

## Human Resources: Class and Cannibalism in Herrick's 'The Hock-Cart'

Herrick's 'The Hock-Cart, or Harvest Home' is a polished, disturbing and deeply ambivalent poem, which anatomizes relations between wealthy landowners and poor labourers with startling perspicacity. The class of unpropertied rural labourers it depicts were facing unprecedented poverty at the time it was written. While the poem's exact date is uncertain, scholarly estimates span a period of which Peter Bowden writes 'The third, fourth, and fifth decades of the seventeenth century witnessed extreme hardship in England, and were probably among the most terrible years through which the country has ever passed.'<sup>1</sup> The frequent bad harvests of these years impacted heavily on the poorest, coming as they did after a long period of rising food prices, increasing population, growing unemployment, and enclosure of common land, which had traditionally provided a vital safety-net for the poor: from 1500 to 1650, Alan Everitt observes, 'the labouring community, as a whole, was being gradually disinherited and impoverished'.<sup>2</sup> Food riots, and even occasional deaths from starvation, continued through the 1640s.<sup>3</sup> Herrick's poem is often discussed

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Bowden, 'Agricultural Prices, Farm Profits, and Rents', in *Chapters from The Agrarian History of England and Wales: Volume 1, Economic Change: Prices, Wages, Profits and Rents, 1500-1750*, ed. Joan Thirsk and Peter Bowden (CUP, 1990), pp. 13-115, at 41. A range of dates have been conjectured for 'The Hock-Cart', the earliest being John Creaser's suggestion of between 1628 and 1630 ("Times trans-shifting": Chronology and the Misshaping of Herrick,' *ELR* 39 (2009), 163-96, at 188), and the latest James Turner's of 1647 (*The Politics of Landscape: Rural Scenery and Society in English Poetry, 1630-1660* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 151). There is no consensus.

<sup>2</sup> Alan Everitt, 'Farm Labourers, 1500-1640,' in Joan Thirsk and Christopher Clay (eds.), *Chapters from The Agrarian History of England and Wales: Volume 2, Rural Society: Landowners, Peasants and Labourers* (CUP, 1989), pp. 161-245, at 190.

<sup>3</sup> John Bohstedt, *The Politics of Provisions: Food Riots, Moral Economy, and Market Transition in England, c. 1550-1850* (London: Routledge, 2010), pp. 21-90.

in the context of the Jonsonian ‘country house poem’, a genre which pointedly ignores the painful realities governing the lives of the rural working poor, yet its closing lines have repeatedly attracted critical attention for their unusually frank acknowledgement of those realities.<sup>4</sup> The harshness of these lines, however, is only the culmination of undercurrents in the depiction of the labourers throughout the poem, which suggest a stark view of their disempowered state, resonating with traditions of political protest stretching from the Old Testament to contemporary pamphleteers. Even as, on one level, Herrick’s poem participates in the familiar mystifications by which the landed class were wont to justify social inequality, at the same time it exposes those mystifications as distortions and perversions of Christian doctrine, and subtextually conveys a sombre critique of socioeconomic injustice and oppression. Beneath the surface celebration of mirth and festivity, with its deeply conservative implications, we find a recognition of controversy, perhaps even a rejection of the ideology which the surface of the poem apparently works to promote. The main work of the current article will be to uncover that disturbing subtext; at the end we shall consider what the reader is to do in the face of these irreconcilable voices, and what could have motivated Herrick to

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<sup>4</sup> Brief but seminal treatments by Robert Lougy, ‘Herrick’s The Hock Cart: Or Harvest Home,’ *Explicator* 23 (Oct. 1964), item 13, and Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (Oxford: OUP, 1975), pp. 33-34. See also Peter Stallybrass, “‘Wee feaste in our Defense:’ Patrician Carnival in Early Modern England and Robert Herrick’s ‘Hesperides,’” *ELR* 16 (1986), 234-252 (at 246-7); Leah Marcus, *The Politics of Mirth: Jonson, Herrick, Milton, Marvell, and the Defense of Old Holiday Pastimes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), pp. 146-49; Ann Baynes Coiro, *Robert Herrick’s Hesperides and the Epigram Book Tradition* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), pp. 156-58; James Holstun, *Ehud’s Dagger: Class Struggle in the English Revolution* (London: Verso, 2000), pp. 416-18. Anthony Low notes Herrick’s ‘realism’ and ‘openness’ approvingly (*The Georgic Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), p. 23; see also 268-69). Andrew McRae sees a ‘tough economic pragmatism...endorsing the profits as well as the pleasures of the land’, in line with contemporary discourse on agricultural ‘improvement’ (*God Speed the Plough: The Representation of Agrarian England, 1500-1660* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), p. 291).

create such a mercurially ambiguous poem.

## I Subjects and Objects

Though the poem opens with an address to the labourers who will be its main focus, it emphasises from the beginning the class division separating them from the speaker, the dedicatee and implicitly the reader:

Come, Sons of Summer, by whose toile

We are the Lords of Wine and Oile:

By whose tough labours, and rough hands,

We rip up first, then reap our lands.<sup>5</sup>

It is clear that the ‘we’ of the second line does not include the labourers. A seventeenth-century reader would not naturally ascribe ‘toile’, ‘tough labours’ or ‘rough hands’ to a ‘Lord’. Even taking ‘Lord’ not as a title but as a looser suggestion of ownership (in one of the senses the OED lists under group I rather than group II), ‘Wine and Oile’ (‘those notably un-English crops’, as Leah Marcus observes)<sup>6</sup> are not goods to which a contemporary labourer would have had easy access. This will be confirmed when Herrick notes the absence of wine from the workers’ supper: ‘If smirking Wine be wanting here,/There’s that which drowns all care, stout Beere’. (36-7) An expensive import, wine was beyond the reach of the poor, who were restricted to locally manufactured and affordable ale and beer, and upon this reality was built the ideological construct that the lower classes were suited by nature to beer-drinking, which reflected their coarse tastes and

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<sup>5</sup> ‘The Hock-Cart, or Harvest home: To the Right Honourable, Mildmay, Earle of Westmorland,’ no. 250 in Ruth Connolly and Thomas Cain, *The Complete Poetry of Robert Herrick* (Oxford: OUP, 2013), vol. 1. (ll. 1-4). All quotations of Herrick will be from this edition.

<sup>6</sup> Marcus, *Politics of Mirth*, 147-8.

unrefined constitution.<sup>7</sup> The consumption of wine is a recurrent motif throughout the *Hesperides*, serving to mark Herrick, the friends who join him in the symposia he describes, and implicitly the reader as members of a refined social elite.<sup>8</sup> In an exception which proves the rule, ‘*To his peculiar friend M. Jo: Wicks*’ (1056) looks forward to visiting his old friend and sharing beer, not wine. The theme of the poem is the straitened circumstances of both men, since Herrick has just been expelled from his living at Dean Prior, while Weekes has managed to keep hold of his rectory at Shirwell, though losing his other church benefices:

Since shed or Cottage I have none,  
I sing the more, that thou hast one;  
To whose glad threshold, and free door  
I may a Poet come, though poor.

The departure from Herrick’s usual wine-drinking habits in that poem is intended to register as poignant, and part of a not-quite-serious pose of poverty: Herrick, we are still to understand, belongs naturally among the lords of wine. The labourers of ‘The Hock Cart’ do not. Meanwhile, ‘Lord’ makes several other appearances in the course of the poem, but only to denote Fane himself. Herrick addresses him formally as ‘my Lord’ in line 7, and when the poem turns to address the

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<sup>7</sup> On the class associations and politicization of wine and beer in the seventeenth century, see Charles Ludington, *The Politics of Wine in Britain: A New Cultural History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), ch. 1, Joshua Scodel’s *Excess and the Mean in Early Modern Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), ch. 7, and the chapters by Cedric C. Brown, Stella Achilleos, Marika Keblusek, and Angela McShane Jones in *A Pleasing Sinne: Drink and Conviviality in Seventeenth-century England*, ed. Adam Smyth (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004).

<sup>8</sup> On Herrick’s symposium poems, see the chapters by Stella Achilleos and Syrithe Pugh in *Community and Conviviality in the Poetry of Robert Herrick*, ed. Ruth Connolly and Tom Cain (Oxford: OUP, 2011).

labourers again we have references to ‘your Lords hearth’ (26), ‘your Lords health’ (38), and ‘your Lords word’ (51), with an obvious intent to evoke a quasi-feudal relation of dominance and dependence underlying Fane’s roles as landlord and employer. The sons of summer and the lords of wine and oil, then, are clearly separate groups.

This separation produces paradoxical effects in the grammar and logic of the lines. The recognition in the first couplet that the material wealth of Fane and his class is generated and maintained ‘by [the] toile’ of others is already noteworthy,<sup>9</sup> but the new twist put on the same grammatical construction in the second couplet amounts to a conceit highlighting the artificial and counterintuitive nature of this arrangement. The first person form of the verbs in line 4 (‘We rip up...and reap’) grammatically enacts the economic appropriation not just of the *product* of the workers’ labour, but of their very agency. These physical actions of ploughing and reaping can be attributed to the landowner only by treating the bodies of the labourers—their ‘tough labours’ and ‘rough hands’—as mere tools.<sup>10</sup> The workers are dehumanized, in a process which we will see taken further as the poem continues, and the boundary between wage labour and chattel slavery becomes blurred.<sup>11</sup> It is precisely as a living tool that Aristotle defines a slave: ἡ κτήσις πλῆθος ὀργάνων ἐστί, καὶ ὁ δοῦλος κτημά τι ἔμψυχον (‘property generally is a collection of tools, and a slave is a live article of property’).<sup>12</sup> This effect is subtly reinforced by the word ‘Lord’ which

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<sup>9</sup> Cp. Peter Chamberlen, in *The Poore Man's Advocate, or England's Samaritan pouring Oyle and Wyne into the Wounds of the Nation* (1649), p. 30: ‘the Rich men are Fedde and Clothed, and grow Rich, by what they get out of the poores labour, over and above their Maintenance.’

<sup>10</sup> As Holstun observes, they are ‘thoroughly instrumentalized’ by the prepositional phrases of line 3. (*Ehud's Dagger*, p. 418)

<sup>11</sup> The Ranter Laurence Clarkson draws the same analogy in the 1640s, telling the ‘commonalty’ of the rich that ‘your slavery is their liberty, your poverty their prosperity’ (quoted in Christopher Hill, *Liberty Against the Law: Some Seventeenth-Century Controversies* (London: Verso, 2020), p. 59).

<sup>12</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, tr. H. Rackham (London: William Heinemann, 1944), 1253β.

punctuates the poem, having already made its first appearance. Though the socioeconomic overtones of the English word are chiefly feudal (and the OED traces its origins to the Old English *hlāfweard*, or loaf-warden, the head of a household with authority to keep and distribute the bread), it is also the word conventionally used to translate Latin *dominus*, most familiarly in Christian contexts, where Latin *dominus* and English ‘Lord’ are titles for God and for Christ. The Latin word is common in other contexts, and strongly associated with the ownership of property: it can usually be translated as ‘master’, and when applied to relations between human beings, specifically implies ‘slave-master’.<sup>13</sup> Hence in classical Roman writing it is used in political contexts to express republican indignation at despotic rule as an assault on the liberty of the citizen.<sup>14</sup>

Herrick’s lines circle quizzically around the notion of ownership. The repeated ‘whose’ of lines 1 and 3 insistently identifies the exertion and suffering of agricultural work as *belonging* to the labourers, suggesting it is properly their role, the birthright of this social group. Meanwhile, the more tangible property of the ‘Lords of Wine and Oile’ is also insisted upon. Though the end of the poem will work hard to conjure the atmosphere of a subsistence economy, in which food is produced for immediate local consumption, one of the effects of naming these exotic goods here is, to the contrary, to underline the fact that the surplus value of the estate’s produce in the market has enabled Fane to accumulate wealth, becoming not a consumer of home-grown food but a purchaser

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<sup>13</sup> The use of this vocabulary in Christian contexts reflects the way in which New Testament writers (especially Paul) embraced the slave-master relationship as a metaphor for the relation of the Christian to God. The pervasiveness of the trope is obscured for modern readers by the translation of Greek δοῦλος (‘slave’) as ‘servant’ in English bibles. See Isobel A. H. Combes, *The metaphor of slavery in the writings of the early church: from the New Testament to the beginning of the fifth century* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998).

<sup>14</sup> It is thus the Latin equivalent of the Greek *despotēs* (whence our ‘despot’). On the two terms and their significance in classical political thought, see Mary Nyquist, *Arbitrary Rule: Slavery, Tyranny, and the Power of Life and Death* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), ch. 1.

of luxury commodities. With the grammatical contortions of the second couplet, the labourers themselves become his tools, and thus implicitly his possessions. Closing the couplet, 'our lands' emphatically asserts the proprietorial claim which underpins all the others, in an economy where the landowner wields so much more power and control than the precariously employed workers.

The extreme imbalance of power created by this web of property is clearly intended to strike the reader (hinging as it does on the counterintuitive grammatical construction of lines 3-4). But the third couplet rounds off the opening address to the labourers with a gesture aimed at making it palatable:

Crown'd with the eares of corne, now come,  
And, to the Pipe, sing Harvest home. (5-6)

Mimicking the royal crown, ultimate symbol of power and authority, the 'crown' of corn allows the workers to play at being lords and ladies for an hour or two. There is a shade of the temporary festive inversion of social hierarchy associated with Carnival or the Roman Saturnalia; like those its temporal limitation is clear, with the musical performance of line 6 marking it out as ritual performance and (prescriptively recurring) special occasion, rather than a new *status quo*.<sup>15</sup> But the suggestion of social inversion is more muted than in those traditions: the poem allows no disrespect towards their Lord by the labourers, in thought, word, or deed, and the only lowering of Fane's status (if it can be so described) is in his deigning to 'come forth' to see the procession, and to let the labourers enter his house. It is a moment of freedom rather than power which is being experienced, or perhaps rather imagined and enacted, here. Only at this moment of licensed festivity, and only in ritual play, can the radically disempowered labourers enjoy momentary relief from subjection.

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<sup>15</sup> On Carnival and Saturnalia, see Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Cambridge, Mass., 1968), esp. pp. 7-11.

That the mock crowns are made of corn, meanwhile, contributes to an impression of the labourers as more a part of nature than of human society, an impression which began with their designation as ‘Sons of Summer’ in the opening line. Such close identification with the seasons is something more intuitively associated with lower life-forms than the human. It is nevertheless a socioeconomic fact that rural workers were more affected by the cycle of the seasons than their social superiors, since agricultural work was seasonal, and wages too low (after decades of rising food prices) to permit saving to buffer against extended periods of unemployment.<sup>16</sup> Harvest-time was one period of the year when opportunities for paid employment were abundant, but many of those attending Fane’s supper would have been day-labourers hired for harvest, rather than ‘farm servants’ on an annual contract. With significant and rising rural unemployment in the first half of the seventeenth century, these casual workers would likely have to rely on poor relief, private charity, or commoning rights to get themselves—and their families—through leaner times of the year.<sup>17</sup> Calling them ‘Sons of Summer’ tacitly registers the feeling that only during this season does their condition bear contemplating. Herrick averts our eyes from the thought of these same people in winter, and the scarcity they are likely to endure, encouraging us to think of them as if their lives—like those of butterflies or gnats—did not extend beyond this moment of plenty. Again they are dehumanized, but this time there are aesthetic and religious as well as political aspects involved. The selective focus on the summer portion of the labourers’ lives makes a more pleasing picture for the consumption of Herrick’s contemporary readers (who, possessing the money to buy and the education to read his volume, probably identify more closely with the ‘Lords of Wine and Oile’ than with the labourers). Meanwhile, to see the labourers as part of nature, and subject to the perennial cycle of the seasons rather than the forces of history, implies that their lot is inevitable, rather than the consequence of injustice and exploitation. Indeed, since Christians believe nature to

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<sup>16</sup> See Bowden, ‘Agricultural Prices,’ pp.39-41; Alan Everitt, ‘Farm Labourers, 1500-1640,’ p. 164.

<sup>17</sup> Steve Hindle, *On the Parish: The Micro-Politics of Poor Relief in Rural England C.1550-1750* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), pp. 15-95.



be governed by a benign Providence, there can be no injustice, no undeserved suffering and no cause for complaint in such a picture.

However, a jarring note disturbs this suggested harmony, thanks to the particularly violent verbs chosen in line 4. It is possible to think of ploughing as working in concert with nature, loosening and turning over the soil to improve fertility and promote healthy new growth. But for Herrick here it is to ‘rip up’ the land, suggesting ruthless violence. It particularly recalls well-known Ovidian and Senecan passages denouncing the avarice which drives men of the vice-ridden iron age to delve in the bowels (*viscera*) or veins (*venas*) of the earth for gold.<sup>18</sup> To harvest the crops, meanwhile, is here to ‘reap’ the land itself, rather than simply the year’s growth, suggesting destructive finality and no care for sustainability.<sup>19</sup> The labour which is the purpose and employment of the labourers and the source of Fane’s wealth, then, is pointedly presented as in itself an act of violence against nature. Thanks once again to the first person subject of these verbs, it is the Lords of Wine and Oile who are presented as the real perpetrators of this violence, as well as its chief beneficiaries. If the labourers are part of nature, this makes them a resource to be exploited by men more powerful than themselves, and greedy for gain.

## II Human Resources

At line 7, Fane himself is invited to come forth and see the cart and procession, displayed for us by Herrick’s description. The ‘Country Art’ of the labourers themselves has worked to produce an aesthetic spectacle here, visible in the ‘maukin’ (an effigy, perhaps made of corn), the horses draped in white linen, and the oak-leaves decorating the sheaves. Herrick’s intended effect is not quite the same as theirs, however. We are invited to look down on this display, perhaps benignly, but

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<sup>18</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses* I.137-40; Seneca, *Natural Questions* 5.15.2; pseudo-Seneca, *Octavia* 416-18.

<sup>19</sup> This usage (OED **reap** 3, with the land as the direct object of the verb) is attested in and before the seventeenth century, but is much rarer than usages where the crops are the direct object (OED **reap** 2a-c, and compare 4a-b).

undoubtedly from a superior position, and with more amusement than admiration. There are only desultory gestures towards the products of ‘Country Art’—‘See, here a *Maukin*, there a sheet’ (9)—with no curiosity as to their meaning or purpose; our attention is focussed instead on the quaint, somewhat comical spectacle of the ‘Rusticks’ (23) themselves, with their efforts at pageantry forming part of their amusing behaviour. Even the list of quasi-religious observances carried out by the labourers at lines 19-22 is tinged with a patronising tone:

Some blesse the Cart; some kisse the sheaves;

Some prank them up with Oaken leaves:

Some crosse the Fill-horse; some with great

Devotion, stroak the home-borne wheat:

While other Rusticks, lesse attent

To Prayers, then to Merryment,

Run after with their breeches rent. (19-25)

Elsewhere in *Hesperides*, an air of reverence generally attends Herrick’s allusions to rituals, but these lines seem intended to evoke a slightly supercilious smile at the superstitions of ignorant rustics—perhaps most clearly when their stroking of the wheat is prefaced and ironically amplified by the adverbial phrase ‘with great/Devotion’, suspended across the enjambed lines. The retrospective classing of these gestures as ‘Prayers’ sounds ironic: Herrick adopts the tone of the country vicar admonishing his parishioners to follow the orthodox practices of the Anglican church, as he must often have done at Dean Prior, but misapplies it for comic effect. The superstitious ‘Rusticks’ emerge with scarcely more dignity than their more boisterous companions, whose torn breeches are at once a sign of poverty and a cause for scornful laughter.

But the more insidiously demeaning implications are to be found in the preceding lines:

The Horses, Mares, and frisking Fillies,  
(Clad, all, in Linnen, white as Lillies.)  
The Harvest Swaines, and Wenches bound  
For joy, to see the *Hock-cart* crown'd.  
About the Cart, heare, how the Rout  
Of Rurall Younglings raise the shout... (11-16)

Cumulation is more important than distinction in this crowd-scene, so that the effect is an indiscriminate mingling of animals and humans. If anything, it is the horses which dominate the impression, being singled out for special attention (and graced with a simile) by the line on their unusual clothing. (The line also has biblical overtones, to which we shall return.) That clothing in itself contributes to a blurring of the line between human and animal. The human members of the crowd seem to fall into the same mould as they follow on from the animals, with the same three categories presented in the same order: just as adult male 'horses' are followed by adult female 'mares' and then young 'fillies', so 'Swaines' are followed by 'Wenches' and finally 'Younglings'. That last term is telling: of all the possible English words for children, Herrick picks the one which could refer equally to animal young.

The suggestion that the labourers are, in a sense, part of Fane's livestock, is subtly conveyed, not crassly stated. But coming after their striking instrumentalization in the opening lines, and those lines' preoccupation with questions of ownership, it seems calculated to convey this idea to the reader, if only at an unconscious level (which is where such toxic ideas work most effectively). The implication of slavery which we noted above returns: as Henry Parker would soon put it, in *Jus populi* (1644), a slave 'is his Lords absolute possession, as a horse, or any reall or personall chattell is'.<sup>20</sup> (We should remember that 'chattel' and 'cattle' are in origin merely

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<sup>20</sup> Henry Parker, *Jus populi* (London, 1644), p. 36.

different forms of the same word, both ultimately deriving from the Latin adjective *capitalis* used to describe a person's 'head-' or principal property or wealth. 'Cattle' was only gradually restricted to beasts over the course of the sixteenth century.)<sup>21</sup> The horses which introduced this list are working farm animals, whose labour contributes to the profit of Fane's estate, just as the 'Rusticks' do, while the specification of male, female and young among the group suggests a concern with stock-breeding to ensure a continuing supply of labour, equine and human alike.

As the poem continues, Herrick's renewed address to the labourers as 'brave boyes' sounds, on the surface, benevolent, if patronizing. But the patronizing tone has similar dark undercurrents. Aristotle influentially argued in the *Politics* that human beings lacking deliberative reason were 'natural slaves', needing to be governed by a master since they were unfit to govern themselves; he draws an analogy with children, who are in need of similar government until they reach maturity, since in them the deliberative faculty is not yet fully developed.<sup>22</sup> Infantilization thus became a common rhetorical ploy in justifications of slavery,<sup>23</sup> and in this poem it forms a part of Herrick's systematic denial of agency to the labourers, both here and again at line 45, where they are addressed as 'frollick boyes'.

We shall pass over the feast itself for now, and pick up the poem again at this point, where Herrick anticipates the resumption of labour when the holiday is over:

Drink frollick boyes, till all be blythe.

Feed, and grow fat; and as ye eat,

Be mindfull that the lab'ring Neat

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<sup>21</sup> See OED **cattle**: *etymology*.

<sup>22</sup> Aristotle, *Politics* 1260a. On the idea of slaves as childlike in Athenian thought, see Mark Golden, 'Pais, "child" and "slave",' *L'Antiquité Classique* 54 (1985), 91-104.

<sup>23</sup> See ch. 3 of Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man: The Definitive Refutation to the Argument of The Bell Curve* (New York: Norton, 1996).

(As you) may have their fill of meat.

And know, besides, ye must revoke

The patient Oxe unto the Yoke,

And all goe back unto the Plough... (43-9)

The subtly dehumanizing effect of Herrick's choice of the verb 'feed' in this intransitive sense, more commonly used of animals, will not be surprising by now. But lest we should fail to notice it, or dismiss it as irrelevant, Herrick quickly follows it up with his first explicit comparison of the workers to livestock. Even as they enjoy it, the feast should remind them of their duty to feed the animals, for 'the lab'ring Neat' need to eat their fill in precisely the same way they themselves do.<sup>24</sup> This is part of the work which remains for the labourers (or at least for those fortunate enough to enjoy continuing employment on the estate), and as Herrick passes on smoothly to the other labours which lie ahead, we have yet again a bundling together of human and animal in the parallels of lines 48 and 49. The ox must return to the yoke, the labourers to the plough. The implied analogy does not need a repetition of the explicit 'As you' to be clear, and the proverbial patience of the ox is the very patience to which Herrick (vicar-like again) is exhorting the feasters. Moreover, it is not, to be precise, the labourers who must 'goe back unto the Plough', but rather 'ye...all', with the suggestion that this category encompasses human and animal labourers together (and since the yoked oxen will be pulling the plough, this makes obvious sense).

The distinction between the ox returning to the yoke and 'all' returning to the plough is so attenuated, that a mental image of the labourers themselves assuming a yoke hovers in the background. This adds a new strand to the poem's persistent evocation of slavery, for 'yoke' (Greek ζυγόν, Latin *iugum*) is a common and ancient metaphor for slavery or subjection to tyranny in English, classical and biblical sources alike. The metaphor is inscribed in the English language in

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<sup>24</sup> Marcus observes of the closing section of the poem 'the laborers...become almost indistinguishable from their own animals'. (*Politics of Mirth*, p. 149)

our verb ‘to subjugate’, derived from Latin *sub* (‘under’) and *iugare* (the verb ‘to yoke’). In Roman sources, the idea of being *sub iugum* occurs not only as a metaphor for slavery or subjection, but also in references to a traditional ritual, in which a defeated army would be made to pass under a *iugum* (so called, suggesting that it represents the agricultural implement) made from three spears.<sup>25</sup> Undergoing this ritual seems to have been an alternative to death or enslavement, yet symbolising a submission to the conqueror on the part of the man whose life has been spared which is felt to be as degrading and humiliating as slavery.<sup>26</sup> In Greek classical sources, ζυγόν is also used in the metaphorical sense: Liddell and Scott cite examples, in the phrase δούλιον ζυγόν (‘the yoke of slavery’) or ἀνάγκης ζυγόν (‘the yoke of constraint’), from Herodotus and all three tragedians. In the Old Testament, yoke is frequently used as a metaphor for slavery, subjection to a foreign power, or oppressive rule. In Ezekiel 34, for instance, God promises to deliver his chosen people (or flock—the chapter employs the common pastoral allegory) from the bad shepherds who have ruled them ‘with force and with cruelty’, who ‘eat the fat, and...kill them that are fed: but...feed not the flock’ (34:3-4):

and they shall be safe in their land, and shall know that I am the Lord, when I have  
*broken the bands of their yoke*, and delivered them out of the hand of those that served  
themselves of them. (34:27, my italics)

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<sup>25</sup> For discussion, see Myles Lavan, *Slaves to Rome: Paradigms of Empire in Roman Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), ch. 2. For examples of the metaphor see Tacitus, *Agricola* 15 and 31 (on subject nations throwing off the yoke of Rome’s colonial rule), and Cicero’s *Philippics*, 1.6 (on Caesar’s assassins having removed the yoke of slavery from the neck of Rome). For the ritual, see e.g. Livy, *Ab urbe condita* Book III, 28.10-11 and Book IX, 5-6.

<sup>26</sup> See Arjen van Lil, ‘The Pass Under the Yoke: Denoting the Defeated in Ancient Italic Ritual Practice,’ *Kleos: Amsterdam Bulletin of Ancient Studies and Archaeology* 3 (2020), 42-63.

Like several other prophetic texts from the Old Testament, this resonates with ‘The *Hock-Cart*’ in more significant ways, too. One of these is in its imagery of predation, already evident in these quotations. To see its relevance to Herrick’s poem, we must turn to the feast itself.

### **III Consumer Society**

Slavery is not the only disturbing connotation of the conflation of the labourers with livestock. In the description of the supper provided for the workers, animals feature prominently again, but in a different capacity:

Ye shall see first the large and cheefe  
Foundation of your Feast, Fat Beeffe:  
With Upper Stories, Mutton, Veale  
And Bacon, (which makes full the meale)  
With sev’rall dishes standing by,  
As here a Custard, there a Pie,  
And here all tempting Frumentie. (28-34)

As seventeenth-century tastes and aspirations would lead us to expect, the glory of this feast is the quantity and variety of meat, overshadowing the other dishes. For landless labourers, it would be especially so, since meat was too expensive to feature prominently in their diet.<sup>27</sup> On the most obvious level, this is intended as a mark of Fane’s munificence. It functions within the poem to suggest bounteous recompense to the labourers, beyond their wages, for the toil which makes Fane a Lord of Wine and Oile—and simultaneously to create an illusion of indebtedness binding them to

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<sup>27</sup> Bowden, ‘Agricultural Prices,’ p. 22. Note, however, that the meats specified here are those deemed appropriate for the labouring classes by their social superiors: see Paul Lloyd, *Food and Identity in England, 1540–1640: Eating to Impress* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), ch. 2.

future labour. For now, I want to focus on the figural functions of this meat, rather than its role in labour relations.

With the carnivorous nature of the harvest supper established so emphatically, we may begin to detect further resonances in those lines, already discussed above, which follow soon after:

Feed, and grow fat; and as ye eat,

Be mindfull that the lab'ring Neat

(As you) may have their fill of meat. (45-7)

That the cattle's fodder is called 'meat' in line 46 will be more jarring to the modern reader than it would have been to a contemporary, since 'meat' still retained its original and general sense of 'food' (as in the senses grouped together in section I of OED, **meat**). Though it was also already in use as a specific term for flesh, as opposed to other edibles (section II of the OED entry), this usage had not yet become exclusive, as it is today. Nevertheless, such a reading would have been available to the contemporary reader, who—with mouth still watering from the catalogue of red meats at lines 28-31—might well have found it springing readily to mind. The thought would be an unwelcome and disturbing one, since carnivorous cows would not only be unnatural and therefore monstrous, but also carry overtones of cannibalism. Here the mind circles back uneasily to the poem's tendency to confuse the categories of human and animal, for the labourers themselves have certainly been consuming quantities of flesh, with gusto and few vegetarian accompaniments. At this point we might become conscious of another disturbing aspect of the instruction, 'Feed, and grow fat'. The alliteration on 'f', and the word 'fat' itself, echo line 29's 'Foundation of your Feast, Fat Beefe', whose resonant final spondee—further reinforced typographically by the unusual capitalization of the adjective—will have made a lasting impression. That beef was 'Fat' because it was well fed while still alive, by farm-workers mindful of their duty to see that it got its fill of meat (in the general sense), just as Herrick's feasters must now be. In eating their supper, the farm-



workers resemble not only the beasts of burden who must be kept strong and healthy with good fodder—‘the lab’ring Neat’ who pull the plough—but also the beef-cattle being fattened for consumption. When we glance ahead a couple of lines to the injunction ‘Feed him ye must, whose food fills you’ (52)—a line which resonates strongly with 29 and 45, through its opening ‘Feed’ and its alliteration on ‘f’—what is evoked begins to appear less like a straightforward economic exchange of labour in return for Fane’s benefactions, and more like a closing of the loop in a food cycle. ‘Feed’ here takes on overtones of OED sense 4, ‘to be, or serve as food for’, with the suggestion that Fane occupies the position of top predator.

This implication of cannibalism has always seemed so obvious to me that I have been surprised it is never mentioned,<sup>28</sup> bemused at how carefully I have to spell it out before friends or students can see it (or at least escape the embarrassing conversation by saying that they do), and sometimes worried that I may have an overactive or diseased imagination (particularly since this is the not the first poem in which I have found myself drawing attention to cannibalism references).<sup>29</sup> However, I prefer to think that people don’t notice it, or *allow* themselves to notice it, because the thought of cannibalism is so repugnant that we instinctively avoid it where possible, and will actively resist it if the context is recognisably akin to our own culture or society.<sup>30</sup> Yet its power to

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<sup>28</sup> The closest I have encountered to a hint is Anthony Low’s locution, ‘reminding the workers that they are feasted not for their pleasure but in order *to fatten them up* for more labor’ (*Georgic Revolution*, pp. 268-9; my italics).

<sup>29</sup> ‘Fanshawe’s Critique of Caroline Pastoral: Allusion and Ambiguity in the “Ode on the Proclamation”,’ *Review of English Studies* 59 (2008), 379-391 (at 388-9).

<sup>30</sup> Claude Rawson’s ‘Unspeakable rites: Cultural reticence and the cannibal question,’ *Social Research* 66 (1999), 167-193 is an interesting meditation on other effects of this reticence, including in metaphorical references to cannibalism as a refuge from acknowledging literal cannibalism in one’s own society. What I am discussing here is not literal but metaphorical cannibalism, but the same reticence may be responsible for a tendency to register allusions to cannibalism only when they are explicit and undeniable (as in the

provoke this instinctive repugnance is what has made it such an effective and affective trope for poets and polemicists across the ages.<sup>31</sup> It is worth setting Herrick's poem aside for a moment, to establish how commonplace and readily interpretable the trope would have been for his contemporary readers.

Already in Homer we find frequent references to cannibalism—though we should now use the Greek term, anthropophagy (literally 'eating humans'), for the word 'cannibal' originates only at the end of the fifteenth century, as a distortion of 'Carib', the name of a tribe whom Columbus believed to be anthropophagous. Most germane to our purposes is the earliest example in the *Iliad* (and thus in western literature), where Achilles addresses Agamemnon as δημοβόρος βασιλεὺς (literally 'people-devouring king', I.231). Apollo has inflicted a plague on the Greek forces, which can be ended only by returning the captive Chryseis to her father, but Chryseis is Agamemnon's slave, and he will relinquish her only if he can take Achilles' slave Briseis to make good his loss. Achilles' metaphor is a colourful repetition of his earlier accusations, that Agamemnon is 'greediest

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examples I am about to give), rather than part of the subtler and shadowy hinterland of connotation in a poem. Literal cannibalism among native Englishmen, as a recourse in times of starvation, was not unheard of in the period. On the public memory of cannibalism during an early fourteenth-century famine in England see Steve Hindle, 'Imagining Insurrection in Seventeenth-Century England: Representations of the Midland Rising of 1607,' *History Workshop Journal* 66 (2008), 27 and note 35; on contemporary awareness of more recent examples among Englishmen abroad, see Lauren Working, 'Violating the Body of the Law: Cannibalism in Jacobean Political Discourse,' *XVII-XVIII: Revue de la Société d'études anglo-américaines des XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles* 71 (2014), 157-175.

<sup>31</sup> Devoting a chapter to the theme of cannibalism in *The Modern Satiric Grotesque and its Traditions* (Lexington, Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 1991), John R. Clarke observes that it is precisely this instinctive repugnance which makes the topic appealing to satirists: 'Because of its perennial power to startle...cannibalism has been throughout history the subject of satire; the satirist repetitiously rubs the spectator's nose in a topic the observer would ardently prefer to leave alone.' (p. 132) It is for the same reason that it features so often in political protest and critique in other varieties of literature, too.

for gain of all men', 'with [his] mind forever on profit' (I.122, 149, in Richmond Lattimore's translation). Though, as leader and 'shepherd of the people' (II.243), Agamemnon should be most concerned for the public good, he is instead abusing his political power to amass personal wealth at his people's expense. This metaphorical usage, which Kirk considers was already 'no doubt...something of a commonplace', will become a staple in critiques of the abuse of power for self-enrichment at the expense of the common wealth, and in the critique of tyranny in general.<sup>32</sup>

Biblical examples from the same period are found in the prophets Isaiah and Micah, condemning the ruling elite of Judah for their oppression of the poor. Micah's diatribe reaches a climax with God's curse (*Mic.* 3:1-3):

And I said, Hear, I pray you, O heads of Jacob, and ye princes of the house of Israel; Is it not for you to know judgment? Who hate the good, and love the evil; who pluck off their skin from off them, and their flesh from off their bones; Who also eat the flesh of my people, and flay their skin from off them; and they break their bones, and chop them in pieces, as for the pot, and as flesh within the caldron.<sup>33</sup>

Micah is the most bitingly outspoken of the four 'eighth-century prophets' of the Old Testament (Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and Micah), all of whom focus on economic injustice. Their shared concerns have been usefully set against the background of the changing economy of eighth-century Israel and Judah, which saw a rapid intensification of agriculture aimed at increasing wheat, olive oil, and wine production for international trade, to be exchanged for luxury imports fuelling the 'conspicuous consumption' of the ruling class in the cities. In the hill country, which had previously practised subsistence agriculture, villagers were forced to specialise in oil and wine production. The process 'widened the already gaping economic chasm between the wealthy urban elite and most

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<sup>32</sup> G. S. Kirk, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, Vol. I: Books 1-4 (Cambridge: CUP, 1985), *ad loc.* (p. 77).

<sup>33</sup> Cp. Isaiah 3:15. English bible quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise stated.

peasants and artisans...[and] pauperized portions of those already poor.’<sup>34</sup> The abuses about which Micah complains include (as one scholar catalogues them):

enclosure of fields (2:2, 4); foreclosure following on insolvency (2:2, 9)—literally stripping the clothes off their backs (2:8; cf. Amos 2:8); forced labour (3.10); the falsification of weights and measures (6:11); bribery and corruption of the judicial system (3:11), and so on.<sup>35</sup>

As this author observes, the list is ‘depressingly familiar’; it will certainly ring a bell for scholars of early modern England, where analogous experiences provoked similar protests, often expressed through the same imagery of anthropophagy which Micah had used.

The enclosure of common land was a prominent and highly contentious part of agricultural ‘improvement’ in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and a major driver of the agrarian capitalism emerging and rising to dominance through the period.<sup>36</sup> In English law, the freemen of a local community (which, after Elizabeth’s manumission of the few remaining serfs in 1575, meant all of its members), enjoyed a plethora of specific usufruct rights, not only on lands designated as

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<sup>34</sup> Marvin L. Chaney, ‘The Political Economy of Peasant Poverty: What the Eighth-Century Prophets Presumed but Did Not State,’ *The Journal of Religion & Society* 35, supplement 10 (2014), 37; conveniently reprinted with others on related topics, in Marvin L. Chaney, *Peasants, Prophets, and Political Economy: The Hebrew Bible and Social Analysis* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2017).

<sup>35</sup> Joseph Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel* (rev. ed. Westminster: John Knox Press, 1996), pp. 93-4.

<sup>36</sup> On agrarian capitalism see T. H. Aston and C. H. E. Philpin (eds.), *The Brenner Debate: Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-industrial Europe* (Cambridge, 1985), and Leigh Shaw-Taylor, ‘The Rise of Agrarian Capitalism and the Decline of Family Farming in England’, *The Economic History Review* 65 (2012), 1-35.

‘common’ (i.e. lands not belonging to a royal forest), but also on forest land. These rights were set out in detail in the *Carta de foresta*, which received the royal seal at the same time as the *Magna Carta*, in 1217, and was confirmed as statute law along with it in 1297.<sup>37</sup> They included rights to pasture for livestock (*agistment*) and mast for swine (*pannage*), to gather wood for building and fuel (*estovers*), to fish in streams and rivers (*piscary*), to glean grain after harvest and mow meadows for hay, to catch rabbits, gather nuts, soft fruits, mushrooms, honey, and medicinal herbs, and to cultivate allocated strips of land. These rights were common to each local community, who were all thus ‘commoners’ regardless of wealth or social status, but of course they were particularly valuable to the poor, providing a means of subsistence in times of dearth or unemployment, and a much-needed supplement to meagre incomes in better times.<sup>38</sup> The beginning of the sixteenth century saw a renewed and escalating assault on these customary rights, as landowners fenced off more and more land, in order to convert it to uses more profitable in the marketplace, generating personal wealth for themselves, but denying local ‘commoners’ access to resources on which they had always relied. Henry VIII’s parcelling out in patronage to favourites of the ten million acres of Church lands acquired at the dissolution of the monasteries was a significant moment in this process, and the ultimate source of Fane’s family wealth. The aggressive assertion of property rights over the traditional usufruct rights of communities was driven at first by a desire to take advantage of high prices in the wool trade, resulting in the conversion of large tracts of lands to pasture for landlords’ flocks, often involving the eviction of tenants, demolition of dwellings, and of course an end to local opportunities for agricultural employment. But the desire to implement new intensive agricultural methods also contributed to the continuing practice of enclosure as the period wore on.

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<sup>37</sup> On the charter and its legacy see N. Robinson, ‘The Charter of the Forest: Evolving Human Rights in Nature,’ in D. B. Magraw, A. Martínez and R. E. Brownell (eds.), *Magna Carta and the Rule of Law* (Chicago: American Bar Association, 2014), pp. 311-77; and Guy Standing, *Plunder of the Commons: A Manifesto for Sharing Public Wealth* (Penguin: Milton Keynes, 2019).

<sup>38</sup> Hindle, *On the Parish*, pp. 27-48.

In combination with dramatic rises both in population and in food prices between 1500 and the mid-seventeenth century, enclosures contributed to large-scale social problems of rural unemployment, debt, destitution and vagrancy.<sup>39</sup>

Throughout the period, enclosures sparked protests, both written and physical.<sup>40</sup> Of the written protests, perhaps the most famous is voiced by Hythlodæus in Thomas More's *Utopia* in 1516, and is built around the same trope:

“Your sheep”, I said, “that commonly are so meek and eat so little; now, as I hear, they have become so greedy and fierce that they devour human beings themselves. They devastate and depopulate fields, houses and towns. For in whatever parts of the land sheep yield the finest and thus the most expensive wool, there the nobility and gentry, yes, and even a good many abbots—holy men—are not content with the old rents that the land yielded to their predecessors. Living in idleness and luxury without doing society any good no longer satisfies them; they have to do positive harm.... Thus, so that one greedy, insatiable glutton, a frightful plague to his native country, may enclose thousands of acres within a single fence, the tenants are ejected...”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> On social consequences see John Walter and Roger Schofield (eds.), *Famine, Disease and the Social Order in Early Modern Society* (Cambridge, 1989), chapters 1 and 2, and A. L. Beier, *Masterless Men: The Vagrancy Problem in England, 1560-1640* (London, 1985). On poverty and class divisions generally, see Hill, *Liberty Against the Law*, pp. 47-144.

<sup>40</sup> See Roger B. Manning, *Village Revolts: Social Protest and Popular Disturbances in England 1509-1640* (Oxford, 1988) and P. Linebaugh, *The Magna Carta Manifesto: Liberties and Commons for All* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

<sup>41</sup> Thomas More, *Utopia*, ed. and tr. George M. Logan and Robert M. Adams (rev. ed., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 18-19

Admittedly, it is the sheep who are presented as man-eating monsters here, but when the landowner is described not merely as avaricious but as an ‘insatiable glutton, a frightful plague to his native country’ (*helluo inexplebilis ac dira pestis patriae*) the accusation rubs off on him too. Introducing the conversation with Hythloday earlier in the text, More relates that he and his companion pressed the traveller with eager questions about ‘the wise and prudent provisions that he observed among the civilised nations’, but ‘made no inquiries about monsters, for nothing is less new or strange than they are. There is no place where you will not find Scyllas, ravenous Celaenos, people-eating (*populiuoros*) Laestrygonians and that sort of monstrosity, but well and wisely trained citizens you will hardly find anywhere.’<sup>42</sup> The man-eating sheep and their masters, when we meet them a few pages later, explain the satirical point to anyone who did not grasp it at the time.

It is often in the context of enclosures that our image crops up. In the mid-century, Robert Crowley calls enclosers men who ‘woud eate up menne, women & chyldren’.<sup>43</sup> Phillip Stubbes employs similar imagery for the same purpose in 1583:

For these inclosures be the causes why rich men eat vp poore men, as beasts doo eat grasse: These, I say, are the Caterpillers and deuouring locustes that massacre the poore, & eat vp the whole realme to the destruction of the same.<sup>44</sup>

Even perpetrators were capable of using the metaphor of themselves: Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester wrote ‘I am like the ogre in the old tale, and have eaten up all my neighbors’.<sup>45</sup> Another version is found in Shakespeare’s *Pericles*, where one fisherman ‘marvel[s] how the fishes live in

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>43</sup> J. M. Cowper (ed.), *The Select Works of Robert Crowley* (Ann Arbor, 1872), p. 132.

<sup>44</sup> F. J. Furnivall, *Phillip Stubbes's Anatomy of the Abuses in England in Shakspeare's youth A.D. 1583* (London: Trübner, 1877-82), Part I, p. 117.

<sup>45</sup> Quoted in Maurice Dobb, *Studies in the Development of Capitalism* (New York, 1947), p. 227.

the sea,' and his companion replies

Why, as men do a-land; the great ones eat up the little ones. I can compare our rich misers to nothing so fitly as to a whale: 'a plays and tumbles, driving the poor fry before him, and at last devours them all at a mouthful. Such whales have I heard on o' th' land, who never leave gaping till they swallow'd the whole parish, church, steeple, bells, and all. (2.1.26-34)

This piscatory variation has its own long history in satire on the oppression of the poor.<sup>46</sup> Beyond the specific theme of economic exploitation, we should also remember the similarly ancient tradition representing the tyrant as one who 'drinketh his subjects blood, gnaweth their bones, and out of them also sucketh even the marrow,' as Bodin puts it.<sup>47</sup>

Periodically throughout the period, enclosures (whether for pasture or for intensive agriculture) provoked riots, and necessitated laws to restrain the worst excesses of landlords—laws which, however, were often poorly enforced. The Midlands Uprising of 1607 culminated in a particularly bloody episode enacted less than twenty miles from Apethorpe Palace, where the five-year-old Mildmay Fane was living. A large group of people calling themselves 'levellers' engaged in destroying fences and digging up illegal enclosures near Kettering, until they were brutally put down by a private army led by Fane's grandfather, Anthony Mildmay, and Edward Montagu, another local landowner.<sup>48</sup> Some forty or fifty protesters were killed in a cavalry charge; others were subsequently executed, their quartered remains displayed in towns across the county as a

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<sup>46</sup> See Wolfgang Miedler, *Tradition and Innovation in Folk Literature* (Routledge, 2016), ch. 6.

<sup>47</sup> For examples and discussion see Nyquist, *Arbitrary Rule*, chapters 1, 2 and 10 (quoting Bodin at p. 357).

<sup>48</sup> On these events, see Hindle, 'Imagining Insurrection'; on the Midlands Uprising generally, see John E. Martin, *Feudalism to Capitalism: Peasant and Landlord in English Agrarian Development*, (London, 1983), pp. 159-215; and Manning, *Village Revolts*, pp. 229-46.



warning to others. Perhaps some of the labourers represented in Herrick's poem would remember the spectacle. A few years earlier, in 1603, James I had travelled through the county and met with crowds complaining of 'wolfish Lords, that have eaten up poor husbandmen like sheep'; the 'levellers' of 1607 similarly spoke of 'tyrants which would grind our flesh on the whetstone of poverty', an image drawn (as Hindle points out) from Isaiah 3:15.<sup>49</sup>

#### **IV The Plough (the Common-wealth)**

The most fully developed articulation of resistance to enclosures from the period is in a series of pamphlets by Gerard Winstanley, spokesman of the 'True Levellers' or 'Diggers', who occupied and cultivated enclosed lands on St. George's Hill and several other locations in the late 1640s. Winstanley observes in *The True Levellers Standard Advanced* that 'all the prophecies, visions and revelations of scriptures, of prophets and apostles, concerning the calling of the Jews, the restoration of Israel, and making of that people the inheritors of the whole earth, doth all seat themselves in this work of making the earth a common treasury', citing Micah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, Amos, and Hosea, among others.<sup>50</sup> His explicit call for the abolition of private property is rare among the printed materials of the period, whose arguments for social and economic reform normally go no further than calling for the enforcement of existing laws. But communist ideas were undoubtedly circulating throughout the period, and we owe our knowledge of Winstanley's views

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<sup>49</sup> Hindle, 'Imagining Insurrection,' 26-7. Hindle also draws attention to the protesters' allusion to Isaiah 5:8, the prophet's denunciation of enclosures, which parallels Micah 2:2. (As discussed above, the eighth-century prophets protest the same practices in the same contemporary context, and often with a similar approach.)

<sup>50</sup> Gerard Winstanley, *The Law of Freedom, and Other Writings*, ed. Christopher Hill (CUP, 2006), p. 88. On the 'materialist understanding and application of verses in the prophets [which] inspired his vision', and on the same prophets' influence on James Harrington and the Fifth Monarchists, see Achsah Guibbory, *Christian Identity, Jews, and Israel in 17th-Century England* (OUP, 2010), ch. 6 (quotation at 169).

largely to the relaxation of censorship in the 1640s.<sup>51</sup> Among the educated, Plato's opposition to private property was well known, and echoed in the communism of More's Utopia; among the lower classes, religious sects like the Anabaptists and the Family of Love also seem to have regarded private property as sinful.

We noticed earlier the heightened awareness of notions of ownership marked by the paradoxical expressions of Herrick's opening lines. It is worth returning to this point briefly, to notice the distribution of possessive terms across the rest of the poem, and to consider their cumulative effect. After the opening contrast between the workers' 'labours' and 'rough hands' and the speaker's proprietary 'our lands', the only possessives pertaining to the labourers are: their torn breeches (25), betokening their poverty; 'your Lord' (26, 38, 51), betokening their subjection; 'your mirth' (27) and 'your Feast' (29), metonymising this fleeting moment of festive liberty; 'your Flailes, your Fanes, your Fatts' (40), instruments and symbols of their labour; and 'your paine' (54), which is what that labour signifies to the labourers themselves, once its fruits have been appropriated by the landowner, as so vividly conveyed by the opening of the poem. The work implements appear in the toasts following the feast; they are preceded by 'the Plough, (the Common-wealth)' (39), which is not given a possessive article, but is glossed with a deeply resonant metaphor, which provocatively foregrounds the question of property.

'Commonwealth' emerges in the fifteenth century as a variant of the earlier 'commonweal', with both appearing normally as two-word phrases ('common wealth', 'common weal') before 1500. 'Weal' in mediaeval usage means either 'wealth, riches, possessions' (OED **weal** 1a), 'stores,

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<sup>51</sup> See Andrew McRae, 'Agrarian Communism,' in *God Speed the Plough: The Representation of Agrarian England, 1500-1660* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), pp. 110-31; Christopher Hill, 'From Lollards to Levellers,' in reprinted in *The Collected Essays of Christopher Hill, Volume II: Religion and Politics in Seventeenth Century England*, (Brighton, 1986), pp.89-116; Holstun, *Ehud's Dagger*, pp. 367-433; and Ariel Hessayon, 'Gerrard Winstanley, Radical Reformer,' in Ariel Hessayon and David Finnegan (eds.), *Varieties of seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century English radicalism in context* (Aldershot, 2011), pp. 87-112.

supplies (1d), or more abstractly ‘welfare, well-being, happiness, prosperity’ (2a); ‘wealth’ is a close cognate, but often carries additional implications of an abundance of riches or costly goods. ‘Commonwealth’ and ‘commonweal’ are part of that complex of terms derived from Anglo-Norman *commun* or Latin *communitas* which were used to express the communitarian ideas so central to late mediaeval politics and enshrined in the *Magna Carta* and the *Carta de Foresta*. In the early modern period they become slippery terms, appropriated and redefined by various political factions, but all usages fall into two broad categories of meaning—the common good, or the polity itself.<sup>52</sup> In the late Middle Ages, when it was ‘axiomatic that the king’s government existed to provide to for the common profit, common welfare, or (in the fifteenth-century vernacular) “common weal” of the realm,’ and society beyond the king was ‘more or less flat’, there is no real tension between these two senses.<sup>53</sup> A tension does emerge from the late fifteenth century on, however. The term remains in use, in part because it affords a familiar and convenient way of englishing *res publica*—itself an important concept amid the fashion for Cicero. But under the

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<sup>52</sup> On the history, uses, contexts and implications of the term, see especially Paul Slack, *From Reformation to Improvement: Public Welfare in Early Modern England* (Oxford: OUP, 1998), pp. 5-28; Jonathan Scott, ‘What Were Commonwealth Principles?’ *The Historical Journal* 47 (2004), 591-613; John Watts, ‘Public or Plebs: The Changing Meaning of “The Commons”, 1381–1549,’ in John Watts and Huw Pryce (eds.), *Power and Identity in the Middle Ages: Essays in Memory of Rees Davies* (Oxford: OUP, 2007), pp. 242–60; *Ibidem*, “‘Common weal’ and “‘commonwealth’”: England’s Monarchical Republic in the Making, c. 1450-c. 1530,’ in Andrea Gamberini, Jean-Philippe Genet, and Andrea Zorzi (eds.), *The Languages of Political Society: Western Europe, 14th to 17th Centuries* (Rome: Viella, 2011), pp. 147-63; David Rollison, ‘The Specter of the Commonalty: Class Struggle and the Commonweal in England Before the Atlantic World,’ *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 63 (2006), 221-252; Phil Withington, *Society in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), pp. 134-68; and The Early Modern Research Group, ‘Commonwealth: The Social, Cultural, and Conceptual Contexts of an Early Modern Keyword,’ *The Historical Journal* 54 (2011), 659-687.

<sup>53</sup> Watts, ‘Public or Plebs,’ pp. 248, 258.

Tudors the polity tends to be imagined as a hierarchically ordered society, with all the machinery of state, managed by an educated, professional class. The universalising and egalitarian implications of mediaeval communitarian thought were foreign to this view. For Thomas Elyot, author of ‘the most dramatic and conceptually violent assault on indigenous notions of “commonweal”’, difference of degree is part of providential order, and a reduction or eradication of social inequality would mean descent into ‘*Chaos*’ and ‘uniuersall dissolution’.<sup>54</sup> He opens *The Boke Named The Governour* by explaining his preference for ‘Publike Weale’ as the true English equivalent of *res publica*, rejecting ‘commune weale’ as implying ‘that euery thinge shulde be to all men in commune, without discrepance of any astate or condition.’<sup>55</sup> Of course, the concern for the well-being and material livelihood of every member of society, including the poorest, out of which the term emerged, does not necessarily imply the abolition of private property, and Elyot is wrong to think it does. But as David Rollison pithily puts it, ‘He wanted everyone to stop using commonweal because many plebeians thought so, too.’<sup>56</sup> The anti-enclosure protesters of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries frequently invoke the term, sometimes with undeniably levelling and communistic overtones. As Rollison demonstrates, ‘Running through the generations from 1381 to

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<sup>54</sup> Withington, *Society in Early Modern England*, p.142; Thomas Elyot, *The Boke Named The Governour*, 2 vols., ed. Henry Herbert Stephen Croft (London: Kegan Paul, 1883), vol. I, pp. 3-4.

<sup>55</sup> Elyot’s demonstration is either confused or disingenuous, for rather than developing the plausible (though tendentious) argument that the term suggests ‘common’ ownership of all things, and thus attacks private property, he chooses instead to stoke class fear by imagining a simple inversion of the social hierarchy. Defining ‘communaltie’ and ‘communers’ in the newly emerging, narrow and restrictive sense as ‘the base and vulgare...not auanced to any honour or dignite’ (and misrepresenting the use of the term ‘communers’ by the City of London as evidence), he concludes that ‘if there shuld be a commune weale, either the comuners only must be welthy, and the gentil and noble men nedy and miserable’. (p. 2-3)

<sup>56</sup> Rollison, ‘Specter of the Commonalty,’ 244.

1649 ... is a distinctive populist politics, centered on the words “common” and “weal”.<sup>57</sup>

Meanwhile among the educated, while the Ciceronian model of the highly stratified Roman republic reflected Tudor hierarchy more closely than mediaeval communitarianism, nevertheless both humanism and Reformation produced calls for social reform and redistribution under the watchword ‘commonwealth’, in the mid-sixteenth as well as the mid-seventeenth century.<sup>58</sup>

Following Plato rather than Cicero, More (against whom Elyot was tacitly reacting)<sup>59</sup> had influentially argued that private property was inconsistent with the concept of *res publica* itself, pronouncing his communist Utopia the only republic deserving the name, for citizens elsewhere must prioritize private profit over public good, to avoid starvation: *siquidem alibi, de publico loquentes ubique commodo, priuatum curant. hic ubi nihil priuati est, serio publicum negotium agunt*. In Ralph Robinson’s English translation, printed in 1551, *publico commodo* here is (naturally, but suggestively) rendered ‘commonwealth’: ‘For in other places they speak still of the commonwealth. But every man procureth his own private gain. Here where nothing is private, the common affairs be earnestly looked upon.’<sup>60</sup> The shift which John Watts detects in the early decades of the sixteenth century, away from uses of ‘commonwealth’ as equivalent to ‘the common good’ and towards ‘commonwealth’ as ‘the polity’, deflects attention away from the material needs of the poor, and onto the necessity of the state, which offered employment to those able to access a

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<sup>57</sup> Rollison, ‘Specter of the Commonalty,’ 251.

<sup>58</sup> On the hierarchy implicit in the Ciceronian model, see Watts, ““Common weal” and “commonwealth””. For the radical Protestant elements, see Scott, ‘What Were Commonwealth Principles?’; Slack, *From Reformation to Improvement*, pp. 29-52; Ethan Shagan, *Popular politics and the English Reformation* (Cambridge: CUP, 2003), 273-280.

<sup>59</sup> See David Baker, ““To Divulgate or Set Forth”: Humanism and Heresy in Sir Thomas Elyot’s “The Book Named the Governor”’, *SP* 90 (1993), 46-57.

<sup>60</sup> Sir Thomas More, *Utopia*, tr. Ralph Robinson (London: Gresham, 19-? (no date)), p. 196.

good education.<sup>61</sup>

‘Common-wealth’, then, is a term which goes directly to the heart of the conflict between communitarian traditions and the nascent agrarian capitalism which has generated the enormous wealth-gap between Fane and his labourers, the sons of summer and the lords of wine and oil. That gap was vast: James Turner estimates Fane’s income from the harvest of 1647 at ‘about £5,750 in rent and over £1000 worth of grain; [while] each labourer that year received five pounds and a dinner’.<sup>62</sup> On one level, Herrick’s use of ‘Common-wealth’ here is part of his attempt to evoke a nostalgic vision of the manorial estate as a contented community enjoying the fruits of their labour in a subsistence economy, with a benevolent feudal lord safeguarding the common good. But in the context of a poem which foregrounds the disparities of wealth and class so sharply, and harps so insistently on the language of *meum* and *tuum*, that evocation seems ironic, or even taunting. Meanwhile, identifying *the plough* as ‘the Common-wealth’ frankly invokes the most concretely material sense of the term, in the basic sustenance which the plough can extract from the land—it is almost as down-to-earth a variation on the theme as Winstanley’s vision of the land itself as ‘a common treasury’ will be. Herrick seems here to acknowledge cheerfully the agency in, and common ownership of, this process of extraction, by the labourers who drive the plough and work the fields. But that agency has already been emphatically expropriated by the landowning class at the beginning of the poem, and since the plough is useless without the land, any ‘common’ rights in the plough without common rights in the land can signify only labour without fruit for the workers. The injunction a little later ‘Feed him ye must, whose food fills you’ will reinforce this grim reality: if labour at the plough can be said to belong to the labourers in any sense, it is already forfeit to repay their debt to Fane, since the ‘food’—its fruits—is presented as his exclusive property, transforming their contracted payment (including the supper) into a voluntary act of gratuitous

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<sup>61</sup> Watts, ““Common weal” and “commonwealth”,’ pp. 149-50.

<sup>62</sup> James Turner, *Politics of Landscape*, p. 151. Turner believes this to be the year in which Herrick’s poem was composed.

charity.<sup>63</sup>

## V The Word of the Lord

It is these final lines which have attracted most attention:

And, you must know, your Lords word's true,

Feed him ye must, whose food fills you.

And that this pleasure is like raine,

Not sent ye for to drowne your paine,

But for to make it spring againe. (51-55)

Setting Herrick's poem beside Jonson's 'To Penshurst' and Carew's 'To Saxham', which he reads with an eye to their elision and mystification of labour, Raymond Williams foregrounds this passage for the way in which it makes 'the governing social relations' explicit, but gives Herrick no credit for his realism. For Williams, the lines express an 'early and jollying form of man-management' which is 'crude in feeling', but reflect a 'consciousness of real processes': 'What Herrick embarrassingly intones is what Jonson and Carew mythicise'.<sup>64</sup> The impression conveyed is of Herrick as either crass, brutal, and devoid of empathy for the labourers, or an incompetent poet,

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<sup>63</sup> Compare Walter, *Famine* pp. 127-8 on 'the bitter but unequal contest over the obligatory nature of [poor] relief [which] resulted increasingly (if never finally) in a redefinition of reciprocities as discriminatory and discretionary charity. Where this was achieved, it allowed the propertied to pass off as a gift what had previously been perceived as a right.' See also Hindle, 'The Politics of the Gift Relation,' in *On the Parish*, pp. 164-70.

<sup>64</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (Oxford: OUP, 1975), pp. 33-34.

clumsily letting slip something which decorum dictates should remain hidden.<sup>65</sup> For Marcus, too, the closing lines are ‘blunt, even jarring’, and notably ‘graphic’ in their exposure of the economic ‘mechanisms’ at work.<sup>66</sup>

In a way, we know that the pain referred to is the specific, physical labour of ploughing Fane’s fields to ready them for the sowing of next year’s crops, because this was the topic of lines 47-9. But the causal mechanism, on a purely materialist reading, is obscure: *how* could the feast serve to renew physical labour, precisely?<sup>67</sup> Peter Stallybrass appeals to Pierre Bourdieu, who describes how ‘gifts, generosity, conspicuous distribution’ (like the lavish supper provided by Fane in Herrick’s poem) transmute ‘overt domination into misrecognized, “socially-recognized” domination, in other words, *legitimate authority*’.<sup>68</sup> On Stallybrass’s reading, Herrick reveals that the supper is not, after all, the gratuitous benefaction by a kindly landlord it may have seemed, but rather a ploy intended to bind the labourers to future labour by creating a sense of dependence and indebtedness. It is, in Bourdieu’s terms, an example of the ‘symbolic violence’ which can create and sustain unequal social relations, substituting for direct physical violence, whenever ‘overt, brutal domination is impossible’ and so ‘must be disguised under the veil of enchanted relationships’.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Low similarly emphasises Herrick’s lack of sympathy with the rural poor, and consequent conservatism (*Georgic Revolution*, pp. 268-72).

<sup>66</sup> Marcus, *Politics of Mirth*, p. 149.

<sup>67</sup> We might possibly point back to the injunction ‘Feed and grow fat’ and the suggestive parallel with feeding ‘the lab’ring Neat’, and suggest with Anthony Low a purpose to ‘fatten them up for more labour’ (*Georgic Revolution*, 269); Leah Marcus observes the labourers ‘are more likely to work industriously if they are kept contented’ (*Politics of Mirth*, 147). Neither suggestion seems quite adequate to explain the effect of the final line.

<sup>68</sup> Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practise*, trans. R. Nice (Cambridge: CUP, 1977), p. 192. Stallybrass cites the passage on p. 244.

<sup>69</sup> Bourdieu, *Outline*, p.191-2.



The recourse to Bourdieu rationalizes what is slightly mystical and obscure in Herrick's lines (*how* does the pleasure of the feast serve to renew the workers' pain, and *what motivates* the one who 'sends' the pleasure to seek this end?), and offers a plausible explanation of Fane's motives, but it does not explain Herrick's. For Bourdieu's 'symbolic violence' to work, the 'veil' disguising it must remain in place:

The reason for the pre-capitalist economy's great need for symbolic violence is that the only way in which relations of domination can be set up, maintained, or restored, is through strategies which, being expressly oriented towards the establishment of relations of personal dependence, must be disguised and transfigured lest they destroy themselves by revealing their true nature; in a word, they must be *euphemized*.<sup>70</sup>

By removing that veil, Herrick's closing lines undermine the relations which the poem seems on the surface intent on legitimating. Stallybrass recognises this with surprise, but does not hazard an explanation:

The extent to which the "disinterested, gratuitous relationship" of the lord to his workers is revealed as "overt domination" is surprising... The lines are so radically ambivalent that they threaten to subvert the ethic of "communal reciprocity" which is central to the rural idyll.<sup>71</sup>

Like Williams, Stallybrass does not consider the possibility that Herrick may have *intended* to disturb the reader and subvert the idyll—probably because that would seem out of keeping with all

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<sup>70</sup> Bourdieu, *Outline*, pp. 191-92.

<sup>71</sup> Stallybrass, 'Wee feaste in our Defense,' 247.

that we know about his social, political and religious conservatism.<sup>72</sup> But Herrick is not generally clumsy or incompetent, and this poem displays a high level of deliberate artistry. It seems sensible to regard the ambivalence as deliberate, and to investigate its purpose.

A closer consideration of the language and imagery of the lines will help, for they are more abstract, metaphysical, and allusive than the materialist readings account for. Leah Marcus comments perceptively on the closing image:

The lord of the manor is identified with the heavens, from which precipitation falls to insure the fertility of the fields. Through his hospitality ‘pleasure’ rains down upon dormant ‘pain,’ causing new effort, new suffering to ‘spring’ up, but also causing a renewed seasonal ‘spring’ of life and fertility.<sup>73</sup>

For Marcus, this is part of the programme by which Herrick ‘argu[es] for a return to all manner of ritual “magic” in the interest of collective well-being’, in poems on traditional festivals scattered throughout *Hesperides*.<sup>74</sup> She sees ‘The Hock-Cart’ as ‘decod[ing]’ this ‘magic’ through its emphasis on the material reality of labour, so that this poem’s argument becomes relatively

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<sup>72</sup> Coiro notes that Stallybrass ‘chooses finally to ignore the subversion that he hears’ (*Epigram Book Tradition*, p. 158).

<sup>73</sup> Marcus, *Politics of Mirth*, p. 149.

<sup>74</sup> Marcus, *Politics of Mirth*, p. 145. Marcus’ topic in *The Politics of Mirth* is the conflict between Stuart and Puritan attitudes to traditional festivities. She has subsequently distanced herself from the view of Herrick as strongly royalist and Laudian which emerges from this focus, and objected to the ‘politicization’ of *Hesperides* by other scholars as ‘an irksome new orthodoxy’, preferring herself to emphasise how ‘fractured and irreconcilably multiple’ the volume is when ‘read as a whole’ (Leah S. Marcus, ‘Afterword: Herrick and Historicism,’ *George Herbert Journal* 14 (1990), 172-3; see also Marcus’ chapter and Achsah Guibbory’s response in her ‘Afterword’, in Connolly and Cain (eds.), *Lords of Wine and Oile*).

mundane: 'The estate's well-being arises...through conformity to primordial collective patterns reaffirmed through holiday observances.'<sup>75</sup> But nevertheless her treatment of the imagery captures something of its less rational, quasi-religious implications. In fact, the lines are calculated to evoke various biblical intertexts, with conflicting and provocative effects.

Indeed, the Bible is virtually named as an intertext, with 'your Lords word' irresistibly evoking scripture. Herrick is in preacherly mode, adjuring his parishioners as he must have done regularly in church. If we take God as the 'Lord' throughout these closing lines, they make perfect sense (though not quite the same sense they make when we read them with Fane in mind—and the difference is important). The Bible reminds us frequently that God is the provider of 'food'. The reciprocal obligation to 'feed him' in return might sound a little odd at first when applied to God, but in fact works easily enough as a shorthand for the sacrifices, offerings and tithes prescribed in great detail in the Old Testament (and could also connote the 'sacrifices' of Laudian ritualism without too much strain).<sup>76</sup> The imagery of the final lines applies quite literally to him, for it is he who sends the rains to ensure the next year's crops, as the Old Testament again frequently reminds us—for instance, Psalm 104 (13-15):

He watereth the hills from his chambers: the earth is satisfied....He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man: that he may bring forth food out of the earth; And wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make his face to shine, and bread which strengtheneth man's heart.

It is also quite orthodox to say that God is ultimately the sender of pleasure and pain—though here the relation between the tenor and vehicle in Herrick's simile will raise problems, as we shall see

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<sup>75</sup> Marcus, *Politics of Mirth*, p. 147.

<sup>76</sup> On Herrick's 'sacrifice poems', Jewish sacrificial practices and Laudian ceremonialism, see Achsah Guibbory, *Ceremony and Community from Herbert to Milton* (Cambridge: CUP, 2006), pp. 99-106.

presently.

Meanwhile, if we leave God out of it, and take ‘your Lord’ simply as designating Fane (as it has done consistently throughout the poem), the revelation which surprises Stallybrass is not the only thing which seems calculated to beg questions. Firstly, ‘Feed him ye must, whose food fills you’ has the tone of a proverbial truth or moral maxim, already widely known and accepted, and transcending particular persons, place and time. Yet presenting it as the utterance of an individual undermines this effect, drawing attention to the power relations and private interests which all too clearly inform the injunction here. Secondly, its simple logic relies on the idea that the food is Fane’s private property to begin with, yet from its opening lines the poem has highlighted the labour necessary to food-production, in which Fane plays no part. Again we are pushed back onto the idea of private land-ownership as the consideration trumping all others and justifying inequality, despite the poem’s attempts to evoke the communitarian values of a benevolently ordered, late mediaeval feudal estate. Thirdly, the comparison of Fane’s benefaction to the rain which revivifies the earth and renews the seasons—even though it is only in a simile—implies a level of divine power which one would not normally attribute to an old friend from university, no matter how wealthy. The simile evokes a natural process so close to the topic being discussed at the literal level (the transition from harvest time to ploughing), that its merely figurative status is de-emphasised and blurred. Marcus’ way of putting it, ‘the lord of the manor is identified with the heavens’, captures how startling this is, or should be. Herrick may say comparable things about the King in other poems without intention to shock, and perhaps even with sincere belief, but the divinity of kings is an ancient and orthodox doctrine: the case is not the same.<sup>77</sup> The impression is of a landlord attempting to extort obedience and service out of tenants and labourers by tendentiously and

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<sup>77</sup> For instance ‘To the King, Upon his Comming with his Army into the West’ (*Hesperides* 77), in which ‘The Drooping West’ revives at the advent of the ‘universall *Genius*’, Charles, and ‘Looks like a Bride now, or a bed of flowers,/Newly refresh’t, both by the Sun, and showers’ (with overtones of Psalm 19:5 and Rev. 21:2).

hubristically assimilating his authority to God's. Perhaps we should say, rather, that the speaker of the poem makes the attempt on Fane's behalf, and on behalf of the class to which they both belong, as 'Lords of Wine and Oile'. But at the same time, it seems to me that Herrick intends this impression—intends us to detect tendentiousness and hubris.

The image of the workers' pain as a springing crop, however, raises new problems. The first critic to draw attention to the troubling notes in the poem's close, Robert Lougy, captures one elusive but disturbing implication of this image, when he observes 'The suggestion now is that the "sons of summer"...are being exploited by the lord. They are, like the crop they are harvesting, nourished and replenished only to be "harvested" again.'<sup>78</sup> Lougy is articulating here a mental image of the labourers themselves as wheat, which the poem does not explicitly delineate, and which will probably not come fully into focus for the reader, but which nevertheless may well be evoked subconsciously, a blurred idea hovering at the edge of the mental field of view. It is a subtle and elusive effect, as we said earlier of the imagery assimilating the labourers to livestock, and of course this is similar in tendency, transforming the workers into a natural resource to be exploited and commodified. We might recall Isaiah 3:15, where the idea of men as grain, harvested, threshed and ground into flour, underlies the imagery: 'What mean ye that ye beat my people to pieces, and grind the faces of the poor?' We may retrospectively pick up resonances with earlier moments in the poem—in the close association between the labourers' bodies and the product of the harvest when they appear 'Crown'd with the eares of corne' (6) or 'with Wheaten Hats' (41), and in the 'Maukin' (9) which opens Herrick's description of the procession, a human effigy which may well have been made of corn, like the one described by Thomas Morison in 1594.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Lougy, 'Herrick's The Hock Cart' (pages unnumbered).

<sup>79</sup> Cain and Connolly, *ad loc.*, cite Morison's *Papatus, seu depravatae religionis origo et incrementum* (Edinburgh, 1594), p. 173, as paraphrased by John Brand, *Popular Antiquities of Great Britain*, rev. W. C. Hazlitt, 3 Vols. (London: John Russell Smith, 1870), Vol. 2, p. 13: 'in England he himself saw the rustics

Fane's agency in bringing about further 'pain' for the labourers thus sits comfortably alongside what we have seen in the rest of the poem. But how does this relate to the idea of divine agency which is at work in the passage? The Christian God is not normally imagined as nourishing humanity in order to bring them pain. There seem to be two relevant things happening simultaneously here. Firstly, the idea of human beings as wheat calls to mind the parable of the wheat and tares from the gospel of Matthew. An enemy has sown tares among a man's wheat while he slept; when the tares spring up, the householder decides not to try to weed them out, lest the crop be damaged, but tells his servants:

Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers,  
Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the  
wheat into my barn. (Matt. 13:30)

Interpreting the parable for the disciples, Jesus explains that the wheat and the tares are good and wicked men, and the harvest is the end of the world, when the wicked shall be 'cast...into a furnace of fire' while 'the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father' (13:42-43). Of course, the correspondences with what is going on in Herrick's simile are not exact. But the memory of the parable which the simile evokes in the reader brings with it two crucial notions, both of which ultimately serve Fane's interest: the notion of suffering as divinely ordained punishment for sin, and the notion that justice must wait till the afterlife. It is axiomatic for Christians that all human beings are sinners, since and because of Adam's original sin, and God's curse on Adam in Genesis 3 is directly applicable to Herrick's labourers:

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bringing home in a cart, a figure made of corn, round which men and women were singing promiscuously'.  
Jacqueline Simpson, 'The Mawkin on Herrick's Hock-cart,' *Rural History* 6 (1995), 1-9 makes a persuasive case for seeing Herrick's 'maukin' as such a corn-dolly.

cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life....

In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground. (3:17, 19)

Adam is cast out of Eden precisely ‘to till the ground’ (3:23). Thus, if Fane’s workforce were to complain about their pay or conditions, they would be denying God’s justice (though the question of why Fane himself is exempted from the curse of labour of course remains open, and could only be answered by aligning him with God rather than with the rest of fallen humanity).

If they are patient and obedient, however, they can look forward to a crown in heaven. In the mean time, pleasures like this harvest supper offer a taste and foreshadowing of that promised reward. Hence, perhaps, the playful evocation of Revelation 19:14 at ll. 11-12. ‘The Horses, Mares, and frisking Fillies,/ Clad, all, in Linnen, white as Lillies’, as Cain and Connolly note *ad loc.*, recall the armies of heaven at the marriage supper of the Lamb, who follow Christ ‘upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean’.<sup>80</sup> Herrick’s joke in this line plays on the way in which the King James translation makes it sound as though the horses are clothed in white linen; in the Greek, the nominative case of ἐνδεδυμένοι (‘clothed’) makes it clear that it actually applies to their riders. The jest may be an innocuous bit of mirth, appropriate to the holiday atmosphere—Herrick’s ponderous equivalent to the rustics’ ‘Merrymment’ (24)—or it may involve a sneer, suggesting that their ‘Country Art’ (8) has dressed the horses this way because of their ignorant misreading of Revelation. Either way, it tends to taint any evocation of heavenly reward for the labourers later in the poem with something of the disdain of the dehumanising imagery—the implication being that to imagine these labourers, who are so akin to livestock, going to heaven is as ridiculous as imagining

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<sup>80</sup> The immediate context in Revelation 19 may have been in Herrick’s mind more continuously as he wrote the poem, with a sense of paralleling Fane’s harvest supper and the marriage supper of the Lamb. Consider 19:9, the Angel’s instructions to John: ‘And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God,’ where the final utterance resonates suggestively with Herrick’s ‘You must know, your Lords word’s true’ (51).

the horses of Rev. 19:14 as saved souls and guests of the Lamb, arrayed in virtue. However, it is also possible that Herrick's humorous tone in line 12 indicates he is not prepared to take seriously any comparison of the harvest supper to heaven, or of Fane to the God who dispenses reward and punishment.

The other way in which an idea of divine agency may inform Herrick's simile involves reference to the Old Testament rather than the New, and a focus on this world rather than the next. Herrick's 'rain' producing a crop of 'pain' creates a disturbing sense of a *conflation* of Yahweh's paired blessing and curse, pronounced at Deut. 11, Deut. 27-28, and Leviticus 26:3-43, echoed and reworked, together or apart, across the Old Testament (including the passage from Psalm 104 quoted above). The paired blessing and curse tell what will happen, respectively, to those who obey and those who disobey Yahweh's commandments, with rain, leading to fertility and abundance, always featuring prominently. Here for instance is Deuteronomy 11:14-17, where Yahweh promises the obedient

I will give you the rain of your land in his due season, the first rain and the latter rain,  
that thou mayest gather in thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil.

And I will send grass in thy fields for thy cattle, that thou mayest eat and be full.

Take heed to yourselves, that your heart be not deceived, and ye turn aside, and serve  
other gods, and worship them;

And then the Lord's wrath be kindled against you, and he shut up the heaven, that there  
be no rain, and that the land yield not her fruit; and lest ye perish quickly from off the  
good land which the Lord giveth you.

In this example, special stress is laid on the commandment to worship no other god, a crime with which the closing passage of Herrick's poem flirts. The longer examples, at Deut. 27-28 and Lev. 26:3-43, follow on from (and clearly refer to) detailed expositions of civil laws, including many



redistributive measures, designed to prevent the concentration of wealth in too few hands, and to protect the poorest in society—debt-forgiveness, charity and manumission of Hebrew slaves in the sabbatical year (Deut. 15), return of lands to their original owners at the Jubilee (Lev. 25:8-13), fair payment for hired workers (Deut. 24:14-15), tithes for Levites, strangers, orphans and widows (Deut. 26), and gleaning rights for strangers, orphans and widows (Deut. 24:19-21). The most significant of these measures is the return of land at Jubilee, the basis for which Yahweh explains at Lev. 25:23: ‘The land shall not be sold for ever: for the land is mine, for ye are strangers and sojourners with me.’ Though the civil laws of the Old Testament were not deemed applicable to modern Christian society, they attracted historical study by humanists in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In his *De republica Hebraeorum* (1617), one of the foremost of these scholars, Petrus Cunaeus, praises this ‘agrarian law’ as ‘providing that the wealth of some might not tend to the oppression of the rest’, by preserving the original distribution of land, with its ‘prescrib’d...bounds’, which ensured that ‘all were equally provided for; which is the prime care of good Governours in every Common-wealth’.<sup>81</sup> Cunaeus’ historicising study of the ‘Hebrew Commonwealth’ exerted a strong influence on James Harrington, who proclaims that the ‘agrarian law’ at the heart of his *Commonwealth of Oceana* (1656) is modelled on God’s laws for ‘the commonwealth of Israel’.<sup>82</sup> But one did not have to be a republican like Harrington to admire the Hebrew commonwealth: Cunaeus presents it as continuing through the reigns of Solomon and David, and observes that its laws ‘commanded the King to follow justice and equity, and to govern the Common-wealth wisely for the peoples good’.<sup>83</sup> It does not seem far-fetched to suggest that, by

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<sup>81</sup> *Petrus Cunaeus of the common-wealth of the Hebrews*, trans. C[lement] B[arksdale] (London, 1652), pp. 12-13.

<sup>82</sup> On the influence of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Christian Hebraists on arguments for redistribution of wealth, including Harrington, see Eric Nelson, *The Hebrew Republic* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010), pp. 57-87. See also Achsah Guibbory, *Christian Identity*, ch. 5.

<sup>83</sup> *Of the common-wealth of the Hebrews*, p. 120. Cunaeus proceeds to quote Deut. 17:15-20.

recalling the blessing-and-curse motif of the Pentateuch at the end of a poem concerned with economic inequality, Herrick was consciously evoking a God who cares deeply about social justice.

Under those provisions of the deuteronomic code, one might reflect that it is Fane, and other 'Lords of Wine and Oile', who have earned Yahweh's curse; yet, in the rough justice depicted in the poem, it is the labourers who will suffer the 'pain'. The contrast thus implied, between the divine justice laid out in the Old Testament and the conditions Fane's labourers must endure, implies a sombre judgement on the economic system of the day, and perhaps suggests that a reckoning is due. Like the curses of Deuteronomy and Leviticus (indeed incorporating a phrase verbatim from Deut. 28:40), Micah prophesies such a reckoning, when those 'rich men...full of violence' (Mic. 6:12) who are now lords of wine and oil shall be so no longer: 'thou shalt tread the olives, but thou shalt not anoint thee with oil; and sweet wine, but shalt not drink wine' (6:15). The next chapter opens with the earth lamenting that good men are perished from the earth, in a resonant simile: 'Woe is me! for I am as when they have gathered the summer fruits, as the grape gleanings of the vintage: there is no cluster to eat: my soul desired the firstripe fruit.' (7:1) The Geneva Bible's 'Woe is me, for I am as the Summer gatherings' is a closer translation, for the Hebrew קִיץ פֶּאֶסְפִי does not imply a 'when' clause: the King James Version translators are rationalizing the verse. It is tempting to hear an echo of Micah's earth, lamenting the oppression of the poor, in Herrick's 'Sons of Summer', themselves merged into the ruthlessly exploited agricultural landscape of Fane's estate.

While many have noted the disturbing nature of Herrick's closing lines, very few have attempted to account for it as deliberate. Lougy, the first to comment, is an exception: he hears in the closing couplet 'indignation' and 'an awareness of injustice', which abruptly transform what was until this point 'a festive [and] occasional poem' into 'one which is critical of the very lord to whom it is dedicated'. This reading still splits the poem in two, overlooking the dark undercurrents present from the beginning, and frames the critical animus of the ending too personally—Herrick is commenting on the wider societal conditions, rather than singling out his friend and patron as a bad

individual landlord. But Lougy is right to acknowledge the tone of indignation and critique. Coiro, meanwhile, recognises in the *Hesperides* as a whole (the volume in which the poem was published) a ‘yoking of flattery with political and social criticism’, but nevertheless shies away from Lougy’s reading of ‘The Hock Cart’, finding it ‘appealing but anachronistic’.<sup>84</sup> The implied assumption here, that it was impossible to perceive or denounce economic injustice until the twentieth century, is obviously quite wrong. The social critique threaded through Herrick’s poem is not overt or strident, and it is not the only voice in the poem. But it is perceptible and coherent, and draws on traditions of social protest which stretch back as long as written literature in the West, and include some of its most canonical texts.

## **VI Conclusion**

Why did Herrick choose to write this deeply ambivalent poem? It clearly does not belong to the category of literary works which aim to express radical views, but are forced to do so obliquely to avoid censorship or punishment, disguising themselves as innocuous or panegyric. Herrick has no reason to fear Fane, and indeed he places himself in the same social group, the ‘Lords of Wine and Oile’, with no attempt to deny his own implication in the system which the subtext of the poem seems to critique. Moreover, that critique is buried so deeply that few notice it, and many readers of this article will very likely think I have dreamt it: if there were a polemical intent here, we would have to say it had failed. We can only speculate as to what Herrick’s intentions were, but if I had to hazard a guess, it would go something like this.

Born to a father and brought up by an uncle who were both goldsmiths and pioneers of banking, living in the mercantile centre of London, and serving as apprentice to that uncle until he was able to invest his patrimony in the university education which would lift his social status to broad equality with Fane and other Cambridge contemporaries, Herrick would have been well

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<sup>84</sup> Coiro, *Epigram Book Tradition*, pp. 92, 158.

equipped to understand the economic realities underpinning his new friends' elevated social positions.<sup>85</sup> At the same time, he would have been aware that his own capital was mainly cultural, and his foothold in this class relatively precarious. His benefice gave him a comfortable living, placing him among those 'Lords of Wine and Oile' who, like Fane (though in a far smaller way), could profit from the land without working it, by allowing him to collect tithes from his parishioners, and making him a small landlord, able to lease some seventy acres of glebe lands to tenants. 'The Hock-Cart' was probably composed before he could have anticipated his ejection from this living and subsequent reliance on the charity of friends. Nevertheless, it would not be surprising if something more than disinterested friendship made him keen to bind the Earl of Westmorland more closely to him. Herrick and Fane exchanged and commented on each other's poems, and Herrick encouraged his friend to publish *Otia Sacra*, but he must have been aware that his own poetic talent surpassed his noble friend's as immeasurably as Fane's worldly wealth exceeded his. He did not bear Fane any ill will for this accident of fortune, but perhaps experienced moments of rueful reflection on its irony. A degree of calculating self-interest told him that the effort of writing a fine and superficially flattering poem dedicated to Fane might be a good investment against a rainy day.<sup>86</sup>

Fane would indeed prove a generous patron when Herrick's need was greatest, supporting him with a series of payments between 1647 and 1660 (when he was able to resume collecting tithes). These payments seem to have begun with a verse exchange between Herrick and Fane which survives in manuscript, and has been dated to November 1647.<sup>87</sup> Herrick's poem is titled 'A Christmass Carroll to the Earle of WestmoreLand'; its explicit purpose is to beg for food. In the first

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<sup>85</sup> For biographical details, see Cain and Connolly (eds.), *Complete Poetry*, pp. xv-lxiii.

<sup>86</sup> Several poems are addressed to Fane in *Hesperides* (112, 459 and 626 in *Complete Poetry*, vol. I); MS 57 in *Complete Poetry*, vol. II, is a verse exchange.

<sup>87</sup> The exchange is MS 57 in *Complete Poetry*, vol. II. See Tom Cain, 'Herrick's "Christmas Carol": A New Poem, and Its Implications for Patronage,' *ELR* 29 (1999), 131-53.

eighteen lines Herrick mournfully lists the foods he lacks, which are desirable for a Christmas dinner, wondering

wher's now the Beefe  
Of Viands cheife  
the Porke the veale  
That glutts the meale (13-16)

Repeating the rhyme-words from the carnivorous climax of 'The Hock-Cart' (ll. 28-31), the passage is clearly intended as a playful allusion to that poem. Herrick goes on to imagine the delicacies gracing Fane's 'geniall Table/ which I poore I/ can never buie/ Because I am not able' (27-30), and asks Fane to

ope your purse  
And bounteous Lord remember  
to give us that  
will make us fatt  
and frollike this December. (38-42)

Here is another, subtler, reminiscence of 'The Hock-Cart'—the 'frollick boyes' who 'grow fat' at Fane's harvest supper (ll. 43-44). The 'remember' of line 39 is rather like an 'Alexandrian footnote' signalling these allusions, which work to remind Fane both of his own image within the earlier poem as a 'bounteous Lord' (an image he should now live up to), and also of the friendship he owes Herrick in return for that fine poetic gift. It worked: Fane's reply duly promises 'plumbe Pies', and probably accompanied the first of the money payments which helped to sustain Herrick until the Restoration. But what we should note here is the way in which Herrick, quite consciously, puts

himself in the subject position occupied by the labourers of 'Hock-Cart', and draws attention to this with his allusions. The tone is playful, the capering short lines and smooth, simple rhymes turning need and self-pity into a charming performance: as Cain observes, Herrick 'gracefully construct[s] a semi-fictional, self-aware, and self-mocking figure'.<sup>88</sup> But there is something genuinely poignant at work beneath. The element of self-conscious role-play is also a form of self-protection, the ludic self-abasement a way of preserving his dignity and side-stepping real humiliation. Looking back in 1647, at least, Herrick was clearly able to imagine and understand what it felt like to be one of the disempowered labourers of 'The Hock-Cart', putting on a 'blythe' air as they obey the command to 'freely' toast Fane's health. The earlier poem is not directly about their feelings, but nevertheless its undertow of social critique is, I think, informed by the same awareness of their humanity, and capacity to see how the social hierarchy looks from their point of view.

'The Hock Cart' may itself be part of another verse exchange, either prompting or responding to Fane's 'My Hock-Cart or Reaping Day', which shares vocabulary and motifs with Herrick's poem.<sup>89</sup> The two are generally seen as related, though uncertainty over the date of either poem makes it impossible to know for sure who was responding to whom. The artistic poverty of Fane's is matched only by its crass (and apparently quite unconscious) objectification of his workforce. Meanwhile, Herrick's duties in his parish gave him some familiarity with the lives of the rural working poor, for all that his poetry displays little empathy with them. I find it tempting to imagine Herrick as responding to Fane, setting out to show him how such a poem *should* be done

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<sup>88</sup> Cain, 'Herrick's "Christmas Carol",' 139.

<sup>89</sup> Fane also gives the alternative title 'Upon my reaping day the 28<sup>th</sup> August 1648', suggesting a date which, if trusted, would preclude the poem's preceding Herrick's. But Fane could have drafted the poem long before affixing this title: harvests recur annually, and nothing else in the poem has chronological implications.

(in an example of the amicably competitive response poems common in the period),<sup>90</sup> and unable to resist parodying Fane's attitude to his workers while he is about it.<sup>91</sup> But whether or not Herrick is responding to Fane's poem, his conscience is troubled by his own implication in an economic system whose inhumanity he understands and finds distasteful. Possibly he even fears that such extreme inequality is unsustainable, and that some form of divine retribution or social revolt must follow. He is no Micah: either he lacks the courage to speak out openly against the oppression of the poor, or believes no good would come of his doing so, or both. But conscience and self-respect move him to encode his misgivings beneath the flattering surface of his poem, confident that his dedicatee will remain cheerfully oblivious. Perhaps he does this only for himself; perhaps he imagines some readers experiencing an obscure discomfort, which they cannot quite pin down or explain, but which might prompt them to begin to question their own assumptions, and to become more humane in their own future dealings with the poor.

The result is a poem which works simultaneously on two levels, quite incompatible with each other, yet producing an effect not of tension and rupture but of a smooth and polished whole. It is a poem of contradictions—complexity beneath apparent simplicity, the serious and sombre in the guise of lightheartedness. If my guess is right, these contradictions arise from unedifying moral accommodations, but nevertheless (for me at least) give the poem a power to fascinate. I never tire of turning it in my hands and watching the colours within change in the shifting light.

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<sup>90</sup> On verse-exchange, see Stella Revard, 'Thomas Stanley and "A Register of Friends",' in *Literary Circles and Cultural Communities in Renaissance England*, ed. Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000).

<sup>91</sup> For instance, the instrumentalization of the labourers in lines 3-4 of Herrick's poem refigures as a pointed conceit the confusion of 'hands', 'sickles', 'rakes' and 'binders' in Fane's third stanza. For suggestive comments on Fane's poem, see Turner, *Politics of Landscape*, pp. 148-9.