

Georgic Scale-Shifting:  
Cultivating Climate Knowledge in John Philips's *Cyder*

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John Philips's *Cyder*, published in 1708, portrays the husbandman's treatment of soil, their grafting of orchards and production of the eponymous brew. Philips promotes the care of the apple above all other agricultural commodities. In literary culture, the figure of the apple is loaded with symbolism; it has been seen as the quintessential emblem of Englishness, the fruit of knowledge, and the bane of mankind (Crawford 126). In Philips's georgic poem, the apple gains a new facet of meaning as a key mediator of the precarious climatic conditions that command and challenge agricultural prosperity in the eighteenth century. The apple, as a small-scale entity of nature, is not only the focus of the husbandman's livelihood but it becomes one organism out of many that index the climatic contingencies that shape their environment.

This attention to small-scale nature appears in *Cyder*'s generic antecedent, Virgil's *Georgics*, which explores the tensions between taxing, agrarian labor and idealized, pastoral life in the rural countryside. Like Philips's study of the apple, Book I of *Georgics* teaches readers to observe the sky, its stars, and the flora and fauna of their land. For Virgil, these bodies's behavior reveals "unfailing signs" of nature's impending "heat, and the rain, and the cold-bringing winds" (105). "Hence," Virgil writes, "though the sky be fitful, we can foretell the weather's changes, hence the harvest-tide and sowing-time" (99). Empirical observation is a necessary practice to cope with seasonal and sudden atmospheric changes. However, many of these changes remain unobservable to the human eye. With the help of small-scale bodies that mediate larger-scale system changes, the georgic shows their laboring subjects analyzing the reality of their environment's unknowable qualities.

John Dryden's 1697 translation of Virgil's *Georgics* paved the way for the creation of imitative eighteenth-century georgic poems with *Cyder* marking the genre's revival as England's first formal georgic (Chalker 17). While encouraging social amelioration through agricultural improvement, Philips's eclectic two book poem embodies both pastoral and georgic conventions and draws from the epic poetic style of his predecessors, namely, Virgil and Milton. Often bypassed in favor of the period's more canonized British literature, *Cyder's* legacy lies largely in the shadows of literary scholarship. Amanda Jo Goldstein, in *Sweet Science*, conveys how British Romantic poets and natural philosophers used verse to explore the new sciences and natural world, finding poetic analogy "intrinsic to any empirical knowledge of nature" (4). In this thesis, I argue that the georgic also retains a plasticity that challenges understandings of the natural world based on empirical observation alone. In the case of *Cyder*, Philips makes connections between a range of scales in the living world and communicate the complexity of nature's hidden and tangled operations. I find that empirical observation requires active experimentation with nature's small-scale entities to gain an understanding of the climatic contingency. Through an attentiveness to ambient, small-scale nature, the georgic augments man's awareness of the Earth's capricious invisible forces. Only then can the husbandmen of a rural environment achieve a degree of climatic knowledge and learn to live in, and with, climate complexity.

### **Small-Scale Mediation of Invisible Forces and Empiricism Reconsidered**

*Cyder* acts, in part, as a tribute to Philips's home of Herefordshire, lying on the border of Wales and the West Midlands of England. As such, Philips presents the Herefordian apple at the heart of his "Miltonian verse," which he states is his "gift" to the Roman goddess Pomona (I.3). Invoking this goddess of orchards, Philips sets out to relay "What Soil the Apple loves, what

Care is due / To Orchards, timeliest when to press the Fruits” (I.1-2). Immediately, Philips shows his admiration for Milton, a great English epicist, and the single apple through epic tradition. While epic poetry typically incorporates grand themes of war and violence, *Cyder* champions the more modest practice of orchard husbandry, a trial Philips finds worthy of praise (Low 12). Throughout the poem, Philips’s embellished verse emulates that of epic poetry, allowing him to both capture an ancient city’s sublime fall and heighten the humble figure of the apple as it weathers Herefordshire’s early eighteenth-century climate. Parodying Miltonic blank verse, the narrator implores “Let every Tree in every Garden own / The Red-streak as supream” (I.512-513) and reveres this famous “Herefordian Plant” (I.524) as a more poetic inspiration than the “Primæval interdicted Plant, that won / Fond Eve in hapless Hour to taste, and die” (I.516-517). Scottish pomologist Robert Hogg relays how young Red-Streak apple trees, as a grafted species, received branches from older seventeenth-century trees in their orchard (165). This idea similarly resonates with *Cyder*’s borrowing of old epic tradition to create a new, unconventional epic reverence for small-scale nature. While Eden’s tempting apple caused the fall of mankind, in this post-lapsarian world, Herefordshire’s apple emerges as a new literary symbol that similarly enraptures eighteenth-century readers familiar with Milton’s epic poem, *Paradise Lost*. Through his focalized interest in the apple as a small-scale organism, Philips presents its “Theme as yet unsung” (I.6).

The husbandman’s intent is to raise a healthy orchard, but the poet’s objective is to demonstrate the trials it faces on its path towards maturity. Philips presents Herefordshire’s husbandmen as incapable of controlling or reversing the sudden meteorological changes that encroach upon their orchards. The natural world remains invisible to the farmer, unknowable and untamable. However, Philips offers the apple as a gauge for understanding Herefordshire’s

occasionally unpredictable climate and hidden forces. Warning of the tribulations of laboring on an unstable landscape, the narrator explores the façade of an apple rotting from the inside out:

Howe'er thou maist forbid external Force,  
 Intestine Evils will prevail; damp Airs,  
 And rainy Winters, to the Centre pierce  
 Of firmest Fruits, and by unseen Decay  
 The proper Relish vitiate (I.437-441)

Philips stratifies his verse as he moves from a depiction of the tempestuous air's "external force" that cultivates "Intestine evils" to the "unseen Decay" that "to the Centre pierce[s]" the apple. The outside of the fruit gives a false sense of ripeness as the ominous "force" of the outer atmosphere lays waste to its inside. This obscure force appears as the intense climate of "damp Airs" and "rainy Winters." While the gelid winter season may not physically afflict the farmer, the significance of these changes manifests in other organisms. The apple's decomposition puts the reality of the farmer's climatic conditions into perspective as a quantitative change in temperature produces a qualitative decline in the apple's health.

Not unique to this stanza alone, a concern with hiddenness is prevalent throughout the poem. Just as the invisible forces invade the apple's core with "Intestine Evils" and engender "unseen Decay," the narrator frequently describes the natural world through its hidden qualities: he describe the apple's innards as a "secret Cave" (I.443), nature's laws as "secret Motions" (I.332) and "hidden Ways" (I. 350), the "Secret Nitre" that "lurks within" snow (I.187), Summer as a "dubious Season" (II.330), the soldiers who "distrust / The Smiling surface" of meadows (I.451-452), even alluding to the "cover'd Fraud" (II.502) committed by anti-monarchic rebels of the English Civil War a century before. Everywhere he looks, the narrator finds Herefordshire's

land enveloped in uncertainty, lurking with secrecy. While his topographical portrayal attempts to give a panoramic familiarity of the environment, Philips also brings to light the obscurity that he cannot explain. Nature distorts his empirical investment in reality. In Courtney Weiss Smith's *Empiricist Devotions*, Smith argues that Philips sees the natural world as "a complex network of relationships that georgic's realist techniques can help articulate and explicate" (204). Yet Philips speaks of nature through terms of clandestineness and deception. Likewise, in John Barrell's examination of later eighteenth-century descriptive poets's representations of landscape and place, Barrell notes how these poets conveyed a knowledge of an environment without a sense of "the 'content' of a landscape" (59). According to Barrell, these poets sacrificed an accurate representation of the environment's operations for its aesthetic appearance. They overlooked the landscape and "manipulated the objects in them, simply according to the rules and structures sanctioned by a pure and abstract vision, and without any reference to what the function of those objects might be, what their use might be to the people who lived among them." While later poets assumed a knowledge of a land after a temporary encounter with it, I find that the georgic reveals a more comprehensive, albeit obscure, depiction of rural countryside as it reckons with nature's complexity. In its depiction of the natural world as obscure, the georgic stresses how empirical observation fails to explicate the workings of nature; rather, it emphasizes the inadequate sensory tools we are equipped with to truly know nature. This becomes especially explicit when the narrator relays how the climate's incremental thermal change affects the life of the apple, but the swain can only judge its health based on its "outward Form" (I.445). As they taste "the bitter Morsel and rejects / Derelisht" (I.448-449) they find themselves deceived by the illusion of ripeness.

Philips gestures towards Milton's famous literary symbol as his duplicitous apple greatly

resonates with the notorious fruit that Eve bites from in *Paradise Lost*. Satan, in tempting Eve to pluck the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge, assures her that “it gives you life / To knowledge” (IX.686-687). This line’s enjambment is deceptive itself as it stops at “gives you life” and invites us to believe that eating the apple is harmless, even beneficial, when it actually brings death into the world. Milton’s next line deviously modifies Satan’s meaning, however, as it clarifies that the apple’s ingestion allows its consumer access to a higher knowledge. Satan’s “persuasive words,” sounding to Eve “impregn’d / With reason, to her seeming, and with truth” (IX.737-738), commence the apple’s symbolic embodiment of deceit. Mankind gives into their senses, trusting the image of the apple while unaware of its underlying deception.

While eating the apple promises eternal damnation and death for the inhabitants of Paradise, there is a glimmer of truth in the apple’s promise of knowledge which manifests in *Cyder* as well. For both poems’s sets of characters, this knowledge is one of good and evil, a greater intuition of when to trust or distrust someone or something. When the rotten apple beguiles the swain’s senses, they gain a new perspective of the invisible climatic forces they previously trusted to nourish healthy fruit. In *Paradise Lost*, Satan claims the apple allows him “to discern / Things in their causes” and “trace the ways / Of highest agents” (IX.681-683), echoing a Lucretian theory of the causality in the natural world. However, the apple in *Cyder* reveals the climate’s unknowability, making the swain acknowledge that they cannot empirically discern the world like they thought they could. While the causes of random planetary events remain unknown to the swain, the apple asserts the reality of the unknowable climate whose unseen temperature variances deceive the swain’s sense perception. For the swain, this experience demands their reconceptualization of the natural world. But, like Eve, they must first bite into the apple to gain this experience and understanding.

The case study of the apple engenders a skepticism in the swain and a sense of distrust towards an object's initial appearance. Kevis Goodman, in *Georgic Modernity and British Romanticism*, explores how the georgic, in its focus on small-scale entities, exhibits a “selective amplification of the real and simulated immediacy of things in this world” (42). For the purposes of my argument, I find that the georgic draws us closer to the reality of climatic instability by showing how climate affects even the smallest of things. Goodman creates an analogy between the georgic mode and the lens of the microscope — the eighteenth-century's “new emblem of science” (43) — and argues that both make a previously undisclosed perspective of nature available to its users. The georgic genre behaves as a technology itself, taking readers closer to the reality of nature's microcosmic world; its “magnifying powers” (Goodman 29) uncovers the abstractions created by the humans who live at a distance from invisible processes inaccessible to the naked eye. Both the unobservable decay of the apple and the invisible climatic forces reflect nature's secret operations and create a tension between appearance and reality in the swain's environment. Their small and large-scale operations, as obscure in their causality as they are in the original *Georgics*, challenge the swain's simple empiricism; the husbandman can no longer interpret their environment based on their senses as they prove inadequate gauges for climate complexity. However, *Cyder*, in its lingering concern with secrecy and deception, forces readers into an extensive rumination on the benefit of small-scale entities and their uncanny qualities representative of the larger unknowable natural world.

### **Acclimatizing to an Unknowable Land**

As he describes the invisible climatic forces that permeate the flesh of the rotting apple, Philips also ascribes a physical entity as responsible for its internal corruption. Introducing a new



mischievous force into the anecdote, the narrator describes how “then the Grub / Oft unobserv’d invades the vital Core” (I.441-442) and “Enlarges hourly” (I.44) inside the fruit. Acting alongside intense climatic forces, the intrusive grub eats away at the fruit. While Philips repeatedly portrays intense changes in the climate at different scales, here, he uses a physically visible entity to show the consequential decay of life and agriculture. The adverb “then” becomes an important temporal marker as the narrator turns towards the grub’s consumption and departs from their previous description of the apple’s deterioration which involves the climate’s “damp Air.” Invisible temperatures provoke the orchard’s initial downfall but physical entities emphasize it. Philips represents large-scale, climatic events in terms of small-scale nature, such as the worm. Within each scalar level of disaster, there are respectively smaller entities that appear as secondary representations of the object’s dissolution.

Philips does not portray fluctuating climate temperatures as lone instigators of agricultural degradation, but rather as accompanying collaborators to natural phenomena. The worm, soil’s elemental compounds, and temperature — things not plainly visible to the human eye — collectively affect the orchard’s life. These small-scale forms inhabiting the farmer’s environment shape and control the orchard they toil on. Despite their varying physical size or degree of visibility, Derek Woods, in an analysis of scale variance, finds the “assemblage” of these non-human species and inorganic matter “travers[ing] scale domain” as they form a group of “terraformers” capable of shaping the Earth System (139-140). This idea of shaping and forming the earth is at the heart of Virgil’s *Georgics*. While *Georgics* convey nature’s invisible processes and sudden atmospheric change through the cryptic influence of mythical gods, Monica R. Gale, in *Virgil on the Nature of Things*, realizes Virgil’s engagement in an intertextual dialectic with Lucretius’s *De Rerum Natura* to relay these events as well. *De Rerum Natura*

substitutes nature's indiscernible phenomena caused by mythical gods with the rationalist, Epicurean understanding of the universe's natural laws (M. Gale 7).<sup>1</sup> For Lucretius, the universe's sublime and quotidian phenomena are caused by "hidden bodies" (I.329) of matter, or "primal atoms of things / From which now all creation has been made" (I.501-502). These atoms retain "secret and hidden motions" (II.128) and while they remain invisible to the human eye, they have the ability to clash and combine as their movements build "gradually up to our senses" (II.138). In this sense, atoms create both nature's invisible forces and the organisms and sentient species that experience such forces.<sup>2</sup> Small, terraforming matter, like Lucretian atoms, amalgamate to create either an invisible mass of climatic force or the life that mediates it. Each retain a powerful agency of their own as fundamental components of the larger Earth System. In *Cyder*, I also consider these terraformers, or small-scale entities in their varying sizes, didactic actors who inform humans of meteorological change.

Adopting an Epicurean world-view where "animals act as 'mirrors of nature'" (M. Gale 90), *Cyder's* narrator also focuses on the sentient small-scale beings of Herefordshire's land which reveal the underlying network of seasonal order that the farmer lives in: an order that challenges their humanized, best-estimate structure of the seasons. While the apple orchards of Herefordshire endure climatic intensification, Philips looks to various entities of the ecosystem to mediate the changing seasons and their transformation of the environment. The narrator relays

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<sup>1</sup> According to Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura* aims "to set free the minds of men / Bound by the tight knots of religion" (I.932-933). Gale identifies *De Rerum Natura* as a polemic against a philosophy of the world in which creation and natural phenomena are caused by mythological gods. Lucretius vies to "exclude the supernatural from his account" and believes the gods "have had no part in any of the material and social advances which have taken place" (28).

<sup>2</sup> In Lucretius's framework, "reason is a crucial distinguishing feature of the human race" and this access to higher knowledge separates him from other animals and creations in nature (Gale 93).

how “The Woodcocks early Visit, and Abode / Of long Continuance on our temperate Climate, / Foretell a liberal Harvest” (II.177-179). The bird’s “Early Visit” and “long Continuance” become vague temporal markers that inform the farmer of the land’s hospitable conditions. The birds leave “th’ harsh Hyperborean Ice” for Herefordshire’s temperate climate “when our Suns / Cleave the chill’d Soil,” signaling his departure as he “backward wings his Way / To Scandinavian frozen Summers” (II.183-185). The narrator does not mention specific temporal durations but rather notes “when” the Sun melts the frosted land the woodcocks will flee. Accustomed to a particular climate, the presence or absence of the woodcock informs the farmer of appropriate harvesting times. This species relays the reality of the natural world and allows the farmer, if they are attentive, insight into its secret operations. The bird is more receptive to thermal change than the human and therefore acts as a gauge for their environment’s conditions. Similarly, the narrator tells us that the farmer “‘Twill profit, when the Stork, sworn-Foe of Snakes, / Returns, to shew Compassion to thy Plants” (I.375-376). The verb “will” expresses a future tense, showing how the animal kingdom allows the farmer to take preemptive action. Profit is tied to the farmer’s realization of the stork’s spring arrival. The bird makes the exact beginning of this season more transparent.

Without the species that vicariously relay the climate’s changing conditions, the farmer could not proactively tend to their fields. The farmer can gauge the seasons through monthly expectations, but small-scale nature crucially translates the Earth’s transitory states of seasonal change. While the georgic may not have been historically revered as an enchiridion of agricultural knowledge, it recognizes the non-human species and organisms that make nature’s invisible processes more visible: these terraformers that shape the Earth System but also help to develop the farmer’s awareness of its inner-workings. While the farmer can view sudden-onset

disasters in awe and subliminally experience the slow violence of phenomenological climate disasters, he can look to nature's smallest entities for a new perspective. The farmer's empirical observations are not enough to understand their environment's behavior, but they can find a more secure intelligence through the eyes of others. Indeed, as John Durham Peters relays in his analysis of scalar inversion, "*sublime* does not just mean glorious or wonderful. It means the suspension of a human scale" and gives man a "salutary humiliation" of their place in the Earth System (311). In the georgic mode, as the farmer focuses on the natural world's small-scale entities, they renounce the anthropocentric notion of their mind as the great index of reality and acclimatizes their perception to the sublime network of actors that shape the world they claimed to know. In modern criticism of the Anthropocene's narration in cultural texts, Woods emphasizes the need to decentralize the focus of man as the master of nature. For Woods, "the optics of the human perceptual mesocosm break down at other scales" and man "can no longer operate to establish the 'golden ratio' of relative size, a 'proper scale' that stabilizes microcosm/macrocosm relations" (137). The georgic invites us to rethink this dialectic by questioning human sense experience and presenting a network of human-nature entanglements in which mankind relies on beings smaller than themselves to convey an unseen reality. While *Cyder*'s primary focus as a georgic is its demonstration of the husbandman's agricultural feats, the poem also highlights the genre's ability to assimilate man's world-view to that of small-scale nature.

Perhaps the greatest advantage of the georgic as a mediating technology is the way it improves the husbandman's literacy of nature's signs. The narrator describes how "when the Sun in Leo rides, / And darts his sultriest Beams, portending Drought" (I.128-129), the agrarian laborer "Forgets not at the Foot of ev'ry Plant / To sink a circling Trench, and daily pour / A just

Supply of alimental Streams” (I.130-132). In an instance of litotes, the laborer “Forgets not,” or remembers, to tend to their plants after interpreting the threatening nature of the Sun’s rays. They dutifully tend to the most meager parts of the plant; the roots and “Exhausted Sap” (I.133) imbibe the water the laborer gives them before they can wilt under the severe heat. Ironically, the crops that usually supply man’s sustenance now finds man giving them an “alimental” contribution. A symbiotic relationship forms between the two. The laborer acts as an empiricist as they observe climatic signs, but anticipate their effects towards their crops and actively tend to them to prevent drought. Without this preventative care, when “his Fruit expect / Th’ autumnal Season,” they will, “in Summer’s Pride, / When other Orcharts smile, abortive fail” (I.134-136). The farmer’s intuition of drought surpasses the present moment, showing their skeptical awareness of the possible climatic instability that could ruin their future crops. As David Alff acknowledges in *The Wreckage of Intentions*, *Cyder* continuously presents a fine balance between ruin and future growth and concludes that it depicts agriculture as a “hope-filled, accident-prone enterprise” (129). The farmer’s labor is only vindicated when, or if, their products are sold unscathed on the market: “Until the fruit falls, the caprices of temperature, rainfall, and insects render ‘uncertain all his Toil.’” Yet the farmer’s potential experience of failure due to these overwhelming forces does not render their toil all for naught. The contingencies that arise on the countryside challenge agricultural enterprise, but expose the farmer to forces that they would otherwise encounter as completely foreign when they did inevitably appear. Like the swain who bites into the rotting apple, the farmer may also experience a bleak harvest, but they become familiarized with the reality of climatic uncertainty and gain a matured skepticism of its unobservable processes.

Random chance events work into the husbandman’s epistemology and make them more

aware of the adaptive measures they need to implement in order to contend with meteorological hazards. Those that experience unforeseen natural phenomena are more surefooted in their rural occupation than those who do not. Philips identifies “Experience” as a “sage” that will “teach thee all the Arts / Of Grafting, and In-Eyeing; when to lop / The flowing Branches” of the orchard’s trees (I.326-328). Experience evokes the concept of practice and the trial and error that occurs as one repeatedly toils with a craft. If learning to cultivate the earth under intense climatic conditions is the farmer’s experiment, the georgic is the experimental tool that makes sense of the large and small-scale phenomena they encounter and learn from. For the husbandman, “All things by Experience are display’d, / And Most improv’d” (I.359). Unlike nature’s mask of secrecy and uncertainty, experience displays “All things” and makes this enigmatic world more tangible. This line also carries a double meaning. Through experience, all things are “improv’d,” meaning the farmer may refine their methods of cultivation. Additionally, their mind also becomes improved by experience. In their inhabitation of Herefordshire’s rural land, the farmer becomes more capable of understanding nature when it can be understood and respecting it when they cannot control it.

### ***Cyder’s Climatic Contingencies and the Felix Culpa***

The experience of climatic instability engenders a didactic skepticism in the husbandmen of Herefordshire. However, Philips presents how the ignorance of such instability can lead to the ruin of not just a single apple orchard but a civilization. *Cyder’s* verse strives to uphold Herefordshire’s reputation as a “native Glebe” with a “bounteous Womb” (I.533-534) where “fructuous Moisture o’er-bound” the soil (I.562). Yet Philips’s historical present was no stranger to extreme heat and threats of agricultural vulnerability. Cautious of the “Sun’s intemp’rate

Force” (I.167), “Noxious to planted Fields, and often Men” (I.139), Philips recalls how the daughter of his friend died in the exceptionally warm year of 1705: “Such Heats prevail’d” (I.159) when she “left this toilsome World / In Beauty’s Prime, and sadden’d all the Year” (I.161-162). The first decade of England’s eighteenth-century saw significantly warmer years compared to those of the previous decade, which experienced extremely frigid temperatures amid Europe’s Little Ice-Age (Manley 403). Data presented by British climatologist Gordon Manley shows that Central England experienced as much as a four-degree rise in summer temperatures between the years 1694 and 1707 (394). Coincidentally, a year after Philips published *Cyder*, a georgic speaking idyllically of ripe English apples and their rich cider brew, England was experiencing a terrible crop yield, “with 1709 establishing itself as possibly the worst year for the production of bread cereals in over half a century” (Thirsk and Finberg 57-58). It seems no coincidence then that an increasingly warm climate was on Philips’s mind.

Philips is exceptionally conscious of the collapse of society as his poem embarks on an early digression into the fall of Ariconium, the land’s primitive civilization. Herefordshire lay upon the ruins of Ariconium, an ancient Romano-British city and agricultural hub during its height of activity in the fourth century (Ray 103). Like Virgil’s *Georgics* that depict the pivotal fall of the Roman Republic and the rise of its Empire, *Cyder* also invokes its double temporal vision to recall the dissolution of the Roman presence in England and the gradual emergence of the modern British nation. While Philips approaches the tale of Ariconium speculating that a sublime earthquake triggered the city’s ruin, we can also see Philips projecting his present climatic conditions into his story of the civilization’s mysterious fall.

In surveying the ancient ruins of Ariconium in September of 1719, antiquarian Roger Gale of the Royal Society found Philips’s West Midland’s county similarly overwhelmed by aridity

and “in want of water”: “There does indeed seem to be a great scarcity of water at the place, the only supply it has being a small brook running at the foot of the little hill the old banks stand upon, at half a quarter of a mile’s distance, and that has now been dry there six weeks” (121-122). Like Ariconium and its history of “environmental stress” (Ray 85), early eighteenth-century Herefordshire showed similar susceptibility to agricultural failure amid rising temperatures. Philips seems to imagine this aridity as a long-term condition of his climate as he depicts this ancient city falling to drought thousands of years before his present time. Indeed, ruin incurred by climatic forces is prevalent in Virgil’s *Georgics*, *Cyder*’s poetic representation of social devastation, and in the history of England’s early eighteenth-century countryside. These poetic and antiquarian accounts show that climatic contingency makes a continual reprise in earth’s geological history with every land and age being subject to nature’s unpredictable behavior.

Like the grub that emphasizes the invisible decay of the apple, Philips uses the physical event of an earthquake to convey the increasingly disastrous, warm, atmosphere that consumes Ariconium. In his analysis of the English georgic’s formal qualities, John Chalker sees this “mythical earthquake” (38) as an epic event manufactured by Philips to integrate a sense of Miltonic gravity into his imitative georgic. While Philips emulates Milton’s epic syntax and dramatic quality, his rhetoric shows there are more consequential forces at work than just one disaster. As the narrator commences the tale of the earthquake he describes

Th’ infernal Winds, ‘till now  
 Closely imprison’d, by Titanian Warmth,  
 Dilating, and with unctuous Vapours fed,  
 Disdained their narrow Cells (I.197-200)



Philips personifies the “infernal Winds” as captives breaking from “narrow Cells” as they disdain their fetters and aggressively expand to consume the surrounding temperate air. Foreshadowing the dire disaster emerging from underneath the unsuspecting city, Philips portrays Ariconium’s social breakdown with a language of heat; he describes its atmosphere in terms of “infernal,” “Titanian Warmth,” and “unctuous Vapours.” At once, the earthquake uproots “old Vaga’s Stream, / Forc’d by the sudden Shock,” and displaces “her humid Train aslope, / Crankling her Banks” (I.203-206). Similar to Ariconium’s dried up brook described in Roger Gale’s antiquary notes, the ancient city’s river contains humid waters, implying its increasingly warm and inhospitable character. Philips further emphasizes the land’s intense heat by extensively comparing the sound of its “Tartarean Dregs, / Sulphur, and nitrous Spume, enkindling fierce” (I.191-192) to that of “the loud disploded Roar / Of brazen Enginry, that ceaseless storm / The Bastion of a well-built City” (I.194-196). These infernal materials are reactive and their combined enthalpy is greater than any man-made impersonation. Given the enjambment of the latter lines, one could consider the powerful culmination of the hellish dregs, sulfur, and spume as terraformers that create a “ceaseless storm” or tempest that overwhelms the city. However, in its alternative context as an adjective these elements also become the rebels that mercilessly “storm” the “Bastion” and overtake Ariconium. In either case, the small energetic particles of matter follow Lucretius’s theory of disaster as they amalgamate to become larger, more powerful forces of nature. Suddenly, the ancient city once “uncontroll’d and free” (I.179) becomes a victim of the hostile atmosphere; a site once known for agricultural production for society’s consumption becomes a society consumed by a climatic disaster. Priming the land for Ariconium’s earthquake, the heat inimically festers before rebelling against the Ariconians and marring their illusion of control over the natural world.

While the heat brews undetected by Ariconium's inhabitants, it seems the city had already fallen to the slow violence of drought before it descended "down to the Realms / Of endless Night" (I.230-231). The narrator describes how the fields "Labour'd with Thirst, Aquarius had not shed / His wonted Show'rs, and Sirius parch'd with Heat / Solstitial the green Herb" (I.188-190). Here, we see the climate exhibiting a lack of rain and "parch'd" vegetation, conditions antagonistic to plant growth. Ironically, the fields are not labored by husbandmen but by "Thirst" that ravages its acres, showing the Ariconians's lack of attention towards their crops. Like the rotting apple, the plants index the drought, but Phillips does not relay the citizens's attentiveness towards these small-scale entities. Instead, the narrator, from a retrospective point-of-view, depicts the Sun burdening Ariconium's environment before the earthquake hits. Phillips's mention of the constellations Sirius and Aquarius — overseers of this "Solstitial" drought — alludes to a similar moment in Virgil's *Georgics* where the Sun, foretelling signs of "dark uprisings" and "hidden wars" (113), becomes one element amongst others that lays waste to mortals in one fell swoop. Phillips draws our attention to the proleptic celestial signs of drought that seemed to foretell the city's demise and shows the importance of actively recognizing and interpreting the natural world's signs of imminent change.

Phillips's digression of Ariconium's destruction appears out of place in a poem so intently focused on the celebratory, "patriotic panegyric" of English life and nationhood (Durling 36). However, Rachel Crawford's *Poetry, Enclosure, and the Vernacular Landscape* considers the georgic's role in cultivating English nationhood, articulating that *Cyder* "recasts Britain as the Eden whose fruit brings life rather than death" (102). This seems to be the case when an apple tree grows out of Ariconium's ruins centuries later:

now Ceres, in her Prime,

Smiles fertile, and, with ruddiest Freight bedeckt,  
 The Apple-Tree, by our Fore-fathers Blood  
 Improv'd, that now recalls the devious Muse,  
 Urging her destin'd Labours to persue. (I. 243-247)

The once drought-ravaged earth is fertile and abundant with fruit, ready for the nation's husbandmen to harvest. At first, one might consider the blood of "our Fore-fathers" the blood of the ancient Ariconians. However, the "Apple-Tree" that grows out of this soil also recalls the Book of Genesis's tale of the creation and fall of mankind's first parents, Adam and Eve. In this stanza's demonstration of enjambment, the paired arrangement between the apple tree and these "Fore-fathers" begins to insinuate the eternal sin committed by Adam and Eve when they ate the forbidden fruit. However, the next line describes their blood as "Improv'd," conveying the amelioration of their sin. The land's future then, like mankind's future, does not appear completely corrupt. Upholding the poem's image of nationhood, Crawford does not see Ariconium's ruin as an "apocalyptic event" (125) that doomed the future of Britons but rather considers the land's soil a symbolic bond between citizens of the past and present: "the blood of ancient Britons has manured Herefordshire's apple trees." In this *felix culpa* that Crawford identifies, good rises out of the bad, abundance grows out of dearth.

The soil's potential to harbor life once more is only possible if the farmer continues to conscientiously cultivate it with a contingent climate in mind. Fortune has given their nation a second chance and it becomes their duty to upkeep it. For Philips, the soil that decomposes the Ariconian's "huge unwieldy Bones, lasting Remains / Of that Gigantic Race" (I. 239-240) also resurrects their legacy through the orchards that arise from the traumatized earth. This moment is a pastiche of the end of Book I in *Georgics* in which Virgil envisions a future farmer discovering

the rusting weapons of Roman soldiers and their “giant bones” buried under Golden Age soil (115). In both cases, the farmer, the figure responsible for the sustenance and prosperity of future generations, uncovers the history of a buried civilization. Knowledge of past strife is embedded in the ground and the farmer, like an antiquarian, sees the products of a failed agriculture. The bones of the Ariconians are the civilization’s only survivors, acting as powerful reminders for the farmer of nature’s fluctuating behavior. Crucially, the narrator relays how “Ceres, in her Prime,” bestows the earth with fertility before the farmer cultivates it. For this reason, the farmer must continuously cultivate the land so it can retain its productivity. The task of agricultural and social improvement rests in their hands. Their enlightened knowledge of climatic conditions, or lack thereof, could make or save or raze a society respectively. Perhaps then, the good that arises from the *felix culpa* of Ariconium’s fall is the farmer’s realization of mutability; it is not a teleological event but manifests as a continuous gift of climatic awareness.

The climate plays an unpredictable role in the life of the farmer, effecting ruin while also nurturing the life that the husbandman attempts to cultivate; it expresses a contingent quality that does not follow their agenda of harvesting and farming. While exploring the georgic’s ecocritical value, David Fairer, in “World of Eco-Georgic,” conveys eighteenth-century scholarship’s consensus that the genre typically promotes a “fascination with mastering nature and exploiting the earth’s resources for human ends mak[ing] it appear at best an innocent trailer for the terrifying global depredations that concern us today” (203).<sup>3</sup> Antagonistic towards environmental values of land conservation, the georgic often portrays this land capitalized into spaces of

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<sup>3</sup> Fairer contemplates the eighteenth-century georgic’s proto-environmental implications amid criticism that it plays a role in modern anthropogenic climate and land-use change. For Fairer, the georgic’s complex “grappling with the possible death of Nature and the breakdown of its infinitely various life-sustaining systems” (214) is crucial to a realist representation of the modern environmental exploitation caused by man.

agricultural profit. However, Fairer advocates for the georgic's realist perspective of the natural world, one that indulges in the complex relationships between humans and nature. The climate in particular appears as one part of the Earth System that does not bend to the will of humanity. Rather, it is a force that actively resists control. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines climate through its long-term, "prevalent pattern of weather in a region throughout year" ("climate, n.2.a"). The climate does not behave as a static average of weather, but exhibits a region's totality of weather changes, seasons, and stochastic variability. *Cyder* reveals its contingent quality throughout the poem in the form of weather and presents a side of the georgic that shows the natural world having an upper-hand over humans. The climate derails the farmer's expectations of normalcy and diminishes their delusion of mastery over nature.

As the poem alters the farmer's expectations of weather patterns, it also reconstructs expectations of seasonal change by challenging the definition of seasonal temporality. Like the drought that manifests in both the symbolic and real representations of Ariconium and Herefordshire respectively, climatic instability manifests again when the narrator recalls how an old friend, no longer "diligent to learn / The various Seasons," (II.121-122) neglected their orchard. While contingent climate events complicate the husbandman's relationship to their crops, the climate's seasonal components exhibit a concept of cyclical "change-within-constancy" (Somervell 46), which typically allows them to build a sense of annual normalcy for prime harvesting conditions. Everyday weather is unpredictable, but by scaling this quotidian temporality up to seasonal temporality, the farmer can more confidently assume the next week's weather conditions. However, even amid this oscillation of seasonal change, contingent spikes in meteorological conditions disrupt the farmer's assumption of normalcy. Philips describes how "the damp Lybian Wind, with Tempests arm'd / Outrageous, bluster'd horrible amidst / His

Cyder-Grove” (II.124-126), making the apple tree’s “genial Boughs / Stript immature” (II.129-130). Amid the blustering tempest, the new season commences without a smooth transition as the unforeseen blight signifies its harsh arrival. The “damp Lybian Wind,” typically warm and dry, becomes moist and almost ruins the young apples. Luckily, the “Sun’s mellowing Beams / Rival’d with artful Heats” (II.131-132) nurture them into maturity. Whether by the farmer’s ignorance of seasonal temporality or their assumption of its weather’s seamless transition, the orchard almost fails. However, by chance and the apples’s will, the orchard remains viable. Unlike the intense drought that doomed Ariconium’s food supply, the orchard’s fallen fruits survive to provide the farmer with cider, proving that some climatic contingencies can fortuitously inspire abundance.

These *felix culpa* paradigms produce unknowable outcomes that lie out of the farmer’s hands. As the apples’s respective fortunate growth and premature fall show, good or bad products can arise from climatic contingency: “A thousand Accidents the Farmer’s Hopes / Subvert or checque; uncertain all his Toil” (II.46-47). Just as the plowman “haply” (I.241) discovers Ariconium’s remains, the ripening of the apples occurs by chance. These organisms, like the climate, operate in unpredictable terms. The farmer that plows, grafts and harvests their orchard in hopes of profiting from its fruit, is only an aid to the apple tree’s growth, a counterpart to its self-determining path towards maturity. While the husbandmen oversee their orchard’s progress, the actual growth of their fruit is unobservable to the human eye: its internal operations and metabolic systems occur on their own accord. Similar to the anecdote of the swain’s apple undergoing “unseen Decay,” these apples’s internal systems of generation are unknowable to the human. The complex systems of vegetation and climate are inaccessible to the farmer through simple empirical observation and require their experience of their behavior. While their orchards

create unknowable outcomes, the husbandman has the opportunity to cultivate better agricultural skills through extensive study and experience of the Earth's small-scale nature that demonstrates and mediates climatic contingency.

### ***Cyder's* "other Realms": Imperial Solutions to Native Climatic Intensity**

From a distance, the georgic poet relays the arduous, often frustrating work husbandmen endure daily and especially amid climatic intensification. In *Cyder*, Philips assumes the poetic capacity "to expand, to dilate on the ramifications of a given theme" (Chalker 64) after synthesizing the ebb and flow of Herefordshire's climatic catastrophes. The benefit of the poet's privileged didactic position is their chance to encourage rural society's active awareness of, and adaptation to, their capricious environment: to learn, as I have argued, from its unknowable qualities and create new understandings of Earth's contingencies. As he presents laborers reckoning with Herefordshire's climatic contingencies, Philips shows English agriculture's potential to not only survive but thrive into the future. At the end of the poem, Philips envisions the country's abundant growth by turning the poem's narrative towards the British Empire. Empire, which evokes images of expansion and mobility, becomes the basis of Britain's ability to overcome the limits and hazards of its native climate.

At the end of *Cyder*, I recall Derek Woods's assemblage theory as the idea of empire appears to embody the idea of a terraformer: an abstract scale and theoretical entity that, as it increases, claims more land and shapes the global market. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "empire" as "an extensive territory under the control of a supreme ruler," that "consist[s] of an aggregate of many separate states or territories" ("empire, n.2.a"). Similar to the "anonymous sum of autonomous terraforming assemblages" (Woods 140), empire scales up to

emulate a mobile force of nature that spreads across the globe. While it is a strictly human invention, it imitates the invisible force of the climate and stages itself as a “supreme ruler” akin to the figure of the gods which Virgil’s *Georgics* support. To avoid the devastating effects of ungovernable climatic contingency, empire appears at the end of *Cyder* as one last solution to reckon with climate complexity. Consequently, Philips presents Britain as a blooming imperial collective that forms a network rivaling that of the climate system.

The poem engages in a scale shift as the narrator enlarges their vision of Herefordshire’s local agricultural production to imagine Britain’s distant colonies. The narrator dilates their perspective to reduce Herefordshire into a small-scale entity that operates under the incommensurable, ideological scale of empire. As the British navy circumnavigates the globe and colonizes new lands, the narrator declares that “Silurian Cyder borne / Shall please all tastes, and triumph o’er the Vine” (II. 668-669) since its legacy is tied to the imperial fleet. The immobile Herefordian orchards make up one small part of the larger Empire, but as Crawford notes, “the imperial success of the Union confirms Herefordshire’s emblematic status in the spread of cider around the world” (129). Crawford describes Britain’s newfound unity amongst its nations after England and Scotland entered into the recent Act of Union in 1707 and its burgeoning Empire began to advance across the globe (94). I find these monumental events promoting Britain’s position as one of the greatest socio-political powers of the modern era, contributing to the pompous, patriotic tone at the end of the poem. The narrator rhetorically asks,

And now thus leagu’d by an eternal Bond,  
 What shall retard the Britons’ bold Designs,  
 Or who sustain their Force; in Union knit,  
 Sufficient to withstand the Pow’rs combin’d



## Of all this Globe? (II.645-649)

The narrator's inquiry as to what entity could possibly break the country's unified bond and ruin their "bold Designs" seems like a fallacy given the climatic mayhem that occurs in Herefordshire's orchards earlier in the poem. As the georgic shows, climate is a powerful force in itself. The climate's existence is omnipresent meaning its contingent behavior can wreak havoc on all of Britain's distant realms; it even acts as the force that "sustains their Force," nurturing Britain's crops and dictating its ability to feed its citizens. Philips exemplifies the climate's contingent quality through Ariconium's destruction, describing its invisible forces as "Heav'nly Pow'rs averse" (I.186). The climate's god-like agency and destructive forces rival the new intimidating image of Britain's "Pow'rs combin'd." However, Ariconium, a past ruin of "Britons' bold Designs," already experienced the wrath of climatic instability and is proof that nature does not obey the aspirations or agenda of the human realm. Alff approaches Philips's reverence for Britain's imperial endeavors with skepticism, finding the Empire's history of native ruin an inescapable reality for its future: "Philip's situation of fruit orcharding atop Ariconium's ruin ensures that the connection between country toil and oceanic fleet is never too seamless, nor the arc from past to future without a discomfiting 'affective reside'" (131). As Alff recognizes, there is an uncanny transition from the poem's earlier accounts of climatic ruin to the grand ambition of empire. While the fall of Ariconium led to the emergence of the British nation, this uncomfortable lack of recognition for climatic contingency in the face of imperial enterprise is reminiscent of a society's failure to learn from experience.

As Philips expands the poem's vision away from Herefordshire's ruins, he resists confronting the possibility of universal planetary hazards, producing a suspicion that imperial vision is incompatible with reality. The "uncontrol'd" (II.652) British fleet that "wave[s] her

double Cross, t'extreamest Climes" and brings England "Indus' Wealth" and "Spoils" from Araby" (II.654-656), sounds eerily similar to Philips's description of doomed Ariconium, a fortress that was also "uncontroul'd, and free" (I.179). Even though Ariconium failed to see its vegetation decay to drought amid increasingly warm temperatures, the narrator still relayed the presence of small-scale nature that could have helped index these invisible forces. However, in his account of Britain's imperial commercial network, small-scale entities are largely absent. Instead, commodities, indexes of exchange-value, are at the forefront of the narrative. As the narrator decentralizes the focus of Herefordshire's local production of cider to the Empire's interest in a larger global market, a literal and metaphorical dissonance arises between England's native farmers and the Empire's overseas nations.

While Herefordshire's local economy becomes a part of the Union's imperial vision, its history of ruin remains a peripheral thought as the Empire sails for new lands. In this way, climate appears controllable and its contingency escapable. Returning to England's reality, Philips describes how "mean while the Swains / Shall unmolested reap, what Plenty strows / From well stor'd Horn, rich Grain, and timely Fruits" (II. 657-659). A disconnect occurs between imperial vision and domestic agrarian reality. Philips has shown through unpredictable, seasonal weather that "rich Grain, and timely Fruits" are not guarantees in the natural world. His previous depictions of harvest and agricultural enterprise grapple with climatic hazards, but all toil disappears in this edenic image. Here, the earth appears as a regenerative, nourishing source that freely "strows" its gifts without interference from malicious increases in temperature or sudden climate-induced disaster. The georgic takes on an idyllic, pastoral resonance that challenges the genre's conception of rural hardship. In analyzing *Cyder's* relationship with England's native local production and its global commercial network, Robert Irvine argues that "the unmolested

swain remains outside the circuits of world commerce because his work represents a material self-sufficiency that is imagined as the source of Britain's global political authority" (979). The swain's "self-sufficiency" expresses their reliance on expectations of sustainable growth. However, when drought raids crops, blustering winds strip apples off the trees and these apples rot, climatic contingency undermines the notion of self-sufficiency. Temperature intensification and an upsurge in weather events subvert the Empire's authority as climatic ruin afflicts its domestic agricultural economy.

As *Cyder* moves from Herefordshire to the outskirts of Britain's Empire, it is worth noting the role agricultural labor played in pushing the nation's imperial vision forward. As Anthony Low communicates in *The Georgic Revolution*, agricultural professions were recast during the eighteenth-century as vital components of national futurity: "labor was transformed from its shameful place at the bottom of the social ladder to a new pioneering role as the shaper of history and the benefactor of humanity" (142). In the real world, farmers are shapers of history and in *Cyder* they crucially mediate the experience of meteorological change through their informed knowledge of small-scale nature. However, in turning away from England's husbandmen to the façade of imperial power, *Cyder*'s last lines adopt a supercilious tone. It does not stress the humility of the anthropocentric world-view like earlier parts of the poem did through man's reverence for small-scale nature. As native British citizens come to rely on the security of empire for an enriched agriculture, Philips writes how "glad they talk / Of balefull Ills, caus'd by Bellona's Wrath / In other Realms" (II. 663-665). Native citizens share circulating stories of "baleful Ills" occurring in "other Realms," making it seem as though their land is spared from "Bellona's Wrath." Echoing Virgil's use of deities to convey hostile atmospheric changes, one can also read this godly wrath as an attack from the climate. However, as *Cyder* has

shown before, climate's inescapable random events have the power to devastate not only the land of Herefordshire but the rest of the world as well. The Empire's increased isolation from the reality of invisible climatic forces creates a greater liability for the nation as it expands to inevitably and incompetently contend with more planetary hazards.

The Empire abstracts its relations with its native land and distances itself from the husbandmen who come to understand its climate best. This disconnect between the Empire and England corresponds to the problem of man's collective unknowability of small-scale nature. If the Empire escapes its homeland and avoids the experience of its environment, it will not learn to respect the climate that controls it and the nature that mediates the climate's invisible forces. Imperial expansion, while seeming to be a solution to the ills wreaked by a contingent climate, only prolongs the chase of a wishful prelapsarian idealism. As the Empire chooses to operate with a false sense of climate control and distance itself from those who have experienced and gained familiarity with their climate's temperament, the Empire promotes an anthropocentric vision of the world. It rejects the Lucretian philosophy of nature that ran throughout the poem until this moment:

If you know these things well, you'll see at once  
 That nature is free, no slave to masters proud;  
 That nature by herself all things performs  
 By her own will without the aid of gods.

(Lucretius II.1090-1093)

The georgic shows the agricultural laborer understanding nature's secret operations through a textual relationship with their environment. In *Cyder*, husbandmen repeatedly experience their environment's volatility and climatic intensification, in turn becoming active,

experimental empiricists working to uncover the reality of the natural world through vital, small-scale nature. As it “focuses on particulars while forging links and glimpsing patterns,” the georgic “makes sense of one thing in terms of other things and of parts in terms of wholes” (Smith 186). Georgic verse displays an interconnectedness between the living world’s inhabitants and the climate’s complex system of invisible forces. From the rotting apple and birds of Herefordshire to the ancient plants of Ariconium, the georgic proves that small-scale entities are nature’s gifts to humans for their cultivation of climatic knowledge. Man is not the sole expert of their environment, but rather an equal amongst the other organisms and species in its system. Of course, this image differs from later eighteenth-century environmental relations in which man commandeers his environment. *Cyder* shows a more respectful relationship that existed between man and land before the ideologies of empire and industrial capitalism accelerated the excessive exploitation of the Earth. As husbandmen cultivate orchards under fitful skies instead of working within four-walled factory buildings, *Cyder* shows humans weathering the forces of nature and learning to live with the complex natural world. England’s early eighteenth-century shows man’s great appreciation for the climate, the sublime authority of the human domain.

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