

Like a Virgil: Georgic Ontologies of Agrarian Work in Canadian Literature

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## Abstract

In this dissertation, I argue that two dominant perspectives on farming in Canada—the technoscientific capitalist perspective on modern industrial farming and the popular vision of hard-won survival on the family farm—both draw on narrative and aesthetic strategies that have deep roots in distinct, but related variations of the georgic tradition, which arrived in Canada in the eighteenth century and continues to shape literary representations and material practices today. Critics of Canadian literature have tended to subsume the georgic under the category of pastoral, but I argue that the georgic is a separate and more useful category for understanding the complex myths and realities of agricultural production in Canada precisely because it is a literary genre that focuses on the labour of farming and because it constitutes a complex and multi-generic discourse which both promotes and enables critique of dominant agricultural practices. I argue that, despite its sublimation beneath the pastoral, the georgic mode has also been an important cultural nexus in Canadian literature and culture, and that it constitutes a set of conventions that have become so commonplace in writing that deals with agricultural labour and its related issues in Canada that they have come to seem both inevitable and natural within the Canadian cultural tradition, even if they have not been explicitly named as georgic.

By analyzing a variety of texts such as Oliver Goldsmith's *The Rising Village*, Isabella Valancy Crawford's *Malcolm's Katie*, Susanna Moodie's *Roughing It in the Bush*, Frederick Philip Grove's *Settlers of the Marsh*, Martha Ostenso's *Wild Geese*, Al Purdy's *In Search of Owen Roblin*, Robert Kroetsch's "The Ledger," Christian Bok's *Xenotext*, Rita Wong's *Forage*, and Phil Hall's *Amanuensis*, I recontextualize Canadian writing that deals with agrarian work within two distinct but related georgic traditions. As Raymond Williams and others have shown, the georgic's inclusion of both pastoralizing myths and material realities makes it useful for

exploring ecological questions. The georgic is often understood in terms of what Karen O'Brien has called the imperial georgic mode, which involves a technocratic, imperialist, capitalist approach to agriculture, and which helped theorize and justify imperial expansion and the technological domination of nature. But as ecocritics like David Fairer, Margaret Ronda, and Kevin Goodman have argued, the georgic's concern with the contingency and precariousness of human relationships with nonhuman systems also made it a productive site for imagining alternatives to imperial ways of organizing social and ecological relations. Ronda calls this more ecologically-focused and adaptable georgic the disenchanting georgic, but I call it the precarious georgic because of the way it enables engagement with what Anna Tsing calls precarity.

Precarity, as Tsing explains, describes life without the promise of mastery or stability, which is a condition that leaves us in a state of being radically dependent on other beings for survival. "The challenge for thinking with precarity," she writes, "is to understand the ways projects for making scalability have transformed landscape and society, while seeing also where scalability fails—and where nonscalable ecological and economic relations erupt" (42). By tracing the interplay between imperial and precarious georgic modes in Canadian texts that have mistakenly been read as pastoral—from Moodie's settler georgic to the queer gothic georgic of Ostenso's *Wild Geese* to the provisional and object-oriented georgics of Robert Kroetsch and Phil Hall—I argue that the precarious georgic strain has always engaged in this process of thinking with precarity, and that it holds the potential for providing space to re-imagine our ecological relations.

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This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my grandfather, Don Parsons, and to my grandmother, Lenore Parsons.

## Introduction

### The Georgic, Ontology, and Imperialism

On August 10, 2018, a jury in San Francisco ordered agricultural conglomerate Monsanto to pay \$289 million dollars in damages to Dewayne Johnson after ruling that Monsanto's *Roundup* industrial herbicide had caused his non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. Three days later, Canadian farmer Tobyn Dyck published an opinion piece in *Maclean's Magazine* defending the modern industrial farm's use of Monsanto's Roundup glyphosate-based herbicide and Roundup-Ready genetically modified seed.<sup>1</sup> Although the case against Monsanto did not directly involve agricultural labour—Johnson himself was a school groundskeeper, not a farmer—Dyck was responding to the widespread and sustained consumer criticism of farmers for their use of Monsanto's Roundup (introduced in 1970) and Roundup-Ready genetically modified seed (introduced in 1996), despite scientifically verified concerns over their safety for both humans and the environment. For Dyck, technoscientific conglomerates like Monsanto make the pursuit of agriculture financially viable because they eliminate the problem of weed competition and the over-spraying of other herbicides in industrial agriculture. This most recent Monsanto case highlights the many competing interests at play in the current field of highly technologized and corporatized industrial agriculture. The combination of genetically modified Roundup-Ready seeds and glyphosate<sup>2</sup> use has increased the yield capacities for industrial farmers, many of whom claim, along with Monsanto, that it has provided a more environmentally friendly alternative to other harmful chemical herbicides, but has also been at the centre of a range of

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<sup>1</sup> Genetic modification is a process in which individual genes of one organism are transferred to the DNA of another organism to alter the organism at genetic level, in a way that would not occur through natural selective processes (ie. through natural selection of breeding pairs, or through the grafting of plants or seed selection).

<sup>2</sup> Glyphosate is the main ingredient in Roundup.

controversies, from consumer concerns about the health effects of genetically-altered produce and chemical weed killers, to legal battles between farmers and Monsanto over seed patents.<sup>3</sup> Because they have confused glyphosate (a herbicide) with neonicotinoid insecticides, consumers have also (erroneously) brought glyphosate under fire for its perceived role in colony collapse disorder—the sudden drop in bee populations that has threatened several species of bees with extinction. These controversies have been fraught with misinformation and disinformation in the increasingly technologically complex agricultural industry. Dyck, then, was responding to the already emotionally loaded environmentalist and consumer debates surrounding food production and expressing frustration with the gap between the realities of twenty-first-century farm labour for farmers and what he sees as the well-meaning, but often naïve, understanding of agriculture expressed by city-dwelling consumers and environmentalists. These consumers, Dyck implies, imagine farm labour in the twenty-first century as taking place in a landscape still—and ideally—populated by small farms producing for subsistence and for local markets. “Our tractors steer themselves,” he writes of his own farm, “the movement of commodities across the globe is now quick and traceable. ‘Survival’ is more a romantic notion or a good hashtag than it is a state of being around here” (Dyck). By survival, Dyck means that farmers and their families once struggled to raise crops and livestock for subsistence in an unforgiving Canadian landscape.

Dyck is responding to the popular understanding of farming that, paradoxically, both conceives of agriculture as grounded in a close relationship between farmers and nature that is seemingly independent of global market pressure and technocracy, and that, at the same time,

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<sup>3</sup> Readers may also be familiar with Monsanto’s case against Saskatchewan farmer Percy Schmeiser. The case—which Monsanto won—was to rule whether Schmeiser’s growing of genetically modified canola constituted a use violation of Monsanto’s patented genetically modified plants when Roundup-Ready canola seed was discovered growing illegally in his field. The case began with Schmeiser’s defense that the genetically modified canola had originally come from seed that had been blown into his field by the wind. Schmeiser had saved and bred the Roundup-Ready seed to use the next year. *Monsanto v. Schmeiser* (2004) is considered a landmark case in the patenting of life forms.

relies on a nostalgic, anti-technological idea of farming to emphasize the precarious nature of farm labour and the farmer's vulnerability to unpredictable natural processes. But Dyck bases his answer to these ideas about farming on an equally idealized technoscientific mastery of natural processes. Dyck's understanding of the role of the farmer is based on two assumptions: that successful farming requires total mastery over nature through technological progress, and that the farmer has an obligation to meet the demands of the global market. He implies that technology has achieved such mastery over natural processes that it has all but eliminated the need for manual farm labour. But while the nature of the farm has not changed, the techniques and scale of the farm have. The need to adapt to increasingly unpredictable weather patterns, protect crops from competing species, ensure the healthy births of livestock, protect against and treat diseases in crops and livestock, and other specialized agricultural tasks remain central to farming, precisely because the survival of the farm relies on unpredictable life processes that continue to evade total human control. Dyck declares that the main objective of the farm is to meet market demand, and admonishes city-dwelling environmental activists who object to genetically modified crops and industrial-scale monoculture: "I grow genetically-modified crops not because I'm a profit-hungry villain with no concern for human health nor concern for the health of the planet—I grow them because the market has an appetite for soybeans" (Dyck). Such a justification implies that the realities of modern industrial agriculture need only answer to the demands of the market economy, having already mastered ecological systems enough to ignore the potential risks of GMO crops and the damaging effects of monoculture on the biological diversity of rural areas. This technologized idea of farming involves an aesthetics of a finely, expertly controlled nature, a "cerebral" and "precise" agriculture (Dyck). The fact that farmers must both embrace and launch a defense against the public to justify their contentious

uses of genetic modification, monocultures, and industrialized farming practices shows how inextricable farming is from technoscientific capitalism, even as agriculture continues to be misunderstood by the broader public as an anti-technological industry.

In this dissertation, I argue that both Dyck's technoscientific capitalist perspective on modern industrial farming and the popular vision of hard-won survival on the family farm draw on narrative and aesthetic strategies that have deep roots in distinct, but related variations of the georgic tradition, which arrived in Canada in the eighteenth century and continue to shape literary representations and material practices today. Critics of Canadian literature have tended to focus on the pastoral and on wilderness, but I argue that the georgic is a more useful category for understanding the complex myths and realities of agricultural production in Canada precisely because it is a literary genre about farming and taming the land, and because it constitutes a complex and multi-generic discourse which both promotes and enables critique of dominant agricultural practices. I argue that the georgic mode has also been an important cultural nexus in Canadian literature and culture, and that it constitutes a set of narrative conventions that have become so commonplace in writing that deals with agricultural labour and its related issues in Canada that they have come to seem both inevitable and natural within the Canadian cultural tradition, even if they have not been explicitly named as georgic. As Raymond Williams, John Chalker, David Fairer, Frans De Bruyn, Margaret Ronda, and others have shown, the georgic's inclusion of both pastoralizing myths and material realities makes it useful for exploring ecological questions. On one hand, the imperial georgic helped theorize and justify imperial expansion and the technological domination of nature. On the other, the georgic's concern with the contingency and precariousness of human relationships with nonhuman systems also made it a productive site for imagining alternatives to imperial ways of organizing social and ecological

relations. The georgic is often understood in terms of what Karen O'Brien has called the imperial georgic mode, which involves a technocratic, imperialist, capitalist, anthropocentric, teleological and scalable approach to agriculture. But as ecocritics like David Fairer, Margaret Ronda, and Kevis Goodman have argued, the georgic also involves a more complicated mode that is more attuned to ecological relations. Margaret Ronda has called this more ecologically-focused and adaptable georgic the Disenchanted georgic. However, I am calling it the precarious georgic because of the way it performs thinking through the state of relations Anna Tsing has called precarity. Precarity, Tsing has explained, describes life without the promise of stability. The term has been used by Judith Butler to address the ways structures of power have historically and continue to marginalize communities of people along the lines of class, race, gender, and sexuality, making these communities more likely to be affected by poverty, illness, and state violence. Adam Phillips has argued in *Equals* that precarity would be the defining condition of a truly democratic state, given that if all beings were equal, the defining experience of equality is disorientation (Berlant 193). In *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, Anna Tsing argues that precarity is inevitable in any socioecological assemblage because they always involve ecological and social entanglements that make us vulnerable to transformation by others. Capitalist and imperialist systems, however, attempt to eradicate precarity by removing organisms from their natural entanglements to make them produce in more predictable, controllable ways. "The challenge for thinking with precarity," she writes, "is to understand the ways projects for making scalability have transformed landscape and society, while seeing also where scalability fails—and where non-scalable ecological and economic relations erupt" (42). Tsing locates these precarious relations not to construe precarity as a positive or even subversive quality that disrupts capitalist expansion. If, as she argues, precarity is the condition of being radically dependent on

others for survival, precarity is the defining condition of existence itself, and its acknowledgement presents a politics in that it forces us to pay attention to sites that allow for more-than-human livability to survive among the ruins of capitalism. I will argue that the precarious georgic has always engaged with this act of thinking with and through precarity.

Cultural understandings of agrarian work constitute a crucial area of investigation for ecocritics, given the increasing urgency of public debates about the ethics of food production and food sovereignty, environmental degradation caused by the increasing intensification of agriculture, the commodification and patenting of life processes like genetic modification under globalised agrarian capitalism, technocratic approaches to industrialized agricultural labour, the exploitation of seasonal migrant workers, the effects of climate change, and the impact of colonization on indigenous communities. The georgic mode, as a literary modality that is directly about the technological expertise necessary to engage with living systems and the challenge of rehabilitating damaged or unproductive landscapes, has historically acted as a cultural nexus for exploring economic and ecopolitical concerns, both in ancient Rome and in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe. The georgic mode can be traced back to two classical texts: Hesiod's ancient Greek didactic agricultural poem *Works and Days* (700 BCE) and the second text of ancient Roman poet Virgil's trilogy of civilization, the *Georgics* (29 BCE). While *Works and Days* focuses on the mythology of the end of the Golden Age and the reasons for humanity's subjugation to toil and pain, Virgil's *Georgics* draws from Hesiod's didactic methods but also expands the scope of Hesiod's instruction through the technical, political, mythical, and philosophical aspects of farming in ancient Rome. In the *Rota di Virgil*, the *Georgics* appear between the pastoral *Eclogues* (44-38BCE) and the epic *Aeneid* (29-19 BCE); the three parts together form Virgil's vast epic movement through the rise and fall of civilization from leisure

under the threat of eviction, to toil under the threat of war, and finally to war itself. In the *Eclogues*, Virgil inaugurates the pastoral tradition by exploring the tension between the peaceful labour and songs of shepherds grazing their flocks on Roman hillsides and the looming threat of eviction from their lands caused by the resettlement of Roman soldiers after the civil war. In contrast, the *Georgics* focuses on the aftermath of the Roman civil war, and the rehabilitation and cultivation of the landscape—and therefore civilization—through the labour of the farmer. The *Georgics*' formal characteristics feature digressions, movements back and forth in time, political propaganda, and instructions on reading the weather, tilling the soil, tending crops, the husbandry of sheep and cattle, and the keeping of bees. This middle style, “which consists in giving plain and direct instructions” (Addison 298), has made it a historically important text both for those who read it as a manual of technical expertise, and for those who read it as a philosophical and political treatise.

Virgil's *Georgics* (29 BCE) is an especially important starting point for understanding why the georgic mode is foundational to Canadian literary depictions of farming, because the popularity of Dryden's translation made it a central influence on the Imperial georgic as it developed in Canada. Although all three of Virgil's major works—the *Eclogues*, the *Georgics*, and the *Aeneid*<sup>4</sup>—have had extensive histories of translation into English and other languages across Europe, by the mid-eighteenth century, English colonization of Canada coincided with the *Georgics*' rise in popularity in England. By the mid-eighteenth century, the *georgic* had become the most popular poetic mode among English farmers and yeomen,<sup>5</sup> and had been taken up by

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<sup>4</sup> This is also referred to as the *scala Vergilii*, the Virgilian hierarchy of genres used as an aesthetic marker of style in eighteenth-century England. The *Georgics* rest in the middle register because of its “mixture of high and low content and sublime and mock-heroic language” (Landry 57).

<sup>5</sup> See Landry, Donna. *The Invention of the Countryside: Hunting, Walking, and Ecology in English Literature 1671-1831*. New York: Palgrave, 2001. 57.

bourgeois improvers who were interested in it as a narrative of progress through the expansion, standardization, and technologization of agriculture.<sup>6</sup> When the first major waves of English-speaking colonizers were arriving in Canada to claim free tracts of land, the georgic was so popular and had become so entangled with discourses of agricultural sciences and politics in eighteenth-century England that it influenced the ways settler-colonizers thought about and engaged with agrarian labour itself.<sup>7</sup> Consequently, the georgic also influenced how they thought about and represented that labour in literary depictions of settlement. In turn, later responses to these settlement and colonization narratives challenged the imperial georgic conventions present in these representations. The purpose of this dissertation is to resituate several canonical works from selected Canadian writers who interrogate issues of agrarian work within a broad history of variations of the georgic mode in Canada to show how the georgic has shifted with emerging and evolving understandings of agrarian work as a site for exploring colonization, globalization and industrialization, and shifting relationships between human beings and technologies and human beings and the ecological systems in which they work. I argue that by identifying shifts in the georgic mode we can better understand why Canadian agriculture has understood—and currently understands—itsself as simultaneously ‘natural’ and technologically precise, universal and homogenous, removed from politics and yet central to the project of nation-building.

Using texts as diverse as Oliver Goldsmith’s *The Rising Village* (1825), Susanna Moodie’s *Roughing It in the Bush* (1852/1871), Isabella Valancy Crawford’s *Malcolm’s Katie* (1884), Frederick Philip Grove’s *Settlers of the Marsh* (1925), Martha Ostenso’s *Wild Geese*

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<sup>6</sup> Landry argues that “The georgic is the preeminent genre of the landlords’ revolution,” (57) which included the acts of enclosure and the emphasis on expansion through agriculture. Landry does not directly mention colonization as a part of the Georgics’ popularity among the landed classes in eighteenth-century England, but it is a phenomenon Karen O’Brien explores in her description of the imperial georgic mode.

<sup>7</sup> See De Bruyn, Frans. “From Georgic to Agricultural Science: An Instance in the Transvaluation of Literature in the Eighteenth Century,” in *Augustan Subjects: Festschrift in Honour of Martin C. Battleston*. ”

(1925), Al Purdy's *In Search of Owen Roblin* (1974), Robert Kroetsch's *The Ledger* (1975), Christian Bök's *The Xenotext—Book I* (2015), Rita Wong's *Forage* (2007), and Phil Hall's *Amanuensis* (1989), I argue that the georgic has existed and evolved in Canadian literary discourses in two broad modalities: the "imperial georgic" and the "precarious georgic." The imperial georgic begins with Dryden's 1697 translation of Virgil's *Georgics*, which "precipitated a major reorientation of georgic toward imperial concerns" (O'Brien 163). The imperial georgic features a linear teleology of human progress and valorizes anthropocentric mastery over nature as key to the development of nationhood and the expansion of empire. In contrast to the imperial georgic, the precarious georgic entails complex and often contradictory movements through time. Its emphasis on precarity as a condition of existence—as opposed to the imperial georgic's emphasis on linear teleological progress—reflects Virgil's original ambivalence about human and non-human relationships in the *Georgics*. The precarious georgic accommodates generic and formal variety and contradiction, emphasizing work as a way of existing within the vulnerability and precarity of life not only for humans but also for non-humans. It performs an ambivalent approach to technology that highlights the contingency and unpredictability that accompanies its intervention in ecological systems.

The georgic also has a strong connection to the material contexts and practices of agrarian work, having historically provoked debates on the use of manure versus tilling, the breeding of hybrid plants, and the husbandry of livestock in the mid-eighteenth century (De Bruyn "Reading Virgil's *Georgics* as a Scientific Text" 661). This didactic focus on describing material practices makes the georgic a key site for exploring the literary mode's aesthetic and thematic impacts on Canadian literary representations of agrarian labour. The georgic is also a useful site of inquiry into how its depictions of human-nonhuman relationships have influenced

the development of agricultural techniques, and how those techniques are reflected in national and imperial agricultural policy, both in England and in Canada. Therefore, the history of the *Georgics* is one of philosophical,<sup>8</sup> practical, and political importance. On one hand, even Virgil's ancient Roman contemporaries understood that the *Georgics* were primarily philosophical; Virgil's purpose in writing the *Georgics* was not to teach farmers how to farm. Virgil's depiction of farming is inconsistent with the techniques of Roman farms, and "Virgil's farmer is not one of the agri-businessmen of first-century BCE Rome who would have worked their land through slaves and other labourers under the oversight of a bailiff" (Nappa 534). Instead, Christopher Nappa and other critics suggest that the *Georgics* were more likely "directed at moral or ethical teaching" (534). But on the other hand, the georgic's didactic style and unadorned language ("It is one of the refreshing aspects of the English georgic that dung can be called *dung*, and a spade a *spade*" (10) writes David Fairer in "Organic Matters") made Virgil's *Georgics* appealing to many seventeenth- and eighteenth-century farmers and yeomen as a manual for farming techniques. Agricultural writers like Jethro Tull and Robert Dodsley debated whether farmers would be wise in following Virgil's instructions in their use of manure, for example (De Bruyn, "Reading Virgil's *Georgics*" 661; Fairer, "Organic Matters" 14-16). Thus, the *Georgics*' role in England was to be the locus of technical and practical instruction for agricultural work. At the same time, because Virgil's *Georgics* treats the political and philosophical implications of

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<sup>8</sup> Many critics would also argue that the history of the *Georgics* is primarily aesthetic, but I (following Nappa) include the aesthetic as a philosophical category insofar as certain aesthetic discourses associated with the georgic, including the picturesque and the sublime, are languages that influence the material ordering of the landscape in relation to human beings. I have chosen, here, the more general term of philosophical, because I will argue that the Georgic also represents a fully formed ontology, which is not only concerned with the ordering of nature as a separate set of systems from the human sociopolitical and economic systems, but which reveals a system of defining and organizing the world in terms of use value. This organization takes place in everything from the eventual global exchange of living organisms in complex production and distribution networks, to the organizing of human sexuality for the purposes of expanding the empire, and the erasure, displacement, or assimilation of societies that express differing relations to exchange and to nonhuman life.

human/non-human relationships and the role of agriculture in the generation of civilization and recovery from the ecological and psychological damages of war<sup>9</sup> in such a complex way, the philosophical and political message could be interpreted in different ways depending on whether later interpreters are promoting empire or criticizing it.

This political flexibility is another reason why the *Georgics* became such a powerful influence in British and colonial literatures. On one hand, in an imperialist England, Virgil's text could be used to promote a vision of agriculture as central to technological progress and the expansion of empire. On the other hand, that combination of practical, political, and philosophical concerns has made the georgic mode particularly useful for exploring the question of what constitutes a sustainable and ethical relationship between humans and the rest of the nonhuman world. From as early as the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in England, knowledge of the ecological destruction resulting from agricultural intensification was present in literature that dealt with georgic concerns, and many of those concerns anticipate our own current concerns about an increasingly industrialized global capitalist agriculture. For example, in their introduction to *The Country and the City Revisited* (1999), which responds to and updates Raymond Williams's classic text on the intellectual and literary construction of urban and rural spaces, *The Country and the City* (1973), Gerald McLean, Donna Landry, and Joseph P. Ward argue that efforts to enclose common grazing areas in a bid to standardize and expand English agriculture opened several ecological debates in England. These debates included the opposition to the enclosure movements posed by the Digger movement, a group of proto-

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<sup>9</sup> John Murdoch, for example, points out that the political contexts of Dryden's 1697 translation of the *Georgics* mirror those of Virgil's Rome: while Virgil is writing in the context of the recovery from the Roman civil wars, Dryden is writing in the recovery from the English Civil War of 1642-1651. See Murdoch, John. "The Landscape of Labour: Translations of the Georgic" in *Romantic Revolutions: Criticism and Theory*. Ed. Kenneth R. Johnston, Gilbert Chaiten, Karen Hansom, and Herbert Marks. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990.

environmentalists and agrarian socialists who believed that all agricultural land should be owned and farmed in common, and that the practice of buying and selling of land be abolished (Aylmer 8). Williams claims that the Agricultural Revolution in England, a massive intensification in agricultural production that took place roughly from 1650-1880 (although the exact dates have been disputed by historians), was the engine of the Industrial Revolution. McLean, Landry and Ward argue that many of the concerns of ecological and economic dissenters, economist Thomas Malthus among them, were already becoming concerned that the rate of resource consumption would outstrip the availability of those resources. These eighteenth-century environmental debates extended to literature, where, as critics like David Fairer have argued, georgic texts often questioned the instrumental approach to nature inhering in the processes of the agricultural revolution by emphasizing instead the precariousness of human labour in natural systems and the ephemeral nature of human achievement.

These conflicting perspectives on the philosophical and ethical roles of agriculture in human civilization broadly resulted in a spectrum of georgic texts that ranged between two modes, one promoting a progressive narrative of technological mastery, and the other reflecting a more complex view of human-nonhuman relations. Raymond Williams argues that, during the long eighteenth century, the georgic poem was transformed from a didactic poetic form which presents “some part of the science of husbandry, put into a pleasing dress, and set off with all the beauties and embellishments of poetry” (Addison 259) to a multi-generic mode which broadens its formal strategies and thematic concerns to include not only poems but also novels and periodical essays that represent aesthetically the intersections between technology, science, nature, and commerce with regard to agricultural production (150-151). Ralph Cohen argues that during the late eighteenth century and the Romantic period, the georgic not only merged with the

pastoral, as Williams argues, but also developed an alternate mode that began to focus in more practical terms on agrarian labour as a model for the productive interrelationship between human beings and nonhuman beings using technology and specialized expertise. As such, the imperial georgic's focus on the material and political conditions of farming in eighteenth-century Britain—its interest in the technologization of farming practices, the enclosure of common lands, and the removal of working farmers from the landscape—anticipate current promotion of the industrialization, globalization, and corporatization of agricultural production. In contrast, with the rise of the Romantics, these images of productive labour became subsumed in images of pastoral countryside, in which nonhuman nature is productive but images of agrarian labour are idealized or removed. These pastoralized images were of productive fields and farms without labourers, and included, in England, the genre of country house poems, in which nature provided feasts for the house without making reference to the labour or labourers involved in the process. The excision of images of active rural labour follows what Anthony Low has called the Georgic Revolution, a social turning point in English literary and social history when a burgeoning form of agrarian capitalism during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries shifted the focus from what he regards as a pastoral resistance to depictions of agrarian labour—the idea that nature would provide without the need for human toil—to a bourgeois-centered emphasis on representations of agrarian labour on rural landscapes (Low in O'Brien 162). This shift, Low has argued, was attributable to the ways in which increasing literacy in England fostered the idea that the literate classes in England might guide the development of agriculture, making it more efficient and more successful in a burgeoning empire. This argument is also echoed by Karen O'Brien, who argues that the trajectory described by Williams and Low, wherein images of agrarian work are gradually excised from the landscape, can be best described as a feature of

what she calls the imperial georgic mode. The imperial georgic emphasized the imperialist and instrumentalist aspects of the georgic, arguing broadly that the expansion of empire depended on human technological mastery over nature, and emphasized a linear ideal of human progress from a *terra nullius* wilderness to civilization and cultural sophistication. The rise of the popularity in translation of Virgil's *Georgics*, which lasted well into the eighteenth century, sparked a revolutionary shift not only in the way the English were thinking about agrarian capitalism, but also in the ways they developed agricultural sciences, capitalist economics, and the control of nature in British imperial interests in Canada. The popularity of the Imperial georgic was complete enough that Colonel Ed Rivers, one of the protagonists of the first English language novel written in Canada, Frances Brooke's *The History of Emily Montague* (1769), comes to claim land in Canada with a copy of Virgil's *Georgics* in his pocket.

Colonel Rivers embraces the imperial georgic expressed in eighteenth-century English translation because it is both a manual for agricultural technique and a treatise encouraging imperial expansion. In this form of georgic, the labour of the farmer was explicitly not being performed for the farmer's own sake, but for the sake of imperial progress: a contribution in eighteenth-century England to a new economic landscape that included a burgeoning agrarian capitalism and an expanding British empire. Farmers, in this case, are willing labourers in service of imperial survival, and imperial survival requires mastery over natural resources to sustain an imperial economy (which, in turn, leads to the necessity of imperial expansion). For O'Brien, this modality is best represented in John Dryden's 1697 translation of Virgil's *Georgics*, a didactic mode characterized by a linear teleological idea of human progress (the idea that the farmer is cultivating civilization), an instrumentalist approach to nonhuman nature (often accompanied by technological idealism), an emphasis on human mastery over nonhuman nature,

and a celebration of imperial interests that includes a heteronormative idea of imperial expansion in which the reproduction of farm families is essential to the production of empire. For example, Dryden translates a passage regarding the cultivation of trees in Book II as follows:

Then let the learned Gard'ner mark with care  
 The Kinds of Stocks, and what those Kinds will bear:  
 Explore the Nature of each sev'ral Tree;  
 And known, improve with artful Industry:  
 And let no spot of Earth be found,  
 But cultivate the Genius of the Ground. (II.45-50)

Although Book II is a didactic verse on the arts of horticulture, Dryden's translation of this passage emphasizes the connection between control over the ecology of the orchard, the improvement and efficiency of land-use, and the expansion of empire with the double meanings of the words "Industry" and "Earth." As David Ferry emphasizes in his 2005 translation, the passage calls on the importance of the industrious use of horticultural knowledge to make every part of the farm productive. On the other, Industry creates capital, which allows the empire to make every inch of the Earth productive for imperial interests.<sup>10</sup> Dryden is also using the heroic couplet, making a formal link between the text's concern with the management of nature and the

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<sup>10</sup> It is helpful, for emphasis, to compare Dryden's translation of this passage with a more modern translation by David Ferry (2005), translated as follows:

Therefore, O farmers, learn what you have to know,  
 The appropriate way to cultivate each kind,  
 To discipline their wildness, make them tame;  
 Don't let your hand lie uselessly unused. ("Second Georgic" 49)

Ferry's translation emphasizes the local ecology of the farm and the pleasure of participating in and cultivating the successful functioning of the farm's ecological landscape and has done away with the references to Industry or Earth. Ferry has also chosen blank verse over Dryden's heroic couplets, further breaking the association between the epic shadings of Dryden's georgic and the pursuit of imperial expansion.

imperialist early eighteenth-century epic.<sup>11</sup> As waves of English settlers were on their way to Canada, the imperial georgic had shaped and reshaped agrarian capitalism in England. For example, De Bruyn has argued that despite the general understanding that the *Georgics* were not intended by Virgil to be a practical manual for farming, even by Virgil's own contemporaries, the *Georgics* informed the education of English farmers so thoroughly that they shaped debates about agricultural techniques of the gentleman farmer (De Bruyn, "Reading Virgil's *Georgics* as Scientific Texts," 662). Although Karen O'Brien argues that this literary mode had fallen out of favour by the beginning of the nineteenth century, her argument is convincing only if we focus exclusively on English literature and ignore the persistent use of georgic throughout the nineteenth century—and beyond—in Canada. The popularity of the imperial georgic in England coincided with the first major wave of English settlers to Upper and Lower Canada, which involved the displacement and genocide of indigenous peoples and the disruption or destruction of their agrarian practices, including the suppression of established techniques of indigenous nations like the Ojibway, and reshaping of the landscape according to established agricultural systems in England (Harris 42). On one hand, as Brooke's mention of Colonel Rivers's pocket Virgil suggests, English colonists were arriving in Canada with the assumption that the agricultural improvements they had made were the key to successfully expanding the empire, and, in fact that they were the only viable techniques, regardless of the unfamiliarity of the North American landscape.

On the other hand, critics like Fairer, Ronda and Goodman have emphasized that the georgic mode, because of its emphasis on variety and on practical engagement with the land, also

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<sup>11</sup> See Jack Lynch, "Glossary of Literary and Historical Terms," wherein he defines the heroic couplet as follows: "Iambic pentameter verse that rhymes in couplets is known as 'heroic verse' from its use in epic poetry in English, especially Dryden's translation of Virgil (1697)" (online, 3 August 1999).

has potential for resistance to or critique of the imperial georgic. David Fairer, for instance, challenges the idea that the georgic represents human technological mastery over nature by calling attention to the contingency of survival in Virgil's original georgics. "[H]uman labour is endless," he writes, "Georgic writing is often shadowed by the realization that nature does not carry us along... It is a gloomier, more dangerous picture we get here, a glimpse of nature that is less comprehensible and supportive than any benevolent system might suggest" (207). Fairer's analysis challenges not only the assumption that the georgic mode always expresses a linear teleology, but also the assumption that ecological writing began with the Romantic poets, as ecocritics like Jonathan Bate have argued. Kurt Heinzelman and Kevis Goodman have argued that "the georgic's close observations of the material particulars and inevitable difficulties of labor, combined with the genre's self-conscious attentiveness to the various forms of information it conveys, tend to outmaneuver any ideologically unified position" (60). Margaret Ronda builds on Goodman and Heinzelman's argument, tracing a trajectory in American georgic writing that has often expressed a mood of struggle, hardship, and contingency rather than a narrative of human progression and a return to a pastoral ideal. In "Georgic disenchantment and American poetry," she argues that "if the georgic, throughout its long history, might be read as a disenchanted genre in its view of agrarian labour as fragile and suffused with difficulty, those georgics written in the shadow of capitalist development are disenchanted in their reflections on the novel hardships of labour under capital" (61). Following these critics, I will argue that, in Canada, too, there has been a tradition of this darker georgic modality. What I am calling the precarious georgic, in contrast to the imperial georgic, emphasises temporal disunity, generic variety, polyvocality, attention to the struggles, precarity, and contingency of human labour and human-nonhuman relationships, and shares this disenchanted character of labour with what

Ronda has called the disenchanting georgic. I will argue that both kinds of georgic appear and continue to appear in Canadian literature but have not been recognized by critics.

Despite the strong connections between the rise of the georgic mode in English literature and the expansion of British imperial interests, the georgic has not been a central mode in Canadian literary criticism. While many Canadian critics, Northrop Frye, D.M.R. Bentley, D.G. Jones, and Susan Glickman among them, have written extensively about the influence of Romantic Pastoral on Canadian literature, little attention has been paid to the continuing popularity of the georgic mode in early Canadian literature or to its survival as a mode in later Canadian literary depictions of agrarian labour. Part of the reason the georgic has not been a central site for exploring representations of farming and their relation to colonialist and capitalist discourses in Canadian literature is that the focus on Romantic pastoral more closely aligned with Frye's emphasis on romance and pastoral in his influential literary system. In this system, romance is the chief genre insofar as it performs most visibly the goal of literature as such: the reconciliation of human beings and world and the return to Eden by way of the "secular scripture" of literature as the supreme expression of the transcendent capacity of the human imagination. At the core of Frye's conception is the "pastoral myth", which he argues rests at the heart of any social ideal. In the "Conclusion to *The Literary History of Canada*", Frye argues that Canadian literature's quest to become truly literary—in the way that classical and European traditions are truly literary for Frye—coincides with its ability to produce works that are grounded in pastoral archetypes. Robert David Stacey argues that "it is precisely a discussion of the Canadian pastoral vision—a discussion Frye launches somewhat precipitously in the final section of the 'Conclusion'—that differentiates the 'Conclusion' from the rest of *The Bush Garden*, where the focus is almost exclusively on the tendency toward terror, 'incubus and

*cauchemar*' ("Canada and Its Poetry" 143) in the Canadian imagination" (85). Frye, then, must rely on Canadian literature's ability to fulfill these pastoral archetypes for his broader system of literary criticism to function. For Frye, the Pastoral represents the social and aesthetic ideal of Canadian literature, and everything in his influential "Conclusion to the Literary History of Canada" encourages critics to think about pastoral, rather than georgic, as the mark of a mature national literary tradition. The New Materialist and ecocritical turn in Canadian studies, on the other hand, moves away from this transcendental ideal of literature and instead emphasizes the vital properties of matter and the materiality of bodies and social environments. Canadian ecocritics such as Greg Garrard, Catriona Sandilands and Diana Brydon have all emphasized the interplay between the material entanglements of humans and nonhumans, the material contexts of labour, and the literature that describes them. As critics like O'Brien, Rhonda, and Goodman have emphasized, the georgic's focus on human/nonhuman relations, technical instruction, and political philosophy makes it an ideal mode for ecocritical and new materialist exploration. Yet despite this, there has been very little critical discussion in Canada of how the georgic, as distinct from the pastoral, might offer new ways of reading representations of human-nonhuman relations in Canadian literature and culture.

At least part of the reason for the critical lacuna lies with the misidentification of the pastoral and georgic modes, due to the conflation of the two modes beginning as early as the eighteenth century in English literature.<sup>12</sup> In Canadian criticism, this conflation carried through in the writing of foundational literary critics like Northrop Frye, who argued that Canadian literature could be characterized by a latent pastoral ideal. As a result, the pastoral has become

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<sup>12</sup> One might refer to Addison's complaint in "An Essay on Virgil's Georgics" that "there has been an abundance of criticism spent on Virgil's Pastorals and Aeneids, but the Georgics are a subject which none of the critics have sufficiently taken into their consideration; most of them passing it over in silence, or casting it under the same head with Pastoral" (298).

the central site of interrogation in Canadian literary study. Scholars like Northrop Frye have privileged Canadian literature that deals with nature more generally, often reinforcing the linear teleological narrative that, if it begins with the georgic, ends in a transcendent return to pastoral. Canadian ecocriticism has also tended to focus on constructions of wilderness and pastoral or picturesque discourses of human interactions with environment, with little attention to how British Imperial and Canadian attitudes about farming have framed Canadian discourses of agricultural intervention in ecological systems, nor how those ontologies of intervention have influenced global agrarian capitalism, biotechnologies, or Canadian environmentalist thought. Nevertheless, the georgic mode provides an important site of interrogation for Canadian literature because it allows us to understand the ways Canadian writers who explore themes of agrarian work and settlement/colonization constructed or challenged—and continue to construct or challenge—cultural narratives of settlement, nation, and progress that centre on agricultural labour.

In arguing for a conceptual return to the georgic mode, I will be building on a variety of methodological approaches. First, in discussing the georgic as a mode, rather than as a genre, I am using the modal approach suggested Jameson's argument in *The Political Unconscious* (1981). This approach allows me to read texts that represent agrarian work through the georgic mode, as a way of rehistoricizing “the ‘essence,’ ‘spirit,’ ‘worldview,’” of a text. For Jameson, these qualities make up “an ideologeme, that is, a historically determinate conceptual or semic complex which can project itself variously in the form of a ‘value system’ or ‘philosophical concept,’ or in the form of a proto-narrative, a private or collective narrative fantasy” (115). Second, my methodological approach has been heavily shaped by John Chalker's work on the georgic. Chalker argues that authors writing within the georgic mode were often not writing

georgics because of the pressure of literary influence (the popularity of Dryden's translation, for example), but that they were focused on generating innovation and variation within the georgic's modal characteristics (154). Chalker writes in "Innovation and Variation: Literary Change and Georgic Poetry" that

not only are new features introduced for new ends, but old features function in new ways by implying resistance to or rejection of former usages. Such rejections are a consequence of discovering or exploring poetic expression for new concepts of experience. Man's relation to man, nature, and God lead to new poetic expressions and means of organization. These conceptual changes form the basis for a new 'type' within the genre as well as for new roles for former genres. (155)

Chalker's approach to the georgic mode is important because it allows us to reunite the georgic mode with its historical context and recognize how the georgic's extreme political and thematic flexibility make it a particularly historical mode of discourse. My account is thus not meant to be a linear understanding of the development of the georgic mode in Canadian literary history, but one of dynamic and contingent acceptances and rejections of emergent ontologies of agrarian work. I also do not mean to imply that each of my chosen authors is consciously writing a georgic, nor necessarily to create a rigid taxonomy of georgics in Canadian literature. Instead, the framework of this project is semantic, in that it reads the georgic mode as a set of conventions that have become so commonplace in writing that deals with agricultural labour and its related issues in Canada that they have come to seem both inevitable and natural within the Canadian cultural tradition, even if they have not been explicitly named as georgic. In focusing on the georgic, my project addresses an important gap in Canadian literary scholarship while building on and responding to current discussions in British and American ecocriticism which

draw on Raymond Williams' argument that the conflation of the georgic mode with the pastoral mode after the eighteenth century resulted in the removal or idealization of representations of agrarian work from representations of the rural landscape, and therefore contributed to the obfuscation of the material realities of agrarian labour. I also extend these discourses to explore the ecological consequences of those excisions, their influences on Canadian agricultural policy and the ontological politics that arise once we begin to interrogate current understandings of agricultural labour. Finally, I build on the work of both critics of the georgic like Fairer, Ronda, and Goodman, and ecocritics like Tsing, Donna Haraway, and Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands to argue that while many Canadian writers have supported imperial georgic, some have also explored the precarious georgic as a way of imagining more ecological alternatives.

Understanding how Canadian writers' ontological and political assumptions about agrarian work operated to justify or challenge culturally accepted farm narratives can help us understand current discourses of farming and food production and the place of those discourses within the broader ecological arguments currently attempting to address complex solutions to living in a time of ecological crisis.

The imperial georgic and precarious georgic are both terms that carry significant ontological as well as ecopolitical importance, as they both function as descriptions for specific assemblages of what Anna Tsing would call world-making activities in Britain, Europe, and North America that include not only the organization of human beings but also the organization of nonhuman entities and their relations. I locate this project within the "ontological turn" in ecocritical scholarship, which was first used as an ecocritical intervention in the idea of "culture" as it functioned in the discipline of anthropology (Heywood 1). Anthropological studies, as well as the humanities and social sciences more generally, have been built around differences in

cultures, but proponents of the ontological turn “argue that the very notion of ‘social’ or ‘cultural’ difference implies its opposite, ‘natural’ unity” (Heywood 2). In other words, the superficial focus on social and epistemological organization of human societies is a discourse that is “not relativist enough” (Heywood 2) in its attention to differences between groups of humans, because acknowledging those differences implies that the object against which those categories is constituted, collectively referred to as “nature,” or “the world,” are always the same (Heywood 2). The ontological turn, then, proposes that there is not one singular nature or world that is viewed differently by different cultures, but that “worlds, as well as worldviews, may vary” (Heywood 2).<sup>13</sup> In his summary of the ontological turn, Paolo Heywood argues that the movement borrows its theoretical foundations from Bruno Latour, who argues that “social scientists should not decide in advance what sorts of things constitute ‘society,’ and what sorts of things constitute ‘nature,’ ... but should proceed as if those categories are outcomes, not the starting points, of complex negotiations between people and objects [and other nonhuman beings]” (Heywood 4). The notion of ontological world-making shares methodological roots with the new materialisms of ecocritics and environmental humanities scholars like Stacy Alaimo, Donna Haraway, and Anna Tsing, whose arguments call for greater attention to the new ways of understanding socioecological relations by paying attention to the participation of nonhuman agencies in economic and social-material systems. This approach has recently been widely adopted across a variety of disciplines, from its roots in anthropology and eco-theory to other social sciences and humanities fields and, more recently, in shifting scientific frameworks.<sup>14</sup> The traditionally individual “organism vs. environment model,” for example, is

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<sup>13</sup> See also Jamie Lorimer’s summary of Latour’s concept of “multinaturalism” rather than only “multiculturalism,” in “Multinatural Geographies for the Anthropocene,” *Progress in Human Geography* 36.5 (2012).

<sup>14</sup> Isabel Waidner argues, “As part of an ongoing ‘turn to practice’ in science studies, scholars have rejected objectivist claims of ‘no interference’ in favour of more embodied epistemologies and ontologies that consider the

being challenged by scientists like Lynn Margulis and Scott Gilbert. The opening of these disciplines to explorations of multiple ontologies involving multiple species makes room for engaging with “the etho-ecological question of ‘who/what, when, and how inhabits what world’” (Savransky 353). I argue that the imperial georgic and precarious georgic constitute two separate but related ontologies arising from the competing emphases on elements of different translations of Virgil’s *Georgics*. In the conflicts and contradictions between those ontologies, I argue, is a politics of world-making processes and relations: in other words, an ontopolitics. Hence the pun in my title, “Like a Virgil”: Canadian writers may write about agrarian work like Virgil, and Canadian farmers may conceptualize agrarian work like the farmers in Virgil, but the ontological possibilities of each depends on which version of Virgil they choose.

The imperial georgic has become the dominant way of thinking about the georgic as a literary mode in Canada. Rather than falling out of use, the imperial georgic has also become a persistent ontological and ideological framework for the way Canadian writers—and indeed, Canadians—think about farming—even though is it not often explicitly named as such, or often assumed to be part of a pastoral framework. The logic of the imperial georgic has become a part of cultural depictions of and understandings of current industrialized and globalized versions of agriculture under late capitalism, both in Canada and globally. In making this argument, I am drawing from economic theorists Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, who argue that the imperial authority of the state has been replaced in late capitalism by the authority of globalized corporate

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performativity of experimentation. In science and technology studies and related perspectives, the performativity of experimentation refers to the assumption that scientific experiments produce the phenomena purportedly under investigation. From these perspectives, rather than the scientists or experimenter either observing a pre-existing object without interfering, or making something up, both experimenter and object under investigation come to be defined within a shared experimental relationship” (39). I return to this perspective in more detail in Chapter Four.

For a more detailed discussion of shifting ontological frameworks in the sciences broadly, and in molecular biology, specifically, see Isabel Waidner, “Christian Bök’s *Xenotext* Experiment, Conceptual Writing, and the Subject-of-no-Subjectivity: ‘Pink Faeries and Gaudy Baubles’” in *Configurations*, Volume 26.1 (2018): 27-46.

entities. The technological utopianism and instrumentalism that is a central feature of the imperial georgic, then, is now manifested in the widespread patenting and standardizing of the technologies and techniques of agriculture—for example, the production of genetically modified seeds and the legal and economic apparatuses, such as the World Trade Organization and a variety of transnational trade agreements, that have forced farmers to buy and plant those seeds in the large-scale monocultures that have replaced mixed-use family farms. This method of standardization is based on what Anna Tsing has called scalability: the ability to expand a project without altering its characteristics. Modern notions of progress, Tsing argues, are tied to the design principle of scalability, as is the expansion of both state and economic power. She writes, “Progress itself has often been defined by its ability to make projects expand without changing their framing assumptions... Scalability requires that project elements be oblivious to the indeterminacies of encounter; that’s how they allow smooth expansion. Thus, too, scalability banishes meaningful diversity, that is, diversity that might change things” (*Mushroom* 33). Scalability works through the processes of salvage accumulation and alienation, wherein individual organisms—both human and nonhuman—must be removed from the relational context in which they emerged and made to reproduce themselves in a repetitive and unchanging way. One of Tsing’s key concepts is that capitalism functions by commodifying the products of life processes that it cannot or does not control (63-64). She calls this characteristic of capitalism “salvage accumulation,” sites of being in which life processes like birth, death, and reproduction of both humans and nonhumans become removed from their respective environments and relations and commodified under capitalist logics through processes of alienation. I argue that what Tsing has called alienation and salvage accumulation—the extraction of value from life processes like reproduction—are of special importance to agrarian work and agriculture under

capitalism. “In capitalist logics of commodification,” she writes, “things are torn from their life-worlds to become objects of exchange. This is a process I am calling ‘alienation,’ and I use the term as a potential attribute of nonhumans as well as humans” (121). Tsing’s analysis of capitalist processes is especially useful for an ecocritical reading of capitalist agriculture and the imperial georgic because she extends these processes to nonhuman beings. Agricultural systems that are designed to be scaled for expansion—such as industrial monocultures—are responsible for catastrophic losses in biodiversity in agrarian ecosystems.<sup>15</sup> Tsing’s notions of scalability and salvage accumulation are integral to understanding georgic modalities. Alienation, then, is the process by which capitalism becomes scalable. In agricultural history, the process of generating scalability through alienation can be found in the enclosure processes of bourgeois land improvers in England and in Europe, in which lands that had been held in common for farmers who would collectively use the land to graze livestock were enclosed and privatized as part of larger farms. Even though he is speaking specifically to an American context, Jeffrey Wagner’s summary of how eighteenth-century enclosure movements in England evolved into a global system of capitalism is useful for understanding why the imperial georgic’s scalability is connected to capitalist systems that are scaled for expansion. He argues that the imperial georgic “developed parallel with the English enclosure movement and the primary form of globalization pursued at the time: colonization” (71). It is the imperial georgic’s emphasis on making agrarian work scalable—and therefore making imperial, colonial, and eventually national, social, and political organization scalable—that makes it so persistent in both Canadian culture and its literature.

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<sup>15</sup> See S.J. Butler, J.A. Vickery, K. Norris et al. “Farmland Biodiversity and the Footprint of Agriculture.” *Science* 19 Jan 2007; Lori Ann Thrupp, “Linking Agricultural Biodiversity and Food Security: The Valuable Role of Sustainable Agriculture” (2010); Kehoe, Laura, Alfredo Romero Munoz, Esther Polaina, et al, “Biodiversity at Risk Under Future Cropland Expansion and Intensification.” *Nature Ecology & Evolution* 1.8 (2017) 1129-1135.

What I call the precarious georgic in Canadian literature and activist practice emerged in response to the challenge of constructing an alternative ontological viewpoint that takes an ecological approach to agrarian work without removing the human from the landscape or resorting to instrumentalist approaches to the nonhuman world. Nonscalable approaches to projects do not attempt to isolate an individual or species from its embedded relationships but requires that each participant in an assemblage be open to transformation through contact with others. Although non-scalability does not necessarily represent a more ethical approach to agricultural practice, Tsing reminds us that non-scalable ontologies hold within them a particularly verdant potential for radical adaptation. Nonscalability is a design feature that embraces the possibility of adaptation, contingency, and contamination. In other words, in the relationality of nonscalable projects, organisms form assemblages along the lines of adaptation, contamination, and therefore change. This is a model, for Tsing, of worldbuilding that thinks with—rather than against—precariousness and contingency: “We are contaminated by our encounters; they change who we are as we make way for others. As contamination changes world-making projects, mutual worlds—and new directions—may emerge. Everyone carries a history of contamination; purity is not an option. One value of keeping precarity in mind is that it makes us remember that changing with circumstances is the stuff of survival” (27). Just as Tsing argues in favour of the non-scalable ontologies and practices that she finds in her fieldwork among Indigenous communities in Indonesia and matsutake mushroom-pickers in the Pacific Northwest, I locate in the precarious georgic’s non-scalable ontology a formal and thematic resistance to the organizing principles of linear teleology and narrowed focus on human-nonhuman hierarchies (or, for that matter, hierarchies between groups of humans) inherent in the imperial georgic. And while it may be tempting to label such bleaker depictions of agrarian work

as anti-georgic, Fairer suggests that it is the mode's adaptability that makes it resistant to subversion or parody: "Georgic," he writes, "was at home with notions of growth and development, digression, and mixture, and had a natural tendency to absorb material. Because of its capaciousness, the georgic was also difficult to subvert (there is no tradition of *anti-georgic* equivalent to the *anti-pastoral*)" ("Organic Matters" 5). We can locate within this more flexible variation of the georgic mode a more ecological sensibility because, unlike the imperial georgic, its tendency toward accumulation and mixture means that it is more diverse, dynamic, and immanent, and therefore resistant to a self-contained logic of Imperial or capitalist progress that is "scaled up for expansion" (Tsing 41). As with the imperial georgic, the non-scalable characteristics of the precarious georgic have manifested in non-scalable material practices in agriculture that have the potential to accommodate ecological mutualism, indigenous and traditional global agricultural techniques, alternative economies and a wide variety of political organizations. In contrast to the imperial georgic's faith in progress toward a utopian future the precarious georgic accepts the pain and disharmony that are inevitably involved in the processes of contamination and growth as a central principle of its ontological structure. The non-scalable accommodates what it encounters and evolves through contamination, but it is never a painless, harmonious, or straightforward process, nor is survival its inevitable outcome for any given individual or assemblage.

In the chapters that follow, I use the precarious georgic to describe a complex set of conventions and processes within the development of the georgic mode in Canadian literature that emphasize formal variety, disruption of heteronormative frameworks, Provisional time, anti-anthropocentrism, and an emphasis on precarity. Each of the works I have situated within the precarious georgic in some way interrogate and challenge the characteristics of the imperial

georgic, but as such, they are minoritarian views that have not been recognized by prevailing modes of literary criticism in Canada. To better describe the various manifestations of the precarious georgic in Canadian literature, I have identified several sub-modes to reflect the myriad ways in which these texts alter or interrogate various aspects of the imperial georgic mode and reflect the broader cultural discourses of their respective time periods: settlement georgic, queer georgic, provisional georgic, and relational georgic. However, these categories are not mutually exclusive, because each category simply reflects the aspects of the precarious georgic that are most clearly emphasized in the text. These categories, in their intermingling, reflect how processes of cultural evolution and awareness are never linear, but involve complex assemblages of understandings of a myriad of complex cultural and ecological issues. In this way, precarious georgic reflects organic processes of evolution. By tracing these variations of the georgic mode through a variety of representative English-Canadian poems and novels,<sup>16</sup> this dissertation shows how recognizing the georgic and its variations can help us understand more about the ontological underpinnings of environmental thought as it evolved through Canadian literary representations of and cultural ideas about agrarian work. Tracing this history of georgic modalities in literary representations of agricultural labour inevitably leads us to explore the material history of agricultural labour in its relation to capitalism.

The imperial georgic was a scalable ontology that emphasized empire expansion through agricultural labour. Not only was it present in the literary representations of agrarian work, but it also permeated the agricultural policies of early English Canada. The first chapter of this project

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<sup>16</sup> Although there is evidence that a similar georgic tradition has existed in Quebecois and Canadian Francophone literature, I focus on the Anglophone literary tradition in Canada because I am not well versed enough in Francophone literary traditions to adequately address them in this project. However, for a similar argument about the Georgics' influence on French-language depictions of Canadian farming, see: Trujic, Irena. "Chapitre II: Le Latin dans Les Anciens Canadiens." *L'intertextualité classique dans la production littéraire du Québec des années 1850--1870*. Université du Montréal, 2011.

argues that although both the pastoral and georgic modes are foundational to Canadian literature, reading the georgic mode as central to Canadian settlement narratives and long poems provides a broader perspective on the world-making projects of those narratives. Susan Glickman and D.M.R. Bentley have argued that settler narratives have taken on an ironic turn in Canada precisely because writers felt unable to adapt English literary modes like the pastoral to the harsher Canadian landscape and climate. But recent critics like Travis Mason have raised concerns that these readings of Canadian literature as ironic or anti-pastoral overlook the relationship between literary and material productions. I argue that settler-colonial writers like Oliver Goldsmith, Susanna Moodie and Isabella Valancy Crawford were not only interested in altering the literary and material landscapes of the new world aesthetically. They were generating imperial georgic narratives designed to promote and perform scalable imperial agricultural systems. The imperial georgic in these narratives manifested a linear-temporal idea of imperial progress founded in the socio-sexual organization of the family homestead, the alteration of Canada's ecology through the importing and exchange of non-native organisms, the importing and enforcement of agricultural techniques developed in England, and the erasure or removal of existing human-nonhuman relations with the relegation of indigenous nations to reservations. Colonists did not simply write about, but also made vast material changes to, the Canadian landscape, and the social, economic, and political organizations already existing in what would become Canada. At the same time, the imperial georgic mode promoted instrumentalist approaches to non-human nature, and these instrumentalist approaches extended to the reproduction of agricultural workers in the name of imperial expansion, harnessing a heteronormative understanding of human relationships to promote human (and therefore imperial) reproduction. By the early nineteenth century, although the popularity of the georgic

mode had waned within English literature, British land distribution policies were still promoting the imperial georgic idea of the gentleman farmer, offering free land to colonists in the military, upper-middle and upper classes. Imperial georgic settlement narratives like Oliver Goldsmith's *The Rising Village*, Isabella Valancy Crawford's *Malcolm's Katie*, and Susanna Moodie's *Roughing It in the Bush* all supported the teleological vision of the imperial georgic in that they wanted to see the British empire expand through agricultural labour. But while Goldsmith's *The Rising Village* largely supports the ontological premises of imperial georgic, Moodie's *Roughing It in the Bush* and Crawford's *Malcolm's Katie* begin to critique the imperial georgic assumption that the gentleman farmer is the genesis and engine of colonial civilization. Isabella Valancy Crawford's *Malcolm's Katie* largely supports the imperial georgic vision of progress but makes clear that the imperial georgic reproduces through the bodies of colonial women, whose agency is limited by the social and economic structures of the empire. Susanna Moodie's *Roughing It in the Bush*, on the other hand, while also mostly supporting the imperial georgic vision of imperial progress, begins to undermine the imperial georgic's linear teleology by emphasizing qualities of the precarious georgic, namely an emphasis on process, polyvocality, and generic variety.

My second chapter argues that by the beginning of the twentieth century, with the colonization of the Western provinces, the imperial georgic had become the established and dominant ontology of colonization, and with it a heteronormative vision of agricultural (re)production that served to expand the nation through heteronormative family structures, including through land distribution policies that explicitly emphasized the heterosexual family. If one of the links between imperialist expansion and the expansion of agrarian capitalism has been through the importing of an imperial georgic framework from England to Canada, by the early twentieth century, Britain was replaced in this ideology by the push for a strong Canadian

nationalism that asserts itself through the reproduction of the family homestead in the West. One of the main elements of the expansion process for both nationalism/imperialism and capitalism has been through the harnessing or commodification of life processes that Anna Tsing calls “salvage accumulation.” The process of salvage accumulation is represented in the georgic concerns of Prairie realist literary works like Frederick Philip Grove’s *Settlers of the Marsh* (1925) and Martha Ostenso’s *Wild Geese* (1925). But although both novels are concerned with the role of heteronormative reproduction in the production of agrarian nationalism, *Wild Geese* differs from *Settlers of the Marsh* in that it treats the imperial georgic as a cultural cliché, recalling the melodramatic techniques used by 18<sup>th</sup>-century queer women writers such as Anne Lister. I read Ostenso’s *Wild Geese* as queer georgic that uses gothic conventions to parody the imperial georgic, destabilizing the heteronormative constructions of agricultural labour and imperial georgic assumptions of linear teleological progress.

The third chapter of my project argues that during the 1970s in Canada, the imperial georgic takes on a nostalgic tone in response to the increasing intensification of agriculture and the dwindling number of Canadians making their living on family farms. Environmentalist movements like the back to the land movement in Canada act as a nostalgic return to a distant agrarian past. Using Paul Huebener’s temporal categories of imperial time (to correspond with imperial georgic) and Provisional time (to correspond to the provisional georgic as a subcategory of the precarious georgic), this chapter argues that for writers in the 1970s, the Canadian long poem becomes an appropriate form for resituating the genealogical time of colonization within a wider variety of geological and nonhuman timescales, thereby challenging the linear teleology of human progress imbedded in the imperial georgic and beginning to emphasize the precarious nature of human-nonhuman assemblages. Both Al Purdy’s *In Search of Owen Roblin* (1974) and

Robert Kroetsch's *The Ledger* (1975) pursue georgic concerns by revisiting Canadian settlement narratives and resituating them within a variety of different timescales. However, even though Purdy disrupts the imperial georgic's linear temporal understanding of human progress by calling attention to other scales of time, including geological and historical time, his conflation of himself with the Loyalist settlers of Roblin Lake returns the focus of the poem to the human figure in the georgic landscape. Because of this, Purdy does not disrupt the imperial georgic narrative of settlement and its elision of the inherent violence of the imperial georgic ontology. In contrast, Kroetsch's *The Ledger* disrupts the imperial georgic's linear teleology and anthropocentric focus by making the tool—the ledger itself, its accidental survival, and the timescale of the object—the centre of the poem's ontological field. Building on Smaro Kamboureli's argument that *The Ledger* resists the question of origin, I argue that Kroetsch's precarious georgic representation of Canadian settlement and agrarian work offers a nonlinear assemblage of both human and nonhuman timescales: what Anna Tsing has referred to as a polyphony. In doing so, Kroetsch de-emphasizes the human at the centre of the imperial georgic and instead emphasizes precarity.

My final chapter shows how the imperial georgic is part of the larger instrumental and anthropocentric ontology that has produced what geologists are now calling the Anthropocene. In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the imperial georgic's emphasis on a linear teleology of human progress through technological mastery of nonhuman life has become more focused on technological intervention in the life processes of nonhuman species; its imperialism is now extended not through the nation-state but through the corporation and its patenting of agricultural technologies. The size of farms has dramatically increased, and agricultural practices have been standardized and scaled up globally through multinational trade agreements. At the

same time, the precarious georgic has come to represent a competing mode that emphasizes the precarity of survival and reframes the work of farming as the chance assemblages of organisms into mutually beneficial collaborations, even if those collaborations are not always harmonious or gentle, and even if those collaborations are based on the chance agencies of nonhuman objects. Contemporary agricultural practices that reflect these kinds of living with precarity include agroecological techniques ranging from biodynamic farming, which seeks to reflect the movements of various organisms in a farm ecosystem (ie. a pasture may be allowed to grow wild, grazed first by cattle, then rooted by pigs, and followed by chickens, all of whom fertilize the grazed fields); permaculture farming, which seeks to locate food production within current ecosystems by paying attention to, and mimicking or complementing existing species relationships; and renewed interest in foraging or “wildcrafting”, in which people harvest wild plants to supplement existing food production practices. Literary texts that also embrace precarity reflect the underlying ethos of these practices by embracing process, multi-temporality, polyvocality, and an interest in dynamic adaptation and change. The chapter focuses on three collections of poems: Christian Bök’s *The Xenotext—Book I* (2015) and its transgenic experiment; Rita Wong’s *Forage* (2000); and Phil Hall’s *Amanuensis* (1989). I argue that all three emphasize, both formally and thematically, the precariousness of collaborative relationships between humans and other humans as well as between humans and nonhumans. However, Bök’s *The Xenotext—Book I*, despite its concerns with environmental crisis and human intervention and its posthuman interest in artistic collaboration between human and nonhuman organisms, ends up reinforcing a late-capitalist imperial georgic ontology. Rita Wong’s *Forage*, on the other hand, offers a more interactionist model of the precarious georgic, which emphasizes agriculture’s place in a deeply co-constitutive world of humans and non-humans.

*Forage*'s poems are both descriptive and didactic, offering both an argument about the precarity of being in a world ruled by global capitalist systems and glimpses of a kind of cooperative survival within those systems. I argue that while Wong's precarious georgic offers an argument about what is possible in embracing precarity, contingency and adaptation against the forces of empire and capitalism, Phil Hall's *Amanuensis* performs the process of living through precarity in both its form and content. *Amanuensis* not only embraces an object-oriented precarious georgic, but it is also inextricable from Hall's later work, in that reading through Hall's entire body of work, a reader can experience how later work is informed by the processes enacted within *Amanuensis* and is informed by them. *Amanuensis*'s decentring of the human from the ontological field, its concern with nonhuman and human relations, its deconstruction of the lyrical self, its multi-temporality, and its resistance to both utopian and dystopian understandings of the georgic and its role in political, economic, and social organizations make it a clear example of a precarious georgic that enacts living with precarity.

If we are to understand the myths and perspectives that permeate the field of Canadian agricultural policies, sciences, and practices in the context of deepening ecological crisis, it is important to acknowledge the historical trajectories of both the imperial and the precarious ontologies. In the chapters that follow, my construction of the spectrum between the imperial georgic and the precarious georgic is not meant to imply a dogmatic or totalizing taxonomy of various Canadian texts that deal with agrarian work. Instead, it is a construction that allows us to see how these representative authors emphasize precarity in varying degrees to critique the imperial georgic and its influence, not only on Canadian literary depictions of agrarian work, but also to draw attention to its political, economic, social, and ecological consequences. Being able to recognize the ways these myths operate in unexpected places, from poetry to the narratives of

farmers like Toban Dyck, can help us navigate urgent debates about the social, economic, political, and ecological consequences of farming policies and practices in a way that avoids both the sentimental nostalgia and the naïve technological utopianism that cloud agricultural discourses. While it may not seem obvious at first, there is courage in thinking with precarity. As Anna Tsing writes, “We are contaminated by our encounters; they change who we are as we make way for others. As contamination changes world-making projects, mutual worlds—and new directions—may emerge. Everyone carries a history of contamination; purity is not an option. One value of keeping precarity in mind is that it makes us remember that changing with circumstances is the stuff of survival” (27). The georgic is still a vital and contentious mode for exploring this stuff of survival.

## Chapter One

### Settler Georgic: Colonization and the Scaling Up of the Imperial Georgic

In the first English novel written in Canada, Frances Brooke's *The History of Emily Montague* (1769), Colonel Ed Rivers enthusiastically declares that he shall have no trouble farming the unfamiliar Canadian landscape. He declares confidently that

the pleasure of cultivating lands here is as much superior to what can be found in the same employment in England, as watching the expanding rose, and beholding the falling leaves: America is in infancy, Europe in old Age. Nor am I very ill qualified for this agreeable [sic] task: I have studied the Georgicks and am a pretty enough kind of husbandman as far as the theory goes; nay, I am not sure I shall not be, even in practice, the best *gentleman* farmer in the province. (Brooke 25-26)

In the novel, Ed Rivers' cheerful confidence belies an agricultural knowledge that will prove ill-suited for the actual labour of converting what colonists perceived to be a wild landscape into the manicured farms of the English countryside. Brooke is leveraging contemporary debates in agricultural theory to undercut Rivers' position as a gentleman farmer. The landowning classes had been focusing on improving agricultural techniques for greater efficiency, and they had been doing so largely using the knowledge gained by reading imperial georgic translations of the *Georgics*.<sup>17</sup> By the end of the eighteenth century, a new set of debates had developed between

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<sup>17</sup> Further context for the phenomenon of the use of the advice contained within the *Georgics* for the purposes of farming in eighteenth-century England can be found in Frans De Bruyn's "Reading Virgil's *Georgics* as Scientific Texts," detailing Stephen Switzer's use of the *Georgics* as agricultural manuals: "Switzer's Virgil anticipated in his outlook the forward-thinking eighteenth-century gentleman: he served the cause of 'Improvement in Agriculture' and excelled 'in a few Words... all that ever wrote before or indeed since him' on the subject" (662). De Bruyn describes the spirited debate that played out between Switzer and gentleman farmer Jethro Tull throughout the 1730s, after Tull declared the Virgilian method "erroneous and pernicious" and put forward his own techniques of tillage and planting.

the agriculturalists—those who studied and wrote about agricultural *theory*—and “practical farmers,” who applied knowledge through empirical observation and experimentation. Not only is Brooke appealing to an audience familiar with the *Georgics* as a cultural touchstone, but she is also appealing to an audience familiar with the figure of the land improver as someone who has developed agricultural theory through Virgil’s didactic poem. Brooke is critiquing popular agricultural debates regarding the desires of landowning or otherwise upper-class members of British society who expect to improve the efficiency and productivity of farming practices through the application of theory. Brooke’s pun on “pretty enough husbandman” is revealed to be a double entendre throughout the course of the novel. Ed Rivers marries Emily Montague but fails to make his Canadian farm productive enough to sustain their life in Canada. Brooke’s pun on husbandman hints at the irony of his failure as an agriculturalist; even if he has successfully courted Emily Montague, by the end of the novel and the couple’s return to England, the union and agricultural enterprise have both failed to (re)produce. Ed Rivers’ belief that the gentleman farmer is the central figure in generating cultural progress who can perpetuate imperial culture through the (re)productive capacity of the family and technological mastery was popularized by Dryden’s *Georgics* and the imperial georgics that followed.

Although critics like Katherine Binhammer have written extensively about the economics of settlement and about Brooke’s ambivalence toward the project of colonization, few critics have mentioned the georgic and its relationship with the material culture of settlement as a central site of inquiry. Critics have instead tended to privilege an aesthetic account of early Canadian settler narratives, especially as settlement continued into the nineteenth century. Northrop Frye, D.M.R. Bentley, E.D. Blodgett, and Susan Glickman, for example, have tended to discuss Canadian settler-colonizer narratives in terms of the writers’ attempted importing of Romantic or pastoral

aesthetics. Most recently, D.M.R. Bentley argues in “The Romantic Aesthetics of Settlement in 19th Century Canada” (2012) that Canadian Confederation poets adapted the sublime and the picturesque to reflect the aesthetics of the work of Canadian settlement, using the sublime to depict the fires set to clear the land of tree stumps and the picturesque “to identify areas of ‘profitable beauty’—that is, areas whose fertility, terrain, and climate were amenable to successful agricultural settlement and, hence, to the eventual realization of the utopian ideal of independence and freedom based on prosperity” (1). Bentley’s argument is consistent with the arguments of scholars like Glickman, Blodgett, and Don McKay in their emphases on the aesthetics of Romanticism in colonial-settler narratives in Canada. Consequently, much early scholarship on early Canadian writing has read texts in relation to Romantic aesthetics without consideration of other popular literary movements like the georgic that may have continued to influence early Canadian writing. Attempts to read Canadian settler narratives as pastoral or through the aesthetic categories of the sublime or picturesque have run into trouble because these texts contain elements that do not belong in these categories such as antiquated metre and bleak depictions of struggle and toil leading to the ultimate successful transformation of wilderness into civilization. Critics like Desmond Pacey and Kenneth Hughes have acknowledged these inconsistencies but have tried to explain them away awkwardly as either the inability to adapt the English pastoral idyll to the harsh realities of North American wildernesses, or an ironic commentary on British assumptions about imperial progress. However, I argue that these elements actually indicate that these texts are working within the georgic mode, because their modal characteristics—representations of labour and material transformations of the landscape, a narrative of nation or empire building that centres agrarian work, digression, and descriptive detail of the material environment—as a whole system of meaning, better fit the georgic than the

pastoral or the sublime or picturesque. It was the georgic, rather than the sublime, pastoral, or picturesque, that provided the ontology that powered agricultural and imperial expansion.

Although Bentley and others have, of course, discussed the role of farm labour in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British aesthetic discourses, they have rarely considered the georgic mode as an informing model. The omission has resulted in the invention of some awkward synonyms, most notably K.P. Stitch's "capitalist pastoralism" and Bentley's "profitable beauty." While these literary terms are useful in describing a relationship between the aesthetics of landscape and the capitalist expansion of British imperial interests, they fall short of describing the actual material relationship between narratives of settlement, farm labour, and the emergent agrarian capitalism of late eighteenth-century England and early Canada. Namely, that the georgic mode had developed in England into a powerful ontology of imperial and agrarian capitalist expansion, combining the same class politics of bourgeois land improvement that had spurred two enclosure movements in England with the political imperative to reproduce British agricultural, economic and social systems in Canada. In contrast to aesthetic categories like the sublime and the picturesque, the georgic mode was a mode that, because it involved both descriptions of landscape and actual instructions for farming, involved or performed material relationships between humans and the land. Understanding how the imperial georgic mode came to be the dominant ontology tying Canadian agriculture to British imperial expansion helps us better situate Canadian settler narratives within broader ecological debates of their time. Doing so also helps to explain elements of texts like Oliver Goldsmith's *The Rising Village*, Isabella Valancy Crawford's *Malcolm's Katie*, and Susanna Moodie's *Roughing It in the Bush* that have been ill-served by their characterizations as imperfect or ironized versions of a derivative Romantic pastoral.

I argue that there was, in fact, a literary mode that many early Canadian anglophone writers successfully imported to Canada, but that mode was the imperial georgic. Goldsmith's *The Rising Village*, Crawford's *Malcolm's Katie*, and Moodie's *Roughing It in the Bush* are not "capitalist pastorals" but New World adaptations of the georgic mode. *The Rising Village* is a straightforward example of the imperial georgic because it offers a linear teleological vision of colonization in Nova Scotia, made successful through the mastery of nature through agricultural work, which is linked with the successful expansion of the British empire. In contrast, Moodie and Crawford both create precarious georgics that challenge the feasibility of the imperial georgic notion of the 'gentleman farmer,' though in very different ways. Crawford's *Malcolm's Katie* complicates the imperial georgic's technological and agrarian capitalist idealism by demonstrating how the imperial georgic operates and reproduces itself through women's bodies at the expense of their agency. Similarly, Susanna Moodie's *Roughing It in the Bush* introduces a sense of precarity using formal variety and a dialectic between the practical imperial georgic advice provided by her husband, Dunbar Moodie, and the knowledges and stories of the many indigenous people and other settler colonizers she encounters. While *The Rising Village* fits neatly into the imperial georgic tradition, *Malcolm's Katie* and *Roughing It in the Bush* signal a departure from the inherited imperial georgic tradition, but one that cannot be classified as either an anti-georgic or Romantic pastoral; instead, these texts represent a sub-mode of the precarious georgic that I call the settler georgic.

Reading these texts with some knowledge of the georgic mode helps explain many of the formal and thematic characteristics that Canadian critics had identified as incongruities or imperfect derivations of English Romanticism. The immense popularity of the imperial georgic mode in British literature and culture —and subsequent public debates about the nature of

agricultural knowledge stemming from that popularity—naturalized the connection between an agriculture that focused on the taming and mastery of wild landscapes and the expansion of British imperial interests. O’Brien argues that “Seventeenth-century commentators expressed pride in the fact that the British Empire was not, like the Dutch Empire, simply an affair of exports and trading bases, but a process of agricultural improvement overseas. Dryden detected and developed poetically this georgic inflection of contemporary public discussion of colonization and international trade” (166). This recognition solidified the relationship between the technical expertise of farming and the expansion of the empire through land acquisition for agricultural use. The imperial georgic influenced not only practical and political debates, but also stressed that the empire through the expansion and reproduction of social organization and agricultural technique. Scientific discourses of agricultural improvement were thoroughly embedded in the imperial georgic’s didactic attention to technique. The imperial georgic’s didacticism and detailed instruction reflected the eighteenth-century’s broader interest in standardization of those techniques, and standardization led to the scalability of British agricultural methods. The imperial georgic’s engagement with building scalable systems of agriculture meant that it could serve a dual function for early Canadian settler-colonizers as emigration progressed into the nineteenth century. But by the late eighteenth century, the imperial georgic’s role in agricultural development had generated technical debate for both British farmers and for Canadian settler-colonizers. On the one hand, texts written in the georgic mode would promote emigration and offer homesteading advice to audiences back in the British metropole; on the other hand, early Canadian settler-colonial writers could use or critique the imperial georgic to explore the complexities of the work of settlement. Bourgeois landowners in England and agricultural scholars in the Maritimes, such as Agricola, were beginning to use

experimentation to test the efficacy of the agricultural knowledge generated by the imperial georgic, collecting observational data that would eventually become the groundwork for modern agricultural sciences, but there was an unequal distribution of technical agricultural knowledge among settlers along the lines of economic and political power. Because the imperial georgic tended to present a philosophy of farming that was idealized and glossed over the material difficulties to focus on the glorious future being produced, those who focused on the material labour were more likely to produce something like the precarious georgic.

D.M.R. Bentley and Travis Mason have both addressed the connections between writers like Oliver Goldsmith and eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century debates on agricultural theory. But what has not been recognized is the extent to which the imperial georgic mode influenced the theories and opinions of Agricola/Young himself, or how early Canadian agricultural reformers were beginning to call attention to the experiential gap between the arts and philosophies of farming and the actual material labour of colonization. Both scholars were interested in the agricultural reformer Agricola, the pen name of John Young. Young founded the first agricultural societies of Halifax and became a member of the Nova Scotia legislative assembly. Indeed, Agricola was in large part a pioneer of the development of what we now recognize as the field of agricultural science in Canada, an argument already established by agricultural historians like Karl Rassmussen.<sup>18</sup> Young's letters to the *Acadian Recorder* addressed the practical, technical aspects of agricultural improvement in Halifax, including soil composition, the use and maintenance of machinery, drainage and irrigation, as well as the philosophical, commercial, and social concerns of farm life. Writers were also beginning to call attention to the class distinctions between the philosophical figure of the British and European

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<sup>18</sup> See Rassmussen, Karl. *Trailblazers of Canadian Agriculture: A History of Agriculture Pioneering and Development in Canada*.

gentleman farmer and the plight of the poorer settlers in the colonies, for whom farming was a desperate bid for survival in a strange and harsh new environment. The goal of Nova Scotian agriculture, for Young, is to build commerce to sustain the kind of agricultural economy that had allowed agricultural improvers to find the same kind of successes they had enjoyed in England and in Europe. To this end, Young sought to use the idealized linear teleology of the imperial georgic to encourage settlers to improve their farming methods. In Letter 37, Agricola/Young quotes from James Thompson's imperial georgic poem,<sup>19</sup> *The Seasons*, as he extols the aesthetic beauty and moral benefits of farm labour. And although Agricola declares that Thompson's aesthetically pleasing descriptions of the productivity of farm labour cannot be applied to Nova Scotia's wild environment, he also insists that "there want not reasons particular to ourselves, and pleasures which in a certain sense may be stiled [sic] our own, to furnish motives for embarking on this line of industry" (446). The real nature of farming, Young argues, is to be found in the pleasures of the land improver, "who possesses the means of enterprise" (447). "Agricultural pursuits," he declares, "exert a friendly influence on [the improver's] contentment, tranquility and health, besides opening up many springs of innocent and unalloyed enjoyment. In Europe they are the relaxation of the nobleman and the retreat of the philosopher. The merchant or manufacturer whose mind has been broken down by the cares of business, regards them as the solace and employment of his maturer [sic] years, and accounts himself happy" (447). But settlers, confronted with the wilderness, "[labour] under the pressure of want, which itself is enough to corrode [their] comfort and embitter [their] enjoyment" (446). As a result, the

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<sup>19</sup> The claim that Thompson's *The Seasons* is an imperial georgic poem is Karen O'Brien's. She writes, "It was the Scottish Poet, James Thompson... who would forge the strongest connection between rural labor, commerce, patriotism, and empire, thereby ensuring the triumph of a georgic rather than pastoral mode of imperial vision in eighteenth-century poetry. ... *The Seasons* were initially published in the late 1720s for the purpose of developing patriotic images and rhetoric for the Whig opposition to Walpole" (168-169).

unaesthetic qualities of the settler farmer's labour—"his dwelling—his barn—his fences—the irregular shape of his fields—his patches of culture—bespeak that poverty which modifies alike his feelings and his conduct.—Whatever were the situation of such a man, it must be cheerless and uncomfortable: and this arises from the meanness of his circumstances, not from the nature of his calling" (446). Agricola assures settlers that the difficulty and toil of the farm labour associated with settlement is a function only of the imperative for survival in a new landscape, but with greater expansion of farming past the subsistence phase, there would be more opportunity for farmers to enjoy the kind of agrarian prosperity depicted in Thompson's imperial georgic. Young/Agricola echoes Dryden's imperial georgic in presenting agriculture as a process of generating culture from wild nature through a set of scalable and standardized techniques for ecological mastery. In this effort, Young/Agricola is not advocating for mere subsistence farms, but for the expansion of an agrarian capitalist system that supports imperial economic interests.

Young echoes the imperial georgic's logic of scalable expansion through the reproduction of farming families when he connects the improvement and expansion of the colony of Nova Scotia to the increase in population that comes from the abundance of food. He declares that "the deficiency of our agricultural produce compared with our internal consumption, must have retarded, since the first settlement of the colony, the increase of our population" (448). Good husbandry and cultivation, for Young/Agricola, is the result of good agricultural science, which, in turn, is the foundation of imperial expansion through heterosexual reproduction. And the root of his worldview is the teleological vision of progress, the emphasis on instrumental mastery, and the agrarian capitalist assumptions embedded in the imperial georgic mode. Indeed, the collection of Agricola's letters to the *Acadian Recorder* reads much like an imperial georgic text, with Letters 6-37 roughly following Virgil's order of discussing climate, soil, machinery, the

importance of regional ecology, husbandry and manure, and—in place of Virgil’s Book IV on apiculture—a lengthy discussion of farming’s benefits for individual, local, and imperial commercial interests. De Bruyn has argued that even though by the early nineteenth century, agriculture had developed from an art predicated mainly on advice found in Virgil’s *Georgics* in England to a more recognizably scientific study that emphasized statistical analysis, these statistical analyses and repetitions retained elements of Virgil’s descriptive didacticism. De Bruyn argues in “Reading Georgics as Scientific Texts” that “The presence of the georgic was ... registered in literary forms far beyond poetry, from travelogues, scientific treatises, and manuals of husbandry, to essays, novels, and conduct books” (661). Agricola’s letters suggest that in the mid-nineteenth century in Canada, important debates in the emergent agricultural sciences showed that agriculture was still intimately connected to the imperial georgic.

Given this history, critics’ attempts to explain early Canadian settler narratives as imperfect derivations of pastoral or of British aesthetic discourses also ignore the material, political, and social ramifications of the imperial georgic’s role in developing agricultural scientific discourses. In an age of standardization, the aim of these debates was to constitute a scalable ontology that demanded massive changes to the ecology and social organization of what would become Canada. One of these massive changes was the suppression of Indigenous agriculture as part of the process of colonization. The nature of scalability, Anna Tsing reminds us, is that it seeks to replicate exactly a predictable system in which all the elements are controlled and standardized so that, in theory it will produce the same results everywhere—this is why it must exclude or assimilate any new element that would alter the overall project. For the British imperialists, the alternative farming practices of existing indigenous nations would have challenged the viability of the imperial georgic by offering forms of agriculture that were dependent not on

standardization, but on adapting to the precariousness and diversity of local environments. One of the pieces missing from discussions of the displacement of indigenous people in Canada by colonizers has been the doubled role of settler colonial agriculture in the theft of indigenous land. On one hand, the destruction of traditional indigenous food sources and the displacement of indigenous nations to reserves in many places resulted in programs that required indigenous people to use British farming techniques and supplies, including the legislated distribution of seed and equipment, to reserve lands that were, often, ill-suited to farming. In other cases, traditional agricultural methods were actively discouraged through governmental market control. In still others, white ethnologists excluded traditional agricultural and subsistence methods of nations like the Anishinaabe from history because they did not resemble European or British farming practices. As Cole Harris explains in *The Reluctant Land*, prior to 1500,

agriculture dominated the economy only in the eastern Great Lakes and St. Lawrence lowlands, where a system of corn-based farming of Central American origin had been introduced almost a hundred thousand years earlier. Along the west coast, rhizomes cultivated in intertidal gardens supplemented food supplies, some of the peoples around the northern perimeter of the eastern Great Lakes and St. Lawrence lowlands farmed intermittently, and here and there a few others grew tobacco. (5)

The nations most associated with farming before 1500 were the Anishinabek, who harvested wild rice and cultivated corn; the Huron-Wendat, who cultivated corn, beans, and squash; the Haudenosaunee, who cultivated corn, beans, and squash, and existed in a large Confederacy with both the Anishinabek and the Huron-Wendat; and the Algonquin. However, this agriculture did not resemble the settled and stationary agriculture practiced by English and European settlers. Cohen argues that it was necessarily seasonal and mobile—crops were sown in fertile areas and

then moved to new locations once the soil was exhausted—and supplemented with gathering and hunting practices. By the early 1800s, however, more indigenous cultures had taken up a form of agriculture, including the Ojibway in Northern Ontario, who had adopted farming as a means of trade with British and French fur traders, but who were actively discouraged from farming less than a century later (Waisberg 175). Waisberg argues that the Ojibway made use of naturally occurring lacustrine plains, areas where lake silt gathered and constituted pockets of fertile land around lake and river basins. In all cases, although indigenous farming practices altered both the landscape and the ecology of the areas in which farming was undertaken, agriculture was occurring on a small scale and was intimately adapted to bioregional landscapes.

Reading the imperial georgic as a scalable ontology helps to show that initially, British settlement depended on encouraging indigenous nations to *continue* farming—but usually using British techniques rather than their traditional semi-nomadic methods of agriculture supplemented with hunting and gathering practices. This conversion served two functions. First, relegating semi-nomadic Indigenous nations like the Mi'kmaq to reserves facilitated the theft of land for the purposes of white settler farming, where property ownership allowed for land that had been used for hunting grounds to be converted into land for agricultural use. Second, where indigenous people successfully adapted British agricultural practices to the point of surplus goods, they could, under the logic of agriculturalists like John Young or Walter Bromley, contribute to the growing agrarian capitalist system of the British empire. The strategy of forcing Indigenous nations from the Great Lakes basin and other arable areas onto less arable reserves, and then forcing them to farm using techniques unsuitable to land that was not arable, justified settler land theft in the name of intensifying agricultural output for imperial markets. In some cases, settlers constructed the stereotype that indigenous people did not know how to farm after

forcing them into reserves on non-arable or less arable lands in order to justify their further displacement. For example, Weisberg argues that prior to 1800, the Ojibway of northern Ontario had been farming for trade, having adopted the practice of farming beans, corn, and tobacco for the purpose. But when the Canadian government began programs in the prairies distributing seed and machinery to indigenous nations to encourage European-style farming, the Ojibway were effectively discouraged from farming because their markets had been disrupted. As a result, Weisberg has argued, white ethnographers who later described Ojibway food production erroneously described them as hunter-gatherers, failing to recognize that they had been farmers who were forced out of the practice. In Nova Scotia, Walter Bromley undertook a years-long campaign to force a Mi'kmaq community to farm using European methods, distributing non-indigenous seed (potatoes, wheat, and other non-indigenous plants), livestock (sheep, cows), and machinery and encouraging the fencing of pens and fields. Mason describes Walter Bromley's attempt to address the House Assembly "in behalf of the Indians of Nova Scotia" (5). He writes,

Titled "An Account of the Aborigines of Nova Scotia Called the Micmac Indians" (1822), Bromley's document provides an account of Mi'kmaq families residing in Shubenacadie and Gold River and incorporating into their daily lives farming equipment and (European) agricultural knowledge provided by Bromley himself. His condescending language and tone prevent a reading of his efforts as anything other than patronizing, yet, if his account is to be believed, the Mi'kmaq families whom he deals with appear to have been adapting as well as possible to a horrible situation. According to his petition, the twelve families living at Shubenacadie had, as of 1819, 'cleared 50  $\frac{3}{4}$  acres of land, 23 of which contained excellent crops of potatoes, turnips, and every kind of grain particular to

the country, all of which were enclosed by good fences' (5). They had also begun raising cattle for milk and poultry for (presumably) eggs and meat. (35)

Bromley's accounts of forcing the Mi'kmaq to farm using British methods speaks to agriculturalists' desire to build a standardized and expandable system of agriculture in Canada.

These and similar attempts to force European farming methods on nomadic and semi-nomadic, semi-agrarian peoples reflect the imperial georgic's scalable ontology. Anna Tsing argues in "On Nonscalability" that the quality of the scalable ontology is that it has "the ability to expand—and expand and expand—without rethinking basic elements," (505) which makes it a particularly powerful precision model for "the 'conquest of nature'" as well as "world making" (505). She describes how a scalable agricultural model developed out of plantation farming in the southern hemisphere with the Spanish, British, French, and Dutch using slave labour and developing technically precise farming methods that could then be replicated throughout the rest of the New World by the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. She writes,

Modernity is, among other things, the triumph of technical prowess over nature. This triumph requires that nature be cleansed of transformative social relations; otherwise it cannot be the raw material of *techne*. The plantation shows how: one must create a *terra nullius*, nature without entangling claims. Native entanglements, human and not human, must be extinguished; remaking the landscape is a way to get rid of them. The exotic workers and plants (or other project elements) can be brought in, engineered for alienation and control: nonsoels.<sup>20</sup> Both work and nature are close to self-contained and

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<sup>20</sup> Anna Tsing uses the term "nonsoels" to describe the possible connections between entities that disappear under the logic of scalability. For example, in intensive farming practices, the individual cow is removed from its processes of grazing and creating waste because those processes are transformed into the feeding and waste management aspects of a large-scale intensive farm. Rather than graze on a grassland, the cow is fed specialized feed at specific intervals. Rather than fertilize that grassland in turn with her manure, the cow's waste is relegated to large tailing ponds and held on the property ("On Nonscalability" 508).

interchangeable in relation to the project frame under these conditions, and thus the project is ready for expansion. (“On Nonscalability” 510)

This, I argue, is the purpose of the imperial georgic: to produce a nature without entangling claims, a human-controlled ecosystem that can be scaled up for expansion. As Tsing argues, the fact that something is scalable does not necessarily make it unethical. However, scalability is a feature of capitalist expansion, and increasingly so (Tsing 42). This feature of scalability is one design attribute that has connected British, European, and North American agricultural practices so strongly with imperialism, capitalism, and capitalist expansion. Tsing argues that

In the nineteenth century, when capitalism first became an object of inquiry, raw materials were imagined as an infinite bequest from Nature to Man. Raw materials can no longer be taken for granted. In our food procurement system, for example, capitalists exploit ecologies not only by reshaping them but also by taking advantage of their capacities. Even in industrial farms, farmers depend on life processes outside their control, such as photosynthesis and animal digestion. In capitalist farms, living things made within ecological processes are coopted for the concentration of wealth. (62)

Tsing refers to the process of relying on pericapitalist processes like life processes (birth, photosynthesis, digestion) as “salvage accumulation” (62). Salvage accumulation, which leads to alienation, is a key process that allows capitalism to work, and both salvage accumulation and alienation are processes that eventually reshape ecologies by removing people and animals from their entangling relations (for example, importing non-native species for the sole purposes of husbandry and food production). As an ontological perspective, the imperial georgic makes these processes scalable as they relate to agriculture by harnessing salvage accumulation and alienation

for the purposes of scalable expansion. These are elements embedded in the technical aspects of the kinds of agricultural practices described in the literary mode of the imperial georgic.

Oliver Goldsmith's *The Rising Village* provides a good example of the imperial georgic. Goldsmith was writing in response to his uncle's—the Irish Oliver Goldsmith's—poem ““The Deserted Village””, a pastoral elegy, so *The Rising Village* fulfills the second section of the *Rota di Vergil*<sup>21</sup> as an imperial georgic text. The Irish Goldsmith's poem traces the gradual decay of and loss of the small farming village of Auburn under the pressures of increasing rationalization of the English countryside during the eighteenth century, including the acts of enclosure that sought to consolidate land under the management of wealthy land improvers. In contrast to this narrative of loss and displacement, the Canadian Goldsmith's *The Rising Village* depicts the generation of civilization in Nova Scotia from wilderness to colony. However, although Ronald E. Tranquila, in his article “Empires Rise and Sink: *The Rising Village* and the Cyclical View of History” gestures toward the cyclical pattern of empire without mentioning the georgic, no Canadian critics have positioned “The Deserted Village” and *The Rising Village* within the *Rota di Vergil*. In the introduction to the first edition of *The Rising Village*, the Bishop argues that there is a direct historical line between the Irish Oliver Goldsmith's poem and his Canadian nephew's attempts to extend the story of the people of Auburn:

[Goldsmith's friends] supposed that a poem upon such a subject [as a developing colonial settlement], from the pen of a person bearing the names of the celebrated Author of the Deserted Village, and allied to him by blood, would hardly fail to excite some interest; more especially as it may be considered as taking up the history of the innocent sufferers who were driven from Auburn, and tracing their humble progress beyond the Western

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<sup>21</sup> Virgil's three books that constitute the epic of the rise and fall of civilization: the pastoral prelapsarian world (*Eclogues*), resettlement and rehabilitation through agriculture (*Georgics*), and war (*Aeneid*).

main, from their first settlement in a rude forest, to a state of comparative comfort and enjoyment. (17)

The Bishop situates *The Rising Village* in a continual narrative of human progress; the villagers and farmers of Auburn, in this imagining, were not forced from the land for nothing; they would find and cultivate civilization in what would become Nova Scotia. Reading Oliver Goldsmith's *The Rising Village* through the lens of the imperial georgic mode helps to solve three interpretive issues that have plagued criticism of Goldsmith's long poem since the 1950s: why Goldsmith chose to use the heroic couplet even though it had begun to fall out of favour, why Goldsmith included the long narrative digression about Flora and Albert, and whether or not Goldsmith's inclusion of the moral vices of the village indicated some dissatisfaction with the British colonial project in Halifax.

*The Rising Village* echoes John Young's comparison between the pastoral idyll of England and the yet undeveloped colony of Nova Scotia as a direct extension of the British Empire. Although the rising village does not yet enjoy England's "chaste and splendid" (54) scenes, *The Rising Village* offers an imperial georgic narrative of development as a scalable, linear teleology of technical mastery over nature—both human and nonhuman. Even though the settlements of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia were largely populated by United Empire Loyalists, Goldsmith's family among them, *The Rising Village* never mentions the American War of Independence, nor the United Empire Loyalists themselves. Such an elision, and the emphasis on English immigration, is suggestive of the poem's strong imperialist leanings, glossing over wider political disruptions in imperial expansion and instead representing history as a long and unbroken teleology of human progress. *The Rising Village* includes the didacticism of eighteenth-century Georgics with its unabashed argument that the empire is responsible for the

success of the settler-colonizer's agrarian endeavours. Addressing the British Empire, the speaker exclaims, "How lost is he who ne'er thy influence knows, / How cold the heart thy charity ne'er fires, / How dead the soul thy spirit ne'er inspires!" (27). For Goldsmith, the British Empire is the source of the soldier-settler's cultural landscape, economic successes, and spiritual compass, and, in turn, the soldier-settler's agricultural labour is the motor of the Empire's successful expansion. The poem begins by contrasting these idyllic imperial scenes with descriptions of the supposed *terra nullius* of pre-colonial Nova Scotia, where "[lone] and drear / Did once [Acadia's] woods and wilds appear" (24). The struggle to control the nonhuman environment is echoed in the parallel structure of Goldsmith's lines. The dark, enclosed atmosphere of Acadia's woods is contrasted with its "wides," which precipitate the freedom of civilization that comes from the mastery and clearing of the landscape. Goldsmith's settlers must endure the "great pain, the danger, and the toil / Which mark the first rude culture of the soil" (55). Both Gerald Lynch and Kenneth J. Hughes have completed the groundwork of close readings of the text, pointing out the multiple valences of words like "prospects", "culture,"<sup>22</sup> (Hughes 39-40) and "nature,"<sup>23</sup> and their connotations both for the control of human impulse and the harnessing of natural resources for Britain's agrarian capitalist economy. Culture coincides with the clearing and cultivating of the soil, carrying the double meaning of growth and of artistic sophistication. Eventually, as a result of the toil of these first settlers, "the arts of culture now extend their sway, / And many a charm of rural life display" (57). But although Goldsmith broadly depicts this development as a linear teleological process wherein the settlers eventually recover the idyllic beauty of the English countryside in Nova Scotia, this progression happens

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<sup>22</sup> See Hughes, Kenneth J.

<sup>23</sup> See Lynch, Gerald.

dialectically. *The Rising Village*'s growth is a struggle in which the settlement must overcome the pre-existing entanglements that threaten the colony's successful development. In Goldsmith's imperial georgic, the expansion of the British Empire via colonization, is seen as a difficult but inevitable outcome of both economic and cultural progress.

*The Rising Village* also reflects imperial georgic ideas of making agricultural production scalable in that settlement must involve the removal of elements that would change the system of scalable reproduction. My argument that the imperial georgic system relies on scalability somewhat echoes Lynch's argument in "Oliver Goldsmith's *The Rising Village*: Controlling Nature," that Goldsmith's narrative long poem is, at heart, "a poem about control, the control of nature, both physical and human" (1). Scalability is about control, in that it is about removing any "meaningful diversity" (Tsing, *Mushroom*, 38) from a project, which is any element that would significantly change its outcome. For the imperial georgic, one element of meaningful diversity is the already existing systems of Indigenous governance present in Canada before colonization. In the beginning of the poem, these challenges to the scalability of imperial georgic appear in the form of "wandering savages, and beasts of prey, / [who] Displayed, by turns, the fury of their sway" (24). The imperial logic at work in the poem requires that the natives be figured as part of chaotic nature—alongside the "beasts of prey", as interlopers in the settler-colonizers' zone of civilization. The effort to make scalable the imperial georgic's social, political, economic and ecological organization requires Goldsmith to erase previous civilizations from the landscape by assuming them to be a part of the *terra nullius* to be reformed. In "The Rising Village," "savage tribes in wildest strain, / Approach with death and terror in their train" (25) while the settler-colonizer "hears them oft in sternest mood maintain, / Their right to rule the mountain and the plan; / He hears them doom the *white man's* instant

death” (25). To acknowledge the anger of the Mi’kmaq people, and the settlers’ trespass on their land, as legitimate would mean that the settler-colonizers would need to negotiate their own inclusion into an *already existing* political, social, and ecological system that does not reflect British imperialism. In pointing to the arguments that the Mi’kmaq repeat— “their right to rule the mountain and the plain”—Goldsmith is not simply relegating the Indigenous people of Nova Scotia to the rest of wild nature as background. It is, rather, that Goldsmith is emphasizing both the wild nature of Nova Scotia and the Indigenous people who live there as part of the same unintelligible system of codes. Goldsmith emphasizes the “noble courage” of those “who leaving far behind their native plain, /.../ braved the perils of the stormy seas, / In search of wealth, of freedom, and of ease”(24), against these unintelligible systems, not because of their successful negotiation with those systems as newcomers, but because they have come to carve out spaces within the landscape—literally—for their own imperial georgic systems. Successful colonization only begins when “his bold aggressors fly / to seek their prey beneath some other sky” (57). As the village begins to take shape, the “savage tribes” are shadowed in the “half-bred Doctor” (59). The obvious racial connotations make clear that Goldsmith’s teleological vision was one in which indigenous peoples are displaced and, gradually, disappear through assimilation. As the poem ends, the excision of indigenous peoples from the landscape is complete, their presence felt only in retrospect: “Not fifty Summers yet have blessed thy clime, / How short a period in the page of time! / since savage tribes, with terror in their train, / Rushed o’er thy fields, and ravaged all the plain” (68). The work of settlement includes not only the physical agrarian labour of clearing the landscape and refashioning it into something recognizably arable (ignoring, of course, the small itinerant farming already practiced by First Nations tribes like the Ojibwa in small forest clearings), but also the military work of colonization, of actively seizing the land

itself from wild animals and First Nations inhabitants: “Yet, [tho] these threat’ning dangers round him roll, / Perplex his thoughts, and agitate his soul, / By patient firmness and industrious toil, / He still retains possession of the soil” (26). In other words, because the settlers persisted in the importation of their system of imperial georgic settlement, over and instead of already existing systems of indigenous government, they could succeed in the rest of the project of imperial expansion by driving out what *The Rising Village* depicts as interfering forces.

As Lynch rightly points out, however, the Indigenous presence in Nova Scotia is not the only pre-existing entanglement the settler-colonizers must excise in the name of imperial georgic scalability. In *The Rising Village*, the speaker warns us about the encroaching vices and insufficient expertise of the village’s teacher (“Whose greatest source of knowledge or of skill /Consists in reading,[and] in writing ill” (31)), the village’s doctor, (described as a hack who consorts with death), and the general run of vice among the village’s younger inhabitants, who have forgotten the struggle and toil of the previous generation. Lynch argues that in this sense, the poem becomes the work of an “obsessively moralising” impulse, written by a poet “who anticipates encroaching chaos in his environment, [and] creeping vice in his neighbours” (1) as the poem follows a cyclical pattern that thematizes a process of gain and loss of control. These concerns of *The Rising Village*, too, are bound up with ensuring the imperial georgic’s scalability. Understanding how the successful reproduction of the imperial georgic system relies both on the technical mastery of agricultural work and the mastering of one’s sense of duty to the heterosexual reproduction of the family farm helps shed some light on a passage in *The Rising Village* that has perplexed Canadian critics. Goldsmith’s one major digression from the linear teleological narrative of imperial georgic progress in *The Rising Village* depicts the story of Albert and Flora. The story takes place just after the settlers have firmly established the village.

In the peace that follows, “vice steals on, in thoughtless pleasure’s train” (62), when Albert—the “foremost of the village train,” (62)—and the “blooming” (62) Flora, fall in love. Albert promises Flora that they will be married, but on their wedding day, Albert sends a note that he has left the village and will never see her again. Flora, “her reason fled” (64), rushes into the snowstorm and nearly freezes to death. She is found and revived by a peasant couple, but never fully recovers from Albert’s betrayal. Many critics, including Pacey and Bentley, have attempted to situate this digression as an allegory of the empire’s responsibility to its colonies, but this reading is unconvincing because to read Albert as analogous to a negligent imperial power contradicts Goldsmith’s overall imperialist leanings. Gerald Lynch and Travis Mason have both offered interpretations of this passage more consistent with the broader themes of the text. Lynch has argued that the Albert and Flora story is an allegory for the dangers of the lack of control over both self and nature. Mason, in the same vein, has argued that the digression about Albert and Flora’s doomed love story is an allegory about the dangers of pursuing short-term profit over the more consistent and productive labour of farming and land stewardship, and situates his reading in the historical context of the sudden demand for Nova Scotian lumber with the eruption of the Napoleonic wars, a sudden market shift that caused farmers to abandon agriculture in favour of logging.

Although I agree with both readings, resituating them in the context of the imperial georgic helps to connect Goldsmith’s concern with bad husbandry to his broader imperial georgic narrative. The social organization perpetuated in imperial georgic ontologies is one where the empire extends itself through both agricultural and familial (re)production: good husbandry *is* good moral control. I argue that Albert represents the negligent future husband, in both the sense that he has abandoned Flora at the altar, and in that he has abandoned the actual

work of husbandry on a whim. In other words, Albert's vice is not only that he has betrayed Flora; his betrayal is an allegory for the wayward youths of the village who are in danger of forgetting agricultural work and losing their sense of responsibility and mastery in maintaining the colony for future generations. For the once healthy and blooming Flora, the moment of Albert's betrayal brings on the chill of winter: "The northern blast along the valley rolled / Keen was that blast, and piercing was the cold" (64). As a result, Flora tries to run to Albert's house, only to nearly freeze to death in the snow, once "Exhausted nature could no further go" (63). Even though Flora is revived, she never marries, and therefore never has children that would carry on and expand the colony through more family farms. The failure of Albert and Flora's love is a failure to become (re)productive, the word *husband* working both for Albert and Flora's romance and for the larger narrative of the extension of empire through the sound application of agricultural principles. Flora's "exhausted nature" is the result of Albert's sudden and irresponsible betrayal of her trust in him, and "such tales of real woe / Degrade the land" (66). Just as Goldsmith uses "culture" to signify both the cultivation of land and the cultivation of the arts, so too does "degrade" doubly signal here. On one hand, as Lynch argues, Albert's betrayal of Flora signals a moral degradation that threatens the village. But on the other, Albert's betrayal stands as an allegory for the irresponsible cultivation of the landscape. Those who do not master the technical aspects of agriculture run the risk of degrading the land of nutrients, reducing soil quality and making that land unproductive for future generations of farmers.

Still, Goldsmith reassures us that these instances of "real woe" are rare in *The Rising Village* and offers readers a glimpse of the future village as a successful example of imperial georgic progress. The poem ends with a return to the descriptions of the gifts of the British Empire. He writes, "Thy grateful thanks to Britain's care are due, / Her power protects, her

smiles past hopes renew, / Her valour guards thee, and her councils guide, / Then, may thy parent ever be thy pride!” (69). Goldsmith’s analogy of the relationship between parent and child relating to the empire and colony echoes the imperial georgic’s linear teleology of reproduction as analogous to a genealogy. And although Ronald R. Tranquila has argued that Goldsmith depicts the development of the village as part of broader cyclical movements in the decline and fall of empire, the poem in fact ends with a projected future in which the colony—and the empire—prosper. In the last lines of the poem, Goldsmith writes with hope that the colony’s “course majestic” will continue “Till empires rise and sink, on earth, no more” (70). Although these lines might be read as a continuation of the cycle that would see the empire fall eventually, as many do, the context of the poem suggests that, if the colony’s successes continue, all empires would rise and sink except for the British empire. The ending, then, is a rejection of the cyclical rise and fall of empires. In other words, the sun never sets on the British empire.

Reading *The Rising Village* as an imperial Georgic also helps to resolve some of the questions that critics have had about its formal characteristics. Criticism of *The Rising Village* has only relatively recently started to diverge from evaluating its literary meaning according to the Romantic aesthetics used to judge many other early Canadian long poems. The poem was widely panned by Goldsmith’s critics as an inexpertly derivative attempt at the English Romantic tradition. More recently, Desmond Pacey attempted to explain the contradictions in *The Rising Village* as a failed attempt at documentary poetry and framed his major complaint about the poem as a failure to represent the colony of Nova Scotia as it was, rather than as what English readers hoped it might be. But *The Rising Village* was never meant to be a documentary poem; Desmond Pacey’s criticism of *The Rising Village* is mainly based on his contention that the younger Goldsmith failed “to give us a detailed and accurate picture of social and economic

conditions" in the Nova Scotia of his time. The Canadian Goldsmith "was saying the comfortable thing, saying what he knew everybody wanted to hear about the progress of the colony" (Pacey qtd. in Jackel n.p.). David Jackel argues, along with Hughes, that Goldsmith was writing in a celebratory tone to show his allegiance to the British Empire. While I agree with Jackel and Hughes, I add that this is not just any success story but specifically the narrative of the imperial georgic in which the farmer's labour will bring about a utopian future. In other words, I argue that Goldsmith was not simply celebrating the "civilizing" of Nova Scotia, but that the celebration of agrarian work that leads to successful imperial expansion is a feature of the imperial georgic mode. The narrative of improvement accounts for more than the documentation of facts, because the imperial georgic is not a narrative of what is there; it is a future-oriented narrative of progress toward an ideal future state that will occur through the continuous labour and vigilance of the farmer. Goldsmith reflects this idea at the formal level, as well, with his use of the heroic couplet form. W.H. New, for example, was baffled as to why Oliver Goldsmith wrote *The Rising Village* in heroic verse, a verse form he argues was already considered archaic at the time of Goldsmith's writing. Until Kenneth J. Hughes's attempt to explain some of Goldsmith's aesthetic and formal choices as thematic, rather than as bad variations on British Romantic pastoral, much of the criticism attempted and failed to grapple with what they saw as disharmonious formal and thematic elements. Goldsmith himself complained that these criticisms did not give *The Rising Village* the credit he'd felt it deserved. At least in this instance, Goldsmith's main complaint may have been justified, since critics did not recognize his use of the heroic couplet as reflective of the poem's mode. While the heroic couplet may already have been archaic, the connection between the imperial georgic and the use of the heroic couplet was already clear. The best-known translations of Virgil's *Georgics* that were written in English, like

Dryden's *Georgics*, employed the heroic couplet.

Oliver Goldsmith's *The Rising Village*, despite its depiction of the colony's wavering moral standards, presents readers with a straightforwardly scalable model for overcoming the obstacles of the Nova Scotian landscape and cultivating a linear teleological vision of imperial expansion through the technical mastery of agrarian work. In contrast, women settler-colonialist writers of this period, although implicated in the violent colonizing of Canada, have complicated the mode by acknowledging the violence that Goldsmith's imperial georgic invokes but disavows and the precarious nature of the imperial georgic project. Isabella Valancy Crawford's *Malcolm's Katie* remains one of the most interrogated nineteenth-century settler-colonial long poems in Canadian literature, and scholars interpreted the title character's—Katie's—potential feelings of separation and alienation from her own thought processes, emotions, and desire as reflecting Crawford's proto-feminist ideas. Crawford's long poem depicts a love story between Max, a poor woodsman employed in clearing the Canadian forests for colonization, and Katie, daughter of wealthy Scottish agrarian capitalist, Malcolm. The poem follows several conventions of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century romance: the secret betrothal of Katie and Max becomes a central conflict of the narrative arc of the poem when, while Max is away in the bush, a wealthy suitor, Alfred, takes it upon himself to attempt to secure a betrothal between himself and Katie so he can access Malcolm's fortune. As the romantic plot unfolds, Alfred leaves Max to die after he is caught beneath a falling tree and attempts to secure a marriage between Katie and himself. He then uses a lie to attempt to sway Katie from her affection for Max. Finally, as a last act of desperation, Alfred threatens to kill both himself and Katie. Max saves Katie, but Alfred drowns. Malcolm is convinced to accept the match between Max and Katie despite Max's humble background, and Max and Katie name their first child Alfred, in a gesture of reconciliation and

forgiveness.

Like *The Rising Village*, Crawford's long poem is an example of the linear teleology of the imperial georgic. But while in Goldsmith's poem the role of heterosexual reproduction in the production of empire is considered only in the episode about Albert and Flora, Crawford emphasizes that women's bodies and desires are the organizing principle through which the imperial georgic is made scalable and reproduced through marriage and birth. Crawford's allegorical narrative positions all three male characters as elements of the imperial georgic ontology. Diana M. A. Relke argues in "The Ecological Vision of Isabella Valancy Crawford" that each character in the narrative long poem represents the relationship between human beings and the natural world, and although she reads the poem as pastoral, her interpretations of the characters actually make more sense if interpreted as elements of imperial georgic. Malcolm, she argues, represents "the *commercial* model ... in which nature is ruthlessly and thoroughly subdued by man and turned into a profit-making enterprise," and Max represents "the *military* model ... armed with his axe and engaged in guerilla warfare with the landscape" (52). Katie's suitor, Alfred, represents "the Darwinian, or scientific model ... in which nature is hostile and triumphantly destructive to man and the culture he creates" (52), in Relke's view. At the nexus of each of these male characters, then, is Katie, who represents "the *New Edenic* model... in which nature and culture are reconciled and exist in harmony" (52). While Relke is using pastoral language, we can recognize in her new Eden the linear teleological trajectory of the imperial georgic. The allegory organizes the characters as each playing a role in the colonial project: Malcolm's agrarian capitalism, supported and protected by Max's militaristic allegiance to the imperial project, helped the colony operate and expand successfully. These two positions make sense in the context of the broader romantic narrative, as well: Max, who wishes to wed Katie,

must first win over and learn to exist alongside the disapproving Malcolm, eventually inheriting Malcolm's wealth. Malcolm, representative of the old country's methods, is already successful and the onus is on Max to prove himself capable of reproducing the successful farm through the clearing of land if he is to reap the rewards of marriage to Malcolm's daughter. Max must first prove he can reproduce the technical expertise of the imperial georgic before he can reproduce the farm family through his marriage to Katie. Alfred rejects this progressive narrative of civilization. The imperial georgic does not rely on destroying the natural world as a threat, but in *domesticating* it and making it profitable.

I argue that reading *Malcolm's Katie* through the lens of the imperial georgic shows us how colonialist agrarian capitalism organized and reproduced itself by producing a state of alienation through salvage accumulation, not only in nonhuman nature and not only through the genocide of indigenous peoples, but also through the instrumental exploitation of female sexual reproduction. Katie is the lynchpin of both the settler-colonial vision of a scalable agrarian society and of the heteronormative family organization on which the reproduction and expansion of that society depends. Crawford offers a proto-feminist critique of the imperial georgic's coopting of the female body for the purposes of reproducing itself and expanding the empire, but that critique is also hindered by the model of feminism Crawford espouses. Rather than rejecting the imperial georgic, her poem expresses the desire for women to have greater agency within it. Colonial women were what made the imperial georgic model work, and they benefitted from that model of resource extraction and expansion, even while the imperial georgic powerfully restricted their agency.

Malcolm and Max go about the work of making nature profitable in different, but complementary ways: Malcolm has already established his homestead and maintains its success

through vigilance against the surrounding wilderness; Max conquers the forest, felling trees to build his own farm. Together, Max and Malcolm function as a machine for expansion. Relke argues that, although Max and Malcolm begin the narrative long poem as opposed, in both the commercial and military models, “nature is depicted as beaten into submission by culture” (54). Malcolm’s commercial model is one in which this domination has already happened, but he is characterized both by his vigilance and by his position between the initial toil of the settlement and the distant prospects of its successes. When Malcolm is first introduced, it is through a description of his house:

Square-shouldered and peaked-roofed, upon a hill,  
 With many windows looking everywhere,  
 So that no distant meadow might lie hid,  
 Nor corn-field hide its gold,  
 Nor lowing herd browse in far pastures, out of Malcolm’s ken. (206)

Malcolm sits watching through his windows, “while his thoughts / Swung back and forth between the bleak, stern past / And the near future” (206). Malcolm, having established a successful homestead through difficult labour, now looks ahead to the future of that enterprise. Max, on the other hand, who hopes to recreate Malcolm’s colonial success, must do battle with the “King of Desolation” (202), felling the forest and creating his own estate, which he will own once the land has been cleared. But although their methods are obviously complementary, Crawford sets up the relationship between Max and Malcolm as a contentious one. Max wants to marry Katie, which means marrying obviously above his station (he describes Katie as “one little daughter heir / who must not wed the owner of an axe” (196)), and Malcolm is set against the idea. Max states his objections to Malcolm both in economic and ecological terms. Despite the

poem's imperial georgic framing of Malcolm's success,<sup>24</sup> Max resents Malcolm because Malcolm already owned the land he developed in service of the empire, having acquired it from his father during the first wave of English and Scottish emigration, and his jealousy seems to focus on having to undertake the task himself in order to gain ownership of his land:

O such a battle! Had we heard of serfs  
 Driven to like hot conflict with the soil,  
 Armies had marched and navies swiftly sailed  
 To burst their gyves. But here's the little point—  
 The polished-diamond pivot on which spins  
 The wheel of difference—they OWNED the soil,  
 And fought for love—dear love of wealth and power—  
 And honest ease and fair esteem of men.  
 One's blood heats at it! (195)

Max's resentment is a classed resentment. The barrier to his marrying Katie—social class—was also Malcolm's safety net even through the work of generating his homestead. Whereas Max sees himself as coming to own the soil by mixing his labour with it in accordance with Lockean principles,<sup>25</sup> he sees Malcolm as having fought only for the leisure he now enjoys, on an already-

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<sup>24</sup> I heard him tell  
 How the first field upon his farm was ploughed.  
 He and his brother Reuben, stalwart lads,  
 Yoked themselves, side by side, to the new plough;  
 Their weaker father, in the grey of life—  
 But rather the wan age of poverty  
 Than many winters—in large, gnarled hands  
 The plunging handles held; with mighty strains  
 They drew the ripping beak through knotted sod,  
 Thro' torturous lanes of blackened, smoking stumps,  
 And past great flaming brush-heaps, sending out  
 Fierce summers, beating on their swollen brows. (195)

<sup>25</sup> See Locke, John. "Chapter Five: On Property." *Second Treatise on Civil Government*.

cleared homestead. Malcolm enjoys ease because his wealth and prosperity had been assured by his social status in the metropole. Max, a soldier, has no such economic advantage, and so envisions his own battle as even more desperate. Malcolm, on the other hand, implies that not only does he disapprove of Max as a match for his daughter, but that he is making decisions based on what he believes his departed wife's desires might be. Malcolm's objection to Max is economic as well, arguing, "he's a drone, / And will never put honey in the hive" (226).<sup>26</sup> Malcolm does not believe Max capable of building a homestead that will overcome a subsistence existence and generate wealth for the empire, because wealth generates wealth, and the propagation of imperial culture depends on the reproduction, not only of the economic structures of the British empire, but also the structures of social class through mutually beneficial, economically driven marriage contracts.

Alfred's attempt to bypass the work of homesteading for easy economic gain through marriage is the central conflict of the poem. Because the scalability of the imperial georgic involves trying to eliminate the precarious entanglements that get in the way of standardization and maximizing efficiency and profit, Alfred's nihilistic presence threatens the functioning of that imperial project. In other words, Katie's marriage must not only be economically suitable, but also must extend the performance of the imperial georgic by reproducing the farming family and the farming techniques that come with it. Therefore, Alfred's attempts to marry Katie are also attempts to interrupt the imperial georgic's teleology of progress and expansion. Although Relke's classification of Alfred's views as Scientific makes sense within the context of Victorian ideas of nature, I suggest that if read through the imperial georgic mode, Alfred has a nihilistic understanding of human-nonhuman relationships that stems from a fear of precarity and death.

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<sup>26</sup> We might be reminded, here, of Virgil's *Georgics* as well, in that Book IV is entirely about apiculture. Dryden's translation of this book anthropomorphizes bees as a microcosm of imperial life.

He rejects any premise of moral action on the grounds that he does not perceive moral action to be a natural trait. Rather than attempt to tame and domesticate these entanglements to ensure the survival and prosperity of the colony, like Max, Alfred's reaction to precarity is to bypass the work altogether and marry Katie for her father's money, with no intention or care to the overall imperial georgic project. When Alfred visits Max in the forest, Crawford contrasts Max's declaration—"My axe and I, we do immortal tasks; / We build up nations—this my axe and I!" (216)—with Alfred's rejection of the linear teleological project of imperial georgic. Alfred's reply is to declare,

Nations are not immortal. Is there now  
 One nation throned upon the sphere of earth  
 That walked with the first gods and with them saw  
 The budding world unfold its slow-leaved flower?  
 Nay, it is hardly theirs to leave behind  
 Ruins so eloquent that the hoary sage  
 Can lay his hand upon their stones and say:  
 'These once were thrones!' (216)

Alfred poses a threat to the imperial georgic project because he does not believe in progress at all, but only in the precariousness and finitude of his immediate existence. In arguing this point, I am not entirely diverging from Relke; Alfred's understanding of nature is Darwinist in that the temporal lens through which he sees the world is so broad that he understands human time as insignificant: human lives are short, and so, too are the existences of their nations and empires. Nature, after all, is not ruled by morality but by—in Alfred's view—violence. But Alfred reacts to this knowledge by alienating himself from his better nature: refusing to acknowledge the

importance of love in building settler social structures, Alfred survives through duplicity and greed. His dangerousness is the result of his nihilism, which threatens to upend the colony in much the same way as *The Rising Village's* Albert.

If Malcolm represents a commercialist and instrumentalist approach to nature and must be reconciled with Max's militaristic domination of the nonhuman landscape for the scalability of the imperial georgic to be established and maintained, then Alfred and Katie become the motor and engine central to the imperial georgic worldview by establishing a sense of stewardship over the newly conquered landscape. Although Bentley, Relke, Jones, and others have discussed at length Katie's declaration at the end of the poem, "if I knew my mind" (236), little has been said about its utterance in relation to Alfred's earlier utterance of the same qualifying statement. When Katie first refuses his advances, Alfred declares, "My pangs of love for gold must needs be fed, / And shall be, Katie, if I know my mind" (210). Within the context of the poem's conclusion, one might read this line as a qualifying statement revealing Alfred's uncertainty about what he really wants and thus his ability to change his greedy, duplicitous character. The poem suggests that some part of Alfred could be useful to the imperial georgic, which explains why Max and Katie name their child after him at the end of the poem, incorporating him into the heterosexual family structure of the homestead. After Alfred's death, Max and Katie remember him "with gracious joyousness, nor kept the dusk / of his past deeds between their hearts and his" (235). Crawford suggests that rather than greed, what drives Alfred is the fear of vulnerability and death. In his argument to Katie that he is unhurt by her rejection, he states that marriage is an economic transaction: "If all man's days are three-score years and ten, / He needs must waste them not, but nimbly seize / The bright, consummate blossom that his will / Calls for most loudly" (209). Alfred's recognition that the natural world is one ruled by

chance and precarity is also mentioned several times throughout the poem. Most notably, when Alfred goes to the woods to see Max, who is still at war with the trees, he responds to Max's hopeful projection of a future nation by pointing out that no nation can be immortal. Everything has its end, Alfred declares, and "Naught is immortal save immortal—Death!" (219). Further, when Max is nearly crushed beneath a falling tree at the height of their argument, Alfred declares "it was chance!" before leaving him beneath the tree, assuming he will die (although he survives).

Katie, as many scholars have argued, is the conduit at the heart of these conflicting masculine relationships with nature, and her position is both of tacit beneficiary of the imperial georgic project of colonization and its alienated subject. Much has been made of Katie's famed last line of the poem, when, after having married Max, and given birth to a child (which she names Alfred as "a seal of pardon" for his attempts to murder both Max and her (235)), she declares,

I would not change these wild and rocking woods,  
 Dotted by little homes of unbarked trees,  
 Where dwell the fleers from the waves of want,  
 For the smooth sward of selfish Eden bowers,  
 Nor—Max for Adam, if I knew my mind! (236)

At the end of the poem, Max has married Katie, and Max, Malcolm, Katie, and baby Alfred are standing in tableau. The baby signals the reproduction of the imperial georgic. Having created his homestead, Max now resides over a functioning farm in the new colony, and his offspring will go on to begin their own farms, continuing the cycle of colonization until the whole of the Canadian wilderness has been made productive. The "wild and rocking woods dotted by little

homes” signify the successful settlement of the landscape, and the “smooth sward of selfish Eden bowers” signifies the completely domesticated wilderness of the English countryside. The final lines, however, are odd ones; if “if I knew my mind” is not taken as a meaningless affectation but as a qualifying statement, Katie’s speech would say something like, “What I desire is the smooth sward of selfish Eden bowers, but if I knew my mind, I would choose Max (and all the trappings of labour that go with him).” In other words, if she understood her desires, Katie would choose the georgic over the pastoral, even if the Golden Age is what she is expected to find desirable. Critics such as D.M.R Bentley, for example, have indeed read these lines as a qualifying statement that ironizes Crawford’s support for the project of colonization as depicted by the rest of the poem. Manina Jones has argued that Crawford’s ending provides what she calls the “feminist urgency” of the text, in which “we find signs of Crawford’s much darker satirical representation of outcomes of the co-optation of feminine desire and the shadow cast on the colonial family and its future prospects” (n. page). Jones reads the passage as hinting at Katie’s alienation from her own body, feelings, and agency, and the argument makes sense in terms of how the imperial georgic works through women’s bodies. Crawford makes explicit that the conquest and regulation of what Tsing has called native entanglements—any relation that would threaten the standardization of the project, including non-reproductive sexuality, alternative farming methods, and species that do not serve imperial expansion—includes subsuming and regulating women’s agency, sexuality, and desire to the successful (re)production of the family structure.

In the Victorian period, the marriage contract was a legal and economic agreement that effectively makes women the property of their husbands by subsuming their identities under their husbands’ name: this, too, is salvage accumulation. Jones argues that a woman’s position in this

exchange places her in the position of both property and proprietor. She argues that, “as a daughter, wife, and childbearing woman, [Katie] is the agent of territorial claim and inheritance through which the acquisition of colonial land is justified, naturalized, and perpetuated on behalf of the developing nation” (n.p). Katie’s use of the qualifying phrase “if I knew my mind” signals her alienation as both property and property owner under the laws that governed women’s status before the passage of the Married Women’s Property Act (1884 in Ontario and 1900 in Manitoba). This legislation made her both a subject lacking agency and the agent who reproduces colonial structures through her body, because her ability to own property depended on her marital status, and because her inheritance would transfer to her husband. In other words, if he married Katie, Alfred would inherit Malcolm’s money and property. Crawford makes clear, too, that this legal framework is only reproduced through specific bodies. Alfred’s attempt to come between Katie’s affection for Max includes, ultimately, the lie that Max had wed an indigenous woman he’d fallen in love with in the backwoods, and that the two had a child. When Alfred tells this lie to Malcolm, he not only attempts to mislead Katie into thinking Max has been unfaithful, but also to confirm Malcolm’s suspicions that Max is “a drone” who will “never produce honey for the hive”, because his marriage to an Indigenous woman signals his departure from the project of Imperial progress. The final tableau might seem to be a satire of the imperial georgic because of Katie’s hesitation and gesture toward the ostensibly more desirable Pastoral of the “selfish Eden bowers”. However, the tableau is not a satire, but a framework for how the imperial georgic incorporates and mobilizes competing and sometimes conflicting ecological knowledges. Relke argues that Katie and Alfred represent opposing poles of Crawford’s religious moral framework, and that Katie is aligned with divine love as “God’s ambassador on earth” (58), while Alfred is aligned with evil and duplicitousness. Alfred’s behavior is indeed predatory;

he plots to deceive Katie and Malcolm into accepting his offer of marriage, resorting to ever more desperate measures that culminate in attempted murder-suicide. But Crawford's final tableau clearly implies that not only will Alfred be forgiven, but also, he will be eventually re-incorporated into the imperial georgic economy. Baby Alfred's position on Malcolm's knee suggests that what made the original Alfred dangerous—his thirst for wealth—will ensure the future success of the georgic economy.

Reading *Malcolm's Katie* through the lens of the imperial georgic mode also clarifies the passages depicting ecological processes outside the human sphere, including the seasons, the landscape, and its nonhuman inhabitants. Relke also includes a fifth characterization of human-nonhuman relationships: what she has called the poem's "ecological model," which includes Crawford's anthropomorphized and mythologized natural elements, including the personified characters of the seasons and trees. Relke argues that these mythologized natural elements are the most ecological of the *Malcolm's Katie's* characters. As in Goldsmith's *The Rising Village* indigenous people are part of the wilderness to be tamed. In *Malcolm's Katie*, Isabella Valancy Crawford conflates the indigenous populations of eastern Canada with the natural landscape by personifying the landscape itself as aboriginal, while simultaneously lamenting what she assumes will be their imminent removal through assimilation or death of Indigenous peoples. Even though indigenous imagery is used to describe elements of the natural world, such as the South Wind, who "laid his moccasins aside" (198), the drama of the changing seasons—from autumn to winter—mirrors, for Crawford, the invasive colonizing of indigenous people in what would become Canada:

"Esa! esa! shame on you, Pale Face!

Shame on you, Moon of Evil Witches!

Have you killed the happy, laughing Summer?

Have you slain the mother of the flowers

With your icy spells of might and magic?

...

She will turn again and come to meet me

With the ghosts of all the stricken flowers,

In a blue mist round her shining tresses,

In a blue smoke in her naked forests.

...

Saying, 'Sleep and dream of me, my children;

Dream of me, the mystic Indian Summer... (201)

Although Relke argues that passages like this one reveal Crawford's "Ecological Model" of human-nonhuman relationships, I argue that it is, in fact, part of the imperial georgic tradition to mythologize nonhuman nature. James Thompson's *The Seasons*, for example, personifies the seasons in a similar way. Thompson personifies Winter as an entity who "spreads his latest glooms... o'er the conquered year" (Thompson n.p.). In contrast, Crawford uses appropriated "Indian" personifications, drawing a parallel between nature and the people who already inhabited what would become the Canadian landscape. Relke reads this passage as a critique of colonization in which the winter represents the devastation caused by settler agriculture, but I argue that, in fact, it is a way of reconciling the already-existing ecological and (Crawford's version of) political systems to the imperial georgic because the spring symbolizes Max and Katie's marriage and their reproduction of the Empire through their production of farm and child. Since the imperial georgic operates through the exclusion or elimination of any element

that would not support its scalable expansion, Crawford differs from Goldsmith and Thompson in that she has instead represented the landscape (and, metaphorically the Indigenous people already living there) as eventually tolerating the presence of this new imperial georgic order.

Both *The Rising Village* and *Malcolm's Katie* give us clear insights into how imperial georgic poetry demonstrated how agricultural work serves as the engine for the generation of and progress of a scalable imperial system. Neither *The Rising Village* nor *Malcolm's Katie* are pastoral, but imperial georgic poems in that they either reconcile or excise existing entanglements—existing civilizations, native flora and fauna and their relations—to present a linear teleological vision of Canadian colonization. In *The Rising Village*, Goldsmith erases or marginalizes the indigenous and nonhuman elements that would complicate such a vision, while in *Malcolm's Katie*, those elements are either marginalized when Crawford renders them present but voiceless—as in the case of the human indigenous characters and seasons and geographical characteristics personified as Indigenous characters—or resolved through the character of Katie, who also reproduces the imperial georgic through her marriage to Max. Both *The Rising Village* and *Malcolm's Katie* are texts that make arguments about what is required for the success of imperial georgic restructuring of social and ecological relationships: this is the vision of a successful scaling up of the imperial georgic agricultural practices and a forward-projecting argument for how these discourses will further imperial progress in Canada. Furthermore, the question of whether the imperial georgic project ought to be successful is not questioned, even in Katie's reservations. Although *Malcolm's Katie* depicts an ambivalence around Katie's status as the nexus of colonial exploitation of feminine desire for the expansion of imperial interests, it is important to note that Crawford does not offer an alternative model for relations between settlers and Indigenous people nor between humans and the nonhuman world. Importantly, these

narratives are also narratives of a teleological process of imperial expansion through agricultural and reproductive labour that do not enact that process within the texts, but rather represent arguments about how that process will work and dramatize its success. In both texts, the processes of colonization are narratively *imagined*, though that imagination has had and did have material consequences. Furthermore, indigenous voices are relegated in both texts to the wilderness as subhuman or nonhuman, and at the same time, the British and Canadian governments were implementing policies that would see indigenous peoples forcibly removed from their land, and actively discouraged from growing their own food using their own agricultural techniques.

Susanna Moodie's *Roughing It in the Bush* is no less imperialist than Goldsmith's and Crawford's poems in that both Susanna Moodie and her husband, Dunbar, are actively involved in the labour of colonization and implicitly support that project, even as Moodie is critical of some of the details of British imperialist policy. However, I will argue that in contrast to the more straightforwardly imperial georgic narratives of *The Rising Village* and *Malcolm's Katie*, *Roughing It in the Bush* enacts a precarious georgic because it is a text that grapples with Moodie's struggles with precarity and nonscalability at both the formal and thematic level. Nonscalability, Tsing reminds us, is a design quality that does not necessarily designate an ethical viewpoint, but merely describes the extent to which a project adapts to dynamic entanglements like new information. To think with and through precarity in Tsing's sense is to be ready to adapt and change with information that cannot be sorted into an initial approach or assumption. In adapting to nonscalable elements, then, the precarious georgic becomes itself non-scalable: adaptable, often polyphonic, and resistant to linear teleological depictions of human progress. I suggest that reading *Roughing It in the Bush* as a precarious georgic text is

valuable because it shows us Canadian colonization as an experiential process of alienation, salvage accumulation, and the introduction of scalable ontology at the level of interpersonal and interspecies relations. I argue that while *Moodie's Roughing It in the Bush* politically aligns itself with the imperial georgic politics of Goldsmith and Crawford, its formal structure, publication history and content invite us to read past its explicit imperialistic content to read it as precarious georgic. Although Moodie's *Roughing It in the Bush* is supportive of imperialism, colonialism, and agrarian capitalism it is also, perhaps accidentally, an important early example of the kinds of process-based formal structures that will be used by later Canadian writers who explore georgic concerns with precarity and vulnerability and who are critical of both imperialism and late capitalist ecological exploitation and destruction.

Like *The Rising Village* and *Malcolm's Katie*, *Roughing It in the Bush* has received widespread and thorough scholarly attention, but most have tended to read it as a disgruntled antipastoral.<sup>27</sup> But as I will show, it has many elements that identify it as part of the georgic tradition. *Roughing It* is a polyvocal (in that it includes both Susanna Moodie's voice and her husband's and brother-in-law's) and generically mixed retelling of Susanna Moodie and Dunbar Moodie's emigration from England and arrival in Canada, their attempts to create and maintain a homestead in the backwoods of Douro, Ontario, their conflicts with other settlers, the many dangers of their precarious position as settlers fighting to survive (including near-starvation and two house fires), and their ultimate failure to make the homestead profitable, and their subsequent relocation to the town of Belleville. *Roughing It in the Bush* is partly memoir, partly manual, and partly travelogue, which straddles the fine line between fictional account and

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<sup>27</sup> See D.M.R Bentley's "The Romantic Aesthetics of Canadian Settlement," and Fiona Sparrow's "'This Place is Some Kind of Garden': Clearings in the bush in the works of Susanna Moodie, Catherine Parr Traill, Margaret Atwood and Margaret Laurence," *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 25(1): 1990. 24-41.

nonfictional report, and includes Moodie's poetic digressions, which frame, but are not necessarily directly related to, the episodes she describes in each of the text's chapters. Although Moodie ultimately seems to support the British imperial project, her feelings about Canada and about being part of it are wildly contradictory. John Thurston has provided important historical and biographical context for understanding why *Roughing It in the Bush* presents such a conflicted account of Susanna Moodie's life attempting to establish a homestead in Canada, including the powerful resentment of the hardship she encountered in the backwoods of Canada that permeates most of Moodie's retelling, her mixed feelings about her unpredictable relations with her American (with whom she must form an uneasy cooperation) and Huron-Wendat<sup>28</sup> neighbours in the Douro backwoods (whom she decides, eventually, are her friends), and her seemingly sudden change of heart in leaving the Douro farm for a more comfortable existence in Brantford. Although other scholars, such as Margaret Atwood, have attempted to explain Moodie's inconsistent and often contradictory allegiances as the result of Moodie's "schizophrenic" relationship with colonization<sup>29</sup>—her constant and traumatic experiences in the backwoods, Thurston's biographical research does important work in contextualizing Moodie's contradictory behavior in terms of the "precariousness of [her] position between establishment and dissent" (Thurston 11), where establishment indicates allegiance to British Imperial colonization in Canada. Thurston also provides important context to Moodie's retelling in detailing the demands of the British literary marketplace, and the way she must navigate the vulnerability of her position in the backwoods as an unskilled farmer. Many scholars, including Carol Shields, have been interested in Moodie's failure to unify the text. John Thurston argues

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<sup>28</sup> Moodie does not name the nations of the people she encounters, but the Douro/Peterborough area is the traditional territory of the Huron-Wendat Nations and the Anishinabewaki nations.

<sup>29</sup> By turns, Moodie is deeply resentful and fearful of the backwoods, and then suddenly patriotic about Canada.

that

If *Roughing It* is Moodie's most rewarding text, seeing it as an apprenticeship novel or a Gothic romance can no longer account for its interest. Rather than being provided an interpretation that attempts to accommodate its disparate elements and perceive its deep, internal organization, rather than being closed in on itself and found a work worthy of detached contemplation, an artefact of intricate, if elusive design, *Roughing It* needs to be opened up to its history and its discontinuities traced to the dispersed social and psychological energies it tries to contain. When *Roughing It*'s contradictoriness has been noticed, recuperation within a larger unity, either of an isolated monad labelled 'Susanna Moodie' or of a collective unconscious labelled 'the Canadian imagination,' has soon followed. The text cries out to be unified; thus abjured, its disunity demands to be explored. (134)

The disunity of the text does not make sense if we try to read it as a Gothic romance, antipastoral, or imperial georgic, because these all require a unified narrative. However, it does make sense if we read the text as precarious georgic, because formal variety and mixture are defining features of the mode, even if the imperial georgic downplays those features. I argue that attending to variety, mixture and process enables us to see how Moodie's text is a precarious georgic.

The formal structure of *Roughing It in the Bush* is the product of collaboration and adaptation on behalf of the Moodie and Strickland families in the backwoods and in Coburg, Ontario, and as such represents an adaptation to the dynamic relationship between the time spent writing and arranging the manuscript among the competing priorities of the people involved in its production. In *The Work of Words*, Thurston argues that *Roughing It in the Bush* was a

collaborative effort, and that Moodie's was "one hand among many" involved in its production (134). Thurston describes how not one, but three authors contributed to *Roughing It in the Bush*, all arranged by Susanna Moodie for the purposes of appealing to an English audience already inundated with accounts of colonization in Canada. Although initially Dunbar Moodie had been presented to Bentley as the primary author of the initial manuscript of *Roughing It*, Thurston writes that by the early 1840s,

[Dunbar] Moodie was involved with his sheriff's job; [Susanna Moodie was] the recognized author. None the less, and likely because he had already written on colonization, when they compiled the manuscript of *Roughing It* they included his four chapters and eleven poems. The poem that opens "The Whirlwind" was contributed by Samuel Strickland, as was almost half this chapter. Mrs. Moodie arranged the manuscript, and at some point the negotiations with Bentley devolved upon her. [Dunbar] Moodie, pointing out that his wife's narrative would be 'unintelligible' without the information he supplies, subordinates his text to hers: 'one of my chief objects in writing this chapter being to afford a connecting link between my wife's sketches'. Although the text is collaborative, its emotional centre of gravity is in her contributions; his is the 'informative, objective, and generally optimistic voice.' (135)

In asserting that Susanna Moodie is the emotional core of the text, as opposed to her husband's more "objective" and "informative" accounts, Thurston attributes a gendered narrative about labour to *Roughing It* as a whole. He also argues that *Roughing It in the Bush* went through several editions under the editorship of Bentley publishing house, and Bentley was also responsible for the permanent titling of the work. The Moodies had originally titled the book *Canadian Life*, and Thurston argues that Susanna Moodie "had no contact with Bentley before

'Canadian Life' appeared with the title by which it has since been known. A few years earlier Bentley had published a book on Australia called *Roughing It in the Outback*. While his advertisement emphasizes hardship, Bentley's title also suggests that the Moodies were only doing what colonists were expected to do, preparing the land roughly for its subsequent full occupation" (137). Thurston's argument suggests that Bentley's editorial influence confirmed the text as a colonization narrative. Following his argument, Alison Rukavina argues that the text "was transformed through successive editions as new collaborators, through excisions and additions, recreated the text to meet their needs and those of their audience" (37), but she contends that Thurston has unnecessarily imposed a distance between Susanna Moodie and the publishing process of *Roughing It*. Such a removal from the process of publishing, she argues, does not appear in the letters between her and Bentley: "Thurston constructs a Moodie who is distanced not just literally from the publishing process but figuratively as well... However, despite her absence from the editing process, one finds upon examining her letters that Susanna Moodie was indeed aware, on a very practical level, of publishing and marketing practices" (39). Rukavina's foregrounding of Susanna Moodie's role in the publishing process is an important one, because it restores Moodie as the main authorial figure who attempts, but fails, to unify the disparate voices and experiences into a coherent teleological narrative. I do not read Susanna Moodie's sections of *Roughing It* as a failure to create cohesion in the text, however, as Rukavina does. I argue instead that reading Dunbar Moodie's account as the more objective and informative voice of the text, we can see that Moodie's participation in the production of this polyvocal and generically mixed text as her negotiation of two different impulses within the georgic mode: the imperial, which we have already seen in Goldsmith and Crawford, and the precarious, which, as I discussed in the introduction, was always an element of the georgic but

which Moodie's text brings to the fore in a way that the other two do not. What emerges from the polyvocality and collaborative nature of the collection of sketches is a precarious georgic that enacts the friction between the scalable imperial georgic ontology—often represented in the voice of Dunbar—and the precarious georgic that emerges from the polyvocal text and the Moodies' conflicted relationship with the Canadian backwoods.

Within this polyvocal structure, Dunbar Moodie's nine sketches straightforwardly express an imperial georgic teleology of progress and attempt to order and make scalable the processes of colonization in Canada. In the chapter on "Canadian Sketches," his enthusiasm for the colonial project recalls that of Max in the backwoods of *Malcolm's Katie*. Dunbar proclaims that

Common labours and common difficulties, as among comrades during a campaign, produce a social unity of feeling among backwoodsmen. There is, moreover, a peculiar charm in the excitement of improving a wilderness for the benefit of children and posterity; there is in it, also that consciousness of usefulness which forms so essential an ingredient in true happiness. (168)

Like Max, Dunbar Moodie has internalized the myth that military servicemen are the perfect settler-farmers because of their military skill. This myth includes a kind of masculine camaraderie that frames the clearing of the forest and the creation of fields as a battle against an ever-encroaching nature. However, it is the yeoman farmer's agricultural labour, not his lust for battle, that brings about the transformation of wilderness into orderly colony. Dunbar's emphasis on usefulness also closely resembles the instrumental attitude toward nature that Karen O'Brien notes forms the imperial georgic's moral justification for colonial expansion in the name of a teleological vision of human progress through technological domination over the natural world.

Dunbar's retelling of clearing the backwoods is straightforwardly imperial georgic in that it emphasizes the work of generating a scalable system of imperial expansion, represented in his emphasis on order and standardization. Dunbar's belief in generating scalability extends well beyond clearing the bush, planting, and harvest; his is an optimism that allows him to move through an unfamiliar landscape with the confidence that he is imposing order on the human and nonhuman life in the backwoods. Dunbar contrasts this masculine confidence in an ordered world with Susanna Moodie's fearfulness and vulnerability. In "The Village Hotel," for example, Moodie writes that

Mrs. Moodie, somehow or other, had imbibed an invincible dislike to [South Africa], for some of the very reasons that I liked it myself. The wild animals were her terror, and she fancied that every wood and thicket was peopled with elephants, lions, and tigers, and that it would be utterly impossible to take a walk without treading on dangerous snakes in the grass. (147)

Susanna, Dunbar claims, remained unconvinced that his accounts of encounters with wild animals in South Africa were the result of his intentional seeking out of dangerous situations because of his "love of strong excitement," and that he "could easily have kept out of harm's way had [he] felt so inclined" (147). Although both Susanna and Dunbar Moodie support the project of transforming wilderness into orderly, useful farms, Dunbar Moodie's imperial confidence that this transformation will inevitably occur means that he can enjoy temporary forays into the wilderness because he sees them as exceptions to the universal progress toward expanding empire and mastery. For Susanna, experience on the ground shows that complete mastery and instrumental control is never possible, and that although she would like to believe in the utopian future, she is more preoccupied with the precarity of the present.

Not only does Dunbar's optimism mirror the instrumentality of the imperial georgic in making scalable what he perceives to be an unproductive wilderness, but it also seeks to order the text itself. Thurston argues that Moodie's accounts of colonization had been included, in part, because he had already written several times about colonization, including a book about British efforts in South Africa. This is an important detail because it indicates that Dunbar Moodie writes within an already-established literary tradition in the imperial georgic. The fact that he had already been a well established writer of colonial narratives suggest that Dunbar was well versed in the modal characteristics of imperial georgic narrative, even if he did not call it by that name. As Thurston has already mentioned, in the beginning of one of his linking chapters, Dunbar writes that

These reflections are a rather serious commencement of a sketch which was intended to be of a more lively description; one of my chief objects in writing this chapter being to afford a connecting link between my wife's sketches, and to account for some circumstances connected with our situation, which otherwise would be unintelligible to the reader. (146)

Dunbar's attempts to make Susanna Moodie's disparate and disorganized sketches—which resist a teleological narrative<sup>30</sup>—intelligible to readers provides both an actual link to the British Empire through its consciousness of the British readership, and a generic link to the imperial georgic logic of an ordering principle that connects the empire to the colony through shared cultural and political goals. Later in the chapter, Dunbar declares that “[a] colony bears the same relation to an old-settled country that a grammar does to a language” (164). In his understanding,

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<sup>30</sup> Susanna mis-dates her sketches frequently.

it is the colony that becomes the organizing principle, and the expression, and thereby the grammar, of the empire (the language). While one might expect the relationship to be the opposite, that the empire is the organizing principle of the colony, Dunbar's idea makes sense in the perspective of the imperial georgic mode. From his perspective and from the perspective of the imperial georgic, the empire does not come into existence until England begins colonizing other countries, and so it does not have to conceive of itself as a fully formed, cohesive imperial logic. It is, then, the colony, that brings the empire into existence and is the organizing principle as well as the material manifestation of imperial ontology. The colony is what makes 'Englishness' and an English way of doing things a scalable, exportable, and reproducible enterprise. In turn, the imperial georgic is the projection of that organizing, scalable set of cultural and philosophical conventions.

Apart from the voices of Dunbar and Susanna Moodie, Susanna Moodie's narrative sketches also include representations of and accounts of relationships with the Huron-Wendat people, United Empire Loyalists, Irish, Americans, and French Canadians the Moodies encountered in the backwoods. The sketches also compose Moodie's accounts of her and her family's hardships, representing a shared community built for survival but subject to internal conflict. Although Moodie is clearly an imperialist in the sense that she participates in and supports the British imperial project, she is also deeply resentful of her husband's decision to emigrate. Her main complaint is that the imperial georgic myth of the yeoman farmer—that military men would have the skills necessary to colonize new lands in the name of the Empire—did not appear to work in practice because soldiers were trained to follow orders rather than act with the self-sufficiency and adaptability that homesteading requires:

A large majority of the higher class [of emigrants] were officers of the army and navy,

with their families—a class perfectly unfitted by their previous habits and education for contending with the stern realities of emigrant life. The hand that has long held the sword, and has been accustomed to receive implicit obedience from those under its control, is seldom adapted to wield the spade and guide the plough, or try its strength against the stubborn trees of the forest. (11)

Soldiers, with their belief in strict hierarchy and orderly and standardized labour, do not possess the ability to adapt to challenges that appear outside the expected trajectory of their work.

Moodie's rejection of the soldier-farmer connection works as a criticism of imperial georgic's emphasis on scalability and standardization. If the Imperial georgic ideology of settlement seeks an analogy between military and agrarian work, it is not an analogy that, in her opinion, was able to survive the trauma of resettlement in an unpredictable and unfamiliar landscape. Her critique of the settler-farmer ideal is also a classed one, as throughout *Roughing It* she claims that rather than upper-class military servicemen, lower-class labourers make the best settlers because hard physical labour is an inherent talent of the poor. She claims that "[w]hat the Backwoods of Canada are to the industrious and ever-to-be-honoured sons of honest poverty, and what they are to the refined and accomplished gentleman, these simple sketches will endeavour to portray"

(11). In an unpredictable social, political, and ecological system, Susanna Moodie argues that the military classes' programmatic approach is not fit for the material realities of agrarian work.

Susanna Moodie's sketches disrupt the confident optimism of Dunbar Moodie's imperial georgic narrative. Like *Malcolm's Katie*, *Roughing It* includes multiple, competing perspectives on human relations with other humans and with nature. However, *Roughing It* differs from Crawford's long poem in that it fails to reconcile these competing ideas into a functional, cohesive imperial georgic narrative in which agricultural and reproductive labour lead inevitably

to an orderly future through the domestication of human and nonhuman nature. Instead, Moodie's text emphasizes the precarious nature of colonization and the ongoing labour of adaptation. For example, the sketch titled, "A visit to Grosse Isle," one of the most critically interrogated studies of the text, opens with the Moodies' ship anchoring off Grosse Isle to wait out a quarantine order during a cholera epidemic in Quebec. Moodie begins her account with the epigraph: "Alas! That man's stern spirit should mar / A scene so pure—so exquisite as this" (13). The epigraph signals the conflict between nature's aesthetic beauty and the difficult realities of human relations with each other and with nature, and it sets up the processes of conflict, negotiation, and adaptation that follow their ship's arrival at Grosse Isle during a cholera epidemic. Almost immediately, at the opening of the sketch, the boundaries between human and nonhuman are blurred by the ship's captain. When two colonial officers come aboard to inspect the ship and the health of its passengers, they ask the captain if there have been any births on board. The captain replies, "'Why yes; now I think on't, we had one female on board, who produced three at birth'" (13). It soon becomes clear that the captain was playing a joke on the officers, as the female he referred to was the ship's bull terrier, who'd given birth to three puppies on the journey. But the joke relies on unsettling of the human/nonhuman boundary and the specifics of human space, a theme that carries through many of Moodie's sketches throughout *Roughing It* and threatens to disrupt the anthropocentrism of the imperial georgic system. Susanna Moodie contrasts a distant, aestheticized impression of the Quebec shoreline with a grounded, precarious perspective. She describes her first view of Grosse Isle as "picturesque" (17) exclaiming, "Nature had lavished all her noblest features in producing that enchanting scene" (17). The view from the ship is one of pleasing balance between human order and disorderly wilderness; the backdrop of sublime hills and valleys is tempered by "neat farm-

houses” (17), “neat churches” (17), and “neat cottages” (18). This far-away observation is one in which the wilderness of the Quebec coastline is tempered and domesticated by human civilization, and Moodie comments that it “‘looks a perfect paradise from a distance’” (19). She soon contrasts this perspective sharply with the chaotic scene on the shore of Grosse Isle, where emigrants had stopped to wash their clothing and wait for the quarantine to end. “The confusion of Babel was among them,” Moodie writes, “We were literally stunned by the strife of tongues” (20). She negatively compares the mostly Irish emigrants to Indigenous people, declaring that “The vicious, uneducated barbarians who form the surplus of overpopulous European countries, are far behind the wild man in delicacy of feeling or natural courtesy” (21). Robert Kroetsch has characterized this sketch as a kind of Bahktinian carnival that helps to produce an altered worldview—however traumatic—in which Susanna Moodie must learn to live in a human and natural world that continually confronts her with the collapse of hierarchical social structures and anthropocentric understandings of an organized and aestheticized natural landscape (“Carnival and Violence”). If Dunbar’s imperial georgic account of settlement is one in which control over the landscape could theoretically still be achieved by the right people, Susanna Moodie’s account is one of a human and natural world ruled by the inevitable loss of control.

What is important about Moodie’s engagement with the chaos at Grosse Isle and elsewhere is that, even while she remains broadly supportive of British colonialism, her sketches portray the idea that the English system of agriculture is not scalable in the sense that its methods and the orderly landscape it produces cannot simply be reproduced in the colonies without being open to adaptation to local complexities. Reading *Roughing It in the Bush* through the lens of the precarious georgic allows us to see how Moodie’s emphasis on encounter and adaptation is not a simple opposition to imperial georgic, but a more complex form of georgic that includes Imperial

elements but also draws on other aspects of the georgic mode to imply that nonscalability is an inescapable feature of the human condition. Susanna Moodie's sketches describe how she must encounter and adapt to both the human beings and the nonhuman inhabitants of the Canadian backwoods, disrupting her husband's confident narratives of colonizing work as a teleological process of imposing order on the landscape. For example, in the backwoods and in the clearing, Moodie is confronted, first, with an unruly natural world that, like the human beings already settled in Canada, repeatedly intrudes on her attempts at creating and maintaining an anthropocentric order between humans and nonhumans. In "Tom Wilson's Emigration," Moodie is first confronted with the situation of Mr. Strong, who, having become overrun with emigrants at his inn in Cobourg, is forced to have his wife and daughters lodge "in a little chamber over the stable, to give [his] guests more room. Hard that ... for decent people to locate over the horses" (52). Later in the same sketch, Moodie notes the "extraordinary likeness, quite ludicrous, between Tom and [his] bear" (56). Upon arrival at their first settlement, Susanna Moodie is confronted with a house without a door, and—to Susanna Moodie's great horror—"[t]here young steers and two heifers... quietly reposing on the floor" (61).

Susanna Moodie must adapt to these chaotic conditions, not (or not entirely) because she wants to support the imperial georgic, but because she must adapt to survive. Despite her fear of cows, Moodie must learn to raise them, feed them, and milk them. She famously learns how to make coffee from dandelion root<sup>31</sup> and sugar from maple sap, adapting to the native flora that constitute her backwoods surroundings. These descriptions of learning and adaptation, and the detail with which Moodie describes the uses of flora and her adaptations of these species to familiar uses, indicate that she is writing in the georgic mode—but one that differs substantially

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<sup>31</sup> I recognize that coffee is, perhaps, not a matter of survival for some people.

from the linear teleology of the imperial georgic. Instead, Moodie foregrounds the georgic's emphasis on practical advice as well as experiential knowledge already present as a feature of Virgil's *Georgics*. As Fairer argues, in this georgic that emphasizes the precariousness of existence and the importance of adaptability, "human beings can 'learn from' nature in the very act of 'imposing on' it—indeed that is one way of getting to understand nature's demands: discovering which *arts* will succeed. The skill of engrafting, for example (distinctly an 'imposition' on 'Nature'), is an excellent means for learning about the characteristics of different varieties of plant or tree and identifying their preferences and potential" (208). While there are passages in *Roughing It* that recall nature as a pastoral retreat, more often the natural world of the Canadian backwoods threatens the lives of its inhabitants in seemingly random and unexpected ways. For this reason, *Roughing It* should not be read as a pastoral text; even in its moments of reprieve from toil, its incorporation of heterogeneous elements and genres is a characteristic of the precarious georgic.

Moodie also must adapt to the other human inhabitants of the backwoods, and many of the survival skills she learns come from her encounters with those other settler-colonizers and indigenous people. Although a far cry from a positive depiction of encounters with difference, Moodie's narrative technique is, as Carole Gerson puts it, not "oppositional but experiential" (8). Unlike both Goldsmith and Crawford, for whom the expansion of empire through agricultural labour requires the removal or erasure of Indigenous people, Moodie does not relegate her indigenous neighbours to elements of the dangerous wilderness nor to the status of mythological representations of the wilderness (or silent observers or imagined characters). Moodie is experiential because she describes actual encounters that are unpredictable and heterogeneous and that do not fit neatly into a linear teleology of progress toward the reproduction of agrarian

utopia on the English model. This is, of course, the lowest bar for human interaction, and does not indicate that Moodie is anti-imperialist, nor that she understands how colonization is affecting the Indigenous people she interacts with, nor does she understand herself as an occupant on unceded land. The experiential depiction of Moodie's negotiation with people she considers "Other" is important because it disrupts Dunbar Moodie's scalable narrative of imperial georgic colonization and occupation. Susanna Moodie's encounters are often uneasy. Carole Gerson notes that when the Moodies encounter the indigenous inhabitants of the Douro backwoods, they bring with them their entire histories of immersion in British literary depictions of Indigenous people, many of which reinforced "noble savage" stereotypes, and took the form of depicting first-person narration from North American indigenous narrators who were considered interesting characters. Gerson argues that these depictions may or may not have influenced Moodie's representational decisions:

Moodie came to North America with notions of racial equality shaped by her strong commitment to the British anti-slavery movement. The sisters also brought with them the outlook of their original cultural context, their humanitarian ideals contained within the framework of social class based on 'education,' meaning good manners as well as academic knowledge. Their recorded engagements with Natives thus involve frequent negotiation with stereotypes of the Noble Savage, locally represented, for example, in ... Adam Kidd's *The Huron Chief*, published in Montreal just two years before the Strickland sisters landed in British North America. Hence Moodie opens her lengthy account of the Indians living near Peterborough by claiming them 'a people whose beauty, talents, and good qualities have been overrated, and invested with a poetical interest which they scarcely deserve (*Roughing It* 298) in order to separate the distinct

men and women she has come to know from the Eurocentric generalizations she once shared with her readers. This involves a leap from the generic 'Indian' to named individuals: Moodie variously introduces 'the old chief, Peter Nogan,' (300) his son John Nogan, his sister-in-law Mrs. Tom Nogan, the Muskrat family, old Snow-storm, Jacob, Susan Moore and Betty Cow. (11-12)

The trajectory of Moodie's experiential representations, then, are not intended to challenge colonization, but to challenge the imperial georgic's idealized representation of the work of imperial expansion. In contrasting Romantic stereotypes about vanishing Indians and the neatly scalable narratives of her husband with her nonscalable experiential accounts of interactions with particular Indigenous people, Moodie exposes the imperial georgic mode as a literary and cultural construction, and offers an alternative account of struggle, loss, precariousness, conflict, and adaptation in its place. Moodie's sketches show how she must repeatedly deconstruct and reconstruct accepted cultural narratives of difference through her various encounters. By the time the Moodies leave the backwoods for Peterborough, Moodie has begun to see and refer to her Huron-Wendat neighbours, the Muskrat family, as friends. But despite this seeming progress toward a utopian idea of settlement, Susanna Moodie is relieved to leave the backwoods for more comfortable surroundings in Belleville. Moodie's process-oriented, polyvocal, and multigeneric approach to the georgic reflects Anna Tsing's argument that "Precarity is that here and now in which pasts may not lead to futures" (61).

Despite this emphasis on variety and the accommodation of conflict within the bulk of the sketches in Moodie's text, she also seeks to reassert control over the narrative structure by attempting, in the end, to reinstate aspects of an English hierarchy that place her in an urban, upper-middle class position despite her years of backwoods agrarian labour. Moodie concludes

that a harmonious relationship between human labour and the natural world is only possible for the working poor. She considers her position as an upper-middle class English emigrant debased by bodily toil, even while she admits that such labour can also be morally elevating. The language Moodie uses to describe her homestead reflects the tension between Moodie's valuing her labour from her present perspective at the time of writing and lamenting her position as labourer in the present of the text. She refers to her backwoods home both as a "prison-house" (330) and as her "dear forest home" (324) within the space of a few pages, and the conflicting accounts have inspired some readers to look for hidden psychological or political subtexts. Others have dismissed the text as flawed, but I argue that the contradictory perspectives mark it as classically georgic in its mixture of imperial and precarious concerns. Unlike Dunbar, Susanna Moodie's inability to reconcile her conflicting feelings does not reveal a flaw in the text itself; rather, Susanna's is the polyvocal, multigeneric assemblage of a precarious georgic, in which "a background of time and change allows georgic's adaptive qualities to come into play" (Fairer 208). Paradoxically, Susanna Moodie's reinstated position in the British colonial class hierarchy during the writing of *Roughing It* provides her with the distance by the end of the text to appreciate not only a pastoral, picturesque, or sublime natural scene but also the immanent process of negotiation with material and social otherness that is central to the precarious georgic. Yet, for Moodie, who is ultimately writing from her comfortably reinstated urban upper-middle class position in Peterborough, the tolerance of conflicting cultural and social practices necessary to life in the backwoods ultimately fails to subvert the Imperial georgic paradigm entirely. These precarious collaborations that Moodie develops with her natures after navigating encounters with their differences reflect collaborations that are not always mutually beneficial, or devoid of violence, or meant to lead to an endpoint of utopian or even dystopian existence. That is why this

text does not offer an imperial georgic, but a precarious georgic: it does not, in fact, lead to a utopian resolution, but takes readers through a process of negotiating encounters with unpredictable particularities that do not resolve into any kind of coherent conclusion.

Reading *The Rising Village*, *Malcolm's Katie*, and *Roughing It in the Bush* through the georgic mode helps reconcile many of the seeming inconsistencies of the texts within an established literary tradition that had been often overlooked in Canadian criticism.

Understanding the agricultural contexts and debates that both arose from the imperial georgic and shaped the literary and agricultural methodologies in settler narratives helps clarify and acknowledge the interconnections between the material work of settler-colonizers in dramatically altering the Canadian landscape and ecology and the literary tradition that made the political, social, ecological, and economic goals of colonization into a coherent, scalable ontology designed for expansion, regardless of the already existing indigenous political and ecological entanglements of North America. In *The Rising Village*, Oliver Goldsmith responds to the eighteenth-century Goldsmith's "The Deserted Village", a pastoral elegy, with an imperial georgic narrative of human progress that emphasizes total human control over both human and nonhuman natures, describing a scalable ontology that relegates indigenous people to the soon-to-be tamed wildernesses of Nova Scotia and implies that British-style land stewardship and agricultural practices will produce a utopian future. Isabella Valancy Crawford shows how this scalable ontology is made operational and reproducible not only through agricultural and military labour but also through the reproductive labour of the bodies of white women in *Malcolm's Katie*. Susanna Moodie's *Roughing It in the Bush* does not offer a simple opposition to these imperial georgic texts, nor does it oppose British imperialism (except in her critique of imperial georgic assumptions about who ought to be doing the work in the backwoods). However,

*Roughing It*'s nonscalable, experiential method of representing georgic concerns makes it a potentially valuable precursor for later writers' deliberately anti-imperial experiments with the precarious georgic mode in Canada, in that later authors have found a similar experiential mode useful for engaging with georgic concerns such as agrarian work and technique, human/nonhuman relations, and narratives of progress or precarity. Although Moodie's deconstructions of important elements of the imperial georgic narrative of colonial progress do not amount to a criticism of colonialism or imperialism themselves, we will see that future authors begin to take her unsettling of elements of the imperial georgic far enough to offer an alternative way of understanding human work in and among nonhuman ecologies and heterogenous human communities.

**Chapter Two: Queering the Farming Family: Agricultural Production and Family  
Reproduction in Martha Ostenso's *Wild Geese* and Frederick Philip Grove's *Settlers of the  
Marsh***

In my previous chapter, I argued that one important facet of imperial georgic depictions and material practices of colonization is the prevailing idea that soldiers make ideal farmers. The idea, in fact, originates in one of the central goals of Virgil's *Georgics*: to train soldiers coming back from the Roman Civil Wars to rehabilitate the devastated farmlands of Greece and Rome and to rebuild the Empire (De Bruyn 662). This basic idea remains in eighteenth-century georgics and, as I argued, formed an aspect of the imperial georgic's philosophical and technical approach to colonization. Although Virgil's *Georgics* expressed the need for soldier-farmers to rehabilitate a landscape destroyed by war, the eighteenth-century imperial georgic implies that the best people to farm a *terra nullius* were soldiers who had previously been equipped for the contingency and danger of battle, and, as both Goldsmith and Crawford imply, are equipped to then protect colonies from what Anna Tsing has called the "enabling entanglements" (2) that threaten the colony's ability to expand into nationhood (and, eventually, empire). By the turn of the century, however, after the death of Queen Victoria in 1901, many Canadians had begun to contest the emphasis on the imperialist interests of Britain in Canadian culture. Writers like Sara Jeanette Duncan, for example, depicted the rising conflict between imperialists and nationalists in Canadian politics in her well-known novel *The Imperialist* (1901). But even as the emphasis shifted from imperialism to nationalism, the idea that farming could rehabilitate soldiers while making a *terra nullius* productive for the interests of the nation persisted. After the First World War, the Canadian Government sought to populate Canada's westernmost provinces and "empty

spaces” with returning soldiers, despite warnings from writers like Susanna Moodie who had taken issue with the narrative ideal that soldiers would instinctively understand or be well equipped for farming an unfamiliar landscape. Nevertheless, the idea that returning soldiers would further the interests of national expansion became a matter of national legislation in the *Soldier Settlement Act* of 1919. In the House of Commons on June 23, 1919, the Minister of the Interior, Hon. Arthur Meighen, stated during a question period about the Act that

The primary and great principle of this Bill is to secure settlers on the lands of this country—to secure settlement of our idle lands, and to make settlers of those who have proven themselves the backbone and stay of the nation in its trouble. We believe that we cannot better fortify this country against the waves of unrest and discontent that now assail us, as all the rest of the world, than by making the greatest possible proportion of the soldiers of our country settlers upon our land. Of course, every class of citizen is necessary to constitute the national life, but the class of citizen that counts the most in the determination of the stability of a country against such forces as I mentioned a moment ago is undoubtedly the basic class—the agricultural class. That class is the mainstay of the nation. (Meighen qtd in Koroscil 69)

The depiction of the western provinces as “idle lands” signals a continuation of the imperial georgic ontology of scalable expansion through agriculture. Meighen’s shift from speaking about the soldiers’ contribution to the national interest in wartime to celebrating the importance of the “agricultural class” assumes, without stating explicitly, that soldiers and farmers serve the same functions in national expansion: conquest and protection. What is important to understand about these policies is not only that they were rooted in the assumptions of the georgic, but also that they retained their cultural purchase even after Canada had stopped seeing itself as a dominion of

the British Empire and begun to see itself as an independent nation. In other words, less important than the specific idea that soldiers should be farming is the broader realization that the imperial georgic had become the dominant ontological understanding of colonization in mainstream Canadian politics, and it continued to drive national development even as major shifts in mainstream Canadian culture from imperialism to nationalism signaled the beginning of the modernist period. Rather than being a holdover from British colonization, the imperial georgic mode, even while not acknowledged as such, had formed a significant part of how Canada understood itself *as a nation*.

As I suggested in my discussion of *Malcolm's Katie*, a second important element of the imperial georgic was the assumption that civilization reproduced itself through the heteronormative organization of space and government land use policies—an assumption that structured early settler narratives and continued to do so through the early twentieth century. As the imperial georgic became the major cultural framework of colonization, marriage continued to be a major concern of women settlement writers like Crawford in as much as the imperial georgic must be reproduced through the heterosexual marriage. Here, I am building on Jill Casid's argument<sup>32</sup> that this imperial project is also a heterosexist one, in that it links the expansion of empire with the reproduction of heterosexuality through the harnessing of desire under masculinized agricultural labour. Virgil does not present the farmer's wife as particularly important, because that was not the case in ancient Rome. In Dryden, however, it is not the individual soldier-farmer but rather the heterosexual couple that becomes the main unit of the imperial georgic. In Dryden's translation of the *Georgics*, he not only emphasizes the celebration of agrarian work in building empire, but he also translates the *Georgics* in such a way as to

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<sup>32</sup> See Casid, Jill H. *Sowing Empire: Landscape and Colonization*. University of Minnesota Press, 2004.

emphasize the role of the heterosexual family structure in agrarian work. Ellen Oliensis argues that the nature of socio-sexual organization during the Roman period could not be read explicitly as heteronormative in the sense that we know it, given that sexual relationships were organized according to socio-political power structures rather than gender. But in Book I, Dryden repeatedly plays off the double sense of the word *husband* in describing the farmer. During the winter, for example, the “lab'ring Husband in his House refrain” (59), and “The Wife and Husband equally conspire, / To work by Night and rake the Winter Fire” (61). These lines suggest that heterosexuality coincides with the cyclical and seasonal pattern of reproduction and renewal. Here, the play on words between *husband* and *husbandry* makes heterosexual reproduction analogous to the reproduction of livestock. The connection between agrarian work and heterosexual reproduction are solidified also in Dryden's instruction to “Plough naked, Swain, and naked sow the Land” (61), in a metaphor of sowing seeds that corresponds to the fathering of children. In Virgil's original poem the farmer's wife is largely absent, other than a brief mention of what could be translated as a ‘companion,’ but would have most likely been a slave.<sup>33</sup> By adding these passages to the *Georgics*, Dryden naturalizes heteronormative social relations as an integral part of the imperial georgic agricultural model that English colonists imported to Canada.

Imperial georgic colonization involved the importation of English ideas about both the techniques of agricultural labour and about heteronormative sexuality as a way of making imperial and agrarian systems scalable. Given this context, it's not surprising that so many early English Canadian settlement narratives like *The History of Emily Montague*, *The Rising Village* and *Malcolm's Katie* revolve around or include not only the successful acquisition and building

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<sup>33</sup> See *The Virgil Encyclopedia*.

of a farm, but also a marriage plot or the threatened failure of a marriage plot. The heterosexual family is even central to precarious georgic settler narratives like Susanna Moodie's *Roughing It in the Bush*, in which Susanna Moodie questions the imperial georgic's idealization of the heterosexual farm family by showing how women's labour on the farm is harder than Dryden presents it to be. In their introduction to *Queer Ecologies*, Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erickson argue that "[b]oth historically and in the present ... sexual politics has had a distinctly environmental-spatial dimension, and landscapes have been organized to produce and promote (and prohibit) particular kinds of sexual identity and practice" (12). This insight helps us see how, because of imperial georgic assumptions about the connection between agriculture and heterosexual reproduction, colonization involved not just a reorganization of the land but also the imposition of white heteropatriarchy. In this context, the family tableau at the end of *Malcolm's* Katie represents both the ideal family structure for the cultivation of the colony and the ideal system of governance overseeing such cultivation, with Malcolm and Max acting as the combined economic and colonial engine of the imperial georgic and Katie as the central figure through which these seemingly contradictory aspects of imperial georgic ideology and culture are reconciled and reproduced. Katie, after all, will bear the children who will inherit the empire.<sup>34</sup> In this chapter, I argue that during the early twentieth century, this emphasis on the

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<sup>34</sup> It is important to note, too, that this imperial georgic ordering of sexuality sought to regulate and control modes of gender expression and sexual organization in existing First Nations and indigenous cultures as well as in settler-colonial societies. As with the technical and material aspects of agricultural labour, the imperial georgic sought to make scalable the entire ontological field of human life, including sexuality, for the expansion and ordering of the empire. Hughes-D'Aeth rightly notes that in what he calls the Settler-Colonial Farm novel, "The dimension of indigenous dispossession—the key fact of settler-colonialism—often disappears completely... [or, in] other novels, the indigene is shown as a roughly cast extra in the shadow of the main performance" (2). I have already discussed how the same has been true for iterations of the imperial georgic in settler narratives, but it is worth noting, as historical fact, how all-encompassing, systemic, and deliberate was the socio-sexual ordering of space involved in the imperial georgic ontology. In *Spaces Between Us: Queer Settler Colonialism and Indigenous Decolonization*, Scott Lauria Morgensen argues that "the biopolitics of settler colonialism produces settler sexuality as the context traversed by non-Native and Native people formulating queer modernities. The queering of Native peoples defined not only settler sexuality, broadly, but also the definition of queer subjects *among* white settlers: as a primitive, racialized sexual margin akin to what white settlers attempted to conquer among natives" (32). Morgensen claims,

heterosexual family as the engine of imperial expansion remained a core characteristic of imperial georgic narratives, and that these narratives informed the representation of agricultural work in prairie realist novels. Critics have tended to read these novels either in regionalist terms or through the lens of the naturalist aesthetics associated with international modernism. In contrast, I argue that novels like Frederick Philip Grove's *Settlers of the Marsh* (1925) and Martha Ostenso's *Wild Geese* (1925) are texts that express georgic concerns in that they are centrally concerned with sexuality and productivity. However, I also argue that *Wild Geese* uses gothic conventions to reveal what has been repressed by the imperial georgic mode in early settler-colonizer narratives. Grove's *Settlers of the Marsh* reaffirms the imperial georgic's emphasis on controlled heterosexual reproduction, along with scalable agriculture, as essential to national expansion. In contrast, *Wild Geese* uses Gothic conventions to show how the imperial georgic's tendency to connect reproductive heterosexuality to farm labourers limits the possible manifestations of female sexual desire. In including Judith as a queer gothic heroine, Ostenso's novel offers a queer version of precarious georgic, because its openness to nonreproductive sexualities challenges the linear teleology of imperial georgic expansion.

In order to understand how and why Grove's and Ostenso's prairie novels engage with the georgic mode, we need to recognize that the material reality of farm life on the prairies was structured by government policies that materially manifested imperial georgic assumptions about agriculture and heterosexuality. *The Dominion Lands Act* (1872-76) reproduces the imperial georgic's heterosexist assumptions about farm labour by ensuring that colonization constructed

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“in concert with Foucault's work, but against the limits he puts on it—that modern sexuality may have arisen first in colonial societies, if not in their relationship to European colonial states ... the sexual violence of colonial heteropatriarchy enabled the European conquest of Native peoples as queer to colonial rule, including by targeting Native systems of gender and sexuality that conflicted with European colonial logics” (35). Morgensen claims that this organizing of settler sexuality and its targeting of Native systems of gender and sexuality resulted in a society of “education”, an extension of that same imperial georgic emphasis on standardization and scalability that formed the basis of agricultural technique.

the rural space of the prairie as heteronormative with an emphasis on nation-building through farming families. The changes made to *The Dominion Lands Act* in 1876 meant that land allotment legislation was redrafted to include that heteronormative family structure, insuring that women's ability to apply for land grants remained tied to both their marital status and reproductive capacity. In her analysis of the gendered development of the *Act*, Sarah Carter argues that the Canadian Government's system for the colonization of the West was predicated on the 1862 U.S. *Homestead Act* in that both were designed to encourage further colonization of the nation through family farms. But the *Dominion Lands Act* featured one important exception: that single, childless women were deliberately excluded from land ownership. Women were, instead, eligible only if they "qualified as 'sole' head of household with a dependent child or children" (268). Importantly, Carter also argues that this exclusion of single childless women was not merely an oversight. As she notes,

The initial legislation had permitted '[a]ny person who is the head of a family, *or has attained the age of twenty-one years*, [emphasis mine] who is a subject of Her Majesty by birth or naturalization' to enter on a quarter section. This wording was interpreted to include single women, and from 1872 to 1876 there were approximately 150 women, some single, others widows, who filed on homesteads. (269)

However, she notes, the government changed the legislation in 1876, shifting the wording to allow "[a]ny person, male or female, who is the sole head of a family, or any male who has attained the age of eighteen" (qtd. 269-270).<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, Carter emphasizes that while there

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<sup>35</sup> The lowered age of entitlement for men, she argues, would mean an increase in the number of male claimants to homesteads, and women would only be allowed to claim the homestead if they could prove they were the sole head of a household with dependent children, exclusive of women whose husbands may be alive, though unable to farm due to injury or illness (Carter 270).

are no clear records indicating why these changes were made, “Canadian federal officials consistently insisted that the goal of the homestead system was to make the land productive” (and women were not considered to have the physical strength to make it so). The government also “stressed that the goal of the homestead system was to settle families or potential heads of families (understood to be male) on the land” (270). While Carter insists that the changes to the *Dominion Lands Act* in 1876 code the land as what she calls a “manly space,” I would add that these changes not only masculinize the space, but code it as heteronormative through its yoking of heterosexual family models with the economics of farming and the sociopolitical project of nation-building and colonization. In the early twentieth century, after the First World War, the Canadian government used the same rhetoric of the family farm to encourage settlement of the prairies by white colonists, now from other parts of Europe as well as Britain. These policies resulted in the landscape familiar to us from prairie realist novels, which tend to focus on the white family farm.

These policies and the push to settle “idle” prairie lands in Canada coincided with a wave of Canadian nationalism that sought to define a Canadianist literary movement that first embraced Frederick Philip Grove and, later, Martha Ostenso, as prairie realist authors. Until recently, both *Settlers of the Marsh* and *Wild Geese* have been read by most critics through the regionalist and geographically determinist lens of prairie realism. Critics such as Alison Calder, Robert Wardhaugh, and Colin Hill have called for a re-evaluation of Prairie Realism as a genre, arguing that the term has become both outdated and obfuscating of the variety of narratives informed by prairie geography, and they argue for a more diverse and historically situated framework in which to explore more contemporary novels categorized as prairie realist. Hill argues, however, that while the recent discussions started by Calder and Wardhaugh go a long

way to situate postmodern and contemporary prairie realist literature within a reconsidered broader and more diversified historical framework than their earlier counterparts, they have “done little to illuminate the formative early twentieth-century prairie fiction” (55): those narratives commonly read as “prairie realism”, works by Robert J. Stead, Martha Ostenso, and Frederick Philip Grove, for example. In this chapter, I argue that certain novels that might have been treated in terms of prairie realism might otherwise be read in relation to a legacy of the georgic mode. Since critics imposed the category of prairie realism on these novels years after their publication to present them as a homogenous regional group, reading them within the legacy of georgic modalities can show how they were informed by an established literary tradition with recognizable conventions. Furthermore, to show how these novels engage with georgic modalities inherited from the colonial period reveals continuities between the logic of settler colonialism, agricultural work, and the emerging Canadian nationalism in prairie fiction that remains obscured by the critical assumption that prairie realism was primarily shaped by the regional landscape's effects on prairie settlers. While there has been a great deal of scholarship aimed at defining prairie realism since the 1950s in fact many of the conventions mentioned by Canadian critics who attempt to outline the conventions of prairie realism inadvertently outline the conventions of the georgic mode. For example, In *Vertical Man, Horizontal World*, Laurence Ricou argues that “The myth of the garden, which Leo Marx has shown to be central to the American experience, has only very limited application to a country where the more usual themes are the severity of climate or the unsuitability of the land for cultivation” (x-xi), signalling that the concerns of Canadian prairie fiction are primarily about the struggle, not only to live in such a landscape, but to make that landscape productive in a way that is recognizable to English and European settlers. Furthermore, in *Unnamed Country: The Struggle for a Canadian*

*Prairie Fiction*, Dick Harrison argues that prairie realist literature “conveys a painful sense of the human failure and waste, weakness and suffering in prairie life. The world it depicts is fallen, and not to be sentimentally restored to a garden state. It must be redeemed by suffering and sacrifice” (100). Harrison signals that Canadian prairie fiction is not easily categorized in the pastoral mode, because it involves the suffering and sacrifice of work; but it does signal that prairie fiction is broadly concerned with the characteristics and themes of the precarious georgic, including a linear teleology of redemption through work. I argue that while novels like *Settlers of the Marsh* and *Wild Geese* both engage with the precariousness of agrarian work, *Settlers of the Marsh* reaffirms the linear teleology of the imperial georgic, while *Wild Geese* gestures more emphatically to the violence inherent in that teleology and engages with the possibilities of a non-teleological precarious georgic mode.

Grove’s *Settlers of the Marsh* is classic imperial georgic in terms of its vision of the role of agriculture in the expansion of the nation and of the relationship between agriculture and heterosexual reproduction. In “Frederick Philip Grove and the Canadianism Movement,” Margaret Stobie argues that Grove’s canonization coincided with the push to solidify a nationalist cultural movement in the wake of the First World War. In the same movement that formed the Group of Seven, the Canadian Authors’ Association, the CBC and the national railway, Stobie argues, *The Canadian Forum* declared a need for an independent nationalist presence in October 1920:

Too much of our news is coloured and distorted, before ever it reaches the Canadian press. Too often our convictions are borrowed from London, Paris, or New York. Real independence is not the product of tariffs and treaties. It is a spiritual thing. No country

has reached its full stature, which makes its goods at home, but not its faith and philosophy. (174)

Grove, himself a vagabond with a complicated background and an immigrant to Canada after a short residency in the United States, launched his writing career with the publication of *Over Prairie Trails* in 1922, during this debate. *Over Prairie Trails* won the praise of some of the most important literary figures and publishers of the time.<sup>36</sup> Such patronage not only launched Grove's career as a well-known Canadian writer from the prairies, at least in Ontario, but it also launched Grove's career as a public speaker and statesman. The book, which Stobie notes to be Grove's "one great success" (175), caught the attention of Graham Spry, who arranged for Grove a speaking engagement in Ontario for the Canadian Clubs, during which Grove was impressed by several of the wealthiest and most prominent figures of the Canadian Left. According to Stobie, the speaking engagement left Grove with an inflated sense of his own influence, and he commented in a letter home that "I never realised quite so forcibly before what a power I am myself in the land" (Grove qtd in Stobie 176). Grove's nationalist sentiments were also bolstered by discussions about employing him in the Department of Immigration (176). The success of *A Search for America* won Grove the admiration of powerful friends, but its success was also owed to the spirit of his time. The story of an immigrant who, dissatisfied with American culture, spurns it for Canada, resonated with Canadian nationalists, and Grove's own politics were directly in line with a national literary project that reflected an imperial georgic teleology of human progress centred on agrarian work and the chaste regulation of heterosexuality.

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<sup>36</sup> These included A.L. Phelps, the head of the English Literature department at Wesley College at the University of Manitoba, and his colleague, Watson Kirkconnell, who then introduced Grove to the likes of Lorne Pearce, president of the Ryerson Publishing Company (174). It was through Pearce that *Settlers of the Marsh* (1925) found a home for publication, and the manuscript was circulated among Pearce's acquaintances, eventually winning the favour of E.J. Pratt and W.A. Deacon, editor of Toronto's *Saturday Night*, who then forwarded the manuscript for *A Search for America* to H.C. Miller at *The Graphic Publishers of Ottawa*.

Grove's reliance on imperial georgic conventions are evident in his speeches for the Canadian Clubs, particularly in "Nationhood." In this speech, which Grove gave on February 27, 1927, during his tour of Ontario, and subsequently collected in *It Needs to Be Said*, he outlines a vision of Canadian nationalism within the British Empire, emphasizing the empire as a community in which several independent nations take part, and further extending this understanding to describe a version of Canadian culture as a coming together of several independent states and cultures in a cooperative whole. Grove's speech is a tacit declaration of Canada's status as a central economic power within the British empire because of the wealth of its natural resources. In "Nationhood," Grove reaffirms the idea of human progress through mastery of nature which will result in a peaceful and prosperous empire—but this time with Canada as a more independent state within the empire than in colonial imperial georgics. Even aside from echoing the Enlightenment predilection for looking for nationalist and imperialist models for civilization and culture in the classical world, Grove indicates that his vision of Canadian nationhood is an imperial georgic one when he concludes the speech by invoking the idea that agrarian labour is the foundation of the nation. Grove closes "Nationhood" with a paragraph of which Stobie asserts he was especially fond, in which he emphasizes,

I have seen a thing which I have never seen in the eyes of a European peasant. I don't know what it is: a new hopefulness perhaps. I don't know whence it comes; but it is bred by something peculiar to Canada; whether, as some have asserted, it is the wider spaces of our plains, the greater height of our mountains, or the vaster extent of our indented shorelines, or what. I have sometimes thought that perhaps it arises from the fact that here, in this country, they can own the soil on which they stand. For I take it to be a desire still inherent in man as born by woman to own that bit of land whence, with

tentative mind, he reaches out into the dark mysteries which surround us. (Grove, “Nationhood,” n.p.)

Such sentiments recall Max’s philosophical outlook in *Malcolm’s Katie*, but without the militaristic undertone. Grove’s choice phrasing of “man as born by woman” deftly outlines the gendered division of national labour he has in mind. The labour performed by women in this conceptualization of settlement is purely reproductive. In this way, Grove also echoes Dryden’s heteronormative vision of agrarian work, in which reproductive heterosexuality is privileged over nonreproductive or homosexually reproductive forms of desire.

Grove’s novel *Settlers of the Marsh* (1925) has been variously categorized as a prairie realist novel, a farm novel (Freitag), modernist novel, an example of naturalism, and a “settler-colonial farm novel” (Hughes-D’Aeth 1). I argue, however, that it is an example of the extension of the imperial georgic into the twentieth century, and that it is important to categorize it as such because it allows us to recognize the ways in which novels like *Settlers of the Marsh* articulate an extension of an already-established ontological system that not only includes the appropriation of land, but also the systematic and deliberate socio-sexual organization of space. In his reading of *Settlers of the Marsh* as a “settler-colonial farm novel,” for example, Tony Hughes-D’Aeth describes one of the conventions of such a genre is that “the human actors are connected to their framing colonial project by the sacrament of their lives. This expresses itself in two sacred spheres of activity. The first is the work of the field... The second is the work of the hearth—particularly the reproduction of children who are to be the legitimate heirs of the world that has been initiated” (2). Hughes-D’Aeth is, here, pointing to a fundamental characteristic of the imperial georgic and its scalable project of colonization. However, understanding the ways *Settlers of the Marsh* fits into and perpetuates the imperial georgic

allows us to see how the processes of colonial expansion through reproduction, though already established conventions in works like *Malcolm's Katie* and *The Rising Village*, continued into the early twentieth century and adapted to the resurgence in Canadian nationalism. If it “almost goes without saying,” as Hughes-D’Aeth argues, that novels like *Settlers of the Marsh* situate sexual desire within the broader ethos of colonial exploitation, understanding the novel as part of a much more established genre like the imperial georgic allows us to see how writers like Grove have also taken this aspect of colonial nation-building for granted. With these conventions established, we can read what Hughes-D’Aeth interprets as the novel’s “deep lines of ambivalence” (2) not as an implicit criticism of the colonial project, as Hughes-D’Aeth suggests, but as an endorsement of the imperial georgic project that, not unlike Goldsmith, stresses the danger of losing control over the corrupting influence of urban cosmopolitanism.

*Settlers of the Marsh* (1925), like many of Grove's canonical works, exemplifies how Grove adapts imperial georgic concerns about the regulation of human sexuality to the modernist context of the 1920s. The novel, which takes place in a developing homesteading community in Manitoba, is a modern-realist depiction of one homesteader’s—Niels Lindsted's—struggle to build a successful homestead while struggling psychologically with his sexual and romantic desires. The novel itself reflects the georgic mode's sensibility in that it prioritizes the work of farming as the work of settlement and nation-building. And, like Goldsmith’s and Crawford’s, it emphasizes the chaste, controlled sexuality of procreation as a duty to that nation-building project. Niels Lindstedt struggles to find a wife for his homestead, building the grounds and the house specifically for the convenience of Ellen Amundsen, intending for her to take on her gendered place on the farm. After a sexual encounter with Clara Vogel, he marries Clara instead, unaware that she was performing in sex work prior to their engagement. When he finds out about

her ongoing sexual transactions with men in the town, he murders her and returns to Ellen, who has since discovered her desire to build a family. While it is tempting to read the novel as critical of Niels' prudishness and fixation on controlling and—with his murder of Clara—eliminating sexuality as a barrier to the successful building of his own homestead and the health of the settlement, the novel's ending—in which Ellen realizes her desire for children and reunites with Niels when he is released from prison—positions what should be the tragedy of the novel (Clara's murder) as a formative moment for Niels' character and the catalyst for Ellen and Niels' successful union.

The novel is a deep exploration of the psychology and character, and sexual and romantic desire of Niels Lindstedt, who thinks of himself as an archetypal patriarch of the emerging Manitoba settlement. Interestingly, initially Niels' labour is not directed toward a nationalist or imperialist ideal, but solely toward the building of a domestic ideal, and toward winning over Ellen. When Ellen rejects his proposal for marriage, Niels must reform his understanding of his place in the world:

A new dream rose: a longing to leave and to go to the very margin of civilisation, there to clear a new place; and when it was cleared and people began to settle about it, to move on once more, again to the very edge of pioneerdom, and to start it all over anew...That way his enormous strength would still have a meaning. Woman would have no place in his life.

He looked upon himself as belonging to a special race—a race not comprised in any limited nation, but one crossed-sectioned of all nations: a race doomed to everlasting extinction and yet recruited out of the wastage of all other nations.... (144-145)

After Ellen's rejection, Niels sees himself as an exile, tasked with a life of solitary labour and unable to reproduce that labour through marriage. His declaration that his "special race" was doomed to "everlasting extinction" recalls both the Virgilian trop of postlapsarian rehabilitation, but also the singular, mythical character of Virgil's original farmer—the farmer who stood in for all farmers, the singular metonym for agricultural work. Niels' framing of the archetypal farmer figure as having been "recruited out of the wastage of all other nations" also aligns with the imperial georgic mode because both Virgil and Dryden describe the farmer as the figure who goes forth to generate civilization in a postlapsarian world after the destruction of war. Despite—or even because of—Ellen's rejection, Niels imagines himself part of an archetypal "race" of settler-farmers whose existence relies only on cultivating civilization in the wilderness. And while Grove's idea of national expansion transfers the power of generating civilization from the centre of the empire to the former colony which is now a burgeoning independent nation, his view is not so different from that of Dunbar Moodie, who saw the colony as the organizing principle of the empire: the thing that calls the empire into being. Grove presents Niels as a nationless figure only because the universal *work* of generating civilization is something Grove understands as outside nationhood, but paradoxically creating the nation through the transformation of wilderness into cultivated land. The fact that Grove has chosen to include such a figure as a protagonist, despite this universalism, signals both his awareness of the georgic mode and his use of it to signal his participation in continuing a Canadian literary tradition in this vein.

Grove's representation of nationalism and agrarian work suggests a practiced understanding of the conventions of the imperial georgic and a commitment to exploring and adapting those conventions to suit the Canadian nationalist discourses of the early twentieth

century. As Margaret Stobie points out, over the course of his career, Grove rewrote this archetypal figure of the farmer several times. For example, she reads Abe Spalding of *Fruits of the Earth*, one of Grove's later novels, as “an evident power in the lives of other men and of society, an industrial force, the farmer as master” (181). Stobie also sees Abe somewhat as an evolution of the character of Niels in *Settlers of the Marsh*. He is a figure of the imperial/national georgic. But in the second part of the novel, “Abe is not the conquering hero but 'the rustic harvest god' (p.228), as he stands atop a gigantic haystack, grassy weeds and barbs sticking in his hair and eyebrows. The saga figure, 'loved by few, hated by some,' has mellowed to a beneficent deity” (181). Taking Niels Lindstedt as a precursor to this figure of the sower, it becomes apparent that sexuality is more of a problem in this novel than in the settler georgic. For Niels to fulfill his role as the imperial georgic farmer, that “special race,” he must suppress his sexual desire and project it onto his relationship with the land, or harness his desire in partnership with a woman who can reproduce the system of imperial georgic by fulfilling the completion of the family farm. Niels is drawn to the role of the solitary farmer as metonym for the importance of farming because it fulfills his need to powerfully contribute to the imperial georgic process. But Niels will eventually reject this construction in favour of what he comes to see as the more fulfilling role of constructing a farming family, because it represents a microcosm of the nationhood to which he wants to contribute. The close connection between the mastery of agrarian work and nature on one hand and the mastery of self and sexuality on the other create the ethical and emotional crux of *Settlers of the Marsh*. Niels' initial assumption that “Woman had never figured as a concrete thing in [his] thought of his future in this new country,” and that “the wife [of his visions] had been a symbol merely” (35) indicates that Niels had already internalized the idea that his role as a homesteader was not only to cultivate the

landscape but also to cultivate a family unit: he imagines his future wife not as a companion or intimate partner but as a symbol of the continuance of his labour and the health of the burgeoning community.

Grove focuses on Niels' struggles to either harness his sexual desire and project it into agrarian work or control it and make it productive, but in the context of the imperial georgic we can see that this concern is really a new rendition of the imperial georgic concept of the return to the utopian ideal in the form of a productive heterosexual farm family. Niels conflates the physical labour of homesteading with the progress of courtship, eroticizing work as sex, which suggests that for him, the progression of civilization is closely interconnected with reproductive sexuality (or, in fact, that reproductive sexuality *is* a form of agrarian work). Niels begins his courtship of Ellen through an exchange of physical labour, when he and Sigursden offer to help Ellen move loads of hay into the loft of her barn. Grove writes the scene as subtly sexualized, with Niels pitching the hay to Ellen, who receives it while standing in the loft. Niels "pitched as he had never pitched before" (86), and afterward, "shook the sweat from his head, laughing" (86) while Ellen is similarly "flushed with exertion" (86). During the interaction, Niels also reinforces gender roles in terms of both work and sexuality, noting that when it came to strength in loading the hay, that Ellen was "as good as a man" (87), but that her job should be to load the hay in the loft, because pitching hay "is a man's work" (87). In this way, Niels has aligned the work of transferring hay to the barn with traditionally patriarchal assumptions about heterosexual sex: the man as bestower, and the woman as receiving vessel. While Ellen in this scene is clearly enjoying the work, her reticence in courtship is evident in her social interactions with Niels. Despite this hesitation, however, Niels considers the progress of his labour alongside his assumed progress in courting her, first deciding that before he asks her to marry him, he "must

have 30 acres cleared and broken” (30), and then linking this process with the slow process of gauging Ellen's interest:

Once more the old life began: work from dawn to dark: he was clearing the land that was to bear his crops ... Was he making progress? He was. Last year his little store of grain had come from Nelson's place; this year he had twice as much; and it came from his own ... Had Sigurdson faithfully looked after cutting and threshing? He had. There were three hundred odd bushels of barley in his granary; and a hundred of them he took to Kelm's to get crushed. He thought of chickens and pigs for the following year: for then he would have a crop to sell, a crop of wheat...

He worked at the house again: the walls were to be finished with plaster-board inside...

On Sundays, he resumed his trips to Ellen's place. (93)

The novel's juxtaposition of long passages of Niels's ruminations on the progress of his farm alongside ruminations on the progress of his home and of his visits to Ellen's farm is strongly suggestive of the connections between the growth of the farm economically and its growth domestically, which connects, in turn, to the growth of the community. Niels' many community connections—the exchange of labour between himself and Sigurdson, the bartering between him and Nelson, and the exchange of goods and services between him and Kelms—indicates not the isolation of the prairie homesteading community, but the interconnectedness on which its growth depends. For Niels, the beginning of the cyclical nature of this growth is the clearing of the land “to bear” his crops, while the end of the cycle is the wife to bear his children, at which point it begins again—ever widening concentric circles of community. Courtship and sexuality are, for Niels, the beginning and end points of a cycle of the progress of work. Thus, Ellen's rejection of

Niels is a rejection not only of his romantic affection, but also of his entire understanding of progress, labour, sexual desire, and—on a very fundamental level—the natural order of the world.

Much like Goldsmith and Crawford, *Settlers of the Marsh* conforms to the imperial georgic's scalable ontology by containing or destroying what does not serve the purpose of reproduction and expansion of an imperial georgic agricultural system—and therefore, the nation. Niels's first wife, Clara Vogel, reflects the return of Niels's repressed sexual desires in her own pursuit of sex and urbane luxury. Niels describes Clara Vogel as “a woman who formed a rather striking contrast to all other women present” (21). While the working women of the settlement “were subdued, self-effacing, almost apologetic; as if daunted by work and struggling not to be swamped by it,” Ms. Vogel “stepped back, into the protection of her sex; and [the difficulties of poverty] passed her by” (21). Clara Vogel, stylish, cosmopolitan, and clever, sparks Niels' interest immediately, but until Ellen rejects him, he considers her only as a curiosity, representing a different kind of sexuality—one not dedicated to (re)production, but to pleasure and desire. Clara Vogel, confident in her sexual power, is “full of smiling scrutiny,” and Niels “has never met a woman like her” (51). When Ellen rejects Niels' proposal, Niels first sleeps with Clara on a trip into the city, and then marries her, hoping that she will fulfill Ellen's place at work on the farm. But Clara does not share Niels' commitment to the imperial georgic ideal. Soon, he realizes that Clara's excessive desire is not suited to his well-honed rhythms of work, and is, in fact, antithetical to agrarian work, as “[o]ften she awakened him in the middle of the night, in the early morning hours, just before daylight; often she robbed him of his sleep in the evening, keeping him up till midnight and later. She herself slept much in the daytime” (155). Niels' disappointment in his wife-as-helpmate is further confirmed when Clara herself declares,

“I hope you didn't marry me in order to make me work. I *will* try to keep house for you. But that is all I can undertake. I am not the kind of woman that works” (159). Such a marriage—founded on an excess of sexual desire—is a further affront to Niels's ambition, and when he realizes his mistake, he decides that “Children would be the perpetuation of the sin of a moment” (171), and that “He did not want children out of this woman!” (171). Subsequently, after Niels discovers that Clara had been a sex worker for the rest of the settlement and catches her in the act of entertaining another man, he shoots her. He then turns his rage on his pure-bred gelding and shoots it in the head. In following the murder of Clara with the murder of the horse, Niels' gesture is symbolic of his destruction both of non-reproductive sexuality and of urban/cosmopolitan luxury: the gelding was a Percheron, a valuable breed of draft horse imported from France, but was unbreedable. Geldings are male horses that have been castrated to make them more docile and more amenable to labour on the farm, but their labour is nonreproductive. The draft horse lives out its days in labour, but that labour ends with its life. As such, Grove draws an analogy between the gelding and Niels in the role of husband to Clara Vogel: perhaps more stylish, living with more sophistication, amenable to the work on the farm, but symbolically castrated. Given this commitment to the imperial georgic imperative of reproductive farm labour, the novel does not treat Niels' murder of Clara Vogel—nor the murder of the gelding—as entirely tragic. In fact, Grove writes that “By the time the case was ready to go to the jury, no onlooker could have any doubt any longer as to the outcome. An acquittal was impossible; but so was a conviction on the charge of murder” (247). Grove represents Niels' actions as understandable, and the novel encourages readers to feel the same: after all, Clara's sexuality was excessive, and her profession illegal. In the world of the novel, Niels' assumption that only reproductive sexuality is acceptable is upheld by the province in the settlement by the

final charge of “manslaughter with attenuating circumstances” (247). The murder of Clara Vogel—with her dyed hair and her “death's-head” (164) face—destroys the urban corruption associated with her nonreproductive sexuality, which is symbolized by her vanity via her artificial hair-colour and her death's head face, and restores the potential scalability of the imperial georgic system of national expansion by freeing the farm from the trappings of unreproductive urban sophistication.

As a complement to Niels' dream of creating a family unit that functions also in the efficient management and expansion of his homestead, Ellen, too, emphasizes control over sexual desire, but for her, control over sexuality means maintaining her celibacy to protect her autonomy. While Niels fears the uncontrolled (or uncontrollable) feminine sexuality represented by Clara Vogel, Ellen's fear is of uncontrolled masculine sexuality as represented by her father, whom she witnesses raping her mother, and who forces her mother to work until her pregnancies are miscarried, as a form of birth control. While for Niels, the threat of Clara Vogel's sexual impulses is an unproductive marriage (both in the sense of agrarian work and in the sense of reproduction), the consequences of the uncontrolled impulses Ellen faces with her father are both the physical and sexual domination and victimization of women settlers, and the many stillbirths and miscarried pregnancies endured (and perpetuated) by her mother in a cycle of abuse. In Ellen's understanding of sexuality, sexual encounters between men and women can result only in suffering and death. Importantly, Ellen also understands the sexual encounters between her father and her mother as instances that change the activities of labour on the farm into instruments of death. She pauses in the middle of her explanation to Niels, in fact, to tell him, “[D]on't think for a moment that I am complaining about the work. I liked it. I was strong. Already I dreamt of one day having a farm all by myself, with mother to keep me company” (131). Ellen, at first,

understands sexuality as violent, according to the relationship modelled in her own childhood by her parents, and as a result imagines—not the imperial georgic imperative of a reproductive sexuality—but the finite vision of a female farmer without a husband. Ellen's understanding of her parents' sexuality as unnatural and wrong is tied to its relationship with farm labour: because her parents' sexual relationship was mired in violence and abuse, her mother's farm labour does not result in individual liberty or fulfillment, but destruction and death. When her mother is overwhelmed by her constant state of unwanted pregnancy, a woman on the farm over suggests that hard farm labour will result in a desired miscarriage, but such a solution inevitably results in Ellen's mother's illness and death. For Ellen, work is not erotic in the way it is for Niels, and, indeed, the kind of autoerotic fixation on labour that Niels seems to feel is not accessible to the women of *Settlers of the Marsh* because their exertions and their gender are so closely connected to their isolation.

Both Niels and Ellen fail at first to fulfill the imperial georgic ideal of the reproductive family farm because they have failed to create productive family structures, albeit for different reasons. The novel presents Ellen and Niels as opposing poles in the relationship between agrarian work, human sexuality, and nature. Niels' mistake was to build his homestead around an uncontrolled sexual impulse, while Ellen's was to reject the possibilities of her sexuality through isolation because of her fear and hatred of her father. However, Niels' incarceration and the intervening years prove a gestating period for both Niels and Ellen to (for lack of a better term) get it right. Niels returns to the settlement, finding “things so changed that he could no longer follow the old-time trail athwart the sand-flats” (251), and noting that in his absence, the settlement had expanded and changed with a new generation of farmers and homesteaders: “The prosperity which had invaded the Marsh was unexpected; the old pioneers had receded to the

margin of civilization; a new generation had taken hold. The change was not entirely welcome: he was of the old generation which had been evicted” (252). Having been incarcerated, Niels has been removed from the linear expansion of the imperial georgic through a new generation of farming families: time has moved on without him. Niels sees the labour of the farm as a part of the continual present for the worker and a source of individual consolation, but he has not yet been able to orient himself to the work in a way that makes his farm reproductive. This tension between the experience of work and the impact of work marks the point at which Grove envisions the imperial georgic not from the outside, but from the inside, from the perspective of the farmer who will never benefit from the conveniences of civilization he generates. The experience of work is immanent because the worker does not reap the rewards of civilization. The farmer’s experience of agricultural labour is more about the ongoing process of trying to find peace and harmony. But Grove suggests through Niels that the farmer is never to find peace and harmony, even if the empire flourishes. In other words, the results of the farmer’s work transcend the work itself:

To drown one's thought in labour is very difficult on the farm: everything is conducive to contemplation. No high ambitions lead you away from the present; and yet those ambitions which are indispensable, the lowly ones, are really the highest on earth: the desire for peace and harmony in yourself, your surroundings...

Farming the prairie does not offer the individual farmer the rewards of that civilization in terms of ease or company. While Niels is working as a single farmer, work is not enough to give the abstract labour of farming any real meaning:

But there were no surroundings. There was no little world, no microcosm revolving within the macrocosm. There was the duty to the farm, the country, the world: cold abstract things devoid of living blood.... (267)

This passage suggests that Grove portrays a version of the georgic more like Moodie's than Goldsmith's because he is concerned with the immanent experiences of the labouring farmer. However, *Settlers of the Marsh* still expresses an imperial georgic linear teleology of settlement and nation building, because the purposes of the farmer's labour—the building of the functioning farm family as a microcosm of the nation—are ultimately assumed to succeed. Niels has learned by the time he returns to the bush that the work of building a farm alone is not enough; the role, then, of the wife and family is to make the farmer's work meaningful by acting as a microcosm of the state: living symbols of the continuing process of labour that will contribute to the expansion and reproduction of the nation. This realization—not that, as with Clara, Niels needed merely a woman on the farm, but a helpmate and mother—allows Niels to seek out the kind of relationship that will result in a harmonious and productive heteronormative family relationship. By this time, Ellen, too, has come to a similar conclusion to Niels, and she confesses that her ambition to farm as a single woman had also been mistaken. When Niels returns to the settlement after his incarceration and sees Ellen for the first time, she insists that the fault for their estrangement was not all on Niels' side, “Not chiefly, even” (275). Their meeting for the second time after Niels' return is set against the backdrop of the “virgin” bush (278), suggesting both the possibility that Niels and Ellen can begin anew with the hopes of also constructing a productive family unit, and evoking the idea that Niels and Ellen are the first of many generations to begin a (re)productive relationship with the land.

'Don't speak. I have more to say. I have been to blame...I should not have said at the time, what you wish can never be. I should have said, what you wish cannot be so long as I live under the shadow of my mother's life. But if you can wait...For, Niels, I knew then as I know now that it is my destiny and my greatest need to have children, children... And I knew then as I know now that there is no man living on earth from whom I could accept them if not you... I thought I could live my life as a protest against the life my mother had lived. I had loved her and she was dead...I should have known... Had she been living, the mistake would never have been made...'. (281)

While initially, Ellen believed that what she wanted was independence and solitary work, she now realizes that she has always had a desire for children that she had repressed. The novel, then, argues against solitude or independence as incompatible with living as a national subject; instead, it endorses the imperial georgic view of the family farm as a microcosm of the state, which extends and continues the work of the progress of civilization through the (re)production of farm labour. The closing image of the novel reinforces this idea, as Niels and Ellen walk back toward her farmhouse: "They do not kiss. Their lips have not touched. But their arms rest in each other; their fingers are intertwined... As they go, a vision arises between them, shared by both" (281). This final image is one that emphasizes controlled desire, the mastery of their own natures that each character has had to learn in order to fulfill their roles within the heteronormative teleology of the imperial georgic.

Despite the relative incoherence of Grove's national vision on the question of empire, and although his version of Canadian imperial georgic sounds much more like the American ideal of the self-reliant yeoman farmer than he would have liked to admit, it is perhaps unsurprising that Grove has been so thoroughly canonized as a towering figure of Canadian literature. While few

of Grove's novels found the same success as *A Search for America*, and his notoriety after his speaking engagements for the Canadian Clubs in Ontario was relatively short-lived,<sup>37</sup> the years following the Second World War saw a concerted effort to canonize his work. In “Staking a Claim,” Paul Hjartsarson points out that Grove's literary reputation was never very high during his own lifetime. Instead, Hjartsarson argues that Grove's significance in the Canadian literary canon can be explained through the rise and fall of Canadian cultural nationalism, central to which is the figure of the settler, and the fact that Grove “wrote about settlement [and] was himself an immigrant who lived for decades among the people about whom he wrote” (28). Although Hjartsarson implies that the settler—or settler-farmer figure—is central to Canadian literary nationalism and therefore Grove's canonization, he misses the fact that Grove inherits the imperial georgic connection between agricultural settlement and the heteronormative ordering of society, and the way that the novel struggles with—even as it ultimately represses—the difficult consequences of the imperial georgic's efforts to control nature and sexuality.

Like Crawford's Katie in *Malcolm's Katie*, Grove acknowledges through his portrayal of Ellen that the imperial georgic perpetuates itself through women's bodies, often—though not in every case—violently. Grove ends *Settlers of the Marsh* by insisting that Ellen learn to embrace the imperial georgic ideal and the use of her body in the reproduction of the nation, whereas Crawford expresses more ambivalence about that through Katie. One of Grove's contemporaries, Martha Ostenso, responded in a more complicated way to this permeation of imperial georgic emphasis on the family farm in *Wild Geese*. Like Isabella Valency Crawford's *Malcolm's Katie*,

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<sup>37</sup> Stobie relates Grove's next speaking engagement, in which he toured the western provinces, as particularly dismal: “In one place, 'they introduced me as Frederick Philip Cook'; in Victoria, the booksellers did not know his work; in Edmonton, no reservations had been made for him and “There was not one copy of my book in town”; in the Peace River country, the car ran out of gas on the way to Grande Prairie; and in Prince Albert, though he had a good meeting, he lost his cane” (178).

Ostenso's *Wild Geese* makes a more explicit and emphatic critique. In *Wild Geese*, Ostenso treats the imperial georgic as a narrative stereotype. In contrast to Grove, who gestures toward the possibility of a queer georgic with his portrayal of Ellen but ends up earnestly endorsing the imperial georgic and its heteronormative social order, *Wild Geese* makes use of both imperial georgic and gothic modalities to construe the imperial georgic as a queer gothic melodrama. The novel depicts the hardships of the Gare family on their farm in Northern Saskatchewan, in which all members of the family are terrorized by its patriarch, Caleb Gare. The patriarchal authority of the novel, Caleb Gare, echoes the instrumentalist and imperial georgic ideology of characters like Malcolm and Niels Lindstedt in *Settlers of the Marsh*, but where earlier writers mostly approve of the figure of the patriarchal farmer, Ostenso presents his control over his family and environment as excessive and destructive rather than progressive or productive. The arrival of Lind Archer, a visiting schoolteacher whose narrative arc resembles that of the pastoral romance, to the Gare farm challenges Caleb's sense of control. His eldest daughter, Judith, on the other hand, is a gothic figure in that her sexual expression and relationship with the land directly conflicts with Caleb's imperial georgic attempt to control his family and surrounding community, while her attraction to Lind, and the removal at which she stands from Lind's world, also troubles Lind's Romantic pastoral expectations upon her arrival at the Gare farm. The competing perspectives of the characters represents a Canadian literary landscape in which the serious social realism and imperial georgic assumptions of contemporaries like Grove, along with the pastoral Romances so popular in other parts of the country, become leveled out in the field of representation; by including both pastoral and gothic elements that disrupt the logic of the imperial georgic while refusing to fully endorse any of the three perspectives, the novel suggests that there may be other possibilities, but they are rendered just out of reach by generic

and ideological constraint. The novel's thematic and modal contradictions produce a gothic melodrama that disrupts but never fully overcomes the imperial georgic's heteronormative socio-sexual organization of nationhood, nor its instrumentalist approach to nature. However, Ostenso's precarious queer georgic nevertheless uses gothic elements to code the imperial georgic as an oppressive ontological force on the development of each of the characters, especially the women.

Ostenson's *Wild Geese* has a similar structure to *Settlers of the Marsh* in that Ostenson details the connection between the heterosexual family farm and agricultural labour, but *Wild Geese* exaggerates the element of capitalist expansion to the point of making it grotesque. Both Grove's *Settlers of the Marsh* and Ostenson's *Wild Geese* are exemplary of the way the imperial georgic mode adapted to twentieth-century modernism by accommodating the gothic mode as a way of expressing the threatening return of what has been repressed in early Canadian imperial georgic settler narratives, namely human sexuality and desire. In "Organic Matters" (2002),<sup>38</sup> David Fairer argues that although the georgic and the Gothic are two literary modes that have been "held apart by the terminology of 'Augustan' and 'Romantic,' the two modalities share a common language (3): "both are concerned with organic processes of growth and decay, mixing and engrafting, recycling and evolving, and especially with how life can re-emerge from depredation and decay" (3). Fairer calls attention to the Gothic's function of revealing the concern with destruction and decay that has been repressed in the Augustan genre. In contrast to the imperial georgic's focus on progressive domestication and heterosexual order, Gothic is interested in what "flourishes out of depredation and random accumulation" (Fairer "Organic

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<sup>38</sup> A talk given by David Fairer in Colorado, the manuscript of which he was gracious enough to lend me for the purposes of this chapter.

Matters” 4). In this respect, it is more like the precarious georgic, which is interested in the processes of survival, adaptation, and change brought on by toil and suffering. The gothic and precarious georgic modes both share a common emphasis on mixture, precarity, vulnerability and contingency. The gothic uses themes of predation and victimization, the threat of death and destruction, the sudden loss of order, and gloomy or frightening moods to address the latent fears in each socio-historical context. Early twentieth-century writers continued imperial georgic assumptions, but translated them into nationalism, still echoing the settler narratives in their focus on the heteronormative family farm and the ordering of Canadian society through agrarian work and heterosexual reproduction. But they were less optimistic about the progress narrative, and these resistances find expression in gothic textual elements. Ostenso’s *Wild Geese* uses these gothic elements to critique the Imperial georgic’s ordering of socio-sexual space and the way it limits the possibilities for women to freely explore and express non-reproductive sexual desire.

Understanding the history of queered versions of the georgic and how Gothic elements unsettle and destabilize boundaries can help us make intelligible some of the incongruities in *Wild Geese* and its representation of—and response to—imperial georgic conventions. I have so far emphasized the role of heteronormative discourses in the imperial georgic’s depiction of creating a scalable system of agriculture that can readily expand imperial and national interests. imperial georgic’s harnessing of heterosexuality as a means of creating a scalable imperial ontology was a dominant aspect of the mode. But as Jill Casid has argued, even at the height of imperial georgic popularity in the eighteenth century, there existed queer versions of the georgic. In the eighteenth-century, she argues, these queer georgics, on one hand, depicted colonial sites of contact with other cultures as sites of exploration for sexual desires that were more repressed within the metropole; on the other, queer georgics celebrated imperial georgic conventions, using

the aesthetics of ruin and language of the picturesque, not to unsettle these conventions, but to gesture toward their long histories (129). These eighteenth-century queer georgics have not yet been extensively studied but offer a productive site of inquiry for grasping some of the incongruities and Gothic elements present in novels like *Wild Geese*. In *Sowing Empire* (2005), Casid argues that while some attention has been given to the pastoral as a site of queer representation in the countryside, relatively little critical attention has been given to the history of queer representation in the georgic mode. She argues that while the eighteenth-century imperial georgic privileged heterosexual reproduction, Virgil's *Georgics* also include non-heterosexual forms of reproduction such as transplantation and grafting, and some modern writers foregrounded these elements to create queer versions of georgic. Casid describes a literary genealogy of such texts which also, like the imperial georgic, shaped the aesthetic and material qualities of the English countryside, from the ornamented farms and poetry of William Shenstone and Marie Antoinette, to the farm and letters of The Ladies of Llangollen, whose relationship was also detailed in the diaries of Anne Lister. She also argues that queer georgic emerged in later texts such as Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*, parts of Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*, and the imagined imperial spaces of Jeanette Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry*. Each text holds in common an interest in the connection between agricultural work and gardening as analogous to the ordering of sexuality, reflecting georgic conventions but queering those conventions by offering an alternative version in which colonial sites represent "the potential held out by the strange, exotic, and queer fruit produced by transfer, contact, and fusing or 'confusing'" (131)—all non-heteronormative reproductive methods that are present in Virgil's *Georgics*. In each case, Casid calls attention to the non-heterosexual reproductive possibilities inherent in these agricultural techniques, and in their expanded potential as a way of

conceptualizing the transplantation and mixing that occurs with the expansion of the British Empire. But she also emphasizes that although these ornamented farms and texts queer and disrupt the linear heterosexual trajectory of imperial georgic sexuality, they often uphold the imperial georgic's overall aim of colonization in their reliance on expanding the empire through the exchange of living matter from the margins to the metropole.

Martha Ostenso's *Wild Geese* is an important example of the way the imperial georgic, by the twentieth century, had become so engrained in Canada's cultural sphere that it could be used as a familiar foundational trope for popular fiction. Understanding the book's publication history can help us understand that the georgic mode had mass appeal not only for literary but also popular Canadian and American audiences. Ostenso won her fame in Canadian literature after entering and winning a contest for Best North American Novel with her manuscript for *Wild Geese*. The contest was held by Dodd, Mead and Company, *The Pictorial Review*, and Famous Players-Lasky, and offered up in prizes publication of the manuscript, a movie deal, and enough prize money to offer Ostenso financial security to support her writing career (McGregor 105). The novel, which Ostenso reportedly wrote in three weeks, used popular literary tropes to appeal to wide, mostly middlebrow audiences in both Canada and the United States, first appeared serially and simultaneously in 1925 in six editions of *Western Home Monthly* (Winnipeg) and in *The Pictorial Review* (New York City) (McGregor and Smith 49). As Hannah McGregor argues, *Western Home Monthly* itself deserves critical attention as a valuable resource in Canada's cultural history: it began as an agricultural magazine, but "by 1924, its circulation had increased to 55,000, and spread beyond the province of Manitoba. By 1929, the April cover could announce: 'This Issue Read by 100,000 Families'" (249). By the 1930s, the parent publishing company of *The Western Home Monthly*, Stovel Printing Company, had increased the

magazine's circulation to 180,000 and changed their name to *The National Home Monthly* before relocating their main offices to Toronto (McGregor 249). The rapid increase in the periodical's popular readership speaks to an increasing interest in Canada's popular culture in settlement and homesteading narratives. The fact that the novel was published in both the United States and Canada—and it was, in fact, the only novel Ostenso published in Canada—speaks to the broad appeal of imperial georgic depictions of farming, both on what Americans would understand to be the frontier, and in the Canadian Prairies. As McGregor and Michelle Smith note in “Martha Ostenso, Periodical Culture, and the Middlebrow,” the differences between popular culture in the United States and Canada in terms of middlebrow periodicals was differentiated by little other than Canada's inclusion of nationalist content. They write,

Canadian and American periodicals had much in common. In order to distinguish themselves from their American competitors in the magazine marketplace, publications like *Chatelaine* (as well as Maclean's and other mainstream periodicals like *National Home Monthly*) yoked their identity to nationhood. Whether it took the form of presenting Canadian authorship, exploring Canadian politics, or surveying Canadian regional distinctions, the discourse of Canadian identity was always prominent in the magazines. While it is important to keep in mind that Canada's literary landscape and publishing industry were markedly different from those of the US, the nature of the mainstream magazine during this period, with its mixture of advertisements and cultural content, transcends national borders. (69)

The fact that Martha Ostenso was able to win audiences in both countries using the same nation building tropes speaks to the wide recognition of the imperial georgic mode in popular North American culture, even if it was not named as such. I argue that it is worth recognizing the publication format of *Wild Geese* because through its serialization we can trace the development

of the imperial georgic as having established a place in Canadian popular literary culture. I draw this argument, in part, from Julie Rak's theory of generic writing. Rak argues that generic writing "works because the recognition of repetition is pleasurable. The act of recognition itself creates a measure of participation for the reader who finds similar elements" (Rak qtd in McGregor 251). For *Wild Geese* to have gained such popularity through serial publication in both New York and in Canada, and to then become so popular as to become both a film and a stage play, audiences had to feel the pleasure of recognition. Even if the imperial georgic was not a named mode, its conventions had become recognizable: the instrumentalist struggle to tame and make productive a hostile natural world, and the idealized linear temporal depiction of progress through agricultural labour on the family farm, are recognizable as imperial georgic depictions of settler narratives. It is this recognition, too, that allows readers to connect with the ways in which Ostenson undercuts the dominance of these narratives in Canadian literature. *Wild Geese*, I argue, is not an imperial georgic. Nor is it a simple opposition to the imperial georgic mode. Rather, it is a precarious georgic that resists and critiques the mechanisms of the imperial georgic mode by using gothic conventions and homoerotic subtext to emphasize how women's sexual freedom is rendered precarious by the scalable ontology of the imperial georgic.

It is useful to read *Wild Geese* as a queer precarious georgic that uses gothic conventions partially because, like *Roughing It in the Bush*, the novel calls into question matters of authorship, genre, nationalist interpretation and collaboration at the level of its production as well as at the level of content. Until recently, much of the scholarship on Ostenson's novel has focused either on nationalist or regionalist interpretation, slotting her into the literary canon as a prairie realist author and, as a result, approaching *Wild Geese* as an earnest representation of geographical determinism that realistically portrays the overwhelming power of the barren

landscape on the Gare family. But as Hannah McGregor and Faye Hammill have argued, Ostenso's writing also resists such nationalist literary narratives. McGregor writes that Ostenso "published in Canadian and American venues while identifying strongly as a member of the Scandinavian diaspora. Her work thus refuses to be reduced to national literary narratives" (106). To complicate matters further, Ostenso signed a deal with her husband, Douglas Durkin, declaring that all literary works Ostenso produced between 1925 and 1958 were the product of a collaboration between the two of them (McGregor, "Editing", 85). The result of the discovery of this signed agreement was that Ostenso's claim to have won the Best North American Prize, along with the history of criticism surrounding her work, has been called into question. McGregor argues that social text editing can make a space for such multiply constituted author identities. Social text editing is the methodology with which a critic undertakes criticism while emphasizing that "'texts are produced and reproduced under specific social and institutional conditions'; thus 'a 'text' is not a 'material thing'" produced by a single author, but "a material event or set of events, a point in time (or a moment in space) where certain communicative interchanges are being practiced"' (McGann qtd in McGregor 107). I argue that a similar embracing of the author figure as multiply constituted is an aspect of the precarious georgic mode, and that this emphasis on the contingent nature of authorship plays out also in the content of *Wild Geese*.

If the precarious georgic is a mode that emphasizes the non-scalable features of contradiction, variety, contingency, collaboration and adaptation in the relations between humans and nonhumans, Ostenso's fluidity as an author figure makes sense in the broader context of the tradition, and also helps to open space for more ecological readings of the text based on exploration of gothic and georgic literary modes. Faye Hammill has suggested that although

critics like Desmond Pacey and Joy Kuropatwa have identified *Wild Geese* as part of a nationalist prairie realist literature, “[co-opting] the novel [as] a narrative of Canadian literary development which follows a rising plot from romance to the supposedly more mature form of realism.... [I]t is... equally possible to argue that romance and gothic predominate the text” (20). Such arguments have been advanced by Margot Northey, Brian Johnson, and Daniel S. Lenoski. More recent readings of *Wild Geese* are beginning to move past the geographically determinist readings that attempt to narrativize the novel as part of the prairie realist genre. Margaret Boyce, for example, makes the case that reading *Wild Geese* from an ecocritical, anti-anthropocentric perspective results in a model for “reading Canadian literature in a way that notices, acknowledges, and responds to the array of subjects, human and otherwise, in whose company we seek a sense of belonging” (92). Hammill rightly points out that none of these critics questions the nationalist readings of *Wild Geese* that place the novel squarely within a specifically Canadian literary history. I build on Boyce’s argument by situating such an ecocritical reading within the context of the precarious georgic and gothic modes. I argue that in combining the gothic with the precarious georgic mode, *Wild Geese* challenges the imperial georgic nationalism promoted by Grove, first by invoking the imperial georgic modality that has been widely integrated into both American and Canadian literary traditions,<sup>39</sup> and then by treating the imperial georgic as a literary ruin among other literary genres.

*Wild Geese* participates in the precarious georgic because it sets the story of Caleb Gare’s building of the Gare homestead in the past, features a gothic heroine in the figure of Judith, and represents her sexual development as precarious under the oppressive structures of the imperial

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<sup>39</sup> See Timothy Sweet, *American Georgics: Economy and Environment in Early American Literature*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002; Donaghue, Brian, Sara M. Gregg, Edwin C. Hagenstein, *American Georgics: Writings on Farming, Culture, and the Land*, Yale University Press, 2011; georgics have been more widely studied, historically and recently, in American literature and ecocriticism than in Canadian.

georgic. The Gare family depicted in *Wild Geese* acts as an inverted version of the family structure presented by Crawford in *Malcolm's Katie*, in that both texts focus on how the imperial georgic is meant to reproduce itself through the bodies of the female characters. Like Crawford's *Malcolm's Katie*, *Wild Geese* depicts a paternal figure who is a successful farmer, but where Crawford's poem ultimately endorses the patriarchal family as the unit of imperial progress, Ostenson uses gothic conventions to invert the reading of the patriarch from benign to demonic. Both Malcolm and Caleb use panoptic surveillance to signal control over their lands and family members, but where Crawford depicts Malcolm's surveillance as motivated by a benign appreciation for his accomplishments and an effort to protect them, Ostenson depicts Caleb's surveillance as a tyrannical and perverse drive for power and control, not only over his farm but also over his family and community. Caleb's tyrannical control over his family is also a nightmare vision of Amundsen's victimization of Ellen in *Settlers of the Marsh* and implies a critique of Niels' imperial georgic assumptions about the role of a chaste and reproductive sexuality in the successful progress of his farm. While Grove's novel endorses Niels' intention to build a microcosm of a productive and well-functioning nation by finding a wife to share in the labour of settlement, Ostenson presents Caleb's authority as self-serving, since Caleb uses the information he has learned about his wife—that her son, Mark Jordan, was born out of an extramarital affair—to ensure that she and his children remain on the farm to do the majority of the hard farm labour. Caleb's goal, like Niels', is to acquire land and assets to grow his homestead, but unlike Grove, Ostenson presents Caleb's behaviour as insidious and challenges the imperial georgic idea that patriarchal control over nature and female sexuality will produce a mutually supportive community of farm families. Further, in *Wild Geese*, Judith provides a gothic heroine who is inherently destabilizing to the imperial georgic's insistence on

heterosexual family structures, in that she challenges Caleb's victimization of her and demonstrates the potential for, and eventual suppression of, queer desire in rural spaces. By emphasizing the precariousness of queer desire in her representation of Judith, Ostenso makes obvious the violence of creating a scalable ontological foundation for building the nation and for building personal wealth.

Judith Gare is the destabilizing queer gothic heroine of *Wild Geese*, in that she disrupts several organizing principles of the imperial georgic mode: in contrast to the farmers' wives in the earlier settler gothic narratives, who willingly participate in the reproduction of farm and empire, she is both a victim and a threatening presence, a figure that provokes both attraction and fear, and a figure who disrupts the categories of masculine and feminine, human and animal, all of which are central to the heteronormative and anthropocentric ontology of the imperial georgic. Judith Gare and Lind Archer set up the nexus in which the gothic romance and the precarious georgic are combined. When Lind Archer comes to stay at the Gare farm as the visiting schoolteacher, she and Judith are described as having an attraction to one another. While Ostenso does not make this attraction explicitly sexual, the homoerotic subtext is clear in Lind's description of seeing Judith for the first time. Initially when Lind comes to the farm, she views it in the aestheticizing terms of romantic pastoral, but soon finds that "The high romance which had attended her setting out for this isolated spot in the north country was woefully deserting her" (Ostenso 10). When Lind first meets Judith, she describes Judith's "great defiant body" and her stance, "as if prepared to take or give a blow" (8) as exceptionally "vigorous beauty" (8). But for Lind, Judith's physical strength and toughness places her not alongside the men in her family as masculinized, but rather as "strangely beautiful ... Like some fabled animal—a centauress, perhaps" (13). Therefore, it is not a simple reversal of normative gender identity that

Ostenso describes. Instead, Judith is to Lind a symbol of powerful, vibrant, unsettling rural femininity, and Lind naturalizes her desire for Judith by connecting her with the primordial forces of nature, “the embryonic ecstasy of all life” (35). She notes that between Judith and Caleb, “the [former] was the more to be feared, for sheer physical power” (38). As Hammill argues, Lind’s description is one that resists a naturalist depiction of Judith and depicts her instead using the language of the gothic romance. Her description destabilizes categories between victimization and power, in that Judith is revealed throughout the novel to be both subject to her father’s abuse and a threatening and powerful figure of resistance. This description of Judith also places her in a liminal space between human and animal. Lind’s description of her as a Greco-Roman Centauress, a horse-human hybrid, draws attention to Judith’s workhorse-like life, but equally presents her as an embodiment of the consequences of women’s victimization. The Centaurs were, in Greco-Roman mythology, a race spawned by the rape of the goddess Nephele (the goddess of hospitality, a cloud-nymph) by Ixion (a son of Ares, the god of war, and the king of the Lapiths). Judith’s relation to the workhorse is replayed in her explicit dehumanization, when Caleb leaves her hog-tied in the stable after a violent encounter during which she throws an axe at his head. Judith’s rebelliousness threatens the destruction of the Gare farm; her freedom would indicate the possibility for her siblings and mother to leave the farm as well—the loss of Caleb’s entire force of labour. After Judith’s encounter with Sven, when she finds herself pregnant, Judith herself projects her pain onto a dead horse: “A horse dropped dead one day in the pasture, and Caleb sent Martin and Charlie out to skin it. Before the carcass had been taken away, Judith came upon it, red and horrible in the burning sunlight. After that, the hurt in her mind seemed to take on the image of the horse” (Ostenso 122). While the Centaur is not traditionally regarded as a gothic figure, in this novel the image of Judith as the

Centauress/horse is a gothic one because Judith transgresses boundaries and embodies the victimization of women that is repressed in idealized accounts of the imperial georgic. Her dehumanization exposes Caleb's industrial/imperial georgic as socially, psychologically, and potentially economically damaging because of its reduction of complex human beings and human relationships to mere instruments of production. Lind's reference to the centauress is a powerful one because it transforms Judith's association with the workhorse into a powerful, mythological figure associated with victimization, reckoning, and mixture.

Judith's association with queer georgic is played out in her autoerotic and arguably homoerotic relation to both Lind and to the landscape itself. When they first meet, we know Judith is also attracted to Lind because of the intense notice she takes in Lind's expression of femininity and because Lind provokes Judith's own feelings of admiration and envy. Although these moments can be read as a simple fact of Judith's enviousness over the delicate femininity of the more sophisticated Lind, the text offers instances that suggest that Judith's feelings are complicated feelings of attraction. When the two women are undressing for bed, for example, Judith "watched Lind taking off her trim outer clothing. When she saw that she wore dainty silk underthings she glanced at her more covertly" (16). Judith is also excited by Lind's jewelry, but compares the beauty of Lind's amber earrings with the colour of Lind's hair: "'Wild honey! Drops of wild honey!' Judith exclaimed in a whisper. 'Just the colour of you!'" (16). When Lind offers the beads, thinking that Judith desires them for herself, Judith refuses, insisting, "No thanks, they were made for you, Miss Archer" (16). These passages do not suggest a simple feeling of envy on Judith's part for the objects of luxury and sophistication that Lind seems to possess but are wrapped up in Judith's admiration for Lind herself. This passage immediately connects back to the land, which Judith observes that same night, is "stretched out black and

remote” beneath the setting sun after Lind is asleep (16). For Judith, the land acts as the site of her displaced desire for Lind, variously representing or foreclosing the possibility of that desire’s fulfillment. Nowhere in the novel is this more evident than in her scene in the woods. The scene takes place after a dinner party during which Caleb accuses Judith of riding a mare without permission, while Judith had been saving a calf from drowning in the muskeg at the end of the farm. Judith retreats to the woods, and the scene is worth exploring in full:

It was clingingly warm, as before rain. Not knowing fully what she was doing, Judith took off all her clothing and lay flat on the damp ground with the waxy feeling of new, sunless vegetation under her. She needed to escape, to fly from something—she knew not what. ...

Oh, knowing how bare the earth was, as if it might have a heart and a mind hidden there in the woods. The fields that Caleb had tilled had no tenderness, she knew. But here was something forbiddingly beautiful, secret as one’s own body. And there was something beyond this. She could feel it in the freeness of the air, in the depth of the earth. Under the body there were, she had been taught, eight thousand miles of earth. On the other side, what? Above her body there were leagues and leagues of air, leading like wings—to what? The marvelous confusion and complexity of all the world had singled her out from the rest of the Gares. She was no longer one of them. Lind Archer had come and her delicate fingers had sprung a secret lock in Jude’s being. She had opened like a tight bud. There was no going back now into the darkness.

Sven Sandbo, he would come home in May, so they said. Was it Sven she wanted, now that she was so strangely free? ... Something beyond Sven, perhaps.... Freedom, freedom. She dipped her blistered hands down into the clear topaz of the pool, lifted them and dipped them and lifted them, letting the drops slip off the tips of her fingers each time like tiny cups

of light. She thought of the Teacher, of her dainty hands and her soft, laughing eyes... she came from another life, another world. She would go back there again. ... Jude hid her hands behind her and pressed her breast against the cold ground. Hard, senseless sobs rose in her throat, and her eyes smarted with tears. She was ugly beyond all bearing, and all her life was ugly. ... Her large body lay rigid on the ground, and was suddenly unnatural in that earthy place. (Ostenso 61-62)

I quote this passage at length because it reveals the complexity and confusion of Judith's relation to her sexuality. Judith's escape from Caleb's tilled fields into the woods plays into what Catriona Sandilands describes as a long history of lesbian and bisexual women's literature in which natural spaces offer refuge from the oppressive heteropatriarchal social structures of the countryside. Sandilands' ideas about queer gothic dovetail with Casid's ideas about queer georgic because in both modes, queer women find sites of resistance inside dominant oppressive structures like the imperial georgic, and those sites of resistance—like the queer georgic country house, or like the wild periphery of the forest—in turn reveal those oppressive structures to be permeable. While the scene is autoerotic, it also involves erotic desire for Lind, as Judith associates Lind with natural beauty, reflected in the “tiny cups of light” from the “clear topaz of the pool” (61-62). But as soon as she thinks of Lind's femininity in this way, the wilderness seems to reject her more masculine body as unnatural. In contrast to settler georgic heroines who embrace the imperial georgic's idealization of the heterosexual farm family, Judith associates farming with violence and ugliness and embraces complexity and confusion, not as the lesser of two evils, but because in the “marvellous confusion and complexity of all the world” (62), Judith catches a glimpse of the possibility of an alternative, queer relation to the land that is richer than imperial georgic because it can include “something forbiddingly beautiful, secret as one's own

body” (61), an expression of queer desire and also a complex tangle of social and human/nonhuman relations. Judith is confused, but she has a glimpse of this possibility, and Ostenson represents it as positive, even if precarious rather than utopian. However, the fact that it’s mixed up with feelings for Sven as well as Lind also points to how she wishes these relations could stay complex instead of having to be domesticated into capitalist heteropatriarchy, “something beyond Sven, perhaps... Freedom. Freedom” (62). *Wild Geese* aligns itself with other works that deal with lesbian sexual desire and agrarian work, such as Radclyffe Hall's *Well of Loneliness* and later works such as Jane Rule's *Desert of the Heart* (1964), in that the relationship between Lind and Judith “plays with a complex tension between an idea of nature as discursive constraint on lesbian sexuality and an idea of nature as a physical space that can both incite and represent lesbian desire” (Sandilands 25).

Judith’s desire for freedom is bound up with her anxieties about the foreclosure of freedom symbolized by her relationship with Sven. In the above passage, Judith’s attraction to and admiration of Lind’s femininity, exemplified by her “delicate fingers” (61) and “soft dainty hands” (61), is contrasted with her realization that the return of Sven would offer the prospect of a relationship or marriage. But still, she desires freedom beyond him. Judith’s relation to Sven is a confusing one: on one hand, Ostenson seems to imply that Judith’s mother, Amelia’s, words have so destroyed Judith’s confidence that she no longer desires Sven at all, because she assumes that he would not marry her even if she wanted him to. Ostenson contrasts Judith’s self-discovery in the woods with her sexual encounter with Sven in a similar forested clearing. The passage in which Sven and Judith finally kiss (and, presumably, have sex—Judith is pregnant shortly afterward), is punctuated by Judith’s genuine anger and described as an epic battle between “two stark elements” (103). They wrestle, and at first, Sven is expecting a romantic encounter, until he

realizes that Judith is fighting him in earnest. After the initial scuffle, when Sven stops to ask whether she would like to stop wrestling, she “lashes out with her arm, striking him full across the face” (102). The scene is vicious and violent, with Sven and Judith hitting, wrestling, crushing, and choking each other until Judith finally relents and asks Sven to kiss her. While this violent encounter is also an expression of Judith’s sexual desire, the contrast between the two scenes is stark: in the autoerotic scene in the woods, Judith experiences desire through the contemplation of the beauty of the natural complexity around her, while the encounter with Sven is characterized by Judith’s performance of masculine strength, vigor, and rage. The contrast connects to the queer georgic in that it suggests that Judith remains a queer gothic figure, even as the narrative relegates her to the position of a domesticated farm wife.

Judith’s feelings after she discovers that she’s pregnant are equally ambivalent. When Judith overhears Caleb telling his wife, Amelia, that no one will ever marry their daughters if anyone finds out that Mark Jordan is her illegitimate son, Judith’s reaction on hearing is one of abject confusion. Her reaction to hearing Sven call his cattle indicates how she connects her mother’s situation with her own:

She heard him calling across the swamps to his own cattle, and knew that it was to make her hear. It made her bitterly lonely. But there was no romance of desire in her loneliness. What she had heard had made her feel soiled and mysteriously unworthy. “Nobody would marry her if they knew,” Amelia had said. (Ostenso 122)

At this point in the novel, Judith’s pregnancy and parentage are both truths that have threatened to reveal themselves. Judith’s pregnancy signifies the same secret that holds Amelia hostage as Caleb Gare’s wife, because Judith was also born out of wedlock. Caleb’s control over Amelia is not one that arises from physical violence, but from his control over knowledge that would ruin

her reputation in the community. On the other, Judith's parentage—herself a child born to Amelia out of wedlock—threatens to foreclose the possibility of her escaping the Gare farm through marriage to Sven, an escape that would re-inscribe her into the imperial georgic teleology of heteronormative social structure. Such a choice forecloses on the possibilities she imagined in the forest when she was thinking of Lind.

Ostenso represents the heterosexual relationships in *Wild Geese* with a deeply engrained violence that she does not, for all the intensity of emotion Judith feels, represent in relations between women. For Ostenso, Caleb's masculinity and sexuality are both caught up in a version of the imperial georgic that has replaced nationalism with capitalism and is thus associated with a perversely eroticized relationship with the land that is made to seem less natural than Judith's displacement of her own sexual longing in the forest. In contrast to earlier imperial georgic settler-farmers like Max and Niels, who channel their sexuality into the production of family and nation, Caleb's sexuality becomes as nonreproductive as Judith's queer desire when it is displaced onto his prized field of flax. In describing Caleb's relationship with his flax in erotic terms, Ostenso emphasizes that the heterosexual family structure of the imperial georgic is not a 'natural' sexual organization, but one based on capital. The fragility of this prized crop suggests that Caleb's emphasis on control and exploitation of the landscape for profit is less natural than Judith's erotic feminization of the land as a lesbian object of her desire. While Judith's autoerotic moment with the feminized land concentrates on her appreciation for the complexity and richness of life, Caleb's appreciation for his prized flax field is framed in terms of the brutality of his methods of production:

A pang of regret struck him as he thought of the cutting of the flax. It had grown with such pride, such rich dignity. It was beautiful, stretching out and stirring with life, as

though nothing could end its being. But there would be other years and other yields, he comforted himself. Next year he would plant more flax. Its delicacy was a challenge to the harsh conditions under which it grew—it was a challenge to Caleb himself to force from the soil all that it would withhold. (213)

In this sense, it is Caleb's attraction to the landscape that Ostenso presents as unnatural. His flax field, precarious in these “harsh conditions” (213), is prized not only because of its market value (which, in Manitoba, would have been high because linseed oil was in high demand),<sup>40</sup> but also because it signifies his tyrannical control—figured as violent rape in the phrase “force from the soil” (213)—over the landscape and over his wife and children, who must work to ensure the crops ripen in spite of the climate. Caleb takes pleasure in observing his “tame hayfields” (17), and his obsession becomes “to get rid of the useless land [of the muskeg] and buy in its place the neck of timber held by Fusi Aronson” (18). However, Caleb's ambitions depend on “[holding] the whip-hand” (18) over his wife and his children as labourers. Caleb's logic of production directly depends on reproduction: “Hired help was worse than none” (18), and so the labour of the farm must be done by his own family. The novel shows, then, that the repression of characters like Judith Gare is not just caused by the struggle with the land, as in a geographically determinist reading, but also by the heteronormative colonial georgic framing of settlement. The ending of *Wild Geese* is bittersweet because Judith's pregnancy and the generic conventions of the georgic foreclose any possibility of pursuing the freedom “beyond Sven” (62). Judith's sexuality is relegated to the choices that would best reproduce the very conditions to which her body was originally subject. Judith's pregnancy reinstates her as a penetrable, productive body which, like the land itself, must be controlled and rendered productive in service of the nation.

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<sup>40</sup> See History of Flax in Manitoba. *Manitoba Flax Growers Association*.

Critical reception of *Wild Geese* in its own time is revealing of how deeply engrained the imperial georgic and its related discourses had become in Canadian literary and popular culture—and in fact, its reception in popular culture may be most revealing of the mode’s pervasiveness. As Faye Hammill notes, *Wild Geese* was published at the same time as *Settlers of the Marsh*, but to very different acclaim: while both novels dealt explicitly with sexuality, *Settlers* was, in fact, banned for its explicit treatment of the subject, while *Wild Geese* became an instant best-selling novel, though it was not received without controversy (Hammill 1). Frederick Philip Grove denounced *Wild Geese* as “trash” (26):

[Grove commented] in a letter to Austin M. Bothwell, “The petty ‘sexiness’ of many passages makes a mature person smile. One cannot avoid the suspicion that that sort of thing was sprinkled in as a spice or with an eye on the ‘movies.’ In fact, how could a young girl know anything of the fierce antagonisms that discharge themselves in sex?” (26)

Hammill speculates that Grove’s reaction comes from an awareness that *Settlers of the Marsh* had also been perceived as having represented sexuality too illicitly for the tastes of 1920s readers in depicting the triangle between Ellen, Clara, and Niels. It is telling that Grove’s reaction to *Wild Geese* is to immediately charge Ostensio with a kind of populist pragmatism—for writing a novel that could easily be adapted to film. It is noteworthy that Grove may have objected to the homoerotic undertones of *Wild Geese*, because it suggests that Grove was fine with a depiction of illicit sexuality so long as it appeared in a novel with a properly heteronormative conclusion. His comments also suggest that in his view Ostensio’s novel was trashy because although it ends with a heteronormative conclusion, it does not actually endorse that conclusion in the same way that *Settler’s of the Marsh* does. As Hammill argues, Ostensio’s inclusion of this homoeroticism

indicates her knowledge of the increasing popularity—at least in America—of psychological explorations of sexual desire in fiction (15). Ostenso's use of the gothic figure challenges the gendered and heterosexist assumptions in imperial georgic sentiment that had been an integral part of the European and British traditions.

*Settlers of the Marsh* is an imperial georgic in which the central conflict is about how uncontrolled and unreproductive sexual desire threatens the imperial georgic logic of scalability and expansion. *Wild Geese*, on the other hand, is a queer precarious georgic that presents the imperial georgic mode as one of several competing modalities in the text, including the gothic and pastoral romance, to critique the ways in which the imperial georgic, in service of agrarian capitalism, suppresses non-heterosexual desire and co-opts heterosexuality as a labour commodity, resulting in the violent oppression of women's bodies. What both Grove's novel and Ostenso's reveal is that at this point in Canadian literary history, the imperial georgic was becoming a nostalgic modality—both *Settlers of the Marsh* and *Wild Geese* are, after all, historical texts written after the first wave of prairie homesteading. They both reveal an anxiety about the new Canadian nationalist discourse, and the co-opting of the established imperial georgic ontology in service of agrarian capitalism rather than empire-building. As both the imperial georgic and the precarious georgic evolve, nostalgia for the imperial georgic will become an important focal point for another wave of Canadian nationalism during the late 1960s and the 1970s.

## Chapter Three

### The Provisional Georgic: The Accident and the Undoing of Imperial Georgic Time

In my previous two chapters I outlined how and why the imperial georgic of the eighteenth century retained a strong foothold in the cultural politics of Canadian settler-colonial narratives. The imperial georgic mode tenaciously remained in Canadian settler-colonial narratives throughout the colonization of the Western prairies, and while its secondary characteristics changed, the core narrative remained intact, and the emphasis on expanding the empire became transferred onto the importance of expanding the nation after the First World War. What we begin to see during the modernist period in Canadian literature that deals with agrarian work is an emphasis on the right kind of capitalist enterprise: agricultural commodities operate through salvage accumulation in the interest of expanding communities and, for Grove, developing a Canadian culture based on the European intellectual and agricultural traditions he most valued. In Osteno's *Wild Geese* the imperial georgic is treated as an established literary tradition among the gothic and romantic pastoral. Rather than emphasize a coherent critique of Grove's imperial georgic, Osteno's novel disrupts and even mocks its impulses, using the gothic to reveal the possibilities of women's sexual desire that are suppressed under these agrarian nationalist narratives. In both cases, however, the core narrative that the authors have either supported or disrupted has been the linear teleological projection from the homestead to the nation, maintained through the reproduction of both white heterosexual families as a ready labour force and the agricultural system that turns nonhuman animals and plants into scalable commodities—salvage accumulation in service of imperial or national progress. The 1960s and 1970s in Canada, for many critics, marked the transition from Canadian modernism to Canadian

postmodernism, but in what is becoming a familiar pattern, this transition involved the emergence of another wave of Canadian nationalist sentiment. In this chapter, I read Al Purdy's *In Search of Owen Roblin* and Robert Kroetsch's "The Ledger" through this georgic tradition as they revisit Canadian settler-colonial narratives in a late modern and postmodern context.

In the period between roughly 1960 and 1985, a wave of Canadian environmentalism emerged that coincided with the heyday of Canadian nationalism. I borrow these dates from labour historian Katrine McPhee and literary scholar Cinda Gault. Gault argues that the years between 1960 and 1980 correspond to a literary era in Canadian literature that was characterized by the desire to form identifications with "feel-good-about-being-Canadian" (363) nationalism. Gault argues that this new nationalist discourse arose in response to George Grant's *Lament for a Nation* (1963), in which Grant laments Canada's inability to become a fully independent nation before it had been taken over by American economic and cultural colonization. The federal government's response to Grant's concerns was to usher in a new era of cultural and economic policy led by the Massey Commission meant to protect and bolster Canadian interests. At the same time, McPhee argues that the years between 1960 and 1985 marked a distinctive movement in Canadian labour environmentalism, in which workers' growing awareness of the effects of environmental contaminants on human and ecological health lead to what she calls a distinctly worker-driven environmentalism in Canada. This period saw the formation of the Sierra Club of Canada (which became active in Canada in 1963), and Greenpeace in Vancouver in 1971. This period saw a rise in discourses of sustainability and the belief that going back to the land was a natural balm for the psychological injuries of rapid urbanization (Coates 5).<sup>41</sup> In the middle of

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<sup>41</sup> In *Canadian Countercultures and the Environment*, Colin M. Coates details several case studies in which back-to-the-land movements gave rise to utopian settlements that also stated their commitment to sustainable practices in response to anxieties over out of control consumerism and development. These include the Ark Bioshelter built at

this general cultural shift, Al Purdy and Robert Kroetsch were writing long poems that historicized imperial georgic settlement narratives and situated them within a broadened understanding of human activity on the land. Given this context, it is perhaps unsurprising that texts grappling with place through its ecology, identity, and the origination of national identity might reflect the conventions of the imperial georgic and precarious georgic, since they readily combine these discourses. Al Purdy's *In Search of Owen Roblin* and Robert Kroetsch's "The Ledger" bear some similarity in that they are interested in troubling the linear teleological constructions of time that are embedded in imperial georgic understandings of Canadian settlement. I want to look at how *In Search of Owen Roblin* and "The Ledger" handle or challenge imperial georgic linear teleological constructions of time because doing so can help us understand how our understanding of time is caught up in the way we construct or challenge notions of progress in or among nonhuman assemblages. Purdy's *In Search of Owen Roblin* is a long poem detailing the poet's attempts to reconstruct the geological, genealogical, and settler-colonial history of Roblin Lake. Purdy opens the poem's ontological field to include multiple timescales, resituating imperial georgic as a nostalgic cultural object that explains the construction of place, and therefore the construction of the poetic self. However, doing so also re-inscribes the imperial georgic's anthropocentrism because it still centres the poet's human genealogical lineage and traces it to an origin (the settlement of Roblin Lake). Purdy's poetics remains anthropocentric because even though it includes multiple timescales, it remains focused on the human scale of the genealogical history of the Roblin family. In contrast, Kroetsch's "The Ledger" focuses not on the poet's human ancestors but on the material objects of labour as such, and uses the accident to destabilize imperial time, decentring the human from the centre of the

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Spry Point, PEI and inaugurated in 1976, which "responded to Canadian concerns about energy use and out-of-control development" (Coates 153).

ontological field and producing a new kind of more ecological georgic that imbues non-human entities with agency across multiple timescales. This is a performance of the provisional georgic, since decentering the human results in a more provisional form of the georgic that is open to the unpredictable effects of interactions between objects.

The physical alteration and rationalization of the landscape and the social organization of space around the heterosexual family were both part of the imperial georgic ontology, but a closer look at these phenomena suggest that they are in fact consequences of the organization of the experience of time. Paul Huebener suggests in *Timing Canada* that the imperial project of settlement was also a colonization of understandings of and experiences of time. I argue that the imperial georgic and Precarious georgic modalities I have so far outlined correspond to two distinct temporal modalities outlined by Huebener in *Timing Canada* (2015): Imperial Time, in which time is constructed as a linear teleology, and Provisional time, a nonlinear assemblage of multiple timescales. Huebener argues that time has been just as important as land in driving narratives of Canadian settlement, and in narratives of Canadian literary development.<sup>42</sup> For example, Huebener turns to Johannes Fabian to argue that

because of the temporal framework of 'progress, development, and modernity' upon which colonial society was predicated, '*geopolitics* has its ideological foundations in *chronopolitics*.' The time socialization stories that underpin much of the discourse of civil society—those deep cultural narratives that teach us that time naturally functions in certain ways—are even more powerful for the fact that they can be difficult to see. (26)

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<sup>42</sup> I am in this chapter chiefly concerned with the temporal assumptions inhering in settlement narratives that feature georgic concerns and in the temporal character of agrarian labour underpinning those narratives. But there have been lengthy debates about the temporal nature of Canadian literature, on the whole, of which Huebener's is the first full-length study, that are only tangentially relevant here. For more information on broader nationalist debates about Canadian literature and temporality, see Frye, Szeman, and Coleman.

Time is embedded in and underpins narratives of process, and constructions of time can only be accessed by examining the ideological foundations of those processes themselves. Stephen Cocker and Daniel Coleman both gesture toward the temporal construction underpinning the logic and ideology of colonization, but Coleman's categorization of this temporal construction best encapsulates the processes of colonization. According to Huebener's gloss on Coleman,

The dominance of Imperial Time is closely tied to homogenizing metanarratives associated with progress, growth, and development, and it is an inescapable presence across many domains of Canadian culture. Because it frames progressive technological and social betterment as both an aspirational dream and an inevitable reality, linear Imperial Time facilitates massive development projects and the envisioning of perpetual improvement to society. On the other hand, Imperial Time can hold the social imagination hostage, shutting down conversations about the need to radically re-envision the concepts of industrial development and economic growth in order to avoid destroying the ecosystems that keep us alive. (29)

Within the context of the social history of farm labour, imperial georgic narrativizes and naturalizes imperial time. As I have already shown, it is an incredibly enabling and pervasive construction of temporality that gave the imperial georgic mode its social and economic power during the eighteenth century, and this conception of time as linear and progressive is the engine which continues to drive the contemporary globalization of industrial agrarian capitalism through the promise of economic growth. I argue that the same sense of time connects the imperial georgic narratives of linear teleology to present narratives of technoscientific progress.

In contrast to imperial time, Huebener proposes Provisional time, which includes multiple simultaneous chronotopes. If the imperial georgic privileges imperial time, the

precarious georgic, with its emphasis on multiplicity, variety, and non-scalability, privileges Provisional time. The provisional georgic opens up human agrarian work to the multiplicity and variety of ecological systems and emphasizes the interdependence of humans and non-human entities within those systems. What I am about to outline as the provisional georgic in Kroetsch's "The Ledger" shares many of its characteristics with precarious georgic, in that it emphasizes the precariousness of human-nonhuman assemblages in agrarian work, but Purdy and Kroetsch's poems are particularly interested in exploring or subverting the temporality of the georgic, which makes it useful to use Huebener's term to discuss them. Thus, I am outlining here a sub-mode of the precarious georgic that I choose to call the provisional georgic because of its interest in what Huebener calls Provisional time. Multiple layers of interdependent life exist within multiple timescales, and the precarious georgic is a mode that emphasizes awareness of the vastness and heterogeneity of these ways of being. When we are aware of those life processes, we can understand how assemblages of human and nonhumans exist in what Tsing has called "Third nature" (*Mushroom* viii): the assemblages of human and nonhuman beings that manage to live "despite capitalism" (*Mushroom* viii). This is an aspect of re-opening the field of awareness that Tsing refers to as "polyphony," which she describes thusly in *The Mushroom at the End of the World*: "To even notice third nature, we must evade assumptions that the future is that singular direction ahead. Like virtual particles in a quantum field, multiple features pop in and out of possibility; third nature emerges within such temporal polyphony" (viii). Paul Huebener argues that the linear teleological progression of imperial time, like imperial georgic, is merely one construction of temporality, and that it corresponds to a specifically Western cultural framework. In *Timing Canada*, his main argument is that our understanding of temporality must be broadened to include a variety of chronotopes: not only imperial time, but geological time,

experiential time, and cyclical timescales should be considered. Broadening our awareness of the multiplicity of ways human beings can perceive time, and the multiple timescales in which human beings and non-humans exist, argues Huebener, allows us to act in ways that are more cognizant of the co-constitution of ecological, political, and social systems. This, I argue, is what Purdy's and Kroetsch's long poems gesture toward with their historical investigations of the imperial georgic.

Although neither Purdy nor Kroetsch expressed overtly environmentalist concerns in their writing, we can understand the cultural context within which Purdy wrote *In Search of Owen Roblin* and Kroetsch wrote "The Ledger" as one in which industrial capitalism, as an extension of the imperial georgic/imperial time, begins to conflict with counter-cultural environmentalist thinking that includes other non-linear timescales and approaches to agrarian work. Although neither author comments directly on the nature of agriculture and agricultural policy in the 1970s, both poems offer some sense of decline of the kind of agrarian ideal that had driven ideas of settlement and progress during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In a broader political context, the 1970s in Canada were characterized at the level of agriculture by two contradictory approaches to farm labour. On one hand, the period between 1969 and 1994 (when NAFTA came into effect) saw major changes in Canadian agricultural policy that included the creation of a task force in 1967 to address the many problems facing Canadian agriculture. These problems included a lack of policy directives in marketing, a surplus in wheat production that drove down prices for Western farmers, protests for higher prices from farmers in Quebec, and, on the other end, rising food costs for consumers that were sparking protests in front of food stores. Importantly, the Task Force's report, released in 1969, called for both the creation of a National Marketing Board and the reorganization and renaming of the Department of Agriculture into the

Department of Agricultural Industry, “with all its planning and operations for commercial agriculture integrated around a central concept of profit-oriented, self-sustaining industry serving the needs of all its major stakeholders” (Gilson 4). The National Farmers Union declared the report “a hostile document,” the “basic philosophical assumptions” of which farmers had “no real choice but to reject” (Gilson 4). The Task Force had intended to update Canadian agriculture and make it competitive in a global marketplace, encouraging small farms to produce for export rather than for local markets. These are the first small steps toward a global agrarian industrial capitalism, the moment where the imperial georgic ideal becomes extended toward a global emphasis on agrarian technological innovation and an instrumentalist and commercial approach to the natural world.<sup>43</sup>

At the same time that the Task Force was encouraging an expansion of scalable, technologized agriculture, environmental counterculture movements in Canada seized upon agrarian work as an environmentally and psychologically restorative activity. The language of the back to the land movement presented this settler-agrarian lifestyle as inherently more ecological. Many Canadian counterculture movements during the 1960s and 1970s sought their utopian ideals in the Canadian countryside (Coates 5). As Colin M. Coates argues, “one key feature of Canadian utopianism—much like its American counter-part—is its connection to an agrarian, ‘natural’ world” (5). Importantly, in many cases, the back-to-the-land movement in both the U.S. and Canada was imagined by more extreme counter-culture movements as a return to nature as a stabilizing influence against possible environmental apocalypse. The official statement of the Marxist-Leninist Ochiltree Commune in the interior of British Columbia, for

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<sup>43</sup> The Department’s title was changed instead in 1985 to The Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. Although the name is less obviously oriented toward market concerns, one can make a distinction between the broad concept of agriculture and the industry-oriented concept of agri-food, which denotes the production and commodification of food products in Canada. (See *The Department of Agriculture and Agri-food Act*, 1985).

example, was that “Time is rapidly running out for Mother Earth. In order to save her, we must get our shit together [sic] and begin building agricultural communes ... the base [sic] of the revolution” (qtd. in Coates 6). Less extreme versions of these back-to-the-land communes focused on agrarian labour as rehabilitative. Other counter-cultural agrarian communes, too, were widely known throughout the Canadian literary community. On a farm in Mono Mills, north of Toronto, for example, Therafields, a psychotherapeutic community, became the meeting place for Steve McCaffrey, Raphael Barreto-Rivera, Paul Dutton, and bpNichol, who would become the sound poetry group The Four Horsemen. Nichol himself would train as a lay psychotherapist with Therafields founder Lea Hindley-Smith. While the project of Therafields fell apart in the early 1980s, its influence on Canadian modernist and postmodernist poetics—particularly through bpNichol—has been felt widely. In “Beyond Nationalism,” Kroetsch writes of Nichol’s *Martyrology*, which hovers around themes Nichol explored through Therafields, “Canadians seek the lost and everlasting moment when chaos and order were synonymous. They seek that timeless split-second in time when the one, in the process of becoming the other, was itself the other. The city of such dreams is unrealizable; the poem of the occasion becomes the unendable long poem such as bpNichol’s brilliant irresolution of resolution, *The Martyrology*” (68). Indeed, the work Nichol explored during his time there focused on the opening of his formal poetics through physical, communal work on the farm, and the *Martyrology*, which includes passages about Therafields and its effect on Nichol, deeply influenced modern Canadian poetics.

The contradictory perspectives of industrial rationalization and back-to-the-land environmentalism in Canada during the 1970s represented two different conceptions of the nature of time. Counter to the linear teleological understanding of agrarian progress rooted in the

imperial georgic/Imperial time, and by extension the standardization of time that coincided with the emergence of industrial capitalism, the theories and practices of ecological and economic sustainability that began to emerge during the 1970s, which included better land and soil stewardship practices, back-to-the-land movements, wildlife habitat conservation, slow food movements, and biodynamic farming practices, all emphasized close attention to the ecological processes of the land rather than technologically driven food production. Thus, they resisted this capitalist standardization of time and privileged more cyclical or task-oriented constructions of experiential time. But one of the criticisms of back-to-the-land movements is that they assume a nostalgic return to a reductive imagining of pre-industrial agriculture. On one hand, E.P. Thompson has cautioned against falling into the Imperial assumptions that industrialization in rural England can be represented linearly as “one single, supposedly-neutral, technologically-determined, process” (382). But on the other hand, Raymond Williams has warned against the opposite by saying that it is equally reductive to think that we could return to a simpler, more natural agrarian order, since that order was itself political and involved its own forms of exploitation. He argues that “Some of these ‘rural’ virtues, in twentieth-century intellectual movements, leave the land to become the charter of explicit social reaction: in the defense of traditional property settlements, or in the offensive against democracy in the name of blood and soil” (36).

If the return to 'natural' and task-oriented cycles of time do not present an adequate solution to the hegemonic construction of imperial time undergirding the imperial georgic, then, the question remains how other georgic modalities construct time in answer to linear time without resorting to simple models of 'natural' process. Paul Huebener's suggestion that an answer to the hegemonic construction of imperial time may lie in making room for

multitemporality, and specifically what he tentatively outlines as Provisional time. Huebener describes Provisional time as a practice in which collective constructions of time are agreed upon and continually rewritten according to the needs of social justice. Provisional time, he argues, remains alive, always present out of necessity, and always ready to undergo new rounds of questioning and negotiation. If a politics of multi-temporality is to engage legitimately with differing temporal experiences and work toward a public sphere of equitable temporal agency, it must be founded on a deep valuation of the legitimacy of multiple temporalities, must recognize the provisional and temporary nature of cultural constructs, and must be willing to recognize and question existing patterns of inequitable temporal power and pressures. A politics of multi-temporality must be able to perform critical readings of the time socialization stories we tell ourselves every day, and imagine new, adaptive ways of socializing ourselves into equitable forms of time. (269-70)

Rather than naturalizing the temporality of preindustrial agriculture, Provisional time acknowledges time as a set of social constructions which shape experiences and applies deconstructive practices to time narratives to work toward more equitably agreed-upon temporal experiences. Huebener rightly acknowledges that the organizational power of normative time cannot be easily undermined—and questions whether it would be worthwhile to do so, since collaboration is essentially impossible without agreed-upon normative timescales. However, what Huebener's call for Provisional time offers is the reminder that cultural constructions of time are temporary narratives, even tools, for the use of organizing human experiences, and that many different and kinds of these constructions can and do exist simultaneously. The theory itself, Huebener reminds us, is Provisional, and meant to create room for the dynamic nature of experiences as they exist in time.

It is with this figuration of time in mind that I suggest that poems like al Purdy's *In Search of Owen Roblin* and, especially, Robert Kroetsch's "The Ledger" exhibit a georgic modality that I would call the provisional georgic. It is Provisional time, in its emphasis on multiplicity, that provides the foundational premises of the Provisional georgic, which is concerned with the disruption and displacement of imperial time. Provisional georgic emphasizes a multiplicity of timescales, and therefore privileges variety, multiplicity, and contingency over technological mastery, instrumentalism, and linear teleology. The georgic's focus on temporality, then, offers us other ways of thinking about narrative and ways of organizing time. In contrast to Liu and Heinzelman, who suggest that the georgic buries its own historicity, Fairer and Goodman argue that georgic, in fact, directly engages with history through acts of disclosure. In *Georgic Modernity and British Romanticism*, for example, Goodman asks,

What happens if we—not naively but heuristically—take Virgil's tableau at its word and explore the possibility that the problem is sometimes not that the plough or the pen buries what could be disclosed, but that the critic's predicament, like that of the farmer and the poet, is the difficulty in recognizing the historical meanings of what does get turned up, not under, by their lines? (3)

Goodman's question reassesses moments in the *Georgics*, like the one in Book I, when work of ploughing churns up pieces of long-buried history. The farmer's stumbling on the bones and rusted helmets left over and buried from past wars represents the historical and temporal objects embedded in the *Georgic's* lines. Fairer makes a similar argument during his "Organic Matters" lecture,<sup>44</sup> when he argues that the eighteenth-century Italian artist, Piranesi, understood the notion of the ruin in particularly georgic terms. In the *Georgics*, he argues, "the soil is something

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<sup>44</sup> "Organic Matters" was never published, but Fairer was kind enough to send a copy of his notes from the lecture and give permission for me to use them for this project.

into which things fall and from which things grow” (1), and that Piranesi's fascination with paintings of ruined Imperial edifices in *Views of Rome* (1770) reflected a curiosity about these ideas of the reclaiming and recycling of the past through the earth (3). This fascination with ruins also suggests a productive overlap between the georgic and the picturesque.

Fairer also argues that the georgic modes resist subversion because they are adept at adapting to ecological, political, and cultural shifts. He writes,

Georgic... was at home with notions of growth and development, digression, and mixture, and had a natural tendency to absorb material. Because of its capaciousness, the georgic was difficult to subvert (there is no tradition of anti-georgic equivalent to the anti-pastoral). It is about reworking materials and developing resources, and in place of the pastoral's ironic juxtapositions, the georgic poem celebrates appropriate mixing and adding. (5)

Fairer addresses here that, in broad terms, the georgic mode's privileging of variety and generic mixing makes it particularly adaptive to changing social and political contexts; but I contend that certain aspects of the georgic—the imperial georgic, for example—can become reified with the changing of a social order. As I explored in my second chapter, in Canadian literature by 1925, the imperial georgic mode, specifically through settlement narratives that privilege the work of farming as the generation of nationhood, already had become a stereotype, even as other, darker and more complex versions of the georgic remained important to narratives about agrarian work. Like Goodman, Fairer reminds us that what is buried in georgic must eventually surface, either through the labour of the farmer, as in Book I, or through the *versus* of the poet's lines.

Goodman's and Fairer's emphasis on the georgic as a mode that accommodates variety and

historicity resonates with Huebener's emphasis on multiple, provisional temporalities, and informs my theorization of the provisional georgic as a sub-mode of the precarious georgic.

The imperial georgic takes the original georgic's complex temporality and imposes upon it a linear teleology. Sara Mack argues that Virgil's *Georgics*, far from using simple comparisons between historical and mythical past and the present moment, and far from developing a teleological idea of progress, jump back and forth through a mixture of temporalities, all filtered through the present work of the farmer. In *Patterns of Time in Vergil* (1978), Mack outlines the ways in which the past, present, and future intertwine in the *Georgics* in order to keep all these conceptions of temporality before the reader. She argues that the *Georgics* jump back and forth suddenly in time

to jolt the reader from his contemplation of seemingly past events and make him look at the *present* with new eyes. Our perspective is suddenly and forcibly changed as we read. What seemed to be the distant past—Golden Age followed by Iron Age—is revealed as being involved in our own present, and the Iron Age of myth blurs into our own iron age, whose problems are the problems of old. As a result of this blurring, the Golden Age, that enchanted, irrecoverable time, while still past, no longer seems to belong to a past so distant as to be unconnected to our own concerns, but to be just out of our grasp, just around the corner, a backdrop for the present against which we can measure it.” (20-1)

The mythical past in the *Georgics*, then, functions as a background against which the historical present is both a comparison and a recurrence of the problems of human endeavor. The death of Julius Caesar and the ensuing civil wars represent the eruption of historical time into the quotidian present of the farmer. This disruption is not only the disruption of labour, but of the cycles of natural time as well. The end of Book I signals the total collapse of the world, as the

poet cautions the farmer that informational warnings are given by the heavens, by sacred geese, or some other non-human agency. As the farmer and poet leave the poem for war at the end of Book I, abandoning their sickles in the field, the overwhelming momentum of historical and political events—represented as a cyclical process increasing wildly in speed—threatens to unmake the farmer's world:

It's as when from the starting line at the track  
 The chariots break loose. Lap after lap,  
 Around and around, and the driver pulls on the reins  
 And it's no use, and the chariot rushes on,  
 All out of control.... (Ferry 43)

Order can only be restored by the farmer's return to the fields, and the trauma of war can only be repressed by the daily, seasonal rhythms of the farmer's labour. This mixture of ideas “produces a remarkable passage that moves from physical to psychological storms, and from a morally neutral aspect of farming to an overall national guilt growing out of the distant past to contaminate the distant future. Past, present, and future come together with the farmer as the fixed point” (Mack 21). The end of Book II signals such a return, with the return of spring and its new growth. Each book cycles through giant sweeps of time, and each section is a mirror of geological, quotidian, and historical process.

Mack argues that this return to the quotidian and seasonal rhythm of farming signals a didactic lesson in the restoration of order: “The implication of Vergil's [sic] poetic statement at the end of the passage [at the beginning of Book II, which praises Italy] is, of course, that the city can learn from the country, not about the country's own *artes*, for these are nonexistent in the present view of the situation, but about the essence of the country: the possibility of harmony

between man and nature” (25). The farmer's work, through this interdependence, is restored not only because he performs his work on the land during a time of seeding and growth, but because “[the] farmer's labor has become a part of the nature of things rather than merely unredeemed hard work” (27). In other words, the result of this set of temporal configurations is to emphasize human agency at the centre of the making of the world. Mack suggests that these shifts back and forth through time throughout the *Georgics* are more than simple comparisons of past, present, and future, and instead suggest, by placing the farmer's labour at the centre of the ever-shifting universe, an “essential order of things” (30):

We come away from the *Georgics* with a sense that something continually eludes man's grasp—just as Justice herself has retreated into the past, so our highest hopes and possibilities always elude us, receding into the past, as at the end of Book II, or even moving into the future, as at the opening of Book III. (30)

It is not the material labour, in other words, of the farmer, nor the outcome of that labour that orders the universe in Virgil's *Georgics*, according to Mack, but the rhythms of that labour, which reflect the rhythms of the natural systems in which the farmer labours. In contrast to the farmer in imperial georgic discourse, who is figured as the agent bringing order to the world, the farmer in Virgil is the conduit for human understanding of the universe, as we see the rhythms of the world through the farmer's easily disrupted work, but the farmer is not necessarily the agent of creating order in the universe. Just as Goodman and Fairer show how georgic time was historical but not necessarily linear, Mack's reading of Virgil shows how the georgic is not necessarily as anthropocentric as the eighteenth-century imperial georgic would suggest, but instead allows for the recognition of more than human timescales.

Al Purdy's *In Search of Owen Roblin* (1974) offers one example of how the georgic mode in a long poem can challenge the linear temporality of the imperial georgic mode by adopting a multi-temporal ontology. *In Search of Owen Roblin* is a book-length multimedia long poem that details the poet's search through the settlement history of Roblin Lake, near Ameliasburgh, Ontario. In the poem, which is accompanied by photographs, the poet explores the environment of Roblin Lake, trying to learn as much as he can about the town's founder, wealthy mill owner Owen Roblin. In the process of this exploration, the poet generates for himself a sense of the dichotomous relationship between self and place. This is not to say that while Purdy was writing *Owen Roblin* that he was thinking mainly of ecology or even of time in a more general sense; for Purdy, all his major stated concerns—his psychological explorations of the self, ancestry, and work—coalesce in a construction of place rather than an explicitly stated environmentalism. Nevertheless, reading *Owen Roblin* through the georgic mode calls attention to the way that the text itself constructs, explores, and manipulates multiple timescales, and performs the ways in which agrarian work itself is the material construction of temporal experience.

Perhaps unintentionally, in calling Purdy a poet of place, or a local poet, much of the criticism on Purdy's work also marks him as a poet concerned with time. For example, in *The Last Canadian Poet* (1999), Sam Solecki opens his chapter, "Starting from Ameliasburg: Old Rid, Owen Roblin, and Al," with the assertion that "For someone who has travelled compulsively and widely and whose poems are set in places as different as Hiroshima and the Galapagos Islands, Purdy has nevertheless remained very much a poet of beginnings and origins" (144). D.G. Jones, too, opens "Al Purdy's Contemporary Pastoral," by presenting Purdy as a poet whose work encourages a sustained, even cyclical reading practice. He writes, "I find myself at

the end of the poem, at the end of another poem, having forgotten my purpose, as if there were no single line shorter than a poem. Purdy's poems, as Gwen MacEwen says, go round and round and where they stop nobody knows" (*Canadian Poetry* 10). In his discussion of the picturesque in *Owen Roblin*, Robert Stacey touches on the picturesque's relationship to time, though only obliquely, when he argues that *In Search of Owen Roblin*

combines a poetic memoir of his early days in Ameliasburg with a sentimental exploration of his "relations" in time and space. In its advocating of *curiosity* as a valid aesthetic experience, the theory of the picturesque offers a useful way of approaching the inquisitive and restless speaker, for whom history is always material, spatial, something *one comes across*. (104)

I contend that *In Search of Owen Roblin* is still a poem that deals with georgic concerns, in that the poet's ramblings are not idle, but involve a kind of labour of settlement, in that the poet's curiosity is the engine for the imaginative cultivation and construction of place and self. Purdy's long poem is concerned with settlement, but unlike early Canadian georgics, which mostly obey the conventions of imperial georgic even while emphasizing struggle, *In Search of Owen Roblin* is a provisional georgic because it uses the imperial georgic narrative of settlement as one temporal mode among others to imagine the construction of the self through the multi-temporal construction of place. However, since the catalyst for that construction of self through place is the poet's own curiosity, the poem remains anthropocentric, and thus does not fully depart from the instrumental and colonizing assumptions of the settler georgic it memorializes.

Purdy's exploration and fascination with time<sup>45</sup> manifests in an aesthetics of accumulation of meaning that mirrors the georgic's accidental disclosure of historical artifacts.<sup>46</sup> Purdy's well-documented fascination with the classical literatures of ancient Greece and Rome, suggests that he may, in fact, have been familiar at least with classical georgic texts like Virgil's *Georgics* and Hesiod's *Works and Days*. More telling, though, is the way he interacts with historicity in his personal correspondence, reimagining historical narrative as the construction of the self by way of an identification with various historical narratives. In a letter to Margaret Laurence dated February 11, 1973, Purdy talks specifically about *Owen Roblin*, time, and materiality. The letter first details some of the connections he is beginning to explore between historical time and subjectivity. "Fuck being objective, too," he writes. "Perhaps like a novelist in this instance, I wanta get everything about me into this, obviously ego, eh? If I inhabit those goddam early settlers then they are me and I am them" (YA 215). Purdy's rejection of historical 'objectivity' reflects a confrontation with normative historical time. By first rejecting the idea of objectivity and then asserting that if he inhabits the stories of the early settlers of Roblin Lake, then he *is* those settlers, Purdy is already exploring the idea that a subjective construction of historical time—imaginative or based in memory—would be the link that connects a person to a sense of place. Further in the letter, Purdy also reveals that *Owen Roblin* is a meditation on geological time, the movement of time through epochs of human and non-human existence. After declaring that the garbage pile scene from *Owen Roblin* is "probably best part" (YA 214) of the poem, Purdy's disappointment is almost palpable when he details his trip to Cape Kennedy's "rocket graveyard" (YA 215):

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<sup>45</sup> In "Disconnections", for example, Purdy asserts that one of the driving questions of his poetry has always been "What is time?" ("Disconnections," 2002).

<sup>46</sup> The image, always returning, is the farmer's stumbling on the bones and helmet of a fallen soldier from the Roman Civil Wars while ploughing his field.

Read a book in Africa that made me think a poem possible re the graveyard. Outmoded rockets and all that, now mouldering into rust. But they're not mouldering, painted and trim as new corsets or working model of a ballista. Had to take a two hour tour by bus of the whole shebang, bored the hell outta Eurithe and me. ... Before going there I had visions of whole city blocks of black rafted into the sky and burning to ashes, meaning the money spent on rockets that would not be spent on slums. And two terrified little monkeys (Able & Baker) in 1959, clinging to each other in outer space, and wondering where are they now? Buried among the poisonous snakes and alligators of Cape Kennedy. Human graveyards at Cape C. too, those of the earliest settlers, not much attention paid to them of course when astronauts are there for autographs. (YA 215)

The fact that the rockets have been repainted and put on display means that they have been reclaimed from ruin and the passage of time, which also removes them from the signifying power of the ruin, which reminds the viewer that the human experience of time is limited in comparison to the vast expanse of geological time. This passage in Purdy's letters indicates he is also thinking about the ways in which great sweeps of technological innovation take up unwitting non-human participants like the monkeys, Able and Baker, rocketing them away from earth even without their ability to have the situation explained. The monkeys' situation, like our own, is always subject to machinations beyond their control. Purdy's vision of these sweeps of history is one in which the past does not recede into the background, but piles up beneath the surface of the place, imbuing it with more and more meaning. This same sense of the accumulation of time pervades and is further troubled in *Owen Roblin*.

Purdy uses multiple timescales to position the poet/farmer as the centre of the ontological field of *In Search of Owen Roblin* by beginning with genealogical time:

Open the album

it is a cage of ancestors

locked in by metal clasps and stiff cardboard

released by my own careless fingers

And the people literally fling themselves

out of the book into your eyes

the same kind of remote unhumans that scared hell

out of the child who changed into me

years ago when no one else was looking. (1)

The poem begins with what seems like an imperative to the reader, but quickly reminds us that it is the poet who has opened the album, and the poet's curiosity which drives the text. The pun on “literally” both as a reference to the text itself—and as the colloquial use of the term as a modifier used for emphasis—calls attention to the constructedness of the poem, even as the image of the ancestors flinging themselves into our eyes imbues them with a kind of agency for catching the reader—and poet—by surprise. This first page of the poem establishes time as an unruly force—the genealogical and historical past (whose ancestors, after all?) finds any opening and comes through to the present. This idea is reminiscent of the scene in Book I of the *Georgics*, wherein the past erupts into the world of the farmer through ghosts (39) and through the work of tilling the soil, when “someday, in those fields the crooked plow / Of a farmer laboring there will turn up a spear” (41). It is, in both cases, the farmer/poet whose work troubles the passage of time, upturning the layers of history and meaning embedded in the text, and in the place, simultaneously.

The poet's genealogical explorations through the photo album gradually connect him to a sense of place around Roblin Lake when he imagines a connection between his own ancestral past and the history of the settlement of Ameliasburg, the work of the farmer-settler, and the historical characters he uncovers. The poet's imperative is to “Stare back at the mirror / seeing yourself a temporal transvestite / wearing black old-fashioned clothes” (2), until “[t]he mirror flares blind / in your eyes and the heart beats hard / in the grandfather clock of your body” (3). In the first part of *Owen Roblin*, through photographs that present the genealogical and historical past, “a dead photographer's deception / that makes them appear wooden dummies /conceals the grin they never showed here / their laughter muffled by earth / and the long drum-roll of time” (3). In photography, history appears static, but time—to the poet—is not. A drum-roll involves a circular movement, the sound resonating in the present. The first four pages of *Owen Roblin*, then, establish the connection between the reader and the poet on a scale of genealogical time, which proves to not only involve the past, but the past erupting into the present through the reader and through the poet. The speaker admonishes,

Close the book again—but gently  
 seeing your own unformed face  
 twisting and leaping at you  
 from a dozen different directions  
 reading back again to them  
 and ahead  
 for the book is not closed (4)

The album, then, becomes the space in which the present, genealogical and historical past, and future become confused and intermixed. In this sense, the album is analogous to the space of the

poem, and the first four pages of the poem establish the genealogical temporalities that become compressed through both the act of writing and through the technology of photography.

To discover his connection to Roblin Lake, Purdy must trace back his lineage along a linear temporal axis to his grandfather, following in reverse the same trajectory that the imperial georgic constructs in earlier settlement narratives as a forward-looking projection to a future civilization. The genealogical and historical registers of time become intertwined as the poet details his grandfather's involvement in the settlement of Roblin Lake, noting that “With only a short plunge back / thru time I can locate him” (n.p.). Details of his grandfather's character emerge, and merge with a mythical farmer-settler figure, a “personal family myth as real as hamburger” (n.p.), who helped to build the Opeongo Road. The poet notes that “Everything happens now and then” (n.p.), again mixing the registers of past and present, genealogical and historical. The effect of such mixture is that the poem, through poetic labour, recreates on a personal level the history of Roblin Lake, not only through the character of the speaker's grandfather, but also through his labour. In places where the speaker notes historical fact, such as names and dates, the insertion of details of place and time, work is always at the centre of the image. The speaker notes that when his grandfather tells him to listen to the teamsters, he can hear them (n.p.), and on the next page, the poem turns to the voice of the grandfather—the past speaks, and it speaks through the farmer:

On the Opeongo Line I drove a span of bays

One summer, once upon a time,

for Hoolihan and Hayes,

Now that the bays are dead and gone

and grim old age is mine

A phantom and teamster  
 start from Renfrew, rain or shine....

Aye, dreaming dreaming

I go teaming on the Opeongo line (8)

This stanza shifts from past to present, the grandfather's voice erupting from the past to speak of an even further past of work but indicating that now (in the past of the poet), the grandfather instead dreams of work in an ongoing process in the present. The grandfather, after his death, becomes a relic in the poet's projected future, whose “wide whalebone hips will make a prehistoric barrow / men of the future may find and perhaps may not: / where this man's relatives ducked their heads / in real and pretended sorrow” (11). And just as the backwoods farmer grandfather's voice recedes with the turn of the page, the grandfather himself is lowered back into the ground to become a historical relic, erupting at some distant future moment in an altered form. Purdy's churning up and under of history speaks to the georgic *versus*—the lines of the poem, corresponding to the lines of the plow—referenced by Kevis Goodman in the passage quoted above as aspects of the georgic's affiliation with historiography. Purdy's preoccupation in *Owen Roblin* is with the task of writing history, and in so doing he must trace backward to dig up and come to terms with the “unsettled elements” (n.p.) of his past, struggling to make sense of his connection to place.

Purdy's return to his grandfather's life, as he was to “soon become an old man / in a one-room apartment over a dry goods store / his head turned listening / to a thousand-mile forest trying to get out / from under the town pavement” (n.p.), suggests that this journey backward is meant to recover the kind of meaningful narrative of settlement that the imperial georgic relied on and co-opted for its colonial project. But because his grandfather now must live above the dry

goods store, Purdy suggests that the work of the homesteading farmer is over. The whole question of the farmer, then, becomes recontextualized as part of longer ecological processes on a more planetary timescale as the forest “tries to get out from under the pavement” (n.p.). Such a passage unsettles the linear time of imperial georgic by signaling the gradual emergence of the natural cycles of growth and decay, a register of ecological time that transcends the human, part of the cycles in which “earth takes him / as it takes more beautiful things / populations of whole countries / museums and works of art / and women with such a glow / it makes their background vanish” (n.p.). This reference to wider ecological movements in time is met with another return of the past to the present, the poet again referencing, not his similarities to his grandfather, but his grandfather’s resurrection through the poet:

And I've somehow become his memory  
 taking on flesh and blood again  
 the way he imagined me  
 floating among the pictures in his mind  
 where his dead body is  
 laid deep in the earth. (n.p.)

Not only do wider ecological movements, historical time, and Purdy’s personal past constantly find ways to move back into the present, but also they are, in the case of the poet’s grandfather, imbued with a sort of agency. Rather than charting a progressive movement toward a future goal, the poet’s persona is constructed via the movements of time in, around, and through himself.

From the genealogical, historical and ecological aspects of time, the poet moves wider to the geological registers of time, deepening the ever-widening circles of temporality within the long poem. Beginning with the “great pine forests / once blanketing Prince Edward County /

19th-century forests seemingly / nearer the last ice age / than the birth of any man living” (n.p.), Purdy's journey through Roblin Lake's real and imaginary history culminates in a vision of the garbage dump in Ameliasburg, and its imagined archaeology. The passage is worth quoting in full, as it is a passage Purdy considered “the best part” of the poem (YA 215), and one that best exemplifies the poet's relationship to time, nature, work and history:

After the spring run-off in april  
 at one end of the seasonal time-fuse  
 before things leap and jump and quiver  
 and the world explodes with growth  
 the A-burg kitchen midden is exposed  
 bright labels faded on tin cans  
 pop bottles half submerged in dead leaves  
 broken glass jars from housewives' kitchens  
 a bulging bosomed dressmaker's dummy  
 ...  
 a cracked plow motionless in the black unplowed field  
 that constitutes the shoreless subterranean world  
 a wornout catcher's mitt and broken bat  
 baby carriage shattered past repair  
 farther down milk churns and old harness  
 under the earth a rusted flintlock rifle  
 some horseshoes  
 maybe a lost green corroded coin

minted in one of the lost Thirteen Colonies  
or a Queen Victoria shilling flung here  
by a disgusted loser in the non-stop  
poker game at the a-burg hotel  
even a cracked and useless school blackboard  
unstuffed teddy bears and fractured dolls  
once even the complete skeleton of a dog  
and I suppose there must be other dogs here  
farm dogs town dogs sheep dogs lap dogs  
dogs that say up yours with every snooty bark  
all kinds of dogs that ever chased chickens  
and dug frantically down groundhog holes  
all the evil wall-eyed smelly roustabout  
pooches mutts curs bitches hounds and mongrels  
frenzied pursuers of sheep and rabbits  
from Caesar to Genghis Khan and back again  
that once were loved by children|  
here descending the swift/slow elevator of time  
...  
All kinds of other bones too  
soup bones beef bones pork chop bones  
fox bones deer bones wolf bones bear bones  
and if I didn't know better

maybe a mammoth's tusk or lizard's forearm  
 ....  
 the camera eye reversed and turned backwards  
 showing even myself a man from another time  
 walking thru the 19th-century village  
 with a kind of jubilation. (n.p.)

Through the gaze of the poet, the garbage heap becomes the archeological site for Roblin Lake's natural, social, and geological history. Interestingly, the process of discovery takes place during the spring, and so the passage begins linked with the cycle of seasonal time associated not only with the yearly cycles of ecological time but also with the cycle and rhythms of agrarian work laid out by Virgil at the end of the *Georgics*. With the coming of spring, just before dormant seeds begin to sprout, the poet imagines the history of place rising slowly to the surface of the garbage heap.

The garbage heap marks a moment in which Purdy acknowledges the imperial georgic as a ruin of Canadian literary history: gesturing to the discarded tools of nation- and empire-building ambitions not only echoes the earlier suggestion that the grandfather's imperial settlement project has ended but also speaks to the perceived cultural failure of the aspirations of early settlement narratives like that of Goldmith, Crawford, and Grove, within a newly renewed search for a national selfhood. The cracked plow, for example, signifies its historical use in the work of settlement, and because it no longer functions in its original role, it reveals itself as an object of the historical past, or the past as object. The meditation on dogs, too, intertwines the town's human history with an affective history of non-human companionship in the case of pets and town dogs, and also with a hidden history of non-human agrarian work, since farm dogs and

sheep dogs worked to control and regulate the space of the farm, protecting its animals from predators (but often—as in the case of chasing chickens—revealing an unharnessable natural instinct in the process). But from the detritus of human life, the poet's imagination ranges also to the prehistoric: the mammoth tusk and the dinosaur bones of unrecorded history. The mixture suggests a kind of ossified version of what Tsing calls the polyphony of multispecies assemblages, a third nature that Purdy is noticing for the first time, and then transferring that awareness into his present moment. Tsing's polyphony overlaps with and productively extends Huebener's idea of Provisional time to include timescales associated with the nonhuman. Understanding polyphony, she writes, is one way we can become aware of third nature: "To even notice third nature, we must evade assumptions that the future is that singular direction ahead. Like virtual particles in a quantum field, multiple futures pop in and out of possibility; third nature emerges within such temporal polyphony" (viii). To this end, the poet's imagination acts as the "slow/swift elevator of time" (n.p) travelling down through the remnants of the history of place, stopping to meditate on dogs and dinosaurs, to return to the present "a man from another time" (n.p).

As part of Purdy's temporal polyphony, not only does the poem reference a mixture of genealogical, geological, ecological, and quotidian time, but it also emphasizes the immediate present, self-referencing how the reader's gaze and understanding constructs the poem through the duration of reading-time. As the poem progresses, Purdy increasingly alerts the reader to the fact that the poem is a process being constructed through the time it takes to read the long poem itself. On returning to a contemplation of his grandfather which was begun at the beginning of the poem, the poet muses,

I see the selective things I remember  
 nostalgic things that appeal to me  
 And yet, perhaps it is really so  
 that I have somehow become his memory  
 and my survival is the only real trace of his own  
 which includes the elegy I wrote for him:  
 “and earth takes him  
 as it takes more beautiful things  
 populations of whole countries  
 museums and works of art  
 and women with such a glow  
 it makes their backgrounds vanish  
 they vanish too”  
 But that part of the elegy is inaccurate  
 actually he survives a little longer  
 and goes with me into the future (*Owen Roblin*)

The text, like the poet's increasing awareness by way of temporal diversity, slowly folds in on itself as the reader progresses through it, and it is this constant unfolding of multiple temporalities that drives the process of the poem itself. In this process of the folding and unfolding of time, vision and revision, Purdy eventually can reveal the lyric Self, realizing

*In Search of Owen Roblin*

I discovered a whole era  
 that was really a backward extension of myself

[...]

For it wasn't only Owen Roblin I was looking for

but myself thru him always myself

[...]

I am the sum total of all I know

all I have experienced and love

and if that makes me a monster of egoism

bring on your Doctor Freud and Doctor Jung

then go look at the face in your own mirror. (n.p.)

For Purdy, then, place and Self are both products of time, and ecological processes, history, and geological processes are all revealed as belonging to the poet's perception. The poet is the grandfather, who is the farmer-settler, who is the mirror of the universe. Rather than presenting agrarian labour as the origin of the nation, however, the poet seems to subvert the labour of settlement into the origin of the self through the origin of place.

For all its emphasis on the intersection of human with nonhuman time, however, the Provisional time of Purdy's *In Search of Owen Roblin* and its performance of the poet's coming to awareness of temporal polyphony have the odd effect of resurrecting imperial georgic narratives that allow little room for the diversity of human and nonhuman experience. All these temporal registers are constructed through the poet's cultivation of his history of place, which is firmly rooted in the imperial georgic settlement narratives of his literary and genealogical relatives. Rather than as an idle curiosity, the initial shock of discovery is motivation to uncover and assemble the story of Ameliasburg's settlement. But where Virgil's farmer stumbles upon the buried remnants of war with his plough—relics of a violent colonization—what the poet in *In*

*Search of Owen Roblin* uncovers is the imperial georgic narrative of settlement itself. Mirroring the passage in Book I of Virgil's *Georgics* in which the poet mythologizes the transition from the Golden Age of the *Eclogues* to the iron age of work, a passage in Purdy's poem, almost exactly in the centre of the book, re-creates the imperial georgic narrative within the context of the settlement of Ameliaburg, albeit with a renewed empathy for the ecological destruction it brought to the surrounding landscape. The passage is overlaid onto two full-page photographs of a log fence covered in snow, and the poet takes on the voice of a man and woman:

WOMAN

We have brought iron here  
 where there was never iron before  
 iron that is the death of trees  
 we have brought fire with us  
 and the forest moans from knowing  
 'Put the fire out, fire out'

MAN

No trace of deer and even rabbits are scarce  
 our own food supplies failing

WOMAN

And yet we shall reach the land of Kente  
 we shall be hungry and we shall have food  
 I will bear daughters and tall sons

and you shall plow the land  
 one spring when we are very old  
 stand between our own fences  
 among our children  
 and know that it is finally yours  
 and the land will take us at last  
 before we vanish forever  
 and we shall be born again & again & again  
 neither waking nor sleeping (*Owen Roblin*)

The dialogue between the man and woman echoes the trajectory of the Imperial georgic, but with one significant difference: rather than ending at the tableau of an ideal future, the lives of the man and woman turn inward on themselves, “born again & again & again.” This phrasing, and the idea that they will be continuously reborn in the present, returns us to the temporal polyphony of the provisional georgic and Provisional time: genealogical time, the way Purdy reads it, becomes compressed into the material, bodily present, the existence in time of the poet as product of his or her place. This movement mirrors in a smaller scale the movement of the timescales in *Owen Roblin*: time is many interlocking, dynamic, circular movements that break and connect repeatedly, with interpretation and cultivation at its centre. The centrality of human work (interpretive and agricultural), however, makes it somewhat different from Tsing’s conception of polyphony, which is more decentered. Such a revision to the traditional settlement narratives of the early nineteenth century does away with the Edenic ideal and focuses instead on an immanent process of cultivation and decay, which roots the work of the farmer-settler firmly within the processes of ecological and geological cycles of time, echoing the natural temporality

Mack finds in Virgil's *Georgics*. But in focusing on the imperial georgic, Purdy re-inscribes the violence of its scalable colonization when he fails to engage with any human history other than the white settler history of the place. The "one-time pioneer settlement goes deeper / rooted inside human character / contemporary as well as ancient" (n.p.), and so the white colonial past retains its life in the present, not only through the poet, but also through all the settler inhabitants of Ameliasburg in subsequent generations.

The longer arc of the poem details the poet's search for the story and identity of Ameliasburg's founder, Owen Roblin, who introduced the new grist mill to the town and became one of its most prominent citizens. But Owen Roblin and his mill, the poet discovers, were mortal and human, died and were relegated to the historical past, only to come to life again and again through the inhabitants of Ameliasburg generations later. The poet is jolted by the discovery that Roblin was not the first European to settle the Ameliasburg area, nor was he the first to build the mill there, but "John Way was before him in 1829 / a few years after the first settlers / broke land and planted their first dead" (n.p.). This discovery complicates notions of a simple progress and expansion since there are clear failures, lapses, and erasures in the story of the town's 'development'. The imperial georgic settlement narrative erases—because Purdy never mentions them—the histories of Huron-Wendat and Haudenasaunee, and Tydeninaga Mohawk communities that were the first human inhabitants of—and continue to inhabit—Prince Edward County. The historical error on the poet's part reveals the history itself to be a fallible construction, subject to the processes of revision and choice (he chooses, after all, not to pursue knowledge of John Way in the same way he researched Owen Roblin, nor the Huron-Wendat, nor the Haudenasaunee). The image of the settlers planting, rather than burying, their dead suggests this same eternal return through the continuing work and life of the town and its

surrounding farms, but it simultaneously naturalizes a settler claim to the land that was violently appropriated. In this lyric with georgic concerns, then, the poet's curiosity becomes the organizing principle for time, taking on the work of churning up the genealogical, historical, imaginative, ecological, and geological cycles of time in order to construct a sense of Self-as-place, cultivating a psychological landscape rather than, as in the georgics, a didactic vision of agricultural labour. But the temporal polyphony of Purdy's *In Search of Owen Roblin* is limited by its anthropocentrism and its resurrection of the imperial georgic's scalable erasure of indigenous inhabitants of Purdy's Roblin Lake.

In contrast, Robert Kroetsch's "The Ledger" also enacts a process of coming to awareness of diverse temporalities through chance encounters and contemplation but attempts to disrupt the temporal anthropocentrism that Purdy's poem inherits from settler georgic by using the thing and the accident as disorganizing principles. "The Ledger", inspired by Kroetsch's discovery of the ledger one of his ancestors used to keep track of expenditures for his sawmill in Bruce County, Ontario, explores the history of his family's movements from Ontario to Alberta. Kroetsch's long poem is concerned with how accidents—mill accidents, farming accidents, accidents befalling historical records, and chance encounters—generate or disrupt the construction of the past. Originally published in 1975 by Applegarth Follies and illustrated with prints of the original ledger, Kroetsch's text functions simultaneously as poem and historical trace of human labour—particularly the agrarian labour documented in the ledger. But "The Ledger" also participates in a long tradition of situating human labour within a timescale interrupted by the event of the accident. As I indicated above, the georgic is a mode which concerns itself with such accidents and the ways they disrupt the linear teleology of human agrarian labour and technological progress. Reading "The Ledger" with some knowledge of both the philosophical

history of the accident and of the georgic modalities discussed by Goodman and Fairer allows us to see how Kroetsch's accidents disrupt the default teleological model of the imperial georgic, presenting us instead with a model of settlement in Provisional time that displaces the human from the centre of the poem's ontological field. In doing so, Kroetsch is really disrupting the ontological lens of settlement in the West: even while he is concerned with human labour's alterations on Canadian landscapes, Kroetsch reminds us that such alterations take place within timescales that stretch well beyond human comprehension of or interventions in their consequences, and that such labour involves accidents that reveal its provisional nature.

The history of the concept of the accident in philosophy is deeply rooted in thinking about objects and time. In *Accident*, Ross Hamilton argues that modern approaches to the concept of the accident as event remain incomplete without its original Aristotelean understanding of accident as referring to a set of secondary characteristics of an object. In Aristotelian thought, the thing can be broken down into “substance” and “accident.” Substance, as Aristotle defined it, is the essential quality of the thing—everything that remains inaccessible to us, the “tableness” of the table, for example. Aristotle defines accidental qualities as those secondary qualities of the thing that are perceptible to the senses: colour, shape, size, texture, and so on. The long philosophical history of the concept of the accident begins with Aristotle's epistemological struggle to describe the persistence of the material world even as it changes through time. More accurately, Aristotle's separation of the form of the thing into essential substance and inessential accidental qualities arises from the attempt to describe how we recognize things as themselves (for example, a table as a table), even as those very things are altered by the passage of time—changing colour or shape, either by human intervention or through natural processes of age and decay. As such, the problem of separating substance from

accident, Hamilton argues, forms the foundational problem for thinking the nature of existence (2). Aristotle, in seeking to separate these two classes of qualities, implicitly points to the dynamic existence of non-living things and their alterations at a specific point in time.

This is where accident becomes associated with event, and therefore with differing registers of time: the accident signifies the sudden, unexpected alteration of an object's inessential qualities. Hamilton argues that this is the position that philosophers like Alain Badiou take when arguing that the accident represents—if it cannot be explained—a rupture in an already existing system that either forces an explanation and adaptation, or the emergence of a new system (9). While Badiou treats the accident-as-event as separate from accident-as-quality, Hamilton argues that we can see how both concepts of accident are related, if accidental qualities of objects are unexpected inessential qualities, and accident-as-event represents the sudden alteration of a set of qualities in a system and the emergence of a new system. He argues,

Although Aristotle's ontological categories opposed substance to accident, over time what we might describe as coordination, symbiosis, or even commingling of his terms blurred or superseded their opposition. Encoded in the accident experience, following it like a shadow, are reformulations of accidental qualities. As a result, moments of conceptual shift function less as breaks than as hinges between one mode of perception and another.

(8)

In other words, Hamilton describes how the accident functions as the conceptual bridge between differing systems for understanding the world. For Hamilton, an accident demands the ability to adapt to and accommodate rapid shifts in ontological positioning, and these rapid shifts constitute the conditions of modernity.

The nature of change and the task of adaptation to unanticipated events are concerns of the georgic mode. English translations of Virgil's *Georgics* (29 BCE) have long been invested in the processes of change and of emerging systems, particularly regarding the social, political and ecological contexts of agrarian work, and in asserting the place of agrarian work in the development of civilizations. In the "First Georgic", for example, Virgil's farmer is confronted with the accidental discovery of the remains of a soldier in his field:

And someday, in those fields the crooked plow  
 Of a farmer laboring there will turn up a spear,  
 Almost eaten away with rust, or his heavy hoe  
 Will bump against an empty helmet, and  
 He'll wonder at the giant bones in that graveyard. (41)

This passage indicates that the Roman world of Virgil's *Georgics* is one trapped in a cycle of war and conquest, the politics of which extend far beyond the timescales of individual Roman citizens. This passage is written in future tense, projecting past the end of another civil war over the Macedonian land, much like the war that drove Miletus from his land at the end of Virgil's previous book, the *Eclogues*. Farming has a rehabilitative function for a scarred and fallen natural world, but that world is one in which the farmer must learn to anticipate potential disaster: storms, diseases, predators, threaten the success of that rehabilitative endeavor, and the farmer cannot rest in this struggle, "Just as one who struggles to row his little / Boat upstream against the powerful current / Should but for a moment relax his arms, the current / Would carry him headlong back downstream" (19). In this upheaval over which they have no power or control, the farmers become observers as well as workers, apart from, but nevertheless subject to, the political and ecological upheavals of the world around them. This sense of constant vigilance

and labour marks the farmer as a participant the complex forces of the farmer's ecological environment and emphasizes labour as a form of survival within these precarious systems. If other actors in these systems experience time accordingly, such a provisional existence depends not only on the labour of the farmer but on chance: chance that equipment will not fail, chance that the farmer will not have forgotten, chance that nothing shakes the farmer's vigilance. Such an existence reflects Fairer, Rhonda, and Mack's idea of the precarious georgic.

Reading Kroetsch's "The Ledger" with some knowledge of both the intellectual history of the accident and the forms of the georgic that engage with Provisional rather than imperial time allows us to see how Kroetsch updates the georgic mode for a postmodern era, and to understand how and why the ledger itself, the accident of its discovery, and its accidental qualities come to represent the crux between two differing ontological understandings of agrarian work and its relationship to the natural world. Although Kroetsch has self-identified and has been identified by many Canadian theorists as having been Canada's foremost postmodern theorist and writer, some critics—Alexander MacLeod and Frank Davey among them—see incompatibilities between his regionalist affiliations and his postmodern theory, suggesting that he may be better categorized within the tradition of prairie regionalist writing that is postmodern than within a broader postmodern tradition. In "Canadian Postmodernisms: Misreadings and Non-readings," Davey makes note of Kroetsch's lack of critical attention from international scholars of postmodernism, noting that the only Canadian writer to be mentioned in the context of postmodernism outside Canada is Steve McCaffrey (17). Pointing to Kroetsch's strong sense of regional pride, Alexander MacLeod points out that "regionalism and post-modernism actually share very little in common" (130), but other critics disagree. "Roberto Maria Dainotto, for example, has suggested that, far from being opposed to each other, regionalism and nationalism

should be understood as essentially similar discourses” (130), and that although regionalist discourse engages with a smaller-scale and a smaller population, “it offers the same mythical promise of a metaphysical union, a profound but falsely 'naturalized' linkage between the people who occupy a specific cultural geography and between those individual subjects and the objective ensemble of physical geographical facts that produce place” (130). Regionalism thus runs directly against international postmodernist discourses, which seek instead to critically deconstruct such naturalizing linkages between subjects and place. McLeod argues that, in contrast to this postmodern impulse, Kroetsch “continuously endorses a more direct, more natural connection to the landscape as the only alternative to the ridiculous textuality of these scholarly pursuits... In every case, Kroetsch's postmodernism endorses, rather than nullifies, the redemptive power of nature, and the author clearly places his support behind a regionalist environmental determinism” (144). But while McLeod suggests that the answer to this problem of situating Kroetsch's postmodernism may be to relocate his work in a prairie regionalist context, I argue that Kroetsch is more appropriately situated in the literary genealogy of Canadian georgics that I have so far drawn out.

“The Ledger” is a long poem built around the objects and representations of agrarian work and settlement, and is concerned with how the language of work attaches itself to those objects, and how those objects continue to operate in the world or signify differently after the humans who used them die, either by accident or by growing old. In calling attention to the timescales attached to the objects, rather than the human, Kroetsch is interrupting the teleological progression present in the imperial georgic assumption that agrarian work represents a progressive movement toward a reclaimed Edenic ideal. Smaro Kamboureli has argued that

Kroetsch's long poem decodes the absolutism and dialecticism of the dream and human drama of the Garden of Eden. Although there is in his poetry an abundance of gardens, he does not deal with this archetypal place in traditional dialectical manner. The prelapsarian innocence and guilt consequent to the Fall are continuously reordered. ... The parodic reversal and its ironic humor [in *Seed Catalogue*] work against the consoling promise entailed by the dialectical structure of the myth of Eden; the fall is presented as a non-event. (113)

While Kamboureli is addressing *Seed Catalogue* here, the same analysis can hold true for “The Ledger”. In contrast to Purdy’s focus on his settler ancestors, Kroetsch does this reordering of the archetypal search for origins by placing the emphasis not on the human actors who drive the progressive teleology of the imperial georgic, but by emphasizing the tool-objects themselves, and the accumulation of debits and credits that, through accident and error, do not or cannot balance.

“The Ledger” is primarily concerned with the accidental qualities of the object not in stasis, but as a mutable entity at differing points in non-linear, Provisional time. It foregrounds Aristotle’s problem with substance and accident by drawing attention to the multiple meanings of the word “ledger” (implying that naming language itself is an accidental quality) while simultaneously focusing on the material object of the found ledger itself and its existence, which is connected to, but stretches beyond, human interventions. The poem opens with the lines,

the	the ledger survived
ledger	
	because it was neither
itself	human nor useful. (11)

Both the arrangement of the lines on the page and their content point to Aristotle's substance/accident problem of the object. The ledger itself survives—despite the pages that are missing, the slippages in meaning represented by the word ledger, and human interventions in its form and appearance—apart from the scale of a human lifespan. The way the lines are positioned, they can also be read, “the ledger survived itself”. The substantive quality of the ledger remains apart from its accidents and accidental qualities as well as or including its use-value. Its “ledgerness” remains: an object identifiable by its intended use but no longer useful.

As Hamilton argues, however, the phenomenon of the accident as event relates directly to the problem of accident as quality. Since the ledger itself is a historical artifact of the agrarian labour of the homesteaders, the missing pages and imbalances of the ledger signify accidents that have left gaps in this flow of historical time, and the poem itself disrupts the ability to create an accurate historical record or provide an origin or an ending to historical narrative. The first definition Kroetsch gives of the ledger is of a book of final entry, recording the economic processes of the homestead, and includes a list of purchases made by James Darling, which, the poet notes, don't balance. As a possible explanation, the poet observes “some pages torn out (/ by accident) / some pages remaining (/ by accident)” (11), indicating both a passage of time and the disruption of the ledger's usefulness as a marker of the history of Darling's labour. If the ledger is a tool for recording agricultural history, it is a damaged tool in Heidegger's sense:<sup>47</sup> the

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<sup>47</sup> My use of this concept is informed by Graham Harman's reading of Heidegger's famous tool analysis from *Being and Time*. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger describes how tools are a special class of equipment in that we only come to notice them as things when they cease to function. As equipment, tools are defined by two innate qualities: ready-to-hand, and present-at-hand. We do not notice tools for what they are as things because usually they exist as ready-to-hand” and are only defined in relation to their usefulness to us. When a tool breaks, suddenly we notice it as being present-to-hand. A broken hammer is suddenly a collection of steel and wood, calling attention to its object-ness. While many philosophers have traditionally interpreted this passage as applying only to equipment, Harman argues that these are, actually, qualities present in all objects in the world, because these two planes of existence—ready-to-hand and presence-at-hand—are defined only by the existence of the other. In *Tool Being*, Harman argues that, “There is ... a double life to equipment—tool in action, tool in disrepair. These two planes would seem never to intersect, since the visibility of the tool immediately marks its cessation as equipment. But in fact, their point of

damaged tool is the tool that reveals its former usefulness, and the missing pages—torn away by a human agent that no longer exists—still signify meaning because they both reveal the ledger as a broken tool and disrupt the linear teleology of imperial time because they introduce gaps in the linear historical record. The poem represents itself as an accumulation of these accidental signifiers wrought by traces of labour found in the object, “the poet: by accident / finding in the torn ledger / (IT DOESN'T BALANCE)”(12). But the work of farming moves forward, and the poem accumulates more signifiers, and where the ledger is a broken tool revealing its substantial nature that transcends its accidental qualities, it also reveals the past as historical object, wherein the poet's search “is a search for the dead' (13), echoing again the ledger's original function as a “*book of final entry*” (13). The ledger's failure to record—to balance—historical accounts begins the process of the slow accumulation of linguistic slippages and signifiers that make up the experiential time of the reader. This experiential time echoes the processes of homestead building, as Kroetsch indicates by noting that the second definition of ledger is the “horizontal piece of timber secured to the uprights /supporting the putlogs in a scaffolding, or the like” (13)—a definition that seems to build from the original economic function of the ledger as a book of final entry for materials purchased.

Because of this connection between the experiential time of the reader and that of the homesteader, the poem's unravelling of substance from accident surrounding the ledger as a historical object undercuts the teleological sense of time inherent in the imperial georgic mode, revealing instead the multilateral Provisional time of the provisional georgic. In this way, the ledger's accidents function as the pivotal point between the imperial and precarious georgic ontologies. What is at stake in undercutting this sense of teleological progress is precisely

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intersection provides what amounts to the central theme for Heidegger's career: namely, the as-structure. Through the 'as,' the two worlds actually turn out to exist *only in communion*, in constant intersection with one another” (45).

Kamboureli's argument about Kroetsch's resistance to the notion of origin. In an imperial georgic narrative of settlement, Canada originates when homesteaders transform the *terra nullius* into productive landscape, which in turn generates settlement and civilization. Kroetsch's "The Ledger" upsets this narrative by introducing the unexpected event—the accident—of finding the ledger, of finding failure to balance, and thereby becoming aware of the loss or destruction of the ledger's historical record in the pages that go missing (or remain) by accident. While the missing pages recall the accidents that are part of the human history of settlement-building, the fact that the ledger survives mirrors the survival in the present of the ecological landscape and its history of previous civilizations outside human experiential time, as the land's existence extends beyond the limited temporality of human lifespans. This revelation of non-human time introduces the contingency of chance into the previously neat teleology of settlement and civilization by widening and complicating the ontological field of the poem to include non-human agencies like the flora and fauna that disappear from the Ontario forests with the arrival of the colonists. The origin in an imperial georgic narrative only exists with the arrival of human actors; but in the polyphonic time of provisional georgic, there are no known origins. The origin depends on a point in a single timescale, and therefore is illusory.

Following the definition of the ledger as the horizontal piece of timber in scaffolding, the poet describes the ecological devastation of the cultivation of the settler community, where "actual settlers" (13) slash and burn the forests and kill the wildlife to raise barns, grow crops, and raise livestock. But the seemingly neat teleological processes of imperial georgic settlement narratives are again disrupted as we are reminded of the vast timescales of objects and their existence beyond human experiential time. Death unmakes the work of John Darling, who has "No time" (15) and whose "barn is still standing / (the mill, however, is gone) / sound as the day

it was raised' (15). The objects of Darling's labour again outlive him; the useful mill is gone with the obsolescence of its task, but the barn, the structure, and the place where, as in the ledger, the traces of labour are stored, remain. The third definition for the ledger, "one who is permanently or constantly in a place; a resident, *Obs.*" (15), further suggests the success of the labour of settlement but notes the decay of the word's valence over time, which reveals both the human place within ecological time—we are mortal—but also the mortality of language. The syntax of the definition suggests not only the obsolescence of the word, but also the obsolescence of the resident. The section makes clear that with each continued arrival—"the sailing ship / arrivals: the axe / arrivals: the almighty dollar"—there are a series of departures, including the "trout stream... passenger pigeon... the pristine forest" (16) and, tellingly, "the birchbark canoe" (17); the land itself is a record of debits and credits, suggesting, also, the absurdity of reliance on the permanence of residency in a place. By revealing the Canadian landscape as already settled, this reference to the birchbark canoe is also an unmaking of the imperial georgic narrative of settlement: there was no *terra nullius* to make into civilization; there was an existing civilization that colonizers unmade rebuilding the landscape according to their own ontological perspectives.

Smaro Kamboureli argues that these arrivals and departures shape Kroetsch's sense of place (113), the dynamics of unpredictable change within the ecology of place thwart the settlers' imperial georgic project of rebuilding the Edenic ideal. In this sense, the poet's failure to locate a sense of origin underscores his dislocation, but it is not only a dislocation in place, but also in time. She argues that "the grammar of Kroetsch's narrative is one of dislocation, a dislocation enunciating what has become of nature as the 'original' origin. By deconstructing the notions of originality and origin, Kroetsch alludes to the underlying ideology that constructed these very myths" (113). While Kamboureli focuses on Kroetsch's *Seed Catalogue*, I argue that her

argument here is equally applicable to “The Ledger”. She argues that the pastoral is located as the origin of the Edenic ideal, and that Kroetsch’s search for origins in *Seed Catalogue* signify Kroetsch’s inability to locate that origin. I argue that the long-standing myths of the imperial georgic actually perform the postlapsarian task of ordering and structuring of the natural world, both syntactically and materially, in an attempt to return to that origin. Kroetsch’s poetics work to undermine that sense of order by decentralizing the locus of that narrative via the unintended and unanticipated accidents of existence—placing the emphasis on objects that persist beyond human experiences of them and on civilizations that exist despite colonizers’ efforts to override them with their own system of order, and overloading the semantic functions for ordering language by pointing to multiple definitions of a single signifier. If the imperial georgic as an ontological category relies on the assumption of an ordered, teleological world, Kroetsch broadens the field of existence to include the accidental and unanticipated interruptions of that teleology.

This idea becomes further highlighted in the section describing the ledger as “the nether millstone” (17), which details simultaneously an event in which the draining of a pond leads to an abundance of fish and an accident that crushes a man's arm in the waterwheel of the mill. The poet muses,

you must see	under the turning wheel
the confusion again	the ripened wheat, the
the chaos again	razed forest, the wrung
the original forest	man: the nether stone (20)

This passage details the process by which the past becomes the foundation for the chaotic present, the collapse of all of the temporal signifiers of the poem. The ledger as book of final

entry, the ledger as support beam, the ledger as resident, and the nether stone have all become historical objects which take on multiple meanings after and during the accident. It is in the accident that all temporal registers collide: the experiential, the ecological, and the historical explode the syntax of the sentence and the narrative, and language signifies simultaneously across several different meanings.

As others have suggested, images of the original forest and the ripened wheat certainly evoke the pastoral idyll. However, the poem is more accurately categorized as georgic because of its concern with agricultural settlement and its interest in genealogical time. The speaker reveals his connection to the past through this genealogical lineage: the search for ghosts is also a search through family history. Like Purdy, Kroetsch is not writing pastoral or picturesque, but rather provisional georgic, since he engages with georgic via an interest in genealogical time understood as situated within polyphonic and Provisional time that resists imperial time. But Kroetsch also differs from Purdy in decentering the human with a stronger focus on accidents and nonhuman objects and agencies. But in contrast to the emphasis on human characters in *Owen Roblin*, in “The Ledger” the search reveals the speaker’s relationships not only to the other historicized characters of the poem, but also to their objects. The fifth definition of the ledger seems to suggest a kind of finality: “a large flat stone, esp. one laid over a tomb” (12). The fifth definition, on one hand, gestures toward the thread of genealogical time, which reinvokes in reverse the linear time of imperial georgic, but by defining ledger as tombstone and including all the accidental deaths, Kroetsch departs from Purdy in emphasizing the precarity of existence and the way homesteading did not involve a linear progress but a more complicated relationship with place that I am calling the provisional georgic. This section opens with the text of a letter that seems to reply to the poet regarding a genealogical inquiry about his late great-grandmother,

describing her appearance and personality while also describing her death. But the genealogical narrative is interrupted several times: the grandmother has lived three marriages, with three different last names, and a list of children who had died—many unnamed, some with unexplained deaths—marks the interruption of any kind of easy teleological narrative of family reproduction:

Census, 1861

County of Bruce:

Deaths in 1860

(Age and Cause):

1yr: croup

blank: born dead

5 months: fits

blank: dysentery

16 yrs: hurt

by sawmill wheel

38: I Deth

Inflammation

Henry's father: dead

(The doctor had good

horses) (23)

As I discussed in chapter two, imperial georgic narratives of settlement involve a connection between family trees and the expansion of empire, since the reproduction of farming relies on the reproduction of heterosexual families. Genealogy in “The Ledger,” however, is represented by a list of accidents. The fact that the list itself includes gaps, blanks, and vagaries in its recording suggests more than just the difficulty in recording historical events. The gaps, the vague references, and the fact that the poet's grandmother had been married three times—taking three different last names—suggests that it is difficult, if not impossible, to rely on any simple linear genealogical narrative as a connection to landscape or place, especially if those connections are formed by the propagation of community and rural culture expanding themselves through family farms. The poet's family tree, we discover, is not a linear record of patriarchal reproduction, but a structure predicated on the family's maternal relationships rather than on a paternal line, which is unknown. The records of the deaths in Bruce County show the prevalence of accidental deaths and deaths caused by illness—acts of nature or of random chaos that disrupt both the genealogical lineage of those families and the teleology of agrarian settlement labour, where labourers are taken from the landscape by sudden accident, despite the best human efforts to impose predictability and order (the doctor's good horses, for example). These ruptures, in meaning, narrative, and history represent the operation of nonhuman agencies (viruses, saw blades, unknown material constituents in the womb that prevent an embryo from developing properly, and so on). Including these details, then, introduces the polyphonic temporalities of nonhuman agencies—which exist on other-than-human timescales—resulting in a genealogy disrupted by Provisional time.

The last section of the poem is structured around accumulated lines from each of the other sections, bringing the accumulation of past signifiers into a current attempt for a

genealogical narrative about the poet's great-grandmother's place in the settlement narrative. The final definition for the ledger—"a book that lies permanently in some place" (27)—similarly suggests permanence and closure, which is unraveled throughout the rest of the poem. "The ledger itself," the poem repeats, "survives" (27), and in the second repetition of this line in the section, the ledger is "surviving," the tense shifting from the simple present tense to the present progressive tense. This tense shift suggests that the survival is ongoing, an act that remains forever present in the poem itself. The repetition of the phrase "WHAT DO I OWE YOU" (25) interspersed with the lyrics from the folk song "Bury Me Not on the Lone Prairie" also suggests the poet's continuing search for the meaning of genealogy in terms of history or origin, a process which is taking place and repeated in the present throughout the poem's accumulation of the historical and material traces of the work of settlement. The poem ends with the missive "REST IN PEACE / You Must Marry the Terror" (28), which is both an echo of the previous section of the poem about the poet's great-grandmother, and an echo of the definition of the ledger as a grave marker. Read through the lens of the provisional georgic's embrace of the accident, however, to "Marry the Terror" is also to embrace the truth of an existence without absolute control or mastery. I locate Kroetsch's provisional georgic as a subset of the precarious georgic because, if we consider Tsing's definition of precarity as openness to transformation through encounter, "The Ledger" performs that precarity in that its form reflects the adaptations and changes to imperial georgic narrative that happen as the result of accidental encounters between humans, nonhumans, and things. In this way, it goes further in thinking with and through precarity than Purdy's *In Search of Owen Roblin*, because it embodies the contingency and precarity of accidental encounter in both its content and its form. The terror—the shock, the accident—are integral to the poem's ontology: in a universe comprised of infinite experiences of

time and of unknowable qualities and interactions, the accident is not only a point of rupture but also an expected agent of change. The accident shifts the world; the substance remains.

Kroetsch's "The Ledger" uses both the accident as event and the accident as secondary quality to disrupt the linear teleology of imperial georgic narratives of settlement. In doing so, the object itself—the ledger and its various definitions—becomes the nexus between two opposing ontologies of agrarian work and settlement. The ledger as a record of agricultural settlement invokes the imperial georgic mode, which has functioned since the 18<sup>th</sup> century as the core narrative of colonization: the farmer is the agent of imperial expansion into landscapes presumed to be empty or otherwise "wild", and farm work generates the foundations and supports of civilization—the recovery of the Edenic ideal of agrarian harmony. On the other hand, the ledger in its gaps and complexities also invokes the Provisional or polyphonic time of the precarious georgic, which privileges a multilayered and decentralized understanding of agrarian work as an ongoing process within a complex set of ecological systems that are both knowable and unknowable to the farmer. Labour, in this case, does not involve mastery of nature but is relegated to sustainable survival, and the human subject is decentered from the ontological field, which is broadened to include a variety of timescales and an awareness of non-human objects and forces. In other words, it is the accident that opens the space of the imperial georgic and reconfigures it as the provisional georgic.

In this chapter, I have argued that both Kroetsch and Purdy are interested in time and the object as they pertain to the historicization of established narratives of settlement. Even though *In Search of Owen Roblin* does not directly comment on environmental concerns, Purdy uses a multiplicity of timescales to reframe the imperial georgic narrative of settlement as one historical object in the garbage heap of history. While this refashioning of the narrative of settlement is not

necessarily reflective of conscious ecological concerns on Purdy's part, it does represent an important shift in the history of treatments of settlement in literature written by Canadian settlers because the shift in perspective removes the imperial georgic from its previous status as totalizing national narrative. But while Purdy challenges the linear teleology of imperial georgic settlement narratives, he stops short of challenging their anthropocentrism, since *Owen Roblin* merely subverts all historical discovery into a construction of the poet through the construction of place. On the other hand, Kroetsch centers the object in the ontological field of the poem, focusing on the ways in which human labour accesses only the accidental qualities of the object, and the ways in which the accident as event serves to shift the timescale of the poem to displace the human from the centre of its ontological field. In doing so, I argue, Kroetsch is writing in a provisional georgic modality that not only disrupts the linear teleology of the imperial georgic mode, as Purdy does, but also enacts the precarious georgic: one that uses the object—not the historicized object but the dynamic existence of the object—as the basis for understanding the shifting ecologies in which agrarian work takes place. My reading of these two poets thus reveals the persistence in Canadian literature of two strains of the georgic mode that represent different ontologies: on one hand, the imperial georgic, which extends and promotes linear, progressive, teleological time and instrumentalist, imperialist, and capitalist approaches to the natural world, and on the other hand, georgic modalities that are provisional, polyphonic, and precarious.

More than ever, an awareness of the consequences of our assumptions about human intervention in those ecological systems—and the ways we perpetuate these ontologies through cultural projects—is vital to understanding current environmental crises, and they have real-world consequences. Imperial georgic ontologies privilege colonization over decolonization, technology over ecology, and human progress over ecological responsibility, evolving into the

ontological foundations of the industrial agrarian capitalism that is responsible for massive ecological damage. In this way, this study of Purdy's *In Search of Owen Roblin* and Kroetsch's "The Ledger" contributes to a much larger project of accurately naming and critically assessing the systems of understanding embedded in our cultural depictions of agrarian work. No solution to environmental crisis comes without embracing a shift in ontology from the imperial to the precarious: we must marry the terror.

## Chapter Four

### Relational Georgics: The Ontopolitics of Agrarian Work in the Anthropocene

So far, this project has been tracing concurrent trends through the history of Canadian literature sharing georgic concerns. My analyses of these texts have revealed a recurring pattern in Canadian cultural history where rises in nationalist sentiment have tended to coincide with renewed interest in agricultural and/or environmental policies and practices. I have argued that Canadian literary critics have overlooked the georgic because they have tended to subsume it under the category and characteristics of pastoral, but the georgic is a complex discourse that involves both imperial and precarious modes that respectively support and resist the imperial and anthropocentric project of colonization. My first chapter outlined how the imperial georgic and precarious georgic modes accompanied English-Canadian settler-colonizers, including Susanna Moodie. The imperial georgic was widely adopted because it served the dual function of representing colonial success to British audiences and promoting British agricultural techniques inspired by the eighteenth-century *Georgics* to colonial audiences. That chapter laid out two important concepts for defining the imperial georgic against the precarious georgic mode: scalability/non-scalability and salvage accumulation. My second chapter built on these concerns by showing how early twentieth-century authors adapted the imperial georgic to suit the rising trend of Canadian nationalist sentiment after the First World War and emphasized how human sexuality was organized in the imperial georgic and subjected to the processes of salvage accumulation in service of national expansion and economic independence. I described how responses to nationalist and heteronormative elements treated the imperial georgic as an already nostalgic set of conventions and engaged with queer and gothic elements to disrupt the linear teleology of settlement. My third chapter outlined how the imperial georgic and the provisional

georgic corresponded to two different constructions and experiences of time: imperial time and Provisional time. I used these concepts of time to argue that back-to-the-land movements signified a nostalgic return to imperial georgic settlement narratives that re-inscribed the poet as belonging to a regional identity. However, these poems disrupt the imperial time of the imperial georgic by placing more emphasis on the timescales that belong to nonhuman objects and agencies: what Tsing has described as a polyphonic third nature.

In this final chapter, I will argue that the georgic is still an important mode for Canadian writers in the twenty-first century, but that the colonizing, anthropocentric, and instrumental assumptions of the imperial georgic have been expanded to encompass the globalization of late capitalism, and that Canadian poets are developing new forms of precarious georgic to engage with the environmental concerns of the Anthropocene. Salvage accumulation is now globally manifested in the technocratic, instrumentalist processes of capitalist accumulation, which no longer center, but still hold a privileged place for, agro-industrial processes and systems of distribution. Even though agriculture forms only one part of this scaled up version of the imperial georgic, it remains “imperial” because it emphasizes the same managerial approach to ecological systems, the same instrumentalist focus on salvage accumulation, alienation, and commodification, and the same emphasis on scalability that has always been part of the imperial project. The increasingly complex contexts of Canadian agriculture reflect the enormous global scale of agribusiness and its interconnected networks of technological and social processes of material production, environmental exploitation, labour, and human migration.<sup>48</sup> In response to

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<sup>48</sup> On February 6, 2012 ten migrant farm workers near Hampstead, Ontario were killed in a horrific bus accident. All national newspapers ran the story, and the subsequent stories that suggested that current Canadian agribusiness was often dependent on the exploitation of migrant labourers made apparent the invisibility of Mexican, Jamaican, Caribbean and Peruvian farm workers in discourses about Canadian food production. Several months later, Canadian agricultural labour was again emphasized when *The National Post* ran an article highlighting the changing nature of Canadian farm owners, citing the emergence of a trend in young, urban-born women beginning small

the political, economic, social, and environmental complexities of current agricultural practices, farmers and activists as well as scholars within the academic field of agricultural studies have called for a wide variety of alternative approaches to food production, including the "slow food" movement and increasing awareness and promotion of more sustainable agroecological practices such as permaculture. These alternative agricultural practices are material examples of precarious georgic, in that they reject the imperial georgic's emphasis on scalability and salvage accumulation for precarity, ecological entanglement, and, at least to some degree, acknowledgement of nonhuman agency (for example, in arguments for the importance of wild pollinator habitat). New literary forms of precarious georgic that challenge not only the scalability of the georgic but also its depiction of linear teleological progress and its anthropocentric ontology have evolved alongside these material practices. These new literary forms also privilege adaptation, diversity, precarity, and contingency.

The history of the imperial georgic's persistence in Canadian literature since the eighteenth century coincides with what many scholars have outlined as the history of the Anthropocene: the geological epoch in which human beings have extended their influence on the natural world to the molecular and extra-planetary levels, impacting the planet at its most basic levels of composition, from atmospheric composition to climate change, to soil composition, to the mass extinction of nearly two-thirds of Earth's vertebrate species by 2050, and the ability to change DNA in a wide variety of organisms. What is most useful about the designation of the Anthropocene is its interdisciplinary approach to human impacts in natural systems, and the

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organic farms outside Toronto and suggesting that this new generation of farmers heralded a new tendency in the industry away from an elderly male stereotype. Such articles capitalize on the implicit assumption that farmers are overwhelmingly aging and overwhelmingly male and play off the novelty of women farm owners breaking into a perceived masculine space and role. Canadian literature mirrors these popular depictions of agrarian work and agrarian spaces, operating under the assumption that agrarian labour is largely a white male enterprise.

ways in which the designation of the Anthropocene epoch has opened a conceptual space for debate about how human beings should proceed in a world that has been fundamentally altered by our activities. In other words, the value of the concept of the Anthropocene is that it places the history of human activity within the broader context of nonhuman agencies and allows us to see the history of human activity as rooted in different sets of assumptions. These assumptions, depending on the community, arise from each community's competing ontologies. The Anthropocene, in its emphasis on the scale of human activity, opens a space for ontopolitics. I use the word 'ontopolitics' as an extension of Paul Huebener's chronopolitics to describe how not only competing experiences of time exist in the Anthropocene, but also competing ontological systems—methodologies for recognizing and naming what exists in our world. Christian Bök, Rita Wong, and Phil Hall are all involved in the histories and traditions of georgic writing and are also all working within the moment of the Anthropocene, rather than the back-to-the-land movement I described in my last chapter. Originating first in 2000 in the *Global Change Newsletter* with Paul Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer's "The Anthropocene," and gaining a wider profile in Crutzen's 2002 *Nature* article, "Geology of Mankind," the term Anthropocene is one that emphasizes the impact of human activity as a significant event in geological time. The formal definition of the Anthropocene is still being debated, but one significant candidate for the beginning of the epoch is the eighteenth century, the Industrial Revolution and increased burning of fossil fuels. Agriculture has been an important part of the planetary events of the Anthropocene, since the late eighteenth century was also when the imperial georgic emerged as a literary discourse and material agricultural practice.

I will be using the critical theory of the twenty-first century Anthropocene to discuss why these texts engage with the georgic mode, even while many of them deal with aspects of the

Anthropocene that are not strictly about agriculture. While all three authors are also concerned with time—Christian Bök with the future, Rita Wong with the present complexity of systems of salvage accumulation, commodification, and distribution, and Phil Hall with an ongoing presentness—I am reading them all through the lens of the georgic to emphasize their engagement with the complex social, economic, and biological systems that make up late capitalist environmental crises within the Anthropocene. I argue that in *The Xenotext—Book I* (2015), Christian Bök aligns himself with a dystopian futurism by imagining how human agency can survive the global extinction event it has caused, and that in doing so, he also aligns himself with the future-oriented and technocratic evolution of the imperial georgic mode in late capitalism. Rita Wong, on the other hand, in *Forage* (2007), aims for a utopian vision of the future by describing the current state of things and attempting to suggest strategies for producing a more just and sustainable future. Phil Hall's *Amanuensis* (1989) rejects both the dystopian and utopian approach in favour working with precarity, contingency, trauma, and process.

As I have been arguing, the imperial georgic is a scalable ontology that was designed to expand imperial, then national, and now capitalist control over life processes. One of the chief characteristics that makes that ontology scalable is its push toward the mastery of agricultural technologies through the standardization of practice. The eighteenth-century English georgic's association with the descriptive statistics and graphs of early agricultural sciences has long been abstracted to mathematics and scientific methodology. However, the assumptions and ideas that make up the conventions of imperial georgic writing have been scaled up to a planetary level in the form of globalized capitalist and technoscientific discourses that centre on agricultural work. Understanding this intellectual genealogy can help us see fully that the progressivist, instrumentalist and heteronormative assumptions embedded in the imperial georgic have not

only caused the colonization and subjugation of indigenous peoples and women, as discussed in my first three chapters, but have also created a planetary ecological crisis. These consequences were only beginning to be recognized by writers in the 1970s as I discussed in my previous chapter. This crisis has been characterized by large-scale monocultures and soil degradation, patents on seed production that control access to food, the factory farming of livestock (and its attendant ecological damage), neonecotonoid pesticide use and the dramatic decrease in bee populations, increasing phosphorus in freshwater systems,<sup>49</sup> alienation of farmers and farm workers from the land (even to the point where testing has begun on robotic farm labour), land-use disputes,<sup>50</sup> human migration and exploitation of seasonal farm labourers, and the expanded

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<sup>49</sup> Among more scientific studies on the environmental impacts of large-scale agriculture, see Hundey, E.J., S.D. Russell, F.J. Longstaffe, and K.A. Moser, "Agriculture Causes Nitrate Fertilization of Remote Alpine Lakes," in which the authors proved that nitrate pollution caused by agricultural production not only travels through the water table, but is also airborne.

<sup>50</sup> Recent studies in human geography show how the commodification of idyllic pastoral iterations of the agrarian myth, such as the current interest in rural living and organic produce, also perpetuate a fetishizing of rural ideas that influence land policy decisions, ironically contributing to the disappearance of farms from the Canadian landscape by turning productive agricultural land into rural residential space. Kirsten Valentine Cadieux writes that myths of agrarian labour have become increasingly important in environmentalist movements, in which connections to nature have become increasingly valued, "and as the demand rises for consumables which promise this connection, terms such as 'rural' and 'organic' have become highly valued symbols of desirable outcomes such as good health and environmental sustainability" but while organic produce was once dependent on non-industrial farming practices that took place on self-sustaining mixed farms, "the supply of organic food has been increased by the very industrial techniques against which 'organic' initially defined itself" (215). Cadieux further argues that the fetishization of the rural and the organic have resulted in an in-migration of urban residents who repurpose formerly productive agricultural land for residential and recreational use. In making this argument, Cadieux shows that contemporary Canadian culture perpetuates the pastoral myth that Raymond Williams identified as an eighteenth-century British response to the enclosure of the commons: in the nostalgic remembrance of an Edenic countryside, "not only [rural] work, but even the turning produce of the seasons, is suppressed or obscured in the complimentary mystification: an innate bounty: 'native sweets'" (Williams 33). In other words, an agrarian myth of the rural not only shapes our cultural representations of rural landscapes and agricultural labour but also impacts the visibility of that labor in the actual rural landscape. When representations of agrarian work are removed from the rural landscape, the technical and cyclical nature of agrarian production—its dependence on seasonal labour and consumption—are suppressed under utopian ideas of the naturalness of continuously productive land. The fetishizing of venerated images of rural life ultimately lead to a reflection of those myths in the actual countryside: fewer, larger, more industrial farms signal greater expanses of seemingly pastoral landscapes. This leads to an aesthetic preference for "'unworked nature' over the aesthetic of 'a worked landscape' [that] has been used by landowners to alienate those who made a living from the land, prior to enclosure" (Cadieux 220). Canada's current agricultural economic system is a product of decreasing rural population density and decreasing acreage of productive land. While rural land is protected for leisure consumption, the reduced proportion of agricultural land within Canada results in an agricultural economy

and continued displacement and disenfranchisement of indigenous peoples and traditional indigenous agricultural practices.

Studies in agricultural ethics have become increasingly important to debates about how to grapple with the Anthropocene, and these studies have necessarily become increasingly interdisciplinary and extend well beyond practices of land stewardship and husbandry. Many of these counter approaches, including biodynamic and permaculture farms and the Slow Food Movement,<sup>51</sup> aim to modify our experience of time as it pertains to the ecological systems with

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which must be subsidized with imported produce from places outside Canada whose environmental agricultural stewardship practices are largely unknown. In a globalizing agricultural production and distribution system, the end result of this trend is to outsource the environmental damage caused by poor land stewardship and ecologically destructive agricultural practices outside the Canadian rural landscape, where it is less visible to Canadians and therefore less troubling. These material changes to the land are another facet of the material reality of farming that literary and cultural idealizations of the family farm often fail to acknowledge.

<sup>51</sup> Similarly, the slow food movement, although still anthropocentric in that it emphasizes that power lies in consumer choices, nevertheless encourages consumers to think more carefully about the processes behind their food production and distribution. The movement, which started as a grassroots movement during the 1980s and was officially founded in Paris in 1989, describes itself as working “to prevent the disappearance of local food cultures and traditions, counteract the rise of fast life and combat people's dwindling interest in the food they eat, where it comes from, and how food choices affect the world around us” (“About Us”). The Slow Food movement encourages people to take the time to prepare and savour the food they eat, and also to reflect on the labour, economics, and global ecological effects attached to the food they eat. From the side of food producers, increased concern about the damage caused by intensive monocultural farming (farms whose production is concentrated on a single, rotating crop—usually wheat, soy, or corn) and factory farming (intensive farming of livestock, often confined to small pens, and injected with hormones to maximize growth rates) has given rise to alternative agroecological farming practices such as permaculture and regenerative farming. The term “agroecology” has several different meanings. In its beginnings, during the 1930s, agroecology merely denoted the application of the principles of ecology to agriculture, focusing on the ecological methods human beings use to improve the yields and conditions of crop plants, the plants that we grow to produce food (6). When researchers noticed how harmful practices of intensive industrial agriculture were to the environment, the term changed meaning, and now refers instead to the methods and principles of alternative agricultural practices. During the late 1980s, agroecology came to be defined as “the scientific basis of alternative agriculture” (Altieri in Martin 6), and “the application of ecological concepts to the design and management of sustainable agro-ecosystems” (Gliessman in Martin 6), respectively. Later, at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the term expanded yet again to acknowledge a more holistic approach to agricultural sciences, this time having been defined “the integrative study of the ecology of the entire food systems, encompassing ecological, economic, and social dimensions, or more simply the ecology of food systems” (Francis *et al* in Martin 6). Each of these iterations of the term indicate a broadening awareness of the vastly interconnected nature of agriculture with global cultural and ecological contexts of food production, including colonization, settlement, late capitalism, and environmental crisis. In practice, agroecological methods have produced varied techniques with a focus on integrating human activity into a sustainable ecological cycle. Examples have included Joel Salatin's diversified farm model, which he describes as relying on the principle that “the Creator's design is still the best pattern for the biological world,” toward the goal of developing “emotionally, economically, environmentally enhancing agricultural enterprises and facilitate their duplication throughout the world” (“The Polyface Story”). Agroecological practices also include the development of permaculture, first coined and developed by Peter Bane and Bill Mollison in Australia during the 1970s, which they describe as having evolved to range from “aquaculture to design against

which we engage, challenging the embedded ideas of linear progress in imperial georgic (and therefore imperial time), with the Provisional time of multispecies interrelation.<sup>52</sup> In focusing on time, these methods draw the focus away from human existence to focus on co-constituent networks of human and nonhuman entities. These innovations in agricultural technique act as a material enactment of an interactionist ontology which places the emphasis on relationships between subjects and objects.

Poets have responded to the Anthropocene by developing theoretical tools for thinking on multiple scales, from the molecular to the planetary, and for paying more attention to multiple and interacting heterogeneous nonhuman agencies, which we need to cooperate with rather than try to master. At the time of my writing this project, the Anthropocene is still a contentious term, one that Anna Tsing notes in *The Mushroom at the End of the World* is “still full of promising contradictions” (19). Tsing draws out these contradictions neatly, noting that

although [some] interpreters see the name as implying the triumph of humans, the opposite seems more accurate: without planning or intention, humans have made a mess of our planet. Furthermore, despite the prefix ‘anthropo-,’ that is, human, the mess is not the result of our species biology. The most convincing Anthropocene time line begins not with our species but rather with the advent of modern capitalism, which has directed

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disaster, from ecological building to local currencies, many people would understand permaculture as being a form of organic gardening” (Bane 15). Permaculture is a form of agriculture that relies on small gardens and their feedback into an already-existing ecosystem. The goal and principles of permaculture farming are specific to the landscape and region in which they take place: they involve observing and learning the land (including soil composition, weather patterns, etc), energy storage (which includes “embedded energy of manufactured things, infrastructures and human cultures. Social capital... and the education and health of people), and harvests to generate a self-regulating ecological system modeled on the specific dynamics of places (both rural and urban), and many scholars have also pointed out how these permaculture principles reflect many indigenous ways of thinking about agricultural technique globally.

<sup>52</sup> In the interests of continuity, I am using the terms of imperial georgic and imperial time as corresponding to Provisional time and provisional georgic, though many critics thinking through these issues offer different terms. Anna Tsing, for example, uses the notion of polyphonic time as a description of the accommodation of differing timescales in the latent commons, offering this conception of ecological systems as an alternative to the linear time of progress that is essential to the functioning of modernist capitalist systems.

long-distance destruction of landscapes and ecologies. This time-line, however, makes the ‘anthropo-’ even more of a problem. Imagining the human since the rise of capitalism entangles us with ideas of progress and with the spread of techniques of alienation that turn both humans and other beings into resources. Such techniques have segregated humans and policed identities, obscuring collaborative survival. The concept of the Anthropocene both evokes this bundle of aspirations, which one might call the modern human conceit, and raises the hope that we might muddle beyond it. Can we live inside this regime of the human and still exceed it? (Tsing 19)

The historical genealogies I have been drawing out so far in this project, then, knit well together: the explosion in popularity of the imperial georgic coincides with the rise of agrarian capitalism (and capitalism proper), with its dream of human mastery, a dream of wealth and power wrested from natural systems, which in turn coincides with the beginning of the transformed planetary conditions that we are now calling the Anthropocene. The practice and representation of agriculture is one arena in which the ontopolitics of the Anthropocene are being played out; therefore, the tension I have been discussing between imperial and precarious strains of the georgic mode has taken on global and planetary significance. In all its contradictions, the categorization of the Anthropocene epoch is a lens that, in moving to a large-scale perspective of human impact in and on ecological systems, requires that we begin thinking about alternative ways of interacting with and living within those ecological systems.

Bök’s *The Xenotext—Book I* and its corresponding transgenic project, *Xenotext* (2016), Wong’s *Forage* and Hall’s *Amanuensis* all engage with questions about the agencies of nonhuman entities, and all three do so with an emphasis on precarious existence that calls attention to the contingency and risk associated with the non-scalable entanglements of humans

and nonhumans in ecological systems and late-capitalist networks of production. In the past few decades, new materialist scholars such as Bruno Latour, Bill Brown, and Stacy Alaimo have worked to develop interactionist and non-anthropocentric ontologies that collapse binary oppositions between subjects and objects, humans and nonhumans. Like these scholars, Tsing argues that the idea of subjects and objects as self-contained individual units must be abandoned in order to meet the challenges of the Anthropocene. Following from these interactionist ontologies, Tsing argues that one of the only ways to survive the destructive effects and oppressive structures of late capitalism under the Anthropocene is to embrace precarity. She argues that one of the problems with scalable narratives like the imperial georgic is that they are centered on self-contained individuals, an Enlightenment construction that allows the individual experience to stand in for the universal experience. Because self-contained individuals cannot and do not change through contact with other beings, it becomes possible to “organize knowledge through logic alone” (29). In nature, she argues, there are no self-contained individuals, and so we are always subject to contamination with other beings, always vulnerable to the indeterminacy of those interactions (29-30). Existing in a state of late-capitalist expansion under the Anthropocene, Tsing argues, requires that we think with and through precarity, which can provide a locus of resistance to the ubiquitous presence of globalized industrial agri-capitalism and shift our awareness of entangling relations to discover what she has called the latent commons: sites that support more-than-human livability where organisms become open to adaptation and change through contact and contamination. These sites, Tsing argues, are not permanent, or even long-lasting. They are random, often short-lived, and easy to overlook, but they are places where organisms engage in world-making projects that exist outside linear narratives of human progress. She writes, “The modern human conceit is not the only plan for

making worlds: we are surrounded by many world-making projects, human and non-human. World-making projects emerge from practical activities making lives; in the process these projects alter our planet. To see them, in the shadow of the Anthropocene's "anthropo- ", we must reorient our attention" (21-22). It is important to note that for Tsing, this awareness does not guarantee the building of utopian worlds. But it is a method of distinguishing nonhuman allies from nonhuman organisms aligned with capitalist and imperial objectives. In "Getting By in Terrifying Times," she argues, "I do not advocate building alliances with just any nonhuman. We need to train ourselves to tell the difference between creatures of empire and potential nonhuman allies. More-than-human livability: this is a politics" (75). What is important in Tsing's theoretical framework is that *paying attention* to the relations between organisms—human and nonhuman alike—is an extension of the political work of generating an ethics and a way of being in the world that is more than human. Precarity, as I have argued, is one of the fundamental characteristics of the precarious georgic.

*The Xenotext—Book I* and its accompanying experiment fit into a broader tradition of transgenic bioart that combines genetic modification with the creation (or destruction) of artistic or poetic texts, many of which express the tension between human dominion and nonhuman agencies. Bök is not the first person to create transgenic bioart, but he is part of a larger field of artists who use genetic manipulation for aesthetic experiments. For example, Brazilian poet Eduardo Kac is best known for his transgenic experiment *Genesis*, in which a line from the Book of Genesis, "Let man have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth" (qtd in Wershler 48), was inserted into the genome of an e-coli bacterium. The bacterium was presented as an art installation in which visitors could manipulate the organism by exposing it to high doses of radiation to speed the

process of reproduction. The line from *Genesis* represents a connection between Kac's project and the imperial georgic tradition, because the Biblical justification for human domination underlies the imperial georgic assumption that agriculture gives humans dominion over nature. Kac's project seems to criticize the idea of human domination because the message disintegrates through random genetic mutations in the organism's DNA as it reproduces, and these mutations eventually destroy the organism. But the bacterium's reproductive processes are still subject to random human intervention in that they are driven by the people at the exhibit, who zap it with radiation to cause rapid mutation. So, although at first glance the project is about the resistance of non-human organisms to human dominion, the bacterium itself functions not so much as living organism than as text: its resistance to the Biblical message Kac imposes on it is itself driven by human activity and interpretation. Kac's experiment is part of a formal movement in biopoetics that, according to Darren Wershler, begins with Joe Davis' "Microvenus" (1990), in which a tiny Germanic rune for life and a line drawing of a vulva were embedded into the DNA of an e-coli bacterium. Kac's *Genesis* came shortly afterward, and then Pak Chung Wong encoded the lyrics of "It's a Small World After All" into the DNA<sup>53</sup> of the bacterium *Dienococcus radiodurans* (2003) (48-49). In each of these cases, the artists claimed that the object of the project was to question the possibility of perfect communication between species. For example, Joe Davis called his specific genre of biopoetry "infogenes" and planned to replicate them by the trillions before sending them into space, with the hopes that their messages

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<sup>53</sup> The process of encoding sentences and messages in the genome of an organism is predicated on the idea that all the information contained in the nucleus of a cell can function much like a human language. It is possible to code messages in the genome of an organism by translating the human language into what is known as "cell language" Cell language consists of four nucleotides or twenty amino acids, the first letters of which form an alphabet (Sunchul 412). The nucleotides and amino acids bond to form "structural genes" or polypeptides, which the cell then expresses as a set of genes that can be translated as a sentence into human language (Sungchul 412). See: Ji, Sungchul, "The Linguistics of DNA: Words, Sentences, Grammar Phonetics, and Semantics," in *Molecular Strategies in Biological Evolution. Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* May 18, 1999. P. 411-417.

could someday be translated by alien species (Wershler 48). Pak Chung Wong also hoped to treat *Dienococcus radiodurans* as a kind of living container for storing information, noting that “organisms...on Earth for hundreds of millions of years represent excellent candidates for protecting critical information for future generations” (Wong, Wong & Foote, 2003, 98, qtd. In Wershler 49). The idea of encoding a message in an organism capable of outlasting the human species has therefore been taken up in projects that anticipate environmental catastrophe.

Although Christian Bök’s *The Xenotext—Book I* is both a collection of poetry and a transgenic experiment, critical discourse surrounding the project has tended to focus heavily on the transgenic experiment and left little room for criticism that focuses on the poems themselves. Darren Wershler, Diana Brydon, Susan Vandenberg, Stephen Voyce, and Isobel Waidner have all engaged critically with the project, but most of the critical energy in an academic context has been spent on explaining the *Xenotext* project, partially because it has garnered so much attention within the scientific community, the media, and the field of ecocriticism. Reviews of the text, however, have noted that *The Xenotext—Book I* involves a translation of Virgil’s Fourth Georgic, and that one of the central concerns of the text is the catastrophic collapse of bee populations, which would lead to the collapse of agriculture and, in turn (according to the logic of the *Georgics*) culture. But *The Xenotext—Book I* is a programmatic text that also formally engages with the georgic in its emphasis on generic variety and its drawing together of both cultural and material practices. The text includes a variety of literary forms: prose poems, sonnets, “modular acrostic” (Leong n.p.) poems generated from the cellular language of DNA, and an essay explaining the conceptual parameters of the project. The poems are organized into six sections: “The Late Heavy Bombardment,” “Colony Collapse Disorder,” “The March of the Nucleotides,” “The Virelay of the Amino Acids,” and “Alpha Helix.” Taken together, the poems in each

section detail the precariousness of life on earth in the context of the chaos of the universe (“The Late Heavy Bombardment”), the relationship between action and unforeseen consequences and potential ecological catastrophe (“Colony Collapse Disorder”), and instructions that detail the *Xenotext* experiment at the molecular level, using cell language as a set of poetic constraints (“March of the Nucleotides,” “The Virelay of the Amino Acids,” and “Alpha Helix”).

“Colony Collapse Disorder” sets up the ecological concerns of *The Xenotext—Book I* because the story of Aristaeus losing his bees as punishment for being the unintentional cause of Eurydice’s death is a metaphor for the unintended consequences of human action, and the ways “our lust for life gives birth to murder” (Bök 74). “The March of the Nucleotides” and “The Virelay of the Amino Acids” are the two sections of *The Xenotext—Book I* that are directly connected to the *Xenotext* experiment. “The March of the Nucleotides” describes cell language and DNA. This cell language is composed of an alphabet made up of the nucleotide bases for codons, which are denoted by the letters A (adenine), C (cytosine), G (guanine), and T (thymine). These nucleobases, in turn, pair to form a codon, a group of two or three letters that signify a series of instructions for creating a gene by transcribing the instructions into a corresponding string of RNA. The series of short poems in “The March of the Nucleotides,” are created from words that correspond to each nucleobase: the building blocks of a cellular language expressed in a poem. The poems are accompanied by molecular diagrams of each nucleobase: essentially a visual depiction of the poem, which Bök has included below each diagram. These are followed by a second series of poems, located on the page beneath similar (but more complex) diagrams of molecular structure that build on each nucleobase. Every word in these poems either ends or begins with a letter corresponding to a nucleobase, and the space in between these words signifies the coupling of the nucleobases into nucleotides (strings of letters

that will bond together to create codons). These poems are followed by an explanation of the codons with computer generated models of the building of the molecules of the proteins that will be generated by the bacterium *Dienococcus Radiodurans* as it reproduces, showing how the cypher for each gene builds the molecule for each protein. “The Virelay of the Amino Acids” repeats a similar programme, in which poems are generated from the letters corresponding to the molecular structure of each amino acid that would be expressed in the RNA of the organism. “Vita Explicata” takes us from the molecular to the extraterrestrial level again, ending with a diagram of the Lyre of Orpheus, the constellation also known as Lyra, which shares a visual affinity with the diagrams of the nucleotides and amino acids and references the myth of Orpheus and Euydice that Bök includes in his translation of Virgil’s Fourth Georgic in “Colony Collapse Disorder.” The collection ends with “Vita Explicata,” a more thorough explanation of the *Xenotext* project itself.

In her criticism of Kac’s transgenic art, Katherine N. Hayles asks, though without delving into an answer, “Does Kac’s intervention in the genetic sequences of bacteria contest the notion that humans have dominion or reinforce it?” (83). This ambiguity recalls the tension I have been discussing between the precarious and imperial strains of the georgic mode. Bök in fact makes this connection explicit in the form and content of *The Xenotext—Book I*, the poetry part of which alludes to Virgil and formally resembles the eighteenth-century georgic in that it is concerned with an instrumental, scalable, and mechanistic approach to the management of natural processes. In what follows, I will argue that Bök’s *The Xenotext—Book I* claims to offer a kind of precarious georgic that resembles Kroetsch’s provisional georgic in that it is concerned with the precarious positioning of life under the threat of environmental collapse. However, it ends up performing an updated version of imperial georgic because Bök’s re-centering of human

sociopolitical organization in his interpretation of bee colony organization closely resembles the imperial georgic in its ontological positioning, and because he re-inscribes the imperial georgic sexual organization in gendering the organism in his poems as female, because the *Xenotext* project is formed on antiquated models of genetic manipulation that treat the organism like a programmable object, and finally, because the framing of the project fails to engage with precarity in that its scalable design does not adapt with unanticipated outcomes, like the resistance of the bacterium.

At first glance, *The Xenotext—Book I* could be read as a precarious georgic, because in its translation of Virgil's *Georgics*, it emphasizes the nonhuman agencies at play in the scientific process and because its central theme is the precarity caused by the unintended consequences of human intervention. It seems to engage with precarity because one of its central anxieties centers on life under the threat of mass extinction. In shaping *The Xenotext—Book I* around Virgil's Fourth Georgic, Bök is recalling the tragedy of Aristaeus' lack of foresight and self-control in his pursuit of Eurydice, and the compounding effects of Eurydice's accidental death not only on Orpheus, but on the balance of living things in the world. In Virgil's recounting of this myth, Aristaeus, the beekeeper, loses his hive, and must ask his mother, Cyrene, how to make them return. She tells him that he must capture the shapeshifting seer, Proteus, and force him to reveal the reason Aristaeus has lost his bees, and how to bring them back. Proteus, she cautions, will not reveal his knowledge unless he has been restrained before he turns into several animals and escapes Aristaeus's grasp. When Aristaeus succeeds in capturing and restraining the shapeshifting god, Proteus tells Aristaeus that he has angered the nymphs by causing the death of Eurydice, and that Orpheus has cursed Aristaeus over her loss after Aristaeus had pursued her, and she'd stepped on a viper that killed her. Proteus then tells the story of Orpheus and Eurydice.

Orpheus, the singer, makes a bargain with the nymphs to travel to the underworld to bring Eurydice home. The nymphs give him an enchanted lyre, and, after proving himself through the completion of several tasks, Orpheus makes a deal with Hades that he will be allowed to bring Eurydice back to the living world, so long as he does not glance backward at her before they leave the underworld. However, Orpheus gives in to his doubt, and turns back to glance at Eurydice just before they cross the threshold into the living world. Because he could not trust her, Eurydice is lost to Orpheus forever, and he is eventually killed by the Ciconian women and his remains are strewn across the landscape. To break Orpheus's curse on him, Cyrene instructs Aristaeus to perform *bugonia*, a sacrificial ritual that encourages the spontaneous appearance of a swarm of bees from the corpses of sacrificial oxen. In doing so, Aristaeus brings to life a new swarm of bees. By recalling this passage from Virgil, Bök indicates that he thinks that the georgic tradition contains an important ecological message that questions human aspirations to mastery.

By calling the Virgilian section of the poem part of *The Xenotext—Book I* “Colony Collapse Disorder,” Bök draws a parallel between Virgil's story of the loss and restoration of pollinating bees and the current problems facing bees and the agricultural practices that rely on them for pollination.<sup>54</sup> The prose poems in “The Late Heavy Bombardment” set up the sense of uncertainty and precariousness of human existence, welcoming us to the “Hadean Eon of the Earth,” (12), and asking, in this eon ruled by death, “What Great Comet has yet to plummet from the heavens....?” (15). Bök's description of precarity and turmoil resists centering human

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<sup>54</sup> Bök's thinking in *Xenotext: Book I* is consistent with the thought about colony collapse disorder around 2011 when the text was originally published. It is worth mentioning, however, that the current thinking about colony collapse disorder and its effect on bee populations is that it has multiple causes, including a monoculture approach to apiculture, which results in a loss of genetic diversity and bee populations that are more vulnerable to disease. It is also worth commenting that Bök's *Xenotext: Book I*, is concerned with the plight of the European honeybee, but that Colony Collapse Disorder is also affecting native North American pollinator species, including solitary pollinator bees, which do not produce honey nor live in collective hives.

activity, contrasting the unfathomable destruction of universal forces like “Hale-Bopp (and every superbomb yet to detonate)” (15) with the destruction wrought by human activities like the atomic bomb. In their destructive tendencies, human beings are less powerful representatives of universal force: “What crater, among the lunar maria,” he writes, “must you yearn to recreate whenever you vaporize an atoll?” (16). “Colony Collapse Disorder,” then, places the potential destruction of the bees and of human culture within the context of this greater and graver destruction that humans mimic in their destructive technoscientific pursuits.

Our precarity is rendered all the more tragic because in Bök’s reimagining of the Fourth Georgic, human beings are put in the position of Aristaeus: we are losing our bees, and we have been brought to the painful realization that the cause is something we did thoughtlessly and without empathy, just as Aristaeus angered the nymphs by causing Eurydice’s death when he pursued her. The inclusion of Virgil’s description of *bugonia* signals the creation of life from the ruins of Aristaeus’s farm. Even though the ritual is successful for Aristaeus, Bök’s reading of the Fourth Georgic in “Epilogue” suggests that Aristaeus’s ritual may bring back his bees, but that it will be a poor metaphor for humanity’s absolution in the destruction of the planet. “How do we absolve ourselves,” Bök asks, “for having caused our own extinction? Be it known that the fruit upon the tree of Eden is a beehive, leaking out black honey, made by bees that feed upon the infernal blossoms of the underworld” (74). This emphasis on the precarious nature of human knowledge and our uses of it points to what Adam Dickinson has argued is the “deterritorializ[ing of] the conventional commercial and industrial environment of [genetic modification]” (Dickinson 45), in that *The Xenotext—Book I* asks us “to consider the aesthetics of an activity that is normally invisible” (15). After all, it moves from the universal scale of cosmic forces of life and death, to the normal human scale of relating to bees to the molecular

scale of genetic modification, asking us to consider the consequences of our actions on the planet on a level that is normally inaccessible to us. This emphasis on the unpredictable consequences of human knowledge and action recalls the precarious georgic with these concerns.

But although *The Xenotext—Book I* may initially be read as a precarious georgic because it includes these critiques of imperial georgic anthropomorphism and linear technoscientific progress, the language Bök uses recalls Dryden’s militarized, instrumental, teleological and anthropocentric imperial georgic rather than the more complex and provisional original.

Although “The Late Heavy Bombardment” attempts to resist anthropocentrism by placing human activity in a broader context of cosmic chaos, in the transition between “The Late Heavy Bombardment” and “Colony Collapse Disorder,” the survival of human activity through the survival of the bees becomes the central focus of the text. Like Dryden’s translation, “Colony Collapse Disorder” emphasizes the military nature of the bees, the similarities between their social organization and human civilization, and the importance of human dominion in the successes of their civilization. In Bök’s updated version, the emphasis on good management of the hive is transferred onto the affinities between scientific and poetic processes, and on human responsibility for the management of those processes. In the poem, “Genetic Engineering,” “Productive, functional, and convenient, / language orchestrates our environment” (84). If genetic engineering shares a connection with poetry in that both seek a programmatic usefulness in language, our lack of proper management of the hive has led to “a better future, where only we thrive” (84), and simultaneously “your barren future, where only we are spared” (85).

Importantly, “Colony Collapse Disorder” is followed by the two sections of *The Xenotext—Book I* that form meaningful short poems from the poetic constraints of cellular language, and the progression through the text suggests that the solution to the chaos of the universe is in the

careful and programmatic application of technoscientific knowledge that, if it does not save us, can extend human thought into an unknown future. In “Vita Explicata,” the final essay at the end of *The Xenotext—Book I*, Bök describes the myth of Aristaeus as “an allegory about the expiations of a general who sends his troops to Hell but cannot bring them home,” noting that “like Aristæus, we have condemned our hives to Hell, but we remain uncertain about our ability to bring them back—and if we cannot rescue the bees, then we may be damning Humanity to Hell, doing so when there may not be enough creatures to sacrifice so as to appease our angered deities before we all expire” (153). In this explanation, Bök updates Virgil’s Roman mythological Hell with the hellish nightmare of mass extinction and replaces Aristaeus’s angry Roman deities (who kill Orpheus for his failure to bring back Eurydice) with the systems and processes of the planet in ecological collapse.

The organization of the poems around the affinities between cellular and poetic language, alongside Bök’s positioning of human beings as Aristaeus, echoes the imperial georgic’s anthropocentrism in that it inadvertently re-centres the human (the poet and the scientist) in managerial positions over the nonhuman world. In Bök’s allegorical relationship, if human beings are in the position of Aristaeus, the poet is Orpheus, master singer with the magic lyre. Susan Vanderborg understands this positioning to be the case when she argues, “Bök also places his transgenic texts within “the elegiac pastoral tradition” (North of Invention, ch. 2), where stylized constructions of nature help immortalize the subject, a ‘shepherd-poet’ (Harrison 1-2). The elegy form promises that the deceased lyricist ‘lives on in’ some afterlife, providing ‘an element of reassurance, of consolation’ (Norlin 309)” (n.p.). Aside from the confusion of the georgic with the pastoral, Bök’s positioning of the poet/singer as Orpheus tasks the human author with the responsibility to find and bring home Eurydice—using his lyrical cypher. This

allegory reveals the teleological progress embedded in the technoscientific project of the imperial georgic, in that even in the case of extinction, human technologies ensure that the human artistic and poetic impulse can live on in a hardier organism.

The poems in *The Xenotext—Book I* not only echo the imperial georgic in its affinity with technoscientific ideas of scalability and in its anthropocentric emphasis on human technoscientific management of nonhuman organisms, but also in its reproduction of heteronormative power imbalances. Bök imposes a gender on the organism in drawing a parallel between the poet and Orpheus and the bacterium and Eurydice and introduces an unequal power relationship on the experiment by inscribing the experiment with gendered relations. “The Nocturne of Orpheus,” for example, describes the project as a dirge and a love song the bacterium must decipher:

This covenant of love in a dirge for a god  
 has delighted an angel who obeys my plea,  
 each sonnet a rhythm for her to decipher,  
 making legible a key in her dream of dusk:  
 a redness that darkens the hue of a tulip  
 is riching her view of the hill of a lea,  
 dappling her vista at the end of my vigil,  
 even if havoc calls forth ruin to kill me (22)

Despite Bök’s claims that the project is a collaboration, this initial poem reveals that relationship to in fact be somewhat less equalizing than originally claimed. The “angel who obeys” is rather the passive recipient of the cypher, the poem “Orpheus,” who glows a “redness that darkens the hue of a tulip” once that message has been received. Aside from the fact that the organism must

fluoresce red to indicate that it is producing the poem “Eurydice” in response to the poem “Orpheus” for Bök to know that he has succeeded, the language of this inscription implies that the organism is asleep before being awakened and responding to the poet’s call. The floral imagery which echoes the convention of a man offering flowers to a woman lover, calls to mind the symbolism of feminine fertility, which in turn indicates that the organism is producing a poetic response. This is a relationship that Bök has consciously produced, framing the relationship between poet and bacteria as one where the poet’s sonnet is a “masculine assertion about the aesthetic creation of life,” Bök explains, and the bacterium’s sonnet is “a feminine refutation about the woebegone absence of life” (Bök in Vanderborg n.p.). While this gendered language becomes entangled with the poems of *The Xenotext—Book I*, they are also ultimately shaped by the greater constraints placed on Bök’s poetry by the *Xenotext* experiment on which this collection of poems is based.

*The Xenotext—Book I*, is intended as a preview for a future book generated by the *Xenotext* experiment, which is, at the time of this project, still ongoing. In an interview with Stephen Joyce, Bök describes the experiment in which, with the help of Stuart A. Kauffman and the Institute of Biocomplexity and Informatics, Bök would “encode a short verse into a sequence of DNA in order to implant it into a bacterium” and “integrate it into the genome of the organism, doing so in such a way that, not only does the organism become an archive for storing my poem, but moreover the organism also becomes a machine for writing the poem” (Joyce n.p.). Bök designed the project, first, as a set of two mutually enciphering poems: “Orpheus” and “Eurydice,” which, incidentally, do not appear in *The Xenotext—Book I*. Bök would encode “Orpheus” using a cipher that corresponded to the seven nucleobases needed to encode his poem first into the genome of the bacteria *E. Coli*, and then into the hardier *D. Radiodurans*, which can

withstand extremely high doses of radiation and is likely to outlive the human species.

“Orpheus” would then be coded into the DNA of the micro-organism, which, in turn, would produce a corresponding poem, “Eurydice,” encoded into its RNA which could then be read using Bök’s chemical cypher. The project is based on the chemical co-dependence of the strands of DNA and RNA in the genome of an organism. The section in *The Xenotext—Book I*, “The March of the Nucleotides,” explains Bök’s cipher using the letter-symbols of the nucleobases of a strand of DNA: “A (for adenine), C (for cytosine), G (for guanine), and T (for thymine)” (78). Bök explains that a set of three consecutive nucleobases form a codon, which functions as a command for the gene to generate a certain protein in response. A series of codons, he explains, constitutes a gene, “‘a command’ which the cell of the organism can ‘express’ by transcribing the codons into a ribbon of ribonucleic acid (RNA)” (80). According to Gayathri Vaidyanathan, “Bök has three benchmarks of success for *The Xenotext*: the gene has to be properly introduced into *Deinococcus*,<sup>55</sup> it has to generate a protein that fluoresces red, matching the opening lines of “Eurydice”; and the protein has to be stable enough to be detected” (2094). At the writing of the article, the lab Bök hired to carry out the experiment had managed to have an *E. Coli* bacterium accept “Orpheus” into its genomic structure and answer with “Eurydice” during its reproduction.

At first glance, the experiment, like *The Xenotext—Book I*, might be read as a version of the precarious georgic, because Bök represents the experiment as a collaboration between the human artist and the living organism. What Bök had proposed in the experiment was not only to use the organism as a passive storage vehicle for the encrypted text, but also, one could say, to make the organism an active participant in creating the future poem. Bök is careful to specify

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<sup>55</sup> Short for *Deinococcus Radiodurans*, or *D. Radiodurans*. Critics have tended to shorten the name of the bacterium inconsistently in the literature, but there remain two species of bacteria in the project: *E. Coli*, and *Deinococcus Radiodurans*.

that he is “hoping to design a text that, when implanted, does not injure the organism, but that instead causes it to generate a protein—one that, according to my cipher, is itself another text” (65). Critical reactions to the *Xenotext* project have addressed the ethical dilemmas associated with the manipulation of a living organism for the purposes of artistic expression. Many critics, however, have only expressed their ethical concerns in passing commentary, settling on the idea that the *Xenotext* project, for all its ethical dilemmas, represents, overall, a collaboration with the organism rather than an exercise in mastery over the organism. Diana Brydon ambivalently notes that “The ethics of interfering with another life form can seem problematic for some and a willingness to yield to the call of otherness for others” (39). Darren Wershler defends the experiment and argues that “the microorganism itself is an active collaborator, potentially writing—but redacting and editing—new poems itself through the process of RNA transcription” (55). Adam Dickinson has argued that “If Kac’s project is about damaging the organism, Bök’s is about subsisting within it like a biotrophic parasite tending toward a mutualistic symbiosis, given his project’s reliance on the health and viability of the bacterium” (11). Susan Vanderborg argues that the experiment is haunted by the influence of William S. Burroughs’ linguistic parasites, noting that although

Bök states in his essay that his “‘word-germ’ has only the most miniscule [sic], most negligible, chance whatsoever of producing any dangerous contagion” (231), at the same time the word ‘rosy’ in the bacterium’s poem hints, like ambient noise, at “Ring around the rosy,” the children’s lyric purportedly based on our historical encounter with the bacterium *Y. pestis*, the cause of the Black Death (n.p.).

These concerns and critiques, in their ambivalence, all point to a running theme of precariousness, contingency, and uncertainty in and about the *Xenotext* experiment itself.

One of the anxieties that runs through criticisms of the Xenotext project is the anxiety about contamination—in Vanderborg’s allusion to Burroughs’ linguistic parasites, which she takes from Bök’s own comments on the project, she points to an anxiety about the contamination between human and bacteria through genetic manipulation. This anxiety about contamination is one that has haunted critics of genetic modification since its discovery in the 1950s. Tsing argues that the field of evolutionary developmental biology, formed as an offshoot of molecular biology after the discovery of genetics, led scientists into direct encounters with the interdependence of organisms even at the level of their genetic development. Scientists

found themselves in conversation with ecologists, and suddenly they realized they had evidence for a type of evolution that had not been expected by the modern synthesis. In contrast to the modern orthodoxy, they found that many kinds of environmental effects could be passed on to offspring, through a variety of mechanisms, some affecting gene expression and others influencing the frequency of mutations or the dominance of varietal forms. (141)

In other words, what was thought to be the ultimate example of scalability was found to operate instead on a logic of what Tsing has called “contamination”: many of the mechanisms necessary for genetic variability and evolution were predicated on contact and interdependence with other entities and substances, even at the level of DNA, the very molecular structure of the organism.

But while Tsing’s idea of adaptation through contamination is an important part of the precarious georgic, in practice, Bök’s *Xenotext* experiment relies on an outdated deterministic model of genetics that reproduces imperial georgic’s anthropocentrism and instrumentalism. At the time of this project, the Xenotext experiment has successfully reproduced “Eurydice” in *E. Coli*. However, in *D. Radiodurans*—the ultimate object of the experiment—the experiment had only succeeded in two of three of its criteria. Bök had planned to continue the project at the

Massachusetts Institute of Technology, using his remaining funding to ensure that the bacterium reproduced a stable version of “Eurydice” in the structure of its DNA. Bök’s criteria speaks to the intended scalability of the project because it is intended to be reproducible across organisms and in multiple organisms: the mutually encrypting Petrarchan sonnets, “Orpheus” and “Eurydice”, were designed to be reproduced in another species of bacteria without changing the characteristics of the project. In other words, this is not a project that will change in response to the genetic resistance of the organism. A true engagement with the precarity of human-nonhuman collaboration would have allowed the experiment to either stop with the failure of the experiment to fully reproduce inside *D. Radiodurans* or adapt with the failure—allowing that the differences between organisms would necessitate that the original model adapt. Instead, it shares with the imperial georgic the intention of representing a scalable version of the non-human world, made predictable and controllable through human technological achievement.

By taking this position, Bök reasserts an affinity with the history of the imperial georgic’s reliance on a scalable model of nature, the same model perpetuated by the imperial georgic mode’s celebration of the triumph of human labour over the natural world. Tsing argues that the discovery of genetics was one of the most important discoveries of modern Western science because it initially told the story of a self-contained, infinitely reproducible and de-historicized species creation through genetic variation. DNA was the key to the seeing the organism as scalable:

The chemical structure of [DNA’s] double helix strands is both stable and, amazingly, able to replicate exactly on a newly built strand. What a model for self-contained replication! The replication of DNA was mesmerizing; it formed an icon for modern science itself, which requires the replication of results, and thus research objects that are

stable and interchangeable across experimental iterations, that is, without history. The results of the replication of DNA can be tracked at every biological scale... Biological scalability was given a mechanism, strengthening the story of thoroughly modern life—life ruled by gene expression and isolated from history. (141)

But what has also become evident in scientific exploration of genetics is that even at the level of DNA, nature does not conform to a scalable, reproducible framework.

Bök's explanation of the processes of gene expression uses the language of technical encoding that also reproduces the idea that living organisms can be reduced to a set of mechanical commands. Even his poetic commentary, produced at the bottom of each page of the scientific explanation of gene expression, juxtaposing the poetic and scientific paradigms on the page, reproduces a forward-looking, teleological trajectory of poetic, if not human, progress. He writes, "*DNA is a vagrant message sent to us, as if from outer space, by a cryptic, but sapient, sender who seeks a perfect poetics*" (82). The lines imply a reversal of the dynamic in "Nocturne of Orpheus," but their trajectory implies mastery in that it implies that "a perfect poetics" is possible. The "perfect poetics" Bök refers to in *The Xenotext—Book I* is not a human-authored poetics but rather a way of describing the nonhuman coding processes of gene expression. Weidner points out that Bök is writing within the "gene control" and "gene action" model, which have been rejected in the scientific community because "it is now known that the causal connection between genotype—all the genes in the cells of an organism—and phenotype—what the organism looks like and how it behaves—defies the simplicity presumed in [those] models" (43). In his framing of genetics in "The March of the Nucleotides" (itself a metaphor tied to the imperial georgic connection with military-enforced scalable efforts), Bök has produced a scalable model of genetic control that is "no longer tenable in [the context of the Anthropocene],

if it ever was” (Waidner 43). Likewise, “The Virelay of the Amino Acids” echoes this technological positivism in its organization of each set of nucleotides into a grouping that constitutes the expression of an amino acid. Each letter-symbol of the nucleotide corresponds to a single word, and those words are arranged in sets that reflect the construction of the amino acid under a visual depiction of the acid’s structure. This, too, in its emphasis on building from the small scale (molecular) to the organism, in a process that implies a linear trajectory of establishing of control at every expression of life.

Finally, Bök also recreates the imperial georgic’s reliance on a heteronormative model of scalable organization. Waidner argues that this engendering of the organism as feminine reproduces a reductive and deterministic version of biology that assumes that genetic modification “dictates, as opposed to influences, the microorganism’s behavior” (41). Because the agency of the feminized bacterium is

Framed by two mutually exclusive propositions, does the experiment work or does it not work, *R. durans* / Euridyce’s agential room for maneuver is narrowed to the extreme and ultimately closed down within the experimental set up of the *XE*. “Her” options, such as destroying the protein (hence critiquing Bök’s poems), not producing the right protein (hence articulating something other than the anticipated response), dying en masse, et cetera, are constituted as failures of the experiment. They are non-events, the details of which have yet to be mined for their subversive potential. (42)

The content of “Orpheus” and “Eurydice”, which set up the framing of the feminized organism then, not only present a problematic frame politically, but in re-inscribing these unequal power relations, present a problem for the precarious georgic Bök had expected to produce, because

they fail to call attention to the inequality of those relations or meaningfully deconstruct them in the process of the experiment.

Even though Bök identifies an ecological dimension in the *Georgics* that he seeks to resurrect in the context of the Anthropocene, he inadvertently re-inscribes the imperial georgic mode in both the form and content of *The Xenotext—Book I* and the Xenotext experiment. In contrast, *Forage* explores the place of farming and agricultural production within a civilization that has already expanded and become, as Tsing would argue, deterritorialized within the logic of late capitalism.<sup>56</sup> While only six of *Forage's* fifty-two poems deal explicitly with agriculture, the collection weaves together concerns with food production and consumption, technological innovation and ecological degradation, the dispossession of Canada's indigenous peoples, the marginalization of immigrants and economic migrants, and the exploitation of seasonal migrant labour. In so doing, the collection shows how the logics of imperial georgic agricultural practices originating in Britain drove colonialist thinking that led to social, ecological, and political oppression both in Canada and on a global scale and have evolved and continue to operate and perpetuate those oppressions. Wong ends the dedication to *Forage* with the phrase, “& yours, interbeing,” a fitting beginning to a poetics that relentlessly interrogates the nature of the relationship between human beings, things, and capital in a globalized world that calls up the precarious georgic's emphasis on adaptation and multispecies entanglement. *Forage* is generally read as feminist ecopoetics, but I am arguing that it can usefully be read as an example of relational georgic because it focuses on the relations between humans and nonhuman entities. Though not a traditional georgic because it does not focus exclusively on farming, it nevertheless echoes georgic concerns in its attempt to situate modern industrialized and globally capitalist

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<sup>56</sup> See Hardt and Negri, *Empire*.

agriculture as an important node in the Anthropocene's extended and overwhelming network of multispecies and object entanglements. Rather than focusing on industrial farming as the beginning and engine of civilizing influence, *Forage* updates the Precarious georgic that I have identified as latent in Moodie, Ostenson, and Kroetsch to emphasize agriculture as a nexus between human activity and the environment in which that activity takes place. In other words, in *Forage*, agriculture is a node within the scaled-up networks of global capitalism that also includes the oppression of indigenous peoples and migrant labourers, genetic science and its complicity with the military industrial complex, the excesses of late capitalist hyper-consumerism, and the destabilising effects of climate change. In contrast to Bök's *Xenotext*, which aims to address ecological anxiety through the embracing of technological advancement, *Forage* performs a search for a collective politics that can meaningfully challenge the imperial georgic's oppression of indigenous people, women, and nonhuman beings and find space for action against the suffering induced by globalized capitalism's scaling up of imperial georgic practices of alienation and salvage accumulation.

Wong's *Forage* explores the destruction caused by the imperial georgic, and particularly the suffering it causes to racialized and Indigenous people and to nonhuman beings. Wong responds to this suffering by imagining a precarious georgic that goes further than Bök's in really being open to nonhuman agency, because it attempts to avoid attaching itself to notions of successful or unsuccessful experiments. Wong's ecological anxiety in *Forage* manifests itself in a relational georgic that identifies the contrasting and contradictory relationships with technological waste, the destruction of the environment wrought by capitalism and uses of technology for the benefit of capitalist expansion, and an emphasis on science as a tool for generating awareness of multispecies entanglements. Wong seeks to offer a utopian, collective

solution to this collective suffering, but these efforts are tempered by the anxiety that pervades human-nonhuman relations in the text. To date, critics such as Catherine Bates and Christine Wiesenthal have read *Forage* with attention to new materialist discourses in Canada, while Rita Wong herself and Petra Faschinger have situated *Forage* within regionalist discourses of decolonization practices and the relationships between Asian and indigenous people inhabiting British Columbia and the West Coast. In both cases, there has been a heavy focus on the urban and industrial emphasis of the text, while little attention has been called to the text's concerns with agricultural work and its relationship to globalized capitalism. Unlike Bök, Wong does not explicitly invoke the georgic tradition, and agriculture is not the focus of her poems.

Nonetheless, *Forage* resembles Bök's *The Xenotext—Book I* in that it responds to the scaled-up imperial georgic of global capitalism and explores how the precarious georgic might offer more livable futures for humans and nonhumans. Reading *Forage* as an example of the precarious georgic offers a way to situate these concerns within the broader contexts of late-capitalist precarity and enables us to see that Wong's poetic engagement with urban pollution and race relations is part of the history of georgic literature in Canada.

For example, the poem "opium" introduces one of the major threads running through *Forage*: an attempt to break open the neat association between agrarian work, the 'natural,' and whiteness in imperial georgic myths of agriculture's role in generating an idealized imperialist civilization. "opium" looks backward to one of the violent imperialist uses for agricultural land, which resulted in the ongoing exploitation of racialized subjects: the farming and distribution of opium by the British Empire. The poem analogizes the myths of alcohol and drug dependencies of indigenous peoples in Canada with the exploitation of Asian economies and people in the Victorian opium trade: "call it crack war / alcohol white powder suffocates / shades of deep

brown earth red desert / yellow skin dependency myths who / needs the high of trying to kill the other?" (13). In emphasizing the entanglement of certain forms of agricultural production with a history of chemical manipulation, racist stereotyping and pharmaceutical production, the poem reveals how the imperial georgic model of scalability, standardization and imperialism exploits racialized people through alienation and salvage accumulation. Enriching this context, a handwritten marginal note references Avital Ronell's observation that "Queen Victoria waged war twice... in order to ensure the free commerce of opium" (13). In "opium," Wong points out the similarity between the genocide and displacement of Indigenous peoples in both the settlement of Canada and the opium trade in Asia. In Canada, the British imposed a scalable plantation model of agriculture that displaced Indigenous nations from their land, whereas in Asia, British and French fought two wars that forced China to cede Hong Kong to British control for tea plantations and to allow increased sales of opium to people in China. Wong shows how the imperial georgic logic of scalability extended the reach and severity of the commodification and alienation of life processes in the service of what would eventually become global capitalism in the Anthropocene. Wong thus emphasizes that agriculture, under Empire, cannot be divorced from trade and imperial violence. This theme is extended in *Forage's* longest poem, "the girl who ate rice every day," in which a prose-poem narrative reminiscent of Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market" runs alongside a column detailing the number and kind of patents that Monsanto<sup>57</sup> has taken out on life forms from soybeans to cauliflower, and then reveals the details of the patents for genetically modified wheat, basmati rice, canola, and pigs. Both poems draw attention to how imperial georgic agriculture colonizes agricultural land, replaces local

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<sup>57</sup> Since acquiring seed patents, Monsanto has also merged with major pharmaceutical conglomerate, Bayer. The size and scope of this mega-corporation is about to be dwarfed only by China's Sinochem, which trades in fertilizer, seed, and agrochemicals, and uses agriculture as one of its five "Strategic Business Units, namely energy, chemicals, agriculture, real estate, and finance. It operates more than 300 subsidiaries around the world" (www.sinochem.com).

ecosystems with plantations of monoculture cash crops, protects the scalability of that colonization through military action, and sets up colonizing sites of production that would cause harm to the indigenous populations.

Many of the poems in *Forage* seek to shift our thinking from the local and regional to the relational, calling attention not only to human-centred globalized networks, but also to the life-sustaining nonhuman networks that are compromised through late capitalist ecological destruction. The poem “reconnaissance” shows how the agricultural standardization introduced with the imperial georgic is accompanied by colonization and the imposition of English as the language of global capitalism. But Wong relates this linguistic imposition of English to the pollution and contamination (in the negative sense) of the water system. The poem is surrounded by a long quote from Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*, in which Carson challenges the assumption that pesticide contamination is limited to a single body of water by emphasizing that the earth’s climate and water systems are so intricately connected that the pollution will spread to every water source on the planet:

It is not possible to add pesticides to water anywhere without threatening the purity of water everywhere. Seldom if ever does Nature operate in closed and separate compartments, and she has not done so in distributing the earth's water supply. Rain, falling on the land, settles down through pores and cracks in the soil and rock, penetrating deeper and deeper until eventually it reaches a zone where all the bores of the rock are filled with water, a dark, subsurface sea, rising under hills, sinking beneath valleys. This ground water is always on the move, sometimes at a pace so slow it travels no more than 50 feet a year, sometimes rapidly, by comparison, so that it moves nearly a tenth of a mile in a day. But mostly it contributes to streams and so to rivers. Except for what enters

streams directly as rain or surface runoff, all the running water of the earth's surface was at one time groundwater. And so, in a very real and frightening sense, pollution of the groundwater is pollution of water everywhere. (59-61)

Water, in framing “reconnaissance”, acts as a metonymic representative of the inextricably connected human and ecological systems of the planet, and the contamination of the earth’s waterways by pesticides exemplifies the way that the standardization and colonization of the imperial georgic do not remain confined to the countries originally colonized under the British Empire, but continue to spread, enabled by global capitalism and the networks on which international commerce rely. Just as water flows through the body of the planet, “reconnaissance” calls attention to language’s material qualities, its origin as sound that emanates from the body and the placement of the tongue in the mouth. In starting with language, Wong takes an elegiac approach to the ontologies of her “poisoned ancestors” (58), connecting the imperative to learn English with the systematic destruction of her cultural heritage. She quotes a passage from the *Longman Student Grammar of Spoken and Written English* that reveals that there is an ontology built into the colonizer’s language which is different from the host languages of the colonized: “verbs that occur in the present tense 80% of the time: bet, doubt, know, matter, mean, mind, reckon, suppose, think / verbs that occur in the past tense 80% of the time: exclaim, eye, glance, grin, nod, pause, remark, reply, sign, smile, whisper” (58). All the words mostly found in the present tense are inactive verbs, such as thinking, which implies stasis; the verbs listed as occurring in the past tense most of the time are verbs associated with secretive communication using gestures that suggest having noticed something. The juxtaposition of the tenses suggests the precariousness caused by the forces of standardization and colonization, as the present verbs suggest the internal processes of decision-making, and the

past verbs suggest subversive acts of noticing, but neither list suggests that direct action is possible. This idea is echoed in another passage that Wong quotes from Pun Ngai's *Made in China*, arguing that “A new Chinese working class is struggling to be born at the moment when the language of class is curtailed and becomes inarticulate. The new Working class is this spectral other, gazing at itself but expecting no one else to see it. An orphan's fate is its misery as well as its luck” (59). The poem ends with a list of indigenous nations whose land has been co-opted by industrial resource exploitation in the form of mining (port radium, nitassinan), oil extraction (lubicon lands), fisheries (burnt church), and leisure (oka, ipperwash). As the Carson passage frames the two poems, the introduction of the list of indigenous nations that have been co-opted in global resource extraction suggests that the initial imperial georgic ethos of standardization, militarization, salvage accumulation and alienation has resulted in the displacement of indigenous nations and the destruction of their worlds.

Wong's georgic is a precarious one, and it goes further than previous precarious georgics I have discussed in previous chapters like those of Moodie, Ostenso and Kroetsch, because Wong seeks self-consciously to address both the social and the ecological effects of imperial georgic by performing a precarious georgic that is rooted in a more relational, non-anthropocentric, and non-teleological ontology. Anna Tsing's concept of the latent commons is a useful concept for understanding *Forage's* precarity, not only because it is anti-anthropocentric, but also specifically because it focuses on possibilities latent within the ruins of capitalism, rather than remaining stuck in imperial georgic teleologies of progress, and because the concept of the commons is rooted in the history of the imperial georgic since the eighteenth century. Since the commons were the precapitalist grazing lands that were available to everyone, it was by turning the commons into alienable private property that the imperial georgic established

dominance over and an instrumental relationship to both land and colonized people. In other words, the commons is the entangled assemblage that salvage accumulation seeks to turn into an exploitable resource. Tsing's use of the concept draws attention to how imperial georgic's colonization of the commons was integral to the history of capitalism since the beginning of the Anthropocene in the eighteenth century. In *Forage*, Wong describes an urban capitalist world in which indigenous agrarian activists, nonhuman beings, and Wong's speakers must find pockets of survival within a violent and overwhelming system of salvage accumulation and alienation. In so doing, she draws attention to what Tsing calls precarious assemblages in which human and nonhuman entities survive in the ruins of capitalism. Tsing's precarious ontology does not allow for the same kind of futurism as that expressed in Bök's *The Xenotext—Book I*. Rather than a latent hope that technology will either save us from ecological destruction or at least extend the human/artist ego into the future in hopes of communicating with, and sharing some human knowledge with, some far-off non-human species, these relational ontologies emphasize survival in the precarious present, which includes recognition of non-human entities sharing the same present and its ruins. Tsing describes these spaces of chance encounters between entities as the "Latent commons", borrowing from the concept of the commons arising from the precapitalist agricultural practice of common grazing, a practice in which some land was held in common for the use of the entire community, where people who did not own land could graze their livestock. Tsing defines this common space as "fugitive moments of entanglement in the midst of institutionalized alienation" (255), and because of their elusiveness, she defines them as a negation of anthropocentric ontologies: "Latent commons are not exclusive human enclaves.... Latent commons are not good for everyone.... Latent commons don't institutionalize well.... Latent commons cannot redeem us" (255). In contrast to the imperial georgic's vision of orderly

human progress through technological mastery of nonhuman nature, Latent commons emphasize the precarity of all existence, an existence based in spontaneous assemblages and the entanglement of many different things and organisms.

Like Tsing, Haraway recognizes the value of becoming aware of systems of being that do not place human beings—or any being—at the centre. Contrary to the compartmentalization and alienation that must accompany more traditionally scientific ways of seeing non-human and human organisms as self-contained individuals, Haraway stresses a systems ecology based on the work of evolutionary biologist Lynn Margulis, who coined the term *holobiont* to name a way of more accurately seeing individuals and systems as ecological assemblages that evolve through symbiosis as well as through competition for resources. Haraway writes,

Perhaps as sensual molecular curiosity and definitely as insatiable hunger, irresistible attraction toward enfolding each other is the vital motor of living and dying on earth. Critters interpenetrate one another, loop around and through one another, eat each other, get indigestion, and partially digest and partially assimilate one another, and thereby establish sympoietic arrangements that are otherwise known as cells, organisms, and ecological assemblages. (58)

This way of seeing the world closely resembles that of the latent commons, but Haraway spells out more explicitly than Tsing does that these assemblages form across all levels of being, from the molecular to the global to the universal. In both interactionist ontologies, the non-human-human barrier breaks down at all levels, placing the emphasis on permeable, precarious, and contingent relations.

Wong's awareness of the precarity of these contingent relations results not only in her championing of the brief and random instances of cooperation among organisms, but it also

results in an anxiety about the unintended consequences of human intervention in ecological systems. Wong's concern with a globalized imperial georgic's patenting and control over the planet's life forms is echoed in several other poems in the collection, most notably in "canola queasy", "on encountering trouble," and "for Lee Kyung Hae Korean farmer martyred in Cancun (1947-2003)". In "Canola Queasy," Wong addresses Monsanto's patenting of varieties of canola, and their subsequently draconian enforcement of that patent against Saskatchewan farmer, Percy Schmeiser, in 2004. Schmeiser became a target of Monsanto after their genetically modified "Roundup Ready" canola seed was found in one of Schmeiser's fields. Schmeiser claimed that he had found the seed growing near his field after it had blown across the road, and upon spraying his own canola field nearby and discovering that it also contained Roundup Ready canola, saved the seeds and intentionally replanted them. Monsanto sued Schmeiser for patent violation and won the lengthy Supreme Court battle with a vote of five to four in 2004. The resulting precedent set by this court case means that Monsanto can sue farmers for copyright violation even when they are saving their own seed, because the Monsanto seed had showed up in his field without their consent due to natural circumstances. Schmeiser's argument that the seed ended up in his field through random events is indicative of the precariousness of nonhuman relations, and the unforeseeable events that can arise from natural ecological processes and random events. The Supreme Court decision to allow Monsanto to uphold and enforce the patent on its seed represents the imperial georgic's emphasis on control, standardization, and regulation, and its reliance on salvage accumulation because it allows Monsanto to harness those random events for profit, forcing Schmeiser and farmers like him to purchase the copyright to the seed—and repurchase every planting season.

Wong's poem sides strongly with Schmeiser, asking, "how to converse with the willfully profitable stuck in their monetary monologue?" (36), and pleading, "don't shoot the messy angels with your cell-arranging blasts" (36). The accompanying marginal note offers a clue that by "messy angels," Wong means the mysterious agency of nonhuman objects and their interrelationships with one another outside human intervention. She notes that "In April 1997 Monsanto pulled two varieties of genetically engineered canola seeds from the Canadian market after testing revealed that at least one of the patented herbicide-tolerant transgenic varieties contained an 'unexpected' gene. This was after 60,000 bags of the seeds had already been sold throughout Western Canada" (36). The reference to "unexpected" genes found in organisms modified by Monsanto underscores the unpredictability of the object's agency, and the marginal note echoes the anxiety within the poem about how accepting the precariousness in a world that respects the agency of objects does not ensure safety or survival. What Wong is saying about the unpredictability of genetic modification is that it does not easily conform to the desired predictability or scalability of reproducible scientific outcomes. Wong's desire to champion this unpredictability is undercut by her acknowledgement of the anxieties of living in a state of precarity.

The patenting of life is an extension of the imperial georgic logic of standardization and expansion that not only creates anxieties by heightening the unknown properties of genetic activity, but it also threatens biodiversity globally because scalable agricultural practices, when paired with seed patents, encourage the planting of monocultures and force farmers to pay yearly for seeds rather than saving and selecting seeds to increase yield capacity according to the ecosystem in which crops are introduced. Wong examines the human cost of patenting the genomes of plants and animals in "for Lee Kyung Hae Korean farmer martyred in Cancun

(1947-2003)”, which begins with the open declaration, “WTO / smashes rice farmers into / the enduring earth” (42). The subject of the poem, Lee Kyung Hae, was a South Korean farmer who had rehabilitated a portion of land that was unsuitable for growing rice in the mountains of Jangsu, opening and sustaining a dairy farm in the small village just south of Seoul.<sup>58</sup> Born into a wealthy family of rice traders, Lee Kyung Hae had studied agricultural science in Seoul, and had sought to use his farm in Jangsu as an experiment to improve agricultural technologies and techniques in order to revitalize agricultural practices in the area, which were often of poorer quality because of the soil and temperature conditions of the mountainous region (Watts). For a time, Lee Kyung Hae's experiment was successful; he had brought in experts from Germany to help him introduce electric fencing for his cattle, which he taught to successfully graze on the high-gradient slopes of the mountain (Watts), and he had successfully designed rice paddies and grazing pastures on the hostile land, raising up to 300 cattle. Lee's farm became a teaching farm, and in 1988 he was awarded a UN award for rural leadership (Watts), and in 1987 he became a key figure in the Korean Advanced Agriculture Federation, which fought to oppose the World Trade Organization's emphasis on export-oriented industrial agricultural agreements that were forcing subsistence farmers to pay to transition to growing industrially patented crops and opening markets to foreign-raised cattle. When South Korea opened its market to the import of Australian cows and encouraged Korean farmers to expand their farms through cheap loans, the price of beef collapsed, bankrupting Lee and many other cattle farmers who had relied on a steady local market. The banks repossessed his farm, and Lee redoubled his efforts as a radical protester against the WTO policies that had bankrupted local small farmers. He staged more than

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<sup>58</sup> See Jonathan Watts, “Field of Tears”. *The Guardian*. 16 September 2003. <[www.theguardian.com/world/2003/sep/16/northkorea.wto](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/sep/16/northkorea.wto)>

30 hunger strikes, often to the point of hospitalization, and, in 1990, attempted to disembowel himself with a Swiss penknife in protest of a World Trade Organization agreement made in Geneva that would open the Korean market to rice imports (Watts). In a warning he published in a pamphlet just after this incident, Lee argued that the WTO represented a stage of globalization that “should be stopped immediately, otherwise the false logic of the neo-liberalism will perish [sic] the diversities of global agriculture and bring disaster to all human beings” (qtd in Watts). Lee killed himself during a WTO protest in Cancun in 2003, while trying to pull down security fences separating the protesters—many of whom were small farmers. Lee climbed to the top of the fence and stabbed himself in the chest and died in hospital several hours later (Watts).

By memorializing Lee’s protest, Wong’s poem addresses how the WTO and similar global agricultural trade deals<sup>59</sup> sacrifice not only the incomes of local small farmers, but also local knowledges and the biodiversity of crops, because the logic of imperial georgic functions by reducing biologically diverse systems to scalable systems for expansion. Reflecting Lee’s warning, Wong links Lee Kyung Hae with both broader agricultural activist movements and different farming cultures and their spiritual foundations, wishing him, “may you be graced by camaraderie with Navdanya, Wild Rice Moon, Hou T’u...” (63). Navdanya, for example, is a seed-saving activist movement founded by Dr. Vandana Shiva, dedicated to preserving the

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<sup>59</sup> The WTO could arguably be compared with the most recent of these global trade deals, the TPP (trans-Pacific Partnership), started as an agreement between 5 countries in 2005, and expanded to include several other trans-Pacific countries in 2015-2016. The TPP is currently being debated in talks with the Liberal government as of 2016. The TPP has been controversial for Canadian farmers—in particular farmers in the dairy sector and smaller produce sectors such as sugar beets—because while it has been argued to increase market shares into export markets to Japan, Malaysia, Australia, and the US, it also threatens the security of farmers in other sectors by increasing concessions for imports in dairy and eggs, and fails to increase market shares in the United States for sugar beets. Beyond the Canadian context, increased exports to markets in Japan, Malaysia, Australia, and the US will also threaten market shares for small farmers in other countries. The TPP is largely about food distribution, meaning that increased imports of produce within Canada as well as increased exports outside Canada could contribute to the weakening biodiversity in global agricultural production—which was one of the concerns of activists like Lee Kyung Hae. <http://www.nfu.ca/issues/trans-pacific-partnership-tpp>.

biodiversity of India's farms. The movement consists both of a seed-saving network of small organic farmers that stretches across eighteen Indian states, and a learning centre, Bija Vidyapeeth, which trains farmers in seed sovereignty and indigenous farming practices and culture (Navdanya). Likewise, Wild Rice Moon represents the annual Ashinaabeg Ojibwe rice harvest event in northern Minnesota (wild rice is one of the only grains indigenous to North America) (Laduke 2000),<sup>60</sup> while Hou T'ou references the Chinese folk deity credited with giving humans the Five Cereals (indigenous grains) (Olupona 201). By linking Lee's story with these ongoing local agricultural practices, Wong emphasizes that the imperial georgic, which began in eighteenth-century England, has now expanded to a global network of capitalist agribusiness that has destructive effects on both nonhuman biodiversity and the diversity of local human agrarian practices. Part of that mastery, when extended globally, includes the kind of genetic modification that allows global corporations like Monsanto to engineer seed that can thrive in multiple bioregions. While this kind of global standardization may at first glance seem like the ultimate solution to global food security, it in fact is the heart of the extension of Empire. The decreasing diversification in agriculture runs hand in hand with decreasing global biodiversity. It threatens not only the livelihoods of small traditional farmers, but also the ecological balance of the bioregions in which those farms are sustained. It is the extension of the idea that human labour and culture is both separate from ecological systems and intended to achieve mastery over them. In *Forage*, Wong situates agrarian work at the heart of a vast network of threatened indigenous cultures and ontologies. If language defines our ontological perspective, then it also defines our relationship to food, and the way in which that food is grown and produced.

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<sup>60</sup> See: Laduke, Winona. "Wild Rice Moon."

In poems like “the girl who ate rice almost every day,” Wong does not simply critique the imperial georgic but also tries to imagine a relational georgic that could emerge in the “latent commons” that persist in the ruins of global capitalism and offer possibilities for multispecies survival through “contaminated diversity.” In *The Mushroom at the End of the World* Tsing offers an example of contaminated diversity and the latent commons by describing the pericapitalist economies started by Hmong-Americans in Oregon who discovered, then began to forage for and sell Matsutake mushrooms growing in the site of a clear-cut forest. In *Forage*, Wong locates a similar site of potential survival in the sewers of Vancouver. The narrative-focused prose-poem in “the girl who ate rice almost every day” reaches underneath accepted myths about agriculture by exploring the history, processes, and ethical ramifications of genetic modification of food crops. But far from a simple critique of the risks of GMOs, Wong imagines a scenario of contaminated diversity to explore the genetic interrelations between humans and nonhumans. It follows a girl named 'slow', who is seduced into eating genetically modified beets before she knows what genetic alchemy has created them. Slow asks, “had these beets been / crossed with cabbages to make / them so huge? Not cabbages / but cows, replied the manager, / with a drosophilic glint in his / melanophore eyes” (16). Slow's question, and its answer, begin a dreamlike exploration of genetic modification as the logical extension of the imperial georgic's valorization of human mastery over natural processes: Virgil's advice to farmers that crops can be improved by grafting and hybridizing plants to create new varieties of fruits and vegetables, and to increase their resilience according to soil and climate, becomes, under the pressures of late-capitalist resource exploitation, the drive to develop experimental genetic combinations of vastly different species that cannot interbreed and so would never have combined genes without human intervention.

Wong's description of the manager is both empathetic and foreboding: the “drosophilic glint” in the manager's “melanophore eyes” is a reference to the species category drosophile, or a group of insects commonly known as fruit-flies, which have been proven to share over 60% of their genomes with humans (National Human Genome Research Institute).<sup>61</sup> Melanophores are the light-absorbing cells in the skin and eyes of reptiles and other cold-blooded animals. By describing the manager’s eyes as “drosophilic” and “melanophore,” then, Wong suggests that this “corporate magic” (17) of gene splicing identifies the genomic similarities between vastly different species and commodifies them, and points out that humans are naturally genetically related to other species that we see as entirely separate and alien. Wong emphasizes that genetic engineering is non-consensual corporate violence, which results in “crossing / goats and spiders who had no / desire to become one creature, / pigs crossed with people until / they collapsed under their own / weight” (17). As the poem continues, however, it becomes clear that Wong's target is not genetic modification itself, since genetic mutation often occurs naturally as part of the process of evolution. Wong’s position is that genetic modification of creatures and humans cannot be done ethically according to the logic of corporate greed, whose ultimate motivation is not ecological survival and adaptation, but profit. Such unprecedented logic—particularly in a long evolutionary history of the planet—threatens to upset the relational logic of species co-evolution, and renders “each object that crosse[s] [slow's] lips an epiphany,” because its altered genetic composition unexpectedly alters her body’s relationship with that food (17). It is the corporate logic of genetic modification for profit that introduces an element of the unknowable

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<sup>61</sup> See, “What results has the field of comparative genomics produced?” from the National Human Genome Research Institute. <https://www.genome.gov/11509542/comparative-genomics-fact-sheet/>

into once familiar objects and nonhuman beings. The object's relationship to the human is no longer a sufficient foundation for understanding the world.

The narrative, then, is not a narrative of returning to a pastoral origin, but of a precarious georgic that features contaminated diversity within an anxious new ecological paradigm. Even though this would be true of non-genetically engineered food, Slow's participation in the multispecies entanglement appeals to the passage of time and the natural processes of species evolution and adaptation to incorporate the once-non-consensual modification of her body and those of the nonhumans with which she is entangled. The final image, however unpalatable, is an enactment of the latent commons. The rice feeds the struggling cities and the rats, and in return, the rice is fed by the excrement of the city's population. Slow's response to her encounter with this corporate logic is not to try to overthrow it, but to locate within the system pockets that hold the potential for a latent commons, gesturing first to the elm and larch trees, whose "roots and the roots of their bach-flower sisters reached deep into the earth that would outlast her" (17). After ingesting the cow-infused beets, Slow must grapple with the unknown consequences of this "corporate magic," choosing to grow a new strain of rice infused with her own beet-ridden excrement in the sewers of Vancouver (with the help of city rats). Slow's process of cultivating this rice is a small rebellion in which the processes of modification actually run through her body (the beets "infused her excrement with a permanent red glow" (17), which infuses the new strain of rice with a rosy hue when she uses it as fertilizer). In allowing these processes to alter both her body and her relationship to the city—the final image of the poem is that of the slow-cooking rice winding its way through the city sewers even after "all of the beet-eaters have died" (18)—slow has integrated herself into the space around her, and, in fact, a part of her will live on in this new strain of rice which has overtaken the city's sewers. The resulting distinction that Wong

establishes between Slow's project and that of the manager, then, is a subtle one: adaptation in place of manipulation. What makes adaptation different from manipulation is that it is not motivated by a desire for control, but rather by a willingness to think with and through precarity as a condition of life. The underlying argument of Wong's narrative about slow and her rice is that the will to control is often the cause of ecological and social harm, because it involves an unwillingness to accept the inherent mystery of vast and interconnected assemblages of things. In trying to turn latent commons into scalable, controllable systems, the corporate logic of the scaled-up imperial georgic instead produces new precarious assemblages of humans and nonhumans, whose effects cannot be totally predicted or controlled, and bring about new risks, but nonetheless form the new ecological order to which humans and nonhumans must adapt. Slow, then, must mitigate her anxieties about late capitalist molecular biological manipulations by exercising her agency within them. This makes the outcome of her experiment different from what has affected the manager, because in the manager's case the rice has been modified to increase profit by overcoming the specificity of place-based eco-systems, whereas in choosing to participate in the multispecies entanglement specific to the sewer and to the specific needs of the rice, she has introduced a measure of agency and consent that grounds her as one participant in that entanglement.

The contrasting information on the opposite column of the page suggests that slow's growing of this new strain of rice is, and is increasingly, a rebellion against this neo-liberal extension of the imperial georgic's logic of control over nonhuman entities and ecological relationships. As of 2007, Wong informs us, searching in the US patent database for the words "Monsanto" and "soybean" results in 210 patents (17). Changing the search term to "rice" gives us 4 patents, corn gives us 21 patents, tomato and potato gives us two patents each, wheat gives

us 5 patents, and cauliflower gives us one (17). Wong includes a note which reads, “dear reader, please note that these numbers are current as of January 2007; there is a high probability that the numbers will be greater by the time you access the database yourself” (17). Indeed, as of August 2016, the same search terms yield the following number of patents:

Monsanto AND soybean: 6028

Monsanto AND rice: 5258

Monsanto AND corn: 5586

Monsanto AND tomato: 4096

Monsanto AND potato: 3995

Monsanto AND wheat: 2582

Monsanto AND cauliflower: 1061 (United States Patent).

Wong thus encourages readers to keep track of the exponentially expanding role of corporate patenting in the processes of genetic modification. Where experiments in crop and livestock improvement have always been part of the imperial georgic, they were previously engineered by farmers themselves, on a small scale that did not involve the splicing of genes in a laboratory. But in twenty-first-century agribusiness, genetic modification has become a multibillion dollar industry that removes the farmer's agency—and indeed ultimately punishes the farmer for modifying his or her own crops for the bioregional conditions in which they are grown, since biotech companies seek to impose a single, scalable model of agriculture everywhere. The patents, by the end of the poem, extend not only to several other plants, but also to a “transgenic large mammal” (18), a life form created solely for the profit of agribusiness. By juxtaposing slow’s rice-farming project with Monsanto’s patents, Wong contrasts the commodification of life

processes inherent in the patenting of seed with slow's site-specific adaptation of the rice to Vancouver's sewer system. The patenting process of Monsanto's manipulations is an attempt to make the manipulations of microbiological processes scalable and reproducible in a similar way to Bök's manipulation of the *D. Radiodurans* and *E. Coli* bacteria and subsequent records of the experiment.

It would be reductive to say that the main concern of *Forage* is solely with the human contexts of the degradation and exploitation of environment and of other human cultures. Underlying all these human injustices—the linguistic, ontological, social, economic, and political consequences of the expansion of imperial georgic's logic of scalability and technological progress to global agrarian capitalism—is an unrelenting anxiety about the autonomy and unknowability of the nonhuman entities on which these human constructs rely. By including the ever-present but unintended and unpredictable consequences of human interventions in ecological systems, Wong's book emphasizes that objects not only participate in the ecological systems which have become compromised through the human fantasy of mastery, but also maintain their own uncanny agency. Beyond a critique of globalized industrial agriculture, the military industrial complex, nationalisms, human and ecological exploitation, and the manipulation of ecological systems, Wong imagines alternatives in random co-operative assemblages, like slow's intervention with the rice, that are mindful of the specific environments that allow certain species to thrive. In other words, Wong imagines the kinds of interventions that potentially arise from attention and awareness to specific, localized ecological realities. In an interview with the CBC about *Forage* during their segments on *Canada Reads Poetry*, Wong describes *Forage* as a collection of poems that attempt to “move beyond denial, toward the possibility of a culture that rejects extravagant wastefulness for ecological resilience and social

justice; as one poem puts it, 'the next shift may be the biggest one yet, the union of the living, from mosquito to manatee to mom'" ("Rita Wong Discusses *Forage*").

Wong's *Forage* offers a counter-ontology to Bök's *Xenotext* in that, rather than conceiving of the Anthropocene as an epoch defined by human mastery, it reconfigures the position of the human in relation to the non-human, rejecting a linear teleology of technological process and instead emphasizing the precariousness of mutually beneficial assemblages of organisms and things as sites of potential resistance within the wastelands of capitalist expansion. Because these assemblages are so precarious and full of latent possibility, Wong represents the Anthropocene as an epoch instead defined by the potential for massive human failure to recognize and adapt to the dynamic, changing conditions of the non-human networks of non-human entities and things on which all political, social, and economic activity rely. While both collections of poetry emphasize scientific knowledge as a tool for recognizing and understanding the non-human, the *Xenotext* experiment functions as an imperial georgic because, even as it engages with themes of ecological destruction and extinction, its intent rests on the mastery of the biological processes of *D. Radiodurans*, harnessing those processes for communication in such a way that disproportionately benefits the human artist and stresses the organism. Rather than focusing on the mastery over nature the imperial georgic mode implies, Wong's *Forage* represents a relational georgic mode that insists on a non-scalable interactionist ontology that displaces the human from the centre of the ontological field and represents it as a small part of a globally dispersed network of human and nonhuman agencies.

Unlike Bök and Wong, Hall has received little critical attention from Canadian literature critics and the general media. But Hall's more than 30 years of poetic output itself constitutes a massive, ongoing poetic experiment in precarity, adaptation, attention, and variability that

provides fertile ground for ecocritics. I argue that Hall's poetry represents one of the strongest examples of the precarious georgic mode. The individual poems in *Amanuensis* may not look like georgics; few of the individual poems are *about* farming. Rather than farming, the speaker is often editing. Unlike *Xenotext*, *Amanuensis* makes few direct references to Virgil or parts of the *Georgics*. And, unlike Wong, Hall's poems do not directly address collective suffering under the structures of late capitalism in the Anthropocene. However, *Amanuensis* does include many references to georgic tropes, including images of farming and settlement, engagement with the countryside and the ecology of farm landscapes. *Amanuensis* also echoes historical georgic in drawing a parallel between poetry and farming, and in the fact that the process of revision makes the poems into contingent assemblages, in which the work of the poet, like that of the farmer, is dealing with continual adaptation and change.

Hall peppers references to georgic conventions like plowing, harvesting, growing, weeding, observing the behaviours of nonhumans, transplantation, variety, mixture, and cultivation throughout his body of work, and they often appear in the form of *ars poetica* guidelines that reference the entire reason Hall sees for building a poetic practice. His collected works, *Guthrie Clothing* (2015), revised much of his work into new poem sequences, essentially creating a new collection altogether as lines were pulled from earlier texts and transplanted into new poetic contexts. Thus transplanted, these lines and phrases take on new meaning, but retain a shadow of their original context as well. Hall's *Amanuensis* was published in 1989. It is organized into three sections, "Pay-Dirt," "Organ Harvest," and "To Be More Round," each of which broadens toward deeper interaction between humans and things. While it may be true that no individual poem can be read as a georgic poem, because each poem is a small piece in an experiential process of writing and reading one's way into awareness of the variety and

complexity of human relations and human/nonhuman relations, and the mysterious agencies of objects. Yet, because all his poetry collections are connected, lines are transmuted from one moment in time to another and take on different meanings according to the context of the poem in which they reappear.

*Amanuensis* enacts a precarious georgic to build an interactionist ontology by experimenting with the pragmatic ethics that Benjamin R. Cohen argues is integral to the georgic mode: in Virgil's *Georgics*, he argues, "doing is knowing... for example, working in the soil is means for knowing what soil is," and in the act of experiencing farming as the precarious nature of human-nonhuman assemblage, farmers not only must learn the habits of the nonhuman entities on which their survival depends, but also to be able to judge right action in terms of sustaining those assemblages (153). Cohen's argument echoes eighteenth-century debates over practicing farmers and the distribution of knowledge. By learning experientially, he argues, we acquire knowledge of the nonhuman relations and their relationship to us, which returns us to farming as a direct multispecies entanglement in which humans have acquired an imperative to act ethically. Hall sees the work of the poet as ethical in a similar way as the work of the farmer, in that both involve a continual process of negotiation with other entities (tools, materials, objects, environments, and other life forms). More than any other text I have so far discussed, Hall's poetics demonstrate the non-scalable process of the precarious georgic mode, because his ontopoetics enacts its own entanglements, bringing in the detritus of Hall's immediate environments in the form of lyrics and references to folk songs, the lines of other poets, nonhuman vocalizations, sublinguistic human vocalizations, image (both linguistically produced and visual), references to the ecologies of his immediate environments, lines from previously published poems, and memory. Hall plays with georgic imagery: fields, farms, plowing, bridled

horses, and sheep, and rhetorically references the georgic mode by conflating the processes of writing with the processes of plowing.

In the scant criticism he has received, mostly in the form of reviews, critics have picked up on these references without having a name for them. Rob McLennan, for example, references Hall's middle style, playing highly technical experiments with sound and structure against the more traditional modes of lyric and folk narrative. "There is something of Hall's work," he writes, "that occupies a nebulous middle space amid polemics. As a poet he plays with experiment of sound and structure against a more traditional lyric and folk-narrative backdrop. Unfortunately, utilizing such a space between the two camps often leaves poets critically out in the cold" (McLennan, *Guthrie Clothing* xiv). McLennan's assessment points to the georgic elements in Hall's poetry without knowing it. His assessment of Hall's "middle space amid polemics" echoes Addison's assertion that the *Georgics*, as translated by Dryden, reach a similar middle balance between registers, offering instruction or argument indirectly via the aesthetically pleasing form of plain-spoken poetry. In "An Essay on Virgil's *Georgics*," Addison describes how Virgil "loves to suggest a truth indirectly, and without giving us a full and open view of it, to let us see just so much as will naturally lead the imagination into all the parts that lie concealed" (302). For Addison, this quality of the *Georgics* is tied to the pleasure of the reader; I suggest, however, that for Hall, it is also an important function of the experiential process of learning in which his poetry is invested. Furthermore, critics have identified in Hall's poetry a preoccupation with contamination, a quality Fairer has described as an aspect of the georgic mode, and particularly what I have called the precarious georgic. In a review of *Hearthedral: A Folk Hermetic* (1996), for example, Willa Walsh describes Hall's poetics by the contaminated relations of his words, which, in her opinion, rendered his poetry inaccessibly difficult because

the contamination of his vocabulary lead to a contamination of meaning: “The strange vocabulary, with the intentionally misspelled words and combinations of words would need an extensive glossary to illuminate the meaning” (n.p.), but she also gives some clue to understanding the form of Hall’s work when she highlights the phrase, “‘whatever words meant has filigreed & transmuted.’ So true!” (Walsh n.p.).

What Walsh sees as “transmutation” of meaning (which combined with “academic inaccessibility” and “filigree” might imply a pure and mystical kind of transformation rather than a contamination) is more accurately understood as contamination in Tsing’s sense. This idea of words that mutate through contamination and growth becomes more pronounced later in Hall’s career. In another reading that indirectly registers the affinity between Hall’s poetry and the georgic tradition, Erin Mouré compares his poetry directly to food production, and through that comparison calls attention to the way that Hall’s poetry is deeply invested in the multispecies and object relations of agrarian work, language, nourishment, and the embodied experience of poetic sound:

Phil Hall has come, by strife with words and their embedded values, to a technique of compression that reminds of Paul Celan’s knotted poems: they beam straight through the skull. So that: “It is a lark drinking rain-water from a sundial” and “oat-dust gold along the snout-beam.” Poetry that recalls the organs of the body, that invents and compounds verbs, nouns and adjectives to reach toward what cannot be spoken, only named, if we use all the names, without censoring our hands’ flutter. It is poetry that “has been taught mockingbirds well.” Which is why, perhaps, Hall’s work has been little recognized by those grocers who are so

invested in the cages and parking lots of the literary supermarket. Never mind. It is recognized by those who want, instead of supermarkets, *food*. (Mouré 44)

Mouré's comments speak to the expansive, entangled, and precarious nature of Hall's poetry, concerned as it is with the struggle to use language as a tool to participate in the living dynamics of the latent commons, the processes of contamination, and the spread of information among assemblages of objects, organisms, and humans. By contrasting the nourishment Hall's poetry provides with the inadequate products offered by the supermarket, Mouré implicitly associates him with the alternative agricultural practices I discussed in the introduction to this chapter, which are trying to find a more nourishing and sustainable way of producing food within contemporary globalized conditions. What both receives and provides nourishment in Mouré's comments is not simply an abstract poetic impulse, but rather an ethical openness to nonhuman and human others that is different from what Jonathan Bate has identified as a Heideggerian poetics of "wise passiveness," or a "letting be" (Bate 278; 264). This process is continually enacted through the process of poetic working that is analogous to poetic work in Hall.

In an essay published for the release of *Conjugation* (2015), Hall explains his title by drawing connections between temporal, linguistic, and biological processes: "I have taken Conjugation to mean the obvious grammatical movement of nouns through time (I am / you are / they will be), / but also as something wider: a tumbling of slight variations, small word by small word—incremental letter adjustments, the almost repetitious music that can result... / Conjugation refers, in biology, to the transfer of information between cells" ("Talking *Conjugation*" 2015). *Conjugation* itself represents an assemblage of lines transferred from Hall's other collections, but also of lines and allusions that are deeply personal to friends and colleagues: in other words, it is a collection of identified affinities. Although *Conjugation* is

Hall's most recent full-length collection of poetry, I chose in this chapter to focus on Hall's *Amanuensis* (1989) as the collection of poetry that marks one point in Hall's oeuvre at which Hall's process of thinking through precarity within the precarious georgic mode is most obvious. What Hall is reaching for in his precarious georgic is what Tsing has called the latent commons, and it differs from Rita Wong's version of the latent commons in that, in *Forage*, the inability to act on or acquire certainty, the inability to be aware of what one is not yet aware of, results in a collective material politics based on collective suffering caused by global capitalist exploitation. In *Amanuensis*, the same uncertainty results in the ongoing onto-poetic practice of searching for and identifying latent commons, those rare and brief instances of multispecies cooperation and more-than-human livability. This ongoing practice allows Hall to work through the lyric subject to deconstruct the enlightenment self by calling attention to the multispecies entanglements and the precariousness that are the condition for all existence.

Hall demonstrates the importance of experientially working through to the generation of an ethics of openness and right action in *Amanuensis*. He opens the first section, "Pay Dirt," with a single-line poem that acts as one of the *ars poetica* I mentioned above, placed near the top of an otherwise blank page: "Writing is plowing near the airport" (13). The first half of the sentence, "Writing is plowing," makes clear that the two forms of labour are analogous, which is a central conceit that appears in both the imperial and precarious georgic. This *ars poetica* places Hall's poetry within the georgic tradition, even though he may not have consciously placed himself there. The line is also making an argument here about the field of perception. In Virgil's *Georgics*, writing poetry and plowing are connected through the *versus* (the lines) of the poem, and a poet can take pride in the straightness of his lines and in the aptness of his verse, just as the farmer can take pride in the straightness of his furrows. Hall represents the act of plowing from

the perspective of the farmer: while in the middle of the work, one cannot observe the straightness of the furrow nor the quality of the lines from behind the plow. The farmer must push the plow ever forward, unable to be aware of anything outside of his or her own perception. Writing poetry is also an experiential process of learning. Doing is knowing. The second half of the line calls attention to a transcendent perspective made possible by the technological potential of flight—an image juxtaposed with the nostalgic image of the plow, implying both the necessity of a transcendent perspective in the process of ethical relations and the grounded perspective of present experience. Readers can judge and interpret the quality of the poetic endeavor from the outside the process of labour that produced it, just as the people on the plane can see the straightness of the furrows. The airport, then, is the point at which awareness develops through transcendent potential. The poem's situation on the page—alone—is also important. The surrounding blank field alludes to the precariousness of the position of the farmer and the poet, who, in this metaphor, also represents more broadly the person who is engaged in the everyday activities of living. If doing is knowing, and we only know the things that we do, then the open space on the page represents all the things we are not yet aware of existing, and with which we must find ethical ways to engage. These are the things, to use Hall's words, that we are not “smart about yet” (*Ottawater* 10). The situation also recalls Hall's chosen epigraph for *Amanuensis*, a line he borrows from Danny Abse: “Working is another way of praying” (n.p.). Both the epigraph and the first poem in the collection therefore reference three cornerstones of a precarious georgic ontology: working is a way of mediating the experience of generating awareness of the unknown. Like praying, working (and poetry) open the ontological field and become a way of acquiring knowledge from the unknown.

The two poems that follow “writing is plowing near the airport” suggest a relationship

between the grounded and immanent actions of coming to awareness of the entanglements in which poets participate through working and the immanent process of creating art. Many of the poems in *Amanuensis* do not share the same direct engagement with imperial georgic imagery and concerns, but they all demonstrate the ways that our entanglements with things and other beings shape both the work and ourselves, and constitute an onto-poetics wherein the speaker hones the precision of his language so he can sharpen his awareness of the negative relations shaped by work in the Anthropocene. The second poem in “Pay-Dirt,” for example, draws attention to the way that we are constituted in our relationships with tools, but that we can never assume to know how those relations will shape us. The poem begins with the remark by John Updike that writers become writers by virtue of the existence of the tools of their craft, analogous to the riveting-gun and the riveter. Updike states, “*Why write? As soon ask: why rivet? Because a number of personal accidents drift us toward the occupation of rivetter, which pre-exists, and more importantly, the rivetting-gun exists, and we love it*” (14). In his response, the speaker points to the potential negative entanglements that arise under the oppressive conditions of late capitalism, which implicates objects and humans in negative entanglements defined by the struggle for power in a system that renders most of us powerless.

Hall’s response to Updike foregrounds the precariousness of the writer’s relation to his tools. He writes, “In this city where some of us write about work / the owner of a construction firm near bankruptcy last year / killed his lover and himself with a riveting-gun / Why write?” (14). The existence of the riveting gun, Hall argues, does not guarantee an ethical relation with the riveter, nor its use as a tool for building. In his story, the riveting gun functions as a weapon used by the owner of the construction firm at a moment of crisis (the firm near bankruptcy). The story about the construction site owner points to the complexity of the mechanisms of abuse and

oppressive capitalist relations, and points to the stakes in the speaker's relationship with language. In framing the poem with "In a city where some of us write about work," and ending it with the question, "Why write?" the speaker is asking why he should write, if words, like riveting guns, can just as easily be weapons as tools. The question itself implies that writing, like any using of tools, is a precarious process, one that involves potential catastrophe. Hall's answer to the question "why write?" is that it is, like the song in Virgil, a way of mitigating the openness to potential catastrophe that is there in every form of work, including farming, riveting, and writing.

The mitigation of potential catastrophe is also a common anxiety running through the rest of Hall's body of work. As many reviewers and critics, including Rob McLennan, have mentioned, Hall's poetry is difficult, not only because it is difficult in its technical aspects, but its repeated engagement with traumatic material makes it difficult emotionally. Although Hall does not mention the speaker's sexual abuse directly in *Amanuensis*, much of Hall's work returns frequently to the subject of sexual, physical, and emotional abuse and the deep anguish and anger of his childhood living in poverty in rural Ontario. Although they do not figure into the text of *Amanuensis*, I mention these lyric confessions about trauma because they inform an important part of how and why Hall develops a practice of awareness that simultaneously deconstructs the singular individualism of the Enlightenment subject and reconfigures it as an assemblage of memories, allusions, and affinities. In short, what we get with Hall's speaker in *Amanuensis* and elsewhere is less a cohesive speaker than a poetic voice that has been deconstructed by a traumatic encounter and reconstructed as a *process*. Like Kroetsch, Hall engages with the sudden disruption of linear teleology, but while Kroetsch sees the accident as the site of transformation through encounter, Hall sees violence and predation as another kind of site for transformation

through encounter. Violence, like the sudden shift in the riveting gun from tool to weapon, alters not only the ontological status of the object, but also the temporal field of being. In *Trauma and the Ontology of the Modern Subject*, John L. Roberts argues that the Enlightenment subject has been defined by the linear representation of time, but that an understanding of the ontology of the modern subject must occur within a kind of temporal fragmentation (9). The traumatised subject, he argues, understands the fragmented past self through future encounters through which he or she learns to reintegrate the traumatic incident. In other words, the traumatized subject must encounter their past selves in future processes of recognition and transformation. If Wong's *Forage* represents for us an ontopolitics in that she seeks to make space for competing ontological frameworks within the same poem, Hall is generating an *ontopoetics* in that his poetry performs the idea that naming what is in our world is a way of constructing a world. For Hall, the ability to identify and name violent entanglements is an especially important aspect of being able to maintain openness to transformation despite the possibility of victimization, but it is also important work in achieving that transformation.

The mitigation of these anxieties is also an important part of the way the georgics represent the function of poetry and song, and so the answer to Hall's anxieties about "Why write?" get worked out in this relationship between song and trust. This relationship is part of a little known, and rarely mentioned, theme already present in Virgil's *Georgics* that critics who focus on imperial georgic tend to overlook, but which remains an important part of the precarious georgic mode. Frans De Bruyn, John Chalker, and others have established that a key feature of the georgic mode in general is that the work of writing is analogous to the work of farming, but few mention the slightly different role from the Pastoral that poetry, or the ritualized song plays in Virgil's ontology. For both Virgil and for Hall, the precision of language is a tool

for opening the field of awareness, just as plowing is a tool for preparing the soil for growth. In both the *Georgics* and *Amanuensis*, the purpose of song (and therefore poetry), is not merely to tell *about* work, but to *perform* its own work function. In both cases, the poet must mediate the precariousness of human existence within that expanded ontological field. While Virgil spends most of Book I of the *Georgics* explaining how the farmer can learn to predict and adapt to catastrophe through the embodied labour of participating in the natural entanglements around him, this still coincides with a ritualized plea to the goddess Ceres for a bountiful harvest to sustain the coming year. The passage comes after a stark warning to farmers of the unpredictable and uncontrollable damage caused by severe storms, including high winds, floods, and lightning, and warns of the damage that can be caused to a year of work at the whim of the gods. The poet advises the farmers that some foreknowledge can be gained from “the months and stars” (29), which is to say general knowledge of local weather patterns and seasons, but that ritual and song can mediate their precarious existence through careful attention to ritual:

Be sure to pay due reverence to the gods.

When spring has come and winter is over and done with,

Yield to great Ceres the yearly rite you owe her.

Spring is the season when the lambs are plump,

The season when the wine is mellowest,

The time of year when sleep is sweetest of all,

And the shadows on the hills are at their softest.

See to it that your laborers all take part

In the rituals of the worship of the goddess:

Let the offering of honeycombs be washed  
 With milk and with soft wine; lead the propitious  
 Sacrificial victim thrice around  
 The fields the sacrifice is for, while all  
 The laborers follow along, joyfully shouting,  
 Calling on Ceres to come in under their roofs;  
 Let none of them use his sickle to cut a single  
 Ear of the ripened grain before he has wreathed  
 His brow with an oak-leaf garland and danced his artless  
 Dance and sung his song in honour of Ceres (29)

The poet's invocation of the goddess Ceres marks the point at which the farmer and rural labourers of the *Georgics* contend with the unknowability of the coming year. The ritual gesture, the “artless” dances and songs of the labourers, and the ritual sacrifice that took place in Roman culture through April and May were meant to appease the goddess so she would help improve yields for the coming harvest. Unlike in the *Eclogues*, where song signifies a dialogical relation between shepherds and their flocks, the presence of song and ritual in the *Georgics* acts as a way of mitigating the contingency and precarity of agricultural work. In the pastoral *Eclogues*, song—or by extension poetry—communicates the shepherds' context: the celebration of pastoral leisure in the face of immanent war. But in the *Georgics*, the songs of the labourers do not simply express human emotion or celebrate rural labour; they have a specific *use*. The rituals of the farmers are the pleas to the goddess to continue to provide harvests in the following harvest season; the songs, therefore, are a part of the labour used to mitigate the contingency inherent in the work of farming, the unpredictability of weather, seed, soil, animal, and tool in their

choreography of production. Song is the final mitigation of the possibility—even probability—of catastrophic failure. If one labourer misses the ritual, it could mean starvation for everyone (and every animal) dependent on the crop. In the imperial georgic that developed in the 18c, the emphasis is on the didactic element, which implies that expertise will be able to mitigate any impending catastrophe. But in Virgil, the didactic and managerial elements coexist with the element of ritual because there is no possibility of mastery. Even though the didacticism in the *Georgics* implies that it is through physical and managerial work that the farmer can alleviate the terror of powerlessness that threatens the foundations of civilization, this element of ritual in the *Georgics* speaks to Virgil's concern with the space beyond predictability that haunts the farmer's work. These two aspects of the precarious georgic are what makes it an ontological position rather than just a set of literary conventions that present a simple opposition to the Imperial georgic mode, or a political programme for social and ecological activism. Together, the ideas of “working is knowing” and of “working is another way of praying,” offer a framework for grounding the writer in an ethics of experiential awareness of him or herself among unknowable, potentially allied other beings and things as a way of mediating the contingency of not knowing what could arise from maintaining an openness to transformative encounter.

For Hall, the immanent work of writing poetry/praying is the work of learning how to identify positive and negative entanglements in the world using the embodied knowledge of trauma as a catalyst for recognition. It is the recognition of the nature of the entanglements to which he has been subjected, as well as those in which he willingly participates, that allows him to transform both his future entanglements and his understanding of his past. In *Amanuensis*, Hall locates reified images of the imperial georgic mode in several other poems in the first and second sections of *Amanuensis*, “Pay-Dirt” and “Organ-Harvest,” and identifies the entangled

relations with the settler townspeople within those images by showing how the narrative and image of the imperial georgic has become an organizing metanarrative for the community, like religion. The second poem in “Organ Harvest” is “Christ Church, Bobcaygeon.” It describes an actual object—a stained glass window in Christ Church, Bobcaygeon, Ontario<sup>62</sup>—that depicts a settler-farmer driving a team of Clydesdale horses. The speaker, however, is at a remove from the depiction of labour and observing it as the image of imperial settlement that has been reified in the church window. The poem is a glosa, structured so that the bold first lines of each stanza form another poem at the end of the poem, a linguistic assemblage that performs entanglement, a theme running through the rest of the collection. In the description, the settler, in driving the depicted Clydesdales, is “driving light / up the centre-aisle to the altar” (34). The double meaning of the line is that the window itself is directing actual sunlight up the centre-aisle of the church. But the horses, too, are light—it is the illumination in the window that makes them visible. Symbolically, the light here is also the light of faith. The church parishioners are, in turn, changed by the light of the window as well as by their faith, coming to the church seeking transformation, “all these years that light / making bowed crowns shine / mauve at prayer” (34). The meditation on the role of the church is interrupted, however, by a description of the horses in the depiction of the farmer in the church window, a “link of hard black manure ... crumbled the length of the jaw” (34). The line gives few clues as to whose jaw the manure is on, but the image suggests a critique of the church and the ossified imperial georgic that has shaped the community: the image driving the light up the centre of the aisle is tarnished.

“Another Weapon-Song” builds on the theme of the complicity of organized religion and the imperial georgic in maintaining the cycle of violence and control over both the nonhuman

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<sup>62</sup> A picture of the stained-glass mural is also featured on the cover of Hall's *Hearthedral*.

world and other human beings. The speaker remembers a description of the scold's bridle, a commonly-used torture device meant for “nags” and “shrews”—women who too loudly or frequently express themselves.

*It fit over a woman's head*

*locked in back*

*had a mouth-plate silencer—*

*Thus smirking church-elders*

*drove their 'quiet' Goodies to market. (44)*

The recognition of the violence of object like the ‘scold’s bridle,’ meant to silence women using the same kind of tool used to control horses, names the violence of the imperial georgic by collapsing, in one image, the ontology of mastery over not only humans but also nonhumans. The final section of the book, “To Be More Round,” returns to this theme, and begins with the speaker's pointing to the only book his mother owned, which is now his: *Hell on Horses and Women* (1953), by Alice Marriot, which details oral accounts of ranch life from the women who work on them. The speaker then points to the signature his mother left on the book, “Written in the distant hills / in her best matriculation hand / Mrs. Cecil Hall” (51). The signature, recreated visually in the poem, implies both that his mother is rural and that her relationship to that book mattered, but it also points to the institution which removes her name, and has renamed her as her husband's property.

This example is again called up in the speaker’s editing job for Carswell Case digest: a legal service for editing and citing Case Law. In “Carswell Case Digest,” the typos in a legal case seeking damages for work injury accidentally reveal the nature of relations between industry and

those subject to working within it: “Probable ~~casual~~ [causal] relationship / between work and ~~industry~~ [injury]” (20).<sup>63</sup> Typos are one of any number of accidents in language that call attention to its use as a tool. They are a malfunction of the relationship between the writer’s body and the writing instrument that creates a new, but unintended meaning, and the irony created by this accidental doubling of meaning calls attention to the parts of language that are at once available for use and that also withdraw from human use or understanding. Hall generates humor from the euphemistic language used as part of an ethics of maintaining the appearance of powerful action. In “(guide for executive suicide),” Hall lists a series of dead metaphors that culminate in, “Put your money / where your mouth is / Shoot your mouth off,” suggesting that the trajectory of the empty slogans of capitalist personal success heads toward death, rather than life (27). For example, the phrase “put your money where your mouth is,” implies a kind of integrity—that action will follow from intention. But the actual phrase is an order dependent on capital, and so ties one’s integrity to one’s capital. “Shoot your mouth off” is a metaphor for speaking rashly, usually given in censure. Hall points out the violence in this image and in the phrase, because it expresses the idea that speaking directly and precisely against oppressive structures risks the speakers’ being made silent by those structures. “(guide to executive suicide)” is striking in its demonstration of the violence of those metaphors. Hall first directs the importance of precisely naming negative or violent entanglements, and the risk involved in that naming, toward corporate structures that build and maintain modern capitalism, but they also speak back to more intimate entanglements, as with the scold’s bridle. Hall is demonstrating the ways in which our accidental encounters with language help us accurately name violent and negative entanglements, and how those identifications alter our understanding of past entanglements,

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<sup>63</sup> Square brackets not included in the original poem, which was represented visually with the words in square brackets placed above the words that have been struck out as corrections.

encounters, and the development of the self. In order to be able to use his tools well and accurately name these violent entanglements, the poet has to be open to accident and contingency in the same way that the farmer has to be open to them in order to see the fruits of his labour.

He eventually begins to show how sharpening one's ability to use language to feel out the nature of one's relations extends beyond the self in learning to identify positive relations, beginning with identifying affinities in other poets and adapting to the knowledge they offer. Hall does this by absorbing their words—ultimately taking in their ontological understanding of language and adapting his own practice with theirs as didactic examples. In “Letter to Parliament Street Library,” the speaker steals Zbigniew Herbert's<sup>64</sup> *Report from the Besieged City* as though he were stealing and eating food from a garden, “[s]licing the end-pages out of this book / and peeling away its catalogue number” (39). The peeling and slicing of the catalogue number and end pages take the book out of circulation—a harvest. Hall draws attention to the way we absorb information and technique from other writers. In consuming Herbert's work (and paying the fee for the lost book), the speaker allows himself the freedom to absorb Herbert's language into his own, telling the library, “*Say card-holder left book on subway / Or tell the truth—say these poems / have realized Herbert's intentions for them / are bread pilot-light and samizdat*<sup>65</sup> in one / have added history's uproar to my song” (38). The nourishment offered by Herbert is that same nourishment Moure refers to in Hall's own work. The work of Edward Thomas, “contemplative / stroller of commons” (53) appears similarly in *Amanuensis*. Hall writes, “A soil analysis / could find him: // an open-eyed nutrient / in my words” (53). Hall's poetry aims to acknowledge how past poets have nourished his own poetics, and in turn have helped to build this ontology of

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<sup>64</sup> Herbert was a Polish poet and member of the Polish resistance movement during the Second World War.

<sup>65</sup> The reproduction of forbidden documents by hand, passed from reader to reader.

precarity through mutual affinities. In naming Thomas as a “stroller of commons,” Hall points to the precarious georgic literary history that has shaped his relations.

*Amanuensis* connects the imperial georgic with the Anthropocene, late-capitalism, and fascism.<sup>66</sup> In performing the entanglement between his own work and that of other poets, Hall begins to make a distinction between an understanding of history as a narrative, and historiography as a process. This disruption of linear historical narrative begins to undo the imperial georgic’s emphasis on linear progressive time. The poets whose work Hall forms affinitive entanglements with are no less historical figures, in that Zbigniew Herbert and Edward Thomas are both connected to the Second and First World Wars, respectively. Herbert was a member of the Polish resistance movement, and Thomas was a vocal anti-war poet who died in the First World War. Both are also well-canonized poets critical of war and imperialism but affiliated with nature poetry. But Hall also points to how easily the impact of their writing about the ontological foundations of violent political systems becomes lost when we become farther removed from them in time. This is especially obvious in poems like “Rudolph Hess,” in which Hall jokingly names a cat “Rudolph Hess,” acknowledging its predatory qualities, but realizes that once he has come to admire the cat, the joke reminds him of the ethical dangers of losing contextual awareness, since by naming the cat after a Nazi war criminal, he has failed to recognize the difference between the cat’s instinctual drive for survival and violent human calculation:

but he’s old alone clawless  
can’t get outside squats

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<sup>66</sup> If this seems a bold claim, one only need to think of the “Blood and Soil!” slogan of the Nazi party and its connection to Lebensraum, and how it was repeated in chants of neofascists during their protest in Charlottesville, Virginia, in August 2017, to call up the uncomfortable connection.

on the chicken-wire fire-escape—

Rudolph Hess

I call him

(joking) and feel each time implicated

deeper into what history does

for a living which is

unsharpen memory's weapons/tools

then kill us. (37)

Hall's joke calls attention to the predatory nature of the cat, now in its feeble age and confined to the indoors, and compares it to high-ranking Nazi official, Rudolph Hess. Hess served with the Nazis until he attempted to negotiate a peace deal with the UK in 1941, and he was taken prisoner in Scotland, where he spent his days in prison until his death by suicide. Hess was also a proponent of the Nazi ideology of *Lebensraum* ("Living Room"), which was a settler-colonial, race-based ideology advocating that a nation was an organism with an imperative to spread. Hall's speaker (and, in fact, the Nazis) sees this ideology as analogous to British and French imperialism and the American ideology of Manifest Destiny.<sup>67</sup> The allusions tie the poem back to Hall's criticisms of the imperial georgic as a violent ontology, by showing how imperial georgic settler-colonialism was analogous to one of the driving pillars of fascist political thought. This is the shock of awareness, and the joke itself brings the horror of Hess's crimes back into full view,

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<sup>67</sup> Ian Klink and Mark Bassin argue that the essay written by German geographer Friedrich Ratzel (1844-1904), "*Lebensraum: a biogeographical study*" that would be used by the Nazis as justification for their racist ideology of expansion, "should be read as an attempt to draw on basic Darwinian ideas to account for the expansive tendency of late nineteenth-century imperialism and state competition. By treating historical and biological processes alike, Ratzel famously came to naturalise both the territorial configuration of world politics and the phenomenon of inter-state war" (53).

because the speaker is reminded as he makes it that the cat's natural predatory instinct is not comparable to the deliberate choices made by Hess and the Nazi party to engage in genocide, nor would their intentions be the same. Furthermore, the ideology of Lebensraum itself is an example of the way ideas become naturalized and weaponized against other human beings.

This misattribution of human calculation to an animal leads Hall to confess how a process of generating awareness of things and relations is a process of embodied labour, and brings him back from his own violent rage against the nonhuman beings around him:

When I was 8 I quit sucking my thumb  
 climbed down out of the apple tree  
 and started shooting—rabbits groundhogs  
 porcupines starlings raccoons fish  
 a dog and nearly my sister—

As penance  
 I choose to worship by touch-study  
 each day's blunted detail. (37-38)

This passage brings new meaning to some of the first poems, including the one that appears beneath Danny Abse's epigraph, "Working is another way of praying," in "Pay-Dirt." The rest of the poem emphasizes the precarious and contingent nature of relying on language, allusion, and writing to judge the nature of ontological relations. Hall demonstrates the contingency of moving through a world where the possibility of violence and the inability to survive is entangled with a person's relative ability to navigate inherently violent or abusive structures of relations, like capitalism (or fascism), and the risk involved in the critique of those systems of

relations. Writing becomes “A prayer to things handled / as the things handled / pray back to us” (15), because, like the riveting gun, words are the tools on which the poet depends, but they are imbued with a sense of precariousness because meaning is never fully stable. “When we handle things and then write words / we speak of that interchange of prayers / but when we handle only pens / we begin to pray to our pens for words / that are solid excuses for having let go” (15).

What makes *Amanuensis* a precarious georgic is this acknowledgement: that writing is a process of labour that involves using language as a tool but also as song—not just instrumental but also ritual. “Letting go,” then, becomes a process of attempting to let go of the security and promise of ‘progress’ that may be found in salaried labour in favour of seeking out the immanent and contingent relations of the latent commons.

In the final section of *Amanuensis*, Hall demonstrates the ethical and moral affinities that arise from the latent commons, and how this process of noticing has changed not only his poetics and understanding of past relations, but also his behavior. This section is set apart formally from the others as a long poem sequence, an assemblage of ideas. Hall appeals to objects that will help him overcome the temptation to exert power over another human for meaningless sex by appealing first to “a mint toothpick / to guard my mouth from kisses / nothing would be meant by” (56), and then “An over-ripe pear / for each of my hands to squeeze / 'til the urge to just use someone / passes” (56). The poem points to an altered sense that the speaker has of his relationships and intentions, and how he has re-evaluated his entanglements by choice. These altered relations are returned back on the world of the imperial georgic, implying an altered sense of the human and nonhuman relations Hall derives from his ability to identify violent entanglements. Later in the sequence, tulips, in their dying, return us both to the church Clydesdales earlier in the collection and to the bridle as torture device, but in an image of

freedom and relief: “they bow in splayed arcs / and half-seem to nuzzle each other – horses / calmed by the absence / of call or harness” (62). In the penultimate poem of the final sequence,<sup>68</sup>

A chickadee

imbeds itself

in the fog

watches

a crab-apple—sh

a long time

puts its head

under its wing

to be more round (63)

Hall is still learning, at this point, to recognize positive entanglements, but now his skill has turned toward relationships in which he is not immediately a part. The chickadee poem demonstrates not that Hall understands what the chickadee wants or what it is thinking. It is only stating as precisely as possible what the chickadee does: to stare at a crabapple, and then to put its head under its wing, which gives it a roundness. But the context of the poem suggests that the chickadee is studying the crabapple, as Hall studies things and relations in the world around him. The poem, then, is about the process of noticing the attention and absorption of knowledge through nonhuman relations as well as human-nonhuman relations and human-human relations. Each of these instances pushes toward an intersubjectivity based in a recognition of desire, a

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<sup>68</sup> And, incidentally, possibly the cutest depiction of a bird I've ever read.

careful movement through the world that points at an ontological process behind all transformative work.

The final poem of the collection, which also sets up much of Hall's later work, presents Hall's engagement with poetics as a series of broken tools. The image of the broken tool recalls the chance encounters Hall has with language, other poets, other people, and ideas that have shifted his understanding of both past and present entanglements. The poem describes the killdeer, a species of bird that builds its nests in open fields, and lures away predators by pretending it has a broken wing. The killdeer's cries, which the poet translates as "here I am / here I am," and "my pain / my pain" (64), lead us back to how the traumatic encounter, and Hall's writing about it, actually point outward to the violent entanglements that victimize all of us, and not inward, to his own traumatic history. In other words, the killdeer becomes an apt image for how Hall has built an ontology using trauma as a transformative tool for learning to identify violent entanglements as well as positive entanglements, and in so doing, to be able to adapt to a world in which predation is possible at both an intimate, personal level, and at a geopolitical or even planetary level. These cries are, according to the speaker, "another waving of old tools / as if they were broken wings" (64). Hall's tools only appear to be broken. Importantly, these last two poems show that the process is also collective rather than just individual: not just the poet but also the nonhumans are studying, noticing, entering into relation with others and also using their cries of pain and brokenness not only to protect themselves but more to protect others from predation. Poetry becomes, then, the practice that realigns the poet with both the task of widening his ontological field, and with reaffirming his relationship to language as a tool for identifying and attempting to resist the violent systems of entanglements that constitute the dominant ontologies of the Anthropocene.

Phil Hall's precarious georgic performs the processes of learning to identify positive and negative entanglements that either thrive from death—entanglements Tsing aligns with Empire ("Getting By" 74) or align with supporting life—something Tsing calls "more-than-human livability" ("Getting By" 74). *Amanuensis* and Hall's other works align with Rita Wong's emphasis on living with precarity in *Forage*, but without offering a utopian programme for social organizations that combats capitalist expansion. Christian Bök, attempts to displace the human subject by focusing his scientific conceptualist *Xenotext* project on the bacterium that is at the centre of his genetic experimentation, but ends up recreating the positivist subject of assumed objectivity at the centre of current scientific debate. In doing so, he also inadvertently imposes the socio-sexual and temporal organizations of the imperial georgic on both the experiment and the text of *The Xenotext—Book I*. At first glance, Hall may seem to be recreating this same problem using the lyric mode in *Amanuensis*, but, through the body of his work, performs the intensely personal deconstruction of the lyric self by learning to identify the entanglements in which he participates and from which he benefits, and uses this knowledge as a catalyst for changing those relations. Hall, then, *cannot* offer a programme for deconstructing the imperial georgic mode, because he offers us instead a process that emphasizes that any truly constructive response to violence and oppression cannot just be a matter of following a program or viewing things from the transcendent, distanced perspective of the airplane in the opening metaphor, but has to involve the immanent process of working with the unknowns. It is a precarious georgic because it asks: after we have identified and rejected abusive entanglements from which we have benefitted, how do we know what to embrace and what is left? This precarious georgic process offers us a way to move into unknown space and locates in that space the imaginative capacity for change.

## Conclusion

### Ecological Crisis and the Ontological Turn

In “Getting by in Terrifying Times,” Anna Tsing argues that “Capitalism is not an abstract machine but situated in a varied set of histories and relations” (74). In this dissertation, I have argued that the imperial georgic and precarious georgic are two important ontologies that shape relations in the Anthropocene and global capitalism. The imperial georgic, which reached the height of its (named) popularity in eighteenth-century England, has constituted a way of knowing not only how to farm, but also how to organize a scalable method of farming—one that can be transplanted to vastly different landscapes and used to shape the relations of those places under its logic of expansion. Its organization and standardization of agricultural science and technique, its socio-sexual organization of space and time, and its championing of human domination over nonhuman ecologies have evolved to shape these sets of human-nonhuman and interhuman relations under late capitalist systems of control. This is partially the story of the Anthropocene, the human drive for mastery over nature, and the consequences of the deep geological impact of human life on the planet. The imperial georgic produces a scalable ontology, and whatever challenges the scalability of the worldview has often been ignored, violently suppressed, or erased. The imperial georgic sees what is useful for colonization and scalability to see: British and European agricultural sciences, and their affinities with imperial and colonial ideologies, have attempted to shape and master ecosystems and suppress other human civilizations rather than seek to adapt to or live with them.

In this dissertation, I argued that Canadian literature that deals with agrarian concerns is best read through the georgic, rather than the pastoral, mode and traced the imperial georgic and

precarious georgic modes through several representative texts in Canadian literature. In my first chapter, I argued that long poems like Oliver Goldsmith's "The Rising Village" and Isabella Valancy Crawford's "Malcolm's Katie" were representative texts operating in the imperial georgic mode in Canada, which constituted not only a set of generic conventions, but also an ontology—a world-making project—designed to be scaled up for the expansion of the empire. Writers like Crawford, however, had already begun to challenge the linear teleology of the imperial georgic and its emphasis on the family farm. Crawford, for example, openly questions the ways the imperial georgic is reproduced through women's bodies, particularly when women's agency is legally and socially limited in settler culture. I argued that Susanna Moodie's *Roughing It in the Bush*, with its emphasis on adaptation, generic variety, and collaboration, provided an early example of the precarious georgic, elements of which would influence further precarious georgic writing in Canada.

My first chapter acted as the foundation for tracing how the imperial georgic and precarious georgic modes appeared and reappeared in Canadian literature during resurgences of Canadian nationalist thinking and changes in Canadian agricultural policy. My second chapter argued that the imperial georgic mode emphasized the heterosexual family farm as central to the nation-building project. Reading Frederick Philip Grove's *Settlers of the Marsh* alongside Martha Ostenso's *Wild Geese*, I argued that *Wild Geese* disrupted the linear teleological narrative of the imperial georgic by gesturing toward alternative possibilities and trajectories of desire, even if Ostenso ultimately foreclosed on those trajectories at the end of the novel. My third chapter continued to explore the disruption of the imperial georgic in Canada, arguing that Al Purdy's *In Search of Owen Roblin* and its accommodation of multiple timescales—what Paul Huebener has called Provisional Time—gestured toward the imperial georgic as a relic of

Canadian cultural history. Robert Kroetsch's "The Ledger," however, focused on the object and accident as central to theorizing Provisional Time. In doing so, the poem anticipates the relational and precarious georgics of Christian Bök, Rita Wong, and Phil Hall.

In my fourth chapter, I argued that rather than disappearing from Canadian literature after the 1970s, the imperial georgic had scaled up to represent the planetary networks and supply chains of global capitalism, and that its emphasis on technological mastery had permeated even the smallest unit of the living organism with the invention of genetic modification. Christian Bök's *Xenotext: Book I*, and its corresponding experiment, for example, could be read as an example of the imperial georgic because of its emphasis on technoscientific mastery and its imposition of heteronormative and anthropocentric gender roles on the non-gendered bacteria, despite its environmentalist sympathies. In contrast, Rita Wong's *Forage* and Phil Hall's *Amanuensis* can be read as precarious georgics that work to disrupt the imperial georgic's emphasis on technoscientific mastery, reliance on heteronormative and patriarchal systems of reproduction and anthropocentrism by emphasizing the heightened sense of precarity that erupts from these globalized capitalist chains of production and consumption. Especially in *Amanuensis*, this emphasis on precarity generates a politics of attention, collaboration, and adaptation that offers a powerful counterpoint to despair in times of ecological, social, and political crisis.

Tracing the imperial georgic's evolution through Canadian literary history allows us to contextualize and demonstrate how a variety of social, political, economic, and ecological injustices and oppressions are deeply interconnected, showing how colonialist and agrarian capitalist thinking has persisted and extended itself—and continues to persist—culturally as well as politically in not only literary forms but also, powerfully, in other forms of popular culture—

both Canadian and American (often consumed by Canadians), from advertising, to visual art, to film. For example, although it is an American advertisement that aired during the Superbowl in 2013, Canadian audiences would have seen, and many would have deeply resonated with, the Dodge Ram commercial titled “So God Made a Farmer.”<sup>69</sup> The commercial superimposes 1930s radio personality Paul Harvey’s voice over nostalgic and stylized images of farmers doing farm work. While the images themselves occasionally feature women farmers (but never people of colour or migrant farm labourers), the text, a poem by Harvey called “God Made a Farmer”, reinforces imperial georgic ideas about farming, beginning with the Biblical idea of human dominion. It begins with the line, “And on the eighth day, God looked down on his planned paradise and said, ‘I need a caretaker.’ So God made a farmer” (Harvey). It also reinforces the sociosexual distribution of the work, emphasizing that a farmer must “bale a family together with the soft, strong bonds of sharing” and “sigh and then reply with smiling eyes when his son says that he wants to spend his life doing what Dad does” (Harvey). The commercial ends by selling us the very identity of this farmer, in text that appears above the image of a Dodge Ram pickup truck parked in a farmyard and declares that it is “For the farmer in all of us.” This sentiment is echoed in Canada by the marketing of President’s Choice “Free From” meat products, which promise the consumer direct information about the farm on which the cows, chickens, and pigs are raised. The packaging, at the time of my completing this project, offers consumers black-and-white stylized representations of the farmers themselves, usually heterosexual couples or single men and women, almost universally white. The products boast their “natural & organic” status by visually and textually offering the feeling of building a relationship with the “authenticity” of

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<sup>69</sup> See Ram Trucks. “Official Ram Trucks Superbowl Commercial ‘Farmer.’” Published 3 Feb 2013. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/AMpZ0TGjbWE>

Canadian agriculture. More recently, the Supreme Court case of *Monstanto v. Schmeiser* has been turned into a documentary theatre production (Annabel Soutar's *Seeds* (2004)) and will soon become a film titled *Percy*, starring Christopher Walken and Christina Ricci in 2019 (IMDB). Imperial georgic representations of technological progress, managerialism, imperial expansion, and anthropocentrism still hold considerable power in Canadian literature and culture. However, within the georgic tradition itself is an alternative tradition to the Imperial that offers all kinds of valuable tools for developing more ethical and sustainable practices. While understanding these tools does not offer the hope of achieving a utopia, it does and has always offered the courage necessary to exist within that latent commons.

As I am finishing this project, shadows of the imperial georgic ontologies of colonization and expansion expressed in texts like *The Rising Village*, *Malcolm's Katie*, *Settlers of the Marsh*, and *Xenotext* continue to actively shape relations globally and in Canada. On the global scale, Canada's industrial agricultural sector looks toward what many companies allegedly perceive to be potential new investment opportunities in Brazil. Its newly-elected right-wing extremist government, headed by Jair Bolsonaro, plans to institute environmental policies that reflect the imperial georgic ontology of scalable expansion and human domination of nonhuman ecosystems and other human civilizations. Bolsonaro has pledged to merge the environment and agriculture ministries, "raising fears the ultra-right leader will ramp up conversion of Amazon rainforest into farmland" (Watson, "Fears for Amazon"). He has frequently attacked the indigenous people who live in the Amazon, indicating genocidal intent with statements like, "It's a shame that the Brazilian cavalry wasn't as efficient as the Americans, who exterminated their Indians" (qtd in Watson). Canada's response in the agricultural sector has been to further encourage trade with Brazil, with the CBC releasing an analysis speculating about "potential

opportunities” (Arsenault) in the Brazilian market, and Export and Distribution Canada (EDC: a Crown Corporation) insisting that “agriculture and agri-food is a leading industry for Canada, and a major export priority for Brazil” (“Putting Relationships First”). In Canada, the shadow of the imperial georgic haunts the Supreme Court ruling against the Federal Government’s duty to consult First Nations and indigenous communities about the drafting of new legislation,<sup>70</sup> allegations of ongoing forced sterilizations of indigenous women,<sup>71</sup> and the continued use of neonicotinoid pesticides like imidacloprid, which have, as I stated in the last chapter, been connected to colony collapse disorder in honey bees<sup>72</sup> and in native pollinators. At the local level, this same ontology is played out recently in land disputes between cottagers and the Curve Lake First Nations over traditional indigenous farming of wild rice in Pigeon Lake.<sup>73</sup> The racist implications of the ontology haunted the acquittal by all-white jury of Gerald Stanley, a Saskatchewan farmer accused of second-degree murder for the shooting death of a 22-year-old Cree man, Colton Boushie outside Battleford in 2016.<sup>74</sup> Stanley’s defense for shooting Boushie

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<sup>70</sup> See Tasker, John Paul, “Supreme Court rules Ottawa has no duty to consult with Indigenous people before drafting new laws.” Posted Oct. 11, 2018. *CBC News*. [www.cbc.ca/news/politics/tasker-indigenous-rights-consultation-parliament-1.4858321](http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/tasker-indigenous-rights-consultation-parliament-1.4858321)

<sup>71</sup> See Kirkup, Kristy, “Examine ‘monstrous’ allegations of forced sterilization of Indigenous women: NDP”. Posted November 19, 2018. *CBC News*. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/sterilization-indigenous-allegations-forced-1.4911837>

<sup>72</sup> Honeybees are non-native to North America, but related species of bees, solitary bees, are also affected by the use of neonicotinoid pesticides.

<sup>73</sup> See Johnson, Rhiannon. “Cottage country conflict over wild rice leads to years of rising tensions.” *CBC News*. Posted Nov 12, 2018. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/kawartha-lakes-pigeon-lake-wild-rice-dispute-1.4894495>

<sup>74</sup> On August 9, 2016, the Stanley family claimed that Colton Boushie, his girlfriend Belinda Jackson, and his friends Eric Meechance and Cassidy Whetstone were stealing from their farm when the group was coming back from a day of swimming and drinking. Stanley fired three shots, the final one killing Boushie at point-blank range. His defense lawyer had claimed that the killing was a “freak accident” as the result of “hang fire,” an unlikely mechanical malfunction. The all-white jury acquitted Stanley of the charge of second-degree murder and the related charge of manslaughter. News coverage of the case covered not only the immediate details of the acquittal, but also the history of colonization in Battleford, which includes the near-starvation of the Cree people because of the over-hunting and poor land management of settlers to Saskatchewan. Starvation led to insurrection by the Cree, after which eight Cree men were hanged outside Battleford by the Crown (Brave NoiseCat).

is embedded in the long history of settler violence against the Cree people of Battleford and surrounding areas, bolstered by the history of government land claim policies which, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, led to the threat of starvation, and subsequent uprising and government suppression of the Cree people. In all of these cases, the imperial georgic's scalable model of colonization still violently and overwhelmingly affects indigenous people who live in Canada, but it continues to exercise dominance in general over the agricultural industry: industrial monocultures are still the rule in Canadian rural landscapes, and the patenting of industrial seed continues to threaten Canada's biodiversity.

These instances of the imperial georgic still in operation in Canadian culture frame a grim reality of Canada in the Anthropocene, but this is also a point in history where the precarious georgic, which has always been a counter and complicating discourse to the imperial georgic, can become especially important. The emphasis on the experience of learning how to adapt to the unknown and unfamiliar that finds some expression in Moodie's *Roughing It in the Bush*, the queer possibilities that trouble the heterosexual normativity of the imperial georgic in Ostenso's *Wild Geese*, the disruption of linear teleological narratives in Purdy's *In Search of Owen Roblin* and Kroetsch's "The Ledger," the attention to networks of human and non-human relations in Rita Wong's *Forage*, and the experience of generating attention and awareness expressed in Hall's *Amanuensis* have all generated imagined alternatives to the imperial georgic's instrumentalist and extractive ontology. At the time I am writing this conclusion, the International Panel on Climate Change, a subcommittee of the United Nations, has just released their report detailing the possibility of catastrophic levels of global warming as early as 2040, twenty-two years from now. In the report, the authors stress the importance of "mitigation and adaptation" ("Synthesis Report") methods that will have to result in a radical transformation of

society, across all levels of governance. The authors suggest that “increasing efforts to mitigate and adapt to climate change imply an increasing complexity of interactions, encompassing connections among human health, water, energy, land use and biodiversity” (“Synthesis Report”). While the report, like the situation, feels especially grim, we might take to heart Tsing’s assertion that if “precarity has become commonplace” (73) in the Anthropocene, we can mitigate the mobilization of the violent politics of what might be called “the end of progress” (73). What I have chosen to call the precarious georgic is not so much a singular, coherent counter-discourse as a wide variety of non-scalable sub-modalities of the georgic that allow for adaptation, contradiction, and the acceptance of vulnerability. It has provided an alternate way of knowing even at the height of the imperial georgic’s popularity in the mid-to-late eighteenth century. Tracing the sub-modes of the precarious georgic through that same history has shown how the imperial georgic mode—though the dominant mode in Canadian literature—was never an uncontested ontological position. The precarious georgic, while it did not always involve conscious critique or resistance to ontologies of colonization, was always present to undermine the certainty with which the imperial georgic ontologies asserted themselves as self-evident and natural.

Precarious georgics are valuable because they emphasize and perform the messiness and non-scalability of assemblages and encounters between groups of humans and between humans and the nonhuman world. Even though the precarious georgic has not always corresponded to an all-encompassing anti-racist, anti-imperial, anti-capitalist or anti-heteropatriarchal stance in each case, texts like *Roughing It in the Bush*, *Wild Geese*, “The Ledger,” *Forage*, and *Amanuensis* have presented us either with a critique of aspects of the imperial georgic or demonstrated a process whereby the imperial georgic’s logic of scalability has broken down. What’s valuable

about the precarious georgic in Canadian literature is its emphasis on and demonstration of the process of enacting that radical change in relation, showing how deep attention, observation, and openness to the realities of precarity and vulnerability can transform not only what we know about the world around us but how we come to know it: not through domination and instrumentalism but through assemblages built from mutual benefit. In the narratives of Moodie's *Roughing It in the Bush* and the poetry of Phil Hall, especially, writers perform the building of an ontological field through the chance encounters with and conscious participation in multispecies entanglements. In *Amanuensis*, Hall's precarious georgic process of "excoriat[ing] normalcy" (*The Small Nouns* 18) is valuable not only because it teaches us how to live with the condition of precarity, but also because it forms a politics and ethics of language that leads backwards, through all of our individual present and historical entanglements, interrogates them, and encourages us to come to terms with our culpability in systems formed of violent ontologies, like the imperial georgic, and the Anthropocene. The precarious georgic envisions a way to consciously use that politics to generate new assemblages and systems that have the potential to transform past entanglements.

Anna Tsing describes this process in "Getting by in Terrifying Times" when she explains that she "[does] not advocate building alliances with just any nonhuman" (75). What the precarious georgic is doing, and what Anna Tsing advocates doing, is learning to identify the assemblages—both human and nonhuman—that serve an ontology that seeks to "protect patches of more-than-human livability" (73). She illustrates this call to a more-than-human politics by comparing the matsutake mushroom that was the protagonist in *The Mushroom at the End of the World* with "phytophthora, the pathogens that cause 'sudden oak-death' in California and the astonishingly fast decline of ash and alder in Europe and the United Kingdom" (74).

Phytophthora are the result of global capitalist networks shipping soil, seeds, and trees in industrial nurseries. She argues, “When living materials are concentrated from around the world in industrial nurseries—and then shipped haphazardly wherever markets take them—the virulence of plant pathogens burgeons out of control, destroying the fragile coordinations of Holocene ecologies” (74). Phytophthora, in this context, are organisms that *benefit* from late capitalism’s globalized networks of exchange of living materials. They align themselves, Tsing argues, with assemblages that serve empire. “Where matsutake promote anthropogenic woodlands, companions to humans throughout the Holocene, the new phytophthora destroy them. These phytophthora are anthropogenic killers, ravaging more-than-human livability” (74). Tsing’s example prompts us to think about how nonhuman beings participate in economic relationships with humans, and what a more-than-human economics might entail. Although the precarious georgic does not offer such a programme, its emphasis on process, adaptability, and change, its emphasis on the precise naming of potential and established harm, requires us to use our attentiveness and curiosity to help us imagine stepping into a space where this kind of thinking becomes possible.

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