

THE COUNTRY AND THE CITY REVISITED

England and the Politics of Culture, 1550–1850

Between 1550 and 1850, the great age of mercantilism, the English people remade themselves from a disparate group of individuals and localities divided by feudal loyalties, dialects and even languages, into an imperial power. Examining literature, art, and social life, and returning to ground first explored by Raymond Williams in his seminal work, *The Country and the City Revisited* traces this transformation. It shows that what Williams figured as an urban–rural dichotomy can now be more satisfactorily grasped as a permeable boundary. While the movement of sugar, tobacco, and tea became ever more deeply interfused with the movement of people, through migration and the slave trade, these commodities initiated new conceptions of space, time, and identity. Spanning the traditional periods of the Renaissance and Romanticism, this collection of essays offers exciting interdisciplinary perspectives on central issues of early modern English history.

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Joseph P. Ward teaches History at the University of Mississippi. He is author of *Metropolitan Communities: Trade Guilds, Identity, and Change in Early Modern London* (1997).

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England and the Politics of Culture, 1550–1850

EDITED BY

GERALD MACLEAN, DONNA LANDRY,
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Abbreviations and notes on the text

Place of publication for printed works is London unless otherwise stated. Spelling and punctuation in quotations from seventeenth- and eighteenth-century works follow the original. Dates are given Old Style, but with the year regarded as starting on 1 January.

Abbreviated references to works frequently cited in single chapters are indicated in endnotes following the first reference. Endnote references to works frequently cited in two or more chapters are given according to the following abbreviations.

Archer, <i>Pursuit of Stability</i>	Ian Archer, <i>The Pursuit of Stability: Social Relations in Elizabethan London</i> . (Cambridge, 1991.)
Barrell, <i>Idea of Landscape</i>	John Barrell, <i>The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place: An Approach to the Poetry of John Clare</i> . (Cambridge, 1972.)
Beier, <i>Masterless Men</i>	A. L. Beier, <i>Masterless Men: The Vagrancy Problem in England 1560–1640</i> . (1985.)
BL	British Library
<i>DNB</i>	<i>Dictionary of National Biography</i>
Helgerson, <i>Forms of Nationhood</i>	Richard Helgerson, <i>Forms of Nationhood: The Elizabethan Writing of England</i> . (Chicago, Ill., 1992.)
Manley, <i>Literature and Culture</i>	Lawrence Manley, <i>Literature and Culture in Early Modern London</i> . (Cambridge, 1995.)
McRae, <i>God Speed</i>	Andrew McRae, <i>God Speed the Plough: The Representation of Agrarian England, 1500–1660</i> . (Cambridge, 1996.)

- Mullaney, *Place* Steven Mullaney, *The Place of the Stage: License, Play, and Power in Renaissance England*. (Chicago, Ill., 1988.)
- Neeson, *Commoners* J. M. Neeson, *Commoners: Common Right, Enclosure and Social Change in England, 1700–1820*. (Cambridge, 1993.)
- PRO Public Records Office
- Thompson, *Whigs and Hunters* E. P. Thompson, *Whigs and Hunters: The Origin of the Black Act*. (New York, 1975.)
- Turner, *Politics of Landscape* James G. Turner, *The Politics of Landscape: Rural Scenery and Society in English Poetry 1630–1660*. (Oxford, 1979.)
- Williams, *Country and City* Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*. (Oxford, 1973.)

CHAPTER I

Introduction: the country and the city revisited,
c. 1550–1850

Gerald MacLean, Donna Landry, Joseph P. Ward

I

AFTER WILLIAMS

In revisiting the literary and cultural terrain mapped out by Raymond Williams in *The Country and the City* (1973), this book seeks to connect Williams's analysis of urban and rural spaces with current critical concerns. In many respects Williams's study remains "the indispensable commentary on the poetry of rural life."¹ Literary, social, and art historians, as well as geographers and social and cultural theorists, continue to invoke *The Country and the City* as a necessary starting point for any investigation of the politics of place in the formation of English cultural identity. As recently as 1996, the "incredibly rich literary analysis" of *The Country and the City* was cited, by the geographer David Harvey, for exemplifying the critical relationship between place and space.² Certainly, its broad historical scope – reaching across several centuries from the emergence of mercantile capitalism through its transformation by and into industrial capitalism and colonial imperialism – continues to challenge seemingly neater historical periods.

In *The Country and the City*, and perhaps more profoundly in his fiction,³ Williams created an influential paradigm for conceiving of place and social space, country and city, the rural and the metropolitan, as dialectically related constructs, not fixed and separate entities. Yet however influential Williams's model of country and city has proved over the years, in the disciplines in which it has had most influence, critical thinking has altered in several important respects. However resonant the term "place" may be of rootedness and fixity, no place can ever be wholly abstracted from the social relationships, capital flows, cultural representations, and global forces that late-twentieth-century theorists have come to call "space."

The decades since the publication of Williams's book have seen a great deal of innovative scholarship on the politics of culture, especially

the representation of social identities and their constitution in specific geographical locations, places networked within the larger web of capitalist space. As early as 1972, John Barrell was revealing the particularities of the poet John Clare's sense of place, nourished in Northamptonshire on the edge of the Lincolnshire fens. Barrell showed how Clare's sense of space had developed in the old open-field agricultural landscape before enclosure, and how Clare struggled to express an aesthetic of locality against the tides of literary convention and agricultural improvement.⁴ In *The Politics of Landscape*, published in 1979, James Turner dealt with the ideological and aesthetic uses of landscape in a sophisticated, theoretically nuanced way that would prove influential.⁵ The work of Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall on gender within middle-class families and Peter Borsary's study of the distinctive culture of provincial towns represent important developments within social history of the 1980s.⁶ Geographers such as Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels have radicalized the understanding of land as landscape by drawing attention to its symbolic dimensions.⁷ The early 1990s saw a flourishing of similarly informed studies across the disciplines of cultural, social, literary, and art history.⁸

In the years since *The Country and the City* was published, notions of space have been theoretically developed in ways that challenge Williams's often tacit conceptions. Especially in the work of Henri Lefebvre, David Harvey, and Edward W. Soja, new conceptions of capitalist space have been formulated with regard for poststructuralist thinking across the academic disciplines.⁹ If the impact of poststructuralism has most often manifested itself in a suspicion of totalizing theory and an eschewing of scientific or empiricist reductionism, these are critical imperatives that were already at the forefront of Lefebvre's project as early as 1971.¹⁰ One of the tendencies of the new spatialization has been to disrupt "received theory and dominant metanarratives," as Harvey has argued, so it is easy to see why spatial metaphors have proved crucial for much theorizing, regardless of discipline.¹¹ Emphasizing the inescapability – and duplicity, or at least slipperiness – of signification within cultural practice has rendered untenable the kind of simple distinction Williams was able to make between the "real history" of social relations on the land, and mere ideologies on the other. From the point of view of more recent work, Williams's England, framed by his study window in Cambridgeshire, is itself only another image, a further gloss upon an already deeply layered text of Englishness.¹²

The rise of interdisciplinary work in history, geography, literature, and art history, combined with the broadening of the English literary canon, make a project like Williams's largely unthinkable today. For all its complex specificities, that deeply layered text was itself formulated exclusively within the parameters of literary history, and more specifically within the Cambridge English curriculum, in ways that scholars, including many of the contributors to this volume, have begun to question. The very notion of literature itself has expanded to include the writing of women and racial and ethnic minorities as well as working-class men. The texts of popular culture, including broadsides, pamphlets, newspapers, court records, and other archival materials both visual and verbal, now clamor to be read alongside the formerly canonical works of literature. The enlargement of the literary canon has complicated the field of literary and cultural studies at the same time that a new social history "from below" – focusing upon women, the working classes, colonized peoples, and ethnic and sexual minorities – has become both possible and necessary. Despite the considerable problems of retrieving evidence for the point of view of those "who left no wills, for whom no inventories were drawn up, who had few family papers, no account ledgers or bills,"¹³ the popularity of writing history "from below" remains undiminished. Movements toward interdisciplinary work in both literary and historical studies have meant that historians such as J. M. Neeson may now investigate the effects of enclosure by considering the evidence of George Morland's paintings and engravings and John Clare's poetry, while literary and art historical scholars like John Barrell have analyzed what enclosure might actually have meant for Clare's parish of Helpston.¹⁴ Williams would no doubt have approved of such developments.

Few would now consider taking on such categories as "country" and "city" across so many centuries of English history from an exclusively literary point of view. At the same time, the very Englishness of Williams's conceptual framework, which gestures toward the British Empire only in its closing chapters, would today be criticized as insufficiently attentive to questions of imperialism and colonialism. Interdisciplinary work now seeks to account for developments both within and across social history, literary studies, art history, and feminist and postcolonial theory. Any study of the politics of culture needs to challenge both old views and guard against premature orthodoxies.

Yet scholars have paid a price for their distrust of historical grand narratives. Although the new interdisciplinarity achieves argumentative

complexity amidst a wealth of detail, it depends upon a retraction of vision from what was possible for Williams. The transition from feudalism to capitalism, the rise of the middle classes and the English novel, the English Revolution that ended in a Restoration of monarchy, the Agricultural and Industrial Revolutions, the making of the English working class, the rapaciousness of the empire machine: large scale explanatory narratives of this sort have come to be seen as too simple, too monolithic, and too ideologically loaded. But what has been proposed instead? Rather than substituting improved explanations for long-term changes, cultural criticism and revisionist history have mainly focused on the local and the particular. As John Brewer once observed, in place of a new grand narrative, they have offered instead many inter-related short stories.¹⁵

In the spirit of Williams's historical comprehensiveness, though aware of its shortcomings, this book offers a longer vista of early modern English history than is generally available in a single volume. Spanning the traditional literary and cultural periods of the Renaissance and Romanticism, the subjects of this book mark the consolidation of a national identity that, despite enormous local and regional variants, confidently imagined itself ordained to set about ruling the world. How were the English people able to remake themselves from a rough, bucolic island nation, divided amongst themselves by localized feudal loyalties, dialects and even languages, into an imperial power? How can new concepts of spatiality, of socially produced space, help us to envisage how new forms of identity emerged during this period?

II

SPACE, MERCANTILISM, IDENTITY

Williams may have represented the country and the city as dialectically related, an advance over many previous analyses, but country and city nevertheless function dichotomously in his scheme of things. Analytical categories are not the same as descriptive terms. While country and city may continue to describe concrete and specific geographical places, they do so as relational constructs within the social production of space, with its movements of capital, labor, and commodities. What Williams figured as an analytical dichotomy can be more satisfactorily grasped as a series of permeable boundaries. Certainly the explanatory force of a single urban-rural divide has been questioned in the work of Ray Pahl and other sociologists, for whom the very terms rural and

urban are regarded as “more remarkable for their ability to confuse than for their power to illuminate.”¹⁶ Between 1550 and 1850, as more people traveled and migrated than ever before, differences between urban and rural cultures became less distinct even as they were increasingly reiterated as the social values that constituted Englishness.

During the whole of our period, English people, as well as the Welsh, Scots, and Irish, were perpetually on the move. For the early part of this period, vagrancy was both “the most intractable social problem,” particularly between 1560 and 1640, and a crime, “the social crime par excellence,” because the vagabond’s status itself was criminalized, apart from any actions committed.¹⁷ Vagrancy might be a crime, but “mobility was so pervasive that it was seen as much a natural part of the life cycle as being born or dying.”¹⁸ From the 1550s on, the greatest movement of people was from rural areas to metropolitan London and other cities and provincial towns. Poverty and ambition drove many into the suburbs, towns, and cities where they hoped to find work in a cash economy, and perhaps status and influence as well.

Yet at the same time that urban populations were expanding, there emerged a powerful counter-current in imaginative identifications, one that is still very much with us today: increasingly, for those who would be properly English, urbanity itself came to involve a rejection of life in the city for the country estate, house, or cottage. In order to avoid the filth and disease that accompanied city life, those who were very successful could return to the countryside, buy up land, and build themselves monuments to their own achievements. It is worth recalling that Ben Jonson’s design in celebrating the ancient family estate of the Sidneys at Penshurst was to repudiate those *nouveau* mansions that had been “built to envious show.”¹⁹ Ironically, as Williams recognized, the Sidneys themselves were relative newcomers to the land, since only half a century earlier Penshurst had been given by Edward VI to William Sidney, tutor and chamberlain of the court. “That is not quite a timeless order,” Williams observes, before going on to note that the very consolidation of one’s profits from courtiership in an ancient pile made it “easy to complain, with an apparent humanity, against the crude grasping of the successive new men.”²⁰

The paradox of country life as the desirable end of urban aspirations was often resolved then, as it is now, with the convenience of a suburban residence. Although the London suburbs were socially and economically integrated with the City from at least the sixteenth century, later suburbs became more imaginatively distinct. By 1700, John

Pomfret's poem, "The Choice," which Samuel Johnson thought had been "oftener perused" than any other poem in the English language, celebrates as the best of all possible lives that of an English gentleman of means with "a private Seat, / Built Uniform, not little, nor too great," standing on a rising ground, with fields on one side and woods on the other. But far from being buried in the depths of the country, the narrator wishes to be "Near some fair Town."²¹ Thus does a suburban sensibility with a genteel face emerge within polite culture in England. This development must shed new light on the flourishing of middle-class suburbanization over one hundred years later, as evidenced in the architecture, gardening, greenhouses, and house-furnishing manuals of John Claudius Loudon and Jane Webb Loudon in the 1830s and 1840s.²²

Flows of labor and capital were both internal to Great Britain and, crucially, colonial. From port cities many departed from British shores for colonial ventures, sometimes willingly, sometimes as the objects of transportation or impressment. The movement of commodities not only paralleled but became ever more deeply interfused with the movement of people. Since chattel slaves bore the legal status of commodities, the traffic in African chattel slaves was the most spectacular form of this commodification of human labor.²³ Sugar, tobacco, and African slaves dominated the West Indian traffic, while the East India trade featured tea, silk, and porcelain. As K. N. Chaudhuri argues, these commodities initiated new conceptions of space, time, and identity: "It was not for merchants to explain, much less to speculate on, the abstract unity formed by silk, porcelain, and tea between a great Far Eastern civilisation, warmed by the tropical sun, and the inhabitants of a cold Western hemisphere."²⁴ But this unexplained, abstract unity bound geographically separate peoples together, plantation chattel slaves and English laborers, transported vagrants and rich merchant adventurers, as well as Far Eastern and North-Atlantic traders. The economics and culture of mercantilism made possible new identities and forms of self-construction that depended on imaginary elements frequently at odds with geography.

Relations between the British colonial project and representations of English cities and countryside began much earlier than Williams's twentieth-century focus implies. The notion of industrial labor discipline originated on the colonial sugar plantation long before its arrival in European factories, for example.²⁵ And the eighteenth-century landscape aesthetics that shaped and reshaped much of England's rural topography into a picturesque notion of what "the countryside" should look like belonged, as Elizabeth Bohls argues, "to a repertoire of discursive

technologies set to advance the imperial project.”²⁶ English landscaped parks and colonial plantations became not only economically but aesthetically interdependent in the course of the eighteenth century. Such metropolitan and colonial relations seriously complicate any simple division between the urban and the rural, and these relations begin with sixteenth-century colonial exploration.

In economic terms, this is the great age of mercantile capitalism, reaching from the Elizabethan explorers and early trading companies that enjoyed monopoly privileges, such as the East India Company and the Levant Company, to the era of middle-class family fortunes made by manufacturing products, such as Cadbury’s chocolate, based on the colonial economy.²⁷ Not until the 1560s, during Elizabeth I’s reign, did English poets first seriously begin to imagine the English nation, and the British Isles, as a whole in terms of geographical space and boundaries. While reiterating Virgil’s line about the Britons inhabiting a world apart, they also began to look inside the national coastline to examine the astonishing variety of local customs and histories that made up the national map.²⁸ Cartographers and pamphleteers, as well as poets, contributed to the construction of new forms of nationhood. The great Elizabethan chorographical artists and writers followed roads and rivers inland to discover and describe ancient cities, local heroes, river nymphs, and other curious spirits of place along the way.

Keeping international trade-routes open frequently meant going to war in the name of one’s country, even as trade offered imaginary alternatives to violent conquest that redefined both *what* that country was and *where* it was to be found. Largely through the agency of the press, an essentially urban civic and political culture – one based on writing and reading – came to assert itself far beyond the legislative world of the Court, Parliament, and the great landowners. It became increasingly possible to be non-aristocratic, and yet nationally powerful beyond one’s immediate place, as studies of provincial towns, English merchants, and middle-class families, have shown.²⁹ In pursuing these developments, this book seeks to challenge the courtly, aristocratic, and London-centered approaches that still tend to predominate in literary and cultural histories of the English in the era before industrialization.

This “long” mercantilist moment, between the Renaissance and Romanticism, was crucial to Williams’s chief concern in *The Country and the City*: the development of literary forms and structures that both insinuated and resisted attempts to make the newly emergent capitalist relations appear fundamental to English life. Although images of country

life had been invoked for centuries to criticize urban corruption, and to posit a golden age of social harmony that had only recently vanished over the historical horizon, there was a particular urgency to English projections of vanishing rural virtues between the reigns of Elizabeth and Victoria. The mercantilist moment, celebrating imperial expansion and English greatness at home and abroad, depended upon a certain confidence, a certainty of identity as buoyant as the great ships of mercantile trade. This confident assertion of national superiority and resourcefulness, summed up in William Blackstone's description of the English as "a polite and commercial people," would no longer prove tenable beyond the early decades of the nineteenth century.³⁰ The aftermath of the American War of Independence, colonial and slave rebellions, the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars that followed, contributed not only to an agricultural crisis marked by a severe falling-off in agricultural productivity and prosperity, but also a crisis of political confidence in British imperial governance. After mid-century, Victorian imperial ambitions would be couched in a new rhetoric of defensiveness or bellicose bombast. If there had ever been such a thing as mercantilist innocence, it did not survive the era of Romanticism and the coming of the railway.

III

A BRIEF HISTORY, NOT OF TIME BUT OF SPACE

As we have seen, between 1550 and 1850 a profound shift occurred in the balance between the urban and rural populations of England, with particular consequences for the making of social identities. What did this shift mean in terms of physical places and social space? During the sixteenth century, most men and women worked in the agrarian sector and lived in the countryside, while fewer than five percent of them lived in towns. By the middle of the nineteenth century that had changed so dramatically that towns with more than 10,000 inhabitants together comprised roughly half the population of England. While English society was becoming more urban, the relations both among and between towns and their surrounding regions changed as well. Through the seventeenth century, London dominated provincial towns; by the outset of the eighteenth century its population was nearly twenty times that of Norwich, the next largest town, and nearly thirty times that of Bristol, the third largest. During the eighteenth century, the populations of many provincial towns, including several that were little more than sprawling

villages, began to rise at an increasingly rapid pace. By the early nineteenth century urban centers such as Manchester, Liverpool, and Birmingham were experiencing growth rates far higher than London's, though their populations were no more than one-tenth that of the metropolis. However, the combination of industrialization and the expansion of internal trade meant that provincial towns not only dwarfed their pre-industrial counterparts, but they emerged from beneath London's shadow.³¹

While there are many obstacles to gauging the metropolitan population with any precision before the 1801 census, the best estimates of the City of London's population in the early years of Elizabeth's reign place it at around 100,000, with an additional 30,000 or so in the nearby suburbs, such as Westminster. Over the next century and a half, the metropolis grew rapidly, if not steadily, until it contained half a million people by 1700, most of them living in suburban areas that had developed in formerly rural parts of Middlesex and Surrey. The relatively high mortality rate in London required huge inflows of immigrants who, responding to population pressures in the countryside, sought better fortunes in towns.³² The relatively rapid growth of London sparked both praise and criticism from contemporaries. In a sermon published in 1620 in the hope of inspiring King James to renovate St. Paul's cathedral, Bishop John King offered the many marvelous buildings and institutions of London – such as the Royal Exchange, the livery company halls, and hospitals for the poor – as evidence that London had become an “Augustus and majestic city” fit for a great cathedral. But King directed his remarks to a monarch who had already taken steps to stem metropolitan growth from fear that “Soon London will be all England.”³³

The fortunes of provincial towns varied widely during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with most undergoing periods of economic and demographic stagnation, followed by considerable improvements after the Restoration. Leading provincial centers such as Norwich, York, and Exeter continued to dominate important economic regions. Middle-size towns such as Coventry, however, failed to adapt to the emergence of a national distribution network for retail goods centered in London, and consequently saw much of their commercial activity being slowly siphoned away to other towns. Yet where a town's merchants and manufacturers adapted to developing domestic and, increasingly, international markets, then it could continue to prosper throughout the period. The population of Bristol, for example, doubled during the years

1550–1700, and then doubled again during the eighteenth century because its traders successfully expanded their interests beyond nearby ports in France and Spain toward the burgeoning markets in the West Indies and the Chesapeake, thereby encouraging the development of local industries such as sugar refining and the manufacture of tobacco pipes.³⁴

Urban growth was made possible by the greater output of raw materials and the steady improvement of the means of transporting them to markets. The growing population in south-eastern counties – and above all in London – contributed to shortages of wood for use in building and as fuel. An increased demand for coal, supplied principally from the Tyneside collieries, in turn encouraged the vast expansion of both mining and shipbuilding in the north-east.³⁵ Metropolitan growth was thus a catalyst for the urbanization of a region on the other side of the kingdom. At the same time, the higher productivity of agriculture made labor available for a wide array of by-employments in rural areas. The gradual emergence of rural communities that combined agrarian with manufacturing work – a process often referred to as “proto-industrialization” – was well underway in the sixteenth century and continued right into the nineteenth century as domestic and international markets expanded. Entrepreneurs, based in towns, took advantage of the willingness of rural people to supplement their incomes with waged labor to produce a wide array of goods ranging from textiles to nails.³⁶

One of the great engines of such demand was the growth of middle-class consumerism, which had emerged during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries largely as a result of increasing profits from commerce, industry, and the professions. In his study of this process in London, Peter Earle suggests that while it is difficult to isolate the specificities of middle-class culture, unmistakable desires and associated activities emerged: collecting certain kinds of objects – clocks, newspapers, novels – purchasing fire insurance, engaging in tea-drinking, joining social clubs, and for men, the new three-piece suit of coat, waistcoat, and knee-breeches. Peter Borsary’s work on the related phenomenon of the “urban Renaissance” of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries demonstrates that in matters of taste and style, London set the example for provincial towns, though there was certainly room for local variations. This emergence of middle-class culture was largely – though not exclusively – urban, since it relied on polite sociability. Urban, indeed urbane, spaces such as coffee-houses, town squares, the meeting

halls of scientific societies, lending libraries, spas, and walks, provided the socially mobile with spaces and opportunities to see and to be seen. Although most often tied to specific domestic locations, middle-class culture also embraced many previously exotic forms of behavior, such as consuming tea, cocoa, and coffee – with sugar, of course. Records of circulating libraries and book clubs in towns such as Nottingham, Leeds, Colne, and Bristol, demonstrate from the 1730s onward a shift in interest away from books on divinity and metaphysics toward titles dealing with travel and exploration, suggesting a broadening and secularizing of interests among those whose business concerns were increasingly global.³⁷

One of the most enthusiastic observers of the conditions of towns and the proliferation of middle-class culture during the early eighteenth century was Daniel Defoe. While he acknowledged in 1722 that London “sucks the vitals of trade in this island to itself,” thereby sapping the prosperity East Anglian port towns such as Ipswich, that had once flourished as regional commercial centers, he also noted the varying fortunes of towns further afield.³⁸ He found successful models in those places with

some particular trade or accident to trade, which is a kind of nostrum to them, inseparable to the place . . . as the herring-fishery to Yarmouth; the coal trade to New-Castle; the Leeds clothing-trade; the export of butter and lead, and the great corn trade for Holland, is to Hull; the Virginia and West-India trade at Liverpool, the Irish trade to Bristol, and the like.³⁹

Since England was still largely rural during the time of Defoe’s travels, he had many occasions to comment on life in the countryside. But he always remembered that he was directing his remarks to a middle-class audience. When describing the working conditions and domestic lives of Derbyshire lead-miners, including a family who lived in a cave, yet displayed both manners and consumer durables of pewter and brass, he announced that his aim was “to show the discontented part of the rich world how to value their own happiness.”⁴⁰

While the towns of eighteenth-century England provided those who inhabited “the rich world” with a wide array of options for consumption and polite sociability, for laboring people they often offered only economic insecurity. In London and the south, an oversupply of cheap labor depressed real wages from the mid-eighteenth century until at least the conclusion of the French wars. Wandering the chartered streets in “London” (1794), William Blake expressed the desperation that many town-dwellers must have felt, noticing “Marks of weakness,

marks of woe” in every face he met and hearing everywhere a clamorous misery:

In every cry of every man,
In every Infant’s cry of fear,
In every voice, in every ban,
The mind-forg’d manacles I hear.⁴¹

Blake’s lines gain power from their appearance during the outset of what would be several years of food shortages – perhaps accounting for the “Marks of weakness” and the “Infant’s cry of fear” – a time when Londoners, like city-dwellers across England, were painfully reminded of their dependence upon the output of the countryside.⁴²

In the newer and expanding industrial centers of the midlands and north of England, laborers fared much better than their counterparts in the south. But even here there were considerable fluctuations over time and variations across industries and skill levels.⁴³ In these areas, however, economic prosperity led to explosive population growth in recently rural areas, and to the creation of sprawling slums. Among the most passionate critics of the growth of industrial towns – and the economic relations that made them possible – was Friedrich Engels. Writing in 1844, a century and a quarter after Defoe, Engels deplored the results of the entrepreneurial processes that Defoe had praised:

The dwellings of the workers are everywhere badly planned, badly built, and kept in the worst condition, badly ventilated, damp, and unwholesome. The inhabitants are confined to the smallest possible space, and at least one family usually sleeps in each room. The interior arrangement of the dwellings is poverty-stricken in various degrees, down to the utter absence of even the most necessary furniture.⁴⁴

It is as if Defoe’s cave-dwelling lead miners have moved themselves – and their cave – to the city, but have left their manners, their pewter, and their brass behind. The city has indeed expanded to encompass the countryside and its residents, degrading each along the way.

Clearly, many of the changes in both country and city often assumed to have taken place during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in fact represent late stages in processes of change that had begun much earlier, in the early modern period investigated in this book. Between 1550 and 1850, but most conspicuously during the eighteenth century, the capitalization of agriculture was a project largely undertaken by those landowners whom Pomfret figures as living the ideal life, those embodiments of “gentlemanly capitalism” who would make their

mark on both countryside and colonies.⁴⁵ As P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins argue, the “peculiar character of the modern British aristocracy was shaped by merging its pre-capitalist heritage with incomes derived from commercial agriculture.”⁴⁶ Between 1688 and 1850, City of London financiers and providers of services, great overseas merchants, and merchant bankers, in effect apprenticed themselves to the landed interest, thus creating “a form of capitalism headed by improving landlords in association with improving financiers who served as their junior partners.”⁴⁷

Contrary to many literary scholars’ continuing fixation upon late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century parliamentary enclosures as the epitome of capitalist agriculture, recent work by historians attempts to distinguish between the history of enclosure per se and technologies of agrarian transformation. We need to look to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries for the mass of English enclosures, since by 1700, according to Eric Kerridge, only “about one-quarter of the enclosure of England and Wales remained to be undertaken.”⁴⁸ Between 1540 and 1700 a “great spurt in production” occurred, ushering in the agricultural developments that would dominate the years between 1560 and 1767.⁴⁹ Attempting to reconcile the findings of both agricultural historians and historians of enclosure, Robert C. Allen has identified “two agricultural revolutions in English history,” the yeomen’s and the landlords’.⁵⁰ The yeomen’s is the one which Kerridge has examined, a mainly seventeenth-century revolution in productivity brought about by yeomen and small farmers, though its legal basis was laid in the sixteenth century. The landlords’ revolution, consisting of the final waves of parliamentary enclosure, but more importantly of engrossment of land and farm amalgamation, began in the fifteenth century but happened mainly during the eighteenth, according to Allen. Rather than increasing output and distributing its benefits widely, as had happened in the seventeenth century, this revolution concentrated benefits among the elite owners of large estates through higher rents and a reduction in agricultural labor. Allen’s conclusion is, he claims, “unavoidable – most English men and women would have been better off had the landlords’ revolution never occurred.”⁵¹ Even recent non-Marxist historians such as J. R. Wordie have admitted that, if the English system did not actively drive people off the land through parliamentary enclosure, it nevertheless prevented people from “*getting onto* the land as population grew. In this way, the English system, devised and operated by English landlords, *made available* a labour supply for industry, although it did not *create* it.”⁵²

The internal travel demanded by commerce, agricultural improvement, and the factory system soon came to be supplemented by the internal travel we now call tourism. In the diverse regions of the first industrialized nation in the world, local identities shaped themselves against the projection of an increasingly imaginary rural English past. For more than a century by 1850, English tourists had been seeking to escape from the squalor of urban areas to picturesque countryside and sublime highland landscapes. At the same time, painted and printed images of rural life became “portable icons of England” for those who had left – “urban dwellers with real or imagined rural origins, colonists and imperial administrators in South Africa or India, soldiers.”⁵³

At the end of the twentieth century, the English countryside has become, on the one hand, the site of agribusiness or industrialized farming, and on the other, a place of recreation and retreat from cities and towns. Today it is difficult to recapture the early modern sense of suburbs as places where city artisans and merchants both lived and worked. Although suburbs today remain as economically linked to the city as ever, they represent a widespread compromise between the rural ideal and urban economic necessity. The origins of this compromise can be traced to the second half of the eighteenth century, as can the continuing English preoccupation with walking as a leisure activity. Going for country walks is the second most common recreation in Britain today, after watching television.⁵⁴ By the end of our period, walking, once the last resort of the indigent traveler, had become a fashionable form of recreation for the middle and upper classes.⁵⁵ Vagrants, formerly criminalized for their status as mobile beings, became Romantic figures of freedom in the popular imagination. The weekend gypsy and the suburban *flâneur* began to hover on the edges of imaginative possibility just as the factory worker and the industrial capitalist became new identities signifying the emergence of a modern England.

IV

IDENTITIES AND SPACES

The cultural consequences of England’s transformation from an agrarian and largely insular nation into an urban and industrial seat of empire can best be understood through a variety of sources and methodologies. No single category, approach, or method will do justice to what we think we know about the complex relation between space and identity, both as experienced and as represented, in England between 1550 and 1850.

Between the city and the country stands the suburb, and as we have seen, the construction of metropolitan space has necessitated the building of new suburbs and the suburbanization of older rural communities for several centuries. Whether a suburb denotes the expensive green retreat of reluctant city-dwellers, or a cheap supplementary bedroom community for workers who cannot afford to live in town, the twentieth-century suburb has often been the object of scorn and derision. Yet in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the emergence of London as a metropolis, and thus the City's very claims to urbanity, depended upon suburban expansion outside the walls of the medieval City of London itself. Joseph Ward identifies the profound interdependence of the City and its suburbs during this period. Countering the assumptions of some historians and many literary critics that London's suburbs were unanimously regarded by citizens as licentious foreign territory, Ward discovers a number of contemporary observers insisting on "the moral integrity of the entire metropolis" in contradistinction to diatribes against the "sinfully polluted suburbs." Ward also offers a new interpretation of the involvement of livery companies and their members in the suburban economy. Only after reformers acknowledged the moral failings of city-dwellers rather than blaming all disasters on suburbanites, and after livery company members were forced to admit their reliance on suburban markets, did Londoners come to imagine themselves as residents of a metropolis.

Despite a great upsurge in mobility, English people in this period had difficulty imagining themselves as travelers unless they went abroad. To be English in England meant being placed, rooted, locally identified. In spite of a mobile gentry actively engaged in a national land market, and vagrants and subsistence migrants taking to the road in unprecedented numbers during the later sixteenth century, to "travel" in sixteenth-century England meant to leave the nation's shores. This discursive framework has obscured the importance of internal travel before the mid-1600s. As Andrew McRae observes, a "powerful discourse of settlement shaped the practices of contemporary administrators and social commentators, and has subsequently informed approaches to historical analysis." Arguing for a recognition of the importance of internal travel in the production of a "capitalist space," McRae aims to recover the shifting range of meanings attached to geographical mobility within England by contemporaries. He discovers that, while "Tudor moralists insistently proclaim the virtues of place, by the early seventeenth century texts increasingly consider the importance of mobility, depicting men and women of middling and lower degree on the move."

Yet the rapid growth of metropolitan London and the phenomenon of cross-country travel in predominantly rural spaces were not the only conditions generating newly emergent forms of English identity in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. What about life in the provinces? Was provincial urban culture derived from London and court culture, as has often been assumed, or might it have certain indigenous origins? According to Robert Tittler, the commemoration of civic worthies in portraits commissioned by civic authorities represents an ideal test case in this debate. At this time of economic, social, and political upheaval, civic leaders “sought ways of projecting civic virtues, appropriating worthy models of civic consciousness, and tying the town’s present identity to its past.” In this effort civic portraits proved an important innovation, Tittler argues, by representing civic benefactors as objects “not of self-fashioning,” as in court culture, “but of a civic fashioning, projected by the urban leadership of the day toward the putative citizenry in the hope of remodelling the ambient political culture of their specific communities.”

Perhaps the most radical innovation in rural culture by the time of the Civil War was the Digger movement for agrarian communism, fuelled by the writings of Gerrard Winstanley, a bankrupt cloth merchant. In April 1649, three months after the execution of Charles I, Winstanley, accompanied by a small group of penniless laborers, began digging, manuring, and planting the common land at St. George’s Hill in Surrey, not far from London. As David Loewenstein argues, the Diggers’ community, which attempted to transform the earth into “a common treasury for all,” was an “acute response to the failures of the Revolution and its experimental Commonwealth.” The Diggers’ action was not so much a rural escape from economic oppression as a protest aimed at the nearby urban sprawl of London, designed to draw attention to the Diggers’ “alienation from the politics and policies of the Interregnum.” Not for the first time in English history, and certainly not for the last, symbolic and social action fused on the land, creating “a new kind of social identity based on communal property.” Loewenstein contends that the Diggers, though “too radical for the Revolution and the cautious Republic it had generated,” nevertheless “boldly challenged and defined the Revolution’s limitations, while in their visionary writings they acutely analyzed and represented some of its deepest contradictions.”

Robert Markley identifies powerful contradictions also at work in the discourses and practices of forestry, particularly after the Civil Wars. Markley argues that Marvell’s poem “Upon Appleton House,” when

considered in the context of contemporary treatises on forestry and agricultural improvement, both reflects and helps to shape “profound anxieties about the degradation of the environment and the resulting scarcity of essential resources, notably timber.” Progressivist historians, such as Eric Kerridge, have celebrated the agricultural revolution as a triumph of productivity through intensification. Ecologists, however, recognize that there can be no intensification of production without the eventual depletion of the resources which such technologies have made available. Markley’s reading of Marvell reveals “the tensions between competing ecological and economic models of the land” that are repressed within progressivist narratives of modernity.

If Markley suggested we should re-read triumphalist agricultural history to uncover the ecological other it has repressed, Nigel Smith proposes that we re-think the traditional polarization within intellectual history of “enthusiasm” and “Enlightenment.” In the case of Thomas Tryon – vegetarian, follower of the mystic Jacob Boehme, and abolitionist – Smith finds ample evidence of a radical artisanal philosophy based in both mysticism and an experimental and practical engagement with its energies. Tryon’s system of bodily self-regulation and rejection of luxury, including plantocratic slavery as well as the excesses of commercial society, is, according to Smith, “nothing other than the elaboration of a radical Puritan agenda, one that had been embryonically formed in the 1650s by others,” including Winstanley. Tryon’s is “a transformed enthusiasm,” anticipating Kant in its critical deployment of contemplative mysticism. Traditional intellectual history has encouraged us to dichotomize enthusiasm and enlightenment, but in Tryon’s system, Smith argues, “enthusiasm becomes enlightenment, and seeks to redeem the world from the terror of meat and the sweet violence of sugar.”

Defenders of forests, suburban Diggers, and urban vegetarians are forms of seventeenth-century social identity that resonate with late twentieth-century concerns. All three identities suggest something of that imaginative dislocation of identity from specific geographical places we have observed arising from physical mobility, the growing commodification of labor, and the effects of expanding markets. By the mid-eighteenth century, what Anne Janowitz has termed “the coincidence of country and country”⁵⁶ was imaginatively in place, but increasingly strained by differences between urban and rural points of view. “Without question,” Eliga Gould argues, “appealing to an idealized notion of the country often worked to cloak political activities which had their origin in Parliament and the urban press in the authoritative mantle

of England's rural past." Gould's example of such a policy is the elder William Pitt's intrusive and widely resented attempt to reform the English militia during the Seven Years' War, the Militia Act of 1757, which sparked some of "most serious rural riots of the eighteenth century." Subjecting all able-bodied men to a compulsory ballot regardless of their social position or personal wealth, this new law demonstrated the regulatory potential of the rhetoric of patriotism – and its unpopularity. The countryside as imagined from Westminster was a very different place from a countryside full of actual English people, for whom patriotism remained "more a public spectacle or artifact for mass consumption than a virtue to be sustained by personal participation."

On the estates of English grandees, however, efforts were made to keep such rural unrest literally out of sight and beyond the park palings, while inviting the attention of tourists. Collections of engravings of country estates, such as those produced by Jacques Rigaud in the 1730s, began not to be peopled with merely anonymous figures to give scale and perspective to the spot, but with recognizable personages. In such collections, eagerly pored over by object-collecting middle-class urbanites, Richard Quaintance discovers an early form of celebrity chasing. Rigaud's eye "for purchasers ready to be teased by a brush with 'celebrity'," Quaintance observes, "thus bequeaths us a sequence of sketchy on-the-spot portraits of four trend-setting Whig proprietors, their families, and, in their entourages, the leading poet, the leading landscape-designer, and a leading castrato of the moment." The effect of such innovations by Rigaud and the English engravers who followed his lead, Quaintance argues, was to demystify place-making, "leaving English ground visually more accessible to more people" than it had ever been before.

It could be said that expanding "English" ground across the globe and rendering it not visually, but verbally, more accessible to more people than it had ever been before, was the task of the imperial georgic poem. Karen O'Brien takes issue with earlier literary historians who have explained the popularity of georgic verse between 1688 and 1789 purely in terms of literary fashion and changing taste. Instead, O'Brien links the rise of georgic and similarly descriptive kinds of poetry "to a new and growing awareness of the British Empire." She finds "the agricultural landscape of these poems imbued with a sense of spatial and economic continuity with the wider imperial world." In an age suspicious of epic and romance, the adaptability of the georgic middle style "that could rise to national prophecy and rapture or descend to technical detail

without breaching generic decorum” proved “highly attractive to poets wishing to communicate the elation of empire, the moral dangers which it could bring, and the mechanics of its implementation.”

As important for the imperial project as georgic verse was the discourse of landscape aesthetics. Elizabeth Bohls examines how, in the case of Jamaica’s colonial historian, Edward Long, landscape aesthetics “belonged to a repertoire of discursive technologies” that were crucial for imperial expansion and the perpetuation of the colonial sugar industry. Long himself represents a new form of social identity, “that peculiar hybrid, the colonial gentleman planter,” as Bohls puts it. “Patterned on the English country gentleman and borrowing his prestige,” Bohls argues, yet potentially embarrassed by his unmediated reliance upon a slave economy, the gentleman planter’s identity “depends on a central paradox: imposing metropolitan sameness on the very different place that is the colony for the purpose of defending that place’s indispensable local difference, namely, the institution of slavery.”

Reconfiguring identities back home is, according to Elizabeth Heckendorn Cook, the subject of Frances Burney’s last novel, *The Wanderer* (1814), which transposes the georgic mode for female narrative purposes while also georgically recuperating the monarchy of George III. On one hand, Cook finds Burney’s “gendered inflection of the georgic mode” an “important – and implicitly feminist – gesture,” perhaps even a claim about the future of “actual women in British society . . . bringing together the discourses of literary georgic, landscape aesthetics, natural history and property law.” On the other hand, as Cook discovers, it is only “by marking the New Forest as the property of the benevolent Farmer George, and *Father* George – that is, as a doubly patriarchal terrain – does Burney obtain a place for her heroine within it.” These “domestications” of the crown forest indicate, Cook argues, that “this terrain is no longer the feudal theater of monarchical charisma and prerogative, nor yet merely a political economist’s neutral repository of marketable resources.” Instead, as both Burney’s and George III’s uses of it demonstrate, the crown forest can now serve “as a screen on which to project images of a new society, dramas of reconciliation and transformation, and fantasies of personal, professional, and political identity.”

In the figures of the Gypsy and the Jew we can observe equally phantasmatic versions of rural and urban identity, mercantilist fantasies of new forms of social being. Throughout the long early modern period, such figures represented perpetual mobility as a threat to social order.

As Anne Janowitz explains, the “exchange between metropolitan and rural culture that both Gypsies and Jews exemplify is grounded in historical processes at work since the mid-sixteenth century.” But by the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, these figures assume a particular urgency in the poetry of William Wordsworth and John Clare that marks a certain historical specificity, and registers the end of the mercantilist moment and the beginning of modern industrial culture. Although, as Janowitz concludes, Jewish peddlers and traveling Gypsy crews might barely be distinguishable from the large numbers of other people displaced through parish exclusion, enclosure, failed harvests, and the press gang, their importance as images in poetry resides in the way they support the imagining of identity in a transitional world – one poised between customary and waged labor.

In the Afterword, John Barrell reconsiders notions of space and identity he initially explored in relation to Clare in *The Idea of Landscape* (1972). Engaging some of the central ideas put forward in the present book regarding the emergence of capitalist space, Barrell goes on to complicate as well as clarify these ideas by analyzing two texts from the 1740s that “offer radically different accounts of space,” *The Life and Adventures of Bampfylde-Moore Carew*, and John Dyer’s “Commercial Map of England.” Carew’s “gypsy” narrative might seem pre-industrial and backward-looking, while Dyer’s manuscript appears to epitomize the rationalization of commodity circulation; but things are in fact a bit more complicated than that. Attending to the precise configurations of space in each text, Barrell suggests how intricate was the knotting together of metropolis and periphery during the mercantilist era.

NOTES

- 1 John Barrell, “Sportive Labour: The Farmworker in Eighteenth-Century Poetry and Painting,” in Brian Short, ed., *The English Rural Community: Image and Analysis* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 105–32, this passage p. 132, n. 10.
- 2 “Militant Particularism and Global Ambition,” the first chapter of Harvey’s *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 19–45, is devoted to a critical appraisal of Williams’s use of the terms “environment,” “space,” and “place”; this passage p. 30.
- 3 See Harvey, *Justice*, pp. 23–39.
- 4 See Barrell, *Idea of Landscape*.
- 5 Turner, *Politics of Landscape*.
- 6 Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780–1850* (Chicago, Ill., 1987); Borsay, *The English Urban Renaissance: Culture and Society in the Provincial Town, 1660–1770* (Oxford, 1989).

- 7 Cosgrove and Daniels, eds., *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design and Use of Past Environments* (Cambridge, 1988).
- 8 See, for example, McRae, *God Speed*; Nicholas Green, *The Spectacle of Nature: Landscape and Bourgeois Culture in Nineteenth-Century France* (Manchester, 1990); Michael Leslie and Timothy Raylor, eds., *Culture and Cultivation in Early Modern England: Writing and the Land* (Leicester, 1992); John Barrell, ed., *Painting and the Politics of Culture: New Essays on British Art, 1700–1850* (Oxford, 1992); and Andrew Hemingway, *Landscape Imagery and Urban Culture in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge, 1992).
- 9 See Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (1974), trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford, 1991); Harvey, *Social Justice and the City* (1973), *Consciousness and the Urban Experience* (1985); and Soja's spirited defense of Lefebvre, "Spatializations: Marxist Geography and Critical Social Theory" in *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (1989), pp. 43–75.
- 10 See Lefebvre, *Au-delà du structuralisme* (Paris, 1971).
- 11 Harvey, *Justice*, p. 9.
- 12 See Cosgrove and Daniels, eds., *Iconography*, pp. 7–8.
- 13 Neeson, *Commoners*, p. 11.
- 14 See Neeson, *Commoners*, and Barrell, *Idea of Landscape*.
- 15 John Brewer, commentary, seminar on "Culture and Consumption," Center for Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Studies, UCLA, November 1990.
- 16 Pahl cited in Michael Winstanley, "The New Culture of the Countryside," in G. E. Mingay, ed., *The Vanishing Countryman* (1989), pp. 142–54; this passage p. 142.
- 17 Beier, *Masterless Men*, p. xxii.
- 18 Peter Clark and David Souden, eds., Introduction, *Migration and Society in Early Modern England* (1987), pp. 11–48, this passage p. 22.
- 19 "To Penshurst," in *Ben Jonson: A Critical Edition of the Major Works*, ed. Ian Donaldson (Oxford, 1985), p. 282.
- 20 Williams, *Country and City*, p. 41.
- 21 Johnson, *Lives of the English Poets*, ed. George Birkbeck Hill, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1905), I: 302; [Pomfret], *The Choice. A Poem, By a Person of Quality* (1700), lines 5–8.
- 22 J. C. Loudon's best-known book of many was *The Suburban Gardener and Villa Companion* (1838); his wife Jane not only helped him to edit and produce his own work, but also wrote nineteen books herself, including the popular *The Lady's Companion to the Flower Garden* (1841). See Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, pp. 188–92.
- 23 See David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1966), and Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass., 1993).
- 24 K. N. Chaudhuri, *Asia Before Europe: Economy and Civilisation of the Indian Ocean from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 122.
- 25 See Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York, 1985), pp. 46–52.

- 26 See Bohls' chapter in this book, p. 180. On the invention of "the countryside" as a generalized aesthetic unity, see Donna Landry, "The Invention of the Countryside: Pope, the 'Idiocy of Rural Life,' and the Intellectual View from the Suburbs," in James E. Gill, ed., *Cutting Edges: Postmodern Critical Essays on Eighteenth-Century Satire* (Knoxville, Tenn., 1995), pp. 301-19.
- 27 On the Cadburys of Birmingham, see Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, pp. 52-9.
- 28 See Gerald MacLean, *Time's Witness: Historical Representation in English Poetry, 1603-1660* (Madison, Wisc., 1990), pp. 64-126; Helgerson, *Forms of Nationhood*; and Clair McEachern, *The Poetics of English Nationhood, 1590-1612* (Cambridge, 1996).
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