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**“We felt a strong burst of vitality”:
“Nature” and the pastoral in Lisa Robertson’s XEclogue**

by

Chris Turnbull, B.A.

**A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of**

Master of Arts

Department of English

**Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario
January 26, 2001
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**“We felt a strong burst of vitality”:
“Nature” and the pastoral in Lisa Robertson’s XEclogue**

**submitted by Chris Turnbull, B.A.
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts**

Thesis Supervisor

Chair, Department of English

**Carleton University
January 25, 2001**

Abstract

Lisa Robertson's book, XEclogue, parodies the literary pastoral genre in order to examine the socio-political constructions that intertwine concepts of nation, nature, and "gender." Renovating the eclogue form, Robertson relocates and refocuses the connections between cultural and aesthetic landscapes that, under the camouflage of "nature," perpetuate a power structure that maintains social disparities in terms of economics, status, and law. Robertson's characters, Lady M and Nancy, interacting with a sexual "masculine" trio, The Roaring Boys, transcend the generic, botanical objectification typical to the genre and revise their roles in a "state" of "nature." This paper discusses the pastoral (and its obsolescence) with respect to the development of "land," "landscape," and "nature." Through close readings of Robertson's eclogues, I focus on the intersection of Robertson's visual and literary techniques with theoretical questions of "gender," "the image," and formations of "aesthetic."

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Introduction

“[. . .] *to invade my own illusions of historical innocence*” (“Prologue”)

Lisa Robertson, through her faux pastoral XEclogue, dramatizes the conjunction of a complicit urban and nationalist environment in constructions of “nature.” She renovates the literary pastoral genre to question how historical processes enable the categorization of “nature” and “feminine” as components of property and ownership. Although this suggests an implicit masculine entitlement, XEclogue does not acknowledge complete victimization — a sort of helpless “feminine” passivity. Instead, any sublimation is part of an image-making condition that arises from varying political, social, historical, aesthetic and cultural developments including an unacknowledged complicity on the part of all players.¹ The act of revealing power structures that use arbitrary conditions of “difference” to inhibit or oppress a body of the people simultaneously interrogates the terms of complicity that enabled the oppression. Essentially, XEclogue examines the construction of a “feminine” subject that exists in a socio-aesthetic structure that “devalues” the subject. When “difference” is based on the assumption that biological sexual differences equate to social differences, what results is a power dynamic (justified initially and then by residue) in the cultural sphere that prescribes a “weaker” and “stronger” sex divided spuriously by biological abilities. Thus, in this dynamic, to be biologically “female” means that the biological “male” dictates the terms of citizenship and social reproduction as a basic “right” proven by “natural” (biological) law and a religious “ethic.” “Sexuality” is a means of establishing social hierarchies that impact on social status, economy, and personal freedoms. When it

is combined with an economic philosophy and distribution of wealth, divisions of class are created based on monetary hierarchies and social differences.

In XEclogue, Robertson examines the translation of “nature” from a biological meaning (natural history) to its cultural expression in literature (pastoral). She examines how cultural expression aids the processes of power that simultaneously control “nature” and its “reproduction.” As Robertson notes, nature is economically viable, but historically accessible monetarily only to landowners and a cultured elite. The pastoral genre is an exercise in optical illusion that aestheticizes land, landscape, and labour.² The “happy shepherd,” for example, bears little relation to the labourer bought off the land as a result of high taxes or a change in ownership, yet in literature and the visual arts he is a “common” image invested with a “richness” of spirit. The occupations of the milkmaid and shepherdess are ignored for their figural representation — they are subject to overt heterosexual speculation and desire. This process ultimately concludes in the marriage contract, the convent, “spinsterhood” or prostitution.³ The pastoral is dependent on norms that privilege sexual binaries of “male” and “female.” This dependence obliquely underlines the power position that privileges what proves to be a phallocentric⁴ convention.⁵

The “feminine” is thus expressed as both part of and metaphor for nature and its abundance.⁶ If legitimacy — as body, as sex, as gender, as class,⁷ and as person — is prescribed by a cultural codification spawned from an idea of “man” in “nature,” spuriously aided by the “laws of nature” in a social contract, then what is the most effective way to deconstruct such categories and legalities, when one does not fit the categories of legitimization? How does one trace identity? What abstractions (beauty,

honour, liberty) or qualities aid or inhibit this deconstruction? Is a phenomenological approach more empowering than an ontological one or is it another means of categorization? What does it mean to plunder classical literature in a quest to examine “what is” pastoral and question its defunct values, using a feminist, postmodern (urban) critique?

Stylistically, Robertson’s text is complex; she interweaves aesthetic ideas, quotations, rhythms, and elusive painterly devices (pulled from the contemporary artistic scene and eighteenth and nineteenth-century landscape painting) to probe the development of representational illusion and its acceptance. The pastoral, as rendered in literature and the “arts,” does not exist. Its longevity is due to an oscillation between modes of description in literature.⁸ Those modes include visual language and narrative devices that form a subject-object condition through sexual differentiation that valorizes (both biologically and psychologically) patriarchal hegemony through sublimation of the “feminine” as image.⁹ The visual is a language. What is imagined and what the eyes see are culturally based processes that have a faster impact on a viewer than written language has on a reader. But literature and language can evoke the visual and imaginary. Robertson’s ornate language and use of heavy adjectival artifice parodies visual objectification by making the “visual” difficult to “see.” For example, in “Eclogue Six: Nostalgia” the woods are described through the perspective of Lady M:

Through the hedged wilds, the evening is coming, indefatigable as
memory, then falling. So tarnished and so languid, it leaks the jargon of
the barbarously pedantic. Lady M, among the glowing birch, thinks of the
tapered, the flexible, the curious; differently, in succession, together.

In addition, the eclogue framing that borrows abstract ideas such as “Beauty” or “Honour” as titles, reformulates abstract values to consider concrete considerations of flesh, and forms of complicity, through the characters Lady M and Nancy. Lady M and Nancy consider the most effective methods of empowerment through dialogue and confessional sequences that block the jamming choruses of the interruptive swains, The Roaring Boys.

In a commentary that addresses her concern with pastoral as a literary mode, Robertson notes that language structures — syntax or metaphor, for example — inform the way the feminine figures in social practice (culture, nature, politics). This forces a performance of a feminine — in a pastoral — as representation of the land: ¹⁰

In pastoral the figure of a woman appears as eroticized worker, the milkmaid or shepherdess swoons in an unproblematic ecstasy with the land. Moreover, she is pleased to give over her youthful pre-social wildness to the domesticating and enclosed tenure of the marriage contract. (Robertson, PhillyTalks #17)

These figures appear from the annals of category and a pictured historicity.¹¹ Their segmented body parts, described or viewed,¹² are an advertisement to the “pleasures” of rural work. Their legs, arms, and faces are curvaceous, soft, and “rosy.” They smile at work; they tend animals that are a perfunctory backdrop to a rural landscape that resembles the figures of the women by physical feature. XEclogue features the body parts of a female figure; they accompany the “titles” of each eclogue. In this way, Robertson focuses the eye on the fragmented figure, if the feminine is “nature,” then “nature” is taken apart.¹³ These pictures offer an expressive, visual component, they

underline the narrator's quest to "subtract" from the "fruiting skin" of nature. In William Bouguereau's painting of the shepherdess, the round hills "are like" her curvaceous body and the hazy horizon is contrasted with her direct and immediate gaze. "Like" in verbal description, functions as analogy that reifies a general understanding of an event or scene. This understanding loses its verbal agency and becomes an unspoken assumption that is accorded the stature of myth, history or allegory. In Jan Vermeer's painting of the milkmaid, the scene is abundant with food and drink that, spatially, fills much of the foreground. It is "ready to be served" by the milkmaid pouring the cream from the jug, reproducing the initial production. These are scenes of the human working the land, producing the land, and propagating the land. The marriage contract¹⁴ ensures a social contract — the humanizing of land and product to establish familial community and the continuation of an economic model.¹⁵

Rethinking such devices, Robertson echoes Judith Butler's notion that repositioning oneself within a seemingly infinite power structure offers a subversive change to a matrix of productivity: "I find it preferable to choose the dystopia of the obsolete. As tactically uprooted use, deployment of the obsolete could cut short the feckless plot of productivity [...] we must become history's dystopic ghosts [...]" (Robertson, The Capilano Review 97).¹⁶ As such, Robertson advocates "obsolescence" as a strategy that materializes¹⁷ the ideological and philosophical foundations of "nation" and "nature" — including certain conceptual subsets (which make up some of her eclogue titles) such as exile, liberty, nostalgia, utopia, beauty and memory. This new subjectivity raises questions of public "distance," in other words, how the "feminine" has been subject to a process of "civilization" as an "aspect" of a body politic represented by

limiting modes of discourse and political structures. “We” closes the distance between a singular, “feminine,” “I” and a subjected, pluralized, “you.” Robertson tries to evade a linguistic tradition that assumes a specialized subject, such as “her” or “she” representative of sexual conquest, either in terms of a pastoral romantic contest or in terms of the land itself, where “nature” is abundant, erotic and available for cultivation.¹⁸ Trapped in a performance that identifies “feminine” with sex and gender through heterosexual (cultural) practice, dilution of the “feminine” subject is implicit. Meaning — “what is “female”— is replaced by representation: “this is feminine, this is female.” At the end of the text, this dilution, of “nature” and of an ontological masculine value, occurs to *The Roaring Boys* as the constructed landscape begins to melt.

In this thesis, I examine the techniques Robertson uses to analyze and parody the integrity of the pastoral genre. I discuss how XEclogue is a “study” of pastoral obsolescence through the concepts of “nature,” “landscape,” and the “feminine,” positing the text as a reformulated “anti-pastoral” or faux pastoral. In particular, I closely read the eclogues in order to explore Robertson’s use of “visual” language and examine how her consideration of framing devices, literary styles, culturally imposed desires, and assumptions of meaning and body fashion a history of sexual differentiation and expression that has its nexus in the pastoral. The pastoral genre seems to be a useful model for political and cultural subterfuge since Virgil. In Britain — which is the focal geographic area for this paper — it had its greatest impetus between roughly 1710 and 1890, which included changes in monarchy, government controls, and industry (the Industrial Revolution). This period is particularly marked with a latent agrarian capitalism and exploitation, aided by urban politics and the desires of a ruling class that

feared public revolt and dystopic ruin as a consequence of the disparity between the divisions of labour, the class structures, and the distribution of wealth. It is also marked by a neurotic concern for “informal” artifice that manifested itself in stringent codes encapsulating gestures, manners, poses, speech, images and dress.

Throughout the paper I will return to historical developments which act as contextual, recorded events that inform Robertson’s cultural investigations. This paper does not, however, consider Robertson’s eclogues in any sequential order; they are selections; their “value” derives as much or more from a spatial than from a chronological or narrative organization. Robertson uses the eclogue to distance the various fictions that the text develops; as frame, they imbue perceptual responses that confuse expectations of a readerly norm as rendered through language. The effect challenges subject-object relationships that as readers cued to a visual descriptive style that matches a narrative linearity we might expect. The thickness of Robertson’s writing both overly “fills in” a representation and “fades out” accessible meaning. The frame is the solid structure, we return to the epigraph-title for explanation. When I suggest the presence of the “filmic” in XEclogue, I am referring to a type of motion (vaguely dream-like) that narrative and description lack. This contributes to the narrator’s¹⁹ phantom elusiveness, functions as a tactic for reorganizing image sequences and aids the focus on emotion rather than “logic” or questions of ontology. I use “screen” and “projection” as metaphors for functional apparatus. Although Robertson’s text is rich with theatrical and dramatic references, I will only refer to this in passing. However, her use of artifice, ornament, painting, and gardening as rendered through language will be extensively considered. Robertson’s use of theatre or drama in combination with the pastoral is a

subject worth examining in more detail elsewhere, the pastoral and its dramatic elements as performed “on stage” is an interesting and relevant topic.

The pastoral is necessarily part narrative, part description — characters describe their surroundings as a site, and narrate what happens to them in it, or when they leave it. The narrative structure is relational; it models the interaction between types of perceptions, memories, emotions, and acts. It is not necessarily verbal; it can be visual and cognitive. The filmic uses symbolic (a narrative abstract, e.g.: allegory, phantom) as part of an illusionary and consciously opaque realm. Cultural response to the literary and visual is essential to the process of image-making, creating an “audience” with an understanding of what they are expected to see. “The audience” inherits their role as spectator over a continuous historical time period.

Keeping with filmic representation, the common projection on a screen as an icon of “landscape,” a part to be looked at, is traditionally labelled as “feminine.” The symbolic is what the “feminine” represents and “is”; the illusion is the projection and its site, localized and transferred in Robertson’s text from figure to “screen.”²⁰ This creates a picture in words (ekphrasis), the combination of visual and literary. Such projection enables shades, flickers, the metaphor of an “I/eye” that directs, narrates, pans, describes, and discourses about “what is” pastoral. In a still frame, film would be calendar. “What is pastoral” is a tradition (including the “feminine” as “pastoral”) of landscape that is instilled in a cultural memory (another screen). This paper further details how Robertson uses literary and visual “style” as a tactic to disinter²¹ the “feminine” from a cultural landscape and how she uses “tradition” to negate the impositions and assumptions the pastoral perpetuates. Through diction that “splays” in definition by offering a

mutivalency of meaning, Robertson fragments both the continuity that the “screen” impels and its tradition of passive “viewing,” to create scenic possibilities which invite interpretation and opportunities for liberty. This theme of rediscovery and liberty is also inherent in exile as a result of a system that labels representation as real: “The only thing to do is to stand on one’s own feet as an escapee, a fugitive slave, a lesbian [...]. First one must step out of the tracks of politics, philosophy, anthropology, history, “cultures,” to understand what is really happening” (Wittig xiii).

Robertson combines narrative and visual description with intense theoretical questions from her main characters concerning “role” and “place” in the “land” and “landscape.” Lady M is titled (aristocratic) and yet an anonymous (female), possibly based on the eighteenth century writer and poet Lady Mary Wortley Montagu; Nancy is a “common-name” construction, confidante of Lady M and metaphoric fragrance, “fickle-stench of the caressed name “Nancy” (Honour). The Roaring Boys are an overt, sexual, baroque ensemble, “protopunks” that flesh the pastoral with their dramatic entrances. They are a choral unit who mistranslate songs throughout the text; their songs interrupt the discourses between Lady M and Nancy, the sexual and “natural” targets of The Roaring Boys’ insatiable desires. The Roaring Boys represent the universality of heterosexual structures of power and designate them as infinite. The rhetoric of The Roaring Boys is allegorical, and mythical — couched in song that refers to Venus, mythological figure of sexual desire and “love.” Robertson’s emphasis on artifice, ornament, category, and calendar — most established in “Eclogue Ten: Utopia” — is an attempt to fragment such universality. The dialectic that Lady M and Nancy engage in, which isolates The Roaring Boys as external “asides” to their conversations and letters,

effectively re-evaluates patterns of dialectic/dialogue and thought (and the “gender” that has been excluded). Their “thinking” throughout the text re-situates their political position — they are not “spoken about” but “speak.” They are shades of the ancestress which Robertson’s narrator searches for, their conversations concern situation and “place.” Unable to propose a future, they can only consider the present and their relationship to each other — what is happening — as a “class,” as “titled,” or not, as “choosing” their histories, as acknowledging the possibility of sexual relations that are not inscribed by heterosexual practices. The task of Robertson’s narrator, instructed by an ephemeral ancestress who speaks through dream, is to find the symbolic garments and their inhabitants that drape her present. The narrator “I” must “[...] tear the symbolic from its own imaginary [...] not in the sense of ignoring it and fleeing from it (fearing it): the imaginary is also what has to be *rediscovered*” (Metz 4).²²

Robertson reformulates the pastoral and its nostalgia for a “golden age” through a linguistic and visual re-identification of the feminine with the land and “nature.”

XEclogue borrows the language of the tradition but uses it in a different way: her feminine characters are not passive, they interrogate the notion of “Thought” as a way of breaking the boundaries of accessible rationality that previously has belonged to a masculine realm. In addition, “Nature” changes into a new landscape through their questions and evaluations of gender roles and political position. No longer a lyrical description, it becomes activated, “gorgeous.”

Chapter One

i. Literary Pastoral, Visual Manifestation, Obsolescence

Ambiguity is a means of protest in XEclogue, a method of haunting an ontologically corrupt “polis.” Lady M describes this in a letter to Nancy, the process of “phantom,” the ramifications of “haunting”:

Are these, then, our only choices: to slip away into oblivion, or to be left behind, clinging to dirty ghosts? [. . .]. If, under the cover of coherence, we were to applaud the irretrievable passing of that world through which we thought ourselves to be moving [. . .] we could jam the grim identifications, the splayed economies, the trussed fusions, and enter into the sibylline promises of a new calendar [...]. A slow pan paints a low horizon. Yet it's still in the service of someone else's belief [...]. (“Utopia”)

Part of the process is recognizing the negative, the edited, the clipped. Lady M and Nancy recognize that they are deployed as ghosts in terms of a construction and reconfigure this deployment by choosing to be ghosts to ghosts. They use the “negative” to find out what the “garden” is: “A perspective extends like a green aperture through which we view another world. For a moment, all the figures have been replaced by foliage. There is almost a fusion of what is nebulous reverie with the dark wood of ragged allegory” (“Utopia”). Such ambiguity (as guise) has previously served as deliberately rich theoretical clothing and tactic:

I prefer to think of both the spuriousness of nature and the spuriousness of femininity as phantom. Once assigned a mythic base in biology, they function as ciphers which reproduce but don't enjoy the autonomy of the citizen. Femininity and nature float both as specters of the state imagination, and as symbols of the nation. A defined locale or gendered body is cultivated to produce an image of benign power, discrete abundance, ontological anxiety, and enclosed exchange. Yet, recognized and deployed as ghosts, this pair may certainly haunt the polis, insinuate their horribly reproductive tentacles through its paved courts and closed chambers. It is in this sense that I wish to "go phantom." It is in this sense also that I wish to farm the notion of obsolescence.(Robertson, PhillyTalks # 17)

It is important to delineate what in literary tradition "is" pastoral, how it has manifested visually, and what is meant by "obsolescence." In a general sense, the pastoral posits a stable and fluid reality²³ where nature, the countryside (its flora and fauna), and the human seem to work in concert. It is a genre that is easily imitated — in fact, a recommended model for writers to attempt before trying their skill at "higher" forms such as the epic or drama. According to Alexander Pope, or Samuel Johnson, the form was considered the lowest in terms of literary form; at the bottom of a literary hierarchy it makes a good candidate for Robertson's examination of social delineations, paralleling the level of genre with who is depicted within it. The pastoral does not only have to be literary. It arises in the picturesque, landscape paintings, and film. The strength of the pastoral in literature is the partial result of depiction — the verbal using

the visual. The term “pastoral,” however, is so general that its meaning has no concision. It can be both singular and plural, an adjective and substantive, refer to both music and painting, and can be applied to rural scenery possessing the qualities embodied in these art forms (Congleton 9).²⁴

Yet the pastoral is— either as a mode within a larger work or as genre — fairly recognizable in this general sense. For example, Edmund Spenser wrote his pastoral allegory, “The Shepherd’s Calendar,” using a colloquial British diction and local places; Alexander Pope wrote a series of “Pastorals” in a neoclassical style celebrating Windsor Forest; William Wordsworth uses the pastoral to express emotion; and the American poet Robert Frost’s celebration of nature gives his poetry a pastoral tone. Nature, emotion, Roman or Greek myth, allegory, and love are all pastoral qualities, and can serve as camouflage for political meanings and directions.²⁵ Robertson uses pastoral as obsolete to reveal political direction. Initially, it was thought that the pastoral themes originated out of “boredom” while the animals were in the pasture; the shepherd had “leisure.” To occupy his time he played his pipe and composed songs.

In the literary canon, it is generally agreed that Theocritus unconsciously started the mode with Idylls, a set of pastoral pieces that documented and celebrated the simplicity of rural life. Virgil imitated Theocritus when he wrote Bucolics, essentially creating the “first” pastoral.²⁶ He borrowed Theocritus’ description of Sicily’s scenery, he introduced mythological figures, and he changed the contextual structure with his first eclogue, “Exile” —which introduced political concepts that intersected with aspects of economy and ownership. The first eclogue is generally recognized to be propagandistic, a paean to Augustus, the “new” Emperor of Rome who granted Virgil land ownership.

Certain conventions became traditional: mythology is a common component of the pastoral, as is the imitation of an “Italianate” landscape. The genre posits enclosure, it offers a heroic stability that is often threatened by outside (urban) sources (for example invasion or different social standards) but tends to defeat or subsume them. Virgil’s politics made the pastoral allegorical and inferential; it is not only a celebration of the rural but represents the “human” ideal in a landscape. The “eclogue” is structurally central; it motivates and completes the pastoral discourse. It is traditionally considered a stabilizing influence on the pastoral form —wherein arguments and contests are resolved although enclosed in an illusory space.

Although the Italian Renaissance produced many pastoral poets — Mantuan (Baptista Spagnuoli), Petrarch, Boccaccio — there was no literary criticism of the form until Vida’s De Arte Poetica (1527), which briefly outlined what was included in the pastoral as genre. According to Congleton, Scaliger’s later study of the form, Ars Poetica (1561), proved to be more influential. It standardized the genre; it argued for rules which could be applied in literature as representative of the shepherd’s life. Art (Virgil’s rendering) not life (the reality of rural living) became the substitute for poetic imitation; the pastoral had instructive purpose to represent country life in the form of shepherds and shepherdesses. Robertson examines this substitution; her diction, characters, and style effectively “use” this genre to model the fact that the pastoral is manipulated for a productive economy.

A common theme of the pastoral is love, initially expressed through the actions of animals, humans, and the music that deified it in songs, such as walking songs, harvest songs, wine-making songs, songs about Gods and their minions, hymns, processions,

chants, and paeans. If the conjecture that the shepherds began the genre through the composition of lyrics is true, then song is the basis of the poetic development of pastoral. Robertson's mistranslation of the Pervigilium Veneris (Songs to Venus) satirizes the love song through the base desires of her characters that sing it — The Roaring Boys. In fact, Robertson uses a variety of modern, urban, pop lyrics as interruptive text throughout XEclogue; this aspect, however, I will not explore further in this paper.

Although some of Robertson's references date to the literary "beginning" of pastoral, she uses England as the geographic area for her critique. Pastoral criticism and poetry did not develop in England until the early 1500's with Alexander Barclay's "Prologue" to Certayne Eclogs (ca. 1514) which prefaced his translation of eclogues originally written by the Italian poets Sylvius and Mantuan. Mantuan was a popular source for British pastoral writers during the sixteenth century; his allegories appealed to concepts of virtue and vice that were part of the British humanist tradition. It wasn't until 1579 with Edmund Spenser's "The Shepherd's Tale" that Britain had an official "pastoral" poetry. To eighteenth-century writers, Spenser began the tradition in England, using a rustic language with "native" references, "common man" (Colin Clout), and an allegorical style. George Puttenham's Arte of English Poesie (1589) is the first real example of British pastoral criticism; it, too, attempted to fashion the pastoral into a conventional genre.

The pastoral is a popular genre for translation. In several ways it lends itself to exploitation (anti-pastoral, satire) and instructive propaganda. Later translators, such as Dryden or Pope, could use it to make England an allegorical Rome through stylistic practice that translated Virgil into "English"; that made Augustan's "Golden Age" of

Rome translatable to a contemporary cultural context in an imperial parallel, “Britain’s Golden Age.” Alternatively, this neoclassical motive was challenged by rationalist argument against the falsity of the neoclassical attempt to import Roman traditions onto British ground — the realists approved of “native” forms, the reality of actual diction and scenery as found in England. Stylistically, neoclassical desire was satisfied by a fable or “tale” form — in terms of the visual, the “scene” or “picture” was an able conveyer of pastoral ideals. Translations, such as Virgil and Longus’ works into English, carry with them cultural fallacies; the texts become owned with the change of language. Thus, the illustrated plates depicting British gentlemen in a pastoral landscape that accompany Dryden’s translation of Virgil’s Bucolics are a reminder that “ancient” rules be modified for “modern” times. By changing the classics from Latin into English translators could forgo the Roman linguistic authority for a British authority invested with the power of empire. Essentially, such activities represented an impulse to naturalize ‘imperium’ (Burow 25).

Alexander Pope’s “Discourse” — a treatise on the pastoral — was published in 1717. In it, he promises to account for the “kind” of poem the pastoral is, imagining that the form emerged out of the “leisure” of a shepherd’s life, and that song was “occasion to celebrate their felicity” (Pope 2). “Leisure” and “felicity” contributed to the “esteem for the virtues of a former age,” which then translated into a neoclassical pastoral during the early eighteenth century. Pope elucidates the pastoral conventions as evident lineage from Virgil.²⁷ He explains the difference between illusion and reality in the pastoral, that a main tenet of the genre is that it “copy Nature”:

If we would copy Nature, it may be useful to take this Idea along with us, that Pastoral is an image of what they call the golden age. So that we are not to describe our shepherds as shepherds at this day really are, but as they may be conceived then to have been. [...] We must then use some illusion to render a Pastoral delightful; and this consists in exposing the best side only of a shepherd's life, and in concealing his miseries." (Pope 4-5)

In Pope's age, the pastoral was a way of avoiding the reality of an aristocratic and mercantile ownership and the "miseries" of farmers and labourers, given the economic value of the land and its production.²⁸ His "Discourse" indicates that he was very much aware of economic and cultural imbalances, but the expedience of considering them "natural" was easier. Pope gives further instructions on style:

Nor is it enough to introduce shepherd's discoursing together in a natural way; but a regard must be had to the subject; that it contain some particular beauty in itself, and that it be different in every Eclogue. Besides, in each of them a designed scene or prospect is to be presented to our view, which should likewise have its variety. This variety is obtained in a great degree by frequent comparisons, drawn from the most agreeable objects of the country; by interrogations to things inanimate; by beautiful digressions, but those short; sometimes by insisting a little on circumstances; and lastly, by elegant turns on the words, which render the numbers extremely neat and pleasing. (5)

Robertson's XEclogue maintains this stylistic dictum, but she also subverts it using the characters Lady M and Nancy. "Florid" language disentangles the "project" of linguistic control that extends to nation-building rhetoric and its various oppressions, as propounded by Dryden, through Pope and also later modernist writers such as Ezra Pound. Within Robertson's eclogues, scenes are presented that have variety —dialogue, description, narration. "Eclogue One: Honour" has frequent comparisons and scenes; in other eclogues, Lady M and Nancy "interrogate" concepts such as "Thought." "Eclogue Four: Cathexis" observes (psychoanalytically) the inanimate as subject to obsession. The dialogues digress from character to character and circumstances are addressed — of being "raised a girl" or "finding evil as a concept's disappeared."

Robertson's political motivation is to renovate the national impulses and power structures that the pastoral supports. The methods she uses are based on what would be "negatives" in a traditional pastoral structure because they subvert the heterosexual policies that the structure promoted. Thus, all of her characters seem urban; they discuss pleasure, erotic love, emotional and conceptual transformation through "thought," they tell stories, offer personal histories, "conceive" of a parallel world. Where this is subversive is most evident in "Eclogue Seven: Exile." The language is floral and sexual; the language enacts Lady M and Nancy's desires. In a traditional pastoral, the lover transplants himself into the "natural world" and it responds to him as if a "feminine" lover. The irony is that in the very early eclogues, homosexual love affairs still delineated the figures as having "feminine" characteristics. Never, however, did the pastoral engage in lesbian relationships except through the writings of Sappho, and the eighteenth century writer Aphra Behn. Robertson plays with such sexual fabric; her

characters are multisexual and sexually transformative. In this way, the implicit thought that “nation” is threatened by expressed sexual liaisons that are not necessarily heterosexual is also challenged. XEclogue uses artifice as a garb to dramatically stage an “exit” of pastoral from a socially constructed play of political, traditional manners.

The need to establish a standard for the pastoral is the basis of a dispute in the eighteenth century between a neoclassical style guided by the ancient critics and pastoral poets or a rational style that, reasonably, imitates English landscapes and shepherds. This disagreement could be extended to fundamental differences in the poetry, an “aesthetic” poetry (neoclassical/Rapin) and a “proletarian” poetry (rationalist/Fontenelle). There were a variety of options within the pastoral that further confused the issue. For example, does one use Roman shepherds or English swains, can the poet use native materials or should they be classical, should the scene be conventional or exactly pictured? Is there room to modernize the pastoral beyond Virgil or Theocritus or is emulation better? Is easy and flowing verse needed or an absolute of pastoral poetry? Whom should contemporary poets emulate — Sidney or Virgil or Theocritus or Mantuan?

Part of the dispute stemmed from fundamental distinctions between the two major studies of the pastoral that emerged at the end of the seventeenth century. Rapin’s “Treatise” was neoclassically oriented, but Fontenelle, who wrote his “Discourse” in response to Rapin, was influenced by Cartesian philosophy and advocated a “native” orientation. It becomes a repeat of the Ancient and the Moderns debate that is imprinted in literary history; all substantial periods, including the contemporary one, engage in a resistance to a previous “tradition.” In economic terms, the desire for a “proper” pastoral accompanied by a set of rules translates into a pastoral literary “property,” that is, it is

owned by its writers and readers who are engaged in a social setting that advocates censorship based on sexual difference, gender roles, and class distinction.

The early eighteenth century, in terms of poetry, was Augustan — following Pope and the Rapinian mandate. Ambrose Philips, another popular writer of the pastoral, who followed native British customs, was the object of Pope's (and his supporters) satire in various pamphlet poems and "The Dunciad." However, there was an implicit agreement among these groups that the pastoral "represent" nature — it was in the matter of style that they largely differed. The late eighteenth century transforms the mental "illusion" of the pastoral, in either neoclassical or rationalist form, into a transcendent "emotion," a "suspension of disbelief" advocated by the early romantics William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

Yet it is also important to locate in this period the development of writing that satirizes and politicizes the pastoral form, that speaks for the "oppressed" — whether class based or gendered — through the analogous land/landscape. For example, George Crabbe's anti-pastoral "The Village," is an attempt to focus attention on the disparity between the depicted "landscape" and the labourers and communities that suffer within it. Urban pastorals, such as the collaborative "Town Eclogs"²⁹ written by Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Alexander Pope, and John Gray, are satires on the "simplicity" of the life that the pastoral depicts. The setting of these "Town Eclogs" is London, where individuals experience the same conditions — love contests, considerations of virtue — within the conventions and mannered structure of a "town life." In other words, the urban pastoral satirizes the artificiality of the pastoral ("simple" vs. "complex") and also the "complexity" (superficiality) of urban "high society." It fails, however, to address the

artifice that is engrained in the pastoral — the reason for casting the rural as “simple,” the purpose or “pleasure” in the pastoral genre. In a particularly interesting eclogue, supposedly written by Montagu and appended by Pope (which Montagu rejected), a lady and her lover discourse about “proof” of love. The lover asks the lady to submit, and the lady logically argues that submission would make her a societal outcast. The lover would benefit by conquest, his social standing would be unimpaired. They are interrupted by the lady’s husband, and the lover slips out by way of the back stairs. Pope’s suggested emendation to Montagu’s poem was that the lady submit to the pleasure and desire that the lover promises. Montagu’s rejection indicates her awareness of the full ramifications of the social situation. Her poem, given the conventions and constrictions of the period, reveals the affair as “normal,” but illustrates that the profession of love and desire (and the entreaty to submit) by the lover is love’s anti-sentiment — that he is asking for proof of conquest.³⁰ In the rural pastoral, affairs are normal but virtue and innocence are different. The social code that threatens the “virtue” of the woman in Montagu’s poem, is absent in Virgil’s work — rather, an “affair” is celebratory and the loss of it cause for lament. The object of the “affair” rarely has a voice.

Two components that strongly characterize the aesthetic practices of the eighteenth-century are perspective and the visual as markers of an “urban taste.” It is important to briefly elaborate this, as it contributes to a movement in aesthetic practice of making land “landscape.” Art forms combined landscape gardening, landscape painting, and poetry. In Xeclogue, Robertson uses this combination as a method that redefines the feminine in a totalizing aesthetic illusion. The eighteenth-century urban adaptations of

the classics in landscape gardening and literature conflict with the narrative traditions that evoked the rural physical landscape.³¹ The conflict lies between an attempt to “evoke” a state and the “real” state itself. Visual practice spanning from roughly 1730-1890, followed political and cultural trends, transforming landscape painting (Watteau and Lorraine) to the picturesque (Gainsborough, Constable). This movement, when analyzed in economic terms, reveals British “landscape” history as a paradox. “Land” in both visual modes was a cultural-aesthetic ideal that perpetuated the tenets of stability, respite, and a rustic “wealth” based on plenitude. It was, however, simultaneously becoming unrecognizable by visual standards due to industrialization and enclosures initiated by landed gentry and state. In turn, this disintegrated the relationship between farmer, labourer and landowner. It changed the remnants of a feudal system that had previously ensured a mutual benefit based on economy, protection, and a social code that was structured on concepts of duty and honour. Instead, the relationship between farmer and landowner became more stratified as the city became the base of culture; the individuals and families involved in rural produce became employees and the landowners employers; and the labourers were depicted alternatively as charitable cases for the parish or slovenly and base individuals. Thus, the social transformation paralleled the cultural-aesthetic ideal of the landscape, repeating a pattern of “loss and imaginative recovery” (Bermingham 1). The proliferation of visual cues in XEclogue not only renegotiates this concept of loss but more importantly the imaginative recovery through the eclogue “titles” and the structure of the piece as a whole. This notion of the picturesque, which used romanticism to hide the actual state of the landscape, is reduplicated in an urban sense through Robertson’s writing practices. The proliferation of visual, painterly

language in XEclogue emerges from her descriptions of paintings of contemporary artists, through conversations with these artists about their material practise, and “plein air” garden description using her own garden as site.³²

Eighteenth-century pastoral literature and gardening design was an aesthetic, cultural manifestation for an elite, where strict utility was rendered less important than pleasure and where allegory was a useful national tool that connected the strengths of a particular culture (in this case Rome) to the contemporary period. Early nineteenth-century landscape gardener Gertrude Jekyll details for gardening practices that exotic flora imported into Britain can create an evident visual pleasure. An estate like Stowe used busts of Roman deities overlooking busts of British “modern” politicians to suggest the disintegration of cultural values that once made an empire. British fear is based on loss of empire. Thus, carefully designed landscapes used inscriptions, statues and architectural forms to include an individual in a historical progression through Britain’s cultural and political periods. These “markers” also serve to remind the individual of status and place within a cultural and “natural” sphere. In landscape gardening,³³ Alexander Pope and William Kent combined their poetic and architectural abilities to collaborate on gardens and estates. Strictures on how a “prospect” should be maintained, or how a landscape should be rendered, are documented in the writings of Joseph Addison through the popular paper, “The Spectator.” The present-day maintenance of estates such as Stowe is physical evidence of the drive for “things classical.”

Essentially, this landscape design is mnemonic, a way of rendering reality through nostalgia or formulated memory. It also creates a theatre of imitation,

establishing a historical grandeur based on an earlier time period, but given meaning by the framework of the particular period. In addition, such use of the landscape translates into politicized desire, the use of visual and literary means in a programmatic attempt to make England a new Rome. The landscape design and architectural formation of the eighteenth century translated form or design from classical ideals (Palladio) and engendered a neo-classical fad. Landscape gardening in the 1700's lent itself, through the guidance of designer/architects William Kent, Indigo Jones, and Capability Brown to scenic views evoking pastoral (Italian) landscapes. The proliferation of art forms that represented nature, such as painting, poetry, letters, manners, dress, landscape, philosophy, and science justified social change. What also occurred was a more subversive "translation of meaning" where the designers attempted to represent and create a moral awareness in its viewers, listeners, and onlookers of nation, self and place. "Liberty" was an applied model of behavior accompanied with a train of followers: Beauty, Virtue, and Honour. All were abstract epithets modelled on a "feminine" form that was "natural": "Nature becomes a key concept linking the cultural representations of social institutions and apparatuses with the economics of an enclosed landscape" (Bermingham 1).

The style of the period aimed for a contrived carelessness in landscape design. The period is paradoxical in its desire for "the natural," and yet it displays cultural need to contain "the natural" by certain rules. Psychologically, the credo evidenced a superficial liberty rooted by hidden, underlying, conventions that maintained the *status quo*: "the scenery that involved the landscape and what was in it, allowed little separation between individual and role — the land became a "theatre of cultural history"(Hunt 44).

The pastoral (field and grove) transformed into “the garden” a compact enclosure immediately accessible to an urban dweller. It was a fabrication using a combination of technology and intelligence, where nature and art collaborate.³⁴ Rather than living in the fields and groves, amongst “Nature,” urbanites appropriated the form of nature, miniaturizing the “shepherdess” in statue, for example or as a costumed figure for a masque or a play. The garden was (and is today) a “free space” that one moves into, around (taking pleasure), and out of again. One cannot, post-Eden, possibly live in the garden, it is for temporary respite that underlines the desire to be “in the world,” the urban space. It also underlines the desire to enact the world – the garden as a stage.

The “nature” and “culture” debate can be located in the eighteenth-century when, politically, England was in transition between rulers, where socio-politically the rational was confronting the metaphysical. There was considerable debate as to whether God governed the world and its creatures or whether the human had sufficient power to construct his reality through the use of reason. In the light of new scientific, technological, and “natural” developments, the Renaissance notion of a social hierarchy of God, King and people seemed less relevant. The garden, wherein an individual could control the environment, was a response to the conceptual disarray of the period. In the case of many landscape gardeners the result was a series of pictures, a fragmented — in the end — view of a landscape that paradoxically seemed complete. Scientific technology, such as optics, added to artistic techniques of concealment and subterfuge.

The possibility of originality is designed into the landscape through the edict of an eighteenth century obsession with taste and perspective that propounded (through Pope) a variety of views (in landscape) and the presence of residual “nature” that was phantom.

This residue translated into “genius of the place” and was imagined as a mystic essence that was feminine, and under man’s design, made optimal. But the basis of the aesthetic had been socially “selected” out of a cultural understanding of sexual “other.” The female had no place other than a depicted role that staged her as a symbol. In this way, seeming liberty conceals artificiality; physical bounds exist in harmony with the possibilities invoked by the perspectives offered. The classical emphasis on rationality and balance (harmony) in art and literature is recreated, as are values of a transposed “stability” and “propriety” that accompany them. Following what “nature” is between the periods of the sixteenth century to the present is a confusing venture. In the eighteenth century it becomes split between scientific, literary and artistic goals; all attempt to “represent” it.³⁵ This representation follows from Renaissance ideas of painterly perspective and focus, mapping and later ideas in optics (Newton) that furthers the contribution to objectification of passive subject “in” the landscape — the “feminine” and the rural as a objects of passion/consumption.

Alexander Pope in the third eclogue of his “Pastorals” wills “nature” to wither, in an action that mimics his love-fostered distress.³⁶ This is a common technique in pastoral poetry. He then reverses this directive, re-ordering nature to resume its fecundity wherever his love, Delia, “flies.” Delia is “in” nature; she is also, then, fecund. This parallel between “Delia” and “nature” as reproductive products of the narrator’s “love” has circular movement — from being the object and representatives of his desire, they come to be projections of himself. Similarly, Robertson’s “protopunk” characters, The Roaring Boys, subject Lady M and Nancy to pastoral song that sexualizes them as “objects,” borrowing “pendant usage” from literature and pastoral description:

Cursed be the fields that cause my Delia's stay;
 Fade every blossom, wither every tree,
 Die every flower, and perish all but she.
 What have I said? Where'er my Delia flies,
 Let spring attend, and sudden flowers arise;
 Let opening roses knotted oaks adorn,
 And liquid amber drop from every thorn.
 (Pope 18)

Roaring Boys (*singing*)
Hey Blushing Berries, you've got us curious. Groves
Nodding can't masque your emotions curious
Fretwork. We need consolement. We're no strangers
To the quick whirls of russet-wrapt or bluish
Emotion, pendant, typical, sultry, fringed
Like a bump on the horizon. Our reddened silks
Rustle with profession. Imitation cramps
Such rudeness: But those games just aren't interesting.
Take this hint — we're typical Boys, our fickle emotion
Wanders and is fed, yet we choose
To dedicate our follies to you. Shall we syncopate
The several beauties known by the name of the Purling
Stream? This tumult's meant to tilt
All grammar. We're just those that
Want you to feel [. . .]. ("Honour")³⁷

Robertson parodies the pastoral, using dialogue between two central characters, Lady M and Nancy, to posit that the “feminine” has never really been “in the land” but subject to it. The “feminine” is a construct made “real” through the sexual conquest and literary eroticism of the flora and fauna (as “nature”) that reifies heterosexual desire and power. The “feminine” and “nature” are rootless, soiled by a nation-making imagination: “Femininity and nature float both as spectres of the state imagination and as symbols of the nation” (Robertson, The Capilano Review 93). As a tactic, Robertson makes use of libidinal language that de-activates the male-female binary as the only sexual option. For example, “Eclogue Seven: Exile” enacts a lesbian relationship between Lady M and Nancy, “Eclogue Eight: Romance” plays with gender categorizations, identifying The Roaring Boys one by one, and “Eclogue Three: Liberty” uses legal, botanical and gender references to poke fun at social expectations, the binding consideration of taste and convention:

Beardless boys stripped to the waist might illustrate my ability to think,
 but, like any experts in hope, they'd just deflate my perfect barbarity. If
 you took this prudish ornament, exuding moody sex as his own ornament,

with his woozy shimmer, his bobbing glamour, fondler of the long-sleeved and lobed, he'd poach. Which means I must invent my own. So, stepping from that house, I celebrate the death of method [...]. ("Liberty")

Robertson transforms concepts such as libido, sexuality, gender and nature into conscious linguistic terminology traditionally used to separate and then narrate the subject/object in literature. She displaces a historical structure that places the erotic in nature, the garden, and then stages the characters roles as heterosexual. Eros, in this resolution, exists in an aporia that fragments the closure that sexual fulfillment offers. Instead, the libido is imaginable and unimaginable, expressed not "in" a subject but through actions: gesture and language. This aporia enables Lady M, in a confessional letter to Nancy, to state that the sexual advances of The Roaring Boys solidify the fact that "All these sluttish thickets and rivulets of green, all these bitchy, sybaritic flickers of leaf only simulate my technical and carminine thirst for the smooth sensation of felicity" ("Honour").

It is all a smooth simulation of "actual" desire. The assumption of mysticism to "feminine" sexuality is paired with "nature's" sensual abundance in a heterosexual framework. The Roaring Boys admit to a "curiosity" about the "feminine" "fretwork," and they single out Lady M as the individual to whom they "choose to dedicate their follies." "Feeling" is accorded by sexual prowess, confirmed by the description "reddened silks." Male genitalia are a type of "dress," and also, behind this, the suavity of repeated intonation — cliché's and pick up lines. Lady M uses The Roaring Boys as an object, a curiosity to test "the coy illusion of Liberty." "Liberty," in this instance, is marked by heterosexual sexual practice. There is an assumption that Lady M will have

sex with The Roaring Boys. It is a “test,” Lady M’s interest is not strictly heterosexual.

In this way, Robertson places Lady M and Nancy in positions that allow choice and conversation in the politicized landscape. They can enact their own “fantasies.”

“Nature” as concept-locus and the “feminine” as concept-agent are ontologically tied to a philosophy that first erases them and then redevelops them, transformed into each other.

Robertson must splice this graft; she must track a “negative” in order to show the subject under its own development. Once the “categories through which one sees” (Butler, Gender Trouble xxii-xxii) are questioned, possibilities — of gender, sex, and body — can be explored. “Obsolescence” begs questions: if nature (in a pastoral scheme) is reciprocal and reproductive, then what relationship is this considered reciprocity based on? Who in this reciprocity is under governance? What are the laws, the contracts, and the ties that bind/ensure/enclose this relationship?

The character “Lady M” in Robertson’s text likely represents a fictionalized Montagu. Robertson’s use of “Lady M” grounds XEclogue in a particular historical strategy that used the pastoral as a political tool. The historical Montagu comments on gender assumptions and social conventions through her poems, travel narratives and satirical articles (where she never identifies herself as a woman or as member of the nobility). She situates “complicity” within a titled nobility (who have power) and also identifies the “nature” of “feminine” representation as founded on a perverse logic that began with the “first Lady” Eve who was convinced of her lack of knowledge and intelligence by the masculine figure, the “serpent/Devil” (Montagu 133). As a titled individual, Lady Montagu had contacts that enabled her to profess her views, but not to identify herself. Indignant at the “barbarous treatment” that “women” received from a

writer in the periodical “Common Sense [January 14, 1738],” and also indignant that women accept their representation, Montagu wrote a series of satirical articles titled “The Nonsense of Common Sense.” Written several years after the “Town Eclogues,” Montagu disparages the social conventions and notions that considered that women were “foolish” and incapable of “thought,” by noting that what the masculine gender “wanted” in a woman prescribed the ideal:

How many pretty Gentlemen have been unmercifully jilted by pert Huzzy's after having cursy'd to them at halfe a dozen operas! nay permitted themselves to be led out twice: yet after these encouragements (which amount very near to an engagement) have refus'd to read their *Billet doux*, and pehaps marry'd other men under their noses. How welcome is a couplet or two in scorn of Womankind to such a disappointed Lover! and with what comfort he reads in many profound Authors, that they are never to be pleas'd but by Coxcombs, and consequently he owes his ill success to the brightness of his Understanding, which is beyond Female comprehension! The Country Squire is confirm'd in the Elegant Choice he has made in preferring the conversation of his Hounds to that of his wife, and the Kind Keepers (a numerous sect) find themselves justify'd in throwing away their time and estates on a parcel of Jilts, when they read that neither Birth nor Education can make any of the sex rational Creatures; and they can have no value but what is to be seen in their Faces. (Montagu 132)

Thus, Montagu is politically engaged — though limited, despite her views, because of her gender. The terms of complicity are subject to revision —Montagu does not take the tradition of “feminine” depiction lightly. Her writings show that she is an early advocate of the notion that a perpetual masculinist perception devalues the “feminine,” that what needs challenging is the acceptance of the view that the woman is foolish, rather than the irony that it is a “foolishness” rather than masculine “rationality” that determines the social conventions and gender concepts:

Men that have not sense enough to shew any superiority in their Arguments hope to be yeilded to by a Faith that as they are men all the Reason that has been allotted to Humankind has falln to their share. I am seriously of another Opinion: as much greatness of Mind may be shewn in submission as in command, and some Women have suffer'd a Life of Hardships with as much Philosophy as Cato travers'd the Desarts of Africa, and without the support that the veiw of Glory afforded him and which is support enough for the Human mind that is touch'd with it, to go through any toil or Danger. But this is not the Situation of a Woman, whose virtue must only shine to her own recollection, and loses that name when it is ostentatiously expos'd to the World [...] I have some thoughts of exhibiting a set of Pictures of such meritorious Ladys, where I shall say nothing of the fire of their Eyes or the pureness of their Complexions, but give them such praises as befits a rational sensible Being, Virtues of Choice and not Beautys of Accident. [. ..] There will be no occasion of amuseing them with trifles when they consider themselves capable of making not only the most aimable but the most Estimable Figures in Life. Begin then Ladies by paying those Authors with Scorn and contempt who with the sneer of affected Admiration would throw you below the Dignity of the Human Species. (134)

Montagu challenges the notion of the feminine as “specter.” She advocates that the “feminine” no longer accepts a passive production through a “nation building imagination.” Reapplying the terms of “logic” and “rationality” onto the masculine subject, she resituates in literature, myth, and political power the reasons for feminine submission and construction, revealing them to be illogical and emotional.

In another sense the pastoral genre is a literary form that transforms a non-human and “natural” land/wilderness into a landscape/farm that is affected and improved by human occupation and labour. It is a genre coded by literary and dramatic forms such as theatrical devices and narrative rhetoric that are capable of projecting a viable “reality.” To be human in this pastoral land and to survive is both plausible and “natural” — humans are the “inheritors” of this “earth.” It is an extremely persuasive and accessible genre because it narrates the provision of basic human needs: shelter (trees/forest), food (animals, vegetables), and community (partners). By depicting social survival through

nature's abundance, the "pastoral" includes conceptual abstractions that act as implicit defense mechanisms. These abstractions, (liberty, utopic "dream," and freedom) are valued as a "human right" that signals a power relationship based on conquering the land and using its resources. Through Christianity, this power relationship is ratified by the myth of genesis, and the fall of Adam and Eve from Eden. Pre-Christian myths and tales revealed the gods and goddesses as part of the land, and daily activities. They were a capricious component in everyday life, manifesting at will. "Human" was subordinate to "nature." A threat to the pastoral — usually in the form of an outside "attacker" from another (urban) land — activates the possible disappearance of these conceptual subsets; to maintain them, individuals have to "protect" the land from invasion and destruction. By eradicating the threat — through death or exile (as conditions of "fate") — the pastoral remains stable, enclosed, and "valid." Thus, in literature, the central tropes embrace "love" (social) in combination with an "idyllic" relationship with the land (needs), but the pastoral is often narrated by an outsider, an individual exiled from the pastoral because the individual threatened the pastoral from within it. This pattern becomes evident in Virgil's first eclogue. Robertson, in "Eclogue Two: Beauty" and "Eclogue Seven: Exile" respectively, parodies the pastoral romance and the tendency of the genre to subsume the political component. In the former, challenge to the genre comes from the threat of war from "urban" sources. In the latter, this challenge is in the form of the character Meliboeus, who does not support Augustus. Robertson offers a perspective that challenges servitude within this realm. In addition, she has created a phantom that can enter the pastoral at will and leave it. She is not visible enough to be

exiled or destroyed. The pastoral, then, is a convenient fiction that camouflages the dominance of a particular political, cultural, and literary power.

ii. In the beginning: Virgil, Longus and “Eclogue Seven: Exile”

Rewriting Longus and Virgil through a dialogue that involves two female characters enables Robertson to trace a historical pattern that begins with Virgil’s eclogues. They question a collective history that perpetuated a seemingly defunct pastoral, that sought the beautiful and framed, that rendered the pastoral economic and political. Robertson tracks this genre, and the motives behind it from the Roman period to the nineteenth-century using materialist arguments:

[. . .] from Virgil to Spenser to Goldsmith,³⁸ the pastoral poem narrated the exigencies of land tenure, labour’s relation to the state and capital, and the establishment of a sense of place as a ground for philosophical being and discourse....We can follow this trajectory from Virgil’s ambivalently gorgeous justification of the Roman Empire, to the Elizabethan articulation of imperial utopias, Augustan parallels between English and Classical pleasures of enlightenment, and late eighteenth century evocations of nostalgia for agricultural capitalism. “Beauty” clinched Pastoral’s edifying function [. . .]. The difficulties and pleasures of maintaining a primary, legal, and productive entitlement to the land provided the pastoral subject since Virgil’s first eclogue politicized the Theocritan idyll. (Robertson, The Capilano Review 96)

In Virgil’s Bucolics the ruling class causes the suffering and exile of Meliboeus and mocks Tityrus’ liberty. However, as a subconscious directive to lead a nation the

pastoral was a brilliant form—the landscape (forest, wilderness, garden) — dotted with sculptures and classical features — became a metonymic prescription for freedom, liberty and empire. In this chapter, Robertson’s parody of Virgil/Dryden and Longus/Thornley follow an initial explication of the texts — the background and stories rendered first, especially with respect to Dryden’s version, allows a smoother transition to Robertson’s eclogues.

“Eclogue Seven: Exile” is a “version” of John Dryden’s English translation of Virgil’s Bucolics. The pastoral narrative of Bucolics subjects the exile to “another land,” faced with the “hardship” of knowing loss. The cause of exile is a new ruler. Dryden sets the scene of the first “Pastoral,” with a historical account:

When Augustus had settled himself in the Roman empire, that he might reward his veteran troops for their past service, he distributed among them all the lands that lay about Cremona and Mantua: turning out the right owners for having sided with his enemies. Virgil was a sufferer among the rest; who afterward recovered his estate by Maecenas’s intercession, and as an instance of his gratitude composed the following Pastoral, where he sets out his own good fortune in the person of Tityrus, and the calamities of his Mantuan neighbours in the character of Meliboeus.

(Dryden, Works of Virgil 3)

The ramifications of Meliboeus’ exile are secondary to his nostalgic emotion, which reconstructs his loss; the abundance that the pastoral fiction offers seems better than the uncertainty that Meliboeus’ exile promises. Thus, the real event (exile) is exchanged for the fiction (pastoral shepherd under tree).³⁹ The political reasons for

Meliboeus' exile are waived in order to support Tityrus' success. Meliboeus refuses to be complicit with the new ruler, but the refusal and the implication of complicity is subsumed in the "natural order" of shepherd and land (as "restored" by Augustus) that Tityrus' story tells. Dryden's translation of Virgil, retold in Robertson's eclogue, posits a hypothetical realm where the pastoral is the antithesis of the concepts (love and idyll) it represents. It is not about "love" or "idyll," but rather it is a necessary fiction that underlines the right of a certain part of society to "rule" and "maintain order" in the state. Virgil's version gives the landowner "rights" over the labourer forced into exile. Dryden's translation occurs at a period in British history when the aristocracy feared revolution. The idea of "fate" that runs through Virgil's text is a manipulation that offers a sense of uncontrol — that some things are beyond human agency. Tityrus is "fated" to have his land back; in an equal fashion Meliboeus is "fated" to lose his land and be exiled — even though their initial political choices were the same. Because Meliboeus does not recant his objection to Augustus, he loses his land, but he escapes the fiction.

The first "pastoral" of Virgil's Bucolics⁴⁰ reveals two typical pastoral characters. The scene is enacted through dialogue between Tityrus and Meliboeus. Unlike the "narrator" who relates Longus' Daphnis and Chloe externally from the action, the dialogue begins at the pastoral/exile gap that Tityrus and Meliboeus experience. Tityrus is enjoying pastoral freedom and love while Meliboeus is transporting himself and his flock away from Mantua. He sees Tityrus, and experiences a profound sense of loss and nostalgia. The scene begins with a commentary on Tityrus' present state that extends to a brief exegesis of the pastoral ideal. The stanza is loaded with topographic terms that carry metaphoric implications:

**[Meliboeus] Beneath the shade which beechen boughs diffuse,
 You, Tityrus, entertain your sylvan muse.
 Round the wide world in banishment we roam,
 Forced from our pleasing fields and native home:
 While, stretched at ease, you sing your happy loves
 And Amaryllis fills the shady groves. (Dryden 3)**

Ease and pleasure are the shepherd's due in the literary pastoral realm, but Meliboeus is no longer literary (the shepherds' pipe) or pastoral. The fantasy of pastoral exists, but as a mode of living it is obsolete for Meliboeus, who has felt the political power that drives it: "what dire effects from civil discords flow! The fruit is theirs, the labour only, mine" (Dryden 6). The dialogue between these two characters comprises a catalogue of the pastoral life; Meliboeus' final statement records what the land "represented" in an extended farewell that describes an aesthetic "landscape":

**Farewell, my pastures, my paternal stock,
 My fruitful fields, and my more fruitful flock!
 No more, my goats, shall I behold you climb
 The steepy cliffs, or crop the flowery thyme! (6)**

The perspective of the shepherd ranges from field to steep cliff, to panoramic view on the mountain's "brow," its abyss, and the "grot" below. The shepherd's perspective is entire. Finally, Meliboeus says farewell to his "tuneful pipe" and at the same time, "all the world." The pipe is the shepherd's pen, it both writes the world the shepherd exists in and the shepherd. It lyrically relates the pastoral.

“Shaded” from the heat (of political strife) by beech boughs, Tityrus is surrounded by the “feminine-as-sources-of-creativity”: the muses, and his love, Amaryllis.⁴¹ He is “stretched at ease” watching his flock, while Meliboeus’ goat loses a litter (his livelihood). Tityrus can sing “happy loves” while Meliboeus looks back at the land he is leaving. This first stanza completes itself in a closed, pastoral, circular sequence when the last line re-enacts the first line; Tityrus and Amaryllis are united by location, within the “shady groves.” Virgil’s first eclogue explains the exile of Meliboeus through the good fortune of Tityrus, but it also pays homage to Augustus,

These blessings, friend, a deity bestowed:

For never can I deem him less than god

[...].

He gave my kine to graze the flowery plain,

And to my pipe renewed the rural strain. (3)

Tityrus not only has his land, but also his pipe. He has the means to “be pastoral,” to narrate through song his romantic loves and life. “Gods” are political; there is an aspect of “fate” to the pastoral as though it was immune from political and human trickery. As a parallel to Tityrus, however, Virgil presents Meliboeus, who lost his land and livelihood to Augustus’ soldiers. Virgil narrates two different outcomes to the same event: Augustus’ power. Thus, Tityrus’s “fortune” is economically literal, but couched in the terms of fate. Meliboeus’ “fate” is political, he recognizes the loss of mythological “gods,” nothing (“external”) will save him from exile.

The Bucolics are not merely fiction, the eclogues refer to the “real world,” to “smallholders in Italy, suffering from the land-confiscation’s ordered by the Caesarian

generals Mark Antony and Augustus” (Kegel-Brinkgreve 82). In the eighteenth century, they represent the pastoral ideal as imagined by a privileged class who own the land. The politics of place support an aesthetic that seems to have a poetic lineage — the British poetic mode impels this lineage forward.⁴²

Tityrus regains his land when he travels to Rome to see Augustus. “Rome” restores hope; decrees are given that decide the fates of the Roman people — much in the same fashion as gods were believed to govern the fates of the Roman people. The politics of state have replaced those of mythology; depending on situation in war or the temperament of the ruler, one’s fortunes could either be made or broken by a single ruling.⁴³ Meliboeus can see the outcome of this: the land is sufficient for Tityrus, the sounds of bees humming, the flowers blooming, the flock well tended, and turtle doves “complaining” in the elms of love. But this is just fantasy. In fact, Tityrus’ land is bleak; it is the neighbour’s field that holds such attractions:

Though rushes overspread the neighbouring plains
 Though here the marshy grounds approach your fields,
 And there the soil a stony harvest yields.
 Your teeming ewes shall no strange meadows try,
 Nor fear a rot from tainted company. (Dryden 5)

The labour of living on this land is transformed by an aesthetic that hides the political. The shepherd is associated with the tree and its shade, the woodlands through his music, and the muses through his flute (Etlin 99). Meliboeus has outlived the pastoral world to which he belonged — war, the changes in the landscape and countrymen have

disrupted his ideal. Meliboeus ends his song with a catalogue of losses. The pipe, which traditionally sings these narratives, is cast off.

Virgil's first eclogue is a dual presentation of the dramatic and non-dramatic. Tityrus's pleasure is set against Meliboeus' exile. Paul Alpers suggests two interpretations: "On the one hand, we can appeal to the dominant impression of the lines and to their formal symmetry [. . .] and say that Tityrus' pastoral happiness encloses or contains Meliboeus's lot; we can compare, to Tityrus' disadvantage, the scope and quality of the juxtaposed ways of life — Tityrus' singing love songs in the shade, as opposed to Meliboeus' concern for fields and *patria*" (Alpers 66). What this leads to is dissonance — the harmony of the shepherds' world is disrupted. The eclogue is evenly divided between Tityrus and Meliboeus. The second half contains the speeches of Meliboeus and closes with Tityrus's invitation that Meliboeus spend the night with him and enjoy pastoral pleasures. In this sense Tityrus's speech encloses Meliboeus' condition of exile.

The dialogue in Dryden's "Pastoral" seems sometimes at odds. Questions are not necessarily answered, and it is obvious that the concerns of one shepherd do not apply to the concerns of the other; thus the directions of the conversation often diverge.

Perspective is expressed through dialogue, evasions and questions create tension and digressions: Tityrus' speech regarding freedom or Meliboeus' rendering of his future as an exile become presentations of personal circumstances and history (Alpers 81).

Meliboeus idealizes the pastoral and describes his suffering in an ornate language comparable to that used to depict the landscape. Tityrus relates the rituals of the peasant life, the working of the soil through a description of the market commerce:

Though many a victim from my folds was brought,
 Yet all the little that I got, I spent,
 And still returned as empty as I went. (Dryden 4)

Tityrus is a landowner; his journey to Rome was in search of “liberty” that essentially meant the freedom and ability to engage in exchange and labour for material goods. Before that point, he describes himself as a “helpless, hopeless, homely swain” who “sought not freedom, nor aspired to gain” (4). Love (Amaryllis), money, and his land represent the “freedom” he aspired toward. Virgil’s eclogue is about Meliboeus’ exile and Tityrus’ fortune; it shows two escapes from “servitude” but also the economics of production that the pastoral seems to represent. Meliboeus and Tityrus had different ethical standards. The pastoral realm, for those characters that remain in it, no longer depicts the shepherd’s simple pleasures, but, rather, the shepherd as landowner.

One of the most pastoral eclogues of Robertson’s text, “Eclogue Two: Beauty,” re-translates Longus’⁴⁴ mythological romance novel, Four Books of Pastorals about Daphnis and Chloe,⁴⁶ from George Thornley’s sixteenth century English translation, Daphnis and Chloe. Thornley retells the story of Chloe, a goatherd, and Daphnis, a shepherd, who grow up together, work together, and fall in love. They are protected by the pastoral figure Cupid, who ensures that they fall in love and that their love is consummated, through a series of instructions given to Daphnis and Chloe by Philetas, an “aged” intermediary who offers a catalogue of love’s emotions and incidences:

Love, (sweet Chloe) is a god, a young Youth, and very fair, and wing’d to flye. And therefore he delights in youth, follows beauty, and gives our phantasie her wings [. . .]. I have known a Bull that has been in Love, and

run bellowing through the Meadows, as if he had been prickt with a Goad; a he-goat too so in Love with a Virgin-she, that he has followed her up and down, through the woods, through the Launs. And I myself, when I was young, was in love with Amaryllis, and forgot to eat my meat, and drink my drink; and for many tedious nights, never could compose to sleep: my panting heart was very sad and anxious, and my body shook with cold: I cryed out oft, as if I had bin thwackt and basted back and sides: and then again, was still and mute, as if I had layen among the dead: I cast my self into the Rivers, as if I had been all on a fire: [. . .]. For there is no med'cine for Love, neither meat, nor drink, nor any Charm, but only Kissing, and Embracing, and lying naked together. (Thornley 64-65)

After many trials from urban sources (that never harm their innocence), Daphnis and Chloe marry in the garden of Philetas (the playing ground of Cupid). Adopted as orphans, and, in a grand unveiling at the end of the novel discovered to be nobility, they nevertheless choose to remain goatherd and shepherd, living “happily ever after.”

Thornley's version eroticizes the story. He fashions it into an instructive book for “Young Ladies” on the “nature” of love and sex:

It should not vex you, unlesse perchance, in your own conscience. Chloe knew well enough (though the Author makes her simple) what, and where, her Fancie was; and Daphnis too, needed not Lycaenium's Lanthorn to a plakit, or to follow Will with the wispe. But hark you Lady, and I will tell you a storie; one I had at a Tavern vesper; a Dialogue from a Summer shade. A boy, and a Girle, were gott thither together; The boy opened his

shop, and drew out all a young beginner had to show; The Girle askt him,
 what it was: the boy said, It was his purse: the Girlie looked upon her self;
 and if that be thy purse; Then, (quoth she), my purse is cutt.(7)

Thornley is offering an instruction book to the Ladies of his day for “You do not know what we meane, when we speak as plain as day.” He is offering allegory for sexual clarity; Robertson uses the allegory and applies it to notions of instruction, translation, sexual acts, and beauty. Robertson fragments his revision. Her version takes specific lines out of Thornley’s text and replaces them in a recombinant sequence that makes his version a configuration of non-sequitors. Robertson’s linguistic play combined with a cultural knowledge of how to read sexually, results in a highly erotic text rife with innuendo. In turn, this way of reading challenges the explicit innocence of Daphnis and Chloe, their state seems all the more unreal (and thus a cause of some amusement) because they are “less” urbane.

Thornley’s eroticism marks the cultural behavior of the sixteenth century; the urbanity is acknowledged by way of social codes that repress its expression openly unless it is in the form of literature or drama. For Robertson’s text, to have contextual meaning requires knowledge of Thornley’s version. Robertson removes named identities and replaces them with pronominal replacements: “he,” “she,” and “I.” “You” see what Robertson’s narrator chooses to relate to you; her vision is much different from Thornley or Longus’ narrator — the myths have altered, become fragmented, and the narrator is female. The text is “like” a picture; a read sequence of linguistic contours that resonate narratively. Robertson’s revisions demonstrate that fragment objectifies meaning.⁴⁷ Language, infused with multi-layered traditions of rhetoric and vision — monocular,

glazed, and informed by illusion — is manipulated in XEclogue to recode a cultural and literary landscape, to make fictional what seems fact: “Make a parallel nation, an anagram of the Land” (“How Pastoral”).

Robertson parodies Daphnis and Chloe and Bucolics. What she does not elect to use shadows her version, the reader (if familiar with the texts) can recognize the lines, but cannot maintain narrative continuity — the context and literary mode are parodic. Her technique is metaphrastic, a combination of imitation and paraphrase.⁴⁸ The translator (Thornley/Dryden) is the matrix of both the original text and Robertson’s fragmented versions. For example, Longus’ narrator was a hunter who became an author; he explores the dialectic of city and country, male and female, myths and rhetoric, innocence and experience through visual language. Thornley, as translator was instructive, offering a translation that would educate “young ladies” in a social realm that made sexuality a form of gestural subterfuge or that referenced it through linguistic innuendo. Sex “in the open” belonged to a pastoral mode, but it was an innocent sexuality expressed first as recognition of desire, elevated to the status of love, and finally consummated.

In “Eclogue Two: Beauty,” Robertson’s narrator is “hunting” for literary allusions (an explanation of why the “feminine” is conscripted in a “natural” language) but she is “lounging,” not “hunting,” in the grove when she sees what was always already there before her: “A pleasant history of love.” Robertson’s translation is a monologue that radically changes the meaning and the genre of romance: the love between Daphnis and Chloe becomes purely incidental because their names are removed from her text, the subject seems to be the narrator, an unidentified “she” and “he” enter her version. There are variations of sexual scenes, represented by pronouns: “a bolder strapping girl,”

“yesterday a boy appeared,” “I myself, when I was young,” “She’s so small and slim and so will slip away.” In Longus’ text (through Thornley), a space is created outside of his narrative for the narrator to “spectate” (a dream space) by way of the prologue. The characters have life beyond the literary — they become literary when the narrator designates them as a scene to watch. Love is voyeuristic. Longus designates romance as a filmic image that, through visual verbal play, encapsulates time and space in a fixed moment of the narrator watching as the plot moves forward. The narrator is fixed. Ekphrasis ensures illusion. The object (the story) has occurred in a historical sequence, a “pleasant history of love” that is re-related.⁴⁹ The pastoral is situated in a certain landscape enclosed by “grove,” “wood” or “field.”

In “Eclogue Seven: Exile,” Lady M questions the horizons and borders of physical space in a dialogue that restates Virgil’s eclogue. For the urban “horizon” is the place where the city ends and the country begins. Robertson places the pastoral in a cultural “present” that directly addresses Nancy. The prose narration (the argument) becomes dialogue between Nancy and Lady M. Whereas Dryden takes liberties with the Latin, Robertson liberally re-phrases, juxtaposing translations and implications to construct a different narrative, disrupting sequence for verbal impact. Robertson uses the Renaissance pastoral command, “Come be” and Nancy speaks it to Lady M and other “exiles”:

Come to the wrought folds

No less than gods

I throw flowers at your pain

Here's tender play, shining and black

Up there, there is no land

Exile and loss, in Robertson's version, provide the focus, rather than the stability that the pastoral offered Tityrus. While political power (Augustus) was relegated godly status in the Virgil/Dryden version, here the exiles are "no less than gods"; they have their own political power. In Robertson's rendering the exile's expedience is replaced by purpose. Lady M and Nancy are allegorical pastoral figures. Robertson parodies Tityrus' gratitude to Augustus — she reconciles the emotion of gratitude with its impact, the unequal exchange of servitude for Lady M's dictum: "We expect total acquiescence" ("Exile"). Nancy, like Tityrus, is "a sufferer among the rest" but although a parallel between Nancy and Tityrus seems evident, Nancy is not content with living a "pastoral" life but would rather use it from within the pastoral to negotiate a new gender position, "Bend Rome to her will." Lady M, on the other hand, "mourns the waste of the substance of the world: her virility stems from a dragged politics of exile."

Their dialogue echoes Meliboeus and Tityrus but Lady M and Nancy discuss the servitude that the shepherd in the landscape and the exile from the landscape exhibit in the pastoral realm. Nostalgia, gratitude, and "product" are mocked; the "exile" has sussed out the pastoral fallacy, and Virgil's text is used "expediently" as pretext for Lady M and Nancy's banter. The first instance of this is the first stanza when Lady M redefines the posture of the pastoral shepherd. Rather than "stretched at ease" (Dryden, Works of Virgil 3), lying under a beech tree playing the pastoral pipe, the physical action "to lay" operates as verbal gesture, "to lie" (to someone):

[Lady M] Lie covertly spread — we outcasts leave

You're sweetly teaching woods

But what does singing prove

Sure, a muse is slender

But we've lost our ease.

Discomfited by the pastoral realm, its "covert lies," Lady M chooses to leave. Singing, sweetly teaching "the woods" music, and the slender muse (pipe) are meaningless ornaments. Nancy, however, points to "land" and "play" as reasons to stay in a prepositional comparison that is never fully developed, relying simply on "here" and "up there":

Come to the wrought folds

No less than gods

I throw flowers at your pain

Here's tender play, shining and black

Up there, there is no land.

Flowers are the pastoral remedies for pain, useless in the realm of political power unless to mark the death of a political subject. The dialogue in this eclogue is tangential; Nancy entreats Lady M to stay in the pastoral because "one has raised her head and will/Bend Rome to her will." Nancy can "eat of their substance." She subverts her servitude to create a new pastoral. Given political agency, she can "bend" the central powers; she can activate the "feminine" as subject in this landscape. Lady M, however, is a proponent of exile — leaving the land and its history of subjection is a more viable option. She does not believe it can be reformed. Thus, their dialogue runs parallel to that of Meliboeus and Tityrus except that the pastoral as defunct is unofficially acknowledged. Lady M is not

“swayed” by Nancy’s arguments; she plays with Virgil’s description of Amaryllis waiting for Tityrus to come home, recombining the sequence:

Hearts of sad thieves sadly	We stood amazed to see your mistress mourn,
Calling from beds of apples —	Unknowing that she pined for your return:
I’m walking a proud road, gone	We wondered why she kept her fruit so long,
From home. Yet here she comes	For whom so late the ungathered apples hung.
Waltzing through the good pines	But now the wonder ceases, since I see
Calling the spring ungathered.	She kept them only, Tityrus, for thee.
	For thee the bubbling springs appeared to mourn,
	And whispering pines made vows for thy return.
	(Dryden, <u>Works of Virgil</u> 3)

She is walking a “proud road” but she is intercepted by Nancy’s “waltzing,” “calling the spring ungathered,” a romantic and pastoral approach. Nancy begs Lady M to remain in a realm that is no longer inscribed by a masculine power structure, where “freedom” is imaginable not only politically but also sexually, through a lesbian erotic relationship:

Your slavery was by the last swain
 So give my plea a fine
 Youthful whisper: Rear up your mind.

But accepting Nancy’s plea would exchange one description for another. Lady M shuns depictions; nothing is recognizable. The possibility in this landscape of a political and

erotic sexual freedom is another fantasy, another pastoral dimension just as subsumed by heterosexual values:

Though blossoms sipped fill another dimension
 I looked for you like a sad description
 And the doves moan and choke your beauty
 You should court the shade, you should hum by the ocean.

Lady M “looked for” Nancy “like a sad description,” a figure, not an identity, in a dimension that had pre-described her. Accepting exile rejects the “beauty” that the pastoral realm offers. Lady M suggests Nancy “court” the shade — whatever else remains in the protected pastoral landscape. She suggests that Nancy examine her position, that she re-assess the “duty” of a goddess to the “nation” that created her. Robertson, through Lady M, suggests exile as an alternative that denies the “feminine” as a tool to foster nationalist reproductive tendencies (as graft) that link beliefs to ideologies. Lady M chastises Nancy, questioning Nancy’s belief that she can “bend Rome”:

Is a goddess not a soldier? They gather
 In a shining bouquet, they graft
 The amazed bounds of nations to their hot souls
 They won’t let up
 So crop your bitter hopes
 Tortured women dream of nations
 As rich as strife, as rich as corn.

The pastoral is economic. Nancy suggests Lady M stay the night, mocking Tityrus’ generous offer to Meliboeus at the conclusion of Virgil’s first eclogue. Since Virgil, the

eclogue form has served to link “the country” and “the city” rather than reveal separation based on socio-economic reasons. Where Tityrus uses nature’s abundance, Robertson replaces these “natural” material comforts with Nancy’s “bought” insubstantial objects, “shadows” and “smoke,” that are described with pastoral fecundity: “ripe shadows,” and “green smoke of mountains”:

Yet tonight you could be my pearl	This night, at least, with me forget your care;
My acorn. I’ll buy you the ripe shadows	Chestnuts, and curds, and cream, shall be your fare;
I’ll buy you the green smoke of mountains	The carpet-ground shall be with leaves o’erspread;
You are this free night or should be.	And boughs shall weave a covering for your head.
	For, see, yon sunny hill the shade extends;
	And curling smoke from cottages ascends.
	(Dryden, <u>Works of Virgil</u> 6)

Illusion assists in perpetuating the pastoral myth. The pastoral is used in all these instances as moralistic pedagogy that imposes “virtue,” or as a reference to a “period” that no longer exists, a call to a “tradition” that enforces societal discipline through comparison between a disruptive urbanity and a “better” innocent rural life. In addition, these two texts reveal that any force that threatens the stability of the pastoral is automatically removed and distanced. In Bucolics, Meliboeus recognizes that the pastoral is a front and leaves it. In Daphnis and Chloe, the pirates who kidnap Daphnis are expediently drowned by escaping cattle and an “official” tribunal championing the pastoral — in the figure of Daphnis — averts the possibility of war from urban sources.

Robertson uses the pastoral (as obsolete) because it offers a “hybrid discursive potential” for those who have been traditionally excluded from the “utopia” it posited.

She uses the discursive as a structural form in XEclogue; that is, her varying “eclogues” are categories that enclose her thematic discourse but also function as digressions that ultimately fragment an expected thematic continuity and closure. The pastoral as it has been used for representational purposes is thus warped. In the final eclogue, “Utopia,” Lady M relates the dissolution of “the real,” the forms that “freedom” takes, the position of the “feminine” in a patriarchal fantasy:

When a boy walks into the philosophical, he’s on a private earth. He’s out of his skin; risk slips into his syntactic cleft then falls out. The private earth dissolves, blooms, contemplates its horizon. The fiction of this belated ground subjects our pleasure to a bitter economy. Liberty stands on this bare, bare, rocky and chilly ground. [. . .] we wedged Virgil’s evening as demotic ghosts who refused to reproduce “freedom.” On the blurred selvage we tucked Liberty in our cheek like a tongued and rotten diction. [. . .] They have called this forest utopia but it is lank and riven. We could scarcely enter without jeopardy, our way ruled by certain landmarks which now we turn, translate, and remove into other places [. . .]”. (“Utopia”)

Lady M chooses “dystopia”; the conversations between her and Nancy break the silence of image-making. The Roaring Boys do not participate in their conversations, and thus they break the priority of the “masculine” speaking subject. They can observe The Roaring Boys as representative of a structure. They assert themselves in their recognition of a false “utopia” as “feminine” subjects liquidating the production of “feminine” as symbol. When Robertson concludes her text with “Eclogue Ten: Utopia”

and within it a newly devised “calendar” based not on days of the week, but days of event, it is proof that the annals of history are subject to her revision. Utopia calendars pastoral desire.⁵⁰ The calendar, also a documentary of rural work and seasons, is a ritualistic form that conscripts the year/time to sectionalized “periods” of economic productivity and scale. In a general sense, it guides the work of the farm/produce; in a more specific sense it acts as a symbol for the regulation of reproduction — the calendar-girls. In another sense, since “nature” is an abstract and general term, the most active way to address it is through description that further assists in generalizing it, avoiding specificity. Description tends to be “visual,” a descriptive tactic that uses verbs and adverbs, for example, would activate the landscape as agents. Robertson’s adjectival descriptors become adverbial, syntactically underlining her need to re-energize the land. Questions become “succulent,” a field is a “livid frisk,” obligation “splices cold.” The landscape is emotive; it turns on its own description and representation and thus eludes an economy of categorization and order: “The trees moved in a slow slither culminating into gorgeousness. The fat light bloomed from strange mosses [. . .]” (“Nostalgia”).

Chapter Two

i. Prologue, Phantom

XEclogue is launched by the prologue, “How Pastoral: A Manifesto,” that announces a public role, manifested in argumentative rhetoric that highlights structure (architectural and literary) and incident at the crux of imaginative embodiment: “I needed a genre for *the times that I go* phantom.”⁵¹ The narrator’s identification with phantom and her use of the “idea” of phantom throughout XEclogue hypothesizes notions of territory and habitat as representative of a perpetually idyllic human existence. She “tracks” an unverifiable subject (as representative sign) who refuses to be “fixed” spatially, who does not accept boundaries.⁵² Territory and habitat are carefully formed concepts that define an inhabited environment by its social codes, constrictions, and extenuating values. “Territory” is a term that, in literature, indicates a record of social habitation. Literary genre— for example, the pastoral— suggests territory by means of motif or transgression. Ornaments within the territory — either structural or “human” bodies and representations — constantly remind an individual of traditions and status, and thus help maintain the status quo; ornament embellishes conventional form. They are objects which, stored in memory, have a historical or cultural impact; they remind an individual or collective of “something” unspoken or unimagined.⁵³ In turn, the markers become so normalized that the objects cease to stand out. They become part of the landscape, territory. Thus, memory is a useful tool for maintaining conventional views, whether political, biological or physical. A landscape⁵⁴ — whether a field or large

garden — devoid of ornaments is less likely to carry a historical meaning outside of itself than one occupied by statues or inscribed trees which name themselves in that space.⁵⁵

The prologue essentially serves the function of argument and story. It enables the narrator to stage a scene, to introduce herself, to project a perspective, and to engage in action that determines the rest of the text. The immediate structure of XEclogue, whereas the narrative is launched by the prologue and closed and contained by the epilogue, is common to theatrical performances or stage scripts. Functioning as gates to a rhetorical landscape, the prologue and epilogue enclose allegories (or architectural follies⁵⁶) that act as metonymic markers for value-laden abstractions. The structure enables sequential, specific narratives which introduce an outside observer, a pronominal voice who dons the character of “I,” claiming need of a “genre” for her quest. The “I” enacts meaning, takes “genre” as significant, and enacts it as a quasi-perception: “phantom.” Unlike the narrator in Virgil or Longus who tend to observe events, in Robertson’s text the “I” is a full participant, creating the narrative. “Ontology,” is laid aside for phenomenology; the senses (sight, sound, smell, and touch) that impel desire, pleasure, emotion are redirected to aid questions of where the “feminine” is in the landscape.

The characters are all shades of the “I.” The prologue and epilogue enclose a culturally imagined (and therefore “real”) space that enables Robertson to challenge social expedience and culture as expenditure through examination of conventional frames and literary diction. Her first collaboration is with an ancestress of unverified “identity” who advises genesis-erasure: “Annex Liberty, absorb her, and recode her: infuse her with your nasty optics. The anagram will surpass and delete the first world, yet, in all its elements, remain identical”⁵⁷ (“Prologue”). The anagram, purely literal (how can you

visualize it?), is conceptualized as a reflection that has all the components of the first word but which is structured in an alternate order. “Thought,” “phantom,” “images depicted in words,” are all ways of rendering a history of subjection to a specific power structure. In addition, “Liberty” is as if an essence that can saturate (“absorb”) a person, but also a “codification” — a language — that is subject to construction. The ancestress makes use of the reversal process, embellishes “Liberty,” infuses it with vision and acts of perception (“nasty optics”) that include spectating, the gaze, the stare, and the glance. “Liberty” is reflective awareness that includes unacknowledged complicity: the unaware situation where “Liberty” is absent. Lady M and Nancy’s rejection of it in “Eclogue Ten: Utopia” identifies “Liberty” as an image-concept — a “type,” enshrined in a historical pattern that they cannot accept.

In XEclogue, “phantom” revalues memory markers situated in a cultivated landscape — for example, a statue in a garden or an object given place through preposition. The expectation in the narrator’s opening statement⁵⁸ is that “go” will refer to a place; it refers instead to a state of being, made intangible by the frequency of incident — “the times” that the narrator *goes* phantom. It is affirmed, this state is expected to happen, will occur “again” and “in the future,” despite the fact that Robertson relates the narrative as explanation for an event which occurred at some other (past) point (history). She means to be immaterial for this period, as an otherwise historically objectified figure, to erase an inconvenient social memory and replace it with a nostalgia for a “feminine” state which has never been encountered — nostalgia for a lack, rather than for a loss. Her insistence on calendar in “Eclogue Ten: Utopia” is an action of agency which records a “new” landscape. It marks the take-over of history, replacing

known days with days which have no immediate, defining, meaning in a cultural lexicon that values time and context. It returns to the “Prologue” as if an eulogy:

In this garden our task has been to witness the fleet and unmelodious ghost called Liberty, but tomorrow we must allow that ambition to gently recede— as a rhythm deferred— and leaning, pluck lust from the pistillate heart. For we’re terse, bent for the aim.[...] Loose-armed imposters, we’ll hone an incendiary calendar, from the still bosco contrive the days that shall give us History, that saline, perplexed crux: Day of Parked Cars; Day of Physical Secrets, Day of a Consonant’s Lip; Day of Lucite; Day of Black Grapes [...]. A bird’s breath is in my throat (Lady M). (“Utopia”)

The concept of phantom, the structure of statue, and the timetable of calendar all have historical residues. They implicitly inform, through reminiscence, a cultural present. A phantom is metaphoric, a moving conceptualization.⁵⁹ A statue is static. It represents measure — a moment of time or the deed of a specifically recorded instant. Thus, a statue is indicative of record, whereby a phantom tends to indicate (in literature) lack. They are reversals of one another — the statue fills space which the phantom represents but cannot fill; the phantom is the absent statue, the unrecorded figure.⁶⁰ Another perspective is needed; meaning (context) is deferred. In classical rhetoric, the ekphrastic moment combines both statue and phantom in narrative, it is a scene shown in words, a linguistic “projection” that [...] intrude[s] upon the flow of discourse and, for its duration, suspend[s] the argument of the rhetor or the actions of the poet, to rivet our attention on the action to be described, which it was to elaborate”(Kreiger 7). In words, it has the action of a statue on a landscape or a ghost in a dialogue. It is wholly dramatic.

The contemporary artist Ian Hamilton Finlay is a source for Robertson's study of landscape-aesthetic, in the sense that he combines image and word to create a concrete "cipher" within a garden space designed for the movement of individuals through it.⁶¹ His work, usually collaborative, renders an implicit critique of the art-object and process while celebrating the aesthetic fragment in his garden-sculpture work, "Little Sparta." Finlay evokes the past through fragment, a recognizable combination of figure, landscape, and function that interrogates the relationship between culture and nature, and concepts of "common access." His garden invites a "visit." It embellishes function as "art" through sculptures and inscriptions — the functions of "garden," and "park," as historicized by laws and social modes. The cultural milieu represents a fragment, referencing the viewers understanding of or interest in establishing patterns in the landscape. Finlay's garden is the subject of phantasie, but it evokes theatrical movement by virtue of a subject moving through an obviously reconstructed landscape, and being obviously alien to the "planned" aesthetic-historical mixture of myths, present day symbols of warfare, and literary epigrams, to name a few.

Essentially, Finlay combines the visual and literary to create concrete poetry that has neoclassical resonances. It translates across different physical media: the page, the garden, stone, marble, and wood. Finlay restructures Modernist practices through "objects" that become "telling" visual markers. However, there is no reference to a "lost" history; rather, Finlay's pieces signify interlocking elements of a process of history — and where he places his art-objects/fragments documents and comments on their role in a socio-historical process. His art-object, much like Robertson's phantom, is emblematic, a "cultural tissue" or "free-floating metaphor," formed from a conjunction of motto and

image (Abrioux 105).⁶² The individual is challenged to think about the production of the art object within a culturally prescribed space.

The narrator of XEclogue is after-the-fact; what she has taken as inherited, as artifact, are suspicious relics suggesting her complicity in a cultural realm that resists “thought.” To track her ancestress she needs to create a “parallel world,” one where nature as a construction and herself grafted onto it are separate:

The buildings, the clothes, the trees are no more or less coy than they were, yet I had been so intent on the dense, lush words that I had not realized a world could be subtracted from her fruiting skin. The old locutions could only lose themselves in that longed-for landscape; but now I pluck for myself “peace in our own time” and the desuetude of nostalgia.
(“Prologue”)

In one sense the environment is unchanged; the buildings, clothes and trees are still “coy” — “more or less” — which indicates that optically they have not moved, that what they represent is unchanged, that a discretion between art (representative) and reality (what they are) is necessary. In addition, buildings, clothes and trees point to economics: what the buildings “house,” what “type” of clothes, the “use” of the trees, and “who” planted them. They all provide shelter; they seem to be what they are, familiars. Robertson’s use of the ambivalent, “more or less,” and epithetical adjective, “coy,” feminizes the structures. “Coy” is a sexually interpreted mode of behavior; it denotes a teasing attitude expressed through body language, the eyes, the hands, and the feet. It suggests the ambivalence of “more or less”; it is a behavioral trait entirely “read” by an individual often participating in the exchange. As such, it is body dialogue — but it is

subject to misinterpretation —what may be taken for “coy” may not be. In pastoral, “coy” is often applied to a feminine subject in a love relationship entreating her to consummate the relationship rather than adhere to societal conventions. As such, it is a heavily laden term that is an ironic incidence of a societal trap: the economics of the marriage convention is set against the fulfillment of desire without marriage — if the latter is chosen, virtue is compromised and the woman “soiled.”

The tense changes: the buildings, clothes, and trees “are” the same, but the narrator “was” intent on the “dense, lush words” of her ancestress. Caught in the sway of language, the narrator realizes afterward that a world could be “subtracted” — taken away, separated (as essence) — from the world of her ancestress. Stylistically, little seems changed — the narrative technique has not altered, the linguistic formulations continue as before — except that “locutions” erupt — it is language that fertilizes ideologies, rhetoric that gives power. The narrator can isolate detail in order to explore it. It is a linguistic harvest; the passage is highly organic, pastoral, and Robertson undertakes a method of decomposition — a new world “sprouting.” Locution (how to speak) and landscape (optical design of environment) are irretrievably linked as a way of reforming a seemingly determined future. Robertson’s political agenda is to renovate “femininity and nature [...] the spurious concepts, purposeful misreadings, which have served the specific use of supporting a singular structure of power, and which therefore have been expediently maintained” (Robertson, PhillyTalks #17). Lady M neatly sums this up: “How then may we speak of futures? [. . .]. A vocabulary is no longer adequate to the precision of our desires” (“Utopia”).

The narrator holds her ancestress accountable. The ancestress offers clues that are not tangible objects; they are conceptual tokens (as per fable/fairy-tales that lead a character through a gate or path). The narrator is given an empowered etiquette for action: “Annex Liberty” — *before* she has fully redressed her cultural predicament. The ancestress as “voice” disrupts conventions of dramatic poesy in terms of the order of her appearance; she is the main cause of the narrator’s reverie and revelation. She is a *dea ex machina*, but at the beginning of the quest, a textured relation whom the narrator “tracks”;⁶³ she is “among the elegant tissue of echoes, quotations, shadows on the deepening green,” a literary field comprised of embedded analytic features. The ancestress is “remembered,” to trace her the narrator needs a starting point in a series of recollections which are historically constituted. But the ancestress is also a presence that suggests a “ruling center” of a particular constellation of memories — the narrator approaches her task not linearly but by an oscillating movement between this center and adjacent or contiguous “presences” that manifest themselves through her titled abstractions.⁶⁴ “Echoes,” “quotations,” and “shadows” provide clues for both creating and analyzing a text; they impart information that “relates” incident to plot, providing a thematic complicity; they are film devices that are assumed through visualization and dialogue. The ancestress is located *in absentia*⁶⁵ (as a voice), and there is a way of tracking her, an “elegant tissue.” This ancestress lacks “verifiable identity” yet her garb is easily identifiable, constructed from the meetings of mouths: “puckers and fissures in use, and also from the flaking traces of her brittle skirt.” Simultaneity operates here, “openings” and “flakes” suggest crumbling forms and contents. The ancestress is at no point tenuously described, despite her seeming anonymity. She is “needed” and “not

useful” — but then not useless — “obnoxious, prosthetic, and irrelevant, as “my gender.” The search for the ancestress is relevant and necessary: “[the] category of women does not become useless through deconstruction, but becomes one whose uses are no longer reified as “referents,” and which stand a chance of being opened up, indeed, of coming to signify in ways that none of us can predict in advance”(Butler 29).⁶⁶

The private world Robertson outlines is a carefully cultivated faux pastoral that uses the generic tradition of “woods” and “garden.” These are staged settings less described than figured by objects that allude to the landscape through their function as props. Robertson uses what Butler theorizes as “scenography and topography of construction; the scenography is “orchestrated” by and as a matrix of power that remains disarticulated if [. . .] constructedness and materiality are necessary oppositional structures.”(Butler, 28). Scenography, a theatrical arrangement, is related to topography, the arrangement of the physical landscape, by way of an exchange that enables topography to be replaced by a scenographic setting (eg: the book, the “eclogue,” the theatre stage, virtual “stages”). This situates the feminine in a performative role that blends performance with place. Admitting “thought” to be both construction and materialist establishes a power base; something has enabled a certain “way” of thought.⁶⁷ The matrix is altered even more when the botanic and scientific language which classifies “what ‘nature’ is” is appropriated by philosophy that attempts to describe human freedom (Rousseau’s Social Contract) and pleasure by using the language of ecology as a metaphor for utopia:

Appearing to serve a personally expressive function, the vocabulary of nature screens a symbolic appropriation of the Land [. . .]. I'd call the pastoral the nation-making genre: within a hothouse language we force the myth of the Land to act as both political resource and mystic origin.

(Robertson, The Capilano Review 95)

In XEclogue this norm is questioned by way of dramatic event that appropriates,⁶⁸ using literary symbols, “what ‘nature’ is” in the philosophical description to determine what “nature” represents:

Enormous grief as if outside “our culture” a sense of peace floated or languished with no historical precedent. As if we could *invent* liberty, as if peace and liberty had no place in that slow starvation. As if, subject only to the “laws of nature,” a gendered life were worth three years or nothing [. . .]. As if nervous yet flung yet decorative – someone a noun discarded – this sweetie went down on a khaki blanket glittering.

(“Liberty”)

Essentially, topology and structures are manipulated in a philosophical or critical discourse to promulgate social reform or to make a spectator/actor (in that space) aware that history is representational; one moves through it. Thus, the narrator makes abstractions, topology — “flesh.” She names the eclogues “Honour,” “Beauty,” or “Liberty.” They become situational sites that she moves between; they are conceptual “places.” This is important to rhetoric, whereby knowledge as information is situated in specific, accessible locations, but secondarily, it is also important in the sense “of putting

(or disposing) arguments into new places after they have been found (or invented) in [. . .] the commonplace”(Yates 30).

Robertson “re-places” concepts and constructions — gendered or materialist — from the “commonplace” into the imaginary (fantasy, dream-state). The prologue is a fable-narration that introduces dialogue with the ancestress’s advice, an unseen “voice,”⁶⁹ after the narrator encounters “deep sleep” (temporarily removing the narrator as a direct agent). The narrator awakes to find herself “in a new world”; she plucks the fantastic and political, “ ‘peace in our own time,’ ”⁷⁰ she picks a po(e)sy, a “pitcher of slim flowers,” which needles “that monumental absence of regret”(“Prologue”). It is an oxymoron, an identification of structured immensity “monumental” with vacant subtraction “absence” and unfulfilled desire (regret). The symbolic, the allegorical, the spatial manifestation of “things” in a landscape in combination with Robertson’s fable, inconvenience a “given” pastoral. Fantasy and dream are accessories that have contributed to an “impacted marriage to the soil” (“Prologue”). Robertson twists the utopic underpinnings that direct these accessories — the promise of abundance and ease that are grafted to utopia camouflage a narrative of loss and exile. Her characters, Lady M, Nancy, and the phantam narrator force a temporal literary topography to be (in a theoretical, ontological fold) (un)becoming, fantastic but not socially expedient.

i. Memory, Phantasie, Phantom

The “feminine” has hovered in a restrictive memory — garbed in a classical diction and physical form which by pervasive reduplication hides an opposing view that the “feminine” is “illusion.” The “feminine” has been literature; inscribed in a syntax

that marries architecture (form) to artistic meaning (context). The “feminine” is “placed” in memory (*loci*) in a pastoral landscape and given a “form” (*imagines*) that is easy to remember as representative. The “feminine” is a fragment objectification ensures that “the order of the places will ensure the order of the “things” in memory technique (Yates 2). If the “feminine” in landscape has been deified and statued and accorded a strictly pastoralized and moralized role, then physical traits also connect to a long history of representation:

The most complex pictures are formed in our minds of the things that have been conveyed to them and imprinted on them by the senses, but that the keenest of all our senses is the sense of sight, and that consequently perceptions received by the ears or by reflexion can be most easily retained if they are also conveyed to our minds by mediation of sight.

(Simonides qtd. in Yates 4)

Memory offers a conceptual link between the visual and the literal land as revealed in the prologue. The word “land” can not be an anagram, because its structure does not comply with the conventions that require the word to be spelled the same backward as forward. Yet how does one ignore the impulse to anagram “Land,” to view it as if seeing it reflected in a pool or mirror? Or if “Land” is also the “feminine body?” Sign and signifier overlap, memory and imagination collude; the result is an oscillating movement that extends the functions of word and image into what imprints as a narrative, a story,⁷¹ and if enacted publicly, theatre or film. Sign is stored in the mind as a symbol of the signified. In literature, action is the prime motivator — this is a fable. In painting (as spatial representation), it functions as symbolic arrangement that is recollected:

What is it that is present to us, the (mere) icon itself or that of which it *is* an icon?

This question, in turn, opens onto a whole series of queries. What determines how we *see* the incised or painted graphics of memory? What enables us to *scan* or *read* the reminder or memorial in such a way that something else, something different, something original, becomes present? How can the *inscribing motion* be reminiscent of what has yet — precisely through its agency — to be remembered? What can have taught us to read and write before we remembered well enough to be taught anything at all? [. . .]. What is the *presence* that we *read* in memory? (Krell 19)

Memory, as evoked by the mind, mimes a treasured subject-object power relationship; it is accessed through portals such as the eyes or mouth of historicity. Its value, however, lies in its ability to maintain rule (as object subject to power) or alter rule (by disrupting the memory sequence). It operates by retrieval that connects concepts to things as though concepts were solid structures. The narrator moves among chapters such as “Beauty,” “Liberty,” and “Utopia” using the eclogue as an inherently mnemonic literary site. The narrator selects a situation where concept is played out by characters. The reader is forced to reconcile concept with actual “scene,” in literary fashion, as a dramatic reminiscence to which the reader does not contribute except in a passive capacity. Selection is a fallacy, a mouthpiece for the narrator to manipulate. Memory and illusion become a dramatic event that arises “in the form of a fact, verifying a proposition, of *actual experience*, a modality of the subject, of *concreteness*, the empirical content of history” (Foucault, Language, Counter-Memory, Practice 180).

The phantasm, in Foucault's analysis, is "situated" at the liminal edge: "the pathological pole of a normative sequence: perception-image-memory-illusion" (180). This "normative sequence" functions to limit "feminine" agency in the historical calendar. The phantom, in Robertson's scheme, is most powerful at the "pathological pole" because (as narrator) it has been reconfigured already in terms of "perception," "image," "memory," and "illusion." Robertson uses "illusion" as the definitive truth of the "feminine" (projected) role. The phantom as zone, rather than emerging out of a historical sequence, spatializes appearance. The eclogue structure reframes abstractions such as "Beauty," and serves to refocus attention. The "phantom" is a "visual cue" that forces a mental model of space, objects, and the motions in them. The luxury of fragmenting an object — like a tree branch — to make it "tree" is devalued in this instance. A "phantom" could be part of many fragments that are unconnected, that normally represent something else.⁷² The narrator flickers through the text, a shade, a pattern, a movement, already periphery made central problem, a violation of a textual and perceptual "natural." Representation, the original, the initial, resemblance, imitation, faithfulness, and morals dissolve or are already bodyless— they dissipate in and amongst Robertson's botanically lush depictions.

This is contrasted with a notion of "phantom," that is already prescribed, "monstrosities" that don a prosthetic for power and playing:

We invented power. Power is a pink prosthesis hidden in the forest.

Between black pines we strap it on and dip our pink prosthesis in the pool.

The plastic glitters with clips and buckles beneath the surface of the pool.

Breasts are a buttoned wedge held by buckled straps. Freedom is this

extra size. We display it to the creaking forest. Also ride horses between our giant new limbs. Our pink bodies are giant and they own us for playing. The glittering giantesses are playing in the dark. ("Phantasie")

The sentence structures of this scene are additive. Its capacity lies in repetitions and coloured phrasings that "flicker" the images. The fantastic elements, combined with the artifice in the forest, make the scene somewhat surreal; the figures in it are both actors and "real." But the sentences are fragmented. Explanation is offered in an unexpected way. Note what happens when the section is interrogated with questions that expect "logical" answers:

Narrator: "We invented power."

Questioner: "How?"

N: "Power is a pink prosthesis hidden in the forest."

The question "How," implies that the questioner knows what "power" is, and wants to know by "what means" it was invented. The question is propelled by "power" as a concept that the questioner already has. "Power" in this narration, however, is redefined. It is a "pink construction" (an object) "hidden" in the forest. "Power in the forest" is hidden. In allegorical tales, the forest is a boundary that, if it is crossed, changes whomever stays in it. The hero (usually male) is challenged by a number of forces (often feminized as in Sir Philip Sidney's The Faerie Queen). Here, the forest is an allegory for where power is located (hidden) and the way in which power is used. The "pink prosthetic" is a feminized joke about the penis as representative of male power; that these "glittering giantesses" don the prosthetic makes the penis a functional tool of power. There is a contrast between the "starlets" who float at the beginning of this eclogue and

the prosthetic. The prosthetic is strapped on, has medical definition, and a different effect on the psyche.

“Nature” can be used to hide a feminized power that is represented by a phallus. It hides a structure that can be donned, that enlarges —“what if, for your new suit, you chose to parade obsolescence” (“Prologue”) — that can be used for play, that has play — room. But it can only be used in the forest:

Q: “Where in the forest?”

N: “Between black pines we strap it on and dip our pink prosthesis in the pool.”

The questions are evaded with descriptive tactics which never specifically describe where the prosthesis is (in the forest), but which do describe what “We” do with it, and with what the “prosthesis” is ornamented. “We” is obviously feminized as a first person plural that organizes a group of objectified first person, singular, “feminine” “I’s.” “Pink bodies” replace the prosthesis that would “own” “us.” The unasked question “Why” is answered, “Freedom is this extra size.” The scene closes with simple sentences: “Our pink bodies are giant and they own us for playing. The glittering giantesses are playing in the dark.” The power for these “giantesses” is artifice. A “new body” that uses the forest as site of play; it represents a zone of cultivation where the “feminine” is still constrained. The prosthetic is both organic and technical, it incites fantasy and “monstrosity.” Body parts, here, are projections by “starlets,” looking for freedom and power. They mimic the organic symbol of power in this forest.

If site comprises a memory locus, and memory is illusion, then what of the site of the body when the body is phantom? Or part of phantasie? Robertson calculates

memory. She enters its physical simulacrum (theatre, garden, field, house) to direct its production as a scenic manipulation. Thus, Lady M and Nancy are eventually able to renounce the boundaries between form and matter, the “garden,” and what is in it:

Say, under the rubric of utopia, these shots, these opening shots – flat garden, stiff tree, sky – postulate silence and dissolution. A slow pan paints a low horizon. Yet still it’s in the service of someone else’s belief. We’re outside the garden. A perspective extends like a green aperture through which we view another world. For a moment, all the figures have been replaced by foliage. There is almost a fusion of what is nebulous reverie with the dark wood of ragged allegory [. . .]. In the spurious world hope’s banner rips and history is opaque and silent. They have called this forest utopia but it is lank and riven. We could scarcely enter without jeopardy, our way ruled by certain landmarks which now we turn, translate and remove into other places. (“Utopia”)

The phantom makes body evident by its absence — it moves in a proximal zone which serves to emphasize the spaces between structures as unacknowledged structure, as transitory areas that establish room. A thing that cannot be perceived cannot be remembered, but where it might have been (where it wasn’t) is as useful a memory as locating an object in a room. To get to that object, one must (like phantom) pass through space. Robertson’s narrator is a disillusioned phantom, she has chosen to move in a space occupied with an image-bent ethical motive. She is a phantom in a phantastic setting of her own devising; her actions are an invitation to interpret absence and the

spaces between transitional sites in order to conceptualize where the corridor or path has led.

To re-imagine “construction” means to re-invent imagination and utility, to zone phantasie, to locate measures of temporary (accessible) escape. These re-inventions posit a break informed by time and desire. “Eclogue Five: Phantasie” describes structures that have a dual function, both of and beyond the body. The body, reciprocally, is an extension (not the center) of extensions. What this translates into is a number of centers (which could mean constant deferrals), a number of outside boundaries. The speaking “I” is distanced from these centers; the “extensions” (read fragments) dislocate the speaker from a logic of bodily components. She is disassociated and decentered, a part (as thinking subject I) of what is “body.” Were she ontologically connected to her extensions, they would acquire identity rather than singular, autonomous, anonymous roles. Telling “about,” then, places the narrator within possibilities (constellations) of discourse (discarnate), approximating (generally “about”/ “around”) a subject as mirroring, a floating metaphor.

“Nature,” “art,” and “movement” are combined in a sentence that shows the failure of all three to supplement the growth of the narrator. The relation between them is historical and sequential: Nature becomes art propelled by movement. In other words, movement is the attempt to make art, nature. “Events congeal into image with no social aggression,” history is recorded but inactive, “congealed” and “unaggressive.” The “Vision” that is projected on (and thus clothes) the narrator’s body is a phantasie (for the narrator) but perhaps a memory for the “starlets.” The difference between phantasie and memory is in the way they are described: phantasie is told as a story, memory is told as a

narrative fact. It is in pictorial form that they collide: phantasie and memory are information systems. “Phantasiai,” according to Longinus, is a method of transportation — “ ‘visualizations,’ ” that transport an audience:

That at least is what I call them; others call them “image productions” (*phantasiai*). For the term *phantasia* is applied in general to an idea which enters the mind from any source and engenders speech, but the word has now come to be used predominantly of passages where, inspired by strong emotion, you seem to see what you describe and bring it vividly before the eyes of your audience. That *phantasia* means one thing in oratory and another in poetry you will yourself detect, and also that the object of the poetical form of it is to enthrall, and that [. . .] of the prose form to present things vividly, though both indeed aim at the emotional and the excited.

(Longinus 217)

Description often substitutes for narration in Robertson’s text because where description seems to objectify an event, narration makes it subjective. Thus, using a descriptive tactic renders the narrator’s governance of the text less obviously self-conscious or controlled. Event occurs; the narrator lets things act, and the descriptive aspect thus “denies” narrative movement to open the process of fictionalization and what motivates it. This is evident in “Eclogue Four: Cathexis” where Robertson uses a descriptive rather than narrative tactic to refocus attention on the phantom, the phantastic, and the mnemonic through reference to a historical objective positioning in literature. As readers, we take advantage of seeking the superficial and representative, rather than following the narrator’s quest (which still drives the text, but alongside this new focus).

The narration supplements the description. We can focus on the descriptive style, and are “freed from the obligation to make progress from one point [. . .] to another, we are now at leisure to examine the textural or surface applications of a theory of description based on the premise that we speak and tell essentially *to describe*[. . .].” (Blanchard 4-5). The sequences in XEclogue are enclosed categorical descriptions that re-order as “selections” a continuous hierarchy of values that act as a central function of narrative. Robertson’s desire to activate the language of pastoral contributes to the change from adjective to adverb, she wants to “liberate” those who have been excluded from what the “land” offers in a political sense, and thus revise a literary genre that “hides” suppressive power structures:

The quaint archaisms of the language; the dainty evocations of springtime pleasures; the innocent characterization of the indolent shepherd: these niceties etched the pleasures of the genre as irrevocably sensual, masking the imperialistic ideologies, or at least couching them in the banalities of conquest and repose [. . .]. The difficulties and pleasures of maintaining a primary, legal, and productive entitlement to the land provided the pastoral subject since Virgil’s first eclogue. (Robertson, The Capilano Review 96)

Robertson’s prologue introduces the notion of “phantom,” and makes use of this history of representation as a form of clothing.⁷³ The phantom, in this visual sense, is a negative. It linguistically recreates modes of discourse to establish an “anagram” of “land”; and it serves as a space beyond the pastoral that can be entered into (developed) as camouflage. As narrator, she will not be recognized, obsolescence is “useful.” She escapes the memory structure that “naturalizes” the pastoral, and she jams nodes of

reference by plundering literary sources; but she makes use of the erotic in her text: the heterosexual framework that identifies and labels “nature” and the “feminine” becomes dysfunctional. Characters are often in “drag;” The Roaring Boys are depicted as limber manifestations of a pedantic, “natural” diction until Lady M and Nancy deconstruct them, Cupid (in “Romance”) is obsolete and a lesbian eroticism replaces him. The framework is “cosmetic,” a compact that renders dream a fallacy — despite the fact that the compact invests heavily in allegorical constructions:

Like a lock of Helen in the dangerous summer, having bloomed from the silvered style of an anxious wrist whose blunt syntax lacquers opacity with greed, yet crushing nothing more than the dampness that moves across the nyloned air with rancid gusts, in an age of tawdry indolence that breeds such smeared doubles for a calling, for a bruised structure, for a duped sincerity that flaunts escape, the next pretty boy emerges like a wraith from his crisis to find the concept does not need him. A slick whisper weaves across the commodities: “Are you looking for fragrance.”

(“Romance”)

Thus, love offered and received is a complicit contract: “[. . .] audacity’s slim wrists cuffed in elegance, wandering fingers clipped to the pulsing sky by those banal enchantments of antiquity and authority and consent.” Love written is an urbane cosmetic, an oral sophistication masking and framing a romantic identity — “She spends the loose coins from a lisped purse on an imported grammar that opens, that goes on sheer, a girl-buoyed mirror, a compact.” “She” constructs the figures of the romance on a mirror, a linguistic erasure of heterosexual girl-boy pairing for a replacement of lesbian

romance. In a sense, the romantic “ideal” is an advertisement — a dramatic, sexualized, cross-sensual pageant accessed by the parallel instruments of lens and aperture: “This is the convex world” (“Romance”).

Romance, body, gender are the blurred remains of a history of image-construction: “Eclogue Two: Beauty” begins with a vision — “When I was lounging in the Grove I saw a Vision: it was like a flickering screen reporting a very pleasant history of love [. . .].” In “Eclogue Five: Phantasie,” “starlets” project their phantasie on the body of the narrator as a tale of power; in “Eclogue Eight: Romance” reflection is the focus: “There is no sea and no forest and no boats passing. This is the convex world [. . .]. The Glass world curves into history leaving a bare pronoun to bask on the roof of a promise.” “Eclogue Ten: Utopia,” delivers the final statement of filmic experience: “Say, under the rubric of utopia, these shots, these opening shots — flat garden, stiff tree, sky -- — postulate silence and dissolution. A slow pan paints a low horizon. Yet still it’s in the service of someone else’s belief. We’re outside the garden. A perspective extends like a green aperture through which we view another world.”(Utopia).

ii. Fable-frame, Dream, Cipher/Symbol/Meaning

The fable is an integral component to a socializing framework that seeks to instruct by illusion and definition. It operates by way of a form of transparency, the reader is included in the subjective experience of the narrator as the power that transforms the “fable” to “real-life” and then enacts the moral as a guiding force, a mode of instruction. The fable, traditionally a form of rhetoric which combined verbal skills with moral instructions in a “rhetorical culture of spectacle,” became in the eighteenth

century a marker for a “new ideological and institutional position in aesthetics and literature” (von Mucke 14-15).⁷⁴ It compels a mnemonic pedagogy that veils subject formation, that makes, through semiotic slippage, a frame for aesthetic ideals — whether landscape, genders (the ideal woman), or literary forms (the epistle, the poem, the novel). Public performance is privatized with the onset of reading; the subject, as a consuming, individualistic citizen is part of an economy. Robertson’s prologue frames XEclogue as a fable, using history as an illusory component. The fable, combining historical time with the seeming plausibility of a coherent narrative, bridges the historical anecdote and parable.⁷⁵ The fable not only utilizes the “illusion of facticity by narrowing an individual incident,” (historical anecdote) but also borrows “all the cohesion of a general, symbolic truth without appearing to be a mere illustration or example for the general truth” (29). This latter point comprises the parable element.

In XEclogue, the historical anecdote is the narrator’s search for an ancestress that is placed within the societal conventions of gender and pastoral. The parable is the mythic structure that assumes the “feminine” in the landscape as a static and ornamented figure; in literature she is not only a concrete individual but also universal. She is a hieroglyph for qualities such as Virtue or Evil or Beauty. The fable bridges these two modes; it is a literary form that allows Robertson the most transgression within the bounds of a tradition that relies on a series of symbolic relationships and patterns (e.g. nature and femininity) as a way to create a historically stable subject. The fable enables the utilization of seeing and reading as a way of instructing an audience; over time the fable becomes, through a general usage, a received “opinion.” It is a form that “naturalizes” itself through use.

Robertson uses a didactic style adapted from rhetorical practice to show that the “feminine” subject has been framed as an integral “part” of an abstract landscape. The narrator is “hunting” a transparent and fictional illusion that (in comparison to the male body) is “unnatural” yet part of the “nature” that must be owned and cultivated by a disciplined, masculine, heterosexual cultural entity. Dorothea von Mucke marks the fable and hieroglyph as a “particularly ‘graphic’ means of signification which — though left behind by the history of semiosis — can be resuscitated in the contemporary praxis of a silent hallucinatory reading and a theatre of identification and illusion”(von Mucke 20). The fable, if serialized as pictures imprinted in the mind as pedagogy, and having a moral value for the disciplining of a society, can be reduced to emblematic significance where the meaning is, over time, “natural,” and the pictures seemingly irrelevant. This is a relevant point in the context of XEclogue. The literary forms that Lady M and Nancy use (the typically “feminine” epistle and dialogue) theatrically replay their positions in a subject formation. In addition, the contextual reading that these forms establish contributes to this. Robertson’s “feminine” characters Lady M and Nancy, as well as The Roaring Boys, are defined and redefined according to the patterns of identity (phantom, naming, writing) which emerge throughout the text. Meaning is displaced by the presentation of sign, figure, and object.

Robertson’s evaluation of the history of visual production and consumption as it impacts on notions of self and extends to considerations of the social, establishes a shift that renders impermanent not only the pastoral as a mode, but the “woods,” “the garden,” and the “stage” that traditionally perpetuate such values. Her insistence on a parallel world denies the ease of binary. Her use of fantasy, illusion, dream, and subject/object

relationships make use of an available Freudian vocabulary (challenged by feminist theorists) that is, because it is based on a phallogentric ideology, psychologically problematic from the perspective of any individual arguing for the pervasiveness of culturally prescribed sexuality, gender or personage.

Rather than offering the imaginary infinitely as alternative space, XEclogue offers the proposition of a parallel world. Rather than deny the fact of a heterosexual construct that represents the “feminine” in an illusory way, imagination is a space where the “feminine” can reconstruct “the real.” The “feminine” is no place: unreal in a heterosexual realm, and unable to inhabit that realm as “real.” Robertson uses XEclogue to reconstruct that realm as imaginary, thus showing the accepted reality as imaginary and the imaginary as (temporarily) real. In the prologue, the ancestress’ desires are transparent, she speaks “through dream” about “ontology”:

Ontology is the luxury of the landed. Let’s pretend you ‘had’ a land.

Then you ‘lost’ it. Now fondly describe it. That is pastoral [. . .]. Make a parallel nation, an anagram of the Land [. . .]. Who can afford sincerity?

It’s an expensive monocle. (“Prologue”)

The ancestress combines grammar and linguistic constructs as part of a cultural production, the artifice of sincerity is specular. The monocle is a manacle tying the state to all levels of production, including the individual.⁷⁶ Thus, Robertson’s narrator tracks an ancestress as “genealogy” that “seeks to understand the plausibility of that binary relation [female as other] and to suggest that certain cultural configurations of gender take the place of “the real” and consolidate and authorize their hegemony through that felicitous self-naturalization” (Butler, Gender Trouble 43). Genealogy (literary, filmic,

personal, pictorial) thus renders a calendar of impermanence — “who” is the ancestress? By “tracking” her, the narrator inhabits positions that the ancestress may have taken. The narrator confronts, in this manner, complicity. Rather than hunting a masculine subject only to “kill” it, the narrator renegotiates the present through the eyes and speech of the past. Her ancestress could be any number of manifestations. The purpose of the pastoral genre is, for the narrator, “to gloss my ancestress’ complicity with a socially expedient code; to invade my own illusions of historical innocence” (“Prologue”). Thus, the narrator’s quest references “naturalism” as a “demonstration of the *production* of character or action by a powerful natural or social environment”; human characteristics, no longer permanent in an accurately reproduced “setting” are not only produced by their environment, but the environment itself is also subject to its own historical constructions (Williams, Problems in Materialism and Culture 127). The “environment” is infinitely shaped by who inhabited it, altered it, manipulated it. The environment, like the ancestress, is an idea.

The changes of scenery throughout XEclogue, from generic woods to garden, from picturesque view to confessional site, have panoptic ramifications reminiscent of the tension between states of the visible and the invisible⁷⁷ — when “seeing” fortifies knowledge, when a power system creates disproportion and illusion. The panopticon makes the garden a prison; the pastoral is a too-long accepted luxury, a method of ontology which, from a feminist position that queries gender roles, inadequately defines “being,” “right,” or “liberty.” The garden is a site which, through design, enables one who is hidden in it to observe or to travel unseen, within it. Dream (a configuration of human ideals as power in space and time) is not communal; it is an individual project

founded on the desire to leave a “place” and also remember a place; it is ideological matter that proposes realization in “the real world.” It is activated through political address that convinces a body politic or individual of pleasure beyond the immediate; it is a formulated achievement which, paradoxically, is ratified by a return to historical precedent, an unreachable past considered obsolete by a current authority.

The “unreachable past,” and the nostalgia that it evoked, was common to eighteenth century painting and writing practices. It is evident in landscape painting, to rural landscapes to the picturesque, whereby the “rural poor” were often depicted nostalgically; the reality of the economic practices on the land at that time (enclosures, factories) were hidden behind an illusion created by pictured fantasy. Thomas Gainsborough, a precursor of the picturesque, sentimentalized the “natural,” and in doing so, portrayed it as unattainable dream; the “countryside/landscape” was a “fantasy solution to dilemmas formed elsewhere [. . .] as the fantasy “irrealizes” the countryside, the countryside becomes less able to “realize” the fantasy.” (Bermingham 44). This translates into the countryside “as though” “something else” — which Robertson parodies with her “as if” constructions. In Robertson’s view, such “utopic visions” have always been a by-product of an economic ideology that suppresses, an accretion of nostalgias with no object other than “the historiography of the imaginary” (Robertson, The Capilano Review 96). Yet this “historiography” points toward the elegiac aspect of the picturesque, an objective concentration on ruins and states of dilapidation⁷⁸ that later connect with the gothic psychology and notions of the sublime. As Bermingham indicates, the picturesque expressed the “complexity of the historical moment,” it celebrated a pre-enclosed landscape, and thus returned to the nostalgia of a rural

paternalism. Yet emphasizing time, it obliquely recognized the uncertainty of the new order that had replaced it (70). Robertson takes such nuances and resituates them as informing the contemporary moment, the “subjects” of the picturesque return to haunt its confining assumptions and imposed melancholia, rendering them obsolete:

[. . .]in the capitalist narrative, the Utopia of the new asserts itself as the only productive teleology. Therefore I find it preferable to choose the dystopia of the obsolete. As a tactically uprooted use, deployment of the obsolete could cut short the feckless plot of productivity. When capital marks women as the abject and monstrous ciphers of both reproduction and consumption, our choice can only be to choke out the project of renovation. We must become history’s dystopic ghosts, inserting our inconsistencies, demands, misinterpretations and weedy appetites into the old bolstering narratives: We shall refuse to be useful.

(Robertson, Phillytalks #17)

Here, dream is a forked tree. The question, “For what is dream?” echoes in a split wood. Where Robertson shows that the “trajectory” of the pastoral poem has established a pattern of reproduction — in a human mime of “nature’s” reproduction — it is one that is not beneficial. Rather, it reproduces a singular mode of power that taps into a constructed memory of what the pastoral “is.” “Innocent,” “simple,” “sensual,” “steady,” these adjectives have hidden a directive pointed toward a landed class that can afford to make them useful for “pleasure.” The pastoral is a dream continued by a moneyed or “legalised” part of society. There is no conjunction between who maintains the dream, and who “works” it. “Dream” is a soporific. While Robertson’s agency could be

considered antithetical to “dream,” in XEclogue, “dream” is its own antithesis. It isn’t real to begin with. Using illusion, insinuation, the “imaginary,” — the antithesis of the “dreamscape” that fertilizes the ideology of the power structure (who use what seems to be “real,” the “land”) — Robertson grounds the spectres that act for a state imagination. She crops this utopic narrative to fragment the images and structures that contribute to — in heavily loaded terms — an imperialist, gendered, state-organized plot. Sex, passion, and the erotic are not so innocent in Robertson’s design; they jam the reproductive tropes of “nature,” they consider “justice,” “passion,” and “honour.” Lady M and Nancy, in dialogue ignore The Roaring Boys calling from the wood with offers of “what was”:

Nancy: I need to assume my dream of justice really does exist. Together shall we discover those conventions which, by giving or selling what has belonged to us, having known such green and felicitous hours, we renounce as we turn to the imagined lives of our polished rosewood dolls? [. . .]

Lady M: I’ve walked through the gate and awoken — I feel my hands are incognito and fringed [. . .].

*I tumble in the luminous musculature
of an ideology
swift and pretty, enclosed as the edged-zest
cross-sex jut of knowledge
as Romance is French, bombastic
end-stopped, supple, passing as a tulip-shaped
end-stopped panic epistemology, legitimate
fantasy. Chthonic Machine! I’m compelled
to shun
the blue just (gigantic jist)
“I’m torn between passion and honour.” (“Cathexis”)*

Using fantasy or the movement of a dream sequence reconsiders formations of “existence”; dream moves from cipher to symbol to meaning. Robertson’s text manifests itself in parallel meanings: the symbol, and the anti-symbol, “nature.” Recasting through “genre” a sequence (eclogues) whereby the narrator “wakes up” as from a dream, and

observes characters, traces an ancestress, and hears voices and visions is a method of redefining the relationship between meaning and symbol, image and its expression.

Dream both betrays and effects meaning; both, like Robertson's "I" and "ancestress," are ephemeral:

Using the imaginary enables a restructuring of seemingly stable "real" laws, "the imaginary world has its own laws, its specific structures, and the image is somewhat more than the immediate fulfillment of meaning. It has its own density, and the laws which govern it are not solely significant propositions [. . .]. Freud caused the world of the imaginary to be inhabited by Desire [. . .] a theology of meanings, in which the truth anticipates its own formulations and completely constitutes them. The meanings exhaust the reality of the world which displays that reality" (Foucault, Dream and Existence 35).

In XEclogue, dream is not the grammar and syntax of Freud, but a specific form of experience that is unavailable for objectification. It is lived experience; the helical motion that occurs when the dream is made "real" through literature and the "real" a dream for a portion, is nullified in an experience that reverses that process through "tracing." How to make the abstract concrete, or ontology phenomenology, is a concern throughout the text: "To understand something or someone is thus definable in phenomenology only as a new grasp in the mode of interiority, a new way of inhabiting the expressive act, a method for reinstating oneself within it [. . .]." (Foucault Dream and Existence 42). Ultimately, singular questions of "ontology" are useless and a luxury; it is the anagram, the review of linguistic (or linguistic-pastoral) constructs that flowers, that

proves “pleasurable,” feminizing or “X-ing” the pastoral — and not negating its historicity in the process. Such historicity (gendered) is a necessary ruin for Roberston’s architectonics; the emotional development of her “green fable.”

Chapter Three: Eclogues: “Dragged politics of exile”/ Fleshing the subject

i. Eclogue One and Three: Honour and Liberty

Honour and liberty are often connected as forms that ratify an individual’s right and place in a nation-state. If during a period of war an individual joins the opposite side, the label is “traitor”; in militaristic terms, this requires a “dishonourable discharge.” Liberty is iconic; the statue in New York City Harbour is proof of that. Liberty has always been figured as feminine and tied to notions of justice (law). Yet in both these eclogues, Robertson does not assume that these qualities are inherent; they are not expected to “show themselves.” Rather, in the first, the narrator uses invocation and physical action, honour, in a catalogue sequence that references dress, texture, and translucence:

Ah, the tidy press of the catalogue, the knotted plantlettes of a foiled age,
the looming test of our grim diaphany, let me embrace these as the lost
term “honour” while I lace this high pink book I call Felicity. (“Honour”)

The narrator “calls” Felicity while putting on a “high pink boot” and locates Lady M “as if” “dreaming on a bus,” “agitated” and experiencing a number of sensations, “an artificial rudeness whose particular odour floods her mind.”⁷⁹ Unstable, heavily descriptive, and urgent, this sequence opens “Honour,” using the full impact of visual language to stage the entrance of “Nancy,” who emerges from “Honour” as Lady M’s partner.

The eclogue maintains a visual and “pleasurable” quality in a tripartite narrative sequence following the first person opening of “Honour.”⁸⁰ Transitions are achieved by conjunction (“Or:”), an impossibly non-metaphoric unit of language that connects phrasal sentences; its only substitute is the semi-colon, a symbolic unit. Conjunction suggests preposition. Robertson’s “Or:” option in sections two and three establishes the “parallel world” offered in “How Pastoral”; it functions spatially by opening the narrative options to the reader, countering the linearity that results from a single description which posits closure. “Or:” enables the reader to pan the scenes, despite the contradiction that the colon that follows it seems to instill. “Or:” does not detract from the choice of scene; rather, the colon punctuates the look, directs the gaze toward the literal depiction, and structures the focus. Using different sequences enables Robertson to further formulate the aspect of “wandering” which seventeenth and eighteenth-century landscape designers tried to effect, that Lady M experiences as an “artificial rudeness,” and that the narrative “I” experiences in the prologue. Robertson blends and erases syntactic units to offer a slightly altered mental vista out of essentially the same materials. The first description suggests the process by which a scene is rendered with paint, “watered patterns lit” (lamp-like), “fine grey pigments cling,” “The teenaged multitude drifts.”

Sites are rendered in descriptive language that pluralizes the means of representation— “watered patterns lit”⁸¹ (lamp-like), “fine grey pigments cling,” “The teenaged multitude drifts” — and their subtle actions which oddly demand sensual recognition through the use of similitude:

Watered patterns sway lit beneath the air or beneath the movement of air. Fine grey pigments cling so pungently with such rich spread that it's all dainty and silken as the fickle-stench of the sibilant and caressed name "Nancy." The teenaged multitude drifts off to a grainy and torpid horizon; they stroke the crude till it compels or decadently blooms. Banality stokes their punctual lust for the familiar; branches, courage, obligation stalk as cathartic yellow splays among roots. Weeds often seem sardonic as the measured tactics of a cold strut; yet if leisure were conquered this landscape would gauntly bud and split into the cold texture embroidered on the lurid skin of a leaf. Or: careful field quincuncial as the exhaustive and private happiness spilt from a necklace of januaries. Knots, compartments and grottos cannot compare to a field's livid frisk, neither to the ridgie factions near the pompous arch. Yet the sky's tolerably liberal and apt to supplement a bitchy little tapestry, in the way the light in a painting seems fringed or redolent as a pimp, in the way a teenager will flagrantly caress a name with paint. Read this orchard as The Roaring Boys who course the town at night: tawdry, flecked and billowing behind their silky fluted pricks, their short lines syncopate as ripe fruits shake the lawn.

"Landscape" is not designated until the end of the first sequence, "[...] yet if leisure were conquered this landscape [...]," where it and its description dissolve into a painterly rendering of an indeterminate "scene," a landscape composition through botanic design,⁸² and a landscape vision encapsulating class and estate.⁸³ The latter is engrained in the picturesque tradition; it offers a visual aesthetic that simultaneously incorporates the painterly and botanic design descriptions. It functions as a romantic aesthetic that superficially glorifies nation by compelling the eye to a view of superficial stately paradise, while rendering as useless the physical labour that "the land" — as a viable economic base — requires. The individual pleasure that gardening — colours, scents, air — provides is elevated to national proportions, the enjoyment of a populous who have the means to enjoy it and the means of "transplanting" landscape designs from other countries to further the pleasure. "Landscape" in the writing of Joseph Addison, for example, or Gertrude Jekyll, could have the properties of "dream" if designed properly.

Thus, Jekyll stipulates in writings such as Wood and Garden, that there is a convention to gardening. Certain arrangements of the flowers produce an effect on the mind; certain landscape developments, such as a path that leads to a grove that leads to a field, can visually and sensually reproduce memories and feelings of solitude or notions of antiquity and inheritance. The garden suggests that everything in “its place” is a microcosm of “order” in the nation and in the universe. It has had a tradition of being a center that suggests, through irregular plantings and earthworks, “extent and freedom...aimed precisely at disguising or hiding the boundary” (Bermingham 13). In the seventeenth and eighteenth-century, enclosure divided the outside landscape through measurement and assessment along parish or town lines. It was “parcelled” out proportionately to landowners, and commonly took the form of rectangles bordered by hedges (13). The landscape became artificial in appearance and the “garden” natural in a mirroring development that blurred the development of artifice and nature; this accompanied a seeming “naturalness” of property and wealth. The prose “of landscape or garden” in narrative forms is nearly always a story or didactic instruction, making free reference to the “feminine” as an analogous entity; this referencing is “natural” — it is unquestioned. Writers such as Addison promoted imitation of “nature” as a way of firing the imagination and the senses, but the imitation was more likely to be achieved by estate owners:

But why may not a whole Estate be thrown into a kind of Garden by frequent Plantations, that may turn as much to the Profit, as the Pleasure of the Owner? A Marsh overgrown with Willows, or a Mountain shaded with Oaks, are not only more beautiful, but more pleasant Prospect, and if

the Walks were a little taken care of that lie between them, if the natural Embroidery of the Meadows were helpt and improved by some small Additions of Art, and the several Rows of Hedges set off by Trees and Flowers, that the Soil was capable of receiving, a Man might make a pretty Landskip of his own possessions. (Addison 142)

Product is the accessible artifice of the gaze, not the produce of the land. Art, not “nature,” prevails. Adjective and verb match in power; Robertson’s description is rich and effete, characterized by “sway,” “drift” “torpid,” “decadence,” “banal,” “measured,” “leisured”. To conquer leisure would cause renascence beyond the present lacklustre dormancy. Stored energy would become active, productively economic: “this landscape would gauntly bud and split into the cold texture embroidered on the lurid skin of a leaf” (“Honour”). The landscape represents an economy devoted to the pictured, the allegorical and the ruled; “leisure conquered” refers to the buy-out of the land for landscape, the cultural aspects of ownership would use “nature” as expenditure. Obviously there is a subtle industry here, similarity between an entrepreneur and landscape gardener, “each altering nature to a consumable form and the client or beneficiary of the landscaper, who in turn has a view or prospect to use, is often only at the very lucky end of a common process, able to consume because others have produced, in a leisure that follows from quite precise work” (Williams 81). Irony sprouts unintentionally: “weeds often seem sardonic as the measured tactics of a cold strut.” In this scenario, occupation would cease to be decorative; it would cease to exist. “Embroidery” would consist of the patterns of the natural world, decorated with the terms of a human occupation subject to the picturesque.

Section two is carefully structural and anatomical. Equalities are established, and undone — note “as” between “careful field quincuncial,” and “the exhaustive and private happiness spilt from a necklace of januaries.” Design, rather than description, appears paramount; “Knots, compartments and grottos cannot compare to a field’s livid frisk, neither to the ridgie factions near the pompous arch” (“Honour”). The closed forms of “knots, compartments and grottos,” contrasts with the expanse of “frisk,” or the view toward the “pompous arch.”⁸⁴ Is it an open field in the background, with a bridge in the foreground — a common picture for eighteenth century landscape painters?

Alternatively, was the bridge in the background, and the field in the foreground? What do these designs mean when they are rendered purely structural? Robertson, using preposition, narrows an already intense visual field: “a [any] field’s livid frisk” to “the ridgie faction near the pompous arch.” This grammatical switch subjects both verb (frisk⁸⁵), and noun (ridgie-faction), to comparison. The result is a value-denomination centered on “ridgie-faction,” which in turn determines the pompous arch as a landscape ornament within the “field.” Ridgification, a double pun on ridgie-faction and frigid, provides a structural parallel to “arch” versus the material enabling its flexion, yet remains solid, a “cold strut.”

Here, architecture is also the body in movement or part of a staged scene that plays eroticism against a “mannered” arrangement (bawdy). The landscape is a pose, set against a backdrop of ornate architectural features. Perhaps a pastoral couple “frisk” (post “frisk,” the shepherd plays his songs in the woods). Or perhaps the architecture flips roles, “arch” sexual teasing — usually applied to an upper class woman, a “Lady” who uses dialogue rather than body language as foreplay in a social setting. Alternatively,

where “arch” is a mode of manner, it is also a class-oriented prefix, “archbishop, archduchy” and suffix — patriarchal. Where the “feminine” version refers to manner (innuendo) as resolved in the body, the “masculine” version refers to the social state. “Cold strut” is a powered movement, it has been considered “show,” the walk of a “tart,” or “slut,” or “bitch,” as opposed to the “arrogant” walk of a political leader or aristocrat. A power game is played out, but as the “feminine” is “owned” in this landscape, she can be “taken” at any time. Mannered movements ornament a particular desire. Perspective produces landscape, and the social conditions that enable such perspective.⁸⁶ Entering this linguist fray is an additional kinetic component to an already denoted painterly function, the filmic⁸⁷ — again, and appropriately considering this is the “pastoral,” we have been “panning” the text.

The “Or:” option that offers scenic separations, the quick visual glimpses (“flickers”), the painterly activated through surprise has movement. These descriptions are not static. The senses are constantly invoked in these passages, especially those of sight and smell — the two senses that contribute to memory. Robertson decants the “cold strut” and “pompous arch” in a comparison that jostles the “built” landscape (and its sexual connotations) against generic natural features — rendered here with my ratio that slightly alters the text:

sky: bitchy little tapestry

light in a painting: fringed or redolent as a pimp

teenager: flagrantly caress a name with paint

Perspective moves upward to a solid-seeming image, “the sky,” that acts as supplement to a tapestry’s patterns. The metaphor of tapestry to landscape is common, (a

“patchwork” landscape), the addition of the adjective “bitchy” renders the artifice contentious, and argumentative. Sky is secondary to artifice — a universal “idea” and fact. The sky is infinite, an atmospheric boundary. This idea of supplement is repeated through the phrasal unit of “in the way that”; interpretation is invited that draws parallels between extended conceits. It all persuades; the sky “is” tapestry (bitchy), the light in a painting “is” “fringed or redolent as a pimp.” The land becomes a “sexy” landscape that can be bought and sold. A “teenager” (of the multitudes) “paints” a “name” “caressingly”. The name or the object is immaterial to the “caress” or “painting of.” The body doesn’t exist here. The name is the body, is the character “Nancy.” Are these sexual implications mainly Robertson’s linguistic play or are they a fetishized construction or are they already “part” of the landscape, and Robertson has “found” them, “seduced by the lure of archaic pleasures” (Robertson, The Capilano Review 97)? The sexual play — which runs throughout the text in the songs of The Roaring Boys, the dialogue between Lady M and Nancy, and the narration— takes different forms in this landscape. It combines “reproduction” with “nature,” “sex” with “ownership,” “sexy” with “visual aids.” The pastoral is sexual. In British poetry entering the “field” from an urban place is usually ascribed, first, to reasons of love and pleasure. Is the sexual image a commodity that has its foundations in an obsolete pastoral, the “piping” between shepherds, how a shepherd can “reed” the landscape, the romantic and unfettered sexuality of the shepherd and the shepherdess (or shepherd and shepherdess)? Nature is abundant enough to “provide” the rest without foreseeable labour. Thus, the literary, “Come be with me and be my love, and we will all the pleasures prove,” is a pastoral without consequence.

The passage, in turn, hinges on “fringed or redolent” — fringed returning to tassels in tapestry, to light, by contrasting brightness or darkness caused by diffraction, to the sky and the horizons, through reference to marginality, and to the entire scape through the way false colour informs an optical image. Redolent mis-rhymes “flagrant,” a pun on fragrant, to reminiscence. The initial images in their “naturalness” are de-romanticized; what is offered is a blunt reminder that these images have other meanings, depending on the background and vocabulary of the viewer.

In contrast to the pure narrative description of the first scene in this eclogue (presented), the next scene is enacted. It initially presents Lady M and Nancy in dialogue, and culminates with a triadic chorus, The Roaring Boys — a descriptive promise of syntactic fragmentation and erotic drama: “tawdry, flecked and billowing behind their silky fluted pricks, their short lines syncopate as ripe fruits shake the lawn” (“Honour”). Similitude, marked previously by the prepositional “as,” is exchanged for simultaneity, the preposition signifying adverb, time, entrance, parallel. Objects in the landscape are the landscape; we experience attraction, repulsion, and propulsion; force-effect of perspective to thought, nature objectified and passive; desire, “ripe fruits,” shaking the metaphysical firmament.⁸⁸ “Landscape,” then, shifts from a rural fruit grove to urban characters and their habit (The Roaring Boys, “cruising”) as an imperative signature: “Read this orchard⁸⁹ as The Roaring Boys who course the town at night” (“Honour”).

The final passage delays the expectation of The Roaring Boys’ entrance. From The Roaring Boys, who are initially cited as orchard, there is now a “she” who is “in the landscape without ambiguity” as analytic option (or interruptive presence) for the reader.

“She” is complicit with the ramifications of “cloister”; “trim” and “tendentious” suggest the advantages of a certain societal trend that, as Robertson points out, are disadvantages. “Cloister,” typically associated with the Church, is a prison-shaped edifice; barring the marriage contract, women’s options (in the eighteenth-century) were to remain unmarried (and be reliant on her family) or to enter a convent (and be married to God). The garden is again invoked, as is the panopticon: a cloister is a covered, collonnaded passage around an open court in a convent, monastery or cathedral (OED, 269). As a socio-political move, the convent avoided a marriage contract, but sequestered the woman. It was, given the social situation, a viable but limited choice. There were three “types” of women in this social construct — the whore, the wife, the nun. The latter may have attained an “intellectual freedom,” a certain freedom from sexual invasion, an honour through chastity, but the “honour” was a construct “through chastity.” The social construct was devised to prevent another “fall” of man. The landscape was already designed around a certain image of a walled garden. A woman bound by service to God may have been chaste, but she was barred from the social relations that marriage would have enabled because she either did not accept the marriage contract or did not want to engage in a sexual relationship outside of marriage (which would have made her a whore or a lesbian). The image of this scene is funereal, anti-cultivation in a double sense: “Wind preens or lustres the elegant weeds; obligation splices cold and keeps darkening and brooding.” The sky image in the second description is overcome by Robertson’s rendering of duty as obviating real choice in the cultural landscape. This descriptive passage relates event; there are no equivalent phrases or prepositional conjectures as in the other sequences. “Everything” is patterning (as

process) a “differing lag” (delay time). This final scene is decorative, ornamented; the stage is set, and again we close with The Roaring Boys miming emotion, miming desire to capture the escaped in a dominant ideological web: “The roaring angels are alert as nets and their sly pricks nudge the cold” (“Honour”). If “she” is Nancy, then she is completely enveloped in cultural tissue, from dwelling-place to garment; she is “sheathed,” “cloistered,” “absorbed,” entirely conventional.

The final section of “Honour” comprises dialogue, a song, and a confessional letter (Lady M and Nancy, The Roaring Boys, Lady M to Nancy) which begins with a discussion of evil, touches on liberty as a product of a Marxist “cashbar” and concludes with an ideological foray on “thought.” All three styles are spatial: they move from positions of fragmentation or non-sequitor openings to erotic or philosophical queries. An interesting dialogic motion propelled by reference and vector occurs when these speeches are pointed “toward” a character who does not immediately respond; during the act of dialogue there is a motion of speech/response, question/answer, description/perception that in this case is not rewarded, the expectation of conversation (echo) is unfulfilled. The expected response is replaced by an unexpected question or line of reasoning expressed by another character not necessarily in the same “set” (e.g., Lady M and Nancy or Lady M and The Roaring Boys). This results in physical or emotional friction between characters; an unverbaised space is created which the character who verbalized the original question enters—as if to find the respondent.

This lack of verbalization establishes movement on a physical level between pauses of dialogue; this is part of Robertson’s “quest” to regenerate the “cause” of gender positions in landscape. For instance, this occurs at the end of “Honour” where the blatant

sexuality of The Roaring Boys is directed at Lady M in the form of a sung question which interrupts the conversation she is having with Nancy about “paradise” and “harmony.” After describing their sexual prowess and admitting curiosity about Lady M, The Roaring Boys state, “This tumult’s meant to tilt/ All grammar. We’re just those that/Want you to feel [. . .]” (“Honour”). Their assumption of emotional acquiescence is interrupted by Lady M’s philosophical description and question of immediate site — physical and mental—to Nancy in the form of a letter. This is grammar. The Roaring Boys are sexual. They serve, for Lady M, no other purpose. She states: “They’ve not advanced from the flimsy past: it’s just the tumult of a pendant usage, it’s just the sultry horror of that fake forest. Choric swains that call me Berry miss the point—dirty little swains playing at the mouth of the gemmy cave, fraying my nerves with their meticulous blossoms”(Honour). The common phrase in XEclogue, “It’s as if” echoes strongly here: the foreplay of The Roaring Boys and their sexual calls of prowess are diminished by Lady M’s prioritization of philosophical state; their assumptions are opposite to her consideration of what is underfoot: “How can these be *Thought*?” Lady M, referring to what is immediate and sensed, invokes a ghostly preposition that assists in biological identification (naming) and role (position) in relation “to”: “How can these be *Thought* [of]?”

In fact, Robertson is characterizing⁹⁰ “nature” — what is understood as “nature” and “human nature.” The botanical references that are strewn throughout the eclogues are a reminder that scientific and aesthetic classification do not combine. Thus, when The Roaring Boys are referred to as “orchard,” or their limbs as “botanical enjambments,” Robertson combines function with aesthetic; she makes use of allegories and myths that

also use the botanical to evoke a human story or lesson. The Roaring Boys “spill over” syntactically; their limbs, like an abundance of leafy or blooming “structures,” are without pause. They represent the continuation of an imposed sexual sentence on Lady M and Nancy. The Roaring Boys caricature “desire”; they arise as a bacchanalian trio in an urban setting, although they emerge out of the “orchard” or “grove.” When Lady M composes her letter, she writes them outside of their “representation”; they, too, need their genre. Robertson’s references to the botanical underline the rift between “human” and “nature,” and the histories of allegory and culture which attempt to link them together without acknowledging sources of manipulation and control.

In “Eclogue Three: Liberty,” Robertson examines a legal source of manipulation carried forward from Jean Jacques Rousseau’s The Social Contract. Questioning “what follows,” from the nation-building impulse, “the interminable journal of culture,” Robertson cites the “body of natural law” as a structure that legalizes how a “person” is activated in a cultural matrix with designations of “gender” or “sex.” Such designations are then accompanied with attributes, characterizations, and a public “place” in society based on these equivalences. The narrator calls this “liberty totalized, an incommensurable crime against the girls” (“Liberty”). To question the privileges that such categorization ensures, the narrator states, “I’m going to shame this world. I will begin by gathering around my body all the facts, for they affect my person” (“Liberty”). She calls into question historical precedent, the foundations of “culture,” expressing “grief,” and “bringing horror.” Rousseau’s “natural law” totalizes the human as sexual and gendered subject; it legitimizes them “in the world,” before the person claims legitimacy as self. Butler analyses this process:

Perhaps the subject, as well as the invocation of a temporal “before,” is constituted by the law as the fictive foundation of its own claim to legitimacy. The prevailing assumption of the ontological integrity of the subject before the law might be understood as the contemporary trace of the state of nature hypothesis, that foundationalist fable constitutive of the juridicial structures of classical liberalism. (Butler, Gender Trouble 5)

Robertson, by narrating “what follows” retraces this structuring. She borrows from Rousseau’s social contract to challenge the notion that individuals in the state of “nature” consent to be governed and, as a result, activate and enable the legitimacy of the social contract. But as subject to a power structure that legitimizes dually through a circular concept of reproduction — heterosexual desire — as extended to a body of legalities, the “feminine” is “born” to a structure where body as functionally reproductive is analogous to the control of the state. Implicit in this social contract is a “penal” code — infraction is punishable. If culture defines body, then culture is “destiny” (Butler, Gender Trouble 12).

Robertson’s narrator moves through the thick “accretions” of liberty, she uses nostalgia for remembrance, she chooses her fate:

I want to remember how [...] the parenthetical real girls shuck the empire of convenience [. . .]. Felicity is their glamour, their key. I have chosen for my fate their verdant garment and also the particular verdures of Libertie. For the image does not need me: rather I feel it is my calling to annotate the sheathed cadence of life beside power [...]. I mean destruct the formal destinies, destruct the phantom body, destruct defunct ritual,

unlock that paradise I mentioned earlier, and give them back a renovated flower. ("Liberty")

Bracketed (parenthetical/subordinate) in gender roles, "the real girls" are inconvenient to a power structure that desires them, but that also fears them. "Felicity" has emotional currency. Robertson's narrator describes a process where she retraces and documents heterosexual, phallic ("sheathed life beside power") constructs. The "return" is botanic, a "renovated flower." Writing with floral accents, Robertson re-sequences a "perennial" relationship of oppressed and oppressor to unroot the fact that, on the grounds of "natural law" or "nature," sexual difference can function as censorship that highlights social opposition between men and women through categorization of masculine/"feminine" (Wittig 2). These categorizations are economic, political, and aesthetic. They artificially conceal political agency and delimit proactive "choice." Rather than breaking off the "social contract," the move would be to break it off as "heterosexual" (35). Robertson's "renovated flower" is a transformation, she "gives it back" to the "real girls" as something "new." It alludes to sexual agency, genitalia that (as opposed to Freud) does not represent lack or suggest reproduction. The narrator, questioning institutions and their constructions, "What is this thought that refuses to reverse itself, that in the cool shade of fantasy creates an institution?"⁹¹ "invents" her own. She celebrates the "death of method," taking that renovated flower as a symbol for "loveliness": "She's lying in the pagan flowers, sweet-faced in her pompous velvet, swathed in the crude luxury of my rhetoric, strewn with the petals of aptly faded hope" ("Liberty"). The narrator is reconstructing her fantasy, refashioning artifice and romantic

ornament, the social “body” as it has considered the development of “sexes,” “sexual differences,” and an accompanying “social order.”

ii. Memory, Cathexis, Desire, Nostalgia

Robertson’s fourth eclogue, “Cathexis,” makes use of the Greek term for “retention,” and the psychological term used in Sigmund Freud’s “Project for a Scientific Psychology” (1895), which refers to the degree of energy within a neuron and the state of preparation for the discharge of this energy. “Retention,” in this sense, results in a state lacking in pleasure — a low amount of cathexis results in “pleasure.” It is economic—the “amount” of libidinous energy directed toward an object — it is also electric, having synaptic allusions of current and charge. If the nation state as a body politic “retains” a certain part of the populous in the economic structure as properties of “desire,” then what is the emotional state of the nation? “Anti-cathexis” results in pleasure, when the ego is no longer bound by objectified desire. The eclogue analyses “object” in a descriptive passage and theatrical display that creates a “reverse-charge,” redirecting national desire by objectifying the botanical as “man-made.” Description, rather than narration, temporarily removes the “ego” that is the object of cathexis.

“Eclogue Four: Cathexis” combines the visual and sensual synaesthetically.⁹²

Robertson’s opening line is a reflexive look at the rendering of flower as glass, as nature made product, as the natural “made” ornament. It also mimics Shakespeare’s, “All the world’s a stage”,⁹³ in a literary memory, we recognize the echo of Shakespeare, and wonder at the transposition of world/theatre to flower/glass flower. Robertson describes what the flowers “are” in an implicit negative, they are not “real” flowers, and, made from

glass, they can be looked “through” or at — “art-appreciation.” They are not organic; they are “made objects.” Entirely, “All the flowers are glass flowers,” combined with vision, “and looking into them,” and physical effect, “the senses would vibrate in a gelatinous thrum,” describes an event that manufactures delight and desire, a simulacrum that, in language, is determined by metaphor. One looks “into” the flowers (as a study), not “through” them. Here, the narrative “I” has vanished. Things are “like” something else, as metaphor or simile. The flower is analyzed through the emotional expression it invokes; it is particularized and fragmented for the purpose of pleasure:

All the flowers are glass flowers and looking into them the senses would vibrate in a gelatinous thrum. Each leaf’s a sumptuous dervish; hurled from the vasty sun, its fretted points so hard and bright and tangy, it leaves a feeling of dangling — yet, with an oily ease, fronds like a fern’s give hint to the deep blue minutes the green boys take. The hot dark stippled tints are indefatigably pleasurable and like widows or hairpins the mitten-shaped leaves are really those pleasures that do not, like those of the world, disappoint your expectations. All these briskly flecked notions sieve through a giddy tissue, unnatural red and rubbed grainless as if a green touch had deferred or shucked history. (“Cathexis”)

This is an elastic moment. “Vibrate,” “gelatinous,” “thrum,” evoke consistency in terms of movement, touch, and sound. The object, “flower,” is fixed. From looking at the flower/glass flower, the description moves from bloom (reproductive stage) to the leaf, which is described with kinetic extravagance.⁹⁴ It is a “sumptuous dervish” that has mythological resonances, “hurled from the vasty sun,” that results in an inconsistency —

in this case revealed by the physical action and pun: “it leaves a feeling of dangling.”

The structure is solid but the emotion it evokes offers a “feeling” of floating, suspension, hanging. The senses that one would use when describing a flower (taste, smell, touch, and sight) are used as descriptive adjectives for a “faux flower” that evokes emotion:

“sumptuous,” “feeling,” “hard, bright and tangy.”

The flower and leaf are replaced in order to offer some understanding, some “hint” of progression, of time, of action, offered in a contrasting hue: “the deep blue minutes the green boys take.” The synapses are the only mode of response; it is a physical response despite the attempt to make the “flower” metaphor into “thought.” The physical is pleasurable. “The hot dark stippled tints” – either of leaf or shade or body — please “indefatigably.” The leaves, mitten-shaped, are vaginal references reduces to bizarre fetishes, “widows” or “hairpins.” The leaves are “like” these things, and offer the same pleasure — the “natural” and the “manufactured” are equalized in terms of consumption, what they have to offer “you.” The entire passage implies a scene where the director and the actors are unidentified other than the “green boys.” The passage completes itself in an expression of pleasure that is equated with a thinking process, “briskly flecked notions.” The “green boys” could be any manifestation of The Roaring Boys, the “green boys” in this scenario reify heterosexual desire.

The leaves do not disappoint “expectation” of pleasure. Pleasure, expected, is part of the character of the glass flower. In other words, the glass flower is a glass flower only because it satisfies (is expected to satisfy) the emotional/physical need of the “green boys.” How is pleasure described? The characteristics of the glass flowers are important only because the process of viewing them as fragments delays pleasure; it makes pleasure

more pleasurable. It is a scaled ratio: glass flower: pleasure = green boys. The transformation is complete; cathexis is released into sexual pleasure subject to phallic order “as if a green touch had “deferred or shucked history.” The simile, “as if” completes the suggestion of fetish, the substitution of one thing for another as an object of fantasy. Submission and delay “to” history is implied by the verb form “to defer,” “shuck” suggests abandon, the removing of layers — clothing, husk. History is delayed or abandoned in a cathectic expression. Robertson sieves through an organic genesis, “Look” to “physical sensation” to “release.” The “feminine” is fixed as object and demoted to a figure of illusion projected by the masculine “I want,” and introjected as affirmation of fulfillment, “I have.” The “feminine” recedes and Robertson offers a sexual pun on “seed”:

All these briskly flecked notions sieve through a giddy tissue, unnatural
red and rubbed grainless as if a green touch had deferred or shucked
history. (“Cathexis”)

Robertson patterns the way light illuminates or shades a subject. The manner in which the visual does not necessarily match description, “briskly flecked notions,” mimics the focus of the mind remembering an object. The passage suggests the movement of XEclogue, is structured in fragments much like film clips that seem to have a continuity — but this continuity is provided by the imagination. “Stippled tints,” “briskly flecked notions,” “senses vibrate,” “fretted points,” are adjectival fragments of an object or emotion, dependent on what light/vision reveals or hides. “Light,” is an unspoken aspect of the pastoral, it enables illusion.

This eclogue enacts a dramatic dialogue between Lady M and Nancy, introduced by a stage direction offering a “soiled” figure, possibly Liberty, that they obliquely discuss:

(Golden and Cruel, a lewdly nuanced ethic leaches from the girl with the abstract thighs. She’s a connoisseur of pomposity: nor will pout or yield a cadence outside the specific tenderness of the caked or couched. Horrible small symbolism is repressive and gives pleasure. Another evening pleats her nap so virtue’s riddled or smacked; in a little while sensation will unlace. (“Cathexis”))

“Golden and cruel,” this “Liberty-girl” is a construction designed for aristocratic use. She is satisfied in her role, she is a femme fatale that uses “pleasure,” she is an expert in desire.

“Rosewood dolls” and their imagined lives have more freedom than the “feminine” has, “having known such green and felicitous hours.” Nancy renders imagination as a realm where her “dream of justice” exists, where a rosewood doll could be “an undulant carnivore who with voices of silk repeats the word leaf,” or “walks the floor folding her fans,” or in a moment of “alarm,” unlooses “silk in salacious clots, blown flowers whose target dissipates or understands cloth.” Nancy believes in the transformational power of the mind to alter “feminine” subjection, as if it were only the “present” that mattered. Nancy does not consider historical implications other than as a fabric, a textile. Lady M, however, believes in translucence, an existence that is spatial and nescient, that uses light for movement, that is assumed: “hands incognito and fringed.” Fully aware of history — her “title” demands it — she also invests heavily in

the symbolic and conceptual: “the garden.” They suggest alternatives. Nancy advocates an act of mental “consideration,” their task to reveal the function of literary and convention and symbol, the “metaphoric function of the gala lining of our favourite coat.” Lady M describes a scenic emotion, what troubles her. She advocates change through emotional economy, “erotic capital,” as a method of renovation:

Nancy: Consider the swell light of the social as floral, as reflexive, so compelled to shun sex or the museum. The task would be to reveal the metaphoric function of the gala lining of our favourite coat. Romance hedged; swift cathexis or villainess escapes actual repertoire of gender stuck to the heart like a spurious clone.

Lady M: Don’t look away! The quiet gets me. This little thicket is my portion, my supple jacket is lined with a humming. Here’s what troubles me: erotic capital; families of women; utopic capital. When I describe shame as floral a weird little freedom is my equalizer. I’m all flattened out and swayless as if, secret and dark, birds flew in a grid at night. Erotic capital shifts, renovates the bosco. I feel as if there is so little time!
(“Cathexis”)

Robertson’s analyses are intricate. XEclogue reveals that the pastoral has always been a convenient fiction — that it does not exist except to hide nationalist and economic designs— and that if the pastoral is fiction, then the “feminine” has also always been fiction, inscribed within it. As a form that creates a social model by positing a “better” life, the figures in this life (the labourers, the women) are expediently replaced through a literary ability to superimpose the aristocracy and the masculine on the land. A

“feminine” subject is rewritten and developed to function as an object that represents male agency; without thought, this “feminine” subject is de-individualized to become a generic figure “of women,” similar to a generic “rosewood doll,” used for playing or display, a carefully crafted object.

A tradition that molds or inscribes the “feminine” in a landscape as “statue” or as a figurative piece, freezes the “feminine” in that frame — she becomes “normalized.” Robertson challenges this process of “normalization.” Her narrator becomes a form in space, separated from matter as a method of engagement. Her immateriality is her choice; she is not subject to the figurations of an “art-object,” but can subject this mode to her own phantasie, and analytic screening:

I want to tell you about the hegemony of my supple extensions. My pliant starlets float like symptoms. They float in the indicative case, flinging accusations, insults, blasphemies and curses. They’re cerebral and illegal. They force me to ask – by what aberration do I submit myself to some dead parody of growth, the rotting pastiche of the abject, a morbid inertia? Events congeal into image with no social aggression....My starlets don’t need art and its cheating edifice. They’re hamfisted and redolent. They project their phantasie on my body [...]. (“Phantasie”)

The narrator, combining her desire to reveal “something” with a linguistic act, resists an enveloping structure: “I want to tell you about...” There are two entities outside of herself, yet part of herself: her “supple extensions” and “you.” Her supple extensions are before event, they “float like symptoms.” They seem celestial, cerebral, they expect and wait to be narrated, they are beyond legality and cannot be

conventionalized. They are recognizable only through a history of abjection and subjection. “Outside” of the narrator’s self (who is phantom), they are “real,” not the body which is “in” the landscape, but the “body” of the phantom which cannot be seen. They have “future” roles; folded a multiplicity of times they regenerate, they direct the narrator’s body in a triple meaning on “pliant.”⁹⁵ Thus, they “float,” they are not comprised of a materialist substance, they are relative to the “I,” they suggest ego, and the voyeuristic pleasure of “looking at” other. They represent grammar and proffer syntactic position through a re-visualization that embraces diffraction and movement.

The narrator’s recognition of these “starlets” occurs at the same time that she questions motive through deviation from the norm: “By what aberration do I submit myself to a dead parody of growth, the rotting pastiche of the abject, a morbid inertia?” Her question has astronomical and optical importance: “aberration” refers also to diffracted light from a “failure” of focal convergence due to a mirror or lens defect⁹⁶ and the displacement of a celestial object from its true position as a result of the relative “motion” of the observer and object (OED 2). The starlets “project” a phantasie that may focus attention away from the present situation for the narrator, but her body becomes a screen, a functional site for another vision. In XEclogue, early in the prologue, the narrator recognizes the danger of such screens. She rejects an assumptive casting: “The proud trees, the proud rocks, the proud sky, the proud fields, the proud poor [that] have been held before my glazed face for centuries” (“Prologue”).

To haunt this scene, the ghost must “go” urban, skirt rural utility to capture capitalist logic in the transit of its pictured freedom (a moving frame), and then abandon it, to reappear elsewhere (as cameo) in another feature. Ultimately, the relationship

between pastoral and urban becomes a delineation of rural and natural versus economic and domestic (state). This, in addition to the distinction between pleasure (erotic) and work (slavery) compels a look at language and history as a function of language. Given the impact of the language system on thought, the use of language as descriptive tactic becomes phantasie. Robertson uses “nostalgia” to formulate a powered dystopia — “nostalgia” is the emotional result of dystopia — an “emotionally remembered” desire for “a time” that was not prescribed by a power structure, that did not bind the “feminine” to months of reproduction — whether economically, biologically or symbolically — as products. In the eighteenth century, to experience “nostalgia” meant to be “homesick.” Nostalgia, then, is an emotional response to “exile.” Lady M and Nancy use nostalgia to compass the fissures in the “system” which are actually opportunities for renascence. They invoke an unavoidable “geography” but invent the landscape:

Rather than diagnosing this nostalgia as a symptom of loss
(which wd only buttress the capitalist fiction of possession) I deploy it as
an almanac, planning a tentative landscape in which my inappropriate and
disgraceful thought may circulate. Nostalgia will locate precisely those
gaps or absences in a system which we may now redefine as openings,
freshly turned plots. Who is to circumscribe the geography in which
thinking may take place? (Robertson, PhillyTalks #17)

“Eclogue Six: Nostalgia,” opens with a dramatic entrance that is staged verbally by the narrator, that repositions the notions of exile and projection (as replacement for loss):

(This is how Lady M enters: Sinuously, flanked by Roaring Boys who pan her stance with flicks of birch; spouting the nonsense of swans, swaggered in the mulberry light; on molten silks; flaunting the lovely ambiguity of the word “Grace”).

Lady M: *Splendid ardour most obviously mine! April is a mere tuck in your shirt.*

Nancy: *You're menacing and delirious. Your face could go back [...]*

Lady M: *Which brings me irrevocably to the sulking plums: The dusk is a precise record [...]*

Nancy: *Of the deadly metonymy of your hips.*

Lady M: *I was raised a girl. I found myself my best possession.*

Nancy: *Or looser hip whose elegance ribbons my yard.*

Lady M: *I choose my fate*

Nancy: *Like those whose phantasies condemn us.* (“Nostalgia”)

Lady M's entrance is expressed as if a record — she is flanked by the swain-like representatives of Pan-like pastoral, The Roaring Boys. They both mock and capture Lady M in a framework; she is flanked by them, as if a prisoner or as if escorted. Her stance is pantomined with a birch switch (a pastoral tree). The Roaring Boys have designed their own stage; they give Lady M an “entrance” which casts her in a role. They direct her, rendering uncertain what “Grace” is — a movement or a coterie of “virtues.” There are two incidents that recollect the theatre: the narrator's description of the scene, and the mime-actions of The Roaring Boys around Lady M. Mime is a theatrical subset

of the pastoral genre, sometimes called “urban mimes” (E. Kegel Brinkgreve 5).⁹⁷ This scene is inferential: we overhear the dialogue and are expected to attach meaning, until Robertson narrates Lady M’s “position” and Lady M offers her “background” in a letter to Nancy.

Lady M, “raised a girl,” chooses self-possession as possession. She chooses “fate” which gives her some freedom, offers “ardour” or dusk’s “precise record.” “Fate” rewrote the history of Tityrus and Meliboeus. In Dryden’s re-write, it is the cause of the economic difficulties of the labouring class in eighteenth-century England. “Fate” is a convenient term that suggests an external power that “controls” an individual — it refers to economic, political, and cultural dominance. Nancy scorns the idea of “fate,” pointing out that Lady M chooses her fate “like those whose phantasies condemn us.” Nancy suggests that Lady M cannot be free of a cultural inscription, that her “fate” is encapsulated in male desire and political play. Her scene is moved to the “woods” by a narrative interception which gives Lady M the chance to “enjoy their solitudes and glooms as analysts” (Nostalgia). The “sheltering” woods and its companion, “evening,” are described in terms that underline obsolescence, defeat, and futility as both approaching and already endemic:

Through the hedged wilds, the evening is coming, indefatigable as memory, then falling. So tarnished and so languid, it leaks the jargon of the barbarously pedantic. Lady M, among the glowing birch, thinks of the tapered, the flexible, the curious, differently, in succession, together. She is emptied by the clear bent of that succulent question which seems to pose itself irregardless of the light. (“Nostalgia”)

The woods offer no answers. Instead a plant-like and luscious question asks itself despite the discouraging gloom, the succulence is one of liberty in this landscape, the “growth” of a feminine subject. Lady M approaches this question in a letter to Nancy, speaking of a “shimmering girlhood” and noting that “the politics of girls cannot refuse nostalgia.” Nostalgia is transference; it is a soft memory; it cannot be relived, but it does evoke emotion. Nostalgia is the reconstruction in the mind of an event. The event is often idealized — inexact — it is embellished with an emotional significance. Lady M offers three scenes, the first is “breeding” a language:

To be raised as a girl was a language, a system of dreaming fake dreams.

In the prickling grass in the afternoon in August, I kept trying to find a place where my blood could rush. That was the obsolete expedience of hope. But yield to evidence. And do not decline to interpret. A smooth span of nostalgia dissects the crackling gazebo. I closed my eyes. [...]

Nancy, it's obvious I've been hurling myself at the past in a language that, plantlike, anticipates its own destruction. Yet my negation caresses.

Think of it as your tableau. Grievously, that old saying seems true — “we can not express what we already believe.” [...] But you don't need to shout *society* out the bus window [...]. (“Nostalgia”)

Language becomes a social system of “raising” a “girl.” A social syntax develops around the actual and the imagined individual — the social “body” imagining a “feminine” construct. But the reality (the girl) has the physical ability to reproduce, and when she does not she is considered “barren” — like the ground where Lady M “kept trying to find a place where my blood could rush.” The “crackling gazebo,” which in the prologue was

where “Liberty” was throned, is dissected by a “span” of nostalgia that focuses on a segment. Lady M closes her eyes and pictures the second scene:

A girl named Queen Beauty is in the midst of horses. She’s born in a language of pungent greed and stiffened satin, dressed in scamming politics, and nothing is more slippery and tenuous than her vinyl night. Girls flick their cantering hips, flick their rough hair, meticulous as a leaf. I feel like I’m yapping secrets, but I want the jacked or spiced vanity of closure, the name of Beauty in the dark. Again and again in a dark brown voice she repeats “I’m not yours” and her wrist’s a proud rough feverish Wednesday lost in a crowd. The fixed-up silence finds me — her muddy skin was purple. (“Nostalgia”)

This is the alternative view. “Queen Beauty” born in economy and “stiffened” satin, a body “dressed” in politics, is given to a “vinyl” night (so leather-like in unreality) that is “slippery and “tenuous.” She is offered as contract, one among many such figures on display who “flick their cantering hips, flick their rough hair, meticulous as a leaf.” Robertson’s adjectives have a lyric bent that plays with the idea of a “broken” record: Queen Beauty in the midst of horses (to be broken), is given to a “vinyl” (record/track) night among others who flick “cantering” (recorder) hips. She is stuck repeating, consistently re-duplicating a line: “I’m not yours” — her wrist a calendared social event, a “proud rough feverish Wednesday lost in a crowd.” The record ends, the scene ends, “fixed-up silence” — “her muddy skin was purple.” Queen Beauty is physical evidence of a different kind of “morbid inertia,” she is dead, asphyxiated.

Lady M's critique is dangerous. It is a "hoarded" secret; the landscape is beginning to alter: wires "sing," the trees move "in a slow slither culminating into gorgeousness," and the "fat light bloomed from strange mosses." The trees are snake-like, light blooms from "strange" mosses, the landscape has become re-active, overtaking a previously passive visualization. The landscape is also unfamiliar. She has "had the impression of living in the present," but in fact her language and inclination have been toward the past; her language anticipates, "plant-like," its own destruction. Given that "to be raised a girl was a language," Lady M is stuttering such description and halting this "system." Queen Beauty "dances" upon a tableau of negation. The impressions, the descriptions, the figures in the landscape occur in a nostalgic, filmic rush; "the sky is mauve lucite swagged by thin fleshy roots of light. Slowly the horizon unravels."

iii Transgressing Romance and History: The Roaring Boys

Robertson's characters, The Roaring Boys, are a baroque trio whose sexualized dramatic performances toward Lady M and Nancy engender, rather than their hoped-for pandemonium of reciprocated desire, an eventual recognition of their own employment in history, in art, and in "nature." Initially they offer their own narrative — they are capricious — they interrupt the musings of the narrator and transect the dialogues between Lady M and Nancy. They are theatrical; they function as the chorus of Robertson's theatre. The Roaring Boys sing as if they know the desires of Lady M and Nancy and their songs entreat a feminine desire socially controlled by edict and a frigid, social aesthetic. They suggest that "paradise" and the "dream world" is only accessible through a male-controlled rite of passage; the sexual act is a male gift providing

“pleasure.” They voice a fetishized pastoral sexual freedom mythologized by urban outcasts:

Crass love fucks under shade trees

Explicit cries burst under little whips of vine

The grass itself a ferociously docile chorus

Cruiser! Your little urge is divinely thrown! (“Beauty”)

The feminine and the masculine are strictly separated by adjective: “Crass love fucks under shade trees” leads the entire stanza. The Virgilian pastoral (Eclogue 1) where Tityrus pipes to Amaryllis songs of love is exchanged here for a physical piping, a “fuck” that is neither emotive nor gently idyllic. And the implication is that of replacement: the singularity of the piping in Virgil’s Bucolics is common to occupation. Part of the shepherd’s work is to play the pipe and to represent gentle love and labour. Here, however, brutal and expected replaces “gentle,” and the singularity of the shepherd is erased for a general sense of “what occurs under the shade trees.” “Romance” is not a matter of manners and taste. “Nature” is miniaturized: “little whips of vine,” grass, “a ferociously docile chorus,” and impulse is a “little urge” divinely given. It is a passive-aggressive description of an event that is about to occur — the projection of a different sexual vision. What is nature is presented as what is “natural,” desire. There is no transcendence offered in The Roaring Boys’ chorus. They celebrate Venus, Goddess of Love; but the irony (as mentioned earlier in this paper) is that whereas the Boys are offering the physical, Lady M and Nancy seek the satisfaction of “Thought.” Considered carnal figures without the abilities of “thought,” Robertson revises the roles of Lady M and Nancy — it is the desires of The Roaring Boys that are carnal, and they are

unthinking figures. In this rewriting, Lady M and Nancy are both thinking and “body” subjects.

The Roaring Boys also evoke the landscape but they crash through it — “protopunks” who seek the urban, a different “class” and scene. In Xeclogue, such horizons are proof of boundary. There is perspective outward, but the extension is limited by difference, by immediacy of location at *this* site. Citation advertises unleashed thought, it is offered as a virtual commodity positing a parallel existence: “A perspective extends like a green aperture through which we view another world,” writes Lady M to Nancy (Utopia). It is offered as a place where event is chaotic:

We [The Roaring Boys] dream of a bare and unbroken hunger blazing up in wild proportions, that we taxi through a wet night on thrumming streets, that a city’s sumptuous edifice wanes like so many abandoned ghosts, that the shock of recognition twists like a blurred selvage, like a roped horizon, like a girl waiting in a car.” (“Romance”)

The view into a parallel world is plural. They want it all, without discrimination. The city is the foundry of longing: excess, paucity, and “wild proportions” from a traditional pastoral perspective. The vision and its structures “waver,” they are insubstantial and rapid, they obliterate “choice.” Extravagant adjectives buff nouns, “a city’s sumptuous edifice,” “We dream of a bare and unbroken hunger,” which are then negated by verbs that leap the comparative/ simile “like” into an implicitly negated adjective/noun descriptor which invokes outline, but not substance. Thus, the phrases, “a city’s sumptuous edifice *wanes* like so many abandoned ghosts” and “the shock of recognition twists like a blurred selvage,” are linked by a specific marker. The pronoun “that” refers

back to dream, avoids the plural “those,” and indicates the perspective is communal. It is “we” who dream. It is a paradox, the location of “we” is nowhere if that is dream. Post-blurred selva it is all a simile, identity of “what is”: “like a roped horizon,” “like a girl waiting in a car.”

The opulent description changes focus later in the eclogue. The scenario describes written images that read like statues, paintings or visual textures; again, there is emphasis on the syntactic, “shaded” and botanical:

In the tender platinum sky a pronoun gallops, a pronoun shifts, a pronoun shifts — Hey Venus! Kick in paradise! Revolve outside March trees of piety. Gently the golden whippet snouts of gorgeousness lust in the tragic streets, torch supine forms of girlish hooligans. A bud will clasp its profligate secret rather than submit to gold-stiff piety, and the pale, jejune week unfolds through the lattice of confusion. (“Romance”)

Robertson’s tactics deny the privileged, monolithic survey. Her text is extremely repetitive, a style that rejects resemblance because resemblance allows the viewer to maintain his or her previous view, opting for a view that “is like” the other. Her descriptions are multivalent, existing in proportion to each other, functioning as fragments or pieces in fissure remarking on conventional model/form. As such, Robertson defiles the sacred (and thus the allegorical) as products of a defined culture; what is perceived is not necessarily “thought”; “thought” occurs when privileged perception is cluttered with objects that exist on the same metaphoric or syntactic plane. Rather than transgress the horizon overtly,⁹⁸ Robertson depicts objects “within” a limit or border, evading issues of “other” that naturally occur when a subject is exiled from its

immediate surroundings; the subject is subjected to imperial fiction and also to its own fiction of victimization. Since the whole text begins with address this implies the presence of listeners within an already demarcated political sphere. As readers, we require a limit or horizon point in order to envision moving toward it. Instead, Robertson includes in her address characters who have the privilege of crossing boundaries with promise of safe passage: The Roaring Boys, Cupid (a tiny flapping boy), Daphnis and Chloe, Tityrus and Meliboeus. Robertson reveals that the objects/characters in the landscape are the limit — mainly because of their complicity in the construction of a culturally confining landscape that invokes “nature” as a pinnacle or a “place” which offers transcendence.

In this instance, transgression, as Michel Foucault defines it, forces “the limit to face the fact of its imminent disappearance, to find itself in what it excludes (perhaps, to be more exact, to recognize itself for the first time), to experience its positive truth in its downward fall [. . .] its role is to measure the excessive distance that it opens at the heart of limit and to trace the flashing line that causes the limit to arise” (Foucault, Language, Counter-Memory, Practice 35). Limit and “imminent disappearance” measure The Roaring Boys who are complicit with (and also “naturally” constructed by) a historical assumption that transcribes “masculine-feminine” desire. When Lady M disempowers The Roaring Boys through categorical and bored description that names their body parts as botanical she scores a syntactic “act” of description beyond the boundary of the line or sentence:

[...] dirty little swains playing at the mouth of the gemmy cave, fraying my nerves with their meticulous blossoms. So I'll loosen up to describe their limbs as botanical manifestations of small irksome enjambments, styleless as numbered doors.

The Roaring Boys' sexual impulses are transformed by the linguistic substitutions of Lady M and Nancy: all the metaphors become physical.⁹⁹ In this way, Robertson further subverts the patterning of landscape, the garden, as fully heterosexual. Lady M and Nancy delineate The Roaring Boys' desires as culturally composed; in "Eclogue Eight: Romance" they are identified as if "numbered doors," "#1, #2, #3"; they are de-gendered, subscribed to an ambiguous meaning in a sequence that reproduces itself, and concludes the eclogue:

Roaring Boy #1 is skinny and pure as the bitter white heel of a petal. Spent lupins could describe his sense of mind as a great dusty silky mass. Yet a feeling of being followed had taken his will away. In an age of repudiation he would exude sullen indolence and reveal his lace. He could be said to profoundly resent his inability to control his desire for an impenitent extrovert. When he closes his eyes he asks: Shall I be sold up? Am I to become a beggar? Shall I take to flight? He is skinny and pure as a calling.

Roaring Boy #2, boy with the volute heart of a girl, names the faithless toss of an abandoned guess exactitude. He gives his thought with the sinuous rigour of a cut silk garment, lives looking at the sky, waiting for the specificity of a pleasure whose deferral is underwritten by a constriction of memory, the violent stammering of a repressed structure. The planes of his face point to the exquisitely even surface of a late antique life. He has begun by setting aside a holy dread. Deferral is his darling.

Roaring Boy #3, rather than submitting to the trial of action, wants deeply to possess an opinion, then having possessed, to distribute it with maximum efficiency. Since the spectacle of luxury pleases him in others, he embarks on a gradual (to the point of imperceptibility) inflation of his own verbal style, and a concurrent, almost compensatory, deflation of his

person. He is both febrile and decorous: a foolish hooligan of sardonic emphasis. ("Romance")

Lady M and Nancy's questions and non-sequiturs re-invent The Roaring Boys. As the narrative progresses through each eclogue, Lady M and Nancy think their way through the Boys' identities; they become objectified and proper (nouns). Lady M and Nancy "permit" themselves to rewrite The Roaring Boys' biography as a romance-tale; a story that seems unreal except for the "authority" which Lady M and Nancy have given themselves:

Nancy: *We need not inure ourselves to peace and luxury — but our privilege lies in understanding how the senses detect what is not servitude.*

Lady M: *Who then would write the biography of their desires?*

Nancy: *We ourselves will claim the requisite authority.*

Lady M: *They wished for lips of red thread like so many spies; they received, through the veil of expression, a heart moved only by etiquette. They wished to experience thought as we would be compelled to remember it; it became a languid impossibility. Their heart was lodged in an inaudible sentence. They wore nervousness on their spine and wrists. Their small, soft, edgy world was an intoxicant. The superb crumbling of the afternoon, so secret and so intense, identified itself as history. The ground shelved gently to the waterside: flowing from the flushed pulse of vulnerability, under full soft hot light, it was a challenged mesh from which our presence had been washed.*

Nancy: *If we were to imagine that contraction as a landscape overwritten with vast, exhausted melancholy, quenched in mauvish tasselled wind, we would only perpetrate the vain imprecision of a hoax. ("History")*

The questions are not so much about identity, but construction: "how" they are.

The landscape is an owned construct, and what is contained within it, within ideological fancies of "the natural," of "dwelling," of "design," has direct relation to foundations of social access: pleasure, rule, and property. Nancy's point is that a melancholy of loss for a landscape "from which our presence had been washed" perpetrates a hoax, because it

assumes a romance that does not exist, a romance of loss. Yet where Lady M and Nancy reject nostalgia as conditional upon a structure of lack, the deconstruction of *The Roaring Boys*, and their eventual awareness of it, initiates their feeling of loss and abandonment. They cannot recognize themselves.

The Roaring Boys, disappearing, “drift aimlessly believing their thoughts imperious.” They proffer a romantic and gothic description of landscape that shuts them out. They are exiled from historical description, give way to myth-constructs that strangely hunt them:

.... a background of shimmering woods fetters our wary gaze. The black brow of a rock parches the leaves; sister of a lynx, girt with quiver, steps cunningly and cheats the light. Recall the echoing crags — a shore’s lip keeps happiness for itself, the wood’s breast is pierced with sight. Why may we not clasp the revolving night? the dusky grove bleeds virtue. For we saw two maids clashing with men whom the black storm had scattered, we saw one bare knee break the ghastly dark, we saw a strong hand raise the bow to slash the weird decrepitude time had wrought. (“History”)

The Roaring Boys are in the foreground, the woods a “background” that “fetters” their gaze. They cannot see beyond the boundary of the woods; they are trapped in the pastoral by the circumstance of their thinking. “Everything” is withdrawing, emptying, draining in a procession that — with the emphasis on light — returns to visualization of “shades”: “shimmering woods,” “parched leaves,” “cheated light,” “storm scattered.” The Roaring Boys describe a humanized landscape: the rock has a “black brow”; a shore’s “lip” selfishly keeps happiness; the grove “bleeds” virtue. The landscape

postures human abstractions; it is an impenetrable metaphor of The Roaring Boys' own desires. Metamorphosis occurs linguistically at the level of question, and in a way echoing (insubstantial) answer: "*Why may we not clasp the revolving night? the dusky grove bleeds virtue.*" But the reason for the question determines the sequence of the paragraph, hinging on "For we saw two maids [. . .]." Cause and effect occur in opposite order: they describe two different but parallel events. Is it not until *after* they saw the two maids clashing that the woods were forbidden? And that the woods were also "pierced with sight?" The Roaring Boys can see, but they cannot act: figures clashing become "two maids" against men that "the storm had scattered." The limbs of the women penetrate the dark; Diana, protector of the woods and the hunt, a virgin goddess, raises her bow and slashes "time." She and Cupid have parallel roles: it is the object of their hunt that is different. Time, too, is an arrow, and the pastoral is a ruin.

The Roaring Boys do not penetrate the mystery nor participate in it other than as observers. The romance of nature is a fallacy, the grove of "lovers," a battlefield. The Virgilian pastoral has its own darkness. Diana, "girt with quiver," is a dizzying addition to a night fraught with danger. The Boys dream, tirelessly moving along paths that (as if in Dante's "dark wood") seemed graceful but become tortuous. The "ground" breeds sentiment, "capital" tags their "lurid route," but they have no other place to go. A mossed inscription announces change, suggests they abandon the artifice of this forest, and mocks their theatrical stagings:

Let go, shirk off the moderate little grace of vain

Cupid and grease the silver and lascivious age:

His livid qualms dope our cool arrival.

Rich poems sag like great nuns; art cheats time's martyrs. ("History")

The landscape is dissolving (literally become italicized). Its moral use, effete sentimentalism, economic guilt, and open slavery is revealed; the landscape is fully active:

From the lip of slavish shade the guilty land reclines, swollen in a thousand livid tints. All around us, everything's humming. In the low valley our future's writ on winking leaves; texture brushes drenched texture in a glamorous frisson of wit. The cushioning ground urges us to remeasure our impatience.....Sunk in moss, we dream of the lustrous pitch of a truculent tissue; it means we are traitors for we do not accept the idea of the present. ("History")

Distances recede and expand, proximal and approximate blend, colours shatter into the scenic view. "Everything" hums, much like in an earlier eclogue, "Everything patterned a different lag." Sensation overtakes The Roaring Boys in a rebirth that rejects "capital"; they dream of the urban and with hopeful effort they seek the titled desires of Lady M:

We dream that their desires have become transparent to us so that we may suavely recite — What does Lady M want? [. . .] Invaded by splendid lucidity, we dream the night is far-spent, inexorable, thick-lacquered, private; it means we have mistaken an invitation for permission. Still we feign this new erudition, inappropriate and demeaning. With a movement of tearing we wake and cry out "We are not our own! ("History")

The Roaring Boys are re-sequenced; they wake from dream to enter what "seems" to be another dream, a parallel world that has echoes of "Cathexis":

... the crooning leaves shut around a mercurial ankle; the stir and toss of the stroking breeze begs belief [...]. These two have transformed us into what we are: green laurels that lose no leaf. [...]. We see the cradling flowers as taunting apostrophes; through the thick glass the granular light slants among fronds, the shining mud sucks at thought, the leaves reek of lust [...]. We dream we are dilations of banality; it means we are the willing captives of their metaphor. ("History")

In comparison, boredom, not disappearance, is for Lady M the result of positive examination of limits:

The enchanted world has disappeared! The martyred world has disappeared! And I am not sorry for I tingle with the exquisite cadence of boredom — that flowers prodigious purple! If you slowly gilded flowers (or didn't), fact: this slow bloom holds the buttery promise of a meaning. ("Liberty")

Contrasting an "enchanted world" with a "martyred world" makes use of the symbolic presence of the characters who inhabit those worlds. The "enchanted world" offers a place that one enters willingly or "finds" a "martyred world" disappears, is destructed and remembered nostalgically. The text refers to "paradise," Lady M comments about the "smoothed over garden" where "evil as a concept's disappeared" ("Honour"). It places the worlds beyond the "horizon"— the "other" world is out of reach and out of sight. Boredom¹⁰⁰ expands, opens, and "flowers prodigious purple"; it has the qualities of "cadence" and "tingle," another synaesthetic response to rhythm and emotion, to a measure of feeling, to emotional outflow. Lady M quivers.¹⁰¹ Fact emerges, a resolve:

“this slow bloom holds the buttery promise of a meaning.” Boredom is the result of realizatio. Meanings which informed in the past hold little relevance to Lady M’s “being”—they are informed by “enchantment” and “martyredom” (as if realm). Boredom is promising; when informational structures cease to have relevance, cease to “mean,” they are rendered obsolete. Boredom is systemic; it can only engender its opposite, mental pursuits that engage the imagination and the intellect.

In each instance the “dream” world is torn apart. Diana with her bow, the Boys out of sleep — and the entirety in black and white light —both blinding. The Roaring Boys assume that the impenetrability of the grove is a challenge to enter it. Their participation in the dream world is an invitation to see differently, but they are incapable, needing to believe that they are the architects of place, that they made themselves. The impact of their own (de) composition occurs when they attempt to describe their formation — their language begins to fail, lose its dynamism on a pictured canvas:

Slowly we came to understand how the forest was fraught or thatched with use: capital had tagged our lurid route [...]. These two [Lady M and Nancy] have transformed us into what we are: green laurels that lose no leaf. What we call thought is cleft, an afternoon's olden frieze cracked and lacking only verisimilitude. We wish to seize the real as a tissue, leave the milieux of the curious and enter that radiantly tortured grove. Yet we are history's minions. [. . .]. We dream we are dilations of banality; it means we are the willing captives of their metaphor.” (“History”)

The Roaring Boys relate a process that is historical, that happened “slowly,” that rendered understanding. The adjectives “fraught” and “thatched” impart the “forest” as

site of industry. “Thatched” refers to the technique of roofing when wood is scarce.

Dwelling (the forest) is exchanged for human dwelling (the house). “Thought” is explained by a cleft sentence “What we call thought is cleft [...]”. The Roaring Boys’ narration winds down and becomes a frieze (and they are frozen in time), a suspended scene of a story, a visual depiction (reminiscent of Daphnis and Chloe in “Beauty”): “an afternoon’s olden frieze cracked and lacking only verisimilitude.” The Roaring Boys are fabrications of a manipulating economy. They are the subjects of fictive practice. They, too, wish to escape, but unlike the narrator they are slaves to their history, placeless in the narrator’s scheme. Robertson’s call for obscurity, obsolescence, phantom, is the call for transgression. Transgression occurs before its history, and if there be a history, it is contained within the limits of writing and the text. But it does not lose itself or become silent. It becomes prolifigate, sybarite, and leafy — the obscure cannot be silenced, the obsolescent is activated in a memory re-sequencing that deletes itself:

Perhaps it is like a flash of lightning in the night which, from the beginning to time, gives a dense and black intensity to the night it denies, which lights up the night from the inside, from top to bottom, and yet owes to the dark the stark clarity of its manifestation, its harrowing and poised singularity; the flash loses itself in this space it marks with its sovereignty and becomes silent now that it has given a name to obscurity. (Foucault, Language, Counter-Memory, Practice 35).

Chapter Four: Conclusion

Nature is not natural and that is natural enough — Gertrude Stein, Ida

In this paper, I have drawn links between Robertson's "phantom" and the renovation of "femininity" through a literary, visual saturation informed by residues from particular historical and cultural moments found in the classical period and centering upon the eighteenth-century. XEclogue presents the link between cultural acceptance of oppression and economic valuations that determine class and social standing, but it also refocuses this link, subjecting it to literary interrogation that reveals how genre can mask social patterns. Robertson disfigures the landscape and a botanic fetishism, her landscape eventually empties itself of constructed objects and categorizations. Her narrator and characters dismantle the image-making process. How "land" becomes "landscape" as part of a mirroring process between cultural-aesthetic practice and the actual properties of "nature," is an essential part of Robertson's analysis. XEclogue revisions the edifices that uphold a conceptualization of "nation" and the individuals within it; it interrogates the foundations of "land," "landscape," and "nature" within their frameworks of private and public relationships, their ornamented, nostalgic, and gendered linguistic contrivances.

The density of XEclogue is relational to what it achieves. Robertson's conceptual links between "nation," "state," "feminine," and "nature" as patterns that evolve from the classical period onward may not be an original analysis, but her methodology is. Using the pastoral genre, literary sources, lyrics, film "scenes," and proliferate allegorical foils as characters, combining aspects of literary, visual, and filmic style, and then "subjecting

them” to theoretical analysis and parody creates an endless maze of conceptual and historical links. Thus, to some degree, a paper that attempts to analyze XEclogue is completed only by virtue of what is left out.

Robertson engages in fantasy and dream. The “I” narrator uses lyric dialectic, eavesdrops on conversations and acts of correspondence, revives pastoral customs, tracks phantom movements, and dons scattered accoutrements to find herself in a “new world” where “pleasure,” elegant, precise, and evil, becomes “her own.” Between quested phantoms is the prosthetic, the body, sites of nostalgia. The abstract-eclogues are an example of “scape” through linguistic means; they offer a way to recreate “place,” with the difference of replacing an awareness of inherited “values” with the discovery of them. The abstractions are psycho-geographical; their discovery erases what informs the “I” and the other characters; landscape is a stage, a surface for choreographed acts of libido, memory, and reason.

By analyzing what the pastoral misrepresents —the economic foundations and political manipulations that force a false idea of the relationship between land, landscape and the individuals who occupy it, Robertson parodies literary sources through mistranslation, and by re-writing the genre she shows it to be inappropriate to the subject matter it proposes. “The pastoral” is a literary culture and literature is a transparent artifact of a cultural sphere; Robertson uses the pastoral as a landscape, rearranging the topographical and scenographic features of her text. The public and private “uses” of landscape as symbols of organizing “society” and “self” in a moralized economy based on propertied liberalism and an ability to abstract are subjected to scrutiny. Robertson fingers a complicit civic impulse as perpetuating power; in her text, “the pastoral” is a

mise en scene that combines narrative properties and drama to establish a filmic movement that “enacts” an account of history. This reconfigures cultural or individual memory patterns which otherwise have unacknowledged impact. Memory connects a non-verbal, visual scene and the linguistic visual scene; it supplies versions of an event, but the event itself remains exact “in time,” “before the eyes.” This notion of time and witness transfers memory to a historical fact or tradition.

The pervasiveness of a “remembered” pastoral (despite seeming to be outmoded as a natural result of modernist and then postmodernist urbanity) deters opposition that could reveal the ideologies and factions that engendered it. Memory aids a cultural desire for a “feminine” “object” in the landscape by making this “desire” seem natural. This desire has been reproduced by the narrative qualities of literature, where “art” represents “life.” The pastoral is a subterfuge that through a series of metaphorical enclosures, ratifies a cultured desire for a “safe” or “beautiful” or “aesthetic” world. “The land” is objectified as a pleasure-ground; it functions in an aesthetic or philosophical manner to a populous who need its illusionary and romanticized stability as a “parallel world” to the urban unsettlement and fragmentation that typifies their working and living environments. It is a “simple” and “innocent” dimension popularized through literature and painting. Psychologically, the rural workers are unfairly represented — they are advertisements, “clips.” It is a particularly pernicious convention: they do not exist in the minds of a reading public except as “real” fantasies; they are emotionless, stable projections.

XEclouge observes a helical motion between “looking” and “documenting” (looking/reading: documenting/writing) that is central to the importance of mnemonics in

the text. Part of Robertson's challenge to this "history" of landscape is how the "pastoral" has impacted on memory. If the "feminine" has been simulated as "real," then memory and imagination, which are based on simulation, are "corrupt." "Re-running" (as remembering) the sequences of such simulations is also a way of observing them and planning a future act. "I needed a genre," for example, is a way of creating a fiction or negating an already present precept of what the imagined is. Perception (visual) is replaced by emotion (sensory) in this necessary fiction. Attempting to understand what the "green fable" was, Lady M and Nancy are left with a shattered reality that becomes a heart. Perhaps expecting physical transformation, emotional swings catch them off guard, desires ("vexed styles of the flesh"), analyses ("masochism's of the intellect"), lust ("in parked cars we shame their ubiquitous pleasure") reform their goals, are expressed in precise description that breaks the enclosed nature of the pastoral, flowering into possibilities of "liberty":

A bird's breath is in my throat. It sucks the slim light and unties the couplets. Though we had assumed that after these letters, these disclosures, we could know what her green fable meant, now all the vexed styles of the flesh have unstitched our thought with the rolling quality of a botched metamorphosis. We are in the inelegant position of having shifted our cathexis. We shatter into all the boring beauties, all the smug voluptuaries, all the masochisms of the intellect. In parked cars we shame their ubiquitous pleasure. The forest, the abstract, the infinitesimal becomes a heart.

How then may we speak of futures? I would prefer to lean and whisper in the throaty privacy of roses but distance brings a discipline both anticipatory and fettering. Our anxieties have dissipated into all the varieties of edge a ruffling hand describes. A vocabulary is no longer adequate to the precisions of our desires. We're on the cusp of an umbelliferous and sweet coin. ("Utopia")

¹ See Robertson's poem, "The Device." "Poetries of Canada: Special Edition." The East Village Poetry Web. Eds. Jack Kimball and David Bromige, Vol. 4, 1998.

<http://www.theeastvillage.com/tc/robertson/pl.htm>

I believe that our complicity, like
 paternity's absurd dream, regulates
 the tacit expression of history's
 absorptive convulsions. It is a gate
 in the ancient style, a node where two
 spatial dispensations compete for
 the iterability of an image
 and its intent. We should pause at this gate
 and research our emotive conventions
 so that affect itself extroverts to
 articulate the commerce in margins.
 Otherwise the romance between primitive
 outskirts and the Imperium stands
 preserved by the formal spectres
 of linguistic materiality,
 fragmentation and doubt.

² Terms may seem to conflate. By "nature," I mean not the nature of natural history, but a constructed "nature" influenced by farming, or gardening. Part of this conflation is due to the representation that Robertson examines, "nature" tends to be romanticized; this is due to visual and literary representation. By "land," I mean the immediate space an individual lives on in a rural setting, or a visual expanse that involves the amount of labour. By "landscape," I mean the aestheticization of the viewpoint as a representation that does not include the labour "land" involves. In addition, the viewpoint is rendered representative of cultural hierarchy and ownership. "Nature" divides in literature into "human" nature and "the natural world."

³ Eighteenth century literary and visual arts return to this phenomenon in poems, plays, caricatures, and portraits.

⁴ As an aside for the pastoral use of this, the mythological figure Syrinx, when chased by Pan (pastoral god), becomes a "reed" that is the symbolic pastoral pipe for shepherd songs. Note the way the "feminine" is described in pastoral language as object or botanical. Note Freud's fascination with "nature" (in dreams) as representative of "male" and "female" genitalia.

⁵ "The pastoral" has had a long history, as will be explained. Thus, when speaking of power and dominance, I am referring to a historical practice based on "sexual" difference that has been stringently theoreticized (and accepted) the last forty years or so by feminist writers.

⁶ I am using this term very gingerly. Judith Butler's elaboration of the way gender, sex, performance and expression in a cultural, heterosexual norm has established an accepted construction, makes me hesitant to use "feminine," "feminize," "female," or any gender terminology unless it is biologically based. Thus, quotation marks around the terms bracket them in their own problematic. "Gender" is also a very unstable term and I use it, too, uneasily, as it is not a "thought" concept but an imposition that implies social norms and aberrations that evolve out of an already conditioned desire structure. Both Monique Wittig and Butler (and other sexual-politic analysts) politicize the term, how it is constructed and with what impact on whom. I am certain Robertson is fully aware of the problematic. However, and this is a good example of how such construction operates in linguistic practice, such terms as "feminine" or "feminize" are the ones most readily available. Thus, when I use them, I use them as unstable yet value laden terms that serve as temporary markers for the cultural translation of biological "sex" differences. Robertson's examination of "complicity" when she tracks her ancestress, furthers the instability of these terms. They operate normatively in the sense that, due to theoretical analysis, they are loaded with historical implications and are used to "remind" of those implications and to challenge (through reminder and instability) a form of historical perpetuation of complicity and oppression.

⁷ See Louise Turcotte's "Foreword" to Monique Wittig's book, The Straight Mind and Other Essays, xi.

⁸ I am using “description” when referring to literary practice — especially when a visual scene is “depicted” in words. Although the visual may be a representation, that representation is achieved through descriptive practices.

⁹ This differentiation is alluded to in *XEclogue* using the cultural, psychological and filmic expression offered by cultural theorists Judith Butler and Monique Wittig or theoreticians who examine “feminist” film developments (through Freudian psychology), such as Therese de Lauretis, Mary Ann Doanne or Laura Mulvey.

¹⁰ See Appendix, Fig. 1 and 2.

¹¹ Note the importance of calendar, the days numbered in the bottom half of the book, and the pictured and allegorical usually on the top.

¹² Described in literature and viewed visually. But “viewed visually” includes post-view literary description explaining what was “seen.”

¹³ The pictures that accompany the text are integral. However, I would like to focus on the text descriptions without referring too often to the photographs in *XEclogue*. Robertson’s connections with the visual arts has been commented upon in this thesis but this would make an interesting topic for another paper.

¹⁴ I am speaking of Western (European) “mainstream” culture in general. See Appendix, Fig. 2

¹⁵ Which is reminiscent of Rousseau’s *The Social Contract*. The family unit is the first social unit.

¹⁶ Part of “Commentary” is repeated in the email conversation between Robertson and Steve McCafferey in “PhillyTalks #17.”

¹⁷ Robertson plays with definitions throughout her text. Here “material” is the opposite of “immaterial,” both in terms of being actual (in the physical sense) and also not “looked over/passed over.” It could also be taken metaphorically for “fabric,” given the number of textile references throughout the eclogues.

¹⁸ In Freudian terms, the “feminine” subject is the cause of male castration anxiety. Projecting the female as objectified desire thus mirrors the masculine ego.

¹⁹ Brenda Carr suggested that “speaker” may be more appropriate as the eclogues are poems. However, I am more comfortable with “narrator” because the term suggests both the visual component and the story component in combination. “Speaker” seems to suggest a teller of the tale, but not necessarily the creator — in the sense that speaker seems to imply a more mediational role between two or more positions. “Narrator,” in *XEclogue* seems to both create the eclogues, display the eclogue, and tell “about” the eclogue, including a personal connection. In addition, the ancestress seems to be more of a “speaker” than a narrator — is there a distinction between “speaking” through fantasy and “narrating” a fable?

²⁰ “Screen” is used as a structural allegory that complies with Robertson’s uses of projection, phantom, fantasy, and dream. However, Robertson’s elaborate language in a visual sense, is filmic. Thus, a parallel movement occurs, between allegory and the actual textual movement.

²¹ “Feminine” as buried. *XEclogue* is a process of disinterment, bringing things up, a cultural forensic practice.

²² I am appropriating Christian Metz’s phrasing here, decontextualizing it to a large degree, as it fits exactly the situation that Robertson’s narrator is addressing.

²³ Which seems like a contradiction. However, the pastoral posits enclosure. It offers the stability of organized reproduction that is, nonetheless, seamlessly reduplicated as “normal.” The pastoral aims toward harmony, the infinite, exact, symmetrical patterns.

²⁴ Congleton’s book is a precise historical and literary study of the pastoral. The following information is taken from his book, *Theories of Pastoral Poetry in England: 1684-1798*. Most of the books I examined were either strictly literary, as Eve-Kegel Brinkgreve’s study, or limited in scope, such as Empson’s critical analysis. Congleton was not only broad in historical time, but also combined the literary, historical, and cultural as approaches to the pastoral.

²⁵ Obviously, these are extremely simplistic examples — these poets are also quite political, but the politics get subsumed by the seeming superficiality of the “natural” images.

²⁶ There are different spellings for Virgil’s text: “Eclogues,” “Pastorals,” “Bucolicks,” and “Bucolics.” Throughout this paper, I will be using “Bucolics,” with the understanding that on some level these varying titles describe the pastoral genre — their mode of description, that is, what they stand for, does diverge. But I do not intend to analyse this.

²⁷ “A Pastoral is an imitation of the action of a shepherd, or one considered under that character. The form of this imitation is dramatic, or narrative, or mixed of both, the fable simple, the manners not too polite nor too rustic: the thoughts are plain, yet admit a little quickness and passion, but that short and flowing; the

expression humble, yet as pure as the language will afford; neat, but not florid; easy, and yet lively. In short, the fable, manners, thoughts, and expressions are full of the greatest simplicity in nature" (Pope 4).

²⁸ Raymond Williams provides an excellent analysis of labour/aesthetics in literature in Britain in his book, *Country and City*, 1973.

²⁹ The eclogues run from "Monday" to "Saturday." It is difficult to determine who wrote what, as the eclogues are all appended by either Gay, Pope, or Montagu in response to whomever wrote them. What is interesting is the collaboration between the three writers, especially given the later enmity between Pope and Montagu. In addition, the eclogues are variously based on Virgil's eclogues, but, as mentioned, given an urban setting and "urban" problems.

³⁰

Dancinda:

Is't not enough, Inhuman and unkind!
I own the secret conflict of my Mind?
....And in your Absence, all the World I shun,
I hate Mankind, and curse the cheering Sun;
Still, as I fly, ten thousand Swains pursue;
Ten thousand Swains I sacrifice to you:
I shew you all my Heart, without Disguise:
But these are tender proofes that you despise—
I see too well what Wishes you pursue;
You would not only Conquer, but undo.
You, Cruel Victor, weary of your Flame,
Would seek a Cure in my Eternal Shame;
And not content my Honour to subdue,
Now strive to triumph o're my Virtue too.
(Montagu, "Wednesday: The Tete a Tete", 190)

Pope's ending:

Madam, if Love could touch that Gentle Breast
With halfe that ardour with which mine oppress'd,
You would not blast my more than vestal Fire
And call it Brutal, or impure Desire.
The Lusty Bull professes not, nor vows,
But bellows equal for a Herd of Cows,
The Stately Horse pursues no chosen Fair,
But neighs and prances for each common Mare.
This is impure desire, this Brutal Lust,
Man sighs for One, and to that One is just.
Why, Lovely Delia, do these sighs arise?
Why heaves your Breast? why sparkle thus your Eyes?
Examine your own Heart, and you will find
Some Wish still left unsatisfy'd behind.
Oh take me, press me to your panting Breast!
Let me be now, and I'm forever blest.
He spoke, and on her Bosom laid his Cheek,
Fair Delia sigh'd, but had no power to speak,
Fair Delia blush'd, while he put out the Light,
And all that follow'd was Eternal Night.
(Pope 192-3)

³¹ I am referring to British practices.

³² Contemporary artists include Lucy Hogg, Philippe Raphenel, Mina Totina, Erin O'Brien, Rhoda Rosenfeld. Lisa Robertson to Chris Turnbull, email correspondence, Nov. 29, 2000.

³³ I am mainly referring to sixteenth to eighteenth-century styles though this point is relevant by today's standards.

³⁴ See Hunt, *Gardens and the Picturesque* 49-73.

³⁵ Raymond Williams links nature and the social environment in his essay, "Social Environment and Theatrical Environment: The Case of English Naturalism" in *Problems in Materialism and Culture*. He states that "There are three relevant senses of 'naturalism,' and of the associated 'naturalist' and 'naturalistic.' the first, and most popular, indicates a method of 'accurate' or 'lifelike' reproduction. The second, and historically earliest, indicates a philosophical position allied to science, natural history and materialism. The third, and most significant in the history of drama, indicates a movement in which the method of accurate production and the specific philosophical position are intended to be organically fused" (125).

³⁶ One of the arbiters of "taste" in poetry and landscape during the eighteenth century, and thus of what "nature" came to represent.

³⁷ "Blushing berries" is taken from Pope's pastoral, in a passage that follows his nostalgic memory of the time he and Delia spent together, and his recognition that her love for him is "dead." He makes the "hills" resound with his neoclassical literary mourning:

Now bright Arcturus glads the teeming grain
Now golden fruits [oranges] on loaded branches shine,
And grateful clusters swell with floods of wine;
Now blushing berries paint the yellow grove;
Just Gods! Shall all things yield returns but love?"

(Pope 19).

³⁸ See Goldsmith's "The Deserted Village." Although the poem attacks the loss of "land" to "landscape" owned by a wealthy class, it also creates a nostalgia for an ideal of the "land" that in part contributed to its development as commodity:

A time there was, ere England's griefs began,
When every rood [piece of tilled land] of ground maintained its man;
From light labor spread her wholesome store,
Just gave what life required, but gave no more:
His best companions, innocence and health;
And his best riches, ignorance of wealth. (2846)

³⁹ This position of exile from the pastoral is a common trope, popularized by Genesis and Adam and Eve's fall from grace, and Eden's paradise.

⁴⁰ Virgil's *Bucolics*, composed in the years following Caesar's assassination in 44 BC (probably between 43 BC and 37 BC) are arranged "reciprocally, so that *Eclogue* I balances *Eclogue* 9 (poems of lost land), *Eclogue* 2 balances *Eclogue* 8 (poems of love), 3 balances 7 (contests of song), and 4 balances 6 (poetry itself)" (Berg, *Early Virgil* 108).

⁴¹ The generic name for a type of lily. There is also a lily named "nymph." "Lilies" are typically "feminine" flowers, Robertson plays with this in her naming of a "lily tribe."

⁴² For example, Virgil's homoerotic second *eclogue*, "Alexis," is rendered by Christopher Marlowe, among others, in a heterosexual version that begins, "Come be with me and be my love, and we will all the pleasures prove."

⁴³ Which indicates the beginning of a cultural and religious transformation. Previously, gods/goddesses were "all around" and part of the lives of the people. As Christianity began to appropriate the myths, the depictions also changed, visual propaganda that instructed and swayed the public toward Christian myths. Augustus' right to rule, for example, was underlined by a fairly steady propaganda routine, whereby his profile on coins became more and more "godlike."

⁴⁴ E. Kegel Brinkgreve points out that the book is originally called *Four Books of Pastorals about Daphnis and Chloe*, the author may have been a native of Lesbos, and that it is dated the late 2nd, or early 3rd century AD. See: "Theocritus' Successors: Constitution of a Genre," *The Echoing Woods*, 67.

⁴⁵ Designated as a "romance novel" because it was written in prose. Related "novels" were Chariton's *Chaereas and Callirhoe*, Achilles Tatius' *Leucippe and Clitophon*, and Heliodorus' *Theagenes and Chariclea or Ethiopica* (Kegel Brinkgreve, 71).

⁴⁶ See Appendix, Fig. 5

⁴⁷ *Pastoral* by Boucher, is a series of fragmented pictures tied together in an implicit narrative genre: tree, goat, male, female, posy. It is possible to "read" the discrepancy between function (shepherd and goatherd) and mode of clothing (upper class, gentry). Daphnis is upright and alert against a tree (a pastoral stance), while Chloe languishes across his lap. A goat lies nearby in comfortable companionship indicating their work and the domestication of animal. A posy of flowers sits near the goat, indicating Chloe's "pleasure." The picture indicates ownership, taming the "wild" or "natural" for human consumption.

⁴⁸ As per Dryden, who reduced translation to three points, "metaphrase," which meant turning an author "word by word, and line by line, from one language to another;" "paraphrase," or "translation with latitude" where the author's words are "not so strictly followed as his sense; and that too is admitted to be amplified, but not altered;" and "imitation," where the translator "assumes the liberty, not only to vary from the words and sense, but to forsake them both as he sees occasion; and taking only some general hints from the original, to run division on the groundwork, as he pleases." (Dryden, *Essays* 237).

⁴⁹ Rather than using the word recontextualized, I am using re-related in a double sense — as a play on related (to the other *eclogues*, or by way of references that seem to cross periods).

⁵⁰ In *Utopia* by Thomas More, time is critical to the ideal state, it functions as a way of marking economic changes, and the lives of individuals within a scemata of productivity. Every three months individuals and families change jobs, locations, identities (within the state structure). This is to better serve democracy; however, it also subjects the individuals to time slots, much like punching a time clock.

⁵¹ Bold and italics are mine for emphasis only. Genre (Structure) is bold; For the times that I go (Incident) is italicized. It could be argued that measure and incident (the times + that I go) in combination create event.

⁵² Robertson's quest evokes a statement of Judith Butler's with respect to examining the notion of femininity and how sexuality and gender are constructed: "I kept losing track of the subject. I proved

resistant to discipline. Inevitably, I began to consider that perhaps this resistance to fixing the subject was essential to the matter at hand." (Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, ix).

⁵³ For example, the Parliament Buildings in Ottawa, or Dunton Tower on the Carleton campus.

⁵⁴ Landscape — the physical, external expanse. Thus, as if from inside a house in the country: lawn, field, river, field, mountain. Or, from an apartment, street, city complex, beyond city complex.

⁵⁵ Note here two different modes: scenography — a staged scene (like the milkmaid) — and topography — an arranged physical landscape. See Appendix, Fig. 3

⁵⁶ The term "folly" refers to the penchant during the 1800's for the upper class to build temples, grottoes, and statues representative of Roman deities and architectural structures on their property in the interest of (conscious) metonymy. These figures functioned as representatives of England's "empire" — England as the inheritor of all Rome's graces and virtues. This was, of course, in translation, lending an Englishness to Roman thought, and has parallels in the literature from Dryden to Pope and onward.

⁵⁷ Identity and identical — the use of these two terms suggests singularity (known) and simulacrum — "I," and "phantom." In terms of feature, the mirror or any reflecting surface is also recollected. The phantom's absent body is reversed; it is made visible through reflection, but only when the individual mirrored looks "at" or "in." This refers to an outside/inside postulation, being/non-being, exiled/landed. Always something in a spatial sense.

⁵⁸ "I needed a genre for the times that I go phantom."

⁵⁹ Much like memory, intangible but representative that one "traces."

⁶⁰ As a visual instance of this, see Appendix, Fig. 4.

⁶¹ It is easier to depict Finlay's work than describe it in this instance. Please see Appendix.

⁶² Also see the essay by Mark Scroggins, "The Piety of Terror: Ian Hamilton Finlay, the Modernist Fragment, and the Neo-Classical Sublime," in the e-magazine *Flashpoint*.

<http://www.webdelsol.com/FLASHPOINT/index1.htm>

⁶³ Which references Daphnis and Chloe, later, "When I was hunting in the grove [...]"; it is also a pun on Robertson's use of the pop lyric, each song comprises a "track."

⁶⁴ See David Farrell Krell's book, *Of Memory, Reminiscence, and Writing: On the Verge*. It is an interesting analysis of memory construction and tracing "presencings" through recollection.

⁶⁵ See Butler, "The body posited as prior to the sign, is always *posited* or *signified* as *prior*. This signification produces as an *effect* of its own procedure the very body that it nevertheless claims to discover as that which *precedes* its own action. If the body signified as prior to signification is an effect of signification, then the mimetic or representational status of language, which claims that signs follow bodies as their necessary mirrors, is not mimetic at all. On the contrary, it is productive, constitutive, one might even argue *performative*, inasmuch as this signifying act limits and contours the body that it then claims to find prior to any and all signification." (*Bodies that Matter*, 30)

⁶⁶ Issues of materiality are also important to Butler: "What does it mean to have recourse to materiality, since it is clear from the start that matter has a history (indeed, more than one), and that the history of matter is in part determined by the negotiation of sexual differences. We may seek to return to matter as prior to discourse to ground our claims about sexual difference only to discover that matter is fully sedimented with discourses on sex and sexuality that prefigure and constrain the uses to which that term can be put. Moreover, we may seek recourse to matter in order to ground or to verify a set of injuries or violations only to find that *matter itself is founded through a set of violations*, ones which are unwittingly repeated in the contemporary invocation" (29). That much of Robertson's prologue could be seen to have a grounding in Butlerian philosophy is demonstrable by such passages as this.

⁶⁷ John Barrell's essay, "The public prospect and the private view: the politics of taste in eighteenth century Britain," notes that political authority in Britain during this period was accorded to the population who could "think" in general terms from the abstract — a "landed" class that did not include women. "Correct taste" in landscape and landscape art was a means of legitimizing political authority, especially in the discourse of "civic humanism." (81).

⁶⁸ Appropriates in the sense that Robertson takes part of Rousseau's *Social Contract* and rewords it here.

⁶⁹ An ancestress who speaks through dream suggests omnipotence, she is complicit with the rendering of "feminine" as a type of "landscape."

⁷⁰ A reference to Neville Chamberlain's act of appeasement to Hitler in Sept. 1938, when he, Hitler, Mussolini, and the then French President signed the Munich Treaty which turned over the former Czechoslovakia to Germany. The President of former Czechoslovakia was not invited to represent his

country; "peace in our time" was part of a speech Chamberlain gave at 10 Downing St. in summary of the meeting to appease fears of war; a year later there was war, Chamberlain resigned.

⁷¹ What I am trying to argue here is that word and image, when combined with enough movement, creates a cinematography, a memory theatre. In shortened form, it is an advertisement.

⁷² For example, see the pictures that accompany the eclogues.

⁷³ The metaphor of sewing, weaving, and clothing is throughout the text, often hidden in a reference such as "tissue," or "couched," that seems to refer to something else. I will not examine this in any other detail than to point it out here.

⁷⁴ Dorothea E. von Mucke's study on transparency and poetic illusion in the eighteenth century is extremely helpful to my study on memory in literature. Her explanation of how the fable operates, her examination of how transparency operates in aesthetics during the eighteenth century as a transfer from rhetorical practices is, in some aspects, a transfer from rhetoric as oral persuasion to literature/aesthetics (sign and signified) as a technique directed toward the reading public to instill a certain set of values. She analyzes "the fable not as an isolated literary genre but as a node in Enlightenment discourse at which the question of the relationship between subject and sign is articulated. The debate on the fable is a discursive locus at which the concerns of epistemology, semiotics, aesthetics, didactics, and pedagogy intersect, at which discontents with the cultural achievements of rationality are voiced and remedies are sought" (15).

⁷⁵ I am borrowing from von Mucke's description of the fable being "between historical anecdote and parable," and the analysis that follows it, as a useful prototype for describing the illusory aspect of the fable, and the manner in which this illusion is necessary for Robertson's feminist fiction and her visions of phantasie.

⁷⁶ Foucault analyzes Freud's dream/meaning and criticizes it with respect to Freud's bypassing of linguistic implications: "Meaning does not appear, for psychoanalysis, through recognition of a linguistic structure, but must be extracted, deduced, gleaned from a word taken by itself. And dream interpretation, naturally, becomes a method designed to discover the meaning of words in a language whose grammar one does not understand [. . .]. Psychoanalysis has never succeeded in making images speak." *Dream and Existence*, 35-38.

⁷⁷ Could translate, here, into image and word-image

⁷⁸ William Hogarth is an interesting example of this. His urban caricatures often reveal a state of "civil" disrepair in the form of operating tables, social situations, and a "chaotic" poverty. Yet, at the same time, he was fascinated with symmetry, "beauty" in abstract. For an interesting parallel with *The Roaring Boys*, see etching, *Boys Peeping at Nature* (1731). It was the subscription ticket for *A Harlot's Progress*.

⁷⁹ See Joseph Addison, *The Genius of the Place*: "We have observed, that there is generally in Nature something more Grand and August, than what we meet with in the Curiosities of Art. When, therefore, we see this imitated in any measure, it gives us a nobler and more exalted kind of Pleasure than what we receive from the nicer and more accurate Productions of Art. On this Account our *English* Gardens are not so entertaining to the Fancy as those in *France* and *Italy*, where we see a large Extent of Ground covered over with an agreeable mixture of Garden and Forest, which represent everywhere an artificial Rudeness, much more charming than Neatness and Elegancy which we meet with in those of our own Country" (142).

⁸⁰ As a slight distinction from triptych, in that this is an obvious narrative, even if it does denote the pictured and musical.

⁸¹ Note this in descriptive terms by Gertrude Jekyll, writing of daffodils planted in old Roman tracks — "Two of such tracks planted with *Narcissus princeps* and *N. Horsefieldi* are now waving rivers of bloom, in many lights and accidents of cloud and sunshine full of pictorial effect." (72.)

⁸² Gertrude Jekyll, landscape designer and gardener. Her descriptions often combine the emotive and the coloured to botanical design; bare roots might have "cathartic yellow" plants in among them. Mainly a colourist in technique, the colours and plants, in their familiarity, seemed to carry impact on the thinking and other senses.

⁸³ I am arguing that each "Or:" option is tripartite. In this instance, I am referring to "Watered patterns sway [. . .] skin of a leaf."

⁸⁴ See Freud, VI: E "The Dream Work: Representation by Symbols" in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 391: "Nor is there any doubt that all weapons and tools are used as symbols for the male organ: e.g. ploughs, hammers, rifles, revolvers, daggers, sabres, etc. [1919] — In the same way many landscapes in dreams, especially any containing bridges or wooded hills, may clearly be recognized as descriptions of the genitals."

⁸⁵ It seems important to note definitions, often a word will have a corresponding meaning to an architectural term or a term for painting technique. Thus, "frisk" according to the OED: v. (2) a playful skip or leap) and "frisket," n. (in painting or crafts), an adhesive substance or stencil used to cover areas of a surface on which paint is not wanted."

⁸⁶ Since Robertson is questioning the pastoral, she references the British landscape. Much of the "pastoral" that we study (as Canadians) is British, the British used it as from Rome via Virgil. In France, pastoral romance was a part of lyric troubadour tradition — perhaps one could argue that Ezra Pound's revision of the troubadouring tradition is a modernist revision of the French lyric pastoral romance.

⁸⁷ "Faction" n. a small dissentient group within a larger one; Faction: n: a literary and cinematic genre in which real events are used as a basis for a fictional narrative or dramatization. OED, 508.

⁸⁸ In contrast to "fruiting" in the prologue.

⁸⁹ Perhaps a pun on the opening of Shakespeare's urban pastoral, play "As You Like It," Act I, Scene I, where the sons of Sir Rowland de Boys, Oliver and Orlando, argue in the orchard — Orlando's contention that he has not received his fair portion of his father's estate is met with disagreement from his brother, Oliver. This argument impels the later exile of Orlando to the "forest." In an email (claiming the possibility of misleading information), Robertson stated that "The Roaring Boys" came out of a New Historicist conference that referenced "The Roaring Boys" as "protopunks" — figures who disrupt urban conventions. Or they could be a reference to Middleton's play, "The Roaring Girls."

⁹⁰ In order to redefine "nature," Robertson has also to "characterize" it.

⁹¹ This echoes Wittig: "What is this thought which refuses to reverse itself, which never puts into question what primarily constitutes it? This thought is the dominant thought. It is a thought which affirms an "already there" of the sexes, something which is supposed to have come before all thought, before all society. This thought is the thought of those who rule over women" (4).

⁹² Synaesthesia, simply, is when one sense compels the expression of another sense. For example, when it is observed that the music of Beethoven sounds "round," or "green."

⁹³ Shakespeare, "As You Like It," II: 7.

⁹⁴ Parallel with the tripartite section of "Honour" with respect to the description: "watered patterns sway [. . .]" etc.

⁹⁵ "Pliant," as in easily directed, but also "ply," which is the fold. It is also interrogative, a question directed toward someone. Also, the suffix for a heavily loaded term here, "suppliant."

⁹⁶ Note: "fringed," "flecked," "fretted," as only some of Robertson's optical adjectives.

⁹⁷ They mime, in the sense of parodic imitation, but also in the sense of a "short dramatic scene, either modelled on daily life or taking its subject from myth. It was recited or perhaps presented by a small company on an improvised stage"

⁹⁸ If it is even possible to fully transgress a horizon.

⁹⁹ The body is transformed. In classical myth the woman, pursued by a deity, tends to transform into a botanical symbol as a method of escape (such as Daphne who, chased by Apollo, is turned into a laurel tree, or Syrinx, chased by Pan, into a reed.) As a point of interest, Apollo is the deity of music (the lyre) and Pan the pagan pastoral god.

¹⁰⁰ Boredom is stalked from the Prologue onward. This is part of Robertson's "tracking."

¹⁰¹ Perhaps a sly reference to Diana, "girt with quiver."

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Appendix

Figure 1: *The Shepherdess*, by William-Adolphe Bouguereau.

Figure 2: *The Milkmaid*, by Jan Vermeer.

Figure 3: *Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Andrews*. Thomas Gainsborough.

Figure 4: *Louvet plaque, 1991*, Ian Hamilton Finlay with Andrew Whittle.

Figure 5: *Apollo and Daphne*, 1987, Ian Hamilton Finlay with Ron Costley.

Figure 6: *Pastorale*, François Boucher.