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Representing Rural Society: Labor, Leisure, and the Landscape in an Eighteenth-Century Conversation Piece

Steve Hindle

If the . . . description [of eighteenth-century social relations as they may be seen from above] is the only one that we are offered, then it is only too easy to pass from this to some view of a 'one-class society'; the great house is at the apex, and all lines of communication run to its dining-room, estate office or kennels. This is, indeed, an impression easily gained by the student who works among estate papers, quarter sessions records, or the . . . correspondence [of the social and political elite].

—Edward Thompson¹

Rustic landscape painting is ideological in that it presents an illusory account of the real landscape while alluding to the actual conditions existing in it. Hence although it neither reflects nor directly mirrors reality, the rustic landscape does not altogether dispense with it.

—Ann Bermingham.²

Laborers are commonly the objects but not the subjects of the landscape gaze. The single-point perspective, compositional framing, and manipulation of recession in an articulated space, conventional features of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century landscape gardens and of visual or verbal landscapes, all tend to enforce a separation and a hierarchy of control between the viewing subject, invited to take the place of the owner of the land represented, and the objects of that most distancing of the senses, sight.

—Elizabeth Helsinger³

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1. Edward Thompson, "Eighteenth-Century English Society: Class Struggle without Class," *Social History* 3, no. 2 (1978): 136–37; see Thompson, *Customs in Common* (London, 1991), pp. 21–22.

2. Ann Bermingham, *Landscape and Ideology: The English Rustic Tradition, 1740–1860* (Berkeley, 1986), p. 3.

3. Elizabeth K. Helsinger, *Rural Scenes and National Representation: Britain, 1815–1850* (Princeton, N.J., 1997), p. 25.

That problematic figure, the agricultural labourer, threatens to disrupt [the] closed circuit of mythmaking by reintroducing the social, the economic, and the political into the realm of the aesthetic.

—Tim Barringer⁴

It is late in the afternoon on a warm July day in 1744.⁵ A gentry family sits at ease on the terrace of their country house, the husband and wife looking devotedly at each other. The face of their sister-in-law is, however, turned instead toward the viewer, a guest who stands—probably—at a first-floor window of their mansion. All three patrician figures have their backs to the estate, but their gestures invite the observer, perhaps by practicing the magnifying, mechanical gaze made possible by the telescope on the landlord's desk, to join him in surveying it. The prospect is an attractive one, especially in the sultry early summer haze, and it calls attention not only to the picturesque features of the managed landscape, with its rectangular ponds, its neatly sculpted shrubs and its trimmed lawns, but also to the distant presence of an agricultural workforce busy at the hay harvest. The vista juxtaposes wholesome toil with well-earned rest, the leisure of the gentry throwing into even greater relief the arduousness of the plebeian task of raking hay.

4. Tim Barringer, *Men at Work: Art and Labour in Victorian Britain* (New Haven, Conn., 2005), p. 86.

5. The scene may be dated with even greater precision, for Sarah Scott posed for the artist Edward Haytley at Sandleford Priory on 25 July 1744. See Rodney Griffiths, "The Life and Works of Edward Haytley," *Walpole Society* 74 (2012): 7; hereafter abbreviated "EH."

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The scene seems strangely familiar, representing as it does one phase of the process through which, as John Barrell famously argued, the landscape was “darkened” in the eighteenth-century: a gradual transition from the jolly imagery of merry England, first to representations of a cheerful, sober, domestic, and increasingly industrious peasantry; then to picturesque images of the ragged and pitiful poor; and finally to romantic depictions of rural harmony in which distant laborers were subsumed into the landscape.⁶ Throughout these phases of evolution, Barrell insisted, rustics were almost invariably portrayed as industrious, although it is never entirely clear whether such representations were descriptive or normative.⁷ Barrell therefore provided the lens through which we might be most tempted to view this remarkable prospect. But the magnification made possible by the landlord’s telescope might give us pause, not least because the laws of perspective focus our attention on one particular laborer, who is, on closer inspection, not only idle, but also refreshing himself enthusiastically from a foot-long keg of beer. Labor is emphatically not to be found in the dark side of this particular landscape, for the drinking haymaker is bathed in sunlight and his demeanor is emblematic less of toil or industry than of leisure and recreation (fig. 1).

The prospect of this problematic landscape is represented for us in Edward Haytley’s *Extensive View from the Terraces of Sandleford Priory, near Newbury, Looking towards the Village of Newtown and the Hampshire Downs*, a painting commissioned by the Montagu family in 1743. Popularly known as *The Montagus at Sandleford Priory*, and now in private (and anonymous) hands somewhere in the United States, the image articulates themes that are now widely recognized as central to the social and economic history of the eighteenth-century English countryside.⁸ It represents the complex and ambiguous nature of the relationships between

6. See John Barrell, *The Dark Side of the Landscape: The Rural Poor in English Painting, 1730–1840* (Cambridge, 1980), p. 16.

7. See *ibid.*, p. 13.

8. For the provenance of the painting, see David Posnett, “*The Montagu Family at Sandleford Priory*” by Edward Haytley, 1744 (*Together with a Short Monograph and Preliminary Catalogue of Haytley’s Works*) in an *Exhibition of English Eighteenth-Century Paintings* (exhibition catalog, Leger Galleries, June–July 1978), plate 7. The painting has attracted only a modicum of interest from art historians: see, for instance, John Harris, *The Artist and the Country House: A History of Country House and Garden View Painting in Britain, 1540–1870* (London, 1979), pp. 161–62, 267; David H. Solkin, *Richard Wilson: The Landscape of Reaction* (exhibition catalog, Tate Gallery, London, 3 Nov. 1982–2 Jan. 1983), p. 25; Michael Rosenthal, *British Landscape Painting* (Oxford, 1982), p. 38; and E. D. H. Johnson, *Paintings of the British Social Scene from Hogarth to Sickert* (London, 1986), pp. 124–25. Bruce McLeod, *The Geography of Empire in English Literature, 1580–1745* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 223–27, offers a brief, and somewhat idiosyncratic, commentary from the perspective of literary criticism.



FIGURE 1.

those who presided over the rural landscape as lords of the earth and those who lived off its soil by the sweat of their brows. By definition, Haytley's painting artificially fixes that relationship, capturing social and economic relations in motion at a time when strategies of estate management (especially engrossing, enclosure, and emparkment) were rapidly evolving. During the middle decades of the eighteenth century, landlords revised not only their *economic* but also their *aesthetic* judgments about the appropriate balance between landed and human resources on their estates. Those judgments were informed by the perception, which (largely for ideological rather than empirical reasons) had become increasingly common during the century between 1650 and 1750, that the working population could rarely (if ever) be persuaded to engage wholeheartedly in unremitting toil.⁹ This doctrine of the utility of poverty—the idea that increasing wages bred only idleness and indigence among the laboring poor—proved ever more persuasive to pamphleteers and social commentators and inevitably found expression in artistic representations of agricultural work. The unfortunate omission of any consideration of *The Montagus at Sandleford Priory* from Barrell's analysis of *The Dark Side of the Landscape*, compounded by the conspicuous absence of any detailed commentary on the painting in subsequent art-historical scholarship, renders the obvious questions all the more urgent: What kind of landscape did Edward Haytley paint? How might we characterize the workforce that "labors" within it? Which side of the landscape is represented and why?¹⁰

What follows is a close reading of the representation of harvest labor in Haytley's painting, paying particular attention to the subtle undercurrents it reveals in the field of force that constrained relations between leisured patrician society and laboring plebeian culture.¹¹ The analysis is principally concerned with perceptions of the changing

9. See John Hatcher, "Labour, Leisure, and Economic Thought before the Nineteenth Century," *Past and Present* 47 (Aug. 1998): 65.

10. The brief appearance and subsequent disappearance from view (after its sale in 1978) of Haytley's painting explains its absence not only from Barrell, *The Dark Side of the Landscape* but also from Bermingham, *Landscape and Ideology*; see Hugh Prince, "Art and Agrarian Change, 1710–1815," in *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design, and Use of Past Environments*, ed. Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 98–118; and Barrell, "Sportive Labor: The Farmworker in Eighteenth-Century Poetry and Painting," in *The English Rural Community: Image and Analysis*, ed. Brian Short (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 105–32. It is, however, discussed in K. D. M. Snell, "In or Out of Their Place: The Migrant Poor in English Art, 1740–1900," *Rural History* 24 (Apr. 2013): 73–77, as a benchmark representation of settled labor against which subsequent depictions of poor migrants might be measured.

11. The idioms are those of Thompson, *Customs in Common*, esp. chap. 2; the celebrated "field of force" metaphor is at p. 73. For a critique, see Peter King, "Edward Thompson's Contribution to Eighteenth-Century Studies: The Patrician-Plebeian Model Re-Examined," *Social History* 21 (May 1996): 215–28.

practices of leisure and labor; and, more broadly, with the relationship between those perceptions and the lived experience of agricultural work in eighteenth-century England. It is possible to explore these themes in the context of the Montagu estate because of the vivid depiction of haymakers in Haytley's painting and because of the survival of a vast archive of personal correspondence that discloses the attitudes of Elizabeth Montagu in particular towards the remodeling of the Sandleford landscape and the most appropriate disposition of the agricultural workforce within it.¹² In turn, this evidence raises fundamental questions about the plausibility of contemporary attitudes to labor; about the aesthetic and economic discourses that justified the improvement of the landscape; and about the dynamics of the relationship between artists and their patrons. By narrowing the scale of observation to the representation of the hay harvest on the Sandleford estate, it is possible to reconstruct in microcosm the pressures that were remaking English rural society in the middle decades of the eighteenth century and to contrast the fictions that the painting presents about agricultural labor with the real seigneurial attitudes that were governing its fate.

1. Artist, Patron, and Commission

What little is known about the life and career of Edward Haytley (1713–1762) has recently been unearthed by Rodney Griffiths.¹³ Haytley was born in Oswestry in northeast Shropshire and was almost certainly educated at the free grammar school there. By 1740, he had moved to London and was already in contact with two of the gentry families, providing flower drawings for Montagu (the celebrated bluestocking, hostess, and lady of letters) at Sandleford and repairing paintings for James Brockman of Beachborough (Kent), whom he was subsequently to paint in such striking style.¹⁴ He may well have been connected to the

12. See Mary L. Robertson, "The Elizabeth Robinson Montagu Collection at the Huntington Library," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 65 (2002): 21–25.

13. See Griffiths, "The Life and Works of Edward Haytley," esp. pp. 2–9. See also Hugh Belsey, "Haytley, Edward (fl. 1740–1764)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. David Carradine (Oxford, 2004), www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/12792 and "Painting Like Devis, Edward Haytley," *English Heritage Historical Review* 1 (June 2006): 83–91.

14. For the biographical context on Montagu, see Barbara Brandon Schnorrenberg, "Montagu, Elizabeth (1718–1800)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2002), www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/19014. The literature on Montagu herself is now growing apace. Among the most important studies are Harriet Guest, *Small Change: Women, Learning, Patriotism, 1750–1810* (Chicago, 2000), esp. pp. 111–51; the various essays collected in the special issue of *Huntington Library Quarterly* 65 (2002) entitled "Reconsidering the Bluestockings," ed. Nicole Pohl and Betty A. Schellenberg; and Elizabeth Eger and Lucy Peltz, *Brilliant Women, Eighteenth-Century Bluestockings* (London, 2008). James Brockman figures prominently in

St. Martin's Lane Academy and probably lived nearby, though by 1748 he was resident on Compton Street in St. Anne's, Soho. Although the paintings for which he is best known—the various conversation pieces depicting the Montagus and the Brockmans, together with his portraits of several members of prominent Lancastrian gentry families and the two roundels that he contributed to William Hogarth's elaborate decoration of the Court Room at the London Foundling Hospital—were painted in quick succession during the mid-1740s, they evidently did not secure his financial future. In March 1748, Haytley was declared bankrupt and seems to have supported himself subsequently both as a linen draper (even supplying canvas to the navy for sail cloth) and by continuing to accept artistic commissions. By 1749 he was married, for his wife Elizabeth (almost certainly née Laycock) was named as his executrix in that year, though the union proved childless. When he died in March 1762, his circumstances were anything but affluent, his will making no reference to any personal belongings (least of all any paintings); giving no clue to his trade, profession, or status; and specifying bequests only of a few shillings each to his own parents and his surviving siblings.

From one perspective, then, Haytley was just another impecunious artist teetering on the brink of insolvency and at the mercy of the whims of his patrons. His relationship with those patrons nonetheless seems to have been relatively close. As early as August 1740, Elizabeth Robinson was referring to Haytley as her "artist friend" ("EH," p. 7). This friendship therefore predated Elizabeth's marriage into the Montagu family by two full years and suggests that however the relationship between patron and artist was subsequently managed (almost certainly by her new husband), she personally exercised a significant degree of agency in advocating commissions. It may even be appropriate to describe her, rather than Edward, as Haytley's patron. She was accordingly in December 1743 referring once again to Haytley as her "very good friend," and was far from shy about advertising her protégé's artistic talents, describing him as "a very ingenious young painter" in July 1744 ("EH," p. 7). Her husband apparently came to share this assessment, remarking in 1745 that Haytley had a "genius" for capturing likeness even when the relatively small figures he depicted were dwarfed by the landscape in which he situated them ("EH," p. 7). In 1754, Elizabeth herself commented warmly if condescendingly that Haytley was a "young man of great merits, and has an elegance of mind

Norma Landau, *The Justices of the Peace, 1679–1760* (Berkeley, 1984), pp. 26, 175, 178–79, 195–6, 198–99, 206, 223.

uncommon in one who has not had a liberal education" ("EH," p. 7). This was doubtless an assessment influenced by the full-length portrait that Haytley had by that stage painted of Elizabeth herself but more particularly by the Montagus' evident pleasure at the completion in 1744 of the painting (of the family at Sandleford) that is now considered to be one of his masterpieces (fig. 2).

It is nonetheless a moot point as to whether Edward Montagu saw the same merits in Haytley's painting as those that have very gradually been recognized by art historians. For Montagu, the defining characteristic of the Sandleford portrait was the accuracy of personal likeness, while one of its few more recent admirers has described it as "one of the finest, topographically correct, and earliest English Landscapes by an English artist."¹⁵ Indeed, the painting in some respects imitates the topographical views of the country house and its associated landed estate that had begun to appear in the seventeenth century and that had yet to be superseded by the compositional views subsequently introduced (under the influence of Claude Lorraine and coinciding with the emergence of the Brownian landscape garden) by Richard Wilson in the mid-eighteenth century.¹⁶ There is in Haytley's vision a wonderful factualness about the view, a pride taken in the comprehensiveness and accuracy of the artist's gaze. As a landscape type, therefore, the painting is not so much *picturesque* as *topographical*. Indeed, the two landscape ideals that would have been familiar to estate owners like the Montagus (and, indeed, artists like Haytley) in the 1740s were georgic and pastoral, derived from Virgil rather than from William Gilpin or Edmund Burke.¹⁷ Both idioms are in play in *The Montagus at Sandleford Priory*; the presence of the harvest laborers invites a reading that emphasizes the significance of intensive agricultural work while the disposition of the Montagus themselves connotes the landed estate as a place of leisure and relaxation from the pressures of city life.

Haytley's depiction of the rural landscape in what is essentially a variant on the genre of the country-house painting is nonetheless fascinating and revealing.¹⁸ The perspective is that of a visitor looking out of the first-floor

15. Posnett, "The Montagu Family at Sandleford Priory" by Edward Haytley, 1744 (*Together with a Short Monograph and Preliminary Catalogue of Haytley's Works*) in an *Exhibition of English Eighteenth-Century Paintings*, n. p.

16. See Bermingham, *Landscape and Ideology*, pp. 9–86.

17. See Nicolle Jordan, "From Pastoral to Georgic: Modes of Negotiating Social Mobility in Montagu's Correspondence," in *Eighteenth-Century Women: Studies in Their Lives, Work, and Culture*, ed. Linda Troost (New York, 2011), pp. 103–30.

18. The following paragraph is based on Snell, "In or Out of Their Place," pp. 73–76 (though note that Snell believes that the scene is captured in the morning rather than the afternoon); see also Harris, *The Artist and the Country House*, p. 267.



FIGURE 2.

window of the Montagu mansion, and the vista is remarkably open to the viewer's gaze, lacking the prominent and densely foliated arboreal border or the classical masonry that frame so many early eighteenth-century paintings. The depiction of light encourages a sense of chronological fixity; this is a scene at Sandleford in the late afternoon of a sunny day in early

summer, the time of the hay harvest. The landscape itself is enclosed informally insofar as it is surrounded and overlooked by the encircling Hampshire hills but also in the more formal sense suggested by the arrangement of the hedges, fences, and walls that stretch out towards the village of Newtown in the middle distance. Beyond Newtown, however, the landscape appears to be less regulated, beyond the reach of private ownership and the productivity that such ownership implied. Possessive individualism has conferred on Montagu the opportunity to beautify the immediate landscape, which is arguably best described as picturesque rather than as manicured. The trees and shrubs have, nonetheless, been arranged ornamentally, the hedges have been trimmed to accommodate distant views, and the terrace has been separated from the meadow with a ha-ha and an associated water feature. Piecemeal enclosure has already transformed the estate and its landscaped hinterland into a gentry-controlled environment, an aestheticized ideal of how the English countryside should look: green, pleasant, productive, and, above all, orderly. Sandleford Priory, even as early as 1744, had become just so much “emptiable space.”¹⁹

Haytley’s painting is, nonetheless, so much more than a realistic depiction of the Sandleford landscape, however evanescent its clouds and ethereal its trees. It very clearly reflects his patrons’ own assessment of the qualities of the landscape. Montagu was very fond of describing the beauty of her view from the priory. “The garden,” she wrote to the Duchess of Portland in 1744, “commands a fine prospect, the most cheerful I ever saw, and not of that distance which is only to gratify the pride of seeing, but such as falls within the humble reach of my eye.” Although she thought that Newtown, lying on the rising ground before her, was “a pretty village,” she was not unaware of the harsh realities of life for its laboring residents. She nonetheless believed that perceptions of hunger and indigence were softened by the beauty of the prospect: “poverty is there clad in its decent garb of low simplicity but her tattered robes of misery do not here show want and wretchedness.” “You would,” she insisted, “rather imagine [that] pomp was neglected than sufficiency wanted.” The landscape was, she was convinced, watered by the silver stream of “health, pleasure and refreshment.”²⁰ In many respects, therefore, Haytley re-created very precisely on canvas the images of labor and the landscape that Montagu seems to have fixed firmly in her imagination. “Ceres rich gifts,” she wrote of Sandleford,

19. Robert David Sack, *Human Territoriality: Its Theory and History* (Cambridge, 1986), p. 78. For the discourses that came to justify “improvement” from the late sixteenth century, see Andrew McRae, *God Speed the Plough: The Representation of Agrarian England, 1500–1660* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 133–228.

20. Evelyn E. Myers, *A History of Sandleford Priory* (Newbury, 1931), pp. 24–25.

“surround my gates. The jolly ploughman whistles over my furrowed lands [and] the rosy cheek’d dairy maid trips across the mead with the brimming pail on her head and sings as she goes.” She seems to have a particularly idealized view of the harvest, which she thought “gives a spirit to life to the country which makes it more delightful.” “The man of taste,” she believed, “admires the verdure of the meadow and the waving of a field of corn, [and] the haymakers and reapers enliven the picture to his eye.” These “objects,” she believed, should be regarded with “sympathy and tenderness,” with “a reference to [one’s] fellow creatures,” and with “a nobler and more tender mind than the uninterested connoisseur to whom all these things are considered merely as lordship.”²¹ Whether Montagu would have regarded her husband as precisely that kind of “uninterested connoisseur” is a moot point. And it is equally uncertain whether either she or her husband could have envisaged that Haytley would depict their harvest laborers reveling in quite the way he did. For her, the prospect from Sandleford Priory betrayed no signs of “debauch” or “intoxication”; for Haytley, labor was frozen in the acts of recreation and inebriation.²²

In formal terms, the Montagu portrait epitomizes two fundamental features of the eighteenth-century conversation piece as that emergent genre of portraiture has recently been characterized by Kate Retford: the focus on narrative, with individuals being captured in the process of leisured or laboring activity; and the shrinkage of the size of the figures as a proportion of the overall frame of reference, thereby liberating space for the minute representation of property.²³ This was, then, a medium in which material possessions could be represented, perhaps even enumerated “to the point of fetishization.”²⁴ Haytley accordingly portrays the landlord and coal owner Edward Montagu, the fifty-two-year-old grandson of the first earl of Sandwich, seated on the terrace of his Sandleford garden. His much younger wife Elizabeth (aged only twenty-five in 1744)

21. Montagu, letter to Elizabeth Handcock, 16 Aug. 1776, MO 6485, Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, Calif. (hereafter abbreviated HEH) and letter to Elizabeth Carter, 15 Aug. 1777, MO 3424, HEH.

22. Myers, *A History of Sandleford Priory*, p. 25.

23. Kate Retford, “From the Interior to Interiority: The Conversation Piece in Georgian England,” *Journal of Design History* 20 (1997): 291. And see her highly effective case studies of various examples of the genre, “The Evidence of the Conversation Piece: Thomas Bardwell’s *The Broke and Bowes Families (1740)*,” *Cultural and Social History* 7 (Dec. 2010): 493–510. See Birmingham, *Landscape and Ideology*, pp. 14–33, and Retford, “The Topography of the Conversation Piece: A Walk around Wanstead,” in *Placing Faces: The Portrait and the English Country House in the Long Eighteenth Century*, ed. Gill Perry, Retford, and Jordan Vibert (Manchester, 2013), pp. 20–41.

24. Marcia Pointon, *Hanging the Head: Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven, Conn., 1993), p. 162.

stands to his right in a pink dress resting her hands on the back of his chair. To his left, Elizabeth's even younger sister Sarah Robinson, subsequently to become famous as the novelist Sarah Scott, stands wearing a blue satin dress and holding her hat in her left hand, her right hand extended to receive a chair being carried by a liveried servant who approaches from her right.²⁵ The vista they survey extends southwards to the hills, which form a backdrop to the village of Newtown. In the middle distance to either side are groups of harvesters raking and stacking hay. In the right foreground is seen the game of bowls at which the family has been entertaining itself, together with a basket and an overturned chair. One of the most striking things about the composition is the presence on Edward's table of a telescope, which appears to be pointing towards the group of haymakers, including the drinking swain, to the left of the prospect. Montagu was therefore quite literally the lord of all he surveyed, and as MP for Huntingdon he could be said to have represented rural England in more ways than one.²⁶

2. Representing Labor and Leisure in the Sandford Landscape

At first sight, then, Haytley's painting seems to fit very comfortably with the analysis of the representation of "the happy rural life" identified by David Solkin.²⁷ Solkin argues that by the end of the seventeenth century, the private landed estate had become so firmly established as the primary sphere of gentlemanly and aristocratic activity that all landowners recognized that careful stewardship was necessary to preserve the patrimony for posterity. This imperative to assiduous estate management implied a new appreciation of the value of industriousness among the poor tenantry who actually worked the land. Although the squire (with or without the help of a steward or bailiff) supervised the estate, it was self-evident that the physical work of cultivating the landscape was performed by others. The landlord therefore carried a certain moral responsibility for his laborers.²⁸ The artistic corollary of this intensified paternalism was the gradual demise of the pastoral mode, idealizing rural peace and order, which had characterized a previous genre of landscape painting. The newer tradition urgently emphasized social distinction, yet paradoxically represented that division

25. For Sarah Scott, see Gary Kelly, "Scott, Sarah (1720–1795)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004), www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/24912

26. Montagu was MP for Huntingdon from 1734 to 1768. See *The House of Commons, 1715–1754*, ed. Romney Sedgwick, 2 vols. (London, 1970), 2:266–67, and *The House of Commons, 1754–1790*, ed. Lewis Namier and John Brooke, 3 vols. (London, 1964), 3:153.

27. See Solkin, "The Happy Rural Life," *Richard Wilson*, pp. 22–36.

28. An insight most fully elaborated in Thompson, *Customs in Common*, chap. 2.

itself as the ultimate source of cosmic and earthly harmony, which would only be perpetuated as long as the patricians were kind and the plebs were patient. As Montagu herself put it, “all the charities of social life will be kept up if each will be contented with what heaven has allotted.”²⁹ This paternalistic ideal was both confident and defensive, arrogant yet anxious; it expressed a righteous faith in the stability of the prevailing social order, but simultaneously conveyed an urgent need to justify its perpetuation. Paternalism of this kind, played out as it was in the theatre of social relations, is perhaps best understood as a gesture politics born of cynicism and fear. It found perfect expression in Montagu’s somewhat self-satisfied account of the patronage she slyly offered in 1764 to one of the garden boys who labored in her hay meadows. Having been impressed with the lad’s industry, she surreptitiously supplemented his meager lunch with a gooseberry pie and was delighted in turn by his response, which turned rapidly from surprise and delight, to suspicion and denial, and ultimately to filial generosity. Because “it was not his pie as it had not been given him,” the boy initially resisted general exhortations to consume the food but subsequently gave in and ate with alacrity, only to pause when halfway through to declare that “it was so pure good he could save it for his little sister.” This “blossom of earthly virtue” pleased Montagu no end because it represented the flowering of a plebeian deference that thrived in response to, and often in the expectation of, gentry paternalism.³⁰

Social distinction is indeed at first sight the central theme of Haytley’s painting, which ostensibly represents a patrician family at leisure while their harvest workers toil relentlessly and their liveried servants attend to their every whim. The presence of *staffage*, especially butlers and maidservants attending tea tables, is entirely characteristic of conversation pieces, where such figures do not constitute the primary subject matter of the painting but (quite literally) *serve* both to emphasize the scale of the composition and to embody the authority and patronage exercised by the patriarchal family on which the viewer’s attention is (or should be) really focused.³¹ Indeed, Haytley’s depiction of Sarah Scott’s aloof gesture towards the valet (with whom she disdains eye contact and over whom she seems to tower) who proffers her chair is almost grotesque in its blatant

29. Montagu, letter to the Earl of Bath, 29 May 1764, MO 4637, HEH.

30. Montagu, letter to the Earl of Bath, 30 May 1764, MO 4638, HEH.

31. On *staffage*, see, most recently, Jeanne Morgan Zarucchi, “The Literary Tradition of *Ruins of Rome* and a New Consideration of Piranesi’s Staffage Figures,” *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 35 (Sept. 2012): 359–80, and Bart Verschaffel, “The World of the Landscape,” trans. Gregory Ball, *Comparative Literature and Culture* 14 (Sept. 2012): n.p.

representation of the interpersonal dynamics of power and servility.³² The demeanor of Edward Montagu himself suggests that he holds himself aloof from this exchange: the valet is almost invisible to him as he turns towards his wife, his hand gesture implying that he has begun to hold forth, perhaps at some length, about what he just observed through his telescope.³³

On the face of it, therefore, the painting articulates a series of binary oppositions—rich and poor; landlord and tenant; employer and employee; the leisured and the laboring. The farmworkers are visible only as fuzzy images of distant industriousness; and they are spatially segregated as they rake hay in the fields beyond the terrace on which their landlord amuses himself with his telescope and the Robinson sisters play bowls. The visual contrast between Edward Montagu’s intellectual curiosity and the ladies’ playfulness is particularly striking and emphasizes the conventional gendered stereotypes of the *pure* intellect of men (suggested here by the telescope) and the *embodied* intellect of the women (represented by their game of bowls). The sisters have apparently ended their play and have called for a third chair for Elizabeth so that she may sit and converse with Edward, who has commanded her attention. We might imagine that in a few moments the whole family will be seated to politely discuss whatever it is that Edward has seen. The differentiated leisure practices of the Montagus are contrasted in turn with the rude work performed by their laborers, who embody only an animal physicality. Polite women might be little more than bodies, but they are bodies with minds, whereas the laborers—who gossip, drink, and sleep—are driven simply by physical, perhaps even animal, appetite.

Haytley’s depiction of Sandleford therefore resembles that of a landscape garden (or *ferme ornée*) organized around views of fields, barns, and ponds so that the landed class could enjoy the georgic unfolding before them, taking delight in the performance of agricultural labor and enjoying the spectacle of a well-run farm.³⁴ Whether or not the Montagus themselves designed Sandleford as a *ferme ornée*, the painting alludes to the viewing pleasure made possible in that type of landscape garden. The pros-

32. Though for an even more blatant example, see Gillis van Tilborch, *The Tichborne Dole*, described by Harris, *The Artist and the Country House*, p. 52 as a “painting of the greatest social distinction”; Steve Hindle, *On the Parish? The Micro-Politics of Poor Relief in Rural England, 1550–1750* (Oxford, 2004), pp. 164–66; in a forthcoming paper by John Walter; and Nicholas Cooper, *The Houses of the Gentry, 1480–1680* (London, 1999), which has the best reproduction on pp. 2 (detail) and 4 (in full).

33. See Bermingham, *Landscape and Ideology*, pp. 21–28, and Arline Meyer, “Re-dressing Classical Statuary: The Eighteenth-Century ‘Hand-in-Waistcoat’ Portrait,” *Art Bulletin* 77 (Mar. 1995): 45–63.

34. See Bermingham, *Landscape and Ideology*, pp. 30, 202 n. 40.

pect that we are invited to share (the leisurely gaze through Montagu's telescope) is that of an efficient and productive georgic landscape in which the distant laborers work hard. One might therefore be tempted to situate Haytley's work alongside that of John Constable, representing labor in the distant crannies of the dark side of the landscape identified by Barrell.³⁵

The economic inequalities that relegated casual labor to the very margins of society are, nonetheless, actually glamorized in Haytley's representation of rich and poor as equal sharers in the fruits of rural harmony. The two distinctive, perhaps even opposing, social groups are very skillfully elided in the painting, and the figures of patrician leisure and plebeian labor are gradually drawn together into a harmonious whole. This is achieved formally by the curious perspective that apparently draws the laborers into much closer proximity with the Montagu family than they actually are; by the symmetry—or visual rhyming—of the shapes of the trees, of the haystacks, and of the ladies' dresses; by the spatial echo of the arrangement of three groups of four persons, in each of which the intimacy of a pair of figures gathered on the right emphasizes their distance from the two lone individuals standing to the left; by the skilful triangulation of the three splashes of livid color (red britches, red stockings, and a red petticoat); and most strikingly of all by the conspicuous situation of almost all the laborers, even those literally in the margins of the picture, in pools of sunlight. However else we might characterize the landscape in which the harvesters labor, it is emphatically *not dark* (fig. 3).

The elision of idleness and industry is not, however, simply a matter of formal artistic technique. Leisure and labor converge even more subtly in the representation of the haymakers themselves. Although they are at work, they can hardly be described as industrious. Despite its exhausting nature in practice, haymaking was conventionally portrayed (in poetic and artistic terms) as a happy, easy task. This falsification of the scale of labor input required during the hay harvest is especially striking in the light of other eighteenth-century representations of haymaking.³⁶ Haytley's image of the hay harvest is in this respect disingenuous, but that is precisely the

35. See Barrell, *The Dark Side of the Landscape*, pp. 156–62.

36. See, for instance, the arduousness of the haymakers depicted at either end of the eighteenth century in the anonymous *Dixton Manor, Haymaking* (c.1710–12) (now in the Cheltenham Art Gallery and Museum, and discussed in Harris, *The Artist and the Country House*, pp. 248–49 and Prince, “Art and Agrarian Change,” pp. 100–102) and in George Stubbs, *Haymakers* (1783) (now at Upton House, Warwickshire, a painting more often discussed in the context of the clothing worn, rather than of the work performed, by the laborers, though see Robin Blake, *George Stubbs and the Wide Creation: Animals, People, and Places in the Life of George Stubbs, 1724–1806* [London, 2005], pp. 239–45, where the industriousness of the workforce is arguably underestimated).

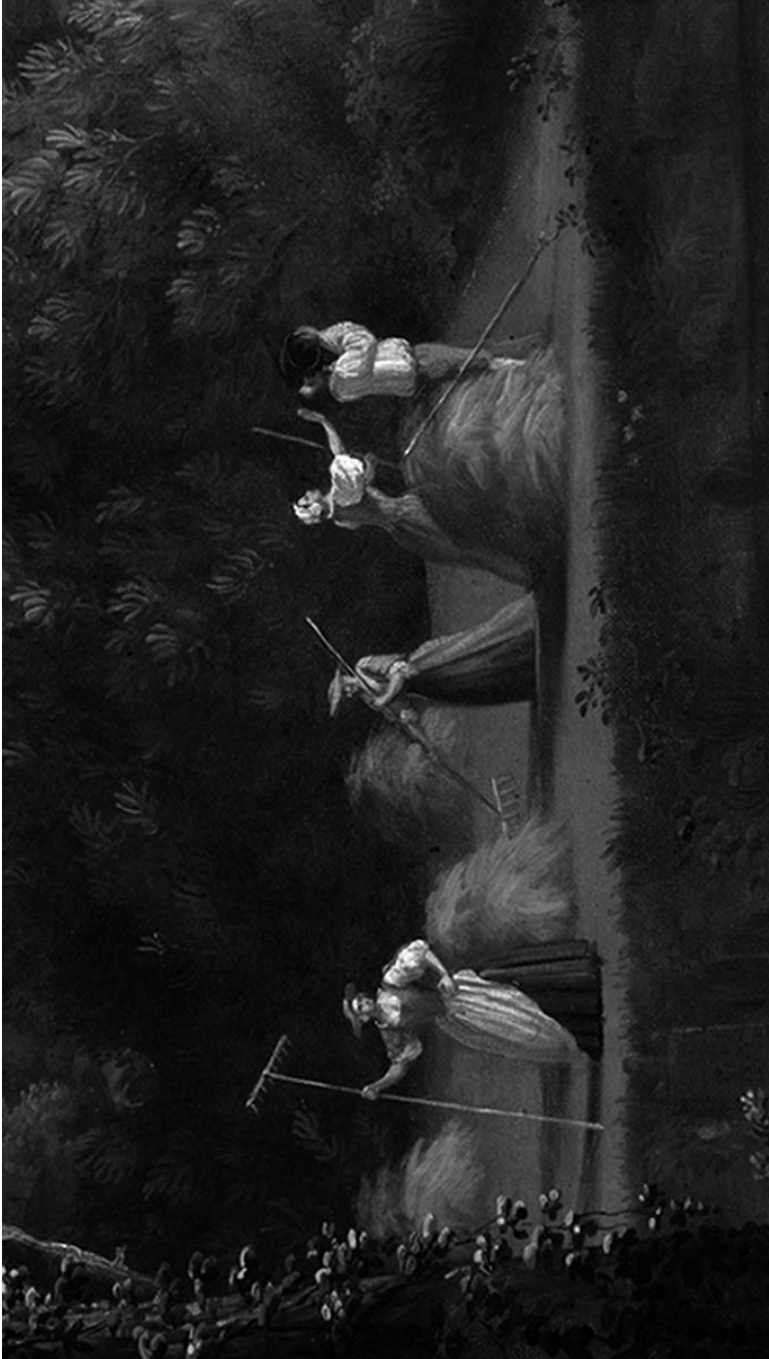


FIGURE 3.

point; few artists and fewer patrons would want to believe that this was anything other than a joyous, festive, and recreational time in the agricultural calendar. Even so, Haytley depicts his haymakers not merely as happy but as downright idle. Although eight harvest workers are conspicuously depicted, the scale of their labor is strikingly diminished. The tasks associated with haymaking—mowing or scything, tedding, raking, forking, cocking, carting, stacking—were, nominally, notoriously arduous.³⁷ Scything or mowing was by the early eighteenth century almost invariably men's work, but the other processes, especially tedding (fluffing and turning the hay to help it dry) and cocking (the consolidation of the windrows into small piles or cocks), generally involved predominantly female teams of four or five women and a man, each of them usually working with rakes.³⁸ The piles of intermediate size depicted in Haytley's painting suggest that the process being undertaken is the building of cobs, topping off the haystacks immediately prior to them being loaded onto wagons. But the execution of these processes by Haytley's haymakers could hardly be said to be intensive. Indeed, only one of the eight "laboring" figures—the woman second-from-left holding her rake firmly in two hands as she busies herself around the stack—is actually working. The two young women at the extreme right of the scene converse (perhaps even argue) together, though they too seem distracted by two other colleagues (a man and a woman) who are bantering with one another around another haystack. The woman on the far left pauses in her work, her hand coquettishly on her hip, her rake raised almost defiantly away from the wet grass. Is she blatantly staring the Montagu family down in a posture of plebeian

37. See E. J. T. Collins, "Harvest Technology and Labour Supply in Britain, 1790–1870," *Economic History Review* 22, n.s. (Dec. 1969): 453–73; Michael Roberts, "Sickles and Scythes: Women's Work and Men's Work at Harvest Time," *History Workshop Journal* 7 (Spring 1979): 9, 11, 13, 16–17, and 22 and "Sickles and Scythes Revisited: Harvest Work, Wages, and Symbolic Meanings," in *Women, Work and Wages in England, c.1600–1850*, ed. Penny Lane, Neil Raven, and Keith Snell (Woodbridge, 2004), pp. 97–98; Christiana Payne, *Toil and Plenty: Images of the Agricultural Landscape in England, 1780–1890* (New Haven, Conn., 1993), p. 16; Andrew Hann, "Labour Policy and Rental Policy on the Ditchley Estate, 1700–1750: Parallel Paths of Transition," in *English Geographies, 1600–1950: Historical Essays on English Customs, Cultures, and Communities in Honor of Jack Langton*, ed. Elizabeth Baigent and Robert J. Mayhew (Oxford, 2009), pp. 81–83; Hindle, "Work, Reward, and Labour Discipline in Late Seventeenth-Century England," in *Remaking English Society: Social Relations and Social Change in Early Modern England*, ed. Hindle, Alexandra Shepard, and John Walter (London, 2013), pp. 263–64. The classic contemporary description of the mechanics of the hay harvest is Henry Best, *The Farming and Memorandum Books of Henry Best of Elmswell 1642*, ed. D. M. Woodward (Oxford, 1984), pp. 33–44.

38. In July 1689, the workforce in the hay harvest at Arbury Hall (Warwickshire) consisted of fifty-nine employees, including seven servants in husbandry, sixteen adult male laborers, and twenty-eight women, boys, and girls; see Hindle, "Work, Reward, and Labour Discipline," p. 264.



FIGURE 4.

insolence? Although it might be expected that displays of gestural dissidence were uncommon in a small-scale face-to-face enclosed village with a resident squire (especially where that squire was also the sole and omniscient employer), the woman's penetrating gaze suggests that even in a place like Sandleford the body language of plebeians might be less easily controlled than the gentry might hope.³⁹ Either way, she has almost certainly been distracted from her work by the adjacent male laborer who bends his body not *forward* to rake the hay but *backwards* to quaff ale thirstily from the barrel, to the point where his female companion feels obliged to restrain him. Most significantly of all, however, a ninth (male) figure, barely visible but situated right in the very centre of the painting, makes no pretence to labor at all and lies apparently asleep in the bushes, quite plausibly the victim less of exhaustion than of inebriation (fig. 4).

The availability of alcohol to those working in the fields of large estates like that at Sandleford is unsurprising. The Montagus, like many other gentry families, almost certainly owned a large-scale brewery to supply

39. See Walter, "Gesturing at Authority: Deciphering the Gestural Code of Early Modern England," *Past and Present* 203, supplement 4 (2009): 96–127.

drink for the household, servants, and workers.⁴⁰ And at harvest time the allowance of ale might be generous to say the least; William Marshall noted toward the end of the eighteenth century that in the midland counties the “customary allowance” during the hay and corn harvest was a gallon (eight pints) of beer for each man every day, and that “in hot weather they drink more.”⁴¹ This extraordinary volume of strong beer was generally a common perquisite as part of a wage bargain and was often supplemented by more small beer on hot days, although mowers sometimes negotiated for as much as two extra quarts of middle beer. Haytley’s laborer drinks lustily from the barrel, and the restraining hand of his female colleague suggests that she thinks that he is overindulging, a sentiment evidently shared by those employers who often provided each laborer with a bottle in order to prevent them drawing more from a cask. Montagu herself expressed this view very bluntly: “I wish our poor people ate more & drank less.”⁴²

This specter of drunkenness, and the almost ubiquitous idleness of which the sleeping figure is emblematic, is rendered all the more striking by the fact that all nine of Haytley’s Sandleford laborers are well, although not extravagantly, dressed in brightly colored and comfortable clothes. Of the two male laborers whose clothing is visible, only one (the eighth figure from the left) wears the dark stockings that would have been standard for the laboring poor, while the other (the thirsty hayraker fourth from the left) wears white, which would be more expensive and unusual for a working man in the 1740s. The women have straw or chip hats secured to their caps with ribbons. Three of the women (the first, third, and seventh from the left) are dressed for hard physical work, wearing only back-lacing stays (rather than gowns) over their shifts and petticoats, which was perfectly respectable clothing since stays were not regarded as underwear.⁴³ The three other women (the second, sixth, and ninth figures from the left) conversely do wear gowns, two of which appear to be patterned, and might

40. See Pamela Sambrook, *Country House Brewing in England, 1500–1900* (London, 1996), pp. 1–19.

41. William Marshall, *The Rural Economy of the Midland Counties*, 2 vols. (London, 1796), 2:44. For the provision of food and drink to harvest laborers, see Bob Bushaway, *By Rite, Custom, Ceremony and Community in England, 1700–1880* (London, 1982), pp. 118–25; Craig Muldrew, *Food, Energy, and the Creation of Industriousness: Work and Material Culture in Agrarian England, 1550–1780* (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 70, 86–88, 103–4, 128–29, 135–38.

42. Montagu, letter to Sarah Scott, 5 Sept. 1774, MS Additional 40663, fol. 46v, British Library, London; hereafter abbreviated BL. See Frederick Morton Eden, *The State of the Poor: Or, An History of the Labouring Classes in England*, 3 vols. (London, 1797), 1:546–47, 3:821.

43. For women dressed in exactly the same way for indoor labor from the same period, see Paul Sandby, *At Sandpit Gate: Washing Day*, reproduced as illustration 30 in John Styles, *The Dress of the People: Everyday Fashion in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven, Conn., 2007), p. 70.

therefore be cotton prints or Norwich stuffs. As John Styles points out, this combination of chip hat, cap, light-patterned gown, and white apron over petticoat, shift, and stays would have been typical morning dress even for a duchess walking in St James's Park in 1744, so the basic constituents of the female wardrobe portrayed in miniature by Haytley actually serve to conceal rather than convey social distinction, which would only be revealed at close quarters in the quality of the fabrics and the accessorizing.⁴⁴ The petticoats depicted here are plain red and green, which is typical of laboring people, although the cost of the relevant fabrics could range from dirt-cheap linsey-woolsey to expensive napped woolen cloth. The light-colored gowns and bright colored petticoats are not the sort of thing that parish officers usually supplied as supplementary relief-in-kind to the deserving poor, and it seems probable that all the garments that the men and women are shown wearing could and would have been bought in Newbury (two miles distant), if not in nearby Newtown. Whether that clothing was worn-out or patched-up is difficult to tell. The shifts worn by industrious harvest workers might be expected, like the one stolen from a yeoman's daughter in Slaidburn (Yorkshire) in 1758, to have holes under each armpit "made by her stays with raking of hay," but there is little evidence of that among Haytley's women, and there is even the suggestion that they were endeavoring to protect their clothing by tying their aprons up at the side to make easier the use of the rake.⁴⁵ Haytley's imagery therefore seems to emphasize, perhaps even glamorize, the elegance of the female haymakers.⁴⁶

Although, therefore, Haytley depicted these harvest workers wearing clothes that were fairly typical of the dress of laboring people in the mid-eighteenth century, they were almost certainly wearing their Sunday best, according to the conventions that associated haymaking no less than Harvest-Home as an occasion of festivity and courtship when best clothing was worn, perhaps to be gleefully discarded as rustic youths and ruddy maids labored and sweated together.⁴⁷ Montagu herself was conscious of

44. Styles, personal communication to author, 26 June 2012.

45. Styles, *The Dress of the People*, p. 75.

46. See Payne, *Toil and Plenty*, p. 16.

47. See Robert W. Malcolmson, *Popular Recreations in English Society, 1700–1850* (Cambridge, 1973), pp. 25–26, 55–69; Bushaway, *By Rite, Custom, Ceremony, and Community in England, 1700–1880*, pp. 128–36; Payne, *Toil and Plenty*, p. 24 (alluding to the potential for merriment and courtship during the hay harvest described in James Thomson's 1730 poem *The Seasons*); Ronald Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England: The Ritual Year 1400–1700* (Oxford 1994), pp. 44, 243; Hutton, *The Stations of the Sun: A History of the Ritual Year in Britain* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 332–47; and Muldrew, *Food, Energy and the Creation of Industriousness*, pp. 293–94.

the inappropriate finery sported by her poorer neighbors, especially on Sundays and other holidays. She complained in 1775 of the tendency of her tenants at Sandleford to “use the manners” and “imitate the dress of the fine folks.” In 1778, she denounced the situation at Sandleford where “the Farmers Daughters go to Church in hats trimmed with gauze & ribbon & flowers, & carry their caps, if not their heads, as high as the finest ladies” and “rural lasses have white silk capuchins trimmed with lace.”⁴⁸ “If you were to see the congregation at our village church on Sunday,” she complained, “you w[oul]d not suspect I was the richest woman in the parish, & yet without vanity I am.”⁴⁹ This criticism of plebeian finery echoes long-standing elite concerns about the importance of enforcing sumptuary codes to govern the consuming passions of the poor and to maintain the social hierarchy.⁵⁰ It also expresses contemporary fears that the Sandleford workforce and others like it might not merely *subsist* but even actually *thrive* in its idleness.⁵¹ If we express this perspective in the olfactory rather than the visual idiom, then, Haytley would have us believe that the smell wafting over the Sandleford ponds to the Montagu family on their terrace is not that of fresh sweat but of stale ale. The drinking haymaker may even be thought of, symbolically if not literally, as the physical embodiment of the leisure preference—what modern economists call a “backward-bending supply curve of labor,” the tendency to substitute leisure for labor at times of relatively high wages.⁵² Labor and leisure are, therefore, more

48. Montagu, letter to Scott, 10 July 1775, MS Additional 40663, fol. 52, BL.

49. Montagu, letter to Scott, 16 June 1778, MO 3840, HEH.

50. N. B. Harte, “State Control of Dress and Social Change in Pre-Industrial England,” in *Trade, Government, and Economy in Pre-Industrial England*, ed. D. C. Coleman and A. H. John (London, 1976), pp. 132–65, and Alan Hunt, *Governance of the Consuming Passions: A History of Sumptuary Law* (Basingstoke, 1996). For sensitive discussions of the role of luxury in Montagu’s thinking, see Eger, “Luxury, Industry, and Charity: Bluestocking Culture Displayed,” in *Luxury in the Eighteenth Century: Debates, Desires, and Delectable Goods*, ed. Maxine Berg and Eger (Basingstoke, 2003), pp. 190–204; and Peter Denney, “‘Unpleasant, tho’ Arcadian Spots’: Plebeian Poetry, Polite Culture, and the Sentimental Economy of the Landscape Park,” *Criticism* 47 (Fall 2005): 493–514.

51. This view has been regarded as implausible on the grounds that there is a contradiction between the arguments that the laboring poor were spending profligately (on the one hand) and that they were idle (on the other); see Hans-Joachim Voth, *Time and Work in England during the Industrial Revolution* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 179–80.

52. From the theoretical perspective, see for example, Jon D. Wisman, “Straightening out the Backward-Bending Supply Curve of Labour: From Overt to Covert Compulsion and Beyond,” *Review of Political Economy* 1 (Mar. 1989): 94–112. For discussions of the existence and nature of a “leisure preference” in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England, see Peter Mathias, “Leisure and Wages in Theory and Practice,” *The Transformation of England: Essays in the Economic and Social History of England in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1979), pp. 148–67; Hatcher, “Labour, Leisure, and Economic Thought before the Nineteenth Century”; Voth, *Time and Work*; Hindle, “Labour Discipline, Agricultural Service, and the Households of the Poor in Rural England, c.1640–1730,” in *Accommodating Poverty: The Housing and Living*

closely intertwined—and much more ambiguously related—in Haytley’s representation of the Sandleford landscape than might at first be thought. The meadow at Sandleford Priory is not the hive of industry subsequently depicted in George Stubbs’s *The Haymakers* (1785), though even Stubbs’s far more famous representation of vigorous and efficient labor in the hay harvest echoes Haytley in featuring (in Stubbs’s case even more prominently) a young woman making unflinching (and therefore highly sexualized) eye contact with the viewer, defiantly meeting his gaze in resentment of his presence.⁵³

The concern about the lack of industriousness that is implied here is entirely characteristic of the mid-eighteenth century as a particularly troubling period in the long history of the relationship between master and servant. Up until the middle of the seventeenth century, discussions of the role of labor within the economy had been principally concerned with a perceived excess of people; with the creation of employment; with the control of hordes of masterless men; and even with facilitating emigration to relieve the pressure on the labor market. But in the changed demographic circumstances of the century after 1650, the pendulum swung in the opposite direction. Contemporaries came to realize that labor was in short supply and that population growth was stagnating. Following from this perception was the desire to encourage demographic expansion; to restrain the level of emigration; to cap the level of wages; and, above all, to ensure that the poor performed their customary role in society by fulfilling their duty to labor diligently. Because labor was relatively scarce, it was believed that “the very fabric of society could be threatened, not just by rising wages and costs, but by a swelling independence among the working masses,” which commonly manifested itself in idleness. There was, accordingly, a growing consensus, emerging among the propertied elite about the “utility of poverty.”⁵⁴ Employers, magistrates, and political economists alike agreed both in print and in the administration of social policy that “the higher the wages labourers and artisans received, the less they worked,

Arrangements of the English Poor, c.1600–1800, ed. Joanne McEwan and Pamela Sharpe (Basingstoke, 2011), pp. 169–90; and Muldrew, *Food, Energy, and the Creation of Industriousness*, pp. 292–97.

53. On Stubbs, see Barrell, *The Dark Side of the Landscape*, pp. 25–31 (where the depiction of the haymakers is described as studied and formal), and Payne, *Toil and Plenty*, pp. 50–51 (who agrees that Stubbs’s representation of labor is artificial).

54. Hatcher, “Labour, Leisure and Economic Thought before the Nineteenth Century,” p. 64.

and that, while low wages bred industry and diligence, high wages bred laziness, disorderliness and debauchery” of the kind that is depicted so subtly in the telescopic detail of Haytley’s painting.⁵⁵

3. Landlord, Landlady, and the Landscape: The Montagus at Sandleford

This concern with the utility of poverty of which Haytley’s painting is arguably an expression is obviously an elite view, the Sandleford landscape as the Montagus might have wanted to see it. The estate is surveyed from the elevated vantage point of the patrician and specifically of a patrician with a telescope, capable of microscopic observation of the activities of his tenants and employees.⁵⁶ The possibility that Montagu’s telescope is a technology of labor discipline is reinforced by the fact that this was not the only landscape painted by Haytley in which the landlord can be seen, quite literally, surveying his estate in telescopic detail. Shortly before he painted the Montagus at Sandleford, Haytley had been commissioned to paint the Brockman family at Beachborough House (Kent), the three-hundred-acre park between Folkestone and Hythe, which had been the seat of the Brockmans since the late sixteenth century.⁵⁷ The stylistic similarities between the two commissions are obvious, although the more ambitious Brockman painting represents the same landscape from two diametrically opposed perspectives, first of Temple Pond with the temple in the right foreground and second of Temple Pond with the temple in the distance on the left. This simple expedient therefore achieved the effect of a 360-degree panorama. In the first of these two paintings, Squire James Brockman is seated in the temple surrounded by his two younger female cousins, and on the desk sits a telescope. When commissioned to paint Thomas Newenham in 1746, moreover, Haytley depicted him with his left hand tucked inside his waistcoat, leaning against a rock upon which sit his hat and a

55. *Ibid.*, p. 69. The evidence is presented *in extenso* in Edgar S. Furniss, *The Position of the Laborer in a System of Nationalism: A Study in the Labor Theories of the Later English Mercantilists* (Cambridge, Mass., 1920), pp. 117–56.

56. On eighteenth-century telescopes, see Richard Dunn, *The Telescope: A Short History* (London, 2009), pp. 55–108. Even in relatively conservative northwest England, a commercially minded landowner like Isaac Fletcher of Underwood, near Cockermouth (Cumberland), might purchase a telescope in the mid-eighteenth century. See Isaac Fletcher, *The Diary of Isaac Fletcher of Underwood, Cumberland, 1756–1781*, ed. A. J. L. Winchester (London, 1994), esp. pp. x–xxviii, and Winchester, “Regional Identity in the Lake Counties: Land Tenure and the Cumbrian Landscape,” *Northern History* 42 (Mar. 2005): 42.

57. See Emma Depraviam, “Two Conversation Pieces by Edward Haytley,” *Apollo* 114 (1981): 65–87; Ursula Hoff, *European Paintings before 1800 in the National Gallery of Victoria* (Melbourne, 1995), pp. 143–44; and Griffiths, “Life and Works of Edward Haytley,” pp. 38–40.

telescope.⁵⁸ Telescopes are in fact common tropes in mid-eighteenth-century conversation pieces: they figure, for instance, in Arthur Devis's portraits of *The John Bacon Family* (c.1742–43) and of *Mr and Mrs Van Harthals and Their Son* (1749); and in William Hogarth's portrait of *Lord Hervey and His Friends* (c.1738–39)—where their presence may testify both to the enthusiasm of “ingenious and learned” gentlemen for empiricism, specifically for new scientific thinking about the relationships among sight, observation, and knowledge;⁵⁹ and to the interests of artists like Devis and Hogarth in questions of perspective. Montagu himself was something of a gentleman scientist and had a reputation as “a mathematician of great eminence.”⁶⁰ The fact that he appears to be using his telescope to survey his labor force suggests an intensely practical as well as an abstract philosophical use of scientific instruments.

Haytley's emphasis on Edward Montagu's vigilance might therefore be explained by the Montagus' consciousness of the conspicuous idleness and incipient disorderliness of the laboring poor. The social history of mid-eighteenth-century Berkshire suggests that these fears were not entirely misplaced because the real economic situation over which landlords like Montagu presided was anything but calm. This was, after all, the milieu in which the systematic poaching activities of the Windsor Blacks, motivated as they were by fairly direct class hatred, prompted the passage of the notorious Black Act of 1723, made famous in Thompson's classic study of *Whigs and Hunters*. Indeed, the contest over the illicit hunting of game preoccupied magistrates in the county into the 1740s and beyond.⁶¹ Crimes of necessity, ranging from the poaching of deer to the theft of foodstuffs, were especially common at times of grain shortage and more particularly when grain was exported away from areas of high demand. Although Berkshire itself was not the site of extensive grain production, grain regularly passed through the Thames valley on its way to ports of shipment farther west, but more especially to London itself, the national *entrepôt* for the export of corn. As prices rose dramatically in the early 1740s and again in the mid-1760s, there were widespread grain mutinies throughout Berk-

58. Griffiths, “Life and Works of Edward Haytley,” 25 no. 19 (fig. 24).

59. See H. R. French, “‘Ingenious and Learned Gentlemen’: Social Perceptions and Self-Fashioning among Parish Elites in Essex, 1680–1740,” *Social History* 25 (Jan. 2000): 44–66, and Steven Shapin, *A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England* (Chicago, 1994).

60. Myers, *A History of Sandleford Priory*, p. 22. See *The House of Commons, 1715–1754*, 2: 266, and *The House of Commons, 1754–1790*, 3:153.

61. See Thompson, *Whigs and Hunters: The Origin of the Black Act* (London, 1975), and P. B. Munsche, *Gentlemen and Poachers: The English Game Laws, 1671–1831* (Cambridge, 1981), p. 77.

shire. In the summer of 1766, there were hunger riots focusing on mills, sometimes involving crowds of up to five hundred people, centering on Newbury, Shaw, and Speenhamland, all of these places only a stone's throw from Sandleford.⁶² At Greenham Mill near Thatcham, only three miles away from the Montagu estate, Richard Winter was accused in 1766 of having “flung away and destroyed [all] the wheat flower.”⁶³ Bakers in Newbury, less than two miles from Sandleford, were forced to stop selling bread in early August 1766 and did not resume business for almost a month and even then only when every bake-shop door was placed under armed guard.⁶⁴ Even so, disorder continued throughout the neighborhood; at Abingdon (twenty miles distant) in September 1766 rioters led by a bargeman seized grain from farmers and distributed it amongst themselves, while at Drayton (nineteen miles away) a crowd of laborers stole wheat, flour, and other provisions.⁶⁵ By December 1766, the numbers of those arrested for riotous disorder in Berkshire was so great that the regular assize courts could not deliver the gaols of those awaiting trial, and special commissions had perforce been established to arraign those who had subsequently been apprehended.⁶⁶ It is difficult to believe that those indicted were a representative cross section of those who had actually been involved in the disorder. Women were almost certainly at the forefront of the marketing process and much more likely to be present at the flashpoint where consumers' expectations of the just price were frustrated by the nefarious practices of corn dealers, yet no women were included among the thirteen individuals who were subject to exemplary prosecution in Berkshire in 1766.⁶⁷ Overt protest and exemplary prosecution were, however, only the tip of an iceberg. Although, as Thompson long ago showed, the menace of the “many-headed monster” gradually receded, the inconvenience of plebeian insubordination had a very long half-life. Indeed, this “blur of indiscipline” could be sensed just beyond the park gates of Sandleford.⁶⁸ “Crimes of anonymity,” as Thompson called them, were committed in Newbury and its environs, especially at Greenham Common adjacent to

62. See W. J. Shelton, *English Hunger and Industrial Disorders: A Study of Social Conflict during the First Decade of George III's Reign* (London, 1973), p. 32.

63. Adrian Randall and Andrew Charlesworth, “The Moral Economy: Riot, Markets, and Social Conflict,” in *Moral Economy and Popular Protest: Crowds, Conflict, and Authority*, ed. Randall and Charlesworth (Basingstoke, 2000), p. 7 n. 24.

64. See Shelton, *English Hunger and Industrial Disorders*, p. 35.

65. See *ibid.*, p. 39.

66. See *ibid.*, p. 149.

67. See Thompson, *Customs in Common*, p. 327.

68. *Ibid.*, p. 41.

Sandleford, well into the early nineteenth century.⁶⁹ In 1772 an anonymous letter posted in Newbury sarcastically condemned the local gentry, including by implication Edward Montagu of Sandleford, as “great men” who were nothing but “sons of [w]hor[e]s”; warned them to “think of the po[o]r”; and reminded them of a recently preached sermon that had threatened damnation if they continued to starve the indigent.⁷⁰ If Haytley therefore invites us to share Montagu’s mechanical gaze of the estate *from above*, this moralized invective is a valuable reminder that Sandleford looked very different *from below*.

The impact of this distress and disorder in Sandleford is disclosed in the surviving archive of almost 7,000 letters to and from Elizabeth Montagu between the 1740s and the 1790s. Montagu’s personal experience of Sandleford was ambiguous: although she idealized retirement to the countryside, she thought that life there was solitary and sedentary. Although “not a place so remote [from London],” she wrote in frustration, “the rules of civility and hospitality regulate our intercourse with our neighbors, rather than choice.”⁷¹ The Sandleford fireside was, accordingly, the epitome of dullness. Although its reputation is not immediately self-evident from the painting, Sandleford Priory was, at least until it was remodeled in the 1770s, deeply unfashionable; its only items of interest (some of them depicted by Haytley) were its old walled garden and evergreen maze, its bowling green, its canal, its fishponds, and its orangery. Although Elizabeth Somerset, Duchess of Beaufort, had been warned by a local innkeeper in 1762 (almost twenty years after the Montagus were painted there) that “nobody went to see Sandleford and that it was by no means fine,” she was still disappointed that her perambulation of the estate left her with nothing but “a fine perspiration.”⁷²

Even while her husband was still alive, Montagu vicariously exercised the duties of the estate manager during his absences in London, describing herself in 1762 as a “mere farmeress who dines alone on beans and bacon and walks joint tenant of the shade with sheep, red cows and oxen.” In 1777 she again aspired to “the character of a farmeress” but complained that

69. See Thompson, “The Crime of Anonymity,” in Douglas Hay et al., *Albion’s Fatal Tree: Crime and Society in Eighteenth-Century England* (London, 1975), pp. 303, 309–10 and *Customs in Common*, p. 126.

70. Thompson, *Customs in Common*, p. 255.

71. Montagu, letter to Gilbert West, 21 Jan. 1753, *The Letters of Montagu, with Some of the Letters of Her Correspondents*, 4 vols. (London 1809–13), 3:224–25.

72. Scott, letter to Montagu, 15 Oct. 1762, MO 5928, HEH. For the context, see Stephen Bending, “Mrs. Montagu’s Contemplative Bench: Bluestocking Gardens and Female Retirement,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 69 (Dec. 2006): 555–80 and *Green Retreats: Women, Gardens, and Eighteenth-Century Culture* (Cambridge, 2013), pp. 135–72.

“the meager condition of the soil” at Sandleford prevented her from living “in the state of a Shepherdess Queen,” which she considered to be the “highest rural dignity.”⁷³ Although she claimed that she knew nothing about farming and had little or no interest in learning about it, she did practice estate paternalism in the 1770s. In the autumn of 1776, she participated in the “social economy of dearth” by planting thirteen acres of potatoes (thinking that “from the cultivation to the eating thereof it would be useful to the poor”) and selling almost £100 worth of the crop to the poor at half the market price (and the following year justified this initiative in relief-in-kind on the grounds that cash gifts would only be “squander[e]d in profitless tea or pernicious gin”).⁷⁴ In the summer of 1778, she bought cows and pigs for those of her tenants who had right of common pasture but were too poor to invest in livestock.⁷⁵ Her letters repeatedly rehearse the pitiful circumstances of the local poor. In May 1764, she found “the whole parish” of Sandleford, “in a wretched” condition with floods having drowned livestock and “bread and all provisions dear.” In August 1772, she noted that wheat, barley, and turnips had “all sufferd by drought,” and that “the dearness of all kinds of provision” had reduced her poor neighbors “to a state of wretchedness which I never saw before in England.” In December 1781, she was afraid that this winter “will be more severe to the poor than nay they have felt for many years,” and noted that what little grain there was was so bad that probably their constitutions may suffer from it.⁷⁶ Even in good years, she was not optimistic about her laborers’ living standards. Although she noted in 1773 that her barns and a large stack yard were “entirely filld” with corn and hay (“you never saw a finer display of rural wealth . . . we had indeed most plentiful crops”), she knew that such bounty offered only temporary mitigation of want: “I hope therefore the distresses of the poor will not be so great,” since “the one good year is not sufficient to make all the plenty one might reasonably wish.” In 1777, with her own wheat fetching as much as eight shillings a bushel, she nonetheless hoped that the price would soon fall, “for the poor labourers cannot earn a subsistence for their families when bread bears

73. Montagu, letter to the Earl of Bath, 9–10 June 1762, MO 4524, HEH; Montagu to Matthew Robinson, 9 June 1777, MS Additional 40663, fol. 57, BL.

74. John Walter, “The Social Economy of Dearth in Early Modern England,” *Crowds and Popular Politics in Early Modern England* (Manchester, 2006), pp. 124–80.

75. Montagu, letter to Scott, 15 Nov. 1776, MO 6002, HEH; letter to Edward Brigden, 16 June 1777, MO 689, and letter to Elizabeth Carter, 16 June 1778, MO 3450.

76. Montagu, letter to the Earl of Bath, 20 May 1764, MO 4632, HEH; letter to Scott, 19 Aug. 1772, MS Additional 40663, fols. 34r–34v, BL; and letter to Scott, 4 Dec. 1781, MO 106, HEH.

such a price.”⁷⁷ At times of dearth, moreover, she became especially sensitive to the level of wages, noting the penny or two differential between the daily rates offered to strong men and to “those past their youth, and believed that wages ought to be regulated by the price of corn.” She knew that the need to provide for shoes and clothing meant that many poor families were reduced to eating nothing but “barley bread,” and she regularly provided them with direct relief in kind.⁷⁸ She nonetheless differentiated between the poorest families who might receive pitchers of broth, soup, or bouillon and the more decent sort who were treated to roast veal.⁷⁹ She even made special provision for her haymakers, offering them a “broth of some nettles and coarse meat,” which amounted to what she believed to be a “good dinner.”⁸⁰ There is no reason to doubt the sincerity of these gestures of charity and hospitality, which were almost invariably offered in person.⁸¹

Her personal sensitivity to the needs of the laboring poor was most transparently expressed in a vivid account, offered to her sister Sarah in 1772, of her customary provision of estate hospitality. “My principal attention,” she wrote, has been to “providing food for my poor neighbors who are in the most literal sense starving.” Montagu explained that the Sandlford kitchens had been producing “eight quarts” (sixteen pints) of “rice milk” every day “for the suppers of hungry babies,” and that on baking days the milk and rice were “consolidated into pudding.” Vats of rice pudding were supplemented by “oceans of broth,” but even so the “general misery” was such that the neighborhood resounded with grumbling stomachs and “croaking bowels.”⁸² She reported that she had personally carried a rice pudding to a poor couple on neighboring Greenham Common who were overburdened with their own children. She had, nonetheless, taken the time to ascertain the facts of the situation. The father was a laborer, earning six shillings six pence a week (a wage that, as we shall see, was substantially below the going rate); the mother was sickly; and seven of

77. Montagu, letters to Scott, 13 [?Sept] 1773 and 26 Sept. 1777, MS Additional 40663, fols. 42–42v, 67v, BL.

78. Montagu, letter to Scott, 28 Jul. 1772, MO 5930, HEH.

79. Montagu, letter to Leonard Smelt, 15 Nov. 1776, MO 5012, HEH and letter to the Earl of Bath, 29 May 1764, MO 4637, HEH.

80. Montagu, letter to Scott, 28 Jul. 1772, MO 5930, HEH.

81. For the long-standing tradition of hospitality practiced by elite women, see Felicity Heal, *Hospitality in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 178–83.

82. Rice pudding also seems to have been her preferred mode of direct relief-in-kind to her pit-workers at Denton (Northumberland). See Montagu, letter to Elizabeth Carter, 17 Jul. 1775, MO 3366, HEH; J. V. Beckett, “Montagu: Bluestocking Turned Landlady,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 49 (Spring 1986): 158; and, more generally, Elizabeth Child, “Montagu, Bluestocking Businesswoman,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 65, nos. 1–2 (2002): 153–74.

their eleven surviving children had been bound out as servants, many of them doubtless forcibly removed as pauper apprentices by the parish officers under the terms of the apprenticeship clauses of the Elizabethan poor laws, reiterated in the 1690s.⁸³ The family's difficulties had been exacerbated by the rheumatic illness to which the father had succumbed the previous winter, which had "put him back in the world." The four resident children ("little ones") had only a bit of blanket each to cover them, and Montagu was so appalled at the sight of their nakedness that she "sent to buy cloth for a smock & linsey woolsey for a jacket," which she gave as charity to the poor mother. One can only imagine how the cottagers felt when Montagu arrived, in her chaise (no less), bearing all this bounty; perhaps their initial shock at the ostentation of her carriage was overcome by genuine gratitude that her ladyship, of all people, had bothered to do anything at all. Montagu herself recalled that the poor woman was "quite astonished," claiming that it was "the first kindness she had ever received," with the sole exception of a gift from the parish ("half a crown," or two shillings six pence) when she was seriously ill during her eleventh and final pregnancy. Although Montagu was delighted to taste "the honeydew of poor peoples good wishes," the general conclusion she drew from this encounter was a moral lesson to the patrician class as a whole: "if the rich people do not check their wanton extravagance to enable them to assist the poor, I know not what must become of the labouring people."⁸⁴ This remarkable and highly personalized act of charity notwithstanding, Montagu nonetheless became convinced that "the squire is more useful to his neighbors by finding them employment than he would be by feeding them at his gate."⁸⁵

The aggressive practices of estate management that were contemporaneously being introduced at Sandleford and elsewhere might obviously be read (as some contemporaries did) as an index of the hypocrisy of a landed class who claimed to be sensitive to the needs of the laboring poor yet nonetheless extinguished common property rights in the interest of possessive individualism. But enclosure might equally be interpreted more

83. See Hindle, *On the Parish?* pp. 191–226.

84. Montagu, letter to Carter, 17 Jul. 1775, MO 3366, HEH; Montagu, letter to Scott, 28 Jul. 1772, MO 5930, HEH.

85. Montagu, letter to the Earl of Bath, 2 June 1764, MO 4639, HEH. For the broader context, see Edith Sedgwick Larson, "A Measure of Power: The Personal Charity of Montagu," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, no. 16 (1986): 197–210; Eve Tavor, "The Bluestocking Sisters: Women's Patronage, Millenium Hall, and *The Visible Providence of a Country*," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 30 (Winter 2006): 25–55; and, more generally, Donna T. Andrew, "Noblesse Oblige: Female Charity in an Age of Sentiment," in *Early Modern Conceptions of Property*, ed. John Brewer and Susan Staves (London, 1995), pp. 275–300.

sympathetically as a recognition that established paternalistic practice, especially gentry hospitality customarily dispensed from the great house, could only ever mitigate the worst symptoms of poverty; and as a sincere attempt to transform unproductive waste into profitable allotments on which the poor might be set to work. As early as the 1750s, Montagu had been an apologist for the enclosure of neighboring estates and had even been perfectly happy to allude to the pejorative idiom—"joining field-to-field"—that the prophet Isaiah had used for engrossing, conveniently forgetting (of course) the Old Testament curse against those who behaved in that way.⁸⁶ But by the 1760s she was prepared to go beyond the justification of enclosure into the celebration of emparkment. She even eulogized the notorious depopulation of the Oxfordshire village of Nuneham Courtenay, some twenty-two miles distant, by Simon, first earl of Harcourt.⁸⁷ Harcourt demolished the old village order to create a landscaped park, designed by Lancelot "Capability" Brown, around his new villa, which had itself been designed by Stiff Leadbetter in 1757. By 1770, Nuneham Courtenay had become the epitome of the enclosed and depopulated community, the destruction of which was lamented in Oliver Goldsmith's celebrated poem "The Deserted Village" (1770), which excoriated those landlords who deracinated and impoverished rural inhabitants simply to create picturesque gardens.⁸⁸ Montagu's celebration of the social relations reconfigured by the creation of Nuneham Park goes way beyond mystification into justification. The village, newly relocated along the main road to Oxford, was, she insisted, "very pretty," its cottages "comfortable and convenient" with "a pretty garden allotted to every House." Montagu was convinced that she "never saw so many happy people as the inhabitants of the village" and that there was "neither poverty nor vice there." She was particularly enthusiastic about the sophisticated mechanisms of charitable relief: "ev-

86. The relevant scriptural passage is Isaiah 5:8: "Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there be no place, that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth!" For the long-standing significance of this idiom in opposition to enclosure, see Hindle, "Imagining Insurrection in Seventeenth-Century England: Representations of the Midland Rising of 1607," *History Workshop Journal* 66 (Autumn 2008): 27.

87. See Mavis Batey, "Nuneham Courtenay: An Oxfordshire Eighteenth-Century Deserted Village," *Oxoniensia* 33 (1968): 108–24.

88. See Oliver Goldsmith, "The Deserted Village" (1770), *Selected Writings*, ed. John Lucas (Manchester, 1988), pp. 51–62. And see Barrell and Harriet Guest, "On the Use of Contradiction: Economics and Morality in the Eighteenth-Century Long Poem," in *The New Eighteenth Century: Theory, Politics, English Literature*, ed. Felicity Nussbaum and Laura Brown (New York, 1987), pp. 121–43. For the various attempts to identify the English rural communities (including Nuneham Courtenay) on which Goldsmith's fictional deserted village Sweet Auburn may have been based, see Michael Griffin, *Enlightenment in Ruins: The Geographies of Oliver Goldsmith* (Lewisburg, Penn., 2013), pp. 172–73 n. 6.

ery villager puts in a penny p[e]r week as a fund for time of distress, and Lord Nuneham doubles it, and there is now a large fund." Charity brought with it incentives to industriousness: the inhabitants held an annual summer feast, awarding prizes to "the persons distinguished for spinning or rural labours." Enclosure and emparkment had, she believed, brought prosperity to the laboring population at Nuneham Courtenay, whose cottages were "so neat" with "such store of excellent bacon, and garden stuff to eat with it" that she thought that she "could lodge and board there very comfortably" herself.⁸⁹ She believed that the same might be true of Sandlford and its environs, much of which were apparently "improved" well before the parliamentary enclosure of Newbury parish in the late 1840s. A 1781 map of the 620-acre Sandlford estate suggests that the surrounding lands near Wash Hill and in western Greenham had already been enclosed by that date.⁹⁰ Montagu was certainly appreciative of what she regarded as the benefits of this process. She wrote to her husband in 1764 expressing delight at how "very agreeable" it was to see "all the waste common in the road to Down Husbands now well cultivated." "Under cultivation," she was convinced, commons "give bread to the industrious," whereas in their "rude state," they "harbor idleness & savage & desperate poverty."⁹¹

The piecemeal enclosure of the neighboring "wastes," including the thousand-acre heathland of Greenham Common, was one thing, the fate of Sandlford Priory itself another. By the late 1770s, Montagu herself had recruited Capability Brown to empark the Sandlford estate, and it is intriguing that she did so very shortly after her husband of thirty-three years died in 1775. It is almost as if her attitudes toward rural labor could only find genuine expression in the independent state of mind that came with widowhood. Indeed, Edward Montagu had been dead but two weeks when Elizabeth wrote that she "may perhaps indulge myself with laying out two or three hundred a year in embellishing the grounds, as the money will keep the neighborhood in better employment."⁹² She had already confided in her sister as early as 1767 that she had "long seen" that the Sandlford estate was "capable of considerable improvement" and "urged it" upon her husband but that "he being averse to trouble was always angry" and re-

89. Montagu, letter to Elizabeth Carter, Sept. 1777, in *Mrs. Montagu, "Queen of the Blues": Her Letters and Friendships from 1762 to 1800*, ed. Reginald Blunt, 2 vols. (London, n.d.), 2:35–36.

90. See Berkshire Record Office, Reading, D/ELM T19/2/13, *Enclosure in Berkshire, 1485–1885*, ed. J. R. Wordie (Berkshire, 2000), p. 112.

91. Montagu, letter to Edward Montagu, 14 Aug. 1764, MO 2523, HEH.

92. Montagu, letter to Elizabeth Carter, 5 June 1775, MO 3361, HEH. For a sensitive analysis of the dynamics of the marriage between Edward and Montagu, see Bridget Hill, "The Course of the Marriage of Montagu: An Ambitious and Talented Woman without Means," *Journal of Family History* 26 (Jan. 2001): 3–17.

fused. Within a year of Edward Montagu's death, however, Brown was let loose on the estate.⁹³ Outbuildings (offices and barns) were removed; several walls and hedges demolished; and the kitchen garden relocated.⁹⁴ This was the price to be paid for the creation of vast, informal lawns and artificial lakes around which ornamental pathways were arranged. Montagu's friend and correspondent the poet and philosopher James Beattie thought it "beautiful," a remodeling conducted to "very great advantage indeed."⁹⁵ Everywhere she looked, Montagu herself thought that "beauty had been enhanced." She reported in 1784 her "great pleasure" at the "great but invisible art" with which Brown had embellished the estate. She was particularly pleased with the "fine effect" of the artificial lake and thought the whole scene elegant without being disfigured by the "tricks and fopperies of art." Brown, she thought, had introduced "great variety" to the landscape "without departing from the rural & pastoral."⁹⁶ She even persuaded herself that the improvement of Sandleford had been conducted without gratuitous expense, arguing that the two to three hundred pounds a year it cost to embellish the estate in this way was unostentatious and even frugal.⁹⁷ It is nonetheless striking that her program of subsidized potato sales and livestock purchases was introduced only after she had begun to remodel the estate in the mid-1770s, almost as if she sensed that the laboring poor would suffer collateral damage as a consequence of emparkment. Nor was she oblivious to the charge of hypocrisy; to complete Brown's scheme, she wrote defensively in 1789, will "cost me eight guineas a Week to day laborers for some months to come, without reckoning the expense of Trees for plantations & salary of a supervisor of the business." She accordingly hoped that she would not be regarded as "a person who says one things, & means another, but while there are so many poor people, who in this time of high price of bread cannot get half employment, I will not economise in the article of Labour."⁹⁸ If even Montagu herself was

93. Montagu, letter to Sarah Scott, 27 Sept. 1767, MO 5859, HEH. For the exchange of letters between Brown and Montagu, see Dorothy Stroud, *Capability Brown* (London, 1975), pp. 195–97, and Edward Hyams, *Capability Brown and Humphry Repton* (New York, 1971), pp. 102–6.

94. For the symbolic significance of the kitchen garden, which was often destroyed or relocated during emparkment, see Rachel Crawford, *Poetry, Enclosure, and the Vernacular Landscape, 1700–1830* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 170, 203.

95. James Beattie, letter to Dr. Porteus, 18 Aug. 1784, in William Forbes, *An Account of the Life and Writings of James Beattie*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1806), 2:152. For Beattie, see Roger J. Robinson, "Beattie, James (1735–1803)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/1831

96. Montagu, letter to Carter, 19 June 1784, MO 3569, HEH.

97. See Myers, *A History of Sandleford*, p. 34, and Bending, "Mrs. Montagu's Contemplative Bench," pp. 557–58.

98. Montagu, letter to Sarah Scott, 4 Nov. 1789, MO 6194, HEH.

unconvinced that the improvement of Sandleford was entirely beneficial to the poor, it is hardly surprising that others were skeptical and even contemptuous. William Cobbett (no less), who passed through the park in October 1821, commented that “of all the ridiculous things I ever saw in my life [Sandleford Priory] is the most ridiculous.”⁹⁹

Whatever its appeal might have been in aesthetic terms—the wholesale extension of its manicured lawns, the creation of two large and beautiful lakes—the emparkment of Sandleford by definition implied depopulation. By 1800, there were only three inhabited households left in the village.¹⁰⁰ Little wonder, then, that the “plebeian” poet James Woodhouse, who was Montagu’s estate steward and the reluctant supervisor of her improvement project in the years 1767–78 and 1781–88, found his responsibilities repellent and demeaning and subsequently turned against her aggressive form of aestheticized estate management. Woodhouse excoriated Montagu in poems so critical that they could not be published until after her death and even then only in expurgated form representing her as a Nimrod who “hunt[ed] the poor from each improverish’d plain.”¹⁰¹ He even imagined her rehearsing a classic formulation of the doctrine of the utility of poverty: “to keep men humble you must keep them poor” (CS, 2:7).¹⁰² The remodeling of the estate was, Woodhouse insisted, symptomatic of her tyranny, with Sandleford being reduced to “a pure, unmix’d, despotic, state” where there was no “room . . . for free debate.” The suppression of dissent ultimately extended even to physical exclusion, with Woodhouse himself reduced to the status of mere *staffage* in a landscape that he had once managed. Taunted and humiliated for his very presence at Sandleford Park, he experienced the kind of ostracism to which the laborers themselves, whom he characterized as nothing but “loath’d rustics,” had already been subject (CS, 1:131, 1:171).

But while Montagu disdained the idle poor, she satisfied her own con-

99. William Cobbett, *Rural Rides*, 2 vols. (London, 1912), 1:5.

100. See Myers, *A History of Sandleford Priory*, pp. 39–40.

101. James Woodhouse, “The Life and Lubrications of Crispinus Scriblerus,” in James Woodhouse and R. I. Woodhouse, *The Life and Poetical Works of James Woodhouse*, ed. R. I. Woodhouse, 2 vols. (London, 1896), 1:118; hereafter abbreviated CS (written in the 1790s though published in abbreviated form in 1814–16). For Woodhouse, see William J. Christmas, “Woodhouse, James (bap. 1735, d. 1820),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/29924; Denney, “‘Unpleasant, tho’ Arcadian Spots,’” esp. 513–14; and Bridget Keegan, *British Labouring-Class Nature Poetry, 1730–1837* (Basingstoke, 2008), pp. 37–64.

102. Compare Joseph Townsend’s remark in 1786 that the “wisest legislator will never be able to devise a more equitable, a more effectual, or in any respect a more suitable punishment, than hunger is for a disobedient servant” (Joseph Townsend, *A Dissertation on the Poor Laws* [London, 1786], p. 20).

science that she was fulfilling her charitable obligations by employing them in their uttermost need and simultaneously succeeded in keeping them grateful. She believed that her improvement schemes would provide employment opportunities throughout the two full years it would take to empark the estate but was sensitive to competing demands for agricultural labor: "I have at present," she noted in June 1783, "many hands employ'd at it, but shall reduce that number from the beginning of harvest till after its conclusion . . . these kind of works are a resource to the poor labourers in Winter, but in harvest time it would be injurious to the Farmer to employ the hands which may assist him." She noted with pleasure that her workforce contained several demobilized soldiers and wished that they would all take such "honest employment."¹⁰³ She wrote in early September 1789 of her satisfaction at being able to employ the poor around the park at a time when wet weather had prevented the harvest from being taken in: "At present the labourers can hardly get bread for their families, & those who are old & infirm cannot get employment of the farmers." She commented proudly that she had eighteen of these "feeble persons" at work on her "pleasure grounds," which is "some help to them," adding that in harvest time she only ever employed "this set of people." She justified her employment of the elderly and the weak on the grounds that it was "hurtful" to other employers to recruit able-bodied labor and counterproductive to employ those who were enterprising enough to seek contracts elsewhere. In doing so she skillfully obscured (and perhaps even refused to admit to herself) the fact that she was relying on cheap labor and therefore driving down wages in the local labor market. Above all, it is the complacency and self-satisfaction in her attitude to labor that shines through: "I think it would be detestable not to endeavour to make ones vanities & luxuries of some use [to the poor]."¹⁰⁴ Woodhouse was unpersuaded, convinced that her philanthropy was hypocritical, describing her charitable activities as nothing but "cheats to hide/unbounded vanities—caprice—and Pride." In essence, therefore, Montagu's emparkment of Sandleford epitomized the "increasingly rigid distinction between the landscape garden as the natural domain of the landlord [or landlady] and the agrarian landscape as the appropriate province of the laborer."¹⁰⁵

103. Montagu, letter to Scott, 16 June 1783, MS Additional 40663, fol.121v, BL.

104. Montagu, letter to Scott, 6 Sept. 1789, MO 6189, HEH. For the view that the old and infirm were by far the least likely groups to secure employment in the difficult conditions of the 1780s and '90s, see Samantha Williams, *Poverty, Gender, and Life-Cycle under the English Poor Law, 1760–1834* (Woodbridge, 2011), pp. 131–59.

105. Birmingham, *Landscape and Ideology*, p. 30.

4. Conclusion: Labor Performed and Labor Represented

Montagu had by the 1770s quite literally edited out of her own field of vision at Sandleford Park those very idle pleasantries of rural life—the laborers gossiping, drinking, and sleeping among the haystacks—that had been so central to Haytley’s representation of Sandleford Priory in 1744. If Haytley’s painting sought (however ambiguously) to idealize Edward Montagu’s polite supervision over the land in the 1740s, one can only speculate how he might have represented Elizabeth Montagu’s subordination of cultivation to aesthetics on the estate in the 1780s. A couple of decades later, the poets Robert Bloomfield and John Clare famously described the landscaping of Euston Park and of Burghley Park, what one garden historian has described as episodes of “bloody and of psychic repression,” in terms of exploitation and expropriation.¹⁰⁶ One can only imagine what a Haytley painting of Nuneham Park or the emparked Sandleford Priory might have looked like. He may well have shared Bloomfield and Clare’s sense that emparkment could be carried out only at the expense of material and psychological loss to the laboring poor, but it is almost certain that he would have had to represent the relatively underpopulated Sandleford landscape of 1744 as almost depopulated altogether by 1784.

So much then (and it is not, it has to be said, an entirely sympathetic assessment) for Elizabeth Montagu. But what about her laborers, those blurry figures in Haytley’s landscape who remain, despite their vivid poses and expressive gestures, so inarticulate? Fragmentary sources might allow us some insight into the life experience—or (to use Keith Wrightson’s resonant idiom) the “life chances”—of the type of Sandleford laborer depicted by Haytley.¹⁰⁷ The Reverend David Davies estimated in 1795 that a Berkshire farm laborer would receive the common weekly wages of seven shillings for eight months of the year, perhaps increasing to eight shillings a week during the remaining four months when he might perform task work (that is, jobs remunerated at piece rates). This was also, moreover, a dual economy, in which the labor input of his wife was not just significant but essential: the wife’s common work was to bake bread for the family, to wash and mend ragged clothes, and to look after the children; but at beansetting, haymaking, and harvest she earned about six pence a week. On the assumption that the family had five children aged between infancy and eight years old, Davies calculated weekly expenses of almost nine shillings (with almost two-thirds of that sum being spent on flour alone),

106. Robert Williams, “Making Places: Garden-Mastery and English Brown,” *Journal of Garden History* 3, no. 4 (1983): 384.

107. Keith Wrightson, *Earthly Necessities: Economic Lives in Early Modern Britain* (New Haven, Conn., 2000), p. 221.

leaving a deficit against earnings of almost six pence (7 percent) a week, and even this made no allowance for replacing clothing, utensils or bedding. Davies was therefore convinced that even with his “utmost exertions” the laborer could “scarcely . . . supply his family with the daily bread.”¹⁰⁸

Davies nonetheless assumed that wages were earned continuously all year round. The realities of the labor market, however, were long periods of chronic underemployment punctuated largely by crisis episodes of short-term unemployment. This experience is typified in the settlement examination of James Wallen, an illiterate agricultural labourer who gave evidence of his life of labor before the Berkshire magistrates Thomas Wyld and Francis Page at Thatcham on 29 January 1784, some four decades after *The Montagus at Sandleford* was painted and seven years after Sandleford was emparked.¹⁰⁹ Wallen explained that he had been born at Cold Ash in Thatcham, some three miles from Sandleford, where his father was legally settled. Wallen’s first employment had been in 1752 when he had hired himself to the Sandleford maltster Thomas Tarrant as a malting man. Although he was promised six pound wages for the whole year, he had fallen victim to the nefarious practice of the “fifty-one week hiring,” his employer turning him off two days before the completion of the full calendar year that would have secured him the legal settlement necessary to continue living and working in Sandleford, and to add insult to injury he lost the six pence wages he would have earned had he served the whole term.¹¹⁰ In 1753, he came to Newbury where he spent the next thirteen or fourteen years as a servant in husbandry (a resident agricultural laborer hired at board wages) to the farmer John Brown. Wallen’s remuneration reflected the seasonality of the demand for his labor: a shilling a week for most of the year, increasing to three shillings weekly during the hay harvest, and six shillings weekly between harvest and Michaelmas.¹¹¹ This apparently secure position ended suddenly in 1764 when his master died, and he was forced to seek work elsewhere. At Michaelmas 1764 he had been hired for a year to serve as “odd[-job] man” to William Austin, a yeoman

108. David Davies, *The Case of the Labourer in Husbandry Stated and Considered*, in *Three Parts* (London, 1795), pp. 13–14, 28.

109. The following account is based on *Berkshire Overseers’ Papers, 1654–1834*, ed. Peter Durrant (Berkshire, 1997), pp. 163, 203.

110. For the notorious practice of hiring farm servants for fifty-one weeks, see Keith Snell, *Annals of the Laboring Poor: Social Change and Agrarian England, 1660–1900* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 73–80, and Snell, *Parish and Belonging: Community, Identity, and Welfare in England and Wales, 1700–1950* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 146–48.

111. Compare the terms of employment usually offered as described in Ann Kusmaul, *Servants in Husbandry in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 1980).

at Widgham, at an annual wage of five guineas (five pounds five shillings). The following year he agreed to another annual contract and his loyalty was rewarded with a pay increase, but an injury to his leg caused him to leave in May of 1766. He returned to Thatcham to live as an invalid with his brother and sister, but his legal settlement (now contested between the four parishes of Thatcham, Widgham, Sandleford, and Newbury) was still at issue in 1784, which explains why he was brought before the justices. James Wallen's life of labor was, therefore, evidently the kind of living—discontinuous, seasonal, poorly remunerated, vulnerable not only to exploitation, chance, and accident but also to the intervention of the poor law authorities—that many contemporaries thought “so precarious and uncertain that they could not give it a name.”¹¹² Indeed, one might reasonably ask, what kind of living was this?

But that is about as far as we can go in plausibly reconstructing the experience of labor in mid-eighteenth-century Berkshire in general and mid-eighteenth-century Sandleford in particular. And in any case, even in the context of the evidence available for Wallen, there is so much that we do not and cannot know about the property and labor relations that governed his experience; we might be aware of his nominal wage rates, but they are of little or no significance unless we can learn how much he paid for rent, for food, for fuel, and the other necessities of life. The situation is all-too-similar with Haytley's haymakers. To be sure, the ritual and economic significance of the hay harvest in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England is well attested, and Montagu's correspondence discloses its local inflection. The “harvest home feast” of 1773, she noted, was “very splendid in its way,” with “a large Lamb roasted whole & crowned with garlands of flowers, & much other good cheer.” She took “great pleasure in feasting those who are seldom feasted” and felt that there was “a kind of neighbourly kindness in thus treating the poor laborers & their families which is more gracious then simply giving them a private meal.”¹¹³ Yet the terms on which Montagu employed her laborers can only be partially reconstructed. She noted in July 1772 that an able-bodied laborer at Sandleford might earn fourteen pence a day (seven shillings a week), an estimate that concurred with that of David Davies. After she assumed sole control of the estate in 1775, she argued that Sandleford was, in terms of ownership and employment, specifically “Amazonian Land,” and considered “the women as capable of assisting in agriculture as much as the men: they weed my corn, hoe my turnips, and sett my potatoes, & by these means promote

112. Wrightson, *Earthly Necessities*, p. 314.

113. Montagu, letter to Scott, 13 [?Sept.] 1773, MS Additional 40663, fol. 42, BL.

the prosperity of their families.” But she was equally concerned about their ability to feed and refresh themselves; she noted in September 1777 that she had “about 40 reapers at work at present, to take advantage of the fine weather,” and that although she brewed “seven hogsheads of small beer” she feared that it would not last through to the end of harvest. “The poor reapers & haymakers,” she fretted, “bring nothing but water into the field, which with bad cheese & fine bread is their general fare.”¹¹⁴ It is nonetheless unclear whether the male wages to which she referred were inflated at times of high demand; whether her “Amazonian” women were hired all year round or only seasonally as required; and whether the small beer that they consumed so freely was a perquisite of the job or given in lieu of wages. And nothing at all is known of the cottages and hovels in which they lived or of the rents that they paid for them. Our chances of matching even plausible, still less precise, economic data to these figures in the landscape seem slight indeed.¹¹⁵

The ideological work performed in Haytley’s painting therefore remains ambiguous and begs numerous questions not only about the relationship between labor and leisure in English rural society but also about the relationship between patron and artist. Given that the widespread internalization of the doctrine of the utility of poverty, on which so many recent commentators have insisted, was reinforcing the perceived need to inculcate industriousness amongst the laboring classes, it is striking that Haytley’s haymakers are not only idle but idle even under the watchful supervision of the landlord. Perhaps Haytley’s personal familiarity not only with the luxurious lifestyle of the propertied elite but, equally, with the realities of poverty among the laboring classes was in play here. After all, his relationship with his patrons may have been close, but it was not enough to save him from bankruptcy. If the artist did share his patron’s concern with the utility of poverty, it may only have been in the sense that he sympathized with the laborers’ insouciant ways. Indeed, it is striking that although Haytley’s master takes pride in his telescope, he is portrayed not in the very act of observing his workers but is actually looking the other way, and his family seems equally oblivious to plebeian licentiousness. The painting might therefore be read more subversively, even as a critique of Edward Montagu’s ineffective labor discipline, with Haytley enjoying the irony of how much both he and the workforce were able to get away with,

114. Montagu, letter to Scott, 28 Jul. 1772, Mo 5930, HEH; and letters to Matthew Robinson, 9 June 1777 and to Scott, 26 Sept. 1777, MS Additional 40663, fols. 57, 67v, BL.

115. For an attempt, based on the closely contextualized study of one particular labor market on a late seventeenth-century Warwickshire estate, see Hindle, “Work, Reward, and Labor Discipline.”

right under the nose of their employer. This may even have been a critique with which Elizabeth Montagu herself came to sympathize, frustrated as she was with her husband's lackadaisical attitude towards the management of the Sandleford estate. One might even imagine Elizabeth Montagu engaging in an overt act of self-fashioning by displaying the picture in the public areas of the house where it would be seen not only by family and friends but also by those numerous visitors who were increasingly keen to tour the country seats of the gentry.¹¹⁶ One wonders how this polite audience might have reacted to the painting; if they looked hard enough, they may well have laughed, but, if so, at whom (and with whom) were they laughing?¹¹⁷

One observer, at least, was less amused than disgusted. James Woodhouse almost certainly saw the painting, and his response focused in particular on Edward Montagu's omniscient telescope. In his withering satire on the Montagu family, he rhetorically asked if "Pleasure's Daughters" and "Dissipation's Wives" would "as nicely scrutinize their [own] careless lives?" He wondered whether "Folly's fashionable Sires and Sons" would "engage their talents while Time's hour-glass runs?" and "turn the same end of telescopic glass" to "watch their [own] faults, and foibles, while they pass?" (CS, 6:201, 2066). In encouraging the Montagus to turn their magnifying, mechanical gaze back on themselves, he was both puncturing their inflated self-image and looking askance at their pretensions to micromanage the conduct of their employees.

Wherever the painting was in fact hung at Sandleford, it nonetheless reinforced Montagu's own developing sense that the rural poor were not only indolent but delighting and perhaps even prospering in that indolence. Whether or not Haytley would have agreed with her is, of course, a moot point, for his untimely death ensured that he did not witness the radical surgery that she conducted on the estate in the 1770s. Even so, many of the themes represented in the painting (the leisure preference of the workforce; the potential for idleness, inebriation, and insubordination not just beyond but within the park gates; the tendency of laborers of both sexes to dress above their station; and the ambition of landlords to oversee, perhaps even to micromanage, the activities of the tenants and laborers) resonate with the personal preoccupations that run through Montagu's correspondence. One wonders therefore if Haytley had not (however unselfconsciously, perhaps even unwittingly) painted a rural landscape—and

116. See Retford, *The Art of Domestic Life: Family Portraiture in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven, Conn., 2006), p. 10.

117. For the comic dimensions of early eighteenth century representations of labor, see Barrell, "Sportive Labor," pp. 108–20.

the lives of labor that were experienced within it—that she would soon come to detest, and ultimately to destroy.

What then, does this art-historical reading of the social relations of production contribute to our understanding of agrarian change in eighteenth-century England? What can be learnt from Haytley's painting that could not be discerned from a close reading of treatises on political economy, manuals of agricultural improvement, or the archives of landed estates? All works of imagination are, inevitably, ideological to the extent they are produced and consumed through various filters of ideas, beliefs, and expectations. This is no less true of Haytley's representation of apparently real Sandleford haymakers than it is of any other rural landscape or conversation piece. Haytley's depiction of the laborers' "industriousness" contrasts with his precise delineation of the Montagus' own "leisure preference" for empiricism and surveillance, and as such it has a connotation that must be explored in the context of the assumptions of the landed elite of which the Montagus themselves were such prominent members. As much as the haymaking scene may seem realistic, it is suspect in the sense that it fixes as natural the ideological fiction that the laboring poor were essentially idle. Quasi-fictional as it is, however, the painting materializes the dynamics of labor in ways that the itemized payments in an estate wages book or the detailed report of a farm bailiff could never do. Haytley's achievement is to render agricultural labor not only more accessible but differently visible, even perhaps more *meaningful*, to those who would have gathered around and conversed about his painting. To this extent, *The Montagus at Sandleford Priory* actualizes the archive, disclosing those residues of labor—the gestures and the gossip, the refreshments and the recreations, the sweat and the slumber—that are only faintly perceptible in the laconic manuscript sources through which economic historians themselves conventionally toil.