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Labor and Laborer in Latin Poetry: the Case of the *Moretum*

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For most sections of the Roman population we possess no written account of their lives and experience as they themselves saw it: there are no slave narratives, no diaries, and no laborer poets from ancient Rome. ¹ At the most we have inscriptions left by those commemorating the dead which tell us something about how the laboring poor, slave, freed or free, chose to identify themselves. ² But these are extremely brief and formulaic and represent almost exclusively the urban population; the agrarian laborers who made up the majority of the working population remain silent to posterity. However, Roman literature, which shows little interest in urban labor, frequently represents the world of the laboring rural poor, although these representations more often than not cover the lives and experience of the laborers with fantasies of the elite. Shepherds are dressed up as poets and vice versa in Virgil's *Eclogues*, and Tibullus (1.5) imagines himself and his Delia as peasants welcoming Messalla to their humble abode. Sometimes rural labor is idealized but the laborers themselves rendered invisible: Virgil's *Georgics* is notoriously devoid of the slave laborers that worked the estates of his readers. ³ Labor and poverty are constantly praised by the [End Page 389] Roman moralists, but from a safe distance: the multi-millionaire Seneca, for instance, recommended imitating the life of the poor for a few days so as to achieve mental security from the blows of fate (*Epistles* 18.5-8). In this context the pseudo-Virgilian *Moretum* is a striking anomaly; as far as I know, it is the only detailed representation of the life of the working poor in Latin poetry that is not explicitly framed so as to relate it to some other agenda. ⁴ The poem consists entirely of the account of a poor peasant, Simulus, waking and preparing the lunch that he will take with him to the fields, a lunch of bread accompanied by a cheese and garlic confection referred to by the title of the poem. The *Moretum* begins when Simulus wakes and ends as he goes off to the fields to plough, secured from hunger by the lunch he has prepared. This slice of life is not framed in any way nor does it allude to greater matters; there is little explicit glorification of poverty or labor, and in general the poem paints a fairly grim picture of Simulus' life.

The anomalousness of the *Moretum* has prompted some to call it realistic, assuming that if it lacks the elite culture's usual investments in the life of the laboring poor then it must be interested in that life for its own sake. ⁵ However, insofar as the concept of realism is useful for ancient literature, it has to imply a polemical force with respect to other representations: the realistic moment in a particular work is its resistance to various kinds of literary decorum. ⁶ I will be situating this poem's anomalous focus [End Page 390] on the life of a poor laborer in a polemical relation to other representations of labor and poverty in Latin literature. My concern will be with the conditions under which labor and poverty can become visible in the Roman cultural context, and this will involve examining the ways in which they are made invisible or partially appropriated by the elite as masks or fantasies. The anomalousness of the *Moretum* allows us to bring into focus the strategies and interests that govern representations of the laboring poor and to explore the cultural norms that tend to make the life of a Simulus unrepresentable. Naturally, the *Moretum* cannot give us access to the experience of the rural laborer in ancient Rome, but what it can do is locate the blind spots in which that experience is hidden from the elite and identify the purposes that elite representations of rural labor might serve. It can also tell us something about the kinds of interest that a poet might have in addressing this subject matter, and I will be arguing that the laborious preparations of Simulus described by the poet serve to materialize the otherwise invisible work of writing poetry. But before turning to the *Moretum* itself I will briefly describe the attitudes that affect representations of poverty and labor by the Roman elite.

Roman Elite Attitudes to Poverty and Labor

The gap between rich and poor in ancient Rome was enormous, both materially and imaginatively.⁷ The poor included all who fell short of the minimum property qualifications for senatorial or equestrian status; in other words the Roman elite was more interested in the relative indigence that disqualified a man from public life than in the absolute indigence that made it difficult or impossible to survive (Whitaker 1993.280). Poverty was thought to deprive a person of the possibility of living a truly human life or, indeed, of having what the literate elite would recognize as a life at all.⁸

But the poor urban plebs did concern the upper-class Roman to the extent that its desperation might make it eager for revolution; not that writers like Sallust would have acknowledged that destitution drove people to revolt, for their outlook was always moral: the lazy plebs wanted [End Page 391] something for nothing.⁹ This desire to hold the poor criminally responsible for their revolutionary potential led the Roman upper classes to produce idyllic images of a contented and self-sufficient poverty, almost always rural. Ovid's story of Philemon and Baucis, a picture of domestic bliss in conditions of rural poverty, attributes the happiness of the aged couple to their uncomplaining acceptance of poverty.¹⁰ When the gods, incognito, visit this virtuous menage they are entertained by the couple with humble fare that is enhanced by the goodwill of the hosts towards their guests (*Metam.* 8.677-78):

super omnia vultus
accessere boni, nec iners pauperque voluntas,

accompanying all this were
friendly expressions and a will neither sluggish nor niggardly.

Lurking beneath this idyll is the anxiety of the urbanite at the ill-will towards their social superiors of the poor (*inertes pauperes!*) who do *not* cheerfully embrace their condition.¹¹ On a more general level, Ovid's idyll reflects the fact that rural poverty lay at the root of the myth of Rome's origins and of the ancestral virtues of its people, as "poor (*pauperis*) Evander" testifies in the *Aeneid* when he urges Aeneas to dare to despise wealth (8.359-69).

The Roman attitude to labor was also conflicted: on the one hand, and here the Romans followed the Greeks, manual wage labor was represented as a morally degrading way of life,¹² but on the other hand, the Romans differed from the Greeks in making *labor* a form of *virtus* rather [End Page 392] than simply a prerequisite of it.¹³ The one notable exception to the generally negative attitude towards manual labor as a way of life was the glorification of the independent small farmer, or *colonus* (Garney 1980.35). The *colonus*, for a long time the backbone of the Roman army as well as the instrument of the colonization of Italy, was seen as the embodiment of traditional Roman values (thrift, hard work, self-sufficiency), and the close connection in the Roman imagination between military and agricultural activity was responsible for what has been called "the myth of the peasant patriarch" (Garney 1980.37). The Roman military ideal was not the Homeric, aristocratic ideal of glorious single combat flavored by battle lust; as Heinze puts it: "waging war is hard work to which the Roman citizen submits for the sake of the *res publica* just as, for the sake of his *res privata*, he ploughs the field in the sweat of his brow."¹⁴ The general who shares the labor of his troops was just as important a figure of Roman social solidarity and national virtue as was the statesman called from the plough to take over the reins of state.¹⁵

Even when rural estates came to be worked by a mixture of slave and hired free labor overseen by a bailiff (*villicus*), the owner may still have wanted to imagine himself as the one who did the work.¹⁶ That bastion of old Roman tradition, Cato the Elder, professed to have learned agriculture by working on the flinty soil of his own Sabine farm. He omits to mention that the estate was worked with slave labor (White 1973.457). Cato's *De Agri Cultura* begins with a paean to the farmer and the respect with which he was held in ancient times, concluding, revealingly, with the observation that those engaged in agriculture are the least likely to be disaffected (*minime male cogitantes*, *Praef.* 4). But after the preface the small independent farmer disappears and Cato goes on to describe how to administer profitably a large estate worked by slave laborers and overseen by a bailiff. It has been observed that Cato's handbook is in fact written for the benefit of the very businessmen whom he contrasts unfavorably with the farmer in his preface (White 1973.457). Buying a farm with slaves and a bailiff was also buying a

fantasy; the extraction of profit from the large scale organization of labor was mitigated by an imaginative participation in **[End Page 393]** the myth of the peasant patriarch. Roman terminology supports this illusion, for the words *agricola* and *colonus* can refer either to the peasant who works the land or to the rich landowner who, at best, supervises the work (Kolendo 1993.199-200).

Virgil's *Georgics* participates in, and feeds, this fantasy of the peasant patriarch, assuming a completely anachronistic context: profit is never mentioned, nor is the hiring of labor, or even the ownership of slaves. ¹⁷ His addressees, some of whom no doubt owned the kinds of agricultural operations described by Cato and Varro, are to imagine themselves as farmers at a time when the peasant landowner is becoming an object of nostalgia. ¹⁸ When Virgil, addressing the Roman elite, speaks of the hard but rewarding life of the *agricolae* he is allowing his readers to exploit the work of others imaginatively as well as materially; the people who are really doing the work are invisible. ¹⁹ Virgil's addressee is to imagine himself dominating nature just as the general imagines himself conquering nations: he "does" what he causes to happen by ordering others, who have a quite different consciousness and motivation, to work. The conflation of worker and owner in the anachronistic perspective of the *Georgics* puts the farmer in the position of the general, representative of imperial Rome and cooperating with nature by dominating it. As Columella puts it, "nature does not adequately accomplish what it wants, unless you help it with work and attention." ²⁰ Nature needs the farmer as the world needs the Roman empire.v **[End Page 394]**

Laborer and Nature

Virgil introduces the subject of agricultural work in the *Georgics* from this synoptic perspective of cooperation with nature in which the human worker disappears (1.43-46):

Vere novo, gelidus canis cum montibus umor
liquitur et Zephyro putris se glaeba resolvit,
depresso incipiat iam tum mihi taurus aratro
ingemere et sulco attritus splendescere vomer.

In early spring, when the cold water on the mountains melts and the crumbling clod is loosened under the West wind, I would have the bull begin to groan under the driven plough and the ploughshare worn by the furrow begin to shine.

The laborer has faded into an ablative absolute (*depresso aratro*) leaving a world of natural forces, animals, and implements; only the dative of interest (*mihi*) expresses human agency, identifying the one who surveys this conjunction of forces with proprietorial synopticism as the one who causes work to happen. ²¹ The ploughman is replaced by the bull, which belongs to the natural world with which agriculture is cooperating, and it is the bull, not the exploited ploughman, who groans under the labor. Relations between humans are elided in this conjunction of natural forces. ²²

The beginning of the *Moretum* might almost be parodying Virgil's absorption of an impersonal labor into the world of nature, with whose mutations it cooperates; here the processes of nature persecute our working hero (1-7):

Iam nox hibernas bis quinque peregerat horas
excubitorque diem cantu praedixerat ales, **[End Page 395]**
Simulus exigui cultor cum rusticus agri,
tristia venturae metuens ieiunia lucis,
membra levat vili sensim demissa grabato
sollicitaque manu tenebras explorat inertes
vestigatque focum, laesus quem denique sensit.

Already the winter night had completed ten hours and the winged watchman had announced the day with his song, when Simulus, the rustic tiller of a small field, fearing the grim hunger that the coming light would bring, lowers his limbs slowly from his poor bed, raises himself, and with a careful hand explores the empty dark, searching for the hearth, which finally he found when it burnt him.

As the dawn breaks with epic inevitability, Simulus, to whom it brings only the threat of hunger, struggles to recover artificial light so he can begin the laborious process of preparing his meal. The poem begins with a grand periodic sentence leading off with a typically epic gesture (*iam nox . . .*) and continuing with a pompous periphrasis (*excubitor . . . ales*), which introduces the grim reality of Simulus' existence. ²³ In place of the swift economy of motion that characterizes the activities of the epic hero we have the groping of Simulus who finds his source of light and warmth only when it burns him. Virgil's smooth integration of the announcement of natural change with the call to work is challenged by this disjunction between the ceremonial decorum of nature's recurrences and the struggle of this particular human to maintain the continuity of light. By preventing the experience of the laborer from coming into focus, Virgil is able to infuse the subject of agriculture with a generously cosmic sympathy (in the Stoic sense) in which any figure who appears on the landscape can then be bathed. ²⁴ The author of the *Moretum*, by contrast, allows an epic dawn to shine cruelly on the cramped existence of the ploughman, thereby making plain the difference in perspective between the worker and the reader of epic. Although the *Moretum* seems uninterested in the social status of its [End Page 396] hero and the relations of dependence that may govern his labor, it *is* interested in the imaginative relation between literate elite and laborer.

How, then, are we expected to respond to the disjunction between the epic decorum of nature and the awkward realities of Simulus' existence, with sympathy or laughter? Insofar as the reader looks down on the existence of Simulus from the vantage of the high mimetic style, Simulus may appear comic. Beneath the elegance of the final clause in the passage I have just quoted (*laesus quem denique sensit*) we may hear the inarticulate cry or curse of Simulus when he burns himself on the hearth. Does this stylistic delicacy uphold the dignity of the poem's hero, or does the economy of expression with which this awkward moment is described mock the unfortunate peasant's clumsiness and slyly encourage us to imagine how he actually reacted? ²⁵ Instead of trying to decide this question and to fix the attitude of the author, I would prefer to see this ambiguity in terms of the conditions of Simulus' visibility. On the one hand, the life of Simulus needs to be shielded from ridicule to become the object of high cultural attention, and in this context the decorum of the language attempts to tune out the "noise" that interferes with its being recognized as a life. On the other hand, the life of Simulus can only truly appear in what resists incorporation into the high cultural style, and is indirectly present in the cry or curse that we hear under the elegance of the language.

The relation between the poem's elaborately decorous style, with its frequent epicisms, and the banal subject matter has been described in quite opposite ways by the two major studies of this poem. Heinze 1960 claims that the style is neutral and serves to present Simulus simply as he is; ²⁶ by contrast, Ross 1975 argues that there is a comic discrepancy between style and subject matter, and that the poem is a parody of the Alexandrian trivialization and domestication of the epic hero. For Ross, the author is not primarily interested in the life of Simulus, which only comes into focus as the *reductio ad absurdum* of a literary trend. For Heinze, the opposite is true: the solid reality of Simulus' life and its claim to the reader's attention exist independently, although the sober observation of this reality is directed against the romanticizing of rustic life in Roman [End Page 397] literature. ²⁷ Heinze disregards the fact that Simulus' life has to be *recognized* literarily as a life; its reality as an object of attention cannot be taken for granted. Ross fails to allow for the fact that the detailed attention to this subject matter takes on its own weight and may unsettle the parodic intention. The parody becomes unstable when the concentrated focus on this life produces another center of gravity from which the pretensions of the epic will themselves be weighed. ²⁸

Simulus, Odysseus, and Aeneas

It would seem perverse of Ross to relate the epicized Simulus to the Alexandrian domestication of the epic hero when Roman culture sets so much store by the "glory of the divine countryside" (*Georgics* 1.168). In a passage at the end of the *Moretum*, to which I will return later, Simulus girds himself for battle (120-22), an epic warrior materialized from Virgil's military metaphors for ploughing (*Georgics* 1.97-99, 104-05). But for the majority of the poem Simulus is a hero of survival, more like an Odysseus than an Achilles or an Aeneas. To acknowledge Simulus' right to our attention in this epic context is to recognize some affinity between Odysseus' struggle to survive, in particular the resourcefulness this struggle generates and displays, and the struggle of Simulus.

Since the *Odyssey* tells the story of a deracinated aristocrat who must learn to survive outside the realm

of his authority (though not of his fame), the life and experience of Odysseus intersects with the lives of the laboring poor. ²⁹ The potentially disruptive effect of this intersection on the social stratification of the epic is controlled by, among other things, the fact that for the epic hero the intersection is an incident in a narrative to which the existence of a *Simulus* provides the static background. ³⁰ [End Page 398]

The distinction between the repetitive existence of the peasant and the life of heroic incident is most clearly maintained by the Homeric poems' similes from the world of the laboring poor. ³¹ Take the comparison of Odysseus sleeping in his bed of leaves on arrival in Phaeacia to the brand a peasant has hid in the ashes (*Od.* 5.488-92):

As when someone has hidden a brand in the black ash on the edge of the land, where there are no neighbors, saving the seed of fire so that he needn't get fire from another, in the same way Odysseus was covered with leaves. And Athena poured sleep on his eyes.

Borrowing this reality from the everyday life of the lone peasant, Homer makes the sleeping Odysseus enormously precious, but for whom? Certainly for Athena, at the opposite end of the scale of being from the peasant; the fact that she has none of the material needs that drive the peasant makes her concern for Odysseus all the more poignant. But, more immediately, it is the audience itself for whom Odysseus is precious because the continuity of the story depends on his waking up. Part of the purpose of Homer's simile is to reassure us that Odysseus will not be forgotten, as the lone peasant *will*, when the narrator and Athena proceed to the palace of Alcinous which has its own stories in progress: Odysseus is the light that will be kept burning through this story, his life its principle of continuity, and this simile tells us how we are to imagine that continuity as the story moves to other lives.

The life of the peasant furnishes the material for a simile figuring the continuity of heroic narrative that is preserved at his expense. The very inclusion, in a simile, of this kind of material from the repetitive lives of those who subsist signals the exclusion of their lives from the narrative repertoire: appropriated from the life of one far removed from Odysseus in social status, this material can mark (by its difference) an incident in his life, although the life of the peasant himself has nothing that the heroic mode would recognize as an incident. [End Page 399]

The *Moretum* begins as though Homer's heroic narrative has been hijacked and the peasant, rather than Odysseus, is the one who wakes up. *Simulus* follows the ancient practice of hiding a brand beneath the ash to preserve the flame, and from it he lights his lamp, but with difficulty (8-14):

parvulus exusto remanebat stipite fomes
et cinis obductae celabat lumina prunae;
admovet his pronam summissa fronte lucernam
et producit acu stuppas umore carentis,
excitat et crebris languentem flatibus ignem.
tandem concepto, sed vix, fulgore recedit
oppositaque manu lumen defendit ab aura . . .

A small piece of kindling made from a burnt log remained, and the ash of the covering charcoal hid the glow; bending his head he brings to this the tilted lamp and draws out the dry wick with a spike, and then with repeated blowing resuscitates the failing fire. Once the fire, at last, has caught (but just!) he draws back and protects the light from the draught with his hand in front of it.

When *Simulus* lights his lamp the proverbial matter from the lives of the poor that provides analogies with epic incident becomes the locus of incident itself; this means that we are invited to recognize the analogy between the experience of the peasant and that of Odysseus, an analogy that the Homeric simile functions to control by having the daily reality of the peasant figure the law of the medium's focus on its hero. But this recognition of *Simulus*' potentially heroic status puts the detail of the daily struggle which *is* *Simulus*' life in the context of the rituals and formulae through which the repeated quotidian activities of the hero are maintained as the *background* to heroic incident. The epic hero prepares meals, girds himself with arms, launches ships, and so on, but this is all performed with a confident and ceremonial dexterity confirming that he needn't be concerned about these aspects of existence. To give a life to the peasant excluded, by his proverbiality, from the narrative layer of the epic is to turn the ceremonial of the hero's everyday activities into something comically precarious. *Simulus*' life lies

somewhere between that of the proverbial Homeric peasant who provides the reassuring background to Odysseus' [End Page 400] story and that of the hero himself who provides the paradigm of an existence worthy of narrative.

The end of the *Moretum* brings Simulus and his life into contact with the world of Roman epic, and specifically the *Aeneid*; having prepared his lunch Simulus girds himself for his daily work (117-22):

eruit interea Scybale quoque sedula panem,
quem laetus recipit manibus, pulsoque timore
iam famis inque diem securus Simulus illam
ambit crura ocreis paribus tectusque galero
sub iuga parentis cogit lorata iuencos
atque agit in segetes et terrae condit aratrum.

Meanwhile Scybale, busy herself, draws out the bread which he receives gladly in his hands and, now that he has driven away the fear of hunger and is secure for that day, he wraps his legs in matched leggings and, with a cap on his head, brings the obedient bullocks under the yoke, drives them to the fields and plunges the plough into the earth.

This ending recalls the end of the *Aeneid* (12.950-51):

hoc dicens ferrum adverso sub pectore condit
fervidus.

Saying this, Aeneas plunges the sword into the chest of Turnus before him, burning with rage.

Armed for action Simulus plunges (*condit*, 121) the plough into the earth as Aeneas plunges his sword into the neck of Turnus (*condit*, 12.950). If this ending puts the worker and the pressures of his existence back into the natural world of the *Georgics*, it also confronts the *Aeneid* with a different kind of laborious heroism equally important to the myth of Rome. When Aeneas plunges his sword into Turnus the word *condit* ("sinks") recalls the exclamation at the opening of the work: "How much effort it was to sink the foundations of the Roman race" (1.33, *taetae molis erat Romanam condere gentem!*). The *Moretum* reminds us of the foundational claims of a *moles* (effort) of a different and far less glamorous sort, namely the archetypally [End Page 401] Roman activity of ploughing, an activity that played quite as important a role in Rome's sense of its unique destiny and character as did Aeneas' triumph. The association of these two actions contrasts the climactic and pregnant epic moment of death and victory with the beginning of a repetitive and repeated daily grind that can have no narrative interest. When Simulus, relieved of the anxiety of hunger, plunges into the mythical stuff of Rome, he disappears from sight at the very moment that his work begins. The ironic reminiscence of the *Aeneid* is a poignant measure of the distance between the heroic life worthy of a narrative and the unnarratable *moles* of the laboring existence.

Slave and Master

We could say that the ending of the *Moretum* repeoples the *Aeneid* by reminding us of the lives of persistent struggle that could more accurately be said to "found" Rome than the mythical incidents and heroic confrontations described by Virgil. The presence of Simulus at the center of high mimetic attention both stakes a claim for the dignity of this life and brings a charge against the epic's exclusions and truncations. This double motive means that epic norms must both be sustained (in order to elevate Simulus) and debunked (in order to challenge the epic's claims to universality).

Repeopling Ovid's idyll of rural poverty in *Metamorphoses* 8, the *Moretum* is similarly equivocal, for while it debunks the egalitarian beauty of Ovid's rustic household it bathes the actions of Simulus in epic decorum. ³² The Greek names of Ovid's Baucis and Philemon stress the mutual affection of this blissfully married and aged couple, who constitute both the masters and slaves in this egalitarian household. ³³ Simulus and his slave Scybale both have Greek names, but there the similarity ends, for the names of the *Moretum*'s couple, "Snubnosed" (*simos*) and "Refuse" (*skubalê*), degrade them both to the subhuman, though even in their degradation the hierarchy between slave and master is upheld. ³⁴

This [End Page 402] hierarchy performs a double function: not only does it debunk Ovid's idyll of a beautifully shared poverty, but it also channels the aesthetic ugliness of Simulus' existence into Scybale, the African slave, making Simulus' right to be touched by the world of high culture plausible by contrast.

Scybale and Simulus are distinguished by contrasting mimetic styles: Scybale is given the most detailed physical caricature of a black in ancient literature and is said to attest her origin with her whole body, but Simulus does not attest to what he is in such inevitable fashion, and his activity is surrounded by an epic aura. Compare the two following passages (19-25):

inde abit adsistitque molae parvaque tabella,
quam fixam paries illos servabat in usus,
lumina fida locat; geminos tunc veste lacertos
liberat et cinctus villosae tergore caprae
perverrit cauda silices gremiumque molarum.
advocat inde manus operi, partitus utroque:
laeva ministerio, dextra est intenta labori.

Then he goes and sits by the mill and puts his trusty light on a small shelf fixed to the wall for that purpose; he frees his twin arms from his clothes and girt in the shaggy skin of a goat, with its tail he sweeps out the stones and the inside of the mill. He calls his hands to the job, each assigned to a side; the left concerned with supply, the right with the labor.

and (31-35):

interdum clamat Scybalen. erat unica custos,
Afra genus, tota patriam testante figura,
torta comam labroque tumens et fusca colore,
pectore lata, iacens mammis, compressor alvo,
cruribus exilis, spatiosa prodiga planta.

Meanwhile he calls Scybale. She was the only caretaker, African by race, her whole appearance testifying her origin, with kinky hair, swollen lips and dark color, broad-chested, with sagging breasts, flat belly, thin legs, and generously ample feet.

[End Page 403]

Scybale's appearance refers (*testante*, 32) to a place outside the realm of Greco-Roman culture, and she is therefore unprotected from the gaze that moves from head to toe to catalog her body as a sequence of discrete parts. ³⁵ Simulus, on the other hand, whose activity is bathed in the decorum of epic ceremony, is surrounded by "trusty" (*fida*, 21) objects and his arms are "twins" (later the left hand will come to the relief of its *sister*, 28); in other words, he is part of an organic and familiar world whereas Scybale refers to a foreign world. The brute reality of Simulus' existence is displaced onto the slave, who is observed with the cold eye that now need not be turned on Simulus, and the reality to which Scybale's appearance attests both is and is not Simulus' life. ³⁶ In debunking Ovid's idyll the poet provides a standard of reality that is external to our hero Simulus and so preserves his epic dignity.

The manner in which the degrading of Scybale enables the elevation of Simulus can be read most clearly from the following lines (49-54):

infert inde foco (Scybale mundaverat aptum
ante locum) testisque tegit, super aggerat ignis.
dumque suas peragit Vulcanus Vestaque partes,
Simulus interea vacua non cessat in hora
verum aliam sibi quaerit opem, neu sola palato
sit non grata Ceres quas iungat comparat escas.

He conveys [the dough] to the hearth (Scybale had already cleaned a suitable space) and covers it with tiles, heaping the fire on top. And while Vesta and Vulcan do their job Simulus is not idle in the unoccupied time, but seeks another resource for himself; lest

bread alone displease his palate he collects food to accompany it.

[End Page 404]

Facilitated by the subhuman (Scybale), Simulus' work is completed by the superhuman (Vulcan and Vesta); it is flanked by what can be taken for granted: on one side the labor of the slave Scybale, and on the other the processes of nature mediated by the cultural cliché of epic periphrasis. ³⁷ This symmetry expresses a truth about the function of slavery: because the master is freed from the need to involve himself with the menial aspects of existence, which are taken care of by slaves who exist on another plane of reality, his life can enter the world of the high mimetic in which he is surrounded by a nature whose deities work for him. ³⁸ One might say that what Homer's lonely peasant is to Odysseus, Scybale is to Simulus.

Urban Fantasy and Alienation

While Vulcan and Vesta are doing their part Simulus goes out to his kitchen-garden in search of herbs to accompany the bread and cheese. In Roman literature the description of a poor man's house usually included a ham hanging by the hearth and this ham is the centerpiece of the meal prepared by Ovid's Baucis and Philemon for their divine visitor. ³⁹ Simulus, we are told, does not even have the traditional chine of salted pork, only a round of cheese and some dill (55-58), and so while the bread is baking he goes off to his adjoining garden in search of something to complete his meal. A twenty-five line ecphrasis of the garden ensues (60-85), and Simulus returns with the ingredients of *moretum* (garlic, parsley, rue, and coriander). Like many small farmers in the ancient world, Simulus has a garden to supplement the income from his land, and this gives him the self-sufficiency that was such an important ingredient of the myth of rural poverty (63-64): ⁴⁰

nil illi deerat quod pauperis exigit usus;
interdum locuples a paupere plura petebat.

[End Page 405]

he lacked nothing that the poor man's life requires; sometimes the rich man would seek more from the poor.

In fact, what the rich need from Simulus, in addition to his produce, is the fantasy of independence from the city that his imagined life provides them. ⁴¹ For his part, Simulus requires nothing from the city, from which he returns, having sold his produce at the market, cash in hand but unburdened by city wares (79-81).

Clearly the poet has in mind Virgil's description, in the fourth *Georgic* (116-48), of the garden of the old man of Tarentum. ⁴² There Virgil digresses from his discussion of beekeeping to describe a garden he purports to have seen, reclaimed from land that was unsuitable for agriculture and providing its owner with a life of contented self-sufficiency and aesthetic beauty. This idyll is visited briefly as Virgil draws to the end of his "voyage" (116-17), which does not allow him to linger (*spatiis exclusus iniquis*, 4.146), and he leaves it to others to commemorate in more detail. ⁴³ Virgil describes his poetic project as a sea voyage, the epitome of business and busy-ness, by contrast with which the old man's land-reclamation figures the kind of contented, creative, and independent activity to which the poet hopelessly aspires. Driven by ambition, and by his obligation to fulfill the harsh demands of Maecenas (*haud mollia iussa*, 3.41), Virgil briefly "puts in" at this contented life before he is shut out again by the restricting demands of his task (*spatiis . . . iniquis*, 147), and in doing so he figures the alienation of his creative activity. ⁴⁴

In the *Moretum* it is our "resourceful hero" (59) Simulus who himself visits his kitchen-garden; he has absorbed the role of the Virgilian poet swerving from his task to snatch time for the taste of another life, and his motivation is partially aesthetic (*neu sola palato / sit non grata Ceres*, 54) (60-62, 65-68): **[End Page 406]**

hortus erat iunctus casulae, quem vimina pauca
et calamo rediviva levi munibat harundo,

exiguus spatio, variis sed fertilis herbis.

...

nec sumptus erat ullius opus sed regula curae:
si quando vacuum casula pluviaeve tenebant
festave lux, si forte labor cessabat aratri,
horti opus illud erat.

there was a garden adjoining the hut, which a few osiers and reused reeds guarded with
slender stalk, small in compass but fertile with many herbs.

...

It cost him nothing but his care and labor. If sometimes rain or a religious holiday kept him
idle at home, if the labor of ploughing was interrupted, it was time to work on the garden.

Whereas the Virgilian poet claims from a busy schedule the time to "visit" the garden, Simulus is filling in the empty time during which the bread is baking (*Simulus interea vacua non cessat in hora*, 52). Simulus' visit to the kitchen-garden gives an aesthetic dimension to the fact of his unrelentingly laborious life and to his very Roman determination not to be idle at any moment, for it identifies the variety in his life with the continuity of his labor. ⁴⁵ It is in this passage that the poem flirts with an idyllic representation of poverty, whose constant demand on the labor of Simulus is not grinding but expansive. The garden, small but fertile and full of variety (62), could describe the life of Simulus as it is imagined at this point by the urban poet.

But the alienation experienced by the poet of the *Georgics* contemplating the old man of Tarentum appears here on the opposite side of the divide between high and low. The description of Simulus' garden stresses the fact that what he sells at the market is not just the surplus that [End Page 407] remains after he has fulfilled his own needs, for the garden contains products that are cultivated exclusively for the tables of others (76-78):

et gravis in latum dimissa cucurbita ventrem.
verum hic non domini (quis enim contractior illo?)
sed populi proventus erat,

and the heavy cucumber that swells into a broad paunch. However, this was not the
master's produce (who could be more pinched than he?) but the public's.

The cucumber's swelling stomach is comically contrasted with the pinched existence of the "master," who will not be enjoying the fertility of his own garden. Lettuce, known for its digestive properties, appears as the "welcome relief from noble (i.e., rich) foods" (*grataque nobilium requies lactuca ciborum*, 74); given his diet, Simulus will not need this particular resource! ⁴⁶ Insofar as it provides relief from rich foods, lettuce has a status analogous to the bracing fantasy of a hard, simple, and virtuous rural life that is periodically consumed by harried urbanites and intellectuals to clear their moral palates. ⁴⁷ So the status of Simulus' life as a fantasy for the rich is reflected in the relation between city and country embedded in his production: just as the best of his produce goes to the city, not to his table, so Simulus himself doesn't enjoy the same life that the educated urbanite enjoys imagining.

Pity and Knowledge

The produce that Simulus on this occasion chooses for himself are the ingredients of a peasant garlic dish whose quaintly distasteful character measures the distance between the sensibilities of reader and peasant. ⁴⁸ [End Page 408] Apicius includes a recipe for this dish in his cookbook, but, sparing the delicate palates of his readers, he holds the garlic (*De Re Coquinaria* 1.21). Both the high and the low have a culture of food, and this allows the separation between those who labor and those who don't to reappear as the distance between one culture of food and the other. In the *Eclogues* the fact that the high and the low both have a culture of "song" is used to the same effect, and the distance between the two becomes a source of pathos in the world of Virgil's poet-shepherds. Culinary and cantatory pathos are combined in *Eclogue* 2 in which Virgil refers to the very same dish that Simulus is preparing for himself. In one of the most pathetic moments of the *Eclogues*, Corydon finds himself singing "unpolished songs" (*incondita*, 4) to the recalcitrant Alexis in the midday heat when all others are taking a rest in the shade (*Ecl.* 2.8-11):

nunc etiam pecudes umbras et frigora captant
 nunc viridis etiam occultant spineta lacertos,
 Thestylis et rapido fessis messoribus aestu
 alia serpyllumque herbas contundit olentis.

Now even the flocks make for the shade and the cool. Now the thickets conceal even the green lizards, and Thestylis pounds garlic and thyme and strong-smelling herbs for the tired mowers in the fierce heat.

The pathos of Corydon's situation produces that distinctly Virgilian pity which depends on the pitier's sense of the touching distance between himself and the pitied. In *Eclogue* 2 the quaintly distasteful *moretum* reminds the reader of the distance between the mellifluous verses they are reading and the rustic (*incondita*) songs they purport to transcribe. When the lovelorn Corydon reproves his own illusions about the possibility of winning Alexis with the words *rusticus es Corydon* (56) the reader's pity is engaged at the same time for Corydon's romantic plight as well as for his touching innocence about his status: the fact that he calls himself *rusticus* ("naive") only reminds the reader that this shepherd is incapable of adopting the position of the sophisticated verse that is put in his mouth, from which position he is indeed *rusticus* ("rustic, boorish"). Corydon is touching because he cannot know the full meaning of his own words, any more than he can taste Thestylis' concoction as the reader might. The cultural elite admires its own capacity to be touched by this world that is so far beneath it, but in a different mode than the socio-economic; the distance [End Page 409] in knowledge between the worlds of readers and shepherds covers and replaces the socio-economic distance, and the pity that is felt across this gap becomes an aesthetic object whose beauty justifies the gap that enables it. [49](#)

When Simulus mixes the *moretum* his reactions register the sensibilities of the reader, but in a comic mode (105-08):

saepe viri nares acer iaculatur apertas
 spiritus et simo damnat sua prandia vultu,
 saepe manu summa lacrimantia lumina terget
 immeritoque furens dicit convicia fumo.

Often the sharp odor attacks Simulus' flared nostrils and he damns his dinner with his snub nose. Often he wipes his weeping eyes with his hand and furiously curses the guiltless fumes.

The pun on his name (*simo . . . vultu*, 106) leaves it open whether Simulus actually wrinkles his nose at the smell or whether his snub nose is facetiously taken by the sophisticated observer to express the distaste that the observer himself experiences. Like Corydon's unwitting pun on *rusticus*, this one reminds us poignantly of the distance between reader and peasant. Again, the pathos of the situation depends on the sense of a difference in knowledge: the harshness of his existence is something Simulus both can and can't experience, like the distastefulness of his diet; it is the reader who provides the knowledge and sensibility that make his situation pathetic. [End Page 410]

Poet and Laborer

Turning now from the question of what an educated urban elite might want from the representation of rural poverty and labor we can ask more specifically what the poet might want from this kind of subject matter. As Ross (1975.261) points out, the Alexandrian and neoteric poets liked to display their virtuosity through detailed descriptions of complex but everyday technical operations, and clearly the *Moretum* continues this tradition. For the most part these descriptions are embedded in heroic narratives and do not constitute the substance of a whole poem as in the case of the *Moretum*. [50](#) Is there a competitive relation between the dexterity of the workers and the virtuosity of the poet who proves that even a subject matter as unpromising as manual labor can be integrated into the high mimetic manner? Certainly these descriptions serve to vindicate the capacity, or capaciousness, of the poetic style. But the careful rendering of the processes of manual labor also serves to materialize the process of writing itself. Take the passage from the opening of Virgil's *Georgics* that I quoted above (1.43-46):

Vere novo, gelidus canis cum montibus umor

liquitur et Zephyro putris se glaeba resolvit,
depresso incipiat iam tum mihi taurus aratro
ingemere et sulco attritus splendescere vomer.

In early spring, when the cold water on the mountains melts and the crumbling clod is loosened under the West wind, I would have the bull begin to groan under the driven plough and the ploughshare worn by the furrow begin to shine.

The disappearance of the ploughman allows the poet to appropriate the image of the plough shining in the furrow for his own dematerialized labor; ploughing, a traditional metaphor for writing in the ancient world, mimics and materializes the process of writing itself, and Virgil has used this fact to express the relation between literary effort and artistic polish (*splendescere*) [End Page 411] in terms that make visible this occult process. ⁵¹ Writing poetry is a form of work that is virtually impossible to represent, although the Alexandrian poets and their Roman admirers made much of the fact that the true art of poetry demands a great deal of labor. ⁵² Descriptions of manual labor allow the poet to find ways of anchoring the poetic product in an activity; they provide a means of imagining the relation between the poetic features of the text and some kind of dexterity. By rendering the operations of everyday life into poetry, the poet can render poetry itself as a form of praxis.

In the *Moretum* the art of Simulus the gardener is described as an art of strategic arrangement and disposition that overlaps with that of the poet (68-70):

varias disponere plantas
norat et occultae committere semina terrae
vicinosque apte circa summittere rivos.

He knew how to arrange the various plants, and how to commit the seeds to the hidden earth, and to skilfully lead the nearby streams around the garden.

Gardening here provides a metaphor for the way that words are strategically placed in Latin verse so as to distribute their agency through the line. Certainly the transferred epithet *occultae . . . terrae* ("to the hidden earth," 69) effectively conveys the mysteriousness of the earth's fertility and of Simulus' knowledge, but Simulus' gardening skill also provides an image [End Page 412] for what happens when an epithet is transferred and, more importantly, it materializes the skill of the poet who transfers the epithet, making language fertile. ⁵³ The poetry that describes the work and skill of the gardener also needs the work of the gardener to help the reader imagine the poet's work.

The *Moretum*'s most striking passage is the description of the making of the dish itself, in which the changing color and texture of the mixture of garlic, cheese, and herbs in the mortar is carefully observed (99-104, 109-13).

dextera pistillo primum fragrantia mollit
alia, tum pariter mixto terit omnia suco.
it manus in gyrum: paulatim singula vires
deperdunt proprias, color est e pluribus unus,
nec totus viridis, quia lactea frusta repugnant,
nec de lacte nitens, quia tot variatur ab herbis.
. . .
procedebat opus; nec iam salebrosus, ut ante,
sed gravior lentos ibat pistillus in orbis.
ergo Palladii guttas instillat olivi
exiguque super vires infundit aceti
atque iterum commiscet opus mixtumque retractat.

His right hand first softens the pungent garlic, then he mashes everything so the juices mix equally. His hand goes round; gradually the ingredients lose their own character, and one color emerges from them all, not totally green, because the white bits resist, nor shining with the milk, because it is varied by all the herbs.

. . .
The work proceeded; no longer bumpy, as before, but the pestle moved more heavily as it

circled. So he pours in drops of Athena's oil and on top of that a little vinegar for sharpness and again he mixes the product and remixes it.

[End Page 413]

There is a fascinating conspiracy here between the vivid representation of a banal, everyday activity in verse and the supplying of an elaborate metaphor for the writing of poetry from the humble practice of cooking. Not only does the repetitive stichic form of hexameter poetry mime the circular movement of Simulus' hand around the mortar, but the action being described draws attention to the turning and circularity of the stichic form itself, which is constantly taking on new material and diffusing the power (*vis*) of the word through the sentence. This graphic realization of the repetition of the hexameter line imagines the work of writing poetry as the persistent polishing and enriching of a single line whose texture undergoes a continuing process of transformation. ⁵⁴ Simulus' mixing provides an image for the *production* of the verse and the process by which a work is constituted.

The vivid and detailed description of the making of *moretum* allows the poet to bring into view two different but related kinds of invisibility: first, the labor of the poet and the process of the constitution of the poetic work and, second, the unnarratable life of Simulus himself. Virgil says of the seasonal rhythm of the farmer's work that "work returns to the farmers, driven in a circle" (*redit agricolis labor actus in orbem*, *Georgics* 2.401). The *Moretum* takes this image out of its cosmic Virgilian context and locates it in the everyday life of the laborer: the pounding of the pestle and its repetitive motion around the mortar become an accelerated version of Virgil's description of the farmer's labor. So the making of this product that sustains the ploughman becomes a figure for the constitution of his life out of the repetitive sequence that characterizes the laboring existence. The gradual homogenization of the ingredients of the *moretum* could be read as an attempt to visualize the blending of this moment into the series that is a life; the focus on the movement of the pestle and the changing texture of the mixture creates an image of the life of one who is both subject and object of a repetitive and grinding labor.

The *Moretum* describes a morning in a series which is rendered identical by the monotony of human need in conditions of subsistence. It raises the question of how we are to imagine the life that cannot be described by a narrative of the sort that defines the epic hero. Simulus' life is situated by the poet on the sidelines of heroic existence, in its formulaic rituals and its similes; when he touches the main business of heroic [End Page 414] existence, as in the reminiscence of Aeneas' final and climactic act of slaughter, he disappears just as his daily work begins. But the closely observed blending of *moretum* provides an image of gradual change as a result of repetitive action that is an appropriate model for the life of Simulus himself.

The title of the poem suggests that its focus is not Simulus himself, but rather the peasant dish in which the tourist-reader takes an amused interest and that the poet uses as a figure for his own poetry. Naturally these aspects of *moretum* are not available to the experience of Simulus himself. But the production of *moretum* does not quite coincide with the end of the poem, which proceeds to put the completed object back into the context of a life whose real work begins when the dish is completed. ⁵⁵ In other words, the poem self-consciously confronts the interest of the voyeuristic reader in this quaint product of rustic life, and in what can be taken away from this visit to the world of the laboring poor, with the role *moretum* plays in the life of Simulus. What Simulus produces, the poet tells us, is the perfect example of a *moretum* (*constet ut effecti species nomenque moreti*, 116), a congruence between form (*species*) and name (*nomen*) reassuring the curious reader that this is the genuine article. For Simulus himself, though, the status of this product is far from being definitive; in fact, it is merely the means by which hunger is staved off for that day. ⁵⁶ Reader and peasant go their separate ways, their respective needs fulfilled to different degrees by *moretum* and the *Moretum*.

Postscript: E Pluribus Unum

Though the *Moretum* has few readers today, even among classicists, certain readers of two centuries ago have ensured that it maintains its presence in our own everyday lives. For the *Moretum* contains one of the few Latin phrases that has real currency in the modern world, the words *e pluribus unum* (*unus* in *Moretum* 102) that feature on the Great Seal of the United States and the dollar bills we use every day. ⁵⁷ The symbolic [End Page 415] significance of these words reminds us that at least one aspect of the poem's strategy continues to function in contemporary American society.

The implied comparison between the union of the states and the mixing of ingredients in Simulus' mortar seems a little undignified. But it anticipates another metaphor of great importance to the nation's self-image, also taken from the world of labor, namely the melting pot. ⁵⁸ The melting pot refers not to the union of the states but to the mingling of ethnic groups in the immigrant nation of the early twentieth century. If the referent of the phrase *e pluribus unus* in the *Moretum*, namely the homogenization of the ingredients in Simulus' mortar, anticipates the metaphor of the melting pot, then the word omitted from this phrase (*color est e pluribus unus*, 102) alludes to the continuing scandal in the imagining of an American national unity forged in the ethnic melting pot, namely racial intolerance. In fact, it has been pointed out that the mingling of white European immigrants in a relatively democratic society was made possible by the exclusion and exploitation of non-whites. ⁵⁹ To return the word *color* to the Great Seal's motto is to allow the motto's subconscious to float to the surface. Is it a coincidence that the poem from which this truncated phrase is excerpted contains the most detailed caricature of a black in ancient literature? Scybale, as we have seen, incarnates those aspects of Simulus' existence that cannot be absorbed into the high mimetic. She is the scapegoat who, having taken on what is irreducibly sordid about Simulus' life, is driven out as culturally other, thus enabling the inclusion of the laborer Simulus into the high mimetic style. The role of the truncated phrase from the *Moretum* in the imagining of American national unity suggests that the melting pot may rest on a similar strategy. ⁶⁰

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Notes

1. On English laborer poets of the eighteenth century, see Williams 1973.134-35, who points out that these poets were nevertheless prevented from speaking about their experience by the poetic conventions through which they had to express themselves.
2. Joshel 1992 is a heroic attempt to recover the voices that speak through these epitaphs.
3. Heitland 1921.229 puts this quite sharply: "Is it not a remarkable thing that the *Georgics* contains not a word of appreciative reference to the myriads of toiling bondsmen whose sweat and sufferings had been exploited by Roman landlords for at least 150 years? Can this silence on the part of a poet who credits an ox with human affection be regarded as a merely accidental omission?"
4. There is general agreement that this poem, which appears in the *Appendix Vergiliana*, is not by Virgil (see Heinze 1960.408ff. for the history of attribution). Though it is included in the *Appendix*, the *Moretum* is not mentioned in any ancient source and first appears in a listing of works in the *Appendix* in the ninth century. Kenney 1984.xxii argues that it survived independently and anonymously until the transference of Latin literature from roll to codex (fourth century), when it was attributed to Virgil. The influence on the poem of Virgil and Ovid gives us a date *post quem* of 8 a.d., but there is nothing in the poem that gives us a clear *terminus ante quem*. Kenney xxii-xxvii sums up the arguments for dating. Macrobius cites and quotes from an "idyll" called *Moretum* by a certain Sueius, probably a contemporary of Cicero. That poem describes a gardener making *moretum*, though to judge by the lines that Macrobius quotes it is a more self-consciously learned poem than this one. Sueius' fragment can be found, with commentary, in Courtney 1993.112-14.
5. Ross 1975.255, n. 52 cites some of the "realists." Heinze 1960.411-12 is a good example of the characterization of the poem's realistic or objective character by a process of elimination.
6. Modern conceptions of realism are generally polemical in that they include some claim to be revealing the *real* (psychological, social, economic) forces that underlie appearance. See Williams 1985.257-63, especially 260-62. But since we are not told what Simulus' status is (slave, tenant, or proprietor?), nor how he came to have a black slave, it is clear that the author of the *Moretum* is not interested in the kind of realism that is rooted in social or historical forces. On Simulus and Scybale, see Kenney 1984.I-li.
7. Whitaker 1993.278 has some interesting comparisons: an unskilled laborer earned about three sesterces a day, about twice what a recruit in Caesar's army earned, at a time when Cato the Younger owned property that would bring in about 550-650 sesterces a day.

8. Seneca (*De Vita Beata* 22) says that in poverty there is room for only one kind of virtue--not to be bowed down or crushed by it. Juvenal (3.152) comments that the worst thing about poverty is that it makes people ridiculous.

9. Sallust *Catilina* 37. Whitaker 1993.274 quotes an interesting graffito from Pompeii which suggests that this attitude was not restricted to the elite: "I hate poor people. If anyone wants something for nothing he is a fool. He should pay for it" (*CIL* 4.9839b).

10. *paupertatemque fatendo*

effecere levem nec iniqua mente ferendo (*Metam.* 8.633-34).

11. Similarly, when Tibullus (1.5) dresses himself up as a poor countryman to entertain his patron Messalla he projects onto the relations between the poor and their rich exploiters the friendly deference that governs the literary circle of the elite. At the same time he playfully acknowledges the social hierarchy *within* the putatively equal elite.

12. See Whitaker 1993.274 and Joshel 1992.66-68 on the locus classicus, Cicero's *De Officiis* 150-51. Seneca *Ep.* 88.21-23 gives Poseidonius' fourfold classification of the *artes*: *vulgares et sordidae, ludicrae, pueriles, and liberales*. Veyne 1987.117-37, in a stimulating discussion of ancient conceptions of work and leisure, points out that the ancient disdain for labor was a social disdain for the classes of those who made their living from it, not for labor itself.

13. Lau 1975.26-45 describes the difference between *labor* and *ponos*.

14. Quoted by Lau 1975.87.

15. On the general who shares the labor of his troops, see Lau 1975.90-92. Persius 1.73-75 indicates the currency of the topos of the statesman called away from the plough to serve the state.

16. On the *vilicus*, see Heitland 1921.158-60.

17. Perkell 1989.29-30 comments on the anachronism of Virgil's farms. See also Kenney 1984.liv-lvi, who suggests that the *Moretum* may be meant as a comment on Virgil's idyllic portrait of agricultural life.

18. "Indeed the emergence and promotion of the myth of the peasant patriarch came at a time when the process of peasant displacement and the concentration of estates in the hands of the rich was speeding up," Garnsey 1980.37.

19. Is Virgil commanding his readers when he says *exercete, viri, tauros* (1.210), or is he quoting what needs to be said by the landowner to the "men" (*OLD* 5)? In the last book of the *Georgics* (4.149-250) Virgil describes in considerable detail the society of the bees, a regimented, orderly society dedicated totally to work. In some of its aspects the society of the bees reflects this invisible element of farming as it was practiced by Virgil's readers: this society of quasi-human beings without individuality, and yet corporately dedicated to their work, is the only form in which the slave gang makes an appearance in Virgil's work. Of course, we cannot read the society of the bees as simply a *representation* of the slave gang; this benign, anonymous society of workers is an ideological replacement, with just enough similarity to the slave gang that the reality of their presence in the countryside can be aestheticized, in the same way as the presence of the shepherds is by the pastoral.

20. *Non enim natura quod vult satis efficit, nisi eam labore cum studio iuveris* (*De Re Rustica* 4.28.2).

21. Pliny *Naturalis Historia* 19.43 stresses the importance of labor for farming and then quotes the ancient saying that the best fertilizer is the proprietor's eye. Compare Columella's tribute to the magical efficacy of the proprietor's eye: *quocumque domini praesentia et oculi frequenter accessere, in ea parte maiorem in modum fructus exuberat* (*De Re Rustica* 3.21).

22. Compare Williams' description of a similar process in Ben Jonson's *Penshurst* (Williams 1973.32).

23. See Kenney 1984.13-14 on the epicisms.

[24.](#) Compare the way the ditch-digger is introduced in the following lines (4.262-64):

optima putri

arva solo: id venti curant gelidaeque pruinae

et labefacta movens robustus iugera fossor.

[25.](#) Could this moment be a parody of Dido's last moments in the *Aeneid*: *quaesivit caelo lucem ingemuitque reperta* (4.692)?

[26.](#) Heinze 1960.408 (on the style) and 412 ("dieser Simylus ist eben einfach wie er ist--und damit gut").

[27.](#) The sharp observation of the rustic life in the *Moretum* debunks the routine glorifications of this existence with the implicit question, "How would you like this?" (Heinze 1960.415).

[28.](#) Subject matter introduced into a literary work for specific purposes may come to take on a life of its own. See Edwards 1993, who shows how the voice of the countryside, introduced into the *Odyssey* to discredit the suitors in the city, begins to threaten the aristocratic ideology of the epic.

[29.](#) For a detailed study of the implications of this intersection, see Edwards 1993.

[30.](#) Edwards 1993.64-77 describes the strategies by which the potential challenge of the voice of the countryside to the epic's aristocratic ideology is controlled.

[31.](#) Especially the similes of woodcutting, cultivating, and herding that dramatize the incidents of heroic warfare in the *Iliad*. These are cited by Edwards 1993.58, n. 69, who points out that they serve to deterritorialize the values of the land from the rural population and reterritorialize them for the elite of the *polis*.

[32.](#) On the *Moretum*'s relation to Ovid's Baucis and Philemon episode, see the commentary of Kenney 1984.li and 22-23.

[33.](#) *Nec refert, dominos illic famulosne requiras: / tota domus duo sunt, idem parentque iubentque* (635-36). On the names of Philemon and Baucis, see Hollis 1970.114.

[34.](#) The splayed nose is a characteristic of animals and of the half-human Satyrs, beings called to mind by Simulus' "shaggy loins" (*saetosa . . . inguina*, 98).

[35.](#) On Greek and Roman descriptions of blacks, see Snowden 1970.2-11 and Thompson 1989.57-85. Thompson's careful examination of the ancient evidence and modern categories leads him to conclude that "Roman attitudes towards *Aethiopes*, even at their most negative, have nothing to do with the familiar modern phenomenon of *race* and are of a kind very different from those commonly described by social scientists by the terms 'racist,' 'racial prejudice,' 'colour prejudice,' and 'racism'" (157). On this passage in the *Moretum*, see Thompson 1989.30 and 159-60.

[36.](#) It is significant that the one physical characteristic that ancient writers commonly attributed to blacks that is missing from the description of Scybale is the flat nose (Snowden 1970.7), which would assimilate Simulus ("snubnosed") to his slave.

[37.](#) Scybale's work is subordinated to that of her master: she *had* cleaned (*mundaverat*) a place in the hearth for Simulus to put the bread; her work enables the continuity of his, and this puts it outside the main action, by which it is assumed.

[38.](#) Joshel 1992.73-76 has some interesting remarks on the relation between living nobly and the ownership of slaves.

[39.](#) Ovid *Metam.* 8.648-50. See Kenney 1984.32 on the importance of pork.

[40.](#) According to Pliny (*NH* 19.57) the ancients would judge the farmer by his kitchen-garden. If the garden was ill-kept, so that the household was obliged to have recourse to the butcher, the farmer's wife was remiss, since it was her job to care for the garden.

[41.](#) Miles 1980.53-59 describes the importance of the image of the rustic life, and particularly its independence and self-sufficiency, for Horace.

[42.](#) *Moretum* 75-76 echoes *Georgics* 4.121-22.

[43.](#) Columella takes up the task in the tenth book of his *De Re Rustica* as he indicates in the preface to that book (*Praef.* 3).

[44.](#) On Virgil's ambition, see *Georgics* 3.8-10 and 291-92, and 4.6. Perkell 1989.59-61 and 64-67 has some good remarks on the poet's discontent, of which the admiring portrait of the gardener is an important expression (66).

[45.](#) The Romans had a moral *horror vacui*, an abhorrence of the idle (*vacuus*), behind which lay, in the agrarian context, the landowner's desire to squeeze the maximum profit out of the workforce. When Cato (*De Agri Cultura* 2.2-3, cf. 37.3-4) speaks of the tasks that can be accomplished on rainy days or religious holidays it is in the context of a response to the inefficient bailiff who is excusing himself for the farm's disappointing yield.

[46.](#) Martial (13.14) refers to the use of lettuce as a digestive at the end of the meal as a custom of "our grandfathers." The relevance of this to the dating of the *Moretum* is discussed by Kenney 1984.xxiv-xxv.

[47.](#) Seneca (*Ep.* 18.5-8) recommends imitating the life of the poor as an exercise in preparing oneself for the blows of fortune. He distinguishes this kind of exercise from the fashionable craze of the rich, bored with their luxury, for "Timon-style meals and hovels of the poor" (7). Seneca also criticizes the decadent practice of picnicking in the style of the poor in *Consolatio ad Helviam* 12.3.

[48.](#) Gowers 1993.290-98 argues that garlic in Roman culture has an ambiguous status, both marking the sharp divide in the social stratification of cooking between the rustic and the sophisticated and also being associated with masculine vigor.

[49.](#) At the beginning of the *Georgics* Virgil invites Augustus to pity with him the peasants "ignorant of the way" (*ignarosque viae mecum miseratus agrestis*, 1.41); the sense of "unsophisticated" always lurking in the word *agrestis* gives an aesthetic dimension to this pity which is firmly rooted in a difference of knowledge. The famous cry *O fortunatos nimium sua si bona norint, / agricolas!* (2.458-59) exercises the same kind of pity on the farmer. Perkell 1989.55-56 has some good remarks on the limitations of pity. I cannot agree, however, with her earlier formulation: "Through the pathos of many passages in the *Georgics*, we readers are made to share others' sorrow, to identify with their suffering, to experience it as potentially our own, and hence to feel the bonds of common pain that unite us with others. Pity, then, makes of readers a community, because pity requires identification with the pain of another." (53) The community of *readers* who admire their communal pity is created at the expense of the pitied, who exist on a lower level of consciousness.

[50.](#) The most striking example in Latin poetry is Catullus' description of the spinning of the Fates in his epyllion (64.311-19).

[51.](#) In ancient Greece writing from left to right and right to left alternately was called *boustrophêdon* (as the ox turns, sc. in ploughing). Some Latin examples of this metaphor are given in *OLD* under *aro* (1d and 3c). For *splendescere* used of literary polish, see the examples in section b of the *OLD* entry under this verb. G. M. Hopkins echoes Virgil's lines in "The Windhover" to similar effect: "sheer plod makes plough down sillion / Shine."

[52.](#) Horace has poets complaining that the labor that goes into their poetry is not noticed (*Epistles* 2.1.224-25):

cum lamentamur non apparere labores

nostros et tenui deducta poemata filo.

For the Alexandrian emphasis, echoed by the Augustan poets, on strenuous workmanship, see the references in Brink's commentary on this passage (Brink 1982.242). Horace's *deducta* (225) is a metaphor from the craft of spinning commonly applied to the activity of poetic composition.

[53](#). So does the distinction between *committere* and *summittere*, which attaches the placing of the verb in the line and the patterning of the grammatical structure to different ways of making things grow: the verb *summittere* is sent to help (*sub-*) the thirsty adverbs and adjective with which the line begins.

[54](#). Simulus continually remixes the dough and kneads it again (113): *atque iterum commiscet opus mixtumque retractat*.

[55](#). Pace Gowers 1993.47, who has some interesting observations on this poem, and especially on the *moretum* as a universe, on pp. 46-49.

[56](#). Pulsoque timore

iam famis inque diem securus Simulus illam (118-19).

[57](#). On the other side of the Seal, also represented on the dollar bill, are the Virgilian tags *Annuat coeptis* and *Novus ordo saeculorum*, modified forms of *audacibus adnue coeptis* (*Georgics* 1.140) and *magnus ab integro saeculorum nascitur ordo* (*Eclogues* 4.5).

[58](#). The phrase is taken from a play about American immigrants called *The Melting Pot*, written in 1908 by Israel Zangwill. As its hero exclaims, "There she lies, the great Melting Pot, East and West, and North and South, the palm and the pine, the pole and the equator, the crescent and the cross--how the great Alchemist melts and fuses them with his purging flames!" See Degler 1959.295-96.

[59](#). San Juan 1991 makes the point that the tolerance of ethnic diversity in US society has been enabled by intolerance of racial diversity (see especially 218 and the quotation from Alexander Saxton).

[60](#). I would like to thank *Arethusa*'s anonymous reader for helpful criticisms and suggestions.

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