

I learned to write nice as hell . . . . Pa's gonna be mad when he sees me do that. He don't like no fancy stuff like that . . . . Kinda scares 'im, I guess. Ever' time Pa seen writin', somebody took somepin away from 'im. (John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 56-57)

**University of Alberta**

**The Smallholder Project**

by

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## Abstract

This dissertation examines the ideological force of the smallholder trope in various discourses, from classical political economy to early Canadian poetry and agribusiness advertising. The project investigates the increasing elision of smallholders from the socio-economic landscape in Canada by tracing the discursive means of their erasure. I theorize smallholders as ideological tools for reifying industrial culture by focusing on the rhetorical strategies of their deployment.

Smallholders emerge in this interdisciplinary analysis as liminal figures enunciated through two motifs: the nature-culture binary and the savage-civilized binary. Through these familiar formulations, smallholders perform ideological tasks in the texts under discussion. These texts, from the political economy of Adam Smith, John Stuart Mill, and Karl Marx to contemporary Canadian fiction by Mary Lawson, deploy smallholders to explain production in processes which are prefigured by rhetorical forms; thus smallholders are at once productive of discourse and figures for discursive production. The dissertation focuses less on “what is” and more on “what is said,” as the figures emergent in these discourses have less to do with flesh and blood smallholders than with rhetorical strategies and attendant ideological effects. Smallholders are then allegories for the manner in which discourses perform political work.

The comparative analysis of western European literature, political economy, and early Canadian literature, as well as the recent documentary film *Food, Inc.* and various pop-cultural texts, reveals that smallholders are marshalled as liminal figures. They hover at the limit between pre-capitalist and capitalist

socio-economic forms and between primitive and civilized worlds. Smallholders are mobilized to naturalize and thereby moralize forms of capitalist production, as this form of production does the ideological work of expropriating smallholders. In discourse, smallholders are the naturally good labourers that perform the political tasks of explaining capitalist production while reifying it. Smallholders, because they retain traces of their primitive, pre-capitalist past, may also be denigrated and relegated to extinction.

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## **Introduction: The Smallholder Project**

### **Hypothesis on Smallholders' Discursive Force**

Ann Bermingham's study of English rustic painting discovers a striking phenomenon: there was a dramatic rise in pastoral works after the countryside they depict had drastically changed. Bermingham points out that rustic painting's "emergence . . . as a major genre . . . at the end of the eighteenth century coincided with the accelerated enclosure of the English countryside" (1). Rural depopulation, increasing urbanization, and the ensuing Industrial Revolution concentrated land ownership into fewer hands. Farms became larger, more mechanized, and more productive, while the peasantry vastly decreased in numbers. Paradoxically, the "period of accelerated enclosure (roughly 1750-1815)" (Bermingham 1) was rapidly erasing the rural England that was being increasingly inscribed in rustic painting. Bermingham unravels the paradox by arguing that

the countryside took on an ideal form and performed the ideological function of providing urban industrial culture with the myths to sustain it. The actual encroachment on the countryside by industry, city, and suburb, together with the absorption of rural symbolism into urban values and experience, in no way, then, diminished the importance of the countryside as a cultural ideal.

Believed in more as it exists less, it had become one of our modern superstitions. (193)

Bermingham argues that no actual peasants need to exist for depictions of the dirty yet disciplined, strong yet obedient, patriotic yet apolitical, and historically specific yet natural peasants undertaking their labour to be culturally prized. For Bermingham, the myth is what matters. The spike in rustic painting coinciding with the socio-economic elimination of the rustic subject can be explained fully neither by socio-cultural nostalgia nor by an aestheticized desire for the natural. As Bermingham suggests, smallholders become virtual but continue to do real work: they become mythic figures that perform ideological functions through art. This dissertation explores the force of the smallholder figure as it operates in discourse as a myth, which industrial culture eliminates yet simultaneously perpetuates.

In a similar context, but on another continent, smallholders continue to be set to their discursive tasks long after they are unable to continue their traditional ones. Todd Babiak's article on Canada's largest country music festival, the Big Valley Jamboree, grabs a spot on the front page of *The Edmonton Journal* on August 5, 2007. The Giller Prize nominated author notes, like Bermingham, that the depopulation of rural areas does not diminish the power of the rural in the cultural imaginary. Babiak cites the 2006 Canadian census which locates Alberta as "one of the most urban provinces in Canada" (A 1). As Babiak observes, if "'rural' means anything in Alberta anymore, it's this contemporary mixture of farmers and ranchers with Blackberries, town folk who keep horses and city

people deeply under the spell of nostalgia” (A 1). “Even as Edmonton and Calgary attract more and more citizens from around the world, and ease toward cosmopolitanism,” he continues, “the story they're telling, and selling, at the Big Valley Jamboree is far too powerful to be overwhelmed by migration patterns, statistics and the proliferation of fusion cuisine” (A 1). The concert is located in Camrose, a small city of about 17,000 people, a mere ninety kilometres from Edmonton’s downtown core. In vast Alberta, as in most Canadian provinces, the country is never far from the city. But the city grows in size while rural communities dwindle.

While the Canadian smallholder wastes away, the big capitalist farmer grows stronger. Babiak interviews “Jake Kirschenman, 19, who owns a small ranch of his own with 100 head of feeder cattle” (A 1). This is indeed a small operation, perhaps supplemented by a second job, one like the operation 48.2% of Canadian farmers have (CBC News). Maybe this off-farm income is the only profitable one, as is the case for the 44% of farms in Canada that reported an operating loss in 2006 (CBC News). Since World War II, there are increasingly fewer farmers in Canada. The farms that remain are progressively larger. For example, 2.6% of Canada’s farms account for 40% of total farm revenue in 2006 (CBC News). Babiak points to the overwhelmingly conservative politics of rural Alberta but his most perceptive insight is that “As Edmonton celebrates Heritage Days and Calgary prepares to launch GlobalFest, highlighting diversity and multiculturalism, they're singing an entirely different song here at Big Valley. It's a song of immense power, stuffed with easy wisdom and cliches, thank-yous and

threats, heartbreak and horses, and we know every word” (A 1). As Bermingham demonstrates, and Babiak suggests, while “the rural” as a place where people live and work decreases in actuality, its symbolic cache, although riddled with clichés and nostalgia, packs a potent punch. This pervasive force persists, overpowering smallholders’ actual demise and living on not only in art but in popular culture.

The increase of representations of smallholders is pronounced despite their actual diminishment in post-World War Two Canada. For concurrent with Canada’s period of mass urbanization driven by the industrialization of agriculture and the so-called Green Revolution is the Media Age. In the age of mass media, representations of smallholders experience explosive growth. The smallholder vote may be minute and hence politically irrelevant, but as a socio-political force in discourse, the smallholder persists nonetheless.

### **Genealogy of an Orange Juice**

What is it about smallholders that makes them so compelling and that obliges them to live on in discourse as they die in reality? What discursive tasks do they take up when they cease working in the fields, forests, mines, and on the seas? I started work on these questions amid the labyrinth of pedways and coffee shops linking one high-rise to another in the heart of Edmonton’s downtown. In the building named Commerce Place, I bought lunch at Sunterra Foods. Sunterra’s niche is the boutique food market specializing in fresh, high quality products. Today, I buy a chicken stir-fry and an orange juice, followed by a Starbucks

coffee. The coffee cup proudly declares its “fair trade” *ethos* of production, which clothes the commodification of agricultural production in a garb the urban consumer can stomach. Sunterra houses the Starbucks coffee giant in their retail locations in Edmonton and Calgary. Starbucks’ gentle corporate practices, in which “one capitalist always kills many,” apparently resonate with Sunterra’s corporate “vision” (Marx, *Capital* 1: 763; Sunterra Enterprises).

Sunterra is one of Canada’s largest family-owned agribusiness corporations. Starting from humble roots as a small-scale farming operation in southern Alberta, in the 1950s the Price family began to obey the imperative of modern agriculture to “get big.” Sunterra vertically integrated its operations and now controls nearly all facets of production, from the breeding of hogs, for example, to their processing, shipping, and retail. “From the farm to the fork” is their corporate motto (Sunterra Enterprises, “From Feed to the Fork”).

The plastic bottle of Sunterra orange juice captured my attention, because it struck me that this dissertation’s argument may be discovered by reading this commodity closely (see Fig. 1 below). The juice is an unassuming, functional, and “material” social artefact whose value is also not reducible to its physical, nutritive uses. Classical political economy differentiates between a commodity’s value and price. Karl Marx, political economy’s fiercest critic, also takes up this problem, as he was less interested in market prices than with value. I am also unconcerned with the price of the Sunterra juice but instead focus on its problematic social role. What constitutes its value? What does this commodity

signify and how does it do so? What are the material (social, political, and economic) consequences of the juice's significations?

The following analysis mobilizes Marx's critique of capitalist production by extending it to a critique of discursive production under capitalism. Marx's critique of value in his analysis of the commodity form offers more than an account of the production of material objects. This critique also contains vital insights into how discourses perform ideological work. Marx blurs the boundary between the economic and the discursive, which provides a useful model for understanding the production of discursive value and its material consequences. Marx's critique of value production is treated, then, as an allegory of reading the ideological force of various discourses, some literary and others pop-cultural.

The Sunterra orange juice instantiates what is for Marx the atom of capitalist production: the commodity form. A close reading of the juice as a commodity serves to elucidate how Marx's theorization of a "language of commodities" (*Capital 1*: 52) draws a clear homology between things and discourses, as both are active social forces. Marx proposes that things have discursive qualities and that the discursive character of exchange-values in the market reifies social relations within industrial culture.

This project traces and problematizes the material consequences of discourses that mobilize smallholders as rhetorical figures which perform political tasks. Smallholders are the key figures in the marketing of Sunterra's orange juice, and they are the subject under investigation throughout this study. The project's object is the force of these particular figures as they are mobilized in

various discourses and in diverse historical periods. Smallholders have a material existence and a history, but they also have a history of discursive mobilizations which trouble the legibility of this material existence and history. Studying the entire panorama of smallholder motifs—petty capitalist, foot soldier of colonialism, industrious backbone of the nation, rustic peasant and victim of capitalist production, to name a few—is not this dissertation’s object. Instead, two key motifs are isolated and unpacked using rhetorical analysis. The motifs are investigated in literature, popular culture, and in intellectual history—notably, in classical political economy—in order to theorize the discursive forces which the smallholder harbours. Both motifs are binary oppositions: nature-culture and savage-civilized.

Sunterra deploys these familiar binaries to naturalize its highly industrialized, capital-intensive form of agriculture. Indeed, this is the thesis of the dissertation as a whole: these two binaries are folded together in order to reify industrial culture. The angle of the fold varies, depending upon the text in question, but the general premise remains the same. In the case of Sunterra, smallholders play an ideological role as they are marshalled discursively to market its commodities. They are the natural—good, constant, necessary, inevitable—figures which moralize Sunterra’s products. But because they are “natural,” they are also “primitive” and thus inhibit progress in the form of unchecked economic growth. They are thus the relics of a bygone age, in Sunterra’s figuration of them, and as such are fit for the dustbin of history. As

figurations of labour and property ownership, Sunterra's smallholders represent the boundary between two forms of production—pre-capitalist and capitalist.

This is the ideological mechanism with which smallholders are at once inscribed in discourse in order to sell a product, and thus reify a mode of production which simultaneously elides them. Smallholders, therefore, are figures for labour which perform rhetorical work; in other words, they are both a way of knowing what labour is and a mode of labour itself. As figures undertaking discursive work, their role is similarly double: they are both civilized appropriators of nature and the expropriated primitive remnants of a pre-industrial mode of production.

This dual mobilization of smallholders has a history, for instance, in Marx's description of pre-capitalist social relations. Marx, like Adam Smith before him, defines smallholding in contradistinction to capitalist production: "Whoever directly satisfies his wants with the produce of his own labour, creates, indeed use-values, but not commodities. In order to produce the latter, he must not only produce use-values, but use-values for others, social use-values" (*Capital 1*: 40-41). Marx calls this production of use-values that are not commodities "labour in common or directly associated labour," which may be found at "threshold of the history of all civilized races" (*Capital 1*: 77). But there is no need to go back to the state of nature to find this production which Smith calls "original," harkening back to the arguments of Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau. Marx cites an example "close at hand in the patriarchal industries of the peasant family" (*Capital 1*: 78).



Smallholders, however, are not simply commonplaces in Marx for inventing the pre-history of capitalist production; they are also an allegory of the naturalization of cultural change through labour. In Marx's account of the labour theory of value, humans and nature both work but nature does what it must do since its work is unchanging. Humanity acts "as one of her [nature's] own forces, setting in motion . . . the natural forces of . . . [our bodies], in order to appropriate Nature's productions in a form adapted to . . . [our] own wants" (*Capital* 1: 177). People have the capacity to labour and thus we share in nature's power. The difference, however, is that "by acting on the external world and changing it," we also "change [our] . . . own nature" (Marx, *Capital* 1: 177). By labouring with nature's materials, "Nature becomes one of the organs of [our] activity, one that [we annex] to [our] own bodily organs" (Marx, *Capital* 1: 179). Labour makes nature into a prosthesis and this prosthesis is nature changed.

Prosthetic nature, however, also changes our nature. Labour, Marx argues, is simultaneously natural and a nature-changer: labour is natural yet it exceeds nature. Labour is like Marx's figuration of smallholders: they are both natural and cultural. Smallholders are qualified to perform this dual role in discourse since they constitute a rhetorical means of prefiguring our discursive labour. Smallholders are both figures for labour and figures that undertake discursive labour. Smallholders are thus a particular figure which Michel Foucault terms a "doublet" (352): both productive of discourse and figures for discursive production.

Understanding Marx's use of smallholders as a rhetorical device is crucial to comprehending the linguistic elements of his labour theory of value. Marx's theory, like Smith's and Mill's before him (which are discussed in Chapter One), suggests that there is indeed something textual—something discursive—about the labour-process and the production of value. Marx's example of "living labour" is a "spinner," recalling his earlier reference to the weaver to distinguish between the labour of nature (fittingly, his example is a spider) and human labour (*Capital* 1: 183, 178). Etymologically, weaving is associated with text (the Latin *texere*, "to weave") (*Oxford English Dictionary*). *Textus* is Latin for "spider's web" (*Oxford English Dictionary*). A text is then an interwoven web of discourses. It is within this etymological background that Marx posits a "language of commodities" (*Capital* 1: 52). Through smallholders, Marx articulates a second nature in which the commodity functions as a socio-natural force.<sup>1</sup> The force of the commodity is linguistic, Marx insists, but how do commodities speak? What do they say?

The mode of Marx's insight into the commodity form's discursive force is rhetorical. The commodity speaks with a form of irony identified by rhetoricians as the trope *paralipsis*. The *Rhetorica Ad Herennium* states that

Paralipsis occurs when we say that we are passing by, or do not know, or refuse to say that which precisely now we are saying . . . .

This figure is useful if employed in a matter which is not pertinent to call specifically to the attention of others, because there is advantage in making only an indirect reference to it, or because the

direct reference would be tedious or undignified, or cannot be made clear, or can easily be refuted. As a result, it is of greater advantage to create a suspicion by paralipsis than to insist directly on a statement that is refutable. (322)

Marx contends that commodities converse with each other about their value. They speak of their value in magnitudes. In order to reveal that “its [a commodity’s] own value is created by labour in its abstract character as human labour”—an abstract value measured in socially necessary labour-time—a commodity reveals its value in relation to other commodities (*Capital* 1: 52). A commodity does not tell us that its value is comprised of labour. This fact is not visible in the commodity itself, for the labour process “disappears in the product” (*Capital* 1: 180). Commodities speak of their value only in a relative sense, in a potentially endless succession of deferrals. What is the value of the commodity? In the language of commodities, it is not present in the commodity itself but rather only in exchange with other commodities. Realization, then, is a process of value in exchange.

This exchange is a rhetorical process. Commodities talk incessantly about their value as products of human labour, but this value is mystified as exchange-value. There is an ideological advantage “in making only an indirect reference” to the real source of their value (*Rhetorica Ad Herrennium* 322). However, what if a commodity’s value, especially if it is rhetorically manifested, “cannot be made clear” in any “real” or final sense (*Rhetorica Ad Herrennium* 322)? What are these commodities telling us about ourselves? How might they be understood as

artefacts which reflect not only the changes we have wrought to/with nature, but also of the changes to our own nature?

Rather than telling us of their value as reified human labour-time, or rather than telling us about ourselves, commodities speak of themselves: they speak the language of relative, equivalent magnitudes.<sup>2</sup> Commodities thus reveal their value by not explicitly declaring it. They speak of their value constantly and thereby undertake social relations. Yet all they are able to speak about is their value in relative magnitudes. “In order to inform us that its sublime reality as value is not the same as its buckram body,” Marx argues, “it says that value has the appearance of a coat, and consequently that so far as the linen is value, it and the coat are alike as two peas” (*Capital 1*: 52). The commodity’s value is not determined by its physical traits but rather by its relation to other commodities, indeed by “numberless other elements in the world of commodities” (*Capital 1*: 62). The value of the coat is infinitely expressed as an amount of commodity X, which is so much of commodity Y, and so on. The chatter of commodities, therefore, does not reveal the measure of their value, or the human labour-time embodied in them. For commodities do not speak of labour as a social relation which constitutes their value. What they are actually talking about, Marx contends, under the surface of their exchange-value, is their “real” value as abstract products of human labour. Commodities, therefore, speak only about us. But they do so by talking about us as relative objectified quantities or as exchange-values.

The realization of value through exchange is also a more broadly discursive process. In order to manifest its “real” value, embedded in its physical properties by labour, labour which is congealed in the commodity, the commodity’s “buckram body” is realized only in the “sublime reality [of the commodity] as value” (*Capital* 1: 52). A commodity’s “bodily form” is actualized only in a process of exchange (*Capital* 1: 64). Marx calls the process of exchange “sublime.” This “sublime” value, however, is mystified human labour. But this labour is at once reified and discursive. “Buckram,” according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is coarse linen. Marx deploys this figure, on one hand, to suggest the concrete materiality of the commodity. But on the other hand, buckram is also a material used to bind books. The commodity’s physicality is interwoven with discourse.

This does not mean, however, that the material effects of labour—whether it is discursive, physical, or both—are either readily perceptible or predictable. Michel Foucault refers to this tendency in Marx as the naivety of theorizing “man” as an “empirico-transcendental doublet,” or a subject whose material practices can be known and predicted through an approach which superimposes a positivism upon an eschatology (Foucault 350, 352-53). There is indeed a persistent *telos* in Marx concerning our capacity to shape nature according to our will in a predictable process which we can prefigure (*Capital* 1: 180). He is adamant that the value of a commodity is the amount of socially necessary labour time congealed within it. Marx considers this analysis to be an empirically verifiable, irrefutable fact of the science of political economy.

However, taking the rhetorical mode of Marx's analysis of the commodity form seriously is to put into question both the teleological and the empirical aspects of his labour theory of value. His mobilization of *paralipsis* in his analysis of the commodity form suggests that the manifestation of value not only contains rhetorical aspects, but that rhetoric folds together with nature in Marx's labour theory of value. Marx, therefore, intertwines a labour theory of value (which is laden with the discourse of classical economy) with a theory of discursive production (which is laden with the discourse of classical rhetoric).

Marx's critique of commodification, then, may be read as an allegory for a theory of discursive production. A close reading of Sunterra's orange juice investigates the Marxian web in which discourse and materiality are held in tension. This reading unfolds the rhetorical function of the orange juice as not only a nutritive product for consumption but also as a means of the production of a socio-economic force. Sunterra's particular rhetorical appropriation of smallholders has the ideological consequence of expropriating their land. Sunterra mobilizes smallholders using *paralipsis*: Sunterra's rhetoric includes an ethical appeal in which smallholders speak about and moralize Sunterra's "progress" by *not* mentioning the company's history of expansion and corporatization. Smallholders are thus set to politico-economic tasks which become legible when this discourse is questioned as to its rhetorical mode.

Sunterra's orange juice bottle declares its contents to be "Fresh Orange Juice." Its label is also inscribed, like all of Sunterra's products, with its commercial slogan: "Fresh Food. From Real Farmers." It is then doubly fresh and

seems quite “real” indeed. It resembles an orange put through a blender. It is now an amalgam of solid and liquid, full of pulp and seeds. This phlegmatic fare is “fresh” as if it had just left the scenic sphere of the natural, growing beneath the “Sun” as the literal fruit of the “terra” scant moments before I found it nestled between a Pepsi and a Perrier, processed in a plastic bottle, in a barrel of ice, in the center of a shopping mall, in the heart of Alberta’s second largest city, in the middle of one of Canada’s most “urban” provinces according to the Statistics Canada 2006 Census.



Fig. 1. Sunterra orange juice bottle. Photo by Cody McCarroll. 23 March 2008.



Yet this superlatively social object claims roots as natural as plants nurtured by the sun and soil. Here it is, more than one thousand kilometres from the nearest orange tree as if nature had dropped it onto the earth for me to pick up. Is it “fresh”? The double deployment of “Fresh” is telling. It is as if its “freshness” was always already in question, as Sunterra’s slogan anticipates the problem of ambiguous signification by supplementing the first “Fresh” with a second. Yet the supplement betrays the original incapacity of the first attempt to refer to its “freshness.” In the ever-receding epistemological horizon of “freshness,” if it tastes fresh—it is fresh. And it is fresh if it tastes fresh. In any case, it says so on the label—doubly.

Smallholders emerge then as “doublets” in this context which already produces doubles. This text further mystifies its mode of production with a second promise: it comes “From Real Farmers.”<sup>3</sup> Its value is hinged not only to “Fresh” in an impossible attempt to actualize the organicity of its social production. It hinges, simultaneously, on nature and (agri)culture. The urban consumer is hailed with a vision of “natural” construction or a non-social socialization which is in fact a commodity produced by one of Canada’s most highly advanced forms of industrial agriculture. This contradiction, however, presents no large obstacle to marketing this commodity. For it is not only from nature. And here lies the second (or third) supplement or the supplement of the supplement: the juice hails “From Real Farmers” (as opposed to robotic ones? Or literary ones?). The juice interpellates the consumer with its use-value, which is fetishized as nutritive goodness. The discourse of authenticity also moralizes the product, as “Real

Farmers” signify not simply ones who are empirically verifiable but, more importantly, essentially good producers. The product appears good because its origin is (spuriously) authentic. Its origin, however, is ambivalent and the product is ideologically motivated.

The work this juice performs, therefore, is more than nutritional. It is sent to the consumer like a perverse post-card. This commodity or Marx’s “active bearer of exchange-value” is posted under the signature of a pre-commodifying mode of production undertaken by putatively “Real Farmers.” It reads something like:

Just journeyed through capitalism and arrived in nature by taking the detour of small-scale farmers. All is rich and lovely here. Met lots of nice, hard-working people. So I set them to work for me. Here are the fruits of their natural [sic] labour. Hope you enjoy it, tell others about it, and buy more.

Signed,

Sunterra Enterprises, Ltd.

Undersigned,

~~Nature~~ Real Farmers.

This marshalling of smallholders morphs agribusiness commodities into use-values, as the small owner-operator’s mode of production, Marx notes, preceded and was distinct from capitalism, although it formed capitalism’s point of departure (*Capital* 1: 713). Sunterra superimposes “direct” or “immediate” producers onto its capitalist mode of production in order to naturalize it.

Sunterra's ideological missive enlists "Real Farmers" to mask the process by which it extracts surplus value from the workers it plays a role in expropriating. The conscription of small-scale farmers in discourse aids the attrition of these same producers in reality, and hence this particular mobilization of smallholders nourishes capitalist agriculture modeled on mass production while desiccating the vast majority of "Real Farmers."

There are of course "Real Farmers" or none of us would eat. But there are no "Real" ones in the "natural" sense Sunterra attempts to mobilize. Even the semi-capitalist owner-operated family farm grows rarer by the day. And these smallholders' mobilization by agribusiness is anything but "Fresh." Rather, marshalling smallholders is a well-worn ideological weapon representing and perpetuating capital's historical project of expropriating the masses. These mobilizations are not of a timeless figure, however, since agriculture is not an unchanging practice. Conversely, it is a dynamic social form of human labour. The classical farmer of Virgil's *Georgics* bears as little relation to the medieval serf as Sunterra bears to its own roots as a small-scale family farm. Sunterra began as a small mixed farming operation (cattle, hogs, and grain) that owned one section (or 640 acres) of land. Sunterra Enterprises now employs more than 600 workers in their: hog barns of 8,500 sows, beef feedlots of 80,000 cattle, 13,000 acres of farmland, 32,000 acres of pasture, and in their meat-packing, shipping, and market retail locations (Gjermudson 349). The orange juice is not merely a use-value and it is not produced by a family farm. It is a commodity and as such is the bearer of a virtual exchange value produced by expropriated wage labour.

How many farms did Sunterra swallow in their expansion “from a single central Alberta mixed farm” to its current vast operations as an agribusiness corporation (Sunterra Enterprises, “From Feed to the Fork”)?

I am drawn to this juice, nevertheless, and buy it because it tastes good, and even better, there is seemingly an ethical dimension from this expenditure: “the responsible consumer” who is dispossessed of the means of production accumulates moral capital. Entranced by the lure of commodity fetishism, an expenditure and consumption inspired by a “social conscience” is shot through with bourgeois ideology which states, whatever you do, just keep buying. We can buy our way out of any problem, environmental devastation included. So recycle that orange juice bottle too if it isn’t too much hassle. Fair trade coffee and organic juice from real farmers—lunch at the mall can’t get holier than this.

I am, however, not only consuming sustenance while producing a dissertation. I am eating smallholders-turned-wage-labourers’ surplus labour-time. There can hardly be any thought of the ameliorative potential of this discursive situation in which an ethic of post-industrial consumerism meets a consumer “ethic” imbricated with bourgeois social relations. What is being recycled here, moreover, is more than plastic. The Sunterra creed draws on the figurative cache of the farmer—the labourer closest to nature this side of “civilization”—in order to naturalize its mode of production. Sunterra’s saving grace is marshalling the very figure it expropriates. My pint-sized orange juice thus packs a powerful socio-economic punch.

Smallholders are not limited to the orange juice, but rather pervade Sunterra's discourse. Hailing us from their corporate brochure is a familiar figure, fashioned to appeal to the urban market segment that buys condominiums, Volkswagens, and Diesel jeans (Sunterra Enterprises, "Corporate Brochure"). Yet this brochure sports a figure quite different from the urban sophisticate. There is a rustic chic, maybe, but the brochure deploys smallholders as being not about style but about substance.

In this nonetheless heavily stylized brochure, the scene is fertile with growth and profit and sterilized of anything limiting both. Sunterra's corporate logo is emblazoned near the top as if it grew there as naturally as grass. To the right is a photo of the Price family, seated around a kitchen table. Also marshalled as Sunterra's spokesperson, along with the various labourers in their chain of production from scientists to grocers and meat cutters, is a man with a weather-beaten face, chiselled jaw, and powerful shoulders, wearing a battered cowboy hat. Western culture seems drawn to this salt-of-the-terra figure like a plant to the sun.

The depicted agricultural producer's clothes place him in the working-class. But in the background looms part of Sunterra's feedlot, with cattle stretching to the horizon and beyond. The huge feedlot and expansive plot of land, however, are capital that points to a capital-owning position. Nevertheless, this scene seems neither jarring nor contradictory. For in Sunterra's discourse, accumulating property by capitalist means is clothed in upright garb. One might say, "This guy looks like a hard worker who earned what he's got. He didn't take

it from anyone. He pulled himself up by his own bootstraps” with a little help from nature. In Marxian terms, he is an “immediate producer” of use-values. Smallholders are thus valorized as foundational to progress through the productive capacity of appropriative labour.

Nevertheless, smallholders are also remnants of a primitive, pre-capitalist mode of production, which in Marx’s terms, marks a “threshold” (*Capital 1*: 77). This side of the smallholder “doublet” is at odds with the millions of dollars of equity which appear behind the man in the Sunterra brochure, the side which represents huge amounts of congealed labour-power. No single person or family could do this vast amount of work unaided. 80,000 cows do not feed themselves. Their owners (the four Price brothers) are now CEOs. They appear on Sunterra’s various web pages, not as the homespun family depicted on the corporate brochure, but as business-*men* with bad haircuts and worse shirts and ties. Their capacity as owners of the means of production is obscured by the domestic scene at the kitchen table—“see, they’re just like the people that work for them.” They have “roots in family.”

The figure agribusiness expropriates, moreover, speaks for them. Smallholders are agribusiness’s natural yet domesticated *topos* that performs a violent function: “primitive accumulation” or the expropriation of the masses necessary for capitalism to begin. The peasantry in western Europe was separated from their traditional means of subsistence, Marx claims, with “blood and fire” (*Capital 1*: 715). Canadian smallholders are propelled toward extinction not by physical but by discursive forces. The process of primitive accumulation is still

underway in Canada. A few small producers remain in Europe, protected by agricultural subsidy programs, but Canada's smallholders are being dispossessed, not by some natural law of economics or by "the market" but by politically motivated discourses.

Sunterra's discursive strike, like the one that twice writes "Fresh" over the industrialization of agricultural labour, is a double one. Sunterra inscribes and erases "Real Farmers" in a single, dull thud. This barely audible thump resonates on the surface of its rhetorical veneer. Sunterra does not merely represent "Real Farmers"; they expropriate them. Sunterra's commodified orange juice does not reproduce the "immediate producers'" labour. Rather, under a different yet overlapping mode of production, it embodies this labour as expropriated and disembodied exchange-value generated from surplus labour-time.

Sunterra's failure to refer to its actual means of production in no way mitigates the force of its discourse. How is it possible for a discourse to come unhinged from reality yet still act on the world it purports, and fails, to describe? How can a discourse gain force by shedding reference? And how can it be that the figure of the "immediate producer" retains its force long after it ceases to exist?

This rhetorical figure I call the smallholder is as much a part of popular culture's storehouse of clichéd images as it is of canonical discourses. Recent media abound with smallholders. From the front page of the *Edmonton Journal* to insurance advertisements, these images seem unremarkable, blasé at best, but their proliferation cannot be explained merely by the rise in representations of

everything in the Information Age. For the representation of smallholders is unbridled despite their growing extinction.

These representations, moreover, put smallholders to work facilitating their own expropriation. For these depictions belie the penetration of industrial capital into Canadian agriculture in which the number of Canadian farms “has decreased by almost 50 per cent” between 1961 and 1996 (Schmitz, Furtan, and Baylis 8). “In the past fifty [now closer to sixty] years,” Schmitz, Furtan, and Baylis argue, “ownership of farmland [in both Canada and the U.S.A.] has become increasingly separated from the farm operator (8). More than 200,000 Canadian farms have been wiped out. The pace of expropriation only accelerates today. It is not driven by vague yet inexorable economic laws. The bulk of farmers are not necessary casualties of “progress.”

Representations of farmers exploit the small, owner-operated farm’s moral mystique in order to justify the transition to capitalist farming already afoot across Canada. Farmers are mobilized in this manner to sell products that increase big capital’s hold on agriculture. Increasingly marshalled by agribusiness with images portraying the concentration of agricultural property into fewer hands as natural, moral, efficient, and progressive, the vast majority of Canada’s farmers become wage labourers. Despite the demise of these farms, images of them and their operators live on in our cultural imaginary and proliferate in media. Such images neither rustle anyone’s cattle nor burn anyone’s house and crops. Although the means of expropriation are not physically violent, they are no less effectual.



While the means of the blow to the bulk of Canadian farmers are pictorial, the ideological ends run deeper than any paper cut.

### **Reading Smallholders: Myth**

Agribusiness marketing campaigns, such as the one embedded in Sunterra's orange juice, deploy smallholders with a rhetorical strategy Barthes terms an "inoculation." He describes this tactic in *Mythologies*: "One inoculates the public with a contingent evil to prevent or cure an essential one" (42). He returns to the notion later in the text, stating that in an inoculation, "evil is *advertised* the better to impede and exorcize it" (84). The acknowledgement of a relatively minor flaw allows for an ultimate lionization. The defect becomes a minor imperfection—even a "prejudice"—in the process of moralizing and/or naturalizing that which is in question. Inoculation is a rhetorical device serving the ideological function of naturalizing objects.

Barthes' analysis of industrial culture resonates with Marx's analysis of the commodity form, moreover, as Barthes' notion of inoculation is reminiscent of Marx's mobilization of *paralipsis*. Commodities, according to Marx, pretend to speak of their essential value while actually talking about the reification of our labour. In Barthes' critique, commodities articulate a contingent drawback in order to communicate through misdirection their supposed roots in nature. Both Marx and Barthes blur economic and linguistic categories, as the analysis of commodities is bound up with the analysis of discourses.

Reading Sunterra's orange juice closely reveals that it indeed functions as an inoculation, as smallholders play their conventionally double role as a means of moralizing capital-intensive agriculture by celebrating its progress while simultaneously denigrating its past. For Sunterra, the stated defect of its juice is quite specific and is right on the bottle. It advertises its "Pack Date" (January 9, 2008) and "Best Before" date (January 12, 2008). Its "freshness" is contingent on a short timeframe, and thus it is "Fresh" yet it may have been packed up to three days before. Moreover, the short timeframe betrays the fact that the lack of preservatives make for a short shelf life. The consumer is allowed to weigh the potential of the juice's three day lifespan with a nebulous notion of what exactly "freshness" might be, as "Real Farmers" are mobilized to mythologize a speciously natural form of production. History is acknowledged as the product is dated, but the history of the capital-intensive production process of this commodity is masked as the product is naturalized by the recourse to "Real Farmers." In Barthes' terms, smallholders are mythic signifiers which, ironically, constitute an "*alibi*" for agribusiness for expropriating them (Barthes 128).

Another example of inoculation in action is a United Farmers of Alberta (UFA) advertisement (see Figure 2 below). UFA was formerly a socialist political organization in Alberta provincial politics. Now it is an agribusiness corporation masquerading as a farmers' co-operative. UFA recently employed the slogan, "There is a future out here." The admitted evil is that for many producers, a future in agriculture is uncertain: why else would the advertisement admit that the future is in doubt? The reason that it is uncertain is implicit in the lone figure standing in

front of hundreds of thousands of dollars of farm equity. The concentration of the ownership of land into fewer hands through the transition to capital-intensive agriculture is the “contingent evil” (Barthes 42). Naturalizing agriculture as mass production is the “essential evil” (Barthes 42) which allows the history of the expropriation of the majority of Canada’s “Real Farmers” to recede in the advertisement. Emerging instead is an inoculation which functions as a powerful rhetoric of the appropriation of land through discursive means.

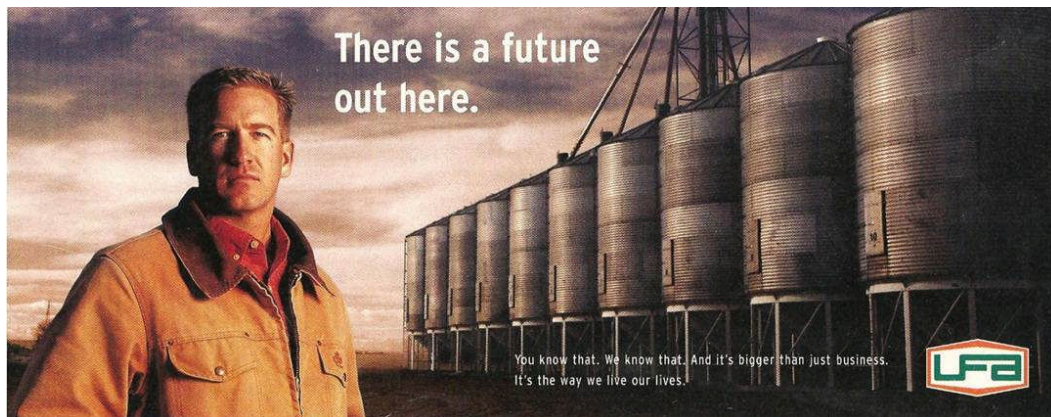


Fig. 2. United Farmers of Alberta advertisement. n.d. 15 March 2005.

According to Barthes, “the fundamental character of the mythical concept is to be appropriated” (119). Smallholders are thus “stolen speech”; they are commonplace rhetorical figures deployed for politico-economic ends. They are appropriated in discourse in order to be expropriated in reality and, more importantly, to naturalize this expropriation. Barthes’ “inoculation” is one rhetorical device used for this purpose, while the “alibi” is another. “Myth is speech stolen and restored,” Barthes argues, but as it is re-deployed it becomes

ahistorical, and this is what “gives mythical speech its benumbed look” (125). By invoking “Real Farmers,” the historicity of the “Best Before” date recedes, along with the juice’s capital-intensive mass production. A natural idyll of production driven by “Fresh Food. From Real Farmers” emerges in its place.

Smallholders, therefore, appear in a familiar binary. They are both natural and cultural, timeless and historical. Smallholders’ discursive constitution as a doublet is not neutral. For instance, they serve the dual function of providing both an alibi and an inoculation for industrial culture. Myth is then a powerful notion for reading smallholders as a politico-economic force because, like smallholders, “Myth has in fact a double function: it points out and it notifies, it makes us understand something and it imposes it on us” (Barthes 117). The ideological motivation of myth, similarly, is also double:

Motivation is unavoidable. It is nonetheless very fragmentary. To start with, it is not ‘natural’: it is history which supplies its analogies to the form. Then, the analogy between the meaning and concept is never anything but partial: the form drops many analogous features and keeps only a few . . . . Finally, the motivation is chosen among other possible ones. (126-27)

Myth is always motivated yet it is also ambiguous. The “analogies” which link smallholders to the general “form” of this mode of production differ historically: here, it is a man dressed in the rural working class clothing of the early twenty-first century in the foreground of the advertisement which is held in tension with the upper class capital in the background. The many possible ways to signify

smallholders, moreover, are limited to the sartorial imagery of the gendered masculine subject; although it recurs throughout the Sunterra corporate brochure as well, this mode of representation is by no means exhaustive of smallholder-icity. UFA's motivations for mobilizing smallholders in this historical moment, moreover, are different those of the past. The company is no longer a co-operative business venture; their advertising aims to increase profits by employing a figure whose economic viability is in competition with its own.

The mobilization of smallholders is thus paradoxical, as the patterns in which they are marshalled to sell agribusiness products endow them with contrary significations: they are both anathema to and representative of large-scale capitalist agriculture. The Barthesian mythologist demystifies cultural discourses by drawing analogies between these patterns in discourses and political motivations. Despite the "fragmentary" (Barthes 126) nature of interpreting myth, comprehension is possible because "the concept [the signified] closely corresponds to a function, it is defined as a tendency" (119). Certain significations tend to perform identifiable social functions, and elucidating these analogies is the mythologist's labour. The UFA advertisement, as well as the Sunterra orange juice, is readable because "This repetition of the concept through different forms is precious to the mythologist, it allows him to decipher the myth: it is the insistence of a kind of behaviour which reveals its intention" (Barthes 120). For Barthes, repetition makes reading possible.

The art of reading as pattern recognition is the core of another contemporary theory of myth. Marshall McLuhan's *The Mechanical Bride* (1951)

pre-dates Barthes' *Mythologies* by six years. McLuhan locates smallholders, to quote the book's subtitle, as part of *The Folklore of Industrial Man*. McLuhan argues that "as the industrial market extends its power and control over thoughts and earnings alike, it swathes itself increasingly in the archaic garments of pre-industrial man" (21). By "pre-industrial man," he means the smallholders idealized by Thomas Jefferson's "creed of political independence founded on the economic independence of small cultivators and craftsmen" (McLuhan 21). McLuhan demonstrates the recurrence of the Jeffersonian ideal in popular culture, as it is "constantly tapped . . . to sell products" (21). Smallholders for McLuhan are at once the nation's idealized, hardworking, moral backbone and the primitive remnants of an outmoded socio-economic status. In his analysis of a Quaker State Motor Oil advertisement titled "Freedom . . . American Style," McLuhan identifies the "pastoral convention" as "aristocratic" (117). The scene of a family picnic amid a fecund countryside marshals the rural idyll of simpler times while conveying the civilized, upper-class existence of industrial culture, revealed in the family's possessions—the car, radio, and so forth (117). The rustic enjoyment of the scene is marked by bourgeois ideology: the countryside is now a place to play rather than a place to live and work.

The conditions of possibility for this demystification, however, are McLuhan's representation of smallholders in the now familiar binaries of nature-culture and savage-civilized. The urban family is inscribed nostalgically in an uncanny rural space in order to naturalize industrial progress through Jeffersonian values, which both repel and attract. As McLuhan wittily remarks, what is the

purpose of the radio on the family picnic: “fear of boredom? Silence?” (117). The contingent defect in the scene is that the seemingly Jeffersonian rustic family is not at home in the countryside, but rather betrays the trapping of commercial culture. The happy prosperity and comfort of the urban family also conveys a Barthesian alibi for industrial culture: the scene is fecund yet the countryside is empty of human residents. Smallholders are absent, and their mythic signifiers in the family unit are other to smallholding itself. Smallholders become a silence—even a primitive, denigrated “boredom”—into which the modern, civilized subject speaks. Quaker State allows the countryside to emerge as a place of the open road, a frontier, but civilized and conquered. Consequently, the history of the politico-economic domestication of the mass of the countryside’s former inhabitants recedes beyond the horizon.

In *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, McLuhan expands on his theory of myth with recourse to smallholders. McLuhan argues that “myth is the instant vision of a complex process that ordinarily extends over a long period. Myth is contraction or implosion of any process” (25). A myth, McLuhan continues, “capsulates a prolonged process into a flashing insight” (82). Quaker State’s “Freedom . . . American Style” (*Mechanical*, 117) is the textual site for such an implosion, as it tells a story of the expropriation of smallholders in post-World War Two America, if one is able to perceive Jeffersonian values as “stolen speech” deployed in tandem with bourgeois culture, all of which appearing in the “benumbed”—de-historicized—fashion of a myth (Barthes 125).

This genealogy of Sunterra's orange juice attempts to account for such a "flashing insight" engendered by the deluge of discourses congealed in this commodity. This mundane plastic bottle contains the compression of discourses representing the ongoing transition, globally and in Canada, from small-scale to capital-intensive farming. This critical account occurs in a discourse that remains necessarily uncertain, partial, and inductive. It proceeds from pattern recognition rather than isolation and classification. McLuhan's mythic criticism, much like Barthes' reading as a mythologist and like Marx's reading of the commodity, works inductively from examples on the premise that, by an inductive leap, the rules of the capitalist socio-political system may be inferred. The unit of this inference realized through rhetorical analysis, like Marx's commodity, is a single text – a single socially-produced object whose value is not reducible to its physical characteristics.

Inundated with discourses circulating as commodities, critics still bound by traditional disciplinary constraints lack an apparatus that not only interpret these media but also gauge their forces. Traditional scholarship classifies data by fragmenting it in a scholarly version of the division of labour (McLuhan, *Understanding*, vii). In the 1950s, McLuhan advocated for critics to operate from an expanded definition of the literary in order to allow new objects of inquiry to emerge, objects "affected by the electric media" as much as by capitalist and linguistic production (82). Thus I ask this bottle of orange juice: what is its value? How is it produced? What forces does it harbour and, most vitally, what violence does it represent, produce, and perhaps foretell?



I propose to pursue this paradox of language's rhetorical capacity to produce material results by affectual means as this problem spirals along concentric textual and historical planes. Signification is not an effacement of reality but rather a revolving door in which certain configurations in discourse seem to spin indefinitely, managing to refer to many objects emergent in different historical moments, with local and strategic enunciations flung out, acting on the world, and reeling away—some of which never to return.<sup>4</sup> Discourse is not merely dispersive or explosive. It is not simply an ever-expanding system of differences. It acts also in a counter-dispersive or collective fashion. Discourse contains accumulations of figures that are perceptible in certain formations as they are held in a precarious limbo in the revolving door of "meaning." Discourse pulls a multiplicity of objects inside it like a tornado turned inside-out. Social relations thus implode in the orange juice which, although "fresh" and not "from concentrate," embodies a concentration of discourses. Marx's analysis of the commodity reveals the source of its value in congealed labour time. The labour of interpretation of a post-industrial commodity is the unfolding of a monad-like container of discourses socially compressed in it—from Sunterra's corporate brochure to UFA advertisements.

The Sunterra bottle of orange juice, if considered "Canadian Literature," would perhaps be classified somewhere in the muddy waters between poetry and "found art." Actually, it is at least as much pulp and seeds than it is juice, but its material constitution and its genre are beside the point. I have attempted to elucidate, very briefly, not the layers of discourse as sediment leading to the

bedrock of properly referential meaning and not the deep structure of its figuration as the substitute for referentiality, but rather the “flashing insight” it harbours. As McLuhan proposes, by proceeding inductively, one can make the more or less intuitive leap that discovers the rules of the system which governs social production. Acquiring them seems to be an ever-receding horizon or an information overload indeed. You must, as McLuhan advises, be prepared to “‘dig’ it”—not down to the subtext or to its deep meaning or structures, but rather toward an archaeology of its forces (*Understanding Media* 26). Literary criticism partakes in this excavation of posited discourses without depth of signification and yet with a history of enunciation, without a timeless unity and yet displaying certain social, historical, and rhetorical patterns of recurrence. The narrative tracing the entirety of Sunterra’s short history would itself be interminable. Embedded in any commodity is an infinite amount of labour which produced it. As John Stuart Mill contends, “It is impossible to decide” or to measure nature’s force or contribution in a given action. Labour, he claims, is likewise incalculable: “The items in the calculation are very numerous . . . [and are perhaps] infinitely so” for we enter “a region of fractions too minute for calculation” when tracing the quantity of labour in a given commodity “back to the origin of things” (Mill, *Principles* 28, 32).

Yet as the myth of a total reading recedes, couched in the language of a material cause and perceptible effect, another comprised of a “flashing insight” emerges in which the abstract yet real affect of an entire system compressed in a single social artefact may be “traced and retraced, again and again, on the rounds

of a concentric spiral with seeming redundancy” (*Understanding Media* 82, 26). Allowing this inductive leap or inference to emerge necessitates disciplinary risks, breaking free from the prejudices of established disciplinary practices which, in English, for example, would restrict this rhetorical analysis to an already established field (Canadian Literature), author (such as Wallace Stegner), genre (the Canadian prairie novel) or historical period (twentieth century). There is no room for orange juice bottles within these interpretive boundaries. Yet these containers contain the system within them.

### **The Farm**

As may have already been inferred, this study springs from my melancholic obsession with the death of the small, owner-operated, Canadian farm. I came by it honestly enough. The farm where I spent most of my life was sold in 2003, the year I began my PhD. The sale offset debt acquired during two especially lean decades in agriculture. Since my family lacked the capital to “get big,” we “got out.”<sup>5</sup> My family still works in the agricultural sector. They are entrepreneurial and self-employed. But now they work primarily for wages rather than profits. I left for the city to stay.

My changing socio-economic situation is neither new nor uncommon. It is not only part of Canada’s history. It represents a globalizing trend. Before smallholding is displaced in Canada, from the loss of fishing boats in the Atlantic Provinces to land and cattle in western ones, European smallholders who are not

propped up by government subsidies had already been deprived of their similar means of subsistence. The industrial capital that built the railroads bringing the Canadian settlers west, or that ships the Acadian fisher-people's catch to market, "comes [into the world] dripping from head to foot, from every pore, with blood and dirt." "A great deal of capital," Marx continues, "which appears to-day in the United States without any certificate of birth, was yesterday in England, the capitalised blood of children" (Marx, *Capital* 1: 760, 756).

Marx locates the source of the blood but where does the dirt come from? The history of the western Europe's industrial revolution is well-known. It is considered mandatory learning material for junior high-school students. Not so celebrated, however, is the expropriation of the masses which both preceded and enabled this industrial revolution, providing a propertyless labour force to set already amassed capital to work making more. This expropriation is tied by historians to the Enclosure laws.<sup>6</sup> Enacted in England as early as the fifteenth century, these laws allowed for the appropriation of the common lands by large landowners. The peasants relied heavily on these lands as a form of communal property vital to their subsistence. When the landed aristocracy appropriated the commons, the peasantry was transformed *en masse* into propertyless labourers.

The enclosure of the commons in England accelerated from the late eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century. This period marks a rapid shift from peasant to capitalist farming, or from small, owner-operated farms to large ones employing modern equipment and, more to the point, wage labourers. The bucolic England comprised mainly of small plots of land divided by hedgerows

disappeared along with the independent yeomen. The yeomen became tenants for the monopolizing landlords or, if they were turned out of their tenancy altogether because the landlord was inclined to convert his expanding holdings to pasturage, they became day labourers, paupers, or other fodder for an expanding industrial labour force.

I emphasize trans-Atlantic parallels between European and New World modes of primitive accumulation. Previous accumulation, or the “expropriation and expulsion of the agricultural population” from their land, is “intermittent but renewed again and again” (Marx, *Capital* 1: 745). A challenge in studying this process in Canada is to understand it not in an empirical vacuum, but rather as a historical recurrence. This study seeks to historicize it by comparing and contrasting the process in Canada with its European precursors. Restricting this study to Canadian contexts alone would be to act as if its smallholders were the only ones affected by globalization, itself shorthand for capital’s extension across national boundaries. I focus, then, on European contexts in order to understand primitive accumulation in Canada, a process beginning in earnest in the eighteenth century and continuing today as Canada’s remaining smallholders negotiate the increasing penetration of capital into their spheres of production.

The smallholder is literally a small land-owner, a freeholder, owner-operator, peasant, yeoman, and farmer. Yet these terms reveal little about this figure’s role in Western, urban, industrialized culture. No single statement encapsulates smallholders’ identity or unique essence. As Marx contends, smallholding has “numberless shades” since it reflects “intermediate stages” in

the dissociation of producers from the means of production (*Capital* 1: 761).

“Smallholder” then defines not a timeless and unified subject but rather a historically contingent and polymorphous one. This figure’s socio-economic determinations range from the yeoman to the *metayer*, from the freeholder to the tenant and sharecropper. I deploy the term “smallholder,” therefore, as shorthand for these myriad socio-economic gradations springing up at the threshold of capitalism as they emerged and receded in western Europe only to re-appear later in force in Canada, both in canonical discourses and popular vernacular.

Whether this subject is a peasant or a small-scale farmer, fisher, logger, or miner, the mode of production, in general Marxian terms, remains the same. These figures pit their petty capital and their own labour (and that of their immediate family, such as the unpaid and unrecognized labour of their partners and/or children) against the penetration of “big capital” into their fields of production. They represent the “numberless shades” of property-holding of a multivalent petit-bourgeoisie that, for the most part, due to its precarious class position, is the soon-to-be proletariat (Marx, *Capital* 1: 761). As Jane Adams argues, “North American family farmers now seem to be on the cusp of virtual elimination, both as direct producers and as social actors” (11). Canadian family farms have been rendered economically infeasible and politically irrelevant.

This project’s interdisciplinary approach considers smallholders less as materially extant producers with a legible history and more as creatures of discourse whose rhetorical structure problematizes empirical and historical knowledge. Anxieties about crossing disciplinary boundaries are numerous,

however, and they often find a voice: “If the smallholder is immaterial, what is the point of this study? How can it be that “force” expropriates Canadian farmers? Where is the blood-stained earth, the burned houses and crops, the destroyed fishing boats, the stampeded and stolen cattle? Surely small farmers are an anachronism, a relic of a bygone age and an outmoded mode of production. They are simply casualties of progress, technological advancement, and inexorable economic laws. Our society cannot afford to have people ‘on the land’ any longer. The world has changed and there is no room for rustics in our global cosmopolitan world. The supporters of farmers and farm funding programs are sentimentalists, gazing backward with nostalgic longing and reactionary desire. Their refusal to change with the times is sour grapes. Their sympathy is misplaced, their passion misdirected. It is not the fault of governments or agribusiness corporations that farming has changed. We must allow for open competition to progress as a society, to allow for human ambition and ingenuity to drive further technological and scientific innovations that save many of us from the daily grind of monotonous physical labour. So enough about the farm crisis—we left our yeomen in Europe and our pioneers in the past.”

Yet they exist in Canada today, dotting our fields, forests, and waterways as well as our literature, hovering in our cultural imaginary between primitive and capital accumulation, between nature and culture, prehistory and modernity. When “the dull compulsion of economic relations,” which the Canadian government loathes to disrupt, fails to expropriate petty landowners and thereby renew again and again the propertyless labour force, physical violence may be

necessary (Marx, *Capital* 1: 737). For “Force is the midwife of every old society pregnant with a new one. It is itself an economic power” (Marx, *Capital* 1: 751). But it is far cheaper and easier to administrate this expropriation discursively. Discursive force, therefore, replaces in Canada the violence that burned the European peasant’s hedgerows. The aggression is textual but the effects are no less material.

The anxious voices return, this time more pointedly: “why study the smallholder, that Anglo-European patriarch and foot-soldier for New World colonialism, the expropriator of Aboriginal peoples, Father of the household, and propertied precursor of the middle-class? Certainly, contemporary academic projects need not to defend both living and dead white patriarchs and property owners. Is this project at root driven by anxiety over the expropriation of masculinity? Where is an account of ethnically diverse itinerant agricultural wage labourers, the partners (of either sex) and children of smallholders labouring for no pay, and the Aboriginal people, expropriated and displaced, that underpin dominant forms of property-ownership?”

I admit that this project at first glance appears conservative, even reactionary: *another* Canadian literature dissertation on *the settler*. Its Trans-Canada and Transatlantic perspective, however, as well as its broadened definition of the literary, allows many subjects to emerge and many voices to be heard, broadening its rhetorical analysis and political critique. I repeat that I deploy “smallholder” as a shorthand for many diverse historical subjects, ranging from the near-slave French *metayers* to the forty-shilling English freeholders,



from Black Ontarian sharecroppers to Ukrainian Manitoban homesteaders, some with holdings large enough to remain economically viable without employing wage labour, seasonal or otherwise.<sup>7</sup> The smallholder is also no patriarch, if Susanna Moodie has anything to say about it, not to mention the thousands of Canadian farm and fisher-women working with their partners and children or going it alone, doing everything from operating heavy equipment to complex accounting.<sup>8</sup> The vast majority of smallholders, moreover, are not fodder for a rising middle class. While still property-owners, the bulk of smallholders are impending proletarians. And given a sampling of the smallholder discursive field which I attempt to provide, it is a *lumpen*-proletariat indeed.

This is for the most part a Western project, which is due in part to its limited historical range. The parallels drawn with Canadian contexts in literature and political economy are mainly Western European and portend neither, then, to any totalizing conceptualization of immigrant “experience” in Canada nor to a complete history of Anglo-European literary and economic discourses as they emerge in the Old World and recur in the New. This study is least of all an in-depth social or economic history of smallholding. Finally, this project is uninterested in preserving colonial or patriarchal modes of property distribution, but instead seeks to critique both under the broad heading of capitalist modes of production and ownership which colonialism and patriarchy reproduce on a global scale.

## **Chapter Breakdowns**

This comparative analysis builds on the discussion of smallholder binaries, as Chapter One introduces this investigation through a close reading of a contemporary Canadian novel before embarking on an extended flashback which continues through Chapter Four. In Chapter One, this flashback traces the development of the smallholder trope as myth, which is emergent in the contemporary novel, in political economy. Chapters Two, Three, and Four continue the examination of smallholders as a discursive force through a comparative, Trans-Atlantic analysis of political economy and poetry.

The archaeology of the force of the smallholder trope in political economy, however, neither contextualizes nor historicizes this trope as it is deployed in the literary texts under discussion. Political economy contains a history of inventions of the smallholder as an ideological device, inventions which trouble notions of “context” or “history” as foundational to a discourse’s objective “truth.” Certain figurations of smallholders in intellectual history do not cause their repetition in literature; in other words, literature is not derivative of a few key motifs from intellectual history, but rather the rhetorical structure of smallholders’ deployment limits serious historical inquiry into these interdisciplinary creatures. The study of smallholders requires an account of their figural status, which is enunciated in various genres and historical contexts. The aim is to outline a theory of the smallholder trope as it operates as a discursive force by tracing the rhetorical modes of the trope’s emergence in political economy as well as in literature. In short, neither discourse has contextualizing

power. Both discourses, however, mobilize smallholders for ideological ends, and a comparative analysis of political economy and literature produces a sketch of the figural elements operative in accomplishing them. This project locates in the two persistent binaries noted above recurrent discursive patterns that, although historically located, stretch across the grain of historical change largely unaffected. The discourses, both literary and politico-economic, which deploy smallholders are marked by tenacious logical fallacies, not the least of which is their tendency to construct ahistorical histories of smallholding. These fallacies, operative in the pattern of two interconnected binaries discussed above, problematize more traditional approaches to smallholder studies, such as more or less empirically-based historical methodologies.

These traditional approaches, however, cast long shadows. They are deployed in this study as heuristic devices, as the conventional strategy of chronology gives shape to the dissertation as a whole. Chapter One first traces the two smallholder binaries elucidated in the Introduction in contemporary literature before locating by way of a flashback these binaries at work in classical political economy. The comparative analysis of Mary Lawson's novel *Crow Lake* (2002) and political economy historicizes the mobilization of smallholders by extending the analysis to intellectual history and literature. It is vital to emphasize again, however, that the focus is not on authors, genres, or periods but rather recurrent discursive structures with ideological consequences. The comparative analysis of literature and political economy simply brings this object into focus.

Chapter Two continues the flashback by again bringing into conversation literature and political economy, this time with histories of enclosure in Britain. Oliver Goldsmith's canonical poem "The Deserted Village" (1770) both reiterates the smallholder binaries of nature-culture and primitive-civilized and redeploys them for political ends. Smallholders are the pathetic figures which nascent capitalism expropriates, yet Goldsmith fails to ultimately question the social institution of private property that is fundamental to capitalism. Smallholders are represented as impoverished, expropriated, and ultimately displaced to the New World, as Goldsmith leaves the tension in his critique between anti-capitalism and pro-private property unresolved.

Chapter Three moves forward in time and from the Old to the New World. The Canadian Oliver Goldsmith, a relative of the Anglo-Irish author of "The Deserted Village," is the literary subject of this chapter. The Canadian Goldsmith's "The Rising Village" (1825) also deploys the two familiar smallholder binaries, but with a different motive: whereas his relative chastised nascent capitalism for impoverishing smallholders, the Canadian Goldsmith champions its success in the colonial context. This success is rather ambivalent, however, as an analysis of the figurative structure of Goldsmith's text is traced in John Locke's theory of property as well as in the natural law tradition, revealing significant ideological motivations for mobilizing smallholders as the moral justification for property accumulation and colonial progress at the expense of Nova Scotia's Aboriginal peoples.

Joseph Howe's "Acadia" (1874) is the literary text under discussion in Chapter Four. It offers another perspective on the settlement of the region, one which is outwardly anxious about its impacts on nature and Aboriginal peoples alike. Whereas the Canadian Goldsmith's anxiety over these issues remains latent, Howe's is full-blown. In a poem riven with ambivalence, Howe on the one hand supports the development of natural resources and the appropriation of Aboriginal people's land. On the other hand, despite key moments of colonial othering in the poem which reify both nature and Aboriginal peoples while constructing pathos for smallholders and bolstering settler society, the text is animated in its support of preserving natural beauty and Aboriginal property rights. Theories of reification are analyzed to account for this ambivalence in Howe's text, one which seems so suited to smallholders: figures composed of binaries, and two of them at that.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Jennifer Bajorek refers to “second nature” as part of “the capital-relation” which is “neither natural nor sensuous and nonetheless becomes . . . *a material condition of life*” (45). See also Pheng Cheah’s “Mattering,” in which he locates the strange tendency in bourgeois logic (like in Marx’s commodity) which is comprised of “dynamic formations [that] can constrain us like a second nature after radical critique has exposed them as contingent non-natural processes.” (133) Cheah cites Frederic Jameson, Georg Lukács, and Louis Althusser who also posit the second nature of capital as implied by Marx’s betwixt and between analysis of a nature beyond nature—or labour as a “socio-natural” relation. All of these thinkers are of course drawing on Marx’s representation of the commodity form as engendering a “phantom” or ghostly objectivity.

<sup>2</sup> See Christopher Bracken’s “Commodity Totemism” in *Magical Criticism* (138-68) for an analysis of Marx’s “language of commodities” as the chiasmatic inversion of two tropes, personification and reification. Our commodities come to life as social products of our labour, according to Bracken; they take on a life and voice of their own, after which we struggle to account for the presence of our lives in our commodities as they appear to us in reified form. Bracken’s analysis of the “magical” force of discourse has influenced my work profoundly, here and throughout this dissertation, in ways which are often difficult to pinpoint. I have departed from his analysis in several ways, such as deploying a tropological range which proceeds outside the bounds of his enquiry, from my recourse to *paralipsis* in the Introduction to *prolepsis*, *metalepsis*, and *anamnesis* in Chapter Three. My

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notion of myth, moreover, is indebted more to Barthes, McLuhan, and to classical political economy than to the discourses of anthropology and ethnography on which Bracken draws. However, overall, *Magical Criticism*, as well as conversations with its author, served as a significant source of inspiration for this project.

<sup>3</sup> For Paul de Man, promises are inextricably bound to excuses. The orange juice's label allegorizes a production process which remains unreadable and for which nature and freshness are excuses for its incompatibility. See *Allegories of Reading*, 246-77.

<sup>4</sup> For example, the Canadian Prairie Provinces are no longer referred to by the Canadian government as "the breadbasket of the world." This figure was an effective turn of the twentieth-century strategy for articulating a discourse of westward expansion and settlement with the Canadian government's design for producing cheap agricultural products for market worldwide. This figure seems to have receded if not died, however, in light of the increasingly obvious fact that Canadian agricultural production is barely large enough to produce a ripple in the ocean of the global agricultural commodities market.

<sup>5</sup> This is the memorable phrase of former United States of America Minister of Agriculture, Earl Butts. His "get big or get out" approach to the farm crisis was tantamount to none at all. Although the USA finally introduced farm subsidy programs, Canada remains the only modern, western, industrial nation without any such thing.

<sup>6</sup> See Joan Thirsk's *The Rural Economy of England, English Peasant Farming, The Agrarian History of England and Wales*, Volume 5, Part 2, and *Rural England: An Illustrated History of the Landscape*.

<sup>7</sup> See the autobiography of Josiah Henson, *The Life of Josiah Henson*, as well as *Fruits of the Earth* by Frederick Phillip Grove, *Grain* by C.K. Stead, and Illia Kiriak's *Sons of the Soil*.

<sup>8</sup> See Moodie's *Roughing it in the Bush*, Catharine Parr Traill's *The Backwoods of Canada*, Mary Lawson's *Crow Lake*, Sharon Butala's *Perfection of the Morning*, Sarah Stickney Ellis' *The Sons of the Soil: A Poem*, and Onoto Watanna's (Winnifred Eaton's) *Cattle*.



## Chapter One: Liminal Smallholders

### Smallholders: Allegories of Discursive Production

If smallholders are textual subjects, do they lack both identity and author? Nancy K. Miller presents a powerful critique of Barthes' rhetorical focus in her concept of "arachnology" (80). Miller offers the term for the study of spiders as a "catachresis"—or, citing Elaine Showalter, a "gynocritics"—for a feminist study of textuality (Miller 80). She argues that Barthes' post-structuralist account of textual production elides the author and by so doing rejects "the embodiment in writing of a gendered subjectivity" (80).

Miller argues that there is a violence done not only to the text but to the "teller": not only is the web of text torn, but the gendered subject within it is effaced when textual production is allowed to overshadow the producer (83). Smallholders, as they are represented in the discourses above, both literary and politico-economic, are predominantly male. Normative historical portrayals entwine property ownership with masculinity. However, also interwoven in the discourse concerning smallholders is according to Miller an effacement of femininity in the discursive production of value, as theories of discursive "labour" tend to elide the feminine quality of labour. As figures which elucidate the labour theory of value, smallholders are mythic *topoi* which emerge in the form of the patriarchal family farm. Lost within this familiar scheme is the labour of the smallholders' partners as more pressing needs for efficiency stretches their

exertion to the limit. A practice Miller calls “overreading” re-establishes the “underread” or effaced role of the feminine in textual production (83).

Miller’s “arachnology” offers a way of reading the problematic of gendered production in discourses which mobilize smallholders. They are producers of value-in-use and valuable figures for ideological uses. That is, smallholders are at once the subjects directing production and the objective means of production. Consequently, as Miller’s analysis suggests, are smallholders the spider or the web? Reading smallholders as creatures of discourse must develop a dual strategy, much like Miller’s but also like McLuhan’s, Barthes’, and Marx’s, of questioning the social text as to the means not only of its production but of what it produces while remembering that the forces it discharges, in the interwoven means and entangled ends of its production, are as much Arachne’s as anyone else’s. The effacement of gender as a determinant element of production functions alongside the racialization of production, which as I will argue also pervades discourses that mobilize smallholders. Gender and race are thought as limits which articulate patriarchal and colonial deployments of smallholders with their others, the feminine and the primitive.

This chapter develops the notion of smallholders’ emergence in the nature-culture and primitive-civilized binaries with a comparative analysis of contemporary literature and classical political economy. A flashback structure is employed, as these binaries are first located in a contemporary Canadian novel and then traced back to their roots in intellectual history. The marshalling of smallholders in Mary Lawson’s bestselling novel *Crow Lake* (2002) is

problematized with reference to the history of these mobilizations in classical political economy, as the novel traffics in figurations of smallholders with an ideologically motivated history contributing to their dispossession. The novel, however, if “overread” in Miller’s sense, also potentiates embodied understandings of discursive production as gendered as well as raced. Lawson’s text, therefore, is recuperated for its employment of rhetorical strategies that disavow patriarchal and colonial deployments of smallholders.

Lawson’s novel opens with “a little bit of family lore,” in a fashion that recalls McLuhan’s notion of myth as a “contraction or implosion” not only of the Morrison family history but also of the labour theory of value and its relationship to the production of texts (Lawson 3; McLuhan 25). This is the novel’s first sentence: “My great-grandmother Morrison fixed a book rest to her spinning wheel so that she could read while she was spinning, or so the story goes” (Lawson 3). With the book rest attached to the spinning wheel, two technologies are hinged, just as the text is hinged to the textile in Marx’s theory of discursive value production. Great-Grandmother Morrison, a smallholder, thus undertakes two kinds of labour simultaneously, one bearing material and the other abstract fruit. Yet the latter is not so immaterial; Great-Grandmother Morrison’s influence produced generations of readers and writers, such as the narrator who spins the tale.

Lawson thus conjoins the practice of textile production and textual production. The labour of spinning, no doubt part of the grinding farm labour Great-Grandmother Morrison wanted her children to escape through education, is

interwoven with the labour of reading. She clothes her family and feeds her mind. But she does not only read, for she is also a producer of texts, both a subject and object of “family lore” which engenders a dream of a better life. This dream has powerful consequences, for as the narrator says in her description of the novel’s central conflict, “What took place between Matt and me can’t be explained without reference to Great-Grandmother. It’s only fair that some of the blame should be laid at her door” (Lawson 3). Great-Grandmother tells us how to read the novel and plays a role in spinning the tale: smallholders are allegories of reading as well as of discursive production. Great-Grandmother Morrison’s dream, although it failed, harbours an active power which animates the lives of generations to come. She is myth-maker and myth, spider and web.

In Barthes’ phrasing, Great-Grandmother Morrison has, like any myth, a double function: she “makes us understand something and . . . imposes it on us” (117). Her homespun image, moreover, if “overread” with Miller’s “arachnology,” represents the domestic labour that is so vital to maintaining a smallholding. Great-Grandmother Morrison is also a portrait of the stoic, morally sound industriousness of the propertied and civilized, but this representation is marked by a prejudice against this socio-economic position which she considers primitive and her longing for something more civilized (Lawson 4, 289). These familiar deployments of smallholders are compressed into the figure of Great-Grandmother Morrison. Lawson’s text casts smallholders in a nostalgic light, in which their expropriation is unfortunate but inevitable.

Lawson's text states that smallholders must be expropriated, though as the use of *paralipsis* suggests, the reasons for this "cannot be made clear" (*Rhetorica Ad Herennium* 322). Just as Marx's commodity speaks by way of *paralipsis*, Lawson's smallholders pretend to say one thing while meaning another. The novel cannot tell us why smallholders must be dispossessed except by specious reference to the tragic nature of an inevitable historical pattern which is fraught with patriarchal and colonial prejudices. This is *paralipsis* in action: a sly, suggestive claim which is in fact groundless (*Rhetorica Ad Herennium* 322).

The use of *paralipsis*, however, does not explain why these particular mobilizations of smallholders are repeated. Another trope characterizes this recurrence, as smallholders are allegorical in Paul de Man's sense of the term (270, 275). For de Man, the tropological (mal)functioning of the referential capacity of discourse "persists in performing what it has shown to be impossible to do. As such, we call it an allegory" (de Man 275). Allegory, according to de Man, is irony in narrative form (300-301). The relationship between smallholders and the binaries of nature-culture and primitive-civilized is ironic, because contradictory elements are brought into comparison. Allegory is the narrative of these incompatible elements, a narrative which continues despite its repeated failure to refer to actuality. The ideological undercurrent of this rhetorical construction of smallholders is not only that their inevitable decline is fabricated but that it does political work and, as it is allegorized, this work is repeatedly carried out. In this reading of de Man, problematizing the rhetorical mode in which smallholders are mobilized constitutes a strategy of demystification.

Despite the prejudices emergent in Great-Grandmother Morrison's representation, her double practice of labour may be recuperated for its consonance with Miller's "arachnology." The textual web is, albeit, uncertain as Lawson puts into question the validity of the piece of Morrison family mythology which is nevertheless so vital to the story itself: the phrase, "or so the story goes," announces, from the novel's first sentence, an epistemological instability concerning the historical or textual transmission of knowledge (Lawson 3). Despite this indeterminacy of meaning, myth's "fundamental character . . . is to be appropriated" or put to use for ideological ends (Barthes 119). The Morrison matriarch's homespun image is "falsely obvious" in that it appears natural, yet its mobilization in the text is ideological (Barthes 11). Lawson's deployment of a matriarchal figure as dominating the Morrison family mythology challenges the Western tradition in two ways: the teller of the tale and the tale itself are "feminine."

As Barthes claims, "the signification of the myth is constituted by a sort of constantly moving turnstile which presents alternately the meaning of the signifier and its form" (123). Great-Grandmother Morrison's spinning wheel, like Marx's spider, is a metaphor for the productive capacity of discursive labour. Spinning like Barthes' "turnstile," Great-Grandmother Morrison's wheel signifies the potential energy of discourse as it is conceived as a Marxian form of labour which both acts on nature and changes human nature. Miller's critique of Barthes reveals the feminine aspects of this labour. Kate is the narrator of a story her Great-Grandmother began weaving, and the story itself, in its figural structure, is

composed with a metaphor of weaving as Lawson allows a notion of discursive “labour” as maternal to emerge. Smallholders’ liminality is written by Lawson as a fold.<sup>1</sup>

Reading smallholders is then a practice that is fraught with problematic notions of gender and race, which belie other more overt ideological discourses of labour, property, and progress. These discourses are political but gauging their forces is as difficult as reading Arachne’s weaving: “the eye cannot say where one color ends / and another starts, so gradual the verging” (Ovid 191). The reification of industrial culture through the nature-culture binary and the racialization of modes of labour and appropriation in the primitive-civilized binary are folded together in the figure of smallholders, each “verging” on or de-limiting the other. By persistently bringing these contradictory elements into relation, smallholders are allegories of discursive production and as such are “verging” subjects, to the extent that they both subjectively direct production and become conventional objects used for prejudicial political ends.

### **Natural (Agri)Culture**

I begin with a close reading of Lawson’s *Crow Lake* (2002) which demonstrates that the novel figures smallholders as liminal before turning to political economy in order to trace the intellectual history of this figuration. Lawson’s settlers hover between nature and culture, primitive and civilized. They carved out their culture in the rough, forested region of the Canadian Shield yet

their labour retains their connection with nature. They are modern civilizers while remaining in close proximity with a “primitive” past. Smallholders are, therefore, a mode of naturalization—a way of rendering culturally constructed change as inevitable.

The novel tells the story of Kate, the narrator, and her siblings coping with the sudden death of their parents in the small, northern Ontario farming community of Crow Lake. Lawson adroitly intertwines Kate’s personal history with the history of the fictional small town. Crow Lake the town, according to Kate, is on the edge of civilization. The Morrison house was “the last in Crow Lake and a fair way out; beyond it there was about three thousand miles of nothing and then the North Pole” (15). It is as if life for Kate as a child was lived teetering between nature and culture, and thus as close to nature as possible without leaving culture completely behind.

Returning to Crow Lake from her urban residence and urbane job is a journey into a temporally distant time, a past which paradoxically persists. Kate remarks several times that returning to Crow Lake is like time travel: “when you fork off the main road[,] . . . the paving runs out and the forest closes in[,] . . . you really feel you’re going back in time” (21). The narrator later repeats this sentence, nearly word for word. Although the road is “paved all the way to Struan [a larger town near Crow Lake] now,” Kate declares, “it is only when you turn off to Crow Lake that the tarmac runs out and the forest closes in and you really start to feel you’re going back in time” (234). Lawson’s repeated associations of time



travel with travelling to Crow Lake evoke a static state of being.<sup>2</sup> The town is a portal into an unaltered past. But how, and when, was this past constituted?

After Kate informs Daniel, her partner, that Crow Lake is comprised of a store, church, and schools, but “mostly just farms,” he thinks that living in Crow Lake is “real old-world stuff” (38). Kate explains that the place where she grew up was “not old-world” and, moreover, that “it’s still like that now, more or less. There are lots of places still like that” (38). She means that these small farming communities are “still” much like they were in the three or four generations separating the settlers of Crow Lake from the novel’s present. It was a settlement carved out of the “true wilderness” by “three stone-broke young men who were fed up with working on other men’s farms and wanted farms of their own” (39). They each claimed fifty acres of Crown land and cleared it, and since “the government wanted it settled, they got it free” (39). Then they no longer had to work for wages. They became owner-operators, possessing the horse and plough and walking behind them on their own land.

This scene, however, runs counter to individualist myths of settlement. Crow Lake’s settlers were not “self-made men” but rather were first dependent on wages. In their transition from wage labourers to owner-operators, moreover, they cleared land together and shared farming equipment for the first few years (39). Although capitalism both precedes and pervades their entrepreneurial ventures, their industriousness is fuelled by communalism as much as by private enterprise. In Lawson, like in Smith and Marx, smallholding is an allegory for conflicting modes of production.

Settlers retain their natural aura in connection to “previous accumulation” (Smith 34; Marx, *Capital* 1: 713) while being markers of and being marked by history. As wage labourers, Crow Lake’s settlers were already engaged in a thoroughly modern form of work. Moreover, they give up their modernity and travel the road back to nature—a road built by commercial logging companies (Lawson 39). The contradiction at work in the text thus becomes more clear-cut, as smallholders in *Crow Lake* arrive in nature, ironically, by civilizing it through labour and private ownership (39).

Crow Lake remains somehow unaffected by Western culture in the very process of its settlement. The liminal figuration of small-scale farmers allows culture to draw nearest to nature while remaining civilized and not straying into the primitive, as smallholders are at once the condition of possibility of differentiating nature from culture, and the primitive from the civilized, while remaining a rhetorical mode of interweaving these familiar binaries. For example, before the colonization of the area by settler society, the region surrounding Crow Lake was characterized as a “true wilderness” (Lawson 38). Even after settlement by smallholders, however, Crow Lake retains its rustic quality. Smallholders alter nature and then naturalize this transformation, for they are figures in a discourse which conflates cultural change with unalterable necessity. At once natural/primitive and cultured/civilized, the smallholder is the unchanging changer.

Smallholders are also the bearers of settler society in the novel. The land given to Crow Lake’s three settlers belonged to the “Crown . . . and because it

was located smack in the middle of nowhere and the government wanted it settled, they got it free” (Lawson 39). The land then had to be cleared, as the farms were “wrest[ed] . . . from the wilderness” and “carved out of the forest” (Lawson 225). Daniel Coleman argues that

images of carving, fighting, and battling that are repeated motifs in this symbolic settler history are symptoms of the traumatic, spectral history that remains undead in Canadian collective awareness. The representation of Canada’s symbolic history by means of the peaceable-seeming term ‘settlement’ suppresses, even if it depends upon, the violence that was employed to expunge any claims which First Nations people had to the northern half of this continent. (29)

The spectral history that Coleman conceptualizes, in reference to Slavoj Žižek, emerges in Lawson’s portrayal of Canada’s “settler-invader” culture (Coleman 14). In settling the region, “the tons of rock shifted, trees uprooted, fields fenced” sublimate through the imagery of hard labour the displacement of Canada’s Aboriginal peoples (Lawson 225). This strategic formulation returns in the text, as the narrator, Kate, explains the settlement of the region to her partner, Daniel. In response to Daniel’s claim that ““It seems crazy to try to farm up here,”” Kate says, ““They [the original settlers] had no money, most of them, and the land up here was free. Crown land. Back then, provided you cleared it you could have it for nothing”” (242). Daniel’s reply is illuminating, as he complains about the biting blackflies in the forested area where they are walking: ““I can see why, if

you don't mind my saying so.' He scratched savagely. It looked as if his love affair with Uncharted Wilderness was going to be a short one" (242). Daniel thinks that the government's desire to settle the region is reasonable, because civilization will decrease the annoying presence of bugs. The itch the government scratches "savagely" with its settlement scheme is the dispossession of Aboriginal peoples. The black flies are part of the myth of conquering an inhospitable environment which is dear to the Canadian cultural imaginary. However, latent within this part of Canada's "symbolic history," according to Coleman, is the "spectral history" of the "continuing suppression of First Peoples' claims to land and sovereignty" (29). The continuing presence of the black flies reflects the region's liminal status. Smallholders drive out the black flies, and yet Crow Lake persistently hovers between primitive and civilized.

Kate's tale which follows the momentary emergence of a First Nation's person into the text further illuminates the "spectral history" at work (Lawson 67-68). Indeed, First Nations peoples are all but effaced. The narrator makes a brief, half-page reference to Jim Sumack who no longer attends school because he cannot afford shoes (66-67). Kate reflects that "The Indians are really poor" and that settler culture "should be ashamed" for reasons which are nevertheless "obscure[]" (67). The tale, however, is much more interesting; it is about a spider lugging a large fly back to its nest (67). The spider works like smallholders: with diligent industriousness, it accomplished its goal of devouring its prey. The fate of the spider is nevertheless unenviable, as Kate's younger sister "stamped on him" (68). This moment in the text speaks to the novel's environmentalist vision,

as it symbolizes natural devastation by settler society, which is represented as operating on petulant whim. The tale of the spider might also be understood as part of the “symbolic history” of settler society as it pertains to smallholders, which is thus rooted in the nature-culture binary, as the spider’s/smallholders’ arduous labour is/are, in the novel, all for naught. As liminal creatures of discourse, smallholders slide easily across these categorical divides. “Spectral history,” moreover, relies on the primitive-civilized binary. According to Marx, the spider is a figure for nature’s work. In Lawson, the spider’s labour is personified as a civilizing mission and yet this mission is pre-empted because of its liminal status: smallholders retain traces of nature and the primitive which return to haunt civilization.

As Kate relates this history of Crow Lake to Daniel, she muses that “they [the original settlers] would have been [her] Great-Grandmother’s contemporaries” (40). Her Great-Grandmother Morrison instilled in Kate’s family the value of education. It was not only self-improvement. Education meant an escape from the farm’s grinding labour and poverty. Great-Grandmother Morrison educated all her children in an attempt to provide them with choices beyond the “five hundred acres of barren farmland on the Gaspé Peninsula” where she lived with her husband and fourteen children (4). Kate’s father, Robert, “the youngest son of [Kate’s Great-Grandmother’s] youngest son” (25), fulfilled his Grandmother’s “dream of getting her family educated and off the land” (25). He becomes a banker in Struan, the town nearest to Crow Lake, but marries a woman from a neighbouring farm on the Gaspé Peninsula and settles in a rural house at

Crow Lake. Just before their deaths, their oldest son, Luke, passed his high school matriculation exams and was accepted into teachers' college, making him the first Morrison, "after three generations of striving[,] . . . to go on to higher education" (8). Luke later rescinds his acceptance, opting instead to find a job and support his brother, Matt (who actually does more to support the family than Luke), and sisters Kate and Bo.

The "Morrison dream" is an escape from farming through education. The "Pye nightmare," in contrast, is eking out an existence from the land (7). "The Morrison dream" shatters, and becomes intertwined with "the Pye nightmare." Jackson Pye was one of the original settlers of Crow Lake, who established a farm and passed it down to two generations, to Arthur and finally to Calvin Pye. All the Pye patriarchs are abusive and the succession of the farm finally ends when Calvin murders his son and commits suicide. Matt Morrison inherits the farm since he is married to Calvin Pye's daughter, Marie. Matt declares that they are "surviving" on the farm, but admits they "will never be rich," echoing what is represented as the historical fate of the Morrisons (274). Smallholders are suspended in a not economically or culturally progressive and yet not a primitive socio-economic mode of being. This liminal being cuts across and problematizes discourses of race, gender, and class.

For example, the Town of Crow Lake is again associated with the primitive: to go there is to leave civilization behind. Robert, Matt and Kate's father, graduated from high school but disliked urban life in Toronto. He then "headed north and a bit west, away from so-called civilization, and by the time he

was twenty-three he was settled in Crow Lake, which was much the same sort of community as the one he'd left a thousand miles behind" (25). He marries "his childhood sweetheart[,] . . . a girl from a neighbouring farm," much like Matt will do (26). Robert leaves the hardscrabble farm on the Gaspé but settles near others like it, and although his standard of living is now better than any of the Morrison farmers before him, he has not entirely escaped the farm. He has been sending money home to support the debt-ridden farms of his parents and brothers.

Similarly, other members of the family, despite being "clever boys," had no chance at education. "They are all on the fishing boats now," reports Kate's Aunt Annie, because "there is no future for them even on the farm. And you might well call it a tragedy, but it is one that most of the world is familiar with" (59).

Smallholding in *Crow Lake* is an inevitably doomed socio-economic form.

This tragedy is evident in Crow Lake the town, since of the three original farms, only one remains in its family's succession as it has entered the lucrative and government-subsidized dairy business. While Matt follows in the footsteps of the original settlers, moving from wage-labourer to owner-operator, others in his family are not so lucky. Judging by the demise of the other original farm in Crow Lake, which was "taken over" by a larger farm, the long-term viability of Matt's farm is unlikely (40).

The cause of the probable demise of Matt's farm mirrors the cause of his parents' own death. They were "killed when their car was hit by a fully loaded logging truck whose brakes failed as it was coming down Honister Hill" (19). The logging truck is itself a double figure of destruction and production as it is loaded

with the fruits of the region's natural resources and, viewed differently, with the industrialized destruction of nature. In Lawson's unsubtle metaphor, runaway industrial production kills part of the "Morrison dream."

"Honister" may refer to the Honister Slate Mine, located in England's Lake District. The mine opened in 1728, passed through several expansions as well as industrial and technological improvements, and finally became one of the most advanced quarries in Britain in the 1980s (Honister).<sup>3</sup>

The story of the Honister mine is an allegory for the demise of the small producer through industrialization. The mine lives on as a tourist attraction just as small farms continue to operate by making alternative consumer appeals to niche markets such as "organic" farming. But like his parents' vehicle, Matt's small farm is in the path of a larger one. He will have gone from wage-labourer to an "old" mode of production that "still" exists and finally back to a wage-labourer.

Matt's sacrifice of his high school education to support his siblings allows Kate to be the first Morrison to attend university. Her professorial research studies the impact of surfactants on invertebrates in fresh water ponds, like those near her childhood home (190). She was drawn to this field upon discovering "a water boatman, *Notonecta*" in a sample taken from a "a small bay at the end of . . . [a] lake" near Toronto that is heavily trafficked by tourists (189, 190). The water boatman "was covered—caked—in a sticky black coat of lubricating oil from one of the lake's many motorboats" (190). She fears that the life in the ponds she knew as a child would fall prey to the same fate, not from boats, but from other possible pollutants (190). Since Crow Lake is so remote, tourism is not an



environmental threat. The ponds remain pristine despite the other impacts of civilization in the area—logging no doubt one of them. The novel's final sentence reports that the ponds, where Kate's love of learning was first piqued by her equally perceptive older brother, Matt, "are just as they have always been" (291). They mirror the settlement of Crow Lake itself: changing yet staying the same. The novel's environmentalist vision counters unchecked, or "runaway," industrialization and seeks to preserve nature in an (illusory) pristine state. This vision is incoherent, however, as it lapses into the familiar ironies which structure smallholders' deployment as myth: the small farmers, such as Matt, are (post)natural civilizers. Kate is a civilized (re)naturalizer.

These are the two contradictions at the heart of the novel, yet they do not diminish the text's affective power. For the novel's marshalling of the small, owner-operated farmer as the natural civilizer, a role played by Kate in her research but in reverse, is an enabling contradiction. Small farmers, and here, their descendants, are natural but they naturalize or produce nature. Smallholders then personify nature's power for self-generation. Deploying smallholders enables the novel to take us back in time and back to nature, yet the novel as a cultural production follows in the footsteps of the settlers it describes. It travels up the road wrought by culture in order to get back to nature, which is supposedly always present and unchanging. Yet *Crow Lake* produces the object—nature—it purports to describe. A novel about smallholders, then, discursively does the labour smallholders are supposed to perform. The text does what it says. *Crow*

*Lake* does not describe smallholders as historical figures farming the land or fishing the sea. Instead, it invents and deploys smallholders as a rhetorical force.

Broadly characterized, smallholders are represented in terms of their contradictory yet enabling and forceful deployment as unchanging changers or natural civilizers. As such, they are allegories of discursive production: discourse produces them while they are also productive of discourse. They are both a means of knowing nature and culture, primitive and civilized, and, at the same time, they produce these notions in and as discourse. But how is nature defined and, in turn, how is the smallholder as a figure for culture to be understood in the terms staked out by Lawson—as a figure whose labour changes nature and then renders those changes natural? How does labour and, more importantly, how does the labour of discourse *do* this?

### **The Labour Theory of Value and the Nature-Culture Binary**

Much like the ponds in the novel's conclusion, smallholders seem ever-present and unchanging: they function mythically as “benumbed” speech (Barthes 125). They have persisted in diverse discourses, emerging across continents in different historical periods. Classical political economy is vital in the history of this figure's invention. For questions animate this discourse—what is value, how is value produced, how does value circulate, and how is value measured?—which intersect with politics and economics, but also with theories of language and rhetoric. An archaeology of the labour theory of value, from classical political

economy to Marx, is thus intertwined with literature and classical rhetoric. These discourses interweave at the site of smallholders, figures that form a singular speculative knot: the material productiveness of immaterial discourses. The following questions orient this investigation: what are the figurative delineations of smallholders in political economy and literature, and how do these rhetorical structures function ideologically in these discourses?

The constitutive rhetorical elements of the labour theory of value in classical political economy are the focus of the remainder of this Chapter, as smallholders are shown to be crucial figures in Adam Smith's and in John Stuart Mill's conceptualization of their ideologically motivated versions of the labour theory of value. Smith and Mill deploy smallholders in the conventional binaries elucidated thus far. They articulate smallholders within similar conceptions of the labour theory of value, albeit with crucial and highly nuanced differences in tropological mode and attendant rhetorical strategy. At issue in both Smith and in Mill is a rhetorical mode of reification. Smith and Mill personify the market in order to naturalize industrial culture. Smallholders are the means of this personification, as for both theorists they are the figures that change nature through their labour, thus giving "life" to various products.<sup>4</sup> Both thinkers have recourse to the market to naturalize this life, as commodity-constructs appear in distorted form as real things. By mobilizing smallholders, Smith and Mill blur the boundaries between language and economics in an ideological move which naturalizes capitalism.

Just as in Lawson's recourse to the nature-culture binary, smallholders in Smith and Mill are the unchanging changers who work on nature, alter it, and thereby modify their own nature and yet they remain ironically the same. Smith and Mill mobilize the primitive-civilized binary as smallholders become allegories for a racialized quasi-history, in which smallholders are at once harbingers of cultural change and the remnants of a stagnant and retrograde socio-economic mode of being which culture must eradicate. Smith and Mill's deployment of the nature-culture binary will be discussed first, followed by their mobilization of the primitive-civilized binary.

Smith marshals smallholders to articulate his labour theory of value in *An Inquiry Into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, the founding text of classical political economy.<sup>5</sup> Marx cites "the tremendous advance on the part of Adam Smith to throw aside all limitations which mark wealth-producing activity and [to define it] as labor in general, neither industrial, nor commercial, nor agricultural" (*Contribution* 298). "Labour," according to Smith, "was the first price, the original purchase-money that was paid for all things" (30). In his metaphor, we buy things from nature with our labour. The "real" value of everything is equal to "the toil and trouble of acquiring it," or to the price we pay to appropriate it through our labour (Smith 30). Labour both appropriates objects and fixes their value. This "original" and "real" value presupposes for Smith a "previous" accumulation in which "the whole produce of labour belongs to the labourer" (47).

Smith maintains that smallholding was the dominant mode of production prior to capitalism. He argues that there was an original state in which humanity subsists by exchanging labour directly with nature: “In that original state of things, which precedes both the appropriation of land and the accumulation of stock, *the whole produce of labour belongs to the labourer*. He has neither landlord nor master to share with him” (64, emphasis added). By “the appropriation of land,” Smith means the enclosure of *all* land. “Previous” accumulation engenders private property relations, but does so on a smaller scale and in a diffuse manner.

Once capitalism is entrenched, the “previous” accumulation that Smith posits is not elided but rather becomes scarce (64). “Such cases,” Smith contends, “are not very frequent” in which an individual is “both master and workman, and enjoys the whole produce of his own labour” (65-66). Smith explains further that “He must in most cases share it with the owner of the stock [capital] which employs him” (49). Under capitalism, smallholders are rare. They are nearly extinct yet persist in a precarious socio-economic position. Lawson’s Great-Grandmother Morrison represents a “contraction or implosion” (McLuhan 25) of this historical process of dispossessing smallholders; she is a socio-economic rarity but a discursive regularity. These rare subjects are discursively interwoven not only with the labourer and capitalist but also from textual threads of a by-gone and modern world. Smallholders hover over divides in economics and in history, divides which are in turn knit together and re-constituted by mobilizing this discursive subject.

Smith argues that the value of smallholders' crops, livestock, fish, lumber, and ore are measured in labour, the "real" value of all commodities. But, Smith contends, this value is limited by the ability to "truck" or trade surplus produce, since there is no incentive to labour and acquire more than the basic necessities and comforts if this surplus cannot be exchanged (17). Smith calls this incentive "the power of exchanging" and locates it in the market (17). The commodity's value is no longer determined by the labour it cost to produce it but rather by the market itself. Exchange, or the mediation of value, becomes the means of producing value. This conceptual move—from value constituted by labour to the production of value through exchange or through mediation itself—marks not only the discourse of classical political economy but also linguistic theories of value production, both literary and rhetorical. Commodity fetishism emerges in Smith through a logic of substitution in which the real is made virtual and the virtual real.

Smith contends that labour is the real source and measure of value, but then invokes as a gauge of value "the higgling and bargaining of the market, according to that sort of rough equality which, though not exact, is sufficient for carrying on the business of common life" (31). Smith's version of the labour theory of value as commodity fetishism continues by claiming that the commodity does not embody a plethora of "metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties" (Marx, *Capital* 1: 71). Instead, a commodity "is a plain palpable object" whereas labour is "an abstract notion, which, though it can be made sufficiently intelligible, is not altogether so natural and obvious" (Smith 32). Smith

personifies the market, allowing its “higgling” to determine the commodity’s value. Marx counters that both capital and the market are social relations between people which are mediated by things. Smith deploys personification to refer to “the business of common life,” but the “life” with which he imbues the market is anything but pedestrian (31). For this “life” is not natural but is, rather, rhetorical.

Smith renders labour “intelligible,” “natural,” and “obvious” by mobilizing the smallholder as the figural representation of “previous” accumulation (Smith 32, 34). Just as Sunterra refers to “Real Farmers,” Smith refers to the “real” or material labour undertaken by smallholders as the foundation of his labour theory of value. His deployment of smallholders in a pseudo-historical narrative lends his rendition of “original” accumulation a literal sheen. Sunterra’s “Real Farmers” and Lawson’s Morrisons are later versions of Smith’s mode of moralizing the pre-capitalist production of use-values.

As Smith makes clear, however, once capitalism is on its feet, most labourers are no longer able to refer to the products of their labour as their own. Instead, they subsist by exchanges mediated by the market. Labour, in Smith’s formulation, becomes an unreliable measure of value, for the labour required to produce something—or the “original purchase-money that was paid for all things”—is substituted for “the higgling and bargaining of the market” as the measure of value (30, 31). Thinking value in the commodity form as the product of the market, rather than as mediated social labour, marks the limit of Smith’s labour theory of value.

The nefarious logic of the production of value through exchange, in which equivalents are exchanged yet value is nevertheless produced, effaces the labour theory of value in Smith as it pertains to capitalism. Although labour was “the first price, the original purchase-money that was paid for all things,” this “price” seems neither natural nor quantifiable (Smith 30). Instead, the commodity, the market in which it circulates, and the exchanges which determine its value, are “natural and obvious” (32). In these exchanges, the “commodity is then sold precisely for what it is worth . . . or for what it really costs the person who brings it to market” (55). “Real” value is posited again as being a product of the market. And this market is avowedly “natural.”

The theory of value production emerging in place of the labour theory of value spectralizes the role of smallholders in value production. First, smallholders are characters in Smith’s pseudo-historical allegory for “original accumulation.” Second, they become a conceptual device in his ideologically inflected naturalization of the market in which immaterial, mediated exchanges produce material gains. Smith deploys the smallholder to explain the transition from feudal to capitalist social relations, as the emergence of market capitalism makes smallholding a socio-economic rarity. Smith moralizes smallholders, whose “exact attention to small savings and small gains,” in contradistinction to “extensive property” which is “unfavourable” to “improvement,” encourages the greatest increase of social prosperity (363-64). For Smith,

The small proprietor . . . who knows every part of his little territory, who views it all with the affection which property,



especially small property, naturally inspires, and who upon that account takes pleasure not only in cultivating but in adorning it, is generally of all improvers the most industrious, the most intelligent, the most successful. (392)

He is critical of western European property structures in which ownership is concentrated into the hands of “a few great proprietors” either by acquisition or “usurpation” (361). He also declares that the laws of “entails” and “primogeniture” are “absurd” because they prevent the re-distribution of property. Smallholders are rare in Europe but therefore they are of great value (363). It is the same with European land. It is impossible to become a landowner with “small capital” in Europe, according to Smith, but one may become a tenant farmer and “live very happily, and very independently” (392). Smith contends that European smallholders hover in a contradictory independent dependence. The “higgling” of the market marks their tenancy agreement and the value of their products. Smith moralizes their labour but does so in the service of capital accumulation which ultimately has made European smallholders scarce, as he admits. Smallholders in the European context are bourgeois management tools for the tension between labour and capital.

His mobilization of smallholders according to this rhetorical strategy extends to the North American context. Despite the rarity of smallholding in Europe, Smith brings glad tidings about the New World. He assures that smallholders are experiencing a rebirth in North America where labourers are few, wages are high, and land is abundant and inexpensive (393, 532). North American

smallholders are full proprietors. They are the source of “rapid advances” made by concentrating capital “altogether in agricultural” production (392). Smith fails to consider, however, that the concentration of capital is precisely the socio-economic phenomenon most threatening to smallholding. As Lawson portrays in *Crow Lake*, the small farms of the region are bought by larger ones.

That smallholders are scarce resources in Europe makes them of great value not only to the prosperity of the nation but for buttressing the ideological notions which contribute to capitalist growth: “the affection which property . . . naturally inspires” and the “industrious” ethic which acquires, maintains, and increases property (Smith 392). Smith marshals the North American smallholders to declare that capitalism is still alive in the nascent American Dream. It is as if Babiak’s Big Valley Jamboree revellers and Lawson’s settlers walk right off the pages of *The Wealth of Nations*. They play the ideological role of legitimating notions of property founded on labour, which nevertheless underpin the dispossession of labourers on an ever-increasing scale as these same notions are mystified by commodity fetishism. Smallholders do not reflect history; they make history happen.

Smallholding’s persistence in Smith’s text delineates smallholders’ role in discourse. They are not (or not merely) the appropriative labourers whose efforts “previous” to capitalism gained them small and diffuse private or semi-private property, and who laid the foundation for the development of a culture in which they were outmoded and all but erased. Smallholders live on in the texts of classical political economy in order to lend their discursively invented and

propagated natural aura to capitalism, the economic system which follows and replaces original accumulation. But it does not replace it completely.

Smallholders convoke both a capitalist world which separates labourers from the products of their work and a pre-capitalist world in which labourers were also owners.

In Smith's text, then, smallholders are not beings of flesh and blood cultivating the earth or fishing the ocean. Rather, they are between-beings.<sup>6</sup> Their labour is not only instrumental in naturalizing the process in which value is produced, either in original or capital accumulation. They are the mediators through which Smith's discourse posits that value-in-exchange produces real value. Therefore, they are a mediation expressing mediation. They are both expedient ideological tools and meta-figural apparatuses which tell of the productive forces harboured in discourse. In Smith's text, smallholders are thus a means of exchange that neither occupy a definite class position nor constitute definable socio-historical subjects but rather are a force propelling value. They are immaterial, ideological weapons which naturalize constructed and contradictory discourses.

John Stuart Mill offers a further development of the rhetoric of the smallholder in classical political economy. He cites Smith's labour theory of value in his *Essays on Some Unsettled Questions of Political Economy* (1844). Indeed, their formulations are strikingly similar. He quotes Smith's contention that "Labour alone is the primary means of production; 'the original purchase-money which has been paid for everything'" (Mill, *Essays* 94). He further

declares that “In the ultimate analysis . . . labour appears to be the only essential of production” (Mill, *Essays* 94). Nothing is of value without labour, Mill claims, since even “the spontaneous gifts of nature” require labour to appropriate them and put them to use (*Essays* 94). Mill gives less credit to nature’s role in the production process than does John Locke, who estimates that labour creates 99% of the value in any production process, leaving the other 1% to nature (Locke 25).

Mill’s later and more substantial text, *Principles of Political Economy: with Some of Their Applications to Social Philosophy* (1848), gives a fuller treatment of the subject of the labour theory of value. Nature provides “mere materials,” but it also has “powers” and “active energies” (Mill, *Principles* 26). The properties of matter and natural potency are at work in all production, Mill claims, and these “natural forces are immeasurably more powerful” than humanity’s strength (*Principles* 27).<sup>7</sup> Labour produces not matter but “motion” (Mill, *Principles* 27). It functions by “availing [itself] of natural forces in existence, or by *arranging* objects in those mixtures and combinations by which natural forces are generated” (Mill, *Principles* 27, emphasis added). By working, we set “objects in motion; the properties of matter, the laws of nature, do the rest” (*Principles* 28).<sup>8</sup> According to Mill, “skill and ingenuity” are needed in “*discovering* movements, practicable by their powers, and capable of bringing about the effects which they desire” (*Principles* 28, emphasis added). Labour unleashes natural forces by the *discovery* of the powers of natural objects and the subsequent *arrangement* of natural objects in order to unleash these powers.

Just as Smith blurs the boundary between language and economics, Mill encodes the labour theory of value with rhetorical terminology, suggesting that there is something discursive about the way in which labour and nature join forces in the production process. In Mill's analysis, it is as if production itself was rhetorical in nature. Aristotle states in *The Art of Rhetoric* that discovery and arrangement are the first two of the five foundational rhetorical categories: style, memory, and delivery are the remaining three. Discovery and arrangement are rhetorical terms vital to the formation of arguments. Mill's conceptualization of the labour theory of value rests then upon a rhetorical foundation. Moreover, his characterization of labour as inventing uses for objects and setting these objects in motion to achieve desired results resonates with Aristotle's definition of rhetoric not as mere persuasion but as "the detection of the persuasive aspects of each matter" (70). Rhetoric is not persuasion itself and labour is not the intended result. Rather, rhetoric is the ability to observe what is persuasive—it is a skill or art. Labour for Mill is the skill of producing motion in a productive manner.

Discovering which movements are possible and how to arrange matter in a manner that will produce motion recalls Aristotle's *topos* of possibility (185-88). Mill deploys this *topos* to argue about labour's incapacity to produce matter, and its capacity to produce motion through applied pressure (*Principles* 27-28). It is impossible for labour to produce matter but it is possible for it to move matter. Mill's labour theory of value anticipates contemporary formulations of discourse's productive powers by conceiving of labour's productive capacities in terms of rhetorical operations: rhetoric compels minds and impels bodies.<sup>9</sup>

Mill's encoding of his labour theory of value in rhetorical terms, moreover, explains his hesitation to reduce the science of production to an empirical science. If labour has rhetorical qualities, then the science of production is inherently un-scientific. First, Mill admits the impossibility of measuring the individual contributions of nature and labour in any act of production. "The part which nature has in any work," Mill argues,

is indefinite and incommensurable. It is impossible to decide that in any one thing nature does more than in any other. One cannot even say that labour does less. Less labour may be required; but if that which is required is absolutely indispensable, the result is just as much the product of labour, as of nature. (*Principles* 28)

Labour may arrange matter in a manner suitable to producing an intended result. But since it is impossible to delimit the role of nature's "powers" in the production process, it is also impossible to predict the consequences of labour as it interacts with nature and unleashes its forces for the purposes of production. According to Mill, labour is also an incalculable force.

Following Mill's logic, determining the value of any commodity requires an accurate calculation of the labour it cost to produce it (*Essays* 94). But in the production process which generates value (value is conceived by Mill as "utility"), labour is an indefinite magnitude that is bound up with an equally inestimable force of nature. In order to measure the value of a given product of labour "back to the origin of things, . . . we come into a region of fractions too minute for calculation" (*Principles* 32). Attempting to measure value as a quantity

of labour, for Mill, is therefore impossible for two reasons: nature plays an indeterminate role in value formation, and there is so much labour embedded in any one “commodity” that “it is seen at once that such quantities are not worth taking into the account for any practical purpose” (*Principles* 32).

Just as Smith dismissed labour as a practical measure of value, Mill also finds that labour is “an abstract notion” whereas a commodity is “a plain palpable object” (Smith 32). In question in both Smith and Mill’s accounts of the labour theory of value then is the discursive production of material effects. Smith imbues the market with the human capacity for labour while Mill articulates this fetishized production by interweaving labour and nature, which combine forces in a distinctly rhetorical manner.

The rhetorical framework in Mill’s *Principles of Political Economy* is not merely stylistic ornament but rather is a constitutive element in his thinking of labour’s relation to nature and the production of value. In Book One, Chapter Two, Mill states that the “Labour of invention and discovery” is important to the production of “the ultimate product as directly, though not so immediately, as manual labour itself” (*Principles* 41-42). “Intellectual speculation” and “theoretic discoveries,” according to Mill, are as vital in producing concrete “national and universal results” as any factory (*Principles* 43, 42, 43). In a move reminiscent of his characterization of the role of labour and nature in the production process as indeterminate, Mill describes the process of invention with a series of historical discoveries, such as Watt’s steam engine and the electromagnetic telegraph (*Principles* 42). His use of the *topos* of precedent provides concrete examples for

the inventive process (Aristotle 202). If labour is defined as creating motion rather than matter, however, then the mental action which impelled matter into motion did not itself create the product. Rather, it did so “directly, though not so immediately,” joining forces with both nature and human manual labour (Mill, *Principles* 42-43).

For Mill, speculation is productive through an immediate mediation and smallholders are a heuristic device for this liminal productive capacity. Smallholders, as Smith and Mill’s first productive labourers, undertake work that is both discursive and material. Smallholders allow each thinker to conceive of labour in its original form as a direct interaction with nature. By labouring, smallholders change nature and thereby change their own nature. This change is measured as fetishized value in Smith while Mill represents labour as an incalculable force. Both thinkers attempt to justify capitalist culture by reifying its social relations with reference to the naturalized mode of production which precedes it. Smith conceptualizes labour in its original “civilized” state as smallholding and then displaces this conception by personifying the market as the producer of value. Mill also represents original civilized labour as smallholding, but then represents value production as the indefinite limit between nature’s and culture’s work. This is a liminal notion of labour which Mill likens to speculation.

In the labour theory of value, smallholders bring Smith’s commodities to life and invest Mill’s speculative thought with its inventive power. Mill’s conception of labour as an unpredictable force reflects on the work of legitimating capitalism which his own text, along with Smith’s, attempts to perform.



Unleashed in these texts is more than a politico-economic understanding of capitalism, however, as part of the texts' incalculable force, following Mill, is that these arguments represent strategic ideological underpinnings when questioned as to their rhetorical mode. Uncovering logical inconsistencies in the labour theory of value is a process of tracing the deployment of smallholders according to the rhetorical conventions of classical political economy.

### **The Four Stages Theory and the Primitive-Civilized Binary**

Smallholders in Mill, as in Smith, are liminal figures for the field of production. As labourers, smallholders are "agents of production" but the limit between this mode of production and manufacturing "cannot be precisely drawn" (Mill, *Principles* 43). Moreover, "hunters or fishers" also do not fit neatly within political economy's "popular distinction of industry into agricultural, manufacturing, and commercial" (Mill, *Principles* 43). This division is "popular" rather than "scientific," Mill concludes, after demonstrating the permeability of these categories (*Principles* 43-44).

In order to differentiate these forms of labour, Mill relies on the received wisdom of political economy. Early in *Principles of Political Economy*, Mill resorts to a pseudo-historical account of production. Mill's "history" is not new and makes no claim to originality. It is a tale spun from the established knowledge of political economy.<sup>10</sup> For instance, it resonates with Smith's famous "four phases" theory of development: hunter-gatherer, pastoral or nomadic, agricultural

or feudal, and manufacturing and commerce.<sup>11</sup> Mill, however, makes no effort to cite Smith, for it seems this knowledge is a *topos*. The historical narrative itself seems factual, in which progress is driven by stages of production advancing from primitive to civilized.

Christopher Bracken's interpretation of the four stages theory demonstrates that racial and ideological motives govern this theory as it operates under the guise of historical analysis. In Bracken's reading of Marx's critique of Adam Smith, political economy mobilizes a "tale of the two sorts" (Bracken 26). The first are "riotous rascals" and the second are the "frugal elite" (Bracken 26). The "riotous rascals" expend, thinking only of the present, while the "frugal elite" save for the future. The "rascals" are "lazy" and thus accumulate no property, while the elite are industrious and save for future gain (Marx, *Capital* 1: 713). The latter then naturally put the former to work for them, according to Smith, in a version of history Marx calls "insipid childishness" (Marx 713). Bracken demonstrates that these two "sorts" are racialized (Bracken 24-27). The barbarous squander what little wealth they produce from their predominant indolence, while the civilized save the fruits of their industriousness for future gain (Bracken 32-33). Bracken contends that political economy deploys the four stages theory "not to explain the emergence of the capital relation but to justify it, enlisting the interpretation of history in the enforcement of morality and the formation of ideology" (26-27). The labouring class are justly punished for their indolence; the capitalist class are richly rewarded for their industriousness.

Bracken's reading of the moral and ideological impetus of Smith's "tale" is fundamental to my analysis of smallholders' discursive force (Bracken 24-34). Bracken articulates a theory of discursive force in which "savages" are both products of discourse and figures for discursive production (27, 34). Smallholders are liminal in the sense that they exist at the threshold of discourse and action, hovering between modes of production and related boundaries of class, gender, and race.

A close reading of the lineage of political economy bears out this thesis. Mill mobilizes the figures of the savage and civilized within his account of the four stages theory as if the manner of their deployment is factual and right as the rain. These figures, however, serve ideological purposes. Early in *Principles of Political Economy*, just before his discussion of the labour theory of value, Mill declares that "Savages" own land but live in "the greatest poverty" because these hunters, gatherers, and warriors are shiftless and indolent (*Principles* 10). They accumulate no property—ironically, other than their tools and other possessions—and they "make slender use" of their land (*Principles* 11). The "progress of mankind" begins only with the domestication of animals and the pastoral phase of development, but accelerates rapidly in the agricultural stage (*Principles* 12). Mill admits, moreover, that these supposedly savage communities do in fact accumulate some wealth, such as clothing, canoes, weapons for war, and tools for hunting (*Principles* 10-11). They even store up luxury items or "ornaments" (*Principles* 10). Incongruously, these examples of their accumulation of wealth

through the productive expenditure of labour leave them in “the state of greatest poverty” (*Principles* 11).

The domestication of animals and the advent of the pastoral phase constitute a mode of production “more conducive to further progress” (*Principles* 11). Surplus food makes the accumulation of wealth possible (*Principles* 12). Labourers become available for non-agricultural industries (*Principles* 13). When “security of person and property” develop slowly over time, the bulk of humanity divides into two main types: “the proprietors of the land, . . . [and] the tillers of it” (*Principles* 17). Eventually, serfs buy their freedom. Some go to the towns and become artificers while others continue to farm. Both smallholders and artificers represent a “saving class” in whose hands wealth accumulates, in contrast with the “feudal aristocracy,” who are—like savages, recalling Bracken’s characterization—“a squandering class” (*Principles* 18).<sup>12</sup>

Consequently, the socio-economic institution of smallholding becomes more prevalent until finally “the proprietor of the land is almost universally its cultivator, owning the plough, and often himself holding it” (Mill, *Principles* 19-20). Mill notes, however, that this is not always the case since smallholding is a divided class position. Proprietors often have an “intermediate agency” between themselves and the labour of agricultural production (*Principles* 20). This intermediary may be a “farmer” who pays rent to the landlord and, potentially, pays wages to labourers as well. Capitalist agriculture emerges along with manufacturing, as small and large-scale production continue to co-exist in “what

is usually called the civilized world” (*Principles* 20). Smallholders are liminal in terms of both class and race.

Civilized nations, Mill concedes, are not composed wholly of productive labourers in manufacturing and agriculture, as he directs the invective usually reserved for other cultures at his own society as well. He considers the “non-labouring class” to be a “great social evil” (*Principles* 758). Not only does the “squandering class” of the feudal aristocracy persist in indolence and unproductive expenditure, but “portions of the inhabitants are in a condition, as to subsistence and comfort, as little enviable as that of the savage” (*Principles* 18, 11). Savagery in Mill is marked by “no accumulation” and “great privation” (*Principles* 10). But it is also characterized by unproductive labour and unproductive expenditure, both of which apply equally it seems to the so-called civilized and savage subjects alike. He recognizes that barbarism, a “social evil,” is alive and well among the rich and poor (*Principles* 758).

The proliferation of folds between the primitive and civilized continues in Mill, as it is not only the poor who do not work. There are also those who cannot work, but more importantly, there are those “who have fairly earned rest by previous toil” (*Principles* 758). These may be aged and “retired” workers or they may be capitalists who no longer need to work because they have learned to save “previous toil” for future reinvestment. Capital, for Mill, is the product of saving, and it would not matter whether this was the capitalist’s own labour or the labour of those s/he hires. The capitalist is no savage, in Bracken’s critical model, in that

s/he has the foresight to save. But capitalists do have a savage trait: the tendency toward great amounts of labour followed by rest.

The smallholder mediates this relation of toil to rest. Mill juxtaposes the smallholder's "unwearied laboriousness" with the wage labourer's lack of industry and frugality (*Principles* 327). In order to move up the ladder of progress both in socio-economic and racial terms, smallholdings are only "admirable when they are not *too* small: so small, namely, as not to fully employ the time and attention of the family" (*Principles* 276). Viable smallholdings employ (and exploit) the labour of the family to the fullest extent. The "untiring industry" of these smallholders makes up for inferior farm technology which large, capitalist farming operations employ (*Principles* 279). Mill's characterization of unfeasible smallholdings, however, is telling. The proprietor of too small a property will live in "indigence on the produce of his land" (*Principles* 277)—phrasing that recalls his portrayal of savagery. Or, the proprietor will become a wage labourer. In either case, smallholders either climb Mill's racialized ladder or slide down, depending on labour and saving. Smallholders are a rhetorical mode of folding together savage and civilized states of being.

Mill declares that "the small farmer [who] follows his [or her] own plough" represents the "sturdy independence" of a class of labourers whose exertion is maximal since they work for their own benefit and also to provide for their descendants (*Principles* 135, 252). The fact of permanent ownership of land—or even the prospect of a just rent at which a profit may be exacted through saving—stimulates great industriousness (*Principles* 278). Nevertheless, he

argues that their independence comes at the expense of profits. Although smallholders' heightened work ethic "yield[s] not only a larger gross but a larger net produce," large cultivators generate greater profits by investing their large capital in modern labour-saving technologies, thus reducing costs (*Principles* 150). Large cultivators also profit by employing wage-labourers (*Principles* 150).

Smallholding, therefore, is highly industrious but relatively unprofitable in comparison to large-scale capitalist modes of agricultural production. As a result smallholders are purged from the socio-economic landscape, a transformation most evident in England (*Principles* 135, 252). Labour and saving play diminished roles in capital accumulation in comparison with the role of previously accumulated capital. By purveying these notions, Mill's text manifests a representational violence directed at non-Western cultures and smallholders, their semi-civilized counterparts.

Smallholders are therefore susceptible to regressing from a freeholder to wage labourer at the same time as they risk slipping down Mill's racialized hierarchy from civilized to savage. If they do not labour with "unwearied assiduity," undertaking "steady and regular" work, they risk becoming like savages again (Mill, *Principles* 256). "To civilize a savage," he states, "he must be inspired with new wants and desires, even if not of a very elevated kind, provided that their gratification can be a motive to steady and regular bodily and mental exertion" (*Principles* 104). Like the savage, the peasant is "coarse, selfish, and narrow-minded" yet is trained in the practical application of knowledge (*Principles* 281). If primitive cultures could master the latter through

industriousness, Mill suggests, they cross the threshold into civilization. But that threshold is treacherous, and one may slide back into savagery in two ways. Mill makes the first explicit. When smallholders lose their land, they either become “hired labourers” or reliant on welfare (*Principles* 135). In each case, peasant proprietors’ “prudence, temperance, and self-control,” which occasion profitable production through saving, give way to improvidence (*Principles* 281). Agricultural day-labourers “spend carelessly to the full extent of their means, and let the future shift for itself” (Mill, *Principles* 282).

It is striking that Mill repeats his characterization of savagery when describing these modern subjects: savagery, like smallholding, folds back onto its opposite. Losing a smallholding is fraught, therefore, with more than economic consequences. For Mill, this loss entails a deficiency of humanity, both physical and moral (*Principles* 295-96). Citing Ireland’s “backward state of industrial improvement” as an example, Mill refers to the “semi-savage listlessness and recklessness” which predominates among the Irish agricultural wage-labourers (*Principles* 767-68). The return of the Irish primitive haunts the modern English wage labourer.

The progressiveness of smallholding for Mill is also debateable. Whether or not small or large-scale agricultural operations contribute more to the wealth of a nation, Mill argues, “is a question on which good judges at present differ” (*Principles* 150). Smallholding uses land more economically and efficiently, as the owner-operator’s ardent labour makes up for inferior technology. Large-scale farming, however, produces the most profit from the standpoint of “mere



investment” (Mill, *Principles* 148). While larger, capitalist agricultural operations stimulate invention by having capital to invest in experimental and often expensive machines and other new technologies, small proprietors “yield not only a larger gross but a larger net produce” than large-scale farmers (Mill, *Principles* 150). Mill suggests that smallholders also allow for progress by stimulating and employing technological innovation, albeit at a slower rate (*Principles* 152).

Mill, however, does not advocate a return from large-scale production (*Principles* 768). Mill extolls the virtues of capitalist production in manufacturing, commerce, and agriculture: freedom from grinding labour; greater efficiency of labour; more leisure time; the evolution of community in terms of education, government, and law; as well as emancipation from a “patriarchal despot” or the internal ruler of the isolated, atomized peasant family unit (*Principles* 768). Smallholding as a masculine-dominated form of production is portrayed as tyranny. In Lawson’s terms, smallholders represent “the Pye nightmare” while a more fully developed civil society is the “Morrison dream” (7). The smallholder is at once an image of productivity and a crucible for civilization and a retrograde mode of production and inferior form of social organization.

Smallholding for Mill makes a hinge between two racialized modes of production. The smallholder has a foot in two racially divided epochs, which are bridged by conflicting modes of production. By mobilizing the smallholder, he both naturalizes the process of property accumulation and valorizes capital accumulation. For the smallholder, as the savage civilizer or civilized savage, may be marshalled for capital gain and then relegated to inevitable extinction.

Political economy, in sum, deploys smallholders in a dual fashion. The nature-culture and primitive-civilized binaries are employed in a manner reminiscent of Barthes' characterization of the signifying force of myth as a "turnstile": smallholders are propelled by means of two contradictory yet powerful myths (123). These are the mode of their deployment as discursive forces. Understanding these forces, Lawson writes, "keeps coming back to Great-Grandmother" (22). Great-Grandmother Morrison is a contemporary instantiation in literature of the history of mythologizing smallholders as simultaneously civilized and industrious and primitive and indigent. These myths, co-existing in an ironic relation, are not referential but allegorical in de Man's use of the term, as they persistently repeat the failure to refer to reality while their force as rhetorical devices remains undiminished. It is as if Barthes' "turnstile" is an irony machine in relation to the referential field and an allegory machine in relation to the signifying field. The first operates with centrifugal, and the second with centripetal, force; irony repels meaning, while allegory cements signification through repetition. McLuhan's description of myth as "contraction or implosion" is productive here for schematizing the monad-like character of Great-Grandmother Morrison: it is as if the discourse about smallholders is compressed into her character, as she emerges in Lawson as a liminal—and politically problematic—representation of race, gender, and class (McLuhan 25). McLuhan's representation of myth as "the instant vision of a complex process that ordinarily extends over a long period" (25) is evident in a character containing the discourse whose rhetorical delineation may also be traced in classical political economy.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> See Derrida's "The Law of Genre" for an analysis of liminality as "invagination" (59, 70, 74). The fold for Derrida is a feminine heuristic device for thinking divided subjectivities and ambivalent concepts.

<sup>2</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau characterizes an unchanging mode of being as primitive. See the "Discourse on the Origin of Inequality" (78-83).

<sup>3</sup> The mine still produces a small quantity of slate, but today it is a tourist attraction that practices environmental stewardship and community-based economic policies (Honister).

<sup>4</sup> For an analysis of personification and reification treated as chiasmus, which served as inspiration for my own, see Bracken's *Magical Criticism* (138-68).

<sup>5</sup> Smith is not, however, the first to posit a labour theory of value. In *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Marx cites Benjamin Franklin (1721) as the inventor of the labour theory of value. Marx also notes that William Petty (1764) is another important precursor of Smith's 1776 text in this regard (Marx 62-63). I am unsure of the accuracy of Marx's claims as to the originator of this theory.

<sup>6</sup> See Marx's reference to the "non-capitalist producer" or "immediate producer," who he contrasts with "the capitalist producer [who] himself operates on such a small scale that he resembles those self-employed producers" (*Capital*, Vol. 3, 600). Smallholding is a diffuse mixture of pre-capitalist and capitalist social and economic relations.

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<sup>7</sup> See James Mill's *Elements of Political Economy* (1821): "Labour produces its effects only by conspiring with the laws of nature" (5). See also Jean-Baptiste Say's rather theological take in *A Treatise on Political Economy, or the Production, Distribution, and Consumption of Wealth* (1803): "No human being has the faculty of originally creating matter which is more than nature itself can do" (65). For Say, labour produces wealth (which he defines as "utility"), not matter, and wealth is produced "by the annexation of value" to nature (Say 65). John Stuart Mill, moreover, repeats Say's claim that humanity cannot create matter and therefore, "labour is not creative of objects, but of utilities" (Mill, *Principles* 46).

<sup>8</sup> This claim resonates with (John Stuart Mill's father) James Mill's argument in *Elements of Political Economy* (1821): humanity "does nothing but produce motion"; "the properties of matter perform the rest" (James Mill 5, 6).

<sup>9</sup> Rhetoric is notoriously unreliable yet this untrustworthiness in no way detracts from its power as a practical discourse with palpable designs intended to effect certain ends. "The art of rhetoric is an operative discourse," argues Paul Ricoeur, in which "the speaker aspires to conquer the assent of his audience and, if the situation is appropriate, to invite that audience to act in the desired manner. In this sense, rhetoric is illocutionary and perlocutionary at the same time" (62). Several modern rhetoricians repeat this definition of rhetoric as active discourse—a discourse of action and a discourse that acts. Stanley Fish declares that rhetoric is "that art of analyzing and presenting local exigencies—a force of discourse" (207). For Kenneth Burke, rhetoric is the "use of language as a symbolic means of

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inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols,” and “rhetorical language is inducement to action (or to attitude, attitude being an incipient act)” (43, 42). L. Olbrechts-Tyteca and Chaim Perelman refer to the “new rhetoric” as “the theory of argumentation, of action on minds by means of discourse,” which both persuades minds and “set[s] in motion the intended action (positive or abstention) or at least create[s] . . . a willingness to act which will appear at the right moment” (9, 45). Steven Mailloux encapsulates rhetoric not as interpretation concerned with locating meaning but rather as “the political effectivity of trope and argument in culture” (379). For modern rhetoricians, then, this “new rhetoric” is a theory of discursive force which compels mental and impels physical action. Rhetoric marks discourse’s inter-disciplinary effects, which are produced through affectual means. Rhetoric is, in short, a “generalized politico-tropological movement” (Laclau 230) between discourse and its referents.

<sup>10</sup> In this science’s pre-history, Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s “Discourse on the Origin of Inequality” (1754) recounts a similar historical narrative of progress (78-83). Rousseau also locates the savage state as lacking progress, in which expenditures of labour produced no saving and, therefore, no advancement was possible (72). For a similar account, see Sir James Steuart’s *An Inquiry into the Principles of Political Oeconomy* (1767), 34-35.

<sup>11</sup> See Smith’s *The Wealth of Nations*, Book Three, Chapter One: “The Natural Progress of Opulence” (356-60).

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<sup>12</sup> Marx extends this characterization to the capitalist class. He suggests that the avowedly indolent must sell their labour power to the supposedly industrious who “have long ceased to work” (*Capital* 1: 713).

**Chapter Two: Three Ironies: History, Genre, and Political Economy in  
Oliver Goldsmith's "The Deserted Village"**

**Synopsis of "The Deserted Village"**

Oliver Goldsmith's canonical poem "The Deserted Village" offers an opportunity to interrogate the deployment of smallholders at a vital juncture in England's socio-economic transformation. At first glance, Goldsmith's poem offers a scathing critique of enclosure and rural depopulation. The poem's dedication represents these problems as historical facts which Goldsmith claims to have witnessed in his "country excursions" (83). Also portrayed as fact is that smallholders are the nation's moral backbone and their dispossession is the grave moral error of a country perverted by the pursuit of luxury.

Throughout the poem, the speaker opposes the Auburn of his childhood to the one he visits now after "many a year [has] elapsed" (Goldsmith 88). A persistent "then-now" structure governs the poem as a whole. This temporal structure enables sentimentalism to shape its political critique, the stakes of which are outlined in the first five stanzas. These stanzas describe the village of "Auburn," which is comprised of small farms, a "busy mill," a church, school, and pub (86, 92, 93). Goldsmith depicts its inhabitants as leading a simple life comprised of "light Labour" (87) combined with ease. Accumulating wealth was foreign, since the villagers laboured to secure only "what life required" (87). "But times are alter'd," Goldsmith claims, as British society is now far removed from

“A time . . . ere England’s griefs began, / When every rood of ground maintain’d its man” (87). Now, one “master” owns the entire region, displacing the “bold peasantry” either to the city or to America (87, 88). Goldsmith derides the dispossession of the English peasantry, which increases the poverty of the many in the name of increasing luxury for the few.

Stanzas six through nine describe the poet’s return to an Auburn now “ruin’d” by the “tyrant’s power” (88). The speaker muses on his now dashed hopes for a comfortable retirement in his childhood home. The area is bereft of population, save for a “widow’d, solitary thing, . . . / She only left . . . , / The sad historian of the pensive plain” (90).

In stanzas ten through seventeen, the poet takes us on a tour of the Auburn of the past. The speaker details the activities and dwellings of the village preacher and schoolmaster, as well as the conviviality of the farmer, barber, “woodman” and the “host” at the village pub, all of which are now effaced by rural depopulation. The preacher was a source of charity and truth, the schoolmaster of practical and theoretical education, and the pub of news, ease, and community. Goldsmith then undertakes a meditation on the “real” source of joy and wealth. In stanzas eighteen to twenty, the speaker juxtaposes the “native charm” of the Auburn of old to the “freaks of wanton wealth array’d” at a “midnight masquerade” (94). Goldsmith castigates the ostentatious display of urban wealth. Those parading about in finery are vilified as conspicuously celebrating the monstrous and aberrant “gloss of art” (94), which the poet opposes to the “native charm” of the rural life that is rapidly vanishing as “The rich man’s joys increase,



[and] the poor's decay" (94 ). Goldsmith then deploys a simile which suggests that only when a nation/woman loses its true value/beauty does it begin to pursue luxury/adornment to compensate (96).

Stanzas twenty-one to twenty-four depict the options available for Auburn's dispossessed smallholders once they are driven from their homes. Neither the common lands nor the city offer any hope, as the "scanty blade" of the commons will not be enough to feed their "flock" (96). Even if it was, "the sons of wealth" have appropriated it. And the city offers only vice associated with luxury on one hand and the "woe" associated with poverty on the other. Goldsmith relates a cautionary tale to illustrate the baseness of city life, as a young and innocent maiden, "ambitious of the town," forsakes her spinning wheel for the perceived comforts of urban life. The poet portrays her as left alone in the rain outside "her betrayer's door," with "her virtue fled" (97). A producer "idly" quits the countryside for the city only to become damaged goods herself.

Auburn's citizens, however, will not be reduced to begging like a woman undone, as Goldsmith allows immigration to appear as the third option. Goldsmith describes America as having horrid weather and being filled with terrifying creatures as well as "savage men, more murderous still" (98). Strangely, wage-labour, either in the fields or in the city, is not considered as being a possible source of subsistence for Auburn's displaced peasantry, even though it would have been the fate of the vast majority of the English peasantry. Perhaps the wage relation appears elliptically in Goldsmith's remark that "each joy the sons of pleasure know, / [is] Extorted from his fellow-creature's woe" (97). The

implication is that the conditions of possibility for luxury for some are the impoverishment of others.

Stanza twenty-five presents the pathetic scene of the “exiles” as they tearfully depart. Following is an apostrophe to luxury, on which kingdoms are built and the excessive pursuit of which causes them to fall (100). The twenty-sixth and final stanza depicts the peasantry’s immigration to America, taking “Poetry” with them. Poetry flees base England to instruct in America where its virtuous voice can be heard in all its “persuasive strain” (101). Poetry will nurture the re-established “states of native strength” in America, a strength predicated on the smallholder’s “self-dependant power” —that although “very poor, may still be very blest” (101).

### **Three Ironies**

The poem makes sweeping historical and politico-economic claims concerning enclosure. In general, enclosure refers to the process which deprives most of the population of its means of self-provisioning. That is, the masses lose their foothold, however partial or precarious, on the land. For some, this would mean an end of their centuries-old right to use the common lands for pasture and firewood. For others, enclosure meant losing tenancy over their increasingly unprofitable small farms. Goldsmith’s history of enclosure, with its attendant portrayal of smallholders and its politico-economic critique, are enabled and constrained by the conventions of these three discursive fields. Goldsmith’s stated

intention to represent the facts about enclosure and rural depopulation is thus ironic in three ways, as its representation of smallholders acquires its political effectiveness by interweaving the often contradictory discourses of political economy, literature, and history.

Goldsmith complains of poetry's declining influence as a primary tool of social critique in the wake of classical political economy and yet he writes his poem using the terms of the discourse he is criticizing. Goldsmith's complaint about noble poetry's loss of status in his increasingly base society is contradictory, because he mobilizes the nature-culture and primitive-civilized binaries used by his contemporary political economists, Sir James Steuart and David Hume. Goldsmith also mimics politico-economic discourses by repeating much of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's critique of mercantilism and enclosure, while ignoring its more radical aspects. He portrays smallholders using georgic conventions which suggest that these subjects are natural and timeless, but he also renders smallholders as primitive according the racialized conventions of his contemporary political economists. Goldsmith's critique of enclosure and mercantilism is blighted by colonialism, as his concern seems to be more about his culture's degeneration into barbarism.

Goldsmith's "eyewitness" account of enclosure is also erroneous when compared to twentieth and twenty-first century historical scholarship of Lord Ernle, E.P. Thompson, Arnold Toynbee, and Keith Wrightson. Goldsmith represents smallholders before enclosure as residing in a natural state of bliss which has abruptly ended in the course of a single lifetime. In contrast,

contemporary histories of enclosure define it as centuries-long. Moreover, these historians portray smallholders in a complex fashion, as existing neither in a timeless and idyllic nor a primitive and indigent state but rather as at the crossroads of change in terms of dominant modes of production and subsequent class conflict.

The third irony is engendered by the disjunction between the poetic and historical fields. According to John Montague, Alfred Lutz, Ricardo Quintana, Roman Kazmin, and C.C. Barfoot, Goldsmith's smallholders are shaped by the literary conventions of the georgic genre. Goldsmith's use of literary conventions facilitates his naturalized inscription of pre-enclosure smallholders, for this genre underscores ruling class ideology by rendering individual modes of property ownership as timeless while also undermining these same notions as being ironically beneficial only for a privileged few (Lutz, "Genre" 167).

Gauging the force of smallholders in "The Deserted Village," therefore, is a matter of situating the poem within its interwoven politico-economic, historical and literary framework. These three discourses are conditions of possibility for smallholders' emergence in the poem, and for our understanding of the text's ideological vigour. Smallholders emerge in the poem as classed, raced, and gendered in ways that bear further investigation, as these discursive functions pertain to the manner in which these liminal subjects are at once moralized and denigrated.

### **Triptych**

Despite being a literary work, genre is not the only constitutive element in this historically, economically, and politically inflected poem. Goldsmith mobilizes smallholders to make legible a history of enclosure, a history which in turn is explicated by the discourse of political economy. This is evident in Goldsmith's portrayals of three particular figures in the poem. Two are smallholders, while the third is their antitype. This triptych is comprised of an impoverished old woman, juxtaposed portraits of simplicity and luxury which are personified and gendered feminine, and a spinning maid. Smallholders are viewed as feeble and powerless, as representatives of an outmoded socio-economic status; as frugal and virtuous, in opposition to the gaudy and superficial commercialism of the time; and as virtuous but morally corruptible, as urban influences pervert smallholders' natural innocence. The patriarchal stereotypes in these representations are obvious, but less apparent are the racialized implications: smallholders are represented as a once noble but vanishing class, and gender and race are the discursive modes of their condemnation. These prejudices in Goldsmith's poem are not historical facts and cannot be fully explained as key literary conventions, for smallholders are a contradictory cultured version of the noble savage trope in political economy. Steuart and Hume employ this enabling contradiction, which the poem re-inscribes in the services of Tory ideology.

Concurrent with Goldsmith's deployment of primitivist notions, in which smallholders' expropriation marks a cultural regression, is another equally egregious prejudice in which his critique of smallholders' dispossession is

allegorized as feminine weakness and betrayal. The allegory unfolds in the following three portraits. The analysis of these portraits is shaped by the following question: is Goldsmith primarily concerned with enclosure and rural depopulation, or does the poem address these issues because the expropriation of smallholders is tantamount to a loss of masculinity and civilization?

In the first portrait, as the speaker muses on his dashed hopes for a comfortable retirement in his childhood home, he notes that the area is bereft of population, save for his encounter with a “widow’d, solitary thing, . . . / She only left . . . , / The sad historian of the pensive plain” (Goldsmith 129, 135, 136). This primitive accumulator is, like Lawson’s Great-Grandmother Morrison, a model for the author. Both figure a matriarchal tradition of a local, familial, and regional knowledge which counters the dominant discourses of masculine authorship.

In contrast to Lawson’s character, who desires an escape from smallholding, Goldsmith’s “sad historian” mourns the loss of this way of life. She is not strong and resilient but rather “feeb[e]” and pathetic (130). She is first described as “widow’d” as the inviability of smallholding parallels the death of masculinity (129). Even though she bravely survives, she does not thrive. Old, alone, “wretched,” and pauperized by enclosure, the woman is at once the repository of knowledge for a glorious past and the painful reminder for the speaker of the current ruination which characterizes the present. It is difficult to interpret this personification of smallholding as anything but powerless and doomed.

In the second portrait, Goldsmith then juxtaposes the Auburn of old to the “freaks of wanton wealth array’d” at a “midnight masquerade” (Goldsmith 254, 260, 259). Those parading about in finery are vilified as conspicuously celebrating the monstrous and aberrant “gloss of art,” which the poet opposes to the “native charm” of the rural life that is rapidly vanishing: “The rich man’s joys increase, [and] the poor’s decay” (Goldsmith 266). Goldsmith then deploys a simile that suggests his critique of enclosure and mercantilism are inflected with gender prejudices:

As some fair female, unadorn'd and plain,  
 Secure to please while youth confirms her reign,  
 Slights every borrow'd charm that dress supplies,  
 Nor shares with art the triumph of her eyes.  
 But when those charms are past, for charms are frail;  
 When time advances, and when lovers fail,  
 She then shines forth, solicitous to bless,  
 In all the glaring impotence of dress;  
 Thus fares the land by luxury betray'd;  
 In nature's simplest charms at first array'd;-  
 But verging to decline, its splendours rise,  
 Its vistas strike, its palaces surprise. (287-98)

The nation, the poet declares, is like an aging woman who loses her natural beauty and compensates with “the glaring impotence of dress” (294). When her true or natural beauty decays, she vainly seeks to preserve it with artifice. Similarly, the

country itself is “adorn'd for pleasure,” says the speaker, but “in barren splendour feebly waits the fall” (285-86). “Auburn” and the countryside become an allegory for naturalized, pre-lapsarian moral values. Nature and morality are violated, however, as the penetration of Auburn by enclosure and the pursuit of luxury is tantamount to the nation’s moral degeneration. Enclosure is personified as feminine dissimulation and as a failure of masculinity.

Goldsmith ends his triptych with a cautionary tale which illustrates the baseness of city life:

-Ah, turn thine eyes

Where the poor houseless shivering female lies:

She once, perhaps, in village plenty bless'd,

Has wept at tales of innocence distress'd;

Her modest looks the cottage might adorn,

Sweet as the primrose peeps beneath the thorn:

Now lost to all, her friends, her virtue, fled,

Near her betrayer's door she lays her head,

And, pinch'd with cold, and, shrinking from the shower,

With heavy heart deplores that luckless hour,

When idly first, ambitious of the town,

She left her wheel, and robes of country brown. (325-36)

Goldsmith’s small-scale producer “idly” quits the countryside for the city only to become damaged goods herself (335). This portrait of the “woman undone” moralizes smallholding: just as the woman who trades natural beauty and virtue



for artifice, this woman forsakes her spinning “wheel” for the perceived comforts of urban life (336). While she works, she naturalizes smallholding by seemingly blending in to the rural setting in her “robes of country brown” (336). This representative form of cottage industry is a mode of idealizing smallholding as “proper” labour. In the previous association with femininity, smallholding is one of “nature’s simplest charms” which the speaker contrasts with luxurious adornment (296). “Charming” nature with art is fine as long as this artifice remains close to nature; that is, the charmer should be the smallholder, Lawson’s unchanging changer. Similarly, in the spinner’s case, Goldsmith compares smallholding to industriousness and morality. Her modesty relates to an unspoiled nature that is violated. Yet the labour of spinning is no such violation, as smallholding naturalizes culture’s impacts on nature. When she ceases to work, however, she is expropriated according to patriarchal stereotypes. These stereotypes are fundamental to Goldsmith’s social critique, as he consistently feminizes luxury.

The maid is also racialized in terms reminiscent of Goldsmith’s contemporary political economists, as wandering away from her labour is a trait associated with barbarism by Steuart and Hume. When she stops spinning, she roams like the savages of political economy’s four stages theory. The spinning maid is then an allegorical figure for smallholders as they reside in discourse between the nature-culture and primitive-civilized binaries.

The spinner naturalizes a certain mode of production and then becomes a vanishing race. This race endures, however, as Goldsmith moralizes the spinner

while simultaneously condemning her socio-economic and cultural regression. As we have seen, John Stuart Mill insists upon the continuing traces of savagery in his society's wage-labourers, feudal aristocracy, and non-labouring poor.

Goldsmith draws on the convention of the wandering and lazy savage in a move which conflates a feminized individual moral lapse with cultural change.

Smallholders are marshalled to sediment colonial and patriarchal notions.

Goldsmith's poem does the ideological work of critiquing emergent capitalism as unnatural and immoral while simultaneously naturalizing and moralizing smallholding as the private property relation which forms capitalism's socio-economic bedrock. Smallholders in Goldsmith then both undermine and support bourgeois logic.

### **Smallholding and Political Economy: Two Types of Production**

Although Goldsmith gripes about the reduced role of poetry as a mainstream discourse for discussing social issues in mid-eighteenth century, the discourse that supplanted poetry, political economy, largely pre-figures the poem's content. The publication of "The Deserted Village" (1770) predates the advent of classical political economy with Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* (1776). The poem is published, however, in the wake of several influential precursors to classical political economy, including Rousseau, Hume, and Steuart. Goldsmith claims that he is a "professed ancient" in the poem's dedication and the poem follows a classical form throughout with its use of heroic couplets.

However, his criticisms of the social and political dangers of luxury are conventions of contemporary politico-economic discourse.

Goldsmith's critique of luxury, for instance, largely repeats Jean-Jacques Rousseau's in the "Discourse on the Origin of Inequality" (1755). Rousseau is equally critical of the process that drives the "husbandman" from his "native field" to "towns," where s/he experiences only "labour and hunger" (111). The expropriated and displaced increase the urban population while in the "abandoned countryside, . . . large tracts of land . . . lie uncultivated" (Rousseau 111). Later, in the "Discourse on Political Economy" (1758), Rousseau observes that "money is always leaving [the country for the capital city] and never returning. Thus the richer the city, the poorer the country" (149). And in the *Social Contract* (1762), Rousseau offers this vivid tableau: "Remember that the walls of towns are built of the ruins of the houses of the countryside. For every palace I see raised in the capital, my mind's eye sees a whole country made desolate" (238).

Goldsmith hints at a radical analysis of how and why this imbalance of wealth occurs between the city and the country. He aligns "joy" with "luxury," which is "Extorted from his fellow creature's woe" (312, 313, 314). The joys of wealth are then "insidious" (Goldsmith 387). Moreover, Goldsmith warns, luxury imperils "Kingdoms," which "At every draught more large and large they grow, / A bloated mass of rank unwieldy woe; / Till sapp'd their strength, and every part unsound, / Down, down they sink, and spread ruin round" (Goldsmith 389, 391-94). The implication is that extracting the property of the vast majority of those who labour and hence impoverishing them to provide luxury for the few prove

“unwieldy” for the “tyrant’s hand” (392, 37). “Woe,” or the peasantry’s immiseration, according to Goldsmith, will burst asunder the tyrant’s grip and with it the nation’s power relations. As Goldsmith’s use of rhyme emphasizes, “woe” continues to “grow” as the village withers amidst a ubiquitously “unsound” social system which can be seen all “[a]round.”

Yet this analysis falls short of Rousseau’s critique of the institution of private property in “Discourse on the Origin of Inequality.” For Rousseau, it is not the expropriation of the bulk of the people which is oppressive but rather the very notion of exclusive property rights.<sup>1</sup> Rousseau argues that “equality disappeared [when] property was introduced, . . . and vast forest became smiling fields, which man had to water with the sweat of his brow, and where slavery and misery were soon seen to grow up with the crops” (Rousseau 83). “Auburn’s” “smiling plain” is not only the battleground where social inequality is founded (Goldsmith 40). Unlike Goldsmith, whose moral vision is rooted in the smallholder’s “self-dependent power,” Rousseau’s contends that the privatization of property itself “civilized men, and ruined humanity” (Goldsmith 429; Rousseau 83). Goldsmith’s enunciation of Rousseau’s socio-economic critique is tinged with conservatism which blinds him to the possibility of a radical critique.

Two other important precursors to classical political economy, Hume and Steuart, are often referred to as forming along with Adam Smith the “Scottish Enlightenment” (Wrightson 8). On one hand, “The Deserted Village” presents a scathing critique of Hume and Steuart’s defence of the pursuit of luxury through capital accumulation. For Hume and Steuart, a balance might be struck between

the industries of the town and country and between the virtues and vices of the pursuit of luxury. In contrast to Rousseau before and Goldsmith after him, Steuart says that reciprocal trade between urban and rural areas is necessary: “What distant farm can . . . complain of the greatness of that noble city?” (65). In Goldsmith’s recasting of Rousseau’s critique, the luxury of the city is drawn from the immiseration of the countryside. This impoverishment is marked by a regression to a primitive state in Goldsmith, a depiction which derives in part from the four stages theory previously discussed via Smith and Mill. This theory, however, is in part derived from Hume before being further inflected by Steuart. These earlier enunciations of the primitive-civilized binary enable the related but distinct mobilization of it by Goldsmith.

In his essay “Of Commerce” (1752) Hume argues that societies began in a “savage state” of “hunting and fishing” before dividing into “two classes”: agriculture, into which the bulk of people originally fall, and manufacturing (5-6). Before commerce arises, there is no need to progress beyond subsistence agriculture. Land lies uncultivated and indolence prevails (Hume 10-11). The advent of trade, however, spurs both spheres of production to become more sophisticated and prolific until they generate surplus produce that enables population growth, and in turn, a population employed in war and in the production of luxury goods. Hume calls all of those not engaged in agriculture or manufacturing “superfluous hands” (“Commerce” 7). Goldsmith calls them the displaced peasantry.

For Hume, the possibility of trade stimulates labour to produce a surplus beyond subsistence. An advanced society's wealth is a "heap" which people can draw from. If this "heap" is sufficiently large and varied, many may take from it "without making any sensible alteration in it" (Hume, "Commerce" 12). The "superfluous hands" may dip into society's wealth without depleting it. He argues that some wealth is indeed destroyed by "superfluous hands" but the heap undergoes no "sensible alteration" because of the prolific productive power of "advanced" society ("Commerce" 10). "Superfluous hands" are mystified as draining, rather than producing, wealth. In light of Hume's claim, Goldsmith's spinner is free to draw on society's wealth rather than producing it once she has wandered away from her wheel and society is left to provide for her indolence. The vital point, however, is that a balance is struck within civilized societies between production and consumption. This balance allows for the progressive growth of a society's wealth. The capital relation in Hume is reciprocal rather than exploitative, whereas in Goldsmith the spinning maid faces social and economic ruin within this system.

Hume takes a more liberal view of luxury than Goldsmith. Hume differentiates between "innocent" and "vicious" luxury, arguing that it is easier to motivate people or to "animate them with a spirit of avarice and industry, art and luxury" than to persuade them to work for the common good with reference to a broad distribution of wealth attained through frugality ("Commerce" 13). He reiterates this point in "Of Refinement in the Arts": "Luxury, when excessive, is the source of many ills; but is in general preferable to sloth and idleness, which

would commonly succeed in its place, and are more hurtful both to private persons and to the public” (32).

Rousseau, on the other hand, advocates taxing luxury items instead of income derived from land and industry. These taxes will act as a social leveller, as the desire of the rich to seek distinction will fund the public good (Rousseau, “Discourse on Political Economy” 152-53). Hume contends that the pursuit of luxury may be a positive socio-economic force, one which produces a “heap” of wealth for all to use, although some may use more than others. As Peter Dixon succinctly puts it, “Hume . . . presented luxury as a system of self-regulating economic, moral, and political checks. The poem [“The Deserted Village”] presents it as a fatally addictive poison, but discovers no antidote” (100-101).

In 1767, Steuart repeats Hume’s distinction between indolent subsisters and the industrious producers of surplus. There are “two classes” of humanity, says Steuart, in a direct repetition of Hume’s phrasing (Steuart 34). The first are “those who, without working, live upon the spontaneous fruits of the earth” (34). The second are “those who are obliged to labour the soil” (34). Steuart divides humanity into two groups: savage and civilized. Once civilized, people become either farmers or “free hands.” In Steuart’s opinion, the barbarian hunter-gatherers do not work and hence do not appropriate land on which they perform, ironically, the labour of hunting and gathering. The agricultural “class” is “obliged to labour for subsistence,” thus appropriating land and gaining a natural superiority over “the others,” meaning the indolent savages, who “will very naturally become their servants” (35, 34).

Steuart's savages, like Goldsmith's, become labourers for the civilized. He described the latter as "free, industrious, and laborious Europeans" (42). Instead of not working at the work of hunting and gathering, the savage as civilized labourer becomes a "free hand" who, whether as a worker in agriculture or industry, subsists on the superfluous produce of farmers. Their labour, in an argument reminiscent of Hume's treatment of "superfluous hands," is directed according to the "wants" of society" (Hume, "Commerce" 7; Steuart 43).

Steuart then divides Hume's category of "superfluous hands" into two parts. Some "free hands" must buy the surplus produce of farmers with "their daily labour or personal service" (58). These are wage labourers who own nothing but their capacity for labour. Other "free hands" are "those to whom [the surplus of farmers] directly belongs" or those who already have the means to purchase it (58).

This distinction requires another one, as Steuart splits the category of "farmers" into two. Some farmers own their own land and labour for themselves and their families. Other farmers labour for someone else to whom the means of production "directly belong[]" (Steuart 58). Thus emerges the "landlord" who furnishes the farmer and freehand with the means of production and subsistence (91). The landlord employs his capital to produce a surplus for trade. A capitalist farmer similarly produces surplus for exchange. The subsistence farmer is "useful only to himself," while the "trade" farmer is "useful to the society and becomes a member of it" (92, 93).



The subsistence farmer is a discursive recurrence of the savage. Somehow, like the primitive subject, the farmer is at once civilized and industrious while remaining primitive and indolent. This is not simply a logical fallacy. It is also an active force as mid-eighteenth-century poetry and political economy render smallholders simultaneously as moral, natural labourers and also as an ignoble and doomed race.

Smallholders hover not only at the limit between pre-capitalist and capitalist modes of production. They also allegorize the manner in which these modes of production are transposed onto historical moments and resulting states of being. At once primitive and civilized, smallholders embody traits of both the industrious farmer and the “landlords” or the “rich idle consumers” (Steuart 69). In Steuart, the smallholder is simultaneously the ironic double of the savage as indolent, absentee landlord and the savage as the industrious, civilized wage labourer whose labour is not “real” productive work. Moreover, just like Steuart’s subsistence farmer, for Hume the savage’s labour does not appropriate anything beyond “the necessaries of life” (Hume, “Commerce” 13).

Hume and Steuart purport to describe two historical moments but their representations of each betray the ideological motivation of their arguments. Both thinkers conceptualize a new form of discipline for the emerging working class, summed up by Steuart in terms of agriculture as the elision of the majority of “husbandmen” in the state so that the few that are left will be forced to be more efficient and have the least possible amount of time for rest (93).

What Hume and Steuart condemn as primitive, Goldsmith praises as the pinnacle of civilization. Goldsmith portrays the patriarchal family farm as an idyllic life revolving around the commons. Steuart's subsistence, not trade, farmers are enunciated in Goldsmith's pre-enclosure "Auburn." And these are not "superfluous hands" in Hume's sense, or those drawing from the heap of society's wealth. Goldsmith characterizes the peasant's pre-enclosure life as ease combined with light labour, producing "what life requir'd, but . . . no more" (Goldsmith 60). Goldsmith also conflates smallholding and primitivism. The difference is that smallholders become primitive (the indolent, wandering spinning maid; the enfeebled old woman reduced to hunting and gathering to subsist) for Goldsmith when they become most civilized for Hume and Steuart; that is, when they are expropriated and displaced from their rural roots.

### **"Those miseries real": A History of Enclosure**

The poem's representation of enclosure is embedded in the discourse of political economy, but the poem also makes sweeping claims as to the historical veracity of its representation of rural depopulation. The history of enclosure is entangled with Goldsmith's own personal history since Goldsmith was a former smallholder. According to William Spalding's memoir of the author, he was born in Ireland and educated in Ireland and England (7). Goldsmith was the son of an Irish clergyman who became the "rector of Kilkenny West" and "obtained . . . a lease at a low rent, renewable forever, of some seventy acres of the Lissoy estate"

(Spalding 7). His father “resided in his parish, in the village of Lissoy, ejections from which were commemorated in the history of his son’s ‘Auburn’, the village Oliver Goldsmith depicts in his poem, ‘The Deserted Village’” (Spalding 8). Scholars, however, disagree as to the poem’s autobiographical content. Mavis Batey disputes William Spalding’s assertion, arguing that “Auburn” was not Lissoy but Nuneham Courtenay, a village which Lord Harcourt levelled in 1761 to make room for his landscape garden (Batey 57). Differences among scholars over the identity of “Auburn” open onto this chapter’s three foci: the history of enclosure and the poem’s construction of this history by mobilizing smallholders both in terms reminiscent of classical political economy and in conventional literary forms. Goldsmith deploys “Auburn” as a means of critiquing the socio-economic excesses of his time, but his critique is more discursive than factual.<sup>2</sup>

Goldsmith, however, makes the opposite claim in the poem’s dedication to Sir Joshua Reynolds. The poet claims to have “taken all possible pains, in my country excursions, for these four or five years past, to be certain of what I allege”; that is, Goldsmith claims first-hand, eye-witness knowledge of the countryside depopulating and that the many socio-economic “disorders” and “misereries” that follow are “real” (page 83). “The Deserted Village” claims historical validity even though it names no enclosing landlord, uses a fictional name rather than citing an actual village, and projects an idyllic quality onto pre-enclosed “Auburn.” The poem locates its invective against luxury within an historical “now” in which “the devastation is begun, / And half the business of destruction [is] done” (lines 395, 396). A persistent “then-now” structure governs

the poem as a whole, and this temporal structure enables sentimentalism to shape its political critique. The “then” the speaker describes belongs to his childhood. Throughout the text, he opposes the Auburn of his childhood to the one he visits after “many a year [has] elapsed” (Goldsmith line 79). Whether or not the poem is autobiographical, it deliberately parallels the pre-history of capital accumulation with the effects of capital accumulation on this pre-history. The poem thus portrays British society undergoing a radical socio-economic transition, although the facts of this transition as portrayed are erroneous when compared to the accounts of modern historians.

Goldsmith depicts the English countryside’s depopulation due to enclosure, a centuries-long process beginning in the mid to late sixteenth century.<sup>3</sup> Twentieth and twenty-first-century historians have produced more nuanced interpretations of the driving forces behind enclosure and their socio-economic effects.<sup>4</sup> The following is by no means a full discussion of the history of enclosure, but rather is a survey of the field with an eye toward the impacts on smallholders which Goldsmith highlights: rural depopulation, dispossession, impoverishment, and displacement to urban centres or immigration to the United States. At issue is the poetic enunciation of a history which ironically contrasts the actual history of these social phenomena.

Keith Wrightson perceives enclosure as the period defined by a shift in agriculture from “smallholders,” or a mode of production for subsistence which originated in the early sixteenth century and which is constituted by the yeoman’s “curious mixture of economic individualism and familial collectivism,” to

agriculture as business undertaken for profit (274, 102). Agrarian capitalism, which flourished in parts of England as early as the mid-seventeenth century, is characterized by “specialist production by large-scale farmers engaged in supplying consumers in distant markets” (Wrightson 274).

As Neal Wood states, “Traditional family subsistence farms . . . were slowly replaced by efficiently operated agrarian enterprises producing for the market, utilizing wage labour, and reinvesting profits in the expansion of production” (18). Smallholders are owner-operators or patriarchal family farmers who produce for their own consumption and/or subsistence. Capitalist farmers produce for the purpose not only of exchanging products for money but profitably reinvesting this money in the production process. For Wrightson, this shift in agricultural production redefines the “landed interest” as aristocratic landowners and commercial farmers. By 1750, Wrightson argues, the expropriation of the masses in England is far from complete and yet it is well underway (316).

As Matthew Johnson claims, “it was not a sudden event” which happened in the course of a single lifetime as Goldsmith represents it, but rather it was of a “gradual, protracted nature over three centuries” (63). The proletarianization of the population then is not finalized by the time Goldsmith writes “The Deserted Village” in 1770. Indeed, the industrial revolution in agricultural production was still to come, and although “agricultural productivity doubled [in England] between 1500 and 1750” (Johnson 61), the cause was not technological advancement in terms of machinery but rather improved agricultural practices such as crop rotation, manuring, change from arable to pasture and back again,

weeding, and sowing of legumes (Chambers and Mingay 4). The increase in agricultural production in early modern England occurred as a result of the “expansion of acreage, reorganization of existing holdings, and, especially, the further application of known techniques of soil and animal husbandry for increasing production” (Chambers and Mingay 13). Labour-saving machines did not characterize the displacement of the rural population that Goldsmith describes. The constitutive elements of the revolution in rural production were class conflict, environmental change, and technological innovations other than industrial ones (Johnson 59-62).

Historical change may appear to be a slow process from a historian’s detached perspective, but it often seems to occur in an instant in its lived reality. Goldsmith’s “Auburn”—whether fictional or not—is a model for the rather sudden and ferocious changes to smallholders’ lives which were wrought by socio-economic forces such as class interests and scientific innovation. According to Lord Ernle, in one of the founding studies of English agrarian change, by the mid-eighteenth century “enclosure had been underway for three centuries” but “from 1760 to 1815” it rapidly accelerated (150).<sup>5</sup> Goldsmith’s text does ring true to the historical record, at least in this respect, as “Auburn’s” precipitous destruction may indeed reflect reality, especially if the poem indeed refers to a village that was razed and replaced with a landscape garden. This is a big “if,” however, and one which is marked by indeterminacy engendered by the text’s figurative status. “Auburn” is a conventional literary village, as argued below regarding the poem’s genre. It is also a village populated by characters from

political economy, as argued above regarding the text's embeddedness in intellectual history.

Ernle, moreover, takes issue with Goldsmith's avowedly first-hand knowledge of the countryside's depopulation. Population, for Ernle, does not thin out in rural areas but rather its constitution changes from predominantly smallholders to mainly agricultural wage labourers. From the later eighteenth to the early nineteenth century, depopulating rural areas was not a pressing social issue. "The 'deserted village,'" Ernle claims, "was a reality of the sixteenth century" (59-60). Depopulation only results from land being converted to pasturage, an assertion which seems to invalidate Goldsmith's claims concerning rural depopulation. Ernle also refers to landscape gardening as a mode of production which reduces rural population. This is the same fashionable mid-eighteenth-century practice which Batey suggests is the possible cause of "Auburn's" demise. Ernle argues, however, that this practice was uncommon and did not significantly alter the make-up of rural England as a whole (60).

Goldsmith describes the situation quite differently, as he asks us to remember that "A time there was," he hyperbolizes, "ere England's griefs began, / "When every rood of ground maintain'd its man" (57-58). Now, however, the "sons of wealth divide" the "common" (Goldsmith 307, 308). Consequently, "ill-fares the land" lying under "the tyrant's hand" and "the tyrant's power" (Goldsmith 51, 37, 76). Enclosure is described thus: "One only master grasps the whole domain / And half a tillage stints thy smiling plain" (Goldsmith 39-40). Tenant farmers are turned out of the commons and many of the large (and

enlarging) estates, as landlords make as much net profit from pasturage as from farming rents. This practice was derided wholesale by political economists of the time, however, as pasturing sheep produced less gross produce from the land than tenant farming would yield. Hence for Goldsmith, the “tyrant’s hand” is also a “spoiler’s hand” (49). The “barren splendour” of his enclosure ensures that although “The country blooms” it is “a garden” for the tyrant “and a grave” for the displaced peasantry, now “scourg’d by famine” (Goldsmith 301-02, 219).

Conversely, Ernle argues that if garden farms and, more generally, the commons are converted to tillage, population and employment increase even if most peasants are converted into wage labourers. This transformation spells progress for Ernle. Although “the divorce of the peasantry from the soil, and the extinction of commoners, open-field farmers, and eventually of small freeholders, were the heavy price which the nation ultimately paid for the supply of bread and meat to its manufacturing population,” the medieval and early modern open-field or manorial system that was becoming obsolete was designed to maintain population, not increase or decrease it (Ernle 149, 299). Moreover, there is little need for labourers if large-scale improvements are not underway, Ernle argues, as he asserts the common ruling class notion that the wage labourer exists for and is sustained by capital and not the other way around (300).

E.P. Thompson agrees with Ernle that enclosure did not depopulate the countryside. Mass migration to urban areas for Thompson was offset by a general rise in population, an increase which compensated for the new socio-economic order in the country (224). Arnold Toynbee concurs, noting that from 1700-1750



England's population increased by eighteen percent but that from 1750-1800, it increased by fifty-two percent (8). According to Toynbee, 1750-1800 "is the age of transition to the modern industrial system, and to improved methods of agriculture" (8). In the period from 1790 to 1830, Thompson contends, agriculture had the most workers in any industry and therefore this era is deemed "the period of maximum enclosure" (213, 214-15). In direct contrast to Goldsmith, Dorothy George claims that although farms decreased in number in the eighteenth-century, population increased in rural areas and food became more plentiful (qtd. in Barfoot 53).

The expropriation of smallholders forms the background of Goldsmith's claim that "half the business of destruction" of smallholding is accomplished by 1770 (Goldsmith 396). But according to historians, although the rural population may not have been decreasing, Goldsmith may have undershot the mark concerning the level of their separation from ownership of the means of production. In sum, enclosure may be understood in the context of Goldsmith's poem as the process by which enlarging capitalist agricultural enterprises annex the common lands. The rise of agrarian capitalism in this historical moment increasingly concentrates land ownership into fewer hands. The rural population faces a new economic reality far removed from, as Alfred Lutz states, "a pre-capitalist rural economy that is based on the politically and economically independent and self-sufficient owner-occupier whose life revolves around the common" ("Genre" 181). The masses are converted from small property-owners

to wage labourers in a long, agonizing, and well-documented social, historical, and economic process.

Goldsmith's representation of the history of enclosure and his subsequent social critique mistake the pressing social problem of proletarianization for rural depopulation. In 1520, between twenty and thirty percent of the rural population worked for wages (Hindle qtd. in Fumerton xii). This figure increased to sixty percent of the rural population by 1650, and by 1700, sixty percent of the British population as a whole were wage labourers (Hindle qtd. in Fumerton xii).

Caryn Chaden contends that "it is a mistake to view any political agenda embedded in *The Deserted Village* as especially progressive. Goldsmith was a Tory; his opposition to the liberal trading practices favoured by the Whigs grew out of a conservative agenda in which a stable social hierarchy was essential to the nation's well-being" (4). Goldsmith viewed smallholders as the foundation of this social hierarchy and was unable to conceive of a society apart from the dominant social conceptions which these figures allowed him to naturalize: social progress rooted in stable property relations. His conservatism blinds him to the possibility of a radical critique, leaving the text tinged with sentimentalism and nostalgia.

### **The Politics of Genre**

The poem is embedded in the history of enclosure to the extent that it is illegible outside of this history. If the poem refers to anything at all, it is to the

politico-economic dimensions of this particular historical moment in Britain. However, as a literary text it is also encoded with generic constraints. The text's literary aspects problematize the predilection of its interwoven historical and politico-economic discourses to cast their arguments as facts, as "The Deserted Village" responds to this third discursive strand, which is perhaps best described as the politics and economics of genre.

The poet mobilizes a supposedly timeless literary form for a particular politico-economic critique of a distinct historical moment. Despite its classical parallels and espoused "ancient" argument (luxury leads to vice), therefore, "The Deserted Village" does not fit neatly within the georgic genre. Goldsmith criticizes Whig mercantilist notions which privileged urban, international trade over an idealized rural form of production in a strategy which resonates with Tory ideology. His deployment of genre is an enabling contradiction as it allows him to support smallholders through historicizing and thereby politicizing the georgic genre while retaining the tenor of this genre's universalizing and thus conservative leanings.

Just as it is ironic that Goldsmith claims that poetry is superior to political economy for social critique while his poem relies on this discourse to provide the means of this critique, he ironically employs a genre in which smallholders are represented as timeless while deploying them in a distinct historical moment for a specific political end. Critics of the poem finesse this differentiation between the poem's particular historical moment and the timelessness of its genre, as each

scholar gauges the extent to which each aspect is operative as an ideological device within the poem.

John Montague contends that “Auburn” is “a composite” picture of what Goldsmith considered to be the “decay in his own time” (Montague 93). He argues that “Auburn” resembles the Irish village of Lissoy in its devastation but it is the likeness of an English village in its idyllic representation (90-93). “The Deserted Village” is not Irish but rather is a quaint model for rural English-ness, which diminishes the poem’s autobiographical status. Efforts to locate the “real Auburn” are as vexed as attempts to validate the historical accuracy of “The Deserted Village,” Montague continues, for “Auburn” “is not a particular, but a universal village, . . . a pastoral Eden evoking the essence of every Virgilian eclogue and Horatian retreat” (Montague 94). As Montague suggests, “Auburn” is a poetic *topos* which Goldsmith mobilizes for socio-economic critique.

Although smallholders are literary conventions, Goldsmith mobilizes them to naturalize as well as to politicize an historical account of enclosure. Roman Kazmin argues that the poem substitutes the conventions of the pastoral tradition for a historically accurate account of enclosure. Kazmin states that “Goldsmith’s work is ideologically charged, and he is, indeed, highly critical of the dramatic social changes facing England in the first half of the eighteenth century. However, he invents a mythological past, based on a literary, rather than a historical, imagination where he situates his notion of virtue” (667). Goldsmith’s “swains” are both pre-lapsarian and classical: literary types rather than historical beings. Kazmin argues that Goldsmith is a staunch opponent of commercial society but

remains an advocate of traditional relationships grounded in pre-capitalist forms of property. Nevertheless, Kazmin claims that the poem's historical inaccuracy does not preclude it from functioning as social criticism, as he characterizes the force of myth as rhetorical ("invents") and locates its discursive force as operative despite lacking empirical facticity.

In consonance with Kazmin, Lutz argues that Goldsmith's poem is not a mere repetition of convention but rather a politicized rewriting of it. In demonstrating this claim, Lutz differentiates between the pastoral and the georgic. The pastoral, according to Lutz, effaces social relations as its timeless quality resists historicization ("Genre" 153-54). The idyllic shepherd, that felicitous blend of nature and culture, is entrenched within the genre as a figure unmoved by either progress or decay. Unlike the pastoral, the georgic, Lutz continues, may "accommodate temporal development" and thus allow for historical change (155). But this alteration is constrained by "a preordained harmony between providence and progress" (Lutz 156).

According to Lutz, Goldsmith rewrites the "country house" sub-genre of the georgic tradition, as well as historicizes the *topos* of "the ruins" in order to undercut these ideologically motivated genres of the ruling class. "The ruins" in Goldsmith's poem are not the faded glory of a country mansion but the result of a social order which has "extorted" its luxuries from the industrious rural peasant, and as a result has become "unsound": "Down, down they [kingdoms who prize luxury above all else] sink, and spread a ruin round" (314, 393, 394). "The ruins" are not the aristocracy's dilapidated property or a reminder to manage their wealth

and privilege well or face the consequences. “The ruins” according to Lutz are a current, mid-eighteenth-century village and the cause of the ruination is not mere mismanagement but a socio-economic system which expropriates and impoverishes the many to enrich the few. Goldsmith then responds to the constraints of genre with a critique of the elite’s pursuit of luxury. “The Deserted Village” is then a reversal of ruling class literary conventions (Lutz 167).

For Lutz genre is constitutive of Goldsmith’s critique of the social effects of the increasing capitalization of production. Despite the poem’s highly critical stance toward social and economic abuses, however, Lutz notes Goldsmith’s Tory sensibility as the root of the poem’s conservatism (“Reception” 181; “Genre” 159). Goldsmith does not critique social institutions themselves but only their excesses. For instance, he does not attack foundational social institutions such as private property and wage labour. Although he clearly derides the social effects of enclosure such as urbanization, his at times scathing denunciation is not a thoroughgoing critique of agrarian capitalism (Lutz, “Genre” 266). Goldsmith fails to “advocate a radical solution” or even articulate a satisfactory ending to the poem. Social problems are left intact rather than solved when his smallholders sail away to a new life in America (Lutz, “Genre” 166). Instead, he doggedly adheres to his society’s dominant social hierarchy. Nevertheless, “The Deserted Village” remains for Lutz a text engaged at least partially in ideological unmasking.

In contrast, Ricardo Quintana allows for both historicization and politicization within the pastoral genre. He characterizes “The Deserted Village” much like Montague as a “historical pastoral” modelled on Virgil’s first and tenth

Eclogues (135). These texts, according to Quintana, also refer to an actual historical event in which farmers and rural villagers were dispossessed (132). Although Quintana notes “a touch of primitivism in Goldsmith’s description of the happy life enjoyed by the villagers before their eviction,” a primitivism he also calls a “Rousseauistic pre-romanticism,” he maintains that Goldsmith’s portrayal of Auburn’s “happy swains” is historically factual (134-35). Smallholders are prefigured yet again as noble savages, as they are for Quintana both critical prejudices and real people. Explaining this critical contradiction, which is equally present in Lutz in his claim that Goldsmith’s “Auburn” is marked by genre and yet refers to an actual village, is crucial in illuminating how smallholders are mobilized for political ends.

The conventions of genre and the actualities of history are brought together by these critics in a manner reminiscent of a particular type of gambling. A parlay is a wager whose success hinges on the positive outcome of other individual bets; all the bets must win in order to collect. Lutz’s argument for the historical facticity of Goldsmith’s “Auburn” is left aside as its focus on genre insulates the argument from the following criticism. Lutz is not necessarily arguing that “the ruins” are referential, or that they point to an actual village, but rather his claim may be understood as situating Goldsmith’s use of a literary convention, which itself resists historicization, in a particular historical situation for strategic political reasons. Lutz is still wagering, however, that poetic language refers to an historical actuality wrought by enclosure, one which modern historians have problematized. In contrast, Quintana bets on the facticity of

historical knowledge by linking two literary texts—Goldsmith’s and Virgil’s—with the history of enclosure. Quintana also parlays two claims for historical factuality—the confiscation and redistribution of land after Octavian’s conquest at Phillippi and eighteenth-century enclosure—with another concerning the accuracy of Goldsmith’s portrait of “Auburn’s” smallholders (Quintana 132, 134).

The problem with this wager is that Quintana imbricates the factuality of two historical events with the representation of a certain historical subject with figural underpinnings. His wager on the accuracy of the historical event Virgil refers to in the first *Eclogue* is outside the scope of this paper. The second bet, however, that enclosure is a fact of the eighteenth century, is both narrow and ill-defined even within the context of the poem. Goldsmith claims to have witnessed not simply enclosure but its effect, which is rural depopulation. This “effect,” moreover, is not historically accurate. And as far as the figural dimensions of “Auburn’s” smallholders are concerned, Quintana names some of them himself: “Auburn’s” smallholders are both primitive and cultured. They retain traits of Rousseau’s “noble savage” while they are firmly within civil society—a contradiction for Rousseau but not for Goldsmith. As argued above, Goldsmith’s conservatism blinds him to Rousseau’s more radical critique of the social institution of private property itself.

Quintana claims that both Virgil and Goldsmith based their pastoral texts on historical fact because “we respond more strongly to truth than to the most artful fiction” (132). But then he goes on to argue that we in fact respond to the truth of figures. He admits that “Auburn’s” smallholders are “overly innocent,



overly helpless before the wealthy and powerful, but,” he continues, “in eighteenth-century England simple people did, we know, sometimes suffer outrageous indignities at the hands of the privileged” (135). By “simple people,” he means smallholders, inscribed prejudicially as rural dullards. More pointedly, he is responding to the truth effect of smallholders, inscribed speciously as both universal entities and as historically located subjects. Goldsmith’s smallholders are not real people, despite the author’s own protestations in the poem’s dedication. As critics of the poem have shown, they are literary figures which respond to the conventions of genre and figuration—of discourse—as much, if not more, than historical fact. Quintana’s parlay concerning the historical accuracy of “The Deserted Village” is a bust.

C.C. Barfoot works from this assumption that historical fact is marked by discursive structures such as genre. “We may admit the imaginative appeal of the poet’s argument,” he claims,

even while we accept its lack of historical validity. That is to say, we might accept that although not well-founded on historical evidence, Goldsmith’s economic ideas, with their demographic implications, offered and still might offer a perfectly satisfactory emotional explanation of a state of mind, and like many political constructions work with the force of an aetiological myth. (53)

“The Deserted Village” for Barfoot has persuasive, seductive, and forceful “symbolic properties” (53). He productively turns criticism of the poem from the struggle in locating its historical referents to elaborating a theory of discursive

force. He argues that the poem's powers of politico-economic persuasion cannot be separated from its linguistic elements (54). But what are the operative "symbols"? What are the resultant forces? And to what end(s) do they function?

Barfoot produces an impressive catalogue of the poem's symbols including: decay, the "inside" constituted by a small group or community, the outside, expulsion, re-integration, centre, periphery, circularity, vertical movement, the body, sensuality, and so on. The argumentative logic of the poem, he concludes, is undercut in the end by its affective register. Barfoot argues that the speaker's own fear of self-examination provokes him to lash out against socio-economic conditions when the actual driving influence of the poem's critique lies within him. The poet seeks to return to the Edenic "Auburn" of his youth. But he is "contaminated with the experience of the outside world" (Barfoot 90). Thus he cannot return to the postlapsarian community and enjoy his retirement; he is different and "Auburn" is gone.

The poet himself, more importantly, represents this change and is the vehicle of Auburn's elision. Barfoot demonstrates that the speaker is the very figure he condemns: the "man of luxury," the outsider. Barfoot contends that "the mercantile system, foreign trade, imported luxury, enclosure and depopulation are the alibis used by Goldsmith to destroy the Auburn which, he insists, has been corrupted out of existence" (90). The historical consequences of these socio-economic phenomena are not the most pivotal constitutive elements. "The violence, the unexpected aggression, the pain, the disfigurement of the poem," Barfoot claims, are the result of "the vengeance that Goldsmith, like a frustrated

child, is driven to visit on others, as if above all they were guilty of ignoring and neglecting his needs, refusing him suck, unwilling to stay behind to sustain his old age, his second childhood, and unready to bolster his precious, though vulnerable, self-esteem” (90-91). Barfoot’s psychoanalytic criticism is illuminating, as the speaker indeed takes his fury out on the villagers, as perhaps best represented by the triptych of women he mobilizes to depict the causes of social change as age, deception, and disloyalty. The poet’s condemnation of these women is motivated by racism and misogyny tinged, as Barfoot suggests, with self-hatred.

There are figural nuances missing from Barfoot’s account of the spinning maid. And these absences are also “political constructions” that “work with the force of an aetiological myth” (Barfoot 53). When Goldsmith moralizes smallholding as a form of production, he does so not only by way of binary oppositions such as the virtuous and sensuous, soul and body, health and contamination. The spinning maid is a recurrence of the figure of the savage as defined by Goldsmith’s contemporary political economists, Hume and Steuart; that is, she is deployed according to the savage-civilized binary. She wanders, as Goldsmith says that “She left her wheel” (336). She is not only nomadic but homeless: “the poor houseless shivering female lies” alone in the city (326). She also “idly” quits her spinning and embarks on her destructive path (335). Ironically, in the process of becoming more civilized (urban), she is contaminated not only by the forces of mercantilism but by a figure “other” to western European civilization. Leaving “her wheel and robes of country brown” (336), smallholder’s regression to a state of savagery is interwoven with her entrance

into civilization. The constraints of the georgic genre enable this ironic mobilization, as the smallholder is both a figure for a virtuous and idyllic culture and for the loss of this culture in an indolent and ignoble torpidity.

### **The New World**

At the end of the poem, Goldsmith envisions the life in store for England's emigrant peasants. He maintains his attachment to private property as the foundation of social independence or "self-dependent power" and morality which he describes as the "rural virtues" of happy and conservative poverty (429, 398). This conclusion is particularly prescient in the history of ideas, as it anticipates Smith's claim that the pre-existing form of property ownership in England held back individual advancement and prevented social mobility. In England, Smith claims, one may invest a middling fortune in agriculture and live happily but with no reasonable hope of advancing that fortune (355-59). In America, however, one may not only live happily as a smallholder because as such one is "truly a master, and independent of all the world," but will have the opportunity for social mobility due to the cheapness of land (due to its abundance) and the expense of labour (due to its scarcity) (Smith 359). Thus an industrious individual may get ahead in the New World—by moving up the ladder from "free hand" to tenant farmer and perhaps even to landlord—with this individual's own hard work. This conclusion is also distinctly pre-capitalist. It locates Goldsmith's poem as critical of capitalism as much as it capitulates to foundational capitalist concepts which

the smallholder so economically encapsulates: labour, property, morality, and progress. The interwoven figuration of these notions is elucidated in the next chapter, which traces smallholders' emergence in Canadian poetry as the nature-culture and savage-civilized binaries follow smallholders across the Atlantic.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Rousseau cites “the wise Locke”: ““There can be no injury, where there is no property”” (qtd. in Rousseau 82).

<sup>2</sup> Landscape, or estate, gardening was currently in vogue and was considered an economic improvement. Adam Smith, however, considers this practice harmful to national wealth and progress since smallholders are a country’s principal improvers (Smith 392). Moreover, contemporary political economists such as Sir James Steuart (1713-1780) denounce this practice on the grounds that it decreases the nation’s productivity and hence its wealth (133). Goldsmith’s poem conveys a similar critique of this aristocratic practice: “The country blooms” as a landscape garden only by driving the peasantry from their land, and thus blossoms only by desiccating the livelihoods of the majority of the population (Goldsmith 96). As Goldsmith writes, “One only master grasps the whole domain, / And half a tillage stints thy [Auburn’s] smiling plain” (39, 40). Goldsmith’s censure of landscape gardening is that a desire for increasing opulence is concurrent with an increase in vice. See Matthew Johnson (149-154). See also Ann Bermingham (11-14).

<sup>3</sup> See Peter Large (106), Matthew Johnson (32), and Lord Ernle (164).

<sup>4</sup> An excellent point of reference is Joan Thirsk’s landmark study, *The Agrarian History of England and Wales*. Ed. H.P.R. Finberg. London: Cambridge UP, 1967. Print.

<sup>5</sup> See also Dyer, Hey, and Thirsk (88).

**Chapter Three: Troping Smallholders: Anamnesis, Metalepsis, and Prolepsis  
in Oliver Goldsmith's "The Rising Village"**

**Synopsis of "The Rising Village"**

The Canadian author of "The Rising Village" is the "namesake and grand-nephew of the English author of 'The Deserted Village'" (New 68). Since neither the Canadian poet nor his signature work are likely to be familiar, non-specialists may find valuable some background information about the author and the text, as well as a concise summary of its contents.

He composed "The Rising Village" between 1822 and 1824, and first published it in London, England in 1825 (Gnarowski 13). It was next printed in 1826 in Montreal, after which a revised version of the poem appeared in New Brunswick in 1834. In this final publication, "The Rising Village" was the centerpiece of a book of Goldsmith's poetry.<sup>1</sup>

The Canadian Goldsmith capitalized on his relative's fame, gaining some poetic renown in the process. As he makes clear in his preface to the poem's 1834 edition, it is meant to pick up where his relative and namesake's work left off. The end of "The Deserted Village" portrays the dispossessed and displaced peasantry emigrating to Canada and the United and States. In the poem's dedication, the Canadian Goldsmith declares that "I have endeavoured to describe the sufferings which the early settlers experienced, the difficulties which they surmounted, the rise and progress of a young country, and the prospects which promise happiness

to future possessors” (5). “The Rising Village” represents the development of a Nova Scotian village in transition from settlement to agriculture and finally to industry and commerce.

While “The Rising Village” retains the moralizing tone of his predecessor’s poem, the Canadian Goldsmith revises his relative’s excoriating political-economic critique of mid- to late eighteenth-century Britain (Lynch xv). The Anglo-Irish Goldsmith castigated the enclosing landlords of his country who drove the peasants from their homes and, more specifically in light of the poem, replaced entire villages with landscape gardens. There is no such critique in “The Rising Village,” however, for the issue in Canada is one of settlement; rather than the problem of smallholders’ expropriation and rural depopulation, the initial establishment of homes and villages is the matter at hand. The Canadian Goldsmith represents a happy union of smallholding with mercantilism (he terms the latter “industry” and “trade”) as he describes a vastly different socio-economic climate in which the depopulation of smallholders from the countryside is not yet an issue (Lynch xv).

There is no evidence in “The Rising Village” that Goldsmith had any other vision of society than the prosperity of the original settlers and their generations to come. Once “the poor peasant, whose laborious care / Scarce from the soil could wring his scanty fare” (Goldsmith, lines 511-12). “Not fifty Summers” of settlement later, “Now in the peaceful arts of culture skilled,” the peasant “Sees his wide barn with ample treasures filled” (499, 513-14). In “The Rising Village,” smallholders retain ownership of “Scotia’s fields” (518). Goldsmith unfailingly



(and blindly) endorses the coexistence of smallholding with commerce, which is the economic entity portrayed as socially destructive in “The Deserted Village.” Lynch characterizes succinctly Goldsmith’s revision of the socio-economic critique contained in “The Deserted Village”:

The poet of “The Rising Village” has not discerned in his great-uncle’s poem the message that ‘the merchant’s glory’ and ‘the farmer’s pride’ are incompatible. But the Canadian Goldsmith’s misreading is understandable: in a pioneering environment, and in accordance with the mercantilist ethos and Adamic mythology that infuse “The Rising Village,” commercial and agrarian interests are viewed necessarily as compatible for the sake of the colony’s prosperity. “The Rising Village” is not concerned with the depopulation of a rural class but with the reverse of Sweet Auburn’s dilemma—settlement. Goldsmith has, however, coloured his poem in the moralistic tone of “The Deserted Village,” particularly in that poem’s sombre assessment of pleasurable pastimes. (xv)

The poem’s opening two stanzas acknowledge his namesake’s poem, “The Deserted Village,” but advise that his own work is not about the “piercing woes” of British smallholders. In contrast, the Canadian Goldsmith tells the reader to “turn with me where happier prospects rise, / Beneath the sternness of Acadian skies” (17-18). He humbly defers to his relative’s greater talents and asks for him to be his Muse (25).

The third stanza moves the poem's action rapidly from the Old to the New World, as he offers a lengthy tableau of progress from wilderness, to settlement, and finally to logging and agriculture (27-73). Goldsmith councils the colonists to remain vigilant in their battle to control nature, both "physical nature" (their battle with the elements, "Indians" and wild beasts) and "human nature" (their battle with desire) (Lynch xviii).

The obsessively moralistic poem, according to Lynch, portrays two momentary lapses from industriousness and moral watchfulness, after which the colonists suffer the ill effects of "nature" in the two forms Lynch identifies: "physical" nature, comprised of the elements, wild beasts, and "savages," and human nature, or the internal battle with desire (xiv-xvi). The first of these threats to morality is the arrival of "savage tribes" (Goldsmith 84) following "the short repose" (77) offered by the labour of first settlement. This labour conquers physical nature, but the respite from industriousness opens the potential for moral lapse among the settlers (see 249-60). Aboriginal peoples, depicted as animalistic savages, assert their right of ownership. The settler runs away and hides from the "murderous band" (85) until they leave. "The wandering Indian" (99) retreats to "far distant wilds" (110) once more settlers arrive and the problem of Aboriginal property claims, and the violent conflict they engender, is solved through strength in numbers. The second threat toward civility is allegorized in the tale of young lovers Albert and Flora (299-426); an outline of this episode is below.

The tale of Albert and Flora is preceded by the development of "the arts of culture" or the "increase / In social life" (121, 127-28) in the colony. Goldsmith

first describes the tavern and the codes of propriety which govern conduct within it, as the tavern is a source of comfort, news, and education to its patrons (121-64). The “village church” (167) is described next, followed by the merchant’s store, the doctor’s practice, and the school house. He depicts the villagers offering thanks for the gifts given to them by God, or “a Great First Cause” (184).

However, dangers to settler society creep in to the poem despite their villagers’ religiosity. These threats include the frivolous commodities for sale at the village store. As Bentley astutely notes, Goldsmith’s list of goods is reminiscent of the items “on Belinda’s vanity in *The Rape of the Lock*,” on which “‘Bibles [are] among the ‘Puffs, Powders, Patches, . . . and Billet-doux’” (Pope, qtd. in Bentley, “Goldsmith” 48). Although Goldsmith states that the items are “All useful things” (215), he includes some things seemingly more “useful” than others—“silks and children’s toys” (214) are perhaps among the offending items of luxury. Moreover, the Doctor is inept (219) and the schoolmaster is “[n]o master” (233) at all, for he is ignorant and unable to maintain discipline.

Nevertheless, the social life of the village seems to be progressing without major blemish, as Goldsmith next describes the settlers’ recreational activities. The poet warns, however, that “[s]oon vice steals on, in thoughtless pleasure’s train, / And spreads her miseries o’er the village plain” (289-90). The poet’s example is the cautionary tale of Albert and Flora. Albert is a youth of vast potential who seems noble. He courts and forges, but ultimately breaks, an engagement to Flora. Albert sends a letter to Flora informing her that he has fled from his “native plain” (363) and Flora, stricken with grief, runs out in the wintry

night. Although her life is saved by a settler and his wife, Flora has become incurably insane.

Immediately following the Albert and Flora story, however, Goldsmith composes a retraction. He describes the predominantly moral order of the “Village” (see 427-440) in contradistinction to the “tales of real woe” such as Albert and Flora’s which “not oft ... / Degrade the land” (427-28). A tableau of culture concludes the poem, as the poet reiterates that settler society has overcome its external and internal threats; both its savages and its savage desires have been more or less conquered. Now, with “boundless prospects stretched on every side” (449), Acadia is prepared to progress to the height of civilization, just as “Britannia” (528) has done. The final image is one of stasis, as the sun reaches its noon-day peak and apparently becomes stuck over Acadia, shining down in “one blaze of pure exhaustless light” (556).

### **Natural Law-Making Violence**

The history of settlement and progress which Goldsmith offers is curiously a-historical as it relies on literary conventions and rhetorical strategies which resist historicization and vex the factuality of his narrative of Nova Scotia’s development. “The Rising Village” represents progressive civilization through settlement as though it were an act of nature, since the village rises as if it were one of the crops cultivated by its inhabitants. Indeed, it is “the Rising Village of the land” (26): it is not simply on but “of” Acadian soil. The smallholders that

populate it mark the fold in which a social process is inverted to appear like a natural one. Colonial conflict, however, irrupts in the text and mars the supposedly unblemished civility of the village's progress. The Albert and Flora and return-of-the-savages episodes are instances of unmanageable tensions within the work which problematize not only settler society but also the notion of justice itself.

Goldsmith's deployment of smallholders in justifying settler society hinges on the distinction between natural law and positive law. Walter Benjamin in "The Critique of Violence" terms this assertion of civility "law making" violence. For Benjamin, natural law considers violence as part of nature and queries the justice of violent acts according to their ends (Benjamin 278). In contrast, positive law views violence as social and historical; it is concerned with means, not ends, and holds that just processes will "guarantee" just ends (278). Benjamin quickly identifies the circularity of this distinction, however, as on one hand ends justify means while on the other means justify ends. In attempting to deal with this circuitous logic, Benjamin abandons natural law, as its focus on ends "can only lead to bottomless casuistry" (279). He focuses instead on "the justification of certain means that constitute violence" (279). Benjamin represents these means by juxtaposing "law making" and "law-preserving" violence.

Jacques Derrida's critical engagement blurs the boundary between the two kinds of violence Benjamin identifies. In "The Force of Law," Derrida interprets Benjamin's analysis of the limits between law and violence thus:

How are we to distinguish between the force of law of a legitimate power and the supposedly originary violence that must have established this authority and that could not itself have been authorized by any anterior legitimacy, so that, in this initial moment, it is neither legal nor illegal—or, others would quickly say, neither just nor unjust? (Derrida 927)

The colonial Other irrupts at the limit between civilized or state authorized violence and the founding violence which establishes the colony itself. The text attempts to legitimate colonization as a civilizing mission, but the Other exposes the contradictory logic of colonial property relations and notions of progress. Logical inconsistencies emerge in a tropology which troubles the boundaries between the poem's fundamental binary of savage-civilized in a manner which demands a rigorous re-examination of justice regarding settler society's relation to its Other.

The poem's mobilization of the natural law tradition, with its a-historical determination of justice with reference not to means but rather to ends, necessitates an examination of the role that this recourse to natural law plays in the poem's ideological functioning as it attempts to naturalize the European colonization of Nova Scotia. Natural law may in fact be based in "bottomless casuistry" according to Benjamin but this illogic nevertheless performs political work: namely, the reification of settler society through the naturalization of its ends as moral and progressive (279). Nature for Goldsmith is then not merely something to control. In a re-examination of Lynch's thesis, "The Rising Village"

also naturalizes and thus attempts to shore up, legitimate, and ultimately justify the logic of settler society.

This chapter's overarching thesis is that smallholders in the poem are ambivalent figures: they both inflict and suffer violence. They purvey violence mystified as colonial progress in their engagement with Aboriginal peoples, and, if the logic of the poem's unwavering endorsement of commerce is extended, they are victims of progress themselves as their mode of production conflicts with unchecked capitalism. Goldsmith mystifies the originary moment of colonization as moral and progressive because it is built on civilized property relations. Goldsmith's colonial logic reproduces this founding violence as the "law-preserving" violence of European property relations. Goldsmith naturalizes these property relations, rendering the poem a study in natural law-making violence, to paraphrase Benjamin.

In deploying this natural law-making violence, Goldsmith deploys three tropes. The first, anamnesis, corresponds to his poem's indebtedness to the discourse of natural law. Goldsmith relies on Locke's mobilization of this discourse, which has roots in Hooker and Aristotle, as the avowedly natural cause of private property relations. Locke arrives at this notion of property, however, only by misappropriating Hooker. In turn, Hooker misappropriated Aristotle. Thus a chain of un-forgettings, or acts of selective memory, constitute the Lockean discourse of property which Goldsmith appropriates in order to expropriate Nova Scotia's Aboriginal peoples.

The second trope is metalepsis. Quintilian claims that it is a transitional trope, like the smallholders to whom its logic is applied. Metalepsis mistakes a contingent relation for a causal one, and thus hovers between cause and effect, as smallholders float between historical periods, modes of production, and categories of race and gender. Whereas Goldsmith's deployment of the natural law tradition is a misappropriation meant to naturalize colonial property relations, the Albert and Flora episode is a cautionary tale of the failure to appropriate. In this chivalric romance gone awry, Albert's failure to cultivate "Flora" is declared both a moral and masculine shortcoming, as his failure to assert his property rights is also a failure of propriety which threatens the community's civility. Albert wanders away from Flora like the savages leave their land in "The Rising Village, and thus he represents the spectre of the primitive returning to haunt the text's civilizing impetus.

Prolepsis is the third trope, and it is Goldsmith's tool for managing this colonial anxiety with recourse to the motif of progress. Prolepsis, in this context, operates in the future perfect tense—the tense of the "will have been." It produces something through language: here, the notion of the settlers' natural right to own the New World, however spurious this "natural" right may be. The return-of-the-savages episode, in which they assert their property rights, is countered by the settlers' assertion that they "still" own the soil because they have always already rightfully owned it. In Goldsmith's formulation, prolepsis promises a natural relation between settler and soil that is past, future, and present.



Prolepsis thus reinforces the poem's initial appeal to natural law in a process that appears dialectical, as natural law—with its recourse to the motifs of morality and property—is first enunciated through anamnesis, then negated through metalepsis, until finally being sublated through prolepsis. Prolepsis re-activates the forgetting of the anamnestic moment of colonization—a moment which anxiously emerges through the poem's metaleptic notion of property as inscribed in the Albert and Flora debacle. The motif of progress, mobilized through the trope of prolepsis, thus attempts to purge the text of its anxieties by naturalizing settler society through the logic of the “always already”: Nova Scotia “will have been” the property of Europeans, a state celebrated by Goldsmith with the heliotropic vision of colonial progress attuned to the full presence of “one blaze of pure exhaustless light” (556). The poem ends without a shade of anxiety or shadow of a doubt, as the existence of the fledgling village is guaranteed by divine authority, arriving proleptically in what for Catherine Kellogg is the Hegelian “*Aufhebung*” or “the temporal structure of the always-already” (4). “Flora,” a figure for growing nature, is properly civilized.

As Kellogg makes clear, however, this dialectical movement is haunted by absence at every stage, as Hegel's universalizing moment of self-presence, manifest in the *Aufhebung*, opens onto a radical alterity or irreducible difference (4). Goldsmith's version of this Hegelian concept, which seeks to “maintain the illusion of the law's universality” (Kellogg 4) in a poetic image of progress reaching its full completion in the here and now, is built upon an effacement of the singularity of Aboriginal property rights and the displacement of these rights

through a ““fabulous retroactivity”” (Derrida, qtd. in Kellogg 4) in which colonial authority appears to be prior and natural.

### **Natural Law: Misremembering and Misappropriating**

Goldsmith deploys a Lockean notion of property to naturalize colonial property rights. This process of naturalization passes off social laws as natural. However, as the following survey of the natural law tradition reveals, this notion of property is founded on a misappropriation of this tradition. In moralizing property relations, Locke selectively remembers Hooker, who has in turn misremembered Aristotle.

Goldsmith articulates the poem’s version of morality with the trope of anamnesis (see Quintilian, Book 12, Chapter 2, Sections 59-85 and Book 12, Chapter 4, Section 245).<sup>2</sup> With this trope, rhetoricians reference a famous deed, quotation, or event. It establishes the writer’s authority and characterizes her as good: well-equipped, knowledgeable, educated, or cultured (*Silva Rhetoricae*). Aristotle argues that ethical appeals are more effective than both logical and emotional appeals, for “character contains almost the strongest proof of all” (Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 75). Memory for Quintilian is the “animating principle” without which all rhetorical training, or learning in general, is “futile” (Book 11, Chapter 2, Section 59). He terms memory the “Treasury of Eloquence” because it contains a storehouse of “examples, laws, rulings, sayings, and facts which the

orator must possess in abundance and have always at his finger-tips” (Book 11, Chapter 2, Section 59). He continues:

So let the orator know as many such things as possible [Quintilian mentions historical examples, legal precedents, and literary texts]. This is what gives old men more authority: they are believed to know more and to have seen more, as Homer often testifies. But we need not wait until the last stage of life, since, so far as knowledge of facts is concerned, study can make us seem to have lived in bygone ages too. (Book 12, Chapter 4, Section 245)

The point of memory for rhetoricians is not simply to be a storehouse of facts but to make use of them, animating their discourses with past wisdom and, consequently, bringing to life an ethically sound status which works to secure their audiences’ assent.

Goldsmith relies on John Locke’s contribution to natural law to naturalize colonial property relations. Locke derives his authority, however, concerning the right of individual property ownership in the state of nature from his citation of Richard Hooker. In *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, Hooker offers an Anglican perspective on the natural law tradition. Hooker argues, like Goldsmith with Aristotelian phrasing, that a “First Cause,” which even the “heathens” acknowledge, is the origin of all things (Hooker 200). By “heathens” he means the ancient Greeks, notably Aristotle. In Aristotelian fashion, Hooker conceives being not as static but as in process. God remains the same, while “all other things besides are somewhat in possibility, which as yet they are not in act” (Hooker

215). Following Aristotle's account of rational and non-rational potentiality—without citing it explicitly—Hooker contends that nature's processes “work by simple necessity” (228), for nature “can do no other” while humanity may “leave the things we do undone” (220).<sup>3</sup> God, Hooker argues, is not a being in process like a person or nature but rather is a perfect being who performs perfect deeds (200).

Hooker conceptualizes God as both a cause and agent. God both authors the law and “willingly worketh by” it (202). God's law is self-imposed (204). This law is both “freely” given and followed by God (204). The creation and direction of the operations of nature are evidence of God's deeds. Nature, for Hooker, is God's “instrument” which both contains and reveals God's orderly, rational laws. A law, for Hooker is a divine rule “which God hath eternally purposed himself in all his works to observe” (204). He also defines a law as “a directive rule unto goodness of operation” (228). Hooker's God “freely” (204) restricts himself to a self-imposed mode of operation and since God directs nature, nature is revelatory of God's own perfect law. Nature cannot stray from this divinely-imposed course.

Humans, in contrast, *should* not drift from it, which explains the moralistic impulse concerning nature in “The Rising Village.” Reason for Hooker and Goldsmith should regulate our appetites, including our natural proclivity for violence. Hooker explains that just as nature's processes tend toward a state of perfection, so too does the “conduct” of humanity (225). We can overcome both originary moments of “law making violence” and state-supported moments of “law-preserving violence” (Benjamin 283-84). For Goldsmith, this is possible by

regulating our actions according to God's law by following the rational, orderly law of nature. By remembering God's law as mirrored in nature, Goldsmith's settlers undertake just actions. The poet deploys anamnesis as a device for self-civilizing, as his citation of the natural law tradition advances an ethical appeal in its recourse to God and a logical appeal in its invention of an argument by antecedent.

Goldsmith mobilizes the natural law tradition to assign God's justification and expiation for colonial violence, but the foundation for these claims is, however, neither divine nor rational. Nature for Hooker teaches us universal laws, but his proof lies neither in nature nor theology but rather in another discourse which is explicitly rhetorical (239). Hooker cites as evidence Aristotle's *The Art of Rhetoric* (Aristotle 125). Hooker in fact calls Aristotle "the arch-philosopher" (Hooker 242) but roots the originary truth of his discourse in a treatise about persuasion. And in the passage Hooker cites from Aristotle, in which universal law is the subject, Aristotle is himself referencing a literary text, Sophocles' *Antigone* (Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 125). Nature as evidence of God's universal law is, it seems, a textual phenomenon in which the origin or cause is mistaken for an effect of textuality. "Nature" is not the origin of justice but rather an effect of the discourse about justice. Retracing this sliver of the history of ideas of the concept of justice reveals that this discourse is both literary and rhetorical; that is, it is constituted figuratively and for ideological ends.

With these ends in mind, Hooker has misremembered Aristotle, and Locke misappropriates Hooker. In Chapter Two of Locke's *Second Treatise of*

*Government*, “Of the State of Nature,” he un-forgets Hooker’s account of the original equality among people. This citation establishes the foundation for Locke’s state of nature, in which liberty and law exist in an uneasy alliance. Hooker admits the possibility that humanity once lived “without any public regiment” (243). Since universal right exists in nature, nature’s laws were sufficient (243). Hooker goes on to say, however, that the “corruption of our nature being presupposed, we may not deny but that the Law of Nature doth now require of necessity some kind of regiment” (243). Patriarchal power structures—in which “to live by one man’s will became the cause of all men’s misery” (243)—gave way in Hooker’s account to “laws . . . wherein all men might see their duties beforehand, and know the penalties of transgressing them” (244). Hooker’s vision of the proper state operates according to natural laws. He cites Aristotle’s examples from *The Art of Rhetoric*, which are that murder, slavery, and prohibiting burial are universally wrong (Aristotle 125). Hooker’s vision of the proper government is as follows:

That which we spake before concerning the power of government must be here applied unto the power of making laws whereby to govern; which power God hath over all: and by the natural law, whereunto he hath made all subject, the lawful power of making laws to command whole politic societies of men belongeth so properly unto the same entire societies, that for any prince or potentate of what kind soever upon earth to exercise the same of himself, and not either by express commission immediately or

personally received from God, or else by authority derived at the first from their consent upon whose persons they impose laws, it is no better than mere tyranny. (245-46)

Hooker stops short of declaring that “public appropriation” (245) or the consent of the governed trumps the divine right of kings, a cue Locke takes in his argument for limited government in the *Second Treatise*. Hooker declares that “positive laws” are a “vow unto God, contract with men, or such like” for the purposes of “the government of them that live united in public society” (245). Positive law assumes the force of natural law, although Benjamin’s analysis of the circular logic of this connection, in which ends justify means and vice versa, looms large. Positive law does not reinforce natural law but rather it reveals its logical vacuity.

Locke, however, makes a vast departure from the foundational reasons for instituting public laws for political society. In Book One, Chapter Ten of *Ecclesiastical Polity*, Hooker argues for a communal organization of people and property, which exists according to “*several rules and canons natural reason hath drawn, for direction of life, [of which] no man is ignorant*” (Hooker, qtd. in Locke 9). Locke shifts from Hooker’s focus on the “*equality of men by nature*” (Locke 8) to a theory of unequal property distribution couched nonetheless in the language of the natural rights of the individual. Locke surmises that we leave the state of nature and enter civil society as individuals with the goal of protecting our own property—a wealth accumulated while living in the state of nature (73-74). Locke’s smallholders become agrarian capitalists while still in the state of nature. Hooker, on the other hand, argues that we enter “*politic Societies*” in order to

accumulate “things needful for such a life as our nature doth desire” in the first place (239). Hooker claims that we enter into civil society based on two desires: a more comfortable and plentiful life as well as the “natural inclination” for “sociable life and fellowship” (239). Life is preserved by laws which regulate our actions according to principles beneficial to “the common good” (239, 240) rather than individual rights founded on private property. In fact, Hooker has little to say about property; indeed, Locke does most of the talking for him. He deems it of secondary importance to the constitution of the moral state and subject functioning in it, who is to be “wise, virtuous, and religious” (241). Hooker contends that everyone desires wealth yet it is poor judgement to pursue it at the cost of wisdom, virtue, and religion. We have a right, however, to rise above “penury,” for even though “the kingdom of God must be the first thing in our purposes and desires . . . [r]ighteous life presupposeth life; inasmuch as to live virtuously it is impossible except we live; therefore the first impediment we . . . remove . . . is penury and want of things without which we cannot live” (240). “The tilling of the earth and the feeding of cattle” (240), along with the development of “sundry arts mechanical” (240), affords a comfortable subsistence for the earth’s first people in Hooker’s gloss of Genesis. “The principle actions of their life afterward,” he adds, “are noted by the exercise of their religion” (240).

In a selective memory of Hooker’s text, Locke’s use of anamnesis mobilizes the smallholder as the tacitly moral appropriator with a right to unlimited amounts of private property while still in the state of nature. It is fruitless, however, to locate a theory of property ownership in Hooker beyond a



vague picture of a loose association of more or less communal smallholders, yet Locke cites “the judicious Hooker” (Locke 13) in order to justify both his claim that humanity once existed in a state of nature and that in this state, individuals may become rightfully rich at the expense of others. For Hooker characterizes the state of nature’s property relations as communal, if at times constituted by violence and patriarchy, and based on subsistence, ease, and the practice of religion in contrast to Locke’s state of nature in which humanity is bent on private accumulation. Conversely, Hooker articulates no clear theory of property. He moralizes neither wealth nor poverty and emphasizes only that both should not detract from one’s religious beliefs and practices.

Locke’s marshalling of anamnesis thus recalls Hooker’s argument while forgetting it at the same time. Locke remembers Hooker’s claims about the state of nature but suffers a convenient amnesia concerning property relations in this state. And, ironically, the foundation for Hooker’s claim, which Locke cites, is Aristotle’s treatise on rhetoric. Aristotle identifies a “general law” which is “that of nature” which is, as he describes vaguely, “something of which we all have an inkling, being a naturally universal right or wrong” (125). This “inkling”—so utterly ambiguous—nonetheless moves with great force. For just as Hooker cites Aristotle, “the arch-philosopher” (Hooker 242), to bring to mind again the (murky) presence of a universal moral order in nature, which according to Hooker is like Scripture because it instructs us in all that is good (271), Locke cites Hooker to mobilize his authority while un-forgetting the content of this authority at the same time. That is, Locke simultaneously forgets and remembers. Hooker’s

God instructs us in moral law through nature's laws. The passage Hooker cites from Aristotle, however, remains ambiguous concerning our ability to know exactly what Aristotle means by universal laws: we can know them only by intuition through a process more rhetorical than philosophical concerning the foundation of justice. Or, as Kellogg argues, this process is political, as the "failure of law" to emerge as self-identical and universal presence "enables politics" (3).

When Locke cites Hooker to demonstrate that a state of nature exists, the authority he marshals is political because the sections he grafts onto his text are misremembered. The argument contains a force, however, which is no less effective. Transplanted from Hooker to Locke, the Aristotelian natural law tradition bolsters Locke's claims about individuals' rights to unlimited amounts of private property. Recalling Quintilian, "study can make us seem to have lived in bygone ages" (Book 12, Chapter 4, Section 245), and Locke's citation of Hooker lends moral and intellectual credence to his argument.

Locke argues in the *Second Treatise* that property is the result of an individual adding value to nature through his or her labour (19-20). "Thus *labour*, in the beginning," Locke contends, "*gave a right of property*" (27). This wording resonates with Locke's other Biblically-phrased assertion: "Thus in the beginning all the world was *America*" (29). The entire world as Locke imagined it originally lay in waste, belonging to everyone and no one. Labour, however, alters nature and thereby produces property. In turn, property propels humanity into civilization, beyond the pre-civilized state of "America." But this civilizing

process occurs within Locke's state of nature, before humanity enters into civil society. It is then natural, Locke argues curiously, to civilize nature—it is natural to exceed nature.

It is not only natural for individuals to own property, in Locke's argument, but also for them to own unlimited amounts of it. Before making this claim, however, he first avers that through labour, an individual justifiably asserts ownership of a part of nature or of what was once lying unused in its natural state. He originally sets limits on the amount of property one may rightfully accumulate. No one may accumulate more than they can use, for if what they have enclosed from others is allowed to spoil, this excess "is more than [this person's] share, and belongs to others" (Locke 20-21). The other limit is the provision that "enough [property], and as good" (19, 21) must be left for others. Locke then cannily supersedes both of these self-imposed thresholds. The first is removed with the introduction of money. By using money, value is converted into a form which cannot spoil. The second limit is effaced by Locke's brilliant claim that the purpose of introducing property in the first place was to increase the productiveness of nature. Labour "fixes" rightful ownership in the (natural) thing laboured upon. Labour, for Locke, constitutes 99% of a thing's useful value, and nature the other 1% (25). Thus labour and, by extension, private appropriation or enclosure from what is common to all is also productive for all. Locke's illustration of this principle is the indolent "Indian" in "America," where a "king" is "clad worse than a day-labourer in England" (26).<sup>4</sup>

For Locke, only “labour could at first begin a title of property” (30), as he constructs an individual’s right to property as a relation between labour and nature: labour “adds” to nature, it “mixes with” nature, it is “joined” to nature, it is “annexed” to and “alters” nature. Labour causes property as labour “fixes” an individual’s right to nature (19-22, 28). In Locke’s text, labour is articulated with nature. Labour is a hinge. An individual’s labour folds onto nature to produce that individual’s private property, which is itself an addition to nature. Yet nothing could be more natural.

It is natural, by Locke’s reasoning, “to alter” through labour something “from the state nature had put it in” (28). Within this enabling contradiction, labour makes it possible for it to be natural to change nature. Stated more concisely, through labour it is natural to exceed nature. Locke’s contention that labour adds value to nature (and money converts this value into an indestructible form) justifies enclosure. But this claim rests on a tangled web of assumptions.

Locke mobilizes a conception of labour which paradoxically constructs property as nature’s prosthesis. In the *Second Treatise*, property is an appendage which folds onto nature through the hinge concept of labour. Everyone labours according to Locke, since in order to eat anything, one must remove it out of the state of nature (Locke 28). The American “Indian” is his figure for appropriation in its most basic form. Even these hunter-gatherers labour. But they add little, if any, value to nature beyond what will perish in consumption (28). For Locke, “husbandry” founded on private ownership is the turning point from savagery to civilization (26). But this “husbandry”—and the move beyond smallholding into

agrarian capitalism, a process well underway in Locke's time—emerges in the state of nature. Smallholders hover not only at the limit between pre-capitalist and capitalist modes of production; they mark the figural manner in which these modes of production are transposed onto historical moments and resulting states of being. Goldsmith's phrase, "rude culture" (Goldsmith 58), encapsulates the simultaneously primitive and civilized "nature" of the smallholder. The founding figure of Western culture in various political-economic discourses thus emerges within these same discourses as, also, patently non-Western.

Goldsmith consistently articulates his moral vision of colonization as a natural process which is controlled by natural laws, as he first names God in the poem as "a Great First Cause" (184). By referencing Aristotle's famous phrase, others being the "eternal mover" (Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 276) or "unmoved mover," Goldsmith invokes the natural law tradition with roots running from Aristotle to Aquinas, Hooker, Hobbes and Locke. A tension thus emerges within the poem: if Goldsmith is obsessed with controlling nature as Lynch argues, then how is nature's law to be followed? The school children's souls are "free-born" (246) and yet require control. This paradox has an economic parallel, as "free" and "swelling" commerce, pregnant with profit, and the "wealth, . . . freedom, happiness and ease" it brings is at odds with the mastery of human desire (520, 524). Thus a kind of selective memory occurs in the text, producing a circuitous logic in which nature is a source of colonial justice at the same time as it emerges as a locus of violence.

Goldsmith invokes natural law in order to selectively remember Nova Scotia's colonial history by recycling discourses from the natural law tradition to lend the logic supporting settler society a sheen of legitimacy. Anamnesis operates in the poem as a self-civilizing mechanism by discursively rendering certain memories possible while attempting to negate others. This an-amnesia, un-forgetting, or selective memory attempts to efface the priority of Aboriginal peoples' property rights by legitimating colonial dispossession as an act of divine justice. The poem manifests anxiety over exceeding the boundaries of civilization in the very act of settlement itself, and may be understood as simultaneous attempts to self-civilize through a teleological recourse to natural law and through forgetting the violent means of this civilizing project.<sup>5</sup>

The poem's formal device of "heroic" couplets mirror the emergence of this anxiety, since the poem pairs in its structure a classical form with an Augustan tinge: the Canadian Goldsmith employs the form of the Anglo-Irish Goldsmith's work in a colonial context in a deliberate attempt to construct a Britain-in-Canada. The violence of this colonial process is evident in the content of the form itself, moreover, since the rhymes themselves in the church scene betray the violence that his selective memory attempts to forget by remembering colonization as naturalized progress authorized by God. The poet writes, "When dangers threaten, or when fears invade, / Man flies to thee for comfort and for aid" (181-82). God protects the settlers against the other's incursion, rendering the divine as a rhetorical device that ironically moralizes the invading settler culture. Other rhymes are symptomatic of colonial conflict in the church scene: "life" and

“strife” (185-86) and “arm” and “harm” (196-96) betray the sounds of muffled violence beneath the poem’s tidy formal structure, as colonial laws receive divine authorization.

Another poetic device which evidences Goldsmiths’ deployment of God to expiate colonial anxiety is the recurrent diction in the church scene and in the episode in which the “savages” attack a settler (see lines 73-120). The poet repeats words and phrases that link the settlers’ religiosity to the violence that such piety attempts to forget. Goldsmith refers to the harshness of physical nature, which Lynch identifies as the climate, beasts, and savages, as the “source of *trouble* and fear” (Lynch xiv-xv; Goldsmith 74, emphasis added). This diction recurs in the poet’s portrayal of God, who soothes when “*troubles* vex and agitate the mind” (179, emphasis added).

Repetitive diction re-emerges in the similarity between “the savage tribes,” who for the settler represent “*dangers* [which] all his hopes destroy” and God’s comforting influence “When *dangers* threaten, or when fears invade” (80, 181, emphasis added). God atones for the settler’s invasion. Also, the settler’s “hope” which derives from his relative prosperity and brief respite from labour offers “solace for his *woes*” just before “the murderous band” of “savage[s]” attack (78, 85, 81, emphasis added). A phrase recurs nearly verbatim as “faith” in God is the “solace of our *woes*” (175). Moreover, in the church scene, physical crises are given a spiritual solution in a manner reminiscent of the settler who “saves himself by flight” (92) when attacked:

When dangers threaten, or when fears invade,

*Man flies to thee* for comfort and for aid;  
 The soul, impelled by thy [God's] all--powerful laws,  
 Seeks safety, only, in a Great First Cause.

(181-84, emphasis added)

Alone in the wilderness, “Where not a friend in solitude is nigh, / His home the wild, his canopy the sky” (193-94), the settler is protected by “God alone” (196). The settler does not survive by saving himself (92), which amounts to a less than heroic running away from conflict, but rather in a sublimated moment of colonial violence, “God alone” (196) defends him. Safe in God’s hands, the settler returns to what has become his property. Now it is his savage attackers who “fly” to “safety in far distant wilds” (107, 110) once other settlers occupy the area, increasing their strength in numbers in this moralized portrait of imperialism.

### **Albert and Flora: Property as Metalepsis**

Goldsmith articulates the imposition of European property relations in Nova Scotia with a trope that calls into question the causal link between individual labour and private property. He enunciates the second motif, property, with the trope of metalepsis. Quintilian defines it as

one of the *tropes* involving change of meaning which remains to be discussed, namely, *metalepsis* or *transumption*, which provides a transition from one *trope* to another. It is (if we except comedy) but rarely used in Latin, and is by no means to be commended,



though it is not infrequently employed by the Greeks . . . . It is the nature of *metalepsis* to form a kind of intermediate step between the term transferred and the thing to which it is transferred, having no meaning in itself, but merely providing a transition. It is a *trope* with which to claim acquaintance, rather than one which we are ever likely to require to use . . . . We need not waste any more time over it. I can see no use in it except, as I have already said, in comedy. (Book 8, Chapter 6, Sections 37-39)

Metalepsis claims a remote, exaggerated, or comedic link between one thing and another, the relationship between them usually being causal (*Sylva Rhetoricae*). Property is metaleptic since it substitutes “nature” as the guarantor of otherwise arbitrary property rights, which are the material effects not as Locke would have it of individual labour but rather of discursive and physical force.

Both the origin of law and its naturalization are discursive and, as Derrida argues, indeterminate effects.<sup>6</sup> For Derrida, the founding, originary, natural, or primitive moment of violence which exists before the law and yet also constructs it—and thus is “neither legal nor illegal” (927)—haunts the state’s attempts to preserve the legal order, as the originary violence which exceeds the boundaries of justice re-emerges in and is constitutive of state authority. Nature does not justify the ends of violence but rather naturalization is an ideological means of effecting violence through discourse, effects which are sedimented by tropological formations.

The following reading of Rousseau and de Man's critique of him argues that labour is not the natural cause of property, but rather that property is one of the ideological effects of the discursive labour of naturalization. Metalepsis exposes the hinge at the heart of the concept of labour which folds the individual onto nature. The labouring subject's connection to nature is then marked by a tropological dimension. This connection is forged, as Rousseau and de Man argue, historically by violence.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau was one of Locke's fiercest critics on the topic of property, and this critique opens a path for speculative inquiry into the figural qualities of what for Rousseau is a social, not natural, entity. He contends in the "Discourse on the Origin of Inequality" that private property does not exist within the state of nature but rather abolishes it (57). Rousseau argues that civil society begins with the first enclosure, as soon as it is recognized by "people simple enough to believe" the individual appropriator (76). In short, Rousseau recognizes the metaleptic error that is property, as it is built on the mistaken metonymic identification between a subject and object. Society for Rousseau is then built on the shifting sands of this tropological condition. The conceptual foundation of private property is "simple"—meaning irrational—since an individual's labour is no justification for another's deprivation (Rousseau 88). "The first effects of property," Rousseau continues in his direct opposition to Locke, are not a general plenty for all but instead a "growing inequality" (87).

In his reading of Rousseau's theory of property, Paul de Man sees "land" as the "most naïve, spatial version" of a "figural structure" or "metaphorical

processes” (261). Land, for de Man, is like the “fence” that separates one parcel of property from another: both are “semantically unambiguous” (262).

Distinguishing mine from yours, in this “simple” sense, is beyond interpretation. For in Rousseau’s text, de Man argues, “The relationship between the owner and the land, or dwelling, is entirely literal” (262). The fence or “‘nontrespassing’ sign,” however, enacts a “principle of functional identification between the owning subject and the owned object” (de Man 262). And identification, for de Man, is a “figural process” (262). Locke states that land is mine since I have fixed my labour, and thus my property, in it. De Man counters, through his reading of Rousseau, that such a conception of property only serves to “confer[] the illusion of legitimacy” (262). Rousseau calls this a “simple” belief. De Man characterizes the “illusion” thus:

This [“geopolitical”] terminology . . . is more precise because the original possession of the land is, in fact, arbitrary and “natural,” in the anarchic sense of the term. One could call it metonymic, simply based on the fact that one happened to be in the proximity of this particular piece of terrain, and this “right of first occupancy,” may be “less absurd, less repellent than the right of conquest” but nevertheless “on close examination . . . it is not more legitimate.” (de Man, quoting Rousseau, 261)

Like Rousseau, de Man claims that property is not identified in any recognizably natural way. He adds that ownership bears an intractably linguistic composition. The link between one and one’s property is discursive. Moreover, this link

“could” be metonymy, which engenders a comparison through contiguity.

Thinking this contiguous relation as metalepsis seems more productive, however, as the connection between the two is neither approximate nor factual but rather remote and dubious. Property is a “geopolitical” social institution based on the “natural” and “anarchic” fact of proximity. As de Man suggests, building on Rousseau’s critique of Locke, the natural right to property is reduced to a spatial relation. The tropological structure of metonymy, which function in de Man’s argument as metalepsis, is mistaken for the politicized structure of private property. De Man’s reading of Rousseau suggests that property is a construction engendered by the pre-existing figural qualities of discourse.

The identification of land as one’s property through what “could” be metonymy is for de Man a “self-reflective” or “onomastic” (262) relation which establishes a “*double rapport*” (264). The first bond is between the owner and thing owned and therefore “feeds fantasies of material possessions” (262). The second “satisfies semiological fantasies about the adequation of sign to meaning seductive enough to tolerate extreme forms of economic oppression” (262). It seems that western culture would rather leave the functional (and for de Man, pleasurable) principle, “this is mine,” in place even if, for most of us, there is little toward which to point. For de Man, the strength of our desire for a connection between our labour and that with which we mix it overcomes the fact that in actuality we own little to nothing of the things with which we work. The strength of this “fantasy,” then, is part desire to own things and part desire to name them. “The rhetoric of property” (262) then is doubly desirous. But it is also productive.

While it constitutes a failure of reference, a claim implicit in Rousseau and made explicit through de Man's trenchant analysis, this failure is nonetheless productive of the inequitable property relations inherent in capitalist societies, relations which de Man characterizes as "extreme forms of economic oppression" (262). The point, however, is that while missing the referent, discourse *produces* other consequences and does so precisely by aiming at them, rhetorically, through misdirection.

As de Man suggests through his reading of Rousseau, the persuasive force of the first hinge within Locke's argument—I work on/with something, therefore, it is mine—may be explained by the devious yet seductive pull of a trope of identification. De Man shifts tropological modes, moving from metonymy, a trope of identification through comparison, to irony, a trope of (mis)identification through (incompatible) difference. Property emerges as a tropological relation between two diametrically opposed things: the owner and that which is owned.

The Canadian Goldsmith's poem relies on conceptions of labour and property that are eerily similar to Locke's, and reading the poem allows us to query the problem of metaleptic error which Rousseau identifies in Locke's argument and which is the problem de Man deconstructs. I propose to expand upon the political implications of this deconstruction, which are also rooted in the figural qualities of discourse. "The Rising Village" offers a way of thinking the problematic connection of the labouring subject with the object laboured upon and thereby owned, a problem de Man identifies and explains as a referential aberration in his reading of Rousseau's take on the problem of property. This

problem resonates in the poem with Locke's treatment of property, a treatment which deconstructs itself. Similarly, reading "The Rising Village" problematizes the enunciation of the smallholder as an originary figure who ushers in property relations while simultaneously naturalizing them. This enunciation, as has been shown above, inextricably binds smallholders with their non-Western other. A close reading of "The Rising Village" also explains how the social relations embedded in the discourse of western European society become rooted in Canadian colonial discourses through the smallholder, a figure with an interwoven tropological structure.

These irresolvable tensions concerning justice are manifest in the tale of Albert and Flora, an episode that illustrates the motif of property. As Michele Holmgren argues, citing D.M.R. Bentley, "ruder footsteps" (Goldsmith 353) than Albert's bring the letter to Flora's door which tells of Albert's broken engagement to her (Holmgren 70; Bentley, "Goldsmith" 52). Both scholars point out the implication that Albert's moral lapse threatens to return the community to a "savage state." Holmgren adds that Flora's running away into the wintry night in a suicide attempt (see Goldsmith 381-97) is the reverse of a previous scenario in the colony's development. The earliest settlers fled into the forest to hide from the "murderous band" or "savage tribes" (Goldsmith 85, 81), but where they run away in order to survive, Flora does so in order to die. Within these textual links, however, both Holmgren and Bentley overlook the connection between the "ruder footstep" (Goldsmith 353) and the European settlers' "first rude culture of the soil" (Goldsmith 58). Does the poem suggest that the first settlers, the supposedly

virtuous bearers of “culture,” are still somehow “savage”? If so, what constitutes this “savagery”?

The question of the identity of the “savage” within the text is bound up with Goldsmith’s problematic motifs under discussion. The Albert and Flora episode is tale of moral impropriety in which un-chivalric Albert fails in his courtship of Flora. The tale is an allegory of the return of the savage, inscribed as the failure to appropriate Nova Scotia in a civilized manner. Not only is the colonial process supposedly civilized, but it is also natural: Albert has been blessed with natural promise, and “Flora” is a figure for nature itself. Flora grows like the village; Albert’s chivalric duty is to court her and foster her growth.

Albert, however, proves to be ignoble. Indeed, he is corrupted by the schoolmaster, who Goldsmith describes as “No master” (243) at all but rather “some poor *wanderer* of the human race” (235, emphasis added). Whereas Goldsmith confers humanity on the village teacher, and withholds it from the Aboriginal peoples, the parallels between them are unmistakable. Each has a tendency—like Albert—to drift from their proper course. The “sway” (46) of the “*wandering savages*[’]” (45, emphasis added) demands for the return of their lands (see 85-88) are unlawful and dismissed—I will return to this point in detail below. The “lawful sway” of the teacher’s knowledge and discipline is similarly lacking, as his students “despise” and “disobey” (244).

The Albert and Flora episode is an extension of the schoolmaster’s inability to “lead[] the opening blossoms into day” (232). “Flora” is one such flower and Albert one of the “rugged urchins” who “spurn at all control” (245).

Goldsmith's obsession with the suppression of the savage without and within is again cast as a civilizing mission, with this process unfolding in a teleological fashion. Knowledge is linked with obedience of the law, and both are hinged with nature. The teacher fails to be "learning's bright display" (231); that is, he fails to be the shining sun fostering his pupils' mental, and subsequently moral, growth. The teacher allows his students to be clouded by their baser natural instincts; rather than submitting to their educator's "control," they follow "the movements of the free-born soul" (Goldsmith 245, 246). The poet describes "Scotia's" "budding hopes" which "rise to view" in the "expectations of each future year" (496, 497, 498) now that the colony has conquered barbarism with "culture's arts" (517). The phallic "rising" is paired with an implied reference to Flora's once bright and flowering future, which was destroyed by the ignominious Albert. Goldsmith further likens Acadia to Britain, the latter which "shin'st in manhood's prime" (533), in direct contrast with "unmanly" (416) Albert who is indeed no knight in shining armour, as the etymology of his name suggests.<sup>7</sup> He is also no industrious smallholder, but the spoiled child of an increasingly leisured class.<sup>8</sup>

Albert is ignoble and also uncivilized in the sense that he wanders away from Nova Scotia. As his letter that informs Flora of the broken engagement states, "I have left my native plain" (363). This breaks the bond, literally of engagement and figuratively of appropriation, which his civilized acts of labour form with "Flora." Albert's labour is figured in conventional literary terms as courtship, as he "sighed, by love and passion fired, [and] / He soon declared the passion she inspired" (325-26). He "sighs" like a courtly lover and nobly declares



the “constancy” of his ardour. Predictably, she is coy until his labours are rewarded: “at length, a mutual flame [she] confessed” (328).

Their engagement ensues and their future as a couple is “golden” (332), as a personified “Love” shines down on them like the sun, fostering the growth of the blossoming relationship they have cultivated. The light nourishing their love fades, however, for once Flora learns of her betrayal, the “sun had set” and all her hope, and sanity, “had vanished into night” (381-82). When the sun rises again (399-400), it illuminates the consequences of the failure to appropriate with courtly propriety: Flora’s incurable insanity (380, 410-12, 418, 422) is an image of the unmanageable tension at the heart of the colonial property relation. Flora, in her “maddened” (422) state, “forbears to blame” (418) Albert; for Goldsmith, nature expresses an undying desire to be colonized by settler society, even if this society harbours the potential to “go savage” again. This desire itself, however, is unreadable, for in the context of the poem, it is insane. The causal link between owner and property, as the poem attempts to naturalize it in terms of chivalric propriety, is irrational.

### **The Return of the Savage: Prolepsis**

The sun is a vital image in the poem which hinges the poem’s motifs of property and progress. Neither Albert nor the savages the poem attempts to forget by banishing them to “far distant wilds” (110) are insurmountable barriers to

social progress; the sun rises again despite the darkening skies represented by the return of the savage in the poem.

In order to justify a social system reliant upon a blend of agrarian and commercial/manufacturing interests, Goldsmith marshals an encounter between the settlers and “the savage tribes” (81). These interests are for a time necessarily compatible. As in Locke’s argument, private property in land is the catalyst for the transition from savagery to civilization. Nova Scotia’s first European settlers in the poem encounter “bleak and desert lands” (56). But as soon as “the sturdy woodman’s strokes” (65) clear the land and the settlers’ crops emerge, the “savage tribes in wildest strain, / Approach with death and terror in their train” (81-82).<sup>9</sup> They demand two things: “the *white man’s* instant death” (89, emphasis original) and their property rights. Viewed from within the Lockean theory that private property derived from an individual’s appropriative labour, the “Indian’s” demands are baseless.

Aboriginal people are portrayed, like in Locke’s text, as little more than beasts living a transient, hand-to-mouth existence.<sup>10</sup> In the scene where Aboriginal people attack a settler’s “hut,” the settler runs into the forest and hides until “The wandering Indian” leaves (92, 99). Apparently Aboriginal peoples are too nomadic to be bothered to stay and kill the settler and reclaim their property. Eventually, Goldsmith adds, the settlers gain strength in numbers and the attacks cease (105-08).

Through colonial eyes, the transience of the “wandering savages” (45) precludes their ownership of property as it is conceived on the European model of

fixed ownership of the soil.<sup>11</sup> As Locke argues, the Aboriginal people's transience wastes the land's productivity. In Goldsmith's phrase, their "bloody footsteps desolate the land" (86). Goldsmith repeats this depiction of nomadic wastefulness later in the poem: The "savage tribes, with terror in their train, / Rushed o'er thy [Acadia's] fields, and ravaged all thy plain" (501-02). Traces of the Aboriginal people's depiction as hunter-gatherers and the nomadic way of life this entails are found in "bloody footsteps" as well as in the alliterative "Rushed" and "ravaged." Just as in Locke, however, Goldsmith implies that the labour of hunting and gathering fails to "fix" property rights. The settlers' labour rightfully appropriates since it is productive and takes on a permanent status. They endure hardship and work patiently, waiting until the time is ripe to reap the fruits of their labour. Seen in this light, their clearing the area of trees, which are then burned, does not "ravage" the land but rather improves it (65-72). Unlike Albert, who fails to cultivate Nova Scotia's fertile "Flora," the settlers display a phallic "firmness" (102). Similarly, the savages' labour fails to appropriate Nova Scotia in a civilized manner, for their shiftlessness prevents their labour from affixing a right of ownership. In contrast, they leave the land in a Lockean natural state of waste.

Locke says that Aboriginal peoples' contentiousness reasserts the need for civil society, which protects against incursions upon an individual's property (for example, see Locke 45-46). When combined with brutish irrationality and "murderous" intentions, Goldsmith precludes taking seriously their "right to rule" (85, 88). For without civilization, there are no rights.<sup>12</sup>

Despite Goldsmith's attempts to disavow Aboriginal property rights, it seems as if they *cannot not* emerge, as the colonial other haunts the logic of settler society. Aboriginal peoples remain a vexing presence despite Goldsmith's attempts to represent them as wild beasts and to represent their political concerns as "murderous," irrational, uncivilized and threatening, outside of the law. "The murderous band" expresses "Their right to rule the mountain and the plain" (85, 88), but in this colonial text their right to land emerges only negatively. Aboriginal peoples continually irrupt despite Goldsmith's attempt to shunt them off on the margins of his text, sending them discursively to "far distant wilds" (110). Goldsmith repeats their banishment later in the text:

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 thy plain.  
But some few years have rolled in haste away  
Since, through thy vales, the fearless beast of prey,  
With dismal yell and loud appalling cry,  
Proclaimed his midnight reign of terror nigh.  
And now how changed the scene! the first, afar,  
Have fled to wilds beneath the northern star;  
The last has learned to shun man's dreaded eye,  
And, in his turn, to distant regions fly. (499-510)

When Aboriginal peoples “Resign the haunts they can maintain no more” (109), the implication is that they are not preserving or improving them in the first place and thus had no right of ownership. These “haunts” are left to the settlers, who are themselves haunted by contradictions in the European discourses meant to justify property right in the New World.

Christopher Bracken articulates a critical model for the temporality of the racialization of labour, a model which is fundamental to my analysis of smallholders as morally ambivalent figures for “progress.” Bracken argues that

The parsimony principle, a prototype of Freud’s reality principle, directs today’s labour toward a “destination” that can only be reached after a delay. It projects the worker onto the horizon of the future—“all times to come”—in a “uniform, constant, and uninterrupted” sequence of instants. It is to history what syntax is to discourse: it inserts space between instants of time. The prodigality principle, a prototype of the pleasure principle, brings time to a halt, seducing the worker into turning away from the future and squandering the fruits of labour in a now that neither advances nor recedes but recurs . . . . The prodigality principle is to history what the force of rupture is to discourse: it lifts an event out of the present of its emergence and makes it available for grafting into other chains of events. (31)

The civilized save for the future while savages expend in the present (Bracken 32). Locke argues that savages only consume and do not save. They devour, Bracken adds, a surplus of produce in a scarcity of time (34).

“The Rising Village” reveals the “parsimony” and “prodigality principles” at work as the following lines, which not only reveal the metaleptic association between a subject and nature. They also constitute Goldsmith’s notion of progress: “By patient firmness and industrious toil, / He still retains possession of the soil” (102-103). The adjectives “patient” and “industrious” suggest Goldsmith’s distinction between civilizing labour and another kind of “toil” which is haphazard, transient, and unproductive. “Industrious toil” is not redundant but signifies the difference between productive and unproductive labour—the kind that “fixes” property rights and the type that fails to adhere. “Patient” signifies the settlers’ ability of foresight or the capacity to delay present gratification for future gain, which is precisely the quality Goldsmith denies the savages in his poem. They “ravage” the land, like Albert does to Flora, while the settlers cultivate it and thus reap the fruits of their improving labour, saving some of the harvest for future use in the process. Moreover, they productively reinvest this surplus, producing enough to fill a “wide barn” with “treasures” (514). “Firmness” suggests the settler’s virtuous uprightness, a rectitude consonant with the phallic imagery associated with moral rigour throughout the poem. Like the “village church” which “in unadorned array, / Now lifts its turret to the opening day” (167-68), the smallholder’s morality is defined by both assiduous labour and

frugality. The steeple pierces the sky while Albert and his savage counterparts fail to rise to the occasion.

Bracken's temporal model of racialization opens onto the poem's deployment of prolepsis. Quintilian defines this trope in Book Nine, Chapter Two, Sections Forty-Three to Forty-Five of the *Institutio Oratoria*. Prolepsis speaks of future things or deeds as if they already exist or as if they are already accomplished (Quintilian). Goldsmith mobilizes prolepsis in his use of "still" (103), which resounds with temporal overdetermination. The settlers appear to own Nova Scotia before, during, and after the Aboriginal peoples' protestations. The settlers "still" own the soil because they have always already rightfully possessed it. Prolepsis allows it to appear as if it could not have been any other way.

Prolepsis, in this context, operates in the future perfect tense—the tense of the "will have been." Prolepsis produces something through language: here, the notion of the settlers' natural right to own the New World, however spurious this "natural right" may be. Since this discursive production is in the future perfect, prolepsis marks the temporal dimension with which the tropological connection between the settlers' labour and the soil is made vivid. In Goldsmith's formulation, prolepsis promises a natural relation between settlers and soil that is past, future, and present. The mode of justification is Bracken's parsimony principle and the mode of this justification's constitution is the prodigality principle. The settlers do not appear to displace Aboriginals. Rather, the settler "retains" (Goldsmith 103) ownership, which suggests that Acadia was always

already European-owned. However, the logic of the “always already” allows the supposedly “future-oriented” settler to slide into the “now-time” of “savage inertia,” or the constant present without change or progress which European discourses reserve for savages (Bracken 36). As Bracken contends, racial determinations are superimposed on temporal and economic relations for ideological ends (34).

Daniel Coleman theorizes the anxiety of settler society which emerges out of this blurred limit between savage and civilized in terms of temporal relation:

Having internalized civility’s ambivalence, the settler-colonist also internalizes imperialism’s temporal gap, feeling himself to be caught in the time-space delay between the metropolitan place where civility is made and legislated and the colonial place where it is enacted and enforced. He feels an anxiety of belatedness that he must hurry to catch up, to leap from primitive, colonial incivility to advanced, modern civility . . . . Because of this feeling of belatedness, the settler must construct, by a double process of speedy indigenization and accelerated self-civilization, his priority and superiority to latecomers; that is, by representing himself as already indigenous, the settler claims priority over newer immigrants and, by representing himself as already civilized, he claims superiority to other Aboriginals and non-Whites. Finally, the colonial settler’s belatedness is intensified by the delay of writing, for the most legitimate and respectable site of publication



is the metropolitan centre, where significance is determined and accessed. The settler may speak in and about the colony, but the written version of his speech will be interpreted in the metropolitan centre (judged in accordance with British constitutional law or with the conventions of British literary taste) for its measure of civility. Thus his speech is required and judged beyond his reach, in a different cultural environment, and only after delay. (16)

Goldsmith's poem, in its homage to his Anglo-Irish relative's as well as in its publication in London and in Montreal and New Brunswick, hovers between the imperial metropole and the colonial hinterland. It seeks the metropole's civilizing influence, its signature and approval, as it ushers in a colonial order in the hinterland. This order is an anxious one, however, as it cites the colonial authority, such as its Lockean notions of property rights, by grafting it into an incompatible social and historical context. Nevertheless, this already established legal order appears as though it was always indigenous, also right, prior, and proper to its "new" colonial environment.

Goldsmith's invents a solution for this anxiety-inducing delay through his use of prolepsis, the trope that superimposes the right of productive use and settlement upon the right of first occupancy, thus effacing any and all Aboriginal title. Goldsmith mobilizes prolepsis as a *topos* of invention within a logical appeal (see Quintilian, Book 9, Chapter 2, Sections 43-45). In this context, prolepsis is used to anticipate counterarguments. Goldsmith puts prolepsis to work clearing Nova Scotia's forests not only of trees but of wild beasts and Aboriginals alike.

Goldsmith thereby generates the blank slate awaiting European development. For the settlers “will have been” the rightful owners, for they “still” (Goldsmith 104) possess Acadia: now, then, always.

Settlers emerge as rightful appropriators despite displacing the original occupants and the First Nations of Nova Scotia appear indolent, shiftless, and indigent. Prolepsis then is a mode of naturalization which is nonetheless ironic: the smallholder operates discursively as a natural civilizer. Prolepsis simultaneously naturalizes the presence of Acadia’s European colonialists as the trope serves to negate the indigene by indigenizing the European. The analysis of prolepsis as progress uncovers the repetition of Eurocentric notions of property rights, which are articulated in an incompatible historical situation. These notions are contradictory and thus the analysis of prolepsis negates the poem’s attempt to portray colonization as inherently progressive. The analysis of prolepsis in the poem then goes nowhere, making the text an ironic one indeed. Nevertheless, the contradictions uncovered are powerful and enabling. Prolepsis is the rhetorical mode in which settlers retain a natural, originary right to the land, a right that is a discursive construct. In other words, prolepsis inscribes the mark of civilization on a putatively natural process as the labour of settlement justifies colonial ownership.

Progress is also consistently associated with an approving representation of British colonialism. Albert, as well as the savages the poem attempts to forget, are not insurmountable barriers to social progress. Goldsmith describes Acadia’s progress to a state of perfection:

Then blest Acadia! ever by thy name,  
 Like hers [Britain's], be graven on the rolls of fame;  
 May all thy sons, like hers, be brave and free,  
 Possessors of her laws and liberty;  
 Heirs of her splendour, science, power, and skill,  
 And through succeeding years her children still.  
 And as the sun with gentle dawning ray,  
 From night's dull bosom wakes, and leads the day,  
 His course majestic keeps, till in the height  
 He glows one blaze of pure exhaustless light;  
 So may thy years increase, thy glories rise,  
 To be the wonder of the Western skies;  
 And bliss and peace encircle all thy shore,  
 Till empires rise and sink, on earth, no more. (547-60)

The "Then" at the beginning of this quotation situates the poem in the aftermath of Napoleon's (the "tyrant" [541]) defeat, which put an end to this threat to Britain's colonial dominance. This passage, however, immediately repeats the "then, now, always" structure of the previously examined lines pertaining to property and progress in which the peasant "still retains possession of the soil" (103). Goldsmith expresses his wish that Nova Scotia become as great a nation as its colonial "mother," but does so with a prolepsis suggesting that a state of progress unto perfection is not only possible but that it has already occurred. Just as the sun rises to its peak each day, so too may Acadia reach the pinnacle of

civilization. Goldsmith ends his poem with a “sway” that is somehow without movement in this depiction of British colonialism as an unchanging yet ever progressive dominance. Acadia progresses just as the sun rises to its noon-day peak. And Acadia supposedly resists sinking back into darkness, instead becoming “one blaze of pure exhaustless light” (556), recalling Aristotle’s “sun” which is “eternally in actuality” (*Metaphysics* 277). Goldsmith hopes that the colony will progress until further progress is no longer possible, since it has become perfect.<sup>13</sup>

Goldsmith ties these Canadian smallholders to a mercantile commercial system that has already rendered smallholding in Europe, especially so in Britain, all but obsolete. The “golden corn” (72) produced by “the first rude culture of the soil” (58) has a mercantile tinge, and like smallholding and commerce, Albert and Flora are also a couple whose union had “golden prospects” (332). Even the author is a “goldsmith,” who makes a poetic land into ideological gold. All are attuned to the central image of progress in poem, the golden sun which has reached its apex above.

Nevertheless, a harbinger of the coming change to the colony’s mode of agricultural production is a scene of progress which depicts present-day Acadia. The “peasant” now “Sees his wide barn with ample treasures filled” (514). The smallholder is not so small anymore. The expropriators are expropriated. Moreover, “savages” abide, albeit on the margins, as their “right” to Nova Scotia proves singularly irreducible to Eurocentric property rights. Finally, Flora’s

incurable madness instantiates the irrationality upon which the moral order of the poem rests.

### **Sundown**

“Can it be,” W.J. Keith asks, “that Goldsmith has temporarily forgotten the argument of his great-uncle’s poem” (5)? He has indeed forgotten it, but only by conjuring it for ideological purposes through the trope of anamnesis. The Canadian Goldsmith’s selective remembering of “The Deserted Village” mobilizes a similarly selective sampling of the natural law tradition. Thus by mobilizing anamnesis, the Canadian Goldsmith offers a vision of the progress of his Nova Scotian village. The force of this vision hinges on his construction of a complex temporal and figural structure, in which anamnesis and prolepsis are deployed in tandem. Held together by their common utility in the present, Goldsmith marshals anamnesis to selectively remember the past to moralize his representation of colonization while also mobilizing prolepsis to portray the natural rise of Nova Scotia to its cultural peak as a present reality. Anamnesis moralizes the appropriative process and prolepsis naturalizes colonization, rendering it progressive and hence morally upright. Goldsmith anchors this figural structure in the smallholder, the erector of this phallic “rising” village, who is represented at once as the past worker, the settler, and the “first” moral appropriator and as the “indigenous” foundation for society which must be surpassed.

The smallholder is the creature in discourse in which anamnesis and prolepsis open onto each other, as the “has been” folds onto the “will be.” The smallholder is put in mind again to generate a future which arrives in the form of the “will have been.” The smallholder is a creature of opposites. Goldsmith asks us to remember that colonialism and mercantilism are both natural and moral, yet it is what he un-forgets which is most ideologically compelling. Emerging out of this un-forgetting is the smallholder as a complexly interwoven figure bearing a palpable moral ambivalence arising out of the poem’s metaleptic deployment of the motif of property. The colonial Other cannot be sublated by Goldsmith’s dialectical logic, as the vexing emergence of Nova Scotia’s Aboriginal people’s right of ownership reveals that his moral order is mystification, his theory of property is Eurocentric, and his vision of progress unto perfection is woefully myopic. An analysis of the poem’s tropology reveals that Goldsmith attempts to establish the moral order of the colony by forgetting Albert and Flora as well as Aboriginal peoples, but he un-forgets them instead. Similarly, he endeavours to justify colonial dispossession through self-contradictory and Eurocentric notions of property before finally authorizing settler society with the logic of the “always already.” The colonial Other, however, as well as Flora, traverse “The Rising Village” in its tropology as they haunt the concept of justice itself. How do we account for or manage Flora’s madness, or the singular “right to rule the mountain and the plain” (88) which Goldsmith allows his Other to express? These unmanageable tensions cast long shadows in Goldsmith’s poem despite its final image.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> For detailed accounts of the poem's revisions, see Gnarowski's "*variorum*" edition of the poem, as well as his preface and introduction (Gnarowski 9). Lynch has also produced a scholarly edition of the poem which contains an engaging critical introduction as well as prints the original 1825 publication side-by-side with the revised 1834 text. All references to the poem are from Lynch's edition of the 1834 publication.

<sup>2</sup> Quintilian does not mention the trope anamnesis, or "to put in mind again," by name but rather refers to memory both as a trope and as a facet of oratory itself, along with invention, organization, style, and delivery.

<sup>3</sup> In Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, Book Theta, nature lives, and because it lives, it changes. Nature's capacity for change, however, is "non-rational" (264). Since nature is deprived of will or agency, "there is a one-to-one correlation of potentiality and effect" (264). Nature then contains a principle of order within it. Yet this order is not static, but rather reflects being in process. This process is governed by what Aristotle calls entelechy, which is the force within nature which draws things toward perfection or completion—toward their proper end. "With . . . rational potentialities," Aristotle continues in contrast, "each potentiality is correlated with a pair of effects" (264). Nature "must of necessity act" in a certain manner (264). Contrastingly, rational potentialities are affected by "desire or rational preference" (264, see also 276). In addition to rational and non-rational potentialities, Aristotle postulates an "eternal mover":

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And if there is any eternal mover, it is not in potentiality that it is in motion. (It can, however, be moving in potentiality relative to its point of departure and point of destination—there is no reason to prevent matter pertaining to it relative to these.)

Hence it is that the sun, the stars and the entirety of the heavens are eternally in actuality. . . . Nor are they wearied in their task. For in their case movement has nothing to do, as with perishable things, with the potentiality of its negation, such that the continuity of movement would be laborious to them. Labour is an effect of substance as matter and potentiality, not actuality. . . .

I think we have made the point: actuality has priority not only over potentiality but over every principle of process. (276-77)

Nature, for Aristotle, acts in a prescribed and orderly fashion. Similarly, we are beings in process. But unlike nature we are free to act rationally; that is, we can choose what we do and how we will do it, whether that choice is made according to reason, will, or desire. And in contrast to both nature and humanity, which live, move, and change, is Aristotle's postulated "eternal mover" (276), a paradoxical blend of the rational capacity to change and perfection, or an unchanging state in which the incapacity to do anything other rules the day. Goldsmith's "blaze of pure exhaustless light" (556) represents a parallel progress to an unchanging state of perfection for Nova Scotia—one that is "eternally in actuality" in Aristotle's phrase (276). This is a moral process, for it appears not only that it could be no other way, or that it is destined, but that it proceeds according to natural, and by



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extension, divine laws. The process unto perfection has moral implications, for nature must follow these laws, while humans, bearing rational potentiality, may or may not.

<sup>4</sup> Neal Wood claims that “Locke took for granted, as did his peers, that day laborers were an inferior species of human being, the lowest on the English social scale” (43). Day labourers lived on subsistence wages and were employed for the most part in the “more advanced agricultural regions of the south and east” (42). Locke’s argument then is that enclosure and the development of agrarian capitalism benefits even society’s lowliest members.

<sup>5</sup> D.M.R. Bentley argues that “The Rising Village” represents “In Canadian poetry . . . the first sign of misgiving regarding native rights in land occupied by Europeans” (Bentley, “Concepts” 40).

<sup>6</sup> Karyn Ball provided the inspiration for this use of metalepsis. She describes the commodity as “metaleptic because it configures the extraction of life from living labour as a mere accessory to objectified labour, which depends on it in fact rather than the other way around” (130).

<sup>7</sup> For Hughes, “Albert” is derived from the “Old German *Adalbert*, compound of *athal* ‘noble’ and *berhta* ‘bright’, equivalent of Old English *Aethelbeorht*.” Hughes considers Albert’s nobility as being representative of “the English aristocratic ruling class when imperial-colonial relations were at their best” (35). Albert’s abandonment of Flora then signifies the economic policies of Britain constricting the growth of Nova Scotia “following the economic boom of

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the Napoleonic Wars” (35). As Hughes also notes, Flora is rescued by a “peasant” in a passage running from 399-412, which symbolizes, according to Hughes, “that a sturdy and self-sufficient Nova Scotia can now go it alone without Britain if necessary” (35). Hughes, however, does not account for the fact that Flora’s madness is by all indications incurable (see lines 412-26). He also fails to account for the figural density/complexity/interwoven discursive mixture which underpins the emergence of the “sturdy and self-sufficient peasant” (Hughes 35) as the foundation on which his analysis here relies.

<sup>8</sup> Hughes argues that the poem ideologically buttresses the “ruling oligarchy in Halifax” (27) since it reduces social, political, and economic problems to the individual or moral level (34). As lines 285-308 in the poem suggest, the relative prosperity of the colony breeds both indolence and moral laxity.

<sup>9</sup> As Lynch notes in his introduction to the poem, this obsessively moralistic work councils the colonists to remain vigilant in their battle to control nature, both physical nature (in their battle with the elements, “Indians” and wild beasts included) and human nature (in their battle with desire). The poem, according to Lynch, contains two moments of brief respite from industriousness, after which the colonists suffer the ill effects of nature. The first is the arrival of the “savage tribes” (81) following “the short repose” (77) that the labour of first settlement offers. The second is the Albert and Flora incident, which enters into the community after physical nature is for the most part conquered (see lines 249-60).

<sup>10</sup> Locke, however, also recognizes the Aboriginals’ humanity. When describing a situation which is “perfectly in a state of nature,” the “*Indian*, in the

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woods of *America*” can make “promises and bargains” with a “*Swiss*,” Locke argues, “for truth and keeping of faith belongs to men, as men, and not as members of society” (13).

<sup>11</sup> See Bentley for evidence of Goldsmith’s familiarity with Lockean theories of labour and property, as well as his knowledge of property law, as derived from the lawyer Sir William Blackstone and the poet Henry James Pye (Bentley, “Goldsmith” 34-38).

<sup>12</sup> Rousseau presents the opposite case: because civilization is the cause of inequality, civil society is itself defined as the struggle between the strongest and the first occupier. Locke argues that all have three inalienable natural rights: ownership of our bodies, our capacity for labour, and ownership of that which we labour upon.

<sup>13</sup> For an analysis of the sun as an allegory of historical progress, see Bracken’s analysis of colonial ideology in Hegel’s *Philosophy of History* (Bracken 177-183).

## Chapter Four: Naturalization and Reification in Joseph Howe's "Acadia"

### Synopsis of "Acadia"

Joseph Howe's "Acadia" was written in 1832-33, roughly a decade after Oliver Goldsmith composed "The Rising Village." Howe's poem was published posthumously in 1874 (Bentley, *Long Poems* 367). Although "Acadia" is included in D.M.R. Bentley's *Early Long Poems on Canada*, like Goldsmith's "The Rising Village" it remains relatively obscure. With this in mind, a brief synopsis of Howe's text will be of particular use for non-specialists.

Part One (1-340) is a description of Acadia's natural beauty and a patriotic history of the region. The poem's first four stanzas praise nature, which inspires aesthetic and patriotic love, and ultimately, the poem itself. Howe describes the poem as a gift to Acadia, a gift constructed from nature itself: the poet wishes to "[b]estow one flower't on my native land" (58; see also 39-42).

Stanzas five through eight portray the seasonal climate as it varied from harsh winter to gentle spring. Even the cold winter is portrayed in a positive light, since "there is health and vigor in the breeze / Which bears upon its wings no fell disease" (69). Spring brings with it a fertile climate in which nature blooms: "clad in green thy teeming vales appear, / Oh! then, Acadia, thou art doubly dear" (89-90). This description of nature is often sexualized: nature is "[g]ently reposing on its mossy bed, / [I]n modest loveliness it rears its head, / And yields its fragrance to the wanton air" (103-105). For Howe, nature's beauty matches that of Acadia's "lovely daughters" (110).

Stanza nine offers a catalogue of the region's trees, while stanza ten also depicts its flowers and stars. Stanza eleven portrays Acadia's lakes, forests, and oceans in a manner that recalls the previous sexually charged description. The lake "its glassy bosom shows . . . / While buoyant flowers, the lake's unsullied daughters, / Lift their bright leaves above the sparkling waters" (141). Nature is virginal, yet fertile as the flowers of the lake "in its wild waves gently dip / As kisses fall on sleeping Beauty's lip" (153-54).

Howe's history of Acadia begins in stanza twelve, as he notes that the unspoiled natural beauty he has just described existed

Ere the soft impress of Improvement's hand,  
By science guided, had adorned the land;  
Ere her wild beauties were by culture graced,  
Or art had touched what Nature's pencil traced. (157-60)

The "dusky Savage" was "Lord" of Acadia (161, 162) in its natural state.

"Savage" culture, however, is depicted as dying: there are "death notes breathed on every passing gale" (165). Stanza thirteen proposes to dwell on the region's primitive or pre-colonial history, which is described in the remainder of Part One (up to and including stanza twenty-three). This part of the poem offers a detailed portrait of "Micmac" (182) culture, and ends with first contact with European settlers.

Micmac skill in hunting is on display in stanza fourteen to the extent that Howe asserts their superiority to Europeans: a deer is killed without "horse or hound to assist . . . in the chase" (191). The next stanza illustrates the hunter's

feeling of pride over the kill and ownership of Acadia, a feeling compared to Othello's jealous love for Desdemona in stanza sixteen. The Micmac's familiarity with Acadia's natural environment is given some backhanded praise in stanza seventeen, as he "pursues his devious way" along "well-known by former rambles made, / . . . that strays between / Opposing hills" (220, 222-24). "Devious" points to his moral laxity, and "rambles" and "strays" signal his transience. All are crimes against culture.

The Micmac then arrives back at the "Camp" with the spoils of the hunt (227). It is described as postlapsarian: the "sylvan city [is] rude as those of yore, / By Patriarch hands within the desert built, / When fresh from Eden's joys and Eden's guilt" (228-30). A depiction of the construction of homes and weapons, and of meal preparation and gifts follows in stanza nineteen, which is followed in the next two stanzas by an account of their social activities, including dancing and music.

Stanza twenty-one offers a colonial perspective on the tableau of "savage" culture which Howe has just offered. Howe represents the settler as an "adventurous Briton" who "won the land his children tread on yet" (313, 316). The last stanza in Part One depicts the moment of first contact, as the "lordly savage" is shocked and confused by the arrival of the European ship. The settlers desecrate a Micmac burial site, and appropriate their trees and land. Consequently, "war, eternal war, his [the Micmac's] soul declared" (340).

Part Two (341-1030) sketches the progress of British civilization from the "rude Barbarians" of the Middle Ages to the colonial era. "Science," "Religion,"

“Imagination,” and “Art” guide progress, which is achieved through “ceaseless toil” (355, 356, 358, 365). Stanza twenty-five parallels Britain’s development with Acadia’s, as it reflects on the sacrifices of the first settlers in their battles with the “savage tribes” (371).

Howe evokes pity for the settlers in stanzas twenty-five through thirty-two. These stanzas detail a settler family’s labour of logging, home construction, and meal preparation. They also represent their family activities, religious observances, and longing for their past life in Britain. Upon this foundation, Howe invites the reader to empathize with their plight when the Micmac attack. He describes this assault in grisly detail in stanzas thirty-three through thirty-eight. The “treacherous” (532) Micmac invade the settlers’ property, and although the father defends the family with a gun and an axe and the mother contributes with a knife, the Micmac overwhelm them. They kill their infant child, torture and kill their young boy, collect scalps, and finally plunder and burn the cottage. Then, [w]ith horrid gesture and demoniac strain, / [they] plunge into the forest depths again” (601-02). Stanza thirty-eight reassures us that Acadia is now “[u]ncheck’d by peril” (607) because of the sacrifices of these pioneers.

Howe then mentions another blemish on Acadia’s historical record: the expulsion of the Acadians. Stanzas thirty-nine to forty-six represent the displacement of a civilized people, which troubles Howe. The French Acadians were advanced in agriculture and religion but were cruelly expropriated much like the Anglo-Irish Goldsmith’s smallholders. Howe wishes he had “the Bard of Auburn’s melting strain” to express the French Acadian’s “pain” (674-75).

A disconnected stanza (forty-seven) follows the depiction of the expulsion of the Acadians in which Howe wishes that Acadia will be built upon the principles of beauty, freedom, truth, culture, and education. The following stanza returns to the theme of the end of savagery, as Howe claims that “you now shall find no trace” of it in Acadia; it has been left in the past, written on “History’s page” (769, 768). Stanza forty-nine supports this claim, as it represents the different European cultures as blending in Acadia, as the British, Scottish, and Irish all live in happy unity. They have all “braved the Indian spears” (776) and sacrificially earned a home in Acadia together.

Stanza fifty broaches another concern of Howe’s regarding the region’s progress: has civilization “[d]efaced Acadia’s wild and simple charms” (810)? Howe’s response is that “together Art and Nature reign” (813); although settlement has left its mark, there are still many places in which the natural environment remains unblemished. Lochaber Lake is Howe’s example of unspoiled nature, and his description of it in stanzas fifty-one and fifty-two picks up where his previous sexualized portraits of the environment left off. The lake is “like a bashful Beauty, half concealed / Beneath the robe of spotless green she wears” (834-35).

The remainder of the poem focuses on a particular kind of Acadian smallholder as the example of a balance between unspoiled nature and cultural progress. The Acadian “Boatman” (942) or fisherperson ekes out an existence in a constant struggle with nature which does not visibly deface it in the process; that is, the removal of a small quantity of fish from the ocean is a less obvious



environmental alteration than logging or agriculture. The fisherperson braves a storm which sinks his boat, and with God's help he miraculously makes it to shore. These poor but industrious "Boatmen" are "[t]he strength, the pride, and sinews of her [Acadia's] land" (940).

The poem ends with an account of a letter arriving from the fisherperson's "long-lost Boy" (996). The text began with an account of the patriotism that Acadia inspires, and it concludes on a similar note. The boy tells his parents of his travels, but expresses that "his spirit sighed for home again" (1018). Although "Acadia's sons may stray at times," Howe declares in an allusion to the Prodigal Son, the memory of Acadia will "cheer [their] heart[s] in many a lonely hour" (1019, 1030).

### **Liminality, Naturalization, Reification**

Much like the Canadian Goldsmith's text, Howe's work is anxious about the region's colonial history. Both texts portray the displacement of Aboriginal peoples, while Howe also includes the expulsion of the French Acadians as further evidence of Nova Scotia's colonial violence (Bentley 368-69). Howe's text, however, unlike Goldsmith's, is outwardly ambivalent about the civilizing mission of settler society. Whereas Goldsmith represents colonization as a moral and progressive assertion of civilizing European property rights, Howe portrays a scene of violent conflict with Aboriginal people in which a settler family is attacked, tortured, and killed although the violence—in the logic of the poem's

repeated diction and motifs—is not unjustified. Also at odds are the poets' representations of pre-colonial nature. Acadia is barren before European settlement for Goldsmith while for Howe it “blooms” (155). Settler society for Goldsmith is a just civilizing mission, but for Howe it is an imposition of European culture which he represents ambivalently through repetitions of diction and motifs between Parts One and Two, as the representation of Aboriginal peoples' culture in Part One is linked to the depiction of settler society in Part Two in ways that suggest Howe's uneasiness with colonization. More specifically, the locus of many of these repetitions is the battle scene in Part Two, as these echoes vex easy distinctions between “primitive” and “civilized,” intruder and rightful owner.

The problem of justice in settler society is indeed a persistent theme in Canadian poetry (Coleman 29). Joseph Howe's “Acadia” presents an opportunity for thinking this problem in relation to property rights and Aboriginal peoples. This chapter continues to explore the savage-civilized and nature-culture binaries which traverse the smallholder's mobilization in another poetic context which concerns issues of settlement, property, and progress. Particularly at issue are the mobilizations of smallholders to naturalize certain discursive constructs such as civilization and property rights. I theorize the ideological effects of discourse by focusing on sources which define ideology as naturalization. Naturalization is in turn theorized as reification in light of Georg Lukács' classic analysis as well as more recent scholarship by Jennifer Bajorek, Christopher Bracken, Axel Honneth, and Judith Butler. I will return to an analysis of the primitive-civilized binary and

its ideological consequences in Howe's "Acadia" after a speculative inquiry into the ideological effects of discourse as it naturalizes its objects.

### **Second Nature and Reification**

The commodity can only be understood in its undistorted essence when it becomes the universal category of society as a whole. Only in this context does the reification produced by commodity relations assume decisive importance both for the objective evolution of society and for the stance adopted by men towards it. Only then does the commodity become crucial for the subjugation of men's consciousness to the forms in which this reification finds expression and for their attempts to comprehend the process or to rebel against its disastrous effects and liberate themselves from servitude to the "second nature" so created. (Lukács 86)

I turn to Lukács not only to theorize the ideological effects of discourse but because the duality of smallholders is present in his canonical theory of reification itself. Lukács observes in his famous reading of Marx that the peasant has no ideological form but borrows it from elsewhere (55, 59-61). Smallholders are situated between capitalists and proletarians and, according to Lukács, they will notoriously support the bourgeoisie over and against their true class interests. This failure of proper class consciousness defines the peasantry as decidedly counter-revolutionary for Lukács, as they cannot recognize that they have more in

common with proletarians, who most of them will become, than with the bourgeoisie.

The false consciousness of the peasantry is symptomatic of a generalized ideological distortion under capitalism. Lukács reiterates Marx's theory of fetishism which states that, in the commodity, social relations between people appear as material relations between things. Lukács famously terms the Marxian analysis of commodity fetishism as reification. Social relations are reified ("thingified" or materialized) and thus acquire what Marx calls a "phantom" or "ghostly objectivity" as social relations arise in the "fantastic form of a relation between things" (Marx, *Capital* 1: 72). At issue in this chapter is the manner in which this "phantom-like objectivity" manifests itself like a second nature in the production process of discourse. For the linguistic mode which naturalizes this apparition is ideology at work. The reification of labour in the commodity form is for Lukács a model of ideology fomenting a second nature.<sup>1</sup>

Jennifer Bajorek offers a recent theorization of how certain discursive formations, driven by the capital relation itself, become primary conditions for existence; that is, how these discourses are mistaken for nature in ideologically motivated ways. For Bajorek, following Marx and Lukács, "the capital relation is not natural or sensuous yet it becomes . . . a material condition of life" (Bajorek 51). Similar to the Marx of *Capital*, Bajorek argues that the production process confers life on capital by displacing it from the working body onto the products of labour. Capital both replaces the worker's capacity for motion and becomes the means of her material existence, even though capital is not alive. Capital does not

move and it is not a thing but rather confers life on things, Bajorek argues, through the linguistic means of personification.

Bajorek offers an account of reification hinged to personification in her analysis of Marx's account of the machine:

The machine is at once capital and labor, from the moment that neither is the tool or the product of man alone: neither a means exclusively for the maintenance and sustenance of life nor the product of living labor power alone; but both a means and a product of living labor power, and a means and a product of that dead labor called capital, whose driving motive and determining purpose are the infinite valorization of value at any cost. The machine becomes the "material foundation" of the capitalist mode of production on the grounds of its inversion of the normal or presumed relations between *tekhne* and life "itself." (Bajorek 65)

The "second nature" of commodity fetishism is the result for Bajorek of "the inversion of the technics-life relation" (66). For Marx the tool extends humans' organic capacity for labour. The machine, however, replaces it by taking on the animate, moving quality which constitutes the zoological life of human labour power. Labour is reified in the machines, which workers ironically set to the task of expropriating themselves. Marx's machine, then, is like labour in general in that it both animates and it is animated: the machine is personified and personifies. The machine also represents, however, the reification of the worker's capacity for motion, cooperation, and consciousness (Bajorek 63). The production

process then engenders new possibilities for life outside of capitalism while at the same time reconstructing the danger of reifying these possibilities within capitalism.

The fact that Marx personifies commodities is less important for Bajorek than “the kind of language this prosopopeia puts in the commodity’s mouth” (Bajorek 45). She argues that commodities speak a “tropological” language (45). Marx’s account of commodity fetishism then relies on the structure of a trope or perhaps on the substitutive structure of tropes in general. It is precisely this substitutive structure, however, that Bajorek puts into question. She does not contend that the trope itself involves a substitution of the referent for the sign. She maintains that commodities are by nature immaterial, improper, fetishized “things.” Unlike Roland Barthes’ theorization of ideology which was outlined in the Introduction in which critique is a revolving door and demystification is merely one artifice replacing another, Bajorek contends that critical language may in fact allow us to “to fashion . . . a world that is already different” as well as “destroy the world it [language] gives us” (67).<sup>2</sup> Bajorek is interested in the productive capacity of irony, the trope that negates meaning but also, in her view, opens possibilities for the emergence of a new world constructed by language.

Christopher Bracken offers a comparable analysis of the relation between personification and reification in Marx’s analysis of the commodity form. He describes the relation not as a distortion of consciousness as in Lukács but as an “inversion” in which “Human capacities become the properties of things; the properties of things become human capacities” (151-52). Significantly, rather than

irony being the focal point as in Bajorek's analysis, Bracken constructs an inverse relation of reification and personification which "conforms to the structure of a third trope, chiasmus" (Bracken 152). The worker animates the object of labour (personification) and the worker's labour is congealed—to use a Marxian term—in the object (reification). For Bracken, "The worker is living labour personified. The commodity is living labour reified" (158). Chiasmus is then the way in which the worker's life is folded onto the object of labour in the production process, as the labourer confers life on the thing worked upon in a process which in turn renders the worker thing-like.

Whereas Lukács' version of this fold is totalizing in its reach, Bracken represents its chiasmic form as the recurrence of a racialized discourse. In Lukács, "society as a whole" is reduced to the commodity form and, as such, the commodity becomes a monad (86). The monad functions like another trope, in which the part stands in for and even contains the whole—a universal synecdoche. Conversely, Bracken argues that rather than being an all-pervasive or universalizing condition of life under capitalism, discursive production is bound up with the pre-capitalist discourse of animism which saturates Marx's theory of commodity fetishism (Bracken 162-65). Bracken argues that Marx's term "commodity fetishism" is ironic because instead of explaining "the error of the political economists," it applies the definition of fetishism to the commodity which is homologous with the discourse of mid-nineteenth-century anthropology (161). Despite his stated intentions, Marx conceives of the commodity not as an object under the empirical investigation of the science of political economy but

rather as “a concrete, sensuous body that harbours an abstract, non-sensuous soul” (Bracken 161). Moreover, Marx’s use of the term “fetishism” is doubly ironic, as it misnames the commodity within the terms of the anthropological discourse of his day, notably Frazer’s definition of the “totem” (162). The fetish is a singular object according to Frazer, whereas the commodity is a “genus” according to Marx and thus corresponds to the “totem” as an artefact with a social function (Bracken 162).

Marx’s contention that commodities perform material tasks but do so in a “phantom-like” manner is then haunted by a non-western other. The production of new possibilities or even worlds is a project located in the discourse of western racism. Bracken and Bajorek both recuperate Marx’s discourse as part of a postmodern tropological critique in which the potential for language to participate in the production of the world is not racialized but affirmed.

Both Bajorek and Bracken are guarded in their optimism regarding the revolutionary character of discursive production. She argues that this production may only occur negatively, in the referential space opened through ironic subversion. The world for Bajorek is “already different” from our conceptions of it and this alterity is the condition of possibility for revolutionary action through discourse. She contends that through personification, discourse participates in the making and unmaking of the world; that is, discourse does nature’s work. This assertion is for Bracken a mainstay of savage philosophy, which maintains that discourse effects reality (1). The productiveness of discourse, however, is reified in the thing produced. We invest commodities with our life-force but as this life is



reified commodities are naturalized and appear to us as iterated but unreadable signs of ourselves. Bracken's critical solution for this problem lies in Walter Benjamin's "conventionally savage hypothesis" that the critical detection of the "dormant social soul" beneath the reified exterior of the commodity "could prime them to explode" (Bracken 168). Criticism reanimates the reified productive force within commodities and allows us to recognize their sociality—a recognition with revolutionary potential.

Axel Honneth's study of reification does not deal explicitly with its discursive form as do Bracken and Bajorek, but his claim that reification is a loss of perceptive capacity attuned to sociality is comparable to Bracken's. Honneth argues that reification is not a totalizing condition describing every act of objectification as it is conceived by Lukács but rather is a forgetting of empathetic recognition of the other (56-58). Bracken's other is racialized, however, while Honneth's is universalized. Reification is neither an epistemic error nor a moral fault for Honneth but rather a loss of attentiveness to this universal other, one which is marked nonetheless with a trace of primitivism. Bajorek's conception of capital's construction of a second nature also resonates with this notion of primitivism, as the inversion of the technics-life relation that she posits as fundamental to capitalism as a second nature assumes a "zoological life" as its basis. Bajorek, however, cagily avoids reducing all life to a universal category, as life "itself" is always already different, for Bajorek; that is, it is already constructed, ideologically marked and motivated. Capitalism's other, for Bajorek, emerges from new technologies of language as they participate in the making of

the world—a postmodern tenet which is, as Bracken demonstrates, a *ricorso* of savage thought (Bracken 14-15).

Honneth's theory of reification harbors a trace of primitivism as he argues that "recognition enjoys both a genetic and conceptual priority over cognition" and that "empathetic engagement precedes a neutral grasping of reality, that recognition comes before cognition" (40). Indeed for Honneth recognition is "primordial": it reflects a basic human trait, the result of which is that "in ontogenesis . . . recognition must precede cognition" (46). He demonstrates in his reading of Lukács that reification is not an empirical error but instead a complex distortion of consciousness which cannot be simply corrected because it has become pathological and indeed so widespread as to constitute a second nature (25). The cure for reification, Honneth argues, is a restoration of empathetic engagement with the other through intersubjective engagement not necessarily tied to the production of objects (27). Honneth thus avoids the "vulgar Marxist" pitfall of economic determinism, as he asserts that this revolutionary social life constitutes "a more primordial and genuine form of praxis" (27). He fails, however, to disavow the notion of a universal human nature.

Although Honneth leaves aside the analysis of discursive forms and focuses on the conceptual aspects of reification, his depiction of reification as a kind of naturalization rooted in forgetting is reminiscent of the trope of anamnesis. He identifies two kinds of forgetting associated with reification. The first is a tunnel vision which distorts or overemphasizes the other's position, and becomes unwavering in this misrepresentation (60). As Judith Butler explains,

this kind of reification involves an active domination of the other (103). The second is a selective memory used in “preserving a prejudice” (Honneth 60). Both types of reification as forgetting are present in what he terms “thought schema” and in social “institutions” (60). Honneth’s conception of reification as forgetting is then attuned to a social critique of ingrained social conceptions and discourses and their institutional manifestations, which would include the emergence of certain discursive patterns in literature. In the previous chapter on Oliver Goldsmith’s “The Rising Village,” the use of anamnesis as one of these patterns has been analyzed as a rhetorical strategy of selective memory and as an ethical appeal which bolsters colonial discourse. The focus in this chapter is on the naturalization of these tropic forms, and how this naturalization emerges in Howe’s “Acadia” in ways in which a theory of reification as social critique may be elaborated.

Butler’s critique of Honneth is compelling as she compares his assertion of a “primordial” recognition of the other to an “Arcadian myth” tantamount to Rousseau’s notion of “natural pity” for others being “distorted and displaced under conditions of property that compel us into instrumental relations that deny that more primary form of social responsiveness” (108-09). In other words, she accuses Honneth, albeit indirectly, of attaching a “noble savagery” to the a priori human quality of affective involvement with others which he asserts. Aggression, Butler points out, manifest in the desire to harm or even kill the other is also highly affective as “extreme aggression” is “equally primordial, social, and human” (103, 104). “What if the struggle between love and aggression,

attachment and differentiation,” Butler asks, “is coextensive with being human” (109)? As she demonstrates, the self and other are co-constitutive, and the liminal relations which pervade the emergence of each are marked by power. Reification then for Butler is constituted by the deadening violence in the “act” of forgetting itself, as forgetting rather than recognition is primary (118). Reification, as Bajorek, Bracken, and Butler suggest, is a constitutive condition of existence under capitalism that may prove insurmountable.

In turning to Howe’s poem in particular, what is literary about reification as a form of naturalization? How might the theory of ideology be informed by a literary instance of reification? Bracken and Bajorek open a path for this analysis with their tropological analyses of reification as a form of second nature. Honneth similarly suggests that discursive forms and institutional structures are both influenced by reification, as certain “thought schema” and the institutions which sediment these discourses also constitute a second nature in which the forgetting of empathetic engagement with the other effaces a “primordial” bond with the other. Conversely, Butler argues that reification is indeed a forgetting but this forgetting is not necessarily of a positive empathetic connection with the other but rather it may also be realized as hate, aggression, or violence. Butler thus theorizes a liminal relation between the self and other in contrast to the agential and intentional praxis of intersubjectivity that Honneth posits.

This liminal relation emerges in Howe’s “Acadia” between the settler and indigene in terms of the tropological analyses of Bajorek and Bracken, analyses which reveal the violence of the poem’s representation of Aboriginal peoples as it

attempts to naturalize settler society. These analyses, however, do not account fully for the tropic complexity of Howe's text. Literature tends to disconfirm theory; it is something other. Consider this chapter then as an open-ended attempt to account for a literary work's rhetorical, and ideological, vicissitudes.

Howe's settler's labour is personified as it re-animates what it mistakes for natural resources without prior claim of ownership. Indeed, the settler's labour asserts a right of ownership proleptically like Goldsmith's settlers in "The Rising Village." By so doing, Howe reifies Aboriginal property and culture by a selective memory consonant with Goldsmith's anamnesis. The failure to engage empathetically with the other, in Honneth's terms, despite Howe's attempt to represent Micmac culture with a degree of pathos, culminates in a climactic scene of violent conflict between a settler family and the "Micmacs." All critics of the poem save one argue that this battle scene effaces the human qualities of the colonial other, thus reifying them in terms of bestial aggression. However, as S.G. Zenchuk contends against the grain of literary criticism, the scene is riddled with repetitive diction and motifs which engender a Butlerian liminal relation between the settler and indigene and thus the battle scene is a locus of colonial anxiety rather than justification. The aggression in this scene is then problematic for Zenchuk as the Micmac's violent attack is justifiable.

The ambivalence of this scene belies the settlers' chiasmic tropic form: they are both savage and civilized, as they personify or animate nature through their civilizing labour—a savage trait, according to Bracken. Their labour in turn attempts to efface Aboriginal title by selectively remembering whose labour is

originally congealed in nature and by rendering settler society as a second nature through this act of forgetting. Aggression in the poem is then a two-way street, one which Howe represents ambivalently. The smallholder functions as Honneth's reifying "thought schema" in which the other is forgotten in conventional ways, according to recognizable tropological forms.

One of these ways is dialectical. Just as Goldsmith's "The Rising Village" attempts to dialectically overcome the ambivalence of the colonial enterprise with the small-scale fisherperson, Howe mobilizes the Acadian "boatmen" (934) to forget the violence done both to nature and to Aboriginal peoples. The liminal relations between these settlers and the Aboriginal peoples in the poem problematize Howe's depiction of the "boatmen" as Acadia's justified possessors. The "boatmen" seem to sublate Howe's desire for an unspoiled nature which so-called primitive culture sustains and his desire to negate this nature through colonization. These smallholders, however, are chiasmic as they represent two kinds of labour: the "savage" or personifying quality of labour and the "civilized" or reifying quality of labour. Howe's smallholders and savages are then folded together through an inverse relation traversed by pre-commodifying and commodifying forms of labour.

The representation of smallholders then appears to conform to the theories of reification offered above. Smallholders are indeed chiasmic as they are the animating discursive figures who perform the ideological task of constructing settler society as a second nature; that is, they both personify and reify. The ideological effects of the poem, however, resonate with the structure of another

trope: litotes. In a productive instance of irony, Howe westernizes the indigene in his faltering attempt at cultural understanding, as the colonial other emerges according to western generic conventions, both literary and politico-economic. Howe's other cannot not emerge as western, and this irony—the other is already different, to borrow Bajorek's phrasing—opens the potential for new articulations. In its representations of smallholders, "Acadia" suggests that we cannot forget the other. In the form of litotes, Howe does not remember to forget the other, or perhaps has not forgotten the other or he cannot forget the other completely. Out of this radical indeterminacy of "unforgetting," a strategy of resistance may be forged with smallholders as a discursive site of engagement. Through smallholders, Howe suggests that settler society can engage in an empathetic relation to nature and to the other. Nevertheless, as Butler reminds us, this mode of liminal co-extensiveness is itself marked by the potential for violence. The close reading of Howe's poem below bears out this ambivalent thesis, as the text at once harbors a dangerous politics of violence toward the other and the potential for an empathetic engagement with the other through a radically indeterminate liminality.

### **Cross-Section of Criticism**

Before delving into a close reading of the poem, a survey of its literary criticism is needed to focus the analysis on one of its more prominent critical cruxes: the portrayal of Acadia's Aboriginal peoples, a question which hinges on

the interpretation of the climactic battle scene. Rather than a haphazard application of these critics' arguments, each will be cited in a nuanced fashion in order to highlight the vicissitudes of critical disagreement on what is, politically, one of the poem's most pressing issues for the contemporary reader. The critics disagree on a fundamental issue: does Howe reify the "Micmacs" or do they remain an unsettling force which vexes the poem's savage-civilized binary?

In his analysis of the early Canadian long poem, C.D. Mazoff offers the latest critical engagement with "Acadia." Most critics of the poem (Wanda Campbell, D.M.R. Bentley, Leslie Monkman, and Susan Gingell-Beckmann) agree that the poem espouses some sympathy (albeit stereotypical) for the Aboriginal people's plight but ultimately dehumanizes them and denounces their murderous actions while portraying British settlers as bearers of progress and culture.

The weight of critical opinion thus does not recognize a thoroughgoing ambivalence in the poem. Instead, the bulk of critical opinion holds that Howe reifies Aboriginal peoples as he demotes their social life to bestial and primitive aggression. For example, Mazoff argues that although he achieves a modicum of understanding and sympathy for Aboriginal peoples, Howe ultimately portrays them as a barbaric and doomed race. For Mazoff, Howe marshals "the rhetoric of depravity" (Mazoff 55) to represent both the untamed wilderness and its Indigenous peoples. Ultimately, according to Mazoff, this rhetorical device "polarizes the settler and indigene" (67) as the poem invites the reader's sympathy with the settlers and revulsion of Howe's "Micmacs." Mazoff works to keep the



savage-civilized binary in place, as “the portrayal,” he contends, of Acadia’s Aboriginal peoples “is not in the least ambiguous” (68). He argues that the description of the Micmacs is negative throughout the poem, with the slaughter of the settler family in Part Two being merely the culmination of the poem’s thoroughgoing pejorative portrayal (68-69). He demonstrates that even moments which seem to evoke sympathy for the Aboriginals’ plight may also be read as deleterious (69).

Bentley, like Mazoff, contends that even though Howe’s Micmacs are both the barbarians of the four stages theory and “the noble savage of post-Rousseauian Romanticism” (Bentley, *Mimic Fires* 175), the balance of pathos and scorn in Howe’s representation, however, tilts decidedly toward the latter. “The Micmacs and the [French] Acadians” for Bentley are “relatively backward cultures” supplanted by “the advanced society that flourishes under” British colonization (185). Bentley cites a passage from the poem in which Howe mobilizes the “legal principles—first discovery, consummation by possession, and conquest” (*Mimic Fires* 178) to extinguish Aboriginal property rights:

For ages thus, the Micmac trod our soil  
 The chase his pastime, war his only toil.  
 ’Till o’er the main, the adventurous Briton steer’d,  
 And in the wild, his sylvan dwelling rear’d,  
 With heart of steel, a thousand perils met,  
 And won the land his children tread on yet. (Howe 311-16)

British settlers are Acadia's rightful owners (*Mimic Fires* 176-79; "Concepts of Native Peoples" 45-46). Howe's rhetorical strategies for displacing Aboriginal property rights also include the proleptic "our soil" (311) and the naturalization of the settler's "sylvan dwelling" (314). An in-depth reading of this passage appears below. Suffice it to say here that Howe renders Aboriginal people much as the Canadian Goldsmith does in "The Rising Village": they are at a primitive stage of social development and, therefore, are the inevitable victims of progress (Bentley, *Mimic Fires* 179).

Leslie Monkman's reading of the poem largely squares with Mazoff's and Bentley's, although she credits Howe with representing "the existence of a vital culture before the white man's arrival" (9). Monkman gives "Acadia" more credit for being a culturally sensitive text than do Mazoff and Bentley, as Monkman states that Howe makes "an attempt at a balanced perspective" (9). Monkman recognizes, however, that Howe's romanticization of the Micmac in terms of the "noble savage" trope ends when "red culture conflicts with that of the white man" (10). Howe demonizes the indigene in Part Two as a "savage antagonist" who "must submit to white civilization" (Monkman 9). Monkman also notes that even Howe's "apparent respect for Micmac culture in the first part of his poem" (10) is not without traces of colonialism, as she observes that Howe tints his forays into cultural understanding with "the idyllic world of conventional pastoral literature" (9). Howe, like the Canadian Goldsmith, "avoids coming to terms with the white man's responsibility for destroying Micmac culture" (Monkman 10). At issue in Monkman's thesis then is Howe's extinguishment of an empathetic relation to the

other, which Honneth locates as the key factor identifying reification. As Butler points out, however, forgetting the other is perhaps a primary condition of any act of recognition. Monkman's observation concerning Howe's literary colonization of Micmac culture within a western genre and according to the well-worn trope of noble savagery bears out Butler's thesis.

Wanda Campbell highlights Howe's gendering of nature and the impact on property rights in her take on representational violence in the poem. For Campbell nature in "Acadia" is female, the author's erotic desire for it is Oedipal, and his desire to possess it is anchored in "the fascination for the aesthetics of violence" (47). Howe's detailed slaughter-of-the-settler-family scene in Part Two, which includes graphic violence by both settler and Micmac and torture by the latter, is an emotional appeal designed to extinguish sympathy for the Aboriginals. At stake in the battle is more than life and death, and intertwined with a battle for ownership is a discourse of patriarchal desire for nature which infuses the poem (Campbell 47; Bentley, *Mimic* 186). Campbell articulates the settler's right to land in sexual and proprietary terms: "The land is still virgin because the Indian never took his bride, consumed as he was with hunting and martial pursuits" (48).

Campbell cites Locke as purveyor of an "ideology of improvement" (48) which inscribes labour as the source of the right of property. Culture is synonymous with agriculture in the poem, Campbell argues, and by gendering nature female in generic fashion Howe "cultivate[s] his own fantasies behind a veil of poetic acceptability" (47), fantasies in which the poet's desire to possess is conflicted. The speaker desires a virginal nature yet acknowledges the need for

improvement (Campbell 48-50). Howe's solution to this problem, Campbell argues, is the smallholder. Progress for Howe is not without its consequences, as culture both improves and defaces nature. The smallholder's labour nonetheless leaves nature in part undeveloped, thus leaving "enough for fancy and enough for use" (Campbell 48-49). In Howe's phrasing, "The virgin soil, [is] with gentle culture broke" by "the soft impress of Improvement's hand" (386, 157). The smallholder as virtuous husbandman allays Howe's anxieties, for Campbell, not over Aboriginal expropriation, but over the destruction of Acadia's natural beauty.

Conversely, S.G. Zenchuk argues that "Acadia" manifests anxieties over the region's history of expropriation and bloodshed, first of the Aboriginal people and then of the French Acadians. According to Zenchuk, the poem sympathizes with the expropriated peoples and criticizes colonial notions of progress. Her close reading of the text demonstrates links between the settler and indigene which problematize easy binary oppositions of savage and civilized, progress and stagnation, and order and chaos.

In her response to Zenchuk, Susan Gingell-Beckmann's thesis re-asserts the bulk of critical opinion: Howe's sympathy for the Micmacs is marked by European poetic conventions and the racialized *topoi* of the noble savage and doomed race. Gingell-Beckmann, however, attempts to refute Zenchuk's rhetorical analysis from the "aesthetic point of view" (Gingell-Beckmann, 30, note 9). She contends that Zenchuk "fails in her attempt to make the poem seem an artistically sound realization of Howe's intentions" (30, note 11). Gingell-

Beckmann does not consider that Howe's "intentions" are unknowable and that poem's aesthetics are dubious. As Northrop Frye observes, early Canadian poetry is "versified rhetoric" which foments colonial ideology (Frye, qtd. in Mazoff 4). Gingell-Beckmann misses the rhetorical strategies of repetition that, as Zenchuk demonstrates, link the settler and Micmac and that interrogate facile notions of the civilized and savage. These connections remain prominent in Part Two of the poem, which all critics named above except Zenchuk argue represent the savage's condemnation and the settler's valorization.

Zenchuk's thesis, therefore, is more compelling and merits further attention. This thesis will be extended and developed with a close reading of the battle scene in Part Two. This interpretation is attentive to the repetitions in the poem which conjoin settler and indigene in a manner which blurs the distinction between civilization and savagery. The British smallholders in "Acadia" are the poem's "moral foundation" (Zenchuk 61). Zenchuk demonstrates that this foundation, however, includes the Micmac culture which these smallholders attempt to destroy (61).

Smallholders are not simply "the common man" (Zenchuk 61), however, but rather yeomen marked with traces of their non-European other. In the only passage in the essay which goes off-track, Zenchuk misrepresents the Acadian fishers' class status. She is correct concerning Howe's "championing of the oppressed poor" (62). The poem, however, portrays neither the fishers nor the Aboriginals as proletarians. They are owners of the soil. Both are subject as such to the "forces of progress and science . . . —forces that, as history has shown,

have proven antithetical to the rural virtues of Acadia” (Mazoff 70). By “virtues” Mazoff means socio-economic sustainability. Howe’s poem thus mobilizes a smallholder interwoven with discourses of class as well as race.

Howe’s colonial anxiety finds resolution neither in the Aboriginal nor settler but in the settler’s transfiguration. Settlers are at once natural and cultural as they are marshalled as a second nature: they are ideologically motivated figures which fulfill Howe’s conflicting desire for nature in its virginal, indigenous state and for progress through toil and small-scale private ownership. For Howe, like for Goldsmith in the previous chapter, this figure dialectically expiates and negates the poem’s colonial violence: it lets him have an unspoiled nature and colonize it too. Despite being anathema to “commerce,” as Howe reveals, smallholders are not unproblematic ameliorative subjects. “Acadia” allows us to think the relationship between Canada’s colonial history, politics, and economics in terms of property and patriarchal desire.

I begin a close reading of the poem influenced by Gingell-Beckmann’s and Zenchuk’s differing readings of “Acadia.” They make opposing claims concerning the poem’s representation of settler and indigenous relations. Zenchuk demonstrates that repetition is key to how Howe links his portraits of the Aboriginal and settler, connections which betray an anxiety over Acadia’s colonial history (52). Whereas Gingell-Beckmann as well as other scholars cited above claim that the battle scene in Part Two elides sympathy for the Micmacs in making it seem like “a totally unjustified attack” (Gingell-Beckmann 29) on the settlers, Zenchuk contends that “the Indians can at least be understood, if not

excused, in massacring the British. They do, after all, have some justification for their actions” (67). The poem indeed builds a case for the Micmacs and this case extends to the battle scene, where recurrent diction connects the indigene and settler. These articulations problematize the poem’s accepted reading as a conflicted but generally legible ideological missive composed in the services of colonialism and re-position the text as an ambivalent critique of Canada’s colonial legacy. The text then does not adhere to an unproblematic savage-civilized binary but rather this binary deconstructs itself, opening new possibilities for political critique.

Howe nonetheless naturalizes a historical mode of production—centuries old in Europe but relatively new to the Canadian context—by casting the smallholder as a bearer of culture and progress and preserver of nature’s beauty. Smallholders thus naturalize European notions of property and progress while eliding Aboriginal culture. The poem first links and finally replaces Micmac culture with settler society through a dialectical process in which Acadia’s pristine natural beauty and the Aboriginal culture that preserves it are negated by the settler and the concurrent Western historical forces of “progress” which Howe names as science, art, and commerce. He negates the agriculturally-based settler as well and sublates the Aboriginal peoples and settlers in the figure of the Acadian “boatmen” (Howe 934). Howe mobilizes the “boatmen” or “Fisher” (886, 897) to engender a second nature with the ideological function of reifying a European mode of socio-economic production in a gesture that is at once colonial

in its erasure of Aboriginal culture and critical of colonialism in its rejection of the mercantile economy.

### **Repetition**

“Acadia” is rife with repetitions which hinge European culture to an indigenous other in a manner which problematizes the savage-civilized binary. A number of repetitions will be investigated and their political implications will be explored. The first is the attachment of the moral failing of greed to both settlers and Aboriginal peoples. Through an allusion to Othello, Howe describes “Micmacs” as possessive and jealous regarding their ownership of Acadia:

Thus, as the am'rous Moor with joy survey'd  
The budding beauties of Venetia's maid  
Drank in the beamings of her love-lit eye,  
Her bosom's swell, the music of her sigh  
He felt, and who can tell that feeling's bliss,  
Moor though he was, her beauties all were his. (213-18)

Howe portrays Othello as subhuman, as “Moor though he was” suggests that his race taints his love. The poet implies the same thing about the “The Micmac” concerning the right of property ownership (182). In an echo of the description of Othello who “felt . . . / [Desdemona's] beauties all were his,” the Micmac “feels, yes proudly feels, [Acadia] 'tis all his own” (217-18, 212). Howe's represents Shakespeare's “Moor” and Acadia's “dusky savage” as greedy and possessive



(161). Both are driven by excessive emotion, as they irrationally “feel” an attachment to their property. He deploys alliteration in the case of Othello, as “budding beauties,” “beamings,” “bliss” and “beauties” highlight the sensuous, rather than rational, connection Othello has to Desdemona. Howe emphasizes this point through the repetitive diction of “feels” when describing the Micmac’s expression of ownership of Acadia (212). Both the Micmac and Othello are irrational creatures who are driven by their appetites.

When describing a settler, however, who secures the door of his log cabin for the night, the descriptive similarities are unmistakable: “As cautiously the miser locks his store, / The anxious parent barricades the door” (403-404). The settler greedily guards Acadia too. He is “anxious” because what he has is of great value. Both the “crops of gold” outside the cabin and the family within are precious (380). The anxiety also stems from a perceived threat for the cabin is secured to protect the settlers from Acadia’s previous owners. Assonance links “cautiously” with “locks,” emphasizing the cabin’s fortification; assonating “a” sounds in line 404 imbue the settler’s cause for concern with a parent’s protective instinct.

Settler and Micmac alike covet Acadia, but race expiates the former and convicts the latter. Howe reifies Aboriginal peoples by investing them with human emotion on one hand, while divesting them of humanity on the other. In Honneth’s terms, Howe fails to recognize the other as he seems to conveniently forget his connection of the settler with the “miser” in an attempt to justify the

colonization of the Micmacs' property (Howe 403). By reifying "the Micmac," Howe's text effectively "preserv[es] a prejudice" (Honneth 60).

Whereas the Micmac's feeling of a deep emotional attachment to his homeland is evidence of his racial inferiority, however, the settler's emotional attachment to his property is sublimated in a scene of *pathos* in which domestic bliss is about to be destroyed by savage intruders. The reader is invited to empathetically identify with the settler-proprietor's anxiety, but in a manner which also renders the reader as a covetous. The mode of our empathetic engagement is reifying as it identifies with the settler in part through his property.

A related repetition with an insidious ideological effect is Howe's use of "pride." It refers to the Micmac as he surveys Acadia's natural beauty and "feels, yes proudly feels, 'tis all his own" (212). Pride is given a negative connotation in the poem in general, especially when referring to the idle rich (Howe 919-22). The smallholder seems free of this vice, because even though "Cottage Homes . . . [are] Acadia's noblest pride . . . / humble hopes and smiling joys are there" (804, 808). The settlers, however, are also "The strength, the pride, and sinews of her [Acadia's] land" (940). For Howe, pride is humble, just as savage may be civilized, and artifice may be nature. Smallholders delineate the fold where these ambiguities are manifest.

Conversely, Mazoff argues that "Where Howe's Natives are portrayed as proud, his settlers are cast as 'humble' in a strategy designed to capture the reader's sympathy . . . . And yet this is not quite true, for throughout the poem the relationship to the land is described in terms of possession, purchase, and

ownership” (69). For Mazoff, this rhetorical device “effectively masks his desire for exculpation” (70). Mazoff’s oversight concerning Howe’s repeated diction is illuminating, as Mazoff strictly divides the settler from the indigene while ignoring the ways in which these two figures interconnect. Howe hinges settlers and Micmacs to appropriation and attendant vice.

Mazoff, however, aptly notes Howe’s desire for expiation from colonial guilt. This desire extends beyond the destruction of Aboriginal culture, Mazoff continues, as the settler is at once purveyor and victim of the “process of natural decay” which destroys Aboriginal culture as posited by “the popular anthropology of the time” (70). Mazoff argues that the “forces of progress and science” are also “antithetical to the rural virtues of Acadia” (70). “Pride” then refers to the Micmacs, settlers, and wealthy merchants. Howe’s smallholders are constantly interwoven with their opposites as represented by Aboriginal peoples and the wealthy British. “The strength, the pride, and sinews of her [Acadia’s] land” (940)—mentioned in direct association with smallholders—resonate with the portrayal of the prideful rich:

Lull’d on the lap of luxury and ease,  
 With cheeks unfann’d but by the mildest breeze,  
 The listless sons of wealth and pride repose  
 Nor heed the poor man’s toil—the poor man’s woes. (919-922)

Acadia’s ruling class is not the only one guilty of pride. In a passage which troubles Mazoff’s reading, even the smallholder’s children are “his hope and pride” (949).

Howe positions the settler as “Acadia’s noblest pride” (804). This superlative cuts across class and genre, as the poem’s closed couplets resonate with smallholders’ nobility and heroic status while representing them simultaneously as peasants. Similarly, aristocratic language describes the Micmac: “the dusky Savage..., / [is] Lord of the loveliness his eye survey’ d” (161-162). Smallholders emerge on the level of diction between the savage-civilized binary, just as they appear between literary conventions and class identities. Who, then, is “noblest”? Who constitutes the poem’s moral centre? Is it really “the common man”—the smallholder—as Zenchuk claims (61)?

It is difficult to assign praise or blame either to a race or class because Howe’s text may be viewed as an ambivalent failure to celebrate the progress made in civilizing the region and to come to terms with colonial wrongs. Smallholders, the ruling class, and the Aboriginal peoples fail to find a unique, irreducible voice in the poem as their representations overlap in an uncanny series of repetitions that makes it difficult to recuperate the text for a political project, however “progressive” or de-colonizing this project might aspire to be. The poem cannot overcome its anxieties, so it displaces them in a chain of repetitions.

Another in this series of repetitions is Howe’s deployment of “rude,” which further articulates the settlers with Aboriginal peoples. This fold problematizes the poem’s distinction between civilization and savagery, progress and decay. Howe describes the “rude frames” and “rude entrance” of the Aboriginal peoples’ “simple homes” (241, 247, 238). The same term returns, however, in the “The rude and lowly cabins of the poor” (972). “The poor” refers

to the Acadian fisherpeople, but these “poor” yet civilized folk are joined through assonance to a “rude” primitivism. Howe also depicts both the settlers’ and Micmacs’ homes as “sylvan”: the Micmacs construct a “sylvan city” and the “adventurous Briton . . . / in the wild, his sylvan dwelling rear’d” (Howe 228, 314; see Zenchuk 66). “Nature’s sons” (238) are conventionally noble savages, but smallholders’ Arcadian homes retain traces of the “wild” society that they avowedly supersede. The assonance of “sylvan city” belies a clear differentiation between a primitive and truly civilized culture, as the repeated and stressed “i” sounds emphasize Howe’s interwoven fabric of savagery and urban culture. Howe thus inextricably intertwines the savage and civilized, which troubles representations of colonization as a progressive, moral, and civilizing mission.

Gingell-Beckmann interprets the use of “rude” as part of the “conventional formula and prejudicial diction” that colours Howe’s “clear-sighted observation” of the Micmacs’ culture (24). Bentley also astutely points out the repetition of “rude” in reference to the Aboriginals, but like Gingell-Beckmann overlooks the term’s reference to the settlers (Bentley, *Mimic* 176-177; “Concepts” 45). Bentley claims that “The repetition of the word ‘rude’ in the description of ‘the simple homes of Nature’s sons’ ([Howe] 238) leaves little doubt that, though enviable in many ways, the Micmacs existed at the lowest of the four stages of social development” (177). His phrase, “leaves little doubt,” is symptomatic of the desire among most critics of the poem to reduce ambiguity by explicitly wishing it away. The term “rude” crosses racial divides, however, as culture and barbarism overflow their referential boundaries. The four stages theory does not apply to the

poem as rigidly as it appears since smallholders, the supposed markers of the great leap forward in cultural progress through agriculture, retain traces of the primitive nature they allegedly surpass.

If the settlers' homes are also primitive, then how is progress distinguishable from savagery? The poet asks the same question:

But has not time—that drowned the din of arms,  
Defaced Acadia's wild and simple charms,  
Broke the deep spells of woodland solitude,  
And banished nature with a hand too rude? (809-12)

Initial colonial violence fades but ensuing settlement—with its “hand too rude”—brings more violence with it, as Howe refracts the Micmac's colonization through damage to nature's pristine beauty. Howe's response is emphatic, as if to quell his mounting anxiety: “Oh! no, together Art and Nature reign” within settler society (813). The poet declares that a balance must be struck between unspoiled nature and cultural artifice.

However, thinly veiled guilt over the “wild and simple” Aboriginals' expropriation interweaves in this passage with discourses of labour and desire: “Though Labour's hand full many a scene has cleared,” he writes, “Yet there are still spots by Art still unprofaned” (815, 817). These spots, like Lady Macbeth's, are metonymies for his guilt over the Micmacs' expropriation. Unspoiled nature reminds him of the culture which his own attempts to displace.

In a tableau rife with colonial desire, his portrayal of these “spots” in the two stanzas that follow (819-52) are loaded with voyeurism. Howe describes

nature “like a bashful Beauty, half concealed / Beneath the rich robe of spotless green she wears” (834-835). When nature becomes a woman waiting to be conquered, the “spots” of colonial guilt disappear. Nature for Howe is desired for its pristine beauty which resists the poet’s gaze; that is, “Nature seems to shrink from human sight . . . / And shun the intruding step, and curious eye” (844-45). Despite celebrating the fact that “No axe profane has touched a single bough, [and] / No sod has yet been broken by the plough” (837-38), the speaker also betrays a desire to penetrate “her [nature’s] deep mysteries” (846) both with his gaze and a patriarchal notion of labour and subsequent ownership.

Just as the ignoble Albert in Goldsmith’s “The Rising Village” fails to plough Acadia’s “Flora,” Howe’s Micmac is also guilty of an affront to culture and masculinity. Campbell claims that the Micmacs are for Howe too disorderly to consummate ownership of Acadia (48). Zenchuk concurs that although the speaker tends to idealize pre-contact Micmac culture and is indeed desirous of the virginal landscape this culture supposedly preserves, “virgins are ultimately sterile, and so the coming of the colonists need not necessarily be a destructive event. Rather, their deflowering of the land may . . . prove to be beneficial” (60) in developing Acadia’s vast resources. Masculinity, interwoven here with a Lockean notion of labour as appropriative, is an ideological device which mitigates the poet’s anxieties concerning Acadia’s ownership and development and which buttresses the poem’s colonial force.

This is not strictly accurate, however, as the logic of the poem’s repetitions resist easy binary oppositions. If it were correct to assert that the settler

is moralized through the discourses of masculinity and appropriative labour, then the Aboriginal would be demonized and feminized. The poem would have to keep this dichotomy intact. This is not the case, for although the settlers are indeed represented as benevolent colonists and patriarchs, they are also capable of barbaric violence which is physical and ideological—a violence referred to in Chapter Three by way of Jacques Derrida’s deconstruction of Walter Benjamin’s “Critique of Violence” as “law-making” and “law preserving.” Ironically, this representational confusion occurs in what is according to most scholars the poem’s the most polarizing scene: the battle between the settler family and the Micmacs. The scene which avowedly extinguishes sympathy for the Aboriginal people, if read carefully, assails the notions of masculinity and appropriative labour upon which rest not only the settlers’ *pathos* but also their moral, legal, and justifiable right of ownership.

There are several repetitions interlacing the Micmac and settler in the battle scene. The smallholder’s “Log House” with “[t]he earth . . . its floor” (389, 392) is a reminder that the settler’s abode sits on the “sod” on which the Micmacs’ “free fathers had for ages trod” (335-336). Howe’s rhyming couplet, linking “sod” with “trod,” suggests that the fact of first occupancy, even nomadic in character, fixes a right of property. The cabin’s “roof with bark o’erspread” (291) is constructed from “the trees which they [the Micmacs] had spared” (339), suggesting that the Micmacs had performed the appropriative labour of logging prior to European settlement. Property relations are literally built into this scene of violent cultural conflict as the Micmacs’ logs form the settler’s house and thus



colonial improvement is also expropriation in the logic of the poem's repetitions. The cabin's "chimney," moreover, is made of a combination of earth and rock: "stones and harden'd clay its chimney form'd" (393). The chimney recalls the "stones" which the Micmac "had gather'd o'er his parents' bones" (337-38), as the construction of the settler's home is not only a violation of property rights but also of a sacred burial site (Zenchuk 66). His aggression that prompts the Micmacs' declaration of "eternal war" (340) challenges the prominent scholarly position that the battle scene reinforces the poem's dominant colonial ideology. Zenchuk's argument, that the Micmacs seem justified in their attack of the settler family, finds support in the logic of text's repetitions.

It is not only the settlers' masculinity that the poem problematizes but also their Lockean claim to rightful appropriation through individual labour. The poem declares that

For ages thus, the Micmac trod our soil  
 The chase his pastime, war his only toil.  
 'Till o'er the main, the adventurous Briton steer'd,  
 And in the wild, his sylvan dwelling rear'd,  
 With heart of steel, a thousand perils met,  
 And won the land his children tread on yet. (Howe 311-16)

The proleptic capacity of "our soil" (311) dissolves Aboriginal property rights both before and after contact with Europeans. Howe invokes political economy's four stages theory—which has been discussed in previous Chapters—as justification for this effacement (Bentley *Mimic* 176-79; "Concepts" 45-46). The

poet makes it clear that the Micmacs do not work except for “war” (312). Hunting is not a productive and highly skilled means of self-provisioning but is instead regarded as a mere “pastime” (312). The speaker reinforces this stereotype in the battle scene in which the settlers hear “the war-cry of a fiend from Hell . . . / [that] Tell[s] them that the Micmac’s toils are round them thrown” (506, 512). “Toils” refers to war but it also points to the house which is “thrown” together from materials (stones, trees, and earth) which the Micmacs, to borrow Locke’s phrasing, also have mixed their labour with and in which thereby have fixed a right of property. The Micmacs, moreover, also construct their homes from wood (239-42) and are generally industrious in hunting, building canoes, and in meal preparation and other domestic tasks (239-64, 181-198). This labour leads to the Micmac’s declaration of ownership: “He feels, yes proudly feels, ’tis all his own” (212). The Micmac also has a “glow of pride” in his “manly cheek” (203) as Howe endows him with European traits: the Micmac logs, builds, and owns. Howe westernizes the indigene, albeit on a supposedly inferior level of social development. The irony is that this level resembles the smallholder’s. A further irony is that the signification of “pride,” which runs amok, yet again folds together the savage and settler.

“The sturdy settler” who is killed along with his family by the Micmacs “lays his axe aside, / Which all day long has quell’d the forest’s pride” (397-98). These lines echo the forest’s description pre-colonization, when “No treacherous steel assails their [the trees’] stems of pride” (171). Personifying the axe—a commodity—as “treacherous steel” (171) makes for a provocative connection

between the Micmacs' "treacherous hearts" (532) in the battle scene and the settler's "heart of steel, [which] a thousand perils met, ... / [and] won the land his children tread on yet" (315-16). The adjective "treacherous" signifies both a threat to nature gendered as feminine but also to the phallic "stems of pride" (171). The smallholder's rigid "heart of steel" (315) connotes both a productive and destructive force. When the "treacherous" Micmacs attack, the settlers do not run into the woods and hide as in "The Rising Village." Howe's settlers "by their thresholds stood / With stern resolve the savage tribes to brave, / And win a peaceful dwelling, or a grave" (370-72). The repetition of "treacherous" does not only undermine the moral integrity of the settler's labour as progressive and civilizing. It also undercuts it by characterizing it as appropriative and masculine yet also violent. Zenchuk argues that Howe sees "Civilization as a kind of two-edged sword" (61), as the smallholder, who phallically "stood" (Howe 370) for private ownership and cultivation, simultaneously calls into question the justice of these property relations.

As a commodity, moreover, the smallholder's axe is reified human labour which is set to the personified task of treachery. Indeed, the axe performs a double and indeterminate task: it colonizes nature and defends this colonization against intruders. It thus enacts a "law-making" act of labour and thereby does violence to Aboriginal property rights. It also undertakes a "law-preserving" act of violence as it inscribes settler society as a reified second nature.

Just as the settler cuts down the proud forest with his axe of "treacherous steel" (171) and thus intrudes upon the Micmac's territory, the Micmac chops

through the cabin's roof with his "polished hatchet" (563), which allows the attackers to gain entrance and eventually kill the settlers. In the scene of graphic violence that follows, the mother wields a "knife" (570) and the father an "axe" (573). The repeated appearance of the hatchet, knife, and axe add to the string of uncanny repetitions that fold together the settler and indigene. These repetitions serve to Westernize the indigene and to indigenize the Westerner (Zenchuk 66-68). The poem's repetitions raise and leave open the question, "Who is the savage?"

### **Fishing for Sublation**

Howe's anxieties over Aboriginal expropriation and the concurrent questions of property ownership and progress are so many fissures in the scholarly theory that the smallholder is an ideological device functioning only in service of colonialism. The fisher section of the poem (853-1018) dialectically manages the tensions between nature and culture by offering the fisher not as an ideal synthesis of the two but as a sublation: the fisher allows society to progress by tapping into nature's resources and yet allows nature to thrive in a pristine condition.

An indirect reference to the fishers emerges early in the poem, as cracks between logs in a settler's cabin are filled with "moss and sea weed" (390). Indeed, the fisher serves as ideological filler. Inviolable nature is negated by smallholding rooted in agriculture. The fisher emerges from this dialectical

opposition. Unlike the settler involved in agriculture and logging, the fisher's labour depletes nature's resources in a less obvious manner, and in a way that is less visibly transformative. The ocean for Howe is a dangerous yet limitless resource for the "Industrious, active, children of the oar" (928) who heroically meet the daily challenges of their work:

Inured to toil, familiar with the storm,  
 Around our coast these hardy boatmen swarm,  
 With nerves well strung to battle with the wave,  
 And souls as free as are the winds they brave. (932-36)

The rhyming couplet of "storm" and "swarm," along with the portrayal of their labour as a noble "battle," betrays Howe's attempt to sublimate the violence of colonization through the figure of the Acadian fishers. In the battle scene, "for his work [war] the Indian loves the night" (520), just as the fisher fights his battle with the storm "As twilight fades, and all around is dark" (871). Moreover, the fisher's lines are "well strung" like the bowstrings pulled taught for conflict, resonating with the "Micmac" as his "bow is bent, his arrow flies, / And at his feet the bleeding victim [deer] dies" (198-99). Both settler and indigene engage in a Marxian primitive accumulation in which sustenance is extracted directly from nature, as the poem's repetitions once again blur the limit demarcating savagery and civilization.

The fisher and smallholder thus have in common a mode of production as well as the speaker's moral approval. This moral valorization takes several forms. The settler and fisher are both held in opposition to the effeminate and idle rich:

the “listless sons of wealth and pride” (921) represent a politico-economic system that opposes Howe’s masculine owner-operators. These smallholders in contrast are free labourers, indentured to no one, but they retain traces of nobility as owners of the ground on which they toil. Their nobility is also a trace of noble savagery. Moreover, “our coast” (933) recalls the proleptic “our soil” (311) as Acadia appears always already European owned by these robust conquerors who are at the same time not knights or lords but poor and honest labourers who own it even before they labour to own it. The fisher is class-fractured—both owner and worker, like Lukács’ peasant—and is also burdened with the literary convention of the romantic hero. He has a boat not a horse and battles nature not a villain or beast, but is victorious nonetheless and thus comprises “The strength, the pride, the sinews of her [Acadia’s] land” (940).

The fisher’s struggle to survive a storm is then a sublimated version of the battle with Aboriginal people. In this version, the smallholder does not struggle with people who suffer injustice at his hands but with a force of nature. Moreover, just as the fisher is about to drown in the waves, he is saved by God:

But vain his struggles, for his shortening breath  
 And wearied limbs speak fearfully of death.  
 Ere light-winged hope deserts him, with a sigh,  
 He casts one earnest lingering look on high,  
 And that omniscient Eye which looks o’er all,  
 And even notes the tiny sparrow’s fall,  
 Beholds and pities, and while life remains,

A billow wafts him and the beach he gains. (911-18).

God as arbiter of fate steps in and decides not that the fisher will simply survive but will prosper. The Canadian Goldsmith's unmoved mover is moved by the fisher's plight. This passage is thus reminiscent of the reference in "The Rising Village" to the natural law tradition as justification for colonization. Through the fisher's battle with nature, "the beach he gains" (918). The rhetorical strategy is the same as the battle scene, in which the smallholders become ostensibly the subject of pity. The poem valorizes their struggle and sacrifice in defence of the property earned by their labour just as it moralizes the fisher's battle with the sea in search of subsistence. "Life the rich prize,—the shore the longed-for goal" (908) is the fisher's reward. He loses his boat but "gains"—or retains—his small share of Acadian soil.

The poem contains another sublimation, this time of the expulsion of the French Acadians (619-732). The poet deplores this part of the region's history. It was violent and impeded Acadia's progress (619-24). The poet wishes "for the Bard of Auburn's melting strain!" (673) in order to capture the pain of the expropriated and displaced French Acadians. Howe is clearly attuned to the legacy of force in the region's history of property rights. He is also aware, in his reference to "The Deserted Village," that this is a Trans-Atlantic socio-economic phenomenon with a literary history. The stanza that follows his account of the French Acadians' expulsion is utterly disconnected in its tribute to the continuing virtues of Acadia such as freedom, wealth, and progress (732-54). Ambiguities concerning the region's progress remain unresolved.

Consequently, the spectre of the French Acadians returns in the refracted form of the fisher's prodigal son. The son is "the cause of all their anxious fear" (983) as he "wander'd many a year" in "foreign lands" (984). This "wand'rer" (992) has a tendency to "stray" (1019) even farther than the roving Micmacs. The son is a version of Albert from "The Rising Village." Whereas Goldsmith's Albert is displaced to the margins of the poem, much like his savages, Howe's fisher's son sends a letter which comforts his parents with tales of his travels and tells of his desire to return home (973-1018). The poem's final stanza reassures the reader that "though Acadia's sons may stray at times" (1019), the natural beauty of home always compels their return. Howe thus leaves open the possibility of the return of an exile, an issue which first emerges in the poem's second stanza (17-30).

The Acadians cannot come back. What does return, however, are the co-emergent figures of the savage as wanderer from Acadia and the civilized as desirous of Acadia's "fertile valleys, and her lovely forms" (1028). The fisher is an ideological tool for managing the poem's many anxieties, including the expropriation of masculinity in general and Aboriginal peoples specifically, the justness of appropriative labour, the criterion for progress, and the development of natural resources.

Howe wants to offer a distinctly Canadian gift to Acadia, depicted as a lover in the early lines of the poem. This gift is literary and is constructed, the speaker claims, from Acadia's own flowers. The poet wants to

Twine a rude wreath around my Country's brow,  
And tho' the flowers wild and simple be,



Take, my Acadia, those I twine for thee. (40-42)

Yet another recurrence of “rude” signals the ambivalence of this gift, as it contains traces of nature and culture, savagery and civilization. Indeed, the poem is an interwoven structure—a “wreath”—in which the “wild” and colonial intertwine. He attempts to give an indigenously Canadian gift but offers a European one instead—a gift laden with European genres and a European figure, the smallholder, resurrected in the new world. The poem is a deliberate attempt to naturalize settler society, which emerges in the text as a second nature.

The smallholder as fisher is a mediating figure for Howe’s anxiety, which is driven by the fantasy (patriarchal, colonial, and capitalist) of virtuous possession. This management strategy’s political consequences are powerful. The poem activates discourses of labour and progress to moralize not the clichéd husbandman who treads (not so) lightly on Acadia’s Aboriginal peoples’ soil, but the fisher who functions like a second nature. He personifies the Lockean appropriator in the contradictory yet ideologically powerful guise of a heroic and noble yet poor and vulnerable worker. The fisher does not simply self-sustain through fixing his labour in nature. This figure is at work sustaining a second nature called capitalism. But the fisher also works to open the path toward a critique, however indeterminate, of this second nature in the textual web of its production. This web is marked by litotes. Just as the letter from the fisher’s prodigal son bears “News too delightful to be disbelieved” (978), Howe sends the smallholder as an ambivalent postcard which both reifies colonization and resurrects a legacy of colonial violence.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> I have thus far conceptualized ideology as naturalization in Barthes' sense of the term. But this force is not merely natural in terms of Barthes' account of the ideological force of myth. "Nature" is not synonymous with "construct" as it is in Barthes' post-structuralism. Nature is not merely an ideological device that attaches referential validity to sign, a sign which in turn operates as a signifier in another second level or mythic sign system. In this view, signs (and the work they do) are like a revolving door: they do not refer to reality but rather spin it in a certain manner. In keeping with Barthes, naturalization is a way in which signs do ideological work.

It is tempting to draw parallels between Lukács' concept of "second nature" and Barthes' thinking of ideology as a semiotic operation rooted in myth and operative by modes of naturalization. The key difference between these thinkers is Barthes' rejection of the redemptive quality of critique. For Barthes, there is no outside to ideologically-inflected myth. Conversely, Lukács posits a classic Marxian theory of revolution through the coming to consciousness of the proletariat (Lukács 76, 81). Critique plays a vital role in Lukács in the awakening of the proletariat to proper consciousness lying beyond the horizon of ideology.

There are undeniable similarities nonetheless between the thinkers, particularly in their treatment of intersected notions of ideology, language, and labour, or perhaps more pointedly, of ideology working—and doing ideological work—through linguistic means. The "second nature" that Lukács posits operates like Barthes' use of naturalization in several key ways. First, both thinkers

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conceive of “nature” at least to some degree as an ideological mechanism that sustains itself through a mode of repetition that is not natural but driven by labour for Lukács and by language for Barthes. Neither theorist represents “nature” apart from cultural construction. Second, this ideological mechanism, whether it is thought of as the labour of language or labour itself as linguistic in nature, owes its force to a loss of force. Ideology works through an ironic structure which must negate itself in order to act. Despite its failure to refer to nature, ideology hides itself in nature and draws its force from it. The commodity does not properly “live” yet it takes on a life of its own. Third, this failure to refer to nature does not mitigate a discourse’s capacity to exert an ideological force. In Lukács, our labour constructs a world that dominates us. “What is of central importance here,” Lukács writes, “is that because of this situation [the reification which marks commodity fetishism] a man’s own activity, his labour becomes something objective and independent of him, something that controls him by virtue of an autonomy alien to man” (86-87). For Barthes, language refuses to do our bidding. Even a critical demystification of the political deployments of language are not only susceptible to re-mystification but are a re-mystification itself (Barthes 126). The “phantom objectivity” of commodity fetishism emerges in discourses of labour and language in these thinkers as these notions intertwine with those of nature. Smallholders, then, are a symptom of reification or a general social condition under capitalism in which we create a discourse that dominates us.

<sup>2</sup> Bajorek’s analysis of the productive force of a tropological critique of capital draws at least in part from Barthes’ dialectical relation of “poetizing” and

“ideologizing” in “Myth Today.” The former creates a vision of the world as it could be. The latter critiques the naturalizing potential of the poetic.

**Conclusion: “It’s the spinning of this pastoral fantasy”: The  
(Revolutionary?) Smallholders of *Food, Inc.***

This is not a conventional conclusion although it contains many traditional elements, such as the restatement of purpose for this research and my intervention in the archive under investigation. It also proposes future directions for research, some stemming from its limitations and others from its future applicability to other fields and/or projects. First, however, allow me to begin with a foray into film criticism. It is not an inappropriate end for this dissertation, which began with a close reading of another artefact of mass consumer culture, the Sunterra orange juice bottle. Both the documentary *Food, Inc.* and Sunterra’s orange juice allow me to broach the question of “so what?” as it pertains to this study from the contemporary perspective of industrial agriculture’s impacts on the discourse about smallholders. This conclusion in general addresses questions concerning the broader applicability of this research, and this is perhaps the most promising connection with my study for today’s researchers working in the fields of rural politics, economics, sociology, and so forth.

The smallholder myth is vital to the moral economy of the earnest and politically committed film, *Food, Inc.* (2008). This Academy Award nominated documentary, directed by Robert Kenner, provocatively critiques the capital-intensive and highly industrialized mass production of food in the United States. The following is by no means a complete analysis of the film but is a close reading of a few characters and scenes meant yet again to highlight the ways in

which the insights of this dissertation may be extended to media not traditionally thought of as “literary.”

The opening scenes contrast not only two forms of food production but two eras: pre-World War Two “agrarian America” (*FI*) and contemporary, industrialized, urban culture. The penetration of industrial capital into agricultural production has all but erased small farms and ranches from the landscape. My aim is to question the still active role of the smallholder in resisting current trends toward capital-intensive industrial production as this resistance pertains to niche local markets and “organic” farming. It is important to note, however, that the focus will not be on the actions of actual smallholders but rather on the figural means and political ends of their representation. Understanding the smallholder as a figure makes legible the ideology of the discourses which represent this figure. More to the point: how does agribusiness represent smallholders, and to what ends?

*Food, Inc.* elucidates the negative impacts of multinational food corporations on farmers, factory workers, and general public health and safety. According to the documentary, these corporations mask the way they produce food by symbolically associating mass production with smallholding. Smallholding sanitizes or even in some contexts “greens” a company’s corporate image. The film demonstrates that multinational corporations mobilize the smallholder as the marketable image for their products. Indeed, the smallholder’s marshalling for this purpose renders mass produced food ideologically and morally palatable to today’s consumer. “It’s the spinning of this pastoral

fantasy,” claims the film’s narrator, which sells to consumers not only an inaccurate but a deliberately biased and ideologically motivated version of the real conditions of food production (*FI*).

The first three shots seem to align with what the film’s narrator encapsulates as “[19]30s agrarian America” (*FI*). These shots become templates for how the film differentiates large and small-scale production. This contrast is not evident in all scenes of *Food, Inc.* but it does represent a general tendency. The three shots are the overhead view of a crop; the ground-level perspective of the old tractor and combine; and the cowboy and herd of cows.

The key difference, however, is not only the content of the shots but the form of the shots themselves. The opening shot is from an airplane. The camera moves quickly while depicting a vast amount of space. Conversely, the two shots that follow focus from ground level on the antique tractor and combine as well as the cowboy on horseback. Spatially, there is a decrease in the field of vision: we see less but what we see is moving slower and is visible in greater detail.

The sweeping wide-angle view of the overhead camera implies enormity, breadth, distance, detachment, perhaps even a global or totalizing perspective. The camera moves quickly, moreover, which prevents close inspection. Nevertheless we see enough to make sense of the shot. It is a farmer’s field, planted with a modern drill as the seed rows are placed with mechanical precision. Just like the fast-moving camera whose position overhead captures much in the field of view in one broad sweep, the seed drill finishes its task with speed and efficiency as it covers much ground in a single pass.

This is a vision of modern industrialized agriculture. This mechanization opposes the natural scene in which it is embedded: the green trees, grass, and rolling hills. What we are seeing then is not “nature” but rather technology in action. Obviously we are seeing nature filtered through the camera. Less obviously, the scene is both social and natural because it bears the marks of both human labour and natural processes. This scene is marked, moreover, by a specific kind of human labour, a mechanized and capital intensive form of agriculture. The quaint farmyard in the background of the shot further illustrates this blend of social and natural production. The farm buildings sit amidst the rolling hills as if they sprouted there as naturally as the grass and trees, yet they are products of technology and the hub of this technology’s use.

The next two shots similarly blend technology and nature in their content but their form differs. They are both at ground level. These ground or eye level perspectives imply close scrutiny, getting at the foundation, or what the narrator calls “lifting the veil” (*FI*) from the material realities of contemporary food production. The film’s second and third shots show how much has changed over the last “fifty years” (*FI*) as both shots are meant to depict throwbacks to or mementos of a largely by-gone era of small-scale agricultural production. These two shots move us in closer, toward a “what’s happening on the ground” type of perspective. This viewpoint reflects the film’s micro-analysis of capitalist food production.

Fittingly, when the third shot shifts to the fourth, the narrator is in the midst of launching the film’s devastating analysis. It is here that “images” begin



to contradict reality (*FI*). More importantly, though, is that images are not simply shown to be inaccurate representations of reality. The narrator identifies these representations as unreliable and then alleges that their infidelity is deliberate; that is, they are falsified for ideological ends. There is nothing particularly brilliant about pointing out the fact that certain discourses such as advertising have deliberate designs on their readers. The way the film makes the point and the context in which it is made, however, illuminate the symbolic means and political ends of agribusiness corporations' representations of smallholders.

The fourth shot seems to stick to the supposed realism of the first three. When the close-up of the red barn behind the white plank fence in the green field ends and the camera zooms out, however, we see that the content of the shot is not real but rather is a picture in a supermarket. This shot then is a picture of a picture. Unlike the detachment and speed of the film's first shot in relation to its object, the fourth shot is at first static and close-up. As the camera zooms out, we see that it is in fact an advertisement for "All Natural Farm Fresh" food (*FI*). The zooming action implies that appearance can be discerned from reality through close, careful analysis (zoom in) which is positioned in a wider context (zoom out). The movement of the camera remains at ground level, however, as the camera zooms out; it stays at the level of production. Just like the shot of the chicken assembly line, the film offers a close inspection of the actual conditions of production and consumption. As the film puts it, "the reality is not a farm, it's a factory" (*FI*).

The later shot of the wheat field being harvested by four state of the art combines with a factory looming in the background offers a vision of highly

industrialized, capital-intensive grain farming. This vision is also from ground level. The shot is thus a synthesis of the film's first overhead shot of a large ripening crop and the ground level perspective of the farmer on his antique tractor and combine. The crop ripens, it is harvested, but the small-scale harvester disappears when we look closer at the realities of production. The large-scale combines emerge in its place. Behind the "pastoral fantasy," therefore, lies the actuality of contemporary grain farming. The film pointedly morphs images into reality: the illusionary food label depicting a singular cow in a pasture is replaced by a cow in a huge feedlot, and the farmer on the old tractor is substituted for the four combines worth about \$250,000 each. The film captures the feedlot's enormity with a sweeping overhead shot as the camera zooms out. Again, large-scale production is associated with this wide-angle, detached view. The overhead shot of the field of grain which begins the film is replaced with an eye-level one, and the content of shot, when subjected to close analysis of the foundational aspects of how food is made, displays large-scale production. The narrator has already brought industrial production under close scrutiny. The detached view of this shot, therefore, is a synthesis of the overhead shot (large-scale production at a distance) and the eye-level shot (micro-analysis of large-scale production).

As the camera continues to pull back, it reveals that right beside the advertisement with the red barn are two more: of the cowboy and his herd from shot three and of the farmer with his antique tractor and combine from shot two. The second and third shots are thus shown to be recreations of the imagery of advertising. It seems as if the old tractor and combine and cowboy were shot in a

purposeful imitation—not of reality—but of the supermarket advertisements. Or perhaps those film shots were turned into pictorial ads. After all, the supermarket used in the film may only exist on a movie set. The viewer cannot be certain which is real and which is artificial: the smallholder is a fold between nature and artifice.

These advertisements declare the supermarket's food to be "All Natural Farm Fresh" yet they use a constructed and all but defunct form of agricultural production to do so. Despite the destruction of the economic viability of smallholding in both Canada and the U.S.A. in the last fifty years, the image of smallholders still resonates with consumers and motivates them to buy food whose production process has nothing to do with smallholding. In the words of the narrator,

The way we eat has changed more in the last fifty years than in the previous ten thousand, but the image that's used to sell the food is still the imagery of agrarian America. You go into the supermarket and you see pictures of farmers. The picket fence, and the silo, and the '30s farmhouse, and the green grass. It's the spinning of this pastoral fantasy.

Advertisers for multinational food corporations are spinning more than a fairy tale about the production of food. As a subsequent shot focused on a shopping cart suggests, "It's the spinning of this pastoral fantasy" that keeps the cart's wheels in motion and keeps commodities flying off the shelves, as the film articulates the

figural means by which agribusiness corporations deploy smallholding as the marketable veneer for capital-intensive, highly industrialized food production.

Smallholders are commodified to sell commodities, as the film's analysis of supermarket tomatoes suggests. As it points out, the tomatoes are symptomatic of a larger socio-economic problem. *Food, Inc.* embeds its analysis of smallholders within a larger critique of capitalist food production. The narrator's analysis of the tomatoes occurs with an eye-level shot: we are at the level of micro-analysis of the production process. Fittingly, the musical score evokes an air of mystery, suspense, and foreboding, as if an unpleasant revelation is about to come to light. The narrator's study of the tomatoes takes us on a field-trip to "the hidden abode of production, on whose threshold there stares us in the face 'No admittance except on business'" (Marx, *Capital* 1: 176). In the narrator's own words,

There's this deliberate veil, this curtain, that's dropped between us and where our food is coming from.... If you follow the food chain back from those shrink-wrapped packages of meat, you find a very different reality. The reality is a factory. It's not a farm, it's a factory. That meat is being processed by huge multi-national corporations that have very little to do with ranches and farmers. Now our food is coming from enormous assembly lines where the animals and the workers are being abused. And the food is [sic] become much more dangerous in ways that are being deliberately hidden from us.

The discursive production of smallholders by agribusiness corporations are part of the masking process. The ideological consequence of these representations is that capitalism becomes further entrenched by the discursive production of smallholders under capitalism. The narrator has already demonstrated the ideologically motivated use of “pictures of farmers” (*FI*) that adorn the supermarkets walls and food labels: smallholders conceal the industrial production of food by glossing it with a natural, healthy, “farm fresh,” “organic,” and even personal—straight from the farmer—sheen. The danger of the food is not simply its lack of nutritional value, its artificiality, or its toxicity. Although these are indeed vitally important material consequences which require further analysis, this food is also dangerous because it wields a socio-economic force, one which impacts consumers and producers alike.

The way this force operates may be discovered in the film’s analysis of the tomato. The film indicates that tomatoes arrive in the supermarket through a complex social process that affects not only their value but their physicality, their material form, their nature. “There are no seasons in the American supermarket,” the narrator explains, because “now there are tomatoes all year round, grown half-way around the world, picked when it [sic] was green, and ripened with ethylene gas” (*FI*). This glimpse into the production process highlights the artifice involved. The narrator adds that “Although it looks like a tomato it’s kind of a notional tomato, I mean it’s the idea of a tomato.” As this statement is uttered, tomatoes in a plastic bag are placed on a supermarket scale, thus emphasizing their materiality. But the statement itself accentuates their immateriality, or the

fact that they have taken on “notional” characteristics. This is another way of saying that they are no longer natural but rather social products. The tomatoes are indeed artificial to a certain extent. The plastic bag says, “Garden Fresh.” The tomatoes are about as naturally fresh as the bag itself; the “notional tomato” is not a natural tomato but a constructed, “plastic” one.

The point is not simply that the food industry’s portrait of agricultural production is imaginary but rather that these constructions have real concrete consequences. The tomatoes carry weight: even though they are “notional” rather than natural, they still act. They place a heavy burden on other alternative, “organic,” or local food producers that seek to compete with relatively cheap, readily available, and convenient mass produced food. These “notional,” unnatural tomatoes thus perform a measurable socio-economic task: they contribute to the economic unviability of small producers. The immaterial, artificial, abstract, or “notional tomato” performs then a political task.

As argued above, the tomato does this by hiding the actual means of its production. The plastic bag says that it is “Garden Fresh.” It is as if someone grew this tomato in their backyard plot in a natural scene that was right as the rain. This natural scene lends the mass production of tomatoes an air of inevitability: it appears that this is how tomatoes were, are, and will always be produced. Just as the singular cow on the meat label masks a massive feedlot and the antique combine hides modern ones, the figure of smallholding as a form of natural production is hijacked by multinational food corporations in order to attach it to their products. It makes them highly marketable, because the food appears

healthy. It gives corporations a hard-working, recognizable, and “greener” face for the production of the food. The products become highly profitable because they perpetuate mainstream food production’s trend toward increasing mechanization and capital-intensification. The film demonstrates, therefore, that smallholders are a replication of a replication; that is, they are counterfeits of an always already discursively rendered nature.

*Food, Inc.* critiques agribusiness’ depiction of smallholders but it also mobilizes smallholders for political ends. The film unmaskes food corporations’ use of the mythic smallholder in their advertising by articulating the way in which the smallholder functions in food corporations’ discourse as an ideological device which produces a second nature. *Food, Inc.* de-natures smallholders by offering a glimpse into the actual conditions of production faced by contemporary smallholders. By indicating these conditions, however, does the film also naturalize smallholders? Is this naturalization similar to the ways in which agribusiness naturalizes the smallholder? If so, what rhetorical means does *Food, Inc.* employ and what are the political consequences?

The film’s contrast of two chicken farmers, Carole Morison and Vince Edwards, provides a forum for examining these questions. Both are smallholders but Carole is on the verge of becoming a proletarian, whereas Vince is on the verge of becoming a capitalist. Moreover, Carole is keenly aware and critical of her socio-economic status and class position, while Vince is relatively ignorant and accepting of his.

Just like Great-Grandmother Morrison in *Crow Lake, Food, Inc.*'s

Morison is an excellent reader of the socio-economic situation of smallholders. The fictional character advocates education as an escape from the farm's grinding labour and static socio-economic status. The woman in the documentary exposes the working conditions of smallholding as it becomes increasingly proletarianized. It is not clear whether or not the fictional Morrison's family owned their property outright, but it is evident that Carole Morison does not. She holds a contract with Perdue, a multinational chicken corporation. Morison has paid for her chicken barns with loans. This debt, she explains, not only eats away her profits but also keeps her shackled to the corporation's exploitative business practices. The company requires updates to her barns which put the smallholder in further debt but failure to comply, according to Morison, results in a cancelled contract.

Morison is important because she is, according to the film, the only chicken farmer out of dozens that were approached to allow filming inside the chicken barns, thus unveiling the "hidden abode of production" (Marx, *Capital 1*: 176). The representations of Morison and the industrial meat-packing workers later in the film serve to de-naturalize mass production and reveal what Bajorek calls capitalism's "greatest trade secret" (63), which is the worker's exploitation.

The analysis is set, like the film's opening three scenes, in a natural setting. The overhead shot of McLean County, Kentucky extends a view of the rural American south. But what we see, just as in the film's opening shot, is mass production nestled into the natural backdrop. There are roughly twenty-eight



chicken barns visible in the first shot of McLean County. When we are taken to ground level for closer inspection, we meet Vince Edwards, a Tyson grower, who claims to have “about 300,000 chickens” (FI). There is a close-up of the Tyson logo on one of Edwards’ chicken barns. A phrase reminiscent of the Canadian Goldsmith’s references to agrarian capitalism—“golden riches” (456) and “golden corn” (72)—appears below the logo. “Golden Feather” (FI) signals a process in which use-values become exchange-values as food products are commodified. The Edwards sequence culminates in his refusal, at the behest of Tyson, to allow filming inside the chicken houses. Both the production process and the worker’s exploitation remain hidden, since, according to Vince, “the chicken industry came in here and it’s helped this whole community out” (FI). Just as in the Canadian Goldsmith’s poem, agrarian capitalism is associated with progress.

While the film represents Edwards as a folksy, honest, hard-working but dim-witted dupe, Morison’s homespun rurality is de-mythologized. She is instead re-mythologized as a proletarian. That is, the film dispels the myth of smallholding as natural and progressive but retains the myth of the moral smallholder. Morison is both a figure of incisive analysis and of pathos. She poignantly and compellingly articulates her divided class position as an owner-operator who is both (petty) capitalist and (lumpen) proletariat. Morison mobilizes her own small capital, raised with a mountain of debt, and it is then up to Morison to exploit her own labour in order to find her wages. The smallholder is still moralized but with a key difference: a Lockean theory of private ownership through individual labour is not valorized but rather another kind of worker

emerges. Just as the film makes common cause with the meat-packing workers, who use hidden cameras to reveal their dangerous working environment, Morison allows filming inside her chicken barns with hidden cameras in order to capture a Perdue pickup. The film highlights not only the abuse of the animals but also the exploitation of the chicken catchers. These workers, according to Morison, are

traditionally . . . African-American men. Now we're seeing more and more Latino catchers, undocumented workers, and from their point of view, they don't have any rights and they're just not going to complain. . . . The companies like these kind of workers. (*FI*)

The film genders the smallholder and the smallholder's class ally is a racialized "undocumented" worker. This class allegiance which a Marxist analysis may wish to forge, however, must not level out the differences between these subjects. This analysis, in any case, is unlike Marx's and Lukács', who doubted smallholders' ability to come to consciousness of their true class allegiances and revolutionary potential.

The differences between Edwards as a well-intentioned dupe and Morison as an incisive critic functions as a clear challenge to the overwhelmingly patriarchal tradition of not only smallholding but also agricultural production. She is neither a helpmeet nor an unpaid marital partner on a family farm. She is the owner-operator who self-reflexively perceives the link between the abuse of the animals and the chicken catchers and her own exploitation. Animal cruelty is an offshoot in this case of class conflict. Second, despite the fact that both the chicken catchers and Morison suffer from exploitation through wage labour,

Morison has “rights” and is “complain[ing]” (*FI*). She does not risk deportation or other consequences like a subject who lives and works illegally in the United States. Perdue, however, cancels her contract because she refuses to upgrade her barns to more “modern” facilities.

Like the tomatoes, smallholders have largely become notional. As one person in the film describes contemporary culture, “Who knows a farmer?” (*FI*). Actual smallholders are decreasing in numbers. But representations of smallholders still have cultural currency. Smallholders retain an affective force: they seem to signify hard work, frugality, perseverance, even a spirit of community and cooperation. Agribusiness, however, adeptly exploits smallholders’ cultural currency in a way which further damages the sustainability of smallholding.

There may be hope on the horizon. The resurgence of environmental movements have led to an increased public awareness of and interest in organic food and locally grown markets. The question is whether it is in local producers’ best interests to continue using the rustic image of the hayseed producer (which agribusiness finds so effective for its purposes) or to trade in this bygone yet powerful image and re-brand their products with an image more reflective of a true alternative to mass production. Smallholders harbour a second nature with a counter-capitalist force but one which appears to be equally susceptible to capitalist deployment. Does a force which is entirely other to capitalism linger within the smallholder figure, waiting to emerge?

### **Restatement of Purpose of The Smallholder Project**

The emergence of smallholders as ameliorative figures is vexed by the conventional tropological structures which govern their construction in a pattern of two binaries: savage-civilized, and nature-culture. The dissertation in general is a study of the ways in which smallholders are mistaken for nature, and the ideological consequences of these discursive acts of naturalization.

The ideological effects of these discourses are defined with reference to Barthes and McLuhan's notions of myth as politically active discursive forms. These forms are delineated through a comparative analysis of political economy and literature, broadly defined. Literature is not viewed as derivative of intellectual history; poetry does not confirm the objective truth of political economy's assertions. Instead, the comparative analysis allows the object of research, which is the force of the smallholder trope, to emerge inductively as Barthes and McLuhan's notions of myth suggest.

### **My Intervention in the Archive under Investigation**

My intention here is not to summarize my analysis of the texts that have been discussed; these points have been already been made. Instead, the aim of this section is to clarify my intervention in an archive including a contemporary novel and film, a bottle of industrially-produced orange juice, classic works of political economy, and three interconnected poems which span the Old and New World.

My intervention is not to correct these texts as they offer ahistorical histories of smallholders. Instead, I demonstrate how the figural structures upon which these “histories” rest limit serious historical inquiry. By resisting the temptation to eliminate ambiguity and to correct these authors, I offer instead an interpretation of their incorrectness which takes seriously the ambiguities inherent in studying the smallholder trope.

This interdisciplinary project thus arrives at different insights concerning the mobilizations of smallholders than a traditional historical approach would yield. This study is not concerned with locating smallholders against a climate of beliefs as definable by a historical context. In contrast, the study of the smallholder trope as an ideological force is pursued at the expense of its contextualizing power, because the trope itself is constructed in a pattern of prejudicial binaries which vex the notion of historical accuracy. Myth, for Barthes and McLuhan, is de-historicized yet no less ideologically effectual within a specific time and place. Smallholders act mythically with a prejudicial force that is also highly conventional, as inferred from the wide range of examples that have been examined.

### **Limits of the Study and Future Directions for Research**

There are, however, several limits to this approach. Although this project focuses on a broad stretch of time, it is fairly narrowly located geographically. It considers Britain in comparison with Canada, and mainly one province in Atlantic

Canada at that (notwithstanding *Crow Lake*, which is set in Ontario, and Sunterra's orange juice, which is manufactured and sold in Alberta but originates who knows where). As the close reading of *Food, Inc.* above attests, American contexts are equally productive for expanding this study, just as a western Canadian perspective will be.

The second limitation is rigorous historicization. Traditional approaches such as focusing on a specific period, or author, or even genre would allow more time and space in the study for an investigation of historical context.

Another limit to this approach is that smallholders do not speak in this study. Apart from the reflections offered by Carole Morison and Vince Edwards in *Food, Inc.*, this is a study of discourse about smallholders. For example, the Anglo-Irish Goldsmith's father was a smallholder, but he was a writer like his Canadian relative.

A future direction for this study may jointly address these two issues by focusing on self-authored smallholder discourse in action in a contemporary, manageable historical context. For example, the Battle River Railway New Generation Cooperative is a group of local rural agricultural producers in central Alberta who banded together to oppose corporate agriculture's destruction of rural infrastructure and with it small producers' self-sufficiency (Battle River). They raised funds to collectively purchase and operate a short rail-line. The study would hone in on discourse produced by the Cooperative, as mediated through newspaper articles, their newsletter, and their website, as well as through my own

scholarly interviews. This marks a new approach, which is necessary to let a new object emerge.

The history of the rail-line, with its reason for being, its political connections, and its community involvement will be analyzed against a background of similar experiments in producer-owned rail-lines in Saskatchewan. In short, there is plenty of traditionally conceived historical work to do. However, the insights derived from this work are applicable to The Smallholder Project as I pursue the following research question: Does a similar pattern of binaries and concurrent tropological structures emerge when smallholders speak for themselves? This question is qualified by scepticism concerning the ability of smallholders to speak at all; that is, to speak for themselves in an original manner, outside of the conventional modes of expression uncovered by this study. The consideration of historically located smallholder discourse will be animated by questions concerning its mediation by an interviewer and various media. The aim will be to uncover new figurative modes of smallholder expression which may prove to be socially ameliorative, or which cannot be co-opted for capitalist ends.

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Sunterra orange juice bottle. Photo by Cody McCarroll. 23 March 2008. Digital image.



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