

Rural Life in English Poetry  
of the Mid-Eighteenth Century

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For my mother, Gill Goodridge  
and in memory of my father,  
Frank Goodridge, 1924-1984

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## ABSTRACT

### 'Rural Life in English Poetry of the Mid-Eighteenth Century'

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This thesis examines several mid-eighteenth century poems, assessing their portrayal of rural life, its literary and historical significance, and the aesthetic and ideological issues it presents. An introductory essay on developments in rural poetry sets the scene for two extended essays.

The first essay is a comparative reading of the subject of rural labour in three poems: James Thomson's *The Seasons* (1726-44), Stephen Duck's *The Thresher's Labour* (1730, 1736) and Mary Collier's *The Woman's Labour* (1739). The viewpoints of a professional poet (Thomson), a farm labourer (Duck), and a working woman (Collier) are compared in relation to kinds of work all three address as well as to individual labouring subjects. The responses of the three poets to such related issues as folk traditions, forms of charity and other 'compensations', are also compared. Some surprising similarities as well as instructive differences are located; and an interesting picture of idealistic and realistic, male-oriented and female-oriented attitudes to labour and labour-related themes emerges.

The second essay analyses the subject of agricultural prescription in John Dyer's *The Fleece* (1757). Drawing on interdisciplinary information, the essay makes a sequential reading of the first book of the poem, whose subject is 'the care of sheep'. It traces the historical and poetic significance of Dyer's advice on land use and environment, breeding and types of sheep, husbandry and veterinary practice. The poet's theoretical models, his use of topography and of epic and pastoral, didactic and popular styles is examined. Dyer is found to make a substantial engagement with contemporary agricultural developments, but also to draw on idealising models of agricultural history and economic development, uniting the contrasting imperatives of the 'practical' and the 'poetical'. Dyer's belief that shepherding provided an important model for society; and his intense engagement with agriculture, inform a complex pattern of mixed motivations.

## PREFACE

The study of eighteenth-century poetry has experienced major advances in the past decade, and the present work is offered as a small contribution to a much larger process of rediscovery and reassessment. Thousands of poems about rural life were written between 1700 and 1800, and I have chosen to look closely at a small number of examples, rather than embarking on a comprehensive survey. The poems I have selected for attention may be seen as representing wider trends, as well as being of individual interest. I have concentrated on the related themes of rural labour (Part I) and agricultural prescription (Part 2). Rural labour seems to me to have been the most important aspect of rural life in the period, for the rural population as well as for the more thoughtful of the poets; while agricultural prescription was a central preoccupation of the eighteenth century, one which tells us a great deal about the period and its psyche.

The help and encouragement of others has been essential, and I would like to thank some of them here. My postgraduate supervisor Claire Lamont has constantly encouraged and helped me. My wife Alison Ramsden has read numerous drafts, checked many references and quotations, and supported me in too many other ways to catalogue. I am deeply grateful to both of them. I am fortunate in having a supportive family, and would like to thank Pete Goodridge for extensive help with agricultural and shepherding matters, Meggie Goodridge for help on textiles, and Gill Goodridge for help on 'Dyer's Workhouse', and with checking references.

Helen Boden read and offered valuable comments on drafts of the thesis. Carolyn Williams kindly supplied ideas and references on the background to John Dyer's anti-French sentiments. The librarians at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne, in particular Robert Firth and Dr Lesley Gordon, have patiently tolerated my demands on their time and resources, as have the staff of the British Library. C. M. Cowan of the Gilchrist Library in the Faculty of Agriculture at Newcastle University very kindly sought out early agricultural books for me. I should like to thank the Dean and Chapter Library, Durham, and its Librarian, Roger Norris, for kindly allowing me to transcribe and quote from Dyer's 'Commercial Map' MSS, in the library's Longstaffe Collection.

I have received encouragement and support from many people, often over a number of years, and I would like to thank Ann and Karen Antonelli, Rowena Burrell, David Fairer, Don Feasay, Liz Goodridge, Desmond Graham, David Hewitt, Ernst Honigmann, Peter V. Jones, Kaye Kossick, Ken Robinson, Iris Rogers, Barbara Rosenbaum, Peter Sampson, Quentin Seddon, Neil Sedgwick, Peggy Smith, Kelsey Thornton, Bob White, Richard Wilson; my undergraduate students and postgraduate contemporaries.

Errors of fact and judgement are my own. I have allowed myself to be led by the interdisciplinarity of the eighteenth-century poets into areas and disciplines in which I am, at

best, an enthusiastic amateur; and I shall be especially grateful to have my shortcomings in these areas drawn to my attention.

*University of Newcastle upon Tyne*

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#### ABBREVIATIONS

- 'Commercial Map' notes      John Dyer, [unpublished manuscript notes, plan and related materials for a 'Commercial Map of England'], Longstaffe MSS, Dean and Chapter Library, Durham.
- Defoe                      Daniel Defoe, *A Tour Thro' the Whole Island of Great Britain* (1724-6), ed. G. D. H. Cole (2 volumes, 1968)
- DNB                        *The Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. Leslie Stephen, Sidney Lee et al (reissued edition, 21 volumes, 1908-9; *Supplement*, 1909; *Second Supplement*, 3 volumes, 1912; *Corrections and Additions*, 1966)
- Drayton                    Michael Drayton, *Poly-Olbion. or A Chorographical description of Tracts, Rivers, Mountains, Forests, and other Parts of this renowned Isle of Greate Britaine* (1613-22), in *The Works of Michael Drayton*, ed. William Hebel, IV (Oxford, 1933)
- GM                         *The Gentleman's Magazine* (1731-1907)
- OED                        *The Oxford English Dictionary* (compact edition, 2 volumes, 1979; *Supplement*, 1987).

## CONVENTIONS

Citations are usually given within the text using the formula (surname, date: page), varied as appropriate.

Letters are cited, where they are available in standard editions, using the formula (*Sender-Recipient*, date).

Longer citations are removed to endnotes.

Quotations from poems under discussion normally have specific references in brackets after the text.

Quotations from the 'Commercial Map' notes are based on my own transcription of the MSS, and are cited by folio number. Where two leaves are mounted on one folio, the additional sigla '[a]', '[b]', are used. Angle brackets <> indicate deleted text.

All texts cited, quoted, or drawn on in the thesis are given in the Bibliography, p. 295.

## TEXTS

For the major texts cited see Textual Note, p. 293

Biblical references are to the *Authorised Version of the Bible* (1611)

Shakespeare references are to the text as edited by Peter Alexander (1951).

## INTRODUCTION

Thou wilt not find my Shepherdesses idly piping on oaten Reeds, but milking the Kine, tying up the Sheaves, or if the Hogs are astray driving them to their Styes. My Shepherd gathereth none other Nosegays but what are the growth of our own Fields, he sleepeth not under Myrtle shades, but under a Hedge, nor doth he vigilantly defend his Flocks from Wolves, because there are none, as Maister *Spencer* well observeth. (John Gay, 'Proeme', *The Shepherd's Week*, 1714)

There are, as Gay says, no wolves in the English countryside. [1] The Scottish poet James Thomson had to let his muse wander as far as the mountains of southern Europe, to find wolves for the machinery of sublime terror in his poem *Winter* (1746 version, 389-413). Nor was their absence from the British Isles of merely literary significance. It played a part in the nation's history; for the wealth on which the rise of England as an economic power was based came above all from wool; and the first condition for successful sheep husbandry is the absence of *Canis lupus*, the most destructive predator of sheep in temperate and subarctic areas.

The context of Gay's remark is an introduction, which has been aptly described as 'preposterous', to a set of mock-pastorals he wrote in 1714. [2] Their intention was to satirise the writings of a group of Whig writers who had decided that the time had come to jettison the Mediterranean conventions of neo-classical pastoral poetry, in favour of something more English. It was the misfortune of this group to be represented by Ambrose Philips (1674-1749), whose mawkish imitations of Spenserian diction, principally his *Pastorals* (1709), made him an easy target for the more talented Scriblerian satirists. The result of this has been that Philips is remembered, not as the founder of an English school of pastoral, but as a somewhat ridiculous figure.

Yet despite its ill-starred beginnings, and the wit of Gay's mock-earnest insistence on what is 'real' in the countryside, the movement towards a revived native pastoral, towards a more 'engaged', more 'realistic' kind of rural writing, was to be as important to the culture of the society which was quickening in the early eighteenth century, as the absence of wolves had been to its economy. From Newcastle upon Tyne where 'Mountains, of Coals' were being 'dug up at every pit', to Bristol where the 'very parsons talked of nothing but trade, and how to turn a penny', [3] the rising mercantile society sought new cultural forms to express new values. The significance of the novel in this process has been well-documented; the role of rural poetry less so.

English literature in the seventeenth century had, according to James Turner (1979: 185), 'lost any sense of the countryside as a "field full of folk"'. Considering what he calls 'The Vanishing Swain', he continues:

Virgilian pastoral thrives, but true Georgics are hard to find. The world of work is no longer thought fit for poetry, except in eccentric and popular verse. Like a new colony, the land is cleared of its troublesome natives and planted with a new and more loyal population--hilarious bumpkins, contented morons, fauns, fairies and demigods.

Turner's allusion to a 'field full of folk' implies that we must go back three centuries, to the time of Langland's *Piers the Plowman*, to find the rural labourer decently portrayed. How far, then, would we need to go in the other direction? One answer might be, to 1798 and *Lyrical Ballads*, in which what Wordsworth (1800: 245) called the 'necessary character of rural occupations' achieved a new level of engagement and significance. However, Turner implies that 'true Georgics' (were they to be found) might yield something more edifying than the cast of rural inhabitants he mockingly lists; and he exempts 'eccentric and popular verse' from the literary forms which excluded rural labour. Both hints are useful, for if we move forward a little from the seventeenth century, we find new poetic traditions, both 'georgic' and 'popular', in which rural life and labour are strongly present. I am thinking in particular of two forms related to the pastoral tradition: the English mixed georgic, and the proletarian anti-pastoral poem. Both came to prominence in the eighteenth century, and both reflect the new, mercantile society. In this thesis I shall be examining some examples of the two forms, and tracing in them a number of aspects of rural life and labour. First I would like to look briefly at the forms themselves, and consider their context a little further.

## II

There has been a tendency either to over- or under-define what we mean by 'pastoral'. Literally 'of shepherds', it can easily be assumed to include--taking a well-known modern example, William Empson's *Some Versions of Pastoral* (1935)--subjects such as proletarian literature (ch. I), Elizabethan double-plotting (ch. II), *The Beggar's Opera* (ch. VI), and *Alice in Wonderland* (ch. VII). Indeed, as David Nokes has written (1987: 122):

'pastoral' has become a word of almost infinite elasticity. It is now applied to anything from a pretty landscape picture to the responsibility for attempting to dissuade young people from committing suicide.

Nokes's examples are obviously designed to show the bizarre expansion of the word's meanings; but they may also serve to delineate a central tension in pastoral, one that helps to account for the fuzziness in our understanding of the word. Pastoral is a manifestation of an apparently universal, pre-conscious, human desire for an ideal and simple world. Because

this desire cannot usually be fulfilled in the 'real world' it is the natural territory of art and literature. But, one way or another, the 'real world' always seems to intrude on the fantasy. The intrusion may be direct or indirect, inside or outside the text. It is direct, for example, in Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia* (1590), where King Basileus hopes to escape from politics and the responsibilities of kingship into an Arcadian retreat, but cannot avoid bringing his problems with him. In this example the pastoral machinery only serves to emphasise the inescapability of reality. Sidney was aware that the pastoral was a kind of illusion or game, and the far-from-innocent plotting of *Arcadia* (the cross-dressing, inappropriate sexual and social behaviour, and so on) serves humorously to acknowledge this.

Indirectly, the real world intrudes through critical hostility to pastoral. This may take the form of critical attacks, as for example when Shakespeare's early critics attacked what they called the 'fantastical' in his plays. Or it may take the form of attempts to modulate the fantasy element of pastoral, by demanding that it adopt a position more overtly related to the 'real world', and especially to the 'real' countryside. We are familiar with this last response to pastoral as an aspect of the modern preoccupation with 'realism'. In the eighteenth century, the demand was not so much for realism as for what might be termed 'responsibility'. Pastoral poetry could justify its existence, and the reader's attention, if, in addition to its traditional ability to satisfy the imaginative need for ideal simplicity it could also, to use a modern phrase, 'earn its keep', by teaching and moralising, by being 'useful'. The English mixed georgic poem offered just such a combination.

### III

There had long been a didactic tradition in English verse; *Piers the Plowman* has been mentioned, and there were many kinds of didactic poetry in the Medieval and Renaissance periods. [4] But it was in the period after 1650 that the factors which were to promote the rise of the English georgic began to appear. Durling (1935: 19) lists some of them:

the prestige of the neo-Latin poetry; the high praise given didactic verse by such critics as Rapin, de Thou, and the Scaligers; interest in the sciences and practical arts of antiquity; new educational theories and practice; and a general interest, stimulated by the Royal Society and the universities, in the improvement of modern knowledge of 'the art of men's hands' and 'the works of nature'.

In 1697 Dryden's translation of Virgil appeared. In it the *Georgics* were accompanied by Joseph Addison's 'Essay on Virgil's *Georgics*', in which Addison prophetically delineated those characteristics of the poem which would ensure its appeal, and the success of its imitators, in the eighteenth century.

Virgil's poem, Addison noted approvingly, was written in the 'middle style' (p. 1). The eighteenth-century georgic-writers would construct their own version of this style, principally from two Miltonic elements: the Latinate epic style of *Paradise Lost*, and the more anglicised style of Milton's pastoral poetry, especially 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso'. In this way they were able to employ certain features of the epic and pastoral genres, without having to work within those genres. This was especially important, not only because of a need, which I have touched upon, to modulate the indulgence and fantasy of pastoral, but also because, as Margaret Anne Doody has shown, epic was distrusted in this period; indeed there was a general distrust of set genres. As Doody says, the 'route to all traditional genres was, like the road to the epic, visibly signed "no entry"' (1985: 67). Thus Addison celebrated the freedom the digressive georgic form offered, taking care to distinguish it from the artifice of pastoral, and emphasising its didactic usefulness. Comparing Virgil's *Georgics* with his *Pastorals*, he writes:

though the scene of both these poems lies in the same place, the speakers in them are of a quite different character, since the precepts of husbandry are not to be delivered with the simplicity of a plowman, but with the address of a poet. No rules, therefore, that relate to pastoral can any way affect the *Georgics*, since they fall under that class of poetry which consists of giving plain and direct instructions to the reader (p. 1).

There is in the *Georgics* none of the pastoral simulation by which the poet pretends to be a rustic, to Addison's obvious relief. But neither is georgic, as the phrase 'plain and direct instructions' might suggest, a dull, earthbound kind of writing. Addison insists on its poetic qualities, finding it the ideal medium for instruction precisely because it is poetry, and so 'addresses itself wholly to the imagination' (p. 2). Virgil's poem, he considers, is:

altogether conversant among the fields and woods and has the most delightful part of nature for its province. It raises in our minds a pleasing variety of scenes and landscapes whilst it teaches us, and makes the driest of its precepts look like a description (p. 2).

This was the perfect combination the new society sought, a poetry which could maintain its traditional lyricism, and its interest in nature and rural life, while also offering, by a kind of sleight-of-hand, moral and practical instruction. The genre could now be defined:

A georgic, therefore, is some part of the science of husbandry put into a pleasing dress, and set off with all the beauties and embellishments of poetry (p. 2).

Addison continues his essay with a more detailed examination of the techniques Virgil uses to blend didacticism and poetry; and his praise of the way Virgil 'breaks the clods and tosses the dung about with an air of gracefulness' (p. 6) has been much quoted. If the eighteenth-century sensibility required its rural poetry to be purposeful as well as poetic, this was not to be achieved at the expense of decorum; and the need for georgic-writers to maintain the 'high' style alongside the 'low' aspects of the georgic would have an important influence on the progress of the form. It may be seen, for example, in the tendency of early georgic-writers to offset the 'lowness' of the form, by the distancing procedure of including an element of burlesque or mockery in their georgics.

A good example of this is John Gay's series of georgics (*Wine*, 1708; *Rural Sports*, 1713; *The Fan*, 1714; *Trivia*, 1716). In these poems, the teacherly function of the georgic is subtly undercut by elements of humour, parody, burlesque, and deliberate inappropriateness. The 'lowness' of georgic is made a part of Gay's creative mixing-up of styles, purposes, and generic expectations. This kind of approach was especially characteristic of the Scriblerian writers, but we also find it in other georgic-writers of the period, for whom the Addisonian view of georgic held strong. Thus the most successful of the early georgic-writers, John Philips (1676-1709), prepared the way for his georgic poem *Cyder* (1708), by writing burlesque Miltonic verses (*The Splendid Shilling*, 1701), and a mock-georgic (*Cerealia*, 1706). In *Cyder* itself, Philips's patent enjoyment of the richness of his neo-Miltonic diction purposefully provides a mildly humorous antidote to the more earnest elements of his poem.

#### IV

Philips's was an attractive model, much plundered by Pope and other contemporaries, and routinely praised in the text of later georgics. *Cyder* showed the potential richness and variety of English georgic poetry. The genre could encompass a number of different styles, including pastoral and epic, panegyric, topographic, epistolatory and meditative verse. It could address philosophy and the sciences, geography and history, politics and trade. Its tone could range from the humorous to the serious, its manner from the satiric and polemical to the lyrical. Agricultural prescription provided a unifying central focus for these diverse styles and subjects.

Later writers would pursue its diversity into different areas. It could be used to address a particular facet of rural life. William Somerville's poem *The Chace* (1735), for example, was the best of many georgics devoted to hunting, fishing and field sports. Different kinds of agriculture inspired georgics on specialist subjects, such as Christopher Smart's *The Hop-Garden* (1752). Further afield, James Grainger addressed Caribbean

agriculture in *The Sugar Cane* (1764), as did several other poets. The georgic could instruct in other areas of knowledge, too. John Armstrong's extraordinary verse account of the circulation of the blood and the operation of the digestive system (*The Art of Preserving Health*, 1744, II, 12-95), is a good example of the widening of the georgic's subject-matter, in one of a number of georgics on the subject of health. John Gay (1716) was the first of many to take the georgic into the city; while John Dyer (1757), whose poem we shall be examining, included for the first time industrial locations and processes. Erasmus Darwin (1791-89) used the genre to teach botany, with digressions to his many other scientific and philanthropic interests. By the end of the eighteenth century the form had been used to teach or to discuss an impressive range of practical and philosophical subjects. [5]

Nor was the georgic restricted to practical didacticism. For some of the most successful georgic-writers of the century, the practical instruction which was the form's major characteristic was merely a stepping-stone to greater poetical purposes. Pope, for example, used the georgic form in *Windsor Forest* (1713) to convey his political and historical ideas, drawing heavily on the patriotic potential of the form, and using elements of pastoral, topography and mythology to focus the poem. More ambitiously still, James Thomson united many different themes and styles into a coherent four-part seasonal structure, in *The Seasons* (1730), the most influential and important of the eighteenth-century georgics.

## V

We shall be examining one of Thomson's themes, rural labour, in some detail, and comparing it with two contemporary poetic treatments of the subject, Stephen Duck's *The Thresher's Labour* (1730, 1736), and Mary Collier's *The Woman's Labour* (1739). I have used the phrase 'proletarian anti-pastoral poem' to characterise these last two poems, and I shall have something further to say about their 'anti-pastoral' quality and its literary sources when we examine the poems. Here, we may very briefly consider their place within the developments we have been discussing.

Labour is a characteristic theme of the English georgic, in contrast to the pastoral, in which labour is normally hidden. The georgic presents a positive, and even a heroic view of labour, as a pleasurable and a socially progressive activity. Poets such as Duck and Collier placed labour at the centre of their poems, in the georgic manner; but their proletarian background, and their first-hand experience of labour led them to take a harsher, more negative view than is usual to georgic. They indeed responded to the new interest in labour as a subject for poetry, and participated in the georgic tradition; but at the same time theirs was effectively a counter-movement, refuting not only the idealisation of labour in the georgic, but the whole edifice of pastoral verse and pastoral attitudes. A satisfactory title for

their genre has not been formulated, partly because their work has been rather neglected in the past, though it seems to me to represent an important response to the georgic tradition.

I have stressed the Virgilian georgic tradition here; but there were, of course, many other kinds of rural poetry in the eighteenth century. The pastoral eclogue found new forms and themes; loco-descriptive and topographic poetry became increasingly popular (there was always a good supply of unsung prospects and localities to celebrate, and an interest in the local and the particular). The Horatian forms were also very popular, inspiring numerous variations on the themes of 'town versus country' and 'the happy man'. All these kinds of poetry, and other, less common forms, are of interest. [6] We shall, however, be concentrating, in what follows, on poetry which derives from the tradition of Virgil's *Georgics*. This is not only because, in the words of a modern critic, (Brower, 1959: 48), the *Georgics* 'occupied a unique position as the perfect poem' in the eighteenth century; but because Virgil in many ways set the agenda for the period's most serious attempts to tackle the subject of rural life, whether we consider the work of Thomson or Dyer, Duck or Collier, Cowper or Crabbe. [7]

#### NOTES

[1] John Dyer (1757) writes:

And beauteous Albion, since great Edgar chas'd  
The prowling wolf, with many a lock appears  
Of silky lustre(*The Fleece*, II, 370-2)

In fact King Edgar (943-75) did not entirely eradicate the wolf, which according to Keith Thomas (1983: 273) is thought to have survived in England until the fifteenth century, and later in Scotland.

[2] Unsigned 'Introductory Note' in Gay (1714, 1969: unnumbered page)

[3] For the comment on Newcastle see Defoe II, 659; the comment on Bristol is recorded by John Latimer, *Annals of Bristol in the Eighteenth Century* (Bristol, 1893), as cited by Meyerstein (1930: 15).

[4] For English didactic verse to 1650 see Durling (1935: 3-19); Low (1985).

- [5] For some indication of the range in subject-matter of the English georgic see Durling (1935: 59-121).
- [6] For eighteenth-century developments in the pastoral eclogue see Mantz (1916); Jones (1925); Sambrook (1970-1); Wood (1985). For eighteenth-century topographical poetry see Aubin (1934; 1936); Foster (1970; 1976). The essential study of eighteenth century Horatian poetry remains Rostvig (1971).
- [7] The most detailed account of eighteenth-century and earlier English georgic poetry remains that of Durling (1935), who also gives a brief summary of later georgics. Chalker (1969) gives a good account of the major poems, concentrating on the late-seventeenth and eighteenth-century period. Low (1985) complements Chalker well, giving an account of Medieval, Renaissance and seventeenth-century georgic poetry. Each of these three accounts presents a different way of categorising georgics, reflecting the variety of the genre.

There are significant materials on the eighteenth-century georgic in Johnson (1938); Emery (1942); Dobree (1949); Wasserman (1959, 1968); Kovacevic (1965); Spate (1968); Sambrook (1970-1); Goldstein (1977); Feingold (1978); Harvey (1978); Barrell (1980; 1983).

Introducing his edition of Dryden's translation of the *Georgics* (1981), Alistair Elliot makes some trenchant points about Virgil's poem and its purposes, which have important implications in considering its eighteenth-century imitators.

PART I

'Hard Labour we most chearfully pursue'

Three poets on rural work: Thomson, Duck, Collier.

## 1. Introductory

### i. *The Seasons*, *The Thresher's Labour* and *The Woman's Labour*

Jonathan Swift's complaint that *The Seasons* are 'all Description, and nothing is doing' (Swift-Wogan, Jul-2 Aug 1732) reflects a fundamentally negative view of rural life as a serious subject for pastoral and georgic. The man credited with the idea of a 'Newgate Pastoral, among the whores and thieves there' (*Swift-Pope*, 30 Aug 1716) could not perhaps be expected to find stimulation in *The Seasons*, for at the heart of James Thomson's vision is a view of the rural world that has little in common with the literary manipulations of Scriblerian pastoral and mock-pastoral. For Thomson the rural world is not only the traditional Horatian alternative to the corrupt city, but also the model for his particular philosophical views. James Sambrook (1981: xvii-xxxiv) divides the concerns of the poem into categories: 'devotional', 'scientific', 'georgic', 'geographical, historical and narrative', 'descriptive', and 'subjective'. The poem is indeed a 'portmanteau' of themes and genres, one strand of which I shall be extracting for critical attention in what follows. But it also has a central theme, a single informing idea: Sambrook's comparison (1981: xxiv) with Lucretius's *De Rerum Natura* is helpful in this respect. Each 'season' has a central 'force'. In *Spring* it is the 'Soul of Love' (line 582), the restorative and renewing power of that season. In *Summer* it is the sun, the 'powerful King of Day' (line 81) that dominates. In *Autumn* the controlling image is more diffuse, as the poet moves between a warm benevolence reminiscent of summer, and a more forbidding environment that anticipates winter. However, the 'weighty Rains' (line 738), and the cycle of water Thomson describes (736-835) perhaps give a central image. *Winter* focuses closely on the sublimity of winter's 'Congenial Horrors' (line 6, 'Congenial' in some later editions). Each of these four forces is for Thomson the manifestation of a deity: this is expressed directly in *Summer* in the description of the sun as 'Soul of surrounding Worlds! in whom best seen / Shines out thy Maker!' (95-6).

The movement in *The Seasons* typically progresses upwards ('progress' and 'upwards' are two favourite words in the poem) through a pyramidal hierarchy. We can see this in *Spring*, for example, where first plant-life, then birds, then Man emerge into the new season (see lines 17, 22-5, 33-7). Man, on earth at least, is at the top of the hierarchy. His emergence from savagery through industry and learning is much rehearsed--though the pastoral-based idea of a descent from a golden age is contradictorily present too, while the praise of Newton (*Spring* 203-17) shows a typically economic Thomsonian melding of the praise of God's creation (the rainbow) and of Man's ingenuity in interpreting it (Newton).

Hence Swift is wrong to find 'nothing doing' in the poem. Far from being 'just' descriptive, the poem is carefully orchestrated to illustrate and illuminate a single theme, and Johnson's accusation of 'want of method' in the poem, in his *Life of Thomson* (1779-81,

1905: III, 299), is in this respect misleading. The tone and message of that theme is one of triumphant harmony. We need to be aware, in extracting a single strand from the poem, that this tone and theme constitutes the major context for all the individual elements of the poem, including the set-piece descriptions of rural labour which will be our principal concern here. The poem has a unitary purpose, and what it 'says' about any individual issue is ultimately guided by that purpose. [1]

Like Thomson, Stephen Duck is ultimately concerned with a single theme, but his theme strikingly opposes Thomson's. *The Thresher's Labour* was commissioned by Duck's local patron, the Reverend Mr. Stanley, as a poem 'on his own *Labours*.' [2] Duck uses a method and a genre which are as focussed as Thomson's, and in their way just as original. In the poem the seasonal and agricultural cycle, traditionally used (not least by Thomson) as a model of harmony and of pleasing *concordia discors*, becomes a dehumanising machine, controlled by 'The Master', and driving the farm workers relentlessly through a never-ending cycle of backbreaking work. It is, as the editors of the *Penguin Book of English Pastoral Verse* (Barrell and Bull, 1974: 377 ff.) acknowledge, an 'anti-pastoral'. But the fact that it is the first anti-pastoral in their anthology is revealing. Our information about Duck's education and development as a poet make it surprising that he would 'found' a new kind of poetry. His principal literary influences, read in the time he could snatch from his farm work, were mainstream texts such as Addison's *Spectator*, Milton's *Paradise Lost* (read with the help of a dictionary and a book of grammar), and Edward Bysshe's *The Art of English Poetry* (1702). His sources seem conventional, and the frequent use of often rather forced epic similes in *The Thresher's Labour* gives some indication of the constraints and inadequacies of his self-education.

Anti-pastoral was available in the early eighteenth century, notably in William Diaper's *Brent* (1720). Diaper's principal anti-pastoral device is to attack the English weather, but he also finds time to complain about food, drink, and many of the features of the English countryside. Duck sometimes hits a similar note, seen for example if we compare Diaper's 'No joyous birds here stretch their tuneful throats' (*Brent*, line 71) with Duck's 'No cheerful sound diverts the list'ning ear' (*The Thresher's Labour*, 1730, 1989: 4), [3] though we have no evidence he had seen Diaper's poem, or indeed any anti-pastoral. It seems probable that he has independently thought of the idea of creating an unrelievedly negative picture (though we will see some relenting in this when we look more closely at his poem). Certainly his central idea of turning the farming year into a malevolent and merciless machine is, as far as can be established, his own original contribution to the genre. [4]

Thus one poet seeks harmony and what he calls 'social Glee' (*Summer*, 370) in rural labour, while for the other 'Tis all a dull and melancholy Scene / Fit only to provoke the Muses' Spleen' (*The Thresher's Labour*, 1730, 1989, p. 4). [5] The third poem I want to look at here is also primarily an anti-pastoral, and at first sight has an easily defined relationship

with that genre: *The Woman's Labour* was written in response to *The Thresher's Labour*, as its author Mary Collier wittily explains in her autobiographical 'Remarks of the Author's Life', which preface the 1762 edition of her works. When she was a washerwoman in Petersfield:

Duck's Poems came abroad, which I soon got by heart, fancying he had been too Severe on the Female Sex in his *Thresher's Labour* brought me to a Strong propensity to call an Army of Amazons to vindicate the injured Sex: Therefore I answer'd him to please my own humour [6]

Collier's first purpose, then, was to refute Duck's accusation of idleness in women, which she does with vigour, answering him point for point. However, her methodology and genre are more complex than those of Duck's poem. Generically her poem has some Thomsonian, portmanteau-like qualities. It is, for example, both an imitation and a parody of *The Thresher's Labour*, extending some of that poem's themes and methods into new areas. Collier echoes and extends Duck's complaint of a hard working life by describing a working life some degrees harsher than his, and comparing it in detail with his. Thus where Duck's dreams are haunted ('Our Labours ev'n in Sleep don't cease', p. 11), Collier replies that 'we have hardly ever *Time to dream*' (p. 20), which 'trumps' his complaint, and raises the anti-pastoral stakes. She highlights each echo/reply to Duck (as here) with italics, to emphasise her imitation of, reply to, and parody of each element in Duck's vision. It is a method worthy of the Scriblerians in its ironic double-edgedness.

She also imitates and mocks the rather heavy classicism of 'great Duck', [7] as she calls him, notably in an opening burlesque passage written in the manner of neo-classical 'decline of' poetry:

*Jove* once descending from the clouds did drop  
In show'rs of gold on lovely *Danae's* lap;  
The sweet-tongu'd Poets, in those generous days,  
Unto our Shrine still offer'd up their Lays:  
But now, alas! that Golden Age is past,  
We are the objects of your Scorn at last.           (1730, 1989: 16)

There is at least a hint, too, of eighteenth-century patriotic panegyric, as when she rails against Duck's hostility to women talking:

In this, I hope, you do not speak your mind,  
For none but *Turks*, that I could ever find,  
Have Mutes to serve them, or did e'er deny

Their Slaves, at Work, to chat it merrily.  
Since you have Liberty to speak your mind,  
And are to talk, as well as we, inclin'd,  
Why should you thus repine, because that we,  
Like you, enjoy that pleasing Liberty? (p. 17)

The 'Liberty' here is the traditional liberty of 'God's Englishmen', celebrated in Thomson's poem *Liberty* (1735-6) and elsewhere, and signalled by Collier's chauvinistic contempt for the unenlightened 'Turks'. Women, of course, were not numbered among 'God's Englishmen', and Collier ironically undercuts the patriotic rhetoric she has set up when she suggests that she and her fellow women workers are 'Slaves'.

There is also in the poem a range of humorous and satirical devices, notably the Popean zeugma she uses to show mock-sympathy to Duck's complaint against women, and:

Those mighty Troubles which perplex your Mind,  
(*Thistles* before, and *Females* come behind). (p. 19)

Collier's poem is a sophisticated concoction, which includes elements of heroic and mock-heroic, panegyric and satire. It is both pastoral and anti-pastoral: as we will discover when we look more closely at her description of labour, there are ways in which she takes up pastoral ideas present in Thomson's poem, as well as the anti-pastoral ideas from Duck.

Thus we find in these three poems a cross-section of ideas about, and approaches to rural labour, including elements of idealism and realism, pastoral and anti-pastoral, humour and seriousness. The perspectives range from the visionary overview of Thomson's poem, to the minutiae of conditions and tasks catalogued by Duck and Collier. There is a good deal of contrast and contradiction, as well as areas of agreement and similarity between the three poets.

A number of critics have made comparisons between the images of rural life presented in *The Seasons* and in *The Thresher's Labour*, and it has become a familiar approach for introductory work on Duck. [8] There are obvious reasons for this. The poems appeared in the same year. [9] They offer contrasting views of rural life and labour, both of which seem more original and more intensely expressed than anything written earlier in the century. Thomson and Duck seem to have had some influence on each other, [10] and *The Seasons* became a touchstone for later rural poets, and was especially cherished by the self-taught poets who emerged in increasing numbers following Duck's success. [11] And though their backgrounds were very different, Thomson and Duck were close contemporaries, [12] their triumphs occurred in the same year, [13] and--a grim final point--both met their ends in premature and slightly related ways. [14]

If comparisons between *The Woman's Labour* and the Thomson and Duck poems have only recently begun to be made, it is because Mary Collier had until the last few years been entirely forgotten, [15] and not because comparisons do not spring to mind: they do, most obviously with *The Thresher's Labour*, which Collier's poem directly addresses and aspires to reply to; but also with *The Seasons*, which offers a contemporary poetic view of rural labour, including women's labour. Some biographical similarity may be seen between Collier and Duck: some fifteen years, and the county of Hampshire, separates their dates and places of birth, but nothing separates their social class--both received only rudimentary educations, Duck in a Dame School, Collier with her mother. And if the sharpness of *The Woman's Labour* suggests a gap between the two, Mary Collier's declaration that she 'soon got by heart' Duck's poems suggests a strong empathy with him; and the elegy his suicide moved her to write is clearly felt. [16]

That comparisons between the three poets should focus on their description of rural labour is equally understandable: the subject is central to Duck and Collier, and Thomson's vignettes of rural work provide important focussing points in his poem. Descriptions of rural labour, furthermore, are not common in the early eighteenth century, either in poetry or in prose. John Barrell (1980: 6-7) shows that significant interest in what he calls 'more actualised images' of rural life by those who purchased books and paintings was a phenomenon of the later part of the century. The degree to which writers presented 'actualised' rural labour in the early part of the century (implying some degree of central attention and focus as well as a more 'realistic' approach) was consequently limited. [17] The three descriptions of rural labour offer some interesting contrasts: between the approaches of a professional poet and of two labourer-poets; between male and female writers; between pastoral and anti-pastoral. These kinds of contrasts, and this rarity in contemporary work description, make these texts and their comparison of historical as well as literary-historical interest.

Two of these poems, *The Seasons* and *The Thresher's Labour*, were popular to a degree that does not suggest a minority interest; and the same may be said of *The Woman's Labour* in a local way. The rural labour in Thomson's poem seems to have been of interest to the poet, and thus (we may reasonably assume) to his readers, in terms of its relationship with the larger patterns of harmony I have said were his theme; while the rural labour in the Duck and Collier poems seems to have been of interest primarily because of the 'novelty' of its being described by labourer-poets. In terms of the demands of readers and the influence of contemporary tastes, Thomson may be seen as a successful innovator; Duck's poem was commissioned, and therefore its subject (though not its methodology and conclusions) were governed by others; and Mary Collier's poem was her own idea, though the publication and reception of Duck's poem had a very clear influence on how and what Collier, and indeed the other post-Duck labourer-poets, described. [18]

So the comparison is worth making, and has to some extent been made. Rayner Unwin (1954) devotes a full chapter to valorising Thomson, quite credibly, as a seminal figure in self-taught rural poetry, and makes three short comparisons of work-description between Thomson and Duck. Alan Warner (1967) quotes in full parallel passages of *The Seasons* and *The Thresher's Labour* on hay-making, and briefly discusses them. H. Gustav Klaus (1985) quotes an abbreviated version of the Thomson haymaking passage, noting Duck's 'break' from its sensibilities, and the significance of Collier's 'courageous reply to Duck, who quite obviously did not include the female agricultural worker in his "we"' (p. 15). Donna Landry (1987), whose principal concern is with Mary Collier, seems to suggest a fruitful three-way comparison in the contrast between what she sees as Thomson's complacent view of winter, Duck's apparent skipping through the season in one line, and the harshness of winter work portrayed by Collier. However she dismisses Thomson with a paragraph of paraphrase and short quotation, and seems to dismiss the comparison itself in her footnoted comment that 'The contrast with Thomson seems obligatory' (p. 292n38).

Both of the recent 'back-to-back' editions of *The Thresher's Labour* and *The Woman's Labour* offer implied comparisons between the two poems by their very presentation, both editors taking up the comparison in their introductions, and dealing on the whole sympathetically with both writers and both sets of experiences. Neither makes comparisons with *The Seasons*, but the aim of both editions is clearly to achieve the basic, important task of making the poems, in E. P. Thompson's phrase (1989: i), 'more widely known and enjoyed than they are': the study of Duck and Collier is still at an elementary stage, and establishing and reprinting their texts is the editors' first priority.

Thus some progress has been made in comparing the three poets on rural labour, though the critics and editors mentioned have been rather brief in their comparisons. [19] More important than their brevity is a perceptible tendency to bring potentially distorting preconceptions to the comparison. Decisions tend to be made about the veracity of each text in terms that involve making reductive connections between poetry and social history. A clear division, for example, is made between Thomson and Duck, in terms of historical 'truth'. Thus Unwin (1954: 62) contrasts Thomson's 'Arcadia with verisimilitude' with Duck's 'unimaginative statements of fact'; Klaus (1985: 13) distinguishes between the 'view expressed' by Thomson, and the 'unadorned presentation of agricultural labour' by Duck; while for Warner (1967: 40-3) Thomson's description is a 'generalised literary picture', and Duck's is 'an authentic picture of cutting the hay'. Similarly, Landry (1987: 113-5) finds that Thomson's account of winter is 'ludicrously "literary"', and is put in a 'new and rather unflattering light' by the 'vivid simplicity' of Mary Collier's description of the season.

The theoretical issues raised by such critical contrasting of 'authenticity' and 'inauthenticity' in literary texts are complex, and some comment on them is needed. I have noted that by their rarity, and the fact that they engage an important aspect of contemporary social life, and do so in different ways, these poetic descriptions of rural life are naturally of 'historical' as well as 'literary historical' interest, as indeed is the other text I shall be considering in this thesis, *The Fleece*. But some thought clearly needs to be given as to what kinds of information they offer. The critics I have quoted all see Thomson's text as primarily 'literary', and Duck and Collier by contrast as plain purveyors of truth: one text is a poem; the other two are, effectively, historical documents.

The view of Collier and Duck is the more worrying. A poet is not a photographer or a social historian, though s/he may incorporate these roles; and a poem is not simply a 'statement of fact', or a regurgitation of sensuous or statistical information. The processes by which a poet selects from experiences and beliefs, selects genre, imagery, language, and develops all these elements into a literary artefact are sophisticated; and modern literary and linguistic theory teaches us, too, that language is not simply 'transparent' in the way that a direct reading of history from literature may assume. In the case of the Duck and Collier poems, I have briefly considered some of the ways in which they are 'literary' as well as documentary. Duck's poem includes epic similes (noted by Warner), prosody, dramatisation, epithets, alliteration, and a coherent, structured anti-pastoral machinery. Collier uses parody, imitation, and elements of satire, pastoral and anti-pastoral, heroic and mock-heroic in sophisticated and equally clearly 'literary' ways.

Neither do the biographical accounts of these two writers suggest that their writings are simply concerned with transmitting the 'truth' of their working lives. Duck's interest in literature began with a love of 'P[s]alms & singing, & Ballads', a 'certain Longing after Knowledge', and the unexpected bonus of access to a friend's cache of classical and modern literary texts. Though the content and methods of his poetry were swiftly colonised by his various patrons and discoverers he certainly wrote at least one poem ('On Poverty') unsupervised, and probably others too. [20] Mary Collier likewise recalls that her 'Recreation was reading', in which she graduated from 'any foolish History' to religious tracts. When Duck's poems 'came abroad' she learned them by heart, and wrote her reply 'to please my own humour'. [21] Both were primarily interested in what is now called 'creative writing'. Their social class and labouring experiences are of course a crucial element in all these developments. Literature was not usually available to these writers (hence they latched on to whatever texts were available); their natural first subject matter was their 'situation' in society, which dominated their waking lives (their time, resources, and opportunities to read and write). But this does not mean that they had no other aspiration than to record the social history of their lives; and even less that their poems are not 'poetry', with all its





They fly for shelter to the thickest bush,  
Their silent sit, and all at once is hush. (p. 8) [24]

This is a very carefully planned and executed simile, clearly the product of Duck's nights with *Paradise Lost*, Bysshe's *Art of Poetry*, and Addison's *Spectator*, the last of which would have told him that 'the Ancients' in their similes 'provided there was a likeness [...] did not much trouble themselves about the decency of the comparison' (no. 160, 3 Sep 1711), that the similes of the heroic poets are designed to 'fill the mind with great conceptions' (no. 62, 11 May 1711), and that Milton 'never quits his simile till it rises to some very great idea' (no. 303, 16 Feb 1712). His primary purpose, in other words, is a literary one; a piece of natural observation of birds falling silent has moved him to try his hand at an extended simile.

Mary Collier's comment on this passage from Duck is that 'on our abject State you throw your Scorn, / And Women wrong, your Verses to adorn'. (p. 16). This is astutely perceptive, and recognises the primarily literary intention of Duck's scene of women in the hayfield. Duck is in fact concerned with working two familiar literary devices into the scene: this simile, and a georgic thunderstorm. Like Thomson he is economical with his imagery, and thus he gives his resentment of the women's talk a threefold literary purpose, as an element of his anti-pastoral machinery, as the occasion for the thunder storm which will silence them, and (as a result) as the focus for his epic simile. Collier's anger at Duck is thus accurately focussed on the trivialisation, the 'Scorn' as she calls it, of his making literary capital out of his chauvinistic attitudes; but she clearly recognises that the problem is not primarily caused by the issue of 'veracity' *per se*, but of the distortions caused by Duck's concern with style at the expense of content. (This of course in no sense excuses his attitude, either for her or for the modern reader.)

Duck is not actually thinking very much at all about what the women are doing in the hayfield. Collier recognises this, and her counter-version of the hayfield scene, in which she draws on her own remembered experience of haymaking, locates an inconsistency in Duck's account which reveals his unthinking aestheticisation, which she pounces on and wittily quotes against him:

For my own part, I many a Summer's Day  
Have spent in throwing, turning, making Hay;  
But ne'er could see, what you have lately found,  
Our Wages paid for sitting on the Ground.  
'Tis true, that when our Morning's Work is done,  
And all our Grass expos'd unto the Sun,  
While that his scorching Beams do on it shine,  
As well as you we have a time to dine:

I hope that since we freely toil and sweat  
To earn our Bread, you'll give us time to eat.  
That over, soon we must get up again,  
And nimbly turn our Hay upon the plain,  
Nay, rake and prow it in, the case is clear,  
Or how should *Cocks in equal Rows* appear? (pp. 16-17) [25]

Having completed his epic simile Duck had been concerned with turning the mood of the poem from one of painful work, to the aesthetic satisfaction of completion:

But better Fate succeeds this rainy Day,  
And little Labour serves to make the Hay;  
Fast as 'tis cut, so kindly shines the Sun,  
Turn'd once or twice, the pleasing Work is done.  
Next day the Cocks appear in equal Rows,  
Which the glad Master in safe Ricks bestows. (p. 9)

His pleasure in the 'equal rows' is closer in spirit to William Shenstone's aestheticising *ferme ornée* ideas of 'throw[ing] all your haystacks into the form of pyramids', [26] than to the realities of a working hayfield; and in focussing on the pleasure of (his) completion he has casually marginalised the women's work. The hay is 'turn'd once or twice'--by women of course, though Duck makes it sound as if the sun is doing the 'pleasing' Work; and the haycocks 'appear', as Collier cannily notices, in an apparent act of self-creation, though she knows that it is the women who build them. We are faced here not simply with the question of veracity, but with literary and aesthetic issues, which Collier's reply shows she is well aware of. We cannot simply ignore the literary elements in this kind of writing, which are as important as (and, for Duck in this instance clearly more important than) the accuracy of its social history, and in any case are inextricably linked with it.

It is not suggested, of course, that there is no basis for the idea that Duck and Collier generally exhibit a greater concern with the harsh realities of rural work than Thomson, that they know more about it, and that Thomson is concerned with a more 'idealistic' vision than those of the two self-taught poets. A farm labourer like Duck and a working woman like Collier are by the nature of things likely to be better chroniclers of what rural labour feels like than a professional writer like Thomson; and the grand overview of Thomson's poem is equally likely to lead him to describe things harmoniously and ideally. What I would challenge is the reductive notion that the two 'labour' poems are purely factual, and the injustice it leads to in its failure to acknowledge what (after all) was the central aspiration of Duck and Collier: to write poetry, to be *poets*. A new kind of 'patronage' hovers about this

approach, with its talk of 'vivid simplicity', 'unadorned presentation' and 'unimaginative statements of fact', however much it lionises the veracity of the self-taught poets. Similarly if we strip these poems of 'poetry', and ascribe that quality solely to Thomson, he is bound to look 'ludicrously literary', though of course Duck, Collier, and many other self-taught poets, from Robert Tattersal to John Clare, were also 'literary' in their theory and their practice. We cannot simply 'dredge out', in Pat Rogers' graphic expression (1980a: 6), 'a little inert social history' from these poems, if their essential life as poems and as historical documents has been extinguished by our refusal to take their authors' intentions seriously.

What can we then learn from a comparison of these poetic accounts of rural life? E. P. Thompson's introduction to *The Thresher's Labour* and *The Woman's Labour* (1989: ix) perhaps gives a hint. He takes a mildly ironical approach to the Duck-Collier controversy, firstly setting up Duck's authority:

Men had long known about the deficiencies of female labour, and Duck's poem confirmed this knowledge. Who, after all, would know better than a Wiltshire thresher?

But then offering another rhetorical question to answer the first one:

Well, perhaps a woman labourer might?

This leaves the reader to decide, but also accepts both views as 'historical', not in the way I have attacked, of making one or both 'true' in a documentary way, but by recording them as both being 'true' in the sense that they reflect the views of the two historical figures Stephen Duck and Mary Collier. The information they provide is not a substitute for historical research, but a potentially important element of it.

It seems to me that what is most 'real' about a poem like *The Woman's Labour* is the way in which it seeks and finds a literary expression for Collier's feelings about her experience of haymaking: her pride in it as part of her personal history, her righteous anger at what she feels is Duck's misrepresentation. Like Duck, she feels the experience in terms of hard work. Like Thomson, her portrayal of haymaking is essentially optimistic, though in a more tempered way. Where his optimism is sustained by pastoral idyll, and the idea of 'social glee' (a togetherness that makes work pleasurable), hers (though also suggesting that idea) is centrally sustained by the idea of 'nimble' conquering the work. Duck also seeks to conquer the work, though his is a more competitive, less sociable work-ethic than those of Thomson or Collier. There are similarities and differences between the three accounts of haymaking; but the way they connect with the 'real world' is through the particular

experiences, social roles, education, temper, literary purposes and techniques of the three writers: their ideas and their ideologies, their dreams and their realities.

We cannot understand fully their significance in eighteenth-century culture, or to eighteenth-century rural life, by arranging them into preconceived hierarchies of realism, or by casting their authors into class-based preconceptions of what they can and cannot be (the diminutive use of 'Stephen' for Duck, by several critics, is ominous in this respect). Thus the comparison between images of rural life in *The Seasons*, *The Thresher's Labour*, and *The Woman's Labour* that follows does not attempt just to weigh the relationship between the poems and the 'reality' of rural life (though this is of course considered); but examines them also as poetry, and in terms of the ideas and attitudes their words and images express. If this is a longer and more tentative route to learning from them something about the early eighteenth century, it is perhaps fairer to the writers and more appropriate to their procedures and intentions than earlier comparative studies.

## 2. Labour (1)

### i. Going to work

The distribution and organisation of labour in rural poetry is a helpful indicator of the concerns of the poet. How is labour initiated? In Milton's portrayal of Eden Eve attempts to divide rationally the work between herself and Adam:

Adam, well may we labor still to dress  
This garden, still to tend plant, herb, and flow'r,  
Our pleasant task enjoined, but till more hands  
Aid us, the work under our labor grows,  
Luxurious by restraint [...]  
Let us divide our labors (*Paradise Lost*, IX, 205 ff)

Eve's primitive socialism suggests much more than it seems to. For the cautious Adam, Eden is a place of dangerous temptation, where 'I should mind thee oft, and mind thou me' (IX, 358), and their separation, for whatever practical reason, is potentially hazardous. A simple division that makes sense to Eve symbolises a serious ideological disunity, which leads to disaster. The subtext that Satan may have put this idea in her head is slightly remote (her dream is five books earlier), but the important point is that for Milton labour, its division and its implementation, so important in the Puritans' world-view, is the natural territory of ideology, and of ideological conflict.

For Alexander Pope, by contrast, it is not, and rural labour in his *Pastorals* is initiated with studied lassitude. The speaker in *Summer* says 'Let other Swains attend the Rural Care' (35), while in *Spring* Strephon says to Daphnis, 'Sing then, and Damon shall attend the Strain / While yon slow Oxen turn the furrow'd plain' (29-30). The lurking pun on 'strain' reflects the separation of function between these swains, whose only duty is to sing and to listen, and the labouring world--'other swains' and 'oxen'--for whom strain means toil. We can see in this a reflection of Pope's quasi-aristocratic and strongly anti-mimetic conception of pastoral, as a place where 'we are not to describe our shepherds as shepherds at this day really are'. [27] His intention is to recreate a 'golden age', and his golden age turns out to be substantially more laid-back than Milton's Eden.

These two examples indicate the extremes of ideological significance that may be attached to the deployment and initiation of labour. Eve's attempt to divide the labour rationally may be read as a response of 'free will' to the question Adam has framed, of 'How we might best fulfill the work which here / God hath assigned us' (IX, 230-1); but which demonstrates for Milton the double-edged quality of free will. Pope's swains are artfully

arbitrary about work because work is not a significant factor in the ideology and aesthetics of Popean pastoral.

In different ways Thomson, Duck and Collier offer very much more ordered modes of labour-initiation than these two earlier poets, and in doing so show the ways in which they see work as an important social function. Thomson's first scene of rural labour begins:

Forth fly the tepid Airs; and unconfin'd,  
Unbinding Earth, the moving Softness strays.  
Joyous, th'impatient Husbandman perceives  
Relenting Nature, and his lusty Steers  
Drives from their Stalls

(*Spring*, 32-6)

At first sight it seems that something like Eve's free will is the initiator: the husbandman apparently makes an independent decision on the basis of a change in the weather. The earth has thawed and dried out sufficiently to become workable, and Thomson dramatises what every farmer knows: that seasonal tasks are best begun the moment that time and weather (forces which are both constantly present in this poem) permit. The husbandman (who, as the emergence of the 'Master' later in this passage makes clear, here means the farm labourer) is simultaneously 'joyous' and 'impatient', which gives further impetus to the idea of him as self-motivating. But the principal mover in the passage is nevertheless 'Nature', for whose 'relenting' the husbandman has to wait. In Robert Bloomfield's popular imitation of Thomson's poem, *The Farmer's Boy* (1800, 1801: 34, 'Summer'), in a slightly different seasonal context, 'Nature herself invites the Reapers forth', which provides a nice gloss to Thomson. Nature, or rather its controlling seasonal cycle, is the manifestation of the deity, the 'varied God' (*Hymn*, 2) of Thomson's poem, and the deity is seen as ultimate controller of the work, and of its initiation. Thomson's constant theme in *The Seasons* is the harmoniousness of things, and the husbandman's joyousness may be read as the first of many instances of optimistic, forward-looking initiations, which set the pitch for this harmony. The poet uses his privileged position within the conventions of georgic prescriptiveness to provide social motivation to the human part of this initiation, directly advising the swain to 'be patient' (*Spring* 137), broadening his address in order to tell his countrymen to 'venerate the Plow' (*Spring* 67), and so on.

Duck's overall purpose is of course entirely opposed to Thomson's, and the benevolent arbitrariness by which, for Thomson and his imitators, 'Nature herself' calls the workers to the land is very different from the despotic arbitrariness of Duck's initiator, invariably 'the Master'. Another kind of urgency rules this work:

Soon as the Harvest hath laid bare the Plains,

And Barns well fill'd reward the Farmer's pains;  
What Corn each sheaf will yield, intent to hear,  
And guess from thence the Profits of the year;  
Or else impending Ruin to prevent,  
By paying, timely, threat'ning Landlord's rent,  
He calls his Threshers forth (1730, 1989: 1) [28]

There follows a series of commands:

As he directs, to different Barns we go;  
Here two for Wheat, and there for Barley two (p. 3) [29]

And finally some pre-emptive bargaining by the Master:

So dry the Corn was carried from the Field,  
So easily 'twill thresh, so well 'twill yield.  
Sure large day's Work I well may hope for now (p. 3)

The contrast with Thomson could not be more strongly apparent. Thomson's 'joyous' husbandman, prompted by nature, moves harmoniously into action, and the spring tasks begin easily: thus in the same passage of *Spring* the Master appears ploughing, the Sower appears casting grain, the harrow follows along. The opening of *Spring* has aptly been called a 'theatrical invocation,' (Williams, 1973: 133) and the field work here begins as if set in motion by a curtain's rise. Harmony is immediate and pervasive.

The most striking difference we find in Duck's work initiations concerns motive. In calling the workers to work (which he does three times in the poem) the Master has usurped the function of Thomson's 'Nature'. He has done so not with any concern for 'harmony', but only with profit in mind. Weather, which is a part of the great balanced harmoniousness of things for Thomson, is for Duck's Master a purely utilitarian subject, which he can use in his preliminary bartering with the threshers to demand maximum output. Neither is he concerned with the importance of human roles. In Thomson's *Spring* initiation, each person has an individualised role, as 'Husbandman', 'Master', and 'Sower', each is a distinct 'actor' in the drama; whereas in Duck, only the Master has a role, the others being literally numbers to divide up arbitrarily.

The motivations of the workers themselves are rather more diffuse in Duck's poem. Living in what the poet clearly shows to be hardship, they are opportunistic about the work, constantly in search of the small advantage that will make life bearable. They cannot choose, and wherever the master commands them to go they go. Thus at the dividing up at the

beginning (pp. 1-2) they simply go where they are sent and begin work. The Master's second command (p. 5) evokes a positive response: they have been stuck in a suffocating barn for months, and the Master's appearance is 'welcome', for it means the 'grateful Tidings' that they can now move to the summer fields. This work, of course, becomes in its turn strenuous and tedious, and they remember the 'kind Barns with friendly Shades' (p. 6). A brief pleasure is registered at the completion of the haymaking (p. 9), and they return with mixed feelings of relief and foreboding (for they will be called out again shortly) to the barns. In sum, they are precluded from the independent pleasure in pursuing seasonal tasks which seems to be available to Thomson's 'swains'; their lives are ruled by a mixture of fearful and hopeful memories and anticipations. Some pleasure is shown in the success of the haymaking and the harvest (pp. 9 and 11), though the physical commitment they have had to make to it gives this response some overtones of relief.

Collier's labour initiations are different again. Concentrating firstly on her rebuttal of Duck's slur, she plunges into her memories of haymaking *in medias res* (p. 16). Her purpose is to show a continuous round of work, caused by the 'double shift' of a working-class woman's life; so we see the female worker in the middle of a day of haymaking, then going home ahead of her husband to start her 'second shift' of housework. What is shown is a continual round of activity, with less emphasis on starting and stopping than there is in Duck. Later in the poem there are two initiations of labour. The first is the corn harvest:

When Harvest comes, into the Field we go,  
And help to reap the Wheat as well as you,  
Or else we go the ears of Corn to glean,  
No Labour scorning, be it e'er so mean,  
But in the Work we freely bear a part,  
And what we can, perform with all our Heart. (1739, 1989: 17)

The fact that there are two options here emphasises the lack of rule-orientation in the women's work, contrasting strongly with the season-orientated order in Thomson, and the profit-orientated order in Duck. The women may reap, they may glean; they do, in fact, any work there is, 'No Labour scorning'. There is an element of pride in Collier's declaration of this flexibility, but it is also the product of necessity. Threshing is, for Duck, a hellishly eternal task, as we shall see, but the fact that it is a year-round occupation has the one positive element to it that the thresher has the security of permanent employment. Mary Collier's working women must take whatever work there is wherever and whenever it is available. By taking a pride in this Collier finds a way of humanising its tyranny, of making a virtue out of what is clearly a necessity.

Collier's final work initiation is of her winter work of 'charring'. [30] Again, this is clearly casual work (they are paid 'Sixpence or Eightpence' at the end of the day, p. 22), taken in winter; and the salient point about it is that it involves getting up before dawn in order to be able to finish it. Though Collier maintains her stoic optimism about this 'Hard labour we most chearfully pursue' the positive word 'chearfully' is ringed with harshness: it is *hard* labour; it needs to be *pursued*, not just 'carried out' but 'sought', 'struggled for'. [31] And Collier uses a piece of dis-harmony unlike anything else in the labour initiations of these three poems to emphasise the uncertainty and difficulty of this: she has the early-rising charwomen locked out and unable to start their work, as the maid is still asleep, being herself overtired from too much 'Work the day before' (p. 20). It is an effective touch; for the women to find any harmony or pleasure in their work is an uphill struggle, though it is one Collier shows they are determined to achieve.

The start of the working day for Thomson's shepherd, in *Summer*, could not be in greater contrast with Collier's wretched charwomen, wandering around in the cold pre-dawn, and locked out on a winter morning. What actually rouses the shepherd is the cock crowing, but any unpleasant alarm-clock associations are dissipated by Thomson's harmonious description of dawn.

Brown Night retires. Young Day pours in apace,  
 And opens all the lawny Prospect wide.  
 The dripping Rock, the Mountain's misty Top  
 Swell on the Sight, and brighten with the Dawn.  
 Blue, thro' the Dusk, the smoaking Currents shine;  
 And from the bladed Field the fearful Hare  
 Limp, aukward: while along the Forest-glade  
 The wild Deer trip, and often turning gaze  
 At early Passenger. Musick awakes,  
 The native Voice of undissembled Joy;  
 And thick around the woodland Hymns arise.  
 Rous'd by the Cock, the soon-clad Shepherd leaves  
 His mossy Cottage, where with *Peace* he dwells;  
 And from the crouded Fold, in Order, drives  
 His Flock, to taste the Verdure of the Morn. (*Summer*, 52-66)

If the work in *Spring* began in a theatrical way, then here we have, as it were, lights and music; a vivid visual rendering of the animate and inanimate elements of the country coming awake, and an overture in the dawn chorus, leading to the cock's crowing. The shepherd's rising is seen alongside, and in conclusion to, the many other 'natural' beginnings of the

dawn: he is a 'natural man', his labour a part of the 'natural' movement of the day. The philippic against 'Falsely luxurious' Man who will not get up that follows may rather spoil the effect for a modern reader, but is perhaps Thomson's way of showing that his intentions are sternly 'georgic' rather than (as the idyllic description of dawn might suggest) idealistically 'pastoral'. Either way, this is clearly an artful awakening, describing the best kind of beginning for a day's work, where Collier has described the worst.

Three basic sets of values, then, control the initiation of labour in Thomson, Duck and Collier. The first is based very much on a sense of philosophical purpose: Thomsonian labour is a pleasure because it is harmoniously a part of an ultimately benevolent Nature. Its participants have a role and a purpose, within a socialised framework. Duckian labour is by contrast a bodge, a question of making the best of a bad job. Motivation is, for the worker, based principally on obeying the Master; and, for the Master, based on extracting profit in the face of a fairly hostile Nature. For Collier's women workers things are clearly hardest of all, with their 'double shift', and their touting for char work on winter mornings. They are excluded from the slight advantage of permanency Duck's work has. Pleasure exists for these women in the pride they have in their versatility and determination to 'perform with all our heart' whatever work needs doing; and in the communality of the working experience.

Nature, Thomson's benevolent force, is in the form of heat the enemy to Duck's labourers, in the form of cold, wind, rain and snow the enemy to Collier's charwomen. However, it is an over-simplification of Thomson's view to see his Nature as purely harmonious. The long georgic passage on insects in *Spring* is evidence of Nature's potential for damage; much of *Winter* is concerned with a Nature sufficiently hostile to destroy a life, and the storm in *Autumn* is especially damaging to Man. Thomson typically posits socially-wrought solutions to these problems, however. Patience is the virtue appropriate to dealing with hostile weather in *Spring* (137-42), while science--a product of Man's rise--will safely see off such problems as the hostile insects (*Spring* 120-136). Industry, above all, hard work, is his ideal (and hence idleness his enemy). Duck's view of hard work is not surprisingly jaundiced by his experiences, and Collier too, has no illusions about its harshness; and *The Thresher's Labour* and *The Woman's Labour* provide, among other things, an important critique of the Thomsonian view of labour.

## ii. Haymaking

Examining the scenes of labour themselves reveals a complex set of relationships between the three texts. The two areas of work the three poets all address are the hay and corn harvests. I want to examine here the various descriptions of haymaking and harvest work,

before looking at the more specialised kinds of labour each of the three poets concentrates on. Haymaking and harvesting were 'peak time' activities, tasks of a sort which involved 'all hands', so we should not be surprised to find each of these writers dealing with them. They are also similar activities in many ways (though there are important differences in the organisation of their tasks), and I shall to some extent be mixing descriptions of hay and corn harvests in my comparisons. Haymaking, the first major harvest of the year, evokes a varied response. It is the work Thomson describes most idyllically (*Summer* 351-70); while Duck gives haymaking a mixed reception (pp. 5-9); and Mary Collier (pp. 16-17) treats it with sprightly energy.

For Thomson, haymaking combines all his ideals. It is a period of intense activity, and it is notable that the haymaking scene follows the latest of a number of attacks on idleness. It is a model of social harmony: 'the Village' joins together in 'happy Labour, Love, and social Glee' (370). Its pleasure and healthiness (two powerful Thomsonian positives) are made apparent in a long string of vivid adjectives:

jovial [...] rustic [...] Healthful [...] strong [...] ruddy [...] swelling [...] fragrant [...] kind  
[...] refreshful [...] green [...] dusky [...] russet [...] gay [...] blended [...] happy  
(extracted from *Summer* 352-70)

Haymaking is a model of perfection for the poet, and the strength of his description led others to try and imitate his description of it. [32] Each individual joins in a communal effort, and to emphasise the universal involvement, Thomson writes, 'Even stooping Age is here; and Infant-Hands / Trail the long Rake' (*Summer*, 358-9). [33]

There is a sense in which Duck is precluded by his own literary purpose from sharing the positives of Thomson's haymaking scene, and the overt literariness of his rejection of women workers I have mentioned is a part of this predicament. Having decided to focus on the unremitting hardship of 'his own situation', he cannot take any pleasure in the communality of haymaking. On the other hand, the fact that he *does* seem to take pleasure, however momentarily, in various other aspects of farm work (including the initial mowing of the hay), suggests that there may be positive reasons for his displeasure. As a 'peak-time' farming activity, haymaking requires outside assistance, and resentment at the presence of 'amateurs' in farmwork may inform the passage. The idyllic mythology of haytime is often seen by farmworkers as the product of 'outsiders' to farm work, who have participated in the pleasurable outdoor activity of haymaking, but not, perhaps, done much dusty threshing, and a certain amount of resentment is likely towards those for whom this peak-time 'work' is actually 'leisure' or 'holiday'. [34]

In addition, the basis of Duck's complaint is documentary as well as literary: it would be superficial not to recognise a knowledge of real hardship here, and the idea that in rural

work 'There's always Bitter mingled with the Sweet' (p. 5) is more than platitudinous. Is Thomson's portrayal therefore idealistic? Certainly Duck gives us more detail, suggesting more thought about the actual work involved. His haymaking is a two-day process, and his account includes various stages in the work, whereas Thomson is concerned with a single and generalised scene of haymaking, set out pictorially. Are his details closely observed? Warner (1967: 42) considers that Thomson's phrase 'tedded Grain' (*Summer* 361) shows he has confused corn and hay harvests, but Sambrook's gloss on Grain here, as 'grass that has gone to seed' (1981: 345n361) clears that matter up. In fact there is no 'factual' misleading in the passage, not even at the level of Duck's apparently self-creating haycocks: if we wish to argue with Thomson's portrayal, it must be on the grounds that he idealises, calls labour 'happy', makes 'love' its motive, buries the hard work in 'social glee'. But the poet makes clear he is 'painting a scene' here rather than documenting a specific occasion, when he writes (after two such scenes, the haymaking and the sheep-shearing) 'A simple Scene! yet hence Britannia' (line 423). Thomson's account is homogeneous: it has one mood and vision, defined in the last line as 'happy Labour, Love, and social Glee' (line 370), and all his literary effort is focussed intently on this.

For Duck haymaking is a more diffuse event. His account has the switchback effect of veering between pleasure and pain. Thus he begins in optimism and 'eager haste' (p. 5, a rather Thomsonian phrase). The mowers, masters of this new activity, size up the task with professional enthusiasm, and for once Duck's epic aspirations work to good effect:

And now the Field design'd our Strength to try  
 Appears, and meets at last our longing eye;  
 The Grass and Ground each chearfully surveys,  
 Willing to see which way th'Advantage lays.  
 As the best man, each claims the foremost place,  
 And our first work seems but a sportive Race.  
 With rapid force our well-whet Blades we drive,  
 Strain every nerve, and blow for blow we give:  
 Tho' but this Eminence the foremost gains,  
 Only t'excel the rest in Toil and Pains.                    (pp. 5-6) [35]

The poet depicts well the irony of an Olympic competition with only a booby-prize to win, adhering to his concept of 'bitter' always mingling with 'the sweet' faithfully, yet taking pride in the description of the work. [36] The heat puts a stop to this competition, and the mowers regret they have worked so hard, a regret which is emphasised by their inadequate meal-break, in which in Duck's punning zeugma, 'the Bottle and the Beer's too small' (p. 7). [37] The ups and downs of haymaking continue through a more sensibly paced afternoon,

and into the second day, the account of which contains the notorious 'prattling Females' passage.

Little can be salvaged from what I have portrayed as a primarily literary error of judgement. The attack on women chattering is soundly condemned by Collier on ideological and factual grounds (pp. 16-17 and passim), along with the imputation of idleness that accompanies it. Again, there may be an element of jealousy at the pleasure the women find in the work, Duck and his colleagues having exhausted themselves in their competitive efforts. In Duck's account their talk is a substitute for activity, but Collier sees it as 'The only Privilege our Sex enjoy' (p. 17). It is thus for her what the slight advantages of change, good weather and so forth are for Duck: a small mitigation to an otherwise unendurable existence. Earlier, in the barn, Duck has complained that the noise of threshing prevents the threshers enjoying the traditional pastoral pleasures of telling a 'merry tale' (p. 3) and singing (p.4). Sociability as a means of enduring rural work occurs regularly in literary and anecdotal accounts, [38] and Duck's resentment may be fed here by a feeling of exclusion from the sociability the women practise: perhaps the mowers are simply too tired to talk (they 'but faintly eat' during their break, p. 7). Their competitive approach to the skilled task of reaping, and their hostility to the women, excludes the kind of sociability that sustains the women workers. [39]

Thus Duck's account of haymaking shows a range of feelings about this 'peak-time' activity, from the misery of becoming excessively exhausted to the pleasure of feeling a 'new' and challenging experience at the start of the work. Less powerfully felt, but important nevertheless, are such responses as satisfaction with a more moderately paced work, as 'each again betakes him to his place' [40] (p. 7, reminding us of Thomson's positioning of his haymakers and reapers, discussed below), the pleasure in the final turning of the hay and the relief at returning to the barn (p. 9). It is certainly a more detailed response than Thomson's, and reminds us of the significance that resides in small details for both the poet and the worker in Duck.

Mary Collier is concerned rather with refuting Duck than with providing a full description of her haymaking. Yet there are important details. The women are, firstly, good workers, whom the farmer trusts:

You of Hay-making speak a word or two,  
As if our Sex but little Work could do:  
This makes the honest Farmer smiling say  
He'll seek for Women still to make his Hay;  
For if his back be turn'd, their Work they mind  
As well as Men, as far as he can find. (p. 16) [41]

This is the preparation for her main defence, which takes the form of the flight of remembered experience I quoted earlier:

For my own part, I many a Summer's day  
Have spent in throwing, turning, making Hay,  
But ne'er could see, what you have lately found,  
Our Wages paid for sitting on the Ground.  
'Tis true, that when our Morning's Work is done,  
And all our Grass expos'd unto the Sun,  
While that his scorching Beams do on it shine,  
As well as you, we have a time to dine:  
I hope that since we freely toil and sweat  
To earn our Bread, you'll give us time to eat. (p. 16)

Collier moves smoothly into the historical present tense here. Although she does not fetishize the labour in any Duckian way, her phrase 'throwing, turning, making hay' shows that the 'women's work' of tedding is a major part of the haymaking, and thus as important as the mowing. [42] Duck's purpose appears to marginalise the women's working lives, and Collier's facetious 'hope' in these last lines neatly unites the women's 'toil and sweat' with their need to 'earn our bread' and to 'eat', echoing the harsh command of *Genesis*, and insisting that Duck recognise that women share the same burdens and imperatives as men. [43]

### iii. Harvests

I want to bring into the comparison now the descriptions of the second great harvest of the year, the corn harvest. As with the initiations of labour in *Spring* and *Summer* discussed above, both Thomson's haymaking and his harvest are initiated in essentially theatrical ways. For the summer haymaking, the participants are carefully placed, as if in a painting. On the one hand there is 'The rustic Youth, brown with meridian Toil, / Healthful, and strong' (*Summer*, 353-4), and on the other:

the ruddy Maid,  
Half-naked, swelling on the Sight, and all  
Her kindled Graces burning o'er her Cheek (355-7)

I have noted the poet's concern with showing a communality of effort, involving men and women, young and old, the 'village' as a united community. In this sense his 'Youth' and his 'Maid' are not primarily individuals but representatives--symbols and synonyms for 'the men' and 'the women'. Yet the way in which they are presented here allows them to appear at the same time as two individuals, a 'couple'; and as individuals the way we see them here suggests the preparation, not for labour, but for a dance. For the autumn harvest Thomson specifies this more overtly, showing a double line of men and women participants, carefully paired:

Before the ripen'd Field the Reapers stand  
In fair Array; each by the Lass he loves                    (*Autumn*, 153-4)

Interesting light is shed on this dance-like pairing of Thomson's in an autobiographical note of a later Scottish rural poet, Robert Burns, who recollects in a letter to Dr John Moore:

You know our country custom of coupling a man and woman together as Partners in the labors of Harvest.--In my fifteenth autumn, my Partner was a bewitching creature who just counted an autumn less [...] a bonie, sweet, sonsie lass

Burns fell in love, and wrote his first poem to his 'Partner'; and thus, as he says, 'began Love and Poesy'. [44] We see here, and in Thomson's descriptions, a Scottish tradition of dance-like pairing in the cornfield. Burns's love of dancing is of course well-documented, as is the Scottish dancing enthusiasm of the period: 'eighteenth-century Scotland', says one Burns scholar (Daiches, 1950, 1966: 288), 'danced as it has never danced since'; and two folk traditions may thus be seen as converging in this pairing of harvesters. [45]

This raises a number of interesting questions: did the pairing have a practical purpose, and if so what was it? Does the fact that we do not find it in the Wiltshire corn fields of Stephen Duck, and the Sussex/Hampshire corn fields of Mary Collier mean it was an exclusively Scottish phenomenon? And was it just a function of the harvest, as Burns's comment suggests; or does it also have a place in haymaking, as Thomson's description in *Summer* perhaps implies?

As a function of the work and from a practical point of view, the pairing of a man and a woman in the harvest field makes sense, and the practice is shown in some visual representations of eighteenth and nineteenth-century harvesting. [46] It requires some consideration of the various processes of pre-industrial haymaking and harvesting to see its purpose. In both hay and corn harvest the work tended to involve 'waves' of workers, following one after another. The sequence of events in the harvest was, in general terms, as follows: reaping, gathering, sheaf-making, stook-building, raking, carting, gleaning. For

haymaking this would be, again in general terms: mowing, spreading, turning, building windrows, building cocks, raking and carting. Both processes involve distinct first tasks (cutting the crop) from which all the other processes follow, and which determine their timing.

However, these subsequent processes differed somewhat. Haymaking involved a great deal of raking up and raking out, building, unbuilding and rebuilding haycocks. The grass was actually being processed into hay in the field, which might involve a number of iterations of the same tasks. Hence pools, or gangs of labourers were needed to carry out these processes as circumstances demanded. These gangs tended to be entirely or predominantly of one gender, and were often women. [47] The corn harvest followed a more rigid sequence. In the eighteenth century most corn was spring-sown, slow-maturing and late-harvesting (hence the impatience to get started in Thomson's *Spring*). It was cut underripe to minimise the loss by scattering of ears of corn, tied into sheaves, and built into stooks, which were often then thatched and left for some time in this fairly weatherproof state to ripen further, before being taken to the rickyard or the barn, built into ricks, and finally threshed. Once it was cut, processing was a matter of some urgency: one was not playing nip-and-tuck with the weather here, as with haymaking, but trying to outrun it (not always successfully, as Thomson's autumn storm, discussed below, suggests). Because corn was late-harvesting, this was often a high-risk manoeuvre, and it required a means of organising the work as streamlined as a modern production line.

Thus, most importantly, each reaper would 'feed' a gatherer, whose job was to gather the spikes into bundles, and possibly to tie these bundles into sheaves. From that point to the rick-building the organisation of tasks was more variable, but the reaper-gatherer part of the process is the important one from the point of view of the subject of pairing, for it was a two-person team job, involving a traditionally male and a traditionally female task, carried out consecutively. A male-female pairing was thus the obvious choice, and an ongoing male-female pair would be able to develop a joint 'pace' for the task as the work went on. Thus while the poet in Burns could read 'pairing' as a charming folk custom, as a working farmer he would know this to be also a piece of agricultural practicality. In Scotland, at least, its association with dancing, and its formalisation into a ritual allowed it to maintain its charm, but its basis in good farming practice is also clear. [48]

The next issue, then, is why we do not find this pairing in Duck or Collier. The answer is slightly disappointing. Duck (pp. 10-11) has other concerns in his harvest scene than describing the actual work-processes in any detail. Firstly, he is intent on a piece of literary work, an apostrophised pathetic fallacy, followed by a rather inconsequential epic simile, both concerning the 'ruin' of the cornfield. [49] And secondly, he makes a more personally felt complaint about the extreme severity of harvest work. Amongst and between these two concerns we can glean a little. As usual the Master commands and is 'our Guide', his role 'to

appoint' and 'we the Work to do'. Women appear, but only as gleaners, as the work begins to get harder, and fence the reapers between the thistles and themselves in a way that, as we saw, much amused Mary Collier. [50] Finally the harvest is completed in a celebratory cacophony of 'Bells and clashing Whips' and 'rattling Wagons' (p. 11). There is nothing here at all, unfortunately, about any task between reaping and carting.

Mary Collier, as we saw, gives reaping 'as well as you', and gleaning, as two of the harvest jobs the women could do (p. 17); but she then chooses the gleaning work for closer description; indeed it is not clear whether by 'reaping' she means the general work of the harvest field, or a more daring challenge to Duck's scything prowess. [51] She does give one vital clue about male-female teams:

What you would have of us we do not know:

We oft take up the Corn that you do mow (p. 20)

This clearly shows that one of the women's jobs is gathering, but does not necessarily suggest male-female teams. We should note of Duck and Collier in this, however, that it would suit the literary purposes of neither writer to emphasise such team-work, so we can infer little from its absence. Other sources, however, clearly indicate that there was indeed an English tradition of male-female partnership in the cornfield. For example George Ewart Evans (1956: 86-7), drawing on Victorian manuscript materials from Sussex, found a harvesting agreement which included the specification 'each man to find a gaveller'. As Evans explains, 'the *gavellers* were usually women, wives of the harvest workers. Their job was to rake the mown corn into *gavels* or rows ready for carting.' This is hardly dressed as romantic folk custom, but the tradition's existence is clear enough. [52]

The final question the Thomson-Burns 'pairing' raises concerns the hayfield, and whether or not a 'pairing' also occurs there, as Thomson seems to suggest. As far as I can establish, the agricultural answer is no. I have touched on the fact that because of the elastic nature of the 'middle' tasks of haymaking between reaping and carting, there is no pairing equivalent to the reaper-gatherer/gaveller team of the harvest. There were by the nature of things, large numbers of men and women in a hayfield, but the teams would be more gender-divided; the men reaping in a line; and the women (principally) raking, turning, tedding and building haycocks. [53]

Yet at the same time Thomson's pairing of 'Youth' and 'Maid' for haymaking is significant and appropriate, for the tangential reason that the hayfield, as well as the harvest, was traditionally a major place and time of sexual opportunity. The close proximity of toiling and (as Thomson says) 'half-naked' young people of both sexes, the sense of fertility and well-being associated with harvesting generally, the sense of heat associated with haytime, the interesting possibilities of haystacks, and (not least) the advantages of July

in terms of a consequent spring birth, provided a unique combination of motives and opportunities. [54] Thomson responds to this human element in the fecundity of hay and corn harvest directly; but, more obliquely, there are ways in which both Duck's haymaking and Collier's harvest descriptions also reveal responses; and I shall conclude this comparison of the three poets' harvests by looking in turn at these three responses.

Thomson's 'ruddy Maid, / Half-naked, swelling on the Sight' and 'Reapers [...] each by the Lass he loves' is less purposefully frank than Burns's affectionate erotic memory: there is a noticeably coy streak in Thomson's attitudes to sexuality and to women. He sets up clear implications of sexuality, particularly in the haymaking passage, in his 'pairing' and by the sensuousness of his descriptive work; but Thomson often seems to be frustrated by a decorum that puts his head and his heart at loggerheads. This is noticeable in *Spring*, where he considers the 'Soul of Love' (582) and its effects. Rising through the ranks of the animal kingdom, his imaginative powers lead him all too quickly to the 'rougher World / Of Brutes' (790-791); and as bulls and steeds do battle his subject of 'love' becomes overtly carnal, something the poet feels the need to declare a wish to avoid. In an attempt to, as it were, cool the subject off, he plunges us into the subject of the 'Monsters of the foaming Deep' (822); but this will not serve to put out the 'Flame' (827) the poet has lit, and he admits he must change the subject, in a passage sufficiently laden with embarrassment for his modern editor to suggest self-parody:

But this the Theme  
I sing, enraptur'd, to the British Fair,  
Forbids, and leads me to the Mountain-brow,  
Where sits the Shepherd on the grassy Turf                      (*Spring*, 830-3) [55]

His 'resolution fails' (to quote his earlier description of fledgling birds, 741-2) 'at the giddy Verge', and the sense of anxious avoidance is palpable. The effect of this awkward break in so delicate a structure as *The Seasons* is to weaken severely the last section of *Spring*. The verse paragraph where the break occurs leads on rather aimlessly, firstly into a conventional pastoral sketch (832-840), and then into a fairly uninspired 'noticing' of prehistoric vestiges with attendant patriotic exclamation (840-848). A third attempt to start anew is less obviously unsuccessful, and the raging carnality of the rutting season appears to be subdued at last by thoughts of God, Lord Lyttleton, and a beautiful prospect (849-962). Thus fortified, the poet can finally tackle the subject of human love, which he divides carefully into unwholesome love (of which 'let th'aspiring Youth beware', 983-1112), and wholesome love, with which the season of *Spring* can be concluded on an acceptably joyous note.

Because the 'rustic youth, brown' and the 'Maid, / Half-naked' in *Summer* are amongst a larger group, sandwiched between 'the Village' and 'stooping Age', Thomson is

less perturbed by the eroticism of their demeanour. The harmony of dancing, this context allows him to imply, is the model for the harmony of rural work, in which all participate; and the physical beauty and energy of the representative 'Youth' and 'Maid'--their erotic and fertile potential--may be appropriated and controlled by this ethos. The equivalent pairing in the autumn harvest uses a more familiar mechanism for rendering gender relations acceptable:

Before the ripen'd Field the Reapers stand,  
In fair Array; each by the Lass he loves,  
To bear the rougher Part, and mitigate  
By nameless gentle Offices her Toil.                    (*Autumn* 153-6)

This is cast in the chivalric mode, and Thomson draws on the male-female reaper-gatherer relationship we have considered, to reinforce a familiar poetic rendering of gender relations. [56]

The reaper-lass relationship is more overtly sexual in Thomson's description of the harvest feast, towards the end of *Autumn*. Here:

The Toil-strung Youth

By the quick Sense of Music taught alone,  
Leaps wildly graceful in the lively Dance.  
Her every Charm abroad, the Village-Toast,  
Young, buxom, warm, in native Beauty rich,  
Darts not unmeaning Looks; and, where her Eye  
Points an approving Smile, with double Force,  
The Cudgel rattles, and the Wrestler twines.    (1223-30)

Carnality is safely rendered here by the mixing of *faux-naïf* flirtation, comic sexual display, and bathos: Thomson has decided to be humorous about sexuality, and the result is reasonably successful.

A fearless misogynist like Duck, of course, has no place in his world for this kind of soppieness, whether it be cast as chivalry or low camp: for him the hayfield and the harvest are places where the fittest survive, and women are a damned nuisance. Yet the competitive vying for position among the mowers I have discussed seems to me to have unmistakable resonances of sexuality. The mowers 'glow' with 'a new Life', and Duck suggestively describes his scythe as 'The Weapon destin'd to unclothe the Field' (p. 5); [57] the mowing is (at first) a 'sportive Race'; [58] and eventually the mowers' strength is 'spent', as they collapse in 'streams of sweat' and with 'parch'd throats'. [59] The overt hostility to the

'chattering' women, seen in this light, may suggest a mystification of the fact that they are actually the chosen audience for this display of male physical prowess. If they are busy chattering they are not paying attention; and nothing, of course, peeves the male ego more than being ignored. The trivialisation of the women and their work is also familiar: this is very much the corollary of a phenomenon Virginia Woolf describes well (1929, 1977: 35) when she writes of women serving as 'looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size': if their own 'stature' in the hayfield were to be acknowledged, they could hardly have this effect.

So we do in fact see a response to the fecundity of harvesting in Duck's poem, though it is one that plays out its sexual theme in terms of a distanced and distancing ritual of gender-war. Mary Collier's harvest is a different matter. She sensibly ignores everything Duck has to say about his 'weapon', his heroism, and the hard work of mowing, echoing only those points she wishes to refute or parody: mowers' machismo is not amongst them. Instead she builds her own picture of the harvest field, concentrating on an entirely different scale of values, and a more nurturing form of human interaction than Duck presents:

To get a living we so willing are,  
Our tender Babes into the Field we bear,  
And wrap them in our cloaths to keep them warm,  
While round about we gather up the Corn,  
And often unto them our course we bend,  
To keep them safe, that nothing them offend.  
Our Children that are able, bear a share  
In gleaning Corn, such is our frugal care.  
When Night comes on, unto our home we go,  
Our Corn we carry, and our Infant too;  
Weary, alas! but 'tis not worth our while  
Once to complain, or *rest at ev'ry Stile*. (p. 19) [60]

Only at the very end does she revert to her 'flyting', her mock-echoes of Duck. The rest is her own exemplum, to be set against the lack of solidarity and of love in Duck's haytime and harvest. Her tribute to the goddess of harvesting is delivered here in terms, not of sexuality, but (equally appropriate) of maternalism and nurture. It seems probable that Mary Collier had no children of her own, [61] but in the miniature utopia of the women's gleaning-field the sense is of a mutuality of concern from which no woman is excluded: all is framed in the undifferentiating first-person plural, 'we'. I shall have more to say about gleaning later: it was painful, backbreaking and hand-cutting work. The narrow parameters that hardship imposes on the ability to care are finely drawn by Collier when she writes here:

Our Children that are able, bear a share  
In gleaning Corn, such is our frugal care. (p. 19)

The whole passage is focussed on the care of the children; yet she uses the phrase 'frugal care', suggesting both that the women cannot protect the stronger and older children from the painful work of gleaning, which must be done if the families are to have flour for the year (a matter on which survival might depend); and the 'frugal' care with which the gleanings are collected in order to make nurture possible. Here we have a most gentle and compassionate evocation of a harsh, indeed cruel imperative, and it is one that ought always to be set against the more obvious pastoral and nostalgic views of the harvest field.

### 3. Labour (2)

#### i. Stephen Duck on threshing

It seems clear enough that haymaking and harvesting are the kinds of labour that may include some areas of pleasure as well as pain, as all three accounts, to different degrees and in different ways, suggest. We may distinguish between the severity of other kinds of work the three poets portray. Thomson, for example, portrays the obviously pleasurable and light work of nutting in autumn, placing it easily into a pastoral context. I want to look here, by contrast, at an activity that is clearly very hard work indeed. This is threshing, and it is the major work of Stephen Duck's annual cycle.

Threshing differs from 'peak-time' activities like the two harvests, or like lambing and shearing, in that it is an indoor job, and therefore is only controlled by weather to the extent that it is carried out when weather-dominated tasks are not to hand. [62] It also has a far greater seasonal span, and can be done effectively at any time from the harvest to the following summer. Even if Duck were not known to posterity as the 'thresher poet' we could establish from its recurrence in the poem that he saw threshing as his major employment. It is a task for which only one saving grace can be found, in the negative fact that it gets the labourers out of the sun, which in post-haymaking and post-harvest periods is portrayed as a relief.

The description of threshing is concentrated in a longish passage of 53 lines (pp. 3-4), reappearing again briefly after the haymaking (p. 9) and at the end of the poem, the morning after the harvest supper (p. 11). Thus it frames the two peak-time activities, and both begins and ends Duck's cycle of toil. The main work description (p. 3) is followed by a litany of the hardships of it. It is firstly (and, by implication, lastly and interminably) uninterrupted labour:

No intermission in our Works we know;  
The noisy Threshall must for ever go.  
Their Master absent, others safely play;  
The sleeping Threshall does itself betray. (p. 3)

The task is unintermittible for two reasons. Firstly, it is never finished. We need to synthesise the three occurrences of it to confirm this. The first threshing begins 'Soon as the Harvest hath laid bare the Plains' (p. 1). [63] The poem then skips winter to spring (giving no information to suggest other tasks interrupting the threshing) until the Master calls the labourers out to cut the hay (the longing here to 'breathe in opener Air', p. 5, also suggests they have been in the barn all winter). Following haymaking they are returned to the barn

for 'But few days' (p. 9) [64] between hay harvest and corn harvest. Finally, the morning after the harvest home, they return to the barn 'To labour there for room for next year's Corn' (p. 11). The threshing is a continuous process, interrupted only twice a year for the peak-time activities. [65]

Secondly, because it is noisy, the farmer has an automatic and insidious way of spying on the workers to see that they are busy: 'The sleeping Threshall does itself betray'. The slightly bitter note in 'others safely play' is filled out with the list of what the threshers cannot do that follows:

Nor yet, the tedious Labour to beguile,  
And make the passing Minutes sweetly smile,  
Can we, like Shepherds, tell a merry tale?  
The voice is lost, drown'd by the noisy Flail.  
But we may think--alas! what pleasing thing  
Here to the Mind can the dull Fancy bring?  
The eye beholds no pleasant object here;  
No cheerful sound diverts the list'ning ear.  
The Shepherd well may tune his voice to sing,  
Inspir'd by all the beauties of the Spring.  
No Fountains murmur here, no Lambkins play,  
No Linets warble, and no Fields look gay.  
'Tis all a dull and melancholy Scene,  
Fit only to provoke the Muses' Spleen. (pp. 3-4) [66]

This is in many ways the most significant passage in the poem. It explains the motivation for the poem's theme of anti-pastoral, and it does so in primarily literary terms. Whether Duck got the idea of the singing, story-telling shepherds from literature or from village culture; whether it was a 'truism' or a seepage from the world of his reading into the world of his work-experience, is not now recoverable. [67] Bearing in mind the slight bitterness we find in Duck towards the supposed pleasures of other workers, we can perhaps sympathise with the feeling of a man in a barn, bullied and spied on by his Master, that 'it is all right for the shepherds'. Moving in one direction from this, we see a surprisingly industrial scenario of extreme noise, dust, and satanic gloom; moving in another we see a literary interpretation of this gloom, as the enemy of the imagination, the deadener of the fancy. Threshing is for Duck (and very pertinently to his current endeavour) the enemy of poetry. A later eighteenth-century poet, the weaver Samuel Law, was able to make the monotony of work entrance him into poetic imagination, meditating, as he says, 'in the sounding loom'. [68]

Unable to transform his confinement in this way, Duck makes poetry from it more straightforwardly by writing an account of it, in the form of his anti-pastoral poem.

I have noted that Duck allows one negative merit in threshing, in that it gets the workers out of the sun in summer. I think that a certain pride exists in the description of the work too, if only as a subtext to the main theme of how hard it is. Duck writes:

Divested of our cloaths, with Flail in hand,  
At a just distance, front to front we stand,  
And first the Threshall's gently swung, to prove  
Whether with just exactness it will move.  
That once secure, more quick we whirl them round,  
From the strong planks our Crab-tree Staves rebound,  
And echoing Barns return the rattling sound.  
Now in the air our knotty Weapons fly,  
And now with equal force descend from high.  
Down one, one up, so well they keep the Time,  
The *Cyclops'* Hammers could not truer chime,  
Nor with more heavy strokes could *Aetna* groan,  
When *Vulcan* forg'd the arms for *Thetis'* Son. (p. 3) [69]

Again, the careful positioning of the workers, as in Thomson's two set-pieces and in Duck's mowing scene (p. 5), is dance-like. But here the movement, with its careful synchronisation of 'just exactness' and its dramatic build-up to the Cyclops image, is itself dance-like. Duck's picture suggests elements of skill, pride, and excitement in the work, and the way in which the rhythmic pace of his poetry leads the build-up of these qualities is impressive. [70] Later, removed to the dubious reality of Queen Caroline's various sinecures, the poet will revisit a hayfield, and record a renewed yearning for the physical involvement of farm labour:

Breakfast soon o'er, we trace the verdant Field,  
Where sharpen'd Scythes the lab'ring Mowers wield:  
Straight Emulation glows in ev'ry Vein;  
I long to try the curvous Blade again  
(*A Description of a Journey*, 37-40, in Duck, 1736) [71]

Duck humorously changes this into a self-deprecating simile about 'old Gamesters' and 'Young Combatants', but the feeling is clearly enough expressed, and as if to confirm that Duck has lost as well as gained by his removal from farm work, he records that his old patron, Stanley, whom he now visits, is no longer there (lines 107-10). It would be absurd to

over-emphasise the pride and pleasure in the work: it is an undercurrent, not the main text, which shows a debilitating and back-breaking routine, [72] but a consciousness of its presence, here and in the mowing scene, allows us a fuller picture of Duck's ideas about his work, and perhaps also makes Thomson's descriptive work seem rather less 'absurdly literary': dance-like movement informs the images of work for both poets.

## ii. Mary Collier on charring

Like Duck's threshing, Mary Collier's charring work is both the occupation of winter, and as she says, 'The hardest of our Toil' (p. 20). I have noted that it differs from Duck's work in one way: that is, it is piece-work rather than guaranteed employment. Given the economic pressure to conform, to appear a 'good employee', that this would suggest, it is perhaps surprising that Collier is, as E. P. Thompson notes (1989: xi-xii) significantly less deferential to her employer than Duck is to his. She is also, as Thompson says, 'sharper'; and there are indications in her description of charring of a clear social and a political consciousness.

She focuses in particular on the 'Mistress', her employer. Whereas Duck's Master seems to have only one concern (greed) and only one mood (wrath), Collier's Mistress manifests a range of bad qualities. She is firstly idle. The women have been working several hours when:

At length bright *Sol* illuminates the skies,  
And summons drowsy Mortals to arise.  
Then comes our Mistress to us without fail,  
And in her hand, *perhaps*, a mug of Ale  
To cheer our Hearts, and also to inform  
Herself, what Work is done that very Morn (p. 21)

Collier has the exact measure of the Mistress here, noting the meagre bribe of a mug of beer in her hand (the italicised 'perhaps' shows the transparency of the ploy), and how poorly it disguises her real purpose, which is to spy: there is a suggestion in this that Collier, like Duck, does not like being overseen. [73]

Along with idleness goes luxury. Describing the range of fabrics the women have to wash, Collier notes their elaborateness:

Cambricks and Muslins, which our Ladies wear,  
Laces and Edgings, costly, fine, and rare,  
Which must be wash'd with utmost Skill and Care.

With Holland Shirts, Ruffles and Fringes too,  
Fashions which our Forefathers never knew. (p. 20) [74]

Clothes are for Mary Collier functional, their purpose to keep you warm. An awareness of cold permeates this poem, even in the summer fields, where:

Our tender Babes into the Field we bear,  
And wrap them in our cloaths to keep them warm (p. 19)

So it is not surprising Collier has little time for the delicate, ornate 'fancy' fabrics whose increasing presence in eighteenth-century middle-class households signalled the arrival of modern consumer-capitalism. [75] Apart from any other consideration their fiddly impracticality made the work of cleaning them very much harder: the Mistress instructs the washerwomen to 'take care / we don't her Cambricks or her Ruffles tear' (p. 21).

With idleness and luxury goes meanness. The Mistress 'most strictly' insists the washerwomen are to 'save her Soap, and sparing be of Fire', for she:

Tells us her Charge is great, nay, furthermore,  
Her Cloaths are fewer than the time before (p. 21)

This final shot from the Mistress is clearly not believed, and serves only to add dishonesty to her character, and complete the quartet of sins.

Collier's attack on her employer, as with so many other things in the poem, has more than one function. It firstly echoes Duck, providing a suitable character to match his 'Master'. Secondly, it is part of the 'complaint' about the difficulty of the work. And thirdly, the Mistress is the representative of what Collier sees as a social parasitism. This is overtly stated in the last lines of the poem:

So the industrious Bees do hourly strive  
To bring their Loads of Honey to the Hive;  
Their sordid Owners always reap the Gains,  
And poorly recompense their Toil and Pains. (p. 24)

This is syntactically separate from the rest of the poem, beginning a new sentence and a new (and final) verse-paragraph. It is a simile without a grammatical subject; the implication being that the subject is all that has come before, the 'So' meaning 'In the Way I have just been describing'. Collier is saying, effectively, that in all the parts of her life she has described--the summer farm work, the winter charring, the additional work of looking after

children and keeping house--she is being exploited. This is more than a complaint, an 'out-doing' of Duck, it is a complete analysis of her working life (which is to say her whole life, by her own account), and the lives of women like her.

The image of bees is an interesting one. E. P. Thompson (1989: xiii) suggests Collier may be alluding to Mandeville's influential work, *The Fable of the Bees* (1714, 1989), or at least may be showing here an awareness of the 'Luxury Debate' the book fuelled. [76] This seems likely; and as Collier had some knowledge of classical mythology (as her clever uses of the Danae and the Danaus stories, pp. 16 and 23, show [77] ), it is possible she also knew of Virgil's allegorical and didactic material on bees, in the *Georgics*, book IV. [78]

As for the work she describes, it is clearly very hard indeed. Its 'hardness' is emphasised when the Mistress gives her Pewter to clean. The description that follows gives a list of 'hard' kitchenware ('Pots, kettles, sauce-pans, skillets', p. 22) and 'hard' metals ('brass and iron', p. 23): untender objects against which 'Our tender hands and fingers scratch and tear' (p. 22-3). Collier easily finds examples from her working conditions with which to parody and out-do the conditions of Duck's threshing. When he threshes peas the 'sweat, and dust, and suffocating smoke' begrimes his complexion (p. 4); whereas after her cleaning work:

Colour'd with Dirt and Filth we now appear;  
Your threshing sooty Peas will not come near.  
All the Perfections Woman once could boast  
Are quite obscur'd, and altogether lost. (p. 23)

Her allusion to the idea of female beauty gives two extra twists of irony to the subject: it raises another aspect of the extra burdens of a woman's life (that she is expected to be beautiful), and strikes another elegiac chord in memory of a lost matriarchal golden age, a time when women could be 'beautiful'.

Collier also finds in her brewing work a parallel with the way Duck has to keep threshing lest the Master notice a silence:

Like you when threshing, we a Watch must keep;  
Our Wort boils over if we dare to sleep. (p. 23)

Having been 'perhaps' offered a 'mug of Ale', the women now have to replenish the supply: and even the very physical materials of consumption (pots and pans, boiling 'Wort') torment those who must supply the consumer culture.

Her work is extraordinarily harsh, too, in terms of time. Moira Ferguson (1985: viii) cites in this context Dorothy George's comment that 'Among the longest hours of

outworkers were those of the wretched women who went out to wash by the day' (George, 1925, 1966: 207). George had gone on to write:

We find them arriving at their employer's house overnight in order to work all night and all next day. 'Women who go out a-washing for their livelihood', according to *Low Life*, had to be at work by one in the morning, but as a matter of fact they often went earlier. Ann Nichols, who washed and scoured for a master-builder at Hackney in 1753, arrived about 12 at night--'that is what we call a day and a half's work', her master said. In 1765 a woman who went monthly to the house of an attorney, said (in connexion with a robbery): 'I went that night a little before dark, time enough to have filled my tubs and copper.'

This certainly explains why Mary Collier's description of her charring is constantly dominated by time. If Stephen Duck sees the year as a wheel which drives him endlessly on from one tedious task to another, for Mary Collier and her washerwomen every day brings a fearful race with the clock:

With heavy hearts we often view the Sun,  
Fearing he'll set before our Work is done;  
For either in the Morning, or at Night,  
We piece the Summer's day with Candle-light. (p. 22)

It is a critical commonplace that one of the most terrifying aspects of *Macbeth* is the 'hideous murder of sleep' in the play. [79] For Mary Collier and her charwomen, the murder of sleep appears to be an almost daily occurrence. [80]

What is most surprising in all this, perhaps, is the deftness with which Collier deploys her evidence of what is clearly an extraordinarily difficult working life. Ferguson's comment (1985: iii) that Collier's poem responds 'angrily' to Duck, and Landry's statement (1987: 109) that Collier 'hurls Duck's jibes [...] back in his face' do not tally with the tone of the poem; E. P. Thompson's characterisation of it (1989: x) as 'witty rather than hostile' is much closer to the truth. George's evidence, as well as Collier's own, suggest that unimaginable hardship and exhaustion lie behind the statement that 'we have hardly ever *Time to Dream*' (p. 20), yet it is framed as a witty riposte to Duck's restless dreams. In describing her work Collier has moved beyond the 'complaint' of Duck: for as she says 'to rehearse all Labour is in vain / Of which we very justly might complain' (p. 23). She deploys her literary skills to testify to the hardship of her working life, and to present a clear social analysis of its cause; but the manner in which she does so indicates a heroic refusal to accept either the cultural poverty or the resigned demeanour that is her 'lot' in life. Her poem insistently brings allusiveness

and wit to the description of her life not, for sure, because her life suggests either culture or humour, but in determined pursuit of poetry itself, in all its double-edged ability to speak both of what is, and what could be. [81]

### iii. James Thomson on shearing

If the threshing and the charring scenes form the essential element in the work-description of *Duck and Collier*, Thomson offers his scene of sheep-shearing as a model of labour, and as evidence and example of his patriotic national vision:

A simple Scene! yet hence Britannia sees  
Her solid Grandeur rise (*Summer*, 423-4) [82]

What kind of a model is it? We have noted a range of approaches to different kinds of labour in *The Seasons*. Where hard work is involved, Thomson invokes a concentrated social effort, whereas his nutting scene is characterised by an easy, pastoral approach, and his shepherd also appears to commence his day's work simply, as part of the natural coming-to-life of dawn.

In no respect does sheep-shearing represent the kind of unremitting toil of threshing or charring, or even the pain of bringing in the hay and the corn harvests. John Dyer, who admittedly has a fairly robust attitude to labour, makes it the central scene of pastoral idyll, in *The Fleece* (1757: I, 601-720), in which his swains celebrate their 'shepherd's harvest'. Thomson finds time for an idyllic scene of pastoral triumph in his description (*Summer*, 400-405), though it is economically slotted into the respite between sheep-washing and sheep-shearing, reflecting the poet's extreme repugnance to any sort of idleness. Its placing, as we shall see, creates some problems.

Energy and movement are the key elements of his opening scene of sheep-washing (371-96). Thomson carefully builds a scene of controlled confusion, in which swains become 'impatient' and hurl the sheep into the water, much clamour is in evidence, the fish are 'banish'd', and the 'harmless race' of sheep express their confusion loudly. Thomson, as we have noted more than once, achieves his effects theatrically, and in theatrical terms this is the lively overture to the idyll and the shearing which follow it. The idyll itself is brief:

The Housewife waits to roll her fleecy Stores,  
With all her gay-drest Maids attending round.  
One, chief, in gracious Dignity inthron'd,  
Shines o'er the Rest, the pastoral Queen, and rays

Her Smiles, sweet-beaming, on her Shepherd-King;  
While the glad Circle round them yield their Souls  
To festive Mirth, and Wit that knows no Gall. (*Summer*, 398-404).

Elsewhere we have seen how Thomson, using his privileged viewpoint, intervenes to 'jolly along' the various activities his unified vision requires. He is not so successful at doing so here. In the scenes of ploughing, haymaking and harvest the workers are bound into their roles by a sense of united purpose on whose significance the poet can expatiate, and busy activity whose energy he can appropriate. Here he has neither resource. This is, in agricultural terms, a scene of waiting, slotted between two parts of a task: it lacks any intrinsic sense of energy or purpose; but on the other hand is it not a suitable moment for the kind of pastoral festivity associated with the completion of peak-time activities, as the task is not yet complete.

As if in compensation for the mis-timing and mis-placing of this idyll, Thomson over-orchestrates it, and as at other weak spots in the poem, a sub-text of unease appears. Thus the creation of a pastoral 'King' and 'Queen' does not tonally fit with the traditional practice among sheep-shearers (and most other groups of 'peak-time' workers) of independently electing a 'captain'; while the related harvest ritual of pastoral 'Kings' and 'Queens', is inappropriate to this moment of work. [83] There is a clash between a vision of men and women as labourers, and another vision of them as a miniature 'court' (one thinks of Duck being made 'Warden of Duck Island' by Queen Caroline). The whole effect seems sanitised and patronising.

One can see this, for example, in the creation of the 'Queen':

One, chief, in gracious Dignity inthron'd,  
Shines o'er the Rest, the pastoral Queen, and rays  
Her Smiles, sweet-beaming, on her Shepherd-King (*Summer*, 400-402)

The sickly artificiality here again raises the spectre of Thomson's frequently stultified and stultifying attitude to women. Apart from the examples I have already discussed we find a cloying mawkishness here, as we do later in the interaction of Shepherd and Milkmaid (*Summer*, 1664-70), in the 'snatched' kissing of the 'sidelong Maid' (*Winter*, 625), and in Thomson's two appeals to the 'British Fair' ('May their tender Limbs / Float in the loose Simplicity of Dress!') at *Autumn* 570-609 and *Summer* 1580-94. The unreality of this 'queen' also reflects a clash between georgic and pastoral modes, because the *real* 'queen' in this work situation, the farmer's wife or 'Housewife', has already been introduced, with 'all her gay-drest Maids', is presiding over the scene, and must necessarily eclipse this powerless mock-queen. [84]



the 'Knife / Of horrid Slaughter' (always a tactless subject to raise with a sheep); and finally gives the beast a--frankly--dishonest account of the 'borrowing' that is going on.

Unseemly realities bulge uglily out. The true dynamics of power and interest are revealed by the 'Master's Cipher', the authoritative 'stamp' of the man who is really king in this situation; by the poverty of the ersatz 'King' and his 'courtiers', suggested in the reference to 'needy Man'; and by the nursery-rhyme explanation given to the sheep. The result is the opposite of what is intended, so that the gory death Man ultimately has in mind for the sheep suddenly becomes vividly and appallingly clear.

In the midst of all this, Pandora's box again springs open. The sheep, as we saw, must be wrestled to the ground, and so Thomson finds himself describing an earthy struggle between the two most potent male figures on the farm, [85] in a scene heavily laden with the signifiers of rampant male sexuality:

And, glorying in his Might, the sturdy Boy  
Holds by the twisted Horns th'indignant Ram. (410-11)

The problem here is not of course that male sexuality is inappropriate. Harvests, be they of hay, corn, or wool, are occasions in which sexuality, symbolic and literal, is appropriate, as we have seen; and in any case, as a theatre critic has written, 'All the best writing has an erotic subtext trying to burst through or being suppressed.' [86] The problem is that there are conflicting forces at work. On the one hand Thomson's intense imaginative engagement with the 'peak periods' of harvests clearly sees and delineates their sexual element; on the other a set of preconceptions as to the socially-allowable limits of sexual behaviour and self-expression fosters a coy artificiality, which we see in Thomson's tone and language here. The presence of coyness in the scene is what makes the appearance of male sexuality seem contrastingly bizarre.

This central scene of rural labour attempts and fails to reconcile forces which in the 'real world' are in conflict, using poetry to try and harmonise them. In the 'real world' conflict exists between social classes, between humans and animals, between social proprieties and sexual expression, and between bourgeois and proletarian views of the limits of rustic festivity. [87] The conflict between humans and animals seems particularly to upset Thomson's harmony here. His other scenes of rural labour for the most part stick to the processes of arable farming. Where he deals with animal husbandry, his concern is with simple pastoral tasks which do not involve the kind of exploitation that the shearing scene hints at. In his treatment of blood sports in *Autumn* no contradiction is present, because he feels able to express his hearty condemnation of them, exempting only the fox, whose status as 'vermin' excludes it from compassion. [88] Here he is in a quandary, and his anxiety leads him to expose potential sources of conflict he would perhaps sooner keep hidden:

between the interests of the real 'queen' of the farm and her puppet-rival; between the interests of the man whose brand is indelibly stamped on the sheep and the 'needy' swain, who needs to 'borrow' (a suggestive as well as a duplicitous word) the fleece; between the decorous straitjacket of 'Wit that knows no gall' and the alarming opposite its unnaturalistic mention raises: that there might be an unkind propensity among the labourers to laugh at their 'betters'--as they well might, if this 'simple scene', sinking inexorably into bathos, is to represent their lives and their aspirations. [89]

## 4. Compensations

### i. Respite

At the margins of the portrayal of labour in Thomson, Duck, and Collier, in the moments of beginning and ending, [90] and in the seams that become apparent when different kinds of portrayal come into conflict, much can be determined. Another useful indicator of ideological intention is the way in which the poets describe or offer what I shall call 'compensations', meaning positive experiences which seem to alleviate or counter-balance the hardship of rural labour. We have seen a rather bizarre version of this kind of thing in Thomson's attempt to explain to the sheep why it is being grappled to the ground, held down and fleeced by a man with a pair of shears; and we may opportunely take this as a graphic, if crude, model for the kind of compensatory material I have in mind, though my concern is with those who may feel fleeced of their labour rather than their coats.

We have also seen some of Thomson's more successful compensations: the enjoyment of Nature offered for rising early on a summer morning (and, conversely, the terrible fate that awaits sleepers-in); and the sense of communal enjoyment in the labour of harvest and haytime. Compensations may also arise 'naturally' from the subject: thus in *Autumn* Thomson sets his swains nutting. Although this is 'work' of a kind, the passage is pure pastoral. I think Thomson recognises that there is no need for social or aesthetic devices to harmonise this: the work is self-evidently pleasurable, and the passage presents no need for overt intervention. The excitement of discovering the 'glossy shower' of hazelnuts, with their faintly sexual connotations, is a 'natural' compensation. [91] The more meagre compensations of Duck's vision have also been apparent in this reading: the brief period when each task is new; the pride in skilled work; the momentarily pleasurable registering of a new season or a new day. We have seen too how Mary Collier's women sustain themselves by their heroic determination and their sense of communality. I want to examine now a more oblique compensation that Thomson seems to offer.

There is a range of specified and unspecified addressees in the poem, and the uncertainty in some areas as to who is being addressed is instructive. This can be seen in *Summer*, which is carefully structured to follow the progress of a summer day. Thus we have (picking between the digressions) the dawn and the shepherd's emergence (43-66), the sun's rise (81-96), the shepherd's second morning task (220-4), the haymaking and sheep-shearing (352-422), the mower's retreat from the sun (432-450), the animals bothered by insects (485-515), evening (1371-6) sunset (1620-9), the shepherds' homecoming (1664-5) and night (1684-5). Interspersed are the digressions, which include three more rehearsals of the theme of idleness (67-80, 342-51, 1630-40). If we place these in their context, which is among the various passages of useful labour, we can see a pattern of antithesis: labouring is

happy, useful, good, satisfying, sustaining; idleness is wretched, useless, false, unsatisfying, wasting.

But who are these codes addressed to? I raise this issue because Thomson also appears to licence a quite different sort of behaviour, based on an easy, unenergetic pastoral enjoyment. At the height of noon, for example, occurs the following passage:

Resounds the living Surface of the Ground:  
Nor undelightful is the ceaseless Hum,  
To him who muses thro' the Woods at Noon;  
Or drowsy Shepherd, as he lies reclin'd,  
With half-shut Eyes, beneath the floating Shade  
Of Willows grey, close-crouding o'er the Brook. (*Summer*, 281-6)

And again, in a second passage about 'raging Noon':

Echo no more returns the chearful Sound  
Of sharpening Scythe: the Mower sinking heaps  
O'er him the humid Hay, with Flowers perfum'd (443-5)

A third passage of leisure, the swimming episode (1244-68) may be discounted in this context, as a digression with no immediate location in the diurnal pattern. But there remains an ambiguity in the two passages quoted: why are these workers lying in the shade, apparently with the poet's approval, after all he has said about idleness? Thomson noticeably gives himself a privileged role in *Summer*, as one who can wander in and out of the action, now observing scenes of labour, now meditating in the woods. The figure who 'muses thro' the Woods at Noon' may be identified with the poet-narrator (noting the first-person of 'In vain I sigh / And restless turn, and look around for Night', 455-6). But the shepherd, the very model of industriousness, is also apparently being allowed to sleep under a tree at 'raging Noon'.

One simple explanation is that this is a reward for his early conscientiousness, a kind of siesta or break. But that does not tally with any detail the poet gives us. For the shepherd, getting up in the morning is seen as its own reward, while sleeping during the day is for Thomson an abomination: all possible moral force is focussed on its condemnation. The mower is similarly indulging in something that ought to be abhorrent within Thomson's ideological framework. A distinction may possibly be made between unacceptable 'lying in' in the morning, and an acceptable 'sleeping over' or 'sheltering from' the hottest part of the day, though Thomson does not make such a distinction in his georgic advice or in his commentary; and Duck and Collier do not admit that any kind of daytime sleeping exists.

Duck's picture allows no escape from the sun for the mowers, and they long even for a return to the wretched threshing-barn for relief. Duck might, perhaps, have been prepared to believe that shepherds lie on pleasant banks when they wish to, but his own feeling of deprivation, as I have shown, informs this notion.

If Thomson intends his two 'rest' descriptions to be a noontide 'break' he is clearly exaggerating. Collier's 'Time to dine' (p. 16) is not time to sleep, and I find no evidence for any tradition of sleeping during a break in the other sources. A proper 'siesta', on the other hand, is a clear tradition in Mediterranean countries, [92] but not in the English (or, for Thomson, lowland Scottish) countryside. Mediterranean rural traditions are by no means rare in English rural poetry, but their presence invariably indicates the influence of a non-naturalistic, neo-classical pastoral. Thus I think that what may have happened here is a seepage between two kinds of rural world. That Thomson's attack on idleness is concerned with the activities of rural labourers is apparent by its context: it appears to be addressed to mankind in general, but only the third and least powerful passage has any general context. The two main attacks are very directly linked to the shepherd's rise and to the haymaking. On the other hand the poet, or indeed any lay wanderer, is not bound by these moral strictures. Thomson moves easily between genres in *The Seasons*. Here, I think, some of the characters of his industrious *georgic* have wandered off with him into the territory of his idyllic *pastoral*. It is perhaps not surprising that this kind of thing should happen in the mixed genre of *The Seasons*. The distinction between pastoral and georgic, and especially between the description of ideal nature in pastoral, and what Addison (1697, 1961: 2) calls the 'beauties and embellishments' with which farming advice is 'set off' in georgic is not so clear that we can always separate the two.

If we are attuned to the nuances of the two genres we might see this as a case of accidental cross-pollination, as the literary equivalent of what happens when a gardener puts fennel and dill too close together. It may be that Thomson would see no such accident here. He weaves, as many of the authors of long poems in the eighteenth century do, many genres together, and is perhaps creating a hybrid deliberately. The advantage, if this is indeed purposeful, is that he can have his cake and eat it; can give carrot-and-stick lectures on industry and idleness, and at the same time appear to admit the 'donkey' into the privileged territory of pastoral. A literary compromise is thus effected, in which stern labour provides the poem with credibility, while the pastoral ease of wandering at will amongst 'Nature' makes it (and by implication makes the work) pleasurable.

In literary terms, Thomson's two summer 'rests' seem closest in spirit to the pastorals of Andrew Marvell, whose *Damon the Mower* (stanza 4) pleads for a retreat from the midday sun; and whose narrative persona retreats to the woods in a very Thomsonian manner in *Upon Appleton House* (stanza 61); and to the Keatsian pastoral of *To Autumn*, in which, by a miraculously compressed version of Thomson's georgic-pastoral sleight of hand

the rich harvests of September are won without anyone apparently moving a muscle. The only figure in Keats's landscape is the personified figure of Autumn, who is in a condition of advanced narcosis, 'on a half-reaped furrow sound asleep, / Drowsed with the fume of poppies' (16-17). 'Autumn' does then briefly give the appearance of carrying gleaned corn across the brook, but in the very next line is again immobile, watching the apple juice drip 'hours by hours' (22). We do not question the lack of labour in this pastoral poem: indeed it seems slightly absurd for us to do so; probably because Keats does not offer the didactic material on labour and its importance that Thomson does: [93] the illusion seems to the modern reader less successful in Thomson, where it sits awkwardly among passages of exhortations to avoid idleness.

Duck cannot create such an illusion at all: so far as he is concerned, the shepherds are out in the fresh air, singing and story-telling to their hearts' content, while he sweats in a dusty barn; and when he is mowing, there is no retreat from the relentless sun. His compensations must be worked more directly and painstakingly from the intractable seam of rural labour. Similarly Mary Collier can envisage no seepage of this sort. Time is for her relentless, sleep a rare luxury, and 'little rest is found' (p. 23) in any circumstances. Her consciousness of hardship is based solidly on her awareness of the unavailability of pastoral idyll, leisure, or indeed genuine compensation of any sort.

## ii. Gleaning

Even if Thomson is purposeful in his generic mixing, it is a purely literary sleight-of-hand. A more practically sustaining compensation might be a plea for charity towards the rural worker. Both Thomson and Duck make such appeals in their poems formally, and I shall discuss and compare them shortly. Firstly I want to look at a form of 'compensation' which is related to charity, and which occurs in all three poems: this is gleaning, and we get a range of approaches to it in the poems. Thomson opts for an exclamatory appeal:

Behind the Master walks, builds up the Shocks;  
And, conscious, glancing oft on every Side  
His sated Eye, feels his Heart heave with Joy.  
The Gleaners spread around, and here and there,  
Spike after Spike, their sparing Harvest pick.  
Be not too narrow, Husbandmen! but fling  
From the full Sheaf, with charitable Stealth,  
The liberal Handful. Think, oh grateful think!  
How good the God of Harvest is to you;

Who pours Abundance o'er your flowing Fields;  
While these unhappy Partners of your Kind  
Wide-hover round you, like the Fowls of Heaven,  
And ask their humble Dole. The various Turns  
Of Fortune ponder; that your Sons may want  
What now, with hard Reluctance, faint, ye give. (*Autumn*, 162-76)

Duck gives us two entirely different versions of gleaning, and for once the later version seems more graphic and eagle-eyed than the earlier. The beginning of both versions is identical. The theme is the adversities the reapers encounter in the cornfield:

The Morning past, we sweat beneath the Sun,  
And but uneasily our Work goes on.  
Before us we perplexing Thistles find,  
And Corn blown adverse with the ruffling Wind. (1730: p. 10; 1736: p. 24)

After this, the first version has the gleaners as a second threat, to match the thistles and the badly-aligned corn ahead:

Behind our backs the Female Gleaners wait,  
Who sometimes stoop, and sometimes hold a Chat. (1730, p. 10)

This is the 'double-fencing' of thistles and women which Collier parodies (making it clear in doing so that this is the version she had read). In the second version the women have gone, and in their place is the old enemy:

Behind our Master waits; and if he spies  
One charitable Ear, he grudging cries,  
"Ye scatter half your Wages o'er the Land."  
Then scrapes the Stubble with his greedy Hand. (1736, pp. 24-5)

This is indeed a major change, and if both versions are put alongside the Thomson passage some interesting questions about influence suggest themselves: all three passages begin with the same verbal formulation, and address the same subject; the evidence of influence seems strong. As I have noted [94] there is a later passage in *Autumn* that seems to have been influenced by the ending of *The Thresher's Labour*. Here we may well be seeing a two-way influence. This demands close reading.

E. P. Thomson makes the point (1989: 29) that there is a factual unlikelihood in the first version:

Gleaners would not have been following behind the backs of the reapers, since it was normally the custom not to permit gleaning until the harvest had been carried. In 1730 Duck had been eliding two labour processes: first, the women's labour of gathering the sheaves into stooks, ready for carrying, and secondly the gleaning.

All the sources I have checked confirm a strict separation of harvesting and gleaning in the cornfield; [95] and the women behind the reapers would indeed be gatherers, for reasons I have discussed earlier. The implication of this inaccuracy (remembering Duck's haytime chauvinism) seems to be that he does not much care what the women are doing--chattering or gleaning or gathering--to him they are just, to repeat my earlier phrase, a damned nuisance; and his marginalisation of their work (by not appearing to care what it is) seems purposely enforced by this apparently casual error. There is also a second possible purpose to the mistake: if the women are gathering, then they are doing useful work. But that is not the impression Duck wants to give. Gleaners by contrast are a ritualised 'other' in the harvest process: where reapers and gatherers have to *give* to the harvest, they *take*. They are a kind of licensed beggar--a tolerated nuisance. Thus the women's superfluousness is again subtly nuanced.

My suspicion that Thomson's *Autumn* may have been influenced by an early version of *The Thresher's Labour* (see note 10) is increased by the fact that Thomson also compresses the processes of harvesting and gleaning. His compression may also be purposeful, in that it enables him to provide a contrast between the farmer's pleasure in his situation and the gleaners' 'unhappy' demeanour in theirs, which I think is intentional: Thomson is concerned with a moral imperative here, and the contrast prepares it well. If Duck is indeed the influence, Thomson has used his compressed reaping-gleaning scene as a stepping stone to a larger (and different) idea.

Six years after the publication of *Autumn*, and a year after Duck had written a poem which praised Thomson (see note 10), the 'official' version of *The Thresher's Labour* was published, with the old remark about gleaning abandoned, and the new quatrain in place. What had happened in the meantime? All other evidence points to Duck's rapid absorption by a culture that cared not a jot about the veracity of rustic poetry. Yet here he carefully increases his veracity, abandoning the poem's second cheap-shot at women workers, in favour of what is one of the most vivid and successful descriptions in the poem. I quote it again:

Behind our Master waits; and if he spies

One charitable Ear, he grudging cries,  
“Ye scatter half your Wages o’er the Land.”  
Then scrapes the Stubble with his greedy Hand. (1736, p. 24-5)

What had probably happened in the meantime was that Duck had read *Autumn*: recognised in Thomson’s gleaning passage an echo of his own poem; noted how it built something he had passed briefly over into a matter of significance (while repeating his own careless mistake); and decided to think again about the harvest-field, and re-write gleaning in the light of *Autumn*. We shall see in the next section that in the 1736 version Duck similarly tagged on to his gleaning a charitable appeal that responds to a similar appeal in *Autumn*. In what follows I shall be looking at this revised 1736 passage on gleaning rather than the 1730 passage.

The moral imperative Thomson invokes is a very ancient one. It is likely that the practice of leaving a remnant of corn in the field stems from pre-historic propitiation rites. For Thomson and for Duck, however, the moral significance and ancient authority behind gleaning would be founded in the Old Testament. No specific comment needs to be made about the familiarity with biblical sources of a conventionally-educated man like Thomson. The self-taught Duck wrote a poetic version of the biblical story of the Shunamite, from which we may assume he too knew these sources. The Bible lists gleaning as a command of God, given twice among his instructions to Moses, and reiterated by Moses to the people of Israel. The story of Ruth illustrates its practice: she of course is a widow, and Moses had translated God’s instruction that the gleanings be left ‘unto the poor, and to the stranger’ (*Leviticus* 23, 22) into ‘for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow’ (*Deuteronomy* 24, 19). Behind the Thomson and Duck passages lies a characteristically inflexible command:

9 And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field, neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of thy harvest.

10 And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt thou gather every grape of thy vineyard; thou shalt leave them for the poor and stranger: I *am* the Lord your God.  
(*Leviticus* 19, 9-10) [96]

Malcolmson (1981: 166n30) notes the conflict in the eighteenth century, part of a larger struggle in the rural world, between gleaning as a right and gleaning as a favour, in which the latter view increasingly won. For both Thomson and Duck, writing in the 1720s, gleaning is already a favour, or at least something which is strongly begrudged. The exact nature of Thomson’s appeal here is problematical. I think we can deduce (as I deduced in *Spring*) that the separate identification of a ‘Master’ means that by husbandman Thomson again means

employee, or harvester. [97] If this is so, Thomson is effectively inviting him (to put it in a legalistic way) to defraud the farmer of some of his corn. In this context the phrase 'charitable Stealth' (*Autumn*, 168) is revealing, suggesting that he should do this unobserved (and not 'get caught' by the corn's owner), and that the justification for this bit of petty crime is 'charity': he is to steal from the rich to give to the poor.

However, the appeal is augmented into apostrophe (in the later lines quoted), in which Thomson declaims that the 'God of Harvest' has filled 'your flowing Fields'. This makes no sense if the addressee is still the husbandman, who owns no fields; and the rest of the speech is similarly addressed as if to someone of means. Unless (as seems unlikely) Thomson means to change his addressee in mid-stream, he is either blurring the differences between employer and employee, or else he considers there to be no difference in function or interest between the two. Either way it is clear that Thomson is not interested in delineating class roles within the peak-time activities: he will allow no conflict of interests, no hint of disharmony, into his harvest scene.

Having thus blended the worker and the farmer into a unified communality of interest, he can acknowledge the existence of difference in status and interest in rural work by channelling it to the gleaners; that is, he can allow the rural poor to be distinctly separate from the harmonious unity of the harvest by rendering them safe through the various euphemisms of patronage, pity and piety he uses to describe them (especially the Biblical 'Fowls of Heaven', from *Psalms* 104, 12); and by giving them a removed form of participation in the harvest, via gleaning. Thomson's moral argument for gleaning invokes the idea of the 'Wheel of Fortune': the privileged farmer (or, in more Thomsonian, class-free terms, the participants in the harvest) might be in the gleaners' position one day, and should share the bounty of harvest. The unspoken link between the two ideas is that one represents a moral 'insurance policy' against the other, put much more directly by Moses when he instructs the People of Israel to leave gleanings 'that the Lord thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hands' (*Deuteronomy* 24, 19): if the gleanings were not left, by implication, the Lord's blessing would be removed (and presumably given to someone else). Thus two achievements are neatly dovetailed: the rural poor are maintained (in both senses of the word) in their role as recipients of charity, reinforcing the privileged position of the harvest's winners; and the continuity of the winners' success is assured. The reference to 'your Sons' (175) lengthens this perspective: a small investment of corn and morality in the gleaning market is seen as likely to pay good long-term dividends.

Duck's careful opening echo of Thomson's 'Behind the Master walks' ('Behind our Master waits', 1736, p. 24) responds to *Autumn* politely enough; but Duck's concern is in fact to cut through the web of moral posturing Thomson has set up; to puncture the high ideals with a memory from his own fieldwork. Duck shows here he has a good nose for

mystification: his approach to the subject is plain and direct, like that of Cobbett, who later recorded that:

We left these poor fellows, after having given them, not "*religious Tracts,*" which would, if they could, make the labourer content with half starvation, but, something to get them some bread and cheese and beer, being firmly convinced, that it is the body that wants filling, and not the mind. [98]

Duck's field workers seem to have precisely this kind of straightforwardness: to leave a bit of corn ('one charitable Ear', 1736, p. 24) for the gleaners seems an uncomplicated matter for them, an automatic act not worthy of elaboration, much less the kind of moralising we find in Thomson. Duck's Master, however, will not allow good grain to go to waste. His farmer--like those Cobbett often portrays--has a head full of the price of corn. Thomson's farmer is also counting ('glancing oft on every Side', *Autumn* 163), but there the resemblance stops. Duck's farmer is angry and unhappy, whereas Thomson's enjoys the success of the Harvest. Duck's is a pleasing if predictable caricature: his farmer is, as well as being angry, greedy, and as a result is inappropriate in his behaviour: scraping the stubble being the prerogative of the gleaners, even to the extent of cutting their hands. [99] But this farmer would rather cut his own hands than lose any profit. As usual, his tone is one of indirect threat: he is essentially an absurd, almost comic figure.

It is in both cases the farmers for whom gleaning is a difficult issue, whether its rationale must be carefully explained to one in *Autumn*, or the other is descending on its practitioners with grasping fury in *The Thresher's Labour*. One gains an interesting composite picture here, which we might see in terms of an ancient, almost instinctive tradition coming into conflict with the new passion for farming productivity. The two accounts, though very different, mesh together well.

I have left Mary Collier's gleaning until last, because she brings to her description of gleaning a perspective that differs fundamentally from the picture we get from Thomson and Duck. For both of them, whatever their sympathies, gleaning is outside the fieldwork: gleaners are 'other'; whereas Collier is herself a gleaner, and not ashamed of it either. So the first thing she does is to reintegrate it with the other tasks of harvest:

When Harvest comes, into the Field we go,  
And help to reap the Wheat as well as you,  
Or else we go the ears of Corn to glean,  
No Labour scorning, be it e'er so mean,  
But in the Work we freely bear a part,  
And what we can, perform with all our Heart. (1739, 1989, p. 17)

There are two hints of defensiveness here: the reference to 'mean' labour, and the pride in performing 'with all our Heart'. Both suggest that gleaning has a disparaged reputation; but Collier's defence is a good one: she deflects gleaning's meanness, refusing to accept that it is useless labour, and demarginalising the work by listing it alongside the productive labour of reaping. This is reinforced at the end of the gleaning passage, where, similarly, she puts alongside it both gathering and cutting peas (p. 20).

Collier's central scene of gleaning has been discussed; it is one of the most impressive moments in the poem, and it reverses Thomson's separation of the gleaners as the poor-relations of the harvest. Collier's gleaners have a low-key sense of communality: they must carry home at night 'Our Corn [...] and our Infant too' (p. 19), which leaves little energy for Thomsonian cornfield triumphalism. Nevertheless the sense of community in the work is as strong as any Thomson offers, and it reinstates the ancient and honourable practice of gleaning as effectively as the more emphatic insistence Collier gives at the beginning and end of her gleaning section.

### iii. Charity

Though it begins as an echo of it, Duck's 1736 reference to gleaning undercuts Thomson's exclamatory prescriptive work. The two poets' appeals for charity have more in common, though their differences are also instructive. Thomson follows his gleaning passage with the parable-like tale of Palemon and Lavinia (*Autumn* 177-310), based appropriately on the Book of *Ruth*. [100] He then introduces an autumn storm (311-50). Thomson loves a storm, and this one has its moments of dramatic excitement. Its purpose, though, is slightly different from those of *Summer* (1103-68) and *Winter* (66 ff.). Their function is to invoke the sublime, and thus dramatise the essence of the two 'extreme' seasons. The *Autumn* storm is a dramatic sequel to the warning Thomson has given in the gleaning scene. The storm's purpose is directly to reverse fortune, by destroying the husbandman's food and cattle. [101]

I have considered some of the many ways in which the poet intervenes *in propria persona* in the scenes he creates, seeing in this a sometimes anxious need to ensure that they always seem socially harmonious, that there is no source of conflict in the human part of his equation (especially when it comes to scenes in which, for Duck or Collier, there is a great deal of conflict). Thomson's daring use of the storm here again invites such a reading, but also marks the poet's intervention on a higher level of his world-picture: he asks the landlord to intervene on behalf of the husbandman against a disharmony caused by Nature itself. This is a new phenomenon in the poem. Nature's predations have hitherto demanded

only a minimum of authorial tweaking: a counsel of patience here so that the ploughman can emerge at the seasonally appropriate time; a literary sleight-of-hand there to remove the farmworkers from the mid-day sun. He now makes Nature do its worst, and then offers the human figures a way out.

A dramatic human intervention is needed if the husbandman is to survive. The appeal made (though it is euphemistically put) is for a suspension of rent. A forthright, *ur-*Marxist analysis of economic relationships is the principal argument:

Comes Winter unprovided, and a Train  
Of clamant Children dear. Ye Masters, then,  
Be mindful of the rough laborious Hand,  
That sinks you soft in Elegance and Ease;  
Be mindful of those Limbs in Russet clad,  
Whose Toil to yours is Warmth, and graceful Pride;  
And oh be mindful of that sparing Board,  
Which covers yours with Luxury profuse,  
Makes your Glass sparkle, and your Sense rejoice!  
Nor cruelly demand what the deep Rains,  
And all-involving Winds have swept away. (*Autumn* 349-59)

This appeal takes us into territory more familiar to students of Gray's *Elegy*, in that its sense implies a criticism of the husbandman's position in society, while its aesthetics imply an acceptance of that position. A similar set of contradictory impulses haunts the potential aspirations and limitations of Gray's 'hoary-headed swain'. [102] The explanation, I think, is that Thomson wishes to invoke both feeling and intellect: he wants his landlord to feel pity for this unfortunate creature (and hence we have the aesthetics of sentimental acceptance), and at the same time to recognise a moral obligation to him (hence the harsh economic analysis). The husbandman must appear to be potentially slightly threatening (morally threatening, at least), and at the same time harmlessly pathetic; which I think he does. The first quality is a dangerous one if Thomson is to maintain his vision of perfect harmony. He risks this, I think, in order to attempt to prove the larger meaning that even the greatest upset cannot destroy the balanced forces of nature and society so long as moral obligation informs the economy of the latter.

Duck's charitable appeal risks less, but has something in common with Thomson's appeal:

Let those who feast at Ease on dainty Fare,  
Pity the Reapers, who their Feasts prepare:

For Toils scarce ever ceasing press us now;  
Rest never does, but on the Sabbath, show;  
And barely that our Masters will allow.  
Think what a painful Life we daily lead;  
Each Morning early rise, go late to Bed:  
Nor, when asleep, are we secure from Pain;  
We then perform our Labours o'er again:  
Our mimic Fancy ever restless seems;  
And what we act awake, she acts in Dreams.  
Hard Fate! Our Labours ev'n in Sleep don't cease;  
Scarce Hercules e'er felt such Toils as these! (1736, p. 25) [103]

The first thing to note is that Duck is not actually asking for anything material or financial. All that he asks is contained in the first couplet, 'Pity'--recognition by the consumers of what the winning of their food costs the labourers in toil. I have suggested that this couplet, which was added in 1736, was influenced by *Autumn*, and there are clearly similarities: to 'pity' (Duck) and to 'be mindful' (Thomson) are akin to each other. The economic analysis is also closely matched; Duck's characterisation of the reapers as those who 'prepare' the feasts is less euphemistic than Thomson's rather periphrastic lines, but they are saying essentially the same thing. Duck also manages without Thomson's sentimental metonymy for the reapers as 'Limbs in russet clad'. In the place of these literary tropes is an alarming sense of things getting worse, as 'Toils scarce ever ceasing press us now'; of barely stopping for the sabbath (we are in the middle of the corn harvest). Not only does the labour voraciously eat more and more time, but, as the passage on sleep conveys, the labourers have no place to retreat: the toil follows them to bed and haunts their dreams. This last passage epitomises Duck's poetic temper, in its combination of sincere complaint, consciousness of imaginative implications ('mimic Fancy'), and ambiguously underplayed humour. The modern parallel, I think, is Charles Chaplin, who plays a harried worker whose mind-numbing work monstrously invades the poor remnant of his 'real life' with the same mixture of humour and profound distress. [104]

Mary Collier, of course, asks for no charity. Her nature is not of a kind which will accept the humble demeanour a charitable appeal would require. Her equivalent addressee is not the powers that be, but Duck himself, whose failure of solidarity she aims to expose and correct. Where she comes closest to asking for something, what starts as a question ends as a statement. The addressee is Duck:

What you would have of us we do not know (p. 20)

Ten low words never expressed frustration more plainly; but her major appeal is saved for the ending of the poem. An economic analysis more clear than those of Thomson and Duck ends the song; and in the place of the suppliant demeanour of the charity ethic there is righteous anger and brave defiance. As E. P. Thompson suggests (1989: xiii), this posture may have helped deprive Collier of a Duckian translation; but there were also advantages in avoiding the psychological morass of eighteenth-century patronage. Mary Collier stands alongside the painter George Morland in this: neither will sacrifice the slightest detail of their artistic vision to the needs of social obligation, or patronage. [105]

## 5. Homecomings

### i. The cottage door

Duck's haunted dreams, though he allows his sense of the absurd to modulate them, are disturbing. His apostrophe to:

Hard Fate! Our Labours ev'n in Sleep don't cease;  
Scarce *Hercules* e'er felt such Toils as these! (p. 11)

is informed by the idea that something is very wrong, which he expresses in indignation, and translates with Duckian decorum into classical allusion. What is 'wrong', in cultural terms, is that in eighteenth-century portrayals of labour, home is the ultimate compensation, the symbol of warmth, food, safety, comfort, nurture, and the 'miniature kingdom' of family. 'Coming home' is a tradition that stretches back through Western literature: to *The Odyssey* (whose hero conquers all enemies, braves all seductions, and turns down at least one utopia in order to get home); and to Sappho, whose pastoral lyric addressed to the Evening Star encapsulates this pervasive theme exquisitely:

Hesperus, you herd  
homeward whatever  
Dawn's light dispersed

You herd sheep--herd  
goats--herd children  
home to their mothers [106]

In Duck's world, no place is sacred--not his home, nor even his bed: his mind itself is invaded by his labour. George Orwell's *1984* makes the modern reader especially sensitive to this ultimate horror. The 'wrongness' of this is informed by Duck's understanding that a major cultural icon is being upturned by his work; and I shall complete this examination of the way the three poets portray rural labour by looking at their approaches to homecoming scenes, to see how they reflect their ideas and feelings about rural labour, and rural life.

If the homecoming scene is a universal Western ideal, the eighteenth century adopted as a favourite depiction of it the 'cottage door' scene. John Barrell (1980: 66-77) has charted some of the meanings such a scene could be made to carry: 'a contentment that arises directly from the sense of labour honestly performed', a 'Properly conducted family life', 'a balanced life in which repose is properly only the reward of industry', and so on.

Barrell's reading of the image in later eighteenth-century poetry and painting leads him to conclude that the portrayal was a neutralising one, whose dissemination in art and literature had the function of keeping the labourer's energies within the microcosm of family life, and thus away from the kinds of consciousness-raising E. P. Thompson charts in *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963).

Barrell's model is a useful one to have in mind when considering portrayals of rural life in the period. However, we need to make some adjustments to it when looking at the poems under discussion. Firstly, in the paintings and poems Barrell examines, the rural labourer has the role of subject, and possibly addressee, but not that of creator; whereas two of our poets, as we have seen, are themselves labourers. Secondly, none of Barrell's poets and artists are women, a matter which cannot but be of importance in considering a *topos* in which women figure so centrally. In their homecoming scenes the obvious class and gender differences between Thomson, Duck and Collier would therefore seem to be of great potential significance: we may expect to see the cottage door from three different angles, as indeed we do; though the homecoming scenes in these poems also produce some surprises.

Thomson's two homecomings in *Summer* may be regarded as the norm, the standard version of the cottage-door scene which conforms to Barrell's characterisation, and against which we may measure other such scenes. The first of these comes early in the poem:

Home, from his morning Task, the Swain retreats;  
His Flock before him stepping to the Fold:  
While the full-udder'd Mother lows around  
The chearful Cottage, then expecting Food,  
The Food of Innocence, and Health! (220-4)

In fact this is a non-standard homecoming in two ways, though Thomson normalises both. Firstly, the shepherd has not been out all day. It is still morning, and the homecoming scene is typically an evening scene, associated with the contented musing appropriate to the period after one's work is complete. Thomson normalises this by making it a reward for the shepherd's early rising, a special morning idyll which conforms to the idea of the 'contentment that arises directly from the sense of labour honestly performed' Barrell describes. By getting up early, and getting the first task of taking the sheep to pasture done so soon, he has earned a reward already, though his day's work will continue later. Secondly, the shepherd is a bachelor, and thus the welcoming wife and children are missing. Again, this is no matter. Thomson piles on the language of nurture and reassurance, and transfers to the shepherd's cow (the 'full-udder'd Mother') the maternal qualities conventionally ascribed to the woman in the scene. For the other qualities the scene requires, Thomson

relies entirely on the pleasant or positive associations of certain words: 'cheerful Cottage', 'Food', 'Innocence' and 'Health'.

No labour behind the scenes, no sense of georgic engagement, is allowed to mar the vision. The shepherd, with his maternally-reassuring cow, and surrounded by his sheep (for children), basks in the warmth of pastoral domesticity; and despite its abnormality, this is a typical cottage-door motif of a kind that suggests the miniature world of hearth and home: the power of the cottage-door scene is such that even a bachelor, with a little artifice, may be seen to receive a share of its benevolence. Thomson's second homecoming (*Summer* 1664-81) is equally conventional, and again concerns the shepherd. His homecoming comforts here take the form of chivalric flirtation with the milkmaid on the way; and his return to what is presumably an empty house is avoided by means of moving the description on to a folksy, reassuring passage about the evening culture of the village: 'Fairy People', 'Village-Stories', and so on.

There is only one other affirmation of the myth of the cottage door in the three poems under discussion, and it is a stringently qualified one. Stephen Duck has finished his first day's hay mowing:

Homewards we move, but so much spent with Toil,  
We walk but slow, and rest at every Stile.  
Our good expecting Wives, who think we stay,  
Got to the door, soon eye us in the way.  
Then from the pot the dumpling's catch'd in haste,  
And homely by its side the bacon's plac'd.  
Supper and sleep by Morn new strength supply;  
And out we set again our works to try (p. 7) [107]

There is little sentiment here. The slow lines, with their combination of dragging 'w' sounds and sibilants, signal exhaustion. Its pleasure is centred on the basic human needs of 'Supper and sleep', with a conventional recognition of reassurance in 'Our good expecting Wives'. There are no children in the scene, nor any other detail of comfort or homeliness that is not strictly utilitarian. It is sandwiched between a painfully slow return, and the imperative to go out and do another day's work. In so far as there are compensations in Duck's homecoming, 'good' and 'homely' are their meagre verbal indications.

It is, nevertheless, clearly a cottage-door scene; and it is equally clearly written by a labourer. Is the cottage-door scene therefore a real compensation, a genuine reward? Three things warn us against believing so. The first we have seen. Duck is notably low-key, the compensations are very basic, and the scene is fenced in, surrounded on both sides by more hard work. Secondly, Duck brings strong wishful thinking to the scene. The day which began

in the heroic pride and warlike postures of a 'sportive race' has ended in utter exhaustion; and the 'good expecting wives' must now provide comfort. This is to be Duck's only reward for his exhaustion, and the vested interest he has in its 'coming true' makes him a partial witness. Finally, Duck has already thoroughly subverted the conventions of the cottage-door welcome, in an earlier passage; Collier carefully exposes its assumptions; and even Thomson, the prophet of harmony, describes a scene which reverses its expectations. Although his intention in this is actually to reinforce the ethic of the cottage door, his sentimental reversal of the scene in fact brings into question the nature and purpose of the topos, and indeed of his whole system of pastoral compensations, as we shall see.

## ii. Behind the cottage door

If the cottage door is a compensation, who compensates the compensators? This is the question Mary Collier's two descriptions of the evening homecoming imply. They carefully expose, point by point, the realities behind Duck's homecoming expectations, and the 'double-shift' of the labouring woman's life:

When Ev'ning does approach we homeward hie  
And our domestic Toils incessant ply:  
Against your coming home prepare to get  
Our Work all done, Our House in order set;  
Bacon and Dumpling in the pot we boil,  
Our beds we make, our Swine we feed the while;  
Then wait at Door to see you coming home,  
And set the Table out against you come.  
Early next morning we on you attend;  
Our Children dress and feed, their cloaths we mend,  
And in the Field our daily Task renew;  
Soon as the rising Sun has dryd the Dew. (1739, 1989: 17)

When Night comes on, unto our home we go,  
Our Corn we carry, and our Infant too;  
Weary, alas! but 'tis not worth our while  
Once to complain, or *rest at ev'ry Stile*.  
We must make haste, for when we Home are come,  
Alas! we find our Work but just begun;  
So many things for our Attendance call,

Had we ten hands, we could employ them all.  
Our Children put to bed, with greatest care,  
We all things for your coming Home prepare:  
You sup, and go to bed without delay,  
And rest yourself till the ensuing Day,  
While we, alas! but little Sleep can have,  
Because our froward Children cry and rave.  
Yet without fail, soon as Daylight doth spring,  
We in the Field again our Work begin,  
And there with all our Strength our Toil renew,  
Till *Titan's* golden rays have dry'd the Dew. (p. 19) [108]

Two passes through the scene are needed to identify and refute every cottage-door illusion, and although for the 1762 printing she altered little else in the poem, Collier took the trouble to revise the second of these homecoming scenes, removing two of her three uses of the word 'alas' (perhaps in the light of her view that all complaint is 'in vain').

The cottage-door scene, then, like the swan, appears to glide serenely along, but beneath the water has to paddle like mad. The scene of cottage-door welcome is shown as a male privilege, and the litany of necessary activities behind the scenes provides the corrective needed even for Duck's modestly-orchestrated cottage-door scene. Indeed the implications of the two passages go further. Collier's exposure of the reality behind the homecoming prefigures a radical idea much more familiar in the twentieth than the eighteenth century. Sheila Rowbotham (1973: 67) puts it clearly:

The irony behind the idyllic happy family as a place of repose is the consumption of female labour power [...] If it were admitted that the family is maintained at the expense of women, capitalism would have to devise some other way of getting the work done.

Collier also shows that, in the modern idiom, 'there's no such thing as a free lunch'. Exhausted, and by now finding the act of walking a problem, Duck had written that:

Homewards we move, but so much spent with toil,  
We walk but slow, and rest at every Stile. (p. 7)

Collier's reply is uncompromising:

Weary, alas! but 'tis not worth our while

In her world of endless work, there is not the glimmer of a compensation, and she shows that even the slightest advantage, the smallest compensation Duck can seek, can only be taken at her expense: while he rests on a stile, she is cooking, making beds, feeding the pigs, cleaning the house, putting the children to bed.

As with Collier's gleaning description, one notices the particular emphasis on the children, and the attention and care they are given. This is the more striking in that neither Thomson nor Duck mention children in their positive renderings of the homecoming scene. Thomson's shepherd is, as we have seen, a bachelor; and in Duck's case his homecoming is deliberately minimal in its evocation of hearth and family. We may also, of course, see in the two male writers a view of the world in which the 'woman's labour' of childminding is marginal. But both poets do have scenes in which children are present: they are in fact saving the image of children for their reversals of the cottage-door scene. For them children are not part of the work but part of the compensation: the most powerful, most emotional ingredient of the cottage-door scene, and as such to be invoked only to make more poignant the moment when the compensation fails.

Of the two, Duck's reversal of the cottage-door scene is the more subversive to the integrity of its totemic value. It arises easily from his description of threshing:

When sooty Pease we thresh, you scarce can know  
Our native Colour, as from Work we go;  
The sweat, and dust, and suffocating smoke,  
Make us so much like *Ethiopians* look,  
We scare our Wives, when Evening brings us home,  
And frightened Infants think the Bug-bear come. (p. 4) [109]

The presentation is partly comic and partly threatening: the images of 'Ethiopians' and 'Bugbear' are part of a wider network of grotesque images used to portray the excesses of work in the poem, some of which we have seen. [110] But there is a serious point. This would normally be a scene of recognition and reassurance, in which the children would (in Gray's phrase) 'run to lisp their sire's return', while Duck's 'good expecting wives' would offer nurture. Here, both recoil in horror, and the reassuring motif of the cottage door scene is instantly reversed.

Duck has placed this between the central threshing scene I discussed earlier, and the Master's 'Cursing' of the threshers:

He counts the Bushels, counts how much a day,

Then swears we've idled half our Time away.  
Why look ye, Rogues! D'ye think that this will do?  
Your Neighbours thresh as much again as you.  
Now in our Hands we wish our noisy Tools,  
To drown the hated Names of Rogues and Fools (p. 4)

Duck compares the labourers to 'School-boys' being ticked off by their 'angry Masters' (i.e. schoolmasters), and the comparison is apt. The Master is humiliating the workers here, and they cannot reply. Their only utterance in the situation can be the noise-making of threshing; and their wish to 'drown' the curse shows both their frustration and their lack of possible redress: incapable of verbally confronting the master, they have no other means of dealing with his scolding.

Thus Duck's reversal of the cottage-door scene provides the essential central image in a three-part picture of the labourer frustrated and deprived of solace in his work, alienated from his compensatory home-coming, and finally humiliated like a schoolboy by his Master. It is a carefully constructed and dramatised piece of descriptive poetry, and although it lacks the kinds of insight we find in Collier's homecoming scenes, it conveys Duck's feelings about the effect of his work on his life with great skill, and shows the fragility of the cottage-door scene.

### iii. The homecoming reversed

It is instructive that Thomson's fullest rendering of the homecoming scene should be his pathetic negative image of it, the moment in *Winter* when the labourer does not return. His scene is a very different one from those of Collier and Duck. Collier deconstructs the motif with facts and figures, analysis; Duck subverts the scene's sentiment with humour, with the anecdotal and the bizarre. Thomson by contrast is serious, exemplary and sentimental. *Winter* has been characterised by Donna Landry as indulging in 'self-regarding sympathetic pastoralism'. She attacks the support for the *status quo* implied by its 'religio-political "consolation"', and finds in it a justificatory attitude to class inequality (1987: 114). Her quotation is from the 'summing-up' passage at the end of the poem, but her comments are also pertinent to the passage I have in mind, and what I have to say benefits from the example and the commentary made in her important essay.

Before I make further comment on this, however, I need to explain one way in which I disagree with her reading. Landry's idea that for Duck, winter can be dismissed 'with a single line' (p. 113), which allows her to award the two male writers dunces' caps for being ignorant of winter hardship, is misleading. A quick run through *The Thresher's Labour* in

search of the word 'winter' would confirm it, but my synthesis of the three threshing references (see section VI) makes it clear that threshing is what Duck's labourers do all winter. And although Landry triumphantly trumps Ducks 'sweat' with Collier's 'blood', I think she would agree that Duck's account suggests extraordinarily harsh conditions--though hers is a dangerous kind of hierarchy which, if pursued to its logical conclusion, would make the 'death' of Thomson's swain the most impressive piece of gritty realism of all.

Thomson offers two main categories of images in *Winter*. The first and most predominant is the imagery of the season's harshness. The major examples of this are the description of the storm (41-208) and the 'excursions' to various remote winter scenes (389-423, 765-78, 794-949). The second is the imagery of consolation in winter. The cosy indoor 'Village' scene (617-29), and the scene of winter sports (760-778) are the principal examples. Both offer reassuring images of the season either 'shut out' or rendered safely enjoyable. Between these two extremes of danger and safety lies a third category, which feeds off both, creating a characteristic uncertainty between reassurance and alarm. The three passages I would put in this category are consecutive (so that their effect is cumulative), and like the movement in *Spring* (see Section I) their movement is upwards through the Thomsonian hierarchy. The episodes are the robin's visit (245-64); the advice to the shepherd (265-75); and the lost swain episode (276-321, with its moral (322-58).

My concern is with the last of these, but some attention to the others is useful. The movement in the first two is from danger to safety. Thus the robin moves from the fields to the 'warm Hearth' (252); [111] the shepherd is advised to be 'kind' to his 'helpless' sheep (265), to 'lodge them below the Storm' (267). Because a tension exists in both of these passages between safety and danger, nurture and exclusion, a hybrid aesthetic quality begins to emerge in them. While the tension is unresolved, it can form itself into neither pity nor indignation on the one hand, nor relief and pleasure on the other. Both the robin and the shepherd passages (though one is descriptive and the other prescriptive) seem to resolve in the direction of safety and nurture. The lost swain episode is contrastingly resolved in the opposite direction. Before it is, however, the hybrid mood I have noted is developed at some length. The movement is from safety to danger. As the scene proceeds the swain becomes lost in increasingly threatening, inhospitable and alien landscapes. Then the opposite possibility is suddenly raised, and the reversal of cottage-door expectations portrayed as part of the dying thoughts of the swain:

In vain for him th'officious Wife prepares  
The Fire fair-blazing, and the Vestment warm;  
In vain his little Children, peeping out  
Into the mingling Storm, demand their Sire,  
With Tears of artless Innocence. Alas!

Nor Wife, nor Children, more shall he behold,  
Nor Friends, nor sacred Home (Winter, 311-17)

It seems to me insufficient merely to slot this into its place in terms of literary parallels, to take the image back to Lucretius or forward to Gray's *Elegy*. As Raymond Williams writes in a similar context, 'All traditions are selective'. [112] Thomson chooses to heighten the pathos of the death by tormenting the swain with visions of what he has lost here, and we may hold him (not Lucretius or Gray) responsible.

I use the word 'tormenting' purposely: the first problem in our reception of the 'lost swain' scene is that Thomson appears to be showing it in primarily aesthetic terms, to be enjoying it too much. One expects a predominance of moral over aesthetic considerations, because of the patterns Thomson has set up throughout the poem, and we are disturbed to find him, in the build-up to the death of the swain, apparently wrapped up with the aesthetics of the situation. Cottage door images, like Thomson's other consolatory images, are deployed elsewhere in a way that suggests a concern for the quality of experience of the rural labourer. Here the image seems to be indulged, as a pleasingly poignant scene. The labourer's role in it is pathetically to die, excluded from the consolation, the aesthetics, the poignancy: he is here expendable. [113]

Why does Thomson let him die? The poet empties a storm over the hapless husbandman of *Autumn*, but then provides a socially-organised means of relief, thus 'proving' the human part of his pattern of harmony. Here, to the dismay of the sensitive reader, he allows 'nature' to kill his swain stone dead, a course from which there can be no back-tracking. R. S. White, beginning a book on 'Poetic Injustice in Shakespearean Tragedy' (1982: 1 and passim) makes the simple but important point that 'Although death is inevitable, nobody *deserves* to die', and his book therefore seeks (and finds) moral significance beneath the apparently meaningless deaths of Shakespeare's various innocent victims. Were such significance not available, he writes, 'how could we justify the poets' claims to "teach and delight", using a hypothetical world to instruct us in the virtues and vices by which we may choose to live our own lives?'

But the eighteenth-century didactic poets give us less room to manoeuvre than Shakespeare; their habit is to make what they consider to be the moral or practical lessons of the poem overtly apparent as they go along. Whereas from the dialogue and stage directions of a Shakespearean tragedy a thousand interpretations may bloom, a poet like Thomson directs his reader far more closely. Thus the 'moral' of the swain's death is given in the passage which follows it, clearly marked off as a separate verse-paragraph, and flagged by its opening apostrophe ('Ah little think the gay licentious Proud', *Winter* 322). This, it is made clear, is where our search for significance must begin; here, if anywhere, will Thomson's wallowing in the pathos of the swain's death be vindicated.

However the modern reader is likely to work through the 'moral' with mounting frustration. It consists of an extended exclamation on the theme of man's inhumanity to man. The fact that we can locate its theme so easily by this phrase (now a cliché, it was originally Burns's) gives some indication of how predictable, how familiar it is. Thomson's sincerity cannot be doubted in his rendering of it: there is feeling in some of its social indignation:

How many pine in Want, and Dungeon Grooms;  
Shut from the common Air, and common Use  
Of their own Limbs. How many drink the Cup  
Of baleful Grief, or eat the bitter Bread  
Of Misery. Sore pierc'd by wintry Winds,  
How many shrink into the sordid Hut  
Of cheerless Poverty (*Winter*, 332-8)

But the passage as a whole merely reiterates and enlarges on, rather than offers explanation or compensation for the death of the swain. It is a 'great speech', but it offers no real solution, or analogy, or moral to the scene. Its real weakness can best be seen at its moments of transition. Firstly, its beginning, following on from the image of the dead swain:

a stiffen'd Corse,  
Stretch'd out, and bleaching in the northern Blast.

Ah little think the gay licentious Proud,  
Whom Pleasure, Power, and Affluence surround;  
They, who their thoughtless Hours in giddy Mirth,  
And wanton, often cruel, Riot waste;  
Ah little think they, while they dance along,  
How many feel, this very Moment, Death  
And all the sad Variety of Pain. (*Winter* 322-8)

As in the sheep-shearing episode, stylistic and intellectual weaknesses coincide. The opening to this new verse-paragraph is flaccid, its rhetorical repetition ineffectual, its antithesis unfocused, its movement uneven and faltering. These may seem like trivial criticisms, but the most talented poets of the eighteenth century (Thomson among them) were especially skilled in these techniques, and in this kind of moralising speech. Here are three well-known examples:

A little Rule, a little Sway,  
A Sun-beam in a Winter's Day,  
Is all the Proud and Mighty have,  
Between the Cradle and the Grave.

(John Dyer, *Grongar Hill*, 1726, 1961, 89-92)

The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power,  
And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave,  
Awaits alike the inevitable hour.  
The paths of glory lead but to the grave.

(Thomas Gray, *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*, 1751, 1969, 33-6)

Condemn'd to hope's delusive mine,  
As on we toil from day to day,  
By sudden blasts, or slow decline,  
Our social comforts drop away.

(Samuel Johnson, *On the Death of Dr. Robert Levet*, 1783, 1974, 1-4)

The modern tendency has been to undervalue these kinds of poetic statement, to see them as being inherently conventional or derivative. But in each of these examples one can hear an individual voice, a particular poet using familiar ideas to say something that is nevertheless his own, and is appropriate to the context he and his poem confronts. Thomson's approach puts one in mind of those smooth clergymen who flawlessly deliver their funeral eulogies over the remains of someone they knew nothing about: if one listens carefully it is possible to detect the join where the name of the deceased is grafted into the pre-set speech.

The three poets quoted each have a specific context for their comments: the first distils a general idea from the view of a ruined castle, the second finds in the 'obscure' destiny of past villagers a meaningful pattern, and the third seeks to acknowledge the wider truth with which the death of a friend has confronted him. The morals may be conventional, and fairly similar, but there is no disparity, no marriage of convenience, between context and content.

Thomson's moral seems inadequate and alien to its context: it huffs and it puffs, but it does not acknowledge what has just occurred. The moral is placed as if in conclusion to the death of the swain, but then uses its own 'examples', which are not related to the death of the swain. We are not told where the cause of the death lies, or what its meaning might be: is it, as its context implies, simply a function of the 'cogent horrors' of the season (which the poet has hitherto been rather enjoying), or is it the result of a social injustice of

the kind the moral is concerned with? It lies between the two, on the page, but no syntactical connection is made with either. Thomson in particular fails to make the connection with social wrongs, and his failure to do so increases our feeling that the death is an excuse for, rather than the subject of, the 'moral'.

The other 'margin', the ending of the moral, is equally unsatisfactory. The argument is essentially circular. If 'fond' Man 'thought' of the injustices Thomson lists, he would be a better person. No amount of personified abstract nouns ('Charity', 'Benevolence', and so on) can conceal the banality of the message that if man were not so bad he would be good. The exit door from this increasingly inadequate speech is marked 'diversion':

And into clear Perfection, gradual Bliss,  
Refining still, the social Passions work.

And here can I forget the generous Band,  
Who, touch'd with human Woe, redressive search'd  
Into the Horrors of the gloomy Jail? (*Winter*, 357-61)

'And here can I forget' is the eighteenth-century georgic-writer's way of saying 'And that reminds me'. Thomson's new concern is with the architects of a concrete social reform, an improvement for one group of people he has used as an example (prisoners). But it takes us even further away from the 'swain', and when Thomson returns to the subject of winter (389) he reverts to the old subject of winter's 'cogent horrors': the death of the swain is now forgotten.

I read in all this a kind of reluctance. All previous reference to the rural labourer has ultimately offered an optimistically harmonious and rational view of cause and effect. Each problem, be it between Man and Nature or between Man and Man, has been resolved. The most illuminating element of Thomson's vision of rural labour has been its focus on co-operative effort; the most admired feature of the poem as a whole a presentation of Nature which may be seen as simultaneously truthful and conciliatory. Man may find harmony with nature by the exercise of moral qualities, patience, industry, charity, and so on. Mimetic and didactic truth have gone hand in hand. With the death of the swain, Thomson's imaginative truth and his moral truth become dislocated. He must portray at its harshest the force of winter (his imaginative and his aesthetic faculties unite to demand this). The movement that results leads him inevitably towards the pitiful spectacle of humanity destroyed by nature (which his aesthetic sense fills out into a fully-blown scene of sentimental pathos). But the moral imperative that then cuts in is incapable of rescuing the situation. He can, as it were, neither revive nor decently bury his swain, and in this dilemma may be glimpsed the terrestrial limits to Thomson's vision of harmony. Ultimately the poem, as we have seen,

ends in a generalised religious consolation for all hardship, but the poet keeps the details of the hardships (whose victims might prefer a sublunary compensation the poet can no longer guarantee) syntactically separate from the superlunary consolation he suggests is the only redress on offer.

My reading paints a picture of a poem that has 'gone too far', that has 'got out of control', and of course nothing in the language overtly suggests this. On the contrary Thomson, like the Johnson of Boswell's biography, is at his most magisterial precisely when he is on his shakiest ground. The coincidence between stylistic and intellectual weaknesses I have mentioned has to be discovered behind a tone of reassurance. In fact this tone does jar slightly in this context; the muted tones of the Dyer, Gray and Johnson quotations I used for comparison are much closer to what is appropriate for an eighteenth-century poet considering mortality. Thomson's blank verse perhaps gravitates against the precision of these other poets, but his own rhymed lines 'On his Mother's death' (Sambrook, 1986: 278) show him to be quite capable of this kind of work in other circumstances. In manner as well as matter, the poet's optimistic view of the rural world has here failed to cope with that world's most extreme moment of crisis. 'Art for Art's sake' has gained a temporary ascendancy over didacticism, which has little to offer here; and the poet's vision of a harmonious rural world pays a heavy price.

\* \* \*

In a sense we can expect no more from Thomson than we get: he has not offered, like Crabbe (*The Village* I, 5), a 'real picture' of rural labour and the labouring poor, but a celebration of the 'varied God' (*Hymn*, 2) of the seasons, and we have to some extent to read against him or between his lines to find more. The point I made at the beginning about extracting only one theme or strand from a greater whole is perhaps significant here.

Yet Thomson claims consideration as an observer of the natural and the rural world. He is, or was for a long time, a revered poet of nature, and there is much in the work that validates that characterisation. His poem also seeks to represent credibly the oppressed generally, be they animals, or the poor, or a ruined farmer. His abandonment of the swain in *Winter* casts a shadow over this, suggesting that his concern for rural labourers may be a limited one that is primarily concerned with their exemplary value, their usefulness in making credible his version of rural life, his vision of harmony in nature. Seen in this light, his system of compensations, however much it may be informed by a desire for rural life to be pleasurable, for the labourer as well as the poet, seems particularly slippery; his championing of the ideal of communal work at best double-edged. His haymaking, for example, seems to embody positive values very similar to those ascribed to haymaking in

William Morris's utopian novel *News from Nowhere* (1891); but at the same time its prescription and description appear to be sited in the real, the non-utopian eighteenth-century countryside; and there, Duck's 'Bitter mingled with the Sweet' (p. 5), Collier's 'many Hardships daily' (p. 20), were considerable understatements.

One is inevitably brought back by these issues to Barrell's reading of the cottage-door scene as a diversion, both in the descriptive terms of idealising reality, and the prescriptive terms of diverting attention from the raising of political and social awareness. Thomson's poem ultimately conforms and contributes to this anaesthetising tradition, despite its passages of sympathy and concern for the oppressed, and however fervently the poet wishes for what he calls 'happy Labour, Love, and social Glee' (*Summer*, 370).

Stephen Duck, by contrast, finds little harmony or love in the countryside. His poem, far less ambitious in its scope, sings a sadder song of hardship, disappointment, and pleasures briefly felt or inadequately grasped. Duck was self-effacing about his poetry; 'I have indeed but a poor Defence to make of the Things I have wrote', he said (1736: vii), 'I don't think them good, and better Judges will doubtless think worse of them than I do'. There has never been any great shortage of such judges, of course, but his major poem nevertheless survived, and remains important. *The Thresher's Labour* inspired a tradition of workplace poetry which has survived into the present century, and initiated a genre which could express the hardship of labour, and which, with the example of his success, gave those who were voiceless precious resources to draw on. [114]

Mary Collier used these resources well. We learn from her poem how thoroughly the 'double shift' dominated the life of a labouring woman; how limited were the sources of strength she could hope for; how much resilience it took for a woman of her class to survive, let alone gain entry into the well-guarded sanctuary of literature and poetry. 'We who write', says Tillie Olsen (1978, 1981: 39), 'are survivors'; and she notes the implications of this 'survival':

For myself "survivor" contains all its other meanings: one who must bear witness for those who foundered; try to tell how and why it was that they, also worthy of life, did *not* survive. And pass on ways of surviving; and tell our chancy luck, our special circumstances.

*The Woman's Labour* is just such a survivor's testimony, bearing witness to the lives of women who did not 'survive', both literally [115] and in the sense of not themselves speaking, bearing witness, 'passing on' their lives. Susan Griffin (1982: 197) observes 'how little of women's daily lives is reflected in literature, how little of our real daily lives'. To this plain truth Collier's poem is a rare and valuable exception.



## NOTES

[1] The machinery and purposes of Thomson's poem are now well-documented, and I do not attempt to add to the weight of apparatus in my reading, which selects a single theme from Thomson's bulging portmanteau. My principal sources for Thomson are Thomson, ed. McKillop (1958); Thomson, ed. Sambrook (1981 and 1986); McKillop (1942); Grant (1951); Spacks (1959); Cohen (1964 and 1970); Barrell (1983: 51-90); Scott (1988).

[2] Duck (1736, 1973: xv). No further details of the Reverend Mr. Stanley are currently known.

My principal sources for Duck are: Duck, (1736, 1973); Duck, ed. Ferguson (1985); Duck, ed. Thompson and Sugden (1989); GM I (1731), 11, 20, 74, 150, 383; III (1733), 216, 382; VI (1736), 316-9, 614; XVI (1746), 329; XXVI (1756), 206; *Spence-Pope*, 11 Sep 1730 (in Pope, ed. Sherburn, 1956); *Swift-Gay*, 3 Oct 1730 and 19 Nov 1730; *Pope-Gay*, 23 Oct 1730; Spence (1736, 1973; 1966); Southey (1836, 1925: 88-113); Davis (1926); Blunden (1929: 106-31); Unwin (1954); Osborn (1966); Warner (1967); Paffard (1977); Klaus (1985); Landry (1987). See also Goodridge (1989 and 1990).

[3] 'No chearful Sound diverts our list'ning Ear' (1736)

[4] In addition to Diaper's 'Brent' (1720), possible influences include *Hogland; or a description of Hampshire. A Mock-heroic poem* (1728), and the anti-pastorals of Swift and Gay. Duck may have seen an early broadside version of 'Brent', published in Bury St. Edmunds in 1720 as *Lincolnshire* (see Foxon, 1975, item L186). Evidence of his reading in contemporary poetry is limited; but he was, as Spence tells Pope (11 Sep 1730, in Pope, ed. Sherburn, 1956), 'so out of the world, that he never saw your Essay in Criticism till his coming to Winton this week'.

[5] 'a gloomy, melancholy Scene' (1736)

[6] Mary Collier (1762: iv: 'Some Remarks of the Author's Life drawn by herself'). Apart from this and the recent 'back-to-back' reprints of *The Thresher's Labour* and *The Woman's Labour* (ed. Ferguson, 1985; ed. Thompson and Sugden, 1989), I have drawn on the following sources for Collier: Collier (1739); Landry (1987); Todd (1987: 90-91); Lonsdale (1989: 171).

- [7] It should be noted that Thompson and Sugden (1989: 29) provide clear contextual evidence that Collier is 'replying' to the non-classicised 1730 version of Duck's poem (see Textual Note, p. 293).
- [8] See Unwin (1954: 62-3); Warner (1967: 38-48); Klaus (1985: 11-14); Landry (1987: 113-4 and note).
- [9] The publication dates were: *Winter*, 29 April 1726 (Foxon, 1975, item T211); *Summer*, 20 February 1727 (Foxon, 1975, T220); *Spring*, 5 June 1728 (Foxon, 1975, T227); *The Seasons*, 8 June 1730 (Foxon, 1975, T236; see also Sambrook, 1981: xlvi); 'The Thresher's Labour' in *Poems on Several Subjects* (seven pirated editions from ?September to ?December 1730).

Composition dates are harder to be precise about. *The Seasons* had a long genesis, begun in Scotland before Thomson's move to London in 1725. If we take the poem as a whole, the principal period of composition is approximately 1725-30, with the creative process, manifested in revisions, continuing on through the rest of Thomson's life. Duck's first poetry was written, according to Spence, around 1724 ('about Six Years ago' he writes in 1730--see Spence, 1736: xii). 'The Thresher's Labour', commissioned by Stanley, was certainly written before Duck was approached by 'a gentleman at Oxford' in 1729 (see Spence, 1736: xv); so we can allot a maximum composition period of five years (1724-1729), and a probable shorter composition period of two years 1728-9. Its first publication in 1730 was unauthorised: the first authorised edition is 1736.

- [10] Sambrook (1981: 380n1232-4) notes an important similarity between *The Thresher's Labour* and *The Seasons*:

But the next Morning soon reveals the Cheat,  
 When the same toils we must again repeat,  
 To the same Barns again must back return,  
 To Labour there for room for next year's Corn.  
 Thus as the Year's revolving course goes round,  
 No respite from our Labour can be found.  
 Like *Sisyphus*, our Work is never done;  
 Continually rolls back the restless Stone.  
 Now growing Labours still succeed the past,  
 And growing always new, must always last.

(Duck, *The Thresher's Labour*, 1730, 1989, pp. 11-12)

Age too shines out; and garrulous, recounts  
The Feats of Youth. Thus they rejoice; nor think  
That, with tomorrow's Sun, their annual Toil  
Begins again the never-ceasing Round. (Thomson, *Autumn* 1231-4)

The seasonal context (post-harvest), and the idea itself, are essentially the same, and there are significant linguistic similarities. Unless a common ancestor has been overlooked the possibility of influence looks strong. What is more, there are further resemblances, between the gleaning descriptions and charitable appeals in *Autumn* and *The Thresher's Labour*, which I discuss in the text (see X. Gleaning and XI. Charity). If these are indeed influences, it is more likely that Duck influenced Thomson than the reverse. Before the end of 1729 Duck had completed his poem, achieved some local fame, and was becoming, as E. P. Thompson puts it, (1989: ii) 'a theme of genteel conversation and a target for competitive patronage'. The traffic of this patronage was one-way; that is, he was being commissioned to write poems, and although he was also being given improving things to read (a process which culminated in his intellectual 'grooming' for Court by Alured Clarke in the summer of 1730) it is most unlikely they would have included the manuscript of *Autumn: The Thresher's Labour* was long-completed before he became so important.

On the other hand Joseph Spence, who had befriended Thomson in 1729, had a week-long meeting with Duck in 1730; and Thomson's patron Frances Thynne, Countess of Hertford, also visited him at this time. Though we cannot precisely date these visits (Spence's came first), they almost certainly took place before Duck's grooming for Court began in summer; and either Spence or Hertford, or one of Duck's earlier visitors, could (and would) have communicated *The Thresher's Labour* to Thomson before *Autumn* finally went to press in the 1730 subscription quarto of *The Seasons* (probably about May 1730 as the subscribers had their copies on 8 June--see Sambrook, 1981: xlvi ff). However in the case of the gleaning/charity passages there is also the possibility of 'influence back' from *Autumn* to the 1736 edition of *The Thresher's Labour* (see X. Gleaning and XI. Charity).

There is some evidence of later interaction between the two poets. Least substantially, it is recorded that Duck's patron Dr. Alured Clarke found 'a great friend of Mr Thomson's very zealous in decrying our Thresher's merit, out of apprehension of his rivalling Mr. Thomson in the esteem of the public'. This kind of thing was also

said about Pope (who is known to have shown kindness to Duck), comes from an unreliable source (Katherine Byerley Thomson, 1850), and looks more like mischievous gossip than historical evidence, though there was clearly hostility to and jealousy of Duck in some quarters.

In his 'Description of a Journey' composed in 1735, Duck describes a significant moment in his journey:

From hence the Muse to silver *Kennet* flies,  
On whose green Margin *Hertford's* Turrets rise.  
Here often round the verdant Plain I stray,  
Where Thomson sung his bold, unfetter'd Lay

Duck's footnote says 'Mr. *Thomson* compos'd one of his *Seasons* here', and the poet goes on to praise Thomson's friend and patron the Countess of Hertford. Commenting on the modesty of his own poetic aspirations in *Every Man in His Own Way* (1741, as cited Davis, 1926: 97) Duck places Thomson in a triumvirate:

Praise is a Feather foreign to my Hope:  
Give it to Thomson, Warburton, or Pope.

One suspects that Warburton's poetic significance here may have something to do with the number of syllables in his surname, but the naming of Pope and Thomson is straightforward enough. Rose Mary Davis sees Thomson's popularizing in the 1720s of 'the Romantic attitude towards natural scenery' as having been influential on some of Duck's post-1730 poetry.

Finally, on 18 September 1737 Thomson wrote to his publisher Andrew Millar, 'Send me one of the large Edition of the *Seasons*, which I must give to Stephen Duck, he having made me a Present of his *Poems*'. This is clearly a generous and friendly response, though I think Douglas Grant's statement that Thomson's 'friendship with Duck was founded upon their mutual delight in Nature' begs a lot more evidence than is presented in his biography. See Davis (1926: 32-5, 40 and 131; 81, 97; 153); Stephen Duck, 'A Description of a Journey To Marlborough, Bath, Portsmouth, &c', in Duck (1736, 1973: 213-4); Grant (1951: 175-6); sources as cited.

[11] See Unwin (1954: 37-46 and *passim*). Two suggestive examples of the influence may be appended here. Firstly, from a poem by the 'milkwoman poet' Ann Yearsley (1756-

1806), where Thomson's winter robin reappears in a delicate evocation of the season that captures well Thomson's sense of winter pathos, and his concern for animals:

half sunk in snow,  
Lactilla, shivering, tends her fav'rite cow;  
The bleating flocks now ask the bounteous land,  
And chrystal streams in frozen fetters stand,  
The beauteous red-brest, tender in her frame,  
Whose murder marks the fool with treble shame,  
Near the low cottage door (1785: 'Clifton Hill')

Secondly, from the autobiography of John Clare, describing his first encounter with Thomson's poem (later he describes his heroic struggle to obtain a copy):

I knew nothing of blank verse nor rhyme either otherwise than by the trash of Ballad Singers, but I still remember my sensations in reading the opening of *Spring* I cant say the reason, but the following lines made my heart twitter with joy:

Come gentle Spring ethereal mildness come  
And from the bosom of yon dropping cloud  
While music wakes around, veild in a shower  
Of shadowing roses, on our plains desend.

Clare's version of *Spring* 1-4 is substantively accurate, though the mis-spelling of 'desend' and the lack of punctuation clearly suggest he is quoting from memory. A later note in Clare's journal, on *Winter*, is also worth looking at:

*Sat. 13 Nov. 1824.* Lookd into Thomson's 'Winter' there is a freshness about it I think superior to the others tho rather of a pompous cast how natural all his descriptions are nature was consulted in all of them the more I read them the more truth I discover the following are great favourites of mine & prove what I mean describing a hasty flood forcing through a narrow passage he says

*It boils & wheels & foams & thunders through  
Snatch'd in short eddies plays the wither'd leaf  
& on the flood the dancing feather floats*

There are two quotations here: *Winter* 105 and 130-1. See Clare, ed. Robinson (1983: 9); Clare, ed. Tibble and Tibble, 1951: 122).

- [12] James Thomson was born at Ednam, Roxburghshire, in September 1700, Stephen Duck at Charlton, Wiltshire, in 1705.
- [13] In addition to the publications mentioned, 1730 saw Thomson's 'Sophonisba' performed at Drury Lane (28 February), sold for 130 guineas, and published (four editions); while Duck's 'Royal Benevolence' was published in October (Foxon, 1975, item D477). In autumn Thomson was appointed tutor to Charles Talbot, while Duck was received by the Queen and granted a pension. Both poets clearly had an exceptionally successful year, though as Duck's collection of poems, and probably his 'Royal Benevolence', were pirate publications, he would have made no financial gain by them.
- [14] Thomson died of a chill following a boating trip on the Thames, 27 August 1748, aged 48. Duck was found drowned either 'in a trout stream' or 'in the Thames' (the sources disagree) at Reading, 21 March 1756, aged 51 or 52.
- [15] The modern rediscovery of Mary Collier may be said to date from 1974, when Sheila Rowbotham printed an extract of *The Woman's Labour* in her important book *Hidden from History*; Mary Chamberlain did the same in her *Fenwomen* the following year. Roger Lonsdale's inclusion of substantial extracts in his two anthologies (1984 and 1989) has now brought her to a wide audience.
- [16] Sources as cited; see also 'Remarks of the Authors Life', and 'Elegy upon Stephen Duck' in Collier (1762). I follow Lonsdale (1989: 171) in dating Mary Collier's birth to c. 1690.
- [17] See also Barrell (1980: 9-11 and passim); and for some similar conclusions about seventeenth-century poetry Turner (1979: 165) and Thomas (1983: 250-2).
- [18] For Duck's influence on his immediate successors see Goodridge (1990).
- [19] The major reason for the brevity of each of the critics mentioned (not just the editors) is that they also have other subjects to deal with. Unfortunately for the present discussion Raymond Williams's *The Country and the City* (1973) finds other comparisons to make with Duck, while Barrell and Bull (1974) at least imply the

contrast by filing Duck, as I have mentioned, as the first in a 'Some Versions of Anti-Pastoral' section, and Thomson as the first of the 'Whig and Post-Augustans'.

- [20] Spence (1966; and 1736, 1973: 'An Account of the Author'); Duck (1736, 1973: 'On Poverty').
- [21] Collier (1762: 'Some Remarks of the Author's Life drawn by herself').
- [22] My characterisation of Crabbean-Johnsonian 'truth' needs some explanation. Crabbe's poem was given to Johnson (as Goldsmith had given Johnson *The Traveller* and *The Deserted Village*) for his comments and suggested amendments. Johnson read the poem 'with great delight', finding it 'original, vigorous, and elegant' (*Johnson-Reynolds*, 4 March 1783). Crabbe accepted Johnson's suggestions, having been, as Huchon says (1907, 1968: 259), 'bred in the robust school of Johnson'.

Truth was a concept of great importance to Johnson. In life he insisted on it literally and exactly. What he means by truth in literature can best be seen in Brown's collection of his critical opinions (1961). There are thirty entries listed under 'Truth', and a composite picture emerges (though some selectiveness is inevitable in disseminating this). The first thing to note is that truth in literature is not for Johnson an end in itself. He writes (no. 14) that 'Between falsehood and useless truth there is little difference'. Documentary facts, in order to become truth, have to have moral purpose. Thus he melds the two modern ideas, *the truth* and *a truth*, into a single ethical and aesthetic ideal, seeing no contradiction between the two, and locating this *truth-with-a-conscience* alongside 'Reason' and 'Nature' (no. 5). It 'lights a torch for criticism' (no. 6), whose job in turn is to 'promulgate the determinations of truth' (no. 8). Item no. 10 is the crucial one in understanding this. It is from the final *Rambler*, (no. 208), which is an *apologia* for the whole *Rambler* enterprise. It has 'always been my principal design', Johnson writes, 'to inculcate Wisdom or Piety', a process which he has already described as 'the propagation of Truth'. 'All my Principles of Judgment', he notes of his critical work, have been established 'on unalterable and evident Truth'. There is clearly no contradiction for Johnson between truth and morality, which tends to confirm that what he meant by truth in literature was a primarily didactic, rather than a primarily documentary quality.

Our ideas about Crabbe's notion of poetic truth have recently been enlivened by a dispute between Gavin Edwards and Frank Whitehead. Despite the angry noise of polemic their essays are both useful. Edwards draws on recent critical theory to show

that the tradition of Crabbe's 'realism' is a dangerous fallacy, particularly if it is used (in the way the Hammonds, in his view, used it) as 'real' social history. Whitehead reminds us that Crabbe's 'realism' was a particular talent of the poet to 'evoke in his readers an illusion of reality'; reiterates the generalising, Augustan, moral function of the truth depicted in *The Village*; and suggests that the Hammonds' social-historical use of the poem avoided 'circularity' by making comparative reference to other historical sources. The realism of *The Village* has been a critical problem since its publication. Its reviewer in *GM* was clearly disturbed by it, and hoped that its depiction of what he called 'the dark side of the landscape' was not 'taken from the life' (adding, despite this, that it was 'well worth reading'). See Johnson, ed. Brown (1961: 250-3); Johnson, *Rambler* 208 (1752); *Johnson-Reynolds*, 4 March 1783; *GM* 53 (1783: 1041-2); Huchon (1907, 1968: 144-5, 259); Hammond and Hammond (1911: II, 12); Edwards (1987); Whitehead (1989).

[23] 'they soon for shelter run' (1736)

[24] 'There silent sit, and All at once is hush.' (1736)

[25] I have restored the first edition italicisation of 'Cocks in equal Rows' here, printed by Thompson and Sugden in Roman, wrongly in my view, as the emphasis of italics is designed to focus the phrase as an accusing echo of Duck's lines.

[26] Cited Thomas (1983: 286 & 397n88).

[27] Pope, 'A Discourse on Pastoral Poetry' (1717), in Pope, ed Audra and Williams (1961: I, 25).

[28] 'Soon as the golden Harvest quits the Plain  
 And Ceres' Gifts reward the Farmer's Pain;  
 What Corn each Sheaf will yield, intent to hear,  
 And guess from thence the Profits of the Year,  
 He calls his Reapers forth' (1736)

The changes here are substantial: Duck has omitted the reference to rent, changed the threshers to reapers, and classicized extensively.

[29] 'distant Barns' (1736)



Dyer captures and institutionalises the celebratory communality of Thomson's hay harvest here.

[34] I am thinking here to some extent of such traditions as hop-picking, where London East-Enders who could not otherwise afford a holiday went picking as a 'working' holiday. The work is an important presence in this tradition, but the 'holiday atmosphere' is what is emphasised in accounts of it, which tend to be idyllic. It is also an occasion where local agricultural labourers, travelling labourers and 'foreigners' (East-Enders) worked together, and there were frictions. See Wade (1987); Malcolmson (1981: 36).

[35] And now the Field, design'd to try our Might,  
At length appears, and meets our longing Sight.  
The Grass and Ground we view with careful Eyes,  
To see which way the best Advantage lies;  
And, Hero-like, each claims the foremost Place.  
At first our Labour seems a sportive Race:  
With rapid Force our sharpen'd Blades we drive,  
Strain ev'ry Nerve, and Blow for Blow we give.  
All strive to vanquish, tho' the Victor gains  
No other Glory, but the greatest Pains. (1736).

Duck has as usual 'classicised' this in the later version, but for once it seems to have gained rather than lost by the process. It is interesting that at a time when he was blurring the vision of much of the poem with pastoral gentility, he managed actually to sharpen up this description of the most 'professional' part of his annual work.

[36] Though Duck presents it as a piece of misplaced exuberance, and frames it as mock-epic, there was also an economic basis for competitiveness among mowers. Paul Brassley (1984: 42) records that, in the North East, an eighteenth-century mower could earn '1s. 2d per day during the hay and corn harvests', while he 'had to be content with 6d or 8d per day for the rest of the year'. There is certainly an element of proud professionalism in the way Duck's mowers prepare the work. As a nineteenth-century reference book (Morton, 1855: II, 15) puts it:

It is an essential point [of haymaking] that the mowers should be good workmen, and perform their work neatly and evenly, making the scythe cut as

near the ground as possible, in order to insure the greatest bulk of hay, and facilitate the springing up of the young shoots of the eddish or aftermath.

There is an interesting earlier literary analogue, Andrew Marvell's 'Damon the Mower' (*Miscellaneous Poems*, 1681; ed. Kermode, 1967: 101), who is as competitive as Duck's mowers, and seems to be motivated by both 'riches' and heroism. He declares:

What though the piping shepherd stock  
The plains with a unnumbered flock,  
This scythe of mine discovers wide  
More ground than all his sheep do hide.  
With this the golden fleece I shear  
Of all these closes every year.  
And though in wool more poor than they,  
Yet am I richer far in hay.

Frank Kermode (1967: 101n) comments, 'The Mower is something of a novelty in pastoral, but rivalry between rustics of different professions is not'.

[37] 'The Bottle and the Beer are both too small' (1736)

[38] Mary Collier's harvest scene (p. 19, discussed in the text) is a good example of this sociability. Neil Philip quotes a nineteenth century female farm worker, who says 'When a lot of women get together it's the pleasantest, for then there's company; but often we work alone--yesterday I was in this field alone, hoeing, from eight till five, all day'. This converse fear of isolation in rural work was a real one, poignantly picked up by M. K. Ashby, in her biography of her father Joseph Ashby, quoted in the same anthology:

From the time he was nine Joseph would spend long, lonely days in school vacations and on Saturdays scaring crows off the short, green corn. He had a wooden clapper, but if he saw no one for hours he took to shouting so as to hear a human voice. This method had another convenience; you couldn't cry while you shouted.

See Philip (1984: items 179 and 61).

- [39] This seems to be what Donna Landry (1987: 109) means when she writes that 'By scorning his female fellow workers, Duck has done violence to their shared occlusion from the bourgeois pastoral prospect'.
- [40] 'each Mower takes his proper Place' (1736)
- [41]' the Work they mind' (1762). This is one of a small number of substantive variants in the 1762 edition of Collier's *Poems*.
- [42] Morton (1855: II, 16), though he has emphasised the importance of mowing (see note 36), devotes a great deal more space (a full column) to the niceties of tedding, in a way that suggests it is an equally critical and skilled task. The hay must be dried as thoroughly as possible, and at the same time can easily be spoiled by rain or by not being turned enough (and thus getting burned). Collier shows her mealbreak as being timed by the work--the hay has to be all turned, then they take their break while it is being 'expos'd unto the sun', whereas Duck's mowers are less ruled by time and weather, stopping simply when they are 'With Heat and Labour tir'd' (p. 7).
- R. Bradley's treatise on farming (1726: 51-4) shows that both mowing and drying were highly skilled and critical tasks; the former dependent on exact timing and physical skill, the latter a balance between too-dry and too-wet; and both a nimble race with the weather. Not for nothing does the agricultural writer Quentin Seddon (1989: 25) call haymaking in our climate 'midsummer madness'.
- [43] 'In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return' (*Genesis* 4, 19)
- [44] See Burns, ed. Roy (1985: I, 137: letter 125, undated); Burns, ed. Kinsley (1968: I, 3, no. 1; III, 1003n1)
- [45] The connection between harvest pairing and dancing is further suggested by the fact that there is a Country Dance called the 'haymakers' or 'haymaker's jig' (*OED* 'haymaker', def. 3).
- [46] In George Stubb's painting *Reapers* (1785), for example, there are three male cutters, two women making sheaf-ties, and another man building a stook. An explanatory illustration in H. Stephen's *The Book of the Farm* (4th edition, rev. J. MacDonald,

Edinburgh, 1889) neatly captions the various processes of harvesting. There are three male reapers, and each has a female gatherer working behind him. Thereafter there is one 'Bandster' binding a sheaf, one 'Man raker' cleaning up loose corn, and two more 'Bandsters' setting a stook. All of these latter figures are male, though the term 'Man raker' perhaps suggests this was more frequently a woman's job.

[47] Richard Jefferies records that 'Large numbers of women still work in the hayfield, but they are not used in gangs so much as formerly' (1892, 1981, p. 87)

[48] I have necessarily summarised and generalised in my characterisation of pre-industrial haymaking and harvesting here, and it is an article of faith in modern agrarian history that local variations are at least as important as general practices. I have drawn on many sources, of which the following are the most important: Tusser (1580, 1984); Bradley (1726: 51-4, 80-1); Morton (1855); Ernle (1912, 1961: 360-1); Evans (1956: 85-97, 'Taking the Harvest'); Hennell (1934, 1984: 101-21, 136-42); Fussell (1952, 1981: 115-151); *The Agrarian History of England and Wales* (1967-89), vols. IV; V,i; V,ii, ed. Joan Thirsk; vol. VI, ed. G. E. Mingay.

[49] Duck flounders in hackneyed neo-classical clichés here, yet his impulse is genuine, and the theme is a worthwhile one. Flora Thompson (1945, 1973: 234) gets it about right:

For a few days or a week or a fortnight, the fields stood 'ripe unto harvest'. It was the one perfect period in the hamlet year. The human eye loves to rest upon wide expanses of pure colour: the moors in the purple heyday of the heather, miles of green downland, and the sea when it lies calm and blue and boundless, all delight it; but to some none of these, lovely though they all are, can give the same satisfaction of spirit as acres upon acres of golden corn. *There* is both beauty and bread and the seeds of bread for future generations.

Duck's allusion to the 'ruin' of the cornfield strongly suggests the idea of the killing of the corn king, chronicled in the English folksong 'John Barleycorn' and elsewhere in folk culture, and representing a very deep, pre-Christian cultural attitude to harvest. For 'John Barleycorn' see, for example, Alfred Williams (1923: 246). Frazer (1890, 1922: 560-7) gives a good account of the subject of the killing of the corn king.

[50] Thistles, however, were a serious problem. Tusser instructs the farmer to 'Give gloves to thy reapers' (1580, 1984: 122). As Evans (1956: 91) glosses Tusser, 'The reapers used gloves to prevent their hands being pricked by thistles as they curved them

round the corn when using the serrated sickle'. Mary Collier is of course 'pricking' Duck in another way.

- [51] Mary Collier provides important evidence that women did involve themselves in cutting crops at this time, not so much in the phrase 'reap the Wheat as well as you', but where she writes:

We cut the Peas, and always ready are  
In ev'ry Work to take our proper Share (p. 20)

Flora Thompson (1945, 1973: 235), as so often, records the end of the tradition:

One of the smaller fields was always reserved for any of the women who cared to go reaping. Formerly all able-bodied women not otherwise occupied had gone as a matter of course; but by the [eighteen-] 'eighties, there were only three or four, beside the regular field women, who could hand the sickle. Often the Irish harvesters had to be called in to finish the field.

- [52] By no means all the sources specify a male-female partnership in the corn-field. Hennell (1934, 1984: 114-5), for example, discusses various other combinations, such as the Yorkshire team known as a 'yan', consisting of three shearers and one bander. Scotland perhaps had a stronger tradition in this than England. Further literary evidence occurs in Charles Keith's poem *The Harst Rig* (1786), in which the male and female workers seem to be fully integrated, with much singing and dancing together in the barn as they wait for the rain to stop. The *OED* gives 'Harvest rig', Scotland:

(a) a ridge, rig, or 'land' of a harvest-field, between two furrows; the harvest-field so divided.

(b) the couple, man and woman, who reap together during the harvest, cutting a 'rig' conjointly.

See *OED* 'Harvest', sb. 7. special combinations; *Scottish National Dictionary*, ed. Grant and Murison (1960: V, 2-3, 'Hairst').

- [53] Strong contemporary evidence of a largely gender-segregated hayfield is provided by a contemporary oil painting by an anonymous artist, (described as 'British Provincial School, Eighteenth Century' and dated c. 1730) in Cheltenham Art Gallery. 'Country

Around Dixton Manor (Dixton Harvesters)', together with what is apparently a companion piece, 'Dixton Manor' (also c. 1730), give a panoramic view of trans-Severn Gloucestershire in the haymaking and sheep-shearing season. 'Dixton Harvesters' gives the side view of a long, large hayfield, with its adjacent fields. Within the field are something in the region of 120 human figures, with a further 20 or so in the adjacent areas. The figures are very small, but it appears that many of them are in single-sex gangs, or in gangs with a clear majority of either men or women. Thus in the left centre foreground a gang of 23 men are spread diagonally across the field, apparently scything hay; to the left of them a group of four women and two men are raking the hay and building small cocks; in the right centre foreground a gang of five women and one man are raking hay into windrows; in the centre background a gang of nine women and three men have shouldered their rakes and are following an overseer away from the small cocks they have clearly just built; behind them a group of six of eight women are resting; and there are various other such groups in the field.

However Thomson also seems to be vindicated here, so far as his hint of the dance goes. Not only are many of the individuals and groups in dance-like postures, but there is a line of eight or ten actual morris dancers dancing out of the field to the right. It is perhaps the artist's conceit that the 23 mowers I have mentioned, though they bear scythes rather than hankerchiefs, visually echo the morrismen. The dance-like aspect of the hayfield is as literally and allusively present in this depiction as the gender separatism.

- [54] Laurie Lee's *Cider with Rosie* (1959) is perhaps the *locus classicus* among literary renderings of hayfield sexuality, but the idea is very familiar in literature. Shakespeare's Autolycus sings bawdily of 'summer songs for me and my aunts, / While we lie tumbling in the hay' (*Winter's Tale* 4, iii, 11-12; 'aunt' here meaning 'a bawd or procuress; a prostitute', *OED* 'Aunt', 3). In Thomson's time, 'Colly' and 'Soflin', in Thomas Purney's pastoral 'The Bashful Swain' (1717) also find a suitably soft retreat in 'fresh Hay' (ed. White, 1933: 68). In 'July' (1827) John Clare records a cluster of sexual associations with haymaking, from the 'swains' with their 'smutty song and story gay' to the description of 'maidens' with 'snow white bosoms nearly bare' (ed. Robinson and Summerfield, 1964, 1973: 71).

Francis Kilvert (1944, 1964: 218) provides an explanation of the 'nakedness' Thomson and Clare both note, in his diary entry for Sunday 27 April 1873:

Visited old Sally Killing. She said when she was young women never wore their gowns out haymaking. If a farmer saw one of his women working in her gown

he would order her to take it off. She herself had been weeks without putting on her gown from Monday morning till Saturday night, in the hay harvest. The women had loose sleeves which they pinned on their 'shift sleeves' and which covered their arms to the wrist from the sun. 'But now', said Sally contemptuously, 'now they are all ladies. They wear *dresses* now, not *gowns*'.

The phrase 'making hay' is of course also a euphemism for 'making love', and may sometimes carry this secondary sense in the proverb 'Make hay while the sun shines': Simpson (1982: 143) quotes J. Carlyle (1835):

'It is good to make hay while the sun shines,' which means, in the present case [...] to catch hold of a friend while she is in the humour. (Letters and Memorials, 1883: I.21)

That there were ritualised connections between haymaking and sexual expression is strongly suggested by Opie and Tatem (1989: 194):

Hay Rick: 1953 R. Duncan, *Where I Live*, 123 [Devon] When I first settled in the country I heard that it was the custom that each new rick of hay should be slept on by a young man and a girl, in order to ensure that the hay would prove sweet, and the fiancee pregnant.

The human aspect of corn-harvest fecundity is too large a subject to more than touch on here. The fertility and propitiation rituals, and the forms of celebration and festival associated with the completion of harvest, were and are innumerable, occurring in virtually all periods and cultures. Thomson (*Autumn* 1217-1234) and Duck (*The Thresher's Labour*, p. 11) both describe Harvest suppers. Brand (1877: 300-311) gives a widely miscellaneous selection of English and Scottish traditions from literary and oral sources; Evans (1956: 101-2, 214; 1966: 149-57) and Philip (1984: nos. 159-62) add some English ones. Frazer (1890, 1922: 178-81; 542-609 and *passim*) remains useful. For the tradition of 'Kings and Queens' or 'Lords and Ladies' of harvest, see note 83, below.

As with haymaking, sexual expression at harvest involved a combination of opportunities and motives. In addition to those of haymaking there was the license of the fact that harvest was the principal time of annual celebrations associated with fertility and well-being. In the case of a reasonably timely harvest the harvest moon was also a factor. The countryside at night, at a time when supernatural beliefs were

widespread, was typically a dark and threatening place, as John Clare testifies (ed. Robinson, 1983: 37-8). A harvest moon, i.e. a full moon within a fortnight of the autumnal equinox of 22/23 September, meant the moon shone full from dusk to dawn, rendering the night safe as well as fertile. For the latter, see Harding (1955, 1971: 21-8, 'The Moon as a Giver of Fertility'); Stith Thompson (1955, 1966-75: V, T521.1).

D. H. Lawrence manages to assemble most of these elements in his scene of cornfield sexuality in *The Rainbow* (1915, 1949: 121-5), including the presence of the 'large, gold' harvest moon.

[55] *Spring* 830-3. The editorial gloss (Sambrook, 1981: 335n830-2) is:

T.s theme of gentle love and his respect for his audience of British women forbid him to sing any longer this dire and discordant song of sexual violence. There is perhaps a hint of self-parody in T.s genteel self-censorship.

[56] However Hennell (1934, 1984: 114) gives a piece of information that may make Thomson's chivalrous reaper more credible:

Towards the end of the day the reapers put down their sickles and assist the binders in setting up the sheaves to dry in stooks or shocks.

This is hardly 'bearing the rougher part' but does suggest help.

[57] 'uncloath the Mead' (1736). Landry (1987: 290n23) notes the masculine significance of the scythe.

[58] Duck seems to be using 'Sportive' in the sense of *OED* A. 1. 'Inclined to jesting or levity; disposed to a playful lightness of thought or expression', and 1b. 'Characterized by lightness or levity; not earnest or serious'. It is a very short step, however, to definition 2. 'Of the nature of, inclined to, amorous sport or wantonness': compare Andrew Marvell's 'Now let us sport us while we may' ('To His Coy Mistress', *Miscellaneous Poems*, 1681). Marvell's meaning of 'Sport' is clearly 'amorous', a word he uses in the next line.

[59] The *OED* was apparently too shy to give the specifically sexual meaning of 'spend, spent' (except perhaps in the case of 'spawned fish'--see 'spent' II, 5, b), though the

*Supplement* picks it up ('spend', sb. 2, 'spend' v. II. 15. c). The usage is amply illustrated in Rochester's poem 'The Imperfect Enjoyment' (wr. 1680; Rochester, ed. Veith, 1968: 38):

In liquid raptures I dissolve all o'er,  
Melt into sperm, and spend at every pore.

[60] 'Weary indeed! but 'tis not worth our while' (1762)

Discussing Mary Kelly's *Post-Partum Document* art exhibition (ICA, 1977) recently, the feminist art historian Whitney Chadwick commented that 'Women's sexuality extends to maternity' (*Womans' Hour*, Radio 4, 11 Apr 1990). See Chadwick (1990); Parker and Pollock (1981: 163-4).

[61] There is no clear evidence as to whether Mary Collier had children or not. She does not mention having had any in her account of her life. But if she had had any they would have been illegitimate, which despite being commonplace in the eighteenth century was nevertheless heavily stigmatised, and hence not something she would mention in such an account. Certainly Landry (1987: 102) provides no satisfactory evidence for her characterisation of Collier as 'a single woman, without children'. The evidence she does quote (p. 289n14) is Mary Collier's comment about endeavouring to 'pass the Relict of my days in Piety, Purity, Peace, and an Old Maid'. *OED* defines 'Old Maid' (1.) as 'A woman who remains single considerably beyond the ordinary marrying age; an elderly spinster: usually connoting habits characteristic of such a condition'. It does not denote childlessness, though it may imply it.

[62] Evans (1956: 96) records that farmers tended to sustain the practice of hand-threshing, even after threshing machines arrived, because 'it helped to solve the problem of what to do with their workers in the winter.'

[63] 'Soon as the golden Harvest quits the Plain' (1736)

[64] 'Yet little Time' (1736)

[65] Jim Forthrower's account of machine threshing from 1893 onwards includes the comment that 'We used to thrash in the winter-time; and then, of course, we had to do something else in the summer'. See Evans (1987: 199).

- [66] 'The Voice is lost, drown'd by the louder Flail' / 'Our Eye beholds no pleasing Object here' / 'No chearful Sound diverts our list'ning Ear' / 'Inspir'd with all the Beauties of the Spring' / "'Tis all a gloomy melancholy Scene' (1736)
- [67] The Theocritean pastoral tradition is pervasive among accounts of shepherding, though two good pre-war accounts are recorded by Evans (1956: chs. 1-3), and they emphasise both the hardship of the life and the prized professionalism and independence of shepherds; the mixture of spartan living conditions, absolute dedication, and freedom from the kind of hostile supervision Duck so resents. Hudson (1910) remains a good modern literary account, and more recently Sheila Stewart (1987) has recorded the life of the shepherd Mont Abbott, mostly in his own words; but it is extremely difficult to find any account of eighteenth-century shepherding not tainted with literary pastoral or Bakewellian improving zeal. There are some excellent seventeenth-century sources, however, of which that of the Yorkshire farmer Henry Best (1641) is perhaps the most interesting. Trow-Smith (1957: 241-50) names and quotes these sources.
- [68] Samuel Law, *A Domestic Winter-Piece: or, a Poem, exhibiting A full View of the Author's Dwelling-Place in the Winter-Season. In two parts. Interspersed with a great variety of Entertaining Reflection* (Leeds, 1772). Law is mentioned by E. P. Thompson (1963, 1968: 324); and is the subject of an interesting historical poem by David Crabtree, 'A Secret: Four Images' ('1. The Flight of Samuel Law'), *Stand*, 31 (1990), no. 4, 66-7.
- [69] 'At proper Distance, Front to Front we stand' / 'That once secure, we swiftly whirl them round' (1736).

The final simile here adapts Dryden's Virgil:

As when the *Cyclops* at th'Almighty Nod,  
New Thunder hasten for their angry God [...]  
With lifted Arms they order ev'ry Blow,  
And chime their sounding Hammers in a Row;  
With labour'd Anvils *Aetna* groans below.

Virgil, trans. Dryden, ed. Elliot (1981: 150-1: Book IV, 170 ff. [Virgil], 245 ff. [Dryden]).

- [70] Compare Evans (1956: 96-7) on nineteenth-century Suffolk threshers:

They also had certain devices for relieving the monotony. If the company were all bell-ringers they stood round the threshing-floor, which was usually made of elm, and they rang the changes with the flail, in exactly the same rhythm as they did in the steeple with the bells, all coming in their proper turn, and changing and changing about at a signal from a leader. From a distance this rhythmic beating of the elm floor made an attractive simulation of the bells.

Duck mentions the 'strong planks' of the threshing-floor, so presumably his was made of elm, too.

[71] Duck (1736, 1973). Between his meeting with the queen in 1730 and his suicide in 1756 Duck was successively made a Yeoman of the Guard (1733), Librarian of 'Merlin's Cave' in Richmond Park and 'Governor of Duck Island in St James's Park' (1735), a Regimental Chaplain (1746), Preacher at Kew Chapel (1751), and rector of Byfleet (1752). See Davis (1926: 33-8, 67, 69-74, 99-100, 101, 104).

[72] Compare Evans (1956: 96) again:

If, however, all that has been stated about threshing gives the impression that there was something colourful or romantic about using the flail, we have the testimony of an old Suffolk farm-worker, who is still living, to disprove it. He was paid at the rate of 3s. a coomb for threshing; and he had no two thoughts about it: 'Threshing was real, downright slavery'.

*OED* gives 'Coomb, Comb' (3.) as 'A dry measure of capacity, equal to four bushels, or half a quarter'. Evans, p. 96, quotes a figure of 3è coombs as a day's work.

[73] Close supervision is of course the sign of wage-labour rather than independent work. Kerridge notes its significance in relation to the role of out-workers in the eighteenth-century textile industry:

In short, everything we learn [about skilled and unskilled, farmed-out and on-site textile work] reinforces and confirms Miss J. de L. Mann's perception: what mattered was whether or not the work had to be done under the master's eye.

See Kerridge (1985: 204); Mann (1960).

[74] Cambric is a fine white linen, muslin a fine cotton, and holland a smooth hard-wearing linen. The Dutch etymologies of 'cambric' and 'holland', and the Iraqi etymology of 'muslin' reflect that these were materials of foreign origin, associated with Huguenot immigrants like Louis Crommelin (1652-1727), who had set up a cambric and damask works in Kilkenny at the beginning of the eighteenth century. There may therefore be an element of national chauvinism in Collier's hostility to 'fashions which our forefathers never knew'. The woollen industry and the government fought a fiercely protectionist battle against 'foreign' textiles and clothing throughout this period, and the cultural resonances would have been sufficiently pervasive for Collier to feel them. See Smith (1747, 1969: passim); Kerridge (1985: 122 and passim); *DNB* 'Samuel-Louis Crommelin'.

[75] For the eighteenth century explosion of consumerism and fashion in clothing, see McKendrick (1983: 34-99).

[76] Collier uses similar language to Mandeville. Apart from the obvious words 'Bees' and 'Hive' there are a number of verbal echoes between Collier's 4-line simile of bees, and Mandeville's *Fable* and its accompanying material. In the comparison that follows (C) = Collier, (M) = Mandeville:

(C) Gains	(M) gain (p. 66)
(C) hourly	(M) Two hours (p. 74)
(C) industrious	(M) Industry (p. 63)
(C) Pains	(M) Pains (p. 75)
(C) poorly	(M) Poor/The Poor (pp. 67, 69, 72)
(C) do hourly strive	(M) daily forc'd (p. 73)
(C) reap the Gains	(M) reap the Fruits' (p. 86)
(C) sordid Owners	(M) sordid Selfishness (p. 83)

Other similarities between the two texts include:

- (C) Drudgery (p. 15); (M) these Holy Drudges (p. 66)
- (C) for Slavery design'd (p. 15) / Their Slaves (p. 17); (M) Slaves (p. 63) slaved (p. 66)
- (C) show'rs of gold (p. 16); (M) bribed with Gold (p. 67) Cloth of gold (p. 74) Golden Dream (p. 152)

See Mandeville, ed. Harth (1714, 1989). For a short discussion of ideological similarities, see Thompson and Sugden (1989: xiii).

[77] Collier's sources for the Danaus and Danae stories are not known; however, both appear in the third book of Horace's *Odes* (nos. xi and xiv). If she got them from this source, she may have known Bentley's edition of Horace (1711), but more probably knew one of the translations and imitations which were fairly common in the period.

[78] Virgil's treatment of the subject of bees mixes elements of folklore and political-social allegory with his georgic advice, as is his wont; Collier's simile makes it clear that if she did read Virgil these layers of meaning would certainly be accessible.

Bees were of great significance in English folk culture. Both Evans (1966: 97-103; 1987: 66-7) and Flora Thompson (1945, 1973: 82-3, 87) record the human duty of 'telling the bees' when someone had died (because of their role as psychopomps); Evans records the folk version of the belief, known to Virgil (*Georgics* IV, 219 ff), that bees originated in Heaven; and both Evans and Thompson record the practice of 'tanging' the bees when they swarmed, to claim them. Bees were considered to be an intelligent and highly-ordered community, and were treated with very great respect. Opie and Tatem (1989: 17-20) record widespread traditions that one could not buy or sell them for money; and that they would not put up with owners who behaved badly. These traditions add ironic significance to Collier's simile.

As a good feminist Mary Collier would also be aware that apiculture generally, and 'talking to the bees' in particular, was especially a female tradition. I have found confirmation of this in a photograph of my great-great-grandmother, Mary Watson of Folkingham, Lincolnshire, sitting between two bee hives, 'talking to the bees'. As well as keeping bees she was the 'wise woman' of her village. See also Brewer (1898: 1056, 'Superstitions (7) Bee'); Knowlson (1930: 207-10); Wright (1936: I, 81); Stith Thompson (1955, 1966-75: II, D1441.2; III, G225.1; Index 'Bees').

[79] G. Wilson Knight, paraphrasing Macbeth's 'voices' (*Macbeth* II, ii, 35-6) writes 'The central act of the play is a hideous murder of sleep' (p. 146); while A. C. Bradley has much to say of the play's 'abnormal disturbances of sleep'. See Knight, (1930, 1965: 140-59, '*Macbeth* and the Metaphysic of Evil'); Bradley, (1904, 1905: 338).

[80] Landry (1987: 102) notes that Mary Collier does her thinking about her position in society from her bed. Collier writes:

Oft have I thought as on my bed I lay,  
Eas'd from the tiresome Labours of the day,  
Our first Extraction from a Mass refin'd  
Could never be for Slavery design'd,  
Till Time and Custom by degrees destroy'd  
That happy state our Sex at first enjoy'd. (p. 15)

At any other time it appears she does not even have time to think, which is depicted as a rare treat captured in the moments before precious sleep.

[81] A good example of Collier's insistence on poetry and allusion, may be seen in the felicitous way she uses classical mythology to 'match' Duck's summary of his work (p. 23). Duck makes several classical comparisons: in his threshing his comparison is with the legendary smiths, 'Cyclops' and 'Vulcan' (p. 3); the harvesting is compared with the labours of 'Hercules' (p. 11); and finally he compares the year's work to the labours of Sisyphus. Collier (who is clearly Duck's best early critic) selects the last of these as the best one to represent him, and writes:

While you to *Sisyphus* yourselves compare,  
With *Danaus'* daughters we may claim a share;  
For while *he* labours hard against the Hill,  
Bottomless Tubs of Water *they* must fill. (p. 23)

Sisyphus, in punishment for various crimes on earth, is condemned in Hades to push a massive block of stone over a hill. As Robert Graves narrates the story:

As soon as he has almost reached the summit, he is forced back by the weight of the shameless stone, which bounces to the very bottom once more; where he wearily retrieves it and must begin all over again, though sweat bathes his limbs, and a cloud of dust rises above his head.

This is Duck to the life; and Graves finds the origin of the story in the idea of pushing the 'sun-disc' up the vault of Heaven, which again makes this highly appropriate for Duck's sun-ruled temporal scheme.

In the story of the fifty daughters of Danaus, *the Danaids*, Collier sets up a more subtle and ironic allusiveness. Caught in a family feud, all but one of the Danaids faithfully follow their father's instructions to marry then murder their fifty male cousins. In

punishment, they are condemned in Hades to the 'endless task of carrying water in jars perforated like sieves'. This is even closer to Collier's work than the stone-rolling is to Duck's; but the Danaids also reflect Mary Collier's 'Strong propensity to call an Army of Amazons to vindicate the injured Sex' (1762: iv). Though the Danaids were not Amazons, they were, like the Amazons, priestesses of the matriarchal moon-goddess, and were credited with having brought the Mysteries of Demeter from Egypt to Greece. Their punishment, though it seems as inconsequential as that of Sisyphus, represents for Graves the sympathetic magic of rain-making; the leaking pot remaining 'a distinguishing mark of the wise woman many centuries after the abolition of the Danaid colleges'. See Graves (1955, 1960: I, 238 [Danae], 216-20 [Sisyphus], 200-205 [Danaids], 352-5 [Amazons]; 1948, 1961: 64 [Danae], 67, 129 [Danaids], and *passim*).

[82] It should be noted that the sheep-shearing (371-422) and the patriotic exclamation (423-31) were both added to the poem in 1744.

[83] There are a number of related traditions and meanings of pastoral 'Kings and Queens' (or 'Lords and Ladies') in English folk culture, which relate also to the corn-harvest period (August-October), haymaking (June-July), hop-picking (August-September), and nutting (October). A simplified model might be as follows:

- (a) Ritual rulers (human/inanimate)
- (b) Harvest organisers
- (c) Owners or proprietors
- (d) God
- (e) Harvest gods and goddesses

I shall briefly comment on each of these in turn.

(a) *Ritual rulers*. More usually female than male, they represent or embody the tutelary deity of harvest, and may be either:

- i. A human figure, often a woman chosen for this role, or the harvesters' elected Lord and/or Lady (see next category).
- ii. A fetish-object, made of straw, flowers, ivy, oak boughs, etc., a 'corn-dolly'.

Brand (1877: 300-11) gives examples from different periods and cultures of human figures, usually a 'Harvest Queen'; and fetish-objects, usually the last or best sheaf of corn, typically made into a human or abstract figure, a Harvest, Kern or Corn-Dolly, Harvest-Queen, Corn-Baby, Mare, Maiden, or Neck (for the final 'neck' of corn cut). A Perthshire tradition Brand quotes, from the *Statistical Account of Scotland* (1797), combines a human figure and a fetish-object:

It was [...] the custom to give what was called a *Maiden Feast*, upon the finishing of the Harvest; and to prepare for which, the last handful of Corn reaped in the field was called *the Maiden*. This was generally contrived to fall into the hands of one of the finest girls in the field [...] the fortunate lass who took the Maiden was the Queen of the Feast.

The ritual ruler is apparently the oldest and most pervasive kind. Its functions were those of propitiation, thanksgiving and the ensuring of continuity by sympathetic magic. See Frazer (1890, 1922: 542-607 and passim); *OED* 'Corn' sb. IV. *attrib.* and *Comb.* 11 Special combinations: 'corn-mother', 'corn-queen', 'corn spirit'; 'Harvest' sb. 3. b. Proverbs and phrases. Lady of the Harvest (a); 'Harvest Queen' (b).

(b) *Harvest organisers*. Also ritualised, but essentially the practical role of chief organiser of the harvest (with, usually, a deputy), elected by the 'company' of harvesters. Evans (1956: 90-1) describes this 'Lord and Lady' in relation to the harvest:

The man who actually treated with the farmer about the terms of the contract was called the Lord of the Harvest. He was generally the foreman on the farm and would be elected by the men to command the company during the term of the harvest [...] The man next in authority was called, strangely enough, the Lady. He was the second reaper and took the Lord's place at the head of the line if he were absent.

The male 'Lady' suggests a reminiscence of the ritual role of harvest king and queen. A good negotiator was likely to be the popular choice of Lord, as he was also a kind of shop steward, as Tusser's advice to the farmer (1580, 1984: 122) suggests:

Grant harvest lord more by a penie or twoo,  
to call on his fellowes the better to doo

Hillman (1710, quoted in Tusser, 1984: 303) describes the type of character who would be chosen:

He that is Lord of the Harvest, is generally some stay'd sober working Man, who understands all Sorts of Harvest-Work. If he be of able Body, he commonly leads the Swarth in reaping and mowing.

Evans's all-male Lord and Lady also went out collecting 'largesse' for the harvest feast, and presided over the harvest supper (p. 101), but the Lord's most important job (or the Lady's, in his absence) was (p. 91):

to lead the men in the reaping: to set the rate at which they were to use their scythes, to determine when they were to stop for a break, and, most important of all, to decide which way they were to cut--along the st[r]etches or strips marked out by the plough, or across them.

Flora Thomson (1943, 1973: 235), writing after the machine age had begun, catches the end of this tradition, in Oxfordshire:

[the reapers] still kept up the old country custom of choosing as their leader the tallest and most highly skilled man amongst them, who was then called 'King of the Mowers' [...] With a wreath of poppies and green bindweed trails around his wide, rush-plaited hat, he led the band down the swathes as they mowed and decreed when and for how long they should halt for a 'breather' and what drinks should be had from the yellow stone jar they kept under the hedge in a shady corner of the field.

Evans also describes (1956: 45) the parallel tradition of 'Captain and Lieutenant' in the organisation of the Blaxhall Company of sheep-shearers, contracted seasonal workers rather than employees (the employees being busy at that time with haymaking):

Before the clipping started, the Blaxhall Company elected a captain to command it; the captain in his turn chose a lieutenant who would write the letters and would be a kind of clerk dealing with the business side of the company. The procedure [...] is very much like that of the harvest company and the Lord and Lady who organised the harvest.

The titles of 'captain' and 'lieutenant' also suggest another tradition, that of harvesting as a 'battle'. There is more than a hint of this in Duck's view of reaping and mowing, where *weapons* are brandished, *fields* surveyed, *blows* given. Brand, quoting Stevenson, *The Twelve Moneths* (1661) makes this explicit, and also makes a clear connection between the ritual and the organising function:

The Furmenty Pot welcomes home the Harvest Cart, and the Garland of Flowers crowns the Captain of the Reapers; the battle of the field is now stoutly fought. The pipe and tabor are now busily set a-work, and the lad and lass will have no lead on their heels [i.e. will dance lightly].

A female 'Lady' of the harvest, in this elective category, is defined in *OED* as 'the female 'mate' of the head reaper, harvest-lady.' Thus in some traditions the 'head' reaper and his female gatherer would be elected Lord and Lady as a team, rather than having a two-reaper all-male pair. See Tusser, Flora Thompson, Evans as cited; Hennell (1934, 1984: 107 ff); *OED* 'Harvest' sb. 3.b. Proverbs and phrases. Lord of the harvest (b), Lady of the Harvest (b); 'Harvest'. 7. special combinations. harvest-lady and harvest-lord; 'Harvest Queen' (c).

(c) *Owners or proprietors*. The literal 'Lord' or 'Lady' are difficult to separate from other harvest rulers, or to place in a folk rather than a literary tradition. Symptomatically, Brand (p. 301) quotes Robert Herrick's 'The Hock-Cart, or Harvest Home':

Come, sons of summer, by whose toil,  
We are the lords of wine and oil:  
By whose tough labours, and rough hands,  
We rip up first, then reap our lands.  
Crown'd with the ears of corn, now come,  
And to the pipe sing harvest home.  
Come forth, my Lord, and see the cart  
Dressed up with all the country art.

The 'Lord' here is 'The Right Honourable, Mildmay, Earl of Westmorland', to whom the poem is dedicated, the owner of the land and of its harvest. However Herrick, whose poem is a careful plea for 'unity' and class-collaboration, purposely blurs the categories. The 'sons of summer' are the reapers, by whose toil 'We' (which includes

the reapers) are all 'Lords'. As in Thomson's harvest, no distinction of interests can be found.

Wright (1936: I, 187) cites an example of the Lord as farmer, in which the fetish-object monarch is also present:

Curses were pronounced by the Harvest Lord, the farmer, on all who might bring harm to the new kern doll, before the next harvest.

See Herrick (1648); Wright (1936: I, 197); *OED* 'Harvest' sb. 3.b. Proverbs and phrases. Lord of the harvest (a).

(d) *God*. The idea of God as the 'Lord of the Harvest' is based on an interpretation of *Matthew 9, 38*. Jesus says:

Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest.

*OED* (mis-citing this as *Matthew ix, 8*) defines 'Lord of the harvest' (a) as 'the proprietor or farmer to whom the crops belong, hence applied to God'. Christ is speaking here metaphorically about his many followers and few leaders, so God is ultimately the 'Lord of the Harvest' referred to, but his literal meaning must be either an organiser or proprietor. The *OED* defines the latter, which suggests the idea of God as Lord of the harvest is historically intertwined with the idea of the proprietor as Lord of Harvest--my category (c). See *OED* 'Harvest' sb. 3.b. Proverbs and phrases. Lord of the Harvest (a).

(e) *Harvest gods and goddesses*. These are most clearly seen in the human or fetish-object representations of my category (a). *OED*, 'Corn' sb. IV. *attrib.* and *Comb.* 11 Special combinations: 'corn-mother, corn-queen', invites the comparison with 'corn spirit', quoting Frazer (1890: I.iii.341 and I, 307) for both:

Out of the last sheaf the Bulgarians make a doll which they call the Corn-queen or \*Corn-Mother.

The \*corn-spirit seems to be only an extension of the older tree-spirit.

The first is the object, the second the god/dess, and *OED* specifically links the two. It also defines 'Harvest Queen' (a) as 'Ceres, the goddess of agriculture and crops'; and Brand (1877: 302) cites a Northumberland source as saying that it is indeed Ceres who is represented by the fetish-object 'Harvest Queen' traditionally made in human form from straw and celebrated in that area on the completion of harvest.

Thomson's pastoral King and Queen sit awkwardly with the categories I have set up, being badly timed for the ritual figure (a), lacking the practical roles of (b), and clearly not relating to (c), (d) or (e). The range of possible kinds of harvest rulers, and their areas of overlap, may help to show why he has failed to actualise the King and Queen within any of these traditions.

- [84] *OED* 'Housewife' sb. 1. 'a woman (usually a married woman) who manages or directs the affairs of her household'--in this instance, the farmer's wife, I think.
- [85] The symbolic and actual sexual potency of the ram needs no elaboration. For more on the sexual potency of the 'sturdy boy' see Kinsey et al (1948: 219 and passim).
- [86] Hugo Williams, reviewing Andrew Davies's play *Prin*, *Sunday Correspondent*, 17 December 1989, p. 32.
- [87] I use these terms as a convenient shorthand, though *bourgeois* (*OED* B. *adj.* or *attrib.* 2. 'Resembling the middle classes in appearance, way of thinking, etc.')
- has a first *OED* citation of 1764. The first *OED* citation of *proletarian* (*OED* A. *adj.*, 'Of or pertaining to the lowest class of the people') is 1663. See *OED* and *Supplement* 'bourgeois'; *OED* 'proletarian'.
- [88] Eric Rothstein (1984) has noted ambivalences in attitudes to bloodsports among georgic-writers, from *Cooper's Hill* (1642) to the late eighteenth century. In Pope's *Windsor Forest* (1713), hunting is seen, consecutively, in negative terms of historical disruption and misuse of the land; in positive terms as 'war without tears' and rural exercise; from the point of view of the pathos of its victims; and as a symbol of royal glory. All these ideas are picked up by later georgics, where their presence is often tagged with versions of Pope's celebrated description of the pheasant's death:

Short is his Joy! he feels the fiery Wound,  
Flutters in Blood, and panting beats the Ground.  
(*Windsor Forest*, 113-14)

In *The Art of Preserving Health* (1744) John Armstrong, writing as physician as well as poet, expounds the philosophy of rural sports as health-enhancing; while in *The Chace* (1735) William Somerville defends hunting both as war without tears and as a royalist and patriotic activity, a kind of voluntary National Service. Thomson emerges as an early and eloquent opponent of blood sports, on both humanitarian and moral grounds, picking up the hint of sympathy to the victim's plight Pope had offered. Pope himself later strengthened his anti-bloodsport position in the third epistle of *An Essay on Man* (1732-4: 27-70, 161-8, in Pope, ed. Butt. 1963, 1968: 526-7, 530-1), and the idea ran on through the period of the georgic's strength to those two later poetic champions of animal rights, Cowper and Clare. See Denham (1642), reprinted in Wasserman (1959); Pope, *Windsor Forest* (1713: 123-34); *An Essay on Man*, as cited; Somerville (1735, 1969); Armstrong (1744); Cowper (1785: Book VI 'The Winter Walk at Noon' 231 ff); Clare, ed. Robinson and Powell (1984: 244-9: 'Animal Poems'); Rothstein (1984); Thomas (1983: passim).

- [89] Shakespeare, Dyer, and Hardy also make literary use of shearing festivals. In *The Winter's Tale* Shakespeare's shearing festival begins with the 'Clown' trying to reckon the profit from the shearing (4, iii, 31 ff.):

Let me see: every 'leven wether tods; every tod yields pound and odd shilling;  
fifteen hundred shorn, what comes the wool to?

He has been sent to buy materials for the sheep-shearing feast, and Shakespeare gives us some nice details:

Three pound of sugar, five pound of currants, rice--what will this sister of mine do with rice? But my father hath made her mistress of the feast, and she lays it on [...] I must have saffron to colour the warden pies; mace; dates--none, that's out of my note; nutmegs, seven; a race or two of ginger, but that I may beg; four pounds of prunes, and as many of raisins o'th'sun.

This ought not to be taken for folklore, although it has folklore elements. The clown's 'sister' is Perdita, who is not a real shepherdess, and whose ingredients are therefore supposed to suggest inappropriately 'laying it on'. The clown's role in the scene as Autolycus's 'gull' also means he must be 'gullible' and incapable of arithmetic, though he is obviously based on the 'Captain' or 'Lieutenant' figure, who would need to be reasonably numerate.

The Shepherd's scolding of Perdita (4, iv, 55 ff.) is also revealing:

Fie, daughter! When my old wife liv'd, upon  
This day she was both pantler, butler, cook;  
Both dame and servant; welcom'd all; serv'd all;  
Would sing her song and dance her turn; now here  
At upper end o'th'table, now i'th'middle;  
On his shoulder, and his; her face o' fire  
With labour, and the thing she took to quench it  
She would to each one sip. You are retired,  
As if you were a feasted one, and not  
The hostess of the meeting [...]  
Come, quench your blushes, and present yourself  
That which you are, Mistress o'th'Feast.

Perdita is again not 'That which you are'; but the picture of the shepherd's wife or daughter as 'both dame and servant', entertainer and 'Mistress o'th'feast', suggests she is seen here as the 'queen' of the shepherd's harvest.

The class issue that the idea of a shepherdess as pastoral 'Queen' suggests (and which I read as causing disharmony in Thomson's rendering) is used by Shakespeare to further his dramatic ends. As Florizel and Perdita prepare to dance, Polixenes and Camillo confer:

*Pol.* This is the prettiest low-born lass that ever  
Ran on the green-sward; nothing she does or seems  
But smacks of something greater than herself,  
Too noble for this place.

*Cam.* He tells her something  
That makes her blood look out. Good sooth, she is  
The queen of curds and cream. (4, iv, 156-59)

The shearing-festival 'queenliness' is nuanced in the 'curds and cream', the food of feast-days, and successfully blends the plot-element of disguised queen with the pastoral idyll of harvest queen.

Dyer's pastoral celebration is at the end of the first book of *The Fleece*, and (*pace* Thomson) cleverly gives the reward of lordliness or royalty to the shepherds by means

of their own triumphant declarations about their lives. Colin (I, 659-69) gives a familiar Horatian speech against the folly of the town and for the simplicity of a 'silly' shepherd's life. Thus inspired, Damon elects them both to a kind of kingship (670-5):

“Deem not, however, our occupation mean”,  
Damon reply'd, “while the Supreme accounts  
Well of the faithful shepherd, rank'd alike  
With king and priest: they also shepherds are;  
For so th'All-seeing styles them, to remind  
Elated man, forgetful of his charge.”

Dyer typically has it both ways here, keeping pastoral idyll and georgic professionalism together without disharmony.

In *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874) Hardy follows Shakespeare and Dyer in centralising food:

‘We workfolk shall have some lordly junketing to-night,’ said Cainy Ball, casting forth his thoughts in a new direction. ‘This morning I see ‘em making the great puddens in the milking-pails--lumps of fat as big as yer thumb, Mister Oak! I’ve never seed such splendid large knobs of fat before in the days of my life--they never used to be bigger than a horse-bean. (ch. 22)

A proprietorial ‘Lady’ of the harvest, is very much in evidence at the feast, and as with Shakespeare, Hardy is able to use a suggestion of the elective harvest ‘lordship’ in his plot. The issue is the empty seat at the bottom of the table, opposite Bathsheba Everdene:

This evening Bathsheba was unusually excited, her red cheeks and lips contrasting lustroously with the mazy skeins of her shadowy hair. She seemed to expect assistance, and the seat at the bottom of the table was at her request left vacant until after they had begun the meal. She then asked Gabriel to take the place and the duties appertaining to that end, which he did with great readiness.

At this moment Mr Boldwood came in at the gate, and crossed the green to Bathsheba at the window. He apologised for his lateness: his arrival was evidently by arrangement.

'Gabriel,' said she, 'will you move again, please, and let Mr Boldwood come there?' (ch. 23)

Thus the shepherd is deprived of his implied pastoral Lordship, and Hardy maintains the tension in Oak's fortunes, which is his primary concern at this stage in the novel.

Next to these bold and largely successful literary usages of the shepherd's harvest, Thomson's idyll seems again a disappointment, a lost opportunity.

[90] For my discussion of 'endings' see Sections XII-XIV.

[91] There are good practical reasons why the hazelnut harvest in *Autumn* (610-24) can be so easily pastoralised. Although hazelnuts were cultivated, their widespread availability in the wild makes it very easy for Thomson to blur the distinction between 'work' and 'pleasure', between a day's harvesting and a day out. Mingay (1984: 108) describes nutting in the East Midlands as a way of supplementing income, along with game-poaching; it was one of the many 'fringe benefits' which enabled survival pre-enclosure. Another reason why nutting would be pleasant is that nuts had to be collected in fine, dry weather, to avoid their rotting in store (Tusser, 1590, 1984: 35 and 223n, warns against gathering fruit and nuts 'in the deaw', for this reason).

Brand (1877: 192) gives Holy-Rood day (14 September) as the day the 'youth' go nutting; and John Clare repeats the old superstition that on that day 'the Devil goes a nutting' (Deacon, 1983: 285, 289n). This was not apparently a bad thing, for Opie and Tatem (1989: 290) quote Yorkshire and Sussex sources in which the devil is actually a helper in the gathering.

As with the other harvests, nutting was celebratory: the harvesting of apples, nuts, and honey came together around September, and the celebration of this cluster of natural riches has had a particular appeal for the poets. John Philips' georgic *Cyder* (1708: II, 46 ff) finely characterises the time of 'lusty Autumn's luke-warm Days' and the harvesting of apples and nuts; Thomson himself moves smoothly on from nutting to the apple harvest (*Autumn* 635-51); and Keats definitively describes the richness of the apple and the nut harvest in 'To Autumn' (*Poems*, 1820).

The sense of sexuality in nutting is threefold. The excitement of discovery and the sensuousness of the hazelnuts work together. Thomson acknowledges both in a round-about way by comparing the 'ardent Brown' colour of the 'glossy shower' with 'Melinda's Hair' (620-1): Wordsworth is more explicit:



(‘Thursday, or the Spell’)

Finally, nuts were associated with fertility. Opie and Tatem (1989: 289) record a tradition of throwing nuts, like confetti, at weddings. They quote Baring-Gould:

In Devonshire, as the bride leaves the church an old woman presents her with a little bag containing hazel nuts. These [...] betoken fruitfulness.

They also record (1989: 290) a very widespread tradition that ‘a great year for nuts [is] a great year for children’. One citation of this tradition makes a reference to the cuckolding of the husbands of ‘Wives’ who go nutting, confirming that nutting was indeed thought of as an occasion of sexual opportunity. See John Philips, ed. M. G. L. Thomas (1927: 69); Wordsworth and Coleridge, ed. Brett and Jones (1798, 1965: 197); Clare, ed. Robinson and Powell (1984: 131); Gay (1714, 1969: 34-5); Seamus Heaney, ‘Digging’ and ‘Blackberry Picking’ (1980a: 12, 15); and ‘Feeling into Words’ (1980b: 42); Brand, Deacon, Mingay, Opie and Tatem, Tusser, all as cited.

- [92] A good and in some ways naturalistic rendering of the siesta tradition is perhaps Van Gogh’s cornfield painting *The Mid-Day Break*, in which a man and woman sleep among the sheaves and loose piles of corn. Two sickles lie by them, as do his shoes, which he has kicked off. He lies on his back, hands behind his head, possibly suggesting idyllic tranquillity; but her semi-prone posture clearly suggests exhaustion. For an interesting early view of the siesta see Theocritus, *Idyll X. Milon’s Song*, described by one translator as ‘a string of popular maxims’, advises as follows:

They that thresh corn should shun the noonday sleep. When the sun’s high,  
Then is the time that chaff from straw will part most easily.  
But reapers should start toiling when the lark leaves his nest,  
And cease work when he sleeps; but in the noonday heat should rest.

See Theocritus, trans. Trevelyan (1947: 36). Milon concludes that ‘It’s songs like that, that men should sing who labour in the sun’.

- [93] That the Thomsonian and Keatsian merging of productivity and lethargy is part of a distinctly pastoral tradition is suggested by Miriam Allott’s annotation to the second stanza of ‘To Autumn’ (1970: 652), in which she suggests parallels with paintings by Poussin and Guilio Romano, and (of particular interest to the present discussion) with

W. Hamilton's engraving of the 'Reaper's Repose', printed in the 1807 edition of Thomson's *Seasons*.

[94] See note 10, above, for other connections between Thomson and Duck.

[95] See for example Tusser (1580, 1984: 124); Hennell (1934, 1984: 133); Flora Thompson (1945, 1973: 28); Evans (1956: 98 ff).

[96] The Biblical references to gleaning are as follows:

a. God's instructions to Moses: *Leviticus* 19, 9-10 and 23, 22.

b. Moses' instructions to the People of Israel: *Deuteronomy* 24, 19.

c. Ruth's story: *Ruth* 2, 7 and 15-16: Ruth asks Boaz for gleaning rights; Boaz instructs his reapers to leave corn generously for Ruth's gleaning:

7 And she said, I pray you, let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves: so she came, and hath continued even from the morning until now, that she tarried a little in the house.

15 And when she was risen up to glean, Boaz commanded his young men, saying, Let her glean even among the sheaves, and reproach her not:

16 And let fall also *some* of the handfuls of purpose for her, and leave *them*, that she may glean *them*, and rebuke her not.

Other sources for gleaning are *OED* 'glean' v. 1-2; Tusser (1590, 1984: 124, 305); Ellis (1744: III, 'August' 34-6); Hennell (1934, 1984: 133-5); Flora Thompson (1945, 1973: 28-9); Fussell (1955, 1985: 56-7); Evans (1956: 99-101; 1987: 6-8); Malcolmson (1981: 34, 166n); Snell (1985: 179-80); Thompson and Sugden (1989: 29). Philips (1984: nos. 148-50) gives three interesting accounts of gleaning, by John Clare, Flora Thompson and Edmund Blunden. The practice survived both enclosure and the early stages of agricultural industrialisation, and was still carried out at the beginning of this century.

[97] The *OED* does not help much in this, which is part of a larger problem of identifying classes and social roles in *The Seasons*. It defines 'Husbandman' (1) as 'A man who tills

or cultivates the soil; a farmer'. This could include anyone who actually works the land, be they employer or employee.

[98] Cobbett, ed. Cole and Cole (1930: I, 94, 'Odiham, Hampshire, Friday, 27 Sept.')

[99] For a late-Victorian rendering of the physical pain of gleaning, see Jefferies (1892, 1981: 88, 92).

[100] See Sambrook's annotation (1981: 366n167-9).

[101] I use the word 'husbandman' here uneasily aware that the usual problem of terminology exists: the victim of the storm is again described as a 'Husbandman', but the evidence of his status is contradictory. The landlord is asked not to demand the rent (implying a tenant farmer), while the husbandman is portrayed as a man whose physical labour keeps the landlord in luxury (implying a labourer, or possibly a small farmer). But in any case a tenant-farmer is itself, as John Barrell says (1980: 2), an occupation 'too capacious to be generalised about with any confidence'. What we can say here is that Thomson is considering someone who carries out physical labour for a living. I cannot resolve this example of what is a fairly intractable problem in the poem further, so I refer in the text to a 'husbandman', as Thomson does.

[102] The modern essay that best comments on the paradox is Roger Lonsdale's Warton Lecture on English Poetry 'The Poetry of Thomas Gray: Versions of the Self' (1973).

[103] The first two lines, containing the charitable appeal, are not present in the 1730 version (pp. 10-11), some of the other lines have been re-ordered, and there are a number of minor alterations. The 1730/1989 text is:

Each Morn we early rise, go late to bed,	1
And lab'ring hard, a painful life we lead.	2
For Toils, scarce ever ceasing, press us now,	3
Rest never does, but on the Sabbath show,	4
And barely that, our Master will allow.	5
Nor when asleep are we secure from Pain;	6
We then perform our Labours o'er again;	7
Our mimic Fancy always restless seems,	8
And what we act awake, she acts in Dreams.	9
Hard Fate! Our Labours ev'n in Sleep don't cease;	10

The 1736 text (p. 25), with 1730 line-positions marked, is:

Let those who feast at Ease on dainty Fare,	NEW
Pity the Reapers, who their Feasts prepare:	NEW
For Toils scarce ever ceasing press us now;	3
Rest never does, but on the Sabbath, show;	4
And barely that our Masters will allow.	5
Think what a painful Life we daily lead;	2
Each Morning early rise, go late to Bed:	1
Nor, when asleep, are we secure from Pain;	6
We then perform our Labours o'er again:	7
Our mimic Fancy ever restless seems;	8
And what we act awake, she acts in Dreams.	9
Hard Fate! Our Labours ev'n in Sleep don't cease;	10
Scarce Hercules e'er felt such Toils as these!	11

[104] I am thinking particularly of Chaplin's *Modern Times* (1936), which has much in common with *The Thresher's Labour*. Chaplin's relentless machine is the 'Electro Steel Corporation', whose worker is driven to nervous breakdown by the repetitive labour's invasion of his whole psyche: his production line, too, allows 'no intermission'. Pastoralism, indicated by Chaplin through a dream of suburban bliss with a real cow to milk, by Duck through the lucky singing, story-telling shepherds, is a bitter joke for both. Duck's mowers 'but faintly eat', while Chaplin's boss tests on the worker a feeding machine that 'requires no energy' and thus eliminates the need for a meal break altogether. Duck's workers are counted off to their tasks by numbers, while Chaplin's opening shot shows a herd of sheep, dissolving into an image of workers rushing to work.

[105] For Morland's achievement see Barrell (1980: 89-129).

[106] Sappho, trans. Barnard (1958: no. 16).

[107] 'Homewards we move, but spent so much with Toil' / 'We slowly walk, and rest at ev'ry Stile' / 'Got to the Door, soon eye us in the Way' / 'And out we set again, our Work to try' (1736). The words '*dumpling*' and '*bacon*' are italicised in 1739, as echoes of Duck.

[108] 'Weary, indeed! but 'tis not worth our while' / 'We find again our Work but just begun' (1762). 'Froward' means refractory, perverse, unreasonable: see *OED* 'froward', a., adv., prep., 1 and 2.

The endings of Collier's two 'homecoming' passages are strikingly similar:

Early next morning we on you attend;  
Our Children dress and feed, their cloaths we mend,  
And in the Field our daily Task renew;  
Soon as the rising Sun has dryd the Dew. (p. 17)

Yet without fail, soon as Daylight doth spring,  
We in the Field again our Work begin,  
And there with all our Strength our Toil renew,  
Till *Titan's* golden rays have dry'd the Dew. (p. 19)

She may have chosen to make this echo to enforce the idea of repetitive work, but it is also interesting for other reasons. In the hayfield (p. 17) they begin work as soon as the dew has dried out; whereas in the gleaning field (p. 19) they work from daylight *until* the dew has dried. This is unusual in that gleaning was normally restricted to between eight in the morning and six or seven at night. What is suggested, I think, is a special arrangement. Hennell (1934, 1984: 134) writes:

People who were known to be honest and respectable had sometimes, by favour of the farmer, the privilege of gleaning between the thraves [i.e. stooks]; much as Ruth had in the fields of Boaz.

If, as I suspect, Collier is suggesting she has been given a sun-up to dew-dry gleaning right by the farmer, then it is another point scored against Duck, for it shows she is a trusted, privileged harvester. The reason for the farmer's trust has already been declared:

You of Hay-making speak a word or two,  
As if our Sex but little Work could do:  
This makes the honest Farmer smiling say  
He'll seek for Women still to make his Hay (p. 16)

[109] 'The sweat, the Dust, and suffocating Smoak' (1736).

[110] The image of 'Ethiopians', which is to say blacks, would create for the eighteenth-century reader a complex of meanings, some threatening, some comic, all 'other'. David Dabydeen's essay, 'Blacks in Eighteenth Century English Art and Society' (1987: 17-40) illustrates these well. In the visual art of the period blacks are often rendered safe as visual accoutrements to images of the aristocracy; elsewhere they are either bizarrely comic, as in Rowlandson's 'Broad Grins' (reproduced by Dabydeen, p. 28), or shown exhibiting 'wit and quick thinking', as in 'The Rabbits' (1792, Dabydeen p. 20). This last example shows something of the kind of image Duck may be invoking. The black rabbit-seller's wit renders safe the inappropriate, outsiderly, vagabond qualities he shows, as he plies his trade at the door of a 'respectable' house. The impression one gets from these kinds of illustration is that 'Ethiopians' would be regarded as bizarre intruders to a sentimental cottage door scene.

[111] For the robin as a privileged semi-domestic creature in the eighteenth century see Keith Thomas (1983: 111 and 117); there are useful materials on the robin in folklore in Brewer (1898: 1059-60); Brand (1877: 686-7); Flora Thomson (1945, 1973: 153); Opie and Tatem (1989: 328-30). One extensive tradition recorded by the latter suggests that Thomson's robin may not be as reassuring a presence as I have suggested: the robin was often believed to be an omen of death, especially if it entered a house. A knowledge of this may possibly inform Thomson's reference to it in the passage preceding the death of the swain.

[112] This forms part of Williams' attack on the practice of giving literary antecedents as if they were adequate explanation for a particular occurrence of a familiar motif in pastoral (his example is a Horatian *Beatus ille* passage). See Williams (1973: 18).

Lonsdale's thorough gloss to the parallel scene in Gray's *Elegy* tells us all we need to know about its precedents. See Gray, Collins, Goldsmith, ed. Lonsdale (1969: 121n21-4).

[113] As my reading ascribes fundamental significance to the 'death of the swain' passage, I should note that it first appeared in the 1730 version of the poem. My reading of *Winter* (1726) would be in this respect a very different one from my reading of *The Seasons* (1730).

[114] For the history of workplace and proletarian poetry see especially Southey (1831, 1925), Unwin (1954) and Maidment (1987). For Duck's immediate successors, and further sources, see Goodridge (1990).

[115] The mortality rates in the early eighteenth century were horrific. Childbirth, poverty, gin-drinking, overwork, poor working conditions, smallpox and other diseases combined to make working-class women exceptionally vulnerable to premature death. See Malcolmson (1981: 60-1, 70-1, 76-7, 154-7); George (1925, 1966: 35-115, 173-4).

PART II

A Pastoral Convention and a Ruminative Mind:  
Agricultural Prescription in John Dyer's *The Fleece* (1757)

## 1. Introductory

### i. Re-reading *The Fleece*

In the first part of the thesis I suggested that caution needed to be exercised in the extrapolation of social history from literature, and especially from that most mystifying of literary forms, poetry. The search for information about the conditions of labour had in my view led some critics into an over-simplified division between the 'poetry' of Thomson and the 'truth' of Duck or of Collier. In developing my readings of these poems I found that there was indeed some basis for this division. One felt in the poetry of Duck and Collier, more strongly than in *The Seasons*, something of the sweat and dust of the threshing floor, the wash house, and the harvest field. At the same time all three poets showed signs of engagement with work-related folkloric traditions; and there were revealing ways in which Thomson's poem attempted to resolve some of the practical and ideological problems of rural labour; while Duck, and especially Collier, insisted on the values of poetry as well as those of realistic documentation. Pleasure and pain were present in all the poems; as were a range of implicit and explicit 'compensations' for the hardship of rural labour.

I want to turn now to a poem which is more concerned with 'prescribing' than 'describing', though the techniques it uses to do so, which are based on Addison's interpretation of Virgil's *Georgics*, involve an artful blending of the two tasks. This is John Dyer's ambitious poem on shepherding and the woollen industry, *The Fleece*, published in 1757 after a long genesis. [1] Dyer offered his readers a three-part theme:

The care of sheep, the labours of the loom,  
And arts of trade, I sing. (l, 1-2)

Following on from my discussion of rural labour, I shall be looking here at the first of these themes, 'the care of sheep'; at the agricultural and ideological principles which inform its presentation, and at the literary and historical meanings it offers.

\* \* \*

The critical history of *The Fleece*, up until fairly recently, makes sorry reading. The poem has been dismissed, ridiculed, damned with faint praise, summarised unread, and indeed declared 'unreadable'. [2] Its defenders have often seemed uneasy, and have usually been in a minority. [3] The poem still lacks textual stability and has no critical edition; Dyer's manuscripts have disappeared from sight (mostly over the last century); [4] and biographical

misconceptions about the poet continue to proliferate. [5] The overall impression one gets is that, as was wittily predicted to Dodsley, and rather unkindly repeated by Johnson in his *Life of Dyer*, the poem has been 'buried in woollen'. In recent years, however, it has begun to receive serious attention for the first time since its earliest reviews, and there have been major re-readings of the poem by Laurence Goldstein (1977: 25-58), Richard Feingold (1978: 1-17, 83-119), and John Barrell (1983: 90-109). [6] We may take these three accompaniments to a generally unannotated [7] and unloved text as our starting point. The great advance they represent in Dyer Studies is based on their tendency towards the ideological interpretation of what had hitherto been seen as merely aesthetic procedures in the poem.

All three critics locate a central dilemma in the poem, though they characterise it in different ways. For Goldstein, whose theme is 'Ruins and Empire', Dyer's dilemma was that of his society: how to avoid the 'entropy' (p. 53) which destroyed earlier societies; how to 'relocate the moral centre of civilisation' (p. 46) to accommodate the momentous socio-economic changes of eighteenth-century society, and especially the ongoing shift in land ownership to a 'new bourgeoisie' (p. 49). Dyer's response, as Goldstein encapsulates it, was to recommend an 'elevated pastoralism as a cure for social no less than spiritual ills' (p. 25). The Popean-Mandevillian theme of 'The Use of Riches' (pp. 53-5), and the 'Whig concern [with] the proper stewardship of England' (p. 47) are the twin intellectual challenges the poet must address; and his 'pastoral' response to them throws up a series of contradictions: between 'luxury' and mercantile motivation (p. 56); between 'the timeless joy of shepherds [and the] grim details of country life' (p. 56); between the ideal of a 'mighty brotherhood' of trade, and the 'mailed fist' of imperial power which Dyer seems to accept as a means to achieving it (p. 57). [8] Like James Thomson, whose *Britannia* (1729) Goldstein locates as the 'chief influence on *The Fleece*' (p. 52), [9] Dyer inevitably finds himself 'loyal to irreconcilable myths: that of the pastoral Golden Age and that of the progress of empire' (p. 55).

Surveying Dyer's achievement between readings of the equally contradictory pastoral visions of Spenser and Wordsworth, Goldstein admits that history was soon to make Dyer's 'epic attempt to revitalize the pastoral' appear 'evasive of bedrock realities' (p. 57). He nevertheless advises a generous acknowledgement of the poet's heroic struggle to harmonise his song and his society, in the face of the undermining 'mockery of his own muse' (p. 58). [10] Richard Feingold (1978) is less sympathetic to the idea that Dyer may be aware of the contradictoriness of his vision. He finds the contradictions to be between the formal conservatism of the Virgilian genre and the 'striking' originality of the poem and its themes (p. 7). Dyer describes, according to Feingold, 'two worlds of work', the 'real and the mythical' (p. 106). They do not sit easily together, because *The Fleece* lacks the 'limits' (p. 115) and the 'tragic sense' (p. 118) of the *Georgics*, and because the new experience cannot be successfully accommodated within old, pastoral literary conventions. Dyer's procedures

set up contradictions between the 'placidity' of pastoral and the 'power' of commerce (p. 110), and between the 'divine' and the 'secular celebration of secular energies' (pp. 110-11), as Dyer attempts to 'link the domains of God and the market' (p. 115). Feingold finds Dyer to have had:

no clear sense that the forces he was celebrating were inevitably part of a new order, very different from that sense of things which sustains the pastoral vision. (pp. 116-17)

The poet is seen as 'naive' (p. 118); and the consequence is that his 'enthusiasm', like Goldsmith's 'despair' in *The Deserted Village* (1770), creates 'an imaginative result which is inadequate to the historical moment' (p. 117).

Feingold's points are generally well made, though a rather high level of hindsight is imposed on the poet (one can think of few works of literature which with hindsight seem 'adequate' to their 'historical moment'). John Barrell (1983), by contrast, is not puzzled by Dyer's generic choice. The georgic, which he describes (p. 90) as:

a genre officially committed to the fairly detailed description of, in particular, rural labours, and a view of modern society as progressive by its labour

was the 'only genre' which could encapsulate Dyer's views of the social function of labour. This does not free Dyer's text from contradictions, but, like Goldstein, Barrell allows the poet some consciousness of the disunities his text attempts to unite. Indeed he goes further than Goldstein, and considers that:

Of all the poets writing in mid eighteenth-century England, Dyer is the one most willing to acknowledge divisions in society: *The Fleece* sets out to demonstrate a unity of interest among the practitioners of different occupations whose attitudes to work and whose styles of life seem utterly opposed. (p. 91)

The major strand of Barrell's reading concerns the details of Dyer's purposeful 'play[ing] off against each other' (p. 95) of pastoral and georgic styles, to represent differing levels of commitment to labour, and different degrees of pleasure in labour. The poet makes the transitions between the two modes with 'ease' and 'sang-froid': he seems 'assured' that the contradictions of his approach can be resolved (p. 95), and that society can indeed be shown as capable of unity through the positive communal effects of individual motivation and individual labour.

There is of course a price to be paid for such 'assurance'. Barrell's reading is a comparative one which puts *The Fleece* alongside Thomson's *The Seasons* and *The Castle of Indolence* (1748), and where he is critical of Dyer's engagement with his subject, his criticism occurs within this comparison between the poets:

If, in the attempts he makes to argue that the society of Britain is harmonious and unified, Thomson, and especially in *The Seasons*, appears to fail where Dyer seems to succeed, it is because he is only too aware, that the conflict between industry and idleness is not primarily a conflict of concepts, or of different productive occupations, but of classes [...] What looked to be, in the context of Thomson's work considered in isolation, a willing agnosticism, becomes in a comparison with *The Fleece*, an awareness of problems of social organization in England Dyer never approaches (p. 106)

Barrell is suggesting (if I read him correctly) that Dyer exercises (whether consciously or not) a kind of substitutionism, in which 'real' patterns of division (which, perhaps, cannot be resolved) are disguised as, or are imitated by, 'artificial' divisions which can appear to be resolved within the poem. It is a subtle, tentative reading of Dyer's 'dilemma' (and of course of the 'dilemmas' I have discussed in relation to labour in *The Seasons*), though it is also (as Barrell says of Thomson's awareness of class-conflict, p. 106) 'not something that can easily be avowed'.

In these three rereadings, it seems to me, the study of *The Fleece* has finally come of age. It is simply no longer adequate, as it was as recently as the 'fifties, to declare that '[*The Fleece*] sings the wool-trade with honest observation and amiably rotund diction', as though Dyer were rather dim-witted, or wrote poetry only in the sense that Moliere's *bourgeois gentilhomme* spoke prose. [11] However we read the poet's particular strategies for finding harmony in the contradictions and conflicts of his society, the intensity, seriousness and care with which his poem engages the major issue facing that society can no longer be in serious doubt. Goldstein, tackling the old 'aesthetic' issue of high style/low theme in the poem from a new perspective, notes that:

The didactic poets of the century descended the hierarchy of poetic subjects because they possessed information the country urgently needed for its survival. Verse was a popular medium in which the spiritual dimension of commercial subjects might be fruitfully explored. Poems like *Cyder*, *The Fleece*, *The Sugar Cane*, and *The Hop-Garden* assume an ignorance of practical matters in the English public; contemporary accounts suggest that poets were not wrong in such assumptions. (p. 48)

The 'intellectual rot' (as Pope had also understood), 'began at the top', with the 'narrow vision' and 'low tastes' of King George II. It blighted the ability of both old and new landowners to meet the socio-economic challenges of a rapidly changing society, and percolated through all levels of that society. [12]

Dyer's response was radical and thorough. What Barrell (p. 107) describes as 'the most comprehensive and well-informed Georgic in English' is emphatically addressed to everybody:

Ye rural Nymphs!  
Ye Swains, and princely Merchants! aid the verse.  
And ye, high-trusted Guardians of our Isle  
Whom public voice approves, or lot of birth,  
To the great charge assigns! ye Good of all  
Degrees, all sects! be present to my song

(l, 2-7) [13]

and (taking the bull by the horns) to the King himself:

But chiefly Thou,  
The people's Shepherd, eminently plac'd  
Over the numerous swains of every vale,  
With well-permitted power and watchful eye  
On each gay field to shed beneficence,  
Celestial office! Thou protect the song.

(l, 12-17)

Goldstein (p. 46) reads this last element of the invocation well:

When Dyer apostrophizes the king as a shepherd, in a poem devoted to the manufacture of wool, and asks that he keep watch over rural occupations, the wit and point of the suggestion must be distinguished from similar compliments in the conventional idyll. Dyer does not allegorize entirely; he means what he says.

Certainly Dyer would not have had a mercenary motive for apostrophising the King (poets found little enough favour from 'Dunce the Second', and in any case Dyer had already achieved his preferment and established his patrons). The king is invoked, with an intense consciousness of the implications of the word 'shepherd', because all classes of society must be recruited for Dyer's vision of a harmonious society to be able to work. [14]

The model for the rhetoric of this opening invocation, signalled especially by its adjectives ('princely', 'numerous', 'watchful', 'Celestial'), is *Paradise Lost*, and particularly

the opening addresses of Satan's four speeches in Hell (I, 315; I, 622; II, 11; II, 430). Its 'high' Miltonic manner is entirely characteristic of Dyer's style. This style has been criticised more than any other feature of the poem, being dismissed, typically, as absurd and inappropriate to the 'low' themes of the poem. But the new readings I have briefly discussed here, and particularly those of Goldstein and Barrell, may begin to suggest that the nature of Dyer's task was such that it could only be attempted in the high, epic manner. To lend credibility to his definitive apologia for the Christian cosmology and the age of revolutions he had lived through, John Milton had, as it were, gathered his bardic robes imposingly around himself, and declaimed *ex cathedra*. If in the eighteenth century, as may fairly be argued, the ability of the nation to survive and flourish depended to a great extent on the ability of landowners and farmers to supply large amounts of inexpensive mutton to the capital, and large amounts of wool to the textile industry and thence to the world, then 'The care of sheep' would indeed become an epic theme. And, similarly, if the poet felt that these processes were in danger of being stifled by widespread intellectual and economic dissipation, then the language with which Satan rallies his demoralised troops in hell would be an appropriate model for an epic attempt to alert the nation to the dangers it faced, and to rally it to a new sense of economic and philosophical purpose.

## ii. Engagement and disengagement in mid-eighteenth century poetry

This intense sense of purpose, the serious and practical engagement the new readings of *The Fleece* imply, and the rationale I have suggested for Dyer's use of epic language and form, seem at first sight surprising. We tend to think of mid-eighteenth century poetry in terms of a group of poets whose major concerns were very far from the current socio-economic demands of their society. The only kind of nation they seem to rally is the mythical thirteenth-century Wales for which Gray's doomed *Bard* performs his heroic suicide; and the classic location for their poetry is not the textile factory, the trading exchange, or even the sheep pastures of England, but the country churchyard. Our usual reading of the poetry of the 1740s and 1750s tracks a retreat from the social and historical engagement of the Queen Anne poets. [15]

The position has been put most eloquently, in recent years, by John Sitter (1982). In the 1740s, he finds the poets moving sharply away from the sense both Dryden and Pope had, of 'the poet's role as historian of his own times' (p. 83). For the new generation of poets contemporary history is a 'crushing presence' (p. 84), from which to escape into the 'politics of melancholy' (p. 85). Considering the changes in terms of the Horatian ideal of retirement, Sitter writes:

By the mid-century, retirement has hardened into retreat. The poet characteristically longs to be not only far from the madding crowd, which Pope had wanted as much as Gray, but far from everybody. (p. 85)

Yet Dyer's feelings in *The Fleece* are exactly the opposite of this. His most intensely felt poetic moments are social ones: the communal idyll of the shepherd's feast (I, 698-720), the Bishop Blaize procession (II, 539-56), and even the communal labour of the factory-workhouse (III, 259-302). His most emphatically expressed theme is of the unifying social virtues of labour and of trade.

It would not be especially productive to pursue here the whys and wherefores of this divide: one could argue endlessly over what the 'characteristic' literature of a period is, to little useful effect. The essential point, I think, is that literary history (like other kinds of history) tends to be written from the point of view of the 'winners', and the 'winners' in this context have been the 'solitary' poets, whose sensibilities coincide with, and indeed prefigure, the modern view of poetry, as Sitter notes in his *Preface*:

One major shock of recognition for the modern observer is the discovery, made in the 1740s, that poetry, if it is to be "pure poetry," should be about a lonely poet surrounded by "nature"--an idea hardly pure or natural but inherited today by almost any beginning writer of verse. It is primarily this new assumption and its variants in the particular consciousness mid-eighteenth-century authors had of themselves as solitary writers for solitary readers that I have tried to characterise as "literary loneliness." (p. 9)

One result of the modern understanding of poetry as the product of a 'lonely poet surrounded by nature' has been the exclusion from the canon of mid-eighteenth century poetry of a genre whose stance is primarily social and sociable. As well as *The Fleece*, other poems of this sort, such as John Armstrong's *The Art of Preserving Health* (1744), Christopher Smart's *The Hop Garden* (1752), Robert Dodsley's *Agriculture* (1753) and James Grainger's *The Sugar-Cane* (1764) will not be found in any but the most comprehensive reference works, are not on any syllabus, and are not discussed by critics such as Sitter.

The problem this raises is not primarily one of how to re-instate the genre, but of how to 'read' it. Recent work on eighteenth-century poetry has led to the rediscovery of many new genres and works from the period, and to a much more open-minded approach to what is 'significant' than has ever been the case before. [16] But the receptive implications of a renewed critical engagement with *The Fleece*, and poems like it, need some attention. Sitter uses the phrase 'pure poetry', albeit in cautious quotation marks. Is the kind of poetry represented by *The Fleece* therefore perhaps 'impure poetry', by modern

standards? What kind of information can we expect to find in it? Should we treat it as being primarily of historical and documentary interest, or can it also maintain its status as poetry? And if it is poetry, does it have a relationship with the personal, solitary, intuitive kind of utterance which to the modern mind is poetry, or are its poetic qualities mortgaged to rational and practical requirements, to its public and social responsibilities?

The reading of one of *The Fleece*'s three themes which follows attempts, as I think Goldstein, Feingold and Barrell have attempted, to 'outgrow' these problems, drawing on interdisciplinary information to measure the historical and documentary value the poem holds, and at the same time treating it as a poem, in the sense of a discourse which involves imaginative and volitional and well as cognitive processes, and which draws on the rhythmic, harmonious and connotative as well the denotative values of language. The important question in this is not so much whether the poet found inspiration in a twilight churchyard or in a clothing factory, as how effectively and credibly s/he uses the force of poetry to express and to find the meaning of the subject, whatever it may happen to be.

It is not at all clear, of course, that poetry can satisfy both rational and imaginative criteria. Shelley, for example, was to make a clear distinction:

Ethical science arranges the elements which poetry has created, and propounds schemes and proposes examples of civil and domestic life [...] But poetry acts in another and diviner manner. It awakens and enlarges the mind itself by rendering it the receptacle of a thousand unapprehended combinations of thought. (1821, 1951: 485-6)

The poets of a slightly earlier period (as we saw in Thomson's *Winter*) attempted to incorporate what Shelley calls 'ethical science' within the poetry; so that *The Fleece* itself 'propounds schemes and proposes examples of civil and domestic life'. The 'dilemma' of the poem lies within this combination of tasks, and the major critical issue is how, and to what effect, they are combined. We may now attempt to unravel this issue, beginning with a look at the historical and theoretical situation in which Dyer's agricultural theme was constructed.

### iii. The Agricultural Revolution

To the modern mind, the combination of 'beauty' and 'truth' belongs typically in a Keats poem, and therefore within the discipline of English Literature. It is not a theme we would expect to find, for example, within the discipline of agrarian history. Keith Thomas has noted (1983: 286) that it was the early modern period, the era of Dyer and Keats, which:

engendered that split sensibility from which we still suffer. What was useful and productive was most likely to be ugly and distasteful.

Dyer fought spiritedly against this psychological split. *The Fleece* is a poem that attempts to contribute to historical progress by giving practical advice on the new industrial and farming methods; and it is also a didactic treatise that attempts to encompass poetic ideals of beauty, and an idealised, 'poetic' view of past history. So far as agriculture is concerned, this attempt to combine 'beauty and truth', from which our modern 'split sensibility' recoils, has another historical analogue, one which is particularly relevant to Dyer's poem.

The idea that in the eighteenth century an 'agricultural revolution' took place has undergone much revision in the last 25 years. One element of it, however, has held its position and status as a major mid-eighteenth-century event. This is the animal-breeding revolution, associated particularly with the pioneering work of Robert Bakewell (1725-95). This revolution was of major significance in the economic development of modern society; and established new methods of animal husbandry not only in this country, but in areas such as Australia, South America and Africa, where the new British breeds became the basis for large-scale livestock agriculture. So far as sheep-husbandry is concerned, the breeding revolution had two major and interlocking features. Firstly, it was the central event in a general change of priorities in the national utilisation of sheep, from wool to mutton. It signalled, effectively, the end of the woollen industry's hegemony within national economic life, after some six centuries of central significance. The wool clip in fact increased in the eighteenth century, though not sufficiently to keep pace with national demand. By 1776 two million tons of wool had to be imported to supply the indigenous clothing industry, and by 1800 the figure was eight and a half million tons. But while the breeding experiments may have actually helped increase the quantity of the clip in some cases, it decreased the quality, and helped put the decline of the high quality combing and carding wools beyond retrieval. [17]

Secondly, the purpose and result of the breeding experiments were to turn the free-ranging, slow-maturing, unprolific, boney English sheep into a closely-monitored, fast-maturing and prolific slab of 'mutton on the hoof'; an animal which could answer significantly the demands of the rapidly-expanding cities, particularly London, for large amounts of cheap protein. [18] In Bakewell's home county of Leicestershire the great droving-routes from the North, Scotland and Wales converged in the rich pasture land of the Soar valley. It was naturally a nursery for English mutton and beef, and a remedial centre for the drovers' cattle and sheep. Locally-bred animals were fattened; and drovers' animals regained there the weight and condition they had lost on the long migration south and east.

The new turnpike roads made the final journey to Smithfield a fairly easy one; and the area was well situated for sending cattle and sheep in other directions too. [19]

In the Middle Ages, mutton had been a relatively insignificant product. Sheep were bred for two main purposes: to manure the land, via folding and coting, and to grow wool. Mutton was a side-product, no more significant than other fringe benefits like milk or parchment (that is to say, useful, but not essential to agriculture or the national economy). By contrast the economic role of wool was central, and enabled not only such familiar local achievements as the 'wool churches' of the Cotswolds, but, as I mentioned in the Introduction, the very rise of England as a major economic power. [20] It might not have been apparent in the mid-eighteenth century that the most glorious days of the wool industry were over--though it had in some ways been struggling for a long time (at least since the later seventeenth century); but the growing significance of mutton as a staple diet for the city masses could be perceived by the more far-sighted, and the Leicestershire graziers were well-placed to possess such insights. Even before Bakewell's time the area, as one commentator noted in 1790, had 'for many years abounded with intelligent and spirited breeders'. [21]

The new, mutton oriented sheep husbandry, then, was born in Leicestershire. We may note at this point that John Dyer owned farms and worked glebe lands in Leicestershire between 1738 and 1755; that he conducted much of his hard research on agriculture there; that he lived in Nuneaton briefly, and from 1742-51 was vicar of Catthorpe, eight miles south-east of Nuneaton. Between Catthorpe and Nuneaton the rivers Avon and Soar, and the ancient routes of Watling Street and the Fosse Way all intersect, in the area of the three-way boundary between Leicestershire, Northamptonshire and Warwickshire. He could hardly have had a better place from which to view the breeding revolution and gain an understanding of its significance than this fertile meeting-point, which he calls in his poem 'Tripontium' (the place of three bridges). [22]

The old, wool-oriented sheep husbandry and its associated woollen industries were more widespread, being strong, for example, in the West of England, much of the South East, Lincolnshire, Oxfordshire, and the Southern chalk-belt. There were as many uses for wool as there were grades and qualities of it; and the uniquely wide range of sheep and wool-types the British landscape and climate had helped to evolve fostered a rich diversity in the woollen industry. [23] Its greatest glory, however, and the area in which it reigned virtually supreme in the early modern period, was its fine quality wools: its lustrous combing long-wools and its fine carding short-wools. These types were most strongly associated with two adjacent areas and two kinds of sheep. For high-quality, lustrous combing wools the Cotswold sheep was for a long time unmatched; while the fine carding wool produced by the Ryelands sheep had acquired an almost mythical status. The Cotswold sheep was most concentrated in Gloucestershire, and the Ryelands sheep in Herefordshire. [24] Again, we

may note that from 1730 to 1734 Dyer toured the West of England and Wales (especially the Welsh Marches) as an itinerant painter; and that he managed a farm at Bromyard near Leominster as a working farmer from 1734 to 1737. [25] Ryelands wool was known in the late-medieval and early-modern period as 'Lemster Ore', from its main wholesaling centre, Leominster, and the enduring belief that its best grades were worth their weight in gold. As with 'Tripontium' Dyer could not have found a better way to learn the history and traditions of British fine wool production than by travelling and farming in these areas, which he calls in his poem 'Siluria' (from the early Welsh tribe, the 'Silures'). [26]

We thus see two elements in eighteenth-century sheep husbandry: the golden legacy of a highly successful woollen industry (and especially a tradition of fine-wool production stretching back to the pioneering work of the Cistercian monks); and the new agri-business of mass mutton-production, still at an early stage, but of enormous future potential and significance. Only hindsight allows us to see that the latter would eclipse the former, and we cannot expect the poet to know this; but we have seen that the poet was in a position to engage with both subjects. His main concern, of course, is *'The Fleece'*, but it is also 'the care of sheep', which must relate to mutton as well as wool-production. We may note here a number of potential contrasts suggested by this preliminary survey. The first is between wool and mutton production. All shepherding practice aims to produce both, but the new breeding programmes, in concentrating on mutton-production, were to destroy fairly swiftly the fine quality of Ryelands and Cotswold wool, which depended on sparse feeding. There is perhaps also a tension here between history as legacy (or, as we would now say, history as 'heritage'), represented by the achievements of the woollen industry; and history as progress, innovation and change, represented by the mutton-orientated breeding revolution. There is thus a sense of potential conflict between the past and the future, a georgic theme pioneered by Virgil in the memorable image of future swains ploughing up the rusty armour and bones of past battles (*Georgics*, trans. Dryden, I, 661-7).

A conflict between the 'aesthetic' and the 'practical' manifests itself within the poem; and we shall find that it also manifests itself within the subject of the breeding revolution. Was the scraggy English sheep transformed in the eighteenth century into an object of austere utilitarian beauty, as many contemporaries felt it was? Or had its diverse natural beauty been sacrificed to produce an ugly, unnatural machine for producing mountains of watery, grainy, low-grade mutton, as those who savoured the legacy of 'Lemster ore', the ancient 'Cotswold Lion', and the sweetness of pre-improvement English mutton would have argued? [27] It will become increasingly apparent as our reading proceeds that these two points of view, the two major concerns of eighteenth-century sheep husbandry, and the two locations I have associated them with, are at the heart of the conflicts and contrasts in *The Fleece*, and particularly of Dyer's attempt to encompass what I have called 'truth' and 'beauty'.

#### iv. The Poet as Researcher

It would be useful at this stage briefly to consider Dyer's methods of research, a subject of importance in measuring our approach to the documentary qualities of the poem's agricultural theme. The evidence is uneven but interesting. First, we have the poet's own characterisation of his work, in a statement in Book II which imitates Milton's autobiographical passage in *Paradise Lost* (VII, 1-39). Dyer declares that his wish is 'to teach th'inactive hand to reap / Kind Nature's bounties, o'er the globe diffus'd' (II, 501-2); and he continues:

For this I wake the weary hours of rest;  
With this desire the merchant I attend;  
By this impell'd the shepherd's hut I seek,  
And, as he tends his flock, his lectures hear  
Attentive, pleas'd with pure simplicity,  
And rules divulg'd beneficent to sheep                   (II, 503-8)

The Christ-like outdoor lecture, delivered as a form of charity by an unassuming 'friend to man' is a favourite image of Dyer's, as his praise of Joseph Nutt (I, 440-50), and his own aspirations as clergyman and poet attest. [28] Being more literal-minded, we note that he gets up early and goes to talk to shepherds and merchants for information on, respectively, shepherding and the wool trade.

We may add a little to this from other sources. There is evidence the poet took a 'professional' attitude to researching and writing the poem. By the early 1750s, *The Fleece* was being nurtured by a group of patrons and advisors. [29] It was regarded by them as a major didactic project, and by Dyer as part of his professional and pastoral work; so that, exhorting his friend Dr James Mackenzie to press ahead with his own book, he wrote:

Even the work of my little Fleece I regard as a part of my business; it generally accompanies my sermon, and takes up at least half my pocket. [30]

The image of Dyer walking around with his latest sermon and the manuscript of *The Fleece* stowed together in his pocket says a lot about the man, as does the description of the *Fleece* notebook (which is now lost) given by Dyer's descendant W. H. Dyer Longstaffe (1847-8: 5: 221):

It is a little parchment-covered tome, bearing ample evidence of its *docketings*. It contains an immense number of fragments for "*The Fleece*," hurriedly written down as they passed through the fired mind, curiously intermixed with other matters, plans for agricultural implements, memoranda of "color and camel's hair" he was to buy, and so forth. Sometimes, indeed, it would seem likely that he pulled the wrong book out of his pocket, for in the midst of one of his grave sermons is a *fleecy* extract snatched from Dryden, "the woolly-breed;" and on the back of another certain desiderata, viz. "Wig--Coat--Linen--Book--Chapman's Agreement."

This provides an excellent picture of the poet at work, though it needs a little annotation. What 'agricultural implements' Dyer was designing is not known, but that he was doing so is entirely characteristic of his practical improving mentality. The phrase 'color and camel hair' indicates painterly concerns, a camelhair being a type of artist's paintbrush. The phrase 'wooly breed' is from Dryden's translation of Virgil's *Eclogues* (1697, I, 9). Dyer also knew well Dryden's translation of Virgil's *Georgics* (1697). Book III (451 ff.) treats the subject of sheep; and Dryden uses the similar phrase, 'woolly flocks', at line 452. There are many echoes of this section of Book III in *The Fleece*.

He carried two notebooks, then, in which sermons, *The Fleece*, and various other notes and queries had a tendency to cross-pollinate. As they are both lost we know little about what agricultural notes he wrote in them. However, Parker (1953: 103), who had access to Dyer's notebooks, records that in 1743 he was taking notes on the price of wool and on stocking rates, quoting an interesting minute from 'Notebook B':

The pasture sheep of Leicestershire &c require half an acre each for the farmer and one acre for the Butcher.

That is, sheep which the farmer intends to keep over winter need half an acre each, while sheep being fattened for the butcher need a full acre. This indicates a serious, measuring type of research, generally ahead of its time, and very like the kind of information collected by the Board of Agriculture reporters at the end of the eighteenth century. From Parker's survey of Dyer's notes on books he had read (1956: 145) we have the negative evidence that, although he had read extensively in a range of subjects relevant to the poem, notes on agricultural works were 'extraordinarily few'. This may possibly suggest a concentration on empirical, first-hand research into agriculture: learning from the 'shepherd's hut', as well as from the poet's own agricultural practice.

Two other sources deserve consideration. Firstly, Dyer's manuscript materials for his projected 'Commercial Map of England' (the 'Commercial Map' notes). These have never received much attention in the past, though they are a potentially valuable historical source.

Although they owe quite a lot to Defoe and other printed sources, they also contain much direct observation. A few extracts on farming matters (Dyer's chief concern in them is of course 'commerce') will give an indication of the kind of research he carried out (in his notes, Dyer uses the letter thorn for 'th', transliterated below as 'y'):

[f. 6: Cambridgeshire] Wisbech--in y[e] Isle--sends yearly to Lond[on] 5000 tun or 52500 quarters of oats--1000 tuns of oil & ab[ou]t 8000 firkins of butter--

[f. 16v: Lincolnshire] y[e] fleece wool in Lincoln shire is y[e] longest in England y[e] sheep in Leicestersh[ire] & Lincolnsh[ire] produce greatest fleeces of wool of any in ye Kingdom--Leicestersh[ire]--y[e] largests Horses

[f. 18va: Leicestershire] thr[ough] Leicestersh[ire] are drove vast numbers of Cattle--roads ought to be made good--Y[e] Leicestersh[ire] & ye Lincolnsh[ire] Droaving Graziers are found to sell off their stocks at ye latter end of y[e] Summer to y[e] Lon[don] <Drovers> Butchers by reason of y[e] badness of y[e] roads--y[e] Butchers & farmers keeping on till 10th y[e] jan[ua]ry sell them dear

one of the most useful Counties in y[e] Kingdom--& best in general for wheat for beans for <black> strong Draught Horse & for pasture Sheep & Long fleece wool--

These are of course only rough notes, but they are nevertheless fairly impressive, and intelligently combine quantitative research, anecdotal evidence, summary and overview.

Finally, we have the evidence of Dyer's own agricultural practice. The vital evidence is the notebook he kept during his first year at Mapleton (1734), which has, like so much else, now disappeared from sight. However Parker and Williams had access to it and wrote a useful article quoting from and interpreting it (1948), which is now effectively the sole source for this material. As their article is easily available, it does not need to be rehearsed in any detail here. We may note, however, that the article is laden with Dyer's statistics, reflecting the poet's scientific, statistical approach to farming; and that Dyer ran a mixed but largely arable farm, on which a major crop was hops (there is no evidence of shepherding). Parker and Williams consider Dyer was a 'moderately progressive farmer' and point out that 'the use of clover, a four-field rotation, and an iron plow are all symbols of [the] willingness of Dyer and his neighbours to consider new crops and new methods'. His first year in farming, which the notebook covers in some detail, was, Parker and Williams record, 'moderately successful' (p. 135). They characterise the notebook as 'unique among literary figures of his time', and 'an interesting addition to the materials on eighteenth-century farming already published'.

## v. Two models of agriculture

Goldstein, as we have seen, argues strongly that Dyer's didactic purpose is serious; and what we have discovered of the poet's methods of research tend to confirm this. It seems Dyer really did have practical information he wished to convey, and that he was determined to learn about it first in a pragmatic, measuring way, through field-research. I have suggested also that we should expect to find in the poem a reflection of the central transition in eighteenth-century sheep husbandry, from fine wool to mutton production; and we have considered some of the conflicts and contrasts which may be found in this and in other, related dualities. One final aspect of Dyer's approach needs to be considered to complete the introductory picture, and it is one which also enables us to begin to read the poem itself. This is Dyer's tendency to make summarising statements, or overviews of agricultural practice, within the poem. I have two particular examples in mind, though we shall also find others as we proceed.

Beginning the second book of the poem, whose subject is the progress of 'the sever'd lock', the poet pauses to comment on the subject he has just completed, 'the care of sheep'. He uses a pathetic fallacy, and a rhetorical pattern of varied repetition, to show how much the sheep 'gives' to man:

Thro' all the brute creation none as sheep  
To lordly man such ample tribute pay.  
For him their udders yield nectareous streams;  
For him their downy vestures they resign;  
For him they spread the feast: ah! ne'er may he  
Glory in wants which doom to pain and death  
His blameless fellow-creatures. Let disease,  
Let wasted hunger, by destroying live;  
And the permission use with trembling thanks,  
Meekly reluctant; 'tis the brute beyond;  
And gluttons ever murder, when they kill. (II, 11-21) [31]

Davies (1968: 442) offers a parallel between lines 13-15 and Pope's *Essay on Man* (Epistle I, lines 133-40), and he could indeed have found many more parallels to these Theocritean lines. [32] He would perhaps have found it a little harder to find a parallel for the progress of Dyer's thoughts in the later lines. The situation is very similar to that of the shearing scene in Thomson's *Summer*. [33] Contemplation of the human uses of the sheep has led in both

cases to the unavoidable fact that the former invariably ends up eating the latter. [34] Both poets are clearly uncomfortable about the idea of eating sheep, and feel they must give an explanation. There I think the resemblance ends. The subject seems to take Thomson by surprise, and the inadequacy of his 'explanation' has been discussed. If Dyer's 'explanation' fails it is mainly because it is oddly written, and therefore difficult to follow. A paraphrase will ensure we are clear what he means.

The sheep gives man more than any other creature, especially milk, wool and mutton (11-15). There is a great deal of euphemism in the lines which follow; but essentially Dyer uses exclamation to express the wish that humans will not revel in the use of meat, as it causes pain and death to the animal, which is an innocent fellow-creature (15-17). The phrase 'glory in wants' goes two ways: the 'glory' suggests a condemnation of any excessive enjoyment of meat; while 'wants' implies that meat is only used out of necessity. The final sentence uses an unexpected grammar in a manner more familiar in the work of the metaphysical poets, though I suspect that this is as much for euphemistic as for metaphysical purposes:

Let disease,  
Let wasted hunger, by destroying live;  
And the permission use with trembling thanks,  
Meekly reluctant; 'tis the brute beyond;  
And gluttons ever murder, when they kill. (II, 17-21)

'disease' and 'wasted hunger' are personifications, representing 'those who suffer from disease' and 'those wasted by hunger'. These people may, in Dyer's wish, use meat; and the implication is that the destruction of animals is allowable in their (special) case only to avoid their own destruction. There is a note of rhetorical paradox in this idea of the causing of death to preserve life. They must in return 'the permission use with trembling thanks'; that is, thank God, in a timid, self-effacing way which suggests they are reluctant to harm living creatures, for 'the permission' God gave Man to control and use animals. [35] Any further use of meat would be brutal ('tis the brute beyond'); and any usage based on greed rather than necessity becomes 'murder' rather than necessary killing.

Dyer seems to be suggesting an extraordinary degree of limitation to the human use of animals: they must not be used for meat except in the greatest emergencies, in which case the usage must be accompanied by a careful routine of propitiatory gestures to distinguish it from 'murder'. This is very strongly put, for its time: even Thomson, a poet who is highly sensitive to animal rights, does not go so far as to proscribe and prescribe in this manner. [36] We do not have any record of Dyer's own shepherding practice (if indeed he kept sheep) but he certainly kept cattle and pigs, which one could hardly do on the basis of

such stringent rules about meat-eating. Clearly he cannot mean what he says in a literal way. The formulation 'ah! ne'er may', and the imperatives 'Let [...] Let', in fact betray that this is a rhetorical rather than a literal piece of didacticism. His real concern is with the psychological effect of his speech, best expressed in the phrase 'with trembling thanks, / Meekly reluctant'. What Dyer is trying to 'teach' is an awe-filled respect for animals, and a constant sense of wonder at their 'kindness' and their utility. This 'respect' and 'wonder' informs all he has to say about sheep husbandry.

The second statement comes a little later. Dyer has moved on to the subject of buying and sorting wool, before doubling back to the subject of how to cultivate good wool. The statement follows naturally on from this advice, but it is also a 'speech':

But lightest wool is theirs who poorly toil  
Thro' a dull round in unimproving farms  
Of common fields. Inclose, inclose, ye Swains!  
Why will you joy in common fields, where pitch,  
Noxious to wool, must stain your motley flock,  
To mark your property? the mark dilates,  
Enters the flake depreciated, defil'd,  
Unfit for beauteous tint. Besides, in fields  
Promiscuous held all culture languishes;  
The glebe, exhausted, thin supply receives;  
Dull waters rest upon the rushy flats  
And barren furrows: none the rising grove  
There plants for late posterity, nor hedge  
To shield the flock, nor copse for cheering fire;  
And in the distant village every hearth  
Devours the grassy sward, the verdant food  
Of injur'd herds and flocks, or what the plough  
Should turn and moulder for the bearded grain:  
Pernicious habit! drawing gradual on  
Increasing beggary, and Nature's frowns.  
Add too, the idle pilf'rer easier there  
Eludes detection, when a lamb or ewe  
From intermingled flocks he steals; or when  
With loosen'd tether of his horse or cow,  
The milky stalk of the tall green-ear'd corn,  
The year's slow rip'ning fruit, the anxious hope  
Of his laborious neighbour, he destroys. (II, 107-33)

This passage provides clear evidence of Dyer's support for agricultural improvement (as opposed to what he calls 'unimproving farms'). Dyer's arguments for enclosure are negative ones. Common land produces less wool (107-9), and creates the need to identify sheep with pitch marks, spoiling the fleece (110-14). Common land is subject to multiple use, so that everything suffers (114-15); and it gets stripped of nutrients, which are not renewed (116). Common land does not have proper drainage, especially in the marshy ('rushy') areas or the ploughed land ('furrows') (117). Similarly, no-one bothers to plant hedges or copses to protect the sheep and provide firewood (118-20), as a result of which everyone instead burns turf, depriving the beasts of valuable pasture, and the growing corn of nutrients (121-5). This in turn leads to beggary, and is unnatural (125-6). Finally, on common land it is easy for thieves to steal sheep (127-9), or to allow their animals to graze other peoples' crops (130-1), destroying the careful work of others (132-3). [37]

In this passage it is notably difficult to separate the subjective and the objective, the 'aesthetic' and the 'practical' elements. Dyer's concern with pitch-marks spoiling the fleece (110-14) is couched in both aesthetic ('Unfit for beauteous tint') and economic ('the flake depreciated') terms. Similarly his delineation of the effects of turf-cutting is both subjective and objective. That it removes valuable pasture is undeniable; but that it causes beggary, and 'Nature's frowns' are subjective statements, reflecting the ideological preconceptions that poverty is a function of lost soil fertility caused by 'taking too much' from the land, and that this loss causes a disharmony in Nature, which is in turn a 'bad' thing.

We see in these two statements the ways in which Dyer's pro-improvement mentality is modulated by moral concerns. Dyer advocates and gives both practical and moral reasons for kindness to animals. He strongly advocates enclosure, as a way of improving the agricultural and productive quality of land, giving practical and observational reasons; but also giving the subjective and idealising view that social, economic and aesthetic harmony coincide and depend on the correct attitudes and approaches to 'Nature', to the land, its crops and its animals. The subjective and objective, the 'aesthetic' and the 'practical' elements in his overviews are thus thoroughly mixed together, and we shall need to consider how such 'mixtures' are constructed when considering the specific agricultural advice the poet gives, and the poetry he uses to give it.

## 2. Variables (1)

### i. Soil

Dyer's shepherding advice fills most of the first book of the poem, and overlaps a little into Books II and III. Although he tends to work backwards and forwards over a few key ideas--the value of improvement and labour, the appropriate response to environment, and the need for a modulation between human intervention and natural development--Dyer is fairly systematic, and we may read his advice in a sequential way. He treats firstly the two 'variables' of terrain (I, 18-124) and weather (I, 125-84), before considering the kinds of sheep suitable to different environments (I, 185-250). There follows a section of veterinary advice (I, 251-320), and a 'calendar' of information on different concerns in the shepherd's year (321-554), which ends triumphantly in a pastoral rendering of the shearing festival (I, 555-720). We may examine each of these areas of advice in turn.

Dyer's first task, then, is to establish and comment on the basic 'variables' of farming: terrain and weather. As soon as the invocation to the people and the 'people's Shepherd' is completed, the poet launches very positively into the subject of terrain:

On spacious airy downs and gentle hills,  
With grass and thyme o'erspread, and clover wild,  
Where smiling Phoebus tempers ev'ry breeze,  
The fairest flocks rejoice: they nor of halt,  
Hydropic tumours, nor of rot, complain,  
Evils deform'd and foul: nor with hoarse cough  
Disturb the music of the past'ral pipe;  
But, crowding to the note, with silence soft  
The close-woven carpet graze, where Nature blends  
Flow'rets and herbage of minutest size,  
Innoxious luxury. Wide airy downs  
Are Health's gay walks to shepherd and to sheep.  
All arid soils, with sand or chalky flint,  
Or shells deluvian mingled, and the turf  
That mantles over rocks of brittle stone,  
Be thy regard; and where low-tufted broom,  
Or box, or berry'd juniper, arise;  
Or the tall growth of glossy-rinded beech;  
And where the burrowing rabbit turns the dust;  
And where the dappled deer delights to bound. (I, 18-37)

This is Dyer at his most effective. The idyllic pastoral imagery gains strength from, and in turn supports, the georgic prescriptivism to which it is tied. Thus for example Dyer uses sound, contrasting 'coughing' with 'the pastoral pipe'. In prescriptive or agricultural terms, shepherding is an observational art, but Dyer here picks up the chief way in which it is also an art of listening: coughing meant trouble, as Dyer shows later, when he describes how 'The coughing pest / From their green pasture sweeps whole flocks away' (I, 264-5). The reference is probably to either brucellosis or tuberculosis: both are now eradicated, but in Dyer's time were quite capable of wiping out a flock; and the intelligent shepherd who is the major implied reader would recognise the danger signals of the word 'coughing'. [38]

In descriptive, or literary terms, the harsh sound of coughing, evoking the often grim realities of shepherding, is contrasted with the literary idea of the 'pastoral pipe', the sweet music of an ideal rural world; and here its idyllic overtones are credible and appropriate. The terrain Dyer describes is indeed 'ideal' for sheep. He emphasises several aspects of this. The kind of terrain he has in mind is naturally dry ('all arid soils'). On such sandy and light soils, especially chalk, water drains away or is absorbed; and thus a number of digestive and infectious diseases associated with wet pasture and stagnant water are avoided. The hilliness of the terrain Dyer describes would also help make this pasture free-draining. The 'airiness' and 'spaciousness' Dyer describes is also an important element of his picture of health. Brown and Beecham (1989: 360) fairly condemn the way that veterinary practices based on 'Galen's theories that "atmospheric corruption" was the cause of epidemic disease' (which Dyer is perhaps following), survived into the nineteenth century; nevertheless in broader terms, space and airiness made good sense as generally health-giving qualities. [39]

A particular kind of pasture is then evoked which contains, as well as grass, 'thyme' and 'clover wild'; and is also described minutely as:

The close-woven carpet [...] where Nature blends  
Flow'rets and herbage of minutest size,  
Innoxious luxury.

The sense of vibrant healthiness which this carries has several sources. Both the range of 'Flow'rets and herbage', and the fact that it is 'close-woven', suggest well-established sheep pasture, whose structural qualities and range of grasses have developed over a long period, and which (as the phrase 'close-woven' secondarily suggests) has been maintained as good pasture through constant grazing by sheep. The range of grasses is itself a good sign, suggesting that the pasture will provide a range of 'bites', which also (as grasses come up at different times) make the pasture of use for a longer part of the year. [40] The traditional

pastoral words 'thyme' and 'flow'rets' are deployed to suggest agricultural richness, but also work in an accurate descriptive/prescriptive way: 'thyme' is exactly the kind of creeping plant which would have strengthened and enhanced the quality of this kind of pasture; and 'flow'rets' indicates the healthy range of flowers and grasses. As Defoe (I, 211) wrote of the land around Dorchester (which is one of Dyer's 'examples' of this kind of pasture):

The Grass, or Herbage of these Downs is full of the sweetest, and the most Aromatick Plants, such as Nourish the Sheep to a strange degree.

Thus Dyer's pastoral and georgic materials are exactly matched and interdependent in this powerful opening section. His task is to describe the best kind of land for sheep, and he does so in a rationally and poetically ordered sequence of different ways. First he describes the shape of the land and the nature of its pasture (18-29). Then he gives the soil descriptions: dry soils in general, and sandy, chalky or marly ('shells diluvian mingled') soil in particular, and preferably with a shallow tilth over 'brittle' (that is, absorbent limestone, chalk, sandstone, etc.) rock (30-33). This is all excellent descriptive work and is agriculturally correct. Dyer then further signposts the right sort of terrain by describing its most visible features, its characteristic shrubs and trees. They are broom, box, juniper and beech, and together they signal the kind of free-draining, light soils he has in mind [41] This again works well in practical terms (it is a good way of identifying the right kind of land), and as poetry, in which the listing of things, especially living species, is a well-established rhetorical technique. The last two lines of the verse-paragraph, following this, are:

And where the burrowing rabbit turns the dust;  
And where the dappled deer delights to bound.

Dyer frequently uses this kind of rhetorical repetition of a phrase, with varying degrees of success. Here I think it works well. It is a consciously idyllic 'pastoral' ending to the paragraph, yet it maintains something of the sense of prescriptive functionalism of the rest of the passage, for of course herbivores such as the rabbit and the deer are indeed likely to thrive in the same areas as the sheep, and thus it is another good observational tip.

Dyer completes and particularises this opening advice in a second verse-paragraph (I, 37-66), which gives a kind of directory of good pastures and appropriate locations:

Such are the downs of Banstead, edg'd with woods  
And towery villas; such Dorcestrian fields,  
Whose flocks innumeros whiten all the land:  
Such those slow-climbing wilds that lead the step

Insensibly to Dover's windy cliff,  
 Tremendous height! and such the clover'd lawns,  
 And sunny mounts of beauteous Normanton,  
 Health's cheerful haunt, and the selected walk  
 Of Heathcote's leisure: such the spacious plain  
 Of Sarum, spread like Ocean's boundless round,  
 Where solitary Stonehenge, gray with moss,  
 Ruin of ages! nods: such, too, the leas  
 And ruddy tilth which spiry Ross beholds,  
 From a green hillock, o'er her lofty elms;  
 And Lemster's brooky tract and airy Croft;  
 And such Harleian Eywood's swelling turf,  
 Wav'd as the billows of a rolling sea;  
 And Shobden, for its lofty terrace fam'd,  
 Which from a mountain's ridge, elate o'er woods,  
 And girt with all Siluria, sees around  
 Regions on regions blended in the clouds.  
 Pleasant Siluria! land of various views,  
 Hills, rivers, woods, and lawns, and purple groves  
 Pomaceous, mingled with the curling growth  
 Of tendril hops, that flaunt upon their poles (I, 38-62) [42]

The primary focus of the locations named is on good sheep pastures. Banstead (38), [43] the area round Dorchester (39), [44] the Dover area (42), [45] and Salisbury Plain ('Sarum', 47) [46] were especially famous for their qualities as sheep pasture. However Dyer's topographical references also evoke other sorts of information, to create a vivid tapestry of geographical, historical and literary allusion. Dover cliff, like a number of other places Dyer names, is the site of a Castle, and a place which gives a 'prospect'. It has Shakespearean connections (compare Dyer's 'tremendous height' with Edgar's 'Horrible steep', *King Lear*, IV, vi, 3) and is traditionally a focus of patriotic feeling. Banstead Down was a recreational area, thought to have health-giving properties. Dorchester and Salisbury have historical associations; and Dyer makes the latter explicit by his mention of Stonehenge. [47]

Interwoven with these well-known locations are a more personal set of topographical references. All but one are 'Silurian', and the exception, Normanton Hall in Rutlandshire, is 'Tripontian'. Dyer is building his own mythology here, to suggest the agricultural richness of the two major areas, and to incorporate patronly references, and other levels of meaning. Examining these references sequentially, we come first to Normanton, the seat of the Heathcote Family. [48] This is in one aspect a patronly reference

to Sir John Heathcote (b. 1689), M.P. for Grantham (1715-22) and Bodmin (1733-41). [49]  
Dyer addresses him again in book III:

So thou, the friend of every virtuous deed  
And aim, tho' feeble, shalt these rural lays  
Approve, O Heathcote! whose benevolence  
Visits our vallies, where the pasture spreads,  
And where the bramble; and would justly act  
True charity, by teaching idle Want  
And Vice the inclination to do good;  
Good to themselves, and in themselves to all,  
Thro' grateful toil. (III, 14-22)

The word 'benevolence' expresses Dyer's gratitude to Heathcote for his patronage of the poet, to whom he presented the livings of Coningsby (1751-7), and Kirkby-on-Bane (1755-7). The phrase 'would justly act' seems also to express a more general belief in Heathcote's benevolence. But 'bramble' is a word that marks the emergence of the agricultural improver in Dyer, and it seems that Sir John's 'benevolence' is specifically associated with agricultural developments: Heathcote was an enthusiastic enclosurist, and showed some interest in the new crops. [50] Pevsner (*Leicestershire and Rutland*, 1960: 311) records that the 'great Palladian house' at Normanton was demolished after the war, but that the estate still had stables, farm buildings and houses 'in a sound and pleasant classical style'.

The 'leas / And ruddy tilth which spiry Ross beholds', (49-50) introduces an important cluster of Silurian references. This is Ross-on-Wye, and the 'ruddy tilth' (red earth) it 'beholds' may still be seen from the A40/M50 motorway, which runs through much of southern 'Siluria'. The moment here is as typically eighteenth-century as my motorist's view is twentieth-century. To characterise a landscape the eighteenth-century poet sought the vantage point, climbing a hill as Dyer himself does in *Grongar Hill* (1726). Here he uses the town of Ross as his hill, the 'overseer' of the area: its prominence was later noted by Gilpin, who wrote (1782, 1973: 6) that it 'commands many distant views'. Dyer thus makes it an important central focus for the southern part of his 'Siluria'. He refers to it later as 'elmy Ross' (I, 206), and in Book II he uses the old word for the area, Urchinfield (II, 199). The characterisation of 'sandy Urchinfield' (II, 37) is both agriculturally and historically alert, for it is the old sandstone rock which gives the earth its rich red colouring; while 'Urchinfield' evokes important historical associations. [51]

Ross also focuses the agricultural richness of southern Siluria. The Ross-Abergavenny area in particular remains notable for its production of hazelnuts, raspberries and cherries. Ross also had a contemporary significance as the location of Pope's exemplary 'Man of Ross'

in the *Epistle to Bathurst* (1733). The 'Man of Ross', as Barrell (1980: 173n99) notes in this context, is an archetypal georgic figure of 'simple, unobtrusive industry'. His philanthropy was typical of the values Dyer projects. Pope had mentioned Ross's 'heaven directed spire' (l. 261) which Dyer makes into the town's essential characteristic as 'spiry Ross' (l, 50). In 1782 another artist, William Gilpin, was to note that what was by now known as the Man-of-Ross's spire 'tapers beautifully'. [52]

Four more Silurian references follow, and lead directly into the passage of praise for 'Siluria':

And Lemster's brooky tract and airy Croft;  
And such Harleian Eywood's swelling turf,  
Wav'd as the billows of a rolling sea;  
And Shobden, for its lofty terrace fam'd,  
Which from a mountain's ridge, elate o'er woods,  
And girt with all Siluria, sees around  
Regions on regions blended in the clouds. (52-8)

The significance of Leominster as the trading centre of Ryelands wool, 'Lemster Ore', has been noted. Defoe (II, 448) was suitably impressed:

Indeed the Wool about *Leominster*, and in the Hundred of *Wigmore* observ'd above, and the Golden Vale as 'tis called, for its richness on the Banks of the River *Dove* (all in this County) is the finest without exception, of any in *England*, the *South Down* Wool not excepted

He also found (II, 447) that Leominster had:

a very great Trade for their Corn, Wool, and other Products of this Place, into the river *Wye*; and from the *Wye*, into the *Severn*, and so to *Bristol* [...] This Town, besides the fine Wool, is noted for the best Wheat, and consequently the finest Bread; whence *Lemster Bread* and *Weobly Ale*, is become a proverbial saying.

Dyer uses Leominster to provide a focus for the northern part of 'Siluria', as Ross focuses the southern part; and the three seats Dyer now names in quick succession fan out to the west and north of the town, forming, appropriately for this part of the country, a ley line. [53]

The phrase 'airy Croft' is a mildly punning reference (compare 'Lemster's crofts', II, 200) to Croft castle, the seat of Sir Archer Croft (1683-1753). Sir Archer was the brother-in-law of Dyer's brother Robert, and represented an old Silurian family which had been

extensively involved in Herefordshire politics since the Middle Ages, inter-marrying with the other two families in this group of references (Batemans and Harleys), and in one case with Janet, daughter of 'the renowned Owen Glendower, Representative of the Princes of Powys' who married Sir John De Croft at the beginning of the fifteenth century. [54]

'Harleian Eywood's swelling turf' is one of three 'Harleian' seats in the area. As it happens Defoe (II, 447) had visited the other two:

The Country on our right as we came from *Ludlow* is very fruitful and pleasant, and is call'd the Hundred of *Wigmore*, from which the late Earl of *Oxford* at his Creation, took the title of Baron of *Wigmore*: And here we saw two Antient Castles, (viz.) *Brampton-Brian*, and *Wigmore-Castle*, both belonging to the Earl's Father, Sir *Edward Harley*

The rich historical and agricultural legacy of these seats would have greatly interested Dyer. We get some indication of the excitement of the former and the scale of the latter, from Bowden (1985: 133), who records that when the royalists attacked Brampton Bryan in 1643 Sir Robert Harley (Prime Minister Harley's grandfather) lost '800 sheep, besides cattle and a stud of 30 brood mares'. The estate of Brampton Bryan was, as Roscoe says (1902: 6), 'considerable'.

What particular interest Dyer may have had with the Harley family is not known, but it is reasonable to conjecture that he received encouragement or patronage from the family, probably for his painting. The major figure was the former Prime Minister Robert Harley (1661-1724), first Earl of Oxford, a patron of writers and a collector of manuscripts who liked in his periods out of politics, as Hill says (1988: 226) 'to share the company of scholars and literary men'. He died rather early to have known Dyer, but his son Edward (1689-1741), the second Earl, was also an important literary patron and, as the *DNB* says, a passionate collector of 'books, manuscripts, pictures, medals and miscellaneous curiosities, which he usually bought at prices much beyond their worth'.

But although Dyer's use of the word 'Harleian' is enough to suggest the Wigmore and Brampton-Bryan Harley associations, Eywood itself is further south, beyond Croft Castle, at Titley; and was the seat of the first Earl's brother Edward ('Auditor') Harley (1664-1735), and of his son, also Edward Harley (1699?-1755), who became the third Earl when his cousin the second Earl died heirless in 1741. Both father and son had literary and patronly interests, like the other branch of the family. The third Earl was also connected with Dyer's patrons the Yorkes, as Linda Colley, discussing his initiation of the Cocoa Tree coffee house 'Board' in 1727, notes (1982: 72):

Unquestionably loyal to the Hanoverian dynasty and a close friend of the Attorney-General, Philip Yorke, Harley was a man distinguished by 'cool good sense' as well as over-burdened by his own moral rectitude. [55]

At the time Dyer was a travelling painter and then a farmer in the area, Auditor Harley was an old man, his son was M.P. for Herefordshire (1727-1741), and Prime Minister Harley's son was busying himself with literature, gardening, building, collecting, and spending too much money. Dyer may have been known to any of the three, and I suspect he received patronage, probably from Yorke's friend the third Earl, identified as the current inhabitant of Eywood in Dyer's footnote. [56]

'Shobden for its lofty terrace fam'd' (I, 55), is Shobden Court, the seat of William Bateman, created Viscount Bateman in 1725, who died in 1744; and of his son and heir John Bateman (1721-1802), the Second Viscount. Archetypes of Silurian good citizenship, the father was Whig MP for Leominster in 1721-2 and 1727-34, and the son held the same office in 1768-84, and was Lord Lieutenant of Herefordshire from 1747 until his death. Like the Harleys, William Bateman 'made a great collection' (according to Gibbs), his interest being paintings and sculpture rather than manuscripts. Dyer has a proven connection with Shobden, in that his friend Lewis Crucius was chaplain there for a number of years, and Dyer's biographer Williams (1956: 82n3) thinks the poet may have visited Crucius at Shobden. [57]

These three topographical references, clustered to the north and west of Leominster, lead directly to the praise of 'Pleasant Siluria! land of various views!', and like the passage about Ross they suggest the perspective of views of the land. Defoe tells us that 'from the Windows of *Brampton-Castle*, you have a fair Prospect into the County of *Radnor*, which is, as it were, under its Walls' (II, 448), and I think Dyer uses the other seats to focus Siluria; both literally, and in historical terms through his allusions to the ancient families of Croft, Harley and Bateman. His is a painter's-eye view, but his prospects are evaluated in terms of historical and agricultural richness. In his praise of Siluria (59-63) he draws together the two sides of this approach, to conclude a section which succeeds both as a poetry of topographical allusion, and as a prescription of good sheep pastures.

It would perhaps be hard to find another passage in the poem which unites pastoral, topographic and georgic elements quite so felicitously as this one. Its success is precisely based on the fact that Dyer is describing perfect land for sheep; and we shall see that he describes an idealised 'Silurian' sheep later on, to go with this 'ideal' terrain. But it is important to notice that he does not make this section successful solely by traditional pastoral means; that is, by the exclusion of any but the most nominal indications of post-lapsarian reality. In particular he has not feared that the queasy subject of sheep-diseases

might damage his pastoral vision. As this is ideal sheep pasture his characterisation of disease is made in a negative way, but it does not prevent it from being vividly unpleasant:

they nor of halt,  
Hydropic tumours, nor of rot, complain,  
Evils deform'd and foul: nor with hoarse cough (I, 20-22)

This is the real as well as the pastoral world, and Dyer's poetry is faithful to both kinds of landscape in this section. Indeed his mention of these diseases gives warning that he will be describing and discussing disease, the sign and subject of a mortal, non-pastoral world, in what is to follow, alongside his pastoral material.

But clearly Dyer cannot proceed in so triumphantly idyllic a manner. His didacticism must concern itself also with less obviously wonderful terrain, less perfect pasture. Thus he moves on to a second piece of advice on land, related to a specific kind of sheep husbandry:

But if thy prudent care would cultivate  
Leicestrian Fleeces, what the sinewy arm  
Combs thro' the spiky steel in lengthen'd flakes;  
Rich saponaceous loam, that slowly drinks  
The blackening shower, and fattens with the draught;  
Or heavy marl's deep clay, be then thy choice,  
Of one consistence, one complexion, spread  
Thro' all thy glebe; where no deceitful veins  
Of envious gravel lurk beneath the turf,  
To loose the creeping waters from their springs,  
Tainting the pasturage: and let thy fields  
In slopes descend and mount, that chilling rains  
May trickle off, and hasten to the brooks. (I, 67-79) [58]

We are drawn here into a somewhat tougher world where the need to work ('the sinewy arm') seems more strongly present, and where the environment is more potentially hostile, with its 'deceitful veins / Of envious gravel'. Dyer's engagement with the subject here is simultaneously less pastoralised and more physical, more 'real'. The poet's attempts to describe the nature of soil and land types are invariably made in strongly sensuous ways. In the first of the two soil descriptions here (70-1), the effect of the poetry is as if Dyer had picked up a handful of the soil and were squeezing it between his fingers: as, of course, a good farmer, and a good poet (one thinks of some of Seamus Heaney's work) would do. We ought not to be put off by polysyllabic Latinate words like 'saponaceous': Dyer is describing a

peat-based loam characteristic of formerly forested areas, and he notes its particular qualities in the conditions in which it is most easily sensuously identifiable, i.e. when it gets wet. Moistened, peaty soil gradually absorbs ('slowly drinks') water; darkens ('blackening') and expands ('fattens'), holding the water, and showing 'saponaceous' (soapy or emulsifying) qualities. One could hardly describe peat-based soil better, in sensuous terms.

A potentially more difficult kind of terrain for sheep is suggested here. It is not enough just to choose the peaty or the marly clay soil Dyer describes, to grow heavy fleeces; one must also have consistency of soil, and one particular danger is described in conspiratorial terms:

where no deceitful veins  
Of envious gravel lurk beneath the turf,  
To loose the creeping waters from their springs,  
Tainting the pasturage: and let thy fields  
In slopes descend and mount, that chilling rains  
May trickle off, and hasten to the brooks. (I, 74-79)

For a man who, as we shall see, is intensely proud of England's rainy climate, Dyer seems strangely hydrophobic here, but his advice makes good sense. Standing water was a major source of sheep diseases in the eighteenth century; efficient under-field drainage systems were a nineteenth-century innovation. His poetic procedures here are rather different from those used in the opening advice on land. His aim is to foster in the landowner and the shepherd an alert awareness of soil and land conditions, so that standing water, springs, drainage, soil types and their qualities are more carefully observed and responded to. By characterising the water and the water-bearing strata as conspirators who, 'envious' and 'deceitful', 'creep', and 'taint', Dyer again recruits Milton's Satan to the new heroic cause of good land-use. The landowner and the farmer are revealed as epic heroes; modern farming becomes the battlefield for a renewed war against evil; and the otherwise rather dull subjects of soil science and land drainage take on a new aura and a new significance.

This in itself might be in danger of seeming bathetic or banal, but Dyer's procedures carefully avoid these pitfalls. In the opening Miltonic invocation, as we saw, Dyer plays on his implied literalisation of the King's role as 'people's Shepherd', and one effect of this is to tie epic procedures to the sublunary subject of 'the care of sheep'. Here, he keeps his feet on the ground in other ways. The Miltonic allusion is a subtle one: we would need to search *Paradise Lost* fairly carefully to find clear 'echoes'; yet at the same time the satanic significance of the words I have highlighted ('envious', 'creeping', etc.) would be easily imaginatively available, not only to a reader acquainted with Milton, but to anyone brought up to know the *Old Testament*, or merely used to hearing Sunday sermons (i.e. any of Dyer's

contemporary readers). It is at once a subtle and a blunt, a 'high' and a 'low' instrument. Secondly, the passage moves swiftly on from the epic evocation of lurking threat (74-7), into a transitional passage which combines the positive force of practical advice with the reassuring music of flowing water (both in lines 77-9). [59] The fearful reader is soothed, and the practical reader given ways to respond to the creeping menace. And finally, Dyer then proceeds to a moralising passage which puts the whole issue into a familiar earthly context. He characteristically acknowledges complexity and difficulty while turning it to rhetorical advantage, introducing a modulating hint of pathos, and an implied plea for 'social aid'. This in turn prepares for a new offering of advice and practical remedies, beginning as a careful exemplum, and moving naturally into the direct address of prescription:

Yet some defect in all on earth appears:  
All seek for help, all press for social aid.  
Too cold the grassy mantle of the marle,  
In stormy winter's long and dreary nights,  
For cumbent sheep; from broken slumber oft  
They rise benumb'd, and vainly shift the couch;  
Their wasted sides their evil plight declare:  
Hence, tender in his care, the shepherd swain  
Seeks each contrivance. Here it would avail  
At a meet distance from the shelt'ring mound  
To sink a trench, and on the hedge-long bank  
Sow frequent sand, with lime, and dark manure,  
Which to the liquid element will yield  
A porous way, a passage to the foe.  
Plough not such pastures; deep in spongy grass  
The oldest carpet is the warmest lair,  
And soundest: in new herbage coughs are heard. (l, 80-96) [60]

Here a potentially bland moralising statement is brought to life by the close descriptive work within the advice it leads into. The discomfort sheep feel on cold damp ground, their moving around in the night to try and find a comfortable position, and the way in which loss of condition shows in 'wasted sides' are all accurate, and seem to be based on observation. [61] Having created this credible image, which evokes pity and concern, Dyer again offers a remedy, adopting a reassuring, practical tone of measurement and decision: 'Here it would avail / At a meet distance'. This is the poet as improving agriculturalist, providing new solutions to age-old problems.

Drainage is of course a good solution, in general terms, though the details of his advice raise one or two questions. In this and in the previous passage Dyer is suggesting some fairly radical environmental interventions. Though the instruction to 'let thy fields / In slopes descend and mount' (77-8) appears to be part of the poet's advice on choosing the right sort of land for sheep, it also seems to suggest landscaping, and hence large-scale earth-works. The implied reader, here as elsewhere, appears to be the shepherd or farmer, but in this context is in fact more probably the large landowner, the only person who would be financially capable of landscaping fields (or indeed of 'choosing' the best land for different agricultural purposes). It would perhaps be thought indecorous or tactless for the poet to seem to be telling the large landowners how to manage their land, so Dyer disguises the addressee as a simple shepherd, by means of the pastoral imagery of the caring 'shepherd swain', and the Virgilian 'careful swain' exemplum which completes this section (108-24, discussed below). His real addressee can be deduced from the tactful, civil tones employed in the instruction ('thy prudent care', 'Here it would avail', and so on: one can almost hear in these phrases the address 'My Lord'); and the fact that both the 'shepherd swain' and the 'careful swain' are in the third person, and are not in fact directly addressed, though they seem to be. Choosing land, landscaping, and especially large scale field drainage were not shepherdly but aristocratic tasks. Dyer was well aware of this, as his praise for 'Russel' (II, 165-76), the fen-draining Earl of Bedford, shows. [62]

This is not quite the full picture, however. The invocation carefully recruited all the social classes into Dyer's labouring utopia, and if it is a patrician task to authorise the sinking of trenches and the landscaping of fields, it is certainly the 'swain' who gets to do the digging. He is thus not only a stalking-horse for an appeal to the mighty which might otherwise appear impertinent, but also a genuine addressee. He is not directly addressed, but the poet finds a tonal way of making him the addressee in the last part of the passage. Drainage of course represents 'improvement' and new ideas, as well as aristocratic concerns; but the warning Dyer gives to complete the paragraph reverts to an older style of shepherdly precept, signalling that the addressee is now in part the real 'swain', the shepherd, from whose culture the tone and shape of the advice is borrowed:

Plough not such pastures; deep in spongy grass  
 The oldest carpet is the warmest lair,  
 And soundest: in new herbage coughs are heard.           (I, 94-6)

This is good advice, which follows up the earlier images of structural integrity in pasture (I, 26-7). It is also consciously proverb-like. The whole instruction, and especially the middle line, echo the reassuring rhythm and phraseology of folk-wisdom, a device often employed in pastoral, and here used to balance the aristocratic-oriented tones and the new ideas we

have seen, subtly readmitting the shepherd into areas of agricultural planning and administration from which he is more usually excluded. [63]

The prescriptive side of the passage is less assuredly managed, but interesting in some ways. Professor Kerridge (1967: 37), who has found extensive evidence for most kinds of agricultural 'improvement' before the mid-eighteenth century, makes no great claims for early modern field drainage techniques, and Dyer cannot be expected to be as prophetic here as he seems to be in other areas of agricultural development. He advises a conventional hedge ('mound') and ditch construction along the field boundary, but his phrase 'meet distance' is vague; and I think he may be confusing two procedures, when he writes:

and on the hedge-long bank  
Sow frequent sand, with lime, and dark manure,  
Which to the liquid element will yield  
A porous way, a passage to the foe. (I, 90-93)

This seems to suggest that sand, lime and manure are appropriate drain-lining porous materials; in fact they are materials associated with hedge-planting. Sand was a medium to carry seeds, and lime and manure are fertilisers (in which role they tend to cancel each other out, though Dyer would not know this). The poet seems partly aware of procedures for planting hedges and for ditching, and it may be that he means to advise on both, and that his advice is simply not very well communicated, rather than accidentally conflated from two procedures.

But Dyer also has a second and more important idea about drainage. His advice on the 'deceitful veins' of gravel which 'loose the creeping waters from their springs' (74-9) is simply to avoid them. However he does make a second attempt at advice on the subject slightly later, by example, in the 'careful swain' passage:

And oft with labour-strengthen'd arm he delv'd  
The draining trench across his verdant slopes,  
To intercept the small meandering rills  
Of upper hamlets. (I, 111-14)

In this passage we are returned from an aristocratic, selective approach to land use, to the self-help ethic of Dyer's exemplary swains. These labouring farmers, of course, cannot 'avoid' the conditions of their land, and so Dyer has to try and show them how to change these conditions. He shows in both passages an awareness of the significance of springs; and his ideas of tailoring drainage systems to the progress of the water flow, being

observationally aware of the subtle patterns of 'rilling', and 'intercepting' the spring water, put him quite close to the major development in eighteenth-century field drainage. In 1764 James Elkington introduced a system of deep drainage. As Kerridge (1967: 37) describes the process:

he used an auger to locate the spring and then intercepted it by a drain at the highest point of the affected patch.

If Dyer's swain is not actually augering, he is certainly moving towards this kind of approach by digging deep drains, intercepting rills, and so on. [64]

Dyer's characterisation of the qualities of 'old' pasture, finally, is a good one, and his warning against ploughing it up is well made. The modern reader, mindful of the fact that our traditional pasture and meadow lands are now almost entirely lost, will find the advice made poignant by the passage of time, and might at this point wish *The Fleece* had found a wider readership than it did. [65]

This warning is the first in a series of pieces of negatively-constructed advice by which Dyer is leading to his exemplary positive. They continue in the next verse-paragraph:

Nor love too frequent shelter, such as decks  
The vale of Severn, Nature's garden wide,  
By the blue steeps of distant Malvern wall'd,  
Solemnly vast. The trees of various shade,  
Scene behind scene, with fair delusive pomp  
Enrich the prospect, but they rob the lawns.  
Nor prickly brambles, white with woolly theft,  
Should tuft thy fields. Applaud not the remiss  
Dimetians, who along their mossy dales  
Consume, like grasshoppers, the summer hour,  
While round them stubborn thorns and furze increase,  
And creeping briars. (I, 97-108)

Dyer's often mixed motivations reach an interesting crossroads in this passage, because the landscape he chooses as a negative example is a 'Silurian' one, and the river Severn is, as we shall see, an especially important element in his vision of agricultural and commercial harmony. This is perhaps why, having used the example negatively (98-9), he strings on a number of subordinate clauses in praise of the area (99-101). Dyer is also challenging his own feeling for the picturesque, his sentiment pulling here in two directions. The 'scene behind scene' of the trees (a very eighteenth-century way of seeing prospect and landscape)

is also a picture of 'fair delusive pomp'. Trees do indeed 'steal' from the ground, and tend to sour the grass around them for sheep, but Dyer finds no solution to this paradox of give and take, aesthetic 'enrichment' and agricultural 'robbery'. The 'prickly brambles' (103-4) are less of a problem: they are not picturesque, and they are straightforwardly an 'enemy' to the fleece and to sheep, as Dyer's evocative characterisation of them 'white with woolly theft' reveals (they can in fact kill sheep as well as just 'robbing' wool). His final sentence, however, (104-8) represents a difficult decision in the choice between aesthetics and practicality, for the 'Dimetians' Dyer rounds on at this point are the West Wales farmers who inhabit the romantic landscape of the poet's youth, celebrated in *Grongar Hill* and 'A Country Walk'. [66]

He is of course right that shrubbery, and especially brambles, hawthorn and other prickly bushes are a danger to sheep, and that neglected pasture swiftly becomes 'rough pasture' (as compared to the lawn-like ideal he has described earlier). Kerridge (1967: 155) describes the pre-improvement Welsh system of ploughing up pasture from time to time--perhaps once every thirty years--to try and gain a corn crop from the poor soils. Several harvests might be achieved in this way, and when they were done, as Kerridge puts it (157):

Tillage abandoned, the land was simply thrown open to gain a sward as best it could [...] what grass did come would soon be invaded by fern, heath and furze. Having degenerated into rough grazing, the land could not be ploughed up again until rested a long time, when its turn came to be folded or beat-burned. Cultivation was thus merely temporary, and since the soils were so fleet [thin], all ploughing was necessarily shallow, and the normal team of two shod oxen led by two ponies hardly more than scratched the surface.

Kerridge accurately literalises the term *scratched the surface*, and could perhaps have done the same with the phrase *scratching a living*, though he in fact calls this system 'shifting cultivations'.

Dyer, who has just praised, and warned against digging up, the kind of pasture that takes decades or centuries to establish, is naturally hostile to this kind of farming, but his view is somewhat unrealistic. His attitude, as we saw in his enclosure speech, is that land should not be over-used (if it is, 'Nature frowns'). He does not see that the farmers are driven not by ignorance, but by the imperative of gaining a crop. 'Balance of Nature' is a luxury available only to those with rich soil, and the idea that Dimetian farmers laze around all day represents the unjust imposition of moral terminology onto agricultural imperatives.

Yet there seems more to this rejection of 'Dimetian' farming practice than agricultural fastidiousness. Dyer's characterisation of the West Wales shepherds as

'grasshoppers' makes a cleverly appropriate biblical allusion which reveals a larger concern. The reference is to *Nahum 3, 17-18*:

17 Thy crowned *are* as the locusts, and thy captains as the great grasshoppers, which camp in the hedges in the cold day, but when the sun ariseth they flee away, and their place is not known where they *are*.

18 Thy shepherds slumber, O king of Assyria: thy nobles shall dwell *in the dust*: thy people is scattered upon the mountains, and no man gathereth *them*.

In the land of his fathers, Dyer finds the very model of the kind of decay against which his poem aims to provide a bulwark. The Dimetians are indeed 'scattered upon the mountains'; and for Dyer their failure to get a grip on the rampant growth of unproductive vegetation means it will ultimately overwhelm them, until 'their place is not known where they *are*'. Dyer takes the role of Nahum, the prophet of destruction, and the allusion may also be read as a disguised warning to another 'King', the 'people's shepherd' of Dyer's invocation, that his land (or at least part of his land) is in agricultural decay, and opportunities are being dangerously squandered. The ultimate fear is the one Dyer had expressed somewhat melodramatically in *The Ruins of Rome* (1740, 1989: 15-18), in a passage which also owes something to Nahum's warning:

Fall'n, fall'n, a silent heap! her heroes all  
Sunk in their urns; behold the pride of pomp,  
The throne of nations, fall'n! obscur'd in dust

In more personal terms, his rejection of 'Dimetia' represents an abandonment of his youthful view of the landscape (though that also, as *Grongar Hill* famously expressed, was sensitive to decay and loss): he is now, as Humfrey (1980: 85) puts it, 'not an artist, concerned with fine views, but a farmer'. [67]

However Dyer is not to be caught concluding any area of his agricultural advice in a negative way, and his 'remiss Dimetians' prepare us by contrast for the bramble-burning 'careful swain' who follows, and who completes the section of advice on land with a positive example:

I knew a careful swain  
Who gave them to the crackling flames, and spread  
Their dust saline upon the deepening grass;  
And oft with labour-strengthen'd arm he delv'd

The draining trench across his verdant slopes,  
 To intercept the small meandering rills  
 Of upper hamlets. Haughty trees, that sour  
 The shaded grass, that weaken thorn-set mounds,  
 And harbour villain crows, he rare allow'd;  
 Only a slender tuft of useful ash,  
 And mingled beech and elm, securely tall,  
 The little smiling cottage warm embower'd (l, 108-119)

This, as has often been noted, is a close imitation of Virgil. [68] Virgil, however, makes his exemplum one of modest retirement and harmonious adaptation to the limitations of the environment. Dyer's swain is by contrast a heroic figure, physically exerting himself with 'labour-strengthen'd arm' to change the environment; battling with the robbing brambles, 'creeping briars', 'haughty trees', and 'villain crows'; single-handedly conquering the massed armies of the fleece's enemies, armed with trenching spade, axe, and fire. [69]

One notices especially the Dyeresque motif of turning a problem to advantage: the brambles are burned and used to fertilise the soil--excellent advice, and showing Dyer again as an energetic improver. [70] The final image is one of reward, and the poet again uses a characteristic pattern of repetition to fill this out:

The little smiling cottage! where at eve  
 He meets his rosy children at the door,  
 Prattling their welcomes, and his honest wife,  
 With good brown cake and bacon slice, intent  
 To cheer his hunger after labour hard. (l, 120-24)

We have examined other examples of this kind of 'cottage door' image elsewhere. Little needs to be added here, except to notice the rather Duckian emphasis on food as an important element in the reward, which shows that Dyer remains alert to at least one reality of rural labour (the need for food), even in his most pastoralised moments. [71] Otherwise this is a fairly conventional conclusion to the poet's advice on types of land.

We have seen that in this advice Dyer merges appeals to large landowners with hints on improvement to small farmers and shepherds; and that he manages to give the impression that each environment has its natural role, while advising the avoidance or alteration of certain adverse conditions. Idealised pastoral and tough georgic are intrepidly intermixed throughout, and Dyer's sense of topographic richness has been brought powerfully into play. This combination of methods is characteristic of Dyer at his most effective, and reflects the harmonising function of his poem.

## ii. Clime

The second major variable is climate, which offers less sense of having to select or alter the environment. Specific shepherdly advice is not really needed in the general context (the advice on seasonal kinds of weather comes later). Thus Dyer swiftly moves from prescription into a piece of patriotic rhetoric, which interestingly reveals some of his structural concepts. He first compares the different nations as potential sites to 'nourish locks of price':

Nor only soil, there also must be found  
Felicity of clime, and aspect bland,  
Where gentle sheep may nourish locks of price.  
In vain the silken Fleece on windy brows,  
And northern slopes of cloud-dividing hills,  
Is sought, tho' soft Iberia spreads her lap  
Beneath their rugged feet and names their heights  
Biscaian or Segovian. Bothnic realms,  
And dark Norwegian, with their choicest fields,  
Dingles, and dells, by lofty fir embower'd,  
In vain the bleaters court. Alike they shun  
Libya's hot plains. What taste have they for groves  
Of palm, or yellow dust of gold? no more  
Food to the flock than to the miser wealth,  
Who kneels upon the glittering heap and starves.  
Ev'n Gallic Abbeville the shining Fleece,  
That richly decorates her loom, acquires  
Basely from Albion, by th'ensnaring bribe,  
The bait of avarice, which with felon fraud  
For its own wanton mouth from thousands steals. (l, 125-44)

We shall have more to say about 'windy brows' and 'northern slopes' later: Dyer is right to say that mountain sheep do not produce high-quality wool. His supplementary clause about Spain ('Iberia') by contrast does not seem to say much at all. I think what prompts it is the sudden thought that Spain is mountainous, and yet produces, as the poet would be keenly aware, the best quality wool in the world, from the Merino sheep. The Spanish system of transhumance, involving the movement of sheep between the mountainous north in summer, and the southern lowlands in winter, would become a subject of intense interest

and speculation to a slightly later generation of agricultural improvers, but Dyer gives little suggestion of that here. [72] Indeed what he says does not advance his argument, which is that England is perfectly placed in temperate conditions which 'nourish locks of price'. The north ('Bothnic' and 'Norwegian' Scandinavia) is too cold and mountainous, the tropics ('Libya') too hot and barren; and if Spain manages to produce superb wool despite being both hot and mountainous, the poet would sooner celebrate the poetic naming of its mountains than ponder the issue further. Despite his hostility to Britain's major wool-trade rivals, Dyer seems rather to admire Spain, and he gives it a brief but heroic place in his history of wool (in Book II, 368-9).

France is a different matter. Dyer was wishing defeat on 'restless Gaul' (I, 10) before he had finished his first verse-paragraph, and he returns contemptuously to the 'hairy wool of Gaul' in Book II (138). Here, his desert simile of the miser and his gold (I, 136-9) seems to inspire him to a torrent of chauvinism against France in general and the French woollen industry in particular. Spain grows good wool fairly: France, according to Dyer, simply steals it. The major French woollen manufacturing centre of Abbeville, on the river Somme in north-east France, is singled out for its success, which is attributed to illegally-acquired British wool. [73] Behind Dyer's nationalistic fury lies a century of legislation against exporting wool to France, a thriving smuggling industry, and a fierce ongoing national debate on the subject. [74] The resulting contrast is a disconcerting mixture of lyricism and venom:

How erring oft the judgment in its hate  
Or fond desire! Those slow-descending showers,  
Those hovering fogs, that bathe our growing vales  
In deep November (loath'd by trifling Gaul,  
Effeminate), are gifts the Pleiads shed,  
Britannia's handmaids: as the beverage falls  
Her hills rejoice, her valleys laugh and sing. (I, 145-51)

Dyer's vision of autumn, almost Keatsian in its gentle warmth, sits uneasily alongside the crudely gendered stereotyping of the French. The contrast seems bizarre, and one can understand why one critic finds elements of self-parody here (burlesque in Dyer's 'trifling Gaul effeminate', and bathos in his praise of the English weather). [75] Nevertheless I think it wrong to believe that Dyer is not entirely serious here. The caricaturing attacks on France, however unpleasant we may find them, are within a recognisable literary tradition; and similar attitudes may be found, for example, in Shakespeare, Dryden, and the Scriblerian writers. [76] More importantly, Dyer's praise of English weather, which his anti-gallicism is designed to emphasise by contrast, has a serious purpose:

Hail noble Albion! where no golden mines,  
No soft perfumes, nor oils, nor myrtle bowers,  
The vigorous frame and lofty heart of man  
Energize: round whose stern cerulean brows  
White-winged snow, and cloud, and pearly rain,  
Frequent attend, with solemn majesty:  
Rich queen of Mists and Vapours! These thy sons  
With their cool arms compress; and twist their nerves  
For deeds of excellence and high renown.  
Thus form'd, our Edwards, Henries, Churchills, Blakes,  
Our Lockes, our Newtons, and our Miltons, rose. (I, 152-62)

We are accustomed to dealing with the rainy, damp weather of England in rueful, humorous or stoical terms, and we need to understand why the poet is praising the climate in grandiose and heroic terms. It is inadequate to merely set our view against his, and find the latter ridiculous. Dyer's subject in Book I is 'the care of sheep', and he is especially concerned here with lionising the qualities of British wool. His successors in this task know, even better than Dyer, what this has to do with the rainy British climate, as we see, for example, in a catalogue of 'British Sheep and Wool' issued by the British Wool Marketing Board a few years ago. 'British wool', says the Board, 'has a number of unique characteristics':

Most British fine and medium apparel wools [...] have a much higher degree of crimp for a given diameter of fibre than wools from other parts of the world [...] Most of the major sheep growing areas of the United Kingdom have a relatively high rainfall, especially in the hill and mountain regions. To live and thrive there, our native breeds have developed a fleece which will shed rain instead of absorbing it. This makes their wool especially valuable for use in outdoor garments where the wearer needs a warm covering which will resist cold and wet weather.

And the Board concludes, in a Dyeresque way, 'No doubt about it. British wool is one of the truly great fibres of the world' (Skinner et al, 1985: 9). Dyer's progression is from fibre to moral fibre: if the secret of British wool lies in the conditioning effects of English rain, it is a short step for the poet to locate a wider national success in the invigorating effect of our climatic 'cold showers' on a number of British heroes. In the labour-based ethic of the eighteenth-century georgic, luxury and decadence, qualities routinely ascribed to France and

other southern countries, are the enemy of progress. The weather may thus be seen as a natural indicator of a nation's success or failure.

We may find this kind of contentious moralising more than a little ridiculous; but, in agricultural terms at least, Dyer was essentially right. A recent historian of the animal-breeding revolution (Moore-Colyer, 1989: 314) ascribes the 'immensely rich genetic pool' available to the British stock improvers to the 'extraordinary range of elevation, climate, soil type, and herbage' of the country; and a standard modern text-book on the subject (Chambers and Mingay, 1966: 199) tells us stirringly that 'England is one of the best farming countries in the world', giving a clear agricultural gloss to the emphasis on mildness and variety Dyer has made in the opening part of the poem:

Its varied soils and its relatively mild extremes of temperature and rainfall make possible the practice of mixed agriculture, i.e. animal and arable husbandry in combination, in most parts of the country in most months of the year.

Dyer is clearly aware of the agricultural potential of these conditions, which he convincingly celebrates in the next verse paragraph:

See the sun gleams; the living pastures rise,  
After the nurture of the fallen shower,  
How beautiful! How blue th'ethereal vault!  
How verdurous the lawns! how clear the brooks!  
Such noble warlike steeds, such herds of kine,  
So sleek, so vast! such spacious flocks of sheep,  
Like flakes of gold illumining the green,  
What other paradise adorn but thine,  
Britannia? (I, 163-71)

It seems paradoxical to us that a rainy, foggy climate can be the sign, and indeed the animating force, of a second Eden. But nevertheless Dyer manages to make it so; and within the agricultural sphere on which his lyricism fixes here, it is entirely reasonable for him to do so.

### 3. Variables (2)

#### i. Environments

'Soil and clime', terrain and weather, are the major variables of farming, the given circumstances. Like Thomson's seasonal forces they are the parameters within which human activity must operate. We have some choice as to land: if we are rich we can be selective, or mould the landscape; if not we can clear it of brambles and dig drainage ditches. We can do little about the weather, of course; but, as we have seen, the rainy climate of the British isles is portrayed as an entirely positive force. It nurtures, not only fine, waterproof wool, but also the sturdy masculinity of God's Englishmen, 'our Edwards, Henries, Churchills, Blakes, / Our Lockes, our Newtons, and our Miltons' (161-2). It makes us regal, heroic and war-like, nurtures our skills in philosophy and science, and fosters the stoical qualities required to write epic poems in blank verse.

The third variable in sheep husbandry is the animal itself. Dyer's advice on this subject follows on from his advice on terrain and weather. It is perhaps the most important section of the poem, so far as our assessment of the agricultural theme is concerned, and we shall be examining it in some detail. I quote it here in full:

Ye Shepherds! if your labours hope success,  
Be first your purpose to procure a breed  
To soil and clime adapted. Every soil  
And clime, ev'n every tree and herb, receives  
Its habitant peculiar: each to each  
The Great Invisible, and each to all,  
Thro' earth, and sea, and air, harmonious suits.  
Tempestuous regions, Darwent's naked Peaks,  
Snowden and blue Plynlymmon, and the wide  
Aerial sides of Cader-ydris huge;  
These are bestow'd on goat-horned sheep, of Fleece  
Hairy and coarse, of long and nimble shank,  
Who rove o'er bog or heath, and graze or brouze  
Alternate, to collect, with due dispatch,  
O'er the bleak wild, the thinly-scatter'd meal:  
But hills of milder air, that gently rise  
O'er dewy dales, a fairer species boast,  
Of shorter limb, and frontlet more ornate:  
Such the Silurian. If thy farm extends

Near Cotswold Downs, or the delicious groves  
 Of Symmonds, honour'd thro' the sandy soil  
 Of elmy Ross, or Devon's myrtle vales,  
 That drink clear rivers near the glassy sea,  
 Regard this sort, and hence thy sire of lambs  
 Select: his tawny Fleece in ringlets curls;  
 Long swings his slender tail; his front is fenc'd  
 With horns Ammonian, circulating twice  
 Around each open ear, like those fair scrolls  
 That grace the columns of th'Ionic dome.  
 Yet should thy fertile glebe be marly clay,  
 Like Melton pastures, or Tripontian fields,  
 Where ever-gliding Avon's limpid wave  
 Thwarts the long course of dusty Watling-street;  
 That larger sort, of head defenceless, seek,  
 Whose Fleece is deep and clammy, close and plain:  
 The ram short-limbed, whose form compact describes  
 One level line along his spacious back;  
 Of full and ruddy eye, large ears, stretch'd head,  
 Nostrils dilated, breast and shoulders broad,  
 And spacious haunches, and a lofty dock.  
 Thus to their kindred soil and air induc'd,  
 Thy thriving herd will bless thy skilful care,  
 That copies Nature, who, in every change,  
 In each variety, with wisdom works,  
 And powers diversifi'd of air and soil,  
 Her rich materials.

(I, 185-230)

This begins clearly enough as a piece of agricultural advice. The opening section (185-191) tells the shepherd that having chosen (or improved) the right terrain, and avoided the poor climate of 'windy brows / And northern slopes of cloud dividing hills' (128-9) he must 'procure a breed' which will match these two variables.

But there is also a kind of double viewpoint in this opening statement. The first sentence implies that the shepherd must locate and arrange the animals in order to achieve 'success':

Ye Shepherds! if your labours hope success,  
 Be first your purpose to procure a breed,

To soil and clime adapted.

(I, 185-7)

However the second sentence moves to another perspective:

Every soil

And clime, ev'n every tree and herd, receives

Its habitant peculiar: each to each,

The Great Invisible, and each to all,

Thro' earth, and seas, and air, harmonious suits. (I, 187-91)

By the end of this sentence God ('The Great Invisible'), rather than the shepherd, has become the force which locates the animals. There is a double-perspective, although the two views seem to be knitted harmoniously together. In *The Seasons* Thomson resolves a similar overlap of roles more clearly:

Be gracious, Heaven! for now laborious Man

Has done his Part. Ye fostering Breezes blow! (*Spring*, 48-9)

This is conceived as a sort of bargain. Man ploughs, sows, and harrows; and God (in Nature) is asked to 'do his part' by kindly sending breezes, rain and sunshine. Dyer, by contrast, does not make such a division.

One element in this is the way the poet silently moves from instruction (185-7) to a moralising explanation (187-91). He will next give examples of the explanation he has given: but it is not made obvious that he has actually ceased to prescribe, and in fact does not continue with his advice until line 203. The poet *appears* in this passage to tell the shepherd he must select the right sheep (185-7), offer a metaphysical explanation as to why he must do this (187-91), give three examples (192-9; 200-213; 214-24), and conclude by explaining that this correctly 'copies' nature (225-30). What he *actually* does is tell the shepherd to select the right sheep (185-7), and then tell him that God does this (187-91), giving an example of how God has placed one type of sheep on the mountains (192-9). He then begins a second 'example' (200-13) by saying that the 'hills of milder air [...] boast' a fairer species: that is, such a species currently dwells in hills of this kind. But there is a subtle alteration of the sentence structure here. In the first example:

Tempestuous regions, Darwents naked Peaks,

Snowden and blue Plynlymmon, and the wide

Aerial sides of Cader-ydris huge;

These are bestow'd on goat-horned sheep

(I, 192-5)

The mountain areas are 'bestowed on' the goat-horned sheep. As this is in the passive mood the mountains are the subject, the sheep the object; but the 'bestower' in the implied active sentence is clearly God. In the second example, the land is the subject, and the 'fairer species' the object:

But hills of milder air, that gently rise  
O'er dewy dales, a fairer species boast,  
Of shorter limb, and frontlet more ornate:  
Such the Silurian. (I, 200-203)

The land 'boasts' the sheep. But there is no implied 'bestower' behind the sentence, no hidden hand; although the way in which it follows on from the previous example does not alert one to this change. At this point, half way through the example, Dyer reverts to instruction:

If thy farm extends  
Near Cotswold Downs, or the delicious groves  
Of Symmonds, honour'd thro' the sandy soil  
Of elmy Ross, or Devon's myrtle vales,  
That drink clear rivers near the glassy sea,  
Regard this sort, and hence thy sire of lambs  
Select (I, 203-9)

Thus this example appears to go both ways--back to the mountains and God; and forward to the lowlands and Man.

In the third and final example, Man is clearly the selector:

Yet should thy fertile glebe be marly clay,  
Like Melton pastures, or Tripontian fields,  
Where ever-gliding Avon's limpid wave  
Thwarts the long course of dusty Watling-street;  
That larger sort, of head defenceless, seek (I, 214-18)

We are now back into purely prescriptive work; and the shepherd must select or locate the animals. The moral which follows seems to reconcile the two agents of change (God and Man):

Thus to their kindred soil and air induc'd,  
Thy thriving herd will bless thy skilful care,  
That copies Nature, who, in every change,  
In each variety, with wisdom works,  
And powers diversifi'd of air and soil,  
Her rich materials. (I, 225-30)

The philosophical reasoning behind this double-perspective seems to be that the shepherd's work is a continuation or a representation of God's work. God has placed animals on the earth in an environmentally appropriate way (Dyer gives many examples of this in the poem). Within limits the shepherd chooses his 'soil and clime', and then selects an appropriate 'breed' for this kind of area, and in doing so continues or completes the natural process of environmental harmonisation.

But if the shepherd is 'continuing' God's work, why is he only continuing part of it? The mountain sheep are already in place (he needs to do nothing further). The sheep of the 'hills of milder air' are also in place--though here the shepherd needs to select a ram; and in the lowland area the shepherd must introduce the right sheep population. Why must the shepherd intervene with some areas and not in others? Only one model can explain this particular combination of a quietist and an interventionist approach, and that is the model of agricultural expedience. If we examine the three examples (or descriptions) Dyer gives, we shall see how this works; and we shall find in the process a number of the poem's major alternatives and dualities: between environmental and hereditary ideas of sheep development; between different uses of sheep; and between aesthetic and practical, poetic and agricultural concerns.

## ii. Mountains

The mountain sheep, we saw, are left to God, and require no shepherdly intervention. This is not just because for a mid-eighteenth century poet mountains were awe-inspiring places in which to contemplate the deity while admiring the sublimity of his handiwork; but also because mountains were essentially beyond the reach of the New Farming. Mountainsides, which are basically rough grazing land, could not support the new fodder crops, rotations or irrigation systems, and were unenclosable even for as enthusiastic an advocate of enclosure as Dyer. The traditional mountain sheep-management system of transhumance did not really lend itself to 'improving', and indeed survived until quite recently in one or two remote areas. Breeding programmes depended on the new techniques. And, apart from the

possibility of artificial improvements to soil fertility, that fairly well exhausted the possibilities of the Agricultural Revolution. [77]

Of course the improving breeders could and did draw on the gene pool of mountain sheep, with considerable success. [78] Similarly the new breeds were themselves interbred with mountain sheep, as they were with virtually all older breeds; and in this process something was added to the old mountain types. But the mountains were not of interest *per se* as sites for improvement. One of the long-term results of this is that mountain sheep have to a considerable extent maintained the hardy characteristics Dyer describes. His characterisation of the 'goat-horned sheep',

Who rove o'er bog or heath, and graze or brouze  
Alternate, to collect, with due dispatch,  
O'er the bleak wild, the thinly-scatter'd meal (I, 197-9)

remains a good description of mountain-sheep. They are wide-ranging foragers, always on the move, and able to survive, as Dyer says, on the 'thinly-scattered meal' of the mountainsides. [79] They are to some extent as beyond the reach of agribusiness as they were beyond the reach of Bakewellian improvement; and it is easy to see Dyer's leaving them to God as a calculated piece of utilitarian common-sense. The improver is effectively redundant here, and it may be left to the creator of mountain sheep to see they may safely graze.

The only remaining issue is that of breed identification. There is a certain amount of interest in Dyer's description of the mountain sheep, and some appropriate characterising, but the sheep is not of significance to his advice in a way that requires close identification. His description therefore concentrates on the points which show the beast's hardy, independent, quasi-feral qualities, and that it is appropriately matched to its environment. As a result, the best identification we can make here is that it is a 'mountain sheep', that is, by using Dyeresque terms of locational appropriateness. The hairy, coarse fleece, nimbleness and hardiness are all generally characteristic of mountain sheep; and no other identifying feature is made, apart from the 'goat-horns', which might be found on many heath, forest, or mountain sheep of the time. No colour indication is given, though as it happens the predominant horned type of the Peak District (Dyer's 'Darwent') was dark or black-faced; whereas the major variety of Welsh mountain sheep (Dyer's 'Plynlymmon'; 'Snowden' and 'Cader-ydris') was tan or white-faced. [80] Speculating, one would perhaps conclude that Dyer is thinking of the Welsh mountain sheep, whose rams were goat-horned, and whose nimble wildness was well-known. Dyer may have seen some similar sheep in the Peak District (the division of types and areas was by no means absolute); but more probably

the word 'Darwent' is simply designed to strengthen the sublime and wild associations of the mountain sheep, which mention of the Peak District would at that time achieve.

The most important point to note is that Dyer's descriptions of sheep are not necessarily close identifications, but do contain observed features. Different degrees of specificity depend on the particular purpose of a given example. It should also be noted that there is some uncertainty as to the exact characteristics and appearance of sheep-types of the early modern period. The breeding revolution altered virtually all British sheep breeds extensively, and many breeds were altered further in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Because the initial phase of this revolution--from about 1780 to the 1830s--changed the character of most breeds fairly rapidly, it is difficult to see past it, as it were, and find out the nature of earlier (or 'pre-improvement') sheep. [81] The experts differ as to how pre-improvement sheep may be classified. There were as many as twenty recognised pre-improvement 'breeds' (like the Cotswold and Ryelands breeds I have referred to); but many agricultural historians prefer to discuss the issue in terms of 'types', such as the four basic types described by Trow-Smith (1957: 231-2) or the seven types described by Russell (1981: 242-52). Caution is required in making specific identifications from the often limited evidence offered by sources like *The Fleece*. [82]

### iii. Lowlands

I want to put Dyer's rather ambiguous 'middle' sheep (the 'fairer species' which inhabits 'hills of milder air') to one side for the time being, and concentrate here on his third, lowland sheep, whose characteristics and location seem more straightforward:

Yet should thy fertile glebe be marly clay,  
Like Melton pastures, or Tripontian fields,  
Where ever-gliding Avon's limpid wave  
Thwarts the long course of dusty Watling-street;  
That larger sort, of head defenceless, seek (I, 214-8)

I have noted the significance of 'Tripontium' as a place where trade routes meet, and where cattle and sheep are fattened. 'Melton' is modern Melton Mowbray, another (less significant) point of confluence, of the Rivers Wreak and Eye; and nowadays of the A606 road, which links the ancient textile centres of Nottingham and Stamford; and the A607, which runs between Leicester (another early textile centre) and Grantham, once a major centre of agriculture. [83] Like 'Tripontium', it is also the central focus of an area of lush pasture (as Cobbett noted), an area of animal-fattening country. [84]

But Dyer's 'marly clay' is slightly more problematic. We need to put two other pieces of text alongside the passage to see why this is so. This is not the first time Dyer has mentioned 'marly clay' in the context of Leicestershire. Earlier, as we saw, he gives the advice:

But if thy prudent care would cultivate  
Leicestrian Fleeces, what the sinewy arm  
Combs thro' the spiky steel in lengthen'd flakes;  
Rich saponaceous loam, that slowly drinks  
The blackening shower, and fattens with the draught,  
Or heavy marl's deep clay, be then thy choice,  
Of one consistence, one complexion, spread  
through all thy glebe (I, 67-74)

In the 'Commercial Map' notes, (f. 3a), Dyer had written:

ye soil <of y[e]> across y[e] Mid[?lands] of Eng[land] from sea to sea--a deep stiff clay  
or marl--at least 50 m[iles] broad & in some places much more--Query &--- [85]

Putting these extracts together, we can see that Dyer makes a powerful association between a type of soil, 'marly clay', and a particular location. In the main extract under discussion (I, 214-18) Dyer gives the two Leicestershire locations as examples of a soil-type. In the earlier extract (67-74) he recommends this soil type (together with the peaty soil type whose description we have discussed) for a Leicester-type sheep. In the 'Commercial Map' note we see the source of both passages: Dyer has a distinct concept of an extended area of 'marly clay' in the Midlands. The three passages show that this concept is associated with a particular pasture area, and a particular type of sheep (and wool) associated by name and by historical location with the area; that is, the Leicester sheep.

We need to consider here what Dyer means by this fifty-mile band of marly clay. His final word 'Query' warns of an uncertainty; and indeed there is no 'sea to sea' belt of 'marly clay' in the Midlands. There is, however, a belt of Lais clay (i.e. limestone-based, 'marly' clay) covering much of the part of Leicestershire east of the Soar. It is roughly 50 miles long; and the Rugby/Lutterworth and Melton Mowbray pasture areas Dyer mentions are sited in the area it covers. This seems to be the belt of 'marly clay' he means. [86]

The next issue is whether he is recommending his third, 'larger sort' of sheep to this kind of soil in general, or to the Leicestershire band of it in particular. On the face of it, both passages point to the soil-type. But both also link it with Leicestershire and nowhere else, giving the impression that it is the place, and not just the soil which Dyer recommended for

this sheep (There would of course be other areas of good pasture which had marl-clay soils). Thus he has it both ways. By focussing on the soil-type Dyer extends the idea that there is a suitable environment for each kind of sheep. By associating this soil-type with Leicestershire alone, the specific location of the breeding revolution, Dyer seems to be leading us towards newer ideas. [87]

The recommendation itself also seems to go two ways. At the beginning of this section Dyer tells the shepherd to 'procure a breed / To soil and clime adapted' (186-7). His advice concerning the second sheep (the 'fairer species', 201) is for the shepherd to 'Regard this sort, and hence thy sire of lambs / Select' (208-9). In this third example, Dyer tells the shepherd to 'seek' the 'larger sort' of sheep; and he closely describes the ram. If the earlier ambiguity we noted was between a quietist and an interventionist approach to sheep management, then here it is between two kinds of intervention. The advice might simply mean the shepherd is to 'obtain' suitable sheep, by buying them or moving them to the chosen area. Or it might mean he is to breed them. All three verbs in the advice, 'procure', 'select' and 'seek', might be used in either context. The choice is between environment and heredity as the major determinant in the qualities of animals; and Dyer's position on this matter is important in assessing his engagement with agricultural developments.

Both positions were available. Kerridge (1968: 319) demonstrates that 'breeding' (and thus by implication awareness of heredity) was 'a point of husbandry much attended to' in the early seventeenth century, and possibly even earlier. On the other hand an environmental interpretation of animal characteristics continued to hold sway, as Russell (1981: 280) records:

Even after the changes wrought by Bakewell and Ellman had been widely diffused, the opinion that the sheep of any region were largely determined by the environment persisted.

Russell adds, in a footnote (391n100):

In the early 19th century Luccock believed that wool quality was a consequence of breed but the geologist Robert Bakewell [another Bakewell, not the pioneer breeder] thought that the fleece form was completely under environmental control.

The fact that the environmental view survived most strongly in relation to the quality of wool is interesting, for Dyer seems at his most environmentalist whenever the subject turns to wool. We have seen that in an earlier passage (I, 67-74) he makes poetic connections between the sensuous qualities of combing wool ('lengthen'd flakes'), and the two soils, 'saponaceous' peaty soil and 'heavy marl's deep clay'. The passage on weather (I, 125-84)

posits a view in which the climate forms the qualities of the wool. The modern sources I quoted on that subject saw climatic conditions as working gradually, through heredity. But Dyer may be read in terms of the direct effect of climate on each fleece:

Nor only soil, there also must be found  
Felicity of clime, and aspect bland,  
Where gentle sheep may nourish locks of price. (I, 125-7)

The verbs are noticeably in the present tense, suggesting the weather 'nourishes' the quality of each fleece, although the 'historical' section on 'British heroes' which follows perhaps implies a development over many generations. Dyer is also enthusiastic about coting, a practice which was dying out in the eighteenth century, and whose function was partly to promote the improvement of fleeces by protecting them from the weather:

Or, if your sheep are of Silurian breed,  
Nightly to house them dry on fern or straw,  
Silk'ning their Fleeces. (I, 492-4).

There is a similar passage in the second book (II, 91-106). [88]

As a wool-enthusiast, then, Dyer tends towards the environmental view of animal determination. In the passage under consideration this is reflected in the suggestion of finding (rather than breeding) the right sheep. However there are also in the passage clear implications of selective breeding, and therefore heredity. The second example specifically tells the shepherd to select a ram with particular qualities for his 'sire of lambs'. The third example advises the shepherd to 'seek' a type of sheep, but the particular focus on the ram indicates the same pattern of advice. To select a ram is to start a breeding programme, even if the suggestion of advice to move sheep to the appropriate area may also be present. The emphasis on the ram is characteristic of eighteenth-century sheep breeding, a point Russell (1981: 298) reveals in explaining a gap in Bakewell's ram records:

The record is incomplete because of the habit of contemporary breeders of believing the sire record to be far more important than that of the ewe.

It was the rams which were specially bred, hired-out, and put to the flock. The ewes were not of course insignificant: Bakewell, 'selected from the flocks around him such ewes as possessed [the] points' he was looking for, as a contemporary (cited by Marshall, 1818: IV, 232), noted; but it was the ram who was sought from afar, and whose record was carefully followed (hence Bakewell became a 'ram-breeder' rather than a 'sheep-breeder').

Dyer's implied advocacy of a breeding programme is very important. It suggests that despite his environmental ideas he is aware of the genetic interpretation of animal qualities, [89] and is thus in touch with the most important new development in sheep husbandry. We shall be able to measure how close he is to this development if we can establish the nature of the ram he recommends in this passage. The description (218-24) is the most detailed in the poem:

That larger sort, of head defenceless, seek,  
Whose Fleece is deep and clammy, close and plain:  
The ram short-limbed, whose form compact describes  
One level line along his spacious back;  
Of full and ruddy eye, large ears, stretch'd head,  
Nostrils dilated, breast and shoulders broad,  
And spacious haunches, and a lofty dock. (I, 218-24)

There is a little external evidence on identification. The prose 'Argument' to Book I lists the subject of 'the two common sorts of ram described'. The ram described in this passage would be the second of the two. We may assume that as Dyer does not mention the four 'arguments' in his letter to Dodsley (12 May 1757) he did not have any significant objection to them, and was probably their author. [90] However William Youatt (1837: 313) quotes all but the last phrase of this description, without comment, as an Epigraph for his section on 'The New Leicester Sheep'. Later historians and literary critics have left the passage alone, apart from John Barrell, whose important comments on Dyer's language in it (1983: 94) we shall be examining later.

These are thin pickings, and there seems to be a contradiction between the 'Argument', which says this is one of two 'common sorts of ram'; and Youatt, who not only considers it to be a 'New Leicester', but chooses it as the best description of the breed to head his section on the subject. Which is it to be? A 'common sort of ram' is a fairly elastic characterisation; but I do not find Dyer's description to tally with any of the known pre-improvement breeds, according to the major early and modern sources I have examined. [91] What he seems to be describing is in fact, as Youatt had recognised, a New Leicester; or, to avoid the breed-naming fallacies Trow-Smith, Russell and others have warned against, an improved Midlands pasture sheep. The descriptive similarities seem to be inescapable. The 'level line along his back' is the most striking visual clue. Dyer, with his training as an artist, would naturally notice it. The New Leicester is the only sheep illustrated in Youatt (1837: 110) which has such a straight back. [92] The illustration in Low (1842: II, Plate XIX) also shows a ramrod-straight back; and the portrait of Bakewell's prize New Leicester ram 'Two-Pounder' (reproduced in Pawson, 1957: opp. 33) shows an exact straight line from ear-tip to

rump. Other major features of Dyer's description, 'stretch'd head', 'short-limb'd', 'breast and shoulders broad', 'spacious haunches' are all equally clear in these illustrations; and the early descriptions of the New Leicester all tally with Dyer's. [93]

This interpretation raises one or two problems. The traditional view that Robert Bakewell 'invented' the New Leicester has been reiterated in a major reference work as recently as 1989; [94] and it is usually accepted that the new breed was made public in 1760, the year Bakewell first hired out rams. [95] This is not compatible with Dyer having described the sheep before 1757, and probably before 1750 (the year the poet took the manuscript of the first book to London). [96] The statement in the first 'Argument' about the 'two common sorts of rams described' must also be addressed.

Although Bakewell's rams did indeed make their first official public appearance in 1760, he had been at work on them for many years. Bakewell took over the management of his father's farm in 1755, but he had been breeding sheep much longer than this. Russell (1981: 281, 391n101), citing a wealth of contemporary and near-contemporary sources, considers that:

he appeared to have begun his sheep-breeding activities in the mid-1740's and to have developed his ideas during a long period of concentration on this species.

This takes us back at least fifteen years from the date often given, and into the major period of Dyer's research. As for the inventor, there were many earlier improving breeders, as Marshall (1790: I, 295) notes; indeed, Bakewell's own father was one. Kerridge (1967: 322-3) considers that 'selective breeding had long been employed in improving Midland pasture sheep'. Intense stock-moving and breeding was going on in the area in response to the wet seasons and 'great rot' around 1747, exactly at the time that Dyer was researching the first book of *The Fleece*. [97]

Why then did Dyer say that he was describing a 'common sort' of ram? One can only speculate; but the picture we get from Kerridge (1967) and Russell (1981) may suggest that Dyer, living in Catthorpe in the 1740s, just twenty-five miles as the crow flies from Bakewell's Dishley, was in fact surrounded by ram-breeders, experimenting shepherds, enthusiastic improvers and visionary graziers. That he had seen a prototype of the New Leicester is clear from the description; and it may even be the case that the shape and features of the new breed were already widespread enough to be regarded in that area of the country as characteristic of one of the 'common sorts of rams'. Against this one should note that his 'Argument' to Book I only tallies in general terms with the content of the poem: he may possibly have intended to describe a 'common sort of ram', and gone on to describe something fairly new. [98]

Be this as it may, Dyer's description and recommendation of the third sheep for the lowland clay-marl areas of Leicestershire is important in two ways. Firstly, it has a historical significance. It is the earliest description of the new kind of sheep I have found; and it adds a little more evidence to the revisions in the dating of the breeding revolution pioneered by Kerridge (1967) and pursued in more detail by Russell (1981). In the light of the seriousness of Dyer's purpose, the depth of his research, and the high level of his engagement in contemporary economic and agricultural matters, we ought not to be too surprised to find in him an important historical witness, and a far-sighted advocate of new inventions and developments. Dyer is aware of major new textile technologies, for example, giving rare eye-witness accounts of the new carding and spinning machines of Lewis Paul later in the poem; and important statistical information on Thomas Lombe's organzine silk mill at Derby in his 'Commercial Map' notes (f. 28). [99] His early advocacy of enclosure has been noted; and in his comments on canals he is also a pioneering thinker. [100] The single extant leaf of his 'Commercial Map of England', and the other surviving evidence of that project, suggest he also had innovatory ideas in the fields of cartography and industrial geography. [101] The way in which his field research looks forward to the methods of the Board of Agriculture has also been noted. In some of these areas his role as historical witness has been acknowledged by economic historians; though by no means all of the historically significant areas of his writing have been considered in this way.

Secondly, Dyer turns here towards the improving breeders, but how far towards them he moves is not clear. We cannot postulate anything specific, like a historic encounter between Dyer and Bakewell, in which the young grazier explains to the chronicler of the fleece the significance of his new breed. Were they to have met (which of course they may have done), however, it seems to me unlikely they would have agreed for very long on the subject of the care of sheep. Dyer's gentle, almost fussy concern for the welfare of the animal, as well as its fleece, seems out of step with the toughness of the improving graziers. The poet's attitude to animals is cited by Keith Thomas as an example of a new, humane sensibility. For Dyer, as Thomas notes (1983: 173), 'Even to the reptile, every cruel deed / Is high impiety' (II, 22-3). By contrast Bakewell, relentlessly putting fathers to daughters and sons to mothers in his 'in-and-in' breeding methods, manipulating the incidence of liver-rot and foot-rot, tying-up and force-feeding sheep before killing and weighing them, and generally doing anything he had to do the better to turn grass into flesh and flesh into money, seems to epitomise Thomas's characterisation of eighteenth-century breeders (1983: 60) as 'ruthlessly eugenic'. [102] In Dyer's description and recommendation of the New Leicester the two sensibilities are at their closest, as the poet attempts to include in his advice the work of the mutton-growing breeders. Elsewhere his functional ethos has a more aestheticised and philosophical, less calculating colouration, a long way away from the procedures of the south Leicestershire graziers and breeders.

iv. 'Siluria'

We left Dyer's second sheep, the 'fairer species' of 'milder hills', in a kind of limbo: half way between the barren mountains of Wales and the fertile lowlands of south Leicestershire; half-way between the control of God and the control of Man; half-way between the free-ranging scavengers of the unfenced mountainsides, and the lowland sheep, fenced-in and force-fed on lush pastures. A 'halfway' position is appropriate. If for William Cowper (1785: 40), 'God made the country, and man made the town'; then for Dyer, God populated the mountainside and man must fill the fields of the lowlands. The middle sheep's role in this is ambiguous. It cannot be so easily defined as the other two, and this is most apparent if we try and identify it in terms of breed or type. It is described as follows:

But hills of milder air, that gently rise  
O'er dewy dales, a fairer species boast,  
Of shorter limb, and frontlet more ornate:  
Such the Silurian. If thy farm extends  
Near Cotswold Downs, or the delicious groves  
Of Symmonds, honour'd thro' the sandy soil  
Of elmy Ross, or Devon's myrtle vales,  
That drink clear rivers near the glassy sea,  
Regard this sort, and hence thy sire of lambs  
Select: his tawny Fleece in ringlets curls;  
Long swings his slender tail; his front is fenc'd  
With horns Ammonian, circulating twice  
Around each open ear, like those fair scrolls  
That grace the columns of th'Ionic dome. (I, 200-13)

This is not quite as plain as it seems. Hills of 'milder air' that 'gently rise', that is to say green or rolling hills, have a 'fairer species' of sheep on them than the mountains; it has shorter legs than the mountain sheep, and a more ornate forehead. [103] The 'Silurian' is an example of this type. If your farm is in the milder areas of Gloucestershire, Herefordshire or Devon, says Dyer, consider this type, and pick your breeding ram from there. He has ('should have' is implied) a tawny, ringletted fleece, a long slender tail, and double-circling horns framing open ears.

In fact the areas named (the Cotswolds, the Symond's Yat/Ross-on-Wye area, and the valleys of Devon), are all examples of the type of environment mentioned ('hills of

milder air'), which seems at first sight to make the advice seem banal: 'if you live in mild rolling hills select a ram from the kind of sheep who live on mild rolling hills'. This could perhaps be paraphrased as 'pick a good ram from an area similar to the one your farm is in', which is more meaningful. The description of the sheep that inhabits milder hills is ambiguous. Many sheep have shorter legs than mountain sheep; and an ornate frontlet may mean either a forehead ornamented with a tuft or poll, or one decorated with horns. It seems to be an aesthetic, impressionistic description rather than an identifying one.

However, Dyer gives an example, 'Such the Silurian'. Now 'Siluria' is a mytho-topographical concept of some elasticity, embracing notions of the Welsh Marches and their bordering counties in general, and the rich agricultural landscape of Herefordshire in particular. But whatever Dyer means by 'Siluria', what he means by the 'Silurian' sheep can be identified as one of two breeds by other references in the poem to it and to its wool. There are three: two are to high-quality wools, and the third is to the practice of 'cotting', or housing sheep in huts or 'cots'. [104] Both subjects plainly indicate that the 'Silurian' is either the Cotswold or the Ryelands sheep. Their unique high-quality wools have been mentioned earlier; and they were the only breeds still being 'cotted' in the eighteenth century whose mention would be credible in this context. [105] A close interpretation of the concept of 'Siluria' would tend to point to the Ryelands, the indigenous sheep of Herefordshire. The text becomes increasingly ambiguous, however. The advice is:

If thy farm extends  
Near Cotswold Downs, or the delicious groves  
Of Symmonds, honour'd thro' the sandy soil  
Of elmy Ross, or Devon's myrtle vales,  
That drink clear rivers near the glassy sea,  
Regard this sort, and hence thy sire of lambs  
Select (I, 203-209)

The phrase 'this sort' may mean either the 'fairer species' or the 'Silurian' which is an example of it, a general type or a particular breed. The particular characteristics for selection are then given:

his tawny Fleece in ringlets curls;  
Long swings his slender tail; his front is fenc'd  
With horns Ammonian, circulating twice  
Around each open ear, like those fair scrolls  
That grace the columns of th'Ionic dome. (I, 209-13)

Whatever this ram may be, it cannot be a 'Silurian', since neither the Cotswold nor the Ryelands were horned sheep: both were, and as far as is known had always been, polled.

On the other hand, Dyer has given as the third of his three named locations 'Devon's myrtle vales', and this does indeed suggest a horned sheep, namely the South-Western Horn, part of Russell's Group 2 (1981: 259-60), and the prototype of the modern Dorset Horn. Sheep were more commonly horned than polled in the eighteenth century, but horns 'circulating twice / About each open ear' are distinctive. The rams of some sheep types (the Norfolk Horn, the Spanish Merino, and the black-faced sheep of Scotland and northern England) had them; but in the context the horn shape strongly suggests the Dorset and its predecessor. It is not compatible in any way with the Cotswold or the Ryelands, both members of a different group in Russell's model (1981: 255-9).

If we are looking for a 'real' breed here, the best we can say is that Dyer is confusing ways of classifying sheep. He is not distinguishing between descriptions of breeds, locational types, and favoured features. The impression given, in fact, is not of a real breed, but of a range of features, appropriated and blended together to make a literary ideal; and we need to look at the literary side of this if we are to pursue it further. John Barrell's comments on Dyer's sheep-descriptions are particularly useful in this. He quotes the two verse-paragraphs describing the 'fairer species' (I, 200-13) and the New Leicester (I, 214-24), and concludes (1983: 94) that:

There are quite clearly two tones and two sorts of diction in these two paragraphs. In the first, the Silurian sheep, a 'fairer species' than the mountain breeds of sheep just discussed, is described in a diction as ornate and classicising as, according to Dyer, its own appearance is. Its fleece is tawny (*fulvus*), curled in ringlets, and its horns curled also, in the shape of the horns of Jupiter Ammon, or the scrolls of an Ionic column. This writing is formal enough, but it has nothing mock epic about it [...] It is a language which, not especially simple in itself, directs attention to the simplicity of the shepherd's lot: if his sheep are Silurian, he need concern himself, it seems, with their beauty only, while less fortunately situated shepherd must worry about profitability.

This needs one annotation. Barrell is right to stress the allusion to the ram-horns of the Roman (originally Egyptian) god Jupiter Ammon; Dyer uses this to give his 'Silurian' ram heroic and classical dignity, as he uses the reference to scrolls of an Ionic column. But the double-circling horn shape also attracted Dyer's enquiring mind and artist's eye in itself. In the 'Commercial Map' notes (f. 19v) are two drawings of fossils. The note above them reads:

*Turbinated shells* & e--in y[e] Earth--y[e] Nautili--& Conchee Amonica of y[e] same sort are found in Gloucester & Warwicksh[ire]

The two illustrations which follow are captioned 'y[e] Nautili' and 'Conchee Ammonica'. Both are simple sketches of spiral (or as Dyer styles them 'turbinated') fossils. The 'Conchee Ammonica' is noticeably double-circled. That he seems to have found these fossils in Gloucestershire and Warwickshire; that is, on the borders of 'Siluria', possibly helped spark the descriptive connection with the 'Silurian' sheep (fossils similarly occur in the phrase 'shells deluvian', I, 30-1).

Barrell contrasts the 'ornate and classicising' language of the 'Silurian' description with that of the New Leicester description, which he aptly calls 'language an auctioneer would understand' (p. 94). It does seem to be the case that Dyer is here concerned with a classicised ideal. He is positing a perfect sheep, whose description suggests, as Barrell says, interest in the beauty rather than the practical value of the sheep. [106] What has happened, I think, is that finding himself in his favourite mental landscape of 'Siluria', half way between the sublimity of the North Wales mountains and the agricultural imperatives of Leicestershire, Dyer has retreated into the classicised imagery of the golden age of British wool. The 'double-circled' horns suggest classical and prehistoric natural images as well as the specifically aesthetically-pleasing horn-shape of the South Western Horn; while the tawny ringletted fleece suggests the 'Cotswold Lion', and of course the 'golden fleece' of the Ryelands sheep ('Lemster Ore'). Barrell's glossing of tawny as the classical word 'fulvus' is also apt. It is a word used by the Roman poets, notably Lucretius (V, 899) in the phrase 'corpora fulva leonem', 'the tawny bodies of lions'. Dyer is always aware of the mythology of the 'golden' fleece: he gives a heroic narration of the Jason story in Book II (218-310), and Longstaffe (1847-8: 5: 221) records that the poem itself was headed the 'Golden Fleece' in an early draft manuscript.

Dyer's topographical machinery is again brought into play in the imagery of 'Cotswold Downs', 'Symmonds', 'elmy Ross' and 'Devon's myrtle vales' (I, 204-6). The first and the last of these nicely extend the catalogue of first-rate sheep-grazing land given earlier (Banstead, Dorchester, Dover etc, I, 37-66). We may add 'Devon' to the long ribbon of good grazing lands extending along the south coast; while Cotswold is quasi-Silurian, and evokes a strongly idyllic tradition of English wool and sheep. The other two places bring us back to Dyer's Siluria. Ross we have seen, while Symmonds (now 'Symonds Yat') is a little further down the Wye than Ross, between Goodrich Castle and Monmouth.

So Dyer's advice on types of sheep shows a range of concerns and approaches. There are three basic stances. The mountain sheep, its hardy characteristics sketched by the poet, may be left alone. The intermediate sheep of rolling hills seems to demand intervention, but the emphasis is on its natural beauty, and one feels no real practical imperative here. For the heavy clays and heavy fleeces of Leicestershire, by contrast, a careful phenotypal identification ensures the shepherd can aim for the kind of animal which

was indeed to dominate the future of British sheep production, a prototype of the New Leicester.

One question remains to disturb the neat grading of priorities here. If Dyer is entirely serious in his agricultural advice, why does he tell the shepherd whose land lies in 'hills of milder air' to select a ram which does not exist? Barrell shows that Dyer's priority in this 'classicizing' sheep-description is not with identifying a breed but with 'direct[ing] attention to the simplicity of the shepherd's lot' (1983: 94) by means of pastoral language. I have noted an intermediate mental landscape, in which the poet can escape from the starkness and/or necessity of the two other descriptions and locations. But both of these interpretations are made in literary and aesthetic terms. The agricultural historian will want to know how we can take Dyer's advice seriously, when he puts a fictional and a real breed side by side. This is in fact the issue of the aesthetic versus the practical, beauty versus truth, in another guise; and I shall conclude this reading of Dyer's treatment of the three major shepherding variables, by looking at an aspect of animal breeding and judgment which may suggest that Dyer's mixture of art and agriculture in this section is not as inappropriate as it seems.

Lord Ernle's classic account of the breeding revolution records the triumph of the practical over the aesthetic. The old breeds were, in his formula, 'the haphazard union of nobody's son with everybody's daughter' (1912, 1961: 179). He explains:

If any care was shown in the selection of rams and ewes, the choice was guided by fanciful points which possessed no practical value. Thus Wiltshire breeders demanded a horn which fell back so as to form a semicircle, beyond which the ear projected; Norfolk flockmasters valued the length and spiral form of the horn and the blackness of the face and legs; Dorsetshire shepherds staked everything on the horn projecting in front of the ear; champions of the South Downs condemned all alike, and made their grand objects a speckled face and leg and no horn at all. (p. 179)

But, for Bakewell, he writes:

the essentials were the valuable joints, and he swept away as non-essentials all the points on which fashion and prejudice had hitherto concentrated, such as head, neck, horn, leg or colour. The points which he wished to develop and perpetuate were beauty combined with utility of form. (p. 185)

This contrast provides an interesting gloss on the difference between Dyer's 'Silurian' and lowland sheep. Ernle is biased towards the improvers: phrases like 'fanciful points' and 'fashion and prejudice' are used euphemistically to signal, in a negative way, aesthetic

criteria, points of beauty. Ernle disguises these, because he wants to attribute beauty to the work of the improvers; but it could equally be argued that theirs was an intensely 'anti-beauty' campaign. [107] The truth is that beauty and practicality cannot so easily be distinguished in the subject of animal breeding, and Dyer's unselfconscious movement between aesthetic and practical descriptions of sheep may be seen as acknowledging this truth. The pre-improvement aesthetic points of 'head, neck, horn, leg, colour' are precisely what the poet is concerned with in all three descriptions, but especially in the intermediate 'Silurian' one. He recommends in his third sheep, on the other hand, a Bakewellian animal possessing 'utility of form', but there is some evidence in his description that he finds beauty here, too. The symmetrical perfection of a 'level line' along the sheep's back, and a 'compact form', are clearly aesthetically as well as practically pleasing to the poet; and, as with his description of peaty soil, Dyer takes a tactile, sensuous pleasure in the fleece being 'deep and clammy, close and plain'.

Indeed it is wool, the poet's major theme, which provides the best evidence that Ernle's distinction is overstated, and that Dyer's 'mixing' is perhaps appropriate. As has been noted, a side-effect of agricultural improvement, of intensive feeding, and of breeding for mutton, was the 'sweeping away' of the ability of the Cotswold and the Ryelands sheep to produce high-quality wools. But this was not a 'non-essential' feature. The high economic value of fine wool meant that this was the loss of one kind of 'utility' in sheep, in favour of another. At the same time the idea of fine wool is in itself an aesthetic one. Ernle dismisses colour as a non-essential detail; but in wool terms it is vital, and had been so at least since the time of Virgil, who advised shepherds to:

Reject any ram, however pure a white his wool,  
If the tongue beneath his moist palate is black, for he'll breed  
Lambs with black-spotted fleeces. [108]

The sale of wool is economically determined by the aesthetic judgements of the textile purchaser. Here, aesthetics and the practical are inseparable. The wool-buyer wants a white fleece, and the farmer must breed accordingly. [109]

And even without market demands, there is a high-level of subjective, aesthetic judgment in the breeding of sheep. Dyer reflects the market in his colour characterisation of 'such Dorcestrian fields, / Whose flocks innumerable whiten all the land' (I, 39-40). But he also emphasises a tawny fleece, as we saw; and elsewhere he writes of sheep being 'like flocks of gold' (I, 169), drawing on national and classical mythologies to suggest richness. But we should not think that these are just Dyer's poetic ideas, unconnected with 'real' sheep husbandry. A reddish tinge in the fleece, found especially in 'red-earth' areas (which are agriculturally rich), is still prized by some breeders, though no practical reason for this can be

offered. [110] Similarly shepherds continue, despite the science of modern breeding techniques, to buy their stock 'by eye', no matter how much the modern textbooks warn against such 'lack of efficiency'. [111] The fact is that aesthetics, intuition, experience and other subjective forms of judgment have always been an important part of agricultural practice.

Youatt's epigraphic usage of Dyer's 'Silurian' sheep description, in his chapter on Cotswold sheep, seems particularly interesting in the light of these considerations. He quotes as follows (1837: 338):

If thy farm extends  
Near Cotswold Downs-----  
Regard this sort, and hence thy sire of lambs select.

Youatt has clearly recognised that there is a problem in Dyer's description, and he deals with it by removing all the descriptive phrases. One can better understand why he nevertheless persisted in using it when one notices that in the first few paragraphs of his section on the Cotswold sheep he cites Camden, Drayton and Stowe, mentions Henry VIII, Henry VI and Edward IV, and recycles the romantic tradition that the English crown in the fifteenth century gave Cotswold wool and Cotswold sheep to the Castilians. The purpose of this story had always been to prove that the Spanish had originally got their Merino wool from our Cotswold sheep (The Merino having always been the fly in the ointment when it came to supremacist feelings about English wool). [112]

Youatt in other words recognised that the Cotswold had become the symbol of an imagined glorious past; and he rightly found in Dyer's description a kindred nostalgic spirit. For all the enthusiasm writers like Dyer and Youatt showed for improvement, there is a deep-seated emotional and imaginative engagement in an older way of farming, which the mythology of the 'Cotswold Lion' encapsulated. In this they reveal that in the early modern period, and perhaps even today, aesthetic and imaginative responses have been as much a part of the discourse of agriculture and agricultural history, breeding programmes and the human uses of animals, as practicality, rationalism and science. Youatt needs to bring the imaginative and mythic structures of Dyer's poetry into his practical treatise on sheep and shepherding, just as Dyer brings the practical and the agricultural into his poetry. There is here an important reciprocal interaction between aesthetics and agriculture.

## 4. The Care of Sheep

### i. The art of preserving health

In starting with terrain, weather, and breed, the three major variables of shepherding, Dyer has, as it were, 'set up' the shepherd to begin his task. The rest of his advice concentrates more literally on 'the care of sheep'. The first priority in this is to rehearse the major diseases of sheep and their possible preventions and remedies, which the poet does next (I, 251-320). William Youatt (1837: 389n) describes the shepherding and veterinary advice of an earlier agricultural writer, William Ellis (1744), as 'a singular compound of good sense and quackery'; and he might have extended the remark to characterise mid-eighteenth century veterinary practice in general. On the one hand certain essentials had been understood, such as the ability of various antiseptic, astrigent and mordant chemicals to work positively on external parasites and infections. On the other hand, shepherds and veterinarians were unable to understand or treat effectively a number of important parasite and micro-organism borne diseases. Dyer uses the image of flocks being 'swept away' twice, to describe, respectively, flash-floods in the South Wales valleys (I, 593-600), and the effect of the 'coughing pest' (I, 264-5). The readiness with which this imagery of instant and overwhelming disaster comes to him reflects Dyer's awareness of the lack of control which still marked the shepherd's relationship with the environment, and the vulnerability of even the hardy English sheep to disease and inclemency in the climate. [113]

Thus disease, and the preservation of health, are fundamental to Dyer and to the shepherding advice in *The Fleece*; and the key message is the familiar one, 'fore-warned is fore-armed':

Sagacious care foreacts. When strong disease  
Breaks in, and stains the purple streams of health,  
Hard is the strife of art. (I, 262-4)

The skill in shepherding, then as now, was to take preventive measures, and where disease did break out, to notice the cough or the limp as quickly as possible and act before further damage could be done. The idea of acting quickly is dramatised in Dyer's advice to 'snatch away' sheep whose pastures have become waterlogged and who are thus at risk; while the idea of prevention by early observation is conveyed in the advice to 'early mark' symptoms of illness.

The manner of this important precept is significant. Here we have again the epic style, distinctly heroic and warlike in its imagery of invasion and 'strife'. The phrase 'stains the purple streams' uses exactly the kind of language we would expect to find in an

eighteenth-century military epic, Pope's *Iliad*, perhaps, or Chatterton's 'Battle of Hastings'. [114] Once again the shepherd is revealed as having the potential qualities of the epic hero, capable of brilliant feats of foresight and 'saving the day'. In forestalling disease, the language suggests, he will enact the archetypal heroic deed of pre-empting a military catastrophe. Dyer also takes care, again, to tie his epic language to the task in hand. As with the 'people's shepherd', he does this here by literalising: the 'blood' of epic battle becomes the 'blood' of sheep invaded by disease.

Dyer's specific advice on health begins as advice on types of grass. But he has little to add on that subject; and he quickly turns towards the subject of disease prevention:

Of grasses are unnumber'd kinds, and all  
(Save where foul waters linger on the turf)  
Salubrious. Early mark when tepid gleams  
Oft mingle with the pearls of summer showers,  
And swell too hastily the tender plains;  
Then snatch away thy sheep: beware the rot;  
And with deterrent bay-salt rub their mouths,  
Or urge them on a barren bank to feed,  
In hunger's kind distress, on tedded hay;  
Or to the marish guide their easy steps,  
If near thy tufted crofts the broad sea spreads. (l, 251-61) [115]

There are some good details here, in both descriptive and prescriptive terms. Dyer observantly notes the range of grasses: there are hundreds, and although we might now distinguish more strongly between qualities than he does, they are all essentially 'good' (he has already described the best kind of pasture). The contrasting of 'tepid gleams' with the 'pearls' of summer showers effectively serves the more than poetic function of stressing the difference between stagnant and fresh water. [116] Dyer warns repeatedly in the poem against putrid or stagnant water, and wet ground in general. In the absence of modern knowledge of infection control and eradication this was one major variable which could be controlled in a way that would reduce disease.

In fact the more general mixture of strengths and weaknesses in the eighteenth-century shepherd's ability to deal with disease is nicely conveyed in this passage. The recognition that stagnant water caused liver rot (and other infections) had been made, as had the fact that the disease was caused by a parasitic worm (though Dyer does not specifically mention this). What was not known at the time was the chain of its infection, associated with a phase in the cycle of the water-snail; or indeed a cure. [117] Dyer's remedy of removing the sheep from wet areas is a good one as far as it goes, but none of

the other things he advises would help much with liver rot. Removal from the field, a change of diet (especially to hay) and salt are all remedies which were still being recommended for liver rot eighty years later (see Youatt, 1837: 458-9); but they are all in fact better remedies for other diseases. Putting the sheep on a 'barren bank' and feeding them on hay, a kind of starvation diet, would have been a reasonably good pre-antibiotic way of treating diseases associated with over-rich or over-wet diet, such as enterotoxaemia and redwater. Making the sheep close-crop on a 'barren bank' would also have been good for mineral deficiency ailments such as grass staggers (caused by a magnesium deficiency associated with the kind of over-lush conditions Dyer describes). The close-cropping this necessitated would mean a certain amount of soil (and hence minerals) would be ingested. Rubbing the mouth with bay-salt (i.e. large crystal sea-salt), and grazing the sheep on salt-marsh, would also help with deficiency diseases, by providing trace elements to the diet. Dyer's instincts as regards modulating and supplementing diet seem generally sound. He does not recommend anything that would be likely to harm the animals. Modern veterinary opinion is against sudden changes in diet for sheep; [118] but liver rot and other infectious diseases demanded drastic measures in the early modern period. In these circumstances, moving to scantier and more arid pastures, and finding ways to supplement minerals, would be fairly good general preventive work.

One notices the skilful way in which Dyer orchestrates his advice here, and the implied role the shepherd has in the drama. The shepherd is an active observer, who must 'mark' the water, 'beware' the rot. Responding to changes in climate and terrain, he dramatically 'snatches' sheep away from one sort of danger, and pastorally 'urges' them away from another. The course he must steer between dynamic action and gentle compassion, toughness and tenderness, is nicely signalled in the oxymoron 'kind distress'. It is traditional for poets to praise the felicities of the shepherd's life, through pastoral imagery. Dyer of course does this, even in the middle of a passage of advice on disease like this one, through phrases like 'summer showers' and 'tedded hay'. But he also uses the less obviously delightful elements of shepherding to positive effect, so that the threat of disease is allowed to give the shepherd significance: he must be observant, astute, capable on the one hand of heroic feats, and on the other of extending the conventional shepherdly virtue of 'gentleness' into a 'kindness' or compassion more usually associated with the Christian idea of 'pastoral care'. Dyer's shepherd is far from being a literary cypher; his calling has here a depth of meaning, and a practical significance usually absent from literary depictions. And although the poet is instructing the shepherd, the impression one gets, through Dyer's skilful mixing of description and prescription, is that the shepherd is a capable, self-motivating figure.

Some problems, however, require the poet to adopt a more directive teaching role. The next verse-paragraph gives more detail on liver rot:

That dire distemper, sometimes may the swain,  
Tho' late, discern; when on the lifted lid,  
Or visual orb, the turgid veins are pale,  
The swelling liver then her putrid store  
Begins to drink: ev'n yet thy skill exert,  
Nor suffer weak despair to fold thy arms:  
Again deterrent salt apply, or shed  
The hoary medicine o'er their arid food. (l, 266-73)

Here the technique of disguising prescription as description has a slightly different emphasis. The swain is ostensibly examining the sheep, but it seems more strongly to be the poet who takes the role of veterinary surgeon, standing astride the animal to lift the eyelid; pointing to the pallor of the bloodvessels; explaining how the disease swells the liver; and advising the shepherd, with the kind of confidence only doctors and vets can muster, not to panic. Despair is the danger here, and the poet's higher profile aims to counteract its debilitating onset.

Well indeed may Dyer call this the 'dire distemper' and advise the swain not to 'suffer weak despair to fold thy arms'. The fact was, as Youatt was to concede (1837: 456), that once liver rot had set in, 'neither medicine nor management will have much power in arresting the evil'. Dyer again can only offer 'detergent' (i.e. purgative) salt; but eighty years later Youatt had to admit (p. 457) that his own 'account of the treatment of rot must, to a considerable extent, be very unsatisfactory', and could only come up with the same remedy, together with two other purgatives, Epsom salts and calomel (with opium, p. 459). Dyer's advice is bravely optimistic in the face of a disease which would continue to terrorise shepherds and farmers through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Eighteenth-century practice was very much more competent to deal with external diseases, and Dyer's next two verse-paragraphs reflect this. Firstly, 'halt' or foot-rot:

In cold stiff soils the bleaters oft complain  
Of gouty ails, by shepherds term'd the Halt:  
Those let the neighb'ring fold or ready crook  
Detain, and pour into their cloven feet  
Corrosive drugs, deep-searching arsenic,  
Dry allum, verdigrise, or vitriole keen:  
But if the doubtful mischief scarce appears,  
'Twill serve to shift them to a dryer turf,  
And salt again. Th'utility of salt

Teach thy slow swains; redundant humours cold  
Are the diseases of the bleating kind. (I, 274-84)

And secondly 'scab', a mange/itch type of skin disease:

Th'infectious scab, arising from extremes  
Of want or surfeit, is by water cured  
Of lime, or sodden staves-acre, or oil  
Dispersive of Norwegian tar, renown'd  
By virtuous Berkeley whose benevolence  
Explored its pow'rs, and easy med'cine thence  
Sought for the poor. (I, 285-91)

The curious thing about both these pieces of advice is the disparity between ignorance of cause and knowledge of cure. Both diseases are contagious, caused respectively by a bacterium (not 'cold stiff soils') and a parasitic mite (not starvation or plenty). Sheep diseases are not specifically caused by 'redundant humours cold' (another example of Dyer using Galen's theory), though cold and wet may be contributory factors--as of course starvation or over-rich diet may be. His cures are generally good ones for their time. Formalin rather than vitriol is nowadays used in foot-baths; 'allum' is still used in medicine as a styptic and astringent; and though the copper compound 'verdigrise' has been superseded as a surface antiseptic by compounds such as Iodine and Potassium Permanganate, and by Copper Sulphate (a similar substance) in the treatment of foot rot, it would have had useful disinfecting and cleaning properties. All these chemicals would have been potentially helpful in the treatment of foot-rot, which demanded substances (like vitriol) which had mordant as well as antiseptic qualities, to get at the infected areas. Foot rot continues to affect sheep, and apart from the move to less dangerous chemicals than vitriol and verdigris the only new weapons available to modern shepherds are the antibiotics. Dipping the sheep in compounds containing pesticides is the modern solution to skin diseases like scab, which is now more or less eradicated (though, as has become apparent in recent decades, at great health cost to some farmers and shepherds). Dyer's remedies of lime-water, staves-acre and tar-water would inevitably be less effective on such a highly infectious condition than specialised modern chemicals, but might be expected to kill the mite and not the sheep, which is about the best one could hope for at that time.

[119] Bishop Berkeley's influential book on tar-water appeared in 1744, but the medicinal use of tar and tar-water goes back very much further than this, and indeed continues. [120]

As the section on diseases moves to completion Dyer's emphasis on teacherly instruction increases. In the last section quoted, for example (I, 274-91), he addresses the

farmer rather than the shepherd ('Th'utility of salt / Teach thy slow swains', 282-3), and having (inaccurately) credited Berkeley with the popularisation of tar-water, urges the poor ('Ye Poor!') to bless the philosopher 'with grateful voice' (I, 291). This move towards paternalism coincides with a retreat from human intervention and towards 'natural health'. Sheep suffer 'pleurisies and dropsies', he writes, because they have been 'driven from Nature's path by artful man' (293-4). But the 'more humble' swain may leave these things to Nature and to God, and should

thy rural gates

Frequent unbar, and let thy flocks abroad  
From lea to croft, from mead to arid field,  
Noting the fickle seasons of the sky.  
Rain-sated pastures let them shun, and seek  
Changes of herbage and salubrious flowers.  
By their All-perfect Master inly taught,  
They best their food and physic can discern

(I, 297-304)

Dyer has it both ways again. Man must not interfere with the natural propensity of sheep to seek healthy terrain; but at the same time he must keep an eye on the weather, keep them out of the wet grass, see that they seek fresh pasture (with the right sort of flowers) and so on. The poetry forces a harmony between the opposing tendencies of quietism and intervention. Dyer wants to stress that there is a natural, divinely-ordered way in which sheep may stay healthy. Human intervention, 'science' and improvement, are not his only scale of recommendations.

In the light of his double-edged attitude to 'nature' it is perhaps appropriate that the passage ends with an intriguing question:

O'er the vivid green observe

With what a regular consent they crop,  
At every fourth collection to the mouth,  
Unsav'ry crow-flow'r; whether to awake  
Languor of appetite with lively change,  
Or timely to repel approaching ills,  
Hard to determine. Thou, whom Nature loves,  
And with her salutary rules intrusts,  
Benevolent Mackenzie! say the cause.  
This truth howe'er shines bright to human sense;  
Each strong affection of th'unconscious brute,

Each bent, each passion of the smallest mite,  
Is wisely giv'n: harmonious they perform  
The work of perfect reason (blush, vain Man!),  
And turn the wheels of Nature's vast machine. (l, 306-20)

The progression is an interesting one. Having somehow made the sheep both self-directing and under the control of the shepherd, the poet observes a tiny piece of animal behaviour. It puzzles him, and he offers two possible causes, before admitting that the reason for it is 'hard to determine'. At this point he asks his friend Dr James Mackenzie to explain the phenomenon.

In more than one sense Mackenzie held for Dyer the role Pope ascribes to Dr John Arbuthnot in the *Epistle to Arbuthnot*. Mackenzie had saved Dyer from life-threatening illness as Arbuthnot had 'prolonged' Pope's life (*Epistle*, 26-8), and supported and encouraged him in his work, particularly *The Fleece*, which Mackenzie may indeed have instigated. [121] He is thus treated as a wise counsellor, a learned doctor who understands the secrets of nature. Pope had asked Arbuthnot (*Epistle*, 29) 'What *Drop* or *Nostrum*' could remove the plague of pestering scribblers; while Dyer asks Mackenzie to 'say the cause' of the strange case of sheep eating 'unsav'ry crowflow'r'. Both questions are in fact rhetorical, and both poets, having asked them, push on with their monologues. But unlike Pope, who aims to expand on his 'dilemma', Dyer needs to move to closure. A 'truth' (but not *the* truth, in the narrower sense) is offered. There must be a good reason for the animal behaviour, since it reflects a work of 'perfect reason'. The movement is from observation and intellectual curiosity to abstraction and pious acceptance, in the face of a purposeful, wise and harmonious 'machine'. Dyer's benevolent deism is clearly enough expressed, but he leaves the question itself hanging: we are not finally told why sheep eat crowsflowers.

The question is itself an odd one. On the one hand it reflects Dyer's role as agricultural researcher, measuring and observing; but on the other it seems to be a poet's question, of the sort Robert Graves (1948, 1961: 9) attempts to answer by and through poetry:

Who cleft the Devil's foot?  
When did the Fifty Danaids come with their sieves to Britain?  
What secret was woven into the Gordian Knot?  
Why did Jehovah create trees and grass before he created the Sun, Moon and stars?  
Where shall Wisdom be found?

It is also, like Pope's question, playful: the poet asks the wise and sober doctor a fanciful or absurd question, with a slight overtone of bantering in-jokery as to the doctor's privileged

ability to know all there is to know about medicines (Arbuthnot) or the mysteries of nature (Mackenzie). Pope allows facetiousness, and Dyer allows bathos, to haunt the question.

With this mixed tonal and structural context in mind we may consider what it means. The 'crowflower' is almost certainly in this context the buttercup, which is mildly poisonous and 'unsavoury' to ruminants. [122] 'Every fourth collection to the mouth' seems both poetic and observational. We are used to the monoculture of modern pasture, but eighteenth-century fields were awash with different flowers and grasses. Thus we may turn the thing round, and consider that in an eighteenth-century field it would perhaps be impossible for a sheep to take four bites *without* eating a buttercup. On such terms poetry and observation of nature may meet.

However Dyer also insists on intentionality; and his two postulated intentions are both interesting:

whether to awake  
Languor of appetite with lively change,  
Or timely to repel approaching ills (l, 309-11)

I take Dyer's phrase 'awake / Langour of appetite' to mean 'awake from', that is, act as a stimulant. The slight bitterness of buttercups might indeed act in this way, as a kind of appetiser. A traditional shepherd's remedy for a sheep which will not eat (before resorting to glucose injections and the like) is to feed ivy to it. Much more than the buttercup, ivy is poisonous and bitter, but it can have the effect of, as it were, rekindling the 'boiler' of the sheep's rumen system, and restoring its appetite; if it will not eat ivy, it will not eat anything. If he is indeed thinking (in less extreme terms) of this kind of thing, Dyer's phrase 'lively change' is a good one. [123]

His second idea, that sheep eat buttercups 'timely to repel approaching ills' may perhaps suggest a homeopathic protection in which an inoculation of slightly-poisonous buttercup wards off the effects of the major natural poisons (more widely commonplace in the eighteenth century); or it may suggest a purgative or emetic function (in the way, for example, that dogs and other carnivores sometimes eat grass). Dyer of course passes the question to Mackenzie at this point, before installing it as a source of natural wonder; and we cannot answer it in any certain way. It becomes, in one aspect, an emblem of Dyer's equivalent of Keats's 'negative capability'. It shows a poet's concern with mystery and intuition as well as with the curiosity, observation, and overview which characterise Dyer's handling of his agricultural theme. The poem encompasses prescriptiveness, rationalism and faith on the one hand, and poetry, vision and intuition on the other. The combination is particularly characteristic of its author.

## ii. The shepherd's calendar

With Dyer's curious question about sheep eating crowflowers, the most important areas of advice are completed. The shepherd is established on the right kind of soil, with the right kind of sheep, in a land of heroes and fine wool. He knows what can be done to improve his land and his sheep, and how to deal with the major diseases. Dyer will add further comments on all these subjects as he proceeds, but the major advice has been given. One notices that Dyer has not followed an annual 'calendar' (the usual method in eighteenth-century agricultural advice, in prose as well as verse) in this opening section. [124] This seems to me to reflect the urgency of his advice in lines 1-320: before the shepherd can settle into the harmonious stability of the annual cycle he must establish the variables, and learn of the major possibilities and dangers of shepherding.

Once Dyer has dealt with these matters he can allow the poem to move into the cyclical rhythm of the shepherd's year, which he now does:

See that thy scrip have store of healing tar,  
And marking pitch and raddle; nor forget  
Thy shears true pointed, nor th'official dog,  
Faithful to teach thy stragglers to return;  
So may'st thou aid who lag along, or steal  
Aside into the furrows or the shades,  
Silent to droop; or who at ev'ry gate  
Or hillock rub their sores and loosen'd wool.  
But rather these, the feeble of thy flock,  
Banish before th'autumnal months. Ev'n age  
Forbear too much to favour: oft renew  
And thro' thy fold let joyous youth appear. (l, 321-33)

At the beginning of this passage Dyer is still in the foreground as the 'teacher', kitting out the shepherd, in the manner of a rather fussy parent, before sending him out into the fields to begin his annual round of tasks. But by the end of the passage the shepherd seems restored to his role as the responsible professional, assessing which sheep are to be sold and which to be kept, mixing compassion and utility. This is traditionally the first task of the shepherd's year; and from here to the end of the first book Dyer follows the calendar from this autumn cull (nowadays called 'making up the flock') through to the summer shearing. [125] The major model for the pattern is Thomson's Seasons; and Dyer makes a Thomsonian

pattern of 'natural' digressions, returning each time to the next important moment in the temporal pattern.

Dyer is not as skilled in this kind of work as Thomson (there are some awkward transitions, and less sense of structure); and his advice is less full, its subjects more selective than one might expect. In the passage quoted above, for example, he misses out the shepherd's crook, an essential piece of equipment, needed to catch and examine sheep. The equipment he does specify is adequate, and would hold no surprises for the shepherd. The tar-pot was a universal panacea for external infections and injuries, and pitch the usual marking substance, (both now superseded by the ubiquitous blue spray). As usual his observation of sheep is keen. The indications of which sheep to cull (those who lag behind, or have loose wool or sore skin), would not be out of place in a modern manual on condition-scoring, though one would expect some reference to other factors, particularly the condition of teeth, the most important indicator of the animal's age and ability to survive the season.

At this moment in the poem, indeed, one gets this impression that the poet's interest in detailed shepherdly advice has waned a little. The major topics of the first half of the book, terrain, weather, animal-types and disease prevention, all allow the poet to express the major themes of what Goldstein accurately calls his 'elevated pastoralism'. They enable him to show the natural harmony and wisdom of nature, and the value and scope of human intervention; he can vent his patriotic fervour, and testify to his religious convictions. The minutiae of the shepherd's tasks do not always offer the poet such fertile possibilities for maintaining the 'epic' and 'high' side of his poem alongside the 'georgic' and the 'low'. The result is that Dyer will sometimes sacrifice didactic credibility for the chance of a literary or ideological coup, as for example in the passage that follows the advice on equipment and 'making up the flock' (333-45). Here, Dyer goes for a heroic rendering of 'the season of imperial love'. The comparison he makes between battling rams and battering-rams is no more successful at hitting the true Virgilian note than the passage of *Spring* (789-820) it imitates; nor does it enhance the status of the shepherd's calling, as heroic material tends to do elsewhere in the poem. It does, however, sacrifice the chance to give advice on the agricultural concerns of the season, especially the preparation of rams and ewes for the mating season, which would be as vitally important to shepherdly success as his earlier advice on 'selecting a breed' was.

Even more seriously, from an agricultural point of view, the poet then entirely misses out lambing, the major event of the shepherd's year. We move from battling rams to advice on the castration of ram-lambs. One could perhaps make an interesting Freudian interpretation of this transition. Changing the subject from rutting to castration may be Dyer's equivalent of Thomson's escape to the waters of the 'foaming deep', when the heat of 'fierce desire' became too intense for the poet in *Spring* (821 ff). More prosaically, Dyer

may not have felt confident in advising shepherds, with their reputation for fierce independence, on what is the most difficult and highly skilled of their tasks; or he may have felt there was little literary mileage in the subject. More probably he had qualms about addressing a subject whose serious didactic treatment would necessarily be gynaecological.

But if Dyer may have felt squeamish about the subject of lambing, he is certainly fearless about the subject of castrating ram lambs, and indeed begins to regain his sense of practical engagement, and his descriptive power, in the passage that follows:

Wise custom at the fifth or sixth return,  
Or ere they've past the twelfth, of orient morn,  
Castrates the lambkins; necessary rite,  
Ere they be numbered of the peaceful herd.  
But kindly watch whom thy sharp hand has grieved,  
In those rough months that lift the turning year:  
Not tedious is the office; to thy aid  
Favonius hastens; soon their wounds he heals  
And leads them skipping to the flow'rs of May (I, 346-54)

The reference to Favonius is a much more credible piece of classicising than Dyer's battering-ram references to the 'tow'rs of Salem'. It is genuinely appropriate to find in the west wind (also called Zephyrus, and traditionally associated with springtime) a manifestation of the shepherd's renewed pastoral spirit of 'kindness', and a healing agent. An early correspondent in *Notes and Queries* (4th ser. VII, 1871: 443-4) can 'scarcely wonder' no-one reads *The Fleece* when the first book offers the subject of castration in its argument. Had he read the text itself he might have been pleasantly surprised by the poet's sense of tact, and ability to address the pastoral context of the subject, in the fullest sense of the word 'pastoral'.

Two major set-pieces end this second half of the book; consecutively, a passage (with some global digressions) on moderation as a principle of shepherding (I, 451-554), and the grand finale of the shearing festival (555-720). The interim passages of the 'shepherd's calendar' (355-450), meanwhile, form a loosely-constructed miscellany of thoughts on shepherding, with a roughly cyclical progression. Despite the loose-knit structure, there is skilful work in this section, as the poet advises and ponders on the various aspects of the shepherd's life and work. The next section, which begins with an echo of the final word of the previous line ('May'), offers some well-written Maytime advice:

May! who allows to fold, if poor the tilth,  
Like that of dreary houseless common fields,

Worn by the plough; but fold on fallows dry.  
Enfeeble not thy flock to feed thy land,  
Nor in too narrow bounds the pris'ners crowd;  
Nor ope the wattled fence while balmy Morn  
Lies on the reeking pasture: wait till all  
The crystal dews, impearl'd upon the grass,  
Are touch'd by Phoebus' beams, and mount aloft,  
With various clouds to paint the azure sky. (l, 355-64)

So distinctive to the modern ear and eye is the language of eighteenth-century poetry that it is easy to see only the surface polish and the artifice of 'poetic diction'. But we have seen that Dyer can incorporate the rhythm and tone of proverbial folk-wisdom; and here the verse gains strength from another ancient and distinctive mode, that of alliterative verse, in which a pattern of internal rhymes and repeated sounds is created. The line 'Enfeeble not thy flock to feed thy land' is especially alliterative in this manner, as are such phrases as 'fold on fallows' and 'Nor in too narrow'. The manner is rather like that of an earlier agricultural poet, Thomas Tusser, who uses short lines, with a range of alliterative echoes and rhymes, to give pith and energy to his advice.

Unlike Tusser, however, Dyer incorporates this kind of technique into what is otherwise a fairly 'high' poetic style (Tusser's writing is doggerel, in the best tradition of that popular style). Taken singly, many of Dyer's two-word phrases ('balmy morn', 'crystal dews', 'azure sky') seem merely conventional; yet the cumulative effect of his various verbal and rhythmic techniques, in a passage such as this one, is convincing. One gets a clear feeling of the May morning, and a real sense of the shepherd's decisions and choices, of the contrast between penned and free-roaming sheep, between impoverished and rich land, and between the chilly dampness of the morning and the heat of the day. One notices Dyer's constant sense of physical reality. For every formal poetic phrase like 'azure sky' or 'crystal dews', there is something more down-to-earth, a 'wattled fence' or a 'common field'. The advice, too, is similarly down-to-earth and common-sensical. Giving the sheep space within the fold, and ensuring they have an adequate quality of tilth, are good advice. We would nowadays find the idea of keeping the sheep away from dewy grass extremely fussy, but the eighteenth-century shepherd can be forgiven for being nervous of wet pastures, for reasons we have seen.

The advice on skin and fleece care in the short verse-paragraph that follows (365-71) is also simple and sensible. [126] Dyer is preparing here for two related and slightly longer flights. The first is an energetic miscellany of shepherdly tasks, and a sequence on telling the weather:

To mend thy mounds, to trench, to clear, to soil,  
 Thy grateful fields, to medicate thy sheep,  
 Hurdles to weave, and cheerly shelters raise,  
 Thy vacant hours require; and ever learn  
 Quick ether's motions: oft the scene is turn'd;  
 Now the blue vault, and now the murky cloud,  
 Hail, rain, or radiance; these the moon will tell,  
 Each bird and beast, and these thy fleecy tribe.  
 When high the sapphire cope, supine they couch,  
 And chew the cud delighted; but ere rain  
 Eager, and at unwonted hour, they feed.  
 Slight not the warning (l, 372-83)

The opening list typifies Dyer's blending of rural labour and pastoral idyll. The shepherd's constant productive activity is seen as self-determined and pleasurable. He spontaneously fills his 'vacant hours' with work: No Duckian 'Master', Thomsonian sense of communal effort, or Colliersque pressure of practical need is present here, and none seems needed. When the shepherd is not actually digging, tending sheep, or making useful things with his hands, he is educating himself, 'ever learning'. That his subject of study is the weather neatly unites Dyer's faith in folklore and the natural wisdom of shepherds, and his interest in education. Thomson had contrasted the 'amaz'd' response of his swain to the rainbow with Newton's disclosure of its meaning (*Spring* 203-17). Dyer's shepherd, a more sophisticated and independent figure, teaches himself to understand meteorology; yet he does so within the observational methodology of shepherdly lore, a combination of the sort we also find in an interesting book title of 1744:

The Shepherd of Banbury's rules to judge of the changes of the weather, grounded on forty years experience. To which is added, a rational account of the causes of such alterations, [...] on the principles of the Newtonian philosophy. [127]

The subject also gives Dyer a chance to take further the idea of the natural wisdom of animals, first suggested in the 'crowflower' passage we examined earlier; and the weather extends the idea of the variety of the shepherd's experience, signalled here as a pleasurable kind of variety.

However, we have noted earlier that Dyer does not gain his sense of pastoral idyll by simply making bad things disappear. The shepherd's is a hard life, as Dyer acknowledges in the context of the swiftly sketched Virgilian/Thomsonian storm that follows the passage on weather forecasting:

Slight not the warning; soon the tempest rolls,  
Scatt'ring them wide, close rushing at the heels  
Of th'hurrying o'ertaken swains: forbear  
Such nights to fold; such nights be theirs to shift  
On ridge or hillock; or in homesteads soft,  
Or softer cots, detain them. Is thy lot  
A chill penurious turf, to all thy toils  
Untractable? Before harsh winter drowns  
The noisy dykes, and starves the rushy glebe,  
Shift the frail breed to sandy hamlets warm;  
There let them sojourn, till gay Procne skims  
The thick'ning verdure and the rising flow'rs. (l, 383-94)

It is interesting that as Dyer is admitting there are 'bad' lands as well as good, he makes a double-echo of Gray's description of the villager's impoverished life in the *Elegy*, through the phrases 'thy lot' and 'chill penurious turf'. [128] The consciousness of hardship and difficulty is certainly more freely expressed in this section of the poem, possibly showing a more general influence of Gray's popular portrayal of the pathos of village life.

We saw earlier that Thomson, in particular, seems to offer 'compensations' for the hardship of rural life. Dyer's 'compensation', in so far as he offers the shepherd one, is what we would now call 'job satisfaction'. The shepherd is faced with a 'chill penurious turf'; but so, even more directly, is the sheep; and it is the shepherd's responsibility to ease conditions for his animals. The pleasure of his life lies in the moral satisfaction of treating his animals with benevolence, and the sense of professional responsibility in the way he can nurture the sheep, saving them from danger by his skill and exertion. Thus Dyer ends the passage quoted, as he does the castration passage, with a joyful emergence into springtime. In both examples this is the reward for the shepherd's pains: the sheep survive to enjoy the safety and pleasure of spring, and the shepherd's pleasure is derived from this success as much as from a direct enjoyment of the new season. Dyer is leading to a formal statement of this view of the shepherd's life. Before he gives this, however, he has two more pieces of description to give, which will add the final touch to this set of illustrations of the shepherd's professional work. They lead on from the passage quoted above:

And while departing autumn all embrowns  
The frequent-bitten fields, while thy free hand  
Divides the tedded hay, then be their feet  
Accustom'd to the barriers of the rick,

Or some warm umbrage; left, in erring fright,  
When the broad dazzling snows descend, they run  
Dispers'd to ditches, where the swelling drift  
Wide overwhelms: anxious, the shepherd swains  
Issue with axe and spade, and, all abroad,  
In doubtful aim explore the glaring waste,  
And some, perchance, in the deep delve upraise,  
Drooping, ev'n at the twelfth cold dreary day,  
With still continu'd feeble pulse of life,  
The glebe, their Fleece, their flesh, by hunger gnawed. (l, 395-408)

We are led into the worst moments of the shepherd's year in this passage. The storm Dyer has just described, the barren fields and the snow drifts are expressed in a less dramatic and sublime way than Thomson's parallel scenes (see *Autumn* 311-50; *Winter*, passim), but the dire significance of the withering grass in the 'frequent-bitten fields', and of the arrival of heavy drifting snow, would be immediately apparent to a shepherd. Dyer's shepherd is able to rescue both situations. Into the starving fields he brings hay, dividing it out with a 'free [that is, generous] hand'; and from the depths of the snowdrift he produces, after twelve days, a living sheep. The models for these two victories are, I think, two of Christ's miracles, the feeding of the five thousand, and the raising of Lazarus; and the second act also literalises Christ's fable of the lost sheep. [129] We have seen that Dyer elsewhere ascribes the Christian idea of 'pastoral care' to the shepherd; here the parallel is at its most forceful. The shepherd is shown as the saviour of the sheep, a most 'elevated' form of pastoral. In the concluding lines of these two descriptions one notices again a powerful use of an alliterative form ('deep delve', 'dreary day'), and of patterns of assonance in the language. In the last line this is combined with the rhetoric of listing, in a way that focuses the 'miracle' in a manner that is both dramatic and gentle:

With still continu'd feeble pulse of life,  
The glebe, their Fleece, their flesh, by hunger gnaw'd. (l, 407-8)

In the resonances between soft fricatives and hard consonants here the contrast between the gentleness and frailty of the sheep and the harshness of the winter; and the contrasting energies of toughness and tenderness in the shepherd's life are precisely expressed.

The passage successfully prepares the way for Dyer's formal statement of the shepherd's role as a pastoral carer; and this in turn provides an appropriate way of addressing the subject of the care of lambs:

Ah, gentle Shepherd! thine the lot to tend,  
 Of all that feel distress, the most assail'd,  
 Feeble, defenceless: lenient be thy care;  
 But spread around thy tend'rest diligence  
 In flow'ry spring-time, when the new-dropp'd lamb,  
 Tott'ring with weakness by his mother's side,  
 Feels the fresh world about him, and each thorn,  
 Hillock, or furrow, trips his feeble feet:  
 O! guard his meek sweet innocence from all  
 Th'innumerous ills that rush around his life (l, 409-18)

When Dyer uses the familiar characterisation of the 'gentle shepherd' in his peroration here, one feels he has earned the right to do so, and is not just using the stock phrases of literary pastoral. The moment is right for the statement, between the success of keeping the sheep alive through winter, and the new subject of the care of lambs.

The poet's treatment of this new subject itself goes some way to making up for his omission of lambing. The 'meek sweet innocence' of the lamb may be a literary notion, but it is appropriate to the vulnerability of the lamb the poet goes on to delineate; and no shepherd would argue with the idea that 'innumerous ills' 'rush around' the new-born lamb. Quentin Seddon (1989: 115-16) characterises them well:

Shepherds say that the first three weeks are half a sheep's life; in that time it finds as many ways to die as in the rest of its days put together [...] Even when safely born, lambs must be closely watched to make sure they get enough milk, resist the wet, avoid the raven and the fox, and through the exhausting weeks of lambing the same patient attention must be paid night and day.

Each of the dangers Seddon mentions receives its share of advice in the passage that follows: shortage of milk (426-7), bad weather (425), the predatory crows (421) and foxes (421-2); and Dyer also warns of a few dangers no longer faced: the attacks of the 'quick kite' (419-20) and the 'bold bird of prey' (428); and the failure of the land to produce an early enough bite of grass (425-6).

This is an impressive passage in didactic and thematic terms; and Dyer draws it to a conclusion well. Hand feeding is recommended as a task for children, so that they learn 'charitable habits in sport'; Dyer finely characterises the shepherd's role again, in the line 'Various as ether is the past'ral care' (440); and he concludes on an exemplary note, punningly pastoralising the name of his friend Joseph Nutt ('Nuceus [...] sweet Hinclean swain'), whom he celebrates as a model of modest didacticism. [130] Nutt is the last of three

individuals (Berkeley, Mackenzie, Nutt) Dyer has held up as exemplifying the ideal of teacherly-pastoral care, and their consecutive mention (at lines 289, 314, 444) weaves this theme through the middle of his shepherdly advice. At one level his praise of them reflexively defends his own role in writing *The Fleece*. At another they are models for the shepherd to emulate. We have seen the way Dyer encourages the shepherd to learn about the weather; and indeed his advice throughout this first book offers itself as a way of encouraging the shepherd to learn useful arts. When Dyer characterises Nutt as one whom 'rude obscurity severely clasps' he is suggesting, as well as a model of modest retirement, the potential for even someone of Nutt's modest background to become a teacher, a 'friend to man'. The implication is that the shepherd, through his benevolent and caring role, and his ability to gain and share practical wisdom, has the capability to become a Berkeley, a Mackenzie, a Nutt or indeed a Dyer. Through the shepherd the poet implies that each role in society has the potential for expansion beyond its immediate function; and he brings the three-fold pastoral role (shepherding, caring and teaching) together neatly to conclude this important part of the poem.

## 5. The Rewards of Labour

### i. Winter feeding

In his heroic depiction of shepherding, as a calling and a model for a successful society, Dyer has two more cards to play. Both are built around pastoral descriptions of key moments in the agricultural year. The first is centred on winter feeding, and begins with a further comment on the subject of climatic moderation. The position of this passage, following the praise of 'Nuceus', amplifies its apparent significance: we get the impression that Dyer is beginning to draw to its conclusion the 'long lesson' whose method of gradual attainment has been the subject of the previous verse-paragraph:

Sheep no extremes can bear: both heat and cold  
Spread sores cutaneous; but more frequent heat.  
The fly-blown vermin from their woolly nest  
Press to the tortur'd skin, and flesh, and bone,  
In littleness and number dreadful foes!  
Long rains in miry winter cause the halt;  
Rainy luxuriant summers rot your flock;  
And all excess, ev'n of salubrious food,  
As sure destroys as famine or the wolf.  
Inferior theirs to man's world-roving frame,  
Which all extremes in every zone endures. (l, 451-61)

In fact two of Dyer's earlier subjects are brought together here: climate (see 125-84), and disease (see 251-320). In uniting them Dyer graphically prepares to particularise the significance of the English climate for shepherding. The extremes of heat and cold are shown as the deadly enemies of health in sheep, thus preparing for an example of the way that the temperate climate of England represents a perfect moderation between the two extremes. The last sentence (460-1) presents an interesting sub-text to this: the extreme climates are not condemned *per se*, but as sites for shepherding. The phrase 'man's world-roving frame' reveals the significance of this stricture; for while in the 'home' climate sheep may thrive under the care of their shepherds, Dyer will later despatch other classes of society (explorers, merchants and traders) to the 'extreme' parts of the earth to buy and to sell. The first preparations for that later movement, and for the idea that it may have a relationship with the idyllic sheep pastures of Albion, are made here.

But the major task in hand is to count the shepherd's blessings in temperate England, and to compare them with less fortunate areas:

With grateful heart, ye British Swains! enjoy  
 Your gentle seasons and indulgent clime.  
 Lo! in the sprinkling clouds your bleating hills  
 Rejoice with herbage, while the horrid rage  
 Of winter irresistible o'erwhelms  
 Th'Hyperborean tracks: his arrowy frosts  
 That pierce through flinty rocks, the Lappian flies;  
 And burrows deep beneath the snowy world;  
 A drear abode! (I, 462-70)

The 'hyperborean tracks' are a purgatory of extended winters ('Twice three slow gloomy months', 475), which the northern shepherd and his 'lank and scanty herd' somehow endure by living on fish bones and tree bark (477-80). This is of course an exaggerated portrayal (eighteenth-century georgic writers were incurably fascinated by the sublime horrors of winter), but the contrasted scene for which it prepares is one of the more successful pastoral moments in the poem:

while ye, O Swains!

Ye, happy at your ease, behold your sheep  
 Feed on the open turf, or crowd the tilth,  
 Where, thick among the greens, with busy mouths  
 They scoop white turnips: little care is yours:  
 Only at morning hour to interpose  
 Dry food of oats, or hay, or brittle straw,  
 The wat'ry juices of the bossy root  
 Absorbing; or from noxious air to screen  
 Your heavy teeming ewes with wattled fence  
 Of furze or copse-wood in the lofty field,  
 Which bleak ascends among the whistling winds:  
 Or, if your sheep are of Silurian breed,  
 Nightly to house them dry on fern or straw,  
 Silk'ning their Fleeces. Ye nor rolling hut  
 Nor watchful dog require, where never roar  
 Of savage tears the air, where careless Night  
 In balmy sleep lies lull'd, and only wakes  
 To plenteous peace. (I, 480-98)

Every aspiration of the eighteenth-century georgic is present in this passage. The contrast between the rigours of the northern winter, and the ease of folding sheep through root-crops in an English winter, faithfully gives what Addison (1697: 2) calls a 'pleasing variety of scenes'. Description and prescription are artfully intertwined; and, again in Addison's terms, Dyer 'makes the dryest of precepts look like a description'. Indeed, so far as the major prescription is concerned, Addison's characterisation of 'dry' precepts seems punningly apt, for the issue in lines 484-8 is one of balancing wet and dry foods.

A modern literary historian (Collins, 1957: 129) has used these particular lines to attack the pretensions of eighteenth-century 'poetic diction'; and we may use his comments as a starting point in examining Dyer's procedures here. Collins writes:

The more ordinary or utilitarian the subject, the more needful the poet generally felt it to avoid the prosaic word at which his sophisticated readers might laugh. So Dyer in his *Fleece* may let his sheep 'with busy mouths...scoop white turnips', but he quickly changes the vulgar turnip to 'the watery juices of the bossy root.' Poetry indeed stood on its dignity when it could not on its inspiration.

This seems to me, as the caterpillar said, wrong from beginning to end. One does not 'avoid' a word by using it, and then drawing further attention to it by reiterating it in elaborate periphrasis three lines later. What is more, these lines carry a meaning which Collins does not address, and which may vindicate Dyer's periphrasis. The poet is concerned to stress the 'ease' of the shepherdly intervention needed in folding; but the 'easy' task he mentions is important, and the descriptive work shows why this is so. The task is:

Only at morning hour to interpose  
Dry food of oats, or hay, or brittle straw,  
The wat'ry juices of the bossy root  
Absorbing. (I, 485-8)

The issue here is dietary balance between roots, which have a high water content (turnips are approximately 90% water), and dry, bulky foods such as oats, hay and straw. The possible danger Dyer has in mind is one of 'extremes' caused by imbalance. Lactic Acid Poisoning, Overeating Disease, Enterotoxaemia, and other such dietary disorders may all be caused by excessive root or concentrate eating, and are best prevented by what the Ministry of Agriculture calls 'careful checks':

Although there is a specific preventive inoculation that can be used against enterotoxaemia [...] careful feeding management is of the greatest importance.

Sudden changes of diet should be avoided and careful checks made on consumption especially with intensive indoor concentrate feeding. [131]

If we remove modern anachronisms such as intensive feeding and inoculation, we can see how the cause of these diseases might focus particularly, in Dyer's world, on winter crop-folding; and the cure on balancing the diet. The phrase 'watery juices of the bossy root' is designed to make a clear contrast with the previous line's 'Dry food of oats, or hay, or brittle straw', and thus vividly to illustrate by this contrast the nature of the balancing task. The word 'turnip' would hardly achieve this effect.

The contrast in the two lines has also a thematic significance. We have seen that Dyer praises the British climate as 'moderate'; and in the same way he advocates 'moderation' in sheep-feeding here, expressed (as with the weather) by means of descriptive contrast. At an immediate level, 'moderation' is of real value in sheep management, whether one considers diet or climate. At another level it is a poetic and philosophical idea which came from Roman culture, particularly through the poetry of Horace, and was much beloved by eighteenth-century Horatians like Pope and indeed Dyer. Thus the poet is again able to tie the literal imperatives of shepherding to his higher ideals. Philosophy and pragmatism, poetry and agriculture, are here in harmonious agreement.

The periphrasis also works if we subject it to close linguistic scrutiny. The turnip is very precisely a 'bossy root'. That it is a root is clear enough; and I am thinking of the first *OED* definition of bossy as 'Swelling in, or like, a boss: projecting in rounded form'. Putting the two words together in a phrase suggests the turnip's physical substantiality (bossy), and its discovered quality (root). Appositely, the phrase 'wat'ry juices' describes its content and substance very precisely, though the phrase provides information which is not usually available (except to a sheep). The whole line sensuously delineates the contrast between the solidity and presence of the turnip's appearance, and the juicy richness of its content. This contrasted depiction in turn ties it to its context of sheep feeding with 'busy mouths'-- another evocative and precise phrase, as anyone who has observed sheep grazing on turnips will confirm. [132]

James Sutherland (1948: 139) wrote of another piece of periphrasis in the poem, 'prickly brambles, white with woolly theft' (l, 103), that it showed how Dyer's kind of periphrasis 'could concentrate much meaning in a single phrase'. It could indeed, and the phrase 'watery juices of the bossy root' has the same capability. These lines intelligently engage their subject in a unified and coherent way, working simultaneously in philosophical, didactic, and physical, observational ways. Of course they tell us something of 'the care of sheep', which is the first intention; but Dyer also uses the periphrasis and contrast to bring together several layers of thought and observation, in a way that only poetry can do.

I find no evidence in this of 'dignity' taking the place of inspiration; and the idea of the turnip as a 'vulgar' or even an 'ordinary or utilitarian' subject is anachronistic and inappropriate to a discussion of eighteenth-century agricultural poetry. For those practically or intellectually involved in agricultural developments in the early modern period (including georgic-writers and their readers), the turnip was nothing less than the silicone chip of the new farming. Its introduction as a field crop in Suffolk during the Interregnum is described by one agricultural historian as having constituted in itself an 'agricultural revolution'; while another goes so far as to declare that the introduction of the turnip and other new fodder-crops on a field scale represented for agriculture 'an innovation equal in significance to any subsequently applied to industry'. Dyer's powerful attachment to the agricultural richness which the turnip and the other new crops were enabling, his 'spacious flocks of sheep, / Like flakes of gold illumining the green' (I, 168-9), makes no concession to modern narrowness about eighteenth-century poetry. We may believe that the turnip is 'low', but Dyer reasonably supposed it to be in the very vanguard of cultural progress. [133]

The rest of Dyer's fine description serves to focus and recommend his gentle, benevolent approach to shepherding. The shepherd protects the flock, using hurdles and cots, with a particular emphasis on the care of pregnant ewes. Again one notes the way in which the pastoral does not conceal hardships ('noxious air', 'whistling winds', and so on); the idyllic mood is characteristically based upon acknowledging difficulties, then showing how the shepherd may defeat them by his labour. Although the shepherd is shown as being fortunate in the benevolent character of the English environment and climate, he also creates his own fortune, through labour, and appropriate intervention. The poet is able to merge Horatian and Bakewellian approaches to the rural world, to make a credible harmonious vision.

Dyer ends the section by making further foreign contrasts with his English idyll. The 'terror' of the earthquake zones is briefly historicised (498-505), reflecting the poet's twin interests in ruins and volcanoes (for the former, see *The Ruins of Rome*; for the latter see the list of volcanoes in the 'Commercial Map' notes, f. 29v). The 'Furies, famine, plague, and war' of 'neighb'ring realms' (506-7) are contrasted with the peace of Albion; as are the heat and drought of the desert and the Bible lands (with some interesting digressions to Arcadia and to the story of Jacob and Rachel, 514-50). The message is clear, and by now familiar: Albion, almost uniquely, provides a perfect and moderate climate in which the shepherd is spared all manner of hardships, expenses and dangers ('perils' and 'toils', 551). A modest (and pleasurable) amount of continuing careful labour, informed by a spirit of didacticism and observational learning, will serve, in the poet's view, to make a favourable land idyllic.

## ii. The shepherd's harvest

So far as the agricultural theme is concerned, three related tasks remain for the poet. He has given most of his advice, and drawn together the major aspects of the shepherdly role: practical tasks, teacherliness and benevolent intervention; the balancing in moderate harmony of the given conditions. Now he will complete the theme by particularising and localising the experience, rewarding the shepherd, and connecting shepherding with the wider worlds of work which are his second and third theme. All this is done through the advice on shearing (555-600), and the shearing festival (I, 601-720). This grand finale to the book has caught the attention of many readers and critics, with its striking blend of first-person narrative, pastoral eclogue, mythologising and lyric celebration. The poet creates an Edenic pastoral scene, incorporating ideas of childhood, innocence and communal rural 'delight', and set emphatically in the mytho-topographical land of 'Siluria'.

Dyer announces his final theme with energy and impatience, as if he were by now becoming a little bored by the easy trick of contrasting foreign lands with Albion, and was anxious to move on to the excitement of Silurian memories:

Such are the perils, such the toils, of life,  
In foreign climes. But speed thy flight, my Muse!  
Swift turns the year, and our unnumber'd flocks  
On Fleeces overgrown uneasy lie.  
Now, jolly Swains! the harvest of your cares  
Prepare to reap, and seek the sounding caves  
Of high Brigantium, where, by ruddy flames,  
Vulcan's strong sons, with nervous arm, around  
The steady anvil and the glaring mass  
Clatter their heavy hammers down by turns,  
Flatt'ning the steel: from their rough hands receive  
The sharpen'd instrument that from the flock  
Severs the Fleece. (I, 551-63)

The excitement and expectation of the new theme is, typically, communicated in terms of georgic urgency: the sheep need shearing, and we must get on with it. More surprising, at first sight, is the fact that the new subject opens on an industrial note. The 'Sounding caves / Of high Brigantium' (556-7) indicate the steel manufacturing centre of Sheffield. The description of its steel-workers, with 'nervous arm', appropriately echoes the 'sinewy arm' of the poem's first reference to 'Tripontian' labour (I, 68-9): like 'Tripontium', 'Brigantium' is more suggestive of georgic labour than of pastoral idyll. The activity of the forges and steel

mills is another example of Dyer's heroic depiction of labour, seen in the classical reference to 'Vulcan's strong sons' (558). It is characteristic of Dyer's imaginative boldness that he should begin a pastoral description of sheep-shearing with an entirely industrial scene; yet it makes perfect sense: his advice is serious, and the serious priority when it comes to sheep-shearing is sharp clippers. The reputation of Sheffield steel in this context remains sufficiently potent for us to need no further explanation of Dyer's 'Brigantium'. [134]

That he is able to bring the steel-forging Brigantes into the charmed circle of his 'jolly Swains' is also remarkable, but again makes sense. The poet's constant refusal to distinguish between pastoral idyll and postlapsarian labour has partly prepared us for the new phenomenon of industrial-pastoral. The specific way in which the steelmakers join the circle is by being made a part of the poet's first piece of advice to shepherds on shearing, where the second, following naturally on, has a different tone:

If verdant elder spreads  
Her silver flow'rs; if humble daisies yield  
To yellow crow-foot, and luxuriant grass,  
Gay shearing-time approaches. (l, 563-66)

This is pastoral, folkloric, proverbial and poetic. It is flower-lore, but it also unites with the first piece of advice as serious prescription. The shepherd, by now established as an intelligent observer, as naturally learns the seasonality of flowers as he does the best place to buy good shears, and thus non-shepherdly industry is portrayed as being part of the same process as pastoral activity. [135]

The passages that follow, on washing and shearing sheep, show that Dyer had read *The Seasons* carefully and intelligently. Like Thomson, he concentrates on the energy and movement of sheep-washing, especially expressed through his verbs, 'Drive', 'plunge', 'sinks', 'glisten', 'seize', 'bears', 'laves'. The shearing advice follows, with the shepherdly gentleness the task requires slightly underplayed in this instance (Thomson, as we saw, melodramatically overplayed it), and the skill of shearing emphasised. A miniature version of Thomson's destroying autumn storm emphasises the need for post-shearing care, and moves us to the Welsh valleys ('Cambrian glades'), in preparation for the shearing festival (whose location is 'along the lively vales', 601).

The year's work is now completed, and there will be no more georgic prescription in this book of the poem (though work is never quite forgotten). Instead, we are moved by degrees, through a series of increasingly lyrical passages, towards what John Barrell (1983: 98) has called the 'extraordinary sentence' that ends the first book. [136] First, moving smoothly on from the floods that overwhelm 'Cambrian glades', another phenomenon of the valleys is described in general, habitual terms:

At shearing-time along the lively vales  
 Rural festivities are often heard;  
 Beneath each blooming arbour all is joy  
 And lusty merriment. While on the grass  
 The mingled youth in gaudy circles sport,  
 We think the Golden Age again return'd,  
 And all the fabled Dryades in dance:  
 Leering they bound along, with laughing air,  
 To the shrill pipe, and deep remurm'ring-cords  
 Of th'ancient harp, or tabor's hollow sound. (I, 601-10)

There is a great deal of the communality of Thomson's harvest scenes in this, though dancing is here more explicit than it is in *The Seasons*. The thought that the 'Golden Age' has 'again return'd' gives the poet a fairly credible excuse to sketch in the classical, Arcadian details of Dryades and pan-pipes, and the rather more Welsh instruments, harp and tabor. [137] What is most notable in this passage, though, is the rare use of the first-person plural 'We'. The use of the first-person is not unknown in eighteenth-century georgic, but the poets tended to save it for special occasions, maintaining the persona of responsible public utterance, expressed in the second and third person, through most of their texts. Dyer, for example, uses the first-person only for special effects: in the invocation (I, 1-2), and the 'I knew a careful swain' exemplum (I, 108 ff); and in his Miltonic declaration ('For this I wake the weary hours', II, 503 ff). Yet this pastoral ending of the first book contains much first-person utterance. 'We', here, brings the poet himself into the circle of the celebrating shepherds, giving a personal, autobiographical flavour to the pastoral.

A second verse paragraph (611-624) shows 'th'old apart, upon a bank reclin'd'. Thomson involved older people in his harvest work, but for Dyer they provide an audience for the music which is a major part of his pastoral celebration. The music itself suggests another line of thought, this time concerning the loss of innocence:

Music of Paradise! which still is heard  
 When the heart listens, still the views appear  
 Of the first happy garden, when Content  
 To Nature's flowery scenes directs the sight.  
 Yet we abandon those Elysian walks,  
 Then idly for the lost delight repine;  
 As greedy mariners, whose desp'rate sails  
 Skim o'er the billows of the foamy flood,

Fancy they see the lessening shores retire,  
And sigh a farewell to the sinking hills. (I, 615-24)

The simile seems extraordinary because, as Barrell notes (1983: 96), these 'mariners' are shortly to be praised for their part in world trade; yet here their 'greed' is compared to the causes for the loss of pastoral innocence. Apart from Goldstein's important comment, which I quoted earlier, about Dyer being 'loyal to irreconcilable myths' (1977: 55), two thoughts on this occur. The contradiction may reflect the degree to which Dyer is able to give himself up to the music of a pleasant memory, and abandon (albeit temporarily) the imperatives of didacticism. We saw in his idealised second sheep that thoughts of 'Siluria' could have this effect of modifying the poet's need to control and instruct. There is also a sense in which the occasion demands a cessation of industrious activity, a moment in which to acknowledge that there are other values than those of labour. The first stage in the fleece's progress is safely completed, and the poet can afford to make his mariners wait, and even acknowledge that their task may be destructive of the 'Golden Age' values which are (again, temporarily) in the ascendant. They will re-establish their control in the later sections of the poem. Here, as both Feingold (1978: 102) and Barrell (1983: 98) observe, the mariners, in the very last image of the first book (I, 718-20) trim their sails respectfully, and 'Linger among the reeds and copsy banks', content, like the poet, simply to enjoy the pastoral music of the shepherds' celebration.

Dyer's first-person approach to the shearing festival is now intensified, though it is almost immediately distanced again:

Could I recall those notes which once the Muse  
Heard at a shearing, near the woody sides  
Of blue-topp'd Wreakin! Yet the carols sweet,  
Through the deep maze of the memorial cell  
Faintly remurmur. First arose in song  
Hoar-headed Damon, venerable Swain!  
The soothest shepherd of the flow'ry vale,  
"This is no vulgar scene; no palace roof  
Was e'er so lofty, nor so nobly rise  
Their polish'd pillars as these aged oaks,  
Which o'er our Fleecy wealth and harmless sports  
Thus have expanded wide their shelt'ring arms,  
Thrice told an hundred summers. Sweet Content,  
Ye gentle shepherds! pillow us at night." (I, 625-38)

Early in this passage the poet's recollection is displaced into a formal eclogue between 'Damon' and 'Colin' (both traditional English pastoral names). To the post-Romantic sensibility, used to poets' first-person accounts of childhood and the experience of nature, it will seem strange and disappointing that Dyer should seem able to manifest his recollection only in the artificial terms of the eighteenth-century pastoral eclogue; and the fact that the eclogue itself shows unmistakable signs of the influence of Ambrose Philips can only make things worse for the modern reader. [138]

But Dyer has serious reasons for moving into the eclogue form. These may be summarised under the headings of dramatisation, and ritualisation. The whole first book has been concerned to show that the shepherd's life is happy, rewarding, and meaningful not only *per se*, but as a model for other, higher roles in society. The most effective way in which the poet can enforce this message is to put it into the mouths of shepherds. The dialogue form avoids the impression of this being simply the poet making a 'speech'; and allows the shepherds to draw the meaning of their roles from their own experience; or rather, from Dyer's experience: for as he directly remembers a shearing feast on the slopes of the Wrekin (625-7), so his shepherd remembers climbing Breidden Hill 'After a kidling' (654-5), describing the experience in entirely Dyeresque terms of scenery and prospect. The shepherd has the articulacy and sensibilities of the author, and can dramatically exemplify Dyer's view of the shepherd's life, arguing against the idea that it is 'mean' (670); and articulating what has been implied throughout the first book, that king and priest are 'also shepherds' (673), and thus by implication that the shepherd's is a noble and spiritual, a teacherly and nurturing occupation, of the greatest antiquity and significance.

Ritualisation goes alongside the 'elevated pastoralism' expressed here. Colin and Damon complete their recollections and opinions, then Damon interrupts himself to begin the 'rites' of the festival:

"But haste, begin the rites: see purple Eve  
Stretches her shadows: all ye Nymphs and Swains  
Hither assemble. Pleas'd with honours due,  
Sabrina, guardian of the crystal flood,  
Shall bless our cares, when she by moonlight clear  
Skims o'er the dales, and eyes our sleeping folds;  
Or in hoar caves around Plynymmon's brow,  
Where precious minerals dart their purple gleams,  
Among her sisters she reclines; the lov'd  
Vaga, profuse of graces, Ryddol rough,  
Blithe Ystwith, and Clevedoc, swift of foot;  
And mingles various seeds of flow'rs and herbs,

In the divided torrents, ere they burst  
Thro' the dark clouds, and down the mountain roll.  
Nor taint-worm shall infect the yeaning herds,  
Nor penny-grass, nor spearwort's pois'nous leaf." (I, 676-91)

The poetic mood shifts slightly here: the careful arguments of 'Colin' and 'Damon' seem to be informed by the eloquence of the Elizabethan pastoral poets. This passage is more attuned to the sensibilities of the seventeenth-century, echoing Milton's *Comus* (1637) and *Lycidas* (1638) as well as Drayton, and reminding one of the Christianised paganism of that other clergyman-poet, Robert Herrick (another flower enthusiast). [139]

The ritual is solemn (the food for the feast must remain 'untouch'd', until it is complete, 703) and elaborate: there are, for example, three distinct stages in the plant lore. Firstly, Sabrina, the presiding spirit of the river Severn, 'mingles various seeds of flow'rs and herbs' into the headwaters of the rivers that rise on Plinlimmon (687-9). None of Dyer's editors have annotated these lines, and I have not been able to trace the origin of this 'seeding', which may either form a sub-text to the Sabrina myth, or relate to the folk-custom of sprinkling flowers on the river Severn at shearing festivals (itself the subject of the third stage of the flower-lore). Secondly, and perhaps relatedly, 'Damon' adds:

Nor taint-worm shall infect the yeaning herds,  
Nor penny-grass nor spearwort's pois'nous leaf. (I, 690-1)

This seems to be expressed, not as a hope, or a plea/prayer, but as something determined, a sort of spell, or a formulaic phrase as part of a pre-ordained ritual. *OED* defines 'taint-worm' as an archaic word meaning 'a worm or crawling larva supposed to taint or infect cattle, etc.' (the word 'cattle' here, like Dyer's 'herd', means sheep as well as cows). Penny-grass could mean one of three species, but almost certainly means Marsh Pennywort (*Hydrocotyle vulgaris*), traditionally thought (wrongly, as we have seen) to cause liver rot in sheep. [140] Similarly 'spearwort' may indicate one of a number of species, but Dyer's indication that it is poisonous, and a suggestive quotation in the *OED* from Gervase Markham about a plant 'vnwholesome for Sheepe', points to *OED* 'spearwort' definition 3, 'One or other of several species of ranunculas, esp. *R. Flammula*'; that is to say, Lesser Spearwort. Kerridge (1967: 358) defines spearwort as 'sheep-rot'. Dyer's interest in the relationship between sheep and the Ranunculaceae seems unabating; but the main theme behind this incantation is the fear of sudden illness, especially in the 'yeaning' (pregnant or lambing) ewes. The sources are clearly folkloric, though the diction is classical and poetic.

Dyer has saved the most vivid folk-custom until the end of the ritual. This is, in the words of the poet's 'Argument', the 'Custom in Wales of sprinkling the rivers with flowers', and it directly follows Damon's ritualising speech:

He said: with light fantastic toe the nymphs  
Thither assembled, thither every swain;  
And o'er the dimpled stream a thousand flow'rs,  
Pale lilies, roses, violets and pinks,  
Mix'd with the greens of burnet, mint and thyme,  
And trefoil, sprinkled with their sportive arms. (I, 692-7)

Apart from the singularity of the custom itself, several things distinguish this passage within the Miltonic pastoral tradition it represents. A faint Dyeresque pun on 'flow'rs' (flow-ers as rivers as well as blooms) enriches the language. One notices the 'sportive arms' of the flower-strewing nymphs and swains: we have seen 'sinewy', 'labour-strengthen'd' and 'nervous' arms in the labouring section (I, 68, 111, 558); the energy of labour is clearly also present in this scene of relaxation. The 'greens' of 'burnet, mint, and thyme' serve the double purpose of setting off the flower colours (suggesting again a painterly sensibility), and of whetting the appetite for the feast which is to come. Lesser or Salad Burnet (*Poterium sanguisorba*), added to a cup of wine, was known to 'quicken the spirits, refresh and clear the heart and drive away melancholy'; the various varieties of mint were universally used as a stimulant and *digestif*; while thyme, which aids the digestion of fatty food, was (and is) widely used as a potherb. The trefoils, members of the pea family, would probably be purely decorative in this context. [141]

Thus visually and gustatively stimulated, and with the fertility and propitiation rituals complete, Dyer's shepherds can now enjoy their pastoral feast, which they proceed to do, ending the scene in life-affirming triumph, with food, drink and music (702-20). The most powerful element within this final section of the first book is not, however, its flower lore, or even its idyllic festivity, but its sense of topography; and I shall conclude this reading of Dyer's agricultural-georgic theme by looking briefly at the poet's topographical referencing in this important pastoral passage.

Topographical naming, the sense of place, is an important and ever-intensifying presence in *The Fleece*, beginning in the opening passage of shepherdly prescription, and culminating in the fourth book, which offers a kind of gazetteer of world trade. We have seen a number of the topographic concepts Dyer sets up in the first book: the cluster of good pasture areas and more personal idyllic locations (I, 38-66); 'Dimetia', the agriculturally neglected lands of South West Wales (I, 104-5); 'Darwent' in the Peak District and 'Snowden', 'Plynlymmon', 'Cader-ydris' in Mid and North Wales, the mountainous regions

where sheep roam free. Most importantly, we have noted Dyer's 'Siluria' and 'Tripontium', sites of particular agricultural significance, embodying several pairs of related or contrasting aesthetic and agricultural ideas, and the prescribed territory for two very differently conceptualised types of sheep. Dyer habitually forms topographical matrices of this sort, and they provide both a sophisticated epic machinery, and (as Barrell, 1983, has noted) a measure of the poet's ideological frames of reference, and his modulation of georgic and pastoral elements in the poem.

There is also an important personal mythology imbedded in Dyer's topographical referencing. Humfrey (1980: 98) calls the poem 'a tapestry or living landscape' of the poet's own life, as indeed it is: 'Dimetia' is the land of his youth; 'Siluria', North Wales, and the English and Welsh border counties are the territory of his early adulthood, the years of itinerant painting and of the poet's first experience of farming. Thereafter Dyer moved inexorably eastwards from Bromyard, across the Midlands, living in Worcester ('Vigornia', III, 433), Nuneaton, and then Catthorpe; so that 'Tripontium', with its sterner and more practical imperatives, represents the landscape of his middle years, and of his new role as parish priest and philanthropic tutor to the poor. [142]

We have also seen that Dyer uses topographical reference to contrast an idyllic national agricultural experience with the various hardships faced by foreign shepherds; thus the classical Falernum/Vesuvius/ Herculanean/Pompeian area (I, 64-6), shows by contrast Britain's freedom from volcanoes and ruins; and the 'Hyperborean tracks' passage (I, 464-80) and its various exotic/extreme opposites (such as Sabaea/Chaldaeae/Egyptus/ Cyrene/Zembla, I, 230-4) show by contrast the moderation of the British climate. As well as the implied contrast with temperate Albion, the message in much of this topography is that each location and each climate has its appropriate role in an ordered scheme of 'natural' and human production.

So far as British topography is concerned, Dyer's models are Camden's *Britannia* translated by William Gibson (1685), and Drayton's *Poly-Olbion* (1613-22), both of which provide analogues for most of his references; and of course Defoe's *Tour Thro' the Whole Island of Great Britain* (1724-6), a project which Dyer's own unpublished 'Commercial map of England' was to have extended into new areas of economic and cartographic information. Camden had aimed to 'restore antiquity to Britaine, and Britaine to his antiquity', and Drayton gave the subject epic treatment, offering his readers 'the Rarities and Historie of their owne Country delivered by a true native Muse'. [143] The practical purposefulness which was Defoe's particular contribution to the topographic tradition appealed to Dyer, as his 'Commercial Map' notes show; and so too did the poetic and epic tradition. Pat Rogers (1980b: 283-4) has suggested that the Renaissance tradition of river-poetry is still unexpectedly alive in the 'rich and complex utterance' that is Pope's *Windsor Forest*; this

specialised area of the topographic tradition is alive, too, in the ending of the first book of *The Fleece*.

But most strikingly, in this final section of the first book, Dyer gives us mountains. We have seen the way in which the poet selects the vantage point within a landscape. In this last section he encircles the pastoral, and the land of Siluria, with vantage points. The pastoral began with Dyer's memory of a shearing 'near the woody sides / Of blue-topp'd Wreakin' (625-7). Situated to the west of Telford, in Shropshire, the Wrekin is a craggy hill, 1,335 feet high, near the north-east bank of the Severn, and marking the north-eastern border of 'Siluria'. A modern gazetteer (Bartholemew, 1970: 743) notes two other archetypally Dyeresque features:

The summit commands an extensive prospect, and is occupied by ancient fortifications, called *Heaven's Gate* and *Hell's Gate Camps*

Like Dyer, the shepherd Damon next recalls a moment of epiphany, climbing a mountain, 'Huge Breaden' (654-5). And again, Breidden Hill (Welsh 'Craig-ap-Wridden') is a prominent hill, this time on the north-west bank of the Severn, to the north-east of Welshpool, in Powys. It marks the north-western border of Siluria, and again is, according to the gazetteer, 'Crowned with [an] ancient camp'.

The topographic neatness, and the way in which these two hills focus a number of roles (historical and geographical prominence, places of prospect and Silurian 'border markers') is striking. They also possess considerable connotative power in the resonances of their names. 'Wreakin' (to use Dyer's spelling) is also the name Drayton uses on the map accompanying Song XXVI to indicate the river Wreake, which flows in an appropriately Tripontian way through Leicestershire and into the Soar. That Dyer's shearing took place 'near the woody sides' of The Wrekin suggests that its massive bulk offered safety and reassurance to the shepherdly pastoral and youthful innocence which the poet offers in this section. The occasion Dyer describes is celebratory, and the Wrekin would be particularly appropriate for such an occasion. In the eighteenth century, and possibly earlier, there was a local toast in the Shropshire area, invoked by George Farquhar in the 'Epistle Dedicatory' to his play *The Recruiting Officer* (1706), to 'All friends round the Wrekin'. [144]

Dyer's spelling of 'Breadon' perhaps also connotes a second mountain, namely Bredon Hill, situated north of Cheltenham, in Gloucestershire. Though not especially high (961 feet), Bredon Hill stands strikingly clear of its mainly flat surroundings, and has, again, an iron age fort on it. It commands a view of England to the East, and Siluria and Wales to the West, and is, as the builders of its fort obviously realised, a perfect border post for the Eastern flank of Siluria.

Thus the poet's topography here marks the borders of the land of Siluria, using mountains which both protect and oversee. Their prospect is a double one, looking inwards with pleasure to the cherished landscape of Siluria, and outwards with excitement to the world beyond, to England, to trading lines, centres of manufacture, industry and consumption. The aesthetic is one of prominence ('huge Breadon', 'blue-topp'd Wreakin'), as the poet finds vantage points from which, even more than on *Grongar Hill*, he can bestride the world and give a prospect of society in terms of a vision of harmony.

One more prominence completes this picture of prospect and enclosure. Dyer writes of the flower rituals:

Such custom holds along th'irriguous vales,  
From Wreakin's brow to rocky Dolvoryn, (l, 698-9) [145]

'Wreakin' has been discussed: its presence is simply reiterated here. Dolforwyn Castle (Dyer's 'Dolvoryn') is a ruined castle on the west bank of the Severn, as it flows north from Newtown to Welshpool, in Powys. If we follow the Severn's arc from Dolforwyn, past Breidden Hill, past the Wrekin (and possibly, as in the connotation I mentioned, past Bredon Hill), we can see that 'Dolvoryn' completes the pattern of Siluria's encirclement by the Severn, or rather, by the Severn's attendant landmarks.

Thus of course 'Sabrina', the spirit of the Severn, is the living heart of this topographical pattern. Damon's ritual speech reflects her mythology:

Pleas'd with honours due,  
Sabrina, guardian of the crystal flood,  
Shall bless our cares, when she by moonlight clear  
Skims o'er the dales, and eyes our sleeping folds;  
Or in hoar caves around Plynlymmon's brow,  
Where precious minerals dart their purple gleams,  
Among her sisters she reclines; the lov'd  
Vaga, profuse of graces, Ryddol rough,  
Blithe Ystwith, and Clevedoc, swift of foot;  
And mingles various seeds of flow'rs and herbs,  
In the divided torrents, ere they burst  
Thro' the dark clouds, and down the mountain roll. (l, 678-89)

In the myth Sabrina, daughter of Lochrine and granddaughter of Brute, the mythical first King of England, escapes from the vengeful Guendolen by jumping into the Severn. She thus becomes the river's presiding spirit; and the flow of the Severn represents her eternal

flight.[146] Plinlimmon (Welsh *Pumlumon Fawr*), the high point (2467 feet) of the great central moorland of mid-Wales, contains the head waters of numerous rivers, flowing in all directions from this central eminence, including the two rivers that enclose Siluria, the Severn and the Wye. [147] Sabrina's four sisters are rivers flowing from Plinlimmon. *Vaga* is the river Wye, so styled by John Philips (*Cyder*, I, 203), and by Pope (*Epistle to Bathurst*, 251), as well as by Dyer. The river Rheidol (Dyer's *Ryddol*) flows west, as does the more southerly Ystwith, both reaching the sea at the coastal town of Aberystwyth. The Clywedog (Dyer's *Clevedoc*) flows east from the Clywedog lake to the head of the Severn.

Sabrina, the guardian of the Severn and of the land the Severn encloses, seeds the waters, an action imitated by the shepherds who cast flowers on the water. Both gestures make, in one sense, a kind of mime or dumb-show to represent the next stage in the fleece's progress, where the wealth of Siluria is itself floated away on the water, to distant lands. The river is appropriately allowed to complete the topographical referencing in the book, with the phrase 'Majestic wave of Severn slowly rolls' (716). Sabrina is at her most powerful here, as she marks out the borders of Siluria, wraps it comfortingly up, and is celebrated as its life-giving maternal deity. The mood in the last section of the book is one of reverence for her power, and reassurance in the comfort of the pastoral environment she provides. How she provides it is in fact by carrying the 'trading bark with low contracted sail' (718), which stops to listen and to 'view' the paradisaical scene of the shepherd's feast in the very last line of the book. The bark's real purpose, of course, is to collect the fleeces, the cider, the produce of a fertile land: and the most important function of Sabrina, the ever-fleeing, encircling river, is to bring and to take the goods that are the life-blood of Dyer's Siluria.

In the remaining books of the poem the ripples of Dyer's topography will spread wider and wider, through the different areas of Britain with their various kinds of productive activity, and ultimately out to the trade routes and the world. A kind of climax is reached in Book III, where a great cluster of Latin town and river names shows the way in which (in Dyer's own phrase) 'o'er the hospitable realm they spread' (III, 430). What is spreading here, as it happens, is the ideal of 'golden-footed Sciences' (III, 405), but the phrase could equally well describe the fleece's spread, the 'naval wave' (III, 421) of seaborne trade, or indeed the network of topographical reference that Dyer uses to convey what he sees as the splendour and complexity of human productive labour.

\* \* \*

Dyer embarked on his last and longest literary journey determined to teach, as he puts it, 'th'inactive hand to reap / Kind Nature's bounties, o'er the globe diffused' (II, 501-2). His major ideological tools were the rationalistic 'benevolent' Christianity he had learned with

the help of John Hough, Bishop of Worcester, whose portrait he painted in 1740-1; the practical didacticism which James Mackenzie, having nursed him through his sickness and depression of 1741, encouraged him to apply to the new project; and an enduring belief, tested extensively in practice, that agricultural activity and especially shepherding were of central economic significance, and possessed important social and spiritual dimensions. He chose the best literary medium available, the Addisonian English georgic, which merged Virgilian and Miltonic traditions into a popular 'middle style', able to address most areas of human experience, and especially capable of dealing with major socio-economic themes such as 'The care of sheep, the labours of the loom, and arts of trade', which earlier genres could only speak of in humorous or sanitised terms.

If the result has often been thought less successful than my reading of the agricultural theme implies, this is at least partly a trick of the light caused by subsequent events. The two great rural poems of the later eighteenth century, Oliver Goldsmith's *The Deserted Village* (1770) and George Crabbe's *The Village* (1783), dealt terrible blows to Dyer's rural ideals, and did so from within his own medium of serious, socially-conscious rural poetry. Enclosure, for Dyer a great improving development (II, 107-33), undoubtedly became a major cause of rural depopulation, the tragedy at the heart of *The Deserted Village*. The workhouse, praised as the saviour of the poor by Dyer (III, 259-303), is the terrifying central image of Crabbe's exposure of rural deprivation in *The Village*. And time has continued to chip relentlessly away at the idealism of Dyer's vision.

We can fairly apply hindsight in the case of the workhouse. Dyer's language ('constraint [...] compell'd [...] Rigour [...] detain', III, 234 ff.) suggests that he is aware of the compulsion of the workhouse system, and may be criticised for failing to acknowledge the implications of this compulsion. It would not, however, be at all clear in the 1750s that enclosure was to prove disastrous for the rural poor; quite the contrary. And other examples of Dyer's idealism show the dangers of applying hindsight indiscriminately. In Book II, for example, the poet celebrates a marvellous discovery:

In Euboa's isle  
A wondrous rock is found, of which are woven  
Vests incombustible (II, 396-8)

The carcinogenic properties of asbestos have now of course been revealed, and the material removed from buildings and identified as a source of fear rather than wonder. But for more than 200 years after Dyer wrote these lines no-one would have argued that it was anything other than a 'wondrous' substance. Similarly Dyer celebrates the draining of the fens by Lord Russell as a great progressive move (II, 159-83). It is just beginning to become apparent, as the peat of the fens gradually shrinks away and green consciousness increases, that the

drainage programme may have set in motion a long-term ecological disaster. If we are only just learning this, we cannot expect Dyer to treat the subject in any terms other than delight at the conquest of the unhealthiest environment in the country, and the opening up to agriculture of millions of productive acres. At the time Dyer wrote *The Fleece* arable land represented mere oases in an island dominated by scrub, heath, forest and rough grazing, a long way indeed from the neat patchwork of tilled fields and pastures we have today. The production of food had a significance and urgency we can no longer envisage; and Dyer, being as Wordsworth called him 'a tender-hearted friend of humanity' (*Wordsworth-Lady Beaumont*, Nov 1811), would naturally support any development which could in his view help feed the poor.

The literary side of his work also raises issues of hindsight. Georgic poetry, indeed didactic poetry, is no longer written. [148] This is perhaps a pity. Dyer's handling of his agricultural theme, if we put aside modern prejudice against the genre, seems in many ways excellent. As we have seen, his agricultural observation is typically perceptive and intelligent; and he manages in most cases to make the poetry a suitable vehicle for his prescriptive work, without sacrificing his agricultural meaning, his poetic skills, or his larger engagement with rural life and the metaphysics of shepherding. The eighteenth century in English verse, according to T. S. Eliot (1930, 1963: 275), was 'cursed with a Pastoral convention [...] and a ruminative mind'. Rereading *The Fleece* suggests to me these were not necessarily curses at all, and could indeed be blessings.

## NOTES

- [1] *The Fleece* incorporates materials from most stages of Dyer's diverse career. From the 1720s there are references based on his legal training (I, 143), his friendships with Arthur Pond (IV, 265) and Lewis Crucius, chaplain at Shobden (I, 55-8), and his visit to the tapestries at Marlborough (III, 498-517). His four years as an itinerant painter (1730-4), managing Mapleton Farm at Bromyard (1734-7), owning two farms at Higham (1738-9), and farming his parish Glebe lands (1741-55) inform the agriculture and topography.

Dyer began collecting material for a projected 'Commercial Map of England' in 1737, and he was able to feed much of this into *The Fleece*. By 1741 he was collecting material specifically for the poem, and he worked on it until its publication on 15 March 1757, continuing to revise it until his death in December 1757.

Two areas of his life are lightly represented in the poem: his formative years in Carmarthenshire; and his Italian tour of 1724-5. Their major literary results may be seen, respectively, in the two early topographical poems '*Grongar Hill*' and 'The Country Walk' (1726), and in Dyer's extended historical-contemplative poem *The Ruins of Rome* (1740).

- [2] The following examples, which could easily be multiplied, are from standard reference sources. Dismissed:

More ambitious poems by Dyer, *The Ruins of Rome* (1740) and *The Fleece* (1757) are regarded as failures by most scholars (Stapleton, 1983: 265, 'Dyer, John').

Ridiculed:

To [the eighteenth] century belongs a particularly good example of a certain kind of vulgarity--Dyer's *The Fleece* (1757) (Cuddon, 1977: 751, 'Vulgarity').

Damned with faint praise:

*The Fleece*, a curious work, has more than one kind of interest, but it is almost devoid of poetic merit (Legouis and Cazamian 1930: 850).

Summarised unread:

[*The Fleece* is] a poem in blank verse, divided into three books, on the subject of wool, by John Dyer (1757) (Brewer, 1898).

Declared unreadable:

it may be said that Dyer's longer poems are now unreadable. (Leslie Stephen, 'John Dyer', *DNB*).

- [3] Humfrey (1980: 77 ff.) notes positive first reviews of *The Fleece* in the *London Chronicle*, where it was called 'this important work [...] the Labour and Expectation of many Years'; the *Critical Review*, which found in it 'one of the most striking pictures we remember to have seen'; and the *Monthly Review*, where James Grainger praised its neo-Virgilian virtues. Akenside and Joseph Warton, both members of the ad hoc advisory panel on *The Fleece* set up by Dyer's friends in the last years he was writing it, also praised the poem. Johnson, however, showed, in Nathan Drake's phrase (1804: I, 214) a 'total blindness' to the poem's merits. Its lowness was its chief fault:

The subject, Sir, cannot be made poetical.

and the 'high' or 'Miltonic' style only made things worse:

The disgust of blank verse further repels the reader.

In his desultory and inaccurate *Life of Dyer* (1779-81), Johnson wrote that the poem was 'now universally neglected'. This was hardly true (as Drake noted, pp. 209-15), though it soon would be.

In the late eighteenth-century, William Gilpin (1782) and John Scott (1785) praised the poet highly. Nathan Drake (1804: I, 209-57) wrote an excellent defence of *The Fleece*; and Wordsworth praised Dyer and *The Fleece* highly, though an uncharacteristically elitist note in his sonnet to the poet suggests he had little hope of reviving popular interest:

Though hasty Fame hath many a chaplet culled  
For worthless brows, while in the pensive shade  
Of cold neglect she leaves thy head ungraced,

Yet pure and powerful minds, hearts meek and still,  
A grateful few, shall love thy modest Lay

(‘To the Poet, John Dyer’, written 1811; pub. 1820; in Wordsworth, ed. Ketcham, 1989)

Sir Leslie Stephen spoke for most Victorians when he said that the poem was ‘now unreadable’: Wilmott’s edition (1855) was the only significant response in the period.

In the present century Edward Parker and Ralph M. Williams have drawn usefully on Dyer’s manuscripts, and written interestingly of the poet’s several ‘roles’ (poet, scholar, painter, farmer and priest); A. H. Collins has also made good use of the manuscripts; and more recently Belinda Humfrey has written an intelligent introduction to Dyer and his work, finding in him a distinct and original creativity, with some characteristically Welsh qualities.

‘*Grongar Hill*’ has always commanded interest and continues to do so. See Johnson, ed. Brown (1961: 343-4); Gilpin (1782: 59-62); Scott (1785); Drake (1804); *Wordsworth-Lady Beaumont*, 20 Nov 1811; Postscript to the ‘Duddon Sonnets’ (1820); *Wordsworth-Dyce*, 12 Jan 1829; *DNB*, ‘John Dyer’; Collins (1930); Parker (1939; 1953); Williams (1946a; 1946b; 1949; 1956); Parker and Williams (1948); Humfrey (1980). For *Grongar Hill* see Dyer, ed. Boys (1941); Greever (1917); Tillotson (1961); Reichart (1969).

- [4] For the problem of editions see Textual Note, p. 293. Penny Boumelha writes of Dyer’s manuscripts in the *Index of English Literary Manuscripts* (1986: III, i, 341):

An account of Dyer’s literary MSS presents substantial difficulties, arising from the absence of any modern scholarly edition of his works, and from the fact that the MSS themselves have largely disappeared from view in the course of this century.

Of the 110 literary manuscript-texts she lists, all but nine are unlocated, and of these only five (the ‘Commercial Map’ notes) are given current locations. Two letters are in the Bodleian and British Libraries.

I can add one further item, having discovered an unrecorded Dyer manuscript in the Brooks Collection of the Northumberland Record Office (vol. IV, p. 175). It is an autograph fragment of introductory material from the ‘Commercial Map of England’

project, and corresponds approximately to f. 31 of the 'Commercial Map' notes. Dyer explains in it how he had abandoned the 'Commercial Map' 13 years earlier, as too expensive and laborious. He had not received much encouragement, he says, but was now planning to publish it at the request of a friend (presumably one of his patrons).

- [5] A few examples may be given. Kovacevic (1965: 270n21) says Dyer gave up painting and art when he took holy orders in 1741. Not so: two of the five extant Dyer paintings Humfrey discusses (1980: 96) date from the 1750s.

Ponting (1970: 58n28) says *The Fleece* is 'the work of a minor poet, James Dyer'.

The recent reprint of Edward Thomas's 1903 edition of Dyer (1989) has on its cover a portrait of Samuel Dyer (no relation), a member of Johnson's Literary Club. This mistake was first made in Johnson's edition (1779-81), and was repeated in all subsequent editions to carry a portrait, until the Wilmott edition (1855), which used instead a print loosely based on Dyer's self-portrait (itself printed in Williams, 1956, and Humfrey, 1980). Its reappearance in 1989 is disconcerting.

Finally, virtually all reference books, including recent ones, give Dyer's death date as 1758. In fact, as Williams (1956: 139) and Humfrey (1980: 97) record, the poet died of consumption in December 1757, and was buried on the 15th, at Coningsby, Lincolnshire.

- [6] See also Barrell (1972: 12-13, 34-6; and 1980: 173n99). Among briefer comments on the poem Durling (1935: 73-5) notes the poem's energy, pleasing genre sketches, and 'casual bits of sharp observation', and seems pleasantly surprised that 'Even his precepts sometimes carry an accent of poetry'. Dobree (1949: 61) considers Dyer's 'Macaulayesque' vision at least potentially 'worthy of a nation of shopkeepers', and in a later summary (1959, 1968: 518) finds *The Fleece* to be 'in many ways the greatest patriotic poem in the language, bursting with the energy which characterized the country at that time'. For Spate (1968) the poem represents the 'high point both of the Georgic and the mercantilist strain'--again, Dyer 'manages things with more art'. Set in the middle of an excellent study of *The English Georgic* Chalker's account (1969: 51 ff.) is a little disappointing, though one or two good points are made. James Sambrook (1970-1: 22) has aptly described the poem as 'the nearest thing to an English national epic in the mid-eighteenth century'.

- [7] The agricultural and industrial materials in the poem remain almost entirely neglected, though they cry out for expert attention. None of the other tools of modern literary criticism have yet appeared; and large gaps remain in our knowledge of the poet's life, despite the best efforts of Williams (1956) and Humfrey (1980).
- [8] Goldstein's characterisation of Dyer's 'mailed fist' toughness towards foreign powers could equally be applied to another area of the poem. In Book III Dyer advocates the building of 'Houses of labour, seats of kind constraint' (235), and describes a workhouse in Yorkshire. The language of nurture and kindness acts here (to extend Goldstein's image) as the velvet glove over the mailed fist of the workhouse ethic; the mailed fist is nevertheless visible in the language of compulsion: 'constraint' (235), 'compell'd' (247), 'charitable rigour' and 'detain' (249).

I have established that the particular workhouse Dyer describes (III, 259-303) is very probably the Halifax workhouse founded by Nathaniel Waterhouse (1586-1642), which received a charter from Charles I on 14 September 1635. That it was founded on the basis of compulsion and Draconian discipline is apparent from its first minute-book, which is extant. In its first three years (from 1635) no less than seventy men and women were whipped, for reasons which ranged from 'scolding' to 'begging', from 'idleness' to 'spoiling work'. Its powers, not only over its inmates but also over the 'paupers' of Halifax, were enormous. It could discipline or press anyone it wished to, and in the early years clearly held a reign of civic terror. Whether it had improved by the mid-eighteenth century is less clear, but Dyer's language of compulsion seems to reveal no theoretical objection to such a regime; and the sources show that its corruption tended to get worse rather than better. See Halifax Reference Library (1635); Wright (1738); Watson (1775, 1980); Halifax Reference Library (1776); Crabtree (1837); *Report on the Charities of the Parish of Halifax of the Commissioners* (1896); Hanson (1920, 1986); Heaton (1920: 354-6); Hanson (1921); Longmate (1974); Noble (1983); Hardcastle (1988); *Halifax Evening Courier* (1989).

- [9] The following verbal similarities between the two poems confirm the influence (where (B) = *Britannia* and (F) = *The Fleece*):

(B) 20 'bright renown'	(F) I, 160 'high renown'
(B) 30 'unwonted patience'	(F) III, 54, 79 and 279 'patient'; III, 88 'wonted'; III, 268 'unwonted'
(B) 53 'proud Iberian'	(F) II, 368 'proud Iberia'

- |                         |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| (B) 92 'dreadful Blake' | (F) I, 161 'our Edwards, Henries,<br>Churchills, Blakes'               |
| (B) 102 'feeble sons'   | (F) I, 329, 407, 411 and 416; II, 47, 77,<br>and 488; III, 15 'feeble' |

[10] A few minor disagreements with Goldstein should be recorded. He says 'No anecdotes of Dyer's childhood exist' (p. 25). This is to overlook the poet's autobiographical 'Journal of Escapes'. Although the manuscript is lost, some of the childhood entries are quoted by Longstaffe (1847-8: 4: 264):

1704. Fell, when a child, into a tub of scalding wort.

1704. Fell on a case-knife, which wanting a handle, was stuck upright in the ground, and which went deep into my throat, but missed the windpipe.

1709. Fell into a well.--Job's Well, Carm'thens.

1714. Ran from school and my father, on a box of the ear being given me.

Strolled for three or four days--found at Windsor, &c.

Goldstein also uses Fausset's faulty text (1930), and thus repeats Fausset's mistake of 'Dream not', for 'Deem not' (I, 670, quoted on p. 55). Finally, he writes that in *The Fleece* 'the shepherd leads his flock from tedded hay or marsh grass' (p. 55). Goldstein is not paying enough attention to the shepherding advice here, which is to do the opposite (see I, 259-60). These are very small blemishes to a sensitive and important reading.

[11] See Humphreys (1957: 87); Moliere (1670: II, vi; 1929: II, 215-80).

[12] Dyer's feeling that radical change, and especially economic reform, was urgently needed, is reflected in a note preserved among the 'Commercial Map' notes (f. 27):

August 1739 ---

the Gentlemen of y[e] Opposition by deserting y[e] House y[e] last Session made way for y[e] Passing more good Bills than have been set on foot in any parliam[ent] since y[e] Union [...] Besides y[e] Act for <t> taking off ye duties upon Woollen and Bay Yarn, they passed a Law for relieving y[e] Sugar Colonies; another for preventing Frauds & Abuses in gold & Silver Wares a third for y[e] relief of Booksellers a fourth for easing y[e] people from y[e] oppression of Solicitors & pettyfoggers a 5th for obviating y[e] difficulties in collecting county

rates a 6th for y[e] easing of Suitors in y[e] high court of Chancery a 7th for y[e] suppressing deceitful & excessive gaming & several others &c---

The legal reforms would please Dyer for personal reasons, as he had been involved in a Chancery suit. The combination of increased free trade, and the suppression of various forms of sharp practice, represent a particularly Dyeresque combination of values.

[13] Davies (1968: 210), following Longstaffe's Collations, has:

Whom public Voice to the great Charge assigns,  
Or Lot of Birth! ye Good of all Degrees,  
Parties and Sects! be present to my Song. (I, 5-7)

Wilmott (1855: 43) footnotes this variant, with 'choice' for 'Voice', citing *Dyer-Dodsley*, 12 May 1757; but as published in *GM* (1835: 47) the word given in the letter is 'voice'.

[14] Dyer has been too easily dismissed as humourless (see, for example, Larson, 1980: 243). In fact he had a keen sense of punning and word-play, as this astute literalisation of the King's role as 'The people's Shepherd' demonstrates. He is particularly fond of puns involving names. The poem includes a pun on the name of his brother's brother-in-law, Sir Archer Croft (I, 52). 'Airy Croft' is Croft's home, Croft Castle, near Leominster; but 'croft' has also the georgic/pastoral meaning of an enclosed pasture. Dyer uses it in this sense at I, 261, 299 and 438; and at II, 200 in a way that suggests again his initial pun ('And Lemster's crofts, beneath the pheasant's brake'). Dyer also plays on the appropriateness of his own name to a subject of great interest to him, dyeing. There are passages on dyeing at II, 97-106; 147-53; 209-11; 557-608; and at III, 184-223, 286-91; and 'dye' is used as noun or verb six times:

II, 106	'a clearer and more equal dye'
II, 149	'dye the living Fleece'
II, 574	'the scarlet dye'
III, 186	'to imbibe the dye'
III, 207	'the best-adapted dyes'
III, 210	'the beauteous dye'

He fully uses his own name once, at ll, 601 ('The dyer's gay materials'). But perhaps the neatest play on names in the poem is Dyer's double-punning pastoralisation of the name and qualities of his friend Joseph Nutt:

The whole long lesson gradual is attain'd,  
By precept after precept, oft receiv'd  
With deep attention; such as Nuceus sings  
To the full vale near Soar's enamour'd brook,  
While all is silence: sweet Hinclean swain! (l, 442-6)

His friend is not only a 'nut' (*Nuceus*), but indeed a 'sweet' nut. There may be a rueful punning reference to Dyer's years of itinerant painting, in the poet's advice to farmers not to reject the 'artists' (i.e. artisans) who come from the cities to buy wool (ll, 55-71).

[15] As I am using Gray as an example I should note an important exception to the 'retreating' character of his poetry. This is the poem 'The Alliance of Education and Government. A fragment' (?1748-9), which, as far as it goes, shares some of the concerns of the georgic-writers. See Gray, ed. Lonsdale, 1969: 85-100.

[16] David Womersley (*TLS*, 2-8 Mar 1990: 233) writes:

During the 1980s the most decisive shift in eighteenth-century studies occurred in the field of poetry. Roger Lonsdale's two anthologies, *The New Oxford Book of Eighteenth Century Verse* (1984) and *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets* (1989), have brought obscure figures into the light and freshened our understanding of the achievements of major writers by both new juxtapositions and an enlarged sense of the literary milieu from which they rose.

There is an important explanation as to why so much of the poetry of the period had hitherto remained unexamined, in Lonsdale's 1984 anthology (xxxv-vii).

[17] The wool clip, according to Chambers and Mingay (1966: 34-5) nearly doubled in the eighteenth century (but the human population also rose steeply after 1740, as did agricultural output generally). Hartwell (1973) notes an ominous wool price stagnation in the second half of the century; distinguishes between the waxing fortunes of long wools (used for worsteds) and the waning fortunes of short wools (used for woollens); notes the significance of the rise of cotton alongside the changes

in breeding and wool quality; and adds many other important variables to a picture of general decline.

For the Agricultural Revolution see Marshall (1790 and 1818, 1968); Youatt (1837); Watson and Hobbs (1951); Trow-Smith (1957 and 1959); Chambers and Mingay (1966); Kerridge (1967); John (1968); Jones (1968); Russell (1981); Thirsk (1985: 533-89); Moore-Colyer (1989); Beckett (1990). Specialised sources are cited in the context of their subjects.

For the history of the woollen industry see Smith (1747); Youatt (1837: 71, 192-227); Baines (1875, 1970); Burnley (1889, 1969); Heaton (1920: 251-8); Lipson (1921: 215-7); Ramsay (1982); Kerridge (1985); and for the changes considered here, especially, Hartwell's important essay 'A Revolution in the Character and Destiny of British Wool' (1973).

- [18] Ryder (1983: 486) writes of the 'lanky' Old Leicester and Lincoln longwool breeds; while Moore-Colyer (1989: 314) describes these types as 'large, coarse-boned, slow maturing longwool animals'. Bakewell selected, according to Youatt (1837: 314), 'the sheep which appeared to him to have the greatest propensity to fatten, and whose shape possessed the peculiarities which he considered would produce the largest proportion of valuable meat, and the smallest quantity of bone and offal'. The result, according to Mingay (1977: 29) was both 'masses of low-priced fat' and 'a high proportion of saleable flesh'.

Chambers and Mingay (1966: 33) estimate that during the eighteenth century over 500,000 sheep were annually sold at Smithfield; while Thomas (1983: 26) gives a 1726 estimate of 600,000 sheep annually killed 'in London alone'. The demand for mutton continued to rise, and Hartwell (1973: 328) records that by 1850 '8 million sheep were slaughtered annually to give the Englishman his mutton'.

- [19] For the pastoral farming of south and east Leicestershire see Defoe, II, 488; Marshall (1790: I, *passim*); Monk (1794: 9-10 and *passim*); Pitt (1809); Marshall (1818: IV, 183-240); Fussell (1949); Pawson (1957: 18-24); Thirsk (1954); Kerridge (1967: 109-12); Mingay (1984: 89-128).

- [20] For the early economic significance of wool see Smith (1747, 1969: I, 14-99 and *passim*); Youatt (1837: 192-231); Clark (1946: 29 ff.); Treharne (1949: 51); Beatty

(1949: 95-6); Trow-Smith (1957: 134); Hill (1967, 1969: 30-1); Ramsay (1982: 48-72); Ryder (1983: 454 ff).

- [21] Marshall (1790: I, 295). On pre-Bakewell Leicestershire breeders see also Kerridge (1967: 318-23); Russell (1981: 290-4).
- [22] For Dyer as a farmer see Parker and Williams (1948); Williams (1956: 85-90; 99-100, 102, 117); Humfrey (1980: 61-2, 74-5). For his Leicestershire years see Williams (1956: 114-24).

Dyer glosses the phrase 'Tripontian fields' as 'The country between Rugby in Warwickshire and Lutterworth in Leicestershire'. Tripontium literally means 'a place where there are three bridges, or where there is a bridge with three arches', and Dyer particularly focuses at I, 215-17 on the crossing of the river Avon and Watling Street (now the A5), which is less than a mile away from Catthorpe. He would also be aware of the junction of Watling Street and the Fosse Way at High Cross, a few miles to the north-west, and the nearby junction of the river Soar and Watling Street. Drayton notes both of these as he travels south-west past Leicester:

Hence wandring as the Muse delightfully beholds  
The beautie of the large, and goodly full-flockd *Oulds*,  
Shee on the left hand leaves old *Lecester*, and flyes,  
Untill the fertile earth glut her insatiate eyes,  
From Rich to Richer still, that riseth her before,  
Untill she come to cease upon the head of *Soare*,  
Where *Fosse*, and *Watling* cut each other in their course  
(Song XXVI, 37-43)

This 'tripontian' area of southern Leicestershire is the second most important topographical focus of the poem, after Siluria. Dyer's conception of it includes not only the 'tripontian' meeting places we have noted, but the rich band of clay-marl pasture which extends to Melton Mowbray ('Melton pastures'), and includes much of east and south Leicestershire. It links two mythically important rivers, two ancient and vital road-routes, three meetings of routes, and some important Roman remains ('Venonae', at High Cross), as well as the rich agricultural quality of the Leicestershire landscape.

I have not found any other poet using 'Tripontium' as a mytho-topographic term (as was widely done with 'Siluria'). Camden (1695: 430) argues that 'Tripontium' was some twenty-five miles south of Dyer's 'tripontian fields', at Torcester (now Towcester), in Northamptonshire.

[23] The range of early-modern English textile products, and their manufacturing sources, is best conveyed by Kerridge (1985). There is a good summary in Ramsay (1982).

[24] For the Cotswold sheep and its traditions see Camden, trans. Gibson (1695: 238); Drayton, Song XIV, 250-278; Defoe, II, 430-1; Youatt (1837: 338-41); Low (1842: 65-6 and Plate XVIII); Morton (1855: II, 283); Ernle (1912, 1961: 98); Wrightson (1919: 29-33); Trow-Smith (1957: 162-5); Whitlock (1965: 133); Brill (1973: 108-18); Finberg (1975: 57-8, 123); Russell (1981: 244); Ryder (1983: 460, 464-5, 469, 487); Skinner et al (1985: 83).

For the Ryelands sheep see Youatt (1837: 258-61); Low (1842: 47-8 and Plate XIII); Morton (1855: II, 282, 836); Wrightson (1919: 43-7); Trow-Smith (1957: 162, 165-6, 207-8); Whitlock (1965: 135); Russell (1981: 243-4); Ryder (1983: 460, 464 ff).

[25] For Dyer's years as an itinerant painter see Williams (1956: 81-3); Humfrey (1980: 159-60, 62). Dyer's only direct statement on the matter (cited Humfrey, 1980: 47) is:

After having been an itinerant painter in my native country (S. Wales) and in Herefordshire, Worcestershire, &c. &c. I married, and settled in Leicestershire.

For Dyer's management of Mapleton Farm see Parker and Williams (1948).

[26] Siluria is the most important topographical area in the poem. The name is glossed by Dyer (1757: I, 57n) as 'the part of England which lies west of the Severn, viz. Herefordshire, Monmouthshire, etc'. Brewer (1870, 1894) describes it as 'Hereford, Monmouth, Radnor, Brecon and Glamorgan'; Camden's contents page schema for the counties (1695) agrees essentially with Brewer: as Siluria he lists 'Herefordshire, Radnorshire, Brecknockshire, Monmouthshire and Glamorganshire'. Its borders are fairly flexible, though Dyer's Siluria seems to be trans-Severn England, with a particular emphasis on Herefordshire.

In his useful short essay on the subject (1980: 173n99) John Barrell traces the significance of 'Siluria' as a 'pastoral-georgic haven in a newly industrialised Britain'

through the poetry of Philips, Diaper, Pope and Dyer, and even in the prose of John Duncumb, in his Board of Agriculture Report on Herefordshire (1805).

The idea that Herefordshire and its neighbours were an agricultural paradise goes back a long way. We can find it in Drayton (Song VII, *passim*), and in Camden (1695: 574) who calls it:

A Country (besides its pleasantness) both for feeding of Cattel, and produce of Corn, every where of an excellent soil; and admirably well provided with all necessaries for life.

In 1696 the intrepid Celia Fiennes (ed. Morris, 1947: 43) stood on a ridge in the Malverns and saw:

Herefordshire which appear like a Country off Gardens and Orchards, the whole Country being very full of fruite trees etc., it looks like nothing else, the apple pear trees etc., are so thick even in their corn fields and hedgrows.

A quarter of a century later Defoe (II, 448) was also impressed:

One would hardly expect so pleasant, and fruitful a Country as this, so near the Barren Mountains of *Wales*; but 'tis certain, that not any of our *Southern* Counties, the Neighbourhood of *London* excepted, comes up to the Fertility of this County.

Informing its reputation as an agricultural paradise Siluria had a distinctive literary tradition. A few examples may be mentioned. In the fourteenth century William Langland's *Piers the Plowman* begins in a clearly Silurian setting (trans. Goodridge, 1959, 1966: 25):

But on a morning in May, among the Malvern Hills, a strange thing happened to me, as though by magic.

In the seventeenth century both Thomas Traherne and Henry Vaughan were 'Silurian' poets (the latter styling himself 'The Silurist'); and John Milton's *A Maske [Comus]* (perf. 1634, pub. 1637), composed for a Silurian location (Ludlow), is appropriately stocked with Silurian imagery. A few eighteenth-century names have been noted: apart from *The Fleece*, the most interesting text is John Philips's georgic, *Cyder* (1708),

a seminal celebration of the area's pomaceous qualities. In the Romantic period Wordsworth's 'Lines Composed above Tintern Abbey' (1798) is perhaps the major Silurian poem; while in the Victorian period Kilvert's diary (wr. 1870-9, pub. 1944) is substantially about Siluria. In the modern period the best known Silurian text is A. E. Housman's *A Shropshire Lad* (1896, 1939, especially I, XXI, XXVIII, and XXXI); while Bruce Chatwin's excellent Cambro-Silurian pastoral novel *On the Black Hill* (1982) provides evidence that Silurian literature remains a living tradition.

- [27] H. J. Massingham (1952: 56, 231) presents the 'heritage' side of this, capturing the romantic and literary associations of 'Lemster Ore' and the 'Cotswold Lion'. 'Years ago', he writes:

I used to see the rams of Mr Garne's sole surviving flock of the Lion breed of Cotswold sheep ochred at Aldsworth on the wolds, "so tyred against the marriage day", the sheep that Shakespeare and Drayton knew, the sheep that built the towns and villages, manors and fifteenth-century churches of the Cotswolds.

Considering the 'roaring lions' of Leominster's mythical history, he notes:

But roaring lions [...] were from the thirteenth to the eighteenth centuries supplanted by sheep, and "Lemyster ore," saluted by Herrick, Camden, Drayton, Izaak Walton and Ben Jonson, was of so delicate a texture as, in Drayton's words (the *Polyolbion*), to compare with "the silkworm's web". In the fifteenth century it commanded the highest price in Britain--#13 a sack as against #5 6s 8d in the rest of the country and only #2 10s in Sussex [...] Leominster achieved her wool-fame in the thirteenth century when the Cistercian farmers of the Cotswolds were evolving the Lion breed of Cotswold sheep

- [28] We have quite a lot of evidence of the philanthropic motivation Dyer felt in his middle and later years, which inspired his plans for the 'Commercial Map' and *The Fleece*, and informed his pastoral work as a clergyman. Williams (1956: 107) quotes from Dyer's Mapleton notebook:

Give me to feed the poor, to soothe the sad,  
To lead a life benevolent and meek--  
This my religion.

He points out that *The Fleece*, as it was initially planned by Dyer and his friend James Mackenzie, was intended as an 'aid to the poor', as Dyer's poem 'Written On Recovery from a Dangerous Illness' (1741, cited p. 106) shows:

Or, spreading o'er the poor my wide regard,  
Shall I attune the old Arcadian reed,  
And sing the Fleece and loom? That, that's the lay  
Pleases Mackenzie.

An undated note among Dyer's 'Prayers and meditations' (quoted by Collins, 1930: 391) also suggests a strong sense of philanthropic didacticism, and a robustly practical view of his ministry:

65. I am not for calling men away from the bustle of life but for guiding them in it; for I much more esteem the merchant, the tradesman, the <mechanic> sailor, the mechanic than the monk, the cl[o]seteer, than the studious and the contemplative man.

This practical didacticism is also demonstrated by a note Williams quotes (115-6), which Dyer wrote in the Catthorpe churchwarden's book, dated 31 March 1746:

Paid for a paper to be read in Church about the distemper among cattle, 2s.

There are ten such entries in 1746-7, and Williams sees this as an indication of 'how parallel were the poet's conceptions of *The Fleece* and of his duties as a clergyman'. For Dyer, he considers:

Education was the first step in "the exaltation of the reason and upper faculties" to "taste something spiritual and above this world." And in so far as education helped his parishioners economically, Dyer felt he was carrying out Christ's injunction, "Feed my sheep," and that the work was therefore worthy of the church.

This epitomises Dyer's sensibility excellently.

[29] Dyer's first advisor was Dr James Mackenzie. Later his friends Thomas Edwards and Daniel Wray became involved; and in 1750, through Wray, Dyer was introduced to Philip Yorke, eldest son of the Earl of Hardwicke (through whom Dyer's degree from

Cambridge was later arranged). Yorke and his wife the Marchioness Grey became Dyer's patrons, and through this connection he was given his two Lincolnshire livings of Belchford and Coningsby the following year. During the early 1750s Edwards and Wray continued to encourage Dyer to press on with the poem; and at the beginning of 1753 a 'board of critics' was set up to advise the poet, who had now completed a draft of all four books. Apart from Edwards and Wray, the most important member of this panel was the poet Mark Akenside. Joseph Warton also read the poem in manuscript. See Williams (1946b; 1956: 122-3, 128-9).

[30] *Dyer-Mackenzie* 28 Jan 1755, in Longstaffe (1847-8: 5: 221).

[31] Davies (1968: 359n) notes a variant in Longstaffe's Collations:

Meekly reluctant; but what Claim has Pride  
To riot in th'Indulgence? know we not  
That Gluttons ever murder, when they kill (for II, 20-1)

This is also noted by Parker (1953: 166), as a manuscript variant.

[32] It is a familiar pattern in pastoral to praise the natural abundance of Nature. Classical examples include Theocritus, *Idyll VII* ('Everywhere spring, and everywhere pasturage, and on every side / Udders swollen with milk, and younglings fostered by their dams'); Virgil, *Georgics II*, 520 ('Autumn drops her varied fruits at our feet [...] cows that hang / their milky udders, and plump young goats on the happy green'); Horace, *Epode 2* (the 'Beatus Ille'). The idea of natural abundance giving itself to Man was widely used in the eighteenth century: see, for example, Pope, *Windsor Forest*, 385-96. See Theocritus, trans. Trevelyan (1947: 31); Virgil, trans. Lewis (1940: 51-2); Horace, trans. Shepherd (1983: 48-50); Pope, ed. Butt (1963: 209-10).

[33] Davies (1968: 442) finds a parallel with Thomson's shearing 'explanation' a few lines later, where Dyer, illustrating that not all humans eat meat, cites Hindu vegetarianism, giving it as an example to the 'gentle swains' whom he exhorts to collect the 'bright unsully'd locks' of the sheep:

Like Brama's healthy sons on Indus' banks,  
Whom the pure stream and garden fruits sustain;  
Ye are the sons of Nature; your mild hands  
Are innocent: ye when ye shear relieve. (II, 26-9)

The Thomson lines Davies notes as a parallel are:

Fear not, ye gentle Tribes, 'tis not the Knife  
Of horrid Slaughter that is o'er you wav'd;  
No, 'tis the tender Swain's well-guided Shears. (*Summer* 417-9)

- [34] Only Thomas More, in *Utopia* (trans. Turner, 1965: 46), could reverse this rule, in order to satirise an earlier period of farming 'improvement':

'Sheep,' I told him. 'These placid creatures, which used to require so little food, have now apparently developed a raging appetite, and turned into man-eaters. Fields, house, towns, everything goes down their throats'.

- [35] The 'permission' Dyer has in mind is given by God to Adam and Eve in *Genesis* 1, 28:

And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

In *Genesis* 9, 2-3, God delivers a similar blessing to Noah and his sons, including specific permission to eat animals. For a discussion of how this was interpreted in the early modern period see Thomas (1983: 17-25 and passim).

- [36] Thomas (1983: 290-7) locates the emergence of moral-based vegetarianism to the seventeenth century. He considers that by the beginning of the eighteenth century 'all the arguments which were to sustain modern vegetarianism were in circulation'. Eighteenth century poets routinely condemned cruelty to animals, though usually in an equivocal and limited way. Thomson, for example, who provides the major model for Dyer here, condemns hunting (*Autumn* 360-458) but advocates the killing of predators like the fox (459-501); and his comment on vegetarianism (*Spring* 336-78), though it seems passionately pro-vegetarian, is equivocal in its conclusions, and leads directly into a passage full of enthusiasm for fishing (*Spring* 379-442).

- [37] Davies (1968: 443) comments:

In this passage Dyer shows he is aware of most of the arguments in favour of enclosure. It was from about 1750 that enclosure really became established, so Dyer is, to a certain extent, a pioneer.

The first point is overstated: Dyer gives a good list of negative, but none of the positive arguments put forward for enclosure. I would agree he is a 'pioneer' in the subject.

- [38] Of the diseases Dyer mentions in this passage 'halt' is foot-rot (*OED* 'halt', sb. 2, 2); 'rot' is liver rot or liver fluke; and coughing could indicate any of a number of bronchial diseases, the most serious of which were brucellosis and tuberculosis. 'Hydropic tumours' are literally dropsical or watery swellings. Though no specific disease is suggested, Dyer later refers to 'pleurisies and dropsies' (I, 294), caused by over-rich or over-wet pasture; and I think he is generally concerned with the range of dropsical diseases such as redwater and the various forms of enterotoxaemia.

*OED* cites the line 'Long rains in miry winter cause the halt' from *The Fleece* under its definitions of halt (sb. 2, 2): the citation should be to I, 456 rather than '56'.

- [39] For sheep diseases, past and present see Youatt (1837: 361-556); Morton (1855: II, 842-53); *Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food* (1956, 1967: 50-4,57-8); Trow-Smith (1959: 40-1, 212-13; 322-3); Goodwin (1971, 1979: 173-98); Martin (1983).

- [40] Kerridge (1967: 42), writing about the chalkland area, explains how sheep maintained these 'close-woven' pastures:

For centuries sheep had grazed the hills and created downland pastures. Chalky soils suited both grasses and sheep and the sweetness of the feed depended on it being nibbled short. Once sheep were removed, the grass carpet became coarse and clumpy and finally declined into rough pasture.

Kerridge uses the same word as Dyer, 'carpet', also used by Defoe, I, 209, to describe the North Devon pasture.

- [41] Sources of tree information as follows: Broom: *Chambers*, ed. Law (1950: 'Broom') '*Cytisus scoparius* (common broom) grows wild on light soils in Britain'; Box: Clapham et al (1968: 147) '[Box, *Buxus sempervirens*, is] Very local in Beech woods and scrub on chalk or limestone in S. England'; Juniper: Clapham et al (1968: 25) 'The lowland form [of the subspecies *Juniperus*

*communis*] on chalk, limestone and slate'; Beech: Stokoe (1937, 1960: 146) '[Beech, *Fagus sylvatica*] will grow in most upland places, where the Oak thrives, though it does not need so deep a soil, and has a preference for land containing lime. Fresh mineral soils, rich in humus, are the best for it. In poor soils its growth is slow and its life is longer'.

[42] Davies (1968: 212), following Longstaffe's Collations, has:

Where moss-grey *Stonehenge*, lonely-solemn, nods,  
Ruin of Ages; such the matted Leas  
And ruddy tilth (I, 48-50)

As he notes (p. 356n), *Dyer-Dodsley* 12 May 1757 gives two alternatives to the lines as printed, this one, and as follows:

Where solitary *Stonehenge*, solemn, nods;

Dyer adds '*Grey with moss* is not so poetical'. Wilmott notes the proposals (p. 44n4) but maintains the original lines.

[43] Banstead Downs, outside Epsom on the North Downs in Surrey, were famous both as sheep downs and as a place of healthy retreat from the city, being conveniently situated near Epsom Spa. Defoe's account (I, 159) takes up the latter point:

*Banstead Downs* need no Description other than this, that their being so near *London*, and surrounded as they are with Pleasant Villages, and being themselves perfectly agreeable, the Ground smooth, soft, level and dry; (even in but a few Hours after Rain) they conspire to make the most delightful Spot of Ground, of that kind in all this Part of *Britain*.

Ernle (1912, 1961: 178) records that Banstead was 'especially famous for the quality of its mutton'; a point alluded to by Pope in his *Imitations of Horace: Sat. II. ii.*, 143-4, 'and Bansted-down, / Thence comes your mutton'. In Book II Dyer links Banstead wool with 'Gay Epsom's too' (II, 375).

[44] Of 'Dorcestrian fields', the area around Dorchester, Defoe writes:

They who would make any practicable Guess at the Number of Sheep usually fed on these Downs, may take it from a Calculation made, as I was told, at *Dorchester*, that there were 600000 Sheep fed within 6 Miles of that Town, measuring every Way round, and the Town in the Center. (I, 188)

We do not have to take those figures too literally to see that this was one of the most successful sheep-grazing area in the land. Camden (trans. Gibson 1695: 43) had noted Dorset's 'great flocks of sheep'; while Drayton's phrase '*Dorsetian fields*' (Song II, 19) may have influenced Dyer.

[45] The Dover area is famously chalkland, and hence good grazing country. Defoe notes the 'pleasant Champaign Country' of the downs on his way to Dover (I, 122). Drayton follows Shakespeare in noting the samphire grown on the chalk cliffs. See *King Lear* IV, vi, 15; Drayton, Song XVIII, 763-4.

[46] Sarum is the old or poetic name for Salisbury. Defoe's description of Salisbury Plain (I, 187-8) illustrates clearly the nature of Dyer's interest, and shows something of the extent of the chalk belt:

From *Winchester*, is about 25 Miles, and over the most charming Plains that can any where be seen, (far in my Opinion) excelling the Plains of *Mecca*, we come to *Salisbury*; the vast Flocks of Sheep, which one every where sees upon these Downs, and the great Number of those Flocks, is a Sight truly worth Observation; 'tis ordinary for these Flocks to contain from 3 to 5000 in a Flock; and several private Farmers hereabouts have two or three such Flocks [...] This plain country continues in length from Winchester to Salisbury 25 miles, from thence to Dorchester 22 miles, thence to Weymouth 6 miles, so that they lye near 50 miles in length, and breadth; they reach also in some Places 35 to 40 miles. (pp. 187-8).

The area was simply the best sheep pasture in the country. Camden characterised southern Wiltshire as 'a large champagne fruitful Country' which 'feeds innumerable flocks of sheep' (1695: 85); and Defoe shows that by the eighteenth century it had been made even more agriculturally productive.

[47] Stonehenge was a fairly common subject for poets in the early modern period. See for example, Drayton, Song III, 41-65; Dryden, 'To My Honour'd Friend, Dr Charlton' (ed. Kinsley, 1962: 32); Chatterton, 'Battle of Hastings [No. 1]', 301-2, 'Battle of Hastings

[No. 2]', 541-50' (1777: 224, 264-5); Wordsworth, *The Salisbury Plain Poems*, (ed. Gill, 1975). See also Celoria (1976); Gill (1989: 75 and 439n27).

- [48] Dyer's note to 'Normanton' (1757) is 'A seat of Sir John Heathcote in Rutlandshire'. Normanton Hall had become the seat of the Mackworth family in the reign of Henry VI; they were later heavily involved on the Parliamentary side in the Civil War. The seat was purchased in about 1729 by Sir Gilbert Heathcote (1652-1733), father to Sir John. Knighted by the Queen in 1702, Heathcote was a long-serving MP, a founder of the Bank of England, and Lord Mayor of London in 1710, awarded a baronetcy in 1732-3. He was unpopular, and Pope's two attacks on him are revealing:

Heathcote himself, and such large-acred Men,  
Lords of fat *E'sham*, or of Lincoln Fen,  
Buy every stick of Wood that lends them heat,  
Buy every Pullet they afford to eat.  
Yet these are Wights, who fondly call their own  
Half that the Dev'l o'erlooks from Lincoln Town.  
(*Imitations of Horace*, Epistle II, ii, 240-5)

The grave Sir Gilbert holds it for a rule,  
That 'every man in want is knave or fool'  
(*Epistle to Bathurst*, 103-4)

For Heathcote/Normanton see *DNB* 'Sir Gilbert Heathcote'; Gibbs (1910-59: 'Ancaster', 'Aveland'); Townend (1970: 72-5, 'Ancaster'; 1302-5, 'Heathcote'; 1709-11, 'Mackworth'); Bartholemew's *Gazetteer of the British Isles* (ninth edition, 1943, 1970: 512 'Normanton'); Pevsner, *Leicestershire and Rutland* (1960: 311); Mingay (1963: 11, citing LRO Ancaster V/D/15); Clay (1985: 238, citing Lincolnshire Archives Office, 3 Ancaster 7/3/12); Pope, ed. Butt (1963, 1968: 656, 576).

- [49] The sources do not date Sir John's death, but his wife died in 1772 (They married in 1720).
- [50] Clay (1985: 238) has a note which suggests Heathcote was interested in the 'new' crops (in this case potatoes):

In 1758, for instance, it was reported to Sir John Heathcote that on an estate near his own in Lincolnshire the steward who had formerly restricted their planting was now permitting [potatoes] to be cultivated without restraint.

G. E. Mingay (1963: 11) gives us a dramatic picture of Sir John's attempts to enclose pasture on his estate:

in the countryside proprietors like Sir John Heathcote, whose attempt to enclose a common pasture was frustrated by a mob who peremptorily threw down his fences [...] knew from experience the limitations of their authority.

This perhaps suggests something closer to Pope's hard-headed view of the older Heathcote than to Dyer's benevolent view of the younger.

- [51] Camden, trans. Gibson (1695: 575) records that Urchinfield was 'laid waste with fire and sword by the Danes in the year 715'; and that in it 'once stood *Kilpec* a noted castle, the seat of the noble family of the *Kilpec*'s, who, as some report, were Champions to the Kings of England, in the beginning of the Normans'.

For Urchinfield/Archenfield See Camden, trans. Gibson (1695, 1971: 573 ff, 'Herefordshire', and map between 572 and 573); Muller, ed. Smith and Grove (1874: plate 10, 'Britannia'); Massingham (1952: 170-87, 'Archenfield'); Rowley (1986: 53, 72-3); various modern maps and atlases.

- [52] See Pope, ed. Butt (1963, 1968: 581-2); Barrell (1980: 173n99); Gilpin (1782, 1973: 6). Defoe (II, 450) concentrates on the commercial aspects of the town. He calls it:

a good old town, famous for good cyder, a great manufacturing of iron ware, and a good trade on the river Wye

He is clearly alert to the commercial significance of the Wye, which had been made navigable after the Restoration. The Man of Ross himself, John Kyrle, died in 1724, in his eighties.

For Ross see Gilpin (1782, 1973: 6); Mee (1938, 1950: 160-5); Massingham (1952: 267-70); Sylvester (1969: 350, 359). For the 'Man of Ross' see *DNB*, 'John Kyrle (1637-1724)'; Mee (1938, 1950: 160-1, 164-5); Massingham (1952: 270). For the improvements of the Wye see Thirsk (1985: 345).

[53] In *The Old Straight Track* (1925) Alfred Watkins finds many ley lines, alignments and sighted tracks in 'Siluria' and the Welsh Marches generally. It is appropriate that Dyer, with his intensely visual sense of landscape, and his love of prominences which provide 'prospects', should name three seats which are 'sighted' on a line.

For Leominster see Camden (trans. Gibson, 1695: 577); Drayton, Song VII, 151-60; Defoe, II, 447-8; Mee (1938, 1950: 125-8); Massingham (1952: 231-5).

[54] Dyer's note on 'Croft' (1757) is 'a seat of Sir Archer Croft'. The baronetcy of Croft of Croft Castle (motto: *Tryumphe O Trespas*) has a substantial history, Bernard De Croft being mentioned as holding land in Hereford in Domesday Book. Dyer's brother-in-law Sir Archer, the Second Baronet (1683-1753), was M.P. for Leominster (1722-7) and later represented Winchelsea and then Deeralston. His eldest son the Third Baronet (also Sir Archer Croft) assumed the Title in 1753.

For the Crofts and Croft Castle see Parker (1953: 27 [Dyer family tree], 64); Williams (1956: 82n3); Mee (1938, 1950: 51-3); Massingham (1952: 239-44); Burke (1970: 686 ff., 'Croft of Croft Castle'); *Who's Who* (1977); Reid (1980: II, 18-19, 'Croft Castle'); *National Trust Handbook* (1988: 116, 'Croft Castle').

[55] See also Colley (1977). Philip Yorke (1690-1764), the Lord Chancellor, who was ennobled as Lord Hardwicke in 1733, and as Viscount Royston and Earl of Hardwicke in 1754, was the buyer who bailed out the second Earl of Oxford when the latter's financial crisis finally struck. He was also the father of Dyer's major patron in later years, another Philip Yorke (1720-97), who was also styled Viscount Royston from 1754-64 (thus Dyer's praise for 'Royston' at II, 10, is ambiguous, and may be addressed to either, or both). In his capacity of High Steward of the University of Cambridge, the elder Yorke obtained for Dyer the mandate degree of Bachelor of Laws in 1751. The Yorkes were also connected to Dyer's other patrons the Heathcotes. In 1749 Marguerite, youngest daughter of the Earl of Hardwicke married Sir Gilbert Heathcote (the third baronet).

These connections between Harleys, Heathcotes and Yorkes probably say as much about the narrow parameters of the eighteenth-century ruling class as about the networks of literary patronage; the two no doubt went hand in hand.

For Hardwicke/Yorke see *DNB*, 'Daniel Wray, Antiquary', 'Philip Yorke, First Earl of Hardwicke', 'Philip Yorke, Second Earl of Hardwicke'; Gibbs (1910-59: 'Hardwicke'); Williams (1946b); Burke (1970: 1244, 'Hardwicke').

[56] Dyer's note on 'Eywood' (1757) is 'of the Earl of Oxford'. For the Harley/Oxford family and their Herefordshire seats see *DNB*, 'Sir Edward Harley, 1624-1700', 'Sir Edward Harley, 1664-1735', 'Edward Harley, Second Earl of Oxford', 'Robert Harley, First Earl of Oxford'; Roscoe (1902); Page (1908: I, 400-402); Mee (1938, 1950: 26-9, 197-200); Gibbs (1910-59: 'Oxford and Mortimer'); Williams (1956: 82n3); Townend (1965-72: II, 287 ff. 'Harley of Brampton Bryan'); Reid (1980: II, 7, 'Brampton Bryan Hall'; 24-5, 'Eywood'); Colley (1982); Bowden (1985: 133); Hill (1988).

[57] Dyer's note on 'Shobden' (1757) is 'of Lord Bateman'. Linda Colley sets Bateman nicely amidst the party-politics of mid-century Siluria: see Colley (1982: 127-8). For Bateman/Shobden see also Gibbs (1910-59: 'Bateman', 'Bateman of Shobden'); Mee (1938, 1950: 170-1); Massingham (1952: 235-6); Williams (1956: 40n20, 82n3); Humfrey (1980: 15); Reid (1980: II, 56-7, 'Shobden Court').

[58] Here the text I am using (1903, 1989) incorporates one of Dyer's amendments, to line 72. Davies (1968: 213), following Longstaffe's Collations, has:

Or Depth of heavy Marl, be then thy choice

and the original 1757 line had been:

Or Marl with Clay deep mix'd

See also note 87, below.

[59] Dyer's use of the harmony and energies of moving water, here and elsewhere, reflects the influence of his friend Thomson: *The Seasons* is animated by moving water more than any other kind of natural image. See especially Dyer's passage on weather (I, 125-84), and Thomson's two passages on the 'water cycle' (*Autumn* 736-835; *Winter* 993-1023).

[60] Line 89 includes another of Dyer's amendments from *Dyer-Dodsley* 12 May 1757. Davies (1968: 213) also has the new line; but Wilmott (1855: 45) keeps the original, which is:

At a meet distance from the upland ridge

- [61] My claim for Dyer's accuracy here is based on personal observation of sheep, confirmed in discussion with shepherds. I have observed sheep repeatedly standing up and finding new positions to sleep during the night in lambing pens (where they are uncomfortable because of pregnancy rather than cold); and noticed that 'wasted sides' are the most obvious physiological sign of a sheep losing condition, in the case of 'broken-mouthed' sheep who can no longer gain sufficient nutrition from grazing.
- [62] Francis Russell, fourth Earl of Bedford, after whom Bedford Level was named, initiated the first effective large-scale drainage of the fens in 1634, a task whose completion was overseen by his son William, fifth Earl and first Duke of Bedford, in 1749. See *Chambers*, ed. Law (1950: 'Bedford, Earldom and Dukedom'; 'Bedford Level').
- [63] Theocritus's *Idyll X* (Milon's Song) weaves together many maxims of this sort, to create a literary effect. In the *Georgics* Virgil also incorporates proverbial wisdom into his text. Tusser (1580, 1984) uses pithy, abrupt statements of this sort, especially in his 'abstracts', whose short couplets suit them well.
- [64] For drainage see also Morton (1855: I, 668-710 'Drainage'; I, 836-62 'Fences').
- [65] Geoffrey Lean delivers a grim report on the post-war destruction of exactly the kind of pastures Dyer advises against digging up:

Ninety-five percent of Britain's traditional hay-meadows [...] have been destroyed--half the remaining 5 per cent damaged [...] Since about 1940 Britain has lost four-fifths of its chalk downlands, once so studded with wild plants that 30 different species could easily be found in a single square yard.

See 'The Destruction of the British Countryside: Green and Ruined Land', *Observer Magazine*, 4 June 1989: 22

- [66] Dyer glosses 'Dimetians' as 'Dimetia, Caermarthanshire in South Wales'. Camden (1695: contents page) has the 'Dimetae' counties as 'Caermarthanshire, Penbrokeshire, and Cardiganshire'; while Brewer (1870, 1894) glosses 'Dimetae' as 'The ancient Latin name for the inhabitants of Carmarthanshire, Pembrokeshire, and Cardiganshire'.
- [67] The mytho-topographic and autobiographical significance of Dimetia is reinstated later in the poem. In Book III (436-45) Dyer writes, in the context of an account of the rise of weaving, of:

that soft track  
Of Cambria deep embay'd, Dimetian land,  
By green hills fenc'd, by ocean's murmur lull'd,  
Nurse of the rustic bard who now resounds  
The fortunes of the Fleece

This is far closer to the spirit of '*Grongar Hill*' and '*The Country Walk*', and suggests an idealisation of the poet's childhood.

- [68] Virgil, *Georgics*, IV, 121-48. Dryden's version, which would be the one best known to Dyer, begins as follows:

For where with stately Tow'rs *Tarentum* stands,  
And deep *Galesus* soaks the yellow Sands,  
I chanc'd an Old *Corycian* Swain to know,  
Lord of few Acres, and those barren too;  
Unfit for Sheep or Vines, and more unfit to sow:  
Yet lab'ring well his little Spot of Ground,  
Some scatt'ring Potherbs here and there he found:  
Which cultivated with his daily Care,  
And bruis'd with Vervain, were his frugal Fare.

Rosenmeyer (1969: 20) aptly describes Virgil's Corycian swain as 'neither Stoic nor Epicurean but an unphilosophical embodiment of Roman peasant virtue'. See Virgil, trans. Dryden, ed. Elliot (1981: 148-9 [Virgil 121-48; Dryden 186-219]).

- [69] Thomas (1983: 196) cites Dyer's hostility to trees here as an example of a wider movement against them related to 'improvement' and the better utilisation of land. Crows (also mentioned in line 421) are 'villains' here because they prey on weak or sick sheep and on lambs, often pecking out the eyes of sheep which cannot protect themselves.

*OED* lists but does not define 'thorn-set' (see line 115), and quotes only the present example (see 'Thorn', sb., IV. 8. *attrib.* and *Comb.* A. *Attributive*, 'thorn-set'). However its definition of the verb thorn is instructive:

Thorn, v. now rare. 1. *trans.* to make thorny, to furnish with thorns; esp. to protect (a newly planted quickset hedge or the like) with dead thorn-bushes.

Dyer seems to be saying that nearby trees will weaken the ability of newly-planted hedges to grow. He uses 'mound' here, and in line 89 ('shelt'ring mound') to mean hedge. *OED* ('mound' sb. 3. 1) says this is a dialect word which is 'current only in Oxfordshire and the counties near its border. The early examples of the sb. and the related verb are all from writers belonging to these localities'. The use may reflect Dyer's field research; on the other hand Dryden uses it in his translation of Virgil's *Eclogues* (1697, X. 83), which, as we have seen, Dyer knew.

- [70] For eighteenth-century developments in fertilisers see Kerridge (1967: 240-50).
- [71] Dyer's food references are interesting. 'Bacon' is of course Duckian food (see *The Thresher's Labour*, 1930, 1989: 7). I think Dyer's 'good brown cake' is probably cake in the Scottish/Welsh sense of bread or oaten-bread, rather than the English sense of sweet or fancy cake (compare *OED*, 'Cake', sb. 1. b and c).
- [72] For later interest in transhumance and the Merino see especially Lord Somerville's address to the Board of Agriculture, in *Annals of Agriculture*, XXXIII (1799: 154-68); Trow-Smith (1959: 151-3).
- [73] Smith (1747: II, 322; see also 422, 427, 436)) quotes a description of Abbeville manufacturing activity from a 1739 pamphlet:

At Abbeville is a large Manufactory, of fine Broad Cloths, in which is used no Wool but Spanish. The Looms are 108. It is carried on by three Partners, Nephews to old Van Robais, who first begun it. They live in as much Grandeur as any Peers in France. But tho' there is none of our Wool used in this Fabrick, there is too much used in the Town of Abbeville. I believe there is above 1000 Looms going in this Town on Paragons, besides a great many employed in Druggets, Serge, Cloth Serge, &c. Those Goods are chiefly sent to Spain, Portugal, and Italy, and sold for English Goods.

- [74] See especially Smith (1747). Though he is very biassed against trade barriers in the woollen industry Smith gives extracts from accounts written from both points of view. He strongly denies (p. 437n) that the French are mixing English wool with their own, though it seems fairly clear that smuggling was indeed rife. It was a subject which had

been playing on Dyer's mind for a long time. In his notebook he took a minute 'from the London Evening Post--Ireland May 3d. 1737' (quoted in Parker, 1953: 138):

there has been lately seizd near Cloughnakilty on the western coast, by the Combers of that Town between 900 & a 1000 stone of fleece Wool designd for the French Market

In the 'Commercial Map' notes (f. 15vb) he noted:

there are such numbers of owlers along the Folkstone & Hithe Coast [that] they Carry over to France in sight of ye Officers vast Quant[itie]s of Wool--

The subject of customs bribery is dealt with in an earlier (1675) essay quoted by Smith (I, 250-1); the progress of the practice in the eighteenth century is less well known. Smith also quotes from an anti-French pamphlet related to the 'French Usurpation upon the Trade of England' from this earlier period (1679, see Smith I, 330). See also Heaton (1920: 192-4, 249-51); Lipson (1921: 24-5, 87-95); Thirsk (1985: 363-6).

- [75] John Chalker (1969: 51-5) finds a 'saving element of self-mockery' (p. 54) in some of the poem's effects, and cites this passage as an example. Chalker considers that when Dyer invokes England in the formulation 'Hail noble Albion! [...] Rich queen of Mists and Vapours!' he is 'either being accidentally bathetic or achieving a deliberate effect'. 'Accidental bathos', Chalker notes, 'would hardly have been expected, and it seems likely that Dyer is deliberately producing an air of comedy in these lines' (by discussing foggy English weather in his 'most elevated style'). His corollary is that Dyer's mockery of 'trifling Gaul, effeminate', though it is 'appropriately emphasized' by the 'burlesque Miltonic dress', rebounds on the poet. It is 'reasonable enough to dislike fogs', and this makes the Frenchman a 'sympathetic figure'.

Chalker's reading seems to assume that the modern, city-dweller's view of the rainy, foggy English weather as a negative, humorous and low subject is an appropriate standard by which to judge an eighteenth-century epic on the care of sheep, which is questionable. Bathos and burlesque are the product of this clash of sensibilities, and the problem is not that of the poet, but of the modern reader.

- [76] Dyer highlights climate to suggest French effeminacy; but the cultural codes he deploys would have been equally understood had he focussed instead on the French diet, like 'Martinus Scriblerus' (1741, 1950: 106) who considers the French 'derive

their levity from their Soups, Frogs, and mushrooms'; or the French language, like Dryden, who writes in his *Dedication to the Aeneis*:

Formerly the *French*, like us, and the *Italians*, had but five Feet, or ten Syllables in their Heroick Verse: but since *Ronsard's* time, as I suppose, they found their Tongue too weak to support their Epick Poetry, without the addition of another Foot.

'Their language', he continues, 'is not strung with sinews like our English'; and interestingly he uses the word 'trifling', as Dyer has done, in characterising French verse:

The *French* have set up Purity for the Standard of their Language; and a Masculine Vigour is that of ours. Like their Tongue is the Genius of their Poets, light and trifling in comparison with the English; more proper for Sonnets, Madrigals and Elegies, than Heroick Poetry.

The French are effeminate, while the English are vigorously masculine. Steele, comparing different types with musical instruments in *The Tatler* (no. 153), compares 'every sensible true-born Britain' with the 'Bass-Viol, which grumbles in the Bottom of the Consort [...] with a surly Masculine Sound'.

In a similar way Pope, in his *Letter to a Noble Lord*, is able to emphasise the 'effeminacy' of his satirical target Lord Hervey merely by pointing to the latter's known preference to French above 'all the learned Languages' (1986: 454). Like Dyer, Pope also used the English weather to draw a distinction between 'effeminate' Europeans (and the 'savageness' of those further north), in the manuscript of his unfinished epic *Brutus* ('Lib. 2'):

He [Brutus] observes when he comes to Britain the nature of a climate equally free from the effeminacy and softness of the southern Climes and the Ferocity and Savageness of the Northern.

The British weather demonstrates the national character of:

a people whose natural genius and temper in the medium between these was suited to all Improvements and Virtues

The French character is for Lady Mary Wortley Montagu the product of a female-ordered upbringing and 'education'; as she writes from Paris (*Montagu-Pope*, Oct 1718):

The Abbot is my guide, and I could not easily light upon a better; he tells me that here the women form the character of men, and I am convinced in the persuasion of this by every company into which I enter. There seems here to be no intermediate stage between infancy and manhood; for as soon as the boy has quit his leading-strings, he is set agog in the world; the ladies are his tutors, they make the first impressions, which generally remain, and they render the men ridiculous by the imitation of their humours and graces, so that dignity in manners is a rare thing here before the age of sixty.

Lady Mary in fact finds this 'French' education a positive thing in comparison to the 'solid thinkers' of England, whose wisdom 'is so often clothed with a misty mantle of spleen and vapours'. However the employment of French tutors and governesses in this country to provide a 'French education' was more often regarded with suspicion and hostility, as it is by Jonathan Swift in *The Intelligencer* (no. 9, 'An Essay on Modern Education').

As well as being a threat to morality and the wool trade, the French actually outnumbered the British in this period, which Fielding seems to have felt was particularly unsporting of them. In a scene in *Tom Jones* where the theme of 'reliance on superior numbers' occurs (1749, 1966: 603) he characterises this authorially as 'a kind of valour which hath raised a certain nation among the moderns to a high pitch of glory'. The idea that the French were not proper men would be reassuring in the context of a British fear of being outnumbered, as it had been in Shakespeare's *Henry V*, where the Archbishop of Canterbury is confident the French are only 'half-men':

O noble English, that could entertain  
With half their forces the full pride of France,  
And let another half stand laughing by,  
All out of work and cold for action!            (I, i, 111-4)

Similarly Dryden, in an earlier part of his *Dedication of the Aeneis*, considers that:

the *French* are as much better Criticks than the *English*, as they are worse Poets. Thus we generally allow that they better understand the management of War, than our Islanders; but we know we are superiour to them, in the day of Battel.

Being 'effeminate' half-men, the French are no match for the English, either in war or in its literary analogue, heroic poetry, no matter how they try to get round this by rapid self-multiplication.

Dyer and Fielding both hint at French 'treachery', as does Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. In Paris, in the letter cited above, she writes:

I stare prodigiously, but no body remarks it, for every body stares here; staring is *a-la-mode* [...] This staring would have rather a solemn kind of air, were it not alleviated by grinning, for at the end of a stare there comes always a grin.

But the grin is found to be nothing but 'a certain contortion of muscles', a social artifice; and Montagu's whole construction suggests bare-facedness (staring) and dishonesty (insincere grinning). The impression is strongly conspiratorial: the French are clearly, as Gay notes in his *Epistle to Pulteney* (line 70), a 'sprightly nation of *Coquettes*'; and from sexual flirtation to political treachery is a short step.

The ultimate model for the English-French relationship in the eighteenth century was the Roman-Greek relationship, as perceived in particular by Juvenal. Johnson makes the connection most clearly in his imitation of the Roman satirist, *London* (1738):

Studious to please, and ready to submit,  
The supple *Gaul* was born a Parasite:  
Still to his Int'rest true, where'er he goes,  
Wit, Brav'ry, Worth, his lavish Tongue bestows;  
In ev'ry Face a Thousand Graces shine,  
From ev'ry Tongue flows Harmony divine.  
These Arts in vain our rugged Natives try,  
Strain out with fault'ring Diffidence a lye,  
And gain a Kick for awkward Flattery.

Here the truth is out: the 'rugged' Englishman is simply a poor creature in comparison to the 'supple Gaul'; and the lurking insecurity behind the macho posturing of Shakespeare, Dryden and the Scriblerians is revealed as a tribal fear of superior

strangers. See Arbuthnot et al, ed. Kerby-Miller (1741, 1950: 106); Dryden, ed. Kinsley (1958: III, 1019, 1048); *The Tatler*, ed. Bond (1988: II, 360); Pope, ed. Cowler (II, 1986: 454); Pope, *Brutus*, Lib. 2, as transcribed from British Library MS. Egerton 1950 by Brie (1939: 150); *Montagu-Pope*, Oct 1718, in Pope, ed. Sherburn (1956: I, 519-21); Swift, ed. Davis (1964: 50); Fielding, ed. Mutter (1749, 1966: 603); Shakespeare, *Henry V*, I, i, 111-14; Gay, ed. Dearing and Beckwith (I, 1974: 208-14); Johnson, ed. Smith and McAdam (1738, 1974: 74); Juvenal, 'Satire III'; trans. Green (1967, 1974: 89-90).

- [77] For sources on the agricultural revolution see note 17. For Dyer as an advocate of enclosure see II, 107-33 (discussed in the text earlier). For transhumance in eighteenth-century Wales see Ryder (1983: 501). Pawson (1957: 79) notes that 'Bakewell, was, of course, concerned with lowland and not hill sheep'. Russell (1981: 279) gives an interesting perspective on the neglect of mountains as sites for improvement:

Exposed hills and cold, early-morning Spring lambing pens could have had only limited appeal to civilised improvers, whose whole philosophy was based on the exertion of control over the environment and the physical comfort that such control produced.

- [78] Bakewell's pursuit of fast maturation, prolificacy and good fattening qualities led to a general diminution of other points like hardiness and maternal qualities, and mountain sheep have been prominent in later crossings to breed these qualities back in. The major early success was the Border Leicester, a large, prolific, hardy long-wooled sheep, produced from a cross between Bakewell's New Leicester and the Cheviot. The Mule, a modern halfbred cross between the Bluefaced Leicester and a mountain sheep (principally the Swaledale) has become one of the most successful and popular modern British sheep, and now accounts for some twelve percent of the national wool clip. it is exceptionally hardy and prolific, and has excellent maternal qualities.

For the Border Leicester and the Mule see Watson and Hobbs (1951: 176 ff.); Pawson (1957: 67); *Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food* (1956, 1967: 16); Goodwin (1971, 1979: 51, 59); Skinner et al (1985: 17-19, 105).

- [79] Hartwell (1973: 325) notes an earlier characterisation of the Blackfaced Mountain or Heath sheep of the eighteenth century as 'the boldest, the hardiest, and the most active and industrious of all sheep species'. Anecdotal information suggests it has not

changed much. I have been told of Welsh mountain sheep raiding dustbins in Blaenau Ffestiniog, and rolling over cattle-grids (being as Dyer says 'nimble'); and (from a hill-climbing friend) of a marauding band of Cumbrian mountain sheep stealing fell-walkers' sandwiches.

- [80] For the different mountain types see Kerridge (1967: 315); Russell (1981: 247, 250, types 2 and 4b); Ryder (1983: 460).

The sublime reputation of the Peak District of Derbyshire dates back at least to Charles Cotton's poem *The Wonders of the Peake* (1681). Drayton had also sung the 'Wonders' of the Peak District, with extensive mytho-topographic explanations, in Song XXVI, 397-538. See also Defoe, II, 564 ff.

The significance of Plinlimmon is seen in the pastoral at the end of the book, discussed in the text. Snowdon is the highest, and Cader Idris the most sublimely steep of the North Wales mountains. Francis Kilvert describes the sublimity of Plinlimmon and Cader Idris:

(Tuesday, 22 February [1870]) After luncheon went for a walk with Mr V. to the top of Drum du. When we got to the cair Plynlmmon was quite visible, but only the ghost of Cader Idris to be seen. We went away disappointed but had not gone far before the clouds suddenly lifted and a sun burst lit up grandly the great snowslopes of round-backed Plynlmmon and the vast snowy precipices of the giant Cader Idris near 50 miles away. (Kilvert, ed. Plomer, 1944, 1964: 10)

- [81] Youatt (1837: 316n) dates the beginning of Bakewell's most successful ram-hiring to 1780, though other sources put this earlier. Marshall (1818: IV, 234) quotes Pitt's *Leicestershire* (1807) as saying that 'the enterprize among breeders remains undiminished'. By 1837 Youatt records (p. 318) that the New Leicesters:

have within little more than half a century spread themselves from their native county over every part of the United Kingdom, and are now exported in great numbers to the continents of Europe and America. Such, indeed, have proved to be their merits, that at the present day there are very few flocks of long-woolled sheep existing in England, Scotland, or Ireland, which are not to some degree descended from the flock of Mr Bakewell.

[82] Russell (1981: 241) states the problem of pre-improvement breeds cogently, citing four faults in modern systems, which may be summarised as follows:

- i. Treating early post-improvement sources such as the *Board of Agriculture* reports and Youatt (1837) as primary sources.
- ii. Lack of system / incomprehensibility.
- iii. Over-reliance on modern versions of early breeds.
- iv. Artificial classifications, not based on biology.

It is difficult to avoid all these pitfalls, though Russell's own classification steers a fairly skilful course between the Scylla of generic chaos and the Charybdis of oversimplification. See Trow-Smith (1957: 230-2 and 1959: 36-41; 121-53); Kerridge (1967: 311-16); Ryder (1964-5 and 1983: 484-95); Russell (1981: 242-52).

[83] For Melton Mowbray and the routes which cross it see Defoe, II, 487-9, 502, 547-51; Cobbett, ed. Cole and Cole (1830, 1930: II, 662-3); *Chambers*, ed. Law (1950: 'Grantham', 'Leicester', Melton Mowbray', 'Nottingham'); modern maps and atlases.

[84] Monk (1794: 9) gives some pasture/arable ratios which illustrate well why Dyer chooses 'Melton' and 'Tripontium' (bearing in mind Dyer's gloss for 'Tripontian fields' as 'the country between Rugby, in Warwickshire, and Lutterworth in Leicestershire'):

About Ashby de la Zouch, and Loughborough, three parts in four are in pasture. Near Melton Mowbray, there is very little arable, not more than one acre to thirty. Market Harborough has also very little arable. The pasture near Lutterworth is in proportion of eight to one. At Hinckley, five parts in six are in pasture.

This is a selective survey, but the high pasture ratios of Lutterworth and Melton Mowbray are interesting. A modern agricultural atlas (Coppock, 1964: 178) shows that the south Leicestershire area still has a high sheep density. See also Fussell (1949: 170, 174-5).

[85] Dyer's abbreviation 'Mid' may mean 'Middle' rather than 'Midlands'. There is another reference to the 'marly' area of Leicestershire in Book II (385-8):

Need we the level greens of Lincoln note,  
Or rich Leicestria's marly plains, for length  
Of whitest locks and magnitude of Fleece  
Peculiar? envy of the neighbouring realms!

- [86] Generalising about soil-types is fraught with difficulty. Quentin Seddon (1989: 205-6) describes the problem eloquently:

This country contains more soil types than cities and they are at least as different from each other as Glasgow from Bournemouth. A single farm may have as many as 20, a single field as many as five different soils. Black peats run into brown loams spread into silvery greensands. Clays alone come in greys, blues, yellows and reds, the loams can be anything from thin, cold, grey and wet to deep, warm, red and freely-draining.

Mingay (1984: 93-4) characterises the East Midlands area as one of 'mixed soils and varied relief', distinguishing the 'clayland vales and alluvial river valley bottoms' as a major type, 'the home of the classical Midland mixed farming or arable-fattening systems'. See also Marshall (1790: I, 188-96; 268-92); Monk (1794: 8-9); Pitt (1809, as cited in Marshall, 1818: IV, 198-9); *Chambers*, ed. Law (1950: 'Leicestershire'); Thirsk (1954); Pawson (1957: 18-19); Kerridge (1967: 91-113); modern maps and atlases, including *Geological Survey Ten Mile Map (South Sheet)* (Institute of Geological Sciences, 1979).

- [87] Dyer was anxious to get this soil-mapping right. In his letter to Dodsley, 12 May 1757 (*GM*, 1835: 47), he made it clear he was not happy with the way an earlier reference to marl/clay had been changed:

If the poem sh[oul]d come to a 2[n]d edition, be pleased, in particular, to make this necessary correction in l. 72, B. i.

Or marl with clay deep-mix'd  
either by restoring the l[ine] of the copy,  
Or heavy marl's deep clay, &c.  
or by this l[ine]

Or depth of heavy marl, be then thy choice.

The absurdity of *marl w[i]th clay deep mix'd* is very glaring to us graziers.

The implied reproof to Dodsley for changing the line would probably have been fairly directed: Thomas Gray had also complained that 'Nurse Dodsley' had given his *Elegy* 'a pinch or two in the cradle' (*Gray-Walpole*, dated Ash Wednesday, 1751). For Dodsley as an editor see Wendorf (1978).

- [88] For coting see Youatt (1837: 338, 259-60); Kerridge (1967: 67, 147, 149, 312); Ryder (1983: 498); *OED*, 'cot' v. 1. 2.

Russell (1981: 279) notes that the 'plasticity of wool fibres in response to environmental change' is the reason wool tended to be the focus of environmentalist view of animal development: it was one animal characteristic that could be seen to respond directly to environment, though its general character is determined genetically.

- [89] The idea of the hereditary evolution of animals was arguably available in ancient Greek writers (Anaximander of Miletus, Empedocles and Aristotle), in the writings of Augustine and Aquinas, and rather later, Bacon and Descartes. It was 'clearly in the air early in the eighteenth century': Hooke, Ray, de Maillet and Maupertius are cited as 'pioneers'; but the two most important figures in this movement were Buffon (1707-88) and Erasmus Darwin. Dyer would probably not have been aware of Buffon (whose major writings on the subject were in the period 1761-6), or of Darwin, who also wrote later. However, both hereditary and environmental views were available; and no doubt Dyer would have encountered versions of both in his field work, among the opinions of graziers and shepherds.

Nothing in Parker's account of Dyer's reading (1956: 143b ff) is significant here. See *Chambers*, ed. Law (1950: 'Evolution').

- [90] We have some evidence about the status of the 'arguments'. Longstaffe briefly describes the poem's draft manuscripts (1847-8: 5: 221). As well as the main draft there was 'a still earlier book, containing the agreements, or rough heads of his intended work, which is there called the "Golden Fleece."' The word 'agreements' makes no sense here, and is almost certainly a misreading of 'arguments' in the manuscript. There is also evidence that Dyer revised the arguments, though the phrase 'the two common sorts of ram described' is not mentioned. See Dyer, ed. Wilmott (1855: 42) for details.

[91] The best model available is Russell (1981: 242-51), who distinguishes seven groups of pre-improvement types, with some sub-types. The phrase 'larger sort' rules out his Group 7 (described as 'Small'), and gravitates against (though does not exclude) his Groups 3 and 4, both described as 'Small and Middle Sized'. The phrase 'of head defenceless' (i.e. polled rather than horned) rules out his Groups 2, 3, 5 and 6 (all horned). This leaves Group 1, and, less probably, Group 4. Russell characterises Group 4 as:

Small and Middle-sized Grey. Brown or Speckled Faced, Polled Down of [for 'or'] Fallow sheep. These were either fine or middle woolled.

Group 4 seems unlikely. Apart from their lack of size, it seems probable Dyer would make some reference to pigmentation were it present, or to the fleece shade (as he does to the 'tawny' fleece in his second example). And while down or fallow sheep would fatten well on the south Leicestershire pasture land Dyer is concerned with, they would not be a very appropriate choice (see Kerridge 1967: 313 for fallow sheep on pasture, and pp. 311-14 for the various agricultural roles of the pre-improvement types). Russell locates his two sub-groups (4a and 4b) to, respectively, the chalk downs and heaths of south and south-east England; and the 'heaths, forests and poor arable' areas of the west Midlands. It is improbable Dyer would recommend either for south Leicestershire pasture land.

This leaves Group 1, described as follows:

Largely unpigmented, hornless sheep types, often with a top-knot of wool on the forehead. Fleece types various, fine, medium or long woolled. All fleeces with a high reputation for whiteness.

There are four sub-types in the group (a to d) corresponding approximately to the types more commonly known, respectively, as the Ryelands, Cotswold, Leicester/Lincolnshire, and Cheviot. Russell purposely avoids these terms, as tending to a fallacious confusing of pre- and post-improvement types, and to give himself a closer generic accuracy than these titles imply (his type 1b, for example, includes the sheep of the Lincolnshire uplands as well as the Cotswolds). This is scrupulous, but limits our ability to pursue in his model some of the phenotypical and observational details Dyer gives. We need to revert to the older categories to find descriptions of this sort, though we must keep in mind Russell's categories and his reasons for using them. Youatt (1837) is an excellent source of information by breed and location titles

(‘Cotswold’, ‘Ryelands’, etc.), although Russell warns us (p. 241) that he should be used as a ‘secondary source’, being on the other side of the improvement ‘divide’. In fact although Youatt uses many species titles, his major ordering is by location, with an overall division between middle wool (which includes what we would call short-wool) and long-wool types. Both means of categorising are rational, though not (in Russell’s phrase, p. 242) ‘biological or historical’. Youatt is scholarly, careful, and historically minded (drawing on many valuable earlier sources), however; and in what follows I shall use his descriptions, though rather cautiously.

We may eliminate at once the Cotswold sheep (linked with the Lincolnshire upland sheep as Russell’s type 1b). Youatt provides no illustration for the breed, for as he says (p. 340) ‘Very few flocks of pure Cotswolds now exist, and these are rapidly diminishing’. By 1837 the Cotswold had become so heavily infused with New Leicester genes as to be unrecognisable in terms of the old breed. His description of the ‘unimproved’ Cotswolds is as follows:

They are taller and longer than the improved breed, comparatively flat-sided, deficient in the fore-quarter, but full in the hind-quarter; not fattening so early, but yielding a longer and heavier fleece. (p. 340)

Kerridge (1967: 312) supplements this:

Old Cotswolds were small-faced, white-skinned and polled, with long, spare, big-boned frames, long necks, square bulks and broad buttocks.

The ‘deficient fore-quarter’ of Youatt’s description is not compatible with Dyer’s ‘breast and shoulders broad’; nor is Kerridge’s description of the head and frame.

Youatt’s description of the Ryelands (pp. 258-61; Russell’s type 1a) is slightly unsatisfactory, as he does not make it clear whether it is a of a pre- or post-improvement sheep; though it is clear that, like the Cotswold, the breed had been thoroughly infused with New Leicester genes. However, Dyer cannot be describing it here: it is ‘small’ and ‘round’, and judging by the illustration Youatt provides (p. 261) could not be said to have a ‘stretch’d head’.

In the case of the Cheviot (Russell’s type 1d), Youatt clearly distinguishes pre- and post-improvement types, drawing on an earlier account by Sir John Sinclair (1792) for the pre-improvement description. It has much in common with Dyer’s description. What eliminates this sheep is its long-leggedness (noted by Sinclair), and its lack of

'depth in chest', noted as a pre-improvement feature by George Culley (both sources as cited by Youatt, pp. 285-6). This defect, as Youatt records, was remedied by crossing with the New Leicester.

Finally, we have Russell's type 1c, the 'Lowland Pasture Longwools'. Conversion into breed names is more complex here, as Russell includes in this type the 'Pasture sheep of the Midland counties' and the 'Marsh sheep of Lincolnshire' (p. 244), and locates them to Lincolnshire, Yorkshire, Durham, Northumberland, Leicestershire, Rutland, Northamptonshire, Cambridge, Warwickshire, Oxfordshire, Somerset, Devon and the East of Kent (the North and West Midlands, Teeswater and Durham are also mentioned). Their 'epicentre', so to speak, is Leicestershire and Lincolnshire. It would be tedious to rehearse here each of the sheep Youatt finds in these areas (though I have checked and eliminated them all to my own satisfaction). Russell is clearly referring to what Youatt (p. 341) calls 'The Midland Long-woolled Sheep', specifically the 'Old Leicesters' and 'The Lincoln Sheep'; the descendants of the 'pasture sheep' that Ernle (1912, 1961: 138-9) quotes a sixteenth-century source as locating to 'all Leicestershire, Buckinghamshire, and part of Nottinghamshire'; and a comparison with these types will be adequate. The Old Leicester was, writes Youatt (1837: 313:

large, heavy, coarse-woolled [with] a white face, no horns--it was long and thin in the carcass, flat-sided, with large bones--thick, rough, and white legs [...] It was covered with wool from 10 to 14 or 15 inches in length, coarse in quality, and weighing from 8 to 13 lbs. The pelt and offal were thick and coarse; the animal, a slow feeder, and the flesh was coarse-grained, and with little flavour.

This is nothing like Dyer's straight-backed, compact-shaped ram. Of the Lincolnshire longwoolled sheep it is sufficient to note that Ellis, writing in 1749 (cited by Youatt, p. 331), finds it the 'longest legged and largest carcassed sheep of all others'. Dyer's ram is indeed a 'larger sort' but it is 'short-limb'd', and while 'long' and 'short' are relative terms, 'longest' is clearly not compatible with 'short'.

[92] Of the other breeds illustrated by Youatt (1837) only the Southdown (p. 233) and the Cheviot (p. 284) lack a pronounced curve to their backs; but these are not as level as the New Leicester's back. Interestingly, these two other breeds were heavily involved in the two most significant breeding developments after the New Leicester: the Border Leicester, and the improved Southdown. Clearly the taste in 'straight-backed' sheep continued. See Watson and Hobbs (1951: 174-205) for details of these later developments.

[93] Descriptions of the New Leicester are many and detailed. Marshall (1790: I: 388-9), describes the Ewe as follows:

The *head* long, small, and hornless, with ears somewhat long, and standing backward, and with the nose shooting forward. The *neck* thin, and clean toward the head; but taking a conical form; standing low, and enlarging every way at the base; the forend, altogether, short. The *bosom* broad, with the *shoulders*, *ribs*, and *chine* extraordinarily full. The *loin* broad, and the *back* level. The *haunches* comparatively full toward the hips, but light downward; being altogether small, in proportion to the fore parts. The *legs*, at present, of a moderate length; with the bone extremely fine. The *bone*, throughout, remarkably light. The *carcase*, when fully fat, takes a remarkable form: much wider than it is deep; and almost as broad as it is long. Full on the shoulder, widest on the ribs, narrowing with a regular curve towards the tail; approaching the form of the Turtle, *nearer* than any other animal I can call to mind. The *pelt* thin, and the tail small. The *wool*, shorter than long wools in general; but much longer than the middle wools; the ordinary length of staple, five to seven inches: varying much in fineness and weight.

Every major feature the poet describes is confirmed here, apart from the legs, which Marshall describes as ‘of moderate length’ rather than ‘short’. However a later note by Marshall (p. 409n) reads:

the legs of the improved breed have been considerably lengthened, since their first stage of improvement

It seems likely, therefore, that Dyer saw the creature at the ‘first stage of improvement’. All other accounts of the sheep I have seen confirm Dyer’s accuracy. See, for example, Youatt (1837: 110) and J. MacDonald, quoted in Burnley (1889: 16).

[94] See Moore-Colyer (1989: 317). Major earlier agrarian historians, such as Ernle (1912, 1961), Watson and Hobbs (1951), and Pawson (1957), make no reference to any predecessor to Bakewell in the invention of the New Leicester; but Kerridge (1962: 322-3), and Russell (1981: 290-4) argue that the new breed had a much earlier and more widespread ancestry.

- [95] *DNB*, 'Bakewell'; Youatt (1837: 315n); and Pawson (1987: 18) all give 1760 as the year the New Leicester was made public.
- [96] Dyer took his MS to London in summer 1750, according to Williams (1956: 122), though the passage under discussion could conceivably have been added later.
- [97] For Bakewell's father see Pawson (1957: 14-18). The stock-moving and breeding activity of 1747 is recorded by Pitt (1809), as cited Marshall (1818: IV, 232). For more on early breeding activity in the area see Kerridge (1967: 318-23), and Russell (1981: 277-81, 290-2).
- [98] Elsewhere in the poem Dyer shows a general awareness of the 'common' Midlands sheep, probably based on his observation of 'old' Leicestershire and Lincolnshire sheep, whose characteristic is its size and length of wool staple. See I, 68-70; II, 386-7; and III, 581-3, where Dyer uses their size to make a comically exaggerated comparison with North Wales ponies:

The northern Cambrians, an industrious tribe,  
Carry their labours on pigmean steeds,  
Of size exceeding not Leicestrian sheep.     (III, 581-3)

None of these citations have the kind of descriptive detail he gives in his advice on the second ram.

- [99] Dyer's descriptions of Paul's two inventions (III, 79-85 and 292-302) have been drawn on by the following textile historians: Heaton (1920: 324, 331-2, 339-40, 342, 355-6); Lipson (1921: 92, 129, 133, 137, 140, 147-8, 180, 182); English (1969: 1, 40, 99; 1973: 80-2); Ponting (1970: 58n28); Kerridge (1985: 150-1, 159, 170, and in a number of footnotes). See also Kovacevik (1965: 270-1; 1975: 21).
- [100] Parker (1953: 126) describes Dyer's interest in canals well:

As will be seen in the Discourse and again is demonstrated in frequent jottings and long passages from his readings deposited in various Notebooks in the "Transactions", canals absorbed a great part of Dyer's attention. He is never weary of transcribing facts about these waterways as they existed in Holland, in France, above all in China. Du Halde's account of China he had evidently studied with close attention, and the Frenchman's picture of the great Canal [...] seems

to float constantly before his eyes. Writing in a day when but a few old cuts here and there connected river and river over short distances in England, Dyer must be accounted one of the pioneer thinkers who foresaw and ardently desired the construction of our network of artificial waterways.

Dyer's favourite canal scheme was a Thames-Severn link, the subject of the final passage of book III (602-32), a tour de force in the manner of Pope's triumphal ending to *Windsor Forest*. Dyer's awareness of the potential significance of canals was prophetic, for their great age was about to begin, with the opening of the Bridgewater canal from Worsley to Manchester in 1761, nearly four years after the poet's death. The 'marriage' between 'Thamis' and 'Sabrina' Dyer hoped for took place thirty years later, in 1789.

Dyer's interest in canals brings him closer to Bakewell, who devised an ingenious system of artificial waterways to carry turnips and other heavy goods around his farm at Dishley. This became a tourist attraction, and was celebrated by Arthur Young and other visitors. See *Chambers*, ed. Law (1950: 'Canals'); 'Commercial Map' notes, ff. 20b, 37-42; Parker (1953: 126-7); Pawson (1957: 64-5 and endpapers); Davies (1968: 449, 458).

[101] The surviving section of the 'Commercial Map' (f. 30, reproduced in Parker, 1956, p. 121b) shows a section of the West Midlands, roughly from Ledbury (SW) to Evesham (SE) to Birmingham (NE) to the area north of Kidderminster (NW), and appears to be generally fairly accurate and to scale. It is finely drawn, on a scale of about 5 miles to the inch, and shows towns, villages and rivers, with mountains shaded, and major manufactures or resources (such as coal or 'mineral signs') labelled. Its style is that of the late-seventeenth-century pre-triangulation maps such as those of Ogilby (1675) and Collins (1693), but the marking of commercial information seems to be Dyer's own innovation. It was a pioneering venture, despite its failure. See Taylor (1957); *Chambers*, ed. Law (1950, 'Map'); Humfrey (1980: 89-90); Williams (1956: 98-101).

[102] For Bakewell's 'in-and-in' breeding methods see especially Russell (1981: 285-7). Bakewell discusses his experiments on sheep in his letters to George Culley, which are in the Robinson Library, University of Newcastle upon Tyne, and are printed in Pawson (1957). See, for example *Bakewell-Culley* 8 Feb 1787; 2 May 1787; 30 June 1787. It is not suggested that Bakewell was exceptionally cruel to animals, only that the approach of the graziers was a fairly tough one (*DNB* finds Bakewell to have been in some ways a 'humane' stockman, though the evidence cited is rather thin).

[103] *OED* defines 'frontlet' (2) as 'forehead', citing, *inter alia*, the usage under discussion.

[104] The other references to the 'Silurian' sheep and wool are as follows:

Or, if your sheep are of Silurian breed,  
Nightly to house them dry on fern or straw,  
Silk'ning their Fleeces (I, 492-4)

And beauteous Albion, since great Edgar chas'd  
The prowling wolf, with many a lock appears  
of silky lustre; chief, Silurian, thine (II, 370-2)

Soft flakes of wool; for in soft flakes of wool,  
Like the Silurian, Atlas' dales abound. (IV, 181-2)

[105] Kerridge (1967: 67, 147, 52) records that Cotswold Sheep were cotted in the winter, and Ryelands sheep were cotted all year round. The only other breed which was cotted, by this account, was the Southdown, which 'only in the worst weather were [...] cotted on the downs at night'.

[106] Barrell's comments on the sheep types in the early frontispiece illustrations of the poem are less persuasive. He writes (1983: 95):

The first two editions of *The Fleece* were both issued with frontispieces of sheep grazing. The first edition showed a breed unrecognizable at least from the various descriptions of sheep Dyer gives in his poem; the second shows one which is recognizably the Silurian--its tail thin, its fleece curled, and the ram with Ammonian horns. In bothering to get the illustration changed, Dyer or his publishers, the Dodsleys, underlined the fact that the poem's centre was Siluria.

To say that 'Dyer or his publishers' changed the picture gives a misleading sense of authorial involvement. The second edition of the poem came out four years after Dyer's death, and as none of the textual changes he had asked for had been made, it is unlikely he would have had a say in the choice of illustration. Neither illustration shows sheep 'grazing'. Both show a 'family group'. In the first frontispiece (1757) the ram (or possibly, though less probably, a second ewe), to the left of the picture, is ruminating, while the ewe is standing, apparently 'guarding' her two lambs. In the

second frontispiece (1761) the ewe is suckling a half-grown lamb while the ram (whose head is the only part of him shown) is either sleeping or ruminating. The horns of the second ram are not 'double-circling' in the way Dyer describes, though they are of a 'circling' (as opposed to a 'goat horn') type. The fleece quality in the second illustration does indeed have a greater quality of curliness (though I do not see 'ringlets'); but I think this simply reflects that it is a better and more detailed drawing.

I find both illustrations poor material from which to draw conclusions about Dyer's sheep types. Both offer the idealising fallacy that sheep live in family groups. If there is any change between them other than in quality, it concerns roles. The ewe in the first illustration has the role of 'guard'; in the second she is suckling the lamb, while the ram 'guards' the group (though not very efficiently if he is asleep, as he seems to be). Both pictures signal the placid and easy life of the sheep. This may be a 'Silurian' concept, but nothing in either picture is specifically 'Silurian'. Barrell's reading of Dyer's language is far more convincing evidence of the centrality of 'Siluria'.

[107] Keith Thomas (1983: 285-6) writes:

Even the new kind of farm animals was distressingly unaesthetic. To breed sheep in the manner of Robert Bakewell, thought Uvedale Price, was to think only of 'their disposition to produce fat on the most profitable parts'--'a very grazier-like and material idea of beauty'. The painter's or poet's idea of a beautiful bull or pig was very different from the farmer's.

[108] Virgil, *Georgics* III, 387-9, trans. Day-Lewis (1940, 1943: 67).

[109] M. L. Ryder (1983: 45) writes:

Wild sheep, and many primitive domestic breeds, are coloured; but most modern breeds are white, at any rate in the main fleece area. Apart from not being wanted in white garments, pigment interferes with dyeing; and the desire to eliminate naturally coloured wool fibres from fleeces may have begun with the discovery of dyeing.

Interesting linguistic evidence of directly aesthetic responses to the colouring of domestic animals is marshalled by Keith Thomas (1983). The Nuer people of the Sudan, he notes (pp. 70-1), 'have six terms for the shape of their cattle's horns, ten main colour terms and twelve for particular combinations of white and grey'; while

Laplanders have 'some fifty names for the colour of their reindeer'. It has been said of the Dinka people of the Sudan that 'the imaginative satisfactions provided by their herds are scarcely less important than the material benefits' (G. E. Hutchinson, *The Itinerant Ivory Tower* (1953: 30), as cited by Thomas (1983: 77).

[110] My information on 'red-earth' colouration is anecdotal, from a breeder of Dorset Horns. Southern Herefordshire contains a large area of 'red-earth' land, as Dyer observes in his description of the Ross/Archenfield area:

And ruddy tilth which spiry Ross beholds (I, 50)

The fleece colour sheep tend to take on from this kind of soil would probably also have been familiar to the poet, and may have provided a directly observational source for his word 'tawny'.

[111] Goodwin (1979: 21), in a section entitled 'Lack of efficiency' warns that farmers who buy 'by eye' are inviting inefficiency. However he also considers that 'Sheep recording [...] in itself will not entirely replace the farmer's eye for good stock'.

[112] For further information on this story, and the other traditions discussed by Youatt, see Smith (1747). For Henry VIII see I, 77 ff; for Henry VI see I, 60 ff; for Edward IV see I, 67 ff. Smith dismisses the idea that the Cotswold was involved in the development of the Merino in a magisterial footnote (I, 69-70):

Whatever truth there may be in this Account, or some others, of Sheep being sent at any Time from *England* to *Spain*, the Notion grafted upon it, of *Spain* deriving their plenty of Wool from thence, is to the last degree fabulous. I should rather be of Opinion, that *England* had borrowed some part of its Breed from thence (as it certainly did the whole from one Place or another:) Because we find that *Spain* and *Portugal* were anciently famous for Sheep and Wool, and the former for fine Cloth, before the *English* knew what it was to be clothed.

[113] The phrases have slightly different emphases. The 'coughing pest' disaster is formulated in terms of scale as well as suddenness. It:

From their green pasture sweeps whole flocks away.

The flash-flood description, which imitates (particularly in its final lines) the storm in Thomson's *Autumn* (311-50), concentrates on pathos as well as suddenness:

Then thunder oft with pond'rous wheels rolls loud,  
And breaks the crystal urns of heav'n; adown  
Falls streaming rain. Sometimes among the steeps  
Of Cambrian glades (pity the Cambrian glades!)  
Fast tumbling brooks on brooks enormous swell,  
And sudden overwhelm their vanish'd fields:  
Down with the flood away the naked sheep,  
Bleating in vain, are borne, and straw-built huts,  
And rifted trees, and heavy enormous rocks,  
Down with the rapid torrent to the deep. (l, 591-600)

Dyer's 'flash flood' seems to have been observational. Mr Alan Morse tells me that a flood of this sort, caused by a heavy water run-off from the Black Mountains and Brecon Beacons, occurred in the Usk Valley to the South East of Brecon four or five years ago, in which 400 sheep were drowned.

[114] For uses of 'purple' in eighteenth-century and earlier literature see Arthos (1966: 280-1). Chatterton's poem 'Battle of Hastings [No. 1]' is particularly steeped in 'crimson' or 'purple' streams of blood, as in the phrase 'Myngle their stremes of pourple bloude', line 260. See Chatterton (1777, 1969: 222).

[115] Davies (1968: 357n) notes a line in Longstaffe's *Collations*, in place of line 252. Parker (1953: 165) describes the same line as being deleted in the MS, before line 252:

Where ling'ring waters rankle not the turf

[116] The word 'tepid' has here the usual meaning of 'lukewarm'. One of the *OED* citations for this word is suggestive in the present context:

1626 Bacon, *Sylva* §346 For as a great heat keepeth bodies from putrefaction, but a tepid heat inclineth them to putrefaction.

[117] For liver rot or liver fluke, and the history of knowledge about it see Youatt (1837: 445-63); Trow-Smith (1959: 40, 213); Whitelaw (1983, in Martin, 1983: 62-70). Trow-Smith writes of the early eighteenth century period (p. 40):

Liver fluke, which after a wet season often halved sheep numbers on the heavy clays and other undrained and sodden soils, had its inappropriate herbal remedy.

Whitelaw (1983: 65-6) makes it clear the disease was still capable of wreaking damage in the 1980s, despite sophisticated flukicidal drugs.

[118] For modern advice on avoiding sudden change of diet see *Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food* (1956, 1967: 50, 53).

[119] Stavesacre is a pesticide extracted from the seeds of Larkspur (*Delphinium staphisagria*). For foot-rot see Boundy (1983) in Martin (1983: 98-103); Goodwin (1971, 1979: 173-5). For scab ('psoroptic mange') see Tarry (1983) in Martin (1983: 181-5); Goodwin (1971, 1979: 185-6). For foot bathing and treatment see *Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food* (1956, 1967: 63); Goodwin (1971, 1979: 77-8, 169, 174); Boundy (1983) in Martin (1983: 100-101). For dipping see *Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food* (1956, 1967: 62); Goodwin (1971, 1979: 186); Tarry (1983) in Martin (1983: 183-4). My information on the various drugs and chemicals mentioned was culled from the above sources; and from the *British National Formulary* (No. 7, 1984); *OED* (esp. 'Alum' 1., 'Stavesacre', 'Verdigris' 1., 'Vitriol' 1.); and *Chambers*, ed. Law (1950).

[120] Nicholson and Rousseau (1970) have shown that Berkeley's *Siris: A Chain of Philosophical Reflexions and Inquiries concerning the Virtues of Tar Water* (1744) was often treated in its time as a work of medicine, rather than the work of philosophy, specifically neo-platonic idealism, that Berkeley had intended. Their otherwise thorough account of the literary response to *Siris* omits Dyer's hymn-like moment, in which the poet characteristically reads Berkeley's book as a two-fold benefit: a scientific advance, and an act of benevolence to the poor.

That the value of tar was known earlier is shown in the fact that Tusser (1580, 1984: 33) included a 'tarpot' and a 'tar kettle' in his 'digression to husbandlie furniture' (p. 33). On the other hand Tusser does not give the important advice as to its use in infection control. He writes, for example (1580, 1984: 104, 282n):

If sheepe or thy lambe fall a wrigling with taile,  
go by and by search it, whiles helpe may prevaile:

That barberlie handled I dare thee assure,  
cast dust in his arse, thou hast finisht thy cure.

Tusser's eighteenth century editor Hillman (1710) correctly reads the problem as maggot infection, and recommends dagging (or fleece-trimming), and the application of tar and tobacco-water, a more effective response than Tusser's casual remedy.

Many modern drugs are tar based. The index for Coal tar in the *British National Formulary* (no. 7, 1984: 450-1) is:

Coal tar, 348, 349, 356  
bandage, zinc paste and, 350  
baths, 349  
ointment,  
    and salicylic acid, 349, 429  
    calamine and, 349  
paint, 349  
paste, 349  
    zinc and, 349  
solution, 349, 350

This is a fairly crude indicator, and does not include substances containing coal tar but listed under proprietary or generic names, such as Alphosyl, etc.

[121] James Mackenzie, MD (1680?-1761) was educated at Edinburgh and Leyden and practised in Worcester for many years, retiring to Kidderminster in 1751. He was closely involved in the establishment of Worcester Royal Infirmary, the last of the group of new provincial hospitals founded in the first half of the eighteenth century. His most important book was *The History of Health and the Art of Preserving it* (1758), a title which imitates that of John Armstrong's georgic poem *The Art of Preserving Health* (1744). Mackenzie, whose friends included Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (another medical pioneer, among her other accomplishments), met Dyer when the latter lived briefly in Worcester in 1736, and became his lifelong friend and mentor, as well as his doctor.

Smith (1932) gives the following information, based on the *Album of Students* at Leyden University:

Mackenzie, Jacobus. Scotus, March 15, 1700, aet. 28. Theology.

M.D. King's Coll., Aberdeen, Dec 12, 1719. Hon. F.R.C.P. Edin., 1755. M.A. Edin. Univ., 1692. In Aberdeen Records he is described as "Invernessensis, tutor to Lord Tarbat, and proficient in Physick." Physician to Worcester Infirmary, 1745-51. He died 1761. Vide D.N.B.

This suggests a birth date of 1671/2, where the *DNB* has '1680?'. See *DNB*; Smith (1932); Wallis (1985, 1988), all under 'Mackenzie'; Davies (1968: 163, 201, 434).

[122] *OED* defines 'Crowflower' as a 'popular name for the buttercup', though single usages for the Ragged Robin and Bluebell are also cited, as (without citations) are local usages for Marsh-marigold (*Caltha palustris*) and Wood cranesbill (*Geranium sylvaticum*). The likeliest candidate seems to be the buttercup, the commonest meadow flower of these, and as the *OED* suggests, the most usual meaning for the word. The question of animals eating the buttercup was a source of curiosity and the focus of various myths. The various types of buttercup, and many other *Ranunculi*, contain an 'unpleasant chemical which is poisonous to cattle' (Press et al, 1981, 1988: 21-2). See also *OED*, 'buttercup' 2, 'butterflower' 1, 'crowflower', 'crowfoot' 1-2; Clapham et al (1959, 1968: 33-4).

[123] Information on the 'ivy' remedy was given to me by a shepherd. For information on the digestive system of sheep see Ryder (1983: 8-10). The concern in the early modern period about the dangers of poisoning, especially from the more poisonous members of the *Ranunculus* family, is reflected by a long note on corn-crowfoot poisoning in Youatt (1837: 432).

[124] See for example Bradley (1726); Ellis (1744). Shepherding advice still tends to include a 'calendar' of the annual tasks, beginning in autumn: see for example Goodwin (1971, 1979: 75-102, 'The Shepherd's Calendar'). The verse example which would be most strongly influential would obviously be *The Seasons*.

[125] Goodwin (1971, 1979: 75) describes 'making up the flock', that is, checking the condition of each animal, and culling as necessary, as the first task of the shepherd's year, which begins in 'late summer or early autumn'.

[126] Dyer recommends the rubbing of 'unctuous liquids, or the lees of oil' on the sheep's skin here (365-68), as a protection against fly-strike, and cold and damp or frosty weather. He ascribed the practice to the 'Brigantes', the shepherds of Yorkshire and the north of England, but Ryder (1983: 165-7) finds in Varro, Columella and Cato

evidence that Roman shepherds of the classical period used olive oil, and other substances including wine, wine lees, wax, lard, and lupin water, to protect the sheep from disease and bad weather, especially after shearing. One can find many later examples of such practices.

For the Romano-British term 'Brigantes' see Camden (1695: contents page); Grant (1974: 72).

[127] Listed in the *Eighteenth Century Short Title Catalogue*, item t012815. The author was John Claridge, and it is based on an earlier work of 1670, originally entitled *The Shepherd's Legacy*.

[128] Davies (1968: 436) has noted the similarity of the phrase 'chill penurious' to Gray's 'Chill Penury' (*Elegy*, line 51). Gray uses the phrase 'Their lot forbade' at line 65. The contexts are similar; both refer to the limits deprivation has put on the villagers' lives.

No other echo of the *Elegy* has been noted in *The Fleece* by Dyer's editors. However, I think Dyer's description of his friend Joseph Nutt as a man whom 'rude Obscurity severely clasps' (I, 447) conflates a series of phrases in the *Elegy*, 'rude forefathers' (16) 'destiny obscure' (30), and 'repressed' / 'froze' (51, 52, cf. 'severely clasps'). Lonsdale gives earlier analogues for all these ideas in Gray's poem, but no specific verbal analogue for the two words both poets use, ('rude', and 'obscure' or 'obscurity'). The purpose of this echo would be to ascribe to Nutt an unassuming nobility, which is an element of Gray's characterisation of the villager's demeanour.

However, there is a problem with chronology. Dyer took a completed draft of Book I to London in Summer 1750, and the *Elegy* was not published until 15 February 1751. There are two possible explanations. Either Dyer saw the *Elegy* in manuscript just before he took Book I to London (it was circulated by Walpole, to whom Gray sent the MS on 12 June 1750); or more probably both echoes are revisions made between 1750 and 1757. None of Dyer's editors have noted any variants to these phrases at any stage, and the manuscripts of the poem are lost, so we cannot easily investigate the matter further. See Gray, ed. Lonsdale (1969: 110-11, 142).

[129] It is the shepherd's gesture of dividing up the hay, as well as the more general situation of food being produced where there is none, that suggests the parallel with the feeding of the five thousand. See *Matthew* 14, 15-21; *Mark* 8, 1-9; *Luke* 9, 12-17.

For Christ's raising of Lazarus see *John* 11, 1-46; for his raising the daughter of Jairus see *Matthew* 9, 18-26; *Mark* 5, 35-43; *Luke* 8, 49-56; for his raising the widow's son see *Luke* 7, 12-15.

For the fable of the lost sheep see *Luke* 15, 4-6.

- [130] Dyer's characterisation of his friend (I, 444-50) imitates the invocation of Lucretius's *De Rerum Natura*. This takes the form of what a modern translator calls a 'Prayer to the creative force of Nature (personified as Venus) to inspire the poet, to bless his patron Memmius and to bring peace to the world'. See Lucretius, trans. Latham (1951: 27-8, 21).

Joseph Nutt (1700-1775) was an apothecary to the poor, and the designer of the 'flooding' system for ironing out bumps in the highway. Dyer's praise of his friend also suggests he was a popular outdoor orator. Hinckley, where Nutt lived, is in the 'tripontian' area. See *DNB*, 'Joseph Nutt (1700-1775)'.

- [131] *Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Food* (1967: no. 166, 53).

- [132] Frederick Raphael also effectively uses the phrase 'busy mouths' to describe animals eating, from the point of view of a young boy, in a recent short story:

The next day he played as usual in Central Park. Red squirrels abounded in urgent stillness when he threw peanuts. They handed them to themselves with busy mouths.

Frederick Raphael, 'Transatlantic Blues', *The Listener* 124, no. 3172 (5 July 1990: 20).

- [133] Kerridge (1968: I, 141-6) writes:

In the middle of the seventeenth century there suddenly took place in High Suffolk an agricultural revolution by the introduction of turnip husbandry, that is, the field cultivation of turnips, hitherto only grown in market-garden fashion and for some years to come not to be established as a field crop in any other farming county.

Defoe had noted of 'High-Suffolk' (I, 58):

This part of *England* is also remarkable for being the first where the feeding and fattening of Cattle, both Sheep as well as black Cattle with Turnips, was first Practis'd in *England*, which is made a very great part of the Improvement of their Lands to this Day; and from whence the Practice is spread over most of the East and South Parts of *England*, to the great Enriching of the Farmers, and encrease of fat Cattle.

Developments such as Jethro Tull's *Horse-Hoeing Husbandry* (1733), and the kind of experiments in crop rotation and with turnips and clover made fashionable by Lord ('Turnip') Townshend after 1730, took some time to filter through to farming practice on any large scale, though their significance for agricultural development was known by the 1750s, when Dyer wrote *The Fleece*. See: Defoe, I, 58; Kerridge (1968) and John (1968), both in Minchinton (1968: I, 141-6 and 223-53).

[134] Dyer glosses 'the sounding caves / Of high Brigantium' as 'The forges of Sheffield in Yorkshire where the shepherds' shears and all edge-tools are made', and he has earlier glossed the term 'Brigantes' (I, 368) as 'The inhabitants of Yorkshire'. Dyer seems to have had a special interest in Yorkshire. In his 'Commercial Map' notes (f. 46) he remarks:

how Leeds, Huthersfield, Halifax <Rotherham> &c, lie in a homely Northern Country, among Steep Hills and Dales, unfit for Sports and Races, unfrequented undisturbed by the great and Polite; yet among navigable Rivers, and Veins of Coal and Pasturage and flocks of Sheep affording <suitable Wool to the most common and useful of their manufactures> no small quantity of that kind of Wool w[hi]ch is Suitable to the most common and useful of their Manufactures. how all Manufactures avoid the South of our Countrey;

In Book III, 259-335, he takes a trip down the Calder Valley, stopping at Halifax to admire its workhouse-factory, and following Defoe (II, 611-13) in his description of the Leeds cloth market (III, 335-347).

What Dyer's particular connection with Yorkshire may have been is not known; but it seems highly likely he visited the county at least once, and a modern historian of the Yorkshire woollen industry (Heaton, 1920: 355) considers that Dyer 'certainly knew Yorkshire very well'.

[135] Of the plants that Dyer mentions, the elder (*Sambucus nigra*), a major element in poetic tree-lore as well as folklore, folk medicine, and folk recipes, flowers in large white clusters in May-June. The daisy (*Bellis perennis*), Chaucer's favourite flower according to the prologue to *The Legend of Good Women* (lines 40-63), flowers between March and October. Dyer's 'yellow crow-foot', like his 'crow-flow'r' (l, 309), is a buttercup, in this instance the creeping buttercup (*Ranunculus repens*), which flowers from May to September. Thus the poet's flower lore points to May-June for washing and shearing the sheep. The humble daisies 'yield' to the buttercup in the sense of being superseded as the primary colour of the field. As has been written of the latter's close relative the meadow buttercup 'There is hardly a meadow that does not become a blaze of buttercup yellow between May and July'. See Stokoe (1937, 1960: 83-5); Graves (1948, 1961: passim); Clapham et al (1959, 1968: 369, 398, 34); Chaucer, ed. Robinson (1933, 1974: 483); Boxer and Back (1980: 39); Press et al (1981, 1988: 330, 21-2).

[136] Barrell (1983: 96-9), and Feingold (1978: 101-3), have made the best analyses of this final scene. Unlike earlier commentators, who are usually happy simply to point to the lyrical beauty of the passage, both read it as central in Dyer's attempt to reconcile the pastoral with the labouring world; and my reading owes much to their important comments. For other literary shearing festivals see Part I, note 89.

[137] A possible explanation for Dyer's combination of instruments (pipe, harp, tabor, and later singing) is that Drayton, in Song VI, tells of how the 'Bards with furie rapt, the *British* youth among' once sang the glories of Plinlimmon 'Unto the charming Harpe' (lines 105-6). Drayton's gloss on this is as follows:

Of the *Bards*, their Singing, Heraldship, and more of that nature, see to the fourth Song. *Ireland* (saith one) uses the *Harpe and Pipe*, which he calls *tympanum*: *Scotland* the *Harpe, Tympanum, and Chorus*; *Wales* the *Harp, Pipe, and Chorus*.

See Drayton, ed. Hebel (1933: IV, 114, 121).

[138] Damon's speech ends with an echo of Philips's notorious line 'Ah silly I! more silly than my Sheep', which Pope had ironically challenged 'the most common Reader' to repeat 'without feeling some Motions of Compassion' (*Guardian* 40, 27 Apr 1713). The parallel passages are:

Ah, silly I! more silly than my Sheep,  
Which on thy flow'ry banks I once did keep.  
(Ambrose Philips, 'The Second Pastoral', 61-2)

And piping, careless, silly shepherds we,  
We silly shepherds, all intend to feed  
Our snowy locks, and wind the silky Fleece. (I, 667-9)

The previous line in Philips's pastoral mentions 'Sabrina', who is a major presence in this part of Dyer's poem. Parker (1953: 147) shows that Dyer had read Philips's poems, and copied extracts from them into his notebooks. See Philips, ed. Segar (1937: 13); *The Guardian*, ed. Stephens (1982: 164); Parker (1953: 147).

[139] For the Miltonic echoes in this section see Davies (1968: 440-1).

[140] The other possibilities for 'penny-grass' are Navelwort or Wall pennywort (*Cotyledon umbilicus*) and Yellow-rattle (*Rhinanthus*). See *OED* 'penny-grass'. For details of the tradition associating Marsh pennywort with liver rot, see Press et al (1981, 1988: 170).

[141] A great deal more could be said about Dyer's choice of herbs: each has a long and full history. For burnet, mint, thyme and trefoil see *OED* 'burnet' sb. 2. 1; Ranson (1949: 184, 171-2, 191-2); Clapham et al (1959, 1968: 183-4, 342-3, 343-4, 157-60); Loewenfeld (1964: 187-8, 142-56, 143-42, 205-9); Hall (1972, 1976: 69-71, 145-9, 191-3).

[142] The final stage of Dyer's personal topographic journey, to complete the picture, was 'the levels green of Lincoln' (II, 385) where, as he wrote rather forlornly on 20 Dec 1751:

At length 'mong reeds and mud my bark sticks fast;  
So Fate thinks proper, who can now sustain  
My tribe with delicacies, frogs and eels,  
'Mong reeds and mud; begirt with dead brown lakes,  
Whose, perhaps pleasant, shores lie far unseen:  
Nor will their habitants the decent face  
Of civil man or woman deign approach:  
Ev'n Rumour comes not here!

(printed in Williams, 1956: 126; Humfrey, 1981: 93-4). As Humfrey remarks, the 'new diet of frogs and eels' had one advantage, in that it 'certainly speeded the composition of *The Fleece*'. Dyer held the living of Belchsford from 1751 to 1755; the living of Coningsby from 1751, and the living of Kirkby-on-Bane from 1755, holding both until his death the following year. All three are within a few miles of each other in the fenlands of east Lincolnshire. (See Williams, 125-7; Humfrey, 92-5).

- [143] Camden, trans. Gibson (1695: unnumbered page, 'Mr Camden's Preface'); Drayton, v, 'To the Generall *Reader*'.
- [144] George Farquhar, *The Recruiting Officer*, ed. John Ross (1977: 3 and ff). See also GM 55 (1784: 96-7). The Roman fort of Uriconium was a few miles away from the foot of the Wrekin. For an imaginative treatment of the two locations see Housman (1939, 1967: XXXI, p. 36).
- [145] Dyer's phrase 'irriguous vales' echoes Thomson, *Autumn*, 751 'th'irriguous Vale'. The fact that this is drawn from Thomson's speculative account of the water cycle is interesting in the light of the mountain and river-lore in this passage of *The Fleece*.
- [146] There are a number of versions of the Sabrina story. See Geoffrey of Monmouth, *History of the Kings of Britain* (trans. Thorpe, 1966: 76-8); Spenser, *The Fairie Queene* (1596, 1912: II, x, 13-19); John Fletcher, *The Faithful Shepherdess* (1610, see Beaumont and Fletcher, ed. Bowers et al, 1976: III, 483 ff.); Drayton, Songs V and VI; Milton *A Maske [Comus]* (1637: lines 824-921); Thomas Chatterton, 'Englysh Metamorphosis' (1777: 196-202); Brewer (1898 and 1894).
- [147] Drayton, Song VI, line 105 ff, draws attention to the Bardic and Cambrian significance of Plinlimmon; it is mentioned by John Philips in *Cyder* (1708: I, 106-7); and is part of Gray's sublime machinery in his dramatic Cambrian ode *The Bard* (1757: line 34).
- [148] The only modern English georgic I know for which claims could be made is Vita Sackville-West's attractive Virgilian imitation *The Land* (1926), which won several literary prizes. Her later attempt at georgic, *The Garden* (1946), also has some fine passages. Heathcote Williams's interesting series of animal poems (*Whale Nation*, 1988; *Falling for a Dolphin*, 1988; *Sacred Elephant*, 1989) might be seen to offer the intriguing prospect of a new 'green' didactic poetry.

## TEXTUAL NOTE

The main editions used are:

*The Thresher's Labour* by Stephen Duck, *The Woman's Labour* by Mary Collier, Two Eighteenth Century Poems, ed. E. P. Thompson and Marian Sugden (The Merlin Press, 1989)

John Dyer, *Poems*, ed. Edward Thomas (1903), reprinted in Facsimile (Lampeter: Llanerch Enterprises, 1989)

James Thomson, *The Seasons*, ed. James Sambrook (1981)

### **1. Mary Collier, *The Woman's Labour* (1739)**

My text is that of the first edition (1739), as edited by E. P. Thompson and Marian Sugden (1989). I have amended one error, 'find linen' for 'fine linen' (p. 20). Substantive changes in the second edition (1762), where they affect passages quoted, are recorded in endnotes.

### **2. Stephen Duck, *The Thresher's Labour* (1730)**

The first publication of '*The Thresher's Labour*' (1730) was pirated, and the authorised edition was not published until 1736. Normal practice would be to follow the authorised text. However I have chosen not to do so, following E. P. Thompson and Marian Sugden, who print the 1730 text. Their rationale is that this text is more 'authentic', as the textual changes involved the classical 'correction' of Duck's descriptions, carried out under the influence of his courtly patrons. I accept this argument, and therefore use the 1730 text, as edited by Thompson and Sugden (1989). Substantive variants in the 1736 edition, where they affect passages I quote, are recorded in endnotes. In two sections (Part I, x and xi) I discuss material added in 1736. See Thompson and Sugden's introduction (i-xiii) for evidence of the manipulation of Duck, and their editorial note (27-30) for their textual rationale. See also McGonigle (1982).

### **3. John Dyer, *The Fleece* (1757)**

No edition of *The Fleece* conforms to current standards of textual scholarship, and no edition of Dyer's prose or letters has ever been published. The result has been textual chaos. For example, among major modern essays and anthologies Goldstein (1977) uses Fausset's edition (1930); Feingold (1978) uses Edward Thomas's edition (1903); Barrell (1983) uses Dyer's Poems of 1761; and Lonsdale (1984) extracts from Wilmott's edition (1855). The major editions are:

- 1757 *The Fleece: a Poem in Four Books* (The only edition published in Dyer's lifetime, it contains unauthorised alterations made by Robert Dodsley. Dyer expressed dissatisfaction with it, and annotated some of the poem in a printed copy, now lost.)
- 1761 *Poems* (Makes some changes, including a few new errors, but does not make the alterations Dyer requested.)
- 1855 *Poems of Mark Akenside and John Dyer*, ed. R. A. Wilmott (Well-edited by Victorian standards; draws on manuscript sources, and includes most poetry and some prose; silently corrects spelling and modernises accidentals; fairly well annotated.)
- 1903 *Poems of John Dyer*, ed. Edward Thomas (Minimally edited; omits Dyer's notes and 'Arguments'; prints only five poems; silently modernises accidentals; introduces a few typographic errors.)
- 1930 *Minor Poets of the Eighteenth Century*, ed. H. L'A. Fausset (Silently modernises accidentals; fails to discriminate between the notes of Dyer and later editors; some typographic errors.)
- 1968 'An Edition of the Poetical Works of John Dyer', by J. G. E. Davies, unpublished M.A. thesis, Aberystwyth (A conscientious attempt to incorporate all appropriate emendations, though the result is a hybrid text; fairly well annotated, and the textual notes are extremely useful; one or two errors.)
- 1970 'The Poems of John Dyer: a Critical Edition', by Robert Warren Kent, Jr., unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Minnesota (Claims to reproduce 1757, but silently modernises and otherwise alters accidentals throughout; apparently unaware of Davies (1968); fairly well annotated.)

A costly facsimile of 1761, and a paperback facsimile of 1903 are the only texts currently in print.

Until an adequate critical edition of the works of Dyer is produced, *The Fleece* remains textually unstable, and like others I have had to choose a text subjectively. I have used the new facsimile of 1903 (Lampeter: Llanerch, 1989), despite its limitations, on the basis of its availability to readers. Where they affect passages I quote, I have recorded in endnotes substantive variants, from the following sources: Wilmott (1855); Parker (1953); Davies

(1968); Dyer's letter to Dodsley of 12 May 1757 (as published in GM 1835: 47); and the 'Collations' of the poem made by Dyer's descendant W. H. D. Longstaffe ('Longstaffe's Collations'), as cited by later editors. I have also silently corrected the following typographic errors:

I, 57:	from 'seas' (1903, 1989)	to 'sees' (as 1855, 1968)
I, 143:	from 'bate' (1903, 1989)	to 'bait' (as 1855, 1968)
I, 209:	from 'curl' (1903, 1989)	to 'curls' (as 1855, 1968)
I, 346:	from 'six' (1903, 1989)	to 'sixth' (as 1855, 1968)
I, 348:	from 'they 'ave' (1903, 1989)	to 'they've' (as 1855, 1968)
I, 399:	from 'flight' (1903, 1989)	to 'fright' (as 1855, 1968)
II, 111:	from 'wood' (1903, 1989)	to 'wool' (as 1855, 1968)

#### **4. James Thomson, *The Seasons* (1730)**

I have used the standard edition of James Sambrook (1981), which is based on the 1746 edition. However, the poem went through a number of transformations, and there has been some tendency to read the various versions of the individual parts of *The Seasons* as separate texts, (see for example Lonsdale, 1984: no. 133). Since I am comparing it with two other poems of the 1730s, any reference to material not in the first edition of the complete poem (1730) is noted as such. Sambrook (1981: xxxiv ff.) gives a thorough account of the poem's development and text.

For other texts used, see Bibliography, below.

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