together into complex political ecological assemblages. For one of Langland's most attentive readers,[16] the sixteenth-century preacher Hugh Latimer, reformist religious polemic against enclosure and covetousness allows him to compose a network that brings together soil ecology, animal hunger, agrarian infrastructure like carts

[16] As Robert Kelly shows in his essay "Hugh Latimer as Piers Plowman."

and roads, market relations, and economic morality in a sermon preached before Edward VI in 1550:

> Let them [ploughmen] therefore have sufficient to maintain them, and to find them their necessaries. A plowland must have sheep. Yea, they must have sheepe to dung their ground for bearing of corn, for if they have no sheep to help to fat the ground they shall have but bare corn and thin. They must have swine for their food to make their veneries or bacon […] They must have other cattles, as horses to draw their plow and for carriage of things to the markets, and kine for their milk and cheese, which they must live upon and pay their rents. These cattle must have pasture, which pasture if they lacke, the rest must needs fail them. And pasture they cannot have if the land be taken in and enclosed from them (149-50).

Latimer links the micro-biology of the soil, with its dung-fattened, decompositional richness, to the circulation of animal energy in livestock for food and transport, to the local economy, and the ethical responsibilities of landlords, exemplifying the ways in which knowledge of agrarian ecology can provide powerful models for imagining reform in terms of the dynamic interactivity of culture and agriculture. Latimer, like the other writers studied here, sought to understand and represent the totalizing process of reform, which involved everything from climate, to animal biology, to market economics, to land law, to ecclesiastical politics, to royal authority. In a Latourian sense, these works are resolutely "nonmodern." This is not a chronological or periodic descriptor, but rather denotes the resistance of these works to the separation of nature and culture in their historical, allegorical, and anthropological attempts to describe the institutions, agents, infrastructures, and environments that compose society as one whole fabric that is always

in the process of being riven and rewoven. But in their frequently critical orientation towards society and their appeal, especially after the anonymous works of the *Piers Plowman* tradition, to transcendent and often violent stabilizing forces that would enforce reform, these works call for a significant departure from the Latourian framework.[17]

**Labor, Ecology, and Domination: Green Marxism and Biopolitics**

*The Ecology of Reform* is not strictly a Latourian project in the sense of being post-critical or against critique.[18] While I hope to further Rita Felski's recent description of how literary studies and Latourian actor-network theory can develop a "less lopsided form of interaction" by, for example, understanding literary works as surviving through the allegiances they form (3),[19] I retain a critical perspective informed by a hermeneutics of labor and power, particularly in contexts of state violence and colonial domination. The biopolitical relations among reform, labor, sovereign violence, and environmental control are as much a part of this project as accounting for the networks formed between actors on a manorial estate. As such, *The Ecology of Reform* has recourse to Marxian, biopolitical, and postcolonial terms and concepts, which are central to a modern practice of critique that Latour envisions his project as surpassing (*We Have Never Been Modern*, 43). My project maintains a critical stance with regard to the instrumentalization of the ecological insights of medieval and early modern agrarian reformists and the related attempt to naturalize ecological relations into manageable hierarchies.

[17] This framework has little patience for critique aimed at changing the world. In his "Attempt at a 'Compositionist Manifesto,'" Latour hopes to move past critique that "has all the limits of utopia: it relies on the certainty of the world *beyond* this world" (475).
[18] On which, see Latour, "Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam?"; Felski, "Context" and "Latour"; Love; Harmann, "Entanglement" 44-45; and *Bruno Latour.*
[19] This, after all, is a good way of describing Langland's (and the character of Piers Plowman's) lasting power for the reformist tradition.

Thinking with Marx might also seem odd in an ecologically oriented project, since, as Jonathan Bate summarizes a popular view, Marx was no ecologist, but an economic developmentalist as rapacious as any titan of industry ("Where capitalism has its Three Mile Island, Marxist-Leninism has its Chernobyl," 91). While environmentalist critiques of communist regimes are surely necessary,[20] the dismissal of Marx's thought *tout court* on ecological grounds has met strong theoretical challenges from Alfred Schmidt, David Harvey, John Bellamy Foster, and Leerom Medovoi, among others, who recognize that Marx's thought about labor and the mutual constitution of nature and culture are ecological insights, even if they do not take the form of Bate's preferred brand of Romantic anti-industrialism. In particular, I have found Marx's remarks on the labor process useful for conceptualizing the deep meanings of agrarian labor in vernacular reformism, especially the observation that humanity "confronts the materials of nature as a force of nature […] [and] Through this movement he acts upon external nature and changes it, and in this way he simultaneously changes his own nature" (283). Such reflections on the labor process express why agrarian labor was so important in vernacular reformism, since it is the activity that shapes both individual and cultural conditions by linking humans into broad, communal networks, mediating singular and collective relations to the life-sustaining (but freedom-diminishing) biosphere. Furthermore, Marx's description of humanity's capacity to awaken "the potentialities slumbering within nature" and to subject "the play of its forces to his own sovereign power" also resides within the fantasies of authoritarian reform and managed development in the writings of late medieval and mid-Tudor polemicists and early Irish

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[20] See Judith Shapiro's *Mao's War Against Nature: Politics and the Environment in Revolutionary China* for a fine example of one such critique.

colonists (283), revealing the extent to which a political ecological orientation towards agrarian labor can be instrumentalized for authoritarian control and top-down developmentalism.

*The Ecology of Reform* takes an actor-network theory approach, in which agrarian labor appears as a collective of social and natural, human and non-human beings and forces, and joins it to a critique of the interactions among labor, literary production, sovereign power, and religious forms of life. It hopes to include the non-human, "eternally banished from the Critique," according to Latour (*Pasteurization of France* 150), within this critical genealogy of authoritarian developmentalism and colonial thought, thereby making ecology obtrusive on recent theoretical engagements with labor, biopolitics, periodization, sovereignty, and secularism.[21] As these chapters linger with the aspects of agrarian political ecology that have to do with art, community, religion, and writing, they still hold in view the constant immersion of these formations within broader, interlocking networks of nature and culture, which I access primarily through writers on agrarian husbandry and through historical research on England and Ireland's agricultural environment in the fourteenth through the sixteenth centuries.[22]

**Contents: Overview and Chapter Summaries**

*The Ecology of Reform* begins and ends with poets who wrestled with hugely complex intellectual traditions and literary methods in order to confront the embodied experience of vast social change as it unfolded within specific historical ecologies.

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[21] Represented by studies like Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work,* Kathleen Davis's *Periodization and Sovereignty*, Roberto Esposito's *Bios* and *Terms of the Political*, Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age*, and Brad Gregory's *The Unintended Reformation*.

[22] The magisterial editions and studies by Dorothea Oschinsky, Joan Thirsk, and Christopher Dyer have been most helpful for this aspect of the project.

Joining Langland and Spenser, less prolific or well-known poets availed themselves of the same traditions and methods as they grappled with the interactions of work, land, law, politics, and writing within the totalizing aim of religious reform. The attempt to write poetry that would render such complexities tractable to thought and reformist action drove these poets, from Langland on, to develop strange allegories and startling personifications, raucous rhymes and eclectic styles, strident polemics and contradictory feints as they wove together the timeless and the transcendent with the quotidian and the earthy. Following the clue of the stylistic commonalities amongst these various writers, from Langland to his anonymous imitators to Skelton, Crowley, and Bale to Spenser, this project tracks the intertwined histories of English literature, religious dissent, and the environments that shaped these endeavors and were in turn shaped by them. It does so with an eye towards illuminating both the nature of poetic thought about religious, economic, and environmental change in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, and the importance of this form of thought for modern understandings of the relations among art, ecology, labor, and power.

Agriculture, as we will see, is an intensely complex effort to wrest the means of communal survival from the earth through cooperative labor and experiential knowledge of how humans and non-humans interact in order to achieve desirable, if frequently unpredictable, results. The archive of agrarian husbandry manuals and tracts on the reform and improvement of the agrarian economy attests to this. As such, agriculture offered a ready model for thinking about complex systems, ambiguous causality, agency and its limits, and the foundations of social order and the mechanisms for its change. Reading *Piers Plowman* and engaging in its exceedingly restless intellectual quest, it

becomes clear that its agrarian setting and laboring personifications are apt allegorical vehicles for unendingly complex explorations of theological, philosophical, and political problems. The communal interdependence necessitated by agrarian production captures the overwhelming conceptual and social complexity a poem like Langland's encompasses. For this reason, not only the figure of the rural laborer, but the alliterative and allegorical mode of *Piers Plowman*, would enliven the attempts of English poets to envision and influence the nature and mechanisms of religious reform and social change for the next two centuries. The scene of agrarian labor renders the immersion of every space of social life, from the court to the cloister, in an interconnected whole, a perspective which imbues reformist agrarian writing with the urgency of cataclysmic material change.

*The Ecology of Reform* brings to bear the archive of agrarian writing and history on the reformist poetic tradition in England, triangulating between poetic modes of thought, religious conflict, and political ecology in order to define an unexplored history of premodern ecological thought. Not only does this project elucidate an important genealogy of environmental awareness and its instrumentalization in the service of royal and colonial power, but it also clarifies the complexities of religious reform itself and its relationship to the political and economic realities from which institutional religion is inseparable. Thinking about agrarian reformist poetry ecologically, then, illuminates not just the modern history of ecological thought, but also the early modern history of reformist thought within and beyond the English vernacular.

*The Ecology of Reform* begins with a scene of agricultural labor and its failure. Chapter 1, "Medieval Political Ecology," inaugurates this project's method of situating laborers and scenes of agrarian labor within a broader cultural poetics of agrarian writing

and practices. Focusing on the plowing of the half-acre scene in passus 6, I demonstrate how labor and agriculture capture a sense of reformist agency and its limitations due to the complex interdependence of society's actors. Chapter 1 establishes the political ecological insights that in subsequent centuries poets at once took from Langland and tried to resolve in their own ways: the messy tangle of discordant human, animal, economic, and environmental actors means that reforming society, like growing food, is a contingent and unpredictable process, where the actions of figures of authority or other interested individuals like writers can only partially affect the process of change.

*Piers Plowman*'s imitators in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries adopted the Langlandian idiom of agrarian allegory to address problems of monastic and political reform, but they did so by allying Langland's ecological insights to the stabilizing fantasy of sovereign violence,[23] as I show in chapter 2, "The Spirit of the Beehive." This chapter represents a turn towards theories of sovereignty and biopolitics as poets in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries imagine the ways in which the troubling mélange of agents and forces in agrarian political ecology can be imaginatively controlled and directed in the service of reform. Chapter 3, "Labors of Reform," considers the ways in which writers like Skelton, Fish, Crowley, and Bale developed distinctive vernacular styles, integrating the Langlandian tradition of agrarian allegory with vivid contemporary discourses of agrarian complaint and satirical invective. In so doing, these writers construct a tradition of oppositional writing about the labor of the commons and the environment it creates

[23] Throughout, I use the terms of sovereignty, particularly as an agent of direct violence, to describe the power to decide life and death, as opposed to subtler forms of discipline and control represented by biopolitics. See Foucault, *History of Sexuality* 135-159; *Society* 239-63.

and depends upon, while at the same time seeking to ally themselves with a figure of the reformist sovereign to safeguard these practices and spaces.

In this way, English Reformation literature influenced the late works of Edmund Spenser through its holistic approach to political ecology, as I argue in chapter 4 “The Dialectic of Reform.” While Spenser’s stylistic affinities with the *Piers Plowman* tradition and English Reformation literature have long been recognized in his pastoral poetry, we have yet to understand how this literary history impacts the environmental history of colonial thought and reform in Ireland. Colonial theorists and post-colonial critics alike reveal how the colonized ecosystem is crucial for the establishment of power and the extraction of wealth. Spenser’s *A View of the Present State of Ireland* is a seminal text in this history, and his late return to pastoral in Ireland represents an attempt to think through the position of the writer within the laborious process of environmental and cultural reform he envisions for Ireland. To do this, he revives the Skeltonic persona of Colin Clout and its resonances of earlier traditions of English reformist literary production.

*The Ecology of Reform* concludes with Spenser’s attempt to think through poetically the dialectical relationship between reformist writing and the process of change it imagines and hopes to affect. As Spenser wrote in *A View*, labor is “of three kindes, manuall, intellectuall, and mixed” (148). Spenser in his late poetry, like Langland and the reformist poets of the sixteenth century before him, used agrarian labor to imagine reform as a kind of mixed labor, “part of bodily labor, and part of the wit” (148), bringing together in dynamic interaction the literary work of envisioning and writing a new world, and the bodily, often violent work of making that world a reality.

## Chapter 1

### Medieval Political Ecology: Labor and Agency on Piers's Half Acre

*Piers Plowman* details the somnolent quest of a dreamer seeking to understand truth and obtain salvation, which he hopes to acheive through episodic interrogations of personified abstractions (Middleton, "Narration" 95). [1] The poem is written in unrhymed alliterative verse,[2] a form, as we will see, that would be embraced to varying degrees in subsequent decades and centuries by poets looking to channel the alternately prophetic, rough-hewn, populist, and apocalyptic characteristics of this monumental dream vision.[3] Its influential conjunction of earthly and otherworldly commitments finds expression in the poem through its pervasive agrarian allegory, signalled in the name of its multi-valent personification of the meeting of body and spirit, Piers the Plowman.[4]

Piers the Plowman is William Langland's figure for Christ's human nature, the integration of the human and the divine; his occupation continues a long symbolic tradition from biblical and commentary sources about the evangelical activity of saving others' souls (Barney 278). Yet his first appearance in the poem, in which he appears

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[1] The poem exists in three distinct versions, attesting to a process of continuous revision from the 1360s to the 1380s. See Kane; Hanna, "Versions and Revisions" for overviews of this textual history.
[2] For accounts of the poem's form in relation to other alliterative works, see Lawton, "Alliterative Style." For the extensive literature on alliterative Middle English poetry see Duggan; Hanna, "Alliterative Poetry"; the collection *Middle English Alliterative Poetry*; Lawton, "The Unity" and "The Diversity"; Pearsall, *Old English and Middle English Poetry*. For a helpful review essay of recent debates in the study of Middle English alliterative verse, see Cornelius.
[3] Much has been written on the legacy of *Piers Plowman* in terms of both the plowman character and the poem's form. See Hudson, "Epilogue"; King, *Reformation*; Kelen.
[4] For a description of the many potential meanings and the changing nature of Piers throughout the poem, see Barr, "Major Episodes."

more literally a laborer than at any other time, ends in his calamitous failure as a leader of agrarian workers. This failure, I will argue, allegorically expresses the limitations of human agency, figured through this scene's representation of the ecological constraints upon individual actors in an agrarian community.[5] Many critics read the scene of labor on Piers's half acre as an allegory of the necessary works one must perform to obtain salvation and to constitute a Christian community, where the division between Piers's willing workers and the antagonistic "wastours" that disrupt their labors becomes a figure for the division between saved and damned, as Langland, in Ellen K. Rentz's words, "emphasize[s] the collective spiritual rewards of communal labor" (97).[6] In this view, the disastrous conclusion of the plowing of the half acre results from the failure of those set apart from productive Christians to work to sustain the community and to obtain salvation; the nature of the work undertaken in this allegory and its relation to community formation is therefore taken to be relatively transparent and stable. According to Anne Middleton, Langland describes an "economy of salvation" through a binary opposition between urban disorder and a rural world that "stands for stable and proper identities," where "salvation is seen as earned by deserving through good works, a process staged allegorically in the form of largely rural and small craft work" ("Acts of Vagrancy"

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[5] On agency, sin, and salvation in *Piers Plowman*, see Bloomfield 4, 19; Baldwin; Fletcher; Adams, "Piers's Pardon" and "Mede and Mercede"; Davis; Simpson "Spirituality and Economics"; Aers, *Salvation and Sin*; Watson, "Visions of Inclusion" and "*Piers Plowman*, Pastoral Theology, and Spiritual Perfectionism"; Fowler 95-133; Knowles; Zeeman, '*Piers Plowman'* 1-8; Grady.

[6] See also Baldwin 62, discussed below, and Clopper, who argues, "[I]f one recklessly disregards his function, then he is likely to be damned. To be saved, a person must know his calling, must know who and what he is so that he will know what he must do" (116). Adams makes the same argument: "what we encounter here [when Piers first notices the "wastours"] is less a matter of gradual degeneration than one of permanent division" ("Piers's Pardon" 414). See also Simpson, "Spirituality and Economics" 95-6.

233).[7] But the failure of the plowing of the half acre insists upon the instability of rural work and its confounding of the autonomous will to find truth, personified here as Saint Truth, Piers Plowman's absent employer. Langland's depiction of agrarian labor activates a network of relations that overwhelm the episode's individual moral agents, as worker and waster become entangled in an antagonistic, mutually-shaping struggle, bearing out the near-contemporary lesson of *Wynnere and Wastour*: "Whoso wele schal wyn a wastour moste he fynde" (390). This entanglement is enabled by and forms a part of a broader web of human and non-human beings connected in dispersed causal links that render work and waste impossible to separate from one another.[8] Langland's detailed engagement with the complex process of agrarian work involves not just a group of individual humans deciding to achieve together a predictable result by manipulating earth, water, and beasts. Instead, the scene on the half acre confronts a host of interrelated and unwieldy material forces, actors, and interests exercising a kind of dispersed "agentic capacity" or "thing-power," to use Jane Bennett's terms (9-10), as the episode undermines an orderly economy of salvation through an ecology of unpredictable relations that frustrate the collective journey to Truth.

Society's dependence upon the product of agrarian labor connects the diverse social worlds through which *Piers Plowman* moves to the primal scene of material determination—God's sentence that '*In sudore* and swynke thow shalt thi mete tilie'

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[7] Andrew Cole, on the other hand, emphasizes the overlap of rural and urban forms of work and their organization (196).

[8] Johnson takes up ecology and waste in *Wynnere and Wastoure* and *Piers Plowman* in "The Poetics of Waste", where she argues that waste is "a crime without boundaries, the commission of which highlights the connectedness among people" (464). On the allegorical experimentalism of *Wynnere and Wastoure* and its influence on *Piers Plowman*, see Breen.

(B.6.232).[9] The law forges an ecology of interdependence from which no one may withdraw, even those who avoid manual toil themselves. Communal labor thus stages what Masha Raskolnikov calls "one of the persistent philosophical, social, and economic concerns of *Piers Plowman*" – "the necessity of dependence on another being" (171). Though physical work is a task unevenly divided amongst the population, the need to eat in order to survive connects each estate and social category – from lords and priests to mendicants and able-bodied beggars – to the agricultural ecosystem. Dependence upon labor to meet the bodily needs of all humans entails an organization of human and non-human beings into configurations that integrate political concerns like social organization and the distribution of tasks and goods with factors like climate, technology, topography, plant and animal life, and their countless interrelations into a complex whole – a political ecology. I use this term in Bruno Latour's sense as a means of conceiving the social in such a way that "bears on complicated forms of associations between beings: regulations, equipment, consumers, institutions, habits, calves, cows, pigs and broods" ("To Modernise?" 229). Such are the associations, Latour goes on to say, that would be "completely superfluous to include in an inhuman and ahistorical nature" ("To Modernise?" 229). [10] The agrarian, institutional, and regulatory character of Latour's political ecological catalogue fortuitously echoes the very forms of association with which Langland is concerned in his depiction of agrarian husbandry on the half acre. Agriculture renders culture and nature indistuinguishable, and it provokes a writer like Langland to think the complex interrelations among categories that seem opposed – labor

[9] All references to the B text are from Schmidt's edition, *The Vision of Piers Plowman: A Critical Edition of the B-Text*.
[10] See also *We Have Never Been Modern* and *Reassembling the Social*.

and leisure, for example, or work and waste.[11] This boundary-disrupting aspect of the "traditional ecological knowledge" contained in the discourse of premodern agrarian husbandry activates Langland's approach to the problem of agency and sin on the half acre (Winiwarter 96). In this episode, agrarian economy and ecology prevent the autonomous will from approaching Saint Truth, because the embodied experience of labor after the fall entangles it in a web of material and communal constraints. These constraints are evident in the medieval husbandry manuals that record the various relationships and forces with which Piers and his laborers have to contend: fellow workers, the non-laboring population, soil, the market economy, draft animals, wild animals, and the weather, to name just a few of the key players. Such manuals allow us to deepen our understanding of Langland's allegorical political ecology of agrarian work, which probes the contradictions between the ideal Christian community and material practice within the poem's complex, dialectical mesh of intellectual quest and material conflict. *Piers Plowman*'s vision of the social world as the place within which spiritual ideals must be enacted encompasses not only the economic and political relations among laborers, landowners, and consumers, but also the array of forces and non-human beings with which humans must collaborate in the process of feeding the population. The discourse of medieval husbandry shows that ecological thought is widespread in the

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[11] Agriculture also represents a chance to put in conversation the often-incompatible "new materialist" idiom of Latour and Bennett with an "old materialist," labor-centric Marxist one that recognized in the labor process the mutual shaping of humanity and nature, with agriculture in particular exemplifying how non-human nature itself is inextricable from human culture, "the result of gradual transformation continued through many generations," as Marx wrote in *Capital: Volume 1* (283, 287). On new materialism, see, in addition to Latour and Bennett, the collection *New Materialisms*. On Marx and ecology, see Foster.

Middle Ages, and it helped shape Langland's exploration of human agency and its limitations in the allegory of the half acre.

**Earth, Need, and Labor**

*Piers Plowman*'s dreamer, Will, longs to understand the relationship between knowledge and action—how can learning abstractly what is right or true change the way humans live? Why does knowledge of the truth not automatically lead to a change in behavior? This gap makes the active achievement of salvation one of Will's abiding anxieties, which he articulates to Holy Church in passus 1: "Teche me to no tresor, but tel me this ilke—/ How I may save my soule" (B.1.83-84). The main point of Holy Church's answer—"Whan alle tresors arn tried [...] Treuthe is the best" (B.1.85)—leaves Will little the wiser. "'Yet have I no kynde knowynge', quod I, 'ye mote kenne me bettre / By what craft in my cors it [Truth] comseth, and where'" (B.1.138-39). Will calls attention to his body ("cors") when he protests his lack of "kynde knowynge," or natural, instinctive knowledge of Truth, suggesting that theological knowledge has little value if it cannot be integrated with embodied existence. In *Piers Plowman*, the needs of corporeality and the specific practices and communities that meet those needs create the conditions in which the search for Truth must take place, but which, as the plowing of the half acre shows, limit the agency of those who would engage in such a quest.

As Holy Church explains in passus 1, humanity's creation came with several material supports to assure its survival:

> For he [Truth] is fader of feith and formed yow alle
> Both with fel and with face and yaf yow fyve wittes
> For to worshipe hym therwith while that ye ben here.
> And therfore he highte the erthe to helpe yow echone
> Of wollene, of lynnen, of liflode at nede
> In mesurable manere to make yow at ese;

> And comaunded of his curteisie in commune three thynges:
> Are none nedfulle but tho, and nempne hem I thynke,
> And rekene hem by reson—reherce thow hem after.
> That oon is vesture from chele thee to save,
> And mete at meel for mysese of thiselve,
> And drynke whan thow driest—ac do nought out of reson,
> That thow worthe the wers whan thow werche sholdest.
>
> (B.1.14-26)

Holy Church begins here with a brief description of humanity's corporeal form and capacities, which depend upon "the erthe" and its helpful stores "of wollene, of lynnen, of liflode at nede," or more specifically "vesture from chele thee to save," "mete at meel," and "drynke whan thow driest." But less apparent in these lines is the connection between these material provisions and sin. The allowance of "drynke whan thow driest" clearly includes alcoholic beverages, a key source of pathogen-free water in the days before filtration and purification (Bennett 16-7). Yet this necessary substance must also come with warnings about its potentially dangerous effects. Drinking "out of reson" will make "thow worthe the wers whan thow werche sholdest," a point that registers both the economic consequences of immoderate consumption and the moral frailty of the fallen body. Humans have material needs that arise from our fleshly creation, and God has provided for those needs through "the erthe," but, as Louise O. Fradenberg observes of *Piers Plowman*, "need can slide very easily into excess," and any attempt to strictly separate the two only "propels desire" for that which is deemed excessive (50, 52). The first consequence of drinking too much—that it will make you a bad worker—calls attention to the fact that needs, desire, and excess are inseparable from the labors that meet those needs, satisfy desire, and create excess. While the earth is supposed to "helpe yow echone [...] In mesurable manere to make yow at ese," the promised clothes, food,

and drink require labor to come into existence. And yet, once these are produced, Holy Church does not give any indication as to what "mesurable manere" might mean for the distribution of these provisions in society at large and the diverse estates of which it is composed.[12]

Piers personifies the potential synthesis of material and spiritual work (Bloomfield 106; Watson, "Pastoral Theology" 95), but it quickly becomes apparent that the legitimacy of non-manual labor is one of the poem's principal difficulties. When Hunger appears at Piers's request after Wastour's arrival, as we will see, this violent figure problematically conflates "Contemplatif lif or Actif lif" as basically equivalent forms of life that "Crist wolde men wroghte" (B.6.248), ignoring the events that led to his own appearance, as Hunger blithely skips over Piers's dilemma about being forced to decide who is legitimately idle and worthy of charity. Piers cannot easily adjudicate the functionally non-equivalent forms of active and contemplative life. Piers's first appearance in the poem ends up demonstrating the impossibility of synthesizing material and spiritual work under coercive labor regimes in which everyone partakes of the fruits of the soil, while only a certain group must do all the work to produce it. While the labor arrangement over which Piers presides is based on daily wages and not servile obligation, this does not mean that, as Anna Baldwin avers, the episode "shows the connection between the free subject, who chooses whether or not he will labour honestly for himself

[12] For more on need as a regulating principle between humans and nature, and the necessity of human action to realize nature's bounty, see Mann 20, and Davis 60. See also Bishop, who notes, "The three necessities [...] are earned through 'work,' through labor. Yet observation in the fourteenth century, like today, shows that these necessities are not distributed equally" (194-95). On the problem of poverty in *Piers Plowman*, see Aers, *Community, Gender, and Individual Identity* 20-73; Pearsall, 'Poverty and Poor People'; Crassons; Kim; Scott.

and for the community as a whole, and the free Christian, who chooses whether or not to sin" (62). Scholarship on labor regulation in the period shows how the punishments for those who chose not to "labour honestly" make this vision of individual agency within the free association of peasant workers too optimistic.[13] The episode's baleful conclusion renders the freedom to avoid sin a theoretical possibility that is incompatible with praxis.

Early in the poem, Will poses a question that runs through the poem's subsequent investigations of the problem of sin and agency—"How I may save my soule [?]" (B.1.84).[14] Later on, Piers asks a surprisingly similar question. Despite his supposed spiritual authority, in his first appearance in the poem Piers wonders whether he can fulfill his duties as an agricultural employer without endangering his soul: "Myght I synneless do as thou sayest?" (B.6.229). Piers's self-doubt when confronted with the bewildering conflicts of the agrarian economy brought on by Wastour's refusal of work reveals the limitations of individualistic moral valuations of labor in conventional estates or monastic ideologies. When it was not the object of classist contempt, peasant labor in the Middle Ages was seen as spiritually beneficial, because it was supposed to be a simple, honest way to keep mind and body from sin. [15] This vision of labor, however, separates its individual moral benefits from the wider ecological, economic, and commercial networks in which agricultural workers are situated in *Piers Plowman*, where

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[13] See, for example, Robertson, "Branding and the Technologies of Labor Regulation"133-53; Aers, *Community, Gender, and Individual Identity* 20-73; Aers, "Justice and Wage-Labor after the Black Death" 169-91; Freedman 260-67; Rubin 32-33; Hilton 152-57; Given-Wilson 21-38.

[14] For a discussion of the importance of Will's question, see Pearsall, "The Idea of Universal Salvation" 257-81.

[15] On medieval attitudes towards the spiritual benefit of labor and its contemptibility, see Le Goff 70, 110-11; Robertson, *The Laborer's Two Bodies* 9, 26; Freedman 24-37, 145-48; Wood 52-53; Hoven 157-58, 236.

agrarian labor figures the links of dependency that draw humans into sin despite their intentions to avoid it. Work is necessary for survival, but the survival of the perishable body in *Piers Plowman*'s vision of society requires participation in a political ecology that is both an occasion for individual sinfulness, and a potential, highly contestable site of general redemption. In terms of both sin and salvation, this embodied depiction of human life forecloses the "radical human freedom for moral self determination" that Robert Adams describes in his reading of *Piers Plowman* ("Piers's Pardon" 395). If there is freedom, it is not radical, but exists within vividly rendered physical and social constraints on human action. The complexity of the relations of interdependence that allegorize these constraints on agency in *Piers Plowman* emerges most fully in light of the discourse of agrarian husbandry, whose intricate sense of the relations between human and non-human agents in the act of farming resonates with the overwhelming of individual intention in the plowing of the half acre.

**The Political Ecology of Agrarian Husbandry and Estate Management**

As we saw in the previous section, *Piers Plowman* situates Will's search for salvation within an agrarian political ecology formed to meet humanity's basic needs. The allegorical implications of this decision emerge in relation to the models of interdependence among human laborers and between laborers and non-human actors in medieval husbandry and estate management texts. Writers on ancient and medieval husbandry reveal how farmers, landowners, and estate managers developed complex social networks and models of cause and effect in order to organize tasks according to who performs them, when they should be done, and how they should be done in response to specific conditions. The experience of growing food required constant attention to the

interactions of air, water, soil, and topography, and the health, skill, and experience of the laboring population, as well as the wisdom of its managers. As the Middle English verse translation of Palladius's fourth-century manual says,

> In thingis iiij, al hosbondrie mot stonde:
> In watir, aier, in londe, and gouernaunce.
> And iij the first, as watir, aier, and londe
> Beth natural; the firthe is of plesaunce
> And crafte of man. But this consideraunce
> Is first to haue, how thing is of nature
> In placis ther thou wolt ha the culture.
>
> (1.15-21)[16]

The concluding couplet of this rhyme-royal stanza, part of a translation prepared for Duke Humfrey of Gloucester "as a useful manual" ca. 1440 (Petrina 268),[17] claims that to succeed in "culture" (i.e. cultivation), one must first know the "nature" of the relationships between water, air, and land in a given place—in other words, its climate. The skill of a husbandman can only extend so far as his knowledge of "nature" supports his efforts at "culture," and knowledge of nature can be obtained both through observation of the land itself and deduction from the health of those that live on the land. In other words, the practical concern of landowners, estate managers, and laborers with working the land provided an "experiential" knowledge of the "interaction between nature and human culture" which defines "traditional ecological knowledge" (Winiwarter 96). More than an "interaction," agrarian labor combines nature and human culture in a relationship of dynamic reciprocity, such that this activity seems less like a stable base

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[16] *The Middle English Translation of Palladius De re rustica*, ed. by Liddell. This edition is based upon the presentation copy given to Humphrey of Gloucester, while the EETS edition of 1879 is based on a later copy.
[17] Petrina also notes the "alphabetically arranged *tabula* that made it possible to consult the text quickly and easily" (268). For an alternative reading of the translation as a humanist literary exercise first, practical guide arguably second, see Wakelin 44.

for an ideal social hierarchy, and becomes instead a site for the orchestration of disparate, sometimes unpredictable and antagonistic agents.

Medieval writings on soil improvement emphasize the laborers' ecological expertise in their descriptions of the tasks different kinds of workers perform. As the Anglo-Norman *Seneschaucy* (ca. 1260-76) prescribes, "Lez tenurs dez charues deivent estre gent de conisance e deivent saver semer [...] e la terre byen gayner e enseysoner" ("The plough-keepers ought to be men of understanding who know how to sow, [...] and how to cultivate and crop the land well").[18] The use of marl and manure exemplifies traditional ecological knowledge, which comprehends the flow of energy between waste and food in the form of life-giving heat (Jones 150-1). The Anglo-Norman manual *Walter of Henley* (ca. 1276-90) advises,

> Beau fiz fens facez norir e de bone terre fetes votre fumer enhaucer e ove les fens meddler. E do votre bercherie chescune qinzeyne fetes le eyre marler de terre arcillouse, si vous leez, ou de bone terre de escurement de fossez, e pus estramer sure.

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[18] *Seneschaucy*, trans. and ed. by Oschinsky 282-83, whose edition remains the authority on the textual tradition of husbandry discourse in medieval England. *Seneschaucy*, along with *Walter of Henley* and Grosseteste's *Rules,* were the most widely circulated husbandry manuals in late medieval England, surviving in 15, 35, and 14 manuscripts respectively (Oschinsky 4, 11), and the ones which I rely upon for this argument. *Seneschaucy* and *Walter* were written in French, as were the *Rules* following a Latin version by Grosseteste (5). French was legible to both clerks and lords, but Latin and English versions of each were also made (9-10). Written for household officers receiving basic training in common law and estate management (3) or for small estate owners (176), husbandry manuals provide valuable evidence for farming practices, and remained influential up through the husbandry books of Fitzherbert and Markham in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries (Lamond xxi). On the manuscripts, see Oschinsky's 'General Introduction' 10-58. For the related tradition of classical Latin agrarian writers in late medieval Europe, see Fussell and Ambrosoli. For the general context of the development of management literature, see Clanchy and Keiser.

> Dear son, enrich the dung and with good earth build up your dunghill and mix the dung on top. And from your sheepfold every fifteen days marl the dung upon the floor with clayish ground, if you will, or with soil taken out of ditches and spread over the top of it.[19]

The same source shows that the raising of sheep for the primarily mercantile reason of selling wool also had definite ecological impacts, which, if harnessed efficiently, could contribute to the production of food, showing the interplay of ecology and economy in the circulation of nutrients and energy: "E a la feste notre dame, la premere, fetes ennoyter votre faude, solum ceo qe vouz avez berbiz ou plus ou meyns, qar en cele sesen gettent mut de fens" ("And on the first feast of our lady set up your sheepfold depending on the number of sheep you have, either more or less, because during that season the sheep drop much dung") (*Walter of Henley* 328).[20] Sheep dung, seen from one point of view as a by-product of the production of wool, turns out, from another point of view, to be an essential fertilizer that returns nutrients to the soil to promote the growth of food for humans and other animals, whose consumption in turn produces more "waste" that restarts this process. Here, the interactions of waste and commodity, and of shepherd, reeve, climate, calendar, the biology of sheep digestion, the wool market, and soil ecology are compressed in a single sentence, exemplifying the dense compression of

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[19] *Walter of Henley* 326. All translations of *Walter of Henley* are by the author, since Oschinsky's edition reproduces William Lambarde's late-sixteenth-century translation, a fascinating text in its own right, but one which distracts from my focus here on medieval manuals. *Walter* was the most popular husbandry manual of late-medieval England, and "was still copied, translated into Latin or English, and rewritten for its naturalist or farming content as well as for its antiquarian interest" well into the sixteenth century (Oschinsky 8).

[20] The Protestant preacher Hugh Latimer would use just this observation about sheep and agrarian ecology in his last sermon before Edward VI on covetousness (1550), which is rich in Langlandian echoes (149-50). See above, "Introduction" 15-16.

broad relational networks inherent in the attempt to write agrarian labor, both in practical and poetic registers.

This type of traditional ecological knowledge was constitutive of the necessary, quotidian expertise required to coax food from the ground. This knowledge had to coordinate a bewildering array of capricious actors, ranging from a careless worker to an unpredictable climate, that could make or mar a harvest. According to the *Seneschaucy,* a reeve

> deit veer ke tuz les serianz la curt seient matin levez a fere lur mesters, e ke lez charues seient part matin, e par ten iointes, e ke lez teres seyent byn arez, e bien enseisonez, e bien attorne, e semez de bone e nette semence solum ceo ke lez terres voilent porter.
> ought to see that the demesne servants rise early to do their work, that the plough teams are yoked in good time and that the lands are well ploughed, cultivated, prepared, and sown with as much good and clean seed as the lands demand (275-77).

Reeves find themselves in the position of trying to manipulate the demands of several human and non-human actors – the demesne servants, with their desire for more sleep, the draft animals with their need to be yoked so that they may be forced to draw the plow together, and the lands themselves, which “demand” an ample store of good seed. Along with other workers, lands, and animals, the calculations of the reeve must also include the vagaries of temperature and precipitation. Walter of Henley notes the necessity of carefully timed sowing, for “Sy aventure avegne qe une grand plue chece sur la terre, dedenz les oyt iours qele ert semee, e pus vegne un asper geel […] le blee […] serra pery”

("if by chance a great rain falls upon the ground within eight days of the wheat being sown and then comes a sharp frost [...] the wheat [...] will be lost") (*Walter of Henley* 322). But despite these precautions, even the most conscientious manager could not prevent the depredations of feckless workers, bad weather, and hungry animals. Estate managers participate in, but do not control, the relations that they must try to coordinate in order to achieve certain effects. Such attempts can easily end in unforeseen failure. Roger Townshend, a Norfolk lawyer and landowner, grumbles that one of his fields "is not redy to wete [for wheat] now for gret necligens of the bailif Brun", and advises his shepherds to "be warre of gresyng fowle mornynges [...] weder dogges and all other thynges" ("be wary of grazing on foul mornings, [as well as] weather, dogs, and everything else"). Townshend's wariness of dogs is the understandable result of an incident where a neighbor's dogs killed twenty-four of Townshend's lambs (Moreton and Richmond 501-2).[21] Even the swings of human temperament can be decisive in estate management. Walter, for example, suggests that a good reeve or bailiff will also look to the emotional state of his shepherd, for excessive anger could have undesirable economic consequences:

> Veez qe votre bercher ne seit pas trop irrous, qar par une ire auqune peot estervilement chacee dunt ele purreyt ester perye. La ou les berbis vunt passantz e le bercher vet entre eus, e les berbis vunt eschiwant dunqe nest pas bon sygne qil seit deboneyre a eus.
>
> See that your shepherd is not too irascible, because through anger some of the sheep may be cruelly driven, from which they may die. Look to where the sheep

[21] Townsend's diary is edited by Moreton and Richmond in their article "'Beware of Grazing on Foul Mornings.'"

> pass and the shepherd goes among them, and should the sheep go fleeing, then that is not a good sign that he is gentle to them (*Walter of Henley* 336).

Walter recognizes that the dynamic interactivity of the agrarian ecosystem merges physical processes, social relations, and affective states. While estate management texts ultimately serve the interests of the landlord, being written for the effective maintenance of socially stratified households and estates, all of these examples attest that writing about agrarian husbandry in practice introduces a set of agents with which the manager or laborer must collaborate on the model not of individual mastery over a subordinate group like servants, employees, or sheep, but rather of a flat, unpredictable network of actors mutually affecting one another.

The vicissitudes of human dependence upon the earth for its bodily needs exposes the vulnerability of the human body and its permeability to outside influences. The verse translation of Palladius, for example, offers advice on recognizing the conditions of miasmic disease:

> The longis woo [lung-woe] comth ofte of yvel eire;
> The stomak als, of aier is ouertake.
> Take heede ek if the dwellers in that leir
> Her wombis, sidis, reynys swelle or ake,
> If langour in their bladdris ought awake.
> And yf thou se the puple sounde and fair,
> No doute is in thi watir ner thyn aier.
> (1.50-6)

The connection between the ill-health of human inhabitants and the poor quality of air and water, much like observations of the connections between soil type and optimal crops, emphasizes the interdependence of disparate phenomena in the ecological assemblage of agrarian work. Writing about the toilsome relationship between humans and the earth means reckoning not only with the human exploitation of other humans, animals, and

lands, but also with the earth's, the air's, and the water's potentially dangerous participation in that process. Miasma, as Timothy Morton observes, is "the great great grandfather of all the other terms – milieu, atmosphere, surroundings, environment, world – with which humans have tried to think the place they live" ("Oedipal Logic" 17).[22] Like crop failure or a labor dispute, disease is a threat that exposes mutual entanglement. Premodern writing about agrarian husbandry foregrounds troubling, vulnerable relations between beings, exemplifying an ecological thought that includes sickness and failure along with regenerative cooperation in its treatment of the agrarian ecosystem. To observe phenomena such as earth-borne disease and the devastating results of unforeseen rogue agents within the network of agrarian production is to notice the human body's composition in and through material processes and flows of energy over which humanity collectively has at best some provisional power. *Piers Plowman*'s scene of agrarian labor captures the vulnerability of both body and soul in their shared entanglement in the political ecology of food production, from which no one, laboring and non-laboring bodies alike, may withdraw.

**The Impossible Community: Agency and Ecology in the Plowing of the Half Acre**

The literature of estate management shows how the specific hierarchical communities formed in the process of growing food situate humans within broad networks of interdependent agents that determine the scope and the efficacy of their actions. This sense of relational dependency emerges as the key feature of the plowing in passus 6, when the episode moves from an enabling sense of shared effort towards a collapse that results from the very connections that make collective labor possible.

[22] On the history of the miasmatic theory of disease, see Aberth 11-18.

Husbandry manuals present the hoped-for results of an ideal practice of farm labor and estate management, but the plowing of the half acre enacts how such processes can go wrong.

In the *Rules*, an Anglo-Norman treatise on estate management compiled at the behest of Robert Grosseteste for the Countess of Lincoln between 1240 and 1242 and based on a set of Latin rules he had made for managers of his own household (Oschinsky 5, 196), the landlord is instructed to

> amonestez trestute vostre maysnee meynte feyth ke tuz iceus ki vus servunt entendaunt servir a deu, e servir vus lealment e peniblement, e pur la volente deu parfere en tute chose, parfacent vostre volente e vostre pleysir en tute chose ke ne sunt pas encuntre deu.
>
> admonish all your household often that all those who serve you should endeavour to serve God and to serve you loyally and diligently and in order to do the will of God they ought to do your will and pleasure in all things; in all things, that is, that are not against God (398-99).

The last, hesitant qualification to this instruction suggests some disparity between a worker's religious obligations and his obligations to his lord. One can imagine the ever-questioning Will wondering, were he to receive such advice, how he should know whether or not an order were against God. This religious and conceptual problem emerges from the material practice of manorial management in a way that mirrors *Piers Plowman*'s method of spinning theological expositions from quotidian encounters and testing theological principles against embodied experience.

The particular experience of employment or servitude carries with it some potentially thorny difficulties over agency and sin. Loyal service means submitting to a whole host of limitations on the individual will. Grosseteste's *Rules* advise complete unity in the household staff: "Comandez ke […] tuz seyent de un acord e de une volente com un quor e une aline" ("Order that […] all ought to be of one accord and of one will, as one heart and one soul") (400-401).[23] If the will, formed by service and dependence, cannot freely avoid sins like wrath or the unwitting denial of charity committed at the behest of a social order in crisis, then a more general reformation, not individual redemption, is necessary. As David Aers puts it in summarizing Thomas Aquinas, "if a community is organized in a manner opposed to the pursuit of the virtues, it would foster 'good' citizens (that is, ones obedient to its laws) whose goodness would actually foster, even demand, wickedness" ("Justice and Wage-Labor" 169-70). Piers lives this dilemma in his role as a plowman and bailiff for Truth in passus 6, unable to reconcile his religious solicitude with the exercise of power his role seems to demand.

In Will's second dream vision, he witnesses a sermon by Reason, whose harangue confronts its listeners with the consequences of their sinfulness, including recent meteorological catastrophes:

> And the south-west wynd on Saterday at even
> Was perliche for pride and for no point ellis.
> Pyries and plum-trees were puffed to the erthe
> In ensample, segges, that ye sholden do the bettre.
>
> (B.5.14-17)

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[23] Elsewhere, Grosseteste advises the lord to make clear which visitors he favors, so that his servants may do the same, "e ke en co puissez especialment esprover ke eus volent ico ke vus volez" ("And by such behaviour your household can in particular prove that your wishes are theirs") (*Rules* 406-407). On Grossetese's theological influence on Langland, see Rhodes 43-71.

This interplay of spiritual action and its manifestations in the material world relies on a common idiom of supernatural causation appearing in natural events, as God's judgment of evil times could be perceived in any catastrophe (Owst 226). The success of Reason's sermon reinforces its contextualization of sin within a wider world, as it inspires the Seven Deadly Sins to confess their wrongs, all of which emphasize their eminently social manifestation. Wrath, for example, says he is a gardener and cook in a convent (B.5.136, 153), sowing seeds of conflict and serving "joutes of jangling" ("stews of squabbling") as if he poisons the food supply (B.5.156), circulating in the community along the same lines that bring it together in growing and eating food. The plowing of the half acre emerges from this episode of general repentance, and expands its vision of the social circulation of sin to the entire food system and its ecological relations.

Reason's admonition to "Seketh Seynt Truthe, for he may save yow alle" is eagerly taken up by his audience, but no one knows where to find this saint, just as Will had no "kynde knowynge" of Truth in passus 1 (B.5.57). The hopeful pilgrims to Saint Truth "blustreden forth as beestes over baches and hilles," seeking him in a starkly rendered rural landscape, devoid of signs or markers (B.5.514). Wandering like sheep without a shepherd, the group eventually encounters Piers Plowman, who presents his credentials as a guide to Truth by listing his duties as Truth's lifelong manorial servant:

> "I have ben his folwere al this fourty wynter—
> Bothe ysowen his seed and suwed hise beestes,
> Withinne and withouten waited his profit.
> I dyke and I delve, I do that he hoteth.
> Som tyme I sowe and som tyme I thresshe,
> In taillours craft, in tynkeris craft, what Truthe kan devyse.
> I weve and I wynde and do what Truthe hoteth.
> For though I seye it myself, I serve hym to paye;
> I have myn hire of hym wel and outherwhiles moore.
> He is the presteste paiere that povere men knoweth:

> He withhalt noon hewe his hire that he ne hath it at even."
> (B.5.542-52)

Piers presents himself as a bailiff or reeve, someone who would be in charge of overseeing the agricultural work of a manor (before appearing as an independent peasant who owns his own plow and croft later in the episode) (Dyer, *"Piers Plowman* and Plowmen" 162). This role required expertise about every detail of the land he inhabits. As the *Seneschaucy* declares,

> Le baillif deit par matin lever e surveyer lez boyz, bles, lez prez, e lez pastures, e veer ke damage ne seit fet. E il deit veer ke lez charues seyent matin ioynz, e a dreit hure dezioynt, issinc ke il facent le iour lur dreite arure quantke il fere pount e deyvent par la perche mesure. E il deit fere lez teres markler, fauder, conposter, aprouwer e amender, ensy ke seon sen aperge par le apruement e lamendement del maner.
>
> The bailiff ought to rise early and inspect the woods, the corn, the meadows, and the pastures to see that no damage is done. He ought to see that the plough teams are yoked early and unyoked at the right time so that they do their proper ploughing for the day, as much as they can and should do by the measured perch. He ought to arrange that the lands are marled, folded, manured, improved, and enriched so that his knowledge becomes evident in the improvements and progress on the manor (268-69).

Piers is a loyal and fairly compensated overseer, who has "waited his [Truth's] profit," fulfilling Walter's axiom that "e qant a pru fere dussent penser de la chose est lur, e qant a despenses fere qe la chose est autrie" ("when it comes to profits they [bailiffs] should think of the thing as their own and when it comes to expenses they should act as if the

thing is another's")(*Walter of Henley* 340). Piers is not only an overseer of the maintenance of agrarian land, but an active worker, who would have been responsible, according to the *Seneschaucy*, for plowing, sowing, and repairing his equipment, as well as knowing how "la terre byen gayner e enseysoner […] fosser, e clore, e batre, e lez terres remuer e fosser pur lez terres asecher" ("to cultivate and crop the land well [...] to dig, make enclosures, and thresh, and to remove earth or dig trenches to dry the land") (282-283).[24] Piers's relationship to the earth is deep, detailed, and multifaceted, ranging from the surveying of various manorial environments, to the preparation of crops for the market, to the disciplining of other workers, to ditch digging and manure spreading.

Drawing on his local expertise as Truth's servant and ploughman, Piers proceeds to render in more detail the stark landscape the pilgrims had wandered through aimlessly, and what was once a blankly indecipherable countryside becomes a map filled with readable signs. Piers directs them past landmarks including a brook, a ford, a croft, two stumps, and a burgh (hill) labeled with unmistakable moral meanings, such as "Swere-noght-but-if-it-be-for-nede- / And-nameliche-on-ydel-the-name-of-God-almyghty" (B.5.570-71). In the presence of the Plowman, the rural landscape comes alive with theological and ethical significance, moving from the austere emptiness of the "baches and hilles," an open space of error, to a recognizable agrarian place.[25] The ford (a man-

[24] Translated by Oschinsky with slight modification by the author.
[25] Dyer in "*Piers Plowman* and Plowmen" argues that these landscape details "resemble (when shorn of their allegorical references) a boundary clause of a piece of land in woodland terrain [...] The characteristic features of woodland landscapes were dispersed farms and hamlets, irregular and hedged fields, and a mixture of arable, pasture, and wooded land. The inhabitants included many free tenants and a high proportion of smallholders, who lived on wage earning or crafts. This happens to be the type of country that is found in southwest Worcestershire and adjacent parts of Gloucestershire and Herefordshire, around the Malvern Hills" (156-57).

made river crossing), the croft (a small enclosed field), and the tree stumps (from clearing woodland to extend the plowland) are all landscape features that result from the type of labor Piers would perform; as he has shaped this landscape, he also interprets it with his allegorized directions. Reason's sermon only partially brings about individual repentance; it inspires remorse, but Piers's subsequent focus on the agrarian landscape and the labors that shape it directs our attention to the daily, relational context in which the people must attempt to follow the sermon's message.

Just as Will is unable to satisfactorily absorb instructive speeches, the pilgrims cannot grasp Piers's directions to Truth by just listening. They request that he join their pilgrimage and be their guide, to which he agrees, but on the condition that they first help him finish plowing his half acre (B.6.1-6). This cooperative labor starts out well, organized along the lines of the traditional, estates-based social order. A knight, at first seized with enthusiasm to learn the plow, takes up his traditional role as defender of the faith and the common people. He is also charged to hunt, an aristocratic activity that depended on the creation of parklands and so often entailed the loss of access to wastes, woods, and pasture for the community in which it was practiced (Mileson 158). But Langland chooses to emphasize hunting's positive ecological impact on the production of food, and to diminish any conflicts or resentment over status it may have caused (Mileson 177). At first, Piers's exchange with the knight seems to celebrate the interdependence and reciprocity figured by humanity's relationship to the earth and the estates' relationship to each other:

> "By Seint Poul!" quod Perkyn, "ye profre yow so faire
> That I shal swynke and swete and sowe for us bothe,
> And othere labours do for thi love al my lif tyme,
> In covenaunt that thow kepe Holy Kirke and myselve

> Fro wastours and fro wikked men that this world destruyeth;
> And go hunte hardiliche to hares and to foxes,
> To bores and to bukkes that breken down myne hegges,
> And go affaite thi faucons wilde foweles to kille,
> For swiche cometh to my croft and croppeth my whete."
>
> (B.6.24-32)

The conditions that Piers offers join the defense of traditional religion to the defense of the agrarian landscape. Workers and aristocratic hunters are brought together through their complementary interventions in the rural ecosystem. Piers sees hunting through the lens of husbandry manuals, in which killing pests is a part of cultivation.[26] The knight's hunt, as Piers understands it, promotes the flourishing of human food by destroying its local animal consumers. Before its failure, this representation of the processes of agrarian production and socialization allows for a generative vision of the estates' reciprocity, but it is through the same material interdependence that binds the estates together that this vision falls apart. When Piers asks the knight to protect him and Holy Church from "wastours," he foreshadows the dangers of interconnectivity that will soon be realized when such wasters appear on the scene. If the connections between the land, workers, their managers, and aristocratic employers or retainers makes possible a reciprocal estate ideology, in which everyone contributes to the common profit by doing their individual tasks, it is these same connections that allow idlers to have such infectious power by virtue of their refusal of work.

Piers's negotiation with the knight situates agrarian labor in the broader rural ecosystem by connecting noble beasts like boar, stags, and falcons to the labor of the plowman. This broadening of labor's context extends to the conflicts and inequities

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[26] The Middle English *Palladius*, for example, has several fascinating recipes and techniques for ridding crops of moles, insects, and other infestations (1.827-987).

inherent in the production of limited food resources during a labor shortage, which inspired the contemporary legal compulsion of work in the Ordinance and Statue of Laborers by the aristocratic and employer classes the knight and Piers represent.[27] This detailed treatment of agrarian labor joins it to both a rural ecosystem of wild animals and managed landscapes, as well as to a socioeconomic and legal apparatus, making this scene an apt figure for the limitations of human agency, not, as Baldwin claims, a celebration of free peasant association (62).

Despite its early success, the plowing of the half acre quickly gives way to a serious labor dispute as workers dig ditches and pull up weeds (B.6.107-11). When Piers pauses at his plow in order to survey the workers and evaluate "whoso best wroghte" (B.6.113), he sees a group of people who flout his authority: "Thanne seten somme and songen atte nale / And holpen ere this half acre with 'How trolly lolly!'" (B.6.115-16). Piers is enraged by this display of idleness, his vengeful response anticipated by the narrator's ironic description of their babbling song as "help," which shows the criterion by which Piers judges this group—do they participate in the production of food or not? While this standard of judgment might go some way towards explaining Piers's vehement reaction to the idlers, the text does not show any immediate consequences of their avoidance of work other than Piers's anger. The suddenness of its appearance and the terms with which Piers expresses it suggest that his anger is a potentially sinful overreaction, not a righteous enforcement of estate ideology. Piers himself is aware of

[27] Dyer notes "some element of collaboration between the aristocracy and the peasantry" in this regard ("*Piers Plowman* and Plowmen" 168). See also Rubin 33. For *Piers Plowman* and labor regulation, see Middleton, "Acts of Vagrancy"; Justice and Kerby-Fulton, *Written Work*; Clopper; Harwood; Musson; Robertson, "Branding" and *The Laborer's Two Bodies*.

this possibility, given the words of the oath with which he begins his threatening exhortation (an oath he will repeat later as he invokes the disciplinary violence of Hunger):

> "Now, by the peril of my soule!" quod Piers al in pure tene,
> "But ye arise the rather and rape yow to werche,
> Shal no greyn that here groweth glade yow at nede,
> And though ye deye for doel, the devel have that recche!"
> (B.6.117-20)

In an explosion of extraordinary rhetorical violence, Piers raises the threat of starvation to those who "wasten that men wynnen with travaille and with tene" (B.6.133). The "tene" that Piers expresses mirrors that which is felt by laborers in their "travaille," as "tene" describes both vexation and the pain of physical toil. This repeated word emphasizes the conflicts generated by agrarian work and its support of those who do not themselves earn "with travaille," undercutting the possibility of the resentment-free division of manual and intellectual labor prescribed by Grace in passus 19: "And alle he lered to be lele, and ech a craft love oother, / And forbad hem alle debat—that noon be among hem" (B.19.251-52). Piers is provoked by these idlers presumably because their inaction might lead to a crop failure, as Anne Scott points out, but this motivation is not specified as the source of his anger at this moment (86). The fact of idleness itself, manifested here as insolent singing and indulgent quaffing of ale, seems to provoke Piers' outrage. Why is his anger so immediate, and why does articulating it cause Piers to think immediately of "the peril of [his] soule"? By this point in the half acre episode, we have seen that seemingly disparate activities performed by different classes of people, such as women sewing, knights hunting, and peasants plowing, all contribute to corporate survival. But this reciprocal interconnection contains within it the possibility of its dissolution. When

someone rejects some supposedly beneficial aspect of this social order, the result of this rejection cannot be contained, but circulates like a virus that is both physically and spiritually harmful. When the knight fails to bring these wasters in line, his role as a non-manual laborer becomes functionally similar to that of an idler in his inefficacy (B.6.164-8). This emphasis on the dispersed causal chain that links the waste of other people's labor, starvation, and disciplinary punishment captures the mechanism by which hunting, aristocratic violence, and the production of food were all connected in Piers's negotiation with the knight. When those who "wasten" try to withdraw from these reciprocal relations in their illicit idleness, their actions reverberate through the agrarian ecosystem. In this way, *Piers Plowman*'s agrarian ecology produces an immanent critique of a fragile social ideal, a community that theoretically defines its members' capacities while at the same time preventing their actualization.[28]

The plowing of the half acre episode demonstrates that in this poem the three estates model is about making and taking food—from the earth, from the animals, and from the labor of other humans. The stomach is therefore the most symbolically appropriate way for Piers to control his workers. After the drinking idlers appear, society's dependence on food produced through agrarian labor evokes an atmosphere of coercive necessity rather than cooperative productivity. Even the confidently moralized landscape that Piers seemed to know so well fails to provide orientation here, as Piers

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[28] Middleton observes how the internal logic through which community is formed in *Piers Plowman* becomes "unstoppable, all the way to the commune's undoing by the very principles that generated it" ("Acts of Vagrancy" 212). Similarly, the philosopher Roberto Esposito defines community as "that which is both necessary and impossible for us," because it is "the community of law, debt, or guilt […] We inhabit the margin between what we owe and what we can do," such that "when we do attempt to construct, realize, or effect community, we inevitably end up turning it into its exact opposite" (*Terms* 15).

swears “by the peril of [his] soule,” contradicting the landmark whose name explicitly forbids such rash oaths (i.e. “Swere-noght-but-if-it-be-for-nede- / And-nameliche-on-ydel-the-name-of-God-almyghty”). This repeated oath expresses the pain caused by the incommensurable demands of theological morality and economic practice. In revealing the social and material facet of religious obligations, the half-acre episode describes with increasing frustration the limitations on any individual’s search for Truth. By engaging in real work on the landscape he once saw and interpreted clearly for the lost pilgrims, Piers loses his status as guide to Truth, and becomes a conflicted instrument of worldly power. To reassert his control, Piers calls upon the hunger that his labor is supposed to prevent.

> “Now, by the peril of my soule!” quod Piers, “I shal apeire yow alle” —
> And houped after Hunger, that herde hym at the firste.
> “Awreke me of thise wastours,” quod he, “that this world shendeth!”
> Hunger in haste thoo hente Wastour by the mawe
> And wrong hym so by the wombe that al watrede hise eighen.
> He buffetted the Bretoner aboute the chekes
> That he loked lik a lanterne al his lif after.
> (B.6.171-77)

This graphic depiction of bodily suffering is a culmination of the dark side of agrarian ecology that lurked in Piers’ negotiation with the knight. Collective reciprocity and society’s dependence on the fruits of manual labor emerge as the forces that constrain individual bodies to suffer. These forces in turn can be strategically manipulated in an attempt to make people behave according to another’s will.

The consequence of succeeding or failing to produce food is individually located in the stomach, but this success or failure depends upon a whole ecological and social network of land and labor. This social order depends upon the exploitation of that labor by classes of people that do not work manually, and whose relative leisure is traditionally, legally, and religiously sanctioned. This social order in *Piers Plowman* appears at times

to be as natural as the need to eat, but the plowing of the half acre scene shakes its foundation in agrarian labor, a divinely ordained burden that falls unevenly across a community. Even when the majority seems to be doing what his or her station in the social hierarchy demands, the behavior of a few disturbs the process and reveals its vulnerability. This dilemma leads directly to the culminating action of Piers's first appearance in the poem—the tearing of the pardon and his renunciation of the active life.

The incompatibility of morality and necessity, of charity and survival, is encapsulated in the hard-nosed advice of the *Seneschaucy*: "Nul provost a nul maner ne teyngne table pur receyvre lez alanz e lez venanz al custage le seygnur, sanz especial comaundement par bref" ("No reeve, on any manor, ought to keep open house and receive visitors at the lord's expense without special warrant by writ") (280-81). The labor crisis of the late-fourteenth century had arguably changed attitudes towards charity, making requests for aid "less likely to be met by townsfolk and landlords" (Rubin 33).[29] Piers, as a loyal employee of Truth, would find it a part of his job description to jealously guard the products of his labor for his lord, Truth; as a prosperous peasant, which he also at times appears to be, he enforces the labor statutes, which aimed at those who quit their jobs before the agreed-upon date to seek better terms.[30] The positive allegorical

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[29] Schofield finds evidence for a hardening of attitudes toward the poor and economic opportunism by the prosperous members of society in his case study of Hynderclay during the Great Famine of 1315-22. Similarly, in "Poverty and Its Relief" Dyer finds that wills in late medieval towns occasionally limit their charitable bequests to householders so as to avoid giving to "vagrants who might have chosen lives of idleness" (62).

[30] See Middleton on the "contract clause" that punished those who left employment earlier than agreed ("Acts of Vagrancy" 227), and Given-Wilson on restrictions of worker mobility in the labor statutes (21-22). Dyer notes the role of prosperous peasants in enforcing the statutes ("*Piers Plowman* and Plowmen" 168); Rubin describes a "new class of substantial tenants" who enforced the labor statutes (32-33).

significance of the economic relationship between Piers and Truth, which at first implies Piers's spiritual authority, turns into a source of that authority's failure as the literal terms of the allegory develop. Piers's attempt to constitute community based on labor in the service of Truth leads to the dissolution of that community and its relationship with Truth.

When Piers calls upon Hunger to discipline the unproductive members of his miniature society, Langland foregrounds questions of individual agency in the deliberate strangeness of an individual calling forth a general state that results from the interruption of ecological networks and social assemblages. The prosopopoetic individuality of the actors in this confrontation (Piers unleashes Hunger on Wastour) calls attention to the systemic nature of the crisis. Hunger appears here as the force that drives humanity to labor on the land. Hunger is the manifestation of Adam's curse that enforces what Karl Marx calls the "metabolic interaction between man and nature" (290) and functions as what Ernst Bloch calls "the oil in the lamp of history" (69). Hunger is a general feature of human existence, but its extreme form as Langland presents it here results from the movement of forces that elude individual mastery, such as crop failures, labor shortages, and manorial power structures. Langland's Hunger consolidates all of the latent violence of a fragile agrarian economy into his single figure as he grips Wastour's gut and threatens to wring out his life, making visible the otherwise dispersed chain of cause and effect that joins individual bodies to systems of nature and power.

This pessimistic vision of labor is balanced in the poem with the possibility of its more positive fulfillment at the level of spiritual symbol. As critics like Aers have argued, Langland's poem is marked by an Augustinianism that does not involve "denying any place for good works in the process of salvation" (*Salvation and Sin* 94). Nicholas

Watson argues of the "Piers hypothesis" as it appear in B.5-7 that in the quest for salvation, "success is possible, if the Christian community […] can find within itself the truth it needs to be saved: a process involving, above all, the performance of work," and even when this hypothesis fails, the failure itself provokes the desire for salvation ("*Piers Plowman*" 94-95, 117-118). According to Rebecca Davis's reading of Anima's gloss of "heathen" as etymologically related to "heath" in passus 15, "[Anima] is confident in the ability of human action to prepare nature for the reception of grace: the empty field can be made fruitful through cultivation" (78). As these scholars demonstrate, human labor in *Piers Plowman* figures optimistically the attainment of salvation at the spiritual level. While literal labor is a constraint on human autonomy, it is also the manifestation of humanity's potential to change its circumstances and to actualize God's bounty – a site for the exercise of agency, not its loss. As Mary Raschko affirms, "humanity both needs the healing mercy of Christ and actively participates in its expression through diverse forms of work in the world" (50). Need calls for mercy; lack leads to its remedy.[31]After all, as Ernst Bloch observes with his own foray into prosopopeia, hunger leads to the desire "to change the situation which has caused its empty stomach, its hanging head" (75). The plowing scene, however, discovers that the cultivation of an empty field does not necessarily mean that it will be fruitful. The experience of agrarian husbandry undermines expectations of fulfillment and reciprocity, of predictable cause and effect. The episode of the half acre deploys the immense causal networks of agrarian ecology, of which communal and individual effort is only one part, in order to explore the

[31] Mann notes that "natural law," as represented by Hunger, "enforces social justice, [but] it also prompts mercy" (20). Zeeman claims that humanity's natural condition is one of lack, but "patient endurance […] may bring the most extreme spiritual rewards" ("The Condition" 3).

incommensurability of the promise of cooperative labor as a foundation of Christian community with the conflicts that it reveals.

After Hunger has done his disciplinary work, he turns into a kind of mouthpiece for natural law and its determining influence on social order (Mann 20). Piers questions Hunger about the difficulty of reconciling coerced labor with the ideal of charity, which should knit a society together:

> "Ac I preie thee, er thow passe," quod Piers tho to Hunger,
> "Of beggeris and of bidderis what best be to doone?
> For I woot wel, be thow went, thei wol werche ful ille;
> Meschief it maketh thei be so meke nouthe,
> And for defaute of hire foode this folk is at my wille.
> And it are my blody bretheren, for God boughte us alle.
> Truthe taughte me ones to loven hem ech one
> And to helpen hem of alle thyng, ay as hem nedeth.
> Now wolde I wite of thee, what were the beste,
> And how I myghte amaistren hem and make hem to werche."
>
> (B.6.202-11)

Piers moves rapidly from recognizing his "blody brethren" to desiring to know how to "amaistren hem," bringing the inequity inherent in the practice of charity uncomfortably close to the manipulation of that inequity in order to dominate poor laborers. Piers realizes that the wills of the poor are not exactly free, but are beholden to *his* "wille" when "defaute of hire foode" effectively destroys their agency. This attempt to instrumentalize need endangers his own ability to avoid sin, as Piers recognizes. After Hunger answers him by counseling charity for undeserving beggars and harsh words for undeserving ones, Piers is still uneasy and asks if such judgment of his "blody brethren"

really is, as his earlier oath suggested, at the peril of his soul: “Mighte I synnelees do as thow seist?” (B.6.229).[32]

Hunger reassures Piers by quoting scripture, beginning with Adam’s curse in Genesis before dilating the concept of work: “Contemplatif lif or Actif lif, Crist wolde men wroghte” (B.6.248). Piers is mostly satisfied, praising Hunger’s “profitable wordes” (B.6.274), but this appeal to authority does not resolve the painful conflict. Instead, it ironizes Hunger’s and Piers’s acceptance that there is a congruence of meaning in the word “wroghte” when applied to the contemplative or the active life, and their assumption that “profitable wordes” will make hunger more bearable. As Kathleen Hewett-Smith observes, “He [Piers] cannot reconcile his experience of actual hunger and distress with this easy intellectualization of the propriety of need” (19). Not even the arrival of the harvest and Hunger’s satisfaction can bring about a stable conclusion to the episode (B.6.299-300). Passus 6 ends with a prophecy of future famine brought about through a storm and flood that follows and potentially results from the idleness that returns after Hunger’s departure. In an exasperated moment of cyclical futility, recognizing that excess and idleness are produced by the labor Piers demands, the narrator warns workers to

> wynneth whil ye mowe,
> For Hunger hiderward hasteth hym faste!
> He shal awake thorugh water, wastours to chaste,
> Er fyve yer be fulfilled swich famyn shal aryse:
> Thorugh flodes and thorugh foule wedres, fruytes shul faille
>
> (B.6.319-23)

[32] On “the potential for ethical catastrophe” in the denial of charity that causes Piers such anxiety here, see Crassons 14.

The problem of community, labor, and agency is not solved, but is destined to begin again, as Hunger will reappear "wastours to chaste," even though this time the famine will be caused by a meteorological catastrophe – yet another rogue agent in the political ecology of agrarian work.

The solutions offered in Hunger's scriptural answers and in the priest's translation of the pardon of passus 7—do well and go to heaven, do evil and go to hell—appeal to an individualist moral principle that falters in the face of daily struggles for survival within an unpredictable climate and community. The pardon and Truth's letter return to the theory of an ideal society with which the plowing episode began, this time including merchants and lawyers as well as laborers, while maintaining the distinction between true and false beggars (B.7.1-106). When the priest translates the pardon, however, Piers gives up his labor and withdraws from society, pledging to follow the path of the religious elite who take no concern for their physical survival (B.7.118-30). Piers's first appearance in the poem, and the only one in which his eponymous occupation is so literal, ends with the disappointment of what Andrew Cole describes as the poem's concern "with reconciling the work of salvation with the work of the world" (181).

*Piers Plowman*'s dialectical movement between questions and answers results from the textual forms and theological, social, and bodily conditions over which Will and his interlocutors often fight that prompt the poem's search to repeatedly begin again.[33]

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[33] As Bloomfield observes, "*Piers Plowman* is a dialogic and dialectical poem, and the quest for perfection gives the work its unity and movement. Since the quest for perfection is a perpetual struggle with opposites in order to transcend them, the form of a *conflictus* best expresses the significant content of that search. The dialogue of Will with his interlocutors, and the conflicts he sees, reflect the spiritual and material aspects of the journey of the soul and society to Christian perfection" (143). See also Middleton on the

Nicolette Zeeman recognizes that in *Piers Plowman* "action also has a passive dimension and is not merely the sum of its own intentionality: action too is something you undergo" (*Discourse of Desire* 8). I have argued that this mixture of activity and passivity results from *Piers Plowman*'s engagement with the agrarian ecosystem, something that would not exist without human action, but which exceeds human control. Focusing on just how *Piers Plowman* depicts the communal and ecological context in which individual moral aspirations take place offers another framework for the ongoing debate about agency, sin, and salvation in the poem, situating these terms within the collective agencies that Langland's prosopopoetic method captures so vividly.

In passus 8 a friar offers a parable of the troubling relationship between soul and body, illustrating how easily people sin by describing a stumbling passenger, a figure of the soul, in "a boot amydde a brode watre," which represents the body (B.8.30):

> "And thus it fareth," quod the frere, "by folk here on erthe.
> The water is likned to the world, that wanyeth and wexeth;
> The goodes of this grounde arn lik to the grete wawes
> That as wyndes and wedres walweth aboute;
> The boot is likned to oure body that brotel is of kynde,
> That thorugh the fend and the flessh and the frele worlde
> Synneth the sadde man seven sithes a day."
>
> (B.8.38-44)

The world "that wanyeth and wexeth" and "the goodes of this grounde" are in their most general sense simply the mutability of matter and material possessions, but they also recall the specific uncertainty of agricultural production, the cyclical rise and fall in abundance of "goodes of this grounde" as a result of "wyndes and wedres," as seen in the prophecy of famine that closes passus 6, with its horrifying vision of Hunger, who "shal

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"combative animus" of *Piers Plowman* in "Narration and the Invention of Experience" (101), and Smith, *The Book of the Incipit* 7-9.

awake thorugh water," rising from a flood to menace the population once again (B.6.321). The friar's parable, however, is not totally deterministic, for the boat remains upright as long as no deadly sin is committed, and humans, after all, are equipped with "wit and free will" (B.8.53). In *Piers Plowman* the moral agency that this allegory implies is always enmeshed in the ecology in which such agency can be exercised. In the friar's parable, the waves are likened to "goodes of this grounde," upon which humans depend for food, but concern for which prevents the fructifying of the Word. The poem's serial reenactment of this material limitation on human freedom reveals that the necessity of labor extends even to those who avoid manual work, emphasizing the impossibility of escape from the communal webs of food production and the necessity of sin this impossibility implies, a dark entanglement that is the political ecology of Adam's curse.

*Piers Plowman*'s prosopopoeitc exploration of agency and embodiment within England's agrarian ecosystem articulates one way in which power can manipulate the "bare life" of its subjects by intervening at the level of the community's access to the earth and its produce (Agamben). While *Piers Plowman* may appear as the more capacious, intellectually supple text compared to the polemical developments of Langland's style and method in the *Piers Plowman* tradition, this does not mean that it is free from the taint of authoritarian control and even violence, upon which James Simpson builds his dichotomy between "reform" and "cultural revolution," which *Piers Plowman* and *Pierce the Ploughman's Crede* respectively represent (*Reform* 377). *Piers Plowman*, considerably longer and more complex than the poems that form the corpus of the *Piers Plowman* tradition, nevertheless introduces a mode of thought about ecological interaction between communities and their agrarian infrastructures in relations of agency

and control that would shape thought about the mechanisms of reform in subsequent centuries, as we will see in the following chapters.

# Chapter 2

# The Spirit of the Beehive: The Worker, the Sovereign, and the Writer in the *Piers Plowman* Tradition

## Introduction

*Pierce the Ploughman's Crede* and *Mum and the Sothsegger* form part of the *Piers Plowman* tradition, a group of late fourteenth- and fifteenth-century poems that takes its alliterative form and allegorical method from *Piers Plowman*. The *Crede* (ca. 1393-1401) survives in whole or fragmentary form in four manuscripts from the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and was printed with *Piers Plowman* by Reyner Wolfe in 1553, while *Mum* (ca. 1409) survives in only one manuscript (Barr, *Tradition* 8-10, 22-23). Like *Richard the Redeless* and *The Crowned King*, the two other poems Helen Barr identifies in her definition of the tradition's corpus, the *Crede* and *Mum* adapt Langlandian poetic idioms in order to address political disorder and religious corruption. The two poems exemplify how Langland's work immediately stirred the imaginations of reformers to use poetry in order to comprehend social reality and speculate about its transformation. This response to Langland would persevere through the sixteenth century.[1] But the *Crede* and *Mum* also exemplify the problem of using *Piers Plowman*'s allegory of agrarian labor to construct poetic fantasies of economic, political, and religious stability, purged of the waste and unpredictability that define Langland's engagement with agrarian husbandry. These two poems intensify the contradictions of agrarian reformism by seeking to wrest a form of literate political agency from

[1] For *Piers Plowman*'s role in fourteenth-century social movements, especially the uprising of 1381 via John Ball's letters, see Justice, *Writing and Rebellion*. For an account of its use to sixteenth-century reformers, see White; King, *Reformation*; Little; Hudson, "Epilogue."

Langland's vision of materially constrained agency. To resolve this tension, the *Crede* and *Mum* imagine an alliance between visionary literature and sovereign violence.

The imagined political agency of these poems depends upon the attempt to naturalize the agrarian political ecology that guides Langland's allegory. The *Crede* and *Mum* reconvert the troubling interdependence of agricultural processes into a stable base for political hierarchy, where wasters are excluded, rather than recognized as painful reminders of a vulnerable social ecology.[2] These poems celebrate the generative capacities of the rural environment and its human workers, but do not incorporate what medieval writers on agrarian husbandry recognized as the inevitable occurrence and central role of waste and conflict in the process of growing food. However, a residue of political ecological disorder remains in this attempt to reconceive the political efficacy of the literary at the intersection of labor and sovereign authority, thanks to the terms of the agrarian allegories these works adopt.

Agrarian ecosystems generate (what appears as) waste and parasites (to some observers) as a matter of course, but the *Crede* and *Mum* represent these unpredictable agents only to imagine their destruction at the hands of a violent sovereign. Building on the conflicts of passus 6 of *Piers Plowman*, where Piers enforces labor by calling down Hunger upon those he casts out of his community of charity and work, these poems seek a "natural" image of social order from which "unnatural" parasites like friars and idle advisers can be excluded, unless they are forced to work. The *Crede* and *Mum* refashion Langlandian political ecology into a static natural order, as opposed to ecological disorder, but they cannot do so without succumbing to contradictory condemnations of

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[2] On naturalization, or the use of natural metaphors to justify social norms, see Campbell; Datson and Vidal, ed., *The Moral Authority of Nature*.

literacy and the sovereign's exceptional leisure, both of which are essential elements of their imagined reformist efficacy.

Each poem condemns leisure and the related phenomena of mobility, aesthetic luxury, and excessive learning, while at the same time celebrating, in artfully balanced alliterative lines, the errant intellectual quests of prophetic malcontents and restless seekers. These poems criticize the learning and aestheticism of the clerical class, even as the manual laborers these poems hold up as the indispensible alternative emerge from a clear literary tradition. The *Crede* and *Mum*, in their attempts to imagine social totality and its reform via agrarian allegory, depict the interaction of manual and intellectual labor in such a way that calls into question the status of reformist writing, at once a luxurious product of contemporary material conditions, and an attempt to change them.[3] The desire to construct a program for reform based on the distinction between productive labor and consumptive, non-manual work falters when the poems themselves represent, and hope to actualize, the material effects of immaterial labor.

The mechanism for such effects in these poems is the political ecological link between the agrarian biosphere, communal survival, and political authority. This link activates the vision of a Christian kingdom remade by the intertwined figures of the impoverished laborer and the royal sovereign, the respective central figures of *Crede* and *Mum*. As these poems imagine social orders purged of parasitic waste, they discover that the mechanisms of reform they look to – writing and sovereign violence – are part of the agrarian political ecology that contains their vision of transformation. In this way, *Crede*

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[3] In this way, the thought of reform figured by manual laborers in poetry participates in the ongoing anxiety of critical intellectuals about their labor and its relation to dominant economic systems. See Brennan and Ganguly for recent reflections on this perennial problem.

and *Mum* show how ecological thought could be instrumentalized in the service of authoritarian reform, while at the same time resisting allegorical naturalization.

***Pierce the Ploughman's Crede*: Work and Waste**

*Pierce the Ploughman's Crede* attacks the four fraternal orders for obscuring the material and moral primacy of agricultural labor with their verbal, intellectual, and architectural excesses. The narrative of the *Crede*, in which an unlearned narrator goes to representatives of the four orders to learn the creed of the Christian faith, only to find that a poor plowman is the only one who can teach him, parades before the reader sputtering friars, lavish buildings, and supposedly authoritative texts and ideas that are, in John Scattergood's words, "invoked only to be rejected" (*Lost Tradition* 168). Against the superfluities – theological, architectural, and bodily – that the *Crede* describes, the poem insists upon agricultural land and labor as the stable measure of economic and moral value. In this regard, the *Crede* is a product of a radical antifraternalism that uses many literary conventions of religious estates satire (such as attacking hypocrisy and mobility), but goes beyond standard insults to advocate the abolition of religious orders.[4] Many have dismissed the poem as an example of an anti-intellectual narrowing of the much longer poem it imitates,[5] but the *Crede* also develops the agrarian focus of the earlier poem by using it as a hermeneutic to understand and demystify the aesthetic forms and learned pursuits of institutional religion – monastic buildings, antiquarian study of monastic origins, religious plays, and fraternal sermons – translating them into

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[4] For a summary description of conventional antifraternalism and its impact on social histories of regular religious life, see Geltner.

[5] Critics generally agree that the poem selectively appropriates *Piers Plowman* and narrows its capacious social vision (Crassons; Simpson, *Reform* 377; Barr, *Tradition*; Scattergood, *Lost Tradition*), although Holsinger has shown its aesthetic sophistication.

manifestations of the primary productive labor that these activities depend upon for their existence. The *Crede*'s critique, however, is threatened by the very terms of its hermeneutical instrument, the agrarian ecosystem that exceeds the poem's attempt to establish neat boundaries between production and waste, worker and parasite.

The *Crede* asserts the foundational status of peasant labor against the historical foundations of religious orders with which the friars are so obsessed. The poem often refers to foundations, or the "foundement," in its historical, social structural, and architectural senses (Simpson, *Reform* 377). The friars trumpet their historical foundation and their place in relation to biblical lineages,[6] while the *Crede*-poet counters with agrarian labor as the foundation of all social order. This fixation is intimately related to the poem's instrumental purpose: in order to reform this corrupt society, it must understand the interlocking functions of different social roles as they relate to the fundamental level of society's material and spiritual survival. In order to decide what counts as valid work, the poem must construct a final arbiter of value – the poor plowman. The *Crede* naturalizes agrarian labor, making the suffering body of the laborer the norm and guarantor of the entire social order, thereby making the corpulent excess of the monastic orders into figures of unnatural consumption that threaten the fantastical homeostasis of an ideal agrarian society. Monastic buildings and monastic bodies throw this system out of balance, while also making visible the agrarian networks upon which

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[6] Cf. David Lampe, "All the parties in this interlocking chain of satiric dialogue are obsessed with arguments about apostolic succession" (72).

the reformist hermeneutic of the poem depends. The *Crede* struggles with its attempt to purge society of figures that are also an integral part of the political ecology it envisions.[7]

In the narrator's quest to learn his creed, he visits representatives of the Franciscans, the Dominicans, the Augustinians, and the Carmelites, in that order. During each exchange, the friars attack each other rather than offer any substantive instruction. Each episode follows the same structure: the narrator asks who can teach him his creed, and then he names a rival order, prompting the friar to which he is speaking to launch an attack on that rival, before praising the merits of his own order. This establishes the "satiric strategy" of the *Crede*, wherein each representative of the fraternal orders undermines his own speech by doing nothing but blaming others, exhibiting no positive virtues (Lampe 77). The Franciscan (32-134) pillories the Carmelites, the Dominican (154-267) attacks the Augustinians, the Augustinian (268-334) denigrates the Franciscans, and two Carmelites (339-419) savage the Dominicans. By the time the narrator encounters Peres (421), the poem has given the narrator (and its readers) little to trust. The *Crede* must shore up the credibility of its final speaker before Peres delivers a lengthy screed against the fraternal orders and finally teaches the narrator his creed (455-850). It does this by demonstrating Peres's true poverty and attachment to the earth (421-432), his generativity, both as a worker and a married father (421-442), and his generosity (444-446). Peres opposes every trait which the friars have mutually accused each other of demonstrating, or which they themselves plainly manifest in their dress,

[7] Not only is this the case in the poem's symbolic economy, but also in the world it addresses, where religious orders were major participants in the agrarian economy as landlords and as buyers and sellers of goods. See Slavin.

bodies, and buildings: excessive wealth, idleness, non-generative consumption, the related privilege of mobility, and a grasping desire for material goods.

As much as the alliterative style or figure of the plowman, the fact that religion and material existence mutually shape one another in the *Crede*'s reformist imagination indicates the depth of its obligation to *Piers Plowman*'s example. The *Crede* is undoubtedly more baldly anti-fraternal than *Piers Plowman*,[8] but the earlier poem performed a way of fusing spiritual and bodily struggles that the *Crede*-poet enthusiastically imitates. The narrator of the *Crede*, full of care "for y can noght my Crede" (8), articulates his concern in terms of the most physical consequences of his ignorance. His parish priest will "penaunce enioyne," requiring him to give up meat for Lent, but also for his lack of knowledge of the creed, he will have to give up meat every Wednesday after Easter, too (9-13). The narrator's search for religious instruction, which he believes bears directly upon his salvation – he quotes John 3:18, "He that leeueth nought on me he leseth the blisse" (15) – takes shape in response to the embodied experience of penitential fasting. While many critics have seen the *Crede* as a polemical reduction of Langland's great work, the reduction is not only one born of misguided appropriation (Simpson, *Reform* 378), but represents a concentration of Langland's poetic figuration of the conflict between activity and contemplation, body and soul.

The *Crede* locates the timeless conflict between material toil and leisure within the timely discourse of monastic disendowment, which had become a real threat to smaller religious houses in the late fourteenth century due to post-plague population shortages (Harper-Bill, *Pre-Reformation Church* 36). The poem parodies the late-

[8] On *Piers Plowman* and anti-fraternalism and anti-clericalism, see Scase; and Geltner 49.

medieval proliferation of apologetic texts on the origins and value of monasticism, which responded to a rising tide of anti-monastic sentiment and the waning of their influence by promulgating self-congratulatory treatises on the antiquity and eminence of the orders that produced them (Pantin, Clark). According James G. Clark, many monasteries sought quite openly "to plesen the puple" (to use the words with which the Franciscan condemns the Carmelites in the *Crede*) in late medieval England, the Benedictines especially, as a strategy of defending their prestige in the face of both dissenting criticism and a waning interest from the public at large (15-32). This involved both attracting the laity to worship at newly decorated monastic churches, and going out into the community in the form of theatrical processions (Clark 24, 29-31). *Pierce the Ploughman's Crede* seems to respond to these efforts in detail, criticizing the dynamic of enclosure and openness, spiritual purity and material inducement, ancient origins and contemporary innovation that the orders undertook. The *Crede* seizes on these attempts and uses them against the religious orders, and in that regard it merely recycles the apologetic treatises of the Benedictines themselves, who denigrated rival orders as they asserted their own priority and prestige (Clark 17-18). Against the Benedictine emphasis on historical origins and scholarly prestige, the *Crede* counterposes the poor laborer as the only foundation that matters, defining a community based on the ostensible stability of rural work, which casts out the mobile, parasitic brethren.

**Errant Brothers**

When the friars attack each other in response to the narrator's requests for religious instruction, they describe a voracious hoard roaming threateningly through town and country. The narrator's first interlocutor, a "Menoure" (Franciscan), vents his ire

toward the Carmelites (thanks to the narrator's instigating remark that a Carmelite could teach him his creed) by alleging that they "lurken in her selles" (60), "And ryght as Robertes men raken aboute, / At feires and at ful ales and fyllen the cuppe, / And precheth all of pardon to plesen the puple" (72-4). The Franciscan's description of the Carmelite combines the passive, unproductive isolation of cloistered monks – they "lurken in her selles"– with the active pursuit of pleasure, both their own and that of others – they preach "to plesen the puple." This interplay of passivity, isolation, and non-generative enclosure with illicit and infectious movement eventually comes to characterize all of the *Crede*'s religious figures. The *Crede* thereby establishes the values it will seek to naturalize when Peres enters the narrative: labor, stasis, and procreative productivity.

For the *Crede*-poet, the mobility of the friars is as much a symptom and symbol of their illegitimate leisure as their lavish buildings or expensive clothes. As the Franciscan says of the Carmelites, "With sterne staues and stronge they ouer lond straketh / Thider as her lemmans liggeth and lurketh in townes" (82-3). Movement enables the lascivious corruption that the four orders supposedly spread throughout the commonwealth. This mobility represents their infective potential, as their bad qualities move from the "selles" where they lurk to "townes." Fraternal movement allows the orders to blur the lines between a healthy social body and its invasive pathogens. In a moment of what we are meant to see as obvious hypocrisy, the Franciscan warns the narrator about wanderers betraying the people to whom they preach: "And thus about they gon and godes folke by-traieth. / It is the puple that Powell preched of in his tyme; / He seyde of swich folk that so aboute wente: / 'Wepyng, y warne yow of walkers aboute; / It beth enemyes of the

cros that Christ opon tholede'" (82-90). The Franciscan here taps into a longstanding association, made much of in Wycliffite writing, between Cain and the friars. Caim, an alternative Middle English spelling of Cain, was used as an acrostic in Wycliffite polemic to associate the four fraternal orders with the original fratricide: Carmelites, Augustinians, Jacobins (Dominicans) and Minors (Franciscans).[9] As Margaret Aston notes, "Genesis used a phrase to describe cursed Cain that seemed perfectly fitted to the wandering mendicant. The condemned brother, 'a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth', was identifiable as the vagrant friar" (46). In addition to Cain's association with heretics as the first farmer who gave "wheat mixed with tares," he also "stood for ... false possession – and indeed his name is associated with the Hebrew word meaning to acquire or get" (Aston 46). This cluster of images around the friars the *Crede* exploits to emphasize the differences between work and wandering, or a true contribution to the community and a false offering.

Cain's (or Caim's) function as an exemplar of mendicant malfeasance activates the *Crede*'s dual obsession with movement and labor. The *Crede*'s spatial imagination intertwines urban, institutional, and agrarian settings, and the economic links between these places are the conduits through which the friars corrupt the social body, spreading hypocrisy while drawing away the community's economic lifeblood. The friars appear not as productive workers with an identifiable social function, but instead perform a perverse kind of labor in their pleasure-seeking and pleasure-giving travels. The *Crede* believes that society as a whole can be reformed if these people are made to do the right kind of labor, the kind that will enable its fantasy of a stable, contained agrarian ecology

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[9] See Aston on the possible origins of this acrostic (47).

and economy. But according to the labor statutes of the mid- and late-fourteenth century, a mobile and unstable rural workforce was the threatening new reality (Middleton, "Acts of Vagrancy"; Robertson, *The Laborer's Two Bodies*). The *Crede* shifts the destabilizing tendencies of the masterless laborer to a different novel and mobile identity: the wandering friar. According to Penn Szyttia's summary of late medieval antifraternalism, the friars

> were an extracurricular intrusion in the ordered and ancient structure of the Church; in their very existence, completely apart from any aberrant behavior, they violated the rational hierarchical order of authority. This view came into being because the friars were an institutional and structural novelty as a religious order. Though religious like monks and governed by a Rule, they differed in key respects: they were not cloistered, they wandered; they were religious, yet their mission resembled the apostolic mission of the clergy in preaching, conversion, confession; and unlike any other order in the 1200 years of the Church, they did not earn a living either by the work of their hands or by ecclesiastical endowment, they begged […] In institutional terms, they were placeless - one might even say homeless. In that sense, as an ecclesiological concept - extracurricular, extraecclesiastical, beyond received boundaries, structurally beyond episcopal control - the friars were monstrous […] In that respect, they embody […] exactly the kind of threat embodied […] by a different group of wanderers who similarly seemed to have no place in an ordered society: the rebels of 1381 (170).

The *Crede* consolidates these anxieties in its figures of fraternal monstrosity. At once regulated and roaming, finding no place in an established ideological structure, the *Crede*'s monks (and not just its Franciscan representative) embody a host of destabilizing social movements that included not just perceived ecclesiastical corruption but also changes in the agrarian workforce. It is against this fear of movement and placelessness that Peres's rootedness to his plowed field responds.

The Franciscan is not the only friar who attributes corrupting mobility to his rivals. The corpulent Dominican, whom the narrator provokes next, accuses the Augustinians of living "withe hores and theues" and engaging in "a pur pardoners craft," wandering about

and peddling penance (245, 247). According to the Carmelite, the Dominicans engage in a threatening social mobility as they insinuate themselves into the world of the powerful: "For with the princes of pride the prechours dwellen [...] Thei medleth with messages and mariages of grete; / They leeuen with lordes with lesynges y-nowe" (354-59). The Dominicans, whose wealth is emphasized in the poem's description of their lavish convent, interpose themselves within lofty political and economic spheres, meddling with the great while also participating too enthusiastically in the mercantile sphere with its solvent effects on ascetic discipline. The *Crede* exaggerates a reality in which, as Christopher Harper-Bill observes, the "external life [of monastic superiors] was little different from that of prosperous secular landlords. The greater monasteries were complex business corporations" (*Pre-Reformation Church* 37).

This collapse of the defining boundaries within society's estates finds form in the *Crede*'s description of the Dominican convent. This building features "posternes in pryuytie to pasen when hem liste" (165), as the home of the order evinces their effluvial, invasive power that at once violates and is activated by their ostensible separation from society. Instead of maintaining the ideal and theoretical founding purpose of the space of the cloister, where "the segregation from the outside world created, in a sense, the one crucial opening to heaven," the Benedictines, like every other order in the poem, embody a worldliness that falls far short of the authenticating and purifying worldliness of the poor laborer (Müller 173). Through an ekphrastic treatment of architectural ornament,[10] and a historical and paranomasial treatment of architectural foundations, the *Crede* describes fraternal entanglement with an ostensibly corrupt and wasteful social reality,

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[10] On which, see Holsinger, "Lollard Ekphrasis."

only to find that the poem's own reformist agrarian foundationalism remains entangled within the indissoluble political ecological links between religious culture and material production that it decries.

**The Fundament is a Grave**

The *Crede* paints the friars as parasitic wanderers, but they are also responsible for the poem's built environment, physically defining and concretizing the contours of the agrarian economy even as they symbolize its unredeemed waste. The friars, in their self-praise and lavish buildings, assert their foundational role within the social order to which Peres's vision of the structure of society is opposed. Foundations, both historical and architectural, are of great concern to these friars. The Franciscan scoffs that the Carmelites "can nought fynden who hem first founded" because "the foles foundeden hem-self," while the Dominican boasts, "our foundement was first of the othere" (64-5, 250). He says this in response to the narrator's galling report that "an Austyn" claimed "[his] ordir was euelles and erste y-founde" (239, 242). The Augustinian claims that "We friers be the first and founded vpon treuthe" (308), as opposed to the Franciscans, who have departed from the founding ideal of poverty. This repeated barb thrown amongst the narrator's interlocutors shows the *Crede*-poet's familiarity with the ways in which the orders manipulated time and space for the purposes of self-aggrandizement. These religious "communities' claims of validity drawn from their own institutional history could be visualized […] in architecture, décor, accoutrements, or even rites," especially, for example, in the mendicant orders' turn towards increased decoration of their chapter houses to assert the historical continuity of the orders with their founding saints (Müller 185-6). In the *Crede*, such trends only serve as physical evidence for the lack of

continuity between the mendicant orders' historical foundation and the contemporary architectural foundations on which they waste the community's wealth.

The Franciscan demonstrates this most clearly in his appeal to the narrator for a donation that moves seamlessly from the order's founding ideals of poverty to glorious architectural display.

> We hauen forsaken the worlde and in wo lyveth,
> In penaunce and pouerte and precheth the puple
> By ensample of oure life soules to helpen;
> And in pouertie praien for all oure parteners
> That gyueth vs any good god to honouren:
> Other bell other booke or breed to our fode,
> Other catell other cloth to coveren with our bones,
> Money or money-worthe, here mede is in heven.
> For we buldeth a burwgh – a brod and a large –
> A chirche and a chapaile with chambers a-lofte,
> With wide windowes y-wrought and walles well heye,
> That mote bene portreid and paynt and pulched ful clene,
> With gaie glittering glas flowing as the sonne. (110-122)

The friar's speech builds an almost ecstatic momentum that eventually causes him to rush from exemplary penance and poverty to a glorious, light-filled convent, culminating in the alliterative exuberance of "gaie glittering glas flowing as the sonne." This grasping enthusiasm serves to further the migration of the resonance of the language of the "foundement" from history, to architecture, to the structure of society, where, in the friar's view, the use of wealth matters more than its production. In terms of an earlier allegory, the Franciscan is Wastoure not Wynnere, seeing in wealth's use its fulfillment, not its loss. In taking the pelf of this world through voluntary donations, the Franciscans use this "good god to honouren" ["wealth in order to honor god"], as excess becomes the new foundation of a soteriological and material economy, a concretized symbol of the donor's salvation. The poem cannot explain the evident success of the fraternal practice

of preaching "to plesen the puple," except to equate their combination of material and spiritual values in their self-valorizing historical narratives with theft, where the prize is uselessly destroyed. But maintaining the strict moral separation between winning and wasting is, as we have seen, nearly impossible given their material continuity with one another.

The precise interplay of rural environment, institutional religion, and agrarian economy emerges in greater detail after the narrator rejects the Franciscan's plea for a donation and seeks instruction in his creed at the convent of the Dominicans. The staggering wealth on display in the Domincans' lavish architecture - "all strong ston wall sterne upon heithe [ground]" (213) – exudes physical permanence, a stolidity that seems to contradict the poem's charges of fraternal decadence and slipperiness. Yet these structures allow the *Crede* to apply its suspicious economic hermeneutic, decoding the Dominican complex in terms of its relation to the agrarian laborer. This richly descriptive section of the poem repeatedly translates the buildings of the Dominicans into the agrarian land and labor that paid for them. For the narrator, these large edifices concretize the toil and infrastructure of the agrarian economy, manifesting the expropriative power of the fraternal order. "The pris of a plough-lond of penyes so rounde / To aparaile that pyler were pure lytel" (169-70). "Though the tax of ten yer were trewly y-gadered, / Nolde it nought maken that hous half, as y trowe" (189-90). "I trowe the gaynage of the ground in a gret schire / Nolde aparaile that place oo poynt til other ende" (197-8). The friar's "kyrtlel [...] was good y-now of ground greyn for to beren" (229-30). The narrator wishes to expose the waste that these ornamental features manifest, tracing the visible buildings to their occluded foundation in the theft of the fruits of the labor of the poor

commoner: “And yet thise bilderes wilne beggen a bagg-full of wheate / Of a pure pore man that maie onethe paie / Half his rente in a yer and half ben behynde” (216-8). Applying the corrosive of economic morality makes the “strong ston wall” melt away, revealing a history of acquisitive violence that undermines the foundational ideals of the Dominican order, such as study and education, which the *Crede*’s Dominican representative utterly fails to provide.

However, when the *Crede* treats architecture as the visible manifestation of land and labor’s wasteful theft, it establishes a mode of thought about religious culture that turns back on itself, calling attention to the relationship between reformist poetry and the material conditions it seeks to change. The *Crede*’s juxtaposition of the architectural “fundament” of the Dominican convent with the earthy foundations of society in agrarian toil crystalizes this problem. The homonymic pun on “fundament,” which meant foundation, origin, and rectum, shows that these two seemingly opposed sites – the productive plowland and the consumptive convent – actually compose different but necessarily interconnected phases of the same process, even as the *Crede*-poet attempts to establish absolute opposition between building and field. This failed separation between monastic buildings and agricultural fields attempts to resist what the language of foundation encodes, as Jeffrey Masten observes: “the fundament lies productively in a strangely active-passive position: it is the ground but also the groundwork; the seat but also the offspring; the founding and the foundation” (135). The *Crede*’s use of Langlandian agrarian allegory recalls *Piers Plowman*’s struggles with passivity and activity, awakening the recognition of ecological interaction that exceeds any attempts to separate different social roles and states of being. The language of the fundament

captures a similar dynamic, where waste proves to be a foundational part of an ongoing process as the poem moves from the excesses of architectural ornament to the generative muck of the fertilized field.

This dynamic of attempted separation and persistent contamination, which troubles the *Crede*'s attempt to define an ideal social order, defines the poem's most richly described building. The Dominican convent is meant to signify the special status of the mendicant order as a group devoted to practices and goals that set them apart from society's other estates even as they remain connected to that world. But their buildings instead suggest easy and secret congress with the world that corrupts the brethren rather than sacralizes the outside world: "And all was walled that wone though it wid were, / With posternes in pryuytie to pasen when hem liste" (164-5). The walls, remarkable in their extent around the whole dwelling, are at once barriers that the narrator must cross ("And thanne y entrid in and even-forth went" [163]) and porous thresholds through which the friars may invade social body. The "foundement" of the Dominicans, given the polysemy of that term, means both their historical founding, and the foundation of their building, as well as their basic, foundational principles, but the *Crede* also activates its meaning as the rectum. Such a pun responds to the "paradoxical attempt of self exclusion from the society, within the society" that monastic architecture represents (Müller 172). This pun also captures the dynamic within reformist writing of the inseparability of reformist thought from the conditions that both provoke it and allow it to take artistic form. The *Crede*'s "fundament" evokes the knowable origins and firm architectural foundations that lead to the florescence of monastic ideals, but it transposes this fantasy of stable beginnings in monastic culture to the recirculation of waste as fertilizer on the

plowed field, the other richly detailed environment the poem describes. The reformist poem, as both an object of art, and hence a product of leisure, and a potential agent of transformation, shares affinities with both the luxury of the Dominican convent and the transformative recombination of waste and labor in the plowed field.

Like the Dominican convent to which it is opposed, Peres's field captures the poem's relationship to the conditions of its own composition by representing the circulation of excess that defies the moralizing strictures through which the poem hopes to contain and purge monastic forms of life. The physical buildings that represent, in James Simpson's words, "an unnecessary excresence in and on the Church" (*Reform* 378) become the useful symbolic waste through which this alternative social and religious space can be defined. Plowlands require fertilizer, and the quaking "quyk myre" [quagmire] (226) of the Dominican friar's ample flesh, seated at the center of his order's sturdy but effluvial "foundement," is well-positioned to supply what is needed for the fields in which Peres plows "in the fen almost to the ancle" (430). The poet requires the excesses of an enemy against which the reformist writer may imagine an alternative community. Given that the first half of the poem condemns the translation of land and labor into art and architecture, the poem's negative attitude towards literacy and writing in its second half suggests a recognition of the analagous position of reformist writing to other forms of leisure and waste, which necessitates the reactive construction of an alternative poetic authority rooted in spaces outside of the halls of wealth and prestige, reasserting the social boundaries that the agrarian allegory consistently blurs.

When aristocrats or clerics denigrated rural laborers, according to Barr, they emphasized the dirtiness of their work: "As a keeper of animals and fertilizer of fields,

the peasant was ripe for comparison to manure and other forms of animal waste [...] Alongside the insistently bodily portrayal of the peasant class – a group, which, if their detractors were to be credited, had no control over their sphincter muscles – was their representation as dirt, or pollution" (*Socioliterary* 131). In Wycliffite discourse, however, "the virulent tradition of peasant contempt" shifts targets from the third estate to the praying estate (Barr, *Socioliterary* 134). The *Crede* participates in this shift by associating its fraternal representatives with bodily waste. The *Crede*'s playfulness with the semantic excess of the "foundement" captures the dynamic of Nicholas Watson's remarks on reformism, orthodox and otherwise, in the fifteenth century: "reform requires boundaries. However inclusive it may seek to be, its inside is organized, rhetorically, over and against an outside […] Yet the real relationship between a reform movement and these excluded ones [...] is more intimate than their stark opposition in reformist rhetoric suggests [...] [R]eformist rhetoric's gestures of exclusion are fraught with a sense of recognition" ("A Clerke" 583). This intimate interplay of inclusion and exclusion finds its allegorical expression in the *Crede* through the images of contamination and circulation that undermine the poem's strident attempts at rhetorical containment. This explains the many parallels between the *Crede*'s corrupt figures and its virtuous narrator, or even between the hypocrisy of the friars and Peres's own contradictory rejection of literate labor. The friars are both firmly entrenched and nomadically parasitic. They are non-participants in a productive economy that nevertheless invade it at every node of operation, from the field to the market, emerging from fortress-like structures that simultaneously allow both closure from, and complete openness to, the agrarian economy. They consume what the laborers in this economy produce, but in so doing, they produce

the place against which the poem defines its reformist project. In the narrator's peripatetic search for answers, his mobility reflects that of the friars he eventually learns to distrust and condemn, while the poem's own status as instrument of reform and artistic artefact parallels the depiction of fraternal architecture as both wasteful excresence and central expression of society's productive energies.

The *Crede*'s desire to separate producer and parasite is undermined not only by its agrarian allegory, but also by its narrative structure, which depends upon each friar criticizing another order as prompted by the question of the narrator. While the excess and hypocrisy of the fraternal invective may be clear, the friars' lack of credibility prevents any stable critical perspective from which an alternative may be posited. In order to ground its critique of the monastic orders, the *Crede* descends into the mud in a lavish description of its icon of authentic religious instruction: the poor plowman. This field and its laborer are the "fundament" in the sense of being both "a material object from which another material object grows or originates" and "the evidence that something is true or valid; the authority for a statement or a definition, the basis of a doctrine, the grounds of an argument, the reason for a belief or an opinion" ("Foundament" Def. 4 and 6). In other words, the *Crede* positions the narrator's encounter with Peres as a demonstration of both the priority of agrarian infrastructure for the survival of society, and of the laborer as the ideal cleric, offering true instruction where official religious figures had failed. Yet, for the boundary-drawing urges of reformist writing, a scene of agrarian labor, rather than exemplifying the type of activity that exists in absolute opposition to religious foundations, allegorizes the deep connections between these forms of life. Peres and the friars form different aspects of the

same process, and Peres's labor encodes a vision of interdependence that exceeds the normative categories of the *Crede*-poet's attempt to naturalize a stable three estates social model.

**Peres, Waste, and Writing**

After his series of encounters with the friars, our narrator "wente be the waie wepynge for sorowe" (420) before encountering Peres and his family in a muddy field. Peres asks the narrator why he is crying: "Sely man, why syghest thou so harde? / Yif the lake lijflode lene the ich will / Swich good as God hath sent" (444-446). Peres's offer of food, recalling the narrator's fear of missing meals as his motivation for learning the creed at the poem's beginning, establishes the worker as the provider of religious instruction that the friars spectacularly failed to offer. Where the friars are consumers, Peres produces; where they are unmarried and non-procreative, Peres has children (Barr, *Tradition* 228; Lampe 75). The nature of his labor, too, carries with it the promise of stability. Peres is a part of the earthy element upon which he labors. He does not need to roam about, to steal and confabulate in order to earn his keep. He can be found, as the narrator found him, when he is needed. All of these traits are meant to protect the credibility of Peres's speech after the sour experience of all the fraternal denunciations that left the narrator in tears.

Peres is situated in an environment that has been shaped by his labor, just as his body and that of his wife, with her wounded feet, bear the marks of this struggle with the earth. The land and the laborer appear inseparable, as the Dominican's corpulence matched the excessive luxury of his convent.

> His cote was of a cloute that cary was y-called,
> His hod was full of holes and his heer oute,

> With his knopped schon clouted full thykke;
> His ton toteden out as he the londe treddede,
> His hosen ouerhongen his hokschynes on eueriche a side,
> Al beslombred in fen as he the plow folwede;
> Twey myteynes, as mete, maad all of cloutes;
> The fyngers weren for-werd and ful of fen honged.
> This whit waselede in the fen almost to the ancle,
> Foure rotheren hym by-forn that feble were worthen;
> Men myghte reken ich a ryb so reufull they weren.
> His wijf walked him with a longe gode,
> In a cutted cote cutted full heyghe,
> Wrappen in a wynwe schete to weren hire fro weders,
> Barefote on the bare ijs that the blod folwede. (422-436)

Each "cloute," made of a coarse cloth ("cary"), functions as a protective covering that offers only openings, echoing the dynamic that defines the friars' permeable enclosures. The wife who accompanies Piers in the field reveals the mutual interaction of labor and earth as her guiding of the cattle "with a longe gode" makes her track blood on the frozen, unplowed mud. This image concretizes the bodily experience of the labor that is abstracted and then manifested in the buildings and bodies of the friars as the final receptacles of alienated wealth.

The exposure of Peres and his family to the environment is further registered in Piers's stockings "Al beslombred in fen," in his mud-soaked mittens, and in the muck he wades through "almost to the ancle." "Fen" means mud, but also dung or excrement, an increasingly current usage throughout the fifteenth century according to the MED ("Fen" Def. 2). The mention of his four heifers in the line following the description of his mucky immersion further connects Peres to the process of fertilization, part of the repertoire of anti-peasant invective that is here invoked as a positive attribute (Barr, *Socioliterary* 154). Fertilizer represents productive waste, emblematizing the poem's ambition to deploy religious discourse against its deftest manipulators, who have crafted durable institutions

and built environments from the same linguistic and textual resources that Peres and the *Crede*-poet will use to oppose them. Peres's rant to the narrator recycles the repetitive and excessive invective of the friars, succumbing to the same provocation by the narrator, whose questions always lead to abusive tirades. Rooted in muck, Peres is both the source of the wealth that the friars squander, and the recipient of the symbolic waste of the fraternal fundament that fertilizes his fields and that he tries to redeem by transmuting their corrupt discourse into the impetus of vernacular religious instruction and reform. As we have seen before, however, distinguishing between instruction and cant, and generation and waste, is a challenge that the poem's allegorical ecology cannot meet.

Peres's rant is supposed to be authentic, even though the fraternal backbiting has established a pattern whereby every denouncer is in turn denounced. If Peres escapes the undermining of his own attack on the friars, it is only by virtue of taking up the labor of instruction that the friars had neglected in response to the narrator's questions. But this instruction, written here in the form of a creed, sits uneasily with Peres's condemnation of fraternal literacy and education, thereby exposing his own discourse to the corrosive effects of hypocritical denunciations. While he might at first seem, as a manure-spattered husbandman, like a figure for the normative reclamation of waste recycled for the narrator's spiritual benefit, Peres's invective produces an excess that rebounds against his status as a figure for the simultaneous valorization of manual labor and religious instruction. Near the end of his polemic, Peres announces his remedy for the spiritual corruption and material waste of the friars.

> 'Y might tymen tho troiflardes to toilen with the erthe,
> Tylyen [till] and trewliche lyven and her flech tempren.
> Now mot ich soutere [shoemaker] his sone setten to schole,

> And ich a beggers brol [brat] on the booke lerne,
> And worth to [become] a writere and with a lorde dwell,
> Other falsely to a frere the fend for to seruen.' (742-7)

Enforced agrarian labor is Peres's plan for restoring the social order that the friars undermine. Peres wants to redraw the social boundaries that the threatening mobility of the friars has erased, restoring these parasites to their rightful place within the social body. Peres denounces the situation where laborers, who "toilen with the erthe" and bear the marks of that labor, just like the souter, or cobbler, whose teeth are "with toylinge of lether tatered as a sawe" (753), may now "setten to schole" their children, such that the "brol" of a beggar can "on the booke lerne" (744-5). For Peres, this textual education undermines the social order he believes his labor upholds. This education makes potential workers "worth to a writere and with a lorde dwell, / Other falsely to a frere the fend for to seruen." Yet, as Scattergood points out, Peres attacks the means through which the reformist desiderata of bible study and vernacular instruction can be achieved (*Lost* 178), and which he himself seems to endorse, given that the poem concludes with Peres taking on the mantel of the pedagogue and finally instructing the narrator in the creed. He concludes his presentation of the creed with the assurance that "All that euer I haue writen is soth, as I trowe" (837). Like the friars, who undermine their own way of life by castigating those of their fellows, Peres, too, catches himself in the voluminous invective by which he hopes to define and exclude society's corrupting element.

Crucially, this moment of literate self-contradiction coincides with an undecidable ambiguity as to who is the speaker, for the following line reads: "And for amending of thise men is most that I write" (838). As Barr describes this moment, "the voices of author, narrator, and Peres all merge" (*Signes and Sothe* 49). The socially destabilizing

effects of aspiring to be a writer that Peres laments in his tirade seem also to invade the fictional characterization that has generated the disputes of the narrative. This ambiguous moment, in which the speech of Peres and its written form overlap each other in a surfeit of potential "speakers" of these lines, marks the *Crede*'s self-defeating attempt to assert, textually and poetically, the foundational role of productive, manual labor over and against the textual work of those who have succumbed to the temptation "on the booke lerne, / And worth to a writere" (745-6). More than just an instance of intermittently perceptible Lollard anti-intellectualism,[11] this moment exhibits the poem's attempt to make sense of the fraught relationship of dependency and undecidable priority between manual labor and intellectual labor, capturing its own reformist art within a satirical trap laid for religious brethren. The figure of agrarian ecology cannot maintain the distinctions between winning and wasting, generation and degeneration that the *Crede* wants to map onto social divisions and cultural forms. Instead, this figure introduces an element that, like its appearance in *Piers Plowman*, shakes the foundation upon which social and religious divisions and hierarchies may be built. *Pierce the Ploughman's Crede* extends *Piers Plowman*'s exploration of the destabilizing interdependence of agrarian ecology as an allegory for social and religious order and agency, but it does so through its failure to naturalize and contain the effluvial, cyclical ecology of waste, work, consumption, and production.

### ***Mum and the Sothsegger*: Sovereign Parasites**

*Mum and the Sothsegger* exhibits the same difficulties with naturalization and containment, but they emerge from *Mum*'s exploration of high politics, particularly the

[11] On lollard anti-intellectualism in general, see Hudson, *Premature* 224-227.

figure of the sovereign, who is at once the guarantee of the political body's integrity, but also its most vulnerable, excluded member, threatened on all sides by the deceitful advisors and agents upon whom his power depends. Where the *Crede* constructs an imaginary foundation from which a unified and productive social order could grow in the plowed field, *Mum* complements this approach by joining the operation of sovereign power to the agrarian work that enables the material survival of the realm. In each case, the imaginary construction of social order requires the definition and exclusion of those paradoxically intimate and foreign agents that weaken the social body, introducing dissension and waste into its otherwise ideal functioning. *Mum*'s will to immunize the body politic activates the "cultural fantasy," to use the terms of Jacques Lezra's discussion of totalitarian ideology, that populations "acquire coherent corporate identities and wills when they are purged of alien bodies […] [and] that political institutions can likewise be purged of competing interests and authorities" (208). As Lezra observes, the figure of "the monarch's intimate advisor or agent" serves as a flashpoint in this fantasy of purgation (208), and *Mum* makes much of this advisory figure in early-fifteenth-century politics, when the troubled reign of Richard II was still a recent memory, and Henry IV's reign was in its early days. In *Mum*, royal power is vulnerable to the manipulation and misinformation of idle and greedy advisors. Such threats find their imaginative neutralization in a dream vision of "ecological sovereignty" (Smith), where sovereign violence protects the land and labor that found the social order. *Mum* represents the political dimension of reformist ecology, as the relations among land, labor, and religious forms of life are shown to be inseparable from sovereign power and its vexed, ambiguous relation to the territory it controls, both as a political unit and biological

support of the population. *Mum* thereby completes the implied sovereign agent of reform in the *Crede*, making visible the person and the process that will guarantee the fantastical image of a stable political ecology by forcing people to labor.

*Mum and the Sothsegger* arrives at this vision of reformist violence through an intellectual quest allegory familiar to readers of *Piers Plowman*. The narrator knows that the king is threatened by self-interested advisors who follow Mum, the personification of self-protective silence that cares nothing for truth, and only for reward. Mum's adversary is the personification of frank truth-telling – the Sothsegger. The narrator wants to know which is best, and can find no one who will defend the Sothsegger, as the world seems to be run entirely by followers of Mum. The poem recounts his efforts to find champions of truth-telling, a frustrating search that ends with the narrator falling asleep and dreaming of a fecund, pleasant agrarian landscape, which contains a garden tended by an old freeholder guarding his beehive. This elderly worker takes up the cause of the Sothsegger, and explains to the narrator the importance of advising the king without fear, using his beehive as an exemplum for this lesson. The narrator awakens and presents a bag of grievances to the king, having become the Sothsegger that he had once sought, and found in the garden of his dream.

The dreamer's vision of the beehive embodies the naturalized ideal of a generative social order, but it is one that depends upon a figure of soveriegn violence that stands outside of the order its violence guarantees. The poem's appeal to sovereign violence to enforce nature's generativity enacts the paradox of ecological reformism, in which the perception of a holism that connects land, labor, work, waste, and religion sits alongside a desire for a world in which stable boundaries, imposed from without, ensure

that everyone and everything works in silos, according to its kind. The sovereign in *Mum* (both the king bee and the human king) is the feeble but somehow indispensible agent who is to bring about this new world, but his divided and supplemented power makes him structurally parallel to the parasitic figures that he destroys in his protection of the commonwealth's integrity.

The lines that open *Mum* - an incomplete sentence due to the manuscript's missing of the poem's beginning - link its investigation of royal power to an image that simultaneously suggests enclosure and unity, and aperture and division.

> Hovgh the coroune [crown] moste be kept fro couetous peuple,
> Al hoole in his hande and at his heeste [hest] eke,
> That euery knotte of the coroune close with other,
> And not departid for prayer ne profit of grete
> Leste vncunnyng comyn caste vp [uncunning commons cast off] the halter
> And crie on your cunseil for coigne [coin] that ye lacke,
> For thay shal smaicche of the smoke and smerte therafter
> Whenne collectours comen to caicche [catch] what thay habben [have]. (1-8)

Crown and halter together must be kept whole and binding, the introductory sentence admonishes. The king's crown, in danger of being "departid," or divided, by covetous people, is made up of knotted sections that cannot have a weak link, or else the other controlling circle, the halter around the commons, will be cast off by an acquisitively petitioning mob. The rest of the poem unfolds under this image of vulnerable governance, in which the metonymic sign of sovereign power is at once a curiously wrought enclosure, and an irremediably divided and permeable opening. The crown's authority is not self-sufficient, but depends upon an analogous device, "the halter" that keeps the commons in check. The need for this halter, or bridle, arises from the king's need to collect the coin that he lacks, underlining from the start the dependence of the sovereign upon the material support of his subjects.

The crown is threatened by the covetousness of the governed, according to *Mum*, because of the absence of a truth-telling adviser, "a fabuler [...] / Forto telle hym [the king] the texte, and touche not the glose, / How the worde walketh with oon and with other" (140-2). This dependence upon a faithful reporter, however, bases the king's authority on the authority of another figure who is conspicuously absent from all of the poem's spaces of authority: the Sothsegger. The textual metaphor for the Sothsegger's counsel positions the poem itself as offering the king the true text of the way the world works. However, the relationship between poetry and *Mum*'s naturalized image of society's material relations and political structure is anything but clear. As in the *Crede*, writing in *Mum* exposes the conflicted dynamic of inclusion and exclusion that defines the similar figures of the sovereign and the parasite.

According to the narrator's initial description of Sothsegger, he is absent from the service of those to whom he tells "soth": "Saunder the seruiselees shuld be his name" (44). He is "seruiselees," or unemployed, because his strength – blunt, plain truthfulness – is also his weakness. The Sothsegger

> can not speke in termes ne in tyme nother
> But bablith fourth bustuely [boisterously] as barn vn-y-lerid; [unlearned person]
> But euer he hitteth on the heed of the nayle-is ende,
> That the pure poynt pricketh on the sothe
> Til the foule flessh vomy for attre [vomit forth poison]. (49-53)

A particular style of unregulated, uneducated speech flows from this figure, which lances the boils of an infected social body. The pierced "foule flessh" that vomits forth its poison anticipates *Mum*'s ultimate image of truth-telling, as the narrator, having woken from his dream, "forto conseille the king," "vnknytte[s] ... a bagge / Where many a pryue poyse [secret poetry] is preyntid withynne" (1343-4). If "pryue poyse" suggests

allegorical poetry, as poetry that is secretive with its meanings, then *Mum* once again calls attention to itself as the Sothsegger's text. As with Peres's anti-intellectual stance in the *Crede*, however, there is an asymmetry between the idealized "vn-y-lerid" speech of the Sothsegger and the artistry of "pryue poyse." In *Mum*, the poem's authorizing images of poetic reformism – lanced boils, opened bags of texts – suggest the uncomfortable continuties between the activity of reformist writing and the excess typically associated with the parasitic figures of the *Piers Plowman* tradition, including the figure of the sovereign.

**Reform, Writing, and Excess: Regulating the Beehive**

Mum provokes the narrator's quest when he claims, "Thow were better folowe me foure score wynter / Thenne be a soeth-sigger" (253-4). Mum schools the narrator in the values of self-protective silence, and the narrator begins his journey to find someone who can answer Mum's assertions. "I was wilful of wil and wandrid aboute," the narrator reports in a line that emphasizes its debt to *Piers Plowman*, before going to visit representatives of the seven sciences at the universities (321). He then moves on to the friars, "alle the foure ordres, / There the fundament of feith and felnesse of workes / Hath y-dwellid many day, no doute, as thay telle" (392-4). As in the *Crede*, the friars are a "fundament:" a foundation of faith, "as thay telle," that has been around for a long time. But their "fundament" is also the source of "felnesse of workes." *Mum* takes up the same anti-fraternal rhetoric of the *Crede,* asserting that Cain "fadre was and fundre of alle the foure ordres" (494). This bad beginning explains their perverse ambition to "gouuernen the grete and guilen the poure" (465). Unsurprisingly, they speak in favor of Mum, since their false foundation precludes the possibility of their commitment to truth.

Throughout his journey from universities to the friars, to cathedrals and churches, the narrator finds gluttons who would rather get than serve. This progression culminates in a richly gourmandizing sermon by a parish priest:

> He taughte thaym by tyme thaire tithing to brigne
> Of al manier grene that groweth vppon erthe
> Of fructe and of floze in felde and in homes,
> Of polaille and of peris, of apples and of plummes,
> Of grapes and of garlic, of gees and of pigges,
> Of chibolz and of chiries and of thaire chese eeke,
> Herbaige and oygnons and alle suche thinges
> That grown in thaire gardynes, lete God his parte haue,
> Of hony in your hyves and of your hony-combes,
> Of malte and of monaye and of all that multiplieth,
> Of wolle and of wexe and what-so yow increceth
> Or newith yow, the ix par tie nymeth to your self,
> And trewly the tithing taketh hooly churche. (600-12)

A corrector to the manuscript, perhaps caught up in this vision of excess, adds three lines: "of lyke and lynne seede of lambes and egges / of coltes and of calues that the cow lycketh / of benes and of boutre that bele doo make." The rhetorical excesses of this passage parallel the description of the Domincan convent in the *Crede*: a central episode of accreted detail that serves to concretize the costs of the corrupt religious estate's appetite. This amplification, a lexical accumulation that is a stylistic hallmark of alliterative verse (Hanna, "Alliterative" 493), is perfectly suited to this evocation of earth's plenty, as the priest's desires find form in his linguistic extravagance. The priest appears here as a caricature, a figure of the waste of both material goods and linguistic resources, using his pulpit and his rhetorical *copia* to advocate for his own stomach. Never does he explain why the church should "haue suche a harueste and helpe not to erie" (616), evidently because Mum has caught his tongue (618). The narrator wants to see some kind of reciprocity between production and consumption, some evidence that a

share of the social product corresponds to a contribution to the common good. He introduces the prospect of a non-laboring estate's conditional right to the fruits of the laboring estate, carrying on the perspective of *Crede* against fraternal consumption on the grounds that the religious orders do not contribute to the common wealth by manually laboring.

The priest's appetitive speech is also a celebration of the fecundity of the English language and its landscape. This vigorous health, however, seems to function only as an invitation to excess. The motivation to sin is sown in the very landscape, since, as the Sothsegger declares, Lucifer "lurketh aboute" seeking ground in which to "sowe of his seede," and "leyeth his lynes" in the physical world to capture "oure foule flessh that foundrith ful ofte" (1157-62). Alluding to the parable of the boat as a body and the soul as passenger and its inevitable foundering on the sins that arise from earthly existence in *Piers Plowman* B.8.38-44, *Mum* responds to *Piers Plowman*'s account of how the necessities of material existence give rise to sinful, excessive desire. The networks of the agarian ecology that satisfy the wants of the human population are also the "lynes" of Lucifer "that lust may be clepid" (1161). The poem must then figure out who is to curb humanity's lust for more, and how, when such cupidity seems to be ingrained in humanity's relationship to the biosphere.

In order to answer this question, the poem leaves the narrator's waking world, entering a dream in which social and political perfection may finally appear. Worn out by trying to understand the dangers that threaten the social body, the narrator "lay dovne on a lynche to lithe my boones [...] And ere I were ware, a wynke me assailled" (857, 869). A "lynche" is a ridge, "especially one used as a boundary marker," which marks the

narrator's passage into his dream of a perfect natural landscape ("Link" Def. 1). The narrator appears as an emblem of luxurious excess, falling asleep on marginal, unproductive agrarian land as a vagrant might, and yet in this position, he dreams of a utopian political ecology in which labor is enforced.

This political and economic perfection is located in the beehive the dreamer discovers within a freeholder's garden. *Mum* channels a long tradition of representing the society of bees as an example for human political organization and economic activity, taking as its most immediate source Bartholomaeus Anglicus's *De Proprietibus Rerum*. The beehive scene in *Mum* consolidates the related discourses of agrarian labor and sovereign violence, which would emerge as a key nexus within sixteenth-century reformist poetry. Importantly for this reformist legacy, *Mum*'s use of the beehive exemplum shows how imagining society as taking its fundamental shape in relation to agrarian labor can lead to an instrumental logic of violent intervention at the level of humanity's relationship to the earth. While this dream vision is meant to serve as a corrective example of natural law to the corrupt political system of the waking world, as Barr shows, it also argues that an ideal, "natural" polity will involve coerced labor ("The Treatment of Natural Law").

The dream landscape both provides an alternative place that exemplifies an ideal society and foregrounds the creation of an outsider, critical poetic authority as an elevated vision. The dreamer ascends to a high place from which to survey this rural utopia:

> I lifte vp my eye-ledes and lokid ferther
> And sawe many swete sightz, so me God helpe,
> The wodes and the waters and the welle-springes
> And trees y-traylid fro toppe to th'erthe,
> Coriously y-courid with curtelle of grene,
> The flours on feeldes flavryng swete,

> The corne on the croftes y-croppid ful faire,
> The rennyng riuyere russhing faste,
> Ful of fyssh and of frie of felefold kind,
> The breris with thaire beries bent ouer the wayes
> As honysoucles hongyng vppon eche half,
> Chesteynes and chiries that children desiren
> Were loigged vndre leues ful lusty to seen.
> The havthorne so holsum I beheulde eeke,
> And hough the benes blowid and the brome-floures;
> Peris and plummes and pesecoddes grene,
> That ladies lusty loken muche after,
> Were gadrid for gomes ere they gunne ripe;
> The grapes grovid a-grete in gardyns aboute,
> And other fruytz felefold in feldes and closes;
> To nempne alle the names hit nedith not here. (889-909)

The copiousness of this beautiful passage echoes the priest's list of foods he will accept as payment. While this fecund landscape is meant to suggest natural plenty, its similarity to the presentation of gluttonous desire suggests that excessive consumption may have as its corollary an excess of production, that ecosystems generate too much energy as a matter of course. The pious dreamer cannot even list this natural profusion of life without thinking of childish desire for cherries and ladies' lust for "pesecoddes grene" in a line that echoes anti-feminist associations between pears and female sexuality (Barr, *Tradition* 334). This profusion of plant life occurs in spaces created by human labor, in crofts and gardens, and its excesses and sensory richness are a source of delight to the dreamer, who has been wandering about looking for answers and is now taking an unexpected nap. The narrator's dream experience mirrors the leisure and excess of the parasitical classes that his dream teacher, the Sothsegger, will violently condemn.

As he walks down from his hilltop towards the freehold, a symphony of birdsong and a floral potpourri overwhelms his senses:

> So cleerly thay chirmed and chaunged thaire notes,
> That what for flauour of the fruyte and of the somer floures,

> The smellyng smote as spices, me thought,
> That of my trauail treuly toke I no kepe,
> For al was vanesshid me fro thorough the fresshe sightes. (939-43)

The seeker of truth, who had been so disillusioned with his world of gourmandizing excess, finds that his own labors are quite forgotten and ignored thanks to the sensuous pleasures of his leisurely frolic through a landscape characterized by vegetal and animal excess. The landscape features are shaped by human labor in the form of groves, meadows, lawns, and so on, but we see no labor until the dreamer enters the beekeeper's garden, where manual work is characterized by its violence towards weeds and drones, whose appetites are satisfied by insinuating themselves into sites of agrarian production – all while our dreamer sleeps by himself on a ridge at the edge of a field that he has not plowed. The contradictions of this dream experience between a paradise of natural plenty and leisure and the valorization of violently enforced labor expresses a constitutive contradiction of the ecology of reform, as the intellectual work of imagining a reformed culture and writing in its favor fits uneasily with the condemnation of the idleness and excessive book learning of friars, philosophers, and advisers.

The dreamer's encounter with the beekeeper comes after he moves from the top of the hill to the bottom, into a dale, rendering in spatial form the movement down a political hierarchy towards its base in a scene of rural labor, which founds the ideal common wealth, and mimics the principles of order and violence that are the prerogative of the sovereign, combining two foundational sites of social order: the field and the throne.

> I moued dovne fro the mote to the midwardz
> And so a-dovne to the dale, dwelled I no longer,
> [...]
> Thenne lepte I forth lightly and lokid a-boute,

> And I beheulde a faire hovs with halles and chambres,
> A frankeleyn-is fre-holde al fresshe newe. (932-46)

The dreamer then sees the Sothsegger tending to a beehive in the garden, crushing drones one by one. Premodern writing about bees, according to Mary Baine Campbell, is "one of the primary utopian discourses of European letters" (619). As Campbell goes on to explain, "The utopian concept, whether strictly literary or purely political, is one of enclosed space" (621), which is to say controllable, intelligible units that express the utopian impulse as "metaphorically resonant images of social wholes" (638). The beehive, like the cloister, is just such an image of a social totality enclosed within a boundary that can be policed, and with an interior that can be purged.[12]

The first part of the narrator's dream vision consists of the beekeeper offering an extended description of apian social order. Derived largely from Bartholomaeus Anglicus, the Sothsegger's dissertation on bee life, especially its productive economy of communal labor, provides an ideal foil to the corrupt society the narrator has experienced in his waking life. The beekeeper confirms the monarchical character of bee society in terms that recall the initial framing lines of the poem about the indivisibility of the king's crown: "Thay haue a king by kinde that the coroune bereth, / Whom thay doo sue and serue as souurayn to thaym alle" (999-1000). The built structure of the beehive corresponds to this political hierarchy, with the king bee occupying "The highest hoole in the hyue" (1002). The beekeeper notes approvingly the industriousness and clever division of labor of the bees (1019-25). All of these observations match the keeper's

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[12] An Augustinian community on an island in Lough Dergh, Ireland was purported to have created "a real, fully functional purgatory," where those who submitted to its strictures would get a head start on the cleansing of their souls in the afterlife (Müller 167).

citation of "Bartholomew." Yet the Sothsegger does not fit his source in some important ways, the most notable being his very presence within the dream's analogy between bee and human society as an external principle that regulates the ostensibly "natural" order of the hive.[13] This is related to two other liberties taken in this scene with the tradition of the beehive exemplum.

The first can be found in the lines that describe the subdivision of the king's authority into jurisdictional units:

> And eche a place hath a principal that peesith al his quarter,
> That reuleth thaym to reste and rise whenne hit nedith,
> And alle the principallz to the prince ful prest [ready] thay been at nede,
> To rere thaire retenue to righte all the fautes;
> For thay knowen as kindely as clerc doeth his bokes
> Wastours that wyrchen not but wombes forto fille. (1012-1017)

The second comes when the beekeeper cites "Bartholomew" for a fact that he does not record:

> The bomelyng of the bees, as Bartholomew vs telleth,
> Thair noyse and thaire notz at eue and eeke at morowe,
> Lyve hit wel, thair lydene [language] the leste of thaym hit knoweth. (1027-30)

These additions combine an insistence on the hierarchy of the hive with a sensitivity to "the leste" and the order of descent by which the king's authority reaches them, as well as the ways in which the king despends upon those over which he rules. The hive is subdivided into "quarters" that allow the principal in each one to stand at ready to muster his bees in defense of the king. These principals are not only at the ready with military support, but also serve a vital advisory function, since they can recognize wasters "as kindely as clerc doeth his bokes." But how can these orders be transmitted and advice

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[13] According to Barr's gloss on this scene, "The introduction of a beekeeper to the political exemplum of a hive of bees is unique" (*Tradition* 335).

given if not through a common language [“lydene”] that is known by “the leste of thaym”? This language is the medium through which bee society is effectively governed, as the *Mum*-poet emphasizes the importance of the vernacular culture it represents. But is this language always “soth”? And is each member of the bee society what it appears to be? If not, then how does the king rule? And if so, how is this clarity of signification maintained, crucial as it is to the enforcement of labor? And if some agent other than the king maintains it, then what is the king’s purpose?

These innovative, pro-vernacular additions to Bartholomaeus Anglicus call attention to the persistence of the problems that the narrator’s quest was meant to help solve. The narrator’s quest began, after all, under the sign of the sovereign’s vulnerable crown, symbolizing a power that is helpless without its advisers and agents. In the image of the hive that *Mum* uses to exemplify productive efficiency of universal labor towards the common good, the political metaphor ends up capturing the vulnerability of political community through the addition of the beekeeper to its version of the beehive exemplum. The beekeeper simultaneously provides this description of hive politics as an outside observer, and functions as the internal principle of sovereign violence that ensures the efficiency and survival of the hive. He must act as such, since the king bee is “spereless [...] Or yf he haue oon, he harmeth ne hurteth noon in sothe” (1033-34). The warrior bees, who supposedly have an instinctive ability to recognize “wasters,” cannot do this job because “The bees been so bisi […] aboute comune profit” that they do not notice their honey being stolen until it is too late; only then do they attack and kill the drones (1078-1086). The beekeeper describes the enclosed space of the beehive as an ideal, utopian community characterized by order, efficiency, and plenty, but it evidently cannot be so

without his violent intervention. Situated within his perfectly kept garden, the beekeeper doubles the figure of the king bee and the figure of the worker bee. He represents both sovereign violence and socially foundational labor. His attack on the drones curiously renders the king of the bee's commonwealth superfluous, like the drones themselves who grow fat on others' labor (1072). The beekeeper describes a king bee that travels in a retinue "Euermore a-myddes as maister of thaym alle," but this masterful position is only "for peril that mighte falle; / And if he fleuble or feynte or funder dovneward, / The bees wollen bere hym til he be better amended" (1040-3). The stinger-less king seems weak, sickly, barely capable of going out "the colours to be-holde / Of the fressh floures" upon which his survival, social order, and built dwelling depend (1038-9).

The internal coherence of the hierarchy over which this feeble king presides depends upon something that exists outside of this social totality: the violent human enforcer. The beekeeper describes how he must "nape thaym on the nolle ere thay thaire neste caicche" (1061), which is precisely what the dreamer sees him doing when he first comes upon the beekeeper in his garden:

> He houed ouer a hyue, the hony forto kepe
> Fro dranes that destrued hit and dide not elles;
> He thraste thaym with his thumbe as thicke as thay come,
> He lafte noon a-live for thaire lither taicches. (966-69)

The beekeeper's protection of the honey is totally effective, as "He lafte noon a-live," utterly destroying any drones that "lurken and licken the liquor that is swete, / And trauelyn no twynte but taken of the beste" (984-5). The drones here could represent any of the defenders of Mum that the narrator had encountered in his waking life: reward-seeking time-servers who do nothing to maintain the system from which they so clearly benefit. However, this social allegory leaves out a crucial aspect of Bartholomaeus's

account of bee food production in *De Proprietibus Rerum* – the absolute necessity of squandering excess, taken here from John Trevisa's translation: "Also been sittiþ vppon þe hyues and soukeþ þe superfluyte þat is in honycombes, and hit is isayde þat ȝif þay deden nouȝt soo, þereof schulden attercoppes [spiders] ben igendred of þat superfluyte and been schulden deye" ("Also, bees sit upon the hives and suck the superfluity that is in honeycombs, and it is said that if they did not do this, then spiders would be engendered of that superfluity and bees would die") (I.612.13-16). According to this account, consuming the "superfluyte" is necessary in order to prevent the spontaneous generation of spiders from the stagnation of excess honey. Wastefulness serves a purpose; at a certain point, excess becomes dangerous and must be expended in a fit of consumption. In the realm of *Mum*'s beehive, however, a vision of enforced labor predominates in which production is all that matters and waste is consigned to the drones to be destroyed by the enforcer of labor.

The dream of the beekeeper brings out the potential violence of the reformist enterprise, as it serves to link the ecological discourse of agrarian labor to the concrete political mechanisms of sovereign power. *Mum* naturalizes political hierarchy through the example of the beehive, but in so doing, it embodies the supplemental figure of violent enforcement in the figure of the beekeeper. This destroyer of drones undermines the traditional reason for exemplifying beehives for their political order in the first place: they are an entirely self-regulating social system, where every bee contributes to the common good and, in Trevisa's rendering of Bartholomaeus, "woneþ in hire owne place þat beþ assigned to hem and chalangiþ nouȝt oþir place but here owne" ("remain in their own place that is assigned to them and lay claim to no other place but their own")

(I.609.25-6). *Mum*'s dream beehive is evidently not self-regulating, and is constantly threatened by parasitical invaders that the weak sovereign and overworked common bees are incapable of detecting or stopping until "thay see thaire swynke is y-stole" ("their work is stolen") (1084).

Despite the dreamer's claim that the meaning of beekeeper's "wise tale [...] is to mistike for me"(1089), the quick shift in the dream dialogue from bees to the "matiere of Mvm" leaves little doubt that this emblematic scene ought to function as an evaluative tool for the events and conditions the poem describes as its central concerns: the truthfulness of the king's advisers, the parliament, and the clergy, and its relation to the commune's material stability and spiritual health. Nevertheless, a "mistike" veil affects the bee community as much as the human one, corresponding to the hermeneutic uncertainty inherent in human politics. The parasitic drones "deceipuen" the bees with "thair subtilite," and the beekeeper will find "his eyen [...] dasid" if the drones manage to hide themselves among the hive (1052, 1053, 1063). The drones must be destroyed not only to prevent their material gluttony, but also to guarantee the transparent signification that allows the bee community to function. This simultaneous enforcement of both labor and clear social signification shows *Mum*, like the *Crede*, confronting its discomfort with the conditions of its own existence as a poem, and its means of intervention in society through verbal play and "mistike" meaning in an allegorical dream vision. It is as if the attempt to model the process of reform through images of the violent enforcement of manual labor has caused the *Mum*-poet to consider more deeply the place of immaterial labor within the agrarian ecosystem, especially the role of speech and writing in relation to the realm's political ecology.

The beekeeper's first example of the mischief caused by Mum is the parliament's silence on difficult issues, and his metaphoric language for describing this problem turns on images of malignant excess and ameliorative speech. When "knightz for the commune" (1119) meet at Parliament, they ought, according to the beekeeper,

> berste out alle the boicches [boils] and blaynes of the heart
> And lete the rancune renne oute a-russhe al at oones
> Leste the fals felon festre with-ynne;
> For as I herde haue, thay helen wel the rather [quicker]
> Whenne the anger and the attre is al oute y-renne,
> For better were to breste oute there bote might falle
> Thenne rise agayne regalie and the royaulme trouble. (1122-28)

The body politic, riddled with sores and infected boils, requires that its members "spare no speche" that would lance these festering wounds and let their "attre" or poision flow out (1121). If Mum prevents this from happening, then the corruption that grows within the body of the realm will threaten the sovereign. The "royaulme" must be purged of this infectious fluid, like the excess honey that might breed spiders in the beehive.

The metaphoric register shifts yet again when the beekeeper describes how Mum leads to the downfall of those that he serves. He

> wircheth vp with wiles a walle of deceiptes,
> Til the fals fundement falle atte laste,
> That thay stumblen after stroutyng and stappen no ferther,
> But lyen dovne on the diche as well nygh y-doluen,
> Both the maister and his man y-murid at oones. (1191-92)

The false foundation is also a failed fundament, allowing, like the boils that go unlanced, the abject social parasites to remain within the body politic. In this case, the fundament *is* a grave, as it leads to an equalizing fall into "the diche ... well nygh y-dolven," as both lord and servant find themselves walled in within the "walle of deceiptes" they had themselves built with their self-interested silence, just as the festering "attre" that the

body politic produces poisons itself when it is not drained. Even Truth, when it is announced to reside in the heart and mind, is vulnerable to the dynamics of infection and invasion that undergird *Mum*'s spatial and bodily political imagination: "Yn man-is herte his hovsing is, as hooly writte techet, / And mynde is his mansion that made alle th'estres" (1224-5). This mansion, however, is under perpetual attack: "Antecrist-is angel [...] dwellith faste by the dore and droppeth many wiles / Yf he might wynne ouer the walle with a wrone entre" (1255-7). Reaclling *Crede*'s architectural imagery, *Mum* deploys a similar cluster of complementary images around the dynamic of exclusion and containment. In the process, it discovers, like the *Crede*, that political allegories that rely on figurative capacities of agrarian labor are not suited to drawing boundaries and separating infectious agents from the otherwise honest and productive members of the body politic.

*Mum* attempts to overcome the problems introduced by its chosen model of reformist allegory – including the instability of agrarian ecology and the inherent ambiguity of allegorical discourse – by imagining the scene of its own reception as an ideal instrument of reformist counsel. An object of art, the product of learning and leisure, the poem strives to be as materially effective as the diligent freeholder of the narrator's dream by provoking and guiding the coercive power of the sovereign. The beekeeper, aware that he is in a dream, instructs the narrator on a new course of action when he awakens:

> Though thou slepe now my soon, yit whenne thou seis tyme,
> Loke thou write wisely my wordes echone;
> Hit wol be exemple to sum men seuene yere here-after. (1267-69)

These instructions encapsulate the hoped-for fate of this poem, and of all reformist writing – that it will effect change amongst its readers. Written from an outsider's perspective, expressing otherworldly wisdom, the *Mum*-poet nevertheless imagines his work finding its place among the most powerful actors in the realm and gathering allies as the king's knights copy this new book:

> Sith thou felys the fressh lete no feynt herte
> Abate thy blessid bisynes of thy boke-making
> [...]
> And lete the sentence be sothe, and sue to th'ende;
> And furst feoffe thou therewith [contract yourself to] the freyst of the royaulme,
> For yf thy lord liege allone hit begynne,
> Care thou not though knyghtz copie hit echone,
> And do write eche word and wirche there-after. (128-87)

Being given to the sovereign, this book takes the place of the human adviser, and begins a top-down reformation of the corrupt political system that motivated the poem's composition. The "blessed bisynes" of book making provides a means to deliver frank truths to the king.

When the narrator wakes up, finding that "alle the sightz that [he] sawe were so sone voidid" (1292), he resolves to carry out the teaching of the beekeeper. The narrator casts himself as a doctor who softens "the soores to serche thaym withynne" (1338). Instead of draining the boils on the body politic, however, the narrator lets loose a flood of text when he

> vnknytte [...] a bagge
> Where many a pryue poyse is preyntid withynne
> Yn bokes vnbredid in balade-wise made,
> Of vice and of vertue fulle to the margyn,
> That was not y-openyd this other halfe wintre. (1343-48)

This bag of books contains a slew of paper records of clerical corruption, the documentary "attre" that poisons the realm. As it turns out, it is not poetry "in balade-

wise made" that the narrator delivers to the king, but a collection of records of legal and political misdeeds, the discursive evidence and excrescence of an ailing kingdom. From this book bag, we learn of overreaching lords that deprive the king of his revenues. The "king y-corouned to kepe vs vnder lawe, / To put vs into prisone whenne we passe boundes" is a political necessity (1632-3), but in order for the king to have this stabilizing function, "a certayne substance shuld be ordeynid / To susteyne this souurayn that shuld vs gouerne" (1637-38). The poem's conclusion explores the vulnerability of the sovereign's dependence upon the "certayne substance" he receives from the political and economic order he makes function. The sovereign ought to be outside of the political system that he maintains by punishing those who pass beyond its bounds, but his political theological sovereignty still takes shape within and depends upon a substantial body that is only sustained by the labor of those the king rules. This supplement to sovereign power shows the knotted crown to be tied to the vicissitudes of agrarian labor and its intermediary expropriators, as the parliament "bynome hym [deprived him] th'olde and the newe" revenues the king sought (1640). The sovereign himself does not work, and as a result, he is vulnerable to the *quid pro quo* logic that the narrator invokes when he criticizes the parish priest for not justifying the church's entitlement to a share of the harvest. The narrator affirms that the king, when he imprisons overreachers, earns his keep, but even in this defense, he concedes and exposes the sovereign's structural homology to the parasitic churchman. They both represent the luxuriance of the productive energies over which they preside, and of which they are the expression, as much as they are its theoretical religio-political guarantee. They are at once the ideological ground of the religious, socio-economic, and political order, and its flower.

The example of the beehive, then, appears as a troubling expression of the sovereign weakness the poem hopes to guard against. The bee king depends upon the industry of the bees, and supposedly he makes it possible, but the products of their industry are only saved from waste by preventive violence that originates outside of the system of sting-less kingship-by-assent that the bee king exemplifies. Even if the beekeeper is a symbol of divine providence, this does not solve the dilemma of the relationship between reformist writing and sovereign action, for if providence really did destroy all wasters and ensure a fully functional community, then *Mum* would not need to advocate material reform. The human king would remain dependent, as he is upon his advisers and agents in order to know how to govern, while he also depends upon material support from the laboring estate for his survival. *Mum* imagines a process of reform in which books reach directly to the sovereign and guide his decisions to make economic and religious change. It also takes up the task of defending the king's right to the "certayn substance" which he must extract from his subjects. This furthers *Mum*'s fantasy of a kind of writing that has material effects by motivating the king to action through the allegorical representation of his place within agrarian economy and ecology. But in articulating this fantasy, the apian political ecology the poem describes exceeds its image of waste-free production, undermining the attempt to naturalize the body politic and justify its purgation at the hands of the sovereign.

**Conclusion**

The beekeeper, who speaks the truth that the dreamer cannot find in waking life, boasts of his control over the garden and his responsibility for its flourishing (949-51):

> 'I am gardyner of this gate,' cothe he, 'the grovnde is myn owen,
> For to digge and to delue and to do suche deedes

> As longeth to this leyghttone [garden] the lawe wol I doo,
> And wrote [dig] vp the wedes that wyrwen [destroy] my plantes;
> And wormes that worchen not but wasten my herbes,
> I daisshe thaym to deeth and delue oute thaire dennes. (976-81)

This passage exemplifies the ways in which vernacular reformism used the image of agrarian labor in order to figure desired forms of social control. The "dennes" of the worms recall the "selles" of the *Crede*'s religious brethren, and both are to be destroyed by labor: the former, through the allegorical labors of the beekeeper, and the latter through the labor the friars will be forced to perform. In these two poems, the very process of ensuring human survival through cultivation creates sinful excess, but destroying those that consume the excess without producing it ought to solve the problem of widespread sin and corruption. The weeding and beekeeping of the Sothsegger represent the persistent hope within vernacular reformism, which Peres baldly states in the *Crede*, that social problems can be solved through the elimination of the underworked figures of overconsumption, usually through direct violence, or severing their connection to the circulation of agrarian goods unless they start to work the land themselves.

The role of agrarian ecology in the writing of reform expresses a persistent belief that the control of non-human nature is a means of, and symbol for, controlling humans and ordering society after the reformist imagination. But, as we saw in *Piers Plowman*'s attempt to marshall agrarian ecology into an allegory of a collective journey to Truth, control of the natural world through labor is only ever temporary and provisional, subject to unexpected consequences and complications from the variety of agents that make up an agrarian ecosystem. Both the *Crede* and *Mum* attempt to overcome this instability by adhering to a naturalized vision of social order, but they eventually succumb to the same contradictory energies that scuttled *Piers Plowman*'s image of the ideal working society.

The failures of the *Crede* and *Mum* reveal a lasting problem in the writing of agrarian reform when it denigrates the study, imagination, and lesiure that such writing requires. In this way, even the one-dimensional prescriptions of enforced labor in the *Crede* and *Mum* exemplify the entanglements of the inspired reformer within the very systems he hopes to change. The writer, the laborer, and the sovereign appear at different points in these two poems as primary agents of reform. Yet the agrarian allegories that express their reformist agency also expose their dependence upon the unstable circulation of energy and goods that the agrarian ecosystem represents. This exposure provokes the fantasy of sovereign violence in order to restore a stable and "natural" generativity, which will prove to be a durable response, as well as a conceptual problem, for reformist thought in the sixteenth century.

# Chapter 3

# Labors of Reform: The Political Ecology of the English Reformation from Skelton to Bale

## Introduction: An Environmental Reformation

According to an increasingly common approach to Reformation historiography, the religious conflicts of sixteenth-century Europe represent the beginning of a "disciplinary society" characterized by a "rage for order" that began in the realm of religious observance, but quickly became a general mandate for progressively totalizing forms of governmentality, while the goal of economic prosperity supplanted the violent disagreements of confessionalization (Taylor 90-145, 176-85). I'm quoting Charles Taylor, but this argument undergirds major studies like Brad Gregory's *The Unintended Reformation* and James Simpson's *Reform and Cultural Revolution*. Drawing from Foucauldian genealogies of increasingly regimented forms of life beginning in early modernity and Eamon Duffy's representative revisionist dismantling of triumphal Protestant historiography, while largely sidestepping Marxian paradigms of primitive accumulation that influenced historians like R.H. Tawney and Robert Brenner, these studies can be seen as elaborations upon Max Weber's foundational assessment in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904-5) of the Reformation as a movement that "meant the repudiation of a control which was very lax, at that time scarcely perceptible in practice, and hardly more than formal, in favour of a regulation of the whole of conduct which, penetrating to all departments of private and public life, was

infinitely burdensome and earnestly enforced" (4).[1] This new regulation is Weber's famous "iron cage" of modern capitalism, "which today determine[s] the lives of all the individuals who are born into this mechanism […] Perhaps it will so determine them until the last ton of fossilized coal is burnt" (123). As his concluding speculation reveals, this hugely influential story of the transformation of the Euro-American ethical system, which Weber attributes to the Reformation and which paves the way for modern capitalism (a thesis which has been widely criticized since Weber published his work)[2] is also an early chapter in another grand narrative of modernity: the beginning of the anthropocene, the age in which humanity enters the geological record as a force of nature in its own right.[3] The impending arrival of an environmental limit upon contemporary industrial development makes remarks like Weber's on the end of the carbon-burning base of capitalist production seem especially prescient, but the political ecology of labor which Weber crystalizes in this passage was something vernacular writers of the English Reformation were closely attuned to in their own time. For Weber, individuals are "born into" a "mechanism" that is at once a work ethic, a technical configuration, a means of survival, and an environmental force; for the writers in this chapter, a similar assemblage of moral, economic, and ecological factors are woven around the figure of the rural laborer and the agrarian landscape. In ribald satires, vituperative polemics, and outraged

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[1] As an index of how Weber's historical sociology still functions as a touchstone for theoretical interventions in the present, even Bruno Latour cites Weber in the fourth section of his description of "the modern constitution," with all its attendant implications for modern political ecology, entitled "The Crossed-Out God:" "The moderns could now be both secular and pious at the same time" (*We Have Never Been Modern* 32-35).

[2] For examples and reviews of these criticisms, see Tawney; Seaver; Weeks; and the essays collected in *Weber's Protestant Ethic: Origins, Evidence, Contexts* and *The Protestant Ethic Turns 100: Essays on the Centenary of the Weber Thesis*.

[3] To delve into the rapidly growing literature on the anthropocene, see Crutzen; Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History" and "Postcolonial Studies"; Morton, *Hyperobjects*.

allegories, mid-Tudor writers channeled the style and oppositional spirit of the *Piers Plowman* tradition to represent the totalizing ambitions of reform. The figure of the rural laborer allowed writers from Skelton to Crowley to activate an array of interlocking social forces, environmental conditions, and intellectual traditions surrounding controversies of doctrine, ecclesiastical reform, and economic justice in the first half of the sixteenth century.

Recent scholarship on the relationship between the *Piers Plowman* tradition and Reformation literature, while firmly establishing the strong continuity between Middle English and mid-Tudor agrarian complaint literature, has tended to focus on the impact of doctrinal debates on this tradition's symbolism of rural work (Little), or the economic morality and socio-political conservatism of much of this literature (McRae, Jones). My approach is less concerned with establishing a clear relation between reformed theology and vernacular reformist writing, or with adjudicating the relative radicalism or conservatism of mid-Tudor economic morality. Instead, I view sixteenth-century responses to the *Piers Plowman* tradition as stylistically self-aware continuations of the political ecological perspective on social change exemplified by Langland and his followers.

Even before Weber reflects on the limits of carbon-burning capitalism, he implies a change in the human relationship to nature as a part of his account of the Reformation when he describes his motivating desire to understand "the origin of this sober bourgeois capitalism with its rational organization of free labour" (xxxvii). Though specific types of labor rarely come into focus in the course of Weber's investigation, his originary distinction between free and unfree labor situates his story within the temporal and

geographic horizons and the specific environments of the late medieval manorial economy and its (hotly debated) transition to early modern agrarian and industrial capitalism. As R.H. Tawney makes clear in *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, his 1922 rejoinder to Weber's thesis, any account of sixteenth-century religious and economic change is also one of environmental transformation: "it was the mastery of man over his environment which heralded the dawn of the new age, and it was in the stress of expanding economic energies that his mastery was proved and won" (67). Carolyn Merchant would decry this sixteenth-century "mastery" of nature in her foundational ecofeminist work, *The Death of Nature*. Charles Taylor, too, extends the Weberian analysis of the Reformation to encompass not just an authoritarian shift in political terms, but a shift in relation to the natural environment, as reformed thought entails a stance towards the world that is newly instrumental in its "disenchantment," leading to the replacement of the porous subject with the "buffered self" of modernity (83, 27). Brad Gregory polemically expands upon this thesis in *The Unintended Reformation*, where the pluralism inaugurated by Protestant theological controversies lays the groundwork for contemporary denials of climate change (18). For James Simpson, the beginnings of literary history are inseparable from the material transformations in the English rural economy brought about by the Act of Supremacy and the suppression of the monasteries, as the bibliographical work of John Leland and John Bale responds directly to the physically precarious situation of monastic libraries in the 1530s (10-11). These influential accounts begin to suggest that the Reformation was not only a theological, ecclesiological, political, economic, and literary event, but necessarily an ecological one, too. In this chapter, I want to deepen our sense of the Reformation as an ecological event

by seeing what the writers who tried to shape its course in England thought the role of the human relationship to the earth played in transforming society. This means attending to the ways poets tried to capture the vastness of the agrarian ecosystem as the defining source of societal health and the site of its improvement. I'll approach this problem by considering the ways labor and leisure served as analytical tools in a handful of the central texts of English Reformation literature: John Skelton's *Collyn Clout*, Simon Fish's *A Supplicacyon for the Beggars*, Robert Crowley's *Philargyrie of Greate Britaine*, and John Bale's *Vocacyon of Johan Bale*.

These texts articulate their criticisms of England's religious institutions through the sturdy idiom explored in the preceding chapters, which uses figures of labor, leisure, and the land to dramatize social problems and their imagined reform. The significance of the sixteenth-century appropriation of *Piers Plowman* and its poetic form and method of allegorical representation lies not just in a literary historical process of creative misreading and tendentious interpretation,[4] but also in the ways the ecological orientation of Langland's poem and that of his lollard imitators provoked Tudor reformers to think about religious reform at the intersection of theology, economy, sovereign power, and the agrarian environment. In each of these texts, royal power serves as the adressee and hoped-for engine of reform. While this confirms a general movement towards political centralization during this period, it also reveals how important the biopolitical control of the relationship between the population and its environment is in this process. Consequently, an ulterior purpose of my argument is to shift back in time a few centuries the beginning of Foucault's history of biopolitics. The biopolitical "acquisition of power

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[4] On which, see King, *Reformation*; Kelen; Little; Hudson, "Epilogue."

over man insofar as man is a living being," including "control over relations between … human beings insofar as they are a species … and their environment, the milieu in which they live,"[5] need not follow temporally after sovereign power as the direct application of power over life and death, but can co-exist with it.

The deployment of this nexus of populist royalism, religious reformism, and idealized rural labor lends itself to colonial ideology, as we will see in Bale's *Vocacyon*, an important bridge text between vernacular reformist discourse and its later outgrowth in Irish colonial writing. This trajectory from vernacular reformist poetry to colonial domination might appear to confirm the narrative of the Reformation as bequeathing a legacy of authoritarianism to modernity. However, none of the texts in this chapter successfully negotiate the ambiguous position of the reformist writer in relation to the violent sovereign. The role of the critical intellectual laborer is not easily assimilable to the ideal of the imaginary plowman, especially when the writer must adopt a stance of supplication, advice, and reportage in relation to the sovereign agent of reform. This stance is especially precarious when the supplicant or adviser is asking the king to destroy all idlers. This emergent tension between labor, leisure, writing, and sovereign and biopolitical power is one that Spenser will try to resolve in his late career writings on Ireland, as we will see in chapter 4.

**Labor and Reform in the Early Sixteenth Century: Skelton and Fish**

In addition to that of *Piers Plowman*, the poetic idiom that caught on among mid-Tudor reformists like Barlowe and Roye, Crowley, and Luke Shepherd comes from an ideologically surprising source in the ostensibly conservative, religiously orthodox poems

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[5] Foucault, *Society* 239, 245. See also Medovoi.

of John Skelton. His vicious satires of Cardinal Wolsey, however, made him an appealing model for heterodox satirists of the Catholic hierarchy (King 255, Carlson 215-38), and one poem in particular, *Collyn Clout* (ca. 1522), stands as an important variation on the tradition of the truth-telling rural outsider that defined lollard productions like *Pierce the Ploughman's Crede* and *Mum and the Sothsegger*. Skelton's appeal to early Protestant writers, notwithstanding his aversion to lollards and Lutherans, makes sense given that the deployment of ecological protest in this period is itself a conservative maneuver, consistently constructing a pre-clerical golden era of agrarian equilibrium that is analogous to the broader Protestant fantasy of reviving a primitive, pre-papal Christianity. Skelton's attacks on new-fangled Lutherans are rhetorically compatible with polemicists who were quite insistent on the antiquity of their positions in their rejection of the church's novel corruptions. Skelton's *Collyn Clout*, with its assaults on Wolsey's wealth and his material depredations of the morally enfeebled church, reported by its eponymous speaker as he wanders amongst restive commoners, renewed the Langlandian stance for Henry VIII's England.

*Collyn Clout* exhibits the same sensitivity to the spatial dimension of institutional power that we saw in *Pierce the Ploughman's Crede* and *Mum and the Sothsegger*, mapping social forms and hierarchies onto rural spaces and the conflicted networks that join court, cathedral, and countryside. Though Skelton openly mocks lollards in his poems, *Collyn Clout* nevertheless exemplifies and carries forward the ambiguous position of the reformist poet, caught between leisure and sovereignty in his advocacy of enforced labor, that we see in the *Crede* and *Mum and the Sothsegger* (an ambiguity that, in contrast, cannot be found in the strident reformist writings of Barlowe and Roye or Fish).

The literary and pedagogical tasks of reading, writing, translating, and disseminating the word fit uneasily into a paradigm that denigrated forms of intellectual labor modeled by Catholic institutions, raising the persistent question of the place of the reformist poet within the broader societal ecosystem of labor and leisure, production and consumption.

*Collyn Clout* savages the contemporary religious estate with as much expansive vitriol as any Wycliffite satirist could muster, even if the thin device that these attacks are merely reports of the fickle popular voice offers a veneer of orthodox reformism (Kinsman 17-23). But doctrinal positions receive relatively little attention compared to *Collyn Clout*'s unrelenting focus on the church's entanglement in economic processes and its voluptuous enjoyment of its wealth. It joins this focus to a poetic form that repurposes the demotic energies of the *Piers Plowman* tradition. The short, repetitively rhymed lines of Skeltonics, according to Ian Gordon, descend from Middle English alliterative verse, where "The original four-stressed line has broken down into two short two-stressed lines, bound together by rime" (194). Within this form, so redolent also of popular romance and ballad traditions (Carlson 231), Skelton narrates not only the relations between "classes within the social totality" (Carlson 215), but also the formation of the interests of these classes vis-à-vis networks of agrarian land and labor. Labels like heterodox, orthodox, conservative, or radical fail for Skelton's poetry, as many critics have noted,[6] because the material networks he wishes to trace are as shifting and unstable as the styles he adopts in his polyphonic verse, capturing the blurriness of the boundaries

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[6] Stanley Fish, for example, says of *Collyn Clout* that "Skelton writes a Lollard and anti-Lollard poem simultaneously" (179). See also Blanchard's description of "this amphibious poet" ("Voice" 127). For more variations on the theme of Skelton's ambivalence with regard to tradition and innovation, orthodoxy and dissent, see Carlson 226-7; Blanchard, "Skelton's Critique" (45); Griffiths (162).

separating the various agents within the agrarian ecosystem he describes. *Collyn Clout* intensifies the politics of poetic style by highlighting the material efficacy of verbal art as the poem at once condemns the efficacy of clerical preaching, while dramatizing the quest of the outsider poet to change his world.

*Collyn Clout*'s use of the device of the truth-telling rustic and the alliterative energies of Skeltonics put it in line with the *Piers Plowman* tradition, but it has an intimate connection to *Piers Plowman* itself in its quasi-personification of a greedy cleric (probably Wolsey) as the source and symptom of the church's failings. This rapacious figure, like Langland's Hunger, consolidates in a single figure a host of economic and ecological processes in a vision of consumption. The Wolsey-figure makes visible, in his land-grabbing luxuriance, the overlapping systems of ecclesiastical authority, court politics, and the land and labor that such institutions control. In this regard, Skelton's clerical malefactors in *Collyn Clout* confirm Elizabeth Fowler's claim that Skelton "dismantl[es] full-blown personification allegory in order to see what he can do with pieces of it" (178). Here, Skelton drops the name, a crucial piece of personification allegory, while retaining the poetic capacity to embody complex social and economic processes and moral categories within a single figure. Protestant satirists responded to this ability to marshal a multitude of extra-courtly voices against a figure that vividly represents an agrarian and institutional economy in crisis.

Collyn resembled Langland's Piers, to a point, as Stanley Fish claimed, but where Fish characterizes this resemblance as one between "solitary figure[s] in a world gone awry" (177-8), I would argue that the resemblance of these two figures lies in their entanglement with "a world gone awry," and not in their solitary separation from it.

Collyn moves among the populace by means of the agrarian infrastructure of an economy in crisis, registering the networks of England's agrarian political ecology through a method of poetic ventriloquizing that situates the speaker within "the processes that distribute and dissolve wealth and power" (Fowler 178). That situation allows Collyn to perceive the networks that compose social reality, while at the same time exposing his complicity with the system he condemns.

According to Arthur Kinney, Collyn's "possible complicity" in the practices and systems he attacks derives from his recognition, signaled in the sources of the poem's epigram,[7] that while iniquity is rampant, no one is free from sin and able to judge others who require, like everyone else, "charity and divine support" (140). In this sense, Collyn has learned one of the lessons of passus 6 of *Piers Plowman*, with its allegory of the inescapable circulation of sin in humanity's material interdependence upon one another for survival. Nevertheless, agrarian social relations appear as a source of Collyn's strength, as his voice confidently projects from the margins of English society.[8]

> And yf ye stande in doute
> Who brought this ryme aboute,
> My name is Collyn Cloute.
> I purpose to shake oute
> All my connynge bagge,
> Lyke a clerkely hagge.
> For though my ryme be ragged,
> Tattered and jagged,
> Rudely rayne-beaten,
> Rusty and mothe-eaten,

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[7] "Quis consurget mihi adversus malignantes, aut quis stabit mecum adversus operantes iniquitatem? Nemo, Domine!" This quotes, according to Scattergood, the vulgate Psalm 93 and John 8. In his translation, "Who will rise up for me against the evil doers? or who will stand up for me against the workers of iniquity? No man, Lord!" (465).

[8] And while Skelton himself was by no means a vagrant, it should be noted that, at the time he was writing his Wolsey satires, "he was a struggling academic and poet who was far from well placed" in terms of courtly patronage (Walker 53).

> Yf ye take well therwith
> It hath in it some pyth. (47-58)

As Scattergood notes in his commentary on this poem, the image of Collyn emptying his "connynge bagge / Lyke a clerkely hagge" echoes *Mum and the Sothsegger*, which concludes when the dreamer "vnknytte […] a bagge / Where many a pryue poyse is preyntid withynne" (1343-4). The self-conscious emphasis on the written means by which corrective advice is given moves quickly into an apology for the poem's rhyme and style in terms that recall the threadbare poverty of Peres the Plowman. Skelton's poetic style mimics the authorizing poverty of the ideal rural worker, and Collyn Clout's name basically means "ragged farmer."[9] The authority of the critical poetic voice emerges from a metaphorical extension of the worn out poverty inscribed on the body of the agrarian laborer to the texture of reformist verse. (It is just one indicator of the ambivalence of the reformist prophet-poet figure in agrarian complaint literature that this "ragged farmer" does not seem to work.) These descriptions of Collyn's rhymes as quasi-material reinforce the poem's attention to the written instrument of reform. Collyn's books tumble out of his bag as he speaks in a rhyme whose style evokes a peripatetic, outdoor existence, a poetry of rural wandering that displays its wide circulation in the world as a marker of critical authenticity. Collyn has wandered the roads of a commoner's England, gathering from these spaces the material with which he will condemn the negligent mighty.

> Thus I, Collyn Cloute,
> As I go aboute,
> And wandrynge as I walke,
> I here the people talke. (285-88)

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[9] "'Collyn' derives from Latin colonus, or farmer, and had long been established as a generic name for a commoner, while 'Cloute' means 'rag' or 'patch'" (Griffiths 162).

Collyn gestures towards the agrarian landscape of fields, towns, and markets, the social space of the agricultural economy and ecosystem.[10] Collyn, as mouthpiece of the commons, figuratively gathers together the material networks of land and labor that make the leisured wealth of the clerical class possible, revealing what the figures of the rapacious prelates and friars in the poem also make visible with their consumption.

Collyn's complementary stance in relation to the religious hierarchy emerges in his remarks on priestly style. His assertion that his rough style "hath in it some pyth" is an obviously understated declaration of his belief that the world needs to hear what he, the *vox dei* as *vox populi*, has to say.[11] Collyn strives for a style of truth-telling poetry that is as materially effective as the smooth style of the clergy, who seem to have no trouble getting people to do what they say. Collyn attests that any given friar,

> Preches for his grote,
> Flatterynge for a newe cote
> And for to have his fees,
> Some to gather chese
> Lothe they are to lese
> Eyther corne or malte,
> Somtyme meale and salte,
> Somtyme a bacon flycke
> That is thre fyngers thyche
> Of larde and of grece,
> Theyr covent to encrease.
>
> I put you out of dout,
> This can nat be brought about
> But they theyr tonges fyle,
> And make a pleasaunt style
> To Margery and to Maude
> How they have no fraude. (837-853)

[10] Ken Hiltner describes a "gestural" as opposed to mimetic mode of engagement with nature in Renaissance poetry in *What Else is Pastoral?*.

[11] On Skelton's inhabiting of the conflation *vox populi, vox dei*, see Griffiths 164.

The wealth of the religious estate depends upon "a pleasaunt style," a way of speaking that has definite material effects. This is the mirror image of the dream of the reformist poet, the achievement of a style that can make people change the way they dispose of their material goods. Against the filed tongues of the religious estate, Collyn sets his ragged, tattered, jagged, rain-beaten and moth-eaten verse, thereby creating a stylistic analogy to the opposition between the impoverished bodies of laborers and the lavish dwellings and rich corpulence of the religious estate. While Collyn's voice seeks the good of the commonwealth, the preaching of friars is in the service of private gluttony. Cheese, corn, malt, meal, salt, bacon, lard – these staples that the friars consume illustrate how reformist poetry links even matters of style and cultural activity like preaching to the agrarian ecosystem. According to Collyn, the friars eat what everyone else must eat, but the difference is that they do not work manually for it, but instead perform; they are like actors or even poets, and in Skelton's attack on their idle service, he makes visible the productive energies of the agrarian ecosystem and the ways in which cultural forms participate within them, not merely as a kind of superstructural superfluity, but as an activity that is intimately, infectiously involved in the process of agrarian production. Despite the religious estate's resistance to physical labor, the actions of the most powerful bishops can easily transform the country's agrarian infrastructure. In a reference to Wolsey's suppression of smaller monasteries, Collyn reports

> Howe ye breke the dedes wylles,
> Turne monasteries into water myllles,
> Of an abbey ye make a graunge – (417-419).

Unlike Simon Fish's disgust, for example, with the effects on the agrarian economy of bequests to religious houses, Skelton condemns the breaking of the wills of the dead by

reversing earlier impropriations, returning church property to agrarian production. Whichever direction this process moves – from agrarian infrastructure to religious building, or vice versa – *Collyn Clout* demonstrates that style, rhetoric, and performance are essential tools in the transformation of church property into granges, or of water mills into church property.

The expansive pull of Skeltonics, which involves linking together as many rhyming words as possible without any definite limit, is well suited to emphasize the copious appetites of a parasitical group. The clerics of *Collyn Clout* require such a great quantity and variety of stuff – food, buildings, clothes, lands, and animals – that they allow Skelton to bolster his desire to speak of and for society as a whole by writing catalogues of commodities that metonymically evoke social totality. A pithy couplet delivers the moral punch of such catalogues – "Theyr moyles [mules] golde dothe eate, / Theyr neyghbours dye for meate" (319-20) – as mules consume an abstract and arbitrary bearer of value while humans are deprived of the real sustenance that has been replaced by this precious metal. Collyn's focus on food and consumption evokes a totalizing picture of society's efforts to survive within its physical milieu or ecosystem. Collyn exposes the clergy's unregulated consumption of the staples and the luxurious meats of the English countryside. The populace complains

> Howe some of you dothe eate
> In lenton season flesshe meate,
> Feasauntes, partryche and cranes;
> Men call you therfore prophanes.
> Ye pyke no shrympes nor pranes,
> Saltfysshe, stockfyssh nor herynge,
> It is nat for your werynge,
> Nor in holy lenton season
> Ye wyll neyther beanes ne peason.
> But ye loke to be let lose

> To a pygge or to a goose,
> Your gorge nat endued
> Without a capon stued,
> Or a stewed cocke
> Under her surfled smocke
> And her wanton wodicocke. (202-19)

Foods both licit and illicit during the season of Lent fill out this report of the commons' grumblings against the clergy, with even the relatively ascetic diet of fish contributing to the picture of a country that is abundantly productive both at land and sea. Lent, which ought to be a season of self-denial, becomes instead a chance for Collyn to illustrate the unbounded appetites that transgress the limits of control. This list of fish, fowl, and flesh concludes with puns on the sexual appetites of the clerics, which is fitting for the biopolitical emphases of commonwealth reformist poetry in this period. The food and sex that Collyn condemns the clerics for consuming represents an attempt to render visible, in order for the sovereign to more appropriately govern, what Foucault called "biopolitics' last domain […] – control over relations between the human race, or human beings insofar as they are living beings, and their environment, the milieu in which they live," thereby defining a "field of intervention" that includes "the birth rate, the mortality rate, various biological disabilities, and the effects of the environment" (*Society* 244-5). As we will see, Simon Fish's condemnation of the non-normative sexuality of priests and friars – they are at once unmarried and promiscuous – will illustrate this, as it arises from a fear that England will become "desert and inhabitable": an environmental effect caused by failed religious morality (6). Collyn's report on the populace's disgust at the bodily desires and indulgences of the clerical class exemplifies the ways in which conventional anti-clerical moralizing against lust and gluttony can express a political ecological

relation between individual bodily desire and the material condition of the populace as a whole.

A text roughly contemporary with *Collyn Clout* further illustrates the ways in which anatomizing conventional virtues and vices can take on unexpected political ecological resonances when the idiom of traditional social theory takes up the issue of agrarian labor. Fitzherbert's *Book of Husbandry*, first published in 1523, provides a compendium of practical advice on farming, while also extolling the religious virtues of agrarian work. This useful book, however, begins with a reflection on social organization that approaches dangerous territory in a way comparable to Skelton's more deliberately provocative attacks on the wealth and leisure of the clerical elite. Fitzherbert goes further and comes closer to questioning political hierarchy itself by extending the necessity of labor as a literal biblical injunction that delegitimizes activities like ruling and praying.

> This is the questyon. Whervnto is euery man ordeyned. And as Job saythe, Homo nascitur ad laborem, sicut auis ad volandum. That is to saye, a man is ordeined and borne to do labor, as a byrde is ordeyned to flye. And the apostle sayth, Qui non laborat, non manducet: Debet enim in obsequio de laborare, qui de bonis eius vult manducare. That is to saye, he that laboureth not, shulde not eate, and he ought to labour and do goddes warke, that wyl eate of his goodes or gyftes, the whiche is an harde texte after the literall sence. For by the lettre the kynge / the quene, nor all other lordes spirituall and temporall shulde not eate, without they shoulde labour, the whiche were uncomely, and not conuenyent for suche estates to labour (A2r).

Taking the "literal sence" of scripture about the universal necessity of work as an essential feature of human existence, it seems impossible to justify the leisure of secular and spiritual powers. This thought, "uncomely" and "not conuenyent" as it is, runs up against a resentment of leisure that glances at the radical possibility of an absolutely egalitarian vision of labor. Needless to say, Fitzherbert backs away from this, invoking the "Boke of the moralytees of chess" (A2r) to authorize his reassertion "that euery man,

from the hiest degree to the lowest, is set and ordeyned to haue labour and occupacion" (A2r). Fitzherbert thus returns, via a moralization of chess, to an affirmation of a static social hierarchy. Without backing down as easily as Fitzherbert, Collyn's critique of the clergy is built upon a similar recognition that the ineffectual spiritual labor of a corrupt clerical class does not compensate the manual labor of the commons. Thinking about labor concretizes diffuse anxieties about clerical legitimacy and political authority, as the example of Fitzherbert reveals. Fitzherbert's otherwise conventional account of traditional social order voices a challenge to the legitimacy of aristocratic leisure almost accidentally, as a result of the subject matter of the book it introduces: agrarian husbandry.

The avoidance of labor of all sorts defines Skelton's corrupt prelates as much as their outsized desires for food, sex, and wealth. "Bysshoppes dysdayne," he reports, "Sermons for to make, / Or suche laboure to take" (133-35). Idle bishops and uneducated priests do not attend to their pastoral duties, Collyn alleges. This accusation provokes the expected remedy of enforced agrarian labor for these idlers.

> A preest without a letter,
> Without his vertue be greatter,
> Doutlesse were moche better
> Uppon hym for to take
> A mattocke or a rake. (270-74)

This flippant solution reflects a long tradition within antifraternal and anticlerical writing of attacking the clergy's ostensible betrayal of their working class origins. The spuriously

Chaucerian *Plowman's Tale*[12], for example, accuses monks of forsaking the true asceticism of worldly labor out of pride:

> To pryde and ese have hem take;
> This religioun is yvell beset.
> Had they ben out of religioun,
> They must have honged at the plow,
> Threshing and dyking fro town to town,
> With sory mete, and not half y-now. (1039-44)

Collyn attributes the same motivations to his religious targets:

> For you love to go trym,
> Brought up of poore estate,
> With pryde inordynate,
> Sodaynly upstarte
> From the donge carte,
> The mattocke and the shovll
> To reygne and to rule (641-7)

Having left behind the dung cart and the mattock, the reformists hope that they get back to the manual labor these instruments symbolize as soon as possible, and under the threat of violence if necessary. The entire religious estate seems to exist, according to Collyn, to provide the sons of laborers a means to escape their divinely ordained position as workers on the soil. Forcing them back to the land would be the surest way to end their illegitimate enjoyment of the wealth of the commons. This authoritarian populism goes hand in hand with the stylistic rejection of smoothness and finery that Skelton at once performs in the texture of his verse and states baldly in Collyn's attacks on the art and architecture of religious buildings. "Buyldynge royally / Theyr mancyons curyously" (934-5), with rooms adorned with licentious tapestries (936-68), bishops create useless

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[12] W.W. Skeat believed that the writer of *Pierce the Ploughman's Crede* also wrote *The Plowman's Tale* (xxxiv), although this now seems unlikely. See Mary Rhinelander McCarl's introduction to her edition of *The Plowman's Tale* from both its 1532 and 1606 editions.

finery from the labor of others, according to Collyn. Skeltonic style, seemingly rough and mimetic of authenticating poverty, opposes smoothness and finery, as if this stylistic stance could fundamentally alter poetry's relationship to the material labors that support the survival of the poet/wanderer/dreamer who, despite his name, does not seem to be a working commoner.

Regardless of whether or not such an attempt to distinguish one kind of art from another based on their relative consumption of wealth in their production, Skelton's style in *Collyn Clout* expresses especially clearly the literary form's role within the political ecology of religious reform. Skelton anatomizes one way in which clerical style instrumentally extracts wealth from the commons, and uses that wealth in the service of a luxurious style of art and fashion. He then crafts an oppositional style against clerical language's material effects. In this way, the formal lineage of the *Piers Plowman* tradition and Reformation literature in which Skelton participates performs the interaction of cultural forms and material processes. In *Collyn Clout*, differences of style between clerical preaching and Collyn's common speech show language acting within the biological and economic processes of growing food, and within the political process of deciding who must produce it and who gets to enjoy it.

Simon Fish's *A Supplicacyon for the Beggars* (ca. 1528-9) has a demonstrable affinity with Skelton's *Collyn Clout* (Carlson 237). In breathless, exhortative prose, it anatomizes the effects of religious culture on England's agrarian ecology (but without the characteristic humor of Skelton's poem). Fish directly appeals to Henry VIII to restore a world in which the land can support everyone who works on it, which is now impossible because of the religious estate. Fish's argument thus depends upon the sovereign's

authority over his subjects to enforce labor and regulate the nature of the people's relationship to the "milieu in which they live" (Foucault, *Society* 245). This argumentative strategy requires the rhetorical capture of the complex interactions of ecology, economy, and ecclesiology, which Fish achieves by constructing an idealized past in which the social body was free of the parasites that now plague it. Fish makes explicit the historical dimension of ecological reformism, a nostalgic developmentalism that will link the environmental imaginary of reformist writing to an emergent discourse of colonization.

*A Supplicacyon for the Beggars* was published ca. 1528-29, and its demands for the disendowment of the church on the grounds of clerical and monastic economic parasitism endeared it to Henry VIII, according to John Foxe's Protestant legend, as the king began to move towards the dissolution of the monasteries in the 1530s. Fish's pamphlet distills and sharpens the emphasis on labor in the late medieval critiques of the church from the *Crede* to *Collyn Clout*, laying out the holistic interaction of economic, religious, military, and environmental systems in England's ostensible decay into geopolitical weakness and spiritual corruption. In this, *A Supplicacyon* shares many characteristics with other tracts encouraging ecclesiastical reform and monastic disendowment. The writer of a reformist tract addressed to Henry VIII in 1532, for example, advises that in order to "begynne […] a right order of faith," the king must "giff all your comon people labors & leuynge," so that "your lords [and] knights & your armes handes & fyngres shall haue all ther Rights & right levyngs owt the lardds of your comon peple" (Anon. 152r, 153r). By forcing anyone who is not disabled to work for a sufficient wage, which would obviously entail abolishing mendicancy and the cloister, "your grace

shall mak your holl Realm the most Richest Realm of plenty of vitalls & money of all Realmes," and by thus ending poverty, Henry VIII will be the "best beloued kyng that euer was in England" (151v). In this anonymous pamphlet, the connection between religious reform and royal authority finds its clearest form in the ability of the king to provide and enforce labor and to transform regimes of land ownership. Fish's related argument shows how religious conflicts are mediated through and decided upon the terrain of the agrarian ecosystem.

According to Fish, England's beggars "for verey constreint […] die for hunger" while bishops, abbots, priors, and an innumerable "idell, rauinous sort" "[set] all laboure a side" in order to beg for (and obtain) "The goodliest lordshippes, maners, londes, and territories" (1-2). Following the technique of poems like *Mum and the Sothsegger* and *Collyn Clout*, Fish deploys rhetorical copiousness to capture the vast material reach of the church over England's rural infrastructure. Fish translates the general legal and political categories for units of landed property – lordships, manors, lands, and territories – into a list of the material commodities they produce: "corne, medowe, pasture, grasse, wolle, coltes, calues, lambes, pigges, gese, and chikens. Ouer and bisides, the tenth part of euery seruauntes wages, the tenth part of the wolle, milke, hony, waxe, chese, and butter" (2). This litany of agricultural produce and infrastructure encompasses everything from different uses of land (pasture and meadow) to the wages of the landless laborers who work in such spaces and the commodities these workers produce and consume. The list conjures verbal plenty in order to illustrate the enormity of its waste.

Completing this argumentative maneuver, Fish turns to the past for an alternative vision of society's relationship to the land and its generative capacities. His detour into

the legends of England's mighty founders adds a temporal component to the assemblage that the list of commodities metonymically represents. History is embedded in the land, and the study of England's current practices of land use and distribution invites the construction of other possibilities in a distant time. The idealized past of *A Suppclicacyon* presents a vision of sovereignty unimpeded by the material impropriations of the religious estate, relating the strength of England's legendary rulers to an imaginary *oikos* of efficient plentitude free from gluttonous waste.

> Oh greuous and peynfull exactions thus yerely to be paied! from the whiche the people of your nobill predecessours, the kinges of the auncient Britons, euer stode fre. […] The danes, nether the saxons, yn the time of the auncient Britons, shulde neuer haue ben abill to haue brought theire armies from so farre hither ynto your lond, to haue conquered it, if they had had at that time suche a sort of idell glotons to finde at home. The nobill king Arthur had neuer ben abill to haue caried his armie to the fote of the mountaines, to resist the coming down of lucius the Emperoure, if such yerely exactions had ben taken of his people (3-4).

Fish uses the story of England's ancient colonization in order to envision a social whole that drew its strength and sustenance efficiently from the earth, since its founding conquerors arrived without what another anonymous reformist supplicant called the "insauable diseases" of the religious estate on the social organism (Royal MS 17 B XXXV, 1r). The downfall of this naturalized social order is the result of an invasive species, according to Fish. "Oh the greuous shipwrak of the comon welth, whiche yn auncient time, bifore the coming yn of these rauinous wolues, was so prosperous, that then there were but fewe theues!" (8). Fish's interpretation of this historical narrative reveals how the naturalization of society allows for the creation of categories like the glutton, the parasite, the invasive species, and the waster, which have no place in the reformed and purged social ecology, activating a proto-colonial discourse of cultural transformation. Fish imagines religious reform and ecclesiastical disendowment as if it

were a kind of recolonization of England, driving out the idle, voracious, and wolfish clergy in order to restore England's ancient productivity and strength (registered in the accounts of England's colonization by Danes and Saxons). Fish's "rauinous wolues" are a key intertext for Bale's later account of the Irish clergy, kerns, and galloglasses, as we will see, as well as Spenser's repeated associations of the Irish landscape and its related social disorder with these notorious predators.

Fish's construction of an ancient precedent is meant to justify what he hopes will be Henry VIII's seizure of church wealth, but he also draws a frightening picture of future political catastrophe if his king fails to act. Drawing together ecclesiology, agrarian economy, and royal power, Fish warns, "all the substance of your Realme forthwith, your swerde, power, crown, dignity, and obedience of your people, rynneth headlong ynto the insaciabill whyrlepole of these gredi goulafres, to be swalowed and devoured!" (10). The metaphorical whirlpool of the clerical maw that eats not only agrarian commodities, but also the symbols and substance of royal authority renders the otherwise abstract and mystified operations of royal power – its "dignity" – in terms of material precarity that connect the plight of the beggars to that of the king. Each is threatened by clerical waste.

This wasteful consumption finds its complement in the image of the non-procreative or illegitimately procreative sexuality of the religious estate. The clergymen take on a sort of double status as both consumers and producers. On the one hand, because the religious cannot marry, they "let the generation of the people, whereby all the realm at length, if it shulde be continued, shall be made desert and inhabitable" (6). On the other hand, they are promiscuous libertines that "generate" illegitimate children, spread venereal disease, and corrupt poor women by offering to pay them for sex (6). The

sins of lust and debauchery turn out to be linked not only to the direct economic transactions between friar and bawd, but to the entire agrarian ecology of England, which depends upon "the generation of the people" in order to prevent the transformation of its fertile fields into an unpeopled and uncultivated desert. The figure of the king, as the hoped-for agent of radical reform, also rhetorically consolidates the networks that the clergy make visible in their non-generative pursuit of pleasure, since the proposed solution he would enact – clerical disendowment – simultaneously involves a policy both of population management and of maintaining the agrarian ecosystem. All that is symbolized by Fish's litany of "swerde, power, crown, dignity, and obedience" depends upon and acts through the population's interaction with the earth, as individual laborers, as procreative subjects, and as a collective unit. As Foucault observes, because of its "procreative effects, sexuality is also inscribed, takes effect, in broad biological processes that concern not the bodies of individuals but the element, the multiple unity of the population. Sexuality exists at the point where body and population meet" (*Society* 251-2). In order for the king to protect himself and his realm from the ravenous whirlpool of clerical appetites and their non-procreative, or even anti-procreative, unregulated sexual activities, Fish proposes the familiar solution of coercing the wasters to work (and urging them to marry):

> Set these sturdy lobies a brode in the world, to get theim wiues of theire owne, to get theire liuing with their laboure in the swete of theire faces, according to the commaundement of god, Gene. iij. to gyue other idell people, by theire example, occasion to go to laboure. Tie these holy idell theves to the carts, to be whipped naked about euery market town til they will fall to labor, that they, by theyre importunate begging, take not awry the almesse that the good christen people wolde giue vnto vs sore, impotent, miserable people, your bedemen (14).

Coerced labor, whether brought about through direct violence or deprivation, once again appears as the dark side of ecological reformism, as the instrumental manipulation of the relationships between population, work, and social order.

Fish, a strident polemicist in prose, does not betray any of the structural doublings of *Mum and the Sothsegger*'s allegory or the contradictory anti-intellectualism of *Pierce the Plowman's Crede* that indicate the ambivalent position of the reformist writer, who engages in the non-manual labor he wants to deny clerics and monks. Skelton, on the other hand, in making Collyn Clout the victim of sovereign violence at the end of his earlier poem for his unregulated speech, captures the entanglement of the writer with the practices Fish condemns. This sense of poetic doubleness, the tension of imagining an alternative political ecology of equitable labor relations while positioning oneself outside of those relations as a prophetic, poetic outsider, would prove to be one of Skelton's lasting influences on the poetry of Edmund Spenser. But before Spenser could take the moniker of Collyn Clout for his own, a generation of poets and polemicists responded to Skelton's virulent attack on Wolsey with more direct imitations of his language, style, and harsh satire.

**Robert Crowley: Personifying the Reformation**

John King and Kenneth Graham have drawn our attention to Crowley's debts to Fish's style and Skelton's satirical edge and formal vigor.[13] These debts are especially clear in his allegory of the Henrician reformation in the 1550 *Philargyrie of Greate Britayne*. The urgency of Fish, Skelton, and other reformist writers enlivens Crowley's verse, while at the same time entangling him and his predecessors in the confusions of

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[13] King, *Reformation* 50; "Introduction" 47; Graham 149.

what Brian Cummings calls “Puritan humanism”: “a literature with a creative ambition only matched by its own doubts about that ambition and that creativity” (277). Part of the challenge of imagining the perspective of the agrarian laborer in reformist thought and recasting religious questions in terms of the struggle to live off the land is finding a place for intellectual activity of any sort in this systemic outlook. Often, as we have seen, this dilemma resolves itself through recourse to poetry’s capacity to exhort sovereign violence, and Crowley, in this regard, is no different.

Written in rhyming lines of dimeter and trimeter designed to resemble Skeltonics (though they are in fact in ballad measure), the insistent rhythms of Crowley’s stanza and his fondness for alliteration signal his stylistic affinity with the *Piers Plowman* tradition and Skeltonic satire. *Philargyrie* adopts reformist style, and with it, personifications of the relations of England’s agrarian political ecology. In this poem, the religious elite exercise biopolitical control over the population and its determining relationship to its physical milieu through a combination of material interventions in the landscape and the use of language. In this way, Crowley attempts to counter dishonest religious rhetoric with a fable of his own designed to change what has been fundamentally unchanged during the Henrician reformation: the control of vast amounts of land and labor by the religious hierarchy. In his preface to the reader, he acknowledges, “I graunt I have feyned and written a lye” (8). Unlike Skelton, who cloaks Collyn Clout in the mantle of the honest reporter, Crowley “feigns” a full-on personification allegory, revealing that one of the many lessons he learned from editing *Piers Plowman* a year earlier was how to use personification to make visible the otherwise unrepresentable interactions of landscape, economy, and power.

The personified agents of *Philargyrie* are driven by the same force that activates the troubling conflicts of passus 6 of *Piers Plowman*: hunger. The summary heading of the first section of the poem promises to tell "the fable Of Phylargyrie y[e] great Gigant of great Britain, what houses were builded and landes appoynted for his prouisions, and how all the same is wasted to content his gredie gut wythall and yet he rageth for honger" (55). *Philargyrie* narrates the interaction of ecological forces, built infrastructure, and poetics – that is, the verbal, architectural, and linguistic making of cultural forms – in the production of wealth and power and its concentration in the hands of Catholic and Protestant religious elites, named Hypocrisy and Philaute respectively. Philargyrie, a giant whose name means "love of silver," represents the principle of greed that drives the leaders of both churches to engage in their expropriative deceptions, but more than a mere personification of a vice, Philargyrie's embodied form consolidates networks that tie together England's land, labor, mercantile economy, and institutional religious wealth, becoming a figure for nothing less than the political ecology of the Reformation and its incomplete transformation of English society. Philargyrie activates the ahistorical appetitive drive to accumulate wealth, while at the same time situating this drive within historically specific transformations of the environment.

Philargyrie first appears in the poem as a quasi-colonial invader, echoing Fish's history of England's legendary age ended by an occupying force of religious "rauenous wolues." The giant gathers to himself "A legion" of followers whom he entices with promises of unpunished theft. He exhorts his piratical band to

> Catch what you can
> From euery man
> And hold it for your owne
> Reape, let me se

And brynge to me
That other men have sowne (113-18).

King and Jones have connected Philargyrie to Langland's Lady Meed and Hunger, respectively, but Crowley's giant is just as much an echo of Wastour (King, "Introduction" 50; Jones 43). But while Langland puts his Wastour in a recognizable scene of post-plague agrarian work, the historical valence of Crowley's allegory is ambiguous here, as Christopher Warley observes, as if there were a time before greed came to the island, after which a non-native religious structure could easily establish itself (276). While the historical terms of the allegory remain vague at this point, the primitive accumulation Philargyrie inaugurates in his pre-religious phase establishes a primary relationship between England's agrarian ecology and the foundation of institutional religion, as we will see. When Philargyrie catalogues the wide array of agrarian produce he wants his followers to gather for him, he extends the spatial and ecological context of similar lists in *Mum and the Sothsegger* and *Collyn Clout*, where the relatively simple relation of commodity to consumer expands through a kind of performative copiousness to suggest a vast network of laborers, landscapes, animals, crafts, and niche economies:

The woule, the lead
The corne for breadde
The bere butter and cheese
Wyll be well solde
Wherefore be bolde
By them you can nought leese […]

You muste therfore
Haue euermore
All those thyngis in your hande
Wherin sprynge
Of euery thynge
And fyrst encrease doeth stande.
  That pasture grownde
That feadeth sound

You must in no case lacke
All maner mynes
And myllis that gryndis
Must helpe to fyll your sacke
    Copsis of wodde
Be verye good
For you to have in hande
You must nedes haue
Greate fermes a thraue
Wyth all good fruitfull lands.
    Short tale to make
You muste all take
And whorde up styll in store
Tyll that be scant
Whereof no want
Was euer sene before. (173-96)

In presenting Philargyrie's originary theft as preceding the establishment of a coherent religious program that governs such expropriations, Crowley simplifies and lays bare the operation of the church's accumulation of wealth, whether reformed or not. Unlike Langland, who is far less willing to reduce the church's claim to a part of the common wealth as mere ideological obfuscation, Crowley uses this pre-church moment of Philargyrie's reign to ground his suspicious critique of institutional religion in a foundational biopolitical operation. This operation begins when Philargyrie seizes control of the relations between the population and the environment in which they live. This pseudo-historical reduction of the allegory to a simpler "before" and a corrupt "after" allows Crowley to describe more clearly than earlier works like *Crede* and *Mum* what is at stake in practices like the church's impropriation of land. When the church gains ownership of land, it is, as Philargyrie says, where "fyrst encrese doth stande" – it is where the production of wealth begins, and the reproduction of the population is ensured. Philargyrie's desire for this primary productive capacity shows that what has been bequeathed to the church over centuries, and has recently passed into the hands of a new

Protestant elite, is not just plots of a certain number of acres collecting a certain amount of rents described in a legally binding formula. This legacy is the concrete form and the living manifestation of the relations of all the labor, land, and climate that allow for the production of commodities like wool, lead, corn, beer, butter, and cheese, together with the past labor that has created pastures, mines, mills, farms, woodlands, and "all good fruitfull lands." As Philargyrie acknowledges, he desires what "other men have sowne" – the taking of land is not the seizing of an inert storehouse of wealth, but an intervention within a dynamic system of labor, climate, soil ecology, and other biological and economic processes that words like "land," "pasture," and "wood" metonymically represent. Once this network of production and consumption is established in Philargyrie's first oration, Hypocrisy plans to physically occupy the landscapes of the agrarian ecosystem "in ech place" (527) with quasi-military strong houses disguised as hospitals in order to put the originary theft on a permanent and consensual footing.

After Philargyrie's initial speech, an adviser emerges from the crowd to propose artful deception that will convince the population to give up their resources willingly. Hypocrisy, as this adviser is named, represents the Catholic Church, and he recognizes how fiction, rhetoric, and style can be used to extract wealth from the populace. For Crowley, purgatory is an extremely successful fiction, the propagation of which through verbal arts like preaching allows the church to amass wealth and construct new buildings. Crowley's own confession in the prologue that he has "feyned and written a lye" suggests a certain degree of envy of the wild success, in terms of actually reshaping the material relations of people and the environment, of the feigned doctrine of purgatory. Hypocrisy correctly predicts that if the people are gulled by fear of the afterlife,

So they wyll brynge
To us althynge
Whereof we shall stande nede
Houses to buylde
Boeth thackt and tylde
And bye us fode and wede (383-389)

These new houses, funded by exploiting the people's fear, in turn exploit their bodily frailties as a way to further Hypocrisy's power.

Then in ech place
That pleasante was
He planted houses sure
Of lyme and stone
They were ech one
Because they shoulde endure
  Bulwarkis also
A thousande moe
Then any man can tell
To beate them downe
That ware the crowne
If they dyd once rebell
  So was that lande
Whole in the hand
Of Philargyries men […]
  But to couloure
His endeuoure
He dyd those places name
Houses for clarkes
And the bulwarckes
Lodgyngis for blynde & lame (527-50)

These buildings concretize the church's possession of England's material resources. They also keep royal power in check by occupying the realm and solidifying Hypocrisy's already successful insinuation into the agrarian economy by means of his preaching. This spatial conquest assures the political supremacy of the religious hierarchy that serves Philargyrie. The charitable purposes of many religious foundations are here exposed to Crowley's corrosive suspicion, as care for the populace becomes a mask for oppression. A bulwark is a military fortification. This militaristic display renders any alternative form

of sovereignty impossible, as the one "that ware the crowne" becomes nothing more than a potential rebel, not a legitimate and absolute ruler, which harkens back to the anxieties of divided sovereignty in *Mum and the Sothsegger*. The nature of Philargyrie's power during Hypocrisy's regime departs from the kind of straightforward sovereign rule for which Crowley is so nostalgic, instead extending, through operations of care for the physical health of the population in the form of "Lodgyngis for blynde & lame," a more totalizing and subtle control over "bare life," or the simple physical existence of both individuals and the population as a whole in its interactions with the environment (Agamben).

Crowley's description of Philargyrie's consolidation of his hold over the agrarian landscape reveals how such a move controls the population too, building upon Fish's polemical analysis of the intertwined effects of clerical greed and lechery on the agrarian landscape. For Crowley, impropriating agrarian land and infrastructure supports the building of religious houses that pretend to care for the bodies and souls of the population, but actually function more like military strongholds, enacting how the clergy's quasi-colonial occupation of England in Fish's tract is carried out through a mission of physical and spiritual care for the population. Thus, in Crowley's analysis of the church, we can perceive a precursor to Foucault's description in the nineteenth-century of the State's "acquisition of power over man insofar as man is a living being […] what might be termed State control of the biological" (239-40). This state control includes "control over relations between the human race, or human begins insofar as they are a species … and their environment, the milieu in which they live" (245). The "bare life" of Philargyrie's subjects, to use Agamben's term for "biological life as such" excluded and subject to

political life (3), is the means through which Philargyrie gains his power behind the back, as it were, of the royal sovereign of the realm he has invaded. As we will see, Crowley longs for the direct application of sovereign power over life and death in order to drive out this subtler regime of biopolitical control.

Philargyrie understands that manipulating the agrarian ecosystem for his own enrichment requires some degree of control over individual bodies and their material needs – what Crowley calls "the rod of hunger." Philargyrie threatens to wield this rod if his followers do not feed him, as he, too, is driven by an insatiable hunger for gold, the only substance that he can digest. The lists of commodities and lands that Philargyrie insists his followers obtain, which could theoretically meet so many basic needs, must be translated to the precious metal, homogenizing and alienating an otherwise diverse ecological and economic assemblage:

> You muste me fede
> Aye at my nede
> Wyth bagges of moste pure golde
> For I coulde eate
> None other meate
> Sence I was two dayes olde.
> A God am I
> That can not dye
> Wherefore I muste be fed
> Wyth golde most pure
> That wyll endure
> And not wyth bryckle breade
> Brynge, bryng bryng, bryng
> Alwaye somethynge,
> And then you shall me please.
> All that is solde
> For redie golde
> Doeth my stomake much ease. (221-32)

Philargyrie's insistence here that things must be sold before he can benefit from the acquisitive activities of his supporters gives him a more precise meaning as a threatening

figure of capitalism (Warley 280). His unique physiology combines the immortality of a god with the puzzling vulnerability that he nevertheless must eat; gold's stability, he claims, makes it the only food that will match his own undecaying life, as opposed to the "bryckle bread," suited to perishable human bodies. This stasis is an important part of Philargyrie's personified meaning, as he transforms dynamic components of a living agrarian ecology into the pure, unchanging medium of gold, which sustains his own eternal presence as the vice of greed. This enduring presence, however, drives the unsustainable contradiction of a ceaseless turnover of land, food, clothes, and shelter into more and more gold, until there is nothing left to keep the population alive.

With more precision than Skelton or the *Crede*-poet, Crowley shows the multi-step process whereby labor is transformed into the useless expenditure of wealth. One of the means by which Philargyrie hopes to obtain his wealth of precious metal is the exploitation of shortages that result from mercantile export: "Convey awaye / These thyngis beyond y$^{e}$ fome / Then shall the pryse / Of that aryse / That shal be lefte at home" (168-72). In this way, Crowley uses personification to make visible the intersection of ecology and economy in the church's exercise of material power over the realm. Crowley leaves out the fact of international trade, showing the export of commodities without any imports, making the shipping of goods an economic black hole equivalent to Philargyrie's bottomless maw. These economic means of coercively extracting wealth allow Philargyrie to deploy the "rod of hunger" due to the resulting food shortages to extract more from the desperate population, a strategy Piers himself used in the failed plowing of the half acre in passus 6 of *Piers Plowman*.

Skelton depicted the appetites of the religious elite to illustrate their control over

the physical landscape and agrarian infrastructure of England, while Crowley personifies such control through Philargyrie's appetites. This represents one of the most evident results of Crowley's editing of *Piers Plowman* in 1550: his absorption of Langland's multifaceted personifications and their ability to capture the structural interactions of religious forms of life and a population's relationship to its ecosystem. Philargyrie's need to be fed the gold that is the transmuted land, labor, and commodities of England recalls Hunger's consumption of the harvest of passus 6, but the giant also resembles Piers himself in his deployment of hunger as a means of coercing the populace:

> I am your God
> And have the rod
> Of honger in my fyste
> Wherefore take hede
> Ye do me fede
> Wyth golde that is fynest (245-50)

As in *Piers Plowman*, the condition of hunger, which involves a process of depriving bodies of food by means of any number of ecological, economic, and political means, appears as a consolidated figure. As the poem goes on, Crowley further anatomizes how controlling the landscape through the built environment and through forms of economic and extraeconomic coercion required specific institutional supports. This is where Hypocrisy, first, and then Philaute step in, proposing different strategies for continuing to extract wealth from the population non-violently, through fear and deceit. Crowley equates Britain's pre- and post-Reformation churches by refusing to see changes in doctrinal or ecclesiastical matters as anything other than superficial attempts to maintain the economic status quo. The Henrician reformation did little to change the fundamental relationships between the people, the agrarian ecosystem, and the institutions that manipulate this biopolitical relationship.

As he articulates this critique in *Philargyrie*, Crowley exposes the material efficacy of persuasive speech, of rhetoric, style, and performance, which underlies the hopeful apocalypticism of his own concluding advocacy for royal intervention to complete the unfinished work of the break with Rome and the dissolution. Hypocrisy solidifies Philargyrie's conquest of the realm by preaching about purgatory, and then offering to sell relief from this fate to the populace. Before Philargyrie consents to this strategy, Hypocrisy approaches the giant as a deferential counselor. Before expounding his plan, he "fell flatte upon his face / And desyred to be pardoned / To speake his mynde a space" (306-10). Where Philargyrie's opening oration exhorted his followers to take by force, Hypocrisy, even before he recommends that they "Worcke subtyltee / And get theyr goodis by gyle" (358-9), already performs his command of the resources of art, performance, and rhetoric.

Hypocrisy falls afoul of Philargyrie when he grows tired of working so hard to fill the giant's unfillable gut, and decides instead to win the people's loyalty and usurp Philargyrie's dominant position. Having already proven himself a master of the instrumental manipulation of people's fears and loyalties, he adopts a subtler inversion of Philargyrie's "rod of hunger." Instead of winning the population to his side with threats, he instead plans to bribe the people with feasting, "For houndis are wont / Freshly to hunte / For them that do them fede" (787-90). As in the construction of fortresses disguised as hospitals, Hypocrisy's plan to seduce the population with food demonstrates Crowley's suspicious equation of religious care for life with illegitimate power over life.

Hypocrisy cannot succeed at plying the populace with feasts, because Philaute, after alerting Philargyrie to his adviser's treachery, proposes a new arrangement. Philaute

requests,

> Let me be sent
> To preach in Lent
> And out of Lent also:
> And I shall drawe
> Them from his awe
> I truste wyth small adoe
>    I wyll declare
> How madde they are
> To gyue him of theyr good
> To be made iust
> Sens all men muste
> Be made iust bi Christis bloud
>    For though he rynge
> Great belles and synge
> A thousande masses and moe
> Yet must Christis bloude
> Shed on the rode
> Delyuer all men from woe (1007-24)

Crowley argues that Protestant doctrine only covers up an attempt to take over the wealth of the church. Philaute's repeated emphasis on "Christis bloud" displaces traditional forms of worship. This doctrinal and liturgical reform, however, is only a means to cut Hipocrisy out of this racket, allowing all the wealth he had secretly amassed to pass directly to Philargyrie and Philaute. The obvious flaw in Philaute's plan is that, if he preaches that salvation cannot be bought, then he will not be able to continue to squeeze gold from credulous believers. Once Philargyrie has eaten through the store of Hypocrisy's wealth, Philaute desperately feeds him "wyth leade / With stones, and wyth tymber" (1278-9). After selling off and dismantling the built infrastructure that marked Hypocrisy's reign, Philaute turns to the infamous practice Crowley and others perceived as a worsening problem since the break with Rome: rack-renting.[14] Even raising rents

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[14] The anonymous *A Supplication of the Poore Commons* of 1546, for example, argues that getting rid of "sturdy beggers" by dissolving monasteries has only created a vacuum

"From fyue grotes to a pounde" (1315) cannot satisfy the giant, however. Finally, Philargyrie uses the direct violence that always hovered as a threat behind the subtler machinations of Hipocrisy and Philaute. For Crowley, all the Reformation achieved was to remove the religious mask of greed and to unleash its direct violence upon a vulnerable population.

> Then gan this God
> To take the rode
> Of hunger in his fyst
> And sayde that he
> Woulde fylled be
> No man shoulde him resiste.
>    Then wyth strokes sore
> He smote the pore (1325-32)

Crowley's critique of both traditional religion and the post-dissolution regime presents the reforms of the first half of the sixteenth century as a liberation of greed, no longer hidden by religious rituals or doctrinal justification. While this is a reductive approach to religious life, making essential theological disputes mere obfuscations of theft, it is also an expansive account of institutional religion's immersion within England's political ecology. The famine which provokes the poem's conclusion extends the hunger that had always kept the church hierarchy working for Philargyrie to the whole population, revealing the church, either traditional or reformed, to be not entirely in control of the forces it had attempted to serve and harness. As Crowley learned from *Piers Plowman*, hunger represents the consolidation of a broad network of forces and agents at their moment of failure to meet individual bodily needs, and it cannot be easily controlled. Unlike Langland, however, Crowley has an ideal sovereign agent to which he turns to

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filled by "a sturdy sorte of extorsioners" who use the dissolution as a pretext for eliminating all customary rents and exacting higher and higher fees from tenants (79).

manage the threat of famine.

Up to this point in the poem, Crowley has repeatedly shown how speech, performance, charity, and ritual can all provide ideological cover for theft. Another way to put this would be to say that he dramatizes the material efficacy of the intellectual laborer within the network of early modern agrarian society. Crowley ends the poem with an attempt to arrogate that kind of efficacy to himself through the mechanism of royal violence. Given the progress of Crowley's critique, this attempt, from one point of view, arrives at an interesting failure. According to Warley, "If the poem obviously wishes to endorse monarchical power at the conclusion, the structure of the poem undermines that promise by exposing monarchy as itself another ideology" (287). Perhaps what Crowley exposes at the end of *Philargyrie*, however, is not so much the ideological function of monarchy itself, but rather the desire of the reformist poet to be as effective an actor in England's political ecology as a Catholic priest or a reformed bishop – not for the purpose of personal enrichment, but for establishing a fantastically productive and just new order. The mechanism of this efficacy is the sovereign's sword. The King, having been informed by Truth about Philargyrie's attack on the commons, announces to God, "Thou hast chosen me / Ouer thy flocke to raygne / Make me of myght / All wrongis to ryght / And make all well agayne" (1404-8). Like the doubled figure of the sovereign in *Mum and the Sothsegger*, Crowley's King has been ineffectually ignorant of the plight of his people, because he seems to stand outside of the system that enables their exploitation. But this very separation also allows him to regulate the system as an outside agent of purgation. Truth's intervention at the end of *Philargyrie* is not only an echo of Langland's St. Truth, but rather a figure for the reformist poet, who serves the purpose of

explaining the material ecology of the realm to the sovereign and activating the sovereign's regulatory, cleansing violence. In this way, Crowley imagines the poet's power within the political ecology he describes, figuring a way in which intellectual labor can have the material efficacy of the manual labor through which he figures society's complex, interactive structure. This sets the stage for Spenser's attempt to express the relation of the reformist poet to the political ecology he would alter, but first, we must pass from England to Ireland via the work of John Bale.

**Coda: The Reformer in Ireland**

John Bale was one of the leading literary figures of the English Reformation: a polemicist, playwright, and bibliographer who had a strong influence on Crowley (King, "Crowley's Edition" 343-44). He also was very briefly a bishop in Ireland at the time of Edward VI's death, and he published an account of this experience in the 1553 *Vocacyon of Johan Bale to the bishoprick of Ossorie*. In this brisk narrative, where Bale "vent[s] his spleen against Irishmen, Flemish pirates, and papists in general" (Fairfield 331), Bale exemplifies how the aggressive idiom that linked religious reform to the elimination of illicit leisure could also form the basis of colonial ideology. Bale describes his "vocacion / persecucion / & deliveraunce" in a way that explicitly follows the example of "the primatyve churche," specifically the trials of St. Paul (32).[15] He rejoices at his salvation from persecution at the expense of "these papistes," who only "rejoyce in helthe / prosperite / riches and worldly pleasures for their bellies sake," as opposed to the austere reformer who delights in "infirmytees / afflictions / losses / and sorrowfull crostes / for

[15] The *Vocacyon* has been described as "an autobiographical saint's life" (Fairfield 332). See also Rankin on Bale's narrative style, and Skura on Bale's "engagingly choleric" identification with St. Paul (49).

Christes veritees sake" (33). Bale's biblical typology for his own missionary activities as a new Paul merges with the material expropriation that was increasingly the aim of Tudor rule in Ireland as the maintenance of this rule became more financially burdensome.[16] We can glimpse this process in the way Bale casts the opposition between "heathen" and missionary in terms of their bodily dispositions, following the anti-clerical tradition of making priests into leisured gluttons, and combining it with a nascent colonial discourse of constructing idle people and uncultivated landscapes as the target of colonial reform's civilizing mission (Montaño 4-6). Intending to write a book "which all concerneth religion," Bale finds that this necessitates writing about the physical comportment of his new flock and their social order in relation to the colonial regime of land ownership in Ireland, especially given the agrarian reformist tradition to which his *Vocacyon* is allied. Like Simon Fish before him, who launched his polemical assault on purgatory by depicting the English clergy as "rauenous wolues" tearing at the substance of the common wealth, Bale too joins his account of preaching against transubstantiation and purgatory to a description of the material ravages of an idle priesthood. Fish imagined the invasion of these wolves as a quasi-colonial destruction of England's former strength; Bale transposes this perspective to the actually colonial context of Tudor Ireland in order to explain not only his missionary zeal, but also to affirm his mission's compatibility with projects of land reform and cultural transformation. Crucially for the vision of reformist kingship we have traced in this and the preceding chapter, this mission is attributed not only to God's calling of Bale, but also to the sovereign will of Edward VI, who "By his

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[16] For an introduction to the financial precarity of the colonial enterprise in Ireland, see Ellis, who observes, "By Elizabeth's reign […] the maintenance of English rule in Ireland now required regular financial and military subventions on a scale unknown since 1399" (14).

Regall power and authorite which both were of God (Ro. 13) was [Bale] both allowed and confirmed" (33). Under the sign of Edward, who appeared in thin guise in Crowley's *Philargyrie*, Bale seeks to enact the fantasy of his contemporary's poem, performing the will of the righteous king as he drives out a greedy and parasitic religious hierarchy from Ireland.

This regal imprimatur, however, only commits Bale to trouble and torment, since the king dies shortly after he takes up his bishopric, forcing him to flee Ireland for Germany with the coronation of Queen Mary. The majority of the *Vocacyon* is a linear narrative of the events that took him from Ireland to Germany, emphasizing at every turn the parallels between his bad breaks and good fortune and those of biblical prophets and early missionaries. Despite his scriptural framework, which constantly makes reference to an ongoing struggle between good and evil beyond historical time that would seem to diminish the significance of the material circumstances he confronts, he nevertheless focuses on Irish social organization and land politics. In his conclusion, he protests that he did not write about coign and livery – the practice of feeding and housing Irish soldiers using civilian resources – because "they perteine nothinge to the tyttle of this boke / which all concerneth religion," before going on for a page about this practice that is "a mayntenaunce to all vices" in Ireland (85) – perhaps even the religious "vice" of persistent Catholic practices, which is close to the position Spenser would eventually take on the necessity of establishing peace and English order in Ireland before reforms in religion could be undertaken. The goal of writing a narrative that a reformist like Bale has in mind, which only "concerneth religion," still requires an account of the conflicts that arise from his position of religious authority, which also entails control of material

resources. This is unsurprising, because the church has a powerful material presence in the world, and discussions of its doctrinal reform will encounter the material consequences of such changes. But Bale ends up approaching the mode of colonial reformist writing as a result of the religious reformist idiom that he adopts in the *Vocacyon*. This idiom casts religious criticism of Catholic believers in bodily terms of labor, leisure, and consumption.

The prefatory litany of dangers from which Bale has been delivered conveys the inseparability of the vocation of religious reform from geography and political organization:

> I have bene in parell of the heathen / in parell of wicked prestes / in parell of false justyces / in parell of trayterouse tenauntes / in parell of cursed tyrauntes / in parell of cruell kearnes and galloglasses.
>
> I have bene in parell of the sea / in parell of shypwrack / in parell of throwynge over the boorde / in parell of false bretherne / in parell of curiouse searchers / in parell of pirates / robbers and mutherers / and a great sort more. (34)

He emphasizes the distance he had to travel to bring the light of the gospel to the threatening "heathen," still in thrall to "wicked prestes," while also registering that this mission makes him a landlord, since he must also contend with "trayterouse tenauntes." His conflicts with the Irish "kearnes" and "galloglasses," paired with his account of his seafaring misadventures, capture an important nexus in sixteenth-century writings about Irish reform: Ireland's insular geography renders it both accessible to colonial exploitation and troublingly separated from English control (Montaño 9). This insular separation is reflected in Bale's account of Ireland's alien social structures, signaled in his list of kerns and galloglasses. For Bale, his time in Ireland represents a confrontation with, on the one hand, the "prosperouse welth / lecherouse ydelnesse / and lordely dignite" of Catholic priests, and on the other hand, the heathenish underdevelopment of a hostile

Irish population and landscape (37). He may get in arguments with Irish priests about transubstantiation, but he ends up first fleeing his post because of fights over the land he controls as a bishop living on the estate of Holmes Court, five miles from Kilkenny.

It became common later in the sixteenth century to relegate the cause of religious reform in Ireland to secondary status after the achievement of a thorough reform of Ireland's system of managing political authority, land ownership, and inheritance. For example, Sir John Perrot, Lord Deputy of Ireland from 1584 to 1589, asserts, "the corrupt Irishe customes of Captencie and Tanaist is the roote of all the barbarisme and disodre of the Lande" (MS Perrot 1, 42v). Similarly, Edmund Tremayne in 1571 only invokes religious motivations for continuing the effort of reforming Ireland as a rhetorical last resort: "If theis matters [of legal and economic reform] be not sufficient to provoke faithfull councellors earnestlie to persuade the quenes majestie to take this enterprise in hand to reduce that Realme to a better gouernement yet lett not the cause of god be neglected nor the compassion of so many sowles as are perished and are to perishe for wante of good instruccions in the cause of god" (Additional MS 48015, 275r). For Bale in the last moments of Edward VI's reign, these priorities have not yet been clearly sorted, and he finds that his desire to spread "good instruccions" in religion leads him, as it did the reformist writers we have studied throughout this chapter, to run up against the complex and conflicted intertwining of religious forms of life and the realm's political ecology and economy.

Bale's arrival in Waterford presents him with the spectacle of "many abhomynable ydolatryes mainteined by the Epicurysh prestes / for their wicked bellies sake" (51). In Bale's view, Philargyrie still has a firm foothold in Ireland, subverting

Bale's task of convincing the populace, like Philaute in Crowley's poem, that the sacrament of the mass is only a cover for "the unsaciable covetousnesse of the prestes" (60). The unintended irony is that, like Philaute, Bale obtains sought-after real estate for preaching against the covetousness of other religious figures. The death of Edward VI exposes this nexus of religion, wealth, and royal politics when Bale describes a land grab that takes advantage of the impending change in religious practice signaled by the death of the reforming king. Once the news of Edward's death spreads, Bale finds himself the victim of an attempted invasion and seizure of his estate at Holmes Court. Barnabe Bolgar, a neighbor and tenant of Holmes Court, "had hired certen kearnes of the Lorde Mountgarret / and of the Barne of Upper Ossorie / whom they knewe to be most desperate theves and murtheres / to slea me" (61). Why this violent plot? "[T]hey were so desierouse of my landes in diverse quarters / and coulde neyther obteine them by their owne importunate sutes / nor yet by the frendeshipp of others" (61). Bale's narrative of being in a country largely hostile to his reforming zeal at the time of the death of the monarch who promoted such zeal offers a fascinating glimpse of the lesson of the Henrician reformation: changes in the religious disposition of the crown are an ecological and economic event, involving transfers of land and its use, not just the institution of a new prayer book or the return of the Latin mass. Bale's narrative also reveals his own implication in processes of economic exploitation and material conflicts over resources as an episcopal landlord, even as he attempts to cast himself as a sickly apostolic outsider correcting the grossly material appetites of the wayward Irish clergy. His flight before a violent attempt to seize his land also foreshadows Spenser's own hurried departure from Kilcolman under similar circumstances shortly before his death.

Bale's *Vocacyon* serves as an important bridge text in connecting reformist and colonial writing in a way that helps us to see the ongoing significance of the tradition of Reformation literature for Spenser's late-career Irish works. Bale's apocalyptic *Image of Both Churches* influenced both the *Theatre for Worldlings* and Book I of *The Faerie Queene* (King, *Reformation* 448), but his connection to Spenser passes through Irish reformist writing as well. In Bale's Irish tale, for example, Irish Catholics produce "prodigyouse howlynges" when they sing the mass for the dead (51), echoing a letter of 1540 that describes how lookouts for Irish trespassers "runneth away crying with a barbarous noyse" (quoted in Montaño 2), and presaging Spenser's report of Irish "wayling" and "hue and cries" in *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe* (312, 315). When the Catholic Church reascends in the wake of Edward's death, Bale echoes Fish when he warns, "Those ydell mercenaries / not only loyter in the vineyarde / but also like cruell wolves they ravishe and destroye (Joan. 10)" (83). The practice of coign and livery, according to Bale, exceeds the exactions "undre wicked Saracene [and] cruell Turke" (84), anticipating Spenser's comparison of the Irish in *A View* to Scythians, another legendarily cruel and martial group. As we saw in the reformist polemics of Fish and Crowley, this kind of invective has roots in the anti-Catholic writing that Bale's *Vocacyon* identifies itself as being before it becomes a quasi-colonial tract in its recognition of the inseparability of religious practices, sovereign authority, land, labor, and violence. The gluttony, lechery, and covetousness traditionally attributed to priests in anti-clerical writing all too easily transfers to the description of recalcitrant colonial subjects who "leave nothinge un-devoure behinde then [sic] in that fertile region nomore than ded the devouringe locustes of Egypte (Exo. 10)" (85). The roaming soldiers of

Ireland wait until “after their harvestes are ended” and take “with much crueltie and fearcenesse” what gluttonous priests in England or Ireland take by deceit; in each case, the consumers of the harvest do not work, and they do not leave anything for those who labored in the production of the food (85). Perhaps there is no greater example of this migration of reformist invective to colonial ideology than in Bale’s joke about the miracle of the transubstantiation of tame and wild Irish: “And to bringe their conceyved wickednesse to passe / they can do great miracles in this age / by vertue of transubstanciacion belyke / for therin are they very conninge. For they can very wittely make / of a tame Irishe a wilde Irishe for nede / so that they shall serve their turne / so wele as though they were of the wilde Irishe in dede” (85). The targets of Bale’s bile in *The Vocacyon* merge in this joke, as he mocks the “miracle” of transubstantiation, attributing this supposedly divine intervention in worldly matter to mere deceit and obfuscation: just as the papists do, so do the kerns and galloglasses in their assaults on the physical substance of the realm.

For Spenser, his well-established poetic relationship to reformist polemic and satirical poetry also has a clear impact on his later output as a colonial theorist and poet in Ireland. Bale’s *Vocacyon* helps us to see more clearly this relationship in Spenser’s late writing, which has gone largely unexamined. In the next chapter, we will see how this dynamic between religious and colonial reformism plays out in Spenser’s prose tract *A View of the Present State of Ireland* and in the mid-career verse of *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe*.

# Chapter 4

## The Dialectic of Reform: Poetic Inspiration and Colonial Ecology in Edmund Spenser's Late Work

Edmund Spenser's poetry displays stylistic and ideological affinities with the "public poetry" of the late-medieval and early-Tudor periods, to borrow Anne Middleton's phrase,[1] but these connections usually appear only in discussions of Spenser's early pastoral, *The Shepheardes Calender* (1579), or of his slippery theological and ecclesiastical allegories in *The Faerie Queene* (1590; 1596).[2] Yet Spenser's affinity with vernacular reformism has much more to say about the late works of Spenser's career in Ireland, especially his return to the pastoral mode in *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe* and Book VI of *The Faerie Queene*, which, according to the paradigmatic Virgilian sequence, he should have left behind in his youth. [3] Spenser came back to this poetic

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[1] For Spenser, this includes a more reformist version of Chaucer's verse, which fell outside of Middleton's definition of Ricardian public poetry (focused on Langland and Gower), but had, by the mid-sixteenth century, been pulled closer to popular reformism due to its presentation as proto-Protestant in sixteenth-century editions by William Thynne (1542, ca. 1550, 1561) and Speght (1598, 1602) by including the pseudo-Chaucerian *Plowman's Tale*, a repurposed lollard poem (Cummings 227, 232; McCarl 16-9). Spenser refers both to *Piers Plowman* and this piece of Chauceriana when he humbly aligns himself with the "Pilgrim that the Ploughman playde a whyle" (10) in the epilogue to *The Shepheards Calender* (Anderson 1-2, 205; Skeat xxxv).

[2] Little's discussion of the critical consensus on Spenser's pastorals is comprehensive and most recent (1-14). See also King, *Reformation Literature* 444-48 and *Edmund Spenser*; Norbrook 53-81; Lane 86-88; McRae 203, 270-3; Jones 137. For a reading of *The Faerie Queene* in terms of early Protestant discourse and theology, see Mallette.

[3] The question of Spenser's late return to pastoral, which is supposed to be, as it was for Virgil, a youthful testing ground of poetic prowess, has mostly been aligned with the paradigm of the Virgilian career: Spenser still progresses from the lowly pastoral to the lofty epic, while *Colin Clouts* (1595) represents a mid-career retrospective that joins the two modes before continuing his national epic (Cheney 237). Cf. Shore: "I want [...] to view *Colin Clout* as a reflection of its author's concern with the nature and direction of his poetic career[...] Spenser returns in 1591 to the pastoral world of his first creation in

mode because he was a colonial reformer in Ireland who had spent a great deal of time in *A View of the Present State of Ireland* thinking about the relationships between land, labor, writing, and cultural change. His Skeltonic pastoral persona, Colin Clout, who debuted in the *Calender*, reemerges in Spenser's late poems to further the project of grasping the interaction between agrarian political ecology and the process of reform. The experience of writing *A View of the Present State of Ireland*, with its echoes of the reformist polemics of the Henrician and Edwardian eras about enforcing change through intervening in institutions of work and land use prompts Spenser to reconsider his relationship to earlier reformist traditions of English poetry. The fruits of this reconsideration can be found in *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe,* which contextualizes English literary history within the historical ecology of the Atlantic Isles in order to complete his vision of the relationship between writing and reform begun in *A View.*

The form of thought about historical change that I've traced in the preceding chapters on reformist political ecology undergirds Spenser's theories of colonial reform in *A View of the Present State of Ireland*, while his varied use of the stylistic mode of popular, satirical verse in *Colin Clouts* conveys Spenser's sense of the relationship between literary and material historical change in his poetry. Thinking through these interrelated aspects of vernacular reformism – history and style – allows Spenser to reimagine the nature and revivifying possibilities of poetic labor, and the relationship between the writer, the worker, and the sovereign in processes of historical change. As we will see, the dual intellectual challenges of completing the reform of Irish culture through its relationship to its physical milieu, and imagining the role of the writer in

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order to reassess the goals and limitations of the poetic journey he had begun with such confidence a dozen years before" (105).

changing both material culture and literary history, provokes the reapperance of Colin Clout. This figure, with his roots in agrarian reformist satire, was a vehicle for Spenser's earliest explorations of the ambivalent value of poetic labor in *The Shepheardes Calender*. It is fitting that this figure would return to Spenser's poetry at a time when he was directly confronted with the problems of the poet's place within the authoritarian transformation of a culture. In *A View*, *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe,* and Book VI of *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser extends the instrumental ecological thought of reform to a colonial context, while experimenting with new ways around the impasse of the meaning and function of the reformist writer in the shaping of material history.

*Colin Clouts Come Home Againe* (1595) represents Spenser's most direct poetic engagement with the struggle between visionary ideals and the material forces which precede and are the object of reformist fervor. This Irish pastoral adapts the *Piers Plowman* tradition and Reformation literature's account of labor and leisure within the material networks of the agrarian ecosystem in order to confront his poetic vocation in relation to *A View*'s vision of enforced agrarian labor. Transplanting the reformist solution of enforcing labor to Ireland, while, through the figure of Colin Clout, defining a poetic vocation which parallels that of the religious vocations earlier reformers attacked, Spenser embraces and resolves the contradictions of reformist writing that had troubled *Pierce the Ploughman's Crede*, *Mum and the Sothsegger*, and Reformation-era poets. Tracing the dialectical interplay between Irish earth and vatic poetic inspiration, Spenser moves between the instrumentalization of ecological thought and the re-enchantment of Ireland's transformed landscapes, and, with the figure of Colin, refashions the vernacular

reformist tradition's vision of labor, sovereignty, and poetic agency by imaginatively inhabiting both the role of the reformist worker and the visionary reformist writer.

*Colin Clouts Come Home Againe* has its eponymous shepherd narrate a voyage from field to court, offering a self-reflexive spatial allegory of the mutually-shaping encounter between matter and mind, and the rough and the refined as these are described in Spenser's poetry and in *A View*'s visions of civilizational transformation. As David Scott Wilson-Okamura shows, Spenser learned to value artful complexity as a hallmark of civilization (41), and the aesthetic antinomies of rudeness and refinement, naturalness and artificiality, which dominated Spenser's education in classical poetry, established a framework through which the material histories and ongoing practices of cultures could be judged. Spenser's combination of the stylistic markers of mid-Tudor reformist literature with his avant-garde poetics complements his theory of reform as expressed in *A View*: that it is achieved in the clash between transcendent ideals and immanent struggles, as the magisterial imagination confronts the reluctant worker. *A View* can be seen as a treatise on the mysterious process by which words and ideas both result from, and can change in turn, the land, labor, and social structures of a society. *Colin Clout* completes this project by connecting his own theories about the nature of literary history and poetic inspiration to the enthusiasm that seizes a reformer and drives him to change his material situation.

**Reformation Literature, *A View of the Present State of Ireland*, and Colonial Ecology**

Even as Spenser strove to be the "New poete," he worked within a long tradition of reformist writing and continued to wrestle with questions that animated the literature of the earlier sixteenth century: what was the relationship between material labor and

spiritual health? How could prayers, preaching, and poetry change the way people worked, and vice versa? Spenser used the *Piers Plowman* tradition and its sixteenth-century permutations in his Irish writings to understand the interplay of work, ecology, religious culture, and literary form. Writers like Simon Fish, Hugh Latimer, John Bale, and Robert Crowley (among other so-called "Commonwealth men"[4]) made work and idleness central terms in their sorting of right- and wrong-believing Christians. Any number of reformist tracts proposed to solve two problems at once by forcing ostensibly idle Catholic monks and clergy to work, thereby eliminating both their bad spiritual example, and their economically deleterious effects on the common wealth. Given that the common wealth of the realm came from its soil, pastures, animals, forests, rivers, and seas, this was both an environmental and an economic aim. The Lord Deputy of Ireland from 1584-89, John Perrot, summarizes the material benefits of pacifying Ireland in just this way, cataloguing otherwise wasted commodities like Crowley's Philargyrie or Fish's supplicant: "The Realme of England shall therby haue there diuers commodities […] As by leade yron timber / beuffe muttons, woole Grains, fishe with diveres other commodities" (BL Additional MS 48015, 311r). Crucially for Spenser, Reformation literature offers a theory of development and change that confronts the problem of the human relationship to the environment in both economic and cultural terms, making the enforcement of labor a necessary means of societal reform, even as it raised new questions about the place and meaning of non-manual labor, such as that performed by

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[4] R.H. Tawney applied the term in *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* 144-145. See also McRae, *God Speed the Plough* 28-32. For subsequent debates about the term, see Jones, *Radical Pastoral* 14-15.

preachers and writers. [5] *A View of the Present State of Ireland* extends the authoritarian impulse in this vein of reformist writing by transporting it to the context of colonial development, and demonstrates the ecological component of early colonial thought to be a significant inheritance from religious reformist discourse, as the colonized ecosystem and its allegedly unworked fecundity become primary sites of reformist intervention.[6]

*A View of the Present State of Ireland* begins as Irenius, the Irish expert in the dialogue, rehearses a few fatalistic explanations for Ireland's difficulties, citing those who say that God or the stars, or "the very genius of the soyle" keep Ireland in its unsettled state (11). Irenius makes it clear that he disagrees with the notion that Ireland's fate is in the hands of some malevolent or indifferent supernatural force. Human beings and the collective ways in which they have met the demands of their environment create these difficulties, he argues throughout his conversation with Eudoxus, an educated but not particularly well-informed interlocutor. "The very genius of the soyle" is not a timeless local deity, the explanatory value of which Irenius hurries to dismiss. However, it does turn out that Ireland's problems do have a great deal to do with soil in Irenius's account. According to him, Ireland's problems must be understood as the result of centuries of migration and adaptation to a particular ecosystem – the island's climate, topography, flora, and fauna. Spenser traces an embedded environmental history in Irish social structures (55, 82-3), material culture (55-70), and subsistence practices (79, 97-

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[5] The meaning of "labor," particularly in relation to activities like writing and praying, has been the subject of important recent research on Spenser by Joshua Phillips and Jeffrey Knapp. For the question of non-manual labor in the Middle Ages and Renaissance more generally, see Robertson; Robertson and Uebel; Masciandaro; Low; Picciotto; Little.
[6] For a discussion of Spenser, ecology, and colonialism in terms of the georgic, see Hiltner, *What Else?* 156-73. For a broader context of "green imperialism" and the ecological impact of colonialism in which to situate Spenser's treatise, see Montaño; Grove; Crosby; Huggan and Tiffin.

102). The purpose of this foray into human ecology and historical geography is to use this knowledge to advocate the desired reforms of the New English settlers, of which Spenser was a respected representative (Hadfield, *Edmund Spenser* 343). The ultimate aims of any specific reforms were to pacify the Irish, to weaken the decentralized authority of the Old English, to bring the Irish legal system in line with English law, and to turn Ireland into a prosperous agrarian economy on the English model of settled agriculture, established market towns, and exports of wool, timber, and other commodities.[7]

These legal, administrative, and economic reforms were inseparable from a vision of environmental transformation, as Ireland was seen as a land of unproductive wilderness; the map of the Atlantic Isles (1564-5) by Laurence Nowell (whose Anglo-Saxon lexical research influenced Spenser's understanding of England and Ireland's past) shows well-ordered boundaries and place names in England, and in Ireland "mainly a green wilderness area of forests and bogs, dominated by an array of lordships and families in various states of disobedience to the crown. The subtext suggests that Ireland must be made to look and behave like England and that the central royal authority must be imposed on these outlying recalcitrant subjects and regions" (Smyth 31). Indeed, the most evident environmental characteristic that Ireland and England share – they are both islands – prompts Edmund Tremayne to opine that it would be relatively easy to re-make

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[7] The debate surrounding Irish "reform" versus a more totalizing "reduction" of Irish culture is represented by, on the one hand, Canny and Bradshaw, who emphasize a strong tradition of conciliatory legalistic reformism in the English pale, and Brady, on the other, who emphasizes a turn towards a more radically destructive English policy towards Ireland in the second half of the sixteenth century. It is clear, however, as these scholars recognize, that "a considerable degree of coercion" undergirds even the more "reformist" approach to Tudor policy in Ireland (Canny 17). For an account of the material and mercantile means and ends of Tudor policy in Ireland, see Ellis 31-50; Gillespie; Montaño.

Ireland in England's image: "that Ireland beinge an Iland as England, is apte with dilligense / to yeilde the commodities that England doeth bothe by sea and lande / Is not so difficile to be brought in the principall pointes of gouernment, to the like order that England is" (BL Additional MS 48015, 275v). For Spenser, too, Ireland's reformation begins with the land's transformation.

Even the legal reforms meant to do away with septency and tanistry,[8] about which Irenius gets so exercised (16-19), are a matter of land use and had long been entangled with discourses of agrarian waste and improvement in the Irish colonial reformer's imagination. According to Perrot, "the corrupt Irishe customes of Saptencie and Tanaist is the roote of all the barbarisme and disordre of this Lande, where if the same were converted to state of inheritance men wolde builde plans and perseuve for their posteritie; where nowe no man careth but for his owne time, and herafter spendeth and spoileth - first his owne and then his neighbors" (Bodl. MS Perrot 1, 42v). The lax incontinence of the "barbaric" Irish, rooted in their traditional social structures, makes them "wasters" in a sense recognizable from a long tradition of vernacular economic moralism, of which *Wynnere and Wastoure* is a prime example, that read an unplowed, unenclosed, or unimproved landscape as a sign of moral failure and communal decadence. Indeed, one of Perrot's first observations about the "comodities and discomodities" of Ireland is that "The Soyle is generally fertyle, but little and badlye manured," which is caused not only

[8] Septency and tanistry refer to the Irish customs of social and political organization, where the "sept" is the primary political unit, and "tanistry" refers to the practice of non-hereditary selection of rulers of each sept. As Montaño summarizes the views of New English reformers on this system, "the central elements of the native landholding system seemed designed to foster mobility, encourage violence and disorder, and consolidate power in the hands of the strongest" (15).

by septency and tansitry, but also because the inhabitants are "geven to a wandringe and Idill life" (Bodl. MS Add. C. 39, 1r).

This convergence of agrarian ecology and moral economies of cultivation and waste also defines Spenser's treatment of "booleying" – the nomadic pasturing of cattle. Cattle herding, which Irenius claims the Irish practice instead of farming, sustains some of Ireland's most troubling traditions, such as nomadism, clan structures, and cattle raiding (55, 149). Ireland's uncultivated landscape of high pastures and "wast wilde places" (24) suited to the herding of cattle both symbolizes Ireland's backwardness and is its cause. The project of bringing "civility" (119) to the Irish must begin with the transformation of Ireland's agrarian political ecology – the system of law, political organization, property regimes, cattle, grass, topography, clothing, and foodways.[9] Hence the first question Eudoxus asks of Irenius assumes agrarian fertility to be the primary frame for discussions of Irish reform: "But if that countrey of Ireland, whence you lately came, be of so goodly and commodious a soyl, as you report, I wonder that no course is taken for the turning thereof to good uses, and reducing that nation to better government and civility" (11). Syntactically, the desire for "better government and civility" follows agrarian development, and is mainly desirable insofar as it can help unlock the benefits of that "goodly and commodious soil." This priority structures the dialogue as a whole, as Irenius and Eudoxus sketch out an ecological vision of authoritarian reform based on enforced labor. As the first section of *A View* makes clear, in which the dialogue tackles the origins and history of Irish culture, this interest in Ireland's soil and its use supports a broad periodic narrative of movement from the "dark ages" of primitive pastoralism to

[9] On this process, see also Montaño; Gillespie; Smyth.

the enlightenment of settled agriculture and its attendant civilizing benefits. Studying the barriers to obtaining the wealth of Ireland's soil leads Irenius and Eudoxus to theorize historical change as a process that combines inherent cultural traits with the adaptation of subsistence labor to the features of the local environment. As the dialogue progresses and Irenius offers more specific reform proposals, we see that changes in the way people work the land can transform deeply ingrained traditions and beliefs. Irenius and Eudoxus discover that the structuring desideratum of the dialogue - civilization - follows mysteriously when everyone is compelled to "to labour thenceforth for their living," as Irenius ultimately recommends (119).

Irenius argues that the Irish take many of their cultural characteristics from "their nations," or the historical peoples from which they descend through successive waves of migration. Their apparent refusal to bring the Irish landscape under cultivation through agrarian labor can be traced back to Ireland's earliest settlers. It is the misfortune of the Irish that they did not descend from some culture that took agrarian labor more seriously, and instead roamed after cattle from pasture to pasture, a way of life and labor that Irenius prefers to characterize not as labor at all, but rather "a very idle life, and a fit nurserie for a thiefe" (149). The wildness of this "Scythian or Scottish" practice is intimately tied to a landscape that Irenius constantly portrays as threatening and wasteful. This genealogy of the Irish as exhibiting "Scottish" customs is indebted to the Anglo-Saxon dictionary of Laurence Nowell, mapper of Ireland and England for William Cecil, Queen Elizabeth's chief administrator, under the entry titled "Irren.": "Irisshe. Ireland. Ireland. Scotland […] therby as likewise Ireland / is called Scotland & Scotia maior […] the cause of this confusion is that the / Irisshe men & Scottes are but one nation / of one

tung & nature & maner of liuing" (Bodl. MS Selden Supra 63, 87r). Spenser's use of Nowell conjoins the latter's cartographic overview of Irish land, his construction of Irish historical geography, and the material practices of subsistence and reproduction engaged in by Irish herders. For Irenius, these Scotch-Scythian thieves wander after their cattle, "pasturing upon the mountaine, and waste wilde places; and removing still to fresh land, as they have depastured the former" (55). Culture, ecology, geography, and history are entangled in this account of the practice of cattle herding and its effects on land and people.

Eudoxus, however, observes that there is perhaps nothing essentially wrong with this way of life. He does not see this form of subsistence as absolutely flawed or backwards, but rather quite suitable to the Irish ecosystem:

> What fault can you finde with this custome? for though it be an old Scythian use, yet it is very behoofefull in this country of Ireland, where there are great mountaines, and waste deserts full of grasse, that the same should be eaten downe, and nourish many thousands of cattle, for the good of the whole realme, which cannot (me thinks) well be any other way, then by keeping those boolies there, as yee have shewed. (55)

Eudoxus, it seems, is a relativist when it comes to subsistence strategies: the local conditions in Ireland have lent themselves to certain practices that need not be measured by the standard of England's agrarian economy. Irenius, however, counters this assumption by shifting the priority of the debate. What matters is not the basic effectiveness of a particular form of subsistence, but the social structures and traditions that arise from it. Eudoxus's observation about the "waste deserts" of Ireland being well-

suited to cattle grazing avoids the main issue, as Irenius sees it, which is that the booley is incompatible with civilization and its ethics of work and moral control. In an anonymous *Discourse uppon the Reformation of Ireland* collected by the Elizabethan antiquary Thomas Talbot, the author notes that cattle herding and theft go hand in hand, as the former, intimately tied as it is to the sept, and hence tanistry, where election depends, allegedly, upon demonstrating strength (Montaño 15), makes Irish men feel "it more honest and gentlemanlike to take or steale […] rather than in eny wise to shame hymself or hys good birth with puttynge his hand to eny Labor" (BL Cotton MS Faustina C IX, 40v). The author finds a familiar fault with those accused of illegitimate idleness in their presumption of nobility as an excuse for their wastefulness, like the sons of laborers who aspire to learning and leisure in the fraternal orders. Irenius, too, condemns the free and mobile leisure of the pastoralists, but like the late medieval and early-Tudor anatomists of fraternal hedonism and mobility, he can barely contain the vision of freedom he means to denounce.

> Moreover the people that thus live in those boolies, grow thereby the more barbarous, and live more licentiously than they could in townes, using what manners they list, and practizing what mischeifes and villainies they will... For there they thinke themselves halfe exempted from law and obedience, and having once tasted freedome, doe like a steere, that hath beene long out of his yoke, grudge and repyne ever after, to come under rule again. (55-6)

"Halfe exempted from law and obedience," doing what they like in whatever manner they like, the Irish herders anticipate here the seductive power of rural *otium*, which vivifies

the convention of singing Irish sheep herders that open *Colin Clouts*.[10] As the Irish and their cattle become harder to distinguish from one another, each stubbornly refusing to follow the long-term plans of cultivators who wield the transformational power of the plow, their troubling similarity to the vision of poetic play in Spenser's pastorals exemplifies the contradictions between the material enforcement of reform and its visionary, imaginative impetus from the intellectual labors of poets and writers.

Irenius gives voice to the authoritarian pole of this reformist structure, proposing controls on the landscape in order to delimit the freedoms he describes. He advocates what William Smyth calls "the endgame for the conquering English": "to create as much geographical freedom for themselves as possible, while at the same time constraining, containing and confining the 'subject' Irish to specific places and locales" (25). To institute the fundamental reforms that would make the Irish more constrained and accountable to centralized authority, Irenius argues that it is their relationship to the land that must be disrupted first. Just as "the minde followeth much the temperature of the body" in the individual, so too are social forms inseparable from the ecosystem in which they exist (71). Even Ireland's degenerate Catholicism (a favorite trope in writings by invaders about Ireland since Gerald of Wales) must await reform until the cattle-raiders are suppressed, "for instruction in religion needeth quiet times, and ere we seek to settle a sound discipline in the clergy, we must purchase peace unto the laity" (85).

Control over the physical landscape is the lynchpin of Irenius's military strategy against the rebel Irish. As any good agrarian developer must, Irenius understands the chain of cause and effect that links the growth of food to the interaction of soil, water, air,

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[10] On the pastoral "convention" of song as both a traditional image and a coming together, see Alpers 81.

animals, and work. Relying on this insight, Irenius lays out his scheme for installing strategically placed garrisons for the purpose of continually harassing the cattle-herders, breaking up the seasonal rhythms that these mobile pastoralists depend upon for subsistence.

> And those 4 garrisons issuing forth, at such convenient times as they shall have intelligence or espiall upon the enemy, will so drive him from one side to another, and tennis him amongst them, that he shall finde no where safe to keepe his creete [herd] in, nor hide himselfe, but flying from the fire shall fall into the water, and out of one danger into another, that in short space his crete, which is his cheife sustenance, shall be wasted with preying, or killed with driving, or starved for want of pasture in the woods, and he himselfe brought so lowe, that he shall have no heart nor ability to indure his wretchednesse, the which will surely come to passe in very short time; for one winter well followed upon him will so plucke him on his knees, that he will never be able to stand up againe. (98)

Irenius strategically follows the chain of human dependence on the biosphere in order to exploit the assumed weakness of the Irish herders, which is their relatively undiversified source of food. By breaking the link between cattle and their seasonal grazing grounds, the Irish will be rendered dependent upon settled agrarian labor, will cease their resistance to English rule, and will then allow for the ultimate goal of religious, legal, and political reform. This strategy begins by breaking the ecological network of pastoralists, cattle, and pasture, which allows for New English control to be established by intervening in the very process that ensures the physical survival of the population. In this plan, Irish obedience would be coerced through hunger.

In addition to its instrumentalization of ecological thought, this understanding of social reform assumes a broadly periodic model of historical change, in which the movements from violence to peace and from laziness to labor announce the achievement of a new level of civilization. Irenius hopes to make everyone “apply themselves to honest trades of civility,” which is to say the settled production of crops and crafts under the eye of English landlords, living in towns “sowed and sprinckled with English” (119, 144). He seems sure that this is possible, against all those who would fatalistically dismiss such schemes as going against God or the stars, because England, too, was once a violent and barbarous place. England’s past is Ireland’s present, and for that reason, Ireland may follow a similar developmental progression.[11] As Eudoxus observes, “the English were, at first, as stoute and warlike a people as ever the Irish, and yet you see are now brought unto that civility, that no nation in the world excelleth them in all goodly conversation, and all the studies of knowledge and humanitie” (21). The material and legal stability of England’s agrarian economy result in the establishment of towns and cities, which create the conditions for achievement in the arts and scholarship. Irenius argues that “civility” can somehow arise from an adjustment in the relationship between land, labor, and leisure. He envisions a scheme in which forcing more people to work in the fields and reducing the number of herders allows Ireland to urbanize, leading to the establishment of churches and grammar schools, the primary means by which the learned

[11]Spenser drew from the research of the early Anglo-Saxonists and legal scholars William Lambarde and Laurence Nowell in his construction of an English past through which to understand the Irish present. For more on this connection, see Brackmann, who describes how the distant English past and its legal traditions were essential in constructing English national identity, which Spenser deploys in order to construct Irish identity as a less developed form of the English. Lambarde also produced a translation of the husbandry manual *Walter of Henley*.

arts may flourish. Like the early Reformers attacking monks, Irenius constructs the Irish herder as a parasitic criminal, only to contrast him with the moral discipline and social beneficence of the settled farmer: "for this keeping of cowes is of it selfe a very idle life, and a fit nurserie for a thiefe," but "husbandry [is] the nurse of thrift, and the daughter of industrie and labour" (149).[12] This industrious husbandry allows for the flourishing of humane religious culture, as Irenius defines it. Ironically, these institutions for the study of learned arts seem all too familiar from the earlier Tudor discourse of anti-monasticism, and even from Spenser's descriptions of the bards of the Irish, where McCabe locates "an uneasy sense of kinship" in Spenser's relation to an Irish culture that grants bardic poets great cultural prestige (McCabe, *Spenser's* 3, 28-56).

As nomads settle near towns and attend to the daily chores of tilling the fields, intellectual labor will flourish: "every parish should be forced to keepe a pettie schoole-master, adjoyning unto the parish church [...] whereby they [the children] will in short space grow up to that civill conversation" so that they "will loath their former rudenesse in which they were bred" (150-1). Irenius begins this section of *A View* by observing that Ireland most sorely lacks intellectual laborers, but the proposed remedy is to make more manual laborers. This alteration in the relationship of humans to the earth directly leads to a change in Ireland's geography, as farm towns follow from the growth in farming; farm labor will lead to peace, since "bella execrata colonis" ["war is hated by farmers"] (149), and this peace will allow for improved education in languages and religion. But

[12] Simon Fish complained in 1517 that monasteries harbored thieves and confidence men, and a later, anonymous *Supplycacion* printed in 1544 recommends that "many ydle hypochrytes and deceyuers be greate burdeyn & charge to your realme /, which hytherto haue lyued vngodly and vnprofytablely /, maye, from henceforthe, be partly conuerted to the supportation and mayntenaunce of common scoles" (10, 44).

this can only happen by consigning the majority of the population to a specific kind of manual labor, thereby fundamentally changing Ireland's ecology, economy, and geography. For Laurence Nowell, the Anglo-Saxonist and historical geographer of Ireland, urbanism and public order go hand in hand: in Munster, once the Irish had "expelled all the Englishe freeholders […] in 50 yeares passed was none there obedient to the kinges lawes, except cities & walled townes" (BL Cotton MS Domitian A XVIII, 95r).

The analysis and plans for reform that Irenius and Eudoxus develop in the course of their dialogue depend upon a cultural hierarchy in which supposedly more advanced agrarian and urbanized civilizations represent a pinnacle towards which Ireland must be guided. But the means by which Ireland will gain this height requires a return to the earth, since reform of the pastoral and wooded landscape will create the conditions that lead to civility. *A View of the Present State of Ireland* establishes a structure in which the artistic achievements of a writer like Spenser both grant him the authority to propose changes to Ireland's agrarian ecology, while also showing that those achievements are inextricably linked to the agrarian ecology of his homeland. Spenser has moved into the position of the virtuosic beneficiary of others' labor, repeating with a difference the economic structure of religious vocations decried by the earlier English reformers upon whose ecological insights he relies.[13] This interplay between labor and leisure in the envisioning and enactment of reforms, especially as these relate to a society's political ecology, reappears in *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe*, where he combines the dated literary techniques of agrarian reformism with his inspired, prophetic, and epic tendencies as his

[13] As Joshua Phillips argues in "Monasticism and Idleness," Spenser appropriates the stance of contemplative repose from discredited monastic practices and uses them to define a space for autonomous aesthetic labor.

protagonist travels from Ireland to England and back, flaunting both the geographic mobility of the colonist and the social mobility of the reformist poet as the poem intertwines narratives of literary progress and material development, laid over the fraught geographies of the Atlantic Archipelago.

***Colin Clouts Come Home Againe*: Colonial Ecology and the Places of Renaissance Poetics**

In the story of Elizabethan pastoral, which often begins with the introductory epistle to *The Shepheardes Calender*, Spenser refashions earlier idioms of English poetry about rural life as he inaugurates a new pastoral poetics, primarily classical and continental in orientation. [14] He at once echoes the hardscrabble realism of Middle English rural complaint literature (King, *Edmund Spenser* 26), while moving away from its socioeconomic orientation and embracing a cosmopolitan, experimental aesthetic (McRae 69). In this view, Spenser's estranged though nevertheless evident relationship to the "Reformation tradition" hinges upon a development away from the social engagement exemplified by *Piers Plowman,* which shows the deep connections between manorial agrarian economies and political and religious structures. But the emphatic aesthetic self-consciousness of Spenser's poetry does not represent an elimination of the materialist orientation of the agrarian complaint tradition in his work. On the contrary, Spenser's stylistic self-consciousness relies upon a trajectory of material development that is inseparable from his view of literary history, and which brings his pastoral innovations nearer to the reformist verse he echoes.[15] As we have seen, Spenser thought a great deal

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[14] For a summary and critique of this treatment of pastoral, see Little 1-14, 143-5.

[15] I disagree with Little's assessment of Spenser's use of figurative laborers in *The Shepheardes Calender*: "To make the poet the laborer is to replace the older figurative

about reform as a material process in Ireland, and Renaissance poetics understood language and form to represent different phases in material development. So the very devices of alliteration and archaism that connect his pastorals to earlier traditions of rural complaint maintain the materialist focus of that tradition in *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe*, since they implicitly enable Spenser to reflect on changed material circumstances through changes in stylistic register, even as the narrative and themes of the poem seem to pull towards the elevated erotic philosophy of Cynthia's court. This polyvocal poetics exhibits a similar sense of "disruptive social ambition" that John Huntington detects in Colin's claim of an inspired *furor poeticus* (306), which also must be read as one of Skelton's most significant legacies for Spenser's use of Collyn Clout.

In the introductory epistle to *The Shepheardes Calender*, E.K. defends Spenser's mixed style and facility with archaisms by comparing literary and visual arts: "Oftimes we fynde ourselues... delighted with the shewe of such naturall rudenesse" that "make more clearly to appeare the brightnesse of braue and glorious words" (Spenser, *Shorter Poems* 26-7). The opposition between "naturall rudenesse" and "braue and glorious words" would structure Spenser's literary style throughout his career, even provoking censure from the likes of Sidney and Jonson.[16] The material of the literary past, such as Chaucerian and Langlandian English, and the satirical "rusticall rudeness" of writers like

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meaning of laborer: the reformer" (163). This is only the case if we think Spenser held these two categories – the poet and the reformer – apart.

[16] Sidney: "That same framing of his style to an old rustic language I dare not allow, since neither Theocritus in Greek, Virgil in Latin, nor Sannazaro in Italian did affect it" (44). Jonson: "Spenser, in affecting the Ancients, writ no language" (428). Cf. Dolven: "[A] contest between ballad and pentameter [in *The Shepheardes* Calender] is the story of Colin's career, his ambition and his nostalgia, his yearning toward epic and his allegiance to the rustic wellspring of his poetic energies" (397).

Skelton and Robert Crowley, offered pleasing and appropriately rural contrasts with the high artistic ambitions of Spenser's works, but with such juxtapositions he also makes an implicit argument about the nature of historical change and its relationship to place and time. The ability of literary style to recall past forms allows it to reflect on changed material circumstances as well. Style can be a kind of memory that revivifies past social configurations and the ways in which poets of previous generations sought to reform them.

Reformation-era writers frequently emphasized the intertwining of the loftiest spiritual aims of the church with its most material manifestations as a landlord and expropriator of food, materials, and labor; they made the government's taking of church property for the benefit of the poor a central concern of the early phase of the Henrician reforms, and later the mid-Tudor church was criticized for failing to live up to early hopes of a more widespread socioeconomic revolution (Jones 155). While advocating for the reform of church and society, writers of Reformation literature sought to understand and intervene in the complexity of social and natural systems. The process of cultural reform, explicitly the main theoretical topic of *A View*, animates Spenser's poetry both when it is most directly engaged with contemporary events, and when it is most concerned with meta-poetic theorizing. *Colin Clouts Comes Home Againe* exemplifies the ways in which Spenser's pastorals joined literary and material reformism, as his depiction of Colin's transformative journey from Irish shepherd to Love's vatic priest overlays an allegory of literary style onto the fraught colonial geography of the Atlantic Isles. Colin's movement from hard labor to the inspired contemplation of cosmic mysteries and back again enacts a stylistic movement between "rusticall rudeness" and a

higher style, while considering the central dilemmas of reformist writing: How do human agents and the land interact to create a culture, and how can literate agents intervene in this assemblage in order to enact a cultural reformation? How can language change a world? Colin's conversion in Cynthia's presence to a priest-like figure, with the subsequent changes in his poetics that this brings about, recalls the Reformers' materialist critique of religious elitism, even as the poet becomes a kind of religious elite in Spenser's vision, showing how the antinomies of reformist thought continued to structure his poetic and colonial self-understanding.

**Colin Clout: Reformist Thought/ Renaissance Poetics**

In 1595, William Ponsonby printed *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe* along with Spenser's elegy for Sir Philip Sidney, *Astrophel*. The introductory epistle is signed "from my house of Kilcolman the 27. Of December. 1591" (Spenser, *Shorter Poems* 344). *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe* was written shortly after Spenser returned from England on a trip to Elizabeth I's court during 1590 with Walter Ralegh. He revised it before publication in 1595. The poem is a thinly veiled account of this journey, in which Colin (Spenser) is visited by the Shepherd of the Ocean (Ralegh) in Ireland, who takes him on a voyage to the court of Cynthia (Elizabeth). In this narrative, Colin goes from pastoral labor to a kind of vatic transcendence in Cynthia's presence, which causes him to return to Ireland as a priest of Love's mysteries and an enthusiastic promoter of Cynthia's power (this despite his disillusionment with the courtly striving that goes on around her). In this pastoral epyllion, or "little epic" with an erotic focus, Spenser's neoplatonic theories of nature, matter, and mutability, explored in his 1596 publications, *Fowre Hymns* and *The Faerie Queene*, meet his prosaic agrarian concerns with the Irish

landscape. That landscape, as an avatar of the earthy, the ancient, and the enchanted, allows Spenser to imagine its potential for progress to higher stages of perfection, while at the same time evoking its recalcitrance, autonomy, and power to reverse the ascent to civilization.[17] These tensions are registered thematically in the narrative of the voyage, a kind of neoplatonic progression and return up and down the ladder of perfection, and the force of this transformative journey is felt in the jarring shifts in stylistic register.[18] The stylistic journey in *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe*, parallel to Colin's geographical progress, charts a course towards neoplatonic transcendence and a high, novel style, moving away from, and then back towards, the materialism of mid-Tudor reformist literature. In these itineraries of literary and geographical movement, Spenser's poetic fictions and reformist theories share assumptions about the nature of matter, progress, and change, as Colin moves from earth, to sea, to sky in a progressively rarefied approach to the center of courtly authority and eloquence, before returning, changed by the experience, to change the Irish landscape in turn.

*Colin Clouts Come Home Againe* begins with a gathering of shepherds listening to Colin make music. His companion Hobbinol interjects and establishes the circumstances of the poem's narrative: Colin has been away and has recently returned to Ireland, which is also the narrative of Irenius in *A View*, but with the order of the voyage reversed.

> Whilest thou wast hence, all dead in dole did lie:
> The woods were heard to waile full many a sythe,
> And all their birds with silence to complaine:

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[17] For an account of Spenser's relationship to Irish earth as a kind of "colonial archaeology" that seeks to efface its ghostly traces of violence, see Schwyzer.

[18] Cf. Sam Meyer: "The poem does not hold to a uniform tenor of speaking, but contains a variety of styles" (35).

> The fields with faded flowers did seem to mourne,
> And all their flocks from feeding to refraine:
> The running waters wept for the returne,
> And all their fish with languour did lament:
> But now both woods and fields, and floods revive,
> Sith thou art come, their cause of meriment,
> That vs late dead, hast made againe aliue. (22-31)

In heavily alliterated lines, Hobbinol celebrates the earthy affinities of Colin with the land and its inhabitants. Hobbinol shows just how saddened he was by Colin's absence by making the landscape a mirror of his grief, although this speech cannot help but seem playfully exaggerated compared to the serious and somber use of this convention in "The Doleful Lay of Clorinda" printed in the same volume. With its slightly misplaced pathos (which might serve to compare Spenser to Sidney, the subject of "The Doleful Lay"), this description makes Colin a sort of *genius loci*, presenting his relationship to animals and the environment in affective terms, a relationship of appreciation and emotional dependency: Colin does not need them to survive, but they need his poetic labor to flourish. Echoing the conventional association of a sovereign with the landscape over which she rules, Colin appears as a sustaining force of nature through his music; the powerful effects it has on his shepherd companions, who "stand astonisht at his curious skill" (8), must also explain the extreme sadness the nonhuman inhabitants felt at his absence. Colin's relationship to the land seems to be characterized by a conventional pastoral *otium*, in the sense that he and his shepherds are shown here relaxing (before toil makes its eventual appearance). At first, though, the only labor that mediates the connection between Colin and the world around him is the affective labor of making music. Hobbinol extends the importance of Colin's art (i.e. Spenser's) to Orphic extremes that surpass the tortuous legal and economic barriers between the poet and the land upon

which his material existence depends.[19] Instead, Spenser reverses the relationship of dependence, making the ecosystem that sustains him rely upon Colin's sustaining presence, upending the relationships among land, labor, and learning as he presents them in *A View*. There, the agrarian base appears as a determining factor in the composition of a society: for this reason, militarily enforced land reforms precede the spread of learning and art. In *Colin Clout*, however, the inspired artist makes the land and animals thrive. This is the ecological complement to the historical and materialist anthropology of *A View*, in that it captures the other movement of the dialectical relationship between humans and the earth; just as cultural forms respond to environmental necessities, so do those responses create and sustain environments, from the more obviously constructed urban environment, to the seemingly natural pasture.

Spenser, and Renaissance poets generally, relished the reversal of relationships of political and erotic dependency in their sonnet sequences and poems of dedication to patrons. Here, Spenser enjoys a similar trick, but this time it is not a patron or queen whose power he ironically aggrandizes in order to aggrandize his own, but the land itself. The Irish woods, birds, flocks, and fields, which he harvested, bought, and sold in order to have the relative leisure to write, become the beneficiaries of his artistic talents, rather than material benefactors. This is a reversal as provocative as saying that powerful patrons are not as great as the poets who control their reputations. Here, it is poetry that sustains the earth and the animals, combining the logic of the power of mimesis, which poets invoke when chiding a haughty lady or tight-fisted patron, with a mythographic tradition that grants music power over matter. As *A View* makes clear, the verbal

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[19] In Spenser's case, these barriers could be quite contentious and complicated. See Hadfield, *Spenser: A Life* 197-230.

construction of place has the potential to change that place by inspiring and directing the labor of reform; *Colin Clout* uses the Orphic myth to express this power of writing. In *A View*, Irenius argues consistently that achievements in the arts follow compulsory agrarian labor and the foundation of market towns, while *Colin Clout* shows how reform can be inspired and emerge from the written word in general, and poetry in particular, that "diuine gift and heauenly instinct not to bee gotten by laboure and learning, but adorned with both" (Spenser 128). This reversal of *A View*'s presentation of the relationship between writer and environment allows Spenser to show how reform emerges from a dialectical encounter between the minds and pens of its inspired, divinely-gifted advocates and the political ecological relations these confront.

Colin's subsequent narration of how he came to leave Ireland extends Spenser's meditation on the relation between land and poet. In the tale that he sings to the Shepherd of the Ocean, Colin animates the landscape with prosopopeia. What seemed like wit in the first several lines of the poem now starts to seem like a defensible position: by singing about the land, the poet can give its history and describe its agency, warning and informing would-be settlers and reformers of its dangers and opportunities; Spenser would assume as much in his composition of *A View* and his subsequent efforts to see that it got into the hands of the political elites of Elizabeth's administration (Hadfield, *Edmund Spenser* 340). His words, he hoped, would change his precarious material situation, just as they do for Colin, whose song of the Bregog and Mulla rivers is so pleasing to the Shepherd of the Ocean that it serves as his ticket to Cynthia's realm.

The tale of how Bregog, with his "deceitfull traine," flows into the Mulla captures the simultaneous movement between a poetic vision that emerges from an intimate

relationship to place, and that vision's desire to control and domesticate place, darkening the playful opening theme of the land's dependence upon the poet by glancing at the violent instrumentalization of the power to think and write ecological interdependence. Spenser depicts the Irish landscape as a lively agent with which he has some fond familiarity, but this narrative also echoes his anxieties about Ireland's recalcitrant ecology in *A View*. When "Old father *Mole*" hears how Bregog "into many parts his streame he shar'd, / That whilest the one was watcht, the other might / Passe vnespide to meete her by the way" (137-40), he responds by rolling stones into the river, dispersing the Bregog's course, "So of a River [...] He none was made" (152-3). In *A View*, Spenser advocates breaking up the population into small, manageable units, "For by this the people are broken into small parts like little streames, that they cannot easily come together into one head" (140). He also advocates the construction of bridges over rivers and the destruction of fords, so that river movements become territorialized (156). Irish topography and its riparian system, which collaborate with and symbolize Irish rebels in *A View*, receives its due as an autonomous agent to be reckoned with in Colin's vivifying narrative. But the success of this story with the Shepherd of the Ocean means that he can leave the landscape and attain a vision of perfection that will inspire him to transform the place that inspired his song.

This earthy tale grants him access to the celestial power of the monarch, an erotic and political progress that enacts the dialectical structure he articulates in Sonnet XIII of *Amoretti*:

> But that same lofty countenance seemes to scorne
> base thing, and thinke how she to heauen may clime:
> treading downe earth as lothsome and forlorne,
> that hinders heauenly thoughts with drossy slime.

> Yet lowly still vouchsafe to looke on me,
> such lowliness shall make you lofty be. (8-14)

This elevating lowliness, in which attention to the "drossy slime" of the earth can raise one to new heights, is a structure that governs the political ecological thought of Spenser's work, as well as its erotic tensions. Spenser's commitment to alliteration and archaism, the ubiquitous sound effects of "rustic" vernacular poetry, manifests this dialectic of earth and heaven in stylistic terms. Hobbinol's introductory description of the effects of Colin's absence, and its contrast with Colin's high philosophical language, exemplifies this dynamic, as we will see. Spenser is a pervasively alliterative poet, which makes it foolish to suggest a singular meaning of this technique. One of its meanings is literary historical: alliteration is a stylistic feature that joins Spenser so firmly to a vernacular tradition of popular, satirical, and reformist verse, from Langland, to Skelton, Crowley, and beyond. But it is also more than a source of literary historical evidence. Alliteration in Renaissance poetics, and especially for Spenser, carried geographical and temporal associations, as did his penchant for archaisms, by which standards critics like E.K., Gascoigne, or Puttenham could assess recent English verse. Given that Spenser self-consciously employs these techniques because they evoke a distant time, place, or peripheral social setting, they form a part of his thought about material change and cultural development.

"Hobbinol," as the psuedonym of Gabriel Harvey, has a special relationship to alliteration in Spenser's work, and his presence in *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe* makes Ireland the geographically marginal location of this equally marginal technique.[20]

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[20] We also know that Gabriel Harvey's brother, Richard, owned a copy of *Piers Plowman*, furthering bolstering the case that the poem was read in Spenser's circle (Anderson 205).

As Chaucer averred, the ability to versify "'rum, ram, ruf,' by lettre," marks one's place, since it is beyond the skill of "a Southren man" ("Parson's Prologue," 42-3). By the time Spenser was beginning his literary career, alliteration served to mark not only geography, but the passing of time, since alliterative verse, never the dominant mode of English making after Chaucer, was by now old-fashioned and potentially dull. George Gascoigne, who channeled the alliterative complaint tradition in a work like *The Steel Glass* (McRae 83), signals the aesthetic limits of the technique in his notes on versifying to Edouardo Donati. "For it is not inough to roll in pleasant woordes, nor yet to thunder in *Rym, Ram, Ruff* by letter (quoth my master *Chaucer*) nor yet to abounde in apt vocables, or epythetes, unlesse the Invention have in it also *aliquid salis*" ("some salt") (237). Puttenham warns against its repetitiveness: "It is a figure much used by our common rhymers, and doth well if it be not too much used, for then it falleth into the vice, which shall be hereafter spoken of, called *tautologia*" (259). E.K. lashes out against alliteration even more forcefully, drawing a distinction between Spenser's "strongly trussed vp" verse forms and loose forms glued together with clanging alliteration: "In regard whereof, I scorne and spue out the rakehellye route of our ragged rymers (for so themselues vse to hunt the letter) which without learning boste, without iudgement jangle, without reason rage and fome, as if some instinct of Poeticall spirite had newly rauished them aboue the meanenesse of commen capacitie" (28). While alliterative verse maintained a sense of oppositional truth-telling in its early- and mid-Tudor prophetic aspirations, exemplified in Thomas Churchyard's "Davy Dicars Dreame" or Robert Crowley's acerbic *Phylargyrie*, it had, by the 1580s, according to the likes of Puttenham, Gascoigne, and E.K. become a formulaic and limited poetic technique.

Nevertheless, Spenser seems unable to do without it. As Paul J. Hecht's study of alliteration in *The Shepheards Calender* discloses, "any systematic search for alliteration in Spenser reveals that it is... there in almost every line" (272). The name "Hobbinol," however, makes the heavily alliterated lines that he speaks in *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe* a special case due to one of Spenser's career-long running jokes (especially if one accepts that Gabriel Harvey had a hand in the creation of E.K.). Hobbinol is the pastoral persona of Gabriel Harvey, with whom Spenser developed a public literary reputation marked by a penchant for formal innovation and critical discernment, as seen in their printed correspondence, the *Familiar Letters*. In one letter, Harvey thanks Spenser for his "long, large, lauish, Luxurious, Laxatiue Letters" before parenthetically apologizing for his alliterative exuberance: "now a Gods name, when did I euer in my life, hunt the Letter before? but, belike, theres no remedie, I must needes be euen with you once in my dayes" (*Prose Works* 441). Evidently, Harvey thought that Spenser tended to "hunt the letter," and decided to "be euen" with him for once in this regard. Alliteration remained a joke between the two in their future references to each other in print. Harvey contributed a commendatory poem to *The Faerie Queene*, "To the learned Shepeheard," and signed it "Hobynoll." The final lines of the first stanza of this poem are laden with heavy alliteration on "L", just as in the letter quoted above.

> Collyn I see by thy new taken taske,
>     Some sacred fury hath enricht thy braynes,
> That **l**eades thy muse in haughty verse to maske,
>     And **l**oath the **l**ayes that **l**ongs to **l**ow**l**y swaynes.
> That **l**ifts thy notes from Shepheardes vnto kinges,
> So **l**ike the **l**iue**l**y **L**arke that mounting singes. (1-6)

Harvey not only aurally quotes his previous epistolary association with Spenser in print in this commendatory verse. He also encapsulates the stylistic hierarchy and the vatic

inspiration to play up and down it, as Spenser did throughout his career (and it is the failure to do so that provides E.K. with ammunition against the inveterate alliterators of his own day). Significantly, the means by which Colin flies up and down this ladder, a kind of vatic enthusiasm, is a thoroughly spatial way of imagining poetic inspiration in terms of a movement between earth and sky. *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe* can be read as an expansion on this verse by Harvey, a dilation on the theme of elevating poetic "fury," formally marked by the contrast between the old-fashioned associations of alliterative poetry and the elevation of poetic enthusiasm.[21]

This association between alliteration and the "sacred fury" of inspiration appeared earlier in Spenser's career in the epistle to *The Shepheards Calender*, as we saw in E.K.'s sarcastic dismissal of "the rakehellye route of our ragged rymers [...] rauished [...] aboue the meanenesse of commen capacitie" (28). In reaching for a high style, one falls all the more spectacularly: "[alliteration] could be a marker of *furor poeticus* in the bad sense, the poet giving up his manhood to the muse, becoming a babbling vessel of divine inspiration that might as well be speaking in tongues" (Hecht 270). If, as A.C. Hamilton notes, Harvey's commendatory verse clangs insistently with alliterative patterns because Harvey was mocking "excessive use of the figure" (722), then Hobbinol's lines in *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe* are Spenser's playful acknowledgement of his friend's earlier parody of Spenser's pastoral style, and Harvey's even earlier imputation of "letter hunting" in his printed letter to Spenser. In fact, Hobbinol's first two lines in *Colin Clouts* echo the alliterative "L" pattern of their earlier exchanges: "*Colin* my **l**iefe, my **l**ife, how

[21] This conjunction of poetic enthusiasm and stylistic transcendence borrows a great deal from Spenser's own Platonic explorations of love and matter in *Fowre Hymns* and mutability and change in "The Ruines of Time." The way these poems reflect on matter and immateriality is laid over the North Atlantic archipelago in *CCCHA*.

great a **l**osse / Had a**ll** the shepheards nation by thy **l**acke?" (16-7). The embarrassment of being associated with this dated and demotic English technique gives the joke its bite. But Hobbinol's speech also recalls the peripheral geographies where dated speech and out-of-fashion forms prevail, insofar as he represents here the pastoral type of the rude swain, describing the earth and its non-human inhabitants with which he lives, as opposed to the abstract concepts to which Colin's narration repeatedly leaps. Alliteration seemed to be a technique out of place and out of time; Spenser's habitual use of it recalls the English writer who invented Colin Clout: John Skelton, a legendary exemplar of how to speak a biting, outsider's truth. Spenser's alliteration was not only embarrassing or dated, but was also a badge of an inspired, prophetic defiance, which could encompass high and low, as in the totalizing social visions of Langland, Skelton, and Crowley, connecting land, rural labor, sovereign power, and religion in the hopes of reforming their configuration.[22]

As Colin begins to tell of his journey to Cynthia's court, the stylistic differences between his speech and Hobbinol's capture the way in which the poem uses style and its historical and geographical assiciations in order to represent Anglo-Irish relations. The history of alliterative verse in English has geographical and temporal associations that make it a particularly significant and complementary technique to Spenser's use of dialects and archaisms, as each indicate how his formal strategies in his verse could echo the geography of developmental processes he describes in *A View*. George Puttenham

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[22] There are singificant parallels here with Paula Blank's discussion of archaism and Northern dialect in *The Shepheardes Calender* as a poetic move that "estranged [Spenser's] language from more traditional forms of courtly discourse in an effort to solicit the very attention that his diction immediately received" (124).

encapsulates the periodic and spatial assumptions that underlie notions of *au courant* verbal decorum, describing the type of courtly aesthetic that Spenser preferred to subvert:

> Our maker therefore at these days shall not follow *Piers Plowman* nor Gower nor Lydgate nor yet Chaucer, for their language is now out of use with us; neither shall he take the terms of northern men such as they use in daily talk – whether they be noblemen or gentlemen or of their best clerks, all is a matter – nor in effect any speech used beyond the river of Trent: though no man can deny but that theirs is the purer English Saxon at this day, yet it is not so courtly nor so current as our southern English is; no more is the far western man's speech. Ye shall therefore take the usual speech of the court and that of London and the shires lying about London within sixty miles, and not much above. I say not this but that in every shire of England there be gentlemen and others that speak, but especially write, as good southern as we of Middlesex or Surrey do, but not the common people of every shire, to whom the gentleman and also their learned clerks do for the most part condescend; but herein we are already ruled by the English dictionaries and other books written by learned men, and therefore it needeth none other direction in that behalf. (229)

Puttenham's "purer English Saxon" recalls Spenser's similar concerns with constructing earlier periods of English life and language in *A View*, using Chaucer, for example, as a source for the etymology of "borough" (146) – a complicated form of spatial and demographic organization allegedly practiced in Anglo-Saxon times and still used in Irish social organization – showing how closely allied linguistics, history, and poetic diction were to economic, social, and material processes of continuity and change. Where

Puttenham prohibits the use of ancient terms, Spenser embraces them, foregrounding the process of linguistic change in the texture of his verse. The study of Anglo-Saxon, as pioneered by antiquarians such as William Lambarde, whom Spenser might have met through the Society of Antiquaries, was a project that was inseparable from the definition of "Englishness" as bearing some essential relationship to the land, language, and laws of the "Saxon" period, an assumption Spenser readily makes in *A View* (Brackmann 178-85). Puttenham's reference to dictionaries and "other books written by learned men" suggests the type of centralized, civilizing mission that Spenser advocates in *A View*, showing that research in linguistic and literary history could provide clues to marshaling literate culture to guide cultural change in the present. Spenser's eclectic poetic style is in part an experiment in discovering how such processes of change in language, learning and, the arts work in concert with legal, political, and ecological changes. Paula Blank says *The Shepheardes Calender* "is predicated on the idea of dialect, of contested boundaries within the national language" (104), and *Colin Clouts* shows Spenser aligning these contested linguistic boundaries with contested spatial and temporal ones as well within the Atlantic Archipelago.[23] Spenser's use of alliteration, archaism, and dialect in *Colin Clouts* stylistically allegorizes the geographical and material dimensions of the rift between England and Ireland, as Spenser understands them, by making Colin's journey across the Irish Sea and back a spatial, social, and aesthetic progression and return narrative.

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[23] Spenser would have had early exposure to such a juxtaposition of non-standard dialects and the cutting edge of the urban center during his days at the Merchant Taylor's School, home of one of England's most influential and innovative pedagogues, Richard Mulcaster, where some of the teachers were "Northern men" who were chastised in a report on Grindal's visit to the school for teaching their students poor pronunciation (Millican 212).

This stylistic journey is activated by the assumption that uneven development has an aesthetic dimension, a principle that guides E.K.'s defense of the unusual language of *The Shepheardes Calender*. For E.K., Spenser uses archaisms "thinking them fittest for such rusticall rudenesse of shepheards, eyther for that theyr rough sounde would make his rymes more ragged and rustical, or els because such olde and obsolete wordes are most vsed of country folke" (26). Somehow, rural speech tends to "bring great grace and, as one would say, auctoritie to the verse" (26). He goes on to claim that the words used by "country folke" are also old words – "pure Saxon English," as Puttenham calls it – that grant authority to Spenser's verse.

The geographical-temporal axis of Spenser's stylistically mixed aesthetic is emphasized further in E.K.'s comparison of landscape painting and poetry.

> Yet nether euery where must old words be stuffed in, nor the commen Dialecte and maner of speaking so corrupted therby, that as in old buildings it seme disorderly and ruinous. But all as in most exquisite pictures they vse to blaze and portraict not onely the daintie lineaments of beautye, but also rounde about it to shadow the rude thickets and craggy clifts, that by the basenesse of such parts, more excellency may accrew to the principall; for oftimes we fynde ourselues, I knowe not how, singularly delighted with the shewe of such naturall rudenesse, and take great pleasure in that disorderly order. (26)

The use of archaisms lends a picturesque contrast to the most refined and artful works, but in *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe*, this spatial analogy for poetic diction extends to the human geography of the Atlantic Isles. To develop an artistic contrast between "the daintie lineaments of beautye" and "naturall rudeness," Spenser looked to rural and

marginal places, where old linguistic forms supposedly persist as living relics, much like Irenius and Eudoxus often try to understand the rebel Irish as living continuations of ancient Scythian, Scottish, or war-like Saxon culture.[24] *Colin Clouts*, with its movement from Irish rusticity to English civilization and back, stylistically and narratively enacts the dialectical completion of the vision of history in *A View* – learned arts shape political ecology, just as political ecology shapes the learned arts, but in a way that is not unilinear. Hobbinol's alliterative "rusticall rudeness" is a part of the dark earthiness that sets off the brilliance of Cynthia's court to which Colin ascends; but Colin, for all his impressive transformations, still returns to Ireland spouting vituperative, Skeltonic satire of the royal court and declaring his intentions to labor to inscribe Cynthia's name in the very earth. The direction of progress and the causal order of reform are by no means clearly directed for Spenser, but are contingent and rooted in a concrete encounter between imaginative vision and material ecology. *Colin Clouts* represents the fantasy of Spenser's reformist poetic agency as direct and effective, but when read alongside *A View*, this fantasy appears as part of a conflicted reformist identity that succumbs to the temptation to confront an unruly political ecology with the threat of violent biopolitical domination.

By the 1580s, alliteration and archaic words register formally the sense of a distant time and place, and Spenser deploys this association in his early and late pastoral works. E.K.'s comparison with landscape painting spatializes differences in style in a way that can be extended to cartographic representations of larger areas than a landscape can enframe. There is a place for the old and a place for the new, and they must at times be separated, as dark must be from light in a landscape painting, or as the empty and

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[24] On Scythians as models for Irish "barbarism," see Shuger.

wooded must be separated from the surveyed and populated (as in Nowell's map of England and Ireland; see above). There are places in poems where the "rusticall rudenesse of shepherds" cannot go, but Spenser's poetic project cannot exist without this rudeness. For example, Book VI of *The Faerie Queene* compresses the narrative of *Colin Clouts* and its spatial allegory of poetic registers. When Sir Calidore follows the Blatant Beast to a community of shepherds and meets Pastorella, he also encounters Colin Clout. Colin's musical virtuosity allows him to lead the shepherds in dance in Canto ix, but Calidore stumbles upon Colin in a much more elevated position in Canto x, leading the dance of the Graces at the summit of Mount Acidale. Spenser emphasizes the spatial elevation and natural barriers to climbing Mount Acidale. The exclusivity of poetic transcendence of earthly matters is figured in a landscape filled with barriers and hierarchies in the approach to Mount Acidale:

> It was an hill plaste in an open plaine,
> That round about was bordered with a wood
> Of matchlesse hight, that seem'd th'earth to disdaine,
> In which all trees of honour stately stood,
> And did all winter as in sommer bud,
> Spredding pauilions for the birds to bowre,
> Which in their lower braunches sung aloud;
> And in their tops the soring hauke did towre,
> Sitting like King of fowles in maiesty and powre. (VI.x.6.1-9)

This stanza climbs through successive stages of upward movement. The hill juts from a flat plain; the wood that encircles it "disdain[s]" the earth; the mention of "lower braunches" establishes a contrast with the tree tops, where sits the "King of fowles in maiesty and powre." Spenser's landscape allegorizes the relentless upward motion of neoplatonic theories of eros and artistic creation, the subject of *The Fowre Hymnes*, also published in 1596, with an explicit political tint that mirrors Colin's arrival at the

apotheosis of civilization in Queen Cynthia's court in *Colin Clouts*. The following stanza in Book VI focuses on what is excluded from this wood-enclosed hilltop by a moat-like river: "ne mote wylde beastes, ne mote the ruder clowne / Thereto approch, ne filth mote therein drowne" (VI.x.7.4-5). The river that encircles Mount Acidale is refined and distilled, for it may contain no trace of "ragged mosse or filthy mud" (VI.x.7.3). Beasts, muck, and "the ruder clown" serve as a metonym for the earthy ecology that forms the opposite pole to Spenser's elevated style, and his civilizational aspirations. Only Colin Clout, with his venerable literary lineage as Skelton's disaffected traducer of courtly mores, may cross over into a position of artistic authority. The prophetic mode of Colin Clout positions him as one who is open to inspiration from above, but who draws his critical power and reformist point of view from below, outside of the strict hierarchies he describes.

This passage on Mount Acidale serves as a compression of the spatial-civilizational narrative and imagery of *Colin Clouts*, and therefore concentrates what is at stake in his more extended and explicit arrangement of Irish and English, and pastoral and courtly spaces in *Colin Clouts*. What Colin departs from in these late works, both in his journey to Cynthia's realm and his ascent of Mount Acidale in Book VI, is a particular poetic register and a particular form of life characterized by "the ruder clowne" and his native ecosystem: the "mosse or filthy mud" in which he lives, the "wylde beastes" on which he depends for food and clothing, and the aesthetic "rusticall rudenesse" of *The Shepheardes Calender*. A drossy, cthonic ecology whose opposition to the airy, "spacious plaine" of Mount Acidale's summit is embodied in the description of the Brigantes who live underground in "darknesse dred and daily night" (VI.x.42.5). The Brigantes "that

neuer vsde to liue by plough nor spade" (VI.x.39.4) are a clear echo of Spenser's depiction of the Irish in *A View* as an earthy assemblage that resists the reformer's faith in the transformational power of the plow (Hadfield, *Spenser's Irish Experience* 184).

In *Colin Clouts*, After Hobbinol has brought Colin up to speed on the sufferings of the landscape in his absence, he asks Colin "to repeat / The passed fortunes, which to thee befell / In thy late voyage" (32-4). Colin immediately gets ahead of himself, skipping to the climax of his journey in language that contrasts markedly with the subject and tone of Hobbinol's initial speech, immediately revealing the physical and metaphysical distances Colin will traverse in this progression and return narrative. Right away, we learn that Colin is now a fervid promoter of Cynthia's greatness.

> And since I saw that Angels blessed eie,
> Her worlds bright sun, her heauens fairest light,
> My mind full of my thoughts satietie,
> Doth feed on sweet contentment of that sight:
> Since that same day in nought I take delight,
> Ne feeling haue in any earthly pleasure,
> But in remembrance of that glorious bright,
> My lifes sole blisse, my hearts eternall threasure. (40-7)

Colin describes the transformative power of his experience in Cynthia's heavenly presence, abruptly shifting from Hobbinol's alliterative catalogue of earthy concerns like fields, forests, fish, rivers, sheep, and birds. He pointedly abjures any "earthly pleasure." In this way, the poem begins to pose the problem of how the inspired vision of the reformist poet can both emerge and depart from the political ecology upon which he depends in order to transform it. It is a paradox that equally animates Spenser's erotic philosophy. *Fowre Hymns*, published a year after *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe*, uses the same language as appears in this passage. In "A Hymne in Honour of Love," Spenser

describes the power of this emotion as a dematerializing force that pulls the mind upward, as it dwells on the image of the beloved:

> He thereon feeds his hungrie fantasy,
> Still full, yet neuer satisfyde with it,
> Like *Tantale*, that in store doth sterued ly:
> So doth he pine in most satiety[.] (198-201)

Colin's memory of Cynthia, "that Angel," evokes the same terms of feeding and "satiety." Cynthia represents the ultimate heights to which erotic love can lead, much like the beloved in *Amoretti*, another angel who provides "my soules long lacked foode" (XIII, 12). The pull to immaterial heights can only be articulated in terms of our most primary physical needs, and this way of thinking also structures Spenser's understanding of the relationship between the sovereign, poetic inspiration, and the material reform of society. This tone of awe and supplication from *Fowre Hymnes* and *Amorretti*, transposed in *Colin Clouts* to an Irish colonist pleading to an English queen, recalls the spuriously-Spenserian "A Briefe Note of Ireland," with its plea for attention from "Out of the ashes of disolacon and wastnes of this your wretched Realme of Ireland" (*Prose Works* 236). Survival – the avoidance of starvation and violence in a realm of "disolacon and wastnes" – prompts the "moldwarp" thoughts of bodily need to leap to the fantastical sweetness and light of a soveriegn power that can ensure "satiety." Such hopes, however, leave the supplicant a "*Tantale,*" unless he can transmute his dematerializing mental ascent into a material force for change.

Colin's leaps to neoplatonic diction in *Colin Clouts* activates the philosophical eroticism of *Fowre Hymnes* and *Amoretti and Epithalamion* within the physical geography of Ireland and England. In "A Hymne in Honour of Love," personifying lust as a "moldwarpe" (mole) (182), Spenser links the rarifying power of love to the invention

of new forms and the upward-striving artistic mind, which in turn suggests the power of that mind to affect the material development of civilizations:

> His dunghill thoughts, which do themselues enure
> To dirtie drosse, no higher dare aspyre,
> Ne can his feeble earthly eyes endure
> The flaming light of that celestiall fyre,
> Which kindleth loue in generous desyre,
> And makes him mount aboue the natiue might
> Of heauie earth, vp to the heauens hight.
>
> Such is the powre of that sweet passion,
> That it all sordid basenesse doth expell,
> And the refyned mynd doth newly fashion
> Vnto a fairer forme, which now doth dwell
> In his high thought, that would it selfe excell[.] (183-9)

This stanza establishes the two poles between which Colin will move in his journey, and the language of the stanza echoes the terms with which Spenser allegorizes poetic style to depict spatial and social configurations. As Colin moves from Irish earth to the angelic presence of Cynthia, the diction and form of the speakers change, connecting the developmental movement among the quasi-Virgilian order of pastoral, epic, love poetry, and philosophical verse to the colonial geography of the Atlantic Isles, as Colin's journey moves from rude pastoral to erotic refinement to passionate philosophy and back.[25] When Colin returns from Cynthia's court, he brings a reforming zeal that he will inscribe directly on the landscape. In order to reach Cynthia's elevated sphere of influence, however, Colin must pass through an intermediary space: the Irish Sea.

Colin's transcendent experience of Cynthia lies on the far shore of a cleansing sea that prepares Colin for his entrance to court and excludes his companions who are not as good at singing, much like the stream encircling Mount Acidale keeps the "ruder clowne"

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[25] On the relationship between *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe* and Spenser's career trajectory, see Cheney.

at bay. The Irish Sea separates two states of being, which correspond not only to the binaries of neoplatonic cosmology and stylistic registers, but also different states of historically uneven development. Colin's crossing allegorically combines the themes of Spenser's neoplatonic hymns with his visions of Ireland's reform under New English rule. The movement from earth to heaven and from Ireland to England announces itself through a stylistic variation that relies on Spenser's association of geography with poetic diction.

The Shepheard of the Ocean takes pity on Colin, his fellow poet, singing in isolation in "that waste, where [he] was quite forgot" (183). In order to leave this situation "Vnmeet for man" (185), Colin agrees to join the Shepherd of the Ocean on his voyage across the Irish Sea. The sea is an important intermediary stage in the poem's progression from earth to heaven – a place that is like earth, only wilder than the personified rivers and mountains we have already met. It is "A world of waters heaped vp on hie, / Rolling like mountaines in wide wildernesse, / Horrible, hideous, roaring with hoarse crie" (197-9), the tumbling dactyls and rumbling alliteration of the concluding line revealing the still-rustic Colin's inexperience and fear. As the ship makes progress in this chaos, the Shepherd of the Ocean reassures Colin that this is in fact a domesticated space, populated with "the Regiment / Of a great shepheardesse, that *Cynthia* hight" (233-4). In the cleansing space before Colin's elevating encounter with Cynthia, she is still a "shepheardesse," a pastoral ideal, not yet a celestial being.

Finally, the shepherds reach Cynthia's land, which is described at first as larger than Ireland and unusually bountiful (296-9), before Colin lays out the vast differences between earthy Ireland and Cynthia's celestial realm.

> Both heauen and heauenly graces do much more
> (Quoth he) abound in that same land, then this.
> For there all happie peace and plenteous store
> Conspire in one to make contented blisse:
> No wayling there nor wretchednesse is heard,
> No bloodie issues nor no leprosies,
> No griesly famine, nor no raging sweard,
> No nightly bodrags, nor no hue and cries;
> The shepheards there abroad may safely lie,
> On hills and downes, withouten dread or daunger:
> No rauenous wolues the good mans hope destroy,
> Nor outlawes fell affray the forest raunger. (308-19)

This is one of Spenser's most direct reflections in verse on the hardships of his life in Ireland, recalling *A View*, which addresses at length the "griesly famine," "nightly bodrags" (cattle raids), and the threats posed to any "raunger" through the Irish landscape. This compact description of England's superiority to Ireland reveals the striking similarities between the mysterious process of poetic inspiration and the impetus for material development and reform; the same neoplatonic vocabulary of inspired transcendence, in opposition to the downward pull of earth, characterizes each in this poem. "Heauen and heauenly grace" bestow upon Cynthia's realm a state of "contented blisse." The celestial emerges in England as the opposite pole to the physical violence of Ireland with its war, cattle raids, and famine. The language of this passage shifts to startling and unfamiliar dialect words marked by heavy consonantal gruffness as Ireland's afflictions are catalogued. Against the dematerialized grace of Cynthia's realm, the lines oppose the harsh sounds of "wayling" and "wretchedness," "hue and cries," and "bloodie issues" and "leprosies," and "griesly famine" and "bodrags." Diseased bodies, threatened by "rauenous wolues" and "outlawes fell" amidst a landscape ringing with cries of war and anguish, the dark ecology and bodily dross of Ireland's earth and its inhabitants could not be more forcefully evoked. The "natiue might / Of heauie earth,"

which resists the ascent to heaven's light in "A Hymne in Honour of Love," finds its kingdom in Ireland, while England's sovereign emits as-yet-impotent celestial rays across the Irish sea. Colin will carry this ethereal influence with him and pledge to make it a material reality in Ireland, just as poetic inspiration, while "a diuine gift and heauenly instinct," must be actualized and "adorned" by the labor of the poet (Spenser, "October" 128). Colin thus becomes the ideal that reformist poets from the *Crede*-poet to Crowley dreamed about but could never actualize within their polemical attacks on intellectual labor and the false consciousness of traditional believers: a priest of love and change, not the false idlers of reformist polemics, whose material efficacy he nevertheless emulates, but a true visionary and teacher whose inspiration will transform his culture's material base, rather than simply living off it parasitically. Even the violence necessary for this transformation, which had appeared in the works of late-medieval and mid-Tudor reformism as the direct application of sovereign force, becomes in *Colin Clouts* an aestheticized intervention in the landscape's appearance, representing the financially influenced separation Elizabeth maintained from the violent methods of her Irish Lord Deputies from earlier in her reign, especially Lord Grey (Hadfield, *A Life* 160-72), as well as the appeal of biopolitical domination, where acess to pasture and food through control over the physical environment, rather than direct military slaughter, becomes the means of disciplining the Irish population.

The differences between the islands of Ireland and Cynthia emerge in Colin's description of the intellectual fruits of the latter's celestial landscape, which are the expected result of Irenius's plans for pacification and development in *A View.*

> The learned arts do florish in great honor,
> And Poets wits are had in peerlesse price:

> Religion hath lay powre to rest vpon her,
> Aduancing vertue and suppressing vice. (320-3)

This turn to scholarship, poetry, and religion from ravenous wolves, famine, and raids makes use of the same contrasts that Irenius deploys in his vision of Ireland's reformation, where the pastoral dispossession and enforced agrarian labor of Irish rebels leads directly to the establishment of towns, churches that offer correct religious instruction, and schools. *Colin Clouts* translates Irenius's views on Ireland's need for reform by sending Colin on a journey up the ladder of civilizational perfection, a journey which precedes and inspires changes in Ireland's earthly realm upon his return. In explicitly invoking the legacy of the Tudor Reformation, in which "lay powre" ambiguously "rest[s] vpon" religion, Spenser links the relatively recent (and ongoing) reform of England's church to his hopes for Ireland's reform. As Spenser knew from the leading exemplars of Reformation literature, doctrinal and political reform could be effectively promoted by an idealized class of virtuous, truth-speaking laborers who assert the centrality of agrarian concerns within ecclesiological debates. Colin's return from Cynthia's kingdom will bring not only a new philosophical and religious vocabulary, for which his shepherd companions chided him earlier in the poem, but also a new orientation towards the material environment of his home. The turn to the "learned arts" shows how closely Ireland's agrarian reform was connected to Spenser's vision of literary development and innovation. In Cynthia's land of plenty, where the earth and its fruits show that "God his gifts there plenteously bestowes" (326), poetry flourishes and religion occupies its proper place. The mid-Tudor reformism that links the agrarian economy to religious and intellectual change continues to exert force in Spenser's fantastical celebration of Elizabeth's and England's exalted status in *Colin Clouts*. Spenser's instrumental

materialism in *A View* finds its poetic, dialectical complement in the journey of *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe*, as the poet's relationship to the land allows a flight towards religious truth and vatic poetic authority. But the arrival at the heights of inspiration in turn leads to a proper understanding of how to control the land at the poem's conclusion.

Colin eventually returns to Ireland with a passion to make his personal transformation in Cynthia's court a general transformation of the island's landscape. This goal maintains its close connection to the literary historical and stylistic narratives with which Spenser has played throughout the poem. The catalogue of Cynthia's court poets (376-455), for example, establishes a literary corollary to the narrative of material development and change by describing a poetic milieu whose cutting-edge achievements would be unattainable if not for Cynthia's kingdom's political stability and prosperity. Yet this courtly milieu is isolated from the earthy energies to which Colin returns, both materially and poetically, when he renounces the courtly literary scene in a display of social paranoia that is positively Skeltonic. Spenser even engages in a miniature Langlandian personification allegory when he laments that wealth is so highly valued in Cynthia's court, "Whiles single Truth and simple honestie / Do wander vp and downe despys'd of all" (727-8). Colin, despite his good hearing in Cynthia's presence, inspiring him, in Cuddy's words, to raise his poetic matter "From flocks and fields, to Angels and to skie" (619), continues in the role of the rustic outsider, and adopts his tone accordingly, in order to continue the project of reform among the "flocks and fields."

Colin's perception of courtly corruption reverses the direction of his movement, but it does not diminish the enthusiasm it inspired in him, which he redirects towards the Irish earth. The experience of a celestial realm of learning and art leads Colin to attend to

the earth with a renewed purpose. Thestylis, having heard Colin praise the wonders of Cynthia's realm, wonders why Colin "returnedst to this barren soyle ... Here to keep sheepe, with hunger and with toyle" (656-8), reminding the reader that the Irish shepherds are not just otiose singers, but exist in a recognizable agrarian ecosystem. Colin intends, however, to do more than keep sheep; he wishes to transform Ireland's soil, forests, and beasts. The poem ends with a philosophically rich explanation of love as the motive force of all creation and procreation, fulfilling Cuddy's claim "That of that God [Love] the Priest thou shouldest bee" (832). A great change has clearly taken place in Colin, but his priestly role, as a sort of conduit of the divine lesson of Cynthia's perfection (symbolized by the circular imagery of lines 336-43), extends not just to his newly abstract singing, but to the Irish landscape as well.

> Her name in euery tree I will endosse,
> That as the trees do grow, her name may grow:
> And in the ground each where will it engrosse,
> And fill with stones, that all men may it know.
> The speaking woods and murmuring waters fall,
> Her name Ile teach in knowen terms to frame:
> And eke my lambs when for their dams they call,
> Ile teach to call for *Cynthia* by name. (632-39)

The geographic progression in an increasingly dematerializing ascent from the Irish landscape to Cynthia's celestial perfection results in a return to the earth, but with a reforming zeal, manifest in the desire to transform the landscape and the creatures that dwell within it. The poem's spatial narrative corresponds to a vatic, transcendent poetic experience that spurns older, earthier forms, and yet preserves the old ideals and privileges of the "parasitic" clergy in the form of the poet-reformer.[26] Colin then takes another step in the dialectic of reform, as his inspired, seemingly transcendent

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[26] On Spenser's appropriation of the monastic ideal for literary pursuits, see Phillips.

philosophical poetics leads him to transform Ireland's earth. From rustic herdsman to the visionary promoter of a perfect truth, he returns to the work of reform on his material surroundings. These lines where Colin states his intention to inscribe the sovereign's name on the land recall Irenius's enthusiasm for a regimented Irish landscape, carved up for the purposes of extending Elizabeth's power:

> And first I wish, that order were taken for the cutting and opening of all places through woods, so that a wide way of the space of 100 yards might be layde open in every of them for the safety of travellers... Next, that bridges were built upon rivers, and all the fordes marred and spilt, so as none might passe any other way but by those bridges... Also that in all straights and narrow passages... there should be some little fortilage... Moreover, that all high wayes should be fenced and shut up on both sides... whereby theeves and night robbers might be the more easily pursued and encountred, when there shall be no other way to drive their stolne cattle, but therein, as I formerly declared (156).

The carving of Cynthia's name into trees and soil metonymically and symbolically represents the colonial project in Ireland, making the end of *Colin Clouts* the beginning of the process of material reform Spenser describes in *A View*. *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe* reveals the source of late medieval and mid-Tudor agrarian reformism's authority in imaginative inspiration, a revelatory experience within the thought, study, and writing this tradition condemns in its enemies. *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe* shows that the "New poete," at what turned out to be the end of his career, was still engaged in the long reformist project of thinking through the impasse of revelation and reform, and the dialectical interaction of material and immaterial labor. Spenser's reformist ecology

describes the relationships between the religious, philosophical, and political motivations of a reformer and the material forms of life that are both the cause and result of reformist projects.

**Conclusion: Representing Reform**

*Colin Clouts Come Home Againe* is Spenser's attempt to bring together his career-long exploration of literary history, style, and the social place of the poet with his later thought about the political ecology of reform. This synthesis is not accidental, but results from his engagement with late medieval and mid-Tudor verse as a form of living literary history, and which was also a primary source of ecological thought about the nature of cultural change in relation to labor and the environment in the period. The stylistic variability of Spenser's pastorals allows him to configure differences among place, class, and temporal period formally, such that his pastoral poetics become a potent mode of thought about the material relations between Ireland and England. In this way, Spenser's late pastorals complete an exchange that began with *A View of the Present State of Ireland*'s adaptation of Reformation-era thought about labor, ecology, and change to an Irish context. Colin Clout's re-emergence in the Irish landscape in the works of 1595-96, after a sixteen-year absence following the debut of this Skeltonic figure with the publication of *The Shepheards Calender* in 1579, can be explained not as a Virgilian careerist retrospective, but as a sign of Spenser's continued engagement with reformist agrarianism as an Irish planter. In *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe*, Spenser elaborates the dialectical relationship between the inspired ideals of the reformist outsider – a stance which Skelton's Collyn exemplified for a generation of reformist satirists – and political ecological transformation. He does so through a spatial allegory that maps political,

aesthetic, and philosophical hierarchies onto the Atlantic Archipelago as Colin ascends from Ireland to Cynthia's island, only to return, as he does in *A View*, to the soil as the place where reformist ideals must be realized and perpetuated.

The example of Spenser reveals that reform is a process that enacts some or all of the following elements: intellectual inspiration and conflict, authoritarian ambitions, aesthetic innovation, economic revolution, and ecological intervention, among countless other descriptive phrases that might pick up one aspect of the movement of reform, but which do not capture the interdependent dynamism of the process. The literature of the Reformation and the *Piers Plowman* tradition with which Spenser engages focuses attention on the aspects of reform that deal with the human-nature relation and the way agrarian labor and landscapes blur the boundary between those two spheres, and the way such an insight can be instrumentalized by authoritarian agents. Spenser responds to this ecology of reform as a way of describing a broad matrix of motivations, actions, and processes inspired by reformist desire and resistance to it. In the complementary texts of *A View of the Present State of Ireland* and *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe*, the intellectual inspiration of the reformer translates a sovereign urge to remake the physical environment in order to transform a religious and intellectual culture. Through the interplay of seemingly opposed states – matter and spirit; rusticity and refinement; earth and heaven –Spenser's late pastoral poetry describes and coordinates the dynamics of reform in Ireland, revealing a strong continuity, rooted in an ecological vision of systemic complexity, between Spenser's late work and the medieval and early modern reformism that preceded it.

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