

All Italy an Orchard: Landscape and the State in Varro's *de Re Rustica*

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Abstract

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This project examines the way in which Varro, in his *de Re Rustica*, interacts with the political and social issues of his day. Written at the end of the Republic, the *dRR* belongs contextually to a period wherein farms and shepherds, the countryside and the villa were all inherently and inevitably part of current political discourse and were the focal point of contemporary ideologies. This context, coupled with the work's striking content—including dynamic settings and characters, wordplay, moralizing, murder, and election fraud—and its dialogue form suggest that the *dRR*, ostensibly about husbandry, is in fact about the Republic. In a dialogue that masquerades as a guide to farming and herding, the land is naturally important, but the ways in which Varro approaches the landscape suggests that it has a deeper resonance within the text. I argue that in the *dRR*, Varro uses the landscape as a filter for examining the state of the state, the shifting values of the Roman elite, Roman identity, and different ideologies regarding the countryside, farming and herding.

Chapter One addresses the conflation of and conflict between spaces, places, and people in the dialogue, looking particularly at the settings, character names, and the relationship

between the city and the country. I argue that by conflating spaces and displacing people, Varro challenges the ideology of the time that celebrates the country as refuge from and answer to the failings of the city. Chapter Two examines the shift in landscape that occurs over the course of the *dRR*, from a landscape that is predominantly natural and privileges *utilitas* in Books One and Two to the morally problematic landscape of the villa and villa herding, which is almost wholly manmade and aims at *voluptas*, in Book Three. In the *dRR*, these shifting landscapes represent a process of moral decline, whereby Romans have lost sight of simplicity, utility and traditional Republican values, and the same luxury and excess that now define the villa have also destroyed the state. Finally, Chapter Three explores the *dRR*'s presentation of mankind's power over nature and the disparity that emerges between the interlocutors' idealization of human control as natural, particularly Roman, and guaranteed with the right knowledge, and the less rosy reality (revealed by the texts inconsistencies and deficiencies), wherein control is illusory, neither natural nor easily attainable. Ultimately, Varro reveals that his interlocutors, the work's farmer-statesmen, who claim to have control over the landscape and the knowledge necessary for success, in fact have neither the control nor knowledge required to run their farms and villas—or the Republic—fruitfully.

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Introduction: Reading the *de Re Rustica*

In 43 BCE, Marcus Terentius Varro found himself on the list that cost Cicero his life. Born in 116 in Reate, Varro had an illustrious political and military career, serving variously as quaestor, praetor, aedile, and tribune of the plebs, appointed to Caesar's land commission in 59, having command of naval forces in Pompey's piratic wars, and commanding military forces in Spain in the Civil Wars.¹ Like Cicero, Varro had been a supporter of Pompey during his war with Julius Caesar, but, also like Cicero, was spared and pardoned in the aftermath of Pharsalus.² While at some point during the two years following Pharsalus Caesar tasked him with the creation of Rome's first public library (Suet. *Iul.* 44), Varro spent most of that period in retirement at his villa, undoubtedly expanding his literary corpus.³ But in 43,⁴ the newly allied second triumvirate placed Varro's name on their proscription list, and Varro lost much of his property, but not his life, to Marcus Antonius.⁵

¹ For brief biographies of Varro, see Conte 1999: 211–12 and Keyser and Irby-Massie 2008: 774–75.

² Diederich 2007: 299 suggests that Varro's involvement in the Civil War was due less to his enthusiasm for the cause than to his friendship with Pompey. Cf. to Skydsgaard 1968: 98–99, who states that Varro "sided with Pompey as the best defender of the Roman Republic." For his role in the Civil Wars, see Caes. *Civ.* 1.38, 2.17-21.

³ For more on Caesar's planned library, see Taylor 1934: 229. Thibodeau 2011: 83 and Diederich 2007: 299 both assert that Varro limited his political activity especially after Pompey's death, instead choosing to spend his time at his villas. Cicero's letters suggest that Varro spent at least part of 45 at his Tusculan Villa (*Fam.* 9.1-5).

⁴ Scholarly opinion differs as to when Antony first seized Varro's estate at Casinum. Conte 1999: 212 and Hooper and Ash 1935: xv both assign the confiscation to 46, when Varro had left Rome with Pompey, while Taylor 1934: 228 points to Cic. *Phil.* 2.104-105 as clearly indicating that Antony confiscated Casinum after Caesar's death.

⁵ In the official proscriptions begun in 43, Octavian undoubtedly had more of a hand than traditionally ascribed to him, as Southern 2013: 94–99 argues. Taylor 1934: 229 proposes that Varro's publication of *de gente populi Romani* in 43, in which he supports the deification of Caesar, may have saved his life in the proscriptions later that same year. According to Appian, Varro survived the proscriptions due to the help of his friend Calenus, who hid him (*B.Civ.* 4.47). Varro does not mention the proscriptions explicitly in the *dRR*, but in the preface to the second

By the time of the proscriptions, villas had evolved from their earliest manifestation—a rural estate that was both residential and productive—to include also suburban luxury properties that offered respite from the city while still providing the creature comforts and extravagances of an urban dwelling (and often lacking the productive function of rural villas), while rural villas boasted more elaborate residences, replete (as Varro notes in the *de Re Rustica*) with frescoing, inlaid work, mosaics, gold, citrus wood, azure, vermilion paintings, and statuary (3.1.10, 2.4-5).⁶ Most of the elite owned multiple well-appointed and lavishly decorated Italian villas, which both displayed their owners' status and, through their produce, provided them with wealth. In other words, between the capacity for profit that many of the villas contained in their attached farms, orchards, vineyards, presses, stables, and pastures, and the monetary value of their increasingly resplendent trappings, villas were significant repositories of wealth. Coming up on the losing side of a political dispute, Varro and many of his peers also lost their villas in all their splendor, labeled enemies of the state to simultaneously justify the plundering of private property and cull potential political opponents.⁷

I begin with Varro's first hand experience of the impact that the contentious politics of the late Republic had on the Italian countryside because it is with this experience of dispossession that Varro wrote the *de Re Rustica* (which I will from here refer to as the *dRR*), a

book, he refers to his personal experience in raising cattle in the past tense (2.Pr. 6). Aulus Gellius relates that Varro, in his work *the Hebdomades* (or *de Imaginibus*), states that his extensive writings, which numbered seventy times seven books by his 78th year (38 BCE), were plundered when he was proscribed (*NA* 3.10.17).

⁶ Marzano 2007 provides an excellent and extensive examination of the function and development of the villa in central Italy, utilizing both literary and archaeological evidence.

⁷ Southern 2013: 97–98 emphasizes that while the financial benefit from the property confiscation undoubtedly played a significant role in the triumvirate's proscriptions, we should not downplay its function as a means of securing their positions by eradicating opposition and reshaping the senate. David 1996: 166–67 notes that the justification of proscription as punishment for people and towns who act like enemies of the state was more understandable in Sulla's proscriptions of 82.

dialogue in three books, which outlines the art of agriculture (Book 1), husbandry (Book 2), and the tending of villa animals, such as birds, bees, and hares (Book 3). In other words, the *dRR* is a work that focuses on the villa—as the land of the elite, as the locus of labor, as the source of wealth—written by a man whose villa, famously featured in the third book as the site for the pleasure aviary par excellence (*dRR* 3.5.2, 8), was confiscated amidst the death rattle of the Republic. Though too often overlooked or under appreciated by the scholars who have studied the *dRR*, this irony demonstrates the necessity of considering *dRR* as a text written in a context where farms and shepherds, the countryside and the villa were all inherently and inevitably part of the current political discourse and the focal point of contemporary ideologies, and that as such the *dRR*, ostensibly about husbandry, is in fact about the Republic.

In a dialogue that masquerades as a guide to farming and herding, the land is naturally important, but the ways in which Varro approaches the landscape—which I define here as the natural features of the Italian countryside, the natural life that is part of the countryside, and the elements that define different spaces, all as they are perceived, experienced, and altered by humans⁸—suggest that it has a deeper resonance within the text. In this study, I argue that Varro uses landscape in the *dRR* as a filter for examining the state of the state, shifting values in the Roman elite, and different ideologies regarding the countryside, farming, and herding. Of course,

⁸ Human relationship to the natural environment and its features is of chief importance in this definition, as landscape (in opposition to “space” or simply “the land”) cannot exist outside of cultural perception, as Alcock 2002: 30 states in her study on landscape in the ancient world: “Landscape...contains a multitude of meanings, all of which revolve around human experience, perception, and modification.” Art historians, while considering landscapes from a pictorial rather than textual context, still also make humans central to the definition of the term. So Andrews 1999: 4: “A landscape, then, is what the viewer has selected from the land, edited and modified in accordance with certain conventional ideas about what constitutes a ‘good view.’” See Cosgrove 1984: 13–39 for an exploration of the history of landscape and its social/cultural implications. Leach 1988, 3–23 and Spencer 2010, 1–10 both provide excellent overviews of what “landscape” is, the importance of the spectator in understanding landscape, and exploring landscape in the Classical world, both in textual and pictorial manifestations.

making such a claim requires more contextualization than the proscriptions alone. What follows is my attempt to provide a fuller context for reading the *dRR*. In addition to exploring Varro's place in the ancient tradition and his assessment in modern scholarship, I overview the significance of land and agriculture in the history of Roman politics and elite ideology as a way of contextualizing the possible implications of agriculture as a theme at the end of the Republic. Lastly, I also discuss the genre and dating of the *dRR*, both of which are problematic but potentially enlightening for a political reading of the text.

1. Varro, the *dRR*, and scholarship

While Varro's political and military efforts were not insignificant, he was and is most well known for his intellect. A prolific writer, he published an estimated 74 works in 600 books in his lifetime. His scope was similarly vast, for he wrote on everything from antiquarian interests and Latin linguistics to Plautus, while also composing 150 books of Menippean Satires, which possibly included a pamphlet against the first triumvirate called the Τρικέφαλον (or, the Three Headed Monster).⁹ In his own day and after, he was considered a master scholar. In the *Brutus*, Cicero calls Varro "a man pre-eminent in genius and in all erudition" (*vir praestans omnique doctrina*, 56.205), praise mirrored later by Quintilian, in whose opinion Varro is "the most learned man among the Romans" (*vir Romanorum eruditissimus*, *Inst.* 10.1.95) and by Plutarch,

⁹ His antiquarian studies include *De Antiquitate Litterarum* on the history of the Latin alphabet and the *Antiquitates Rerum Humanarum et Divinarum* on the history and organization of Rome's culture and religion. His work on Latin Linguistics, *de Lingua Latina*, is his most well known work today, despite being only partially extant. His works on Plautus include the *Quaestiones Plautinae* (a commentary) and the *De Comoediis Plautinis*, which examined and categorized the 130 comedies attributed to Plautus. Appian attests the Τρικέφαλον at *B. Civ.* 4.2.9. For an overview of why many modern scholars doubt the traditional interpretation of this text as a critique of the triumvirate and an argument for the traditional interpretation, see Astbury 1967.

who calls Varro βιβλιακώτατος, “the man most book-learned” (*Rom.* 12.).¹⁰ Cicero also depicts Varro as a masterful wordsmith. In the *Academica*, which Cicero dedicated to Varro in expectation for the latter’s dedication of the *de Lingua Latinae*, he lauds Varro for his ability to bring the subject of his works to life for his audience (*Cic. Acad.* 1.3.9).¹¹ The first public library in Rome, completed under Octavian’s auspices and Asinius Pollio’s supervision, boasted a bust of Varro, the only living author so represented and thus an attestation to the esteem in which he was held. Indeed, in his time and after, his popularity was on par with that of Cicero and Virgil—an assessment upheld by Petrarch, to whom Varro is, after the two more canonical authors, “il terzo gran lume di Roma,” the “third great light of Rome” (*TF* III.38)¹²

Yet for all the adulation Varro and his extensive corpus received throughout antiquity, very little of his work survives. The Menippean Satires, the *Antiquitates*, and other of his work survive only in scant fragments, many preserved in Aulus Gellius’ *Noctes Atticae* or in Augustine’s *de Civitate Dei*. Records of other works exist in later authors who cite them as a source—for instance, Vitruvius informs us that one book of Varro’s *de Novem Disciplinis* was on architecture (7.Pr.14).¹³ Of the original twenty-five Books that comprised *de Lingua Latinae*, Books 6-10 have survived in tact, while of Varro’s immense oeuvre, the *dRR* is the only work now completely extant.

Despite being the only completely surviving work, the *dRR* is little read and underappreciated. A dialogue in three books, the *dRR* presents staged conversations on three related

¹⁰ All translations in this study are mine, unless otherwise noted.

¹¹ Cicero writes the dedication for the *Academica* in a letter (*Fam.* 9.8), contrary to normal practice. For more on the complex relationship between Cicero and Varro, see Fantham 1977, Leach 1999, and Wiseman 2009: 107–130.

¹² See Conte 1999: 220–21, who overviews his continued high stature in later antiquity.

¹³ Jerome, who credits Varro with writing more in his life than most people could copy, provides an (by his account) incomplete index of Varro’s Latin works (*Ep.* 33.1-2). For a summation of what we know of Varro’s works and their contents, see Conte 1999: 212–19.

rural sciences. In Book One, set at the Aedes Telluris in Rome in 43 BCE,¹⁴ agriculturally-named Roman men,¹⁵ while waiting for the arrival of their host, the temple caretaker, who had invited them to the temple in the first place, strike up a conversation on the how-to's of farming, led largely by Gnaeus Tremelius Scrofa and Gaius Licinius Stolo, two expert agronomists—the former, who served with Varro in Caesar's land commission of 59 BCE, himself an author of a lost work on agriculture. After examining such subsections of farming as the best type of land, the buildings necessary for a functional farm, and the seasons for planting and harvesting, the book abruptly closes before the official end of the discussion at hand, when a distraught slave announces that the host, who has indeed been absent for the whole discourse, has been accidentally murdered in the forum, and the interlocutors disperse. Book Two, which is set in Epirus in 67 BCE during Pompey's Piratic Wars, offers a discussion, again held by men whose names are apt for the topic, on large-animal herding. Covering topics ranging from purchasing and breeding to pasturing and feeding, the gathered men discuss the proper care of cows, pigs, sheep, goats, horses, donkeys, mules, dogs, and herdsmen. Having discussed the herding instructions for the nine animals agreed upon, the men part ways, leaving for a festal banquet.¹⁶ The final book takes place in 50 BCE at the Villa Publica in Rome,¹⁷ where the interlocutors have gathered after voting in the aedilician election. While awaiting results, the men—many with the names of birds—outline the science of the *pastio villatica*, or the pasturing of villa animals, such as bees, birds, fish, and dormice. In the midst of the discussion, news that somebody has been

¹⁴ The dramatic date of Book One is neither stated nor firmly agreed upon (when it is discussed at all) by scholars. See pp. 43-49 below for more on the issue.

¹⁵ I explore the names of the interlocutors of all three books and their signification and significance in Chapter One. See pp. 68-82 below.

¹⁶ The specific occasion being separated has been lost from the text, but is likely the Parilia, as I discuss further below. See pp. 53-54.

¹⁷ The dramatic date of Book Three, like Book One, is not specified in text, but most scholars now agree that 50 BCE is the most likely date. See p. 63 below.

caught stuffing the ballot boxes emerges, and the intricacies of tending aviaries and hives are set against periodic updates on the fraud. The Book ends with the announcement of the winning candidate and a summation of the most morally disputatious part of villa herding, fishponds.

For years, scholars have lamented that the *dRR* is the only fully extant text of an author of Varro's reported caliber, as Dahlmann attests by asserting that reconstructing his fragmented works is the most important task in Varronian studies.¹⁸ Tatum also notes this scholarly privileging of Varro's lost works over the complete but often eschewed or maligned *dRR*.¹⁹ Indeed, other scholars, based on what little we have left of his work—namely the *dRR* and the extant books of the *de Lingua Latina*—might believe we are better off not having more: “One might even venture the outrageous suggestion that Varro would be less highly thought of if his work had been better preserved.”²⁰ By and large, modern assessment of Varro conflicts with his reputation in antiquity. While tastes inevitably change over time, the chasm that exists between ancient and modern opinion on Varro's worth suggests that we may be missing something—that is, beside most of his literary output. Over the last century or so, much of modern scholarship focused on Varro's literary or stylistic merit, most highlighting its inadequacies.²¹ For instance, according to Eduard Norden, the worst style in Latin prose is to be found in the *de Lingua*

¹⁸ Dahlmann 1963: 3.

¹⁹ Tatum 1992: 195: “Varro is not the only author from antiquity whose literary reputation rests primarily on works we no longer possess. Whatever merits we profess to find in the fragments of the *Menippean Satires* or the *Logistorici*, one may safely say that the literary attributes of Varro's extant and continuous prose writings have proven, if not quite elusive, then certainly little appreciated.”

²⁰ So Laughton 1965: 64, who makes this suggestion after asserting that “we can find no literary merit to justify” devoting a symposium to Varro, thus indicating exactly how highly Varro is currently regarded.

²¹ Some works on style include Krumbiegel 1892, Heidrich 1892, Norden 1898, Heurgon 1950, Laughton 1960.

Latinae and the *dRR*.²² Others are less sweeping and more specific in their critiques: Heurgon sees in Varro's style a strange and careless blend of colloquialness and artifice, while Tilly describes it as neither elegant nor clear, and Laughton declares that Varro's sentences are simultaneously clumsy and complex.²³

Of course, ancient appreciators of Varro such as Quintilian and Augustine were not always entirely taken with his eloquence, but they had the benefit of his entire oeuvre for forming more balanced opinions of his work.²⁴ While many modern scholars have written on Varro's non-extant works, and while the *de Lingua Latina* benefits from being of linguistic interest, the *dRR* has long suffered from a simplistic approach.²⁵ Scholarly work on the dialogue has traditionally been limited mostly to elements of cultural, historical, or legal interest. For instance, Varro's pleasure aviary at Casinum, described in loving detail in Book Three, has been the focus of multiple articles and attempts at reconstruction.²⁶ The *dRR* has also garnered interest for its presentation of slavery and legal questions, such as the relationship between the *pastio villatica* and the laws of *occupatio*, as well as the use of the death penalty for killing a plow ox.²⁷ Others have focused on Varro's use of other authors in the dialogue, on specific characters (or

²² Norden 1898: 194ff. While outdated, his judgment of Varro sets the tone for scholarly assessments of Varro for the next 75 or so years.

²³ Laughton 1960: 1; Tilly 1973: 13; and Heurgon 1978: L. Diederich 2007: 172–79 also provides an overview of distinguishing characteristics of Varro's style, though without the denigration that is a part of most earlier examinations of his style. See also Dahlmann 1935: 1186–94 for a more positive stance on the literary merit of the *dRR*.

²⁴ Quint. *Inst.* 10.1.95 and Aug. *de Civ. D.* 6.2

²⁵ A small sample of non-*dRR* Varronian studies includes work on the *Menippean Satires* (e.g. Rolle 2013, Lee 1937, and Bonandini 2012), scholarship on linguistics and the Latin language (e.g. Maltby 1993, Guasparri 1998, Garcea 2008, and D'Alessandro 2012), and on Roman religion, history, and culture (e.g. Taylor 1934, Cancik 1985, Green 2002, Klingshirn 2006, Van Nuffelen 2010, and Zack 2012).

²⁶ van Buren and Kennedy 1919, Fuchs 1962, Laughton 1965, and Flach 2004

²⁷ On slavery, Roth 2004, Roth 2005, and Lewis 2013; on the *occupatio*, Watkin 1990; on the death penalty, Bellandi 2007.

occasionally specific events) in the *dRR* and their correlation to historical counterparts, or on questions regarding the dramatic dates of the text.²⁸

While the tendency to hyper-focalize is not in and of itself a bad one, it becomes problematic when scholarship on a particular work is limited to this kind of exploration. The *dRR*, however, has also suffered from readers' insistence or ready acceptance that the dialogue is in fact, as it seems, simply an agricultural text. This traditional assumption leads many either to excuse or ignore its technical shortcomings in an effort to portray the work more positively, or to dismiss it as an ineffective farming manual. Rayment, who argues that the *dRR* excellently displays Varro's range of interests and versatility before cataloguing instances of both, acknowledges that the technical nature of the work either turns readers away or limits their pleasure.²⁹ Tilly blames faults in the *dRR* and in its style on Varro's haste in writing it but still maintains that the work's (and Varro's) merit resides in its encyclopedic approach to facts and data.³⁰ Skydsgaard, who explicitly states that he views the dialogue as a branch of science not as literature, repeatedly highlights the work's limitations and inconsistencies and general unhelpfulness for any reader looking for a practical handbook.³¹ Taking a slightly more nuanced approach, Rawson, while asserting that the errors and shortcomings of Varro's technical explanations distance it from the needs of real life, recognizes the literary flair of the work: "the dialogue convention, learned references and literary digressions attest the author's aspiration to

²⁸ On his use of other authors, see Magno 2006 and De Angelis 2007; for characters and events, see Tatum 1992 (on Appius in Book Three), Virlouvet 1996 (on Clodius Pulcher's election fraud as inspiration for Book Three), and Martin 1971: 237-55 (for Scrofa in Books One and Two); on the *dRR*'s dramatic dates, see Jones 1935, Richardson 1983, and Linderski 1985.

²⁹ Rayment 1945.

³⁰ Tilly 1973: 26-27.

³¹ Skydsgaard 1968, esp. p. 8.

artistic form.”³² In allowing the *dRR* to have some merit as a piece of *literature*, Rawson gives the work space to be more than an ineffectual and inconsequential manual.

Rawson’s recognition of the literary as well as the technical aspects of the dialogue is part of a trend in more recent scholarship on the *dRR*, which looks beyond the text’s ostensible subject of farming. Taking into consideration the dialogue form, the distinctive settings of each of the books, the linguistic playfulness and wit displayed throughout, and the strange events—such as the accidental murder of the dialogue’s host in Book One or the electoral fraud in Book Three—that color the work, scholars have increasingly focused on the work’s literary aspects and the implications that its artistry and complexities have regarding its function. In this vein, Linderski, asserting that the dialogue is a blend of genres, examines the interplay between the *dramatis personae*, the humor, and the dialogue discussion of *dRR* 3.³³ Additionally, Tatum, while focused mainly on the question of the historicity of Varro’s presentation of Appius in Book Three, notes that the *dRR* is a highly literary work, composed with artistry and wry humor and dealing with typical Roman themes such as modern extravagance and past thrift.³⁴ Indeed, this new perspective on the *dRR* has become pervasive, and scholars who deal with the dialogue in some capacity are now less likely to dismiss it as technical drivel or antiquarian ramblings.³⁵

Nevertheless, in-depth studies of the *dRR* are still in short supply. Most scholars who work with the text do so only as a small portion of research on a specific topic or related

³² Rawson 1985: 46, 137. See also Percival 1976: 25–26; Diederich 2007: 180; and Nelsestuen 2011: 333 who similarly perceive the *dRR* as having both a technical function a more literary framework.

³³ Linderski 1989: 114

³⁴ Tatum 1992: 190–95

³⁵ See, e.g., Rawson 1985: 136–38; Henderson 2002: 131; Thibodeau 2011: 83–84, who all acknowledge the literary nature of the *dRR* in their works on other topics. Purcell 1995 provides a literary take on the *dRR*, examining the third book’s portrayal of the nature of a real villa in terms of the *pastio villatica* and the issue of productivity.

works—such as Roman space or Virgil’s *Georgics*.³⁶ Yet several studies offering a substantial focus on the *dRR* have recently come out that are particularly important for my own work, as they approach the dialogue as more literary than technical in nature, a text that is both shaped by and responding to the cultural and political atmosphere in which it emerged. On the comprehensive end of the scholarship spectrum, Diederich’s book on the agricultural texts of Cato, Varro, and Columella provides a useful if broad examination of the *dRR*, looking at aspects including but not limited to Varro’s source material, philosophical influences, genre, the style of Varro’s prose, humor in the text, the division of speaking roles, and the social issues at play in the work.³⁷ In a more focused article that provides a persuasive interpretation of the settings in the *dRR*, Green examines the interplay between the setting of Book Three at the Villa Publica during an election and the interlocutors’ discussion of the art of the *pastio villatica*. She suggests that the opening of Book Three is a *mise-en-abîme* of the dialogue’s section on aviaries that guides the readers in understanding the birds as an allegory for Roman citizens in the current political state—that is, amidst the turmoil of the civil war between Antony and Octavian.³⁸

Similarly influential are the scholars, particularly Nelsestuen and Kronenberg, who have recently emphasized the parodic or satiric qualities present in the *dRR*. Nelsestuen uses the character of Scrofa in the first and second books as a means of examining the generic nature, arguing that the work is “satirico-philosophico-technical dialogue” with intellectual and

³⁶ In addition to Rawson 1985, Henderson 2002, and Thibodeau 2011, see also Leach 1988:147–76, who primarily assesses the *dRR* in terms of its relationship to Virgil’s *Georgics*.

³⁷ Diederich 2007: 1–10, 22–52, 172–208, and 297–367. While the breadth of her study limits her overarching point (which is that Roman agricultural texts, like Varro’s *dRR*, Cato’s *de Agricultura*, and Columella’s *dRR*, merge the scientific with the literary and participate in cultural ideology), the scope of her work also assures that it has something for everyone interested in Varro’s dialogue.

³⁸ Green 1997.

ideological agendas.³⁹ In her recent book on Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*, Varro's *dRR*, and Virgil's *Georgics*, Kronenberg provides her interpretation of what Varro's agenda in the *dRR* might be, reading the *dRR* as a parody of the traditional pro-countryside morality stance of Roman discourse, whereby Varro reveals that profitability is the true virtue of farming. Lastly, Spencer includes Varro in her monograph on Roman landscape, treating the *dRR* as a work that participates in the broader Roman literary discourse on landscape—which includes farms, villas, the countryside, and the city—and its use as a way of configuring and conveying Roman identity.⁴⁰ In its recognition of the ideological potential inherent in the dialogue, her work is particularly significant for this project, providing the stepping-stones for the deeper and more focused examination of Varro's multifaceted use of landscape as a means of engaging with contemporary political and social issues found here. While this shift in approach to Varro is promising, these more nuanced examinations of the *dRR* are still limited in scope. This dissertation is an attempt to broaden our understanding of the way in which Varro, in his dialogue, interacts with the political and social issues of his day. As I argue, the landscape acts as a metaphor for the state in the *dRR*. As a means of dissecting the function of landscape in the dialogue, I explore the various complex relationships that Varro describes between landscape and man and that he creates by juxtaposing landscape with moralizing comments or politicized moments.

³⁹ Nelsestuen 2011 (quote from p. 348). The article's intent is to demonstrate the generic complexity of the *dRR* as an argument for showing why the dialogue deserves more study, so Nelsestuen does not delve into the more complicated question of what specifically the broader intellectual and ideological agendas of the text might be.

⁴⁰ Spencer 2010, esp. 69–84.

2. Historical Context and the Problems of the *dRR*

Many elements contribute to a literary reading of the *dRR*, and the chapters that follow will examine specific components within the text that suggest a greater social and political awareness within the dialogue than is usually credited to it. In addition to such in-text moments, there are several general factors that can be enlightening for readers of the *dRR* and, because they are either problematic or frequently overlooked, that require careful consideration: the dialogue's genre and dating, as well as its historical context, particularly in respect to the history of land in Roman ideology and politics. As important components of the work's basic framework, these three issues, when carefully examined, provide a richer understanding of the *dRR* and its complexities.

A. Genre

The genre of the dialogue has long been a factor that has directed (or misdirected, as the case may have it) its scholarly interpretation, even though the question of generic classification is far from a straightforward one. The agricultural (and pastoral) subject matter of the discussions in the *dRR* has been the impetus for many scholars' interpretation of the work as a technical manual, particularly since Varro, in the prefaces to the three books, and the interlocutors whose conversations are recorded frame those conversations as guides—instructions on farming and herding for the elite Roman. However, two aspects of the *dRR* complicate this generic assessment: the work's dialogue form and the obvious inadequacies of the agronomic instructions.

Cato may have first taught agriculture to speak Latin, as Columella prettily states in his own agricultural treatise (Col. 1.1.12), but of all the Latin authors who later took up the mantle

and wrote specifically about husbandry, Varro alone chose the dialogue form to do so.⁴¹ Despite the uniqueness of Varro's choice, and the questions that it should at the very least raise regarding the genre of the work, most early scholars either ignored the medium of the *dRR* in their discussions or viewed it as a means of enlivening the subject matter.⁴² In an article on Virgil's *Georgics*, Doody suggests that modern audiences are faced with the question of "how to square literariness of writing with the practicality of the subject matter."⁴³ While she applies her answer—that literariness and traditional knowledge are not mutually exclusive—to Virgil, her call for scholars to recognize that the boundaries between technical and non-technical writing may be more fluid than traditionally allowed is equally apt for Varro's agricultural work. The form of the *dRR* certainly makes the presentation of the rustic topics more entertaining, but its use is more suggestive than that, as the dialogue is a philosophical form, and, given that the *dRR* was written in the decade after Cicero's prolific outpouring of political and philosophical dialogues, Varro's choice to present his work on husbandry in this form necessarily suggests emulation of Cicero.⁴⁴

That the dialogue form is more than just a meaningless conceit to add variety to a potentially dry subject is evident in Varro's adherence to features of the medium that characterize its philosophical use. The carefully constructed *mise en scènes*, the suspension of

⁴¹ A fact that both Dahlmann 1935: 1186–94 and Linderski 1989: 113 cite as evidence of Varro's originality and value.

⁴² For example, van Buren and Kennedy 1919, Heurgon 1950, Laughton 1960, Laughton 1965, and Ross 1979 all ignore the potential impact that the work's dialogue form has for the text. Rayment 1945: 352 counts the dialogue form as one of the *dRR*'s unqualified successes as a work, while Skydsgaard 1968: 10 attributes its use to Varro's wish to make a dry subject more interesting.

⁴³ Doody 2007: 182.

⁴⁴ Scholars more recently have been apt to point out the philosophical associations of the *dRR*'s form. See, e.g., Green 1997: 428; Diederich 2007: 180–82; and Nelsestuen 2011: 317. Tatum 1992: 195 asserts that Varro's use of the dialogue form implies both the direct influence of Cicero and emulation or competition with him.

normal business that allows for a leisurely discourse, a sense of playfulness mixed with an exploration of deeper issues, and the attention necessary on the part of the reader to understand the implications and richness of the text are all aspects of the *dRR* that it shares with the unquestionably philosophical dialogues of Plato and Cicero.⁴⁵ The latter author is particularly significant as a counterpart to Varro. For, writing under similar conditions (as supporters of the losing party in a period of political instability), he was responsible for utilizing the philosophical dialogue to engage with political and social questions. Cicero's dialogues, written mostly between from 46 to 44 BCE, take on as subject matters everything ranging from a history of oratory to friendship to Stoicism. Some are more overtly political or philosophical than others, but all seem to contribute to Cicero's overarching philosophical program, wherein written philosophy is a tool for mending Roman citizens and the failing Republic when other arenas for serving the state have closed.⁴⁶ In other words, in Latin, the dialogue was—or became—primarily a political-philosophical form.

The *Brutus* may provide a useful parallel for the generic problem we face with reading the *dRR*. Cicero's *Brutus* is a lengthy dialogue, strangely set in Rome, ostensibly providing a history of Latin oratory. As with the *dRR*, readers generally take the dialogue at face value, but both works are, rather, “paradigms of the use of apparently disengaged intellectual inquiry to work out political disputes in a way typical of late Republic Roman literary culture.”⁴⁷ That is, readers who do not look beyond the subject miss essential elements of the dialogue: for the

⁴⁵ For dialogue settings, see Levine 1958: 147; for the requirement of leisure for the discussions, see Cossutta 2006:197; Stroup 2010:47; and Womack 2011: 26; for the combination of playfulness/entertainment with serious discussion, see Levi 1976: 13, 18 and Womack 2011: 28; for the attention to detail that is required to fully understand the implications of the text, see Kronenberg 2009: 9 and Nicgorski 2012: 249.

⁴⁶ So Dugan 2005:13–19; Baraz 2012: 2–3; and Nicgorski 2012: 2–4.

⁴⁷ Dugan 2005:177 offers a description of the *Brutus* and its use of a history of oratory as a means of examining problems in the State that is equally apt for Varro's *dRR*.

Brutus, Cicero's proposed program of literary production;⁴⁸ for the *dRR*, commentary on the state of the state. The connection between Cicero, Varro, and literary production is more direct, however, because the former implored the latter to join him in "writing republics" (Cic. *Fam.*

9.2.5):

modo nobis stet illud, una vivere in studiis nostris, a quibus antea delectationem modo petebamus, nunc vero etiam salutem; non deesse si quis adhibere volet, non modo ut architectos verum etiam ut fabros, ad aedificandam rem publicam, et potius libenter accurrere; si nemo utetur opera, tamen et scribere et legere πολιτείας, et, si minus in curia atque in foro, at in litteris et libris, navare rem publicam...

Only let this stand firm for us—that we live together in our studies, from which we before were accustomed to seek pleasure, but now also salvation; that we not be found wanting if anyone wishes to employ us, not only as architects but even as workers, to build up the republic, and, more, that we hasten to it with pleasure; if nobody will take advantage of our service, that we still both write and read *Republics*; and that we serve the Republic zealously, if not in the senate house or in the forum, in our letters and books.

Although it is unclear whether Cicero is encouraging Varro to write dialogues in particular (the reference to building and writing republics could be a double reference to Cicero's political agenda and his dialogue the *de Re Publica*), his appeal that Varro contribute to his philosophical vision by writing in service to the state is an unequivocal statement of his view of the importance of literary production for the vitality of the Republic and proof positive that Varro was aware of it.

In addition to the type of politically minded philosophy that Cicero produced at the end of his life, the dialogue form may link the *dRR* to Menippean Satire. Scholars have traditionally asserted what Bakhtin describes as a genetic relationship between Menippean Satire and the Socratic dialogue.⁴⁹ While we know that Varro wrote 150 books of these satires,⁵⁰ there is still

⁴⁸ See Dugan 2005:172–250 for a persuasive political reading of the *Brutus*, and Stroup 2010: 163–66 for the literary program in the *Brutus*.

⁴⁹ Bakhtin 1981: 26. See also Relihan 1993:180 and Kronenberg 2009: 4.

some uncertainty as to what form the satire took. Conte describes them as being prosimetric, with “a certain recurrence of fantastic, celestial themes.”⁵¹ Kronenberg, on the other hand, emphasizes that the Menippean satire was not a fixed genre and thus had greater potential for variety in structure and content.⁵² While there is more ambiguity to the generic parameters of Menippean satire than makes it possible to determine whether the *dRR* could be counted as such, the latter dialogue still contains clear satiric elements that suggest, at the very least, the influence of that genre.

Bakhtin describes Menippean satire as work that “turn[s] inside out the lofty aspects of the world and world views,” and that to this “must be added an intense spirit of inquiry and a utopian fantasy,” although the utopian element is “timid and shallow.” Its “unfettered and fantastic plots and situations all serve one goal—to put to the test and to expose ideas and ideologies.”⁵³ Full of wordplay and etymologies that are out of place in technical literature (as Varro would have been well aware) and semi-scientific systemization, the *dRR* also combines humor and intellectual inquiry—to a degree that has received much attention from scholars.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ We have some titles and fragments of Varro’s satires. Cicero highlights the direct influence of Menippus on Varro’s style of satire at the *Academica* 1.8: (*Menippi*) *libros M. Varro in satiris aemulatus est, quas alii “cynicas,” ipse “menippeas” appellat*, “Marcus Varro emulated the books of Menippus in his satires, which some called “cynic,” but he himself called “Menippean.”

⁵¹ Conte 1999: 216–18, probably basing these generic characteristics on Quintilian, who comments that Varro wrote another kind of satire in a mix of prose and verse (10.1.95).

⁵² Kronenberg 2009: 4–5, who notes that the works of Varro alone, whose satires were called Menippean by Jerome, and Lucian, who wrote dialogues featuring Menippus, are explicitly connected to Menippus. See also Relihan 1993: 50–51.

⁵³ Bakhtin 1981: 26.

⁵⁴ Heurgon 1950: 69–70 calls Varro an etymologist first and foremost and explores his use of humor; Tilly 1973: 28 points out that the “Invocation to the Muses, the many digressions on etymology and history and derivation of words do not belong to a scientific treatise on agriculture.” Skydsgaard 1968: 10; Linderski 1989: 110; Purcell 1995: 153; and Diederich 2007: 203 all note the connection between the *dRR*’s comedic elements and satire. Kronenberg 2009: 76 and Nelsestuen 2011: 333–336 both see the hyper-scientific or hyper-intellectual portrayal of the work’s interlocutors as either satiric or parodic.

Furthermore, the dialogue offers idealized pictures of the rural sciences they expound, contributing a minor but clear ‘utopian element’ to the world that Varro creates in text, a world whose detail and vividness of characterization has also been pointed out as similar to the world building found in satires.⁵⁵ Lastly, the *dRR* also resembles satire in its complex examination of morality and social issues, simultaneously offering up ideals and ideologies even as it subtly calls them into question—a process through which the dialogue comments upon the state of Rome and its people.⁵⁶

The apparent ineptitude of the so-called informative material in the *dRR* also becomes significant in light of the text’s potential relationship to satire. As mentioned above, those who have read the dialogue as instruction manual alone must either ignore or in some way account for its inadequacies as such. Commonly, readers have taken the words with which Varro opens the work’s first preface to heart as an explanation (*dRR* 1.1.1):

otium si essem consecutus, Fundania, commodius tibi haec scriberem, quae nunc, ut potero, exponam cogitans esse properandum, quod, ut dicitur, si est homo bulla, eo magis senex.

If I had possessed more leisure, Fundania, I should write more suitably for you these things which now I shall set forth as I am able, thinking that I must make haste because, as it is said, if a man is a bubble, an old man is more so.

The clunky prose, the inconsistencies, the errors, the lack of appropriate information are, thus, attributed to his haste and his old age.⁵⁷ Of course, this response is part of the greater tendency

⁵⁵ For the golden age imagery in the text, see pp. 154-61 below. Purcell 1995: 153 views Varro’s world building—from the names and characterizations of the interlocutors, their banter, and the scene-setting—as recognizable as the same types of worlds found in the satires of Horace.

⁵⁶ Leach 1988: 161 and Green 1997: 431 both connect Varro’s treatment of ideologies with a satiric influence. Kronenberg 2009: 74, while not explicitly connecting the use of ideology in the *dRR* and satire, emphasizes that while Varro explores elite ideology, he subverts it rather than embraces it. Diederich 2007: 297; Spencer 2010: 70; and Nelsestuen 2011: 328 all also call attention to the importance of ideology to Varro’s treatment of the rural arts in the *dRR*.

⁵⁷ See, e.g., Laughton 1960: 4 and Richardson 1983: 287, who suggest that the haste was probably habitual to Varro as a prolific author, not due to age; Skydsgaard 1968: 86, who

among readers to accept Varro's statements as simple facts—as Tatum puts it, they “do not respect him enough to doubt him.”⁵⁸ By attributing the instructions' inadequacies to an elderly man who is writing too quickly to write either accurately enough or with sufficient detail to be useful to his wife (which is an irony, if ever there was one, given that his concern is that he help her while he still can), we take away from Varro the attribute that all ancient commentators accredited him with—his great learnedness. While even the most intelligent or educated of people make mistakes or occasionally become sloppy in the details out of haste, given the degree to which the information in the text is problematic, it seems more likely that the inconsistencies and errors in the text are (at least largely) intentional and, thus, significant.⁵⁹ In other words, they are yet one more aspect of the *dRR* that contribute to the social and political commentary that the work as a whole engages in.

B. Dating

Having now a fuller picture of the complexities inherent in the matter of the work's genre and how that relates to readings of the dialogue, one more general issue remains that is relevant here: namely, dating. In the opening of the first book, Varro states that he is approaching his eightieth year. Born in 116 BCE, that places the production of (at least) the first book of the *dRR*, by Varro's own account, in 37 BCE. This date—or the few years around it—has been generally

attributes mistakes both to haste and to insufficient practical knowledge on Varro's part; Tilly 1973: 27 also cites haste and a lack of revision.

⁵⁸ Tatum 1992: 190 contrasts the ready acceptance of Varro's word, due to his perceived artlessness and inadequacies, to the suspicion (of veracity) with which scholars approach authors who are perceived of as more literarily gifted, like Cicero and Caesar.

⁵⁹ Diederich 2007: 173 argues that haste in writing could only account for some of the textual inconsistencies, while Green 1997: 431 likewise views what she calls the “paradoxes” in the text intentional. See also Kronenberg 2009: 73. For more on the issues with the instructions, see Chapter Three below.

accepted as the date of composition.⁶⁰ A few difficulties, however, remain. First, each book of the *dRR* has a distinct dramatic setting and date. While the temporal setting of Book Two is clear—Varro mentions that he and the other interlocutors are in Epirus in the midst of Pompey’s war with the pirates (2.Pr.6), which sets the Book unequivocally in 67 BCE—the dramatic dates for Books One and Two are rather more nebulous, at least for a modern audience.⁶¹ For *dRR* 1, two timeframes are generally proposed: the mid-fifties or the period around Julius Caesar’s assassination—both periods of trouble for Rome.⁶² More scholarly ink has been dedicated to deciphering the dramatic date of *dRR* 3, which features an aedilician election and the historical Appius Claudius Pulcher as an augur. Given this, most scholars agree that the date of Book Three is either 54 or 50 BCE, although most now agree that the latter is more likely.⁶³

Without here going into the likelihood and significance of the different dramatic dates of the three books, which I examine in Chapter One, the broad range in dates that the dialogue’s narratives offer has led to disagreement regarding the composition date, with some readers

⁶⁰ See, e.g., Tilly 1973: 29; Richardson 1983: 461; Linderski 1985: 253; Thomas 1987: 230; Tatum 1992: 199n.51; Green 1997: 432; Conte 1999: 219; Roth 2007: 287; and Thibodeau 2011: 6. Virlouvet 1996: 881 and Hutchinson 2009: 204 both suggest a lengthier composition period by emphasizing that Varro wrote the *dRR* from 37 on.

⁶¹ While the year of Book Two is undisputed, Jones 1935 puts forth a convincing argument that it is more specifically set during the *Parilia*, both a shepherd’s festival and the anniversary of the founding of Rome, in April of that year.

⁶² The violence with which Book One ends—namely the accidental murder of the temple caretaker—is a factor for both camps. Linderski 1989: 119 sees it as a reference to the street fights between the gangs of Clodius and of Milo that plagued Rome in 57 and 56. Alternatively, Diederich 2007: 182 interprets it as a mirror to the uproar following Caesar’s assassination—including the accidental murder of the poet Cinna. The circumstances of Cinna’s death fit more closely the Aeditumus’ murder as Varro describes it at the end of Book One.

⁶³ Dahlmann 1935: 1192 and Richardson 1983 offer arguments in favor of 54. Linderski 1985; Tatum 1992: 193; Green 1997: 432; and Diederich 2007: 183 all support 50 (notably the last year before Caesar crossed the Rubicon) as the dramatic date, Linderski in particular providing a thorough examination on evidence of both sides of the question.

suggesting that Varro wrote the three books individually over an equally broad period of time.⁶⁴ This proposal stems from two key factors: a recognition of textual inconsistencies countered by an urge to explain them (in this case, the contradictory function of the first preface as an introduction to the work as a whole but also to the first book alone) and an assumption that the dialogue is a record of real rather than composed conversations (and thus, that comments within the dialogue that might help date it also correspond to the period in which Varro wrote that book).⁶⁵ But as discussed above, the reasoning behind this dating scheme ignores the generic implications of the text, needlessly seeking to amend and bring into line inconsistencies that are probably intentional and disregarding that the conversations represented in dialogues are, by convention, fabricated and often set in the past.⁶⁶ In other words, there is no reason to suppose that Varro wrote the dialogue over an extended period.

Second, while the accepted composition date of 37 is a solid supposition, it is not without problems. The date is based on Varro's own statement of his age, the veracity of which declaration cannot be guaranteed. Varro died in 27 BCE, providing a definitive date *ante quem* for the composition of the text, while references to the Julian calendar, instituted in 45 BCE, in Book One supply a date *post quem*. Close similarities between the *dRR* and Virgil's *Georgics*, which scholars have used to show Varro's influence on Virgil (and help establish the starting date for the latter's work on the *Georgics*), cannot in themselves serve to fix the period of the *dRR*'s

⁶⁴ So Martin 1971: 223, 227–35, 282–86 suggests that Varro composed Book One in 55, Book Two at an undetermined date, and Book Three close to 37, when he put out the complete product. Heurgon 1978: XXV–XXVI concurs.

⁶⁵ Martin 1971: 219 explicitly remarks that the conversations are not imagined.

⁶⁶ Cicero himself pedantically explains the functionality of dialogues in his epistolary dedication of the *Academica* to Varro (*Fam.* 9.8.1): *Puto fore ut cum legeris mirere nos id locutos esse inter nos quod numquam locuti sumus; sed nosti morem dialogorum*, “I think that when you read this you will be surprised that we discuss among ourselves that which we have never discussed; but you know the custom of dialogues.” For Cicero's tendency to set his dialogues in the past, see Levine 1958: 147.

composition, since the direction of influence cannot be determined.⁶⁷ Columella, however, provides confirmation that the *dRR* antedates the *Georgics*, for he lists Varro immediately preceding Virgil in his chronological list of Latin sources for his own agricultural text (Col. 1.1.12), limiting the possible production date of Varro's *dRR* to between 45 and roughly 37 BCE. Finally, although not definitively, given that Varro sets Books Two and Three in the past, it is likely that Book One is similarly not contemporaneous to the time of composition—even if it is set only a few years prior. If the dramatic date of Book One is January 43, as I argue in Chapter One, the *dRR* was composed—as is generally believed—in the early 30s. Varro wrote his agronomic dialogue, then, in the midst of the civil war between Antony and Octavian, the second extended period of civil strife for Rome in just over a decade.

C. Rome and the land

This leads to the final consequential factor for reading the *dRR*, the historical context. The *dRR* was not written in isolation from the world in which Varro lived, and so it of necessity engages to some degree with the political turmoil of the time, from civil strife and the uncertain vitality of the Republic to the perceived decay of morality and the use of husbandry and the villa as a means of negotiating both national and political identity. Romans had a long history of identifying the farmer as the good citizen and good statesman.⁶⁸ To the elite, agriculture and (to perhaps a lesser extent) herding represented the traditional way of life for Romans, the original national occupations, foundational and fundamental to Roman identity, and thus a source of

⁶⁷ For the dating of the *Georgics* see Thibodeau 2011: 6. For the *dRR* as a significant source for the *Georgics*, see, e.g., Griffin 1979: 64; Leach 1988: 147–80; and Doody 2007: 181–84. Tilly 1973: 29 rightfully points out that it “cannot be determined if both drew closely from the same source, or if one drew from the other.”

⁶⁸ As Linderski 1989: 113 says, a *vir bonus* is a *bonus agricola*

authority for the ruling classes.⁶⁹ These associations, between husbandry and Roman identity and the glorious Roman past (since the early Romans were all envisaged as farmers or herdsmen) were co-opted into political rhetoric as Rome as a city grew larger and more important and Rome as a state grew more powerful and—in the opinions of some—more corrupt. The traditional way of Roman life, spent in the fields rather than the forum, was held up as one of moral supremacy, the way to counteract moral decay.

Through this ideological process, rural spaces—fields and pastures—become landscapes of morality, spaces opposed to the decadence and turpitude of the increasingly cosmopolitan city, even as the statesman farmer, who serves the state when needed and cultivates his field the remainder of his time, is idealized as the model Roman citizen, a moral and political exemplar.⁷⁰ In this way, Cincinnatus and Dentatus become paradigms of the Roman statesmen farmers for Cato the Elder, who participates in the complex of ideologies surrounding farming in his *de Agricultura* when he equates agriculture with morality and the farmer with bravery and stability (Cat. Agr. Pr.), and who uses his treatise to establish himself as in line with the *maiores* and their rural traditions.⁷¹ Cato the Elder himself became the exemplar par excellence of the ancestral farmer statesmen and traditional Roman morality over a century later, when political elite such

⁶⁹ Connors 1997, 74 argues that for Romans, “rusticity is traditional, native, and hardworking.” Doody 2007, 190 highlights the connection between agronomics and the “traditional way of Roman life,” while Reay 2005, 338, 352 and Nelsestuen 2011, 325 both emphasize the ideological use the Roman elite make of that connection to bolster their positions through their relationship to their land.

⁷⁰ For the morality of farming and the countryside, see, e.g., Lowenstein 1965: 116; Connors 1997: 71; O’Sullivan 2006: 145; Doody 2007: 190; and Spencer 2010, 13. As Murnaghan 2006: 110 points out, the dichotomy that places the corrupt city in opposition to the moral superiority of the country is part of Greek ideology as well as Roman.

⁷¹ On Cato’s use of agriculture to establish himself as in line with the traditional elite way of life and as a new farmer statesmen, see Reay 2005. On Cato’s use of agricultural ideology in response to the rapid Roman expansion of his time, see Spanier 2010: 99–150. On Cato’s use of agriculture in reaction to a perceived shift away from the *mos maiorum*, see Earl 1967: 44–53; Spencer 2010: 45; and Percival 1976: 25–26.

as Cicero point to the *mos maiorum* as the source of salvation for a Republic whose foundations were shifting and shaken.⁷² For Cicero and his contemporaries, Cato was the model Roman politician, a true defender of the *Res Publica*, and a paradigm for proper behavior, while the *de Agricultura* became a touchstone for traditional and ancestral Roman *mores*.⁷³ In traditional Roman discourse, then, farming is part of the political and national ideology, the occupation held up as producing and exhibiting the qualities that make Romans Roman, that make Rome great, and that are perceived as being threatened by the political and imperial shifts that irrevocably altered Rome in the first century BCE. As such, for Romans, farming manuals are not simply instructions, but are texts that automatically engage in a broader dialogue on Roman identity and morality.

Farming, however, was not only an *ideological* frame for exploring Roman identity in the midst of civic tension, political shifts, and perceived moral decline. The Italian land itself, divided primarily into public agricultural plots after Roman conquest of non-Roman territory, had a politically rich and contentious past, one impossible to separate from both politics in general and in particular the slow unraveling of the Republic.⁷⁴ Indeed, landscape is a ripe object for political allegory precisely because land and statehood are inextricably linked. A nation cannot function without territory, but it also must have food and wealth. Agricultural (and

⁷² See, e.g., Cic. *Ver.* 2.1.14; *Phil.* 8.8.23. Dugan 2005: 214 points to the *Brutus* as exemplary of Cicero's use of traditional Roman *virtus* as an expression of imitating the valor of one's ancestors. Also, as Reay 2005: 359 argues, Cicero's use of Cato as a philosophical figurehead in several of his works also indicates his desire to become another Cato, called back to Rome to save and serve the Republic, while Baraz 2012: 184–185 correctly draws attention to the *auctoritas* Cicero and his dialogues derive from his use of mouthpieces such as Cato.

⁷³ Cato the Elder has a starring role in Cicero's *de Senectute* and is praised as an orator in the *Brutus* (60-70). Earl 1967: 39 asserts that to Cicero and his contemporaries, Cato "was the very epitome of ancient Roman *virtus*," while Spencer 2010: 75 highlights that Cato's work comes to represent the *mos maiorum* for later Romans, including Varro.

⁷⁴ So Doody 2007: 190, who asserts that politics and agriculture go hand in hand. Similarly, Martin 1971: 258 remarks that the state of the state and the state of agriculture correlate.

pastoral) landscapes are therefore particularly useful as political allegory, as a means of commenting on the state, because they combine these three elements: the land, food source, and wealth source. Political power comes from possessing and/or controlling these elements, and political health to a large extent depends upon the ability of the state to manage successfully its territory, its food supply, and its wealth. Balance is of greatest importance, for surplus can be as dangerous to the wellbeing of the political system as scarcity, and the manner in which any or all of these components are distributed among the people of a nation plays a significant role in the vagaries of politics. The events of the last few centuries of the Roman Republic demonstrate how central land was to the events that shaped and ultimately destroyed the Republic.

Roman conquest of Italian tribes, the starting point of what would become Rome's empire, provided the state with land, confiscated from the defeated people.⁷⁵ While some land gained in conquest was set aside for Roman or Latin colonies, some allowed to remain in the hands of the now subject tribes, some granted in *virgane* allotments to the poor, and some leased for revenue, the remainder became public land (*ager publicus*), used primarily for farming and which people could work by occupying it (*possessio*).⁷⁶ Legally, occupants were constrained in the amount of public land they could claim and work,⁷⁷ yet the 500 iugera limit was long ignored, as some took possession of increasingly more land from which they developed slave-run

⁷⁵ The following overview is of necessity heavily abridged and simplified, as the history and implications of Rome's land policies are both extensive and complex. For fuller accounts of the issue, including the history of conquest, colonization, land reform, and the role of the army in land matters, see, e.g. Brunt 1971; Gargola 1995; David 1996; Williamson 2005: 131–190; and Bispham 2007. Frayn 1979 approaches agrarian issues from the perspective of subsistence farmers.

⁷⁶ Brunt 1971: 278–283, who notes that such land appropriation increased greatly after the second Punic War, provides an overview of colonies, centuriation, and settlements that occurred in different conquered regions.

⁷⁷ The *lex Licinia* of 367, which introduced the 500 iugera limit to landholding, was named for one of the tribunes of the plebs who promoted it: Gaius Licinius Stolo, ancestor to the Stolo who takes part in agricultural discourse of *dRR* 1.

mega-farms, or *latifundia*.⁷⁸ At the same time as large-scale farm estates were emerging on what was originally public land,⁷⁹ small farmers were disappearing from the countryside, largely due to two key factors. First, the increase in wealth and produce that the elite gained from their ever larger working estates was economically deleterious to the farming poor, who found it increasingly difficult to eke a living from their own small plots, unable to compete with the pressure of the higher producing and more innovative mega-farms.⁸⁰ Second, the high rate at which the farming masses, that is the poorer small-share holders, were conscripted into the Roman army paralyzed their ability to sustain their farms.⁸¹ With military duties requiring prolonged absences from their farms—for months or years at a time—many fell into debt, their farms ruined in their absence and subsequently bought up by the already land-rich aristocracy.⁸²

The imbalance between wealthy and poor was both evident in and increased by the disparity in their holdings in the countryside. The inequality of the distribution of what was *ager publicus* and the economic burdens it produced was an intense social issue; while various

⁷⁸ David 1996: 88–98 explains in particular the effect that increased slave labor (another byproduct of Roman conquest) had on the rural economy, in particular the size of farms, methods of production, and the distribution of labor. de Ligt 2004: 728 notes that scholars have traditionally held the increase of rural slavery during this period to be a factor contributing to the population decline of the free Italian population and viewed this decline as evidence of the problems that lead to land reform legislation, although he himself argues that there was instead a population increase that caused those same rural issues.

⁷⁹ Landholders would become de facto landowners due to the length of time many of them held their land, and given that the wealthy landowners were also the holders of power within the state, Tilly 1973: 16 notes that they would have found it easy “to annex for themselves much of the public land to enlarge their own estates.”

⁸⁰ David 1996: 94: “It was then difficult for peasant communities, let alone individuals, to defend themselves against the pressure from often powerful aristocrats who were trying to set up new forms of farming with profit-making in view.

⁸¹ de Ligt 2007 provides an overview of the methods of recruitment for the Roman army during the middle Republic, arguing that the Republic met its increased need for soldiers (due to their increasing empire) by lowering the property requirements for conscription.

⁸² Brunt 1971: 397–400 highlights the disproportionate economic burden that conscription placed on the poor masses.

attempts were made to redress the imbalance,⁸³ to guarantee that the old limit of 500 iugera was followed, and to ensure that the poor had ready access to either land or grain, the issue of land rights and distribution became a consistent source of political strife in the last century or so of the Republic. The *lex Sempronia agraria* of 133, which sought to enforce the 500 iugera limit by confiscating public lands held in excess of it for redistribution and which Tiberius Gracchus passed through dubious and provocative means, embodies the divisiveness and incendiary nature of land reform in the late Republic.⁸⁴ Such laws not only openly polarized the wealthy and the poor, the two groups who stood to lose and gain respectively through the agrarian legislation,⁸⁵ but also were perceived to challenge Senatorial control. In the case of the reform of 133, T. Gracchus offended the Senate by bypassing them and taking the proposed law directly to the *Concilium Plebis* for vote and further challenged senatorial authority by allocating money (a responsibility of the Senate) for the land commission using his tribunician powers.⁸⁶

Following the *lex Sempronia* of 133, agrarian legislation was regularly proposed and passed.⁸⁷ Yet the number of land reforms itself demonstrates that landholding continued to pose

⁸³ Gargola 1995: 143–45 and Rich 2008: 564–65 both highlight that agrarian reforms enforced a moral standard and that their passage exemplified traditional Roman attitudes, just as laws regarding corruption, usury, etc. provide evidence of their social values. While this may be true ideologically—as it falls in line with Roman adulation of the “good farmer” who lives modestly and serves the state, the backlash against the passage of many agrarian reforms indicates that the elite did not truly view their large landholdings as comparable to forms of financial misconduct.

⁸⁴ Rich 2008 examines Gracchus *lex Sempronia* in light of the earlier law, the *lex Licinia*, that originally limited the size of landholdings, and argues that Gracchus in fact applied the size limit in a more limited fashion than the earlier law legislated.

⁸⁵ Boren 1969 argues that the most pressing problems that the Gracchan reforms highlighted and exacerbated were economic; he focuses in particular on the urban economic issues that plagued Rome toward the end of the Republic.

⁸⁶ App. *B. Civ.* 1.7-17 and Plut. *Ti. Gracch.* Gargola 2008 provides a detailed analysis of Appian’s account of the Gracchan reforms.

⁸⁷ Following the index of reliable laws and proposals provided by Williamson 2005: 451–73, fifteen known agrarian laws regarding land distribution or the status of land holdings were proposed or passed between the Gracchan reform of 133 and the 37, when the *dRR* was likely

problems for the state and that the attempts to address issues tied to the countryside were inadequate as solutions for all parties or all problems involved. While the principal of redistribution that T. Gracchus established with the *lex Sempronia* of 133 remained largely in tact—if controversial—for decades, the Social and Civil Wars of the early first century BCE, as well as Sulla’s proscriptions of 82, shifted favor firmly to larger landholders.⁸⁸ Several proposed and/or passed agrarian laws—such as the *rogatio Servilia agraria* of 63 or the *leges Iuliae agrariae* of 59—attempted to return to Gracchus’ redistribution policy, but, instead, purchase of land for public use became the norm.⁸⁹

The anxiety over landholding and land distribution that these repeated legal attempts demonstrate was not only about economic balance or political power. As I mentioned above, one outcome of the landholding system before the Gracchan reforms was the soldiery’s loss of farmland due to their prolonged absences with the army. While conscription was compulsive rather than voluntary,⁹⁰ the dispossession of soldiers in this manner had the consequence of making them ineligible for service, due to the military’s property requirement.⁹¹ One goal of Tiberius Gracchus’ reform was to bolster the numbers of men eligible for recruitment by

composed. This count leaves aside laws regarding the establishment of colonies, laws that were passed to aid land distributions laws (for instance, the *lex Sempronia agraria alter iudicandis* of 133, which established the jurisdiction of a three man land commission for the enactment of the Gracchan land reform law), and agrarian laws whose function is conjectural or uncertain (for instance, the *lex Saufeia agraria* of 91).

⁸⁸ Brunt 1971: 318: “Much land confiscated by Sulla had not been divided up and was occupied by *latifondisti* with no clear title.”

⁸⁹ See David 1996, 164, who notes that most of the *ager publicus* was eventually exhausted due to regular assignments.

⁹⁰ Brunt 1971: 391–413 argues stridently that conscription did not become voluntary in the first century BCE, but carefully adds that “conscripts were not necessarily unwilling.”

⁹¹ Cagniat 2007 provides a good, succinct overview of army in the late Republic, including the property requirements at various stages of that period. See also Hildinger 2002: 19–35, who provides a look at the structure and culture of the Roman army from the time of Tiberius Gracchus through the period of Sulla’s domination.

redistributing land to those who had lost theirs (Plut. *Ti. Gracch.* 9). Additionally, the property requirement was lowered significantly at some point in the late second century BCE from 4,000 *asses* to 1,500 *asses*, qualifying for service men who had formerly been members of the proletariat class and thus unable to serve except during states of emergency.⁹² Yet lowering the property requirement and allowing the lowest classes into the army made service a more mercenary endeavor, for some who served did so undoubtedly hoping for spoils beyond their stipulated salary.⁹³ Land was an appropriate form of reward: many wars of conquest yielded additional land for the state, land was what many in the army sacrificed through their service, and, finally, distribution of land to veterans was an old Roman practice—in other words, traditional.⁹⁴ The hope for such reward, however, tied the troops more closely to their commander than to the state, forming tight allegiances between the legions and men like Sulla, Pompey, and Caesar.⁹⁵ In the course of the first century BCE, when these leaders strove for power in Rome and became involved in civil conflicts to obtain it, land reform was increasingly used as a means of granting land to veterans.⁹⁶ Therefore, land settlement—still in itself contentious—became even more politicized. It became factional, a way to benefit Sullans or Caesarians or Pompeyans, a method of marking one's side in the power struggles of powerful men, one more weapon in the civil wars of the late Republic.⁹⁷

⁹² While de Ligt 2007: 124–27 allows that the evidence for the precise date of this shift in property requirements is far from conclusive, he argues that 130 or 129 are the likeliest dates.

⁹³ Keppie 1983: 38–43 overviews types of veteran rewards typical at the end of the Republic, noting that land and monetary prizes were the most common.

⁹⁴ So Brunt 1971: 392–400.

⁹⁵ Brunt 1971: 409 points out that this state of affairs often came at the expense of what was in the public interest.

⁹⁶ The *lex Iulia agraria* of 59 is one instance, wherein Caesar sought settlement for Pompey's troops. The *lex Plautia agraria* of 70 and the *lex Antonia agraria* of 44 are two others.

⁹⁷ See de Blois 2007 for an overview of the relationship between generals, whom he describes as men who wished to use their armies as weapons in the civil war, and their legions.

3. The Work Ahead

Written at the tumultuous end of the Republic, in a generic form that Cicero used to address the state, and in the wake of nearly a century of heightened social and political tension over land use, the *dRR* uses the land and husbandry to engage with the social and political issues of the day. In a dialogue that masquerades as a guide to farming and herding, the land is naturally important, but the ways in which Varro approaches the landscape suggests that it has a deeper resonance within the text. In this dissertation, I argue that in the *dRR*, the landscape is a filter for examining the state of the state, the shifting values of the Roman elite, and different ideologies regarding the countryside, farming and herding, and Roman identity.

My first chapter explores the conflation of spaces, places, and people that occurs in the *dRR*. I argue that the books' settings function in two ways. First, disparate elements of the opening scene combine to hint at (without much subtlety) the topic of discussion, playfully creating a setting that previews what will follow. Second, with more nuance, the settings also contain political, social, and cultural information that becomes significant for understanding the cultural, social, and political significance present in the agronomic sceneries described in the books proper. Additionally, the names of characters are connected to traditional views of Roman identity (e.g., herding names as evidence of Romans' shepherding past, *dRR* 2.1.10). As symbols of *Romanitas*, the characters of the dialogue reveal, through their names, the spaces that they should ideally inhabit, while Varro's placement of them in the urban and foreign landscapes he creates reveals the instability of the country-based model of identity prevalent in the ideology of the late Republic. Lastly, I argue that Varro's use of both setting and character highlights the tension between city and country as well as conflates the two spaces, ultimately confronting the

ideology of the time that celebrates the country as refuge from and answer to the failings of the city.

My second chapter investigates the shift from the more natural, though man-influenced landscape that permeates Book One to the almost wholly constructed landscape of the villa that occupies Book Three. Elements of the constructed appear in Book One, and elements of the natural appear in Book Three, but the focus has reversed, and the sort of moralizing commentary that accompanies suggests that the shift from natural to made is not a good one. Of particular importance in this regard are the goals of the farmer/herder/villa-owner, which Varro states are *utilitas* and *voluptas* (1.4.1). While Books One and Two still reflect the old fashioned pre-eminence of *utilitas*, for agriculture and herding are both of benefit to the farmer on a basic level, Book Three shifts its focus to the villa and the less practical animal keeping associated with it. Where in Book One, the villa was both part of the landscape and a practical response to it, the villa in Book Three *is* the landscape, containing within it small-scale replications of the world outside, aiming at amusement and novelty and extravagance, not utility. Through a conflation of the private villa as topic of discourse and the Villa Publica as setting of Book Three (3.2.3-6), the moral dubiousness of the emphasis on luxury and excess that pervades villa herding also becomes a commentary on the state (e.g. 3.2.16, 3.3.6-10, 3.17.2).

My last chapter is a study of the presentation of mankind's power over nature in the *dRR*. First, I examine the idealization of human control that permeates the opening of the discussions in all three books and carries into the interlocutors' presentation of information on the rural sciences, which suggest that humans' control over their environment, including their land and animals, is natural, easy, and national—that is, something particularly Roman (e.g. 1.2.3-7, 2.1.3-10, 3.2.7-18). However, inconsistencies and deficiencies in the text, as well as contextual

information about the period in which Varro composed the *dRR*, reveal this ideal control to be illusory and suggest that control over nature (and thus over one's success as a farmer or herdsman) is neither natural nor national, neither complete nor guaranteed. At the same time, the text presents *scientia* ("knowledge") as a means for man to secure control over nature and minimize the dangers it poses (1.4.3-4), a notion that is manifested in the interlocutors' careful defining and hyper-schematization of the three rural arts. Yet the privileging of knowledge also falls short as a means of control in the text as the instructions themselves are imprecise, incomplete, and superficial, failing to provide the information necessary for a husbandman to turn his agricultural or pastoral produce into profit, let alone successfully respond to his changeable environment.

Chapter One: Conflated Spaces

Early in Book One of Varro's *dRR*, the interlocutors waiting at the Aedes Telluris for the return of the Aeditumus,⁹⁸ or temple caretaker, decide to pass their time in a discussion on the topic of agriculture, seemingly suggested not only by a *picta Italia* on one of the temple walls (1.2.1),⁹⁹ but also by the presence of two masters of agricultural knowledge, Gaius Licinius Stolo, the descendent of the Stolo who promoted the *lex Licinia* of 367 BCE that limited the landholding to 500 iugera, and Gnaeus Tremelius Scrofa, a member of the land commission charged to implement Julius Caesar's land legislature of 59 and author of an agricultural handbook (1.2.9-12).¹⁰⁰ But before discussion can begin, the characters must first agree on what "agriculture" means (1.2.12):

Prius, inquit, discernendum, utrum quae serantur in agro, ea sola sint in cultura, an etiam quae inducantur in rura, ut oves et armenta.

"First," he said, "it must be determined whether only those things which are sown in the field belong to cultivation, or also those things which are led in the countryside, such as sheep and cattle."

This wish to define the terms proves somewhat difficult, as Stolo, Scrofa, Varro, and the rest of the interlocutors debate whether herding, slaves, and the managing of clay pits should be included within the bounds of "agriculture" (1.2.13-28). Similar deliberations of definition begin the discourses of the second and third books, where the interlocutors discuss respectively how to

⁹⁸ While the more common spelling is *aedituus*, I follow Varro's own preference of *aeditumus*, the form "we were taught to say by our fathers," (*dicere didicimus a patribus nostris*, 1.2.1)

⁹⁹ What form the *picta Italia* took is unknown. Possibilities include either a map of Italy, perhaps something along the lines of the Peutinger Tables, or an anthropomorphized *Italia*, holding grain, olives, and other such Italian produce in a representation of the nation's fertility, as befits the Temple of the Earth, as Leach 1988: 159 suggests. Roth 2007: 295–299 discusses these options, but leans towards the *picta Italia* as being an odologically focused map of Italy.

¹⁰⁰ Although Kronenberg 2009: 76, 80–81 suggests that Stolo and Scrofa both reveal themselves to be parodies of Republican intellectuals in the course of the text, without actual knowledge.

delineate the science of herding (2.1.13-28) and what *is* a villa and how *pastio villatica* (the tending of villa animals) is a distinct art from shepherding (3.2.7-17).¹⁰¹

In all three books, the participants of the dialogue care about the proper delineation of their subject, understanding not only what it *is* but also what it *is not*, and distinguishing it from the other related yet distinct arts and sciences of the countryside. For Varro's interlocutors, definition is important. Several scholars have pointed out the hyper-organization of these moments, which are an attempt to neatly box and arrange what may not in reality be so very neat or precise.¹⁰² While these scenes raise issues of control—detailed categorization as an attempt to fully encapsulate, understand, and thereby control these topics—they also display the importance of division: separating each of these related arts into distinct sciences, giving them their own rules and their own spaces. As he places agriculture and herding and *pastio* into their own discrete spheres of rustic life, Varro also marks out the landscapes these activities inhabit as distinct. Here, Andrews' description of landscape and framing is useful:¹⁰³

The landscape acquires significant organization as a result of certain extrinsic and intrinsic factors. A frame establishes the outer boundaries of the view; it gives the landscape definition. The frame literally defines the landscape, both in the sense of determining its outer limits and in the sense that landscape is constituted by its frame....

In each book, Varro conjures up, populates, and delimits the scenery appropriate to the subject, so by the end of the dialogue, he has framed for and presented to his audience several distinct yet

¹⁰¹ Varro's insistence on adding a new division to *res rusticae*—the art of *pastio* (the tending of villa animals)—and his pride in being the first to write about it as its own art likewise highlight the importance of careful demarcation (*dRR* 3.1.7).

¹⁰² See Rayment 1945: 350; Skydsgaard 1968: 11; Leach 1988: 168; Henderson 2002: 131–132; Diederich 2007: 36–44; and Nelsestuen 2011: 336. Whether or not Varro is capable of following the schemes as he outlines them is doubted by both Laughton 1965: 64 and Ross 1979.

¹⁰³ While Andrews 1999: 5 is largely focused on pictorial landscapes, his description of how a landscape is indicated and defined applies not only to artistic representations, but to living landscapes recognized in the land, his point being that landscapes have become culturally prefabricated, identifiable outside of art as something organized, contained, and distinct from the land at large.

related landscapes: the agricultural in book one, the pastoral in book two, and that of the villa in book three.

The landscapes that Varro creates in the course of the dialogue do share some features: the countryside, animals, and human presence and labor. But what makes these landscapes unique is that each includes a specific set of expectations for each of these shared features. The precise location, the kind and use of animal, the type of human activity and human relationship to the land all mark out these spaces as culturally distinct, and by extension socially significant. These landscapes also gain meaning from their contrasts with one another. Spencer discusses at length the type of dichotomies that different Roman texts create through their use of landscapes. She suggests that Latin pastoral, such as Virgil's *Eclogues*, explores the opposition between rural and urban that late Republican literature presented as extreme, while agricultural texts like Varro's shift the focus to the division between the agricultural and the pastoral worlds.¹⁰⁴ These dichotomies became one way for authors to talk about questions of politics and identity during a period fraught with conflict, change, and instability, all of which seemed to demonstrate (at least according to the literary elite) a decline in the morality of the Roman people.¹⁰⁵

While the division of topics into distinct books—complete with a recasting of interlocutors, change of setting, and chronological shifts—coincides with definite differences in the landscapes of the dialogue, and while his demarcation of these landscapes as discrete has significance not only textually but also socially, in reality, the distinctions that Varro makes are

¹⁰⁴ Spencer 2010: 31–37

¹⁰⁵ The general lamentation of the literary elite toward the end of the Republic was that the political climate—and the decline of the old Republic—reflected a decline in the good old fashioned morals of the old Republic and its citizen-farmers, perhaps most ideologically represented by Cato's *de Agricultura*. For more on this aspect of the issue of Roman identity, see, e.g., White 1977: 2, 8–10; Connors 1997; Kronenberg 2009: 94–98; and Spencer 2010: 35–45, 70–75.

less sure than they initially seem. The city and country are not always clearly isolated,¹⁰⁶ and the lines between the pastoral world and the agricultural blur at times.¹⁰⁷ Initially (or even primarily) presented as contrasts, these spaces all have some level of interdependence both in reality and in the text, and the stark opposition turns out to be something of a fiction.¹⁰⁸ But what does this dulling of distinction between spaces mean for the landscapes and for the text, when, returning to Andrews' theory of frames, those distinctions—the boundaries that separate and define a space, in this case, cultivation, herding, villa care, city, country—are what give context and cultural meaning to a set of natural features?¹⁰⁹ In this chapter, I explore both the distinctions that Varro makes between different spaces and landscapes and also the ways in which he complicates or belies those divisions. Throughout the dialogue, Varro repeatedly, if subtly, conflates spaces, places, and people. Although Spencer claims that in the *dRR*, like in other agricultural texts, the primary dichotomy of landscapes is that of the agricultural and the pastoral, I argue that the opposition between the rural and the urban that is so prevalent at the end of the Republic still holds a prominent place in the *dRR*, but as the focus of Varro's conflation of spaces.¹¹⁰ Focusing on the settings of the three books—their frames, to continue the metaphor—Varro's use of names, and his treatment of the city and the country, I examine how Varro uses both contrast and conflation of spaces to explore Roman identity, along with its moral and political ramifications,

¹⁰⁶ See, e.g., *dRR* 1.2.9-10, 1.16, 2.Pr., 3.2.3-6

¹⁰⁷ See esp. the debate about whether or when pastoral animals count as elements of agriculture at *dRR* 1.2.17-21, but also 1.19.3-1.20.2, 2.Pr.4, 2.1.3-5, 3.1.7.

¹⁰⁸ Spencer 2010: 35 notes that the city and countryside are interdependent in practice, even if they are divorced in literary and ideological representations. This false sharp distinction between rural and urban is a timeless problem, as Tacoli 1998 shows.

¹⁰⁹ Andrews 1999: 5; Spencer 2010: 35

¹¹⁰ Spencer 2010: 34, although she and other scholars still recognize that the city/country opposition is highly significant in the *dRR*. For more on the this opposition, see, e.g. Lowenstein 1965: 114–118; Leach 1988: 161; Kronenberg 2009: 94–107; Spencer 2010: 72–85; and, more generally, Evans 2008.

and to question and confront the typical elite moral posturing which demanded a resurgence of the *mos maiorum* and the farmer Roman.

1. Setting the Scenes

According to Rayment, Varro had little interest in the physical setting, being focused instead in what he calls “stage business, in situations.”¹¹¹ While the focus of my present work on the landscapes of Varro’s *dRR* indicates that I disagree with the first portion of Rayment’s assessment—there is plenty of physical description, although perhaps not as upfront or lyrical as Rayment may like—he was certainly correct in noting the primacy granted to the staging of the three books of the *dRR*.¹¹² All aspects of the settings, from place and occasion to chronology and participants, are carefully crafted, not merely fitting but even contributing to the discourses that they frame. As mentioned earlier, frames are essential in the world of landscape for delineating the boundaries, and thus the content, of a landscape, giving it shape and meaning.¹¹³ In every case, the settings of the books establish the spaces that the dialogues will inhabit in two ways. First, the settings give physical definition to the discourses they frame: disparate elements of the opening scene combine to hint at (without much subtlety) the topic of discussion, playfully creating a preview of what will follow. Second, with more nuance, the settings also contain political, social, and cultural information that becomes, through the relationship between setting and subject on a more basic level, significant for understanding the dialogue itself in a more

¹¹¹ Rayment 1945: 353

¹¹² So Tatum 1992: 195, following Dahlmann 1935: “Varro unquestionably deserves credit for his careful composition in *R.R.*’s various framing episodes, for his animated if amiable dialogue, for his sensitivity to setting and, what has too often been ignored, for his success in characterization.” See also Tilly 1973: 23 and Rawson 1985: 137, who both describe Varro’s settings as vivid.

¹¹³ Rawson 1985: 137, like Andrews 1999, conceptualizes landscape as space defined by an uncrossable frame and which must be read from the outside in.

refined way. Just as the settings function on a basic level to cue the reader into the subject matter, the social hints they contain also frame and impact the main discourse. In this way, the settings of the three books of the *dRR* define and create the landscape that the contents of each book inhabit, and it is by understanding the frameworks of the books that the audience can better understand the cultural, social, and political significance present in the agronomic sceneries described in the books proper.

A. Book One: Temple Farmers

Book One of the *dRR* opens with Varro's arrival at the Aedes Telluris in Rome during the Sementivae, a rural festival celebrating the sowing of the crops and seeking divine protection of them.¹¹⁴ On this feast day, Varro comes to the Temple, located in a residential area of the Esquiline Hill, having been invited by the Aeditumus, whose duties included conducting visitors through the temple, for a *cena*, either a figurative meal of words or a literal dinner (1.2.11). Already present and likewise awaiting the caretaker, are various Roman citizens: Gaius Fundanius, Varro's father-in-law; Gaius Agrius, a Roman knight belonging to the Socratic school; and Publius Agrasius, a tax collector (1.2.1). Upon entering the Aedes, Varro discovers the other guests gazing at (*spectantes*) the *picta Italia* on the temple wall. As a means of passing the time until their host arrives, the men, seemingly inspired by the depiction of Italy that they inspect (whether map or personification), launch into a discussion about Italy's bounty, first on a

¹¹⁴ The Aedes Telluris is located in Rome on the Esquiline Hill, near the houses of Marcus Antonius and Quintus Tullius Cicero. M. Cicero had charge (*curatio*) of the temple in the early to mid 50s and informs us that the temple housed an armory, which P. Clodius Pulcher and his gang raided at some point prior to 56 (Cic. *Har.* 31), likely during the periods of street fighting with Titus Annius Milo. For a basic overview of the temple's history, see Platner and Ashby 1929: 511. The festival of the Sementivae occurred in January on a moveable date, although Ovid sets it from the 24th to the 26th (*Fast.* 1.658-82).

cosmic scale, assessing her ideal position in the inhabited world (1.2.3-5), and then more locally, setting Italy apart region by region from other places in the world (1.2.6-7).

This cosmic foray into questions of production and bounty is a prologue of sorts to the real discussion on the finer points of agricultural activity, which the interlocutors take up with gusto when the two masters of agriculture, Scrofa and Stolo, arrive to the temple (1.2.11-12). As such, this overview of Italian agricultural abundance is a bridge between the venue and the subject of the dialogue proper that highlights the aptness between setting and subject, which Varro establishes largely through characteristically playful use of language. The Temple of the Earth, with the depiction of Italy on its wall identifies the topic as the land of Italy, while the agricultural significance of the goddess Tellus pinpoints Italy's cultivated fields more specifically as the matter at hand. Indeed, Varro himself highlights the link between agriculture and Tellus in the preface to Book One, where he invokes the god as one of the twelve agricultural deities to whom he dedicates the work: *Primum, qui omnis fructos agriculturæ caelo et terra continent, Iovem et Tellurem* ("First, Jove and Tellus, who hold all fruits of agriculture in the sky and in the earth;" 1.1.5).

The occasion for the gathering likewise emphasizes the agrarian aspect of the scene, since the Sementivæ is specifically agricultural in nature and particularly tied to Tellus. The festival was held between the two sowing seasons, the first spanning the autumn months, the second occurring in the spring. As such, Romans during the Sementivæ celebrated "the end of one agricultural period and the beginning of another," praying to Tellus and Ceres for protection of the crops already sown and those soon to be planted.¹¹⁵ It is a festival that both makes sense of the interlocutors' presence at the temple of Tellus and turns their discussion of the how-tos of

¹¹⁵ Scullard 1981: 51 and 68, who notes that Romans sacrificed to Tellus on the first day of the festival and Ceres on the second.

agriculture into part of the celebrations rather than just a way to pass the time. Yet the festival also emphasizes the rustic (as opposed to urban) orientation of the subject, which Varro further enhances in a more playful manner with his cast of characters, many of whom have names that pun on agricultural terms: Fundanius, Agrius, Agrasius, and Stolo—or Mistery Farm-boy, Field, Country-side, and Sprout. The men, with their agrarian names, more specifically pinpoint our location and subject as the working farms and fields with their good, old-fashioned Roman inhabitants. The setting of Book One, through the combination of people, place, and occasion, builds up a microcosm of an ideal Italy, demonstrating all the elements that work in conjunction to maximize the fertility and concord that are, according to the interlocutors' initial foray into agronomic discussion, natural to Italy, a land inherently suitably for cultivation and production.¹¹⁶

On its most basic level, then, the *mise-en-scène* of Book One prefigures the content of the following conversation for the audience, like a shadow box depicting in minute yet streamlined detail the fullness of a real-life milieu. The audience, from the opening scene alone, can get a clear idea of the topic of conversation that these men, at their leisure, will engage in. But the framework is more than a preview of the dialogue at its most basic, containing as well elements that complicate the seeming straightforwardness of the discussion and enrich its significance. While initially the opening scene of Book One seems a quaint and peaceful microcosm of rustic and productive Italy, upon a closer inspection, a few things appear to be amiss.

First, while the *Aedes Telluris* is appropriate to the agronomic subject matter and a suitable place to celebrate the *Sementivae*, its location in Rome makes it a somewhat strange

¹¹⁶ O'Sullivan 2006: 139 describes the intersection of city and country in the opening of the dialogue nicely: "although the participants sit on a bench in the middle of Rome, their conversation will stroll through Italian farms and fields."

choice as setting for a dialogue.¹¹⁷ The dialogues of Plato and (most importantly) Cicero were often set in secluded spots in the countryside, which, as Diederich rightly points out, would have been the most natural location for a dialogue on agriculture.¹¹⁸ The country setting is especially prominent and significant in the dialogues of Cicero, as time in the country represents both production (of the estate) and leisure (from civic life), two elements required for literary production (the dialogue).¹¹⁹ The locales of most of Cicero's philosophical works reflect this: his interlocutors gather at one or another of their country-estates, always on a day allowed for leisure, and use their *otium* to have a philosophical/political/technical discussion. Even in the *Brutus*, which Cicero set in Rome during his own time, the speakers gather and converse in a space that feels like the countryside, a retreat from the city: in the privacy of Cicero's home, they sit in the small meadow (*pratulum*), under a bust of Plato (6.24).¹²⁰ But in the *dRR*, the men convene in a public building in the city—a temple that is, in the dialogue, representative of the

¹¹⁷ Green 1997: 430 counts the Roman location as one of the “important details” of the setting that is “not quite appropriate to the topic,” in this case agriculture.

¹¹⁸ Diederich 2007: 185: “Nichts läge also näher, als zum Schauplatz von Dialogen über die Landwirtschaft Landgüter zu wählen.” Linderski 1989: 106 similarly points to the Villa as an apt location for Roman literary dialogues. As Womack 2011: 26–28 says of Plato, the dialogue conversation is “a retreat, a pleasant suspension of normal business.” For Cicero's use of villa as setting for philosophical discussions, see Spencer 2010: 63–68. Nicgorski 2012: 249–50 provides a succinct overview of the features typical in Ciceronian dialogue settings.

¹¹⁹ Littlewood 1987: 12 points to villas as the appropriate space for reading and writing. For the nuances of *otium* as regards public life and literary production in the late Republic, and Cicero's significance in shaping the literary implications of the term, see Stroup 2010: 34–58.

¹²⁰ Linderski 1989: 107–108 also identifies Cicero's *de Re Publica*, the *de Natura Deorum*, the *Cato*, and the *Laelius* as being set at urban houses. Nevertheless, the scene-setting for these dialogues is vague. The *de Re Publica* is set in Scipio Africanus' *hortus*, but whether the garden belongs to his urban dwelling or a suburban or country villa is not specified (*Rep.* 1.14). The *de Natura Deorum* takes place in the *hortus* of M. Aurelius Cotta during the *feriae Latinae*, a festival celebrating the unity of the Latin peoples and held on Mons Albanus outside of Rome, which suggests that they are meeting outside the city (*N.D.* 1.15). The *Cato* and the *Laelius* are set at Cato's and Laelius' residences respectively, yet Cicero provides no further detail regarding location for either dialogue (*Sen.* 1.3 and *Amic.* 1.5.). The *hortus*, like the *villa* was a distinctly Roman space, see von Stackelberg 2009: 9–48.

natural world—rather than a private space, such as a garden, that tangibly mimics it.¹²¹ So the Aedes Telluris simultaneously connects the dialogue to its subject and, as an urban location (with a merely metaphorical relationship to the countryside) that subverts generic expectations of dialogue settings, distances the readers from it. In the same way, the agricultural importance of the Sementivae adds a level of dissonance to the location of celebration: however central Tellus is to the festival, true farmers would honor the holiday in the country. The symbolic connection between the temple, the holiday, and the countryside cannot disguise the fact that the Romans gathered here to discuss agriculture are not out in the countryside putting those words into practice. Instead, they spend their leisure time in the city.

The venue of the dialogue is not the only part of Book One’s framework that is mislocated. The men have gathered at the Aedes Telluris at the invitation of Fundilius, the Aeditumus, for a conversation, but their host is absent (1.1.2). His non-presence at his temple and at his own dialogue is distinctly uncomfortable, and reveals an underlying tension of this opening scene, a sense of unfulfilled expectation—for host and for the conversation for which he called them together.¹²² The discussion that does occur is a way to kill time, and while it seems to successfully distract these Romans as they wait, the abrupt closure of the book with the announcement of Fundilius’ murder jars both the interlocutors and the external audience from their complacent conversation and reinforces its true status as placeholder: with their would-be host’s death there is no longer a reason to wait, and the men go their separate ways without ever finishing their overview of agriculture (1.69). The absence of the host and choice of venue begin

¹²¹ The *public* aspect of the space is problematic, as Stroup 2010: 43 suggests: “however a man of the Republic should choose to spend his *otium*, he should not be enjoying it *in public*.” According to Diederich 2007: 185, there is no clear literary model for the choice of a temple as a setting in a dialogue, adding to the strangeness of the *dRR*.

¹²² Green 1997: 430 also notes that the absence of the Aeditumus is unsettling.

as elements of the setting whose dissonance is barely palpable, but the shock of the host's murder at the end of the book is also a reminder that we are in the city and highlights, in retrospect, the sense of unease that was in fact always present in the opening scene.

The setting of Book One is further imbued with a tension, as well as a political edge, through its dramatic date, which locates us temporally at the end of the Republic. Now, while it is unclear—that is, neither stated nor readily apparent, at least to a modern audience—in what precise year Book One is set, the possible range is firmly between 59 BCE, the year in which Scrofa and Varro were members of the *decemviri* (1.2.12),¹²³ the group of men commissioned to distribute land in Campania in accordance with Julius Caesar's land bill of that year, and 37 BCE, when Varro, on the brink of turning eighty says he wrote the *dRR* (1.1.1).¹²⁴

While several scholars have proposed the early to mid 50s for the Book's timeframe, pointing to the violence of the street gangs of Publius Clodius Pulcher and Titus Annius Milo at the time as a parallel to the murder that closes Book One,¹²⁵ several points within dialogue make this early dramatic date impossible. First, Scrofa mentions being on campaign far within Transalpine Gaul at the Rhine (*In Gallia transalpina intus, ad Rhenum cum exercitum ducere* 1.7.8), a campaign that dates to 55 BCE, when Caesar led his troops to the Rhine (Caes. *B. Gall.*

¹²³ Although Jones 1935: 214 asserts that the dramatic date for Book One is 67 BCE

¹²⁴ As discussed in the introduction (see pp. 19-22 above), the date of composition is based upon Varro's statement in the preface to the work that he is writing the dialogue as he nears his 80th year and an understanding that he was born in 116 BCE (Conte 1999: 211). This assessment of the date of composition of course assumes that Varro is being honest with his facts in the preface, as most readers seem to believe he is, for we also use the preface as the sole evidence for the name of Varro's wife (1.1.1). It is, however, also feasible that "Fundania" is a fictive name chosen in the same punning vein as most of his cast of characters. The veracity (or lack thereof) of Varro's assertions in the preface would have been immediately evident to his contemporary readers, and as such would probably have been useful indicators in themselves of the satirical or allegorical nature of the work as a whole, but the modern audience has nothing to go on but his own claims here. While we have no way of verifying the name of Varro's wife, it is almost certain that Varro did compose the *dRR* in the early 30s BCE, as I explain in the introduction.

¹²⁵ So Martin 1971: 227–228, 238–241 and Linderski 1989: 119.

4.16).¹²⁶ At another point, Scrofa refers to the time when Varro, together with Pompey's fleet, spent at Corcyra prior to the battle of Pharsalus in 48 (*cum Corcyrae esset exercitus classis, dRR* 1.4.5).¹²⁷ The last of the definitively identifiable references in Book One is the discussion of the calendar that occurs mid dialogue, when Scrofa mentions that the seasons have been reduced to a set number of days in accordance with the official calendar that is now in use (*quae redacta ad dies civiles nostros, qui nunc sunt* 1.28.1). He refers, of course, to the changes implemented by Julius Caesar's calendar reforms, which went into effect on January 1st of 45 BCE, providing a date *post quem* for the book. Nevertheless, the framework itself may refine the date *post quem* somewhat in the figure of the Aedile, whose summons for the Aeditumus of the Temple of the Earth is the reason for the latter's absence from the dialogue (1.2.2). Julius Caesar added two *Cereales Aediles* to the office's rosters in 44 BCE, presumably at the start of the year (Dio Cass. 43.51.3). Given that their primary duty was care of the grain supply, and given the association of Tellus with agriculture, it is conceivable that the Aedile mentioned in the preface was meant to be a *Cerealis Aedilis*.¹²⁸ The first book of Varro's dialogue, therefore, likely occurs at some point between 44 and 37, during the final death throes of the Republic.¹²⁹

While narrowing down the specific year from this range is an exercise in educated speculation, several elements of the book's setting make a compelling case for a dramatic date of January of 43. The first of these potential date references is more subtle: after Varro's arrival at the Aedes Telluris, the men gathered all sit down on *subsellia*, which happened to be present in

¹²⁶ So Dion 1963. Martin 1971: 240–241, however, argues that the campaign indicated is that of 58 against Ariovistus, and that *ad Rhenum* merely means vaguely in the direction of the Rhine, rather than indicating any real proximity to it.

¹²⁷ Both Hooper and Ash 1935: 186n.2 and Flach 1996: 11 identify the reference to period immediately before Pharsalus.

¹²⁸ Conversation with Dr. Sarah Culpepper Stroup

¹²⁹ Diederich 2007: 182 views 45–37 as the range of potential dramatic dates for Book One.

the temple. While generically a *subsellium* is a low bench, it more specifically refers to either the benches of a theater or the benches for the senators in the Curia.¹³⁰ Why, then, are there *subsellia* present in a temple located in a wealthy residential neighborhood? Leaving aside the potential nod to or commentary on the theatricality inherent in a dialogue (my own repeated references to stage-settings and opening scenes similarly play into this association), it is the potential political associations that I find particularly intriguing here. Senate meetings were not always held in the Curia, but were often conducted instead at various temples in Rome, including the Aedes Telluris. According to Cicero, the Temple of Earth was host to the first Senate meeting following the assassination of Julius Caesar (*Phil.* 1.1, *Att.* 16.1). Whether or not the Temple was used as the venue for other Senate meetings,¹³¹ it was a location where some sense of peace and the hint of the possibility of a restored Republic papered over some of the fear and chaos that followed the death of Caesar,¹³² and Tellus' role as venue for this pivotal moment is forever remembered in accounts of these events.¹³³

The scene upon which Book One closes corroborates and reinforces the potential reference to the immediate aftermath of Caesar's assassination that the *subsellia* and the Aedes Telluris offer. As Stolo discusses how to determine when to store crops and when to bring them to market, the servant of the Aeditumus runs up in tears to the interlocutors, interrupting their discussion, with news of their host who never showed up (*dRR* 1.69.2):

¹³⁰ *OLD* s.v. *subsellium* 1; the political implications of the *subsellia* as a matter of significance here was suggested by Dr. Sarah Culpepper Stroup.

¹³¹ As seems likely, given its convenient location in a fashionable residential neighborhood, home to many Roman senators including Q. Cicero and M. Antonius. Its location near Antonius' house is the reason attributed to him for choosing to hold the first Senate meeting following Caesar's death at the temple (*App. B.Civ.* 2.126).

¹³² *Cic. Phil.* 1.1, 31; 2.89; *Plut. Ant.* 14.3, *Brut.* 19.

¹³³ See *App. B.Civ.* 2.126; *Dio Cass.* 44.22.3

Ille flens narrat ab nescio quo percussus cultello concidisse, quem qui esset animadvertere in turba non potuisse, sed tantum modo exaudisse vocem, perperam fecisse.

As he cries, he tells us that his master, having been struck with a knife by who knows whom, had died, and that he, amid the crowd, could not determine who it was, but had only heard a cry that a mistake had been made.

The murder of the wrong man in a chaotic crowd is one that his readers would recognize from 44.¹³⁴ The story goes that at the funeral of Julius Caesar, which, like the Senate meeting held at the Aedes Telluris, occurred within a few days of his death, the crowd became worked up in their outrage at the dictator's murder to such a pitch that they attacked and killed Helvius Cinna, a tribune and poet, having mistaken him for Cornelius Cinna, a conspirator.¹³⁵

The temporal associations suggested by the Aedes, the senate benches in the temple of Tellus, and the mistaken murder of a man in a crowd are somewhat tenuous individually, but when taken together they create a convincing picture of the events that followed the Ides of March in 44. Just as the crowd's violent and deadly uproar at Caesar's funeral shattered the temporary peace that the Senate meeting at the Aedes Telluris had just achieved and sent both conspirators and senators to their houses to hide,¹³⁶ the accidental murder that ends Book One jarringly and violently interrupts the harmonious meeting of minds and the discourse of produce and profit, scattering the interlocutors to their homes. In this way, the Aedes Telluris becomes not only a thematically apt location for the Book, but a politically charged reference to these events whose impact was far reaching. By 43, the peace that had originally been found at the Aedes Telluris had not been re-established, but upheaval and political uncertainty had continued.

¹³⁴ Diederich 2007: 182.

¹³⁵ For various versions, see Suet. *Iul.* 85; Val. Max. 9.9.1; App. *B. Civ.* 2.20.147; Dio Cass. 44.50; and Plut. *Brut.* 20.

¹³⁶ Cicero's account of these events in the *Philippics*, where the funeral immediately follows the Senate meeting, highlights the false sense of peace that the meeting instilled and the funeral dispelled (*Phil.* 2.89-91).

In January of 43, Marcus Antonius was besieging Roman forces at Mutina, and Cicero gave three speeches (the *Philippics* 5-7) asking the Senate to declare war upon him rather than sending ambassadors to negotiate a peace. That January marked a tenuous and inevitably short-lived limbo, a period between hoped for peace and outright violence, waiting for Antony's response—akin to the movement from harmony to violence that Book One exhibits, as the interlocutors wait for the return of the Aeditumus, but instead hear of his death.¹³⁷

From its setting in 43, then, Book One looks back to Caesar's murder and shows that the hope that this act would finally and fully restore the Republic was misplaced. Instead, Rome was still, a year later, a place where the wrong man could be struck down in a crowd, another Cinna, and nobody would be surprised. Yet even as the book engages with the tumultuous events of the preceding year, it also echoes other moments of political strife and urban violence from the city's recent history. The absence of the Aeditumus might bring to mind the departure of Pompey, his followers, and many of the political officials from Rome in January of 49, after Caesar in that same month crossed the Rubicon, marking the start of another period of civil violence.¹³⁸ Similarly, the scene of street violence that brings the interlocutors' pleasant conversation to an end recalls the recurring hostilities between Milo and Clodius in the 50s. Starting in 57, when Milo wished to recall Cicero from exile and Clodius was anxious to block the orator's return, both men organized gangs of slaves and gladiators to support their side with violence in the streets. Clodius' election to aedile in 56 protected him from prosecution for the violence his

¹³⁷ Another similarity between the events of 43 and the framework of the dialogue possibly exists in the death of one of the ambassadors sent to Antony at Mutina. While Servius Sulpicius Rufus died of illness, Cicero argues in *Philippics* 9 that he was as good as murdered by Antony (9.7).

¹³⁸ The reference to Pompey's fleet before Pharsalus at 1.4.5 bolsters this reference. Additionally, Scrofa's use of the term *alea* at 1.4.4 and 1.18.8 could, in this light, be a slight wink to the report that Caesar exclaimed '*alea iacta est*' upon crossing the Rubicon (Suet. *Iul.* 32).

gangs caused in opposition to Cicero's recall, but on January 18 of 52, after intervening years of violence between the gangs of the two men, Milo's slaves killed Clodius.¹³⁹ The Book's closing bloodshed reflects as well the force utilized by Caesar to support his agrarian bill of 59,¹⁴⁰ the violence used in countless elections—in 56, 55, 54, 53, and 50—to obstruct or influence elections, and the attempted murders of political rivals, such as Clodius of Cicero in 63 (Sal. *Cat.* 27.3-28.3) and Lucius Vettius and others of Pompey in 59 (Cic. *Att.* 2.24).¹⁴¹

In one respect, the precise dramatic date of *dRR* 1 does not really matter: whenever it was supposed to have occurred, the drama that bookends the dialogue reflects the violence that marked the end of the Republic,¹⁴² events that make even accidental murders seeming commonplace, as the interlocutor's reaction to the death of the Aeditumus shows. For upon hearing the news of his demise, those present at the temple display not surprise, only sorrow that such a thing had happened in Rome (... *de casu humano magis querentes, quam admirantes id Romae factum*; 1.69.3). These men live in a place and at a time where such acts have lost their shock value, where a mistaken murder is not a bombshell.¹⁴³ The Rome that this dialogue closes upon is one of danger. The seemingly peaceful atmosphere of the Aedes Telluris, a representative of literal earthly production and bounty where men gather to turn their festival

¹³⁹ For more on these events, see, e.g., Cic. *Red. Sen.* 19, 22; *Sest.* 75-91; *Dom.* 6, 11-14; *Har. Resp.* 15; *Att.* 4.3.2-3; *Q.F.* 2.1.1-2. Also, Gruen 1995: 294-299

¹⁴⁰ Dio Cass. 38.6.1-5; Suet. *Iul.* 20.1; Cic. *Vat.* 22-23.

¹⁴¹ Lintott 1999: 209-16 provides an excellent summary by date of acts of violence in Rome.

¹⁴² As Lintott 1999: 204 describes it, "At the end of the Republic violence was used to force measures through an assembly, to influence the outcome of an election or trial, and to intimidate or even kill political opponents."

¹⁴³ Hooper and Ash 1935: 302 n.2 cite the "unusual turbulence" of the last years of the Republic as an explanation for the interlocutors' lack of shock at news. Similarly, Tilly 1973: 24 asserts that Varro uses this scene to show "how acts of violence were a commonplace during the turbulent days of the Civil Wars."

leisure time to mental and oral production,¹⁴⁴ turns out to be little more than a fiction by the end of the book.¹⁴⁵ At this time in Rome, there is no place—not even one that evokes the countryside—where one can escape the present realities. In Book One, production gives way to destruction,¹⁴⁶ and it is the setting, the framework, that directs the audience through that shift and affects how they approach and react to the discussion that falls in between.

B. Book Two: Herdsmen Abroad

The second book of the *dRR* provides a rather different approach to the setting of the dialogue, not only in terms of place, time, and cast of characters, but also in how Varro unveils the opening and leads into the topic of the dialogue, herding. Unlike in Book One, Varro opens the dialogue proper *in medias res*, with the interlocutors already gathered and a conversation already underway, or perhaps coming to a close—the first clause of the dialogue announces the departure of Menates, while Varro seems to be readying for departure. The first spoken lines forbid Varro from leaving until he has spoken on the origin, the dignity, and the science of herding (2.1.1), from which point the dialogue begins. A possible *lacuna* at the end of the preface may explain the unusual nature of this opening, at least to some degree. In the MSS, the words *hic intermisimus* appear in all capitals following the last two lines of the introduction,

¹⁴⁴ Earthly production as metaphor for oratorical, literary, or mental production more broadly is common in Roman discourse (e.g., Cic. *Brut.* 4.16; Varro *dRR* 3.1.10). The connection between agriculture and speech is built into Latin vocabulary regarding speech. See Connors 1997.

¹⁴⁵ As Diederich 2007: 185 says, “Doch am Ende dringt mit der Nachricht von der Ermordung des Tempelhüters die harte Realität unversehens aus der chaotischen Außenwelt, aus einer Gesellschaft, der nichts mehr heilig ist, brutal in die friedliche Szenerie des landwirtschaftlichen Gespräches ein.”

¹⁴⁶ Perhaps a particularly poignant message if the year is indeed 43, given the many proscriptions that occurred following the formation of the second triumvirate; Varro himself was proscribed, and while his life was spared, his property was plundered. See Hooper and Ash 1935: xv.

incipiam hinc (2.Pr.6).¹⁴⁷ Jones reads the *hic intermisimus* as a scribal note indicating a gap in text.¹⁴⁸ Storr-Best similarly suggests that the scribe facetiously added these words in place copying a hopelessly illegible or senseless portion of the text.¹⁴⁹

However, given that the interlocutors seem ready to leave from their meeting, rather than having just met as is usual in dialogues, the missing text would need to be lengthy in order to adequately establish the scene as we have it, that is a gathering winding down. Instead, the *hic intermisimus* at the close of the preface can be read as a flippant scribal note reacting to both what precedes it and what follows: to Varro's words introducing the discourse, *incipiam hinc*, and the conversation that in fact begins *in medias res*, the scribe cheekily responds, in effect, *no, we do not begin here, we interrupt here*. Indeed, this opening is striking for a few reasons. First, it is a rather dramatic departure from the types of opening traditional in dialogues, both Greek and Roman. Plato and Cicero both typically begin their dialogues by introducing the narrator (and thus the audience) into a gathering of people, after which the dialogue takes off as conversation turns to the topic at hand.¹⁵⁰ While it is clear from the opening of Book One, where Varro finds an uncommon location for his dialogue in the Aedes Telluris, that Varro is not adverse to

¹⁴⁷ Hooper and Ash 1935: 310n.1 excise *hic intermisimus* from their edition of the text, following Keil 1899: 72 and Goetz 1929.

¹⁴⁸ Jones 1935: 214

¹⁴⁹ Storr-Best 1912: 125n.2; a somewhat problematic explanation given that a true *locus desparatus* interrupts the text only a few lines into where the scribe supposedly chose to begin copying again.

¹⁵⁰ For instance, Plato's *Republic* opens with Socrates and his friend Glaucon meeting Adeimantus and Polemarchus on the road, and then going together to Polemarchus' house, whereupon the debate on the nature of justice begins. Plato's *Symposium* likewise begins with Socrates being enticed to somebody's house (in this case Agathon's) for a symposium, after which they all speak on the nature of love. Cicero's *Brutus* begins with Brutus and Atticus interrupting Cicero as he is taking a solitary walk in his garden, their conversation ultimately leading to the history of oratory.

bucking tradition, his method of beginning Book Two is a jarring departure, much more striking as untraditional in its very abruptness.

But the opening is strange not only when compared to other dialogues, but also—and especially—when compared to how Varro creates the settings of Books One and Three. In both other books, Varro follows the conventional format: he unfolds the setting, states the occasion, allows the audience to witness the narrator coming upon the future interlocutors, and introduces the latter. Since the audience has come upon the scene with the narrator, they are privy to the beginnings of the conversation—how the topic of the dialogue comes about. In Book Two, Varro seems to deny the audience these advantages. Most scholars suggest that the modern text is simply missing the key stage-setting moments of the opening of Book Two, wherein Varro would supply the information apparently missing—introduction to the cast, description of the location, and identification of the occasion.¹⁵¹ Indeed, there is a *locus desperatus* a few sentences into the dialogue proper, which occurs at a point wherein Cossinius seems about to explain the circumstances under which the topic at hand—herding—had originally been introduced on the previous day. However, while it is conceivable—and perhaps even probable—that the missing text explains something of the setting and context, given its location several lines into the dialogue, after several interlocutors have already spoken and one has left, it would at the very least be an awkward spot for an introduction to the cast of characters. At any rate, whether or not this missing section of dialogue did clarify the who, the where, and the why that the opening in its current condition does not answer, it would not eliminate the abruptness or peculiarity of beginning the book in the midst of a gathering already (well) underway.

¹⁵¹ So Hooper and Ash 1935: 311n.3.

While Varro drops his audience into what seems to be a play in progress, he does provide some detail of the dialogue's setting at the end of Book Two's preface, where he explains to his dedicatee, Turranius Niger, the origin of the dialogue that follows (2.Pr.6):

de re pecuaria breviter ac summatim percurram ex sermonibus nostris collatis cum iis qui pecuarias habuerunt in Epiro magnas, tum cum piratico bello inter Delum et Siciliam Graeciae classibus praeessem. Incipiam hinc...

I shall briefly and summarily run through the subject of cattle breeding, based on discussions that we had with men who possessed large cattle herds in Epirus at the time when I had command of the Greek fleets between Delos and Sicily during the Piratic War. I shall begin here...

Providing both a date—sometime during a three-month span in 67 BCE¹⁵²—and a general location, Greece in the vicinity of Epirus,¹⁵³ Varro at least offers his audience some basic context before inserting them into the action already in progress. Although rather earlier than the occasions for either Book One or Book Three, the dramatic date of Book Two and its specific context of Pompey's campaign against the Cilician pirates mark a point in Roman history that has long-reaching political effects. Pompey gained the generalship of the Cilician campaign with tremendous difficulty, as many of the Senate were reluctant to offer the popular leader the sort of power that the office would require. But the deftness and, more importantly, the speed (three months) with which Pompey successfully ended the campaign and settled the Cilicians paved the way for much of Pompey's future success and power: a year after the Piratic War, and largely due to his success there, Pompey was placed in command in Rome's long-standing war against Mithridates VI of Pontus, in which Pompey emerged victorious, popular among the people, and

¹⁵² See Jones 1935: 214, who is undoubtedly correct in writing that Book Two must take place sometime between March and June of 67.

¹⁵³ It is unclear from this passage where precisely the dialogue takes place in Greece, for while he mentions that his discussion had been with men who possessed herds in Epirus, it does not follow that they had their conversation in Epirus, given both that the owners of large herds rarely led their own flocks (as is clear from *dRR* 2.10, where the herders are discussed as a type of flock animal themselves) and that flocks, unlike farms, were mobile.

powerful. Of course, the Piratic War also has the benefit of being a politically significant event in which Varro played a real part, as commander of a fleet.

While the campaign against the pirates makes sense as a dramatic date, points later in Book Two, when the setting again intrudes into the dialogue, indicate that Varro originally specified a more precise occasion for this gathering of Romans than the war, just as he did with the Sementivae in Book One. At 2.8.1, a freedman comes onto the scene to announce that “the cakes had been offered and the sacrifice prepared” (*liba absoluta esse et rem divinam paratam*), leading to the same conclusion that the freedman, whose entrance disperses the gatherers and ends the dialogue, confirms: they are gathered on a feast day (*dies festus*; 2.11.12). While the knowledge that the conversation occurs on a festival day that involved sacrifice and *libum* does not alone provide a distinctive date, several scholars have argued that the festival in question is the *Parilia*,¹⁵⁴ a rustic festival held on April 21 that coincides with the date of Rome’s founding.¹⁵⁵ The assertion is based primarily upon the suggested emendation the MSS reading of *Palibus* at 2.5.1 to *Palilibus*, *Palilia* being an alternate form of *Parilia*.¹⁵⁶ This proposal is made more appealing, if not more probable, by several other factors, all of which Jones addresses in his brief article in defense of this suggested occasion.¹⁵⁷ According to Ovid, *liba* were used in the sacrificial rituals of the *Parilia* (*Fast.* 4.774). Additionally, the timing of the festival would fit well into the timeframe of the Piratic Wars, and may well have coincided with a brief pause between the two parts of the war. Most circumstantially, and yet perhaps most convincingly, the *Parilia* was a sacred day in honor of Pales and the pastoral life of the Roman community, as

¹⁵⁴ So Jones 1935; Flach 1997: 41; and Diederich 2007: 183.

¹⁵⁵ On the *Parilia*, see Ov. *Fast.* 4.721-862; also Scullard 1981: 103–105.

¹⁵⁶ Jones 1935: 215 and Diederich 2007: 185. Hooper and Ash 1935: 366n.1 instead select the emendation *Laribus*, but admit that even with that change the meaning of the sentence is unclear.

¹⁵⁷ Jones 1935: 215

Varro the interlocutor states when accounting the dignity of herding at 2.1.9, where herdsmen prayed to Pales for protection for themselves and their flocks and performed ritual purifications. The pastoral associations of the festival do suggest a fitting occasion for a conversation on the ins and outs of herding, just as in Book One the Sementivae, as an agricultural festival, was a suitable choice for the discussion of agriculture.¹⁵⁸ In both cases, the precise occasion serves as quick way to establish the parameters for the discussion at large.

The physical setting of Book Two presents more difficulties than the dating of the Book. Early on, Varro establishes that the dialogue is set in the region of Epirus on the Western coast of Greece (2.Pr.6, 2.1.2). If it was ever part of the text, the precise location for the meeting of these herdsmen has been lost. Atticus' presence and participation in the dialogue suggests a location near Buthrotum, where he owned a villa.¹⁵⁹ Historical evidence on the identity of the other interlocutors provides no other clues as to where the Book is set; although the villas of Menates and Vitulus are both mentioned as destinations for various of the interlocutors at the close of the dialogue, there is no other indication as to where those villas might be (2.11.12). Yet Epirus as a region works well as a setting for a dialogue on herding, since the land was well suited for

¹⁵⁸ The only other strong candidate is the *Fordicidia* on April 15, a festival promoting the fertility of both land and flocks, wherein priests sacrifice pregnant cow (*forda*) to Tellus, saving the ashes for use on the *Parilia* (see *Ov. Fast.* 629-672 and Scullard 1981: 102.). The association between herding and farming, Pales and Tellus make this an interesting possibility, but given the stronger association of the festival with agricultural fertility (the festival occurs in the middle of the *Cerialia*) and the lack of distinct textual evidence supporting it as the occasion of Book Two, it seems less likely than the *Parilia*. The other rural festivals that occurred between March and June and have some possible tie to the world of the *dRR* are not pastoral. The *Liberalia* on March 17 is centered around Liber, another of the twelve agricultural gods to whom Varro dedicates the *dRR* as a whole (1.1.5), and involves *liba* and sacrifice (Scullard 1981: 91–92.). Yet while the festival was both rustic and aimed at fertility, its focus was on people rather than crops or animals, and thus is not a likely candidate for Book Two. Similarly, while the *Robigalia* (April 25) and the *Ludi Florae* (April 27) are also in honor of gods whom Varro includes in his dedication—Robigus and Flora respectively (1.1.6), both are strictly agricultural in nature.

¹⁵⁹ This would provide another link to the troubles of the 40s, as Caesar occupied Buthrotum during the civil wars with Pompey (*Caes. B.C.* 3.16).

pasturage and thus was a prime location for herding.¹⁶⁰ In this way, the framework of Book Two is like that of the first book, although in many other ways it is surprisingly different: the settings of both books, as displayed on a basic level in their occasion and location, reflect their respective topics of discussion, and through the physical conflation that this mimicry provides between setting and subject, they allow an avenue for other conflations—for reading the social and political aspects of the setting, the strangenesses there, in the dialogue itself.

In some ways the site of Book Two is more traditional than that of Book One. Though it is unclear precisely where the men have gathered, the end scene makes it evident that they are located somewhere between the country proper and the city, for it is on the road between Vitulus' country villa and the city that his freedman find the interlocutors (2.11.12). While it doesn't seem that the men are gathered at a villa for their discussion,¹⁶¹ their non-urban location is more in keeping with generic tradition than the urban setting of Book One's *Aedes Telluris*. Yet the Greek location for Book Two is ultimately problematic, not only in comparison to the Roman setting of the other two books of the *DRR*, but also in terms of the subject matter of Book Two. First, Varro is writing for a Roman audience. In the preface to Book One (which also serves as a preface to the *DRR* as a whole), Varro asserts that the dialogue is a manual designed to guide his wife in all that she needs to know for the successful running of her farm (1.1.2-4), which suggests that his instructions are meant for those with agronomic activity in Italy. Varro's invocation of Italian gods in the preface, combined with the praise of Italy as land of cultivation and bounty that opens the conversation in Book One, underscore the Roman aim of the dialogue. The preface to Book Two, which shifts the dedication to Turranius Niger (though all three books

¹⁶⁰ Several comments in Book Two of the *DRR* highlight Epirus' strong link to herding. See, e.g., 2.Pf.6 and 3.5.10.

¹⁶¹ It seems likely that at least one interlocutor would stay if they were at a villa, but at the end of the conversation, all the gathered men disperse.

are dedicated to Fundania in the first preface), continues to emphasize the Romano-centric focus of the dialogue's topics. Here, Varro concerns himself with addressing the way Romans live now versus the way Romans used to live—luxuriously in the city or simply, yet actively, in the country (2.Pr.1-3), but he also addresses the ways in which herding, agriculture, and the city are tied together in Roman history (2.Pr.4-5). Varro the author continues the latter topic in the dialogue itself, through the voice of Varro the character, who outlines the ages of herding for his fellow interlocutors, and affirming that Romans are descended from shepherds (2.1.3-10). By drawing so tight a connection between Italy, Romans, and herding in both the preface and the start of the dialogue's discussion, Varro not only identifies his audience—his fellow Romans—he also brings his audience's attention to their national link with the topic at hand.

But in setting his dialogue in Greece, Varro subverts the Italo-centric expectation that the preface sets up and the dialogue itself reiterates; indeed, on a more basic level, the Greek location calls into question the practicality of the advice on offer: how can a gentleman who owns flocks in Epirus, however successfully, instruct a Roman in the logistics of buying and tending his flocks in Italy? But it is this disconnect that gives the lie to the purported purpose of the dialogue. Practical instruction would come from men who successfully held flocks in Italy, and of those gathered in Epirus for the conversation on herding, it is Varro alone—as far as he himself reports to the audience—who had successfully tended flocks on Italian soil (2.Pr.6).¹⁶² Indeed, the dialogue emphasizes the ties of those present to Epirus and the Greek world: Cossinius and Atticus are half-Greeks (2.1.2) and different speakers invoke Homeric goatherds

¹⁶² Although Green 1997: 430 seems to question the legitimacy of this assertion, given the fact that Varro's role during the Piratic War was an emphatically military one: he was clearly not playing the farmer during this period.

(2.3.1, 2.4.1).¹⁶³ While these instances have a playful tone, and the Homeric references are a show of literary knowledge common in Roman written discourse, Varro the author's emphasis on the Greek-ness of the proceedings is not accidental. Indeed, even Varro the interlocutor is given a Greek appellation in the course of the dialogue, for he is deemed in Homeric fashion ποιμὴν λαῶν (shepherd of the people; 2.5.1). While this epithet, used primarily in the *Iliad* for Agamemnon in his position as chief ruler and military leader of the Greek force,¹⁶⁴ is fitting for Varro in his current roles of military leadership, Varro's use of a Greek rather than Latin term of approbation is striking.¹⁶⁵

But beyond the strangeness of setting a supposed instruction manual designed for Romans in Greece, a fact that the repeated use of Greek names, epithets, and also vocabulary help the audience to remember, the Greek emphasis of the text clashes with the message of the preface and Varro's (as an interlocutor) history of the Romans as shepherds.¹⁶⁶ If Rome is a city built up by and around shepherds, if herding is a quintessential part of Roman (and, by extension, Italian) identity, then why not set Book Two in Rome like the other two books? This question is especially troubling in conjunction with the sentiments that Varro offers in the preface of Book Two about the troubling Hellenization of the Romans (2.Pr.2-3):

Quae nunc vix satis singula sunt, nec putant se habere villam, si non multis
vocalibus retinniat Graecis, quom vocent particulatim loca, procoetona,

¹⁶³ Cossinius likens himself to the goatherd Melanthius of *Od.* 17.217; Scrofa disavows descentance from Eumaeus, Odysseus' swineherd (*Od.* 16.22).

¹⁶⁴ See, e.g., *Il.* 1.263, 2.85, 2.105, 2.243, 2.272, 4.296, etc.

¹⁶⁵ Spencer 2010: 59–60, on the other hand, sees this Homeric usage as Varro's way of connecting “a pastoral pre-Roman world to the big names of Trojan epic.”

¹⁶⁶ Examples of Greek elements in the *dRR* include, e.g., *hypenemia* and *chorion* at 2.1.19; τυποποιίαν at 2.1.28; reference to herding practices in Epirus at 2.2.20; the history of the Greek name for pigs at 2.4.9; χαίρετε at 2.5.1; *busycos*, *bupais*, *bulimn*, *boopis*, and *bumamma* at 2.5.4; *ἰππίατροι* at 2.7.16; μῦθος at 2.8.9; ὀπός and δάκρυον at 2.11.4. It is significant, as Diederich 2007: 191 notes, that Varro has comparatively fewer Hellenizations than Cicero, and so his use of them is more marked.

palaestram, apodyterion, peristylon, ornithona, peripteron, oporothecon. Igitur, quod nunc intra murum fere patres familiae correperunt relictis falce et aratro et manus movere maluerunt in theatro ac circo, quam in segetibus ac vinetis, frumentum locamus qui nobis advehat, qui saturi fiamus ex Africa et Sardinia, et navibus vindemiam condimus ex insula Coa et Chia.

Nowadays, a single [Greek gymnasium] is scarcely sufficient, nor do they think that they have a Villa if it does not resound with many Greek names when they designate places severally—the *procoetion*, the *palaestra*, the *apodyterion*, the *peristylon*, the *ornithon*, the *peripteros*, the *oporothecon*.¹⁶⁷ Therefore, since in these times the heads of the family have crept within the walls, deserting the sickle and the plow, and prefer to concern their hands with the theater and the circus than with the grain fields and the vineyards, we hire a man to bring us grain from Africa and Sardinia so that we might be satiated, and we store a vintage come by ships from the islands of Cos and Chios.

Varro here puts forward the privilege that contemporary Romans give to Greek designations for spaces in their villa as a strong indication of decline. The Hellenizing terms highlight the ridiculous excess of having fruit rooms and a palaestra within a villa, an indulgence so much worse than the presence of a single urbane Greek gymnasium (*Graecorum urbana gymnasia*), which Varro portrays as an attempt to citify the country life and improve the health of those who live it—futilely, since those who live a more traditional rural life (that approved by *nostrī maiores*, 2.Pr.1), dwelling modestly in the country and working their fields, make their lands more productive and themselves much healthier than these luxuries could (2.Pr.2).

Both the Greek terms and the spaces that they indicate, then, not only signal a turn toward the citification of the country and the embracing of luxury which that entails, but also are an embodiment of the Romans' turning their backs on the old ways, even though they brought success and well-being. The foreignness of the words mirrors the way in which both the spaces they represent and this new type of life are—or should be—out of place in the Roman world.

Varro carries this idea into the dialogue through his use of Greek elements there. By setting

¹⁶⁷ Or the antechamber, the exercise room, the dressing room, the colonnade, the aviary, the pergola, and the fruit-room respectively.

Romans in Epirus and then highlighting the Greek-ness of the setting throughout the text (through Greek names, epithets, places, etc.),¹⁶⁸ the dialogue proper becomes a demonstration of the phenomenon that Varro notes in the preface. These are Romans discussing a very Roman subject, certainly, but they are doing so utilizing Greek terminology, away from the homeland. The pastoral world, like rural life as a whole, is out of sync with the *mos maiorum*, and the dialogue itself, through its setting, points this out.

C. Book Three: Villa Birds

The setting of the final book of the *dRR*, which covers the art of the *pastio villatica*, is more similar to that of Book One than Book Two, and in seeming to bring the audience back to the same type of scene that began the work, creates a nice sense of symmetry. Book Three opens with Varro and Axius, a senator, agreeing to wait for the results of an election of the *aediles* in the Villa Publica (3.2.1). Upon entering the Villa, they find Appius Claudius, an augur, likewise awaiting the outcome with a group of Romans, all of whom happen to have bird names: Merula (“Blackbird”), of consular family; Pavo (“Peacock”), a fellow Reatean; Pica (“Magpie”); and Passer (“Sparrow”). As Axius points out, the augur has collected an aviary in the Villa Publica (*Axius Appio subridens, Recipis nos, inquit, in tuum ornithona, ubi sedes inter aves?* 3.2.2). Once gathered, the speakers begin to discuss the merits of the Villa Publica versus the private villas that men build in the country, considering in their conversation aspects such as function and decoration. Ultimately, as the interlocutors seem to be understanding “villa” and “adornment” and “function” in different ways without explaining themselves fully to each other, they reach nothing but a rather platonic state of *aporia*, leading Appius to declare “I don’t know

¹⁶⁸ Even going so far as to point out the displacement of the men from Italy and the strangeness of them then having a discussion on herding (*dRR* 2.4.1): *sed quis e portu potius Italico prodit ac de suillo pecore expedit?* “But who sets out from a harbor, preferably an Italian one, and explains swine-herding?”

what a villa is” (...*ego ignoro, inquit, quid sit villa*; 3.2.6). Finally, they attempt to define what constitutes a “villa” in the first place (3.2.3-18), and in their attempts to unravel both qualitative and constitutive questions about the “villa,” the men, through agreeing that it is an (or *the*) essential component in defining a villa (3.2.10), reach the topic of the book, which is the science of the *pastio villatica*, particularly in regards to its profitability.

Varro once again uses the setting of his book to presage the topic of its discourse. While the topic of Book Three is ostensibly more concerned with the animals that make up what Varro deems the *pastio villatica*—animals whose lives and care are more tightly tied to the property of a villa owner than the herding animals of Book Two, whose grazing lands often extend beyond property lines—the villa, as the place that ties these animals together, is also central to the dialogue.¹⁶⁹ Varro combines both the villa and its animals into the framework, not only choosing the Villa Publica as the dramatic location and clear nod to the villas of the countryside that are central to the book, but also placing in that villa an aviary of citizen birds as representative for all the villa animals that will come under discussion. The setting also playfully—if allusively—depicts the thematic transition from Book Two to Book Three: at the beginning of Book Three, Varro and Axius enter the Villa Publica after voting for their candidate, which they would have done in the *Ovile* (“Sheep-pen”) the voting area in the Campus Martius located adjacent to the Villa Publica.¹⁷⁰ The opening of the dialogue physically manifests the shift from the herding of

¹⁶⁹ Green 1997: 437–38 notes that the real distinction between the grazing animals of Book Two and those covered in Book Three is legal: the former were legally deemed tame by nature, while the latter were legally deemed wild by nature. For animals such as bees, snails, mice, and birds—as well as people—physical possession was requisite in order to have a claim of ownership.

¹⁷⁰ The *Ovile* was so-named due to its likeness to a sheep-pen. It was also called the *Saepta*, a term that also regularly applies to animal enclosures (see p. 110n.257 below). For more on the *Ovile*, see Platner and Ashby 1929: 373.

cattle, sheep, etc. to that of villa animals through Varro and Axius' walk from the "Sheep Pen" to the Public Villa.¹⁷¹

But as with Book One, the dramatic location of Book Three is problematic even as it is thematically ideal for the subject, for the Villa Publica is in Rome and the traditional private villa setting of the Ciceronian dialogue is an even more obvious and apt choice for a book about the *pastio villatica* than it was for a book on farming.¹⁷² Yet in again ignoring generic traditions and instead locating his work in a public urban space, Varro signals that his dialogue is not merely an agronomic handbook, but a text that is relevant to the public and urban life of Romans. Green thoughtfully examines the social and political significance that the framework of Book Three reveals in the dialogue portion of the book. Viewing the framework of Book Three as, in essence, a *mise-en-abîme* of the content of the discussion about the keeping of villa animals, she argues that Varro uses the setting of the Villa Publica and the aviary of characters to refract the account of the villa aviary that follows, altering its significance by turning it into political and urban metaphor.¹⁷³

The Villa Publica is simultaneously a stand-in for the private villa at the center of Book Three's discourse and, as a public space connected to the political life of Rome, a representation of the Republic.¹⁷⁴ Through their debate of whether the Villa Publica is better than private villas (3.2.3-6), the characters establish the comparative framework that allows the reader to remember the unstated public version of the villa as they follow the dialogue's discourse on the running of the private villa. But their initial discussion comparing the Villa Publica to the private villa also highlights the civic function of the public space (3.2.4):

¹⁷¹ Green 1997: 432, 438; Diederich 2007: 186.

¹⁷² As Sluiter and Rosen 2006: 7 write, "the villa was a suitable locus for philosophical speech."

¹⁷³ Green 1997

¹⁷⁴ Green 1997: 432; Diederich 2007: 186

Et cum haec sit communis universi populi, illa solius tua; haec quo succedant e campo cives et reliqui homines, illa quo equae et asini; praeterea cum ad rem publicam administrandam haec sit utilis, ubi cohortes ad dilectum consuli adductae considant, ubi arma ostendant, ubi censores censu admittant populam.

And while this villa is common to the whole population, that villa is yours alone; this villa is the one to which citizens and other people come from the Campus, that villa is the one to which horses and asses come; furthermore, while this villa, where the cohorts sit when convened by the consul for a levy, where they display arms, where the censors grant the populace audience for the census, is useful for the administration of the republic.

As a large, relatively open space located in the Campus Martius, the Villa Publica was a natural site for many civic functions, especially those that involved amassing citizens.¹⁷⁵ But Appius, in bundling together its various public roles under the heading *ad rem publicam administrandam utilis* establishes the Villa Publica as an embodiment of the Republic. In symbolizing both the private villa and the political life of Rome at once, the Villa Publica becomes the nexus through which the villa is conflated with the city and the framework of Book Three collapses with the agronomic content. Through this setting, the Roman bird-named citizens, gathered at the Villa Publica, are aligned with the captive villa birds: neither have freedom but both seem not to notice so long as they are provided with luxury and food.¹⁷⁶ Where the framework to Book One embodied the dangers of the most turbulent period of the Republic through the murder of the Aeditumus, Book Three through its metaphorical aviary demonstrates the loss of freedom that also came with the political turmoil.

¹⁷⁵ Hooper and Ash 1935: 430n.3. For more on the Villa Publica, see Platner and Ashby 1929: 581.

¹⁷⁶ See Green 1997: 435–45, who also supports this allegorical connection between the Citizen birds and the birds of the aviary by pointing out that in Rome ownership of birds and men falls under the same legal category in Rome, by which physical possession is necessary.

The dramatic date of Book Three underscores the theme of political turmoil and loss of freedom, since it is set on the day of the aedile elections in 50 BCE.¹⁷⁷ In other words, the setting of Book Three marks the last elections before Julius Caesar crossed the Rubicon in January of 49 and seized control of the state—effectively, the last truly free elections of the Republic.¹⁷⁸ Varro repeatedly reminds the audience of the text’s dramatic occasion throughout Book Three. At several points during the dialogue proper, the setting intrudes upon the conversation, first to announce that somebody has been caught stuffing the ballot boxes (3.5.18), and subsequently as interlocutors come and go to deal with both the election fraud and its results (3.7.1, 3.12.1, and 3.17.1) Although the action of *dRR* 3 occurs before Caesar’s march on Rome altered the course of public life finally and irrevocably, leading to civil war and dictatorship and the ultimate end of the Republic, Varro uses the fraudulent election at the heart of the setting to make clear that the health and integrity of the political process were already in question. But these electoral intrusions to the conversation not only serve to characterize the unhealthy state of Roman politics, they also deny the readers the opportunity of forgetting the setting of the Book—the reason that the men are in the Villa Publica in the first place, and the trouble that has arisen around it—in the course of the dialogue on the *pastio villatica*; they are instead a frequent reminder of the metaphorical connection between setting and topic.

Nevertheless, the dramatic occasion of Book Three is strange, even troubling. While aspects of the *dRR*’s settings defy Ciceronian tradition—occurring in urban and public spaces, or

¹⁷⁷ There has been quite a bit of ink spilled in scholars’ various attempts to determine the dramatic date of *dRR* 3, the two leading possibilities being 54 or 50. See Richardson 1983: 456–59 for a full rundown of the reasons for these being the two years possible. While Dahlmann 1935: 1192 and Richardson 1983: 459–60 both support the earlier date, most scholars (see, e.g., Tatum 1992: 193; Green 1997: 432; Flach 2002: 29–30; and Diederich 2007: 183) agree that 50 is the more likely year. See Linderski 1985 for the key arguments.

¹⁷⁸ Kronenberg 2009: 116.

foreign ones, instead of private villas or gardens—the locales provide a sense of continuity between the books of the *dRR* and with the topics they address. So while Books One and Three are both set in the city, the specific locations are thematically appropriate for their respective subjects of conversation. In addition, the Villa Publica location of *dRR* 3, through its connection to the Ovile, provides a symbolic link between this book and the previous one. The dramatic location of Book Two, while problematic in setting the scene in Greece, at least provides a more traditional rural background for the discourse. But Books One and Two both occur on a day of leisure—that is, a day when it would be most ideologically suitable for a group of Roman citizens (i.e., politically active men) to gather and have the sort of discussion that occurs in dialogues.¹⁷⁹ But in Book three, the dramatic occasion is not merely *not* one of leisure, but is actively one of business, of civic duty. Indeed, the conversation on the *pastio villatica* has to be shaped and held around the business that has really gathered these men—they and their conversation are at the mercy of their offices and public position and the political events surrounding them: Pavo leaves as it was the custodian of the ballot box for his candidate accused of fraud (3.5.18), Appius as Augur is summoned by the consul (3.7.1) and returns to fill the gathered interlocutors in on what is happening (3.12.1), and the men leave, before they have finished their discourse on the art of the *pastio villatica*, to hear the herald read the election results (3.17.1).

By setting Book Three on an election day, an important aspect of Roman political life, Varro denies his interlocutors the opportunity of leisure, as well as the intellectual pursuits that accompany *otium*, that a dialogue usually grants. By the late Republic, the private suburban and rural villas of the Roman elite had become spaces of refuge from the increasingly dangerous and

¹⁷⁹So Levine 1958: 147 states that Cicero, in his *mise en scènes*, is careful to indicate that the discussion reported in the dialogue did not interfere with any fulfillment of civic duties.

closed off world of Roman politics.¹⁸⁰ The private villa was still a space where Romans who were now politically impotent could exert some control (over production, *labor*, men, and animals) and maintain some part of their Roman identity by tapping into the ideology of the traditional Roman-farmer.¹⁸¹ But beyond being an arena for personal power, the villa was also the space of *otium* and the intellectual production that in the end of the Republic became a symbolic alternative to the political life in the city.¹⁸² But in the symbolic world of the framework of the *dRR*, where the private villa and Villa Publica are analogous, the political occasion of the setting and its repeated intrusions into a conversation that, as part of a dialogue in a space that represents the private villa, should be a sign of leisure suggests that perhaps escape is not really possible for the Roman elite. The realities of the Roman world, in all its messiness, will intrude even upon the villa and its intellectual pursuits. Romans are indeed like Varro's birds, caged animals at the mercy of others, with no true place of refuge left to them.¹⁸³

This last point seems to be brought home through Varro's description of the pleasure aviary at his villa near Casinum, a large and elaborate structure, replete with colonnades, fish-basin, a wooded area, a bird-theater (*theatridion avium*), docks, dining area, and water clock

¹⁸⁰ The movement of the urban elite to the country was especially prominent in the 1st c. BCE, coinciding with the increased wealth that accompanied Roman development. See White 1977: 7–8 and Spencer 2010: 26, who notes the literary overuse of the topos of country villa as retreat during the late 1st c. BCE. Diederich 2007: 188 highlights the role of the political climate at the end of the Republic in the exodus of the elite to the country.

¹⁸¹ As Spencer 2010: 75 points out, this explains the continuing popularity of Cato's *De Agricultura* as a “touchstone for the *mos maiorum*,” even though the agricultural detail was undoubtedly out of date.

¹⁸² This trend is most strongly associated with Cicero, who did overwhelmingly turn to literary production when he was barred from active political involvement; see Stroup 2010: 57–58. More significantly, as both Kronenberg 2009: 88–89 and Nicgorski 2012: 4 suggest, the literary production that came out of Cicero's turning to the villa and *otium* is far from apolitical, but can instead be viewed as a continuation of his service to Rome and the Republic.

¹⁸³ While Green 1997: 445 effectively calls attention to the shift that *dRR* 3 suggests in the villa (“from a place of which the citizen was proud guardian, to a prison-like refuge, where citizens like Varro had to hide from the men in power”), she still sees the villa as place of escape.

(3.5.9-17).¹⁸⁴ In the abundance of very human, very Roman amenities that fill Varro's aviary, the allegory between these caged birds and the bird Romans gathered in the Villa Publica—and other Romans by extension—becomes, as Green suggests, abundantly clear: “There is a theater, as in Rome; basic food and water are supplied in abundance, as in Rome There can be no doubt that Varro's aviary is a small city-like structure for bird-citizens.”¹⁸⁵ But Varro's aviary goes further than suggesting that Romans are no longer free or that the elite are now trapped by circumstance in comfortable cages of their own making—that is, the villa; for Varro's aviary is turned toward the country and shaped like a writing tablet (*in agrum versus ornithonis locus; ornithonis deformatus ad tabulae litterariae speciem*; 3.5.10). Kronenberg has taken this description of the aviary as literary symbolism, representative of the countryside as place of literary production,¹⁸⁶ and part of what she views as Varro's program in the *dRR* as a whole: the promotion of “a life guided by intellectual pursuits.”¹⁸⁷ Indeed, the writing-tablet conceit of Varro's aviary does rather forcefully bring to mind the Ciceronian solution of escape to the countryside and action in writing, perhaps especially for Varro's audience, who were the same elite that would have passed around Cicero's works. Yet Varro's description of the aviary is cut short by the first of Book Three's many interruptions—the announcement that somebody has been stuffing the ballot boxes (3.5.18). If Varro is suggesting that the villa is no longer a viable

¹⁸⁴ For attempts at reconstructing Varro's aviary, see van Buren and Kennedy 1919 and Fuchs 1962. There is some dispute over whether the dining-area in the aviary was meant for humans or for the birds, but as Green 1997: 441–43 points out, Varro's interlocutors have already indicated that humans sharing dining space with birds does not provide for a pleasant meal (3.4.3), and so it seems logical and more likely that everything Varro describes inside his pleasure aviary is meant for the birds who inhabit it.

¹⁸⁵ Green 1997: 443

¹⁸⁶ Kronenberg 2009: 120–22 explains her metapoetic reading of Varro's aviary in more detail, but also more broadly asserts that, as presented in the *dRR*, pleasure aviaries more broadly represent the pleasures of the mind.

¹⁸⁷ Kronenberg 2009: 128–29

place of private retreat, then in breaking off his account of his writing-tablet aviary with news of political corruption, his point goes further. Not only is every villa now a public one, rather than a private paradise, but in it the political world can no longer be left behind in writing.

All three of the *dRR*'s settings create a landscape that becomes conflated with the space inhabited by their respective subjects, through the playful wordplay of setting and occasion as well as on a deeper level through the political and ideological implications of the framework. But all three settings also give the appearance of respite, a break from the realities of life to varying degrees. In Book One, the interlocutors spend their *Sementivae* gathered in the *Aedes Telluris* for a day of conversation; while they have not left Rome, the *Telluris*, as representation of the land as countryside, allows them a symbolic share of the respite that removal from the city grants, as well as the intellectual activity that comes with such leisure. Book Two reveals interlocutors who have indeed left the city on a festal day, and who likewise embrace the opportunity for discourse; perhaps more importantly, Book Two's conversation represents not merely a day's *otium* for religious purposes, but signifies a more substantial reprieve for at least some of the characters, who have a temporary hiatus from the Piratic War.¹⁸⁸ In Book Three, those gathered at the *Villa Publica* have come for shade, a metaphorical respite from civic activity, and stay for the discussion, attempting to turn the *Villa Publica* into a private villa.¹⁸⁹ But in all three books, Varro hints (not always subtly) that the sense of separation is an illusion, nothing more than appearance. Business goes on, and civic life will inevitably intrude, whether in the form of an accidental murder, religious rites (and looming war), or electoral fraud. The

¹⁸⁸ Diederich 2007: 186 views the location of book two, which she calls an undisturbed resting place of reflection, as a counterpoint to the dangers of the campaign against the Pirates.

¹⁸⁹ Green 1997: 445–46 nicely discusses the metaphorical implications of shade as used in the opening of the *dRR*, whereby the shade is connected to the removal of Rome's civic protectors, once considered dangerous to the state, but now necessary for those citizens' safety.

safe places that Varro creates in his settings are not as stable as they appear—their boundary lines are fluid, and by conflating places of safety with scenes of violence and corruption, Varro gives the lie to the dream of the glorious, golden countryside.

2. What's in a Name?: Names and Roman Identity

One of the most striking features that all three books of the *dRR* share and that contributes greatly to the sense of ambience of their settings is Varro's cast of characters. The names of the citizens that populate the *dRR* have long been commented upon by scholars—even those who decry the work as dry, tedious, and uninspired have noted the mild wordplay present in Varro's colorfully chosen characters.¹⁹⁰ They are all real Romans, or at the very least all have legitimately feasible names,¹⁹¹ but given the quantity of names in the *dRR* that are examples of word-play in the text, and the limited information that we possess about the real-life characters and interests of these men, their living, breathing counterparts seem largely besides the point. Indeed, characters such as Gnaeus Tremelius Scrofa and Publius Claudius Appius have garnered scholarly attention because what we know about them biographically does not entirely align with what Varro presents as part of their history and characters in the *dRR*.¹⁹² While few of the characters in the *dRR* are well-known enough today to be enlightening in regards to the accuracy of Varro's representation, the discrepancies that we are privy to, combined with the very small number of prominent Romans portrayed, suggest that the characters of the *dRR* were not chosen

¹⁹⁰ See, e.g., Rayment 1945: 350–51; Linderski 1989: 114–16; Roth 2005: 312; Spencer 2010: 70–72

¹⁹¹ Linderski 1989: 116–17 attests that all of the interlocutors in the *dRR* have names independently attested in literature and inscriptions. But as Matthews 1973: 20 points out, “Roman names are ripe for punning.”

¹⁹² For instance, Tatum 1992 addresses the disparity between the known wealth of the Claudii Pulchri in the 60's and Appius claim of poverty during that time (see *dRR* 3.16.2). While both Nelsestuen 2011 and Kronenberg 2009: 76ff tackle the disparities between the Scrofa of the *dRR* and the one whose work Columella cites.

for their historical legacy.¹⁹³ Indeed, for many of the participants in these three separately imagined discussions, the most significant attribute seems to be their names.

The characters, through their topically themed names, contribute to the sense of atmosphere and detail that makes the settings of the *dRR* so distinctive. Book One of the *dRR* is inhabited, appropriately enough, by characters whose names largely reflect the agricultural world that they then systematically unfold. Fundanius (“Mr. Farm-boy”), Agrius (“Mr. Field”), Agrasius (“Mr. Country-side”) and Stolo (“Mr. Sprout”),¹⁹⁴ contribute to the scene in the Aedes Telluris a more specific sense of place—not just the Land, but cultivated Italian land, where the *fundus* and *agri* are found together, the space in which a farmer cares for his crops and controls the offshoots, *stolones* or otherwise, that appear. While the presence of Scrofa (“Mr. Brood Sow”) is well enough explained by his role as the master of agronomics, his name is also linguistically relevant to the book’s setting, since a pregnant sow was the traditional sacrifice to Tellus and Ceres during the *Sementivae* festival.¹⁹⁵ Even outlying characters heighten the agricultural ambiance of Book One. The absent Aeditumus is called Fundilius, or “Mr. Farmer” (1.2.11); his name is topically apt like the others, but, beyond this, it is symbolically fitting: the

¹⁹³ Linderski 1989: 16–18 notes that of the twenty interlocutors in the *dRR*, only Appius Claudius Pulcher was a true noble, while most probably belonged to what he calls the municipal aristocracy—the strata below the senators and equestrians. This is not only in direct contrast to the social status of the interlocutors of Cicero’s dialogues, most of whom were of consular ranks, but also noticeably different from the characters attested in the fragments of Varro’s *Logistorici*, which were dialogues in 76 books. For a list of Cicero’s *dramatis personae* and the known interlocutors of the *Logistorici*, see Linderski 1989: 108–109, 118.

¹⁹⁴ “Stolo” explicitly refers to the new shoots (also called suckers) that spring from the trunk or roots of a tree, which are to be culled from cultivated trees (*dRR* 1.2.9). See *OLD* s.v. *stolo*. Scrofa and Varro are the other two interlocutors of *dRR* 1, the former is described in the text as being the current master of agronomics (1.2.12). Stolo, whose name does have an agricultural significance, albeit less obvious than the likes of Fundanius and Agrasius, is also granted the mantle of being a former master of the art of agriculture.

¹⁹⁵ Scullard 1981: 68.

Divine Earth of the *dRR* is under the care of the Farmer.¹⁹⁶ But Varro's name-play in reality begins before the dialogue itself, in the dedication of the first book to his wife Fundania upon her purchase of a *fundus* (1.1.1-2).¹⁹⁷ From the foundation of the book, then, Varro utilizes names to not so subtly allude to the theme of the conversation and contribute to the farm-y ambience of the whole setting.

Book Three, like Book One, boasts a cast of characters whose names playfully reflect the topic at hand. Through their presence together in the Villa Publica, sitting around an augur, Cornelius Merula ("Mr. Blackbird"), Fircellius Pavo ("Mr. Peacock"), Minucius Pica ("Mr. Magpie"), and Marcus Petronius Passer ("Mr. Sparrow") are the human counterpart of the villa aviaries that are a central feature of Book Three's discourse on the *pastio villatica*, with Varro calling direct attention to the contrivance by calling the collected interlocutors an aviary (*ornithona* 3.2.2). Appius Claudius Pulcher doubly contributes to the atmospheric name-play, both through his role as augur—and thus diviner and overseer of his group of bird-named citizens, but also through his *praenomen*, which by popular etymology is related to *apis* ("bee"), another animal that falls under the heading of *pastio villatica* and the topic that Appius himself expounds upon at length in the dialogue (together with Merula, 3.16). The cast is rounded out through the Book's dedicatee, Pinnius ("Mr. Feathery"), and the brief role of Pantuleius Parra ("Mr. Barn Owl"), the messenger who interrupts Varro's description of his pleasure aviary in order to announce the discovery of the ballet-box stuffing (3.5.18). Parra as a name fits the character scheme in play in the book, but it also calls attention to the augural implications

¹⁹⁶ So Green 1997: 430n.8: "Of course the temple of the Divine Earth should be overseen by a Farmer." It is not accidental that in Latin, *colo* is used both for cultivation of the earth and care of the gods (*OLD* s.v. *colo*).

¹⁹⁷ The aptness of his wife's name may be coincidental, but it is also possible (perhaps even likely) that *Fundania* is a pseudonym—a stand-in for his real wife or nobody at all, a dialogue's equivalent to the girlfriends of Latin elegy.

inherent in populating a dialogue with men who have bird names—especially if you then pair them with an augur. Barn owls are birds of ill omen, and as the announcer of election fraud, Parra lives up to his name.¹⁹⁸

A few of Book Two's characters are also named with topical aptness, boasting names related to the herding animals under discussion in the course of the dialogue. The dedicatee of Book Two, Turranius Niger, initially seems incongruous with the other two dedicatees, Fundania and Pinnius, whose names obviously suit them to the subject of their respective books, yet as Bertha Tilly suggests, "his name is probably connected with *taurus*, 'a bull,' which in Umbrian is *turu*."¹⁹⁹ While his name requires more knowledge to understand as wordplay than most of the other characters, it suits Varro's reputation as both a very learned man and as a lover of language and etymology. The secondary characters, mentioned in the course of the work, Quintus Modius Equiculus ("Mr. Little Horse", 2.7.1), who comes up during the portion of the discussion dedicated to horses, and Vitulus ("Mr. Calf", 2.11.12) provide clearer examples of how names in the *dRR* mimic subject, bolstering the theme and adding playfulness. Scrofa and Vaccius ("Mr. Brood Sow" and "Mr. Cow-boy") are the only interlocutors with literal animal names, but Varro compensates for this dearth by spotlighting the wordplay. Indeed, unlike the participants of Books One and Three, those engaged in the discussion on pasturage and herding repeatedly call attention to the link between human appellations and animal designations, spelling out for the

¹⁹⁸ Many scholars note the clear play on the augural association of the barn-owl in Parra's role in *dRR* 3 receives much comment: e.g., Hooper and Ash 1935: 458n.1; Linderski 1989: 116; Green 1997: 443–44; and Kronenberg 2009: 124.

¹⁹⁹ Tilly 1973: 230, a proposal supported by Linderski 1989: 114 and Kronenberg 2009: 114n.13. Green 2012: 38 offers an alternative source for his name, suggesting instead that Turranius derives from *turris*, and that Varro is here most interested in the martial associations of that word (a military *turris* being a siege engine), given that Book Two is set during the Piratic War.

audience the wordplay that, characteristic of Varro's style, pervades the *dRR*.²⁰⁰ When the discussion arrives at the purchasing, breeding, feeding, etc. of swine, the men assume Scrofa, given his piggy name, will handle the topic (2.4.1): *Tametsi Scrofam potissimum de ea re dicere oportere cognomen eius significat* ("And yet Scofa's surname signifies that he must be the most capable of speaking on this matter"). Likewise, when the discussion comes to cattle, Vaccius swoops in and claims the right to pontificate on his animal brethren (2.5.2): *In quo quidem, inquit Vaccius, meae partes, quoniam boves ibi* ("Indeed here is where my part comes in," said Vaccius, "since the cows are there"). According to this logic, names do not function merely as a way of distinguishing one person from another, but are also indicative of expertise: nomenclature says something about a person's realm of knowledge, maybe even about who they are.

These moments with Scrofa and Vaccius, then, show that the significance of names in the *dRR* goes beyond either the mild humor of wordplay or the creation of an appropriate framework—a locale descriptive and definitive of the subject of discourse—but also have an intellectual purpose.²⁰¹ Names are significant to identity, both on an individual and on a national level, as Varro the interlocutor points out himself as he expounds on the dignity of herding and its central place in Roman history (2.1.9-10):

Non ipsos quoque fuisse pastores obtinebit... quod nomina multa habemus ab utroque pecore, a maiore et a minore—a minore Porcius, Ovinus, Caprilus; sic a maiore Equitius, Taurus, Asinius—et idem cognomina adsignificare quod dicuntur, ut Anni Caprae, Statili Tauri, Pomponi Vituli, sic a pecudibus alia multa?

²⁰⁰ Given that there either was no introduction to the speakers or that portion of the setting has been lost, it is difficult to keep easy track of the *dramatis personae* of Book Two. Here follows a list of the interlocutors of Book Two, with the citation of their first appearance in the text: Varro (2.1.1), Cossinius (2.1.1), Murrius (2.1.1), Gnaeus Tremelius Scrofa (2.1.2), Titus Pomponius Atticus (2.1.25), Vaccius (2.1.27), and Quintus Lucienus (2.5.1).

²⁰¹ And as Partington 2009: 1794–1803 notes regarding puns, the best are not merely plays on words, but also plays on ideas, carrying some significance *sense-wise* on top of the phonic play.

Will this not also prove that they themselves also were shepherds, that we have many names from both kinds of herding, from the larger and the smaller—from the smaller, Porcius (*Piggy*),²⁰² Ovinus (*Sheep*), an Caprius (*Little Goat*); and from the larger, Equitius (*Horse*), Taurus (*Bull*), Asinius (*Ass*)—and the *cognomina*, as surnames are called, indicate the same, such as the Anni Caprae (*Goats*), the Statili Tauri (*Bulls*), the Pomponi Vituli (*Calves*), and many others.

This fairly straightforward idea—that occupation influenced appellations—is not only about semantics, it is a statement of ideology, of national identity. Shepherding and *Romanitas* go together—*Romanorum vero populum a pastoribus esse ortum quis non dicit?* (Truly, who does not affirm that the Roman people sprung from shepherds? 2.1.9)—and Roman names reflect this shared heritage through recording their collective identity.

While Varro is specifically addressing the significance of shepherding in forming the national character, his words are also true for farming. As he himself addresses at several points, both as narrator and as interlocutor, herding and farming are intimately connected and mutually beneficial: they have a “great association between them” (*societas inter se magna*, 2.Pr. 5), to such an extent that the offspring of the shepherds who founded the city “did not know that cultivation and herding were not the same thing” (*ignorantes non idem esse agri culturam et pastionem*, 2.Pr.4). Although Varro maintains, rather vehemently, that they are discrete sciences now (2.Pr.4-5), he does acknowledge that the distinction between them was a result of—not antecedent to—the growth in the size of flocks (3.1.7). And so, the kinship between them, which allowed the ancient Romans to believe them to be the same thing and which even now caused the interlocutors of Book One some confusion in determining where the boundary line really was

²⁰² The name of the Roman gens to which M. Porcius Cato Censorinus, writer of the *de Agricultura*, belonged—a particularly apt example of Varro’s point, since Cato the Censor was viewed even in Varro’s time as the representative of the *mos maiorum*, advocating a life of labor in the *res rusticae*.

between farming and pasturage (1.2.13-21), demonstrates that if herding is foundational to Roman identity, then farming must also be.

Even though Varro never explicitly claims that farming is a part of *Romanitas*, it is as apparent in the text as the concept is inherent in Roman ideology. When, in Book One, the interlocutors discuss Italy as the locus where all the natural elements that make for the most generative land and the best produce converge, they also closely link the worth of the Italian soil to human involvement: external factors may favor Italy, but the resulting excellence, that is, the country's extensive cultivation—*cultus*—only finds expression through the farmer (1.2.3-4).²⁰³ It is significant that in this depiction, nature and the farmer come together to make Italy the most cultivated land, for it naturalizes and idealizes the relationship between Roman husbandman and the countryside. This in turn reflects back upon the interlocutors of Book One, whose agricultural names manifest a Roman ideology of farming, which privileges the country life as being more ancient, more natural, more necessary, and morally superior to city life.²⁰⁴ Farm-related names, such as Fundanius and Agrasius, are like herding names: both identify husbandry, whether of the land or of animals, as the root of elite classes and, by extension, the city.²⁰⁵ Good Roman citizens are tied to the country, and long before Varro's day, calling someone a good agronomist and a good farmer was a mark of high praise.²⁰⁶

²⁰³ Italy is both the most cultivated land (*Ego vero, Agrius, nullam [terram] arbitror esse quae tam tot sit culta*, 1.2.3), and the most fit for cultivation (*Dicendum utique Italiam magis etiam fuisse opportunam ad colendum quam Asia*, 1.2.4).

²⁰⁴ Varro returns to this notion elsewhere in the *DRR*, especially in the prologues to Books Two and Three. See, e.g., 2.1.1-4; 3.1.1-4. For more on the ideology of farming and the countryside for Roman elite citizens, see, esp. Reay 2005, but also Lowenstein 1965: 116; White 1977: 5; Doody 2007: 190; Marzano 2007: 3-4; Roth 2007: 288; and Spencer 2010: 13, 37-39, 70-71.

²⁰⁵ Rosenstein 2008: 24 suggests that landholding was more significant as a means of indicating social standing than as a means of making a profit.

²⁰⁶ Cato *De Agri Cultura* Pr.2: *Et virum bonum quom laudabant, ita laudabant, bonum agricolam bonumque colonum*, "And a good man whom they would praise, they praised in this

If both herding and farming, then, are intimately connected with Rome as a city and Romans as a people, and if names are the manifest record of this ideology of identity, then the characters of the *dRR* are not merely examples of humorous wordplay, but also the embodiment of this ideology. Their names provide information as to who Romans should be, where they should be, and are, by extension, representations of the values, such as industry, exertion, and moderation that go with all of this.²⁰⁷ As symbols of *Romanitas*, the characters of the *dRR* reveal the spaces that they should ideally inhabit, while Varro's placement of them in the landscapes he creates reveals the instability of the country-based model of identity in the Rome of the late-Republic.

So, in the set-up of Book One, while Fundanius, Agrasius, and Agrius, through the meaning of their names, help turn the temple setting into a metaphor for a harmonious Italy, and also in this way point to the subject of the dialogue, they also, given the ideological baggage of their names, pose a problem. To be idyllic and ideal, Italy requires farmers and the land to work in unison. Yet these interlocutors, whose old-fashioned names identify them as belonging to the land, are spending their holiday in the city rather than the country. Mr. Farm-boy, Mr. Field, and Mr. Countryside are out of place. In the preface to Book 2, Varro explains that in times gone by, people would only spend in the city what time was necessary to conduct business, living in the country the majority of their days (2.Pr.1).²⁰⁸ Varro also taps into traditional moralizing here,

way: "Good agronomist!" and "Good farmer!" Cato also claims that the best men and the best soldiers come from farmers (*ex agricolis et viri fortissimi et milites strenuissimi gignuntur*, Pr.4).

²⁰⁷ The sort of values that Varro suggests put country inhabitants who work over rural villa-dwellers or city-dwells at 2.Pr.1-3.

²⁰⁸ In contrast, Green 2012: 32–33 argues that "farming, the material and moral basis of civic life in Roman ideology, was, nevertheless, firmly subordinate to the life in the city." While her point, made from the perspective of the elite estate owners, who also had houses in the city, is undoubtedly true from a practical standpoint, it does not necessarily follow—as Varro's description here shows—that such was also the case ideologically.

asserting that by this arrangement, Romans of the past had lands of the highest productivity (*cultura agros fecundissimos haberent*) and themselves enjoyed greater strength in health (*ipsi valetudine firmiores esent*, 2.Pr.2).²⁰⁹ But this is no longer the case: Romans no longer dedicate themselves more to the land than to urban refinements.²¹⁰ Our interlocutors, whose farm-inspired names tell us that they should be farming in the country, are instead sitting in the city with little active knowledge of the how-tos of cultivation;²¹¹ while Fundanius, Agrius, Agrasius, Varro, and (to a slightly greater extent) Stolo all speak during the course of the dialogue, whether to ask a question or direct Scrofa to his next topic or to make asides or flippant remarks, Scrofa is the expert—the *rudis* (1.2.12)²¹²—and as such is responsible for unfolding the science of agriculture.²¹³ Just as the shepherds once taught their offspring the art of agriculture, so now Scrofa, whose name identifies him as herder, attempts to teach his Roman peers how to farm.

The ideology of the Roman farmer goes beyond the idealization of cultivation as an occupation or the glorification of life in the country, because the Roman farmer is also, ideologically, the Roman statesman. For those who promote the *mos maiores* that Cato presents in the *de Agricultura*—that is, the good farmer as good man (*de Agricultura* Pr.2)—men like Lucius Quinctius Cincinnatus and Manius Curius Dentatus and even Cato himself, who labored

²⁰⁹ Kronenberg 2009: 96 sees Varro here as being somewhat disingenuous, more interested in *how* Romans came to view farming as superior than actually buying into and promoting that view himself.

²¹⁰ Varro returns to the issue in the preface to Book 3, where he indicates that the influx of people to Rome was problem enough that “our ancestors tried to lead their citizens out of the city and into the country” (*maiores nostri ex urbe in agros redigebant suos cives*, 3.Pr.5).

²¹¹ Spencer 2010: 72 highlights the incongruity of the interlocutors’ names, which identify them as farmers, and the fact that none of these men are actively farming. While her point is valid, the incongruity seems to go beyond a mere abstention from farming to an ignorance in how to do it.

²¹² Literally, *rudis* refers to the wooden baton carried by an instructor in a gladiatorial school. See *OLD* s.v. *rudis*², 3.

²¹³ Scrofa’s prominence in Book one is especially noticeable in contrast with Books Two and Three, where different speakers claim expertise (or at least exposition rights) for different aspects of the larger subject, rather than having one speaker largely tackle the whole topic.

in their fields until the state had need of them and to return to their land once they had capably served and saved the Republic, are heroes, prime exemplars of the way things ought to be.²¹⁴ Cincinnatus, Dentatus, and Cato all were indeed both farmers and statesmen, but the connection between farming and statecraft also works on metaphorical level.²¹⁵ In Cicero's *de Re Publica*, Scipio Africanus uses a farming metaphor to describe the founding of Rome (*Rep.* 2.5): Romulus sowed the Republic (*rem publican serere*).²¹⁶ In *dRR* 1, the political symbolism of farming is present in the setting, which, as I suggested earlier, represents a microcosm of Italy.²¹⁷

Following the scene setting of Book One, Varro's interlocutors describe the ideal nature of Italy's position and the suitability of her soil of cultivation (1.2.3-7). In the course of their overview of Italian production, the speakers effectively create an analogy between Italy and an estate (1.2.6):

Contra quid in Italia utensile non modo non nascitur, sed etiam non egregium fit? Quod far conferam Campano? Quod triticum Apulo? Quod vinum Felerno? Quod oleum Venafro? Non arboribus consita Italia, ut tota pomarium videatur?

On the other hand, what useful thing not only is not born in Italy, but does not also grow outstandingly? What spelt shall I compare to that of Campania? What wheat to Apulian? What wine to Falernian? What olive oil to that of Venafrum? Is not Italy so sown with trees that the whole of her seems to be an orchard?

²¹⁴ That is, the way things were in the good old days of Rome's past, as Pliny also expresses in the *Natural Histories*, when he compares the abundance produced by Roman villas in the past to the more limited yields of farms of his day (*HN* 18.4). For more on Cincinnatus, see Livy 3.26-29, Cic. *Sen.* 56. For Dentatus, see Cic. *Sen.* 56, Plut. *Cat. Ma.* 2.1-2. For Cato's use of Cincinnatus and Dentatus as models of the *mos maiorum*, see Reay 2005: 333-34.

²¹⁵ Kronenberg 2009 argues for this as one of the allegorical uses of farming in all three of the works she examines: Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*, Varro's *dRR*, and Virgil's *Georgics*.

²¹⁶ Kronenberg 2009: 109 also discusses the social importance given to farming in the *Republic* when the interlocutors describe Numa's land distribution as intended to help *iustitia* ("justice") and *fides* ("fidelity") flourish.

²¹⁷ See p. 40 above.

By comparing Italy, extensively sown with trees as she is, to an orchard, the villa comes directly into play, as *pomaria* were always attached to villas. In essence, this whole passage describes the landholdings of a villa, complete with a number of crops—spelt, wheat, grapes, and olives, each grown in a distinct part of the estate—²¹⁸ and an orchard. But, here, the property is the whole of Italy, and the villa is presumably Rome. The villa’s lands supply it with food, which mirrors the way that the countryside feeds Rome (3.14). The Villa Publica setting of Book Three confirms the notion of Rome as villa: a public, political, and very Roman villa that Varro conflates with a real (private) villa.²¹⁹ The conceptualization of Rome as villa of Italy ties back to the ideology of farming, linking again the good Roman citizen (our agriculturally named interlocutors) with the good villa-owning agronomist. But if this microcosm is to fully function, then the good villa-owning agronomist must also be the good statesman, because taking care of the villa is analogous to taking care of Rome as political state. By forgetting how to be farmers, our farmer citizens have also neglected the state. Fundilius’ murder at the end of the book reinforces this point, calling into question the potential success of Scrofa’s discourse on how to farm (how to care for the state?). The death of the temple caretaker is metaphorically also the loss of the caretaker of land, and with the expectation of his return removed, Mr. Farm-boy, Mr. Field, and Mr. Countryside disperse. The end reveals that this is not merely a problem of displacement and of forgotten identity, but rather a broken system, now without a caretaker to fix it.

²¹⁸ Varro maps out production in Italy, which provides another connection between this scene and the setting of dialogue, via the *picta Italia*. Roth 2007: 291 explains that the four districts referred to here (Campania, Apulia, Falernum, and Venafrum) are connected to Rome by two main roads: the first three by the Via Appia, the last by the Via Latina. Roth uses this as support of his interpretation of the “painted Italy” as being odological.

²¹⁹ As Green 1997: 434 points out, the Villa Publica has a sheep-pen (the Ovile nearby where voting occurred) and an aviary (those bird-citizens assembled, whom Axius describes as an *ornithona* at 3.2.2), two features that identify a villa as a villa.

In Book Two, Varro’s use of herding names—or, rather, their conspicuous absence—picks up the thread of the lost caretaker, by playing on the metaphorical associations of shepherds as leaders. The connection between leadership and shepherding goes all the way back to the *Iliad*, in which the epithet ποιμὴν λαῶν is used of men such as Agamemnon, Achilles, and Hector, who all hold positions of authority over others.²²⁰ They are, as the epithet suggests, shepherds of people rather than shepherds of sheep. But for the Romans, the earliest leaders combined the metaphorical with the literal, for they were shepherds who founded and ruled a city (2.1.9):

quis Faustulum nescit pastorem fuisse nutricium, qui Romulum et Remum educavit? Non ipsos quoque fuisse pastores obtinebit, quod Parilibus potissimum concedere urbem?

Who does not know that Faustulus, the foster parent who reared Romulus and Remus, was a shepherd? Will this not also prove that they themselves also were shepherds, that they founded Rome above all on the Parilia?

While the Parilia is one piece of evidence that witnesses the strength of the connection between shepherding and the state, being simultaneously Rome’s birthday and a pastoral festival, Roman names, as mentioned before, also record this history.

In highlighting as he does the significance of animal names, Varro draws attention to the names he uses in Book Two. Already conspicuous when compared with the abundance of aptly named characters in Books One and Three, the paucity of characters with shepherding names here becomes obtrusive. Of the seven interlocutors, only two have animal names, and as Scrofa so insistently points out, his does not actually have any swinish origin (*cognosce meam gentem suillum cognomen non habere*), but instead came from an ancestor’s claim to scatter the enemy “like a sow scatters her pigs” (*ut scrofa porcos, disiecturum*; 2.4.1-2). The general lack of herding names functions as a way of demonstrating dissociation between Romans now and

²²⁰ See pp. 56-57 above for more on the phrase ποιμὴν λαῶν.

shepherding, literal and metaphorical. Similarly, Scrofa's eagerness to dismiss a familial heritage in shepherding is also a dismissal of the Roman heritage and the foundations of the state that such a name would represent, at least in the world of the *dRR*. This example is particularly telling, because it expresses through his name the disconnect between appearance and reality: Scrofa seems to have inherited a marker of the Roman ancestry, but in truth did not. Each interlocutor also seems to partake of the shepherding heritage of Romans, for they each take responsibility for expounding upon the art of the herding of one animal. But, just as the successful farmer must know the ins and outs of the entire farm, whether he himself accomplishes any of it or he delegates all of it to his underlings,²²¹ the successful master must know the intricacies of all herding, not merely the details of one flock animal (2.1.12): *Ita fiunt omnium partes minimum octoginta et una, et quidem necessariae nec parvae*, "Therefore there are at least 81 parts [of the science of husbandry], and indeed all are necessary and none are inconsequential." So, while they each have some knowledge, they are missing the complete picture.

By analogy the best metaphorical shepherd—leader of the people, leader of the state—must also be well rounded. Yet, in the context of the *dRR*, this is not the case: all leaders associated with herding are military leaders. Scrofa's family name, which we saw earlier suggests to the uninformed a pastoral background, in fact has a military background, as it commemorates an ancestor's success in rousing his troops to dispel the attacking enemy. Later,

²²¹ The need for complete knowledge is Varro's reason for writing the *dRR*: so that his wife has a guide for any situation (1.1.4): *Quocirca scribam tibi tres libros indices, ad quos revertare, siqua in re quaeres, quem ad modum quidque te in colendo oporteat facere*, "Therefore I shall write for you three catalogue books, to which you may turn if in any matter you question in what way you ought to do something in farming." As for who really accomplishes the tasks on a farm, as Reay 2005, 335 explains, by the concept of "masterly extensibility," the master is always the "working" the fields (or herding the cattle, as the case may be) even when he is not actually present, because slaves are conceived of his "prosthetic tools."

Varro is called ποιμὴν λαῶν, a tribute to his role as commander during the Piratic War, the dramatic context of Book Two (2.5.1). But this privileging of martial activity comes at the expense of other kinds of activity—the military is only one aspect of the leadership necessary to manage a state. In the historical context of the *dRR*, the subtle messages of Book Two come together: the long periods of civil war that filled much of the 1st c. BCE indicate an increasing turn to war as the primary means of gaining control, keeping control, and solving political problems. Through its simultaneous emphasis on military leadership and the dearth of thematically named characters (especially given that Varro spells out the ideological implications of shepherding), *dRR* 2 demonstrates another absent caretaker, an equivalent to the Aeditumus of Book One: Romans have distanced themselves from their heritage, and as such they no longer have the sort of leader who can build a nation and not just bring it to war.

Finally, the bird names of Book Three are not tied inherently to Roman identity in the way that the pastoral and agricultural names of the first two books are, but offer instead a representation of a different issue that faces Roman citizens. Given their use in the setting, the avian nomenclature of *dRR* 3 presents a conflation of animals and men that is mirrored elsewhere in the work. In *dRR* 1 and 2, humans are included in the discussions on agriculture and herding, but they are included in a way that does not distinguish them from the animals also under discussion. In Book One, humans come under the heading of tools, just one type of instrument used in the process of cultivation, like an ox or a plow (1.17.1-2). Book Two's conversation on herding is organized by herding animal, with each interlocutor providing the full rundown on purchasing, breeding, feeding, etc. for one animal. After the interlocutors have covered pigs, goats, sheep, cows, horses, and dogs, Cossinius begins the overview of humans (2.10), whom are included as one of the nine herding animals. Their presence in the course of the discourse, as just

another animal, is indicative of the legal and intellectual conceptualization of slaves as no different from other property, akin to animals or tools.²²²

Yet Book Three lacks a comparable section that categorizes humans as instruments, even though humans just as surely took care of villa animals as they did the crops or other herding animals. Instead, Varro conflates the human and the animal in a different manner and to a different end in Book Three through the names that he provides his interlocutors. By naming his characters after birds, Varro provides atmosphere, certainly, but also nods to the religious part of Roman identity through the association of birds with augury and by placing these bird-citizens around an augur, one who can divine the will of the gods through the correct reading of his birds. But beyond this, by turning his interlocutors into birds in an aviary, like the real life birds in Varro's aviary who have no escape, Varro takes the conflation between human and instrument of the first two books one step further: it is no longer just slaves who are exchangeable with animals, it is Romans, and by conflating them with animals, he conflates them with slaves. By the end of the *dRR*, animals, slaves, and Romans alike lack the *libertas* that characterized the citizens of the Republic.²²³

3. Urban Cowboys: City Meets Country

The names in all three books reveal a displacement of Romans from their appropriate spheres, whether that be laboring in the country, leading the city, or retaining the freedom and responsibility that was essential to the working of the Republic. In each case, the misplacement

²²² As Green 1997, 437 and Reay 2005, 335–36 points out in their separate discussions on agronomic texts. For more on the slave's status as property, see Wiedemann 1981: 13–32. See also pp.185-88 below, where I further discuss Varro's inclusion of slaves as tools in Book One and animals in Book Two, looking at these passages particularly in terms of the question of control.

²²³ As Green 1997 successfully argues, lack of *libertas* is inherent in the metaphor of an aviary of bird-citizens.

is symptomatic of the turbulent and dangerous political context that provides the backdrop of the *dRR*, and thus serves as a metaphor for a state that no longer functions as it should. Varro is pointing to an issue that was far from unnoticed: the recurring civil wars, prevalent political corruption, violence in the city, and the increasing consolidation of power into fewer hands caused no small amount of concern to the Romans alive to see it, as the writings of Cicero and Sallust well record. In response to the increasing political tensions, contemporary elites turn to the country as both the cause and solution: first, pointing to the Romans' desertion of the country for the city,²²⁴ indicative of the abandonment of the *mos maiorum*, as the source of the state's current decline;²²⁵ then turning to the country as an escape from the city and a place of respite from the political turmoil found there. In this valuation, the country is good, the city is bad, and there is no ground in between.

As it was for many of his contemporaries, the city-country dichotomy has a place of significance in the *dRR*. In the Preface of Book Two, Varro engages in the type of moral posturing typical of the period (2.Pr.1-3):

Viri magni nostri maiores non sine causa praeponerent rusticos Romanos urbanis. Ut ruri enim qui in villa vivunt ignaviores, quam qui in agro versantur in aliquo opere faciendo, sic qui in oppido sederent, quam qui rura colerent, desidiosiores putabant. Itaque annum ita diviserunt, ut nonis modo diebus urbanas res usurparent, reliquis septem ut rura colerent, Quod dum servaverunt institutum, utrumque sunt consecuti, ut et cultura agros fecundissimos haberent et ipsi valetudine firmiores essent, ac ne Graecorum urbana desiderarent gymnasia.... Igitur quod nunc intra murum fere patres familiae correperunt relictis falce et aratro et manus movere maluerunt in theatro ac circo, quam in segetibus ac vinetis, frumentum locamus qui nobis advehat, qui saturi fiamus ex Africa et Sardinia, et navibus vindemiam condimus ex insula Coa et Chia.

Those great men, our ancestors, not without reason set country-dwelling Romans above those who lived in the city. For just as in the country those

²²⁴ For a numerical analysis of the urban migration of the 1st c. BCE, see Scheidel 2004

²²⁵ See, e.g., Lowenstein 1965 and Spencer 2010: 45 for this traditional elite take on the morality of the country versus the city.

who live in a villa are idler than those who are engaged in doing some work in the field, so they thought that those who reside in town are more slothful than those who inhabit the countryside. Therefore they divided the year in such a way that they attended their city business only on the ninth days, and lived the remaining seven in the country. As long as they maintained this practice, they achieved both having through cultivation the most productive fields and themselves being stronger in health and not needing the urban gymnsia of the Greeks. . . . Therefore, since in these times the heads of the family have crept within the walls, deserting the sickle and the plow, and prefer to concern their hands with the theater and the circus than with the grain fields and the vineyards, we hire a man to bring us grain from Africa and Sardinia so that we might be sated, and we store a vintage come by ships from the islands of Cos and Chios.

What initially seems a rather mild agreement with the *maiores* valuation of country dwellers as better than villa dwellers as better than city dwellers, becomes a clear indictment of Romans who have turned away from a simple life in the country, and the employment there of the sickle and plow, for a life of idle enjoyment, marked by theaters and races, in the city.²²⁶ While Varro confirms the moral overtones of this passage succinctly in the preface to book three, where he easily declares that agriculture is better (*melior*) than city living (3.1.4), the passage from Book Two on the contrary is limited in its use of moralizing language, keeping to terms of indolence. Even so, Varro still manages to convey that what is at stake is more than the loss of the health and fertility found in the countryside, but some part of who the Romans are—or, rather, were: men who labored and reaped the profit of that labor, men not lured by the unnecessary luxuries of the villa or the amusements of the city, men who provided for themselves rather than relying on other nations for something as basic yet essential as grain.²²⁷

²²⁶ Kronenberg 2009: 96 sees Varro here as being somewhat disingenuous, more interested in how Romans came to view farming as superior than actually buying into and promoting that view himself.

²²⁷ Varro returns to the issue in the preface to Book 3, where he indicates that the influx of people to Rome was problem enough that “our ancestors tried to lead their citizens out of the city and into the country” (*maiores nostri ex urbe in agros redigebant suos cives*, 3.Pr.5).

The interlocutors of Book One are a part of this problem—they are Romans whose names indicate that they should be in the country, yet who instead are in Rome. Fundanius, Agrasius, and Agrius still speak of the countryside, of cultivation, of the production of the land, but in their portrayal, Italy falls little short of being a land where the golden age still prevails, where crops grow virtually on their own and the farmer has little to do to receive his *fructus* (1.2.6): *Contra quid in Italia utensile non modo non nascitur, sed etiam non egregium fit?* (On the other hand, what useful thing not only is not born in Italy, but does not also grow outstandingly.) The use of *nascor* (to be born) and *fio* (to become) to describe the process of food production renders the harvest a natural process of propagation—the land gives birth and the humans benefit from the utility of the offspring. But their description belies their pretense at knowledge. As any true farmer would know, and as Scrofa soon endeavors to inform them, cultivation is difficult, requiring knowledge and perseverance to deal with and minimize adverse external conditions (1.4.4). Fundanius, Agrius, and Agrasius are out of touch with the actual situation and cling to the ideological portrait of the rural life that appears repeatedly in the text. Their displacement from the countryside has fostered in them an ignorance that runs counter to their agricultural heritage.²²⁸

These interlocutors, then, in choosing the city have also seemingly cut themselves off from everything in the country. This is in keeping with the traditional discourse on the city and the country; it functions by clearly demarcating the country as entirely discrete from the city (and vice versa), by presenting the two spheres as dichotomous (3.1.1):²²⁹

Cum duae vitae traditae sint hominum, rustica et urbana, quidni, Pinni,
dubium non est quin hae non solum loco discretas sint, sed etiam tempore
diversam originem habeant.

²²⁸ See pp. 196-200 below for more on the shortcomings of the interlocutors' knowledge.

²²⁹ Spencer 2006: 239

While there are handed down two kinds of life for humans, the rural and the urban, there is not any doubt that these not only are separated by place, but also that they have each a different origin in time.

Yet, for all the moral posturing that occurs in the prefaces, Varro confronts the dichotomy that such moralizing implies by conflating the city and the country in the course of the dialogues. The settings of Books One and Three both map the country onto the city: the microcosm of Italy created by the combination of the Aedes Telluris and the aptly named Fundanius, Agrasius, and Agrius bring the agriculturally productive land of the Italian countryside into a small urban space, while the Villa Publica, with Ovile attached and an aviary filled with citizen birds within, recreates a private rural villa in a political artery of Rome. Through this conflation of two ideologically distinct spaces, Varro reveals the interdependence that really exists between city and country: they are no more isolated from each other practically than they are spatially.²³⁰

Agriculture, having developed out of pastoral life (1.2.16), is both an *ars* and a *scientia* (1.3.1). It has a refinement that is missing from pasturing, which Varro seems to indicate in the opening of Book 2, the book on the pasturing of animals (2.Pr.4):

Itaque in qua terra culturam agri docuerunt pastores progeniem suam, qui condiderunt urbem, ibi contra progenies eorum propter avaritiam contra leges ex segetibus fecit prata...

Thus, in the land where shepherds who founded the city taught their progeny the cultivation of the fields, there instead their descendants, on account of avarice and against the laws, made pastures from the grain fields....

Varro here ties tilling of the land with the development of the cities.²³¹ Cultivation and urbanization go hand and hand, and bring mutual benefit. Cities need farms for food supply as

²³⁰ As many modern commentators are apt to point out: they are connected in space (Tacoli 1998: 147), in practice (Spencer 2010: 35), in politics (White 1977: 3), in architecture (Purcell 1987), and in thought (Sluiter and Rosen 2006: 4).

²³¹ Although in the preface to Book 3, he reverses this and claims that agriculture predates cities (3.Pr.1): *Antiquior enim multo rustica, quod fuit tempus, cum rura colerent homines neque*

well as for soldiers during times of war (1.2.10, 3.1.4). Farms utilize towns for materials and specialized workers, among other things (1.16.3-4). The dependence of the farm on towns, however, sits somewhat uneasy, for as Scrofa indicates here, it isn't always necessary. While it can make better financial sense for a farm to bring in a physician from town when needed rather than keep one permanently, the interdependence seems to blur the line between town and country.

This can be seen likewise in the way the farm-house, the *villa*, is built (1.13.6-7):

Illic laudabatur villa, si habebat culinam rusticam bonam, praesepis laxas, cellam vinariam et oleariam ad modum agri aptam.... Item cetera ut essent in villa huiusce modi, quae cultura quaereret, providebant. Nunc contra villam urbanam quam maximam ac politissimam habeant dant operam ac cum Metelli ac Luculli villis pessimo publico aedificatis certant.

Then a villa was praised if it had good, simple kitchen, spacious stables, a cellar for wine and oil appropriate for the size of the farm.... In the same way they took care that they had in the villa other things of this kind, which cultivation demanded. Now, on the contrary, they make the effort to have an urban villa, as large and as refined as possible, and they contend with the villas of Metellus and Lucullus, built to the public ill.

Villas, originally farmsteads, have ceased to reflect their use and their setting. Rooms in a villa should be practical for the function of the farm—space is determined by function and serves the *utilitas* of farming. The sort of villa that Scrofa describes as prevalent now is characterized by luxury, not utility. Villas in this manner become not simply a source of wealth, but a showcase of wealth. Varro makes an important distinction between the two types of villas he here describes: the one appropriate for the country is *rustica*, while the modern villa is *urbana*. Now farms are not only near population centers, but the city has also made its way into the farm, for the sake of luxury and to the detriment of the public. The relationship between country and city is not always beneficial.

urbem habent, “For the rural life is older by much, that is the time when men cultivated the land and did not have a city.”

Through his use of the dichotomizing moral statements of the prefaces, his conflation of the two spaces in the settings, and his depictions of both the good and the bad interdependence of city and country, Varro succeeds in complicating what had become simplified in the ideology of the day. The result is twofold. First, while acknowledging that there may be some validity in critiques on the city—or what the city represents—Varro ultimately rejects the solution that the contemporary elite suggest in seeking asylum in the country.²³² He is not simply utilizing the traditional morality stance, calling for a return to the good old days when citizens lived a simple yet productive life on the land.²³³ Rather, by alluding to this trope, Varro highlights the disparity between this ideal and reality. The solution is not as simple as disavowing the city and returning to the country, because what happens in the city affects the goings-on of the country, as the murder of Fundilius at the close of Book One shows—his death in the city scatters the agriculturally named interlocutors, a symbolic disintegration of the microcosm of Italy (1.69.3). Urban turmoil expands outward, and everybody feels the effect. Rome and Italy, like a villa and its landholding, are mutually dependent. Connected as they are, the state of the city is reflected in the state of the country, and in its current turmoil, both are broken, to their very foundations.

Second, his multifaceted portrayal raises the question as to whether it is the city and country that are the problem, or rather people's ways of thinking about them. Returning to the preface of Book Two above, it is striking that the moral judgment of country, villa, and city comes solely in terms of the respective productivity or sloth of their inhabitants. The problem with the city, here, is that its men are indolent (*desidiosus*), an assessment that Varro bears out in his description of their urban activities—the theater and the circus, both activities of watching

²³² Thibodeau 2011: 84–85 notes that more elite turned to the country life as state of the State progressively worsened at the end of the Republic.

²³³ Kronenberg 2009: 30–32 also notes the traditional morality in the *DRR*, but argues that Varro undermines it by in fact blaming societies ills on the greed of farmers.

rather than doing, ironically contradicting Varro's description of men busying their hands at them (*manus movere*; 2.Pr.3). A similar distinction can be made between the rustic villa and the urban villa that Varro describes in Book 1: the former's *utilitas* mark it as both product of and contributor to the efficient *working* of a steading, while the latter is a representation not of labor but of luxury, wastefulness not productivity. The villa itself is a physical manifestation of the problematic shift in work ethos that occurs when men spend too much time in the city.

Varro makes the dangers that the city poses to the country explicit in another passage referred to above. Following his description of the benefit that a nearby town brings to a farm, Scrofa suggests that time in towns might also lead to dereliction of duty (1.16.4):

Si enim a fundo longius absunt oppida aut vici, fabros parant, quos habeant in villa, sic ceteros necessarios artifices, ne de fundo familia ab opere discedat ac profestis diebus ambulet feriata potius, quam opere faciendo agrum fructuosiore reddat.

For if towns or villages are too far distant from the estate, they acquire smiths, who would live on the farm, and also other necessary artificers, so that the farm workers may not leave their labor and amble about holiday making on workdays rather than make the farm more profitable by doing their duty.

By this mentality, being in the city, even on farm business, is all that is necessary for a worker to become as bad as the *desidiosus* city dweller the *maiores* looked down upon. What emerges goes beyond location, to what that location represents. In the words that Skoie uses in regards to Virgil's *Eclogues*, "One might argue that instead of the city/country distinction we have now ended up with a new distinction, *otium/negotium*."²³⁴ Varro has depicted a world in which the city life, instead of being one of business, is a place of *otium*, of leisure and pleasure, while the country, which originally was a space of *negotium*, of labor, is now threatened to be overtaken by the uselessness and ease that once distinguished it as superior to city. Through his conflation

²³⁴ Skoie 2006: 319, where she sees the pastoral landscape as the embodiment of *otium*.

of the country and the city, Varro makes the fates of both mutually dependent: a danger to one is necessarily a danger to the other.

But by turning the leisure of the city into the thing that threatens to contaminate the countryside, Varro reveals perhaps the real issue with the elites' retreat to the country: the *otium* that they seek there is a part of the problem. It is not leisure that is needed, but labor. Not respite, but productivity. Roman identity, the Italian countryside, the Republic—all will not be fixed by escape, but through work. It is no accident that while the *dRR* begins with the word *otium*, Varro's claim is that he does not in fact have it. The *dRR* is not a product of his leisure, but his lack of leisure, and as such, it may not be serviceable in form, but it will be useful in content (1.1.1). It is through labor that a work will emerge that is, like the Sibylline books, an answer to a state in crisis (1.2.3).

Conclusion

The settings of the *dRR*, the element of the work that even skeptical scholars have admired, are engaging and dynamic. Location, occasion, dramatic date, and interlocutor names all work together to provide a thematic mirror to the agricultural and pastoral discussions that the frameworks introduce. Beyond this, the urban and public settings of Books One and Three, the foreign setting of Book Two, and the politically charged dramatic dates of each book provide both setting and dialogue with political underpinnings. The thematically apt names of the interlocutors tap into the ideology of Roman identity, where Romans are shepherds and farmer, and farmers are statesmen. Yet by placing them in the city instead of the fields, and in Greece instead of Italy, Varro calls into question the continued legitimacy of such ideologies.

Ultimately, the way that Varro frames the three books *dRR* spins the dialogue as a work concerned with the proper functioning of Rome, of the villa, and of Rome as villa. But through

the displacements that the different aspects of the frameworks reveal, Varro also shows that things are no longer where they need to be for Rome to be Rome as it is idealized, or for Romans to be Romans as they identify themselves—as farmers who are statesmen, as leaders who are shepherds, as citizens who are free. With the Romans in the city when they should be in the country, idle when they should be active, and with the problems of the city spreading to the country, the system that makes the Republic function and that the elite praise the *maiores* for is falling apart, and escape is not a solution.

Chapter Two: From Orchard to Aviary

While the frameworks of the *dRR* establish a tension between the city and the countryside, the opposition between *otium* and *negotium* that Varro's moralizing prefaces reveal as underlying the urban/rural problem has a greater resonance within the dialogue. For, the issue of indolence and industry that colors Varro's depiction of the city and the country maps onto the dichotomy of *utilitas* and *voluptas* that is central to how the interlocutors' conceive of the rural sciences discussed in the text. Early in Book One, Scrofa describes the goals of farming to be two-fold: *utilitas* and *voluptas* (1.4.1). The diligent Roman keeps an eye upon utility, while the indolent man privileges his own enjoyment, seeking entertainment in the circuses and theaters of the city and leaving useful labor to foreigners (2.Pr.1-3).

Yet in husbandry, *utilitas* and *voluptas* are, ideally, complimentary goals rather than opposing ones. Indeed, Maggiulli has noted that the two-pronged goal of *utilitas* and *voluptas* that Scrofa lays out in Varro's *dRR* is a consistent feature of Latin agricultural discourse, found not only in Varro, but also in Virgil, Columella, Palladius, and even in Cicero and Vitruvius.²³⁵ This persistent focus on utility and pleasure as the twin aims of the husbandman underscores their ideological and cultural significance in how Romans conceive of farming—or, rather, any labor on one's villa estate. In this conceptualization, the farmer (or herdsman) aims at utility, which will find expression in the profit he derives from his labors, while the aesthetics of a well-maintained field provides him pleasure, as does the labor itself and the fruits of his efforts. In turn, the fields that provide pleasure—that is, that are well ordered and thus visually pleasing, have higher productivity—that is, they are more profitable, and thus more useful. In other words, utility and pleasure both ideally (and ideologically) stem from labor, from a well-worked and

²³⁵ Maggiulli 1994

well-maintained villa. The best husbandman—the Roman husbandman—recognizes that *utilitas* and *voluptas* go hand in hand and finds both in the successful running of his estate.

While the *dRR* follows in line with this ideology, insofar as it promotes both as the aims of its sciences, the text also subtly suggests that the productive balance between hard work and the enjoyment of its benefits is not guaranteed and that these two goals can be—and have been—unyoked. Varro may adopt these traditional features of agricultural texts, but he also adapts them to serve the non-agricultural undercurrents of the dialogue. In its movement from the subject of farming in Book One to that of villa tending in Book Three, the dialogue displays a corresponding shift from a practice that privileges *utilitas* to a sort of husbandry that favors a *voluptas* embodied in luxury rather than found in labor. Books One and Two, which focus on humans working in the land through agriculture and large animal herding, with minimal attention given to the villa or other man-made structures, still reflect the old fashioned pre-eminence of *utilitas*—for agriculture and herding are both of benefit to the farmer on a basic level. In contrast, Book Three shifts its focus to the villa, the less practical animal keeping associated with it, and the *voluptas* that both embody. Where in Book One the villa was only a small part of the landscape and a practical response to it, the villa in Book Three *is* the landscape, containing within it small-scale replications of the world outside, aiming at amusement and novelty and extravagance, not utility. In other words, the shift that occurs as the *dRR* progresses is simultaneously one that moves from *utilitas* to *voluptas* and one that moves from the natural world of farming and pastoralism to the more fabricated world of the *pastio villatica*. In the world of the *dRR*, these two shifts are connected.

In this chapter, I explore the progression from the natural to the man-made and the corresponding shift from the functional to the frivolous, arguing that the description of

landscapes in terms of humans' prominence in it—whether they participate in the natural world or impose their own structure on it—and the ends to which man imposes on the landscape together point to a shift in the *dRR* from focus on the use of land as a source of benefit to the recreation of nature within the villa as a source of pleasure. In the course of the *dRR*, various interlocutors and Varro himself make statements regarding the benefit or detriment of the different spaces under discussion, praising certain kinds of villas—the simple and old-fashioned, for instance (1.13.6)—and denouncing others—such as those filled with luxury and foreign elements (1.13.7), lauding certain elements of husbandry—shepherding is ancient and dignified (2.1.6-10) and condemning others—fishponds are wasteful and useless (3.17). Such judgments show that the coinciding shifts from the natural to the constructed and from *utilitas* to *voluptas* are temporal, a movement from how things were to how they are now, and negative. These transitions reveal, even as they are caused by, the shifting priorities and declining character that distinguish modern Romans from their morally superior ancestors. Finally, in the *dRR*, where Rome is Italy's villa, man's shifting presence in the landscape and his new prioritizing of *voluptas* over the *utilitas* that characterized husbandry of old also necessarily represents a shift in the state. As such, intrusions of the political world into the book on villa herding, as well as comparisons between the private villa and the Villa Publica, imply that the moral dubiousness of the luxury and excess that pervade the *pastio villatica* implicates and taints the Republic as well.

1. Man in the Land

The issue of shifting focus, from the natural to the man-made, begins with humans and their relationship to the land around them. The subject matter of the *dRR* assumes human interaction with the landscape, as land and animal management require people to engage with the natural world. So while the land has a primary place in the *dRR*, much of the work's distinctiveness as a

so-called agronomic text derives from the importance placed in the text on humans' place in the landscape—the more so because Varro demonstrates that the type and degree of mankind's presence in the land is not fixed and determined solely by the job that must be done, whether that might be cultivating the earth or tending to animals. Instead, over the course of the three books, Varro shifts both the degree of man's prominence in the land and the focus of the gentleman farmer from the natural to the constructed. Starting in Books One and Two as a text that emphasizes the natural world, while granting man a place to work within and manipulate it, the *dRR* shifts focus in Book Three to the man-made world of the villa, while granting imitations of the natural world a place within it as a source of pleasure for the villa owner. In other words, the world of the *dRR* moves from nature-centered to man-centered, and the transition proves to be problematic.

A. Natural Landscapes

At the opening of their discussion of agriculture in Book One, the interlocutors approach their selected topic by admiring the natural fecundity of Italy and the bounty that defines the land as the most productive of nations (1.2.3-7). In their idealized portrayal, the peninsula is the location where all the natural elements that make for the most generative land and the best produce converge: her position on the globe, her position in Europe, and the balance of night and day all together make Italy more healthful (*salubriora*), more fruitful (*fructuosiora*), more temperate (*temperatior*, 1.2.4), and thus best for cultivation (1.2.3): *Ego vero, Agrius, nullam [terra] arbitror esse quae tam tot sit culta*, “Indeed, said Agrius, I think there is no other land that is so wholly cultivated.”²³⁶ In these sections, the interlocutors highlight the natural features that make the land most responsive to human shaping through cultivation. Yet while the farmer

²³⁶ Also, *Dicendum utique Italiam magis etiam fuisse opportunam ad colendum quam Asia*, “Therefore it must be said that Italy is even more fit for cultivation than Asia” (1.2.4).

is still necessary in order for the full worth of the Italian soil to be fulfilled—cultivation by definition cannot occur without human hands—in this picture of Italy, it is the land, which takes precedence in the relationship between farmer and field, that is necessary for agricultural success.

In the sections that follow the general praise of Italy's cultivability, Varro further foregrounds the preeminence of the natural in the world of the *dRR* Book One, for his description of the harvest that comes from the peninsula highlights its excellence, while downplaying the human element (1.2.6):

Contra quid in Italia utensile non modo non nascitur, sed etiam non egregium fit? Quod far conferam Campano? Quod triticum Apulo? Quod vinum Felerno? Quod oleum Venafro? Non arboribus consita Italia, ut tota pomarium videatur?

On the other hand, what useful thing not only is not born in Italy, but does not also grow outstandingly? What spelt shall I compare to that of Campania? What wheat to Apulian? What wine to Falernian? What olive oil to that of Venafrum? Is not Italy so sown with trees that the whole of her seems to be an orchard?

While human involvement in this produce can fairly be inferred from the emphasis on *cultus* that preceded this passage, Varro instead here more directly connects the produce to the land itself. The use of *nascor* (“to be born”) and *fio* (“to become”) to describe the process of food production are particularly striking in this respect, as these verbs render the harvest a natural process of propagation—the land gives birth and the humans benefit from the utility of the offspring. There is no mention here of man's role as provider of the seed and custodian of the growth. The shift from man as co-productive with the land through *cultus*, to the land as the progenitor of the crop makes the Italian countryside not just ideal but also idyllic, the sort of

bountiful and harmonious landscape that has notes of a golden age.²³⁷ The wording of the above passage is yet more complex, and its oddities are apparent. Spelt, wheat, grapes, and olives, which spring forth (as if of their own accord) from the land, are all sown crops, specifically associated with cultivation. But the abundant trees (*arbor*), which one might expect to grow in the Italian countryside without cultivation, are *consita* (“sown”). By naturalizing what would have been the result of tending and by describing what would have been natural in terms of tilling, Varro makes nature and cultivation, at least in Italy, indistinguishable. This opening to the dialogue of Book One establishes farming as part of the natural world, and grants man a natural place in it.

The second book of the *dRR* presents a similar beginning to its discourse. Like the picture of Italy that begins Book One, the first portion of the discussion about animal husbandry in Book Two confirms for the audience that the natural world is both theater and star of the subsequent discourse, with humans as the movers and shakers working within its confines. Varro as interlocutor begins the book’s discussion with an overview of the *origo* (“origin”) and *dignitas* (“dignity”) of herding (2.1.2), first presenting to his fellow cattle owners the drovers’ take on the ages of man (2.1.3-5):

necesse est humanae vitae ab summa memoria gradatim descendisse ad hanc aetatem, ut scribit Dicaearchus, et summum gradum fuisse naturalem, cum viverent homines ex his rebus, quae inviolata ultro ferret terra, ex hac vita in secundam descendisse pastoriciam, e feris atque agrestibus ut arboribus ac virgultis decarpendo glandem, arbutum, mora, poma colligerent ad usum, sic ex animalibus cum propter eandem utilitatem, quae possent, silvestria deprenderent ac concluderent et mansuescerent. In quis primum non sine

²³⁷ Varro may be playing with multiple golden age images here. First, the traditional Hesiodic golden age, wherein the earth of its own accord bears fruit in abundance and ungrudgingly for mortals (καρπὸν δ’ ἔφερε ζείδωρος ἄρουρα αὐτομάτη πολλόν τε καὶ ἄφθονον; Hes. *WD* 117-18). The second, the golden age of Roman farming, as promoted by Cato the Elder in *De Agricultura*, which ties into the farming ideology mentioned above (see pp. 23-25). For more on the golden age type of imagery that appears in the *dRR*, see pp. 154-61 below.

causa putant oves assumptas et propter utilitatem et propter placiditatem; maxime enim hae natura quietae et aptissimae ad vitam hominum. Ad cibum enim lacte et caseum adhibitum, ad corpus vestitum et pelles adtulerunt. Tertio denique gradu a vita pastorali ad agri culturam descenderunt, in qua ex duobus gradibus superioribus retinuerunt multa, et quo descenderant, ibi processerunt longe, dum ad nos perveniret.

It is necessary that [people and flocks] have descended from the earliest memory of human life step by step to this age, as Dicaearchus writes, and that the earliest step was that of nature, when humans lived on those things, which the untouched earth brought forth voluntarily; from this age they descended into the second, the pastoral, when just as they collected for use acorns, arbutes, blackberries, and fruit by picking them from wild and uncultivated trees and bushes, so also they captured, contained, and tamed what wild animals they could for the same benefit. Some think not without reason that among these, sheep were taken first, both on account of their usefulness and on account of their gentleness: for they are by nature most docile and most fit to mankind's way of life. For to his food, they added milk and cheese, to his body they gave clothing and pelts. Finally, in the third stage they descend from the pastoral life to the cultivation of the land, in which age they retained much from the two earlier stages, and when they had descended to which, there they continued for a long while until reaching our stage.

What begins as a typical description of the ages of man, starting with the golden age, when the earth was inviolate, productive, and giving, becomes—instead of an account of the increasing difficulty of survival and life—an overview of the shifting relationship between humans and the wild and man's increasing manipulation of the world around him. From passive benefactor of the earth's fruit, to picker of food and captor of animals, to active tiller of the fields, humans in this account may increasingly take charge of the natural world, yet their actions are still determined by and dependent upon what that world offers. Additionally, Varro's ages of man are not an account of moral or anthropological decline. Instead, man is the gainer at every step, because the life and benefits that each previous stage offered are not wiped out at the start of the next, but rather retained and added to: *in qua ex duobus gradibus superioribus retinuerunt multa*. Man's increasing agency within the natural world, his discovery of ways of coaxing an existence from the land and from the wild, is not a punishment, but a benefit. The verbs in the passage

emphasize the significance of the cooperation between man and earth—sometimes the earth and her animals as provider (*ferret, adhibitum, adtulerunt*), at other times the humans as takers (*colligerent, deprenderent, concluderent, mansuescerent, assumptas*).

While the above account seems to show the increasing activity of humans in their relationship with the land, Varro still emphasizes the *wildness* of the world and his inhabitants. Man picks produce from untamed (*ferus*) trees and bushes, and the animals that he captures are wild (*silvestris*). Yet even with the taming of animals and crops that results from the pastoral and agricultural stages, humans have not domesticated all of their surroundings, as Varro points out immediately following the above passage (2.1.5):

Etiam nunc in locis multis genera pecudum ferarum sunt aliquot, ab ovibus, ut in Phrygia, ubi greges videntur complures, in Samothrace caprarum, quas Latine rotas appellant. Sunt enim in Italia circum Fiscellum et Tetricam montes multae. De subus nemini ignotum, nisi qui apros non putat sues vocari. Boves perferi etiam nunc sunt multi in Dardanica et Maedica et Thracia, asini feri in Phrygia et Lycaonia, equi feri in Hispania citeriore regionibus aliquot.

Even now in many places there are several species of wild beasts, from sheep such as live in Phrygia, where many flocks are seen, or the goats in Samothrace, which they call *rotae* in Latin. For there are many goats in Italy near Mounts Fiscellum and Tetrica. Concerning swine, nobody is ignorant, except anyone who does not think that wild boars are called swine. There are many wild cattle even now in Dardania and Maedica, and Thrace, wild asses in Phrygia and Lycaonia, and wild horses in several regions in nearer Hispania.

By reminding his audience at such length that even species that are typically considered domesticated for human use still have untamed herds in the wild, Varro brings his account of the ages of man, which seems increasingly to promote the dominance of man, back to the earth (so to speak), once again equalizing the relationship between humans and their world. We may have figured out how to shape and manipulate the earth, but only to some degree. Varro's account

begins with the wild earth and ends with an enumeration of untamed creatures. Even amidst human interference, the land and the animals can still claim to be wild.

Varro affirms this nature-centered perspective soon after this in Book Two through his penchant for the history of names. In the course of proving the dignity of herding as an art, Varro the interlocutor points to the incidence of places with pastoral names: the Aegean Sea, named for goats;²³⁸ Taurus, or Mount Bull, in Syria; Mount Cantherius in Sabine country, so-called after the Greek word for a pack-ass (κυνθήλιος); two straights called Bosphorus, or Ox-ford;²³⁹ a town in Greece named “horse-rearing” (*Hippion*) Argos; and Italy itself, derived from *vituli*, the word for bull calves (2.1.8-9).²⁴⁰ In linking the land with herding through these designations, Varro accomplishes something similar to what he does through the associations he makes between pastoralism and the naming traditions of Roman families. With the latter, the herding names prevalent among Romans of various classes not only speak to Roman identity, but also indicate the appropriate ideological place of Romans, that is, in the fields tending flocks.²⁴¹ Similarly, the pastoral names of places throughout the extended Roman world provides not only a sense of identity to these various places—herding being so significant to them as to provide them with their signifiers—but also specifically localizes herding to the natural world and makes it part of the landscape. Varro allows some room for association of herding with more man-made locations, as he also names one town, Hippion Argos, in his catalog; however, this list overwhelmingly indicates that the natural features of the natural world have precedence in the arena of herding.

²³⁸ αἴγες. Varro also explains the derivation at *dLL* 7.22.

²³⁹ βόσπορος, for βοδὸς πόρος

²⁴⁰ “bull calves.” Varro offers an alternative etymology at *dRR* 2.5.3, when he states that the ancient Greeks called bulls *itali*.

²⁴¹ See discussion above pp. 68-82.

The natural is similarly emphasized in the descriptions of the grazing areas appropriate for each animal, which vary depending not only upon season but also upon type of day, and read like pastoral-lite—brief and prosaic versions of the sorts of landscapes offered in the rustic poetry of Theocritus and Virgil: broad (*patulus*) and shady (*umbrifer*, *umbrosus*) trees, groves (*nemus*), wooded (*silvestris*) forests (*saltus*), nearby water, and the midday (*meridianus*, *meridies*) heat (*aestus*).²⁴² The similarity between these descriptions of grazing grounds and pastoral poetry comes not from any direct imitation, but from the close conjunction of the features typical in pastoral poetry, that is idyllic spaces shielded from the heat of midday by shady trees, groves and woodlands abounding in water.²⁴³ The resemblance, however brief, between these descriptions and bucolic spaces lends to the directions on herding the rustic, man-in-nature orientation that the latter genre presents; it thus also reminds the audience, who might otherwise get caught up in the instructional nature of the text an immediately recognizable reminder that animal husbandry, as attested by the high authority of the poets, belongs to the rustic realm.

Of course, the very nature of herding as an activity dictates that its sphere is the natural landscape, as Varro and his fellow interlocutors indicate in the discourse that follows. Scrofa, who takes the mantle from Varro to provide an outline and overview of the *scientia pastoralis* (“the science of animal husbandry,” 2.1.11), highlights this when he first discusses the pasturage of herding animals and the movement it entails (2.1.16-17):

²⁴² These are some of the terms used in at *dRR* 2.2.11, 2.4.6, and 2.5.11-12, the descriptions of pasturing protocol for sheep, swine, and cattle respectively.

²⁴³ E.g., Virg. *Ec.* 1.1-5, where Tityrus sits under a broad beech tree (*patula fagus*), in the shade (*umbra*) near the woods (*silva*); cf. Theoc. *Id.* 1.1-16. Jones 2011: 24–28, describes Virgil’s pastoral landscape as green, benign, filled with plants providing fodder and shade for animals, and populated with gentle and sociable herdsmen—elements that likewise define the landscape of *dRR* 2. See also Saunders 2008: 102–127, for more on the bucolic landscape.

Neque eadem loca aestiva et hiberna idonea omnibus ad pascendum. Itaque greges ovium longe abiguntur ex Apulia in Samnium aestivatum atque ad publicanum profitentur, ne, si inscriptum pecus paverint, lege censoria committant. Muli e Rosea campestri aestate exiguntur in Burbures altos montes.

Nor is the same place suitable to all animals for pasturing in both summer and winter. Thus flocks of sheep are driven a long way from Apulia into Samnium for summering and are reported to the tax collector, lest they commit an offense against the censorial law by pasturing unregistered flocks. Mules are driven in summer from flat Rosea into the high Burbur Mountains.

The transhumance required to feed many herding animals takes both the flocks and their human watchers away from the confines of the villa and its surrounding estate, situating them instead in the mountains, the lower plains, and the long trails between (2.2.9): *ut iugum continet sirpiculos, sic calles publicae distantes pastiones*, “Just as a yoke holds two baskets, so the public cattle-trails connect distant pastures.”²⁴⁴ Although, in reality, the lengthy and difficult trek between the summer and winter grazing grounds meant that some herds might never spend time on the owner’s farm²⁴⁵—indeed some animals were too destructive to live near human settlement²⁴⁶—the above passages indicate human regulation and manipulation of herding beyond the guidance provided by the herder. The cattle-trails (*calles*) were public, but under state control; those who used the trails and the pasturage alongside it had to pay a toll to tax collectors (*publicani*). Indeed, the *calles* were sufficiently extensive and important that they constituted a province, the *calles provincia*, which fell to the charge of Julius Caesar in 59 BCE (Suet. *Jul.* 19).²⁴⁷ Yet even

²⁴⁴ The interlocutors of the *dRR* indicate that sheep (2.1.16, 2.2.9), cattle (2.5.11), mules (2.1.17) and goats (2.10.3) are transhumant.

²⁴⁵ Tilly 1973: 18, who also notes that the connections between the widely dispersed pasturelands opened up with Roman control of the entire Italian peninsula.

²⁴⁶ So indicates Cossinius, in his overview of the herding of goats (*dRR* 2.3.7): *Itaque a carpando caprae nominatae. Ab hoc in lege locationis fundi excipi solet, ne colonus capra natum in fundo pascat*. “Therefore, goats are named from *carpere*, to crop. For this reason, in the lease of a farm, it is customary to make the exception that the tenant not graze the goat’s offspring at the farm.”

²⁴⁷ Tilly 1973: 19–21, although Rolfe 1915 debates whether the *calles* were ever a province in the strict sense of *provincia*, or in its general sense, meaning simply a sphere of duty. For

while acknowledging that humans shape and influence both the science of husbandry and the landscapes it inhabits, the accounts of herding in the *dRR* reflect that the humans involved take advantage of, not take over, the natural requirements and landscapes of herding animals.

This is evident even in the case of the large animal herds that dwell at and pasture near the farm. The descriptions of their enclosures found in *dRR* 2 demonstrate that the human handprint is minimal, even though their pens are permanent and on the villa's estate. The placement of folds is determined by environmental requirements for the well-being and protection of the animal. For instance, the fold (*stabulum*) for sheep kept on the steading should be located on sloping ground to allow for drainage in order to keep the sheep appropriately dry (2.2.7). Cattle pens (*cubile*) should be strewn with leaves to ensure that the cattle rest more comfortably (2.5.14). The structures themselves, when the interlocutors indicate them at all or mention more than their mere existence, are basic yet serviceable, a way to contain, shelter, and benefit the animal.²⁴⁸ Thus, cow stalls (*praesaepe*) should be paved to prevent hoof-rot (2.5.16), while goat stalls (*caprile*) should be paved to maintain cleanliness better (2.3.6). The noteworthy factor in all of these descriptions of the pasturage and housing of herding animals is that all human involvement, which is a necessary part in the domestication of animals, is first and foremost functional, a utilitarian response to the needs of the animals and the shape of the land.

Even the herdsmen themselves must fit the criteria imposed by the demands of the animals and their landscape (2.10.3):

archaeological evidence of herding practices in central Italy, see Barker *et al.* 1991: 30–37, 72–79 and Barker 1989. Frayn 1984 examines the history of sheep-rearing in particular in Italy. For a history of transhumance as it is connected to Roman conquest of the peninsula, see Williamson 2005: 131–190.

²⁴⁸ The interlocutors do not discuss the matter of enclosures for asses (2.6) and mules (2.8), while they mention pens without any specifications for the structure for sheep (2.2.7) and horses (2.7.7).

Neque enim senes neque pueri callium difficultatem ac montium arduitatem atque asperitatem facile ferunt, quod patiendum illis, qui greges secuntur, praesertim armenticios ac caprinos, quibus rupes ac silvae ad pabulandum cordi. Formae hominum legendae ut sint firmae ac veloces, mobiles, expeditis membris, qui non solum pecus sequi possint, sed etiam a bestiis ac praedonibus defendere, qui onera extollere in iumenta possint, qui excurrere, qui iaculari.

For neither old men nor boys easily bear the difficulty of the cattle trails and the steepness and the roughness of the mountains, which must be endured by those who attend the flocks, especially herd of cattle and of goats, who like the cliffs and forests for grazing. Herdsmen should be chosen who have physiques that are strong and swift, nimble, with lithe limbs, who could not only follow the herd, but also protect it from beasts and bandits, who could lift loads onto the pack animals, who could keep pace, and who could throw a javelin.

Of course, any good villa owner would want to choose the people best suited to the job, and so the stipulations provided here for the herdsmen of the roving flocks make sense, but this passage reminds the audience in the last portion of the *dRR* 2 of the real nature of herding, the roughness, the wildness, the danger that it entails in the mountains and the forests. The villa owner, who does not himself lead cattle and sheep and goats on their repeated treks, does not personally face the danger and is thus removed from it, but in ending the book with this account of what those slaves who do deal with the herds face, Varro removes herding from the abstraction it gathers as the subject of discourse for this group of arm-chair herdsmen and reinstates it in the natural world.

Because farming is more intimately connected to the steading than herding, human influence is felt more acutely in the descriptions that Scrofa and the other interlocutors offer in Book One. Nevertheless, nature still dominates the agricultural landscape. In *dRR* 1, Scrofa begins his overview of the agronomic science by addressing the possible natural configurations (*formam naturalem*) of the farmland (1.6.1-7.1). The plot's topography, as well as the type and quality of soil, should determine not only what kind of crops the farmer will grow, but, more

significantly for the present discussion, how he organizes the structures required on a working farm. Those who fail to allow the lay of their land to dictate how they build end up either wasting money or losing their crops (1.11.1):

In modo fundi nonanimadverso lapsi multi, quod alii villam minus magnam fecerunt, quam modus potulavit, alii maiorem, cum utrumque sit contra rem familiarem ac fructum. Maiora enim tecta et aedificamus pluris et tuemur sumptu maiore. Minora cum sunt, quam postulat fundus, fructus solent disperire.

Many errors lie in not observing the measure of the farm, seeing that some build their villa smaller than the size stipulate, others larger, when either goes against the property and its profit. For buildings that are too large we build at higher cost and maintain at a greater expense, while those that are smaller than the farm requires usually ruin the produce.

In addition to size, the type of buildings needed—for instance, wine cellars or granaries—should also be determined by the land. Natural water sources (springs or streams) are preferable to artificial (cisterns and reservoirs, 1.11.2). The placement of the villa is dependent upon the natural topography and the drainage, salubriousness, and protection from the elements it can provide (1.12.1-4), while the layout of other buildings takes advantage of level, dry, warm, or cool locations depending upon their particular function (1.13.1). The picture that emerges, as Scrofa dictates where everything should be located in regards to both the elements and each other, is that of a *functional* farm where all of the individual components meet the requirements of agricultural production or fulfill some necessity imposed by the external landscape. While man's presence is clearly felt, it is also clearly a response to the surrounding land rather than an imposition on it.

The different levels of human presence in Books One and Two initially seem to reflect a traditional distancing between the agricultural and the pastoral landscapes in Roman

imagination.²⁴⁹ But while different features mark the worlds of pastoralism and of agriculture in the *dRR*, the landscapes ultimately share the privileging of nature as determiner, rather than man as manufacturer. Varro highlights this accord between farming and agriculture by providing a third, new science—the *pastio villatica*—that opposes both in the landscape it inhabits. Initially, the *pastio villatica* seems to be in line with large animal herding, as Varro remarks that he is the first to distinguish the care of villa animals from that of roving flocks (3.1.8). Given that the subjects of Books Two and Three are, in Varro’s estimation, two parts of the same whole (*Quae* [i.e. herding] *ipsa pars duplex est*), the audience might expect villa herding to resemble land herding in perspective—nature before man. Yet the *pastio villatica* also shares an important facet of farming, through its villa setting. However, instead of partaking in the same nature-centered mentality demonstrated in Books One and Two, the landscape of the *pastio villatica* is distinctly man-made, and instead of embracing the elements that tie it to farming or animal husbandry, the artificial landscape of villa pastoralism sets it apart.

B. Manufactured Landscapes

The beginning of the discourse in Book Three establishes that the world of the *pastio villatica* is constructed rather than natural. The shift this represents is striking and bizarre. Where the opening portions of Books One and Two both establish an idyllic landscape for their respective occupations, Book Three’s initial conversation leaves out nature, focusing instead on the villa itself: what makes a villa good, and what makes a villa a villa (3.2.3-11). The conversation begins with talk of adornment: is a villa more of a villa or a better villa if it is simpler, like the Villa Publica (*Sed non haec, inquit, villa, quam aedificarunt maiores nostri,*

²⁴⁹ Because agriculture is tied to the villa, while pastoralism is traditionally envisioned as inhabiting a more natural world: see Purcell 1995: 153 and Spencer 2006: 246. Spencer 2010: 32–35 connects this as well to a temporal difference: pastoral takes place in a natural world that seems to have vanished, while agricultural landscapes occupy the present.

frugalior ac melior est quam tua illa perpolita in Reatino? “But, he said, is this villa which our ancestors built not more modest and better than that thoroughly polished villa of yours at Reate?” 3.2.3)? What in fact makes a villa extravagant when it comes to luxuries, as Axius argues the Villa Publica is (*deliciis sumptuosior*, 3.2.4). However, the occupations that take place on an estate soon become part of the definition of the villa. According to Axius and accepted by Appius, the two men carrying out the argument, in order to qualify as a villa, an estate must participate in farming or herding, called the *membra rustica* of an estate (3.2.9).

But even in introducing activities that Books One and Two established as nature-centered, Book Three’s Axius frames farming and herding in terms of the human element involved. So, Axius points to the farmers and the shepherds abundant on his estate (*crebra sartoris et pastoris*) rather than to its fields and pastures as evidence of its status as a villa (3.2.5). Similarly, Axius chooses to use the human structures that aid in carrying out the occupations to demarcate the *villa*-ness of ancestral estates (3.2.6).²⁵⁰

Denique quid tua habet simile villae illius, quam tuus avos ac proavos habebat? Nec enim, ut illa, faenisicia vidit arida in tabulato nec vindemiam in cella neque in granario messim. Nam quod extra urbem est aedificium, nihilo magis ideo est villa, quam eorum aedificia, qui habitant extra portam Flumentanam aut in Aemilianis.

Therefore, what does your villa [the Villa Publica] have that is comparable to that villa which your grandfather and great-grandfather owned? For this one, unlike that one, has never seen mown hay dry on the floor or the vintage in the cellar or the harvest in the granary. For just because a building is outside the city, it is no more for that reason a villa, than the buildings of those who live beyond the Porta Flumentana or in Aemiliana.

By shifting the frame on the agricultural and the pastoral here, so that the human involvement which had previously been secondary to the natural becomes instead the principal feature of

²⁵⁰ The sorts of structures that are traditionally classified as the *villa fructuaria*, according to the definitions provided by Columella (1.6.1), although Ackerman 1990: 42 notes that in excavated villas, the functions of these sorts of structures are incorporated instead into the *villa rustica*, or the structures that house slaves and animals.

importance (at least when considering villas), Varro as author turns farming and herding into an equivalent of the adornments—inherently and indisputably denoting human manufacture—that are the other possible signification of the *villa* (3.2.9): *Quid igitur, inquit, est ista villa, si nec urbana habet ornamenta neque rustica membra?*, “He asked, ‘How, therefore, is that place a villa, if it has neither the ornamentation of the city nor the equipment of the country?’” As Purcell notes, “the choice of the villa owner is not between getting on with the agricultural job and making a splash with decoration,” but that “agriculture and elegance are alternative forms of display.”²⁵¹ In Book Three, the land and the herds, in the form of the *pastio villatica*, serve the man-made, becoming additional adornments for the human constructions that are now the focus.

In the discourse that follows, the landscape of the *pastio* is consistently one of human design. The descriptions of the buildings needed for housing various animals of the *pastio* are replete with architectural terms typically used of human structures. For instance, the aviary that contains birds raised for profit is either a large domed building (*testudo magna*) or a netted peristyle (*peristylum*) roofed with tiles, both of which terms were traditionally used in reference to the inner court of a house (3.5.1).²⁵² Besides the aviary’s courtyard-like design, Merula also indicates that the building should have plumbing to supply and remove water (*aquam venire oportet per fistulam, ... cadauca...per fistulam exire*, 3.5.2), plaster around the doors and windows (*tectorio tacta esse levi circum ostia ac fenestras*, 3.5.3),²⁵³ and a feature resembling the

²⁵¹ Purcell 1995: 152. Similarly Spencer 2010: 46, who notes that expansive villas in the late Republic came to be zoned intellectually as landscapes of self-display.

²⁵² Varro explains the term *testudo* at *dLL* 5.161, describing it as the term used for an inner court (*cavum aedium*) of a house that is completely roofed.

²⁵³ The dovecote described at 3.7.3 has significant architectural similarities to this aviary, the structure being a vaulted *testudo* (*testudo magna, camara tectus*), with either Punic or latticed windows (*fenestris punicanis aut latioribus reticulatis*), and plastered walls (*quam levissimo marmorato toti parietes ac camarae oblinuntur*).

balustrades (*cancelli*) of the theaters and arenas (3.5.4).²⁵⁴ All of these architectural elements create a space that is visibly human, sharing in a civilized landscape through its use of constructed features. Lucullus' aviary, which Merula describes in an overview of the types of aviaries, exemplifies this most clearly, for he used the bird enclosure as an (ill-advised) avant-garde dining room, *ubi delicate cenitaret et alios videret in mazanomo positos coctos, alios volitare circum fenestras captos*, "where he could dine luxuriously and see some birds placed cooked in a dish and others fluttering captive around the windows" (3.4.3). In combining the dining room and birdhouse, Lucullus turns his *pastio* into a literal display of his wealth, as well as a reminder of the source of both his fortune and the meal, in a context—dining—that is particularly suited for display and expenditure.²⁵⁵ The aviary, then, is fully subsumed into the human landscape and the cultural and social associations that go with it, while being literally cut off from the natural landscape outside of its confines—lest the ability to see the trees and free birds makes the captive birds despondent with longing (3.5.3).

Other structures of the *pastio* seem to blend the constructed with aspects of nature. For instance, the enclosure for ducks (*nessotrophion*) is located, ideally, on a naturally suitable part of the estate—that is, either on marshy land (*paluster*) or an area with a pond either natural or

²⁵⁴ *dRR* 3.5.4: *praeterea perticis inclinatis ex humo ad parietem et in eis traversis gradatim modicis intervallis perticis adnexis ad speciem cancellorum scenicorum ac theatri*, "In addition, [there should be] rods inclined from the ground to the wall and transverse rods affixed to these step by step at modest intervals, after the manner of the banisters at the theaters and the arenas." According to Hooper and Ash 1935: 448n.1, in this context, the *cancelli* refer to "tiers of seats guarded by grilles as described. See also Ovid *Am.* 3.2.64.

²⁵⁵ The extravagance associated with dining among wealthy Romans is expressed through the decorations of the *triclinium*, the entertainment accompanying dinner, and the food itself. See, e.g., Cic. *Ver.* 4.22; Hor. *Sat.* 2.8; Mart. *Ep.* 2.37; Petr. 26-78. See Dunbabin 1996 and Dunbabin 2003 for the material and archaeological perspective on the importance of Roman dining. See Gowers 1993 for the significance and ideology of textual portrayals of food and dining, and more particularly, Purcell 2003, who explores Roman mentalities about food and their attitudes toward shifting diets and production as expressed in literature.

man-made (*naturalis aut lacus aut stagnum aut manu facta piscina*, 3.11.1)—with surrounding walls (*parietes*), covered sleeping areas (*tecta cubilia*), and a brick-work vestibule in front (*vestibulum earum exaequatum tectorio epere testaceo*, 3.11.2). While the landscape within is (largely) natural,²⁵⁶ the constructed elements that Merula mentions are distinctly domestic, the types of elements that are common in a human residence. The use of *parietes* for the walls is particularly telling, because the term is used chiefly of house walls.²⁵⁷ While *cubiculum* is the standard term for bedroom, the way Varro here describes the layout of the separate sleeping cubbies (*cubilia*) as lining the interior of the *parietes*, with an open court before them (the *vestibulum*), resembles the layout of bedchambers around the inner court (*cavum aedium*) of a house.²⁵⁸ In this passage, the order of the description is important. By beginning with the natural location, and then describing the structures at greater length and in greater detail, the constructed supersedes the natural. Built over the terrain, the man-made features shape how the audience reads the landscape within: through the filter of the architectural features, the natural landscape of the duck-enclosure becomes instead the constructed landscape of a residence.

Similarly, although on a much more impressive and imposing scale, Varro's pleasure aviary at Casinum combines the natural with the artificial in such a way as to turn all into an attractive yet built landscape. The large structure is shaped like a writing tablet with a small

²⁵⁶ Unless, of course, the lake itself is artificial.

²⁵⁷ *OLD* s.v. *paries*, 1a and 1c. *Saeptum* or *saepes* would be the more natural term for the wall of an animal enclosure, and Merula does in fact initially define the walls as *saeptum* (*dRR* 3.11.1).

²⁵⁸ Which Varro describes at *dLL* 5.162. *Vestibulum* originally refers to the ante-court of a residence, that is the enclosed space before the entrance to a house (*OLD* s.v. *vestibulum*, 1a), but comes by transference to describe secondarily the space before sleeping quarters of any creature, human or animal (*OLD* s.v. *vestibulum*, 1b). Volpe 2012: 97 provides a diagram of the Auditorium villa, ca. 225-150 BCE, that demonstrates this layout.

head-piece (*deformatus ad tabulae litterariae speciem cum captiulo*, 3.5.10),²⁵⁹ a description that immediately and automatically frames the aviary as human and cultured. In addition, it features architectural elements and structures that are associated not only with houses, but with public buildings and spaces (3.5.11-17): porticos (*porticus*), fish-ponds (*piscinae*), a hand-planted wooded area (*silva manu sata*), docks (*navilia*), a contraption serving food and drink to guests,²⁶⁰ a rotunda (*tholus*) faced with a circle of columns (*rotundus columnatus*), a bird-theater (*theatridion avium*) with bird-seats (*sedilia avium*) between the rotunda's two rows of columns, and an horologium and wind compass on the rotunda's domed ceiling.²⁶¹ Various combinations of porticos, central open space, water features—including fish-basins, mock-maritime structures, fountains, pools, and grottos—and dining space are typical in both the courtyards and pleasure gardens of the villas of the wealthy from the first century BCE onwards.²⁶² Yet Varro's pleasure aviary goes beyond the simple resemblance to areas of a Roman residence that the other bird enclosures described in the *dRR* possess, because it also includes features that turn the space into a miniature town, complete with shipping docks and a theater. Of course, this similarity has significance for the allegorical significance and satirical potential of the dialogue, a means of reading the birds of *dRR* 3 as stand-ins for Roman citizens,²⁶³ but it also firmly brings these

²⁵⁹ Hooper and Ash 1935: 452n.1 elucidates the description: “the comparison with the *tabula litteraria* or school-boy's ‘slate,’ clarifies the description. As the *tabula* was provided with a loop or ring at the top with which to carry it..., so the quadrangle was topped off with a projection rounded on the upper end, the *capitulum*.”

²⁶⁰ Littlewood 1987: 15 argues that the “guests” are human guests, and the food and drinks are provided for them, while Green 1997: 442 believes the ducks are the “guests.”

²⁶¹ See van Buren and Kennedy 1919 for a reconstruction of the aviary, including a ground plan and arguments for interpretation of ambiguous or corrupt passages.

²⁶² Ackerman 1990: 48–58 provides descriptions of villas of the first centuries BCE and CE based on archaeological remains, including rundowns of the features of their various courtyards and gardens, many of which share several architectural elements with Varro's aviary as described above.

²⁶³ As Green 1997: 443–445 argues, and as I discuss in Chapter One, see 62 and 65-67 above.

birds, anthropomorphized as they are, and the *pastio* of which they are a part into a fully constructed and controlled landscape, one in which even the trees have been planted by hand rather than by nature.

Even those enclosures whose architectural features are downplayed in favor of elements of the wilderness mimic nature more than they actually inhabit it.²⁶⁴ For instance, during the discussion on the *leporarium*, a preserve that houses not only the rabbits that give it its name, but also deer, roe, and other animals (3.12.1), Axius includes an anecdote about Quintus Hortensius' game-reserve, or θηροτροφεῖον, a walled-in forest for the rearing and housing of game animals.²⁶⁵ While the enclosure of a natural space seems unintrusive enough, and comparable to if more permanent than the fencing off of pens for herding animals as described in Book Two, the use of the space reveals that the natural elements are, in reality, a pretense for the entertainment of humans (3.13.2-3):

Ibi erat locus excelsus, ubi tricilinio posito cenabamus, quo Orphea vocari iussit. Qui cum eo venisset cum stola et cithara cantare esset iussus, bucina inflavit, ut tanta circumfluxerit nos cervorum aprorum et ceterarum quadripedum multitudo, ut non minus formosum mihi visum sit spectaculum, quam in Circo Maximo aedilium sine Africanis bestiis cum fiunt venationes.

There was a high place there, where we were dining at a laid out triclinium, to which he instructed Orpheus be called. When he had arrived there with his robe and his cithara and was ordered to sing, he blew a shepherd's horn, with the result that so great a throng of stag and boars and other animals that it

²⁶⁴ Spencer 2010: 79 suggests that the features that characterize the villa in Book Three (the bird houses, the *leporarium*, and the fishponds) “developed naturally and practically from the environment rather than as signs of a designed landscape.” While this may have been true once, it does not accurately encapsulate the way that Varro and his interlocutors themselves describe the features in the course of the book.

²⁶⁵ According to Littlewood 1987: 15, the first Roman game preserves were built in the first century BCE. Pliny the Elder credits the development to Fulvius Luppinus, but mentions Lucullus and Hortensius as earlier followers of the trend (*HN* 8.78.211). But Green 1997: 440 points out the earlier imperial connotations of game-preserves, stemming from their associations with figures such as Cyrus (Xenophon calls such space παράδεισος, see e.g. *Cyr.* 1.3.14, 8.1.38; *Oec.* 4.20-21), and the implications of great wealth required to have them.

seemed no less lovely a spectacle than when the hunts of the aediles happen in the Circus Maximus without the African beasts.

Initially, this passage seems mostly to speak to issues of control—the human desire to have control over nature and to display that power²⁶⁶—but beyond that, it discloses the constructed reality behind what humans want to appear as natural. So instead of a real Orpheus calling to himself wild animals through the power of his song, the fake Orpheus of Hortensius' dinner party can only lure trained creatures. The dinner and the entertainment provided by the Orpheus-like piper all expose the strings behind the scenes, showing that the forest and animals that surround the diners are set-dressing rather than real, turning the space into a constructed nature—a point borne out by the comparison to the *venationes*, an event that inhabits the undeniably human and urban landscape of the Circus Maximus.

In summary, then, where in Books One and Two, the villa was both part of the landscape and a practical response to it, the villa in Book Three *is* the landscape, containing within it small-scale replications of the world outside. Elements of the constructed appear in Books One and Two, for the villa, animal pens, and storage sheds are part of the landscapes of agriculture and pastoralism, and elements of the natural appear in Book Three, for the man-made structures there boast trees and woodlands and ponds. Between the first two books and the last one, the focus has reversed, shifting from the land to the man, from how man works within the natural world to how man mimics nature within a landscape he has constructed. Yet in the *dRR*, this shift does not occur without comment or cause. As we shall see, moralizing commentary accompanies the interlocutors' descriptions of these shifting landscapes and suggests that the movement from natural to constructed signifies moral and social decline. Yet in order to assess why the shift is portrayed as a negative, we first must consider why the change in landscape occurs and what

²⁶⁶ As Green 1997: 440 correctly points out, and as I will discuss in Chapter Three below.

about that change affects the moral implications of the landscape of the *pastio* when compared to the agro-pastoral landscape. Upon examination, the text reveals that the shift in what landscape dominates—natural or manmade—and the moral condemnation of the latter are tied to a corresponding shift in the profit motive, a change in the source and use of the financial return for which farmers farm and herders herd.

2. The changing landscape of profit

A. The profit motive

Early in Book One, Agrius asks a question which Scrofa soon answers: what end does agriculture have in view—utility, pleasure, or both? (*agri cultura quam summam habeat, utilitatemne an voluptatem an utrumque*, 1.2.12). Scrofa explains that the farmer aims at both utility and pleasure, since the first leads to profit (*fructus*) and the second, enjoyment (*delectatio*), and that utility (and profit) is more important (*priores*) than pleasure (1.4.1). While Scrofa is here specifically speaking about agriculture proper, having just explained the distinction between agriculture and pastoralism (1.2.13-28), the goals he lays out seem to hold true for both herding and the *pastio villatica* as well, or rather, more specifically, the goal of profit. In stating that there is a science of herding so as to receive the greatest possible profit from it, Scrofa implies that the purpose of subsequent instructions is to help the cattle-owner to achieve just that (2.1.11), while Merula in Book Three explicitly asserts that profit and enjoyment (*fructus ac delectatio*) are the object behind learning the ins and outs of the *pastio villatica* (3.3.1).²⁶⁷

²⁶⁷ Xen. *Oec.* 4.5-13, through the character of Cyrus the Great, similarly emphasizes both profit and pleasure as aims in agriculture.

The focus on profit throughout the three books of the dialogue is indeed both consistent and pronounced, the term *fructus* appearing a total of 104 times.²⁶⁸ A motivating factor for the villa owner, material gain is tied not only to the three rural occupations described in the dialogue, but also to the landscapes in which they occur. The connection between agriculture and herding is even linguistically evident. To Varro the academic wordsmith, a term always simultaneously indicates both its own referent and its own derivation, and so it reveals relationships, even those that are otherwise obscure.²⁶⁹ *Fructus* (“profit”) is tied etymologically (and thus historically) to the land and its literal produce. Varro provides two related, yet not identical derivations in his *de Lingua Latina*, one in which *fructus* stems from *frui* (“to enjoy”), *frui* from *fruges* (“fruit”), and *frux* from *ferre* (“to bear,” *dLL* 5.37), and the other in which *fructus* comes from *ferre*, “specifically those things which the farm and those things which are on the farm bear so that we might enjoy them” (*fructus a ferundo, res eae quas fundus et eae quae in fundo ferunt ut fruamur*, 5.104).²⁷⁰ In both cases, *fructus* both derives from and is dependent upon the produce that can be reaped from the land—it is, in other words, agriculturally rooted. This point is even more evident in the dual definitions of *fructus*, a term that on the one hand denotes financial gain

²⁶⁸ *Fructus* is used sixty times in Book One, eighteen times in Book Two, and twenty-six times in Book Three.

²⁶⁹ See *dLL* 5.2: *cum unius cuiusque verbi naturae sint duae, a qua re et in qua re vocabulum sit impositum..., priorem illam partem, ubi cur et unde sint verba scrutantur, Graeci vocant ἐτυμολογίαν, illam alteram περί σημαينوμένων*. “As the nature of each and every word has two parts, the thing from which and the thing to which the term is applied..., the former part—where they investigate why and whence words are—the Greeks call *etymology*, the other part *semantics*.”

²⁷⁰ Logically, the two derivations are different merely in explicitness. Where the first derivation provides all of the derived terms, it does not explain the reason behind the semantic relationship. The second explanation provides the logical process of how *fructus* ultimately derives from *ferre*, and it includes explicit mention of *frui* as part of the chain between *fructus* and *ferre*, as well as mention of things produced on the farm, in all likelihood, the *fruges*, which *dLL* 5.37 identifies as the other intervening link between *fructus* and *ferre*. Internal logic aside, as Kent 1938: 35n.37e notes, Varro was in fact mistaken in including *ferre* as part of this etymological group, although *fruges*, *frui*, and *fructus* are related.

or the enjoyment of the possession of something, and on the other hand is also applied to the actual produce of the land and animals.²⁷¹ Similarly, *pecunia* (“wealth”) comes from *pecus* (“cattle”), for “a herd is the foundation of all wealth” (*nam omnis pecuniae pecus fundamentum*, *dRR* 2.1.12). Profit, then, is ingrained in the very fabric of farming and herding—and, by extension, the landscapes they inhabit. The fields that can be turned into produce, which in turn becomes monetary gain, and the pastures that fodder the flocks, fattening them for greater material reward, are essential components in the profit picture. In other words, the natural landscapes that make up Books One and Two are landscapes of profit, with human touches throughout to promote the best proceeds.

Instructions regarding building layout, pasturage, and organization of crops reflect the financial endgame. The landscapes that the interlocutors describe in Books One and Two are designed, if not to ensure, at the very least to offer the best chance at profit. At a basic level, in *dRR* 1 these instructions delineate that profitability is the primary factor for determining not only what crops to grow on an estate, but also what other activities or structures that are not strictly agricultural to include at the farm—in other words, all the most basic elements that make up the landscape of an estate. The sensible farmer pays attention to the type of soil his estate has because it drastically impacts the crops’ *fructus* (1.9.4). The *fructus* at stake is not only the harvest of whatever one plants, but the revenue that produce, through its quantity and its quality, provides. The profit incentive extends beyond crop choice. For instance, Scrofa recommends planting elm trees along the property lines of an estate, both for the security of a firm boundary, and because the elm in particular is the most profitable option (*maxime fructuosa*), providing

²⁷¹ For the abstract use of *fructus* as enjoyment of possessions and as profit, see *OLD* s.v. *fructus* 1, 4, 5, and 6. For the concrete use of *fructus* as the actual products of land and beast, see *OLD* s.v. *fructus* 2 and 3.

baskets for grape-gathering, foliage for herd animals, timber for fencing, and logs for the hearth (1.15.1). Similarly, what a neighbor has planted on his boundaries should determine what a farmer plants nearby, because of how his neighbors' plants might affect the financial return from his own. Therefore, a farmer will not plant olives adjacent to a neighbor's oak grove, for the latter drains the former of productivity and thus profitability (1.16.6).

In Book Two, in respect to herding, the drover chooses the grazing grounds that best serve and protect the animals—not only paying attention to the type of pasture each kind of animal prefers to eat, but also to their varying requirements for heat or coolness, moisture or dry air, and sunshine or shade.²⁷² Similarly, the placement and type of folding impacts the condition of the animals. Sheep require a pen that is cleared and set on a slope for improved dryness, because moisture damages both their fleece and their hooves (2.2.7), while cow pens should be paved to prevent hoof-rot. While profit is not directly mentioned in conjunction with any of these instructions, the aim in every case is the direct benefit it brings to the animal, whether in terms of its nourishment, well-being, or health, and it is a thriving, healthy, and robust animal that bring the greatest financial return. Most of the instructions seem to come down to maintaining or improving the overall health of the herd, since Scrofa says that “generally, the causes of illness are that they are afflicted on account of heat or coldness, or even on account of too much work or, alternatively, too little exercise” (*Fere morborum causae erunt, quod laborant propter aestus aut propter frigora, nec non etiam propter nimium laborem aut contra nullam exercitationem*, 2.1.22). Health is vital to profit, since an unhealthy herd is faulty and will bring ruin to the owner (2.1.21). The connection between an animal's good health, breeding, and appearance and its value can further be inferred from the importance given to these elements in the instructions for

²⁷² See, e.g. *dRR* 2.2.11, 2.4.5-6, and 2.5.11-12.

purchasing an animal: the better quality an animal is overall, the higher its fertility and the greater the gain it brings its owner.²⁷³ The impact of the space herding animals inhabit on their profitability is most clearly evident in what Varro calls the *extraordinarius fructus*, or the supplementary income, of herding (2.11.1). Because sheared wool earns a profit (2.11.11), it follows that the villa owner who makes sure the sheep pen stays dry, and thus avoids damaging the fleece, will earn a better profit than the owner whose pens are damp. Similarly, the quality of the milk from goats and cows—another source of profit for the farmer—is dependent upon the type of pasturage on which the animals fed (2.11.2).

Profit in farming and herding also comes from resource management, which, in respect to the landscapes at play, involves proper use of and response to space. In Book One, when Scrofa discusses the importance of proper measurement when constructing the various villa buildings, his focus is on the impact miscalculation has on returns (1.11.1): *Maiora enim tecta et aedificamus pluris et tuemur sumptu maiore. Minora cum sunt, quam postulat fundus, fructus solent desperire*, “For buildings that are too large we build at higher cost and maintain at a greater expense. While those that are smaller than the farm requires usually ruin the produce.” Scrofa applies the same profit-driven logic to his rather common-sense recommendation that estates with vineyards need to build larger wine-cellars, while grain-producing farms should invest in more expansive silos (1.11.2). In the herding of *dRR* 2, the owner maximizes his return by utilizing all available pastureland, because idle grazing ground is nothing short of lost profit (2.1.24). Similarly, in *dRR* 1, full utilization of available resources can improve the profit margins of crops that require greater outlay, such as grapevines—vintners can defray the expense

²⁷³ See, e.g., *dRR* 2.2.2-6, 2.3.1-4, 2.4.3-5, 2.6.2-3. Note the recurrence of *fructus* in respect to choosing animals at the most fertile ages, as well as the importance placed upon the quality of the animals.

of maintaining their vineyard if their farm produces the materials necessary to make the supports for the vines (1.8.1-3). By capitalizing on the usefulness of all the space at hand, as well as any materials that land provides, the villa owner combines utility and profit in both agriculture and pastoralism.

In addition to this type of advice that benefits the bottom line through proper resource management—building the appropriate structures at the appropriate size and using all available land so that neither product nor space nor labor is wasted—Scrofa also gives instructions in Book One that aim at profit through increased output, arranging the agricultural landscape in a way that maximizes productivity. For instance, an additional crop should be planted amidst the tree rows of a young orchard in order to increase the output of the land before the tree roots demand too much of the soil (1.23.6). Additional profit can be eked from the land by planting some crops in particular configurations. Planting trees in rows allows every tree more even access to the sun on every side, thus producing more fruit which in turn leads to more gain (*pretium*, 1.7.3). Better yet, attention to conformation in planting is also associated with heightened visual appeal (1.7.1-2):

De formae cultura hoc dico, quae specie fiant venustiora, sequi ut maiore quoque fructu sint, ut qui habent arbusta, si sata sunt in quincuncem, propter ordines atque intervalla modica. Itaque maiores nostri ex arvo aequo magno male consito et minus multum et minus bonum faciebant vinum et frumentum, quod quae suo quicque loco sunt posita, ea minus loci occupant, et minus officit aliud alii ab sole ac luna et vento.

I say this regarding conformation in cultivation, that it follows that what is more pleasing in appearance also brings greater profit, such as if orchards—for those who have them—are planted in a quincunx pattern, on account of the methodical arrangement and moderate intervals. Therefore our ancestors, from a field of equal size but poorly planted, were accustomed to make less and inferior wine and grain, seeing as plants which are situated each in its place occupy less space and obstruct each other less from the sun and moon and wind.

In this passage, profit is found through a visually pleasing landscape. Financial benefit is not a zero-sum game that comes at the loss of enjoyment. Rather, the two goals of agriculture are mutually beneficial: a landscape that is attractive is more likely to have increased productivity, while a profitable farm is also more likely to be visually appealing. But while profit can be associated with pleasure, the relationship is in fact incidental rather than causal—in other words, the profit does not actually derive from the enjoyment that the neatness of prettily arranged land bestows, but rather from the practical benefits of good order. This nod to the place of pleasure in agricultural success is also significant as a concession to the appeal that the attractive has to human nature. As Scrofa earlier remarked, people will pay more to purchase land that is beautiful than to buy an unsightly farm, provided their value is otherwise the same (1.4.2). But it is also a reminder of the greater place that enjoyment has in the considerations of modern Romans. In this case, concession to pleasure is advantageous.

The landscape of the *pastio villatica* is also one of profit.²⁷⁴ In the preface to Book Two, Varro highlights that gain consequent from raising villa animals is extraordinary (2.Pr.5). Book Three, however, claims that that the profit derived from tending villa animals is not merely large, but outstrips the revenue of the more traditional rustic occupations presented in the first two books: (3.2.13): *...ex iis pastionibus ex una villa maioris fructus capere, quam alii faciunt ex toto fundo*, “...he reaps a greater profit from the *pastio* on one villa than others get from a whole farm.” Villa herding, then, packs the greatest financial punch per square iugerum, earning more revenue in less space and turning the villa proper into the landscape of profit par excellence. The magnitude of the proceeds derived from the *pastio* are that much more effectively impressive and

²⁷⁴ Kronenberg 2009: 95 notes that “as the work progresses, the profit motive only increases.” While it is true that Book Three seems to underscore profit more than the preceding two books, I would argue that the emphasis placed on financial gain is least in Book Two. The lower occurrence of words for profit, such as *fructus* and *pretium*, seem to support this.

astonishing when contrasted with the smaller profits of larger spaces, and the interlocutors provide numerous instances of people earning remarkable amounts from the tending of villa animals: a freedman of Varro's earned 50,000 sesterces yearly from his villa pasturing (3.2.14); Axius' maternal aunt took in 60,000 sesterces yearly—twice as much as Varro's 200 iugera farm at Reate earned—from the aviary alone (3.2.15); Lucius Abuccius earned 20,000 sesterces a year from the *pastio*, while his farm brought him only 10,000; and Cato sold the fish from his villa's fish-ponds for 40,000 sesterces (3.2.17). The amount of earnings that Axius and Varro here spout off are surprisingly high, as even a modern reader without knowledge of the relative monetary value of the sesterce can recognize through Axius' repeated expressions of surprise (3.2.14, 15) and his sudden eagerness to learn the ins and outs of the *pastio* (3.2.18).²⁷⁵

The *pastio* is especially extraordinary in its ability to transform otherwise barren land into productive and lucrative spaces. During the discussion on what qualifies a place as a villa, Appius mentions the house near Ostia that he wishes to purchase, suggesting that he needs to know what constitutes a villa so that he does not end up buying a worthless house instead of a seaside villa (3.2.7). His remarks hint at his unease that because the house in question does not have asses—synecdoche for farming or herding—nor, as he soon reveals, fancy decorations, it does not qualify as a true *villa*. The absence of *membra rustica* (the “rural accouterments” that indicate farming or herding occurs on a villa) exposes the property as unproductive, and its littoral location reinforces this picture since the coast of western Italy could not support the more

²⁷⁵ Rosenstein 2008 examines the profits margins from agriculture during the middle and late Republic and the impact that the realities of agriculture likely had on aristocratic attitudes, ultimately arguing that profits from commercial farms were probably insufficient to support an extravagant lifestyle. Marzano 2007: 9–10, however, argues that if the financial return of non-agricultural forms of production and profit (such as brick and tile making from mud pits located on the estate) are included in estimates, then elite villas “were in most cases a source of wealth.”

traditional sources of villa profit. But sterile land finds new life through the *pastio*.²⁷⁶ This specialized type of herding succeeds in places where farming or large animal herding are not viable options, because it requires less space and because the environmental needs of villa animals can be successfully replicated by human invention (e.g. 3.14.2). So Lucius Abuccius' claim that a coastal villa could bring him a yearly revenue of more than 100,000 sesterces is indicative, if exaggerated, of the transformation that the *pastio* can have over how a landscape is perceived—productive instead of fruitless—and how a landscape can benefit its proprietor (3.2.17). In the case of villa herding, the benefit is extravagant.

Given that the *pastio* is just one type of herding and, like its sister-occupation, brings in large revenue, Merula argues and the other interlocutors accept that it counts as part of the *membra rustica* and thus as one possible defining feature of a true *villa*, the other being the *urbana ornamenta* (3.2.9-11). A villa is identifiable as a villa through visual indicators, and so the various apparatuses of farming and herding that visually mark a villa as productive are as much a form of display as urbane decorations. Where displays of adornment show off the villa owner's wealth by showing what sort of elegant luxuries his villa's revenue affords him, the mechanisms of farming, herding, and the *pastio* on the *fundus* make visible to the guest the source of the wealth that allows for the finer indulgences and demonstrates through their show of productivity that the source of that wealth is stable and renewable. But in addition, agricultural and herding implements that are visible on an estate connect the estate and its owner to the ideological implications associated with these occupations in the Roman elite imagination. An estate owner whose land supports both cultivation and cattle can claim for himself a part of traditional Roman identity, in which the farmer and herder are hard-working, upright citizens,

²⁷⁶ So Purcell 1995: 153, “the *pastio villatica* turns coastal desert to profitable productivity.”

praiseworthy and in tune with appropriate *mores*, good soldiers, good statesmen.²⁷⁷ In sowing grain and raising cattle, a villa owner participates in something that is time-honored, in large part because it is useful. Both occupations served a necessary purpose, including feeding the masses in the city (3.14).

The *pastio*, however, is disconnected from both of these traditional Roman occupations. While including some customary elements, such as beekeeping, the *pastio* as a whole is marked by its dependence upon the wealthy and extravagant clientele (3.2.16): *Sed ad hunc bolum ut pervenias, opus erit tibi aut epulum aut triumphus alicuius, ut tunc fuit Scipionis Metelli, aut collegiorum cenae*, “But in order to get such a haul you will need either a banquet or someone’s triumph, such as the one Scipio Metellus had that one time, or guild dinners.” Varro the author’s use of *bolus* here underscores the high stakes nature of the *pastio*.²⁷⁸ Because *bolus* means first and foremost “a throw of the dice,” its meaning of “profit” is dependent upon luck and inherently involves great risk. Any misstep could cause the dice of the *pastio* to turn up snake eyes. One year without triumphs and the incredible profits the interlocutors promise will disappear (3.2.16). While all farming and herding are risky, the danger involved in villa husbandry is more problematic because its goods, unlike the produce of the field and the foodstuff supplied by large herding animals, are explicitly luxury items. With some luck and hard work, farming and herding bring profit derived from *useful* produce, while the *pastio* brings profit derived from *pleasure* produce.

²⁷⁷ See pages pp. 22-24 above. See also Cato *De Agri Cultura* Pr.2.

²⁷⁸ Purcell 1995: 154 notes that the ability of the *pastio* to turn a vast profit quickly made it a ready target for what he calls “satirical raconteur.” The use of the term *bolus* here, used most frequently in the comedies of Terrence and Plautus, would seem to support his claim.

B. From rustic utility to urbane delights

It is this shift from utility to pleasure that marks the difference between the landscapes of profit presented in the *dRR*. Books One and Two naturalize utility. When stating that a farmer should plant what is most suitable to the natural conditions of a given field, Scrofa explains that the profit (*fructus*) of a farm derives from what is planted for a useful (*utilis*) purpose (1.23.1). By this reckoning, profit comes explicitly from utility, and utility is found by working in accordance with nature rather than by challenging or changing it. Functionality and profit also coincide with adherence to the dictates of the land in Scrofa's recommendations concerning the types, size, and arrangement of buildings on an estate (1.11.1-1.13.5). Profit in herding derives from finding the natural environment best suited to keeping the animals safe, healthy, and well-fed (e.g., 2.4.5-6)—in other words, finding what is useful for the herd in nature promotes the herd's profitability. But the *utilitas* offered in Books One and Two is, by and large, missing from Book Three, as a simple word count of instances of *utilitas* and *utilis* in all their forms suggests, occurring twenty-five times in Books One and Two, as compared to five times in Book Three. Indeed, Merula begins his overview of the villa herding by explaining that its aims are profit (*fructus*) and pleasure (*delectatio*, 3.3.1). The goals are similar to yet significantly different from those that Scrofa provides for cultivation—utility (*utilitas*) and pleasure (*voluptas*)—and the switch from utility to profit is telling. Most villa animals bring profit—without reference to utility²⁷⁹—and all induce enjoyment through their superfluity (e.g. honey, 3.16.1-2), their exorbitant material worth (e.g. peafowl, 3.6.6), and the extravagance and elegance of their

²⁷⁹ Profit (*fructus* or *pretium*) and utility (*utilitas*) appear in conjunction four times in Book One (1.17.3, 1.23.1, 1.23.4, 1.4.2) and three times in Book Two (2.3.1, 2.8.2, 2.9.7), in close proximity three times in Book One (1.20.3-4, 1.55.6-7, 1.7.3-4) and once in Book Two (2.11.1-2), but do not occur in conjunction or close proximity at any point in Book Three.

enclosures, where people as well as the animals can feel at home (e.g. aviary, 3.4.3, and game-preserves, 3.13.2-3).

The villa itself, in regards to both its type and its prominence, embodies the shifting priorities reflected in the *dRR*, as can be seen in Fundanius' description of contrasting villas in Book One (1.13.6-7):

Fundanius, Fructuosior, inquit, est certe fundus propter aedificia, si potius ad anticorum diligentiam quam ad horum luxuriam derigas aedificationem. Illi enim faciebant ad fructum rationem, hi faciunt ad libidines indomitas. Itaque illorum villae rusticae erant maioris preti quam urbanae, quae nunc sunt pleraque contra. Illic laudabatur villa, si habebat culinam rusticam bonam, praesepis laxas, cellam vinariam et oleariam ad modum agri aptam.... Item cetera ut essent in villa huiusce modi, quae cultura quaereret, providebant. Nunc contra villam urbanam quam maximam ac politissimam habeant dant operam ac cum Metelli ac Luculli villis pessimo publico aedificatis certant.

Fundanius said, "A farm is certainly more profitable in its structures if you lay out the building in accordance with the economy of the ancients than with the luxury of those living today. For the former traditionally constructed in consideration of profit, while the latter build for their untamed desires. Therefore the *villae rusticae* of our ancestors were more expensive than the *villae urbanae*, which, conversely, are more costly now. Then a villa was praised if it had good, simple kitchen, spacious stables, a cellar for wine and oil appropriate for the size of the farm.... In the same way they took care that they had in the villa other things of this kind, which cultivation demanded. Now, on the contrary, they make the effort to have an urban villa as large and as refined as possible, and they contend with the villas of Metellus and Lucullus, built to the greatest public harm."

The first villa that he describes—the original farmstead—falls in line with the useful landscape that prevails in the earlier books. Its rooms serve the need of the farm, and functionality is the basis of design. Although manmade, it, like the rest of the structures Scrofa earlier specifies, is in response to and appropriate for the land around it, fitting within the landscape it serves. But the second villa, the type Varro as Fundanius claims is prevalent now, is characterized by luxury, not utility. Without functional spaces, it is little more than a showcase of wealth.

While this passage conveys the typical elite praise for the morally superior ways of the ancestors, it also displays an interesting (and intentional) misrepresentation of the villa that confuses types of villas by using the lens of ideology and for the sake of isolating the motive of profit from the incentive of luxury.²⁸⁰ The *villa rustica* and the *villa urbana* were discrete, but not mutually exclusive parts of the building complex of a farm, with the *villa fructuaria* as the final portion of the facility. The *villa urbana* was the manor house and included bedrooms, dining rooms, bath houses, and the like; the *villa rustica* was the farm structure, with barn and stables, living quarters for the overseer and herdsman, and a kitchen; the *villa fructuaria* incorporated the storage facilities for the farm, from the cellars and granaries to the haylofts and press rooms (Col. 1.6).²⁸¹ When Fundanius praises their Roman forebears for spending more on the *villa rustica* than the *villa urbana*, unlike men today, he is praising them for putting the farm as farm and ranch ahead of farm as residence—in other words, as he himself says first, for putting the profit of the *fundus* and the structures that help make the farm more productive and more lucrative ahead of creature comforts that are fiscally wasteful even while being an ostentation of prosperity. In this context, it isn't a matter of choosing whether to have a *villa rustica* or a *villa urbana*, but rather choosing which to put more energy and money into, and thus

²⁸⁰ Fundanius, in other words, plays with the full range of semantic meanings of *villa*—technical, social, and ideological. As Dyson 2003: 19 indicates, the designation *villa* could be as imprecise in Latin as it is in English. Also noting the wide range of meanings modern scholars and ancient authors alike assign to *villa*, Marzano 2007: 2–3 points to the discussion of what makes a villa in *dRR* 3 as similarly playing with and providing evidence for the ambiguity of the term.

²⁸¹ Although Columella wrote his *dRR* probably in the 60s CE, about a hundred years after Varro, the indication in the first half of the above passage that a landowner would have both a *villa urbana* and a *villa rustica* clearly shows that Varro too understood those terms in the technical sense (i.e., as discrete parts of a villa complex) that Columella later gives them. Cato, writing roughly a hundred years earlier than Varro, also uses the terms *villa rustica* and *villa urbana* with these meanings (*de Agri Cultura* 3.2, 4.1), showing that the technical division of the villa existed even in infancy of the term *villa* itself (which Ackerman 1990: 42 suggests may have been new when Cato wrote his agricultural treatise).

choosing what one's priorities are for the farm as whole. The implication here is that Romans of the past still had *villae urbanae* in their technical sense, but that they were more modest and reasonable than the *villae urbanae* found in the late Republic.

But Fundanius' description of the villas themselves complicates this rather straightforward technical distinction between the *villa rustica* and the *villa urbana*, because the ancestral villa he depicts first does not adhere to it. The villa of the Roman elders, with its country kitchen and stables and cellars, combines the functions of the *villa rustica* and the *villa fructuaria*, with no reference to the *villa urbana* and the comforts it offers to the proprietor. Yet Fundanius makes it sound like a complete villa in and of itself. The impression, then, is of a people so dedicated to farming and the profit it brings that fine living is not even part of the picture—these are uber citizen-farmers, Catos on steroids, for even Cato granted a place to a *villa urbana* that would entice more frequent visits to the estate and make them more enjoyable (*de Agri Cultura* 4.1). The ancestral villa then is not a *villa rustica*, but a *villa* that is *rustica*.²⁸² The villa of Varro's day, on the other hand, initially appears to maintain the earlier technical distinction between villa parts, for Fundanius calls it a *villa urbana*, and the emphasis on size and refinement, complete with a comparison to Lucullus—the paragon of luxurious living²⁸³—confirm its function as providing comfort to the proprietor. But in juxtaposing it in contrast to that of the ancestors, Fundanius implies that the modern *villa urbana* is, like the rustic villa of old, complete in itself. As the villa of elders was all practicality, seemingly lacking any

²⁸² According to Ackerman 1990: 43–48 the excavated remains of ancient Roman farms reveal significantly more instances of villas with combined functions than villas with discrete functions.

²⁸³ Varro frequently refers to Lucullus and his villa in connection with extravagance (*dRR* 1.2.10, 1.13.7, 3.2.17, 3.3.10, 3.4.3, and 3.17.8), a fairly typical association in ancient references to Lucullus (see, e.g., Plut. *Luc.* 39.3-5; Vell. Pat. 2.33.4; Pl. *HN* 8.78.211, 9.80.170). For a more comprehensive and thus more evenhanded portrait, see Keaveney 1992.

refinements of living, the villa of today is all luxury, seemingly lacking any nod to country occupations.²⁸⁴ The modern villa then is wholly a *villa urbana* and a villa that is urbane.

In shifting the discussion (at least ostensibly) from particular areas of the villa complex to the villa as a whole, Varro as author turns the technical adjectives *rustica* and *urbana* into more nuanced descriptors, bringing with them additional (and ideological) baggage. Given the moralizing tone of the passage, which makes the old villa praiseworthy and the new villa pernicious, the description of the former as *rustica* and the latter as *urbana* is suggestive of the contemporary elite ideology regarding the superiority of the country.²⁸⁵ In this passage, rusticity, utility, antiquity, and moral superiority become linked, perhaps even synonymous—as do urbanity, luxury, modernity, and moral decline. But on a more basic level, *rustica* and *urbana* also indicate the different landscapes that these distinct villas evoke. The rusticity of the former villa places it firmly in a setting more characterized by nature than by man, while the urbanity of the latter locates it in a space dominated by humans and their handiwork. It is fitting, then, with the natural landscape predominant in Book One, that Varro has Fundanius advocate the *villa rustica* as the most suitable villa for an estate owner, while denigrating the *villa urbana*.

The use of the terms *rustica* and *urbana* in association with two types of villas in Book One is picked up in Book Three in the two defining features of a villa—the *membra rustica* and the *urbana ornamenta* (*dRR* 3.2.9). Here again there is a correlation between *rustica* and utility and the countryside, and *urbana* and luxury and built environments, all stemming from the interlocutors' preceding conversation regarding the Villa Publica on the one hand and Axius' villa on the other. Appius argues that the Villa Publica is a better villa than Axius', pointing to

²⁸⁴ Marzano 2013: 82–101 examines the ideology of the *villa rustica* in the Roman Republican imagination. Bodel 2012 looks at Cato, Cicero, and Varro to demonstrate that the culture and ideology surrounding villas shifted in the late Republic.

²⁸⁵ As I argue in Chapter One, see pp.82-85 above.

the former's lack of expensive building materials and its utility for conducting public business (*ad rem publicam administrandam haec sit utilis*, 3.2.4). In his depiction, the Villa Publica is a veritable *villa rustica*, lacking in luxury while serving the needs of its environment (in this case, the state). Yet Axius flips this depiction on its head, turning the *Villa Publica* instead into some sort of *villa urbana*, “more lavish in luxuries than all the villas of everybody in all of Reate” (*deliciis sumptuosior quam omnes omnium universae Reatinae*, 3.2.5). Filled with paintings and statuary—its *urbana ornamenta* (in this case truly *urbana* because the Villa Publica is actually in the city)—the Villa Publica lacks fields and pastures, and thus the sort of functionality that makes up the *membra rustica*. It may be *utilis*, but it is not the kind of serviceable that matters for a villa—the kind that involves tilling, animals, the land, and profit. Axius' Reatine villa combines both elements, from fine materials such as citrus wood, gold, and mosaics, to cultivated fields; it trumps the Villa Publica as a demonstration of villa-hood.

Appius ultimately admits defeat, giving up on his championing of the Villa Publica, by asking Axius to teach him what a villa is, since he himself clearly doesn't know (3.2.7). Although Appius' concession is distinctly tongue-in-cheek in tone, implicated in the smile with which he precedes it (*subridens*), the interlocutors continue the conversation in all evident seriousness, having accepted that agriculture/herding and adornment are significant in the classification *villa*. But it is important that they note in the ensuing discourse that only the *membra rustica* is essential to villa-hood (3.2.10): *nihilo minus esse villam eam quae esset simplex rustica, quam eam quae esset utrumque, et ea et urbana*, “that building which is only rustic is no less a villa than that which is one as well as the other, both rustic and urbane.” While in itself Merula's comment here does not necessitate that a place with *urbana ornamenta* but no

rural activities cannot be considered a villa, given that it follows the evident dismissal of the Villa Publica for that very reason suggests that some sort of rustic function is fundamental.

In this early portion of the book's discourse, when the interlocutors' discussion is still abstract, focused on definitions and the overarching picture, Merula classifies the *pastio* as part of the *membra rustica* (3.2.10). Notionally, the assignation of *pastio* to the same realm as farming and husbandry makes sense, since, as Varro himself argues in the preface and has Merula contend here, herding is herding whether the animals belong at the villa or rove the pastures or countryside, both being two kinds of the same occupation (3.1.8, 3.2.11). But in the dialogue that follows, it frequently seems as if it would be more apt to categorize the *pastio* instead with the urbane luxuries and delights that make up the *urbana ornamenta*. For not only is the revenue from villa herding dependent upon luxury, but the manner in which it is now carried out is characterized by luxury (3.3.6): *Omnibus tribus his generibus sunt bini gradus; superiores, quos frugalitas antiqua, inferiores, quos luxuria posterior adiecit*, "In each of these three divisions [of the *pastio*] there are two stages; the former, which the thrift of old times defined, and the latter, which later luxury has turned to." Merula follows this assertion by comparing the *pastio* practices of the ancestors with modern customs, from which a clear picture emerges of simplicity and functionality in the old arrangements, befitting the *frugalitas antiqua*, and of excess and frivolity in the new (3.3.6-10). Given the tone of the comparisons that follow, *superiores* and *inferiores* not only clarify the time period of the stages of the *pastio* but also qualify their quality: the older is superior, the newer inferior.

The contrast here vividly recalls Fundanius' comparison of ancient with modern villas in Book One, as both positively associate the old ways with thrift, practicality, and simplicity, while negatively linking new ways with extravagance and grandiosity. But where Fundanius urged his

fellow listeners to follow the example of their Roman forebears rather than current trends when planning their villas, the specific instructions that follow Merula's statement reveal that the practitioners of the *pastio* in the *dRR* are only interested in the modern methods, as Axius explicitly confirms (3.4.1): *Ego vero, inquit, ut aiunt post principia in castris, id est ab his temporibus quam superioribus*, “‘For myself,’ he said, [I would have you begin], as they say in the army, behind the front rank, that is from the present time rather than the past.”” In other words, while the ancestral *pastio* fits well with the *membra rustica* as the interlocutors describe it, the *pastio* that Book Three actually portrays seems, in its luxury, to resemble more the *urbana ornamenta*. The plasterwork (*tectorius*) that contributes to the *urbana ornamenta* of Axius' villa also features prominently in the enclosures of the villa animals, sometimes without any reason provided.²⁸⁶ Similarly, the dovecote boasts *marmoratum*, a plaster made from marble dust and used in the soundest plasterwork in human structures.²⁸⁷

Beyond small details such as this, the structures themselves are not the slipshod or simple pens that suffice for the herding animals, but—as discussed above²⁸⁸—elaborate edifices that share features with the proprietor's villa. Indeed, in his initial explanation of the *pastio* as a science, Merula goes so far as to claim that the aviaries that today shelter only thrushes or peafowl are in themselves grander (*maiora*) than entire villas used to be (3.3.7). The *pastio* is in part problematic because it blurs the line between these two different defining features of the villa; it turns the *membra rustica* into *urbana ornamenta*, privileging pleasure over utility. While

²⁸⁶ The plaster-work of Axius' villa is at 3.2.9, while plaster is also used, without a named purpose, in the enclosures of turtle-doves (3.8.1) and ducks (3.11.2), while it is also recommended in the enclosures of birds (3.5.3), peafowl (3.6.4), hares (3.12.3), and dormice (3.15.1) for the reported purpose of containment from the outside world.

²⁸⁷ Vitruvius (7.3.6-9) and Pliny the Elder (*HN* 36.55) explain that coats of plaster made from marble dust contribute to making the walls—of human dwellings—the highest quality.

²⁸⁸ See pp. 108-10 above.

the features of the *pastio* structures themselves exhibit a grandiosity that is alien to the more straightforward world of Books One and Two, the close link between luxury and animal herding—and thus the distinctiveness of it as an agronomic science—finds its fullest expression in the fact that not all villa animals are kept for profit, but that some are kept solely for their extravagance and the enjoyment that extravagance brings.

This point is brought home from the very first animal catalogued in Book Three, for Merula begins his instructions for the *pastio* with it (3.4.2): *Duo genera sunt, inquit, ornithonis: unum delectationis causa... alterum fructus causa*, “‘There are,’ he said, ‘two kinds of birds: one for the sake of pleasure, another for profit.’” As an overview of pleasure aviaries as a kind,²⁸⁹ Varro describes in great detail his elaborate and extravagant pleasure aviary at Casinum, following Merula’s explanation of the first aviary for profit, that of the thrush. By closing the account of the thrushes with commentary upon the extraordinary gain they bring their owner, so long as there is a banquet or triumph to put them in demand (3.5.8), Appius emphatically reminds the audience that profit is the point. But Varro’s aviary, which, as Merula notes, he built *animi causa* (for the sake of amusement), not only earns him no money, since the birds that occupy it are used neither for food nor feather, but must in fact require a significant expenditure. Their home, which I have described above,²⁹⁰ is lavish, filled with features that traditionally make up human environments or that outright mimic social spaces, including a theater, a dining space with a human servant and opulent coverlets (*peripetasmata*), an horologium, and—perhaps most tellingly—fishponds. Although, like everything else in the enclosure, the fishponds of the aviary are smaller in scale, the notoriety in terms of expense and moral depravity with which villa fishponds are regarded among the contemporary literary elite make their presence at any

²⁸⁹ For an overview of the history of pleasure aviaries, see Jennison 2005: 99–121.

²⁹⁰ See pp.110-12.

size startling in what is—or perhaps should be—little more than a cage for pet birds.²⁹¹ If it is problematic for humans to have fishponds on their villas, how can it be justifiable to grant them to birds that have no use? Indeed, all of these features, the scale of the enclosure and maintenance everything requires speak to the profligacy of such a space, which goes to such extremes in procuring an enjoyable walk for humans as to make a miniature pleasure space for the birds themselves, who can derive no actual enjoyment (by human standards) from the luxury that is their home. What this demonstrates is that useless luxury, rather than productive spaces, is the source of enjoyment for Romans of the day.

In the account of the villa fishponds which closes Book Three and thus also the work as a whole, Varro makes explicit the correlation between luxury, wastefulness, and the aim of pleasure that the account of his aviary at Casinum left implicit. Although Axius does not make a sharp distinction between fishponds for profit and fishponds for pleasure, as Merula did for aviaries, his division between freshwater ponds and saltwater ponds amounts to the same thing (3.17.2):

Piscinarum genera sint duo, dulcium et salsarum, alterum apud plebem et non sine fructu, ubi Lymphae aquam piscibus nostris villaticis ministrant; illae autem maritimae piscinae nobilium, quibus Neptunus ut aquam et piscis ministrat, magis ad oculos pertinent, quam ad vesicam, et potius marsippium domini exinaniunt quam implent.

There are two kinds of fishponds, fresh and salt, the one is at the disposal of common people and is not without profit, where the Lymphs furnish the water for our fish; however, those seawater fishponds of the nobles, for which Neptune provides the water and the fish, suits the eyes more than the purse, and rather drains the owner's coffers than fills them.

²⁹¹ Cicero in particular is especially vitriolic (see *Att.* 1.18.6, 1.19.6, 1.20.3, 2.1.7, 2.9.1), but later authors also demonstrate unease about their prevalence and use (see, e.g., Val. Max. 9.1.1, Pl. *HN* 9.79.168, 9.80.170). For a general overview of the history of fishponds, see Jennison 2005: 122–125.

While clearly creating a financial contrast between fresh- and saltwater ponds, Axius' comments upon the "profitable" freshwater ponds are remarkably limited and opaque. Their accessibility to the masses would indicate that the expense of creating and maintaining them is reasonable enough for people of moderate incomes to afford, yet he adds nothing in the remainder of his discourse on fishponds to elucidate this remark further. Similarly, even the degree of their profitability is questionable, since the double negative with which he expresses their revenue potential merely limits them to the some sort of positive return, a far cry from the immoderate gains eagerly boasted of in respect to the other kinds of *pastio*. But by keeping the description of freshwater ponds vague here and all but ignoring this kind of pond in his overview of *piscinae*,²⁹² Varro as author fundamentally strips them of a place in the kind of *pastio villatica* the *dRR* is interested in. The freshwater ponds of the common people go the way of the first and simpler stage of the *pastio villatica* of the ancestors.

Instead, Axius focuses on the saltwater fishponds, which—as his double pronouncement regarding their tendency to hemorrhage money makes abundantly clear—are explicitly expensive and only implicitly enjoyable. The cost of building, stocking, and maintaining salt ponds is prohibitive (3.17.2), thus explaining how the nobility alone can afford to keep them and why they are seen as a marker of social status.²⁹³ In Axius' portrayal, saltwater ponds elicit an almost obsessive quality in the men who keep them, leading to everything from a compulsive expansion in the number of ponds (3.17.3-4), to greater possessiveness for one of its fish than for an entire carriage and team (3.17.7), to the estate owner feeding his fish with his own hands (3.17.6). In

²⁹² They are mentioned in one additional sentence in the section on fishponds, in which their prevalence among the plebians and their association with the adjective *dulcis* is repeated, and the only new information given is that people are able to be content with one freshwater pond (3.17.3).

²⁹³ See Higginbotham 1997: 55–64 for an examination of the association between *piscinae*, social status, and luxury starting in the Late Republic.

this way, an already costly pursuit—Hirrus spent the entire earnings of his villa on the upkeep of his fishponds (3.17.3)—becomes an even more crippling expensive pastime. So Hortensius is willing to supply saltwater fish to his *piscinae* even in the midst of bad weather and a food shortage for humans, and even though his pond fish are dear pets and not dinner (3.17.5, 7). Axius drives home the uselessness of the saltwater ponds by making his account itself entirely useless for the reader who wants to establish his own. Filled with anecdotes of men like Hortensius and Lucullus and their fishponds, the reader can garner no practical instructions for the establishment and care of this kind of *pastio*.²⁹⁴ A salt pond on a villa serves no purpose but to demonstrate and drain wealth.

In their extravagance, uselessness, and showiness, the fishponds of the end of Book Three demonstrate both how much more in line the *pastio villatica*, as it appears in the *dRR*, is with the *urbana ornamenta* of a villa than the *membra rustica* and how far removed this agronomic science is from cultivation and pastoralism. The landscape of the *pastio* is not marked by the natural or by the practical features that fill the landscapes of agriculture and large animal herding, but rather by fine features of enjoyment and refinement and luxury. In other words, in its privileging of extravagance and pleasure over utility, in its use of space, in its preference of the manmade over the natural, the *pastio villatica* of Book Three is of a type with the *villa urbana* that Varro as Fundanius describes in Book One as detrimental to the public, while the farming and herding that the interlocutors of Books One and Two teach belong to the rustic, simple, functional, and appropriate villa of the past. But just as the Roman farmer-citizen is no longer hanging out in his fields, but instead spending holidays in the city, the landscape of the farm presented in Book One is now little more than a snapshot of the longed for past. It is the

²⁹⁴ See pp. 175-88 below for more on the lack of practical instructions throughout the *dRR*.

space that is slowly being taken over by the landscape of Book Three, brought on undoubtedly in part by the elite citizen's abandonment of the field for the forum, for it is their urban banquets and triumphs that pay for the goods of the *pastio* (3.2.16).²⁹⁵

So while the *dRR* as a dialogue links farming, pastoralism, and villa husbandry as three-of-a-kind rural sciences, and the interlocutors of Book Three likewise attempt to unite them under the heading of the *membra rustica*, the *pastio* is, in the reality of the text, presented as *other*. The shift that occurs from Book One to Book Three manifests itself in the landscape but goes beyond humans' relationship to and place in the land. It is a shift from the Roman past to the present, from the utility and simplicity and rusticity that the ancestors promoted to the pleasure and luxuries and urbanity that contemporaries embrace, from laudable uprightness to dangerous immorality. While all three agronomic sciences aim at profit, the moralizing moments in the *dRR* indicate that there is something less upright about the gains and the end of *pastio villatica* and the villa landscape it inhabits. If the villas of Lucullus are built to the greatest public harm (1.13.7), then the repeated invocation of Lucullus as an exemplar of successful villa husbandry calls into question the rightness, the true benefit, of the *pastio* (3.2.17, 3.3.10, 3.4.3, 3.17.8). The aim of pleasure and privileging of luxury that characterize the tending of villa animals make it, like the modern luxury villas that Varro the author laments both in Book One and in the preface to Book Two (1.13.6-7, 2.Pr.2), evidence of contemporary moral turpitude.²⁹⁶

²⁹⁵ Marzano 2013: 87 highlights the connection between high production of luxury goods and low production of basic foodstuffs: "The production of these quality products [of the *pastio villatica*], stimulated by the demand of the large Roman market, went alongside the limited production of staple foods needed to feed the inhabitants of the metropolis."

²⁹⁶ Vocabulary solidifies the connection between villa herding and the modern luxury villa, for both the lavish pleasure villas typical of the day and the modern villa herder possessed *ornithones* ("aviaries") rather than the more staid and traditional *aviarii* (2.Pr.2, 3.3.7).

The innovations of the *pastio* are praiseworthy to the luxurious (*luxuriosi*), not to strict and morally good men (*severi boni viri*, 3.6.6).

3. The Pastio Politica

In part, the shift in the landscape that occurs over the course of the *dRR* is a visualization of the contemporary decline from the *mos maiorum* and the ideological baggage that attends this kind of perceived downslide—an expression of the sort of social problems that underlie Varro as Fundanius’ vilification of the modern villa. As such, Varro participates in the typical elite ideology that presents the ancestral ways—rural, useful, agricultural—as morally superior,²⁹⁷ and he uses the *pastio villatica* to highlight how Romans have gone wrong. While the social commentary that this provides is a useful if conventional addition to the compendium of such viewpoints abundant in the late Republic, the setting of the dialogue and its repeated invasions into the discourse of Book Three adds a political perspective to Varro’s portrayal of the *pastio*. Returning to the beginning of *dRR* 3, the interlocutors open their discourse by comparing the Villa Publica to a private villa, debating whether the former or the latter are richer in adornment (3.1.3-6). By treating the Villa Publica—a public and political space—as if it were somehow the equivalent of a private villa, the interlocutors effectively equate the villa of the state with the villas of individuals, thus inviting further associations between the state and the landscape of the villa that emerges in the discourse that follows.

But in addition to establishing the relationship between state and villa, this initial discussion about the relative merits of the Villa Publica and the private villa establishes that the outlook for both is negative. While Appius, the augur, argued that the Villa Publica was the best villa, insofar as it was free from adornment and was useful in administering the state, Axius took

²⁹⁷ For an overview of this ideology, see pp. 22-24.

the stand that the Villa Publica was worse than the private villas Appius contrasts it with, as it was both filled with costly delights and lacking in field and pasture. The two men are, essentially, using the filter of the villa to argue about the state of the state: does it more resemble the good villas of Appius' depiction that are simple and useful—the ancestral villa of Book One—or is it, like the modern luxury villas that Varro condemns in Books One and Two, useless and decadent? Does the state still provide useful services, or are pleasure and frivolities now the business of the day? Appius' de facto concession to Axius that the latter's private estate is a better villa than the Villa Publica is suggestive of the state's dysfunction without being decisive. By not explicitly admitting that he was wrong about the Villa Publica, but instead smiling and asking that Axius teach him what a villa is, Appius still leaves room for debate on how well and how uprightly the state is functioning.

This opening discussion establishes the significance of utility and luxury as criteria for determining the goodness of a villa. Adornment is fine so long as there is also practicality. Where the villa of the *pastio villatica* proves to be problematic is in its lack of balance between utility and refinement, the privileging of the latter at the expense of the former. Axius points to this same imbalance as the reason that the Villa Publica fails to be good—gaudiness without functionality, an implication that the business conducted there is just for show and not for benefit. In fact, “usefulness” earns little more than lip-service, for it is given a position of significance in their idealizing discourse that it lacks in the reality of the *pastio* and politics as the third book of the *dRR* lays them out. As the interlocutors present it, villa herding is a science that can make an estate a villa—the sort of activity that could turn Appius' seaside home or the Villa Publica into a real (read functional) villa. However, in continually foregrounding the extravagance—not the utility—connected with villa herding, Book Three suggests not only that

something is wrong with the *pastio*, but also that something has shifted in the understanding of what a villa is.

If an estate that has no agriculture or husbandry beyond the luxurious *pastio* can still be called a villa, then perhaps the definition of villa as luxury residence rather than practical farm is the go-to meaning—regardless of what the interlocutors claim for the importance of practicality at the start of the book. The modern villa, with its extravagant *pastio*, represents the way things are now for Varro and his contemporaries—with new ways of operating and a new set of priorities and new definitions for things. Yet this negative shift, wherein opulence replaces utility and profit derives from extravagance and the simple and functional ways of the ancestors no longer define Roman spaces or activity, does not just affect private citizens and their own affairs, but also implicates the state. The connection between the state and the villa that the opening sections of Book Three establishes also transfers these new and negative characteristics of the luxury villas to the Republic, indicating the state, like the villas of Book Three, is equally suspect morally, equally changed in its function and significance. Similarly, the same elements that Varro highlights as problematic in the modern villa—luxury, lack of utility, excess, and thus moral bankruptcy—become likewise the problems of today’s politics through the link the dialogue establishes.

Frequent interruptions to the flow of the dialogue remind the audience throughout the book of this association between state and villa, reestablishing the connection at strategic points in the text and further elucidating the tone of the political commentary. Having gathered at the start of Book Three at the Villa Publica to await the results of an aedile election, Varro and Co. embark upon their discussion of villa herding, during the course of which they pause or are stopped at four separate points for updates on the progress of the election. The first disruption

occurs following Varro's description of his pleasure aviary, when the interlocutors hear a shout in the Campus, and Pantuleius Parra—the bird of ill omen—informs them that somebody has been caught stuffing the ballot boxes and is being taken to the consul (3.5.18). Next, following the account of tending peafowl, Appius' aide brings him a summons from the consul, presumably to deal with the election fraud in his capacity as an augur (3.7.1). The third and briefest interruption brings Appius back onto stage, and after an exchange of information with the other interlocutors—the specifics of which Varro as author does not share with the readers—the men continue on to discuss hare warrens (3.12.1). Lastly, immediately after a lengthy account of beekeeping, Pavo returns to tell the men that the herald is about to announce the election results, and the interlocutors scatter, leaving only Axius and Varro to tack on a cursory explanation of the fishponds that is more flippant than informative. The dialogue ends with Axius and Varro heading to their separate homes after running into the aedile-elect with his crowd of followers and commending him in his victory (3.17.10).

The first and last interruptions are the two longest and most explicit, as they both mention the election specifically, unlike Appius' two disruptions, where the reader is left to infer (granted, without much difficulty) their political context. As the start and end points of the miniature political theater that the series of interruptions play out, the two exterior intrusions hold the positions of emphasis, offering definitive information—political corruption! election results in!—where the interior breaks hint at unspecified continued drama. It is undoubtedly not an accident that the two most significant interruptions in Book Three happen in immediate proximity to the accounts of the two parts of the *pastio* that entirely ignore profit in favor of pleasure—in other words, the two most problematic (from a moral standpoint) parts of villa herding. Varro's account of his pleasure aviary cuts off with the first announcement of the

election fraud, while the truncated account of saltwater fishponds is sandwiched between the news that election results are in and the men's congratulations to the victor. The contiguity between these heated political moments and the accounts of the *pastio* that most embody its worst qualities—uselessness, extravagance, and wastefulness—encourages the audience to read them together as mutually informative.

The political corruption at the heart of the first interruption offers an unflattering snapshot of the civic life of Rome, twisting the picture of citizens doing their public duty and participating in politics. While the crowd outside the Villa Publica cries out at the discovery of the fraud, our interlocutors remain surprisingly unflustered: Pavo alone reacts to Parra's information, because it was his candidate whose representative was caught stuffing the ballot box. The rest of the interlocutors continue on with the discourse as if they hadn't been interrupted at all, let alone by scandal. In the context of the dialogue, placement of the news of fraud immediately following Varro's aviary is significant, for it mirrors the placement of the discussion about villas that follows the earlier meeting of Appius' human aviary. The pleasure aviary has a symbolic tie in the text to the aviary of bird-citizens gathered in the Villa Publica at the start of the book, established through the anthropomorphizing environment with which Varro's birds are surrounded, from accouterments of a pleasure villa to those of an urban center.²⁹⁸ This connection between the real and the metaphorical aviaries likewise ties the fraud, interrupting the pleasure aviary as it does, back to the interlocutors' discussion of the Villa Publica. The men gathered in the Villa Publica immediately follow their assemblage into Appius' aviary (3.2.2) with a debate that calls into question the worth of the building as a villa. Similarly, an occurrence—the ballot stuffing—that calls into question political worth

²⁹⁸ For more on the link between the human aviary and the pleasure aviary in Book Three, see pp. 62 and 65-67 above, also Green 1997.

immediately follows the description of the pleasure aviary. The evidence of this corruption confirms the conclusion implied in the book's original debate: the state is not, at least at the moment, the right kind of villa.

The symbolic tie between Varro's aviary and the human aviary likewise makes it significant as commentary that Varro's aviary is a *pleasure aviary*. That the aviary to which the interlocutors most connect in the text is for pleasure alone and is extravagant—especially in addition to the textual conjunction to political fraud—is telling when looking back to the citizen aviary of the Villa Publica and the emphasis of the seeming contrast between utility and pleasure that makes up the conversation on its villa-ness. If the aviary of interlocutors is symbolically yoked to a useless pleasure aviary, that fact calls into question, by extension, the actual utility of the Villa Publica, offering one more piece of evidence that Appius' claims of utility for the Villa Publica do not hold weight. The Villa Publica, highlighted in the *dRR* in its connection to elections, fails in its utility if the elections are not honest and those waiting in its decorated halls await only doctored results. A fraudulent election is not properly functional, for through whatever corruption was employed to affect results it ceases to be, as it is supposed to, a useful gauge of the will of the Roman people. So just as the birds in the pleasure aviary serve no purpose beyond making the villa look good, the bird citizens in the Villa Publica have participated in a political event that turns out to be all appearances without functional substance.

The interlocutors' non-reaction to the news of the ballot-stuffing furthers this impression. First, the degree of nonchalance with which our elite interlocutors respond to the news is highlighted by the uproar with which the throng outside responds. Indeed, the crowd reacts in a manner more in line with what a reader might expect given the circumstances. But the noise they create seems to have no greater purpose in the text than as a means for alerting the interlocutors

that *something* has happened and a way to throwing their relative indifference into sharp relief. Their non-reaction is marked by the contrast. In returning without discussion or fuss to their dialogue, the men enact the very same notion that the book as a whole is arguing: the modern tendency to privilege pleasure and disregard utility. The Villa Publica was the place the interlocutors chose to spend the leisure time they have on election day, where they wait until there is something else to do (3.2.1)— for like a private villa, the public villa is simultaneously a place of respite and of work. In choosing to continue their activity of leisure and pleasure, namely their discourse on the *pastio*, the interlocutors as a whole effectively ignore the call to activity. They stay in the elaborately adorned Villa Publica and demonstrate through their general lack of action that it does indeed lack *membra rustica*.

Finally, in the greater context of the late Republic, the non-reaction of the interlocutors lends an air of normality to the election fraud, turning it into something not worth being scandalized by or upset about. Indeed, when the interlocutors do give attention to the fraud, they act and discuss it with an unconcerned composure. Upon hearing the announcement, Pavo rises (*surgit*), and Varro does not specify any action or reaction beyond this simple movement, leaving the reader to infer that Pavo leaves to attain more information (3.5.18). Similarly, Varro does not state in the text that Appius departs to deal with election matters, but instead implies that he leaves by stating that he received a summons from the consul (and, indeed, Varro does not even make explicit that the summons was related to the fraud; 3.7.1). In both cases, the departure is not acknowledged or commented upon by the remaining interlocutors, who continue their discussion as if nothing had changed. Likewise, at the only point when the men discuss the election fraud, Varro presents it as little more than an equal exchange of information—Appius' news in return for a *pastio* recap—again without detail or emotion from author or play-actors

(3.12.1). So even while these moments in which the election intrudes into the discourse are noticeable and noteworthy to the reader, Varro manages to marginalize the significance of the fraud to the interlocutors by minimalizing their response.

The text's treatment of the fraud as an everyday occurrence rather than as shameful corruption calls to mind the rampant reports of election tampering that were prevalent in the final few decades of the Republic.²⁹⁹ According to the intellectual elite, the appalling state of the state, as manifested in the political changes and misconduct and venality of the day,³⁰⁰ was inherently linked to (if not a product or symptom of) the ascendancy of luxury and excess.³⁰¹ The problem for Romans as a people and Rome as a society and a state is that utility has been shoved aside for the sake of pleasure and profit devoid of utility. So when Varro places the electoral interruptions in *dRR* 3 next to the accounts of those parts of the *pastio* that most embody its modern negative associations with excess and uselessness, he creates for the attentive reader a parallel between the problems of the *pastio* (and the modern approach to farming and herding more broadly) and

²⁹⁹ Diederich 2007: 184 calls ballot stuffing “an outgrowth of the sprawling *ambitio* of the time. The addition of six laws specifically against electoral corruption (*leges ambitus*) in a thirty year span at the end of the Republic attests to either the heightened prevalence of such fraud or a heightened concern about it: the *lex Cornelia de ambitu* of 81 (Schol. Bob. 78), the *Calpurnia de ambitu* of 67 BCE (Ascon. 69b, 75c-76a, 88b), the *rogatio Cornelia de ambitu* of 67 BCE (Cass. Dio 36.38), the *lex Tullia de ambitu* of 63 BCE (Cic. *Mur.* 2.3, 23.46-47, 32.67, 41.89), the *rogatio Aufidia de ambitu* of 61 BCE (Cic. *Att.* 1.16), and the *lex Pompeia de ambitu* of 52 BCE (App. *B. Civ.* 2). For more on electoral corruption at the end of the Republic, see Lintott 1990 and Gruen 1995: 211–224. Finlay 1983, 51 advises caution in identifying something as corruption: “Canvassing, persuasion, exchange of services, rewards and benefits, alliances and deals are the essential techniques of politics in real life, in every known political society, and the line between corruption and non-corruption is not only extremely difficult to draw but also shifts according to the observer’s ethical system.”

³⁰⁰ Which Varro criticizes in several Menippean fragments (frgg. 450ff. Astbury and 497ff. Astbury).

³⁰¹ See, e.g., Cic. *Att.* 1.18.2-3; Sall. *Cat.* 10.1; Livy 39.6-7. Both Sallust and Livy trace the roots of the joint degradation of politics and morality in Rome in the 1st C. BCE to the 2nd C., and the same moral/political concerns appear in the writings of men from the 2nd C. (e.g., Scipio frgg. 17-26; Cato frgg. 94, 96, 112, 141, 145, 146, 185). See Earl 1967: 17–23 for the close link between morality and Roman views on politics.

those of the state: as in husbandry, so too in the state. The repeated juxtaposition of the electoral business with the worst parts of the *pastio* suggests that, even though the fraud itself is presented in the text without much outrage or commentary, it embodies the same sort of modern problems that aviaries and fishponds reveal.

The end of Book Three is particularly suggestive in this respect, as it combines numerous political references, the ambiguous close of the election, and the part of the villa husbandry—fishponds—that most conspicuously displays the purposelessness, wastefulness, and prodigality of the modern approach to farming. Significantly, much of Axius’ account of fishponds is anecdotal rather than instructional, composed of numerous tidbits about the ponds of notable contemporaries: Gaius Lucilius Hirrus (3.17.3), Quintus Hortensius (3.17.5-8), Marcus Lucullus (3.17.8), Lucius Lucullus (3.17.9), and Julius Caesar (3.17.2). For most of these men, Varro addresses at length their dedication to their fishponds, expounding upon the excessive outlay of time and money that allows these men to maintain and attend to the *piscinae* and the fish they hold. In the process, the single-minded focus that these men display for their fishponds comes off as ridiculous and misguided, giving the undeniable impression that their energies are egregiously misplaced; the implication is that these men of public standing are neglecting the Republic, a concern that Cicero more directly expressed to Atticus more than twenty years earlier (*Cic. Att.*

1.18.6):

Sed interea πολιτικὸς ἀνὴρ οὐδ’ ὄναρ quisquam inveniri potest; qui poterat, familiaris noster (sic est enim; volo te hoc scire) Pompeius togulam illam pictam silentio tuetur suam. Crassus verbum nullum contra gratiam. Ceteros iam nosti; qui ita sunt stulti ut amissa re publica piscinas suas fore salvas sperare videantur.

But meanwhile no political man or dream can be found; for he who could be—our friend (for so he is, I wish you to know this), Pompey—defends his little embroidered toga with silence. Crassus says nothing that is damaging to the favor he has. The others you know already; they are so foolish that they seem to trust that even with the Republic lost their fishponds will be safe.

The passage suggests that men who could or should be πολιτικοί ἄνδρες are too tied up in their fishponds to notice or care about the declining state of the Republic. Cicero lives in a Rome without true politicians—men whose motivation is the state itself—because everybody now has a personal goal and focus that is external to the Republic: personal power, public favor and opinion, or fishponds.³⁰²

In Cicero's writing, the mention of fishponds becomes a sort of shorthand for the diseased Republic and the negligence of men who should be politicians.³⁰³ As such, fishponds are not so much problematic in and of themselves as they are a handy signifier of several perceived social ills. In acting as a marker simultaneously of excess and of political neglect, *piscinae* become inherently politicized, even in a less overtly political text such as the *dRR*. With this background in mind, Varro's account of fishponds becomes a suggestive attack on the publically significant figures he names, men whose obsession with fishponds necessarily means the Republic and her health are being ignored.

The framing that the election drama provides to Axius' summary of this last part of the *pastio* stresses the association between the *piscinae* and the damaged state. Before Axius gives Varro his description of the fishponds as the conclusion to the interlocutors' discourse, Pavo, who had left the conversation and the Villa Publica at the announcement of the ballot-box stuffing (*dRR* 3.5.18), returns to inform the men that the herald was announcing the results of the election (3.17.1). Strikingly, the occurrence of the fraud is not mentioned, and the reader is left unsure how the situation was dealt with and what impact it had on the results of the election; the

³⁰² As Takács 2009: 25 remarks, "Political reality of the late Republic was that individuals and their interests superseded those of the community."

³⁰³ See also Cic. *Att.* 1.19.6, 1.20.3, 2.1.7. As Sokolov 2008: 264 remarks of Cicero's use of the insult *piscinariii* of the rich elites, the implication is that people who maintained fish ponds (*piscinae* or *vivaria*) at their palaces or their opulent villas around the Bay of Naples were effete valetudinarians who neglected their responsibilities as political leaders."

interlocutors never ask. They are happy to congratulate their candidates and go home (3.17.1, 10). The ambiguity of the election is troubling, for the possibility remains that the ballot stuffing was successful in altering the results of the election, while the lack of reaction and concern and comment from the interlocutors suggests that it does not really matter one way or the other.³⁰⁴

The potential that—beyond an attempt at fraud merely occurring—the election results were fraudulent becomes especially significant given both the dramatic date of the *dRR* 3 and Varro’s mention of Julius Caesar in his account of the *piscinae*. Set in 50 BCE, Book Three of the *dRR* depicts the last elections before Caesar crossed the Rubicon, the last year of the Republic in which a censorship and free elections were held.³⁰⁵ As the implementer of this shift in at the very least the appearance of the sanctity of elections—perhaps what might be called the straw that revealed the Republic’s back was on the verge of cracking if not in fact already irrevocably broken—Julius Caesar’s presence in Varro’s fishponds is particularly noteworthy. Early in his account, Axius relates an anecdote that Julius Caesar borrowed 2,000 lampreys from one Croesus-like salt-pond owner (3.17.3).³⁰⁶ This tidbit ostensibly serves no greater purpose than to demonstrate that the elite spend an immense amount of money to maintain their *piscinae* and that they do so on an elaborate scale, maintaining fishponds extensive enough to allow the “loan” (*mutua dedisse*) of so many fish, while it also shows Julius Caesar as a participator in fishpond culture and a beneficiary of it. On a literal level, as a recipient of so many lampreys, he exemplifies the excess of the times and the desire for luxury goods over simpler products.

³⁰⁴ In contrast, and in my opinion incongruously with the text, Diederich 2007: 184 views the electoral victory with which Book Three ends as a positive close to the work.

³⁰⁵ Tatum 1992: 197. Following Caesar’s return to Rome in 49, he took control of the elections (directing who was nominated as well as implementing them as he saw fit) to varying degrees until his assassination. See, e.g., Suet. *Iul.* 41, 76; Dio Cass. 42.20, 43.33, 43.46, 43.51; App. *B. Civ.* 2.122; Cic. *Phil.* 2.79.

³⁰⁶ Pliny maintains that the loan was of 6,000 lampreys (*HN* 9.171).

Whether he himself owns fishponds or not (and Axius does not say), Caesar demonstrates that the threat the fishponds pose, their problematic qualities, are not limited to the handful of people who can afford to possess and maintain them; they are not the cause of societal ills, but a symptom. But the anecdote is even more suggestive in view of the symbolic ties between *piscinae* and political decline. In this context, in receiving the bounty of Hirrus' fishponds, Julius Caesar becomes the beneficiary of the ailing Republic, and like the men who neglect the state in favor of their ponds, he and his two thousand eels further destroy the Republic he should be mending.

Based on the Republican ideology that underlies the problem Varro identifies in the *dRR*, the solution to this state of affairs should be straightforward: a return to the *mos maiorum*, staple foodstuffs instead of luxury goods, rustic villas instead of urban dwellings, utility over extravagance, orchards instead of aviaries. In the world Varro has constructed, there is room for pleasure as well as utility, luxury as well as simplicity—so long as one's priorities are correct. Romans need not abandon their pleasure villas so long as there is balance. An optimist might therefore believe that balance is all that is needed to fix the state as well. Yet Varro never prescribes any solutions to the problems he diagnoses, and in closing with the fishponds that are most emblematic of all the issues facing the Republic and the ambiguous conclusion of a fraudulent election, the dialogue seems anything but optimistic. Perhaps it is too late to save the Republic, and in offering his view on where Rome has gone wrong, Varro is doing what he can to explain why.

Conclusion

In the *dRR*, the natural world is the playground of the instructions of Books One and Two, and in these books, the farmer and the large animal herder both work within the parameters of nature in

order to survive and succeed. While they do put a human mark on the land, through buildings and animal pens and the tilling of the earth, they nevertheless fit their presence to what the landscape itself demands. But the husbandmen of the first two books of the *dRR* also utilize the natural landscape, deriving benefit from it for themselves and their crops and their animals, and as such, the natural landscape that characterizes Books One and Two is also a landscape of profit derived from utility. Yet Varro shifts all of this in Book Three, where the landscape is no longer natural but is now manufactured, where the aim is no longer utility but is now pleasure, and where the products produced are no longer useful but are a symbol of the detrimental luxury that pervades Rome.

Through moralizing passages lamenting the *luxus* of modern villas and modern Romans, Varro reveals that the change that occurs between the first two books of the *dRR* and the last is a product of deterioration, simultaneously a moral shift and a temporal one. Where *dRR* 1 and 2 present the sort of rustic and natural and useful landscapes that demarcate a space as traditionally Roman—the sort of space the farmer-statesmen of old would inhabit—and representative of the *mos maiorum*, Book Three’s manmade and extravagant and frivolous landscape reflects the harmful way that Romans shape their space now. In other words, the landscape of the villa—the constructed landscape of *dRR* 3—is a landscape of loss and moral turpitude, one that reflects how Romans now are divorced from the *mos maiorum*. And by connecting the state to the private villa (via the *Villa Publica*), Varro also makes these shifts in scenery and profit an expression of the Republic’s decay. Remembering the analogy between Rome and the villa, and Italy and the estate, that the conjunction of the three prefaces and settings create, Books One and Two indicate the type of villa and estate that Rome and Italy should be, while Book Three presents that type of villa that Rome has, to its detriment, become.

Chapter Three: Controlling the Chaos

While the shift from a more natural to a more constructed landscape reveals something significant about the ends to which man imposes on the landscape, and these shifting goals of land use reflect a moral and political decline in the Roman elite, the need to control underlies humans' agricultural and pastoral interactions with the land—regardless of whether they modify the scenery as little as possible or fill it with artifice, of whether utility or pleasure drives them. On a basic level, success in these rural endeavors relies upon the farmer's or herdsman's ability to manipulate land and animals effectively, to tame and dominate, to have a greater hold on the landscape than do nature and all her vagaries. Without power over the natural environment and circumstances, the farmer and herdsman likewise lose the power they have over their occupational success—most significantly manifested in the profit of their enterprise. Thus, control can be seen as a way to minimize through order the inherent risks of working in nature: because humans must battle the world around them for control, by imposing order on what naturally lacks it, the landowner reclaims power over his livelihood from the whims of fortune and the dangers of nature. In Hesiod's *Works and Days* and Virgil's *Georgics*, it is the divine order of Zeus and Jupiter that humans must negotiate for this control.³⁰⁷ In Varro's *dRR*, the order and control is human, found in and expressed through both *ratio* (calculation, method, or

³⁰⁷ In the *Works and Days*, it is the order of Zeus that determines human success or failure (*WD* 3-4). The farmer flourishes by understanding and following that order as it is expressed through the other gods and through the cosmos. See Nelson 1998: 44–48, 107–110. In the *Georgics*, Jupiter introduces the age of *labor* for the benefit of humanity (*Geo.* 1.121-46), and divine law and religion govern human activity (1.269-78). For the complexities of the order of Jove in the *Georgics*, see Johnston 1980: 70–71; Nelson 1998: 111–113; and Nappa 2005: 230–231. Kronenberg 2009: 133–144, 158–159 argues that the divine order and *religio* at work in the *Georgics* ultimately fail at mastering nature within the poem.

reason), which Varro recommends we follow rather than chance (*alea*, *dRR* 1.18.8), and *scientia* (knowledge or science), which improves odds for the farmer (1.4.4).

Human control, expressed through order, is the counterpoint to the chaos and potentially destructive effects of nature. As such, it has a logical place in agronomic discourse, and—as many scholars have pointed out—the desire for and expression of control are an inherent part of landscape.³⁰⁸ Yet the discourse of order and chaos, domination and destruction, often has broader, symbolic implications. Scholars have long noted the pervasiveness of these themes in Virgil’s *Georgics*, but the obviously literary nature of the four book poem has led most to see the dichotomies mentioned above as part of the work’s larger commentary on non-agricultural issues: mankind’s place in the universe,³⁰⁹ the conflict and connection between civilization and nature,³¹⁰ yearning for moral order in a chaotic world,³¹¹ the state of society and political life in the late Republic,³¹² and the chaos and destruction of civil war and the order and peace that follows.³¹³ Virgil’s utilization of the symbolic potential found in the issue of control over the landscape conforms to a broader tendency in Roman discourse—literary, visual, and

³⁰⁸ Cosgrove 1984: 18: “in landscape we are offered an important element of personal *control* over the external world.” Andrews 1999, 4, defining how we understand the term “landscape” in regards to its visual aspect, says “A landscape, then, is what the viewer has selected from the land, edited and modified in accordance with certain conventional ideas about what constitutes a ‘good view’. It is land organized and reduced to the point where the human eye can comprehend its breadth and depth within one frame or short scan.” Leach 1988: 79 similarly argues, in regards to Roman landscape, that “the depiction of space...fixes a relationship between the spectator and his environment that indicates man’s confidence in his capacity for organization and control.” Spencer 2006: 243 reads ‘nature’ discourse as “intrinsically about control on every level;” and Spencer 2010: 15 more explicitly claims that “controlling nature is central to what landscape means in ancient Rome.” For specific, albeit non Classical, examples of the correlation between landscape and the expression of control or power, see, e.g., Mitchell 1994b; Mitchell 1994a; Bermingham 1994; and Cosgrove and Daniels 1988: 8.

³⁰⁹ See, e.g., Nappa 2005: 12

³¹⁰ See, e.g., Nelson 1998: 152–154

³¹¹ See, e.g., Kronenberg 2009: 159–166

³¹² See, e.g., Thibodeau 2011: 74–76

³¹³ See, e.g., Nappa 2005: 115, 143; Kronenberg 2009: 138, 145

conceptual—to express national or political dominance (and their right to it) through the demonstration of power over nature and the land.³¹⁴ Varro similarly taps into this trope and, like Virgil, uses the microcosm of the farm (and the pasture) to talk about the state.

In this chapter, I explore the issue of human order and control of the landscape in the *dRR*, examining the significance of order and control within the text and the social and political implications that emerge from the complicated portrait of power presented in the dialogue. In the course of the *dRR*, Varro depicts the successful husbandman as one who shapes the landscape to his needs, creating the environment necessary for the salubrity, productivity, and profitability of land and animals, while also controlling movement in and through the landscape and directing the interactions between animals and land. Throughout the text, Varro and his fellow interlocutors build up an image of idealized control, by means of comments, scenes, and instructions that make the manipulation of nature to one's will seem natural, easy, or a matter of course.

Yet simultaneously woven into the dialogue is a bleaker vision of nature that belies as simplistic the notion that taking and having control is easy, and a tension between the ideal of control and the reality of it pervades the text. Through vocabulary choices, character names, namedropping, and intrusion of scene into the dialogue, Varro reveals that the question of agronomic control in the text mirrors a similar dichotomy between political order and chaos. Specifically, the ideal of control in Roman politics, whereby the Roman elite (the landowning

³¹⁴ So, for instance, the prominence of the globe (celestial or terrestrial) on Roman coins, esp. in the first century BCE as a representation of universal Roman domination (see Nicolet 1991: 35–36); roads as both functional means of transport and symbols of Rome's unification of the world and her power over other cities and nations (see Laurence 1999, 18–26); geographical writing and map-making as displays of global knowledge and control (see Nicolet 1991, esp. 110–114; Rutledge 2012: 193–220); and the importation of foreign plants and animals to Rome as icons of the State's taming of various lands and people (see French 1994: 216; Murphy 2004: 131, 160–163).

farmers and herdsman), collectively control the state conflicts with the new reality, where the many landowning elite have lost control to fewer, power hungry individuals. The shift from a natural to a manmade landscape—from utility to luxury—that we saw in the last chapter reflected a change in the political values practiced by individuals during the last century of the Republic, when the literary elite pointed to the privileging of personal interests and personal gain (pleasure and luxury) over the interests of the state (utility) in politics as the downfall of the state. Similarly, the detachment between ideal and real control in the *dRR* might be viewed as a representation of the result of that collective shift in individual political ethos—the consolidation of power into fewer hands. When the *object* of power is no longer a matter of concern for those seeking it, not only do those who should, or rather who used to, have power lose out, but—more importantly—so does the Republic. Ideally, the Roman elite, the farmer-statesman, would have a comfortable hold over his land and a portion of the control over Italy as nation; but in the reality of the first century BCE, this dream has been shattered, and Italy as a nation has suffered for it.

1. Natural Order: Control by Consent

As a text, the *dRR* is greatly, if not always explicitly, concerned with the concept of control. Throughout the dialogue, Varro, through his interlocutors, demonstrates the centrality of control in a variety of forms. In their discussions of the three branches of husbandry, the dialogue's participants depict control as readily obtainable by, if not inherent to, Roman farmers, who can (and do) manage and manipulate and dominate their land and animals for their own purposes and profit. Their control is either granted by nature or obtained through knowledge, and is visually evident in the physical order they create in their farming or herding, while the financial success that they achieve in their fields and flocks is—at least in the world of the *dRR*—the ultimate

proof (and aim) of successful control.³¹⁵ Yet while the interlocutors actively, if sometimes obliquely, assert an ideal of control, inconsistencies in the text and inadequate or impractical instructions reveal that the idealized control peddled by the participants falls short of reality. In the following sections, I examine how Varro and the interlocutors demonstrate different kinds of control and how the text itself ultimately breaks down their vision of power.

A. Idealized Beginnings

In the lead up to discussion of farming in Book One, the interlocutors gathered in the *Aedes Telluris* discuss the natural bounty of the Italian country while gazing at the *picta Italia*. According to them, Italy is both the most cultivated land (*Ego vero, Agrius, nullam [terram] arbitror esse quae tam tot sit culta*, 1.2.3), and the most fit for cultivation (*Dicendum utique Italiam magis etiam fuisse opportunam ad colendum quam Asia*, 1.2.4), while every useful foodstuff is not only born in Italy but also grows there exceptionally (*Contra quid in Italia utensile non modo non nascitur, sed etiam non egregium fit?* 1.2.6). As discussed in Chapter One, the interlocutors describe Italian soil as naturally productive while still clearly linking its abundant yield and extensive cultivation to human involvement.³¹⁶ In this passage, the men use terms of tilling (*cultus* and *consita*) and those of natural production (*nascor* and *fio*) seemingly interchangeably; as a result, they naturalize cultivation.³¹⁷ The passage has the further result of making human control over the land *natural*: productivity is an accord between the Italian soil and her Roman caretakers, evidence of the landscape sanctioning the farmer's control. In other words, the picture the interlocutors create is not of control that is hard-won by forcefully working the land into submission, earned by knowledge (*scientia*) that lessens the risks (*alea*) of farming

³¹⁵ Since profit is the primary goal of farming and herding: *dRR* 1.4.1, 2.

³¹⁶ See pages p. 85 above.

³¹⁷ For more on the vocabulary in this passage, see pp. 96-97 above.

(as Scrofa would have it at 1.4.4). Instead, it is a control born both of the earth herself and of Italy's beneficent and beneficial relationship with her farmers. No dangers, no risks—just bounty, and an idyllic country painted with a golden age brush.³¹⁸

The interlocutors' discussion of Italy's bounty not only naturalizes agricultural control and success, but also *nationalizes* the symbiotic relationship between land and landowner, making cultivation and the control necessary to succeed in it not only natural but also expressly Roman. The passage begins in praising Italy, which the speakers declare of all the nations to be the land most blessed in climate and location, and thus the most cultivated and cultivatable: Italy is healthier and more temperate than Asia and Europe (1.2.4) and more productive than even the famously abundant Phrygia and Argos (1.2.7). But if excellence and ease of cultivation are the *métier* of Italy, then the effortless control that farmers enjoy is also particularly Italian—or, rather, Roman: Romans have a natural control over the land. Within the passage itself, this nationalizing of the question of control finds expression in the way the speakers turn the diverse regions of the Italian peninsula into a brief catalogue of Italian abundance (1.2.6):

Contra quid in Italia utensile non modo non nascitur, sed etiam non egregium fit? Quod far conferam Campano? Quod triticum Apulo? Quod vinum Felerno? Quod oleum Venafro? Non arboribus consita Italia, ut tota pomarium videatur? An Phrygia magis vitibus cooperta, quam Homerus appellat ἀμπελόεσσαν, quam haec? Aut tritico Argos, quod idem poeta πολύπυρον? In qua terra iugerum unum denos et quinos denos culleos fert vini, quot quaedam in Italia regiones?

On the other hand, what useful thing not only is not born in Italy, but does not also grow outstandingly? What spelt shall I compare to that of Campania? What wheat to Apulian? What wine to Falernian? What olive oil to that of Venafrum? Is not Italy so sown with trees that the whole of her seems to be an orchard? Is Phrygia, which Homer calls *rich in vines*, more wholly covered in vines than here? Or Argos, which the same poet calls *rich in*

³¹⁸ Cf. to Virgil's Praise of the Farmer at *Georgics* 2.458-540, where he similarly depicts farming as requiring minimal effort from the farmer, who lives in a world of golden age bounty. See Kronenberg 2009: 160. As Evans 2008: 24 points out "smooth and productive landscapes" are aligned in the Roman imagination with "harmony and tranquility."

grain, in wheat? In which land does one *iugerum* bear ten and fifteen cullei of wine, as certain regions in Italy do?

In this demonstration of Italian productivity by example, Fundanius brings his fellow speakers and the audience on a miniature tour of Italy—Campania and the *Falernus ager* in central Italy, where many wealthy Romans owned villas; Apulia in the heavily colonized south-eastern part of the peninsula; and *Venafrum ager*, a Samnite city on the border between Latium and Campania. But in doing so with comments only upon their agricultural offerings, and by collecting them under the heading of bountiful Italia, Fundanius unifies what were in fact regions with distinct cultures, ethnicities, and identities.³¹⁹ In the *dRR*, agriculture is an expression of cohesion, a way of exhibiting the relatively recent unification of Italy—through the extension of citizenship to Italian allies and colonies—in 90 BCE.³²⁰

This passage effectively presents Italy as if the peninsula were the landholdings of a Roman villa, with its regions like the various fields of a farm, producing different crops—spelt and wheat and grapes and olives. All of Italy (*tota Italia*) is an orchard (*pomarium*, 1.2.6), while Rome and her farmer citizens (men such as the agriculturally named interlocutors, as well as the Catones and Cincinnati of the day) maintain an easy control that is expressed through the harmony and productivity exhibited in this idealized portrait of a cultivated Italy. In the *dRR*, the villa is a metaphor for the state, and so in this passage cultivation, control, and national unity become inextricably linked and inherently politicized, displaying how Varro and his interlocutors use agricultural control—control over the land and nature—as a filter for exploring Roman power in general. The political undertones are even more evident when Fundanius also includes

³¹⁹ Spencer 2010: 73, who also notes that Varro leaves out any sense of distinct Italian cultures, argues that “diverse Italian local identities disappear once their landscapes are rezoned as Rome, from a Roman perspective, and regions are redefined in terms of quintessential crops rather than unique ethnoscaples.”

³²⁰ For more on the expansion of citizenship and the development of a “unified” Italy, see Bispham 2007.

as an exemplar of Italian fertility the district of Faventia, located not in Italia, but rather in Roman Cisalpine Gaul (1.2.7). The Social War united the peninsula south of the Po River through the extension of Roman citizenship, but officially designated Cisalpine Gaul, the part of Italy north of the Po and the Rubicon, a Roman province³²¹—part of the Roman empire, yet still separate. But in including Faventia, an area that Fundanius praises for its high yields of wine, Varro makes the easy and ample productivity under discussion not simply the benefit of a place—*Italia*—blessed with the ideal position and climate, but also a product of national association, of Roman control.

The tone of this passage is idealizing, depicting farming as simultaneously natural and easy, and success—at least for the Roman farmer—is seemingly guaranteed. By using an idealized and naturalized portrayal of Italian farming as a stepping stone to the remainder of the dialogue, the interlocutors also set the tone for the instructions that follow.³²² If the world they create here, sitting in a temple to the god of the earth, with their agricultural names—another way of naturalizing control by equating these Romans with the earth itself³²³—if it is one where success is certain, then their instructions for the Roman farmer do little to suggest that there might be real dangers and difficulties for a man in the land, as we will see in more detail below. In this model of farming, control and all that comes with or from it is a given for the denizens of Romulus' city. The interlocutors of Book One are not alone in using an idealized take on their subject matter as a way both to set up the subsequent discourse and to establish its tone. In Books Two and Three, the speakers similarly present romanticized versions of large animal and villa

³²¹ Cisalpine Gaul was incorporated into Italy in 42 BCE, a date that is likely earlier than the composition date of the *dRR* (ca. 37 BCE), but later than the probable dramatic date of Book One (43 BCE). See pp. 43-49 above.

³²² As Beagon 1992: 161 says of the *Picta Italia*, it is “a visual metaphor for the entire book, which invites the reader to contemplate Varro’s representation of the fertile Italian countryside.”

³²³ For more on the significance of the names in the *dRR*, see pp. 68-82 above.

herding as lead-ins to the discourse proper, as a means of demonstrating the ease with which Romans can control their success by controlling their land and animals.

Where Book One naturalizes control by making the land itself a willing—indeed, eager—party to its own cultivation and productivity, Book Two naturalizes control by making herding intrinsic to being human in general, and Roman more specifically. At the beginning of his explication of the origin and dignity of large animal herding, with which the interlocutors of Book Two begin their discourse on its science, Varro explains that pastoralism developed in the second stage of the rustic ages of man (2.1.3-4).³²⁴

necesse est humanae vitae ab summa memoria gradatim descendisse ad hanc aetatem, ut scribit Dicaearchus, et summum gradum fuisse naturalem, cum viverent homines ex his rebus, quae inviolata ultro ferret terra, ex hac vita in secundam descendisse pastoriciam, e feris atque agrestibus ut arboribus ac virgultis decerpendo glandem, arbutum, mora, poma colligerent ad usum, sic ex animalibus cum propter eandem utilitatem, quae possent, silvestria deprenderent ac concluderent et mansuescerent. In quis primum non sine causa putant oves assumptas et propter utilitatem et propter placiditatem; maxime enim hae natura quietae et aptissimae ad vitam hominum. Ad cibum enim lacte et caseum adhibitum, ad corpus vestitum et pelles adtulerunt. Tertio denique gradu a vita pastorali ad agri culturam descenderunt, in qua ex duobus gradibus superioribus retinuerunt multa, et quo descenderant, ibi processerunt longe, dum ad nos perveniret.

It is necessary that [people and flocks] have descended from the earliest memory of human life step by step to this age, as Dicaearchus writes, and that the earliest step was that of nature, when humans lived on those things, which the untouched earth brought forth voluntarily; from this age they descended into the second, the pastoral, when just as they collected for use acorns, arbutus, blackberries, and fruit by picking them from wild and uncultivated trees and bushes, so also they captured, contained, and tamed what wild animals they could for the same benefit. Some think not without reason that among these, sheep were taken first, both on account of their usefulness and on account of their gentleness: for they are by nature most docile and most fit to mankind's way of life. For to his food, they added milk and cheese, to his body they gave clothing and pelts. Finally, in the third stage they descend from the pastoral life to the cultivation of the land, in which age they retained much from the two earlier stages, and when they had

³²⁴ For a reading of this passage in terms of the *dRR*'s shift from natural to manmade, see pp. 97-99 above.

descended to which, there they continued for a long while until reaching our stage.

The golden age hues that the interlocutors of Book One use in their description of the Italian soil similarly imbues Varro's description of the early life of man here. While Varro indicates that the free giving of food by the goodwill of the earth was the first in a series of stages of man, and that humans have progressed from there, each step in human history is one of evolution, not devolution, building upon rather than losing what the previous stages offered (*in qua ex duobus gradibus superioribus retinuerunt multa*).³²⁵ In other words, the willingly productive earth that supported humans of her own accord in the infancy of the species can, in this schema, exist for man—and, if we are to believe the interlocutors of Book One, Italy herself proves that this is the case.

In addition to asserting that these steps in human history—the rustic ages of man—result in a human race that can simultaneously enjoy the benefits of a benevolently productive earth, and of pastoralism, and of agriculture, this origin story also depicts humans as increasingly dominant: each stage grants humans more control over their surroundings. In the first stage, the earth, untouched by humans, actively offers (*inviolata ultro ferre*) her produce for the survival and benefit of mankind. On one level, humans during this time are subject to the goodwill of the earth, dependent upon her munificence for their own survival—a scenario that means it is the land and not the people who have control. However, the idyllic nature of the period makes control irrelevant. While Varro's description of the natural stage is succinct and undetailed, it is still clearly identifiable as a kind of golden age and thus as part of a clearly characterized

³²⁵ Cf., however, to Varro's comments in the preface to Book Three, where Varro comes closer to the standard motif of Ages of Man as Stages of Decline when he laments the increasing abandonment of the country life—the only remains of Saturn's reign (i.e., the golden age)—for the city (*dRR* 3.1.4-5).

construct.³²⁶ In Roman literature, which follows closely from Greek depictions, golden ages are times of peace and harmony, when the earth provides humans with everything needed without their laboring for it, and mankind lives in safety and abundance, free from harm and hindrance by animals or by the elements.³²⁷ When there is no opposition to success, no threats or difficulties inherent in the quest for prosperity, control is unnecessary: it is only a factor when there is the potential for contention and imbalance, when humans must fight—land, animals, natural elements, or each other—for survival and superiority.

The control that is lacking in the first stage of human history appears in the second, when humans begin to pick and collect (*colligo*) their food, taking the active role where in the first stage the earth had the agency (she bears, *ferre*, produce for humans). Additionally—and, perhaps, more significantly in terms of control—humans begin to tame and keep (*deprendere*, *concludere*, *mansuescere*) animals during the second stage and consequently gain the benefit of products derived from domesticated herds. The second stage in the history of mankind is curious, then, because while it maintains the traditional trajectory seen in Ages of Man toward increased effort and agency on the part of humans, Varro’s version makes humans more active in the world without increasing their danger in it. He avoids the decline into more difficult and more dangerous conditions that marks each stage in most such accounts of the history of the

³²⁶ In their classic study on primitivism in antiquity, Boas and Lovejoy 1965: 1–4 would classify Varro’s golden age description here as one kind of “Chronological Primitivism”, which they define as “a kind of philosophy of history...as to the time—past or present or future—at which the most excellent condition of human life...must be supposed to occur.”

³²⁷ Boas and Lovejoy 1965 and Blundell 1986 both explore ideas of primitivism, evolution, and progress, including depictions of golden ages and golden races, in Greek and Roman texts. Zanker 2010: 498–501 provides a brief overview of golden ages in Greek and Roman literature, highlighting key features that they share. Evans 2008, esp. 1–92 explores the history of the golden age motif in great detail, exploring both the kinds of utopian landscapes that appear in Roman literature and its part in narratives of decline. Literary depictions of a golden age prior to the likely composition date of 37 BCE for the *dRR* include, e.g., Hes. *WD* 109-20; Arat. *Phaen.* 100-14; Virg. *Ec.* 4.37-45; Hor. *Epod.* 16.43-52.

human race. Instead, he seems to suggest that human control over their surroundings is a natural development because animals such as sheep are naturally docile (*placiditas*). In other words, domesticated animals—like the Italian soil of Book One—are inherently inclined to human subjugation. In Varro’s third stage, humans increase their own agency by adding cultivation of the land to their set of skills: now they are not only active choosers of the earth’s offerings (since they maintain elements of the first two stages in the third), but they can actively manipulate the earth to bring forth what produce they will. While Varro describes the agricultural stage in little detail here, it is far from difficult for his readers, given the positive tone of the passage as a whole, to picture this age as resembling the idealizing depiction of Italian farming and fecundity that a different set of interlocutors creates at the beginning of Book One (1.2.3-7).

In addition to establishing gained mastery over the landscape as a key part of the development of humanity, Varro also uses his opening account in Book Two to demonstrate the value, both financial and cultural, and pervasiveness of herding in civilized society (that is, among the Greeks and the Romans). As proof of the dignity of herding (*dignitas*, 2.1.6), Varro points to the prevalence of terms such as *polyarnae* (rich in flocks), *polymeli* (rich in sheep), and *polybutae* (rich in cattle) in Greek and Latin literature,³²⁸ the prominence of sheep in mythology, the number of herd animals represented in the constellations,³²⁹ and the abundance of places named for herd animals (2.1.6-9). Notably, the examples that Varro chose not only show that herding was demonstrably ubiquitous in Greek and Roman cultural expression, but they also

³²⁸ πολύρρην and πολυβούτης both appear twice in *Iliad* 9, describing the people dwelling in the seven cities that are part of Agamemnon’s proposed gifts for Achilles—their wealth in flocks and sheep means they can honor Achilles with gifts (*Il.* 9.154, 296). πολυμήλος appears at *Il.* 2.705 and 14.490, used to describe two different warriors. While these words appear in a few places in addition to this, they are not very common.

³²⁹ Varro includes the Ram and the Bull, noting that their position at the start of the Zodiac shows how honored herd animals were, and Capricorn, as well as the she-goat (*capra*), the kids (*haedi*) and the dogs (*canes*).

reveal that the animals are consistently conceptualized as objects of human control. For instance, the terms that Varro highlights from early poetry (*polyarnae*, “rich in sheep;” *polymeli*, “rich in flocks;” and *polybutae*, “rich in cattle”) are all used as epithets for men, and thus the significance of flocks, sheep, and herds lies in their status as possessions, as animals under a man’s mastery, and as signifiers of his wealth.

The particular stories that Varro mentions, in which individual sheep are central, likewise demonstrate the understanding that these animals are objects of men and sources of wealth. The connection between herding animals and wealth is made explicit in myth by rendering the sheep’s fleece golden (2.1.6): *Qui ipsas pecudes propter caritatem aureas habuisse pelles tradiderunt*, “And they have recounted that on account of their dearness the sheep themselves had golden pelts.” In the stories of golden sheep that Varro names, viz. that of Jason and Aetes, of Atreus and Thyestes, and of Hercules and the Golden Sheep (a variation of his labor of the Golden Apples based on the ambiguity of the Greek μῆλα), the very feature—the gold pelt—that underscores both the costliness and the financial benefit of herd animals also emphasizes the desire for and necessity of control. The golden sheep is an object, and the struggle to gain control over it becomes the linchpin of each of the stories: Jason’s quest is to retrieve the golden fleece from Aetes, who refuses to relinquish his prized possession.³³⁰ Thyestes steals Atreus’ golden lamb, which grants the power to rule to whoever has it.³³¹ As one of his labors, Hercules obtains from the Hesperides the golden sheep, whose divine protection—both the nymphs and a

³³⁰ For more detailed versions of Jason’s interactions with Aetes and the Golden Fleece, see, e.g., Pind. *Pyth.* 4 and Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 3.597-4.182.

³³¹ For the story of Atreus, Thyestes, and the Golden Lamb, see, e.g., Eur. *Or.* 812-13, 997-1000, Apollod. *Epit.* 2.10-11, and Sen. *Thy.* 220-245 Gantz 1993: 545–48 explores the different variations of this episode—many found in Scholia—in the context of the larger power struggle and feud between the two brothers.

dragon—demonstrates their preciousness.³³² These animals are too beneficial to humans, whether as sources of income or sources of pelts and foodstuff, for men not to (try to) control them, and the golden fleece that visually and tangibly mark the sheep in these myths as valuable also becomes a way for the players in these stories to demonstrate their importance and power, both physical (as with Hercules and Jason) and political (as with Aetes and Thyestes and Atreus).³³³

Where Varro's history of humans portrays the domestication of herd animals as an easy and natural process, the examples that Varro pulls from Greek and Roman society to show the nobility of herding, focusing on its prevalence and its worth, take for granted that humans control herd animals: the relationship between man and herd becomes inherent to both. In this way, the use of herding vocabulary as place names becomes doubly suggestive. Since names are significant, the frequency with which places have the names of herd animals attests that the Greeks and Romans honored pastoralism to a high degree (2.1.8-9). But in addition to demonstrating the central importance herding held in their societies, which point Varro himself explicitly makes, the use of animal names such as goat (*αἴγες*) in Aegean Sea or bull (*taurus*) for a mountain in Syria is a way to suggest that control of that place is natural. While naming a place to begin with is a way of staking claim, of exerting authority over that area, calling a place after an animal whose subjugation to man is accepted as natural can be seen as a means of conceptually bolstering that claim to local authority, suggesting that that space—like a goat or a bull—belongs by nature to the humans who possess it.

³³² For versions of Hercules' Eleventh Labor that feature Golden Sheep instead of Golden Apples, see Diod. Sic. 4.26.2-3 and Palaeph. 18, both rationalizing accounts of mythology.

³³³ Lorkipanidze 2001 argues that Golden Fleece in Jason's story, as well as the golden lamb of the House of Pelops, is seen as both a protector of and symbol of royal power (see esp. pp. 1, 3-4). See also Newman 2001.

But if herding is natural to humanity and inherent to culture and society, the Romans are thrice masters of herd animals, since Varro lastly claims that pastoralism is an indelible part of Romans as a people and Rome as a state (2.1.9):³³⁴

Romanorum vero populum a pastoribus esse ortum quis non dicit? Quis Faustulum nescit pastorem fuisse nutricium, qui Romulum et Remum educavit? Non ipsos quoque fuisse pastores obtinebit, quod Parilibus potissimum condidere urbem? Non idem, quod multa etiam nunc ex vetere instituto bubus et ovibus dicitur, et quod aes antiquissimum quod est flatum pecore est notatum, et quod, urbs cum condita est, tauro et vacca essent muri et portae definitum, et quod, populus Romanus cum lustratur suovitautilibus, circumaguntur verres aries taurus, et quod nomina multa habemus ab utroque pecore, a maiore et a minore...

Truly, who does not affirm that the Roman people sprang from shepherds? Who does not know that Faustulus, the guardian who brought up Romulus and Remus, was a shepherd? Will this not also prove that they themselves also were shepherds, that they settled the city exactly on the Parilia? Will the following not prove the same thing: that even now a fine is pronounced in accordance with the old custom in oxen and sheep, and that the oldest coined copper were marked with cattle, and that when the city was founded, the walls and the gates were given their limits by a bull and a cow, and that, when the Roman people are purified by the *suovitautilia*,³³⁵ a swine, a ram, and a bull are driven round, and that we have many names from both kinds of herding, from the larger and the smaller...

With this list that proves the depth of Rome's connectedness to herding—expressed here through the names of many Roman people and through the important role herding animals play in everything from finances to religion to the very walls of the city, and how shepherding is foundational to the Roman state, founded by shepherds who were raised by shepherds, built under the auspices of the shepherd's festival, and the protective limits demarcated by cattle—Varro again nationalizes control. Just as farming is a part of the Italian land, as Book One's

³³⁴ A traditional claim in Roman literature: see also Livy 2.1.3 and 5.53.9. For more on the connection between herding and Roman identity, see pp. 71-73 above.

³³⁵ The *Suovetautilia* was a lustral sacrifice consisting of a swine (*sus*), a sheep (*ovis*), and a bull (*taurus*). Cato describes the ritual used for private fields in his *de Agricultura* 141. For its use as a public lustration, see Livy 1.44.2. The *Suovetautilia* is also represented on several monuments, as is overviewed by Moede 2007: 170–71, 173–75.

passage in praise of Italy showed, herding is fundamental to Roman character and politics, the foundation upon which the state was raised.

Where the openings of Books One and Two idealize their respective sciences by suggesting, through golden age style depictions, that control over land and herds is natural and national, both a benefit of and essential to being Roman, Book Three instead introduces the *pastio villatica* through an idealized presentation of its exorbitant profits. After the interlocutors of the third book of the *DRR* have gathered at the Villa Publica, their debate concerning its merits as a villa and their questions concerning what even makes a place a villa leads the men to the topic of villa herding (3.2.7-18). First mentioned as a science whose practice qualifies as a type of husbandry and, thus, as sufficient for granting an estate villa status, the *pastio* is chiefly characterized by its ability to bring in extraordinary amounts of money. The introduction the interlocutors provide on villa herding before they embark on a full account consists of numerous “real life” examples that demonstrate the financial gain at stake. According to them, as a whole the *pastio* earns more than entire farms bring in (3.2.13, 15, 17), while even the tending of one villa animal can bring in a hefty profit. For instance, the aviary of Varro’s aunt earned her 60,000 sesterces in one year (3.2.15), while Cato’s fishponds grosses 40,000 (3.2.17), amounts high enough to elicit exclamations of surprise from Axius and encourage him to learn the science himself (3.2.15, 18).

While on the surface the profit-oriented opening to the dialogue on the *pastio villatica* seems more mercenary and less idyllic than those that introduced farming and large animal herding, all three ultimately underscore the same thing: how much humans (and Romans in particular) gain, and with what ease, from the land and animals. The farmers of Roman soil, through her willing consent to be sown, reap a high profit in crops—the *fructus of fructus*;

Roman herdsman gain foodstuffs and money through their natural and easy mastery of sheep and oxen. The benefit that the tenders of villa animals derive is, at least according to the interlocutors of Book Three, extravagant, quantifiable, and explicitly monetary. The openings of Books One and Two focus upon the harmonious relationship between mankind and the land and herds, which allows men to control the soil and animals with ease and to their own advantage, but the degree of its benefit to men is vague instead of explicit: Italy is simply *more*—more healthful, more fruitful, more temperate (*salubriora, fructuosiora, temperatiora* 1.2.3), more productive of any given number of crops (1.2.5-6), while the herds of Book Two *add* (*adferre*) to human bounty in both food and clothes (*ad cibum, ad corpus* 2.1.4) and cattle are proverbially—if not actually—the basis of all wealth (*omnis pecuniae pecus fundamentum*, 2.1.11).

On the other hand, the introduction of the *pastio* in Book Three focuses on the high profits it brings and presents numerous examples with the precise amounts earned in revenue—a precision that makes their depiction of the science’s fruitfulness seem more real and substantial—leaving the reader to infer, logically, that the estate owner here too enjoys a harmonious relationship with his property and an easy mastery of the animals under consideration. If successfully tending villa animals were difficult, the science would not be so astoundingly financially productive. As the interlocutors say, there is nothing to prevent Axius or anyone else from having the *pastio* of Seius (3.2.12), whose revenue from the *pastio villatica* alone exceeds what others make on their entire farms (*fundus*, 3.2.13). Indeed, according to this account, the only thing that threatens the high productivity of villa herding is not the health of the animals or weather conditions or the like, but rather a change in demand for the luxury products it provides, however unlikely such a change might be (3.2.16): *sed ad hunc bolum ut pervenias, opus ert tibi aut epulum aut triumphus.... Sed propter luxuriam, inquit, quodam modo epulum*

cotidianum est intra ianuas Romae, “Yet in order to get such a haul you will need either a banquet or someone’s triumph.... But on account of our extravagance, he said, after a fashion there is a banquet daily between the gates of Rome.”

In addition to idealizing the profitability and implied ease of the *pastio*, the interlocutors also suggest that the science has the remarkable ability to transform the productive potential of the land itself. During the initial description of the science of villa herding in Book Three, Appius mentions that he has his eye on the villa of Marcus Seius for sale near Ostia, but is concerned that the house does not have asses—in other words, farming or herding (3.2.7). The lack of husbandry on the estate confirms what its coastal location suggests: that the land itself is untenable for fertility and thus the villa in question is unproductive, at least in traditional ways.³³⁶ Yet the continued conversation makes it clear that far from being unprofitable, as one would expect of a villa unable to support farming or large animal herding, Seius’ Ostian villa in fact outstrips other farms in terms of its income, a fact due entirely to its utilization of the *pastio villatica* (3.2.13). The example of Seius’ villa demonstrates effectively that the *pastio* has the ability to make barren land fertile, to transform the fruitless into the fruitful, to turn a profit from nothing. In other words, the *pastio* frees men from the constraint of soil quality and natural fecundity. Through villa herding, the Roman estate owner gains a way to bypass nature herself and have control of his own land and (in this case extravagant) profit.

B. A disordered reality

On the surface, the *dRR*’s outlook—or, rather, the outlook of its interlocutors—is optimistic, yet the depiction of power is, of course, rose-tinted and one-sided at best and a pipe-dream at worst. For in each of these three openings, there is a tense duality, with the

³³⁶ As Purcell 1995: 153 notes, the coast of western Italy did not support the two traditional sources of villa profit, farming and herding.

foregrounded idealizing of the sciences of the husbandry on the one side, while bubbling just below the surface are evident inconsistencies and less positive features that suggest the ideal is not in fact real. The beginning of Book One idealizes the ease and fecundity of Italian farming, as well as the unification of *Italia* through both agriculture and politics, and thus the control at stake is not only the power a farmer has over his fields and produce but also the control Rome has over Italy. The idealized picture the interlocutors create as they talk in the Aedes Telluris is one of fruitful accord, where the Italian soil easily acquiesces to the manipulations of the Roman husbandman, and where the disparate parts of the Italian peninsula, through the uniting force of the Roman Empire, together provide Rome's citizens with all their daily needs of grain and oil and wine—not only the breadbasket of Rome, but her estate.

Yet the depiction of *Italia* as hyper-productive and harmoniously joined, while pleasant, blatantly ignores the more questionable realities of agriculture and Italian politics. For land and cultivation were at the root of many of the social and civil problems from at least the time of the Gracchi on, and in reality the Italian peninsula did not enjoy true accord nor was agriculture ever a unifying force. Agrarian laws and policies, which dealt with issues such as land distribution and the use of public fields, were contentious, first because it pitted the wealthy with their extensive landholding and mega-farms against both the poor and the soldiery hoping for land, and secondly because the laws and policies were created in Rome, thus privileging city-dwelling citizens (or those wealthy enough to travel back and forth) over their rural and Italian brethren, too poor or too busy to leave their farms. Such problems led to riots (such as that caused by the *lex Iulia agraria* in 59 BCE), assassinations (such as that of Tiberius Gracchus in 133 BCE), and

were a major factor in the Social War (App. *B. Civ.* 1.7-9).³³⁷ The turbulence of the history of land was only increased by powerful and ambitious generals/politicians, such as Sulla and Caesar and Pompey, who rewarded their soldiers with settlements, whether by looking to the Senate for land-grants from the *ager publicus*, by seeking a redistribution of land with or without compensation, or through proscription.³³⁸ Such practices guaranteed Sulla and co. their men's allegiance, but also incited enmity and stirred contention throughout Italy.³³⁹ In other words, the promise of land for veterans was a contributing factor to the pseudo-privatization of the soldiery that contributed to the Civil Wars and the collapse of the Republic. Finally, and not least significantly, the decades of civil war—first between Marius and Sulla, then Caesar and Pompey, and lastly between Antony and Octavian—which pitted city against city and region against region, depending upon what man each backed, belies the image of a harmoniously unified and idyllic Italy.³⁴⁰ Any Roman aware of these events would recognize the disparity between what the interlocutors here present and the more troubled reality.

³³⁷ Tilly 1973: 15–18 provides a brief history of the interplay between land use/distribution and Roman expansion/politics in the Republic. For the role of agrarian issues in the various social and civil conflicts of the last hundred years of the Republic, including redistribution of land to the poor, centuriation, and the disparity in political participation and representation between rural citizens and urban, see, e.g., Badian 1969, esp. 15-20; Vanderbroek 1987: 21, 96–97; Keaveney 1987; Quilici 1994; and Roselaar 2010. See also Frayn 1979: 81–87, who examines the impact of specific agrarian laws and events on small farms. For a summary, see also pp. 26-30 above.

³³⁸ For the role of land, veteran settlement, and the army in the lead up to the end of the Republic, see Broadhead 2007 and Keaveney 2007: 57–70.

³³⁹ Keaveney 2007: 61 makes this point explicitly of Octavian in the aftermath of his and Antony's proscriptions, but the same could logically be said of his political predecessors. See Rosenstein 2007 for the development of allegiance between commanders and their legions at the expense of the state and the significance of this shift in the power struggles of the late Republic. de Blois 2007 provides three case studies examining this same effect.

³⁴⁰ David 1996: 162–76 examines the impact of the civil wars on Italy and Italian communities, looking at the impact of veteran settlements in the power struggles for the peninsula, the divide of support, and the violence wrought on the countryside through proscriptions or fighting.

In terms of cultivation, the unreality of this idealized passage is also evident. Grain shortages, the general popularity of the grain dole during the Republic (and later), and the strategic significance of highly productive areas such as Sicily and Egypt would make clear, even to those who have themselves never farmed, that farming is far more fraught with difficulty than the interlocutors here let on.³⁴¹ In agriculture, the farmer knows that the land does not offer produce of its own accord and that agronomic success does not necessarily follow from planting crops, even in Italian soil: the farmer does not have the upper hand over nature, but rather must constantly work and adapt to whatever it throws his way, using his knowledge—the *scientia* of agriculture—to help him embrace good luck and mitigate bad circumstances. In reality, as Scrofa admits in Book One, the work of the husbandman is an *alea*—a game of chance (*dRR* 1.4.4).

Books Two and Three follow suit in beginning their discourses with a portrait of herding that is idealized on the surface, but upon closer inspection reveals itself to be problematic. In the second book, as in the first, large animal herding is praised as natural to mankind as a whole but also as fundamental to Roman identity. The relationship between animal and man is harmonious, and the herdsman's control over his herds is sure, while the possession of flocks ensures and demonstrates both the wealth and the authority of the shepherd. Lastly, the use of herding terms as place names suggests that the landscape also participates in the ordered and beneficial

³⁴¹ For more on grain shortages, see Garnsey 1986. Virlouvét 1995, esp., 1–16, 27–31, 165–84, 243–308 surveys the logistics of the grain dole—when, how, and to whom—at the end of the Republic, while Erdkamp 2005: 240–44 provides a brief overview of both the history of the dole and estimates for how many benefitted from it and how much. For Rome's reliance on Sicily for grain, see, e.g. Cic. *Verr.* 2.3, 7 and Livy 27.5.5. Kessler and Temin 2007 explains the organization of the grain trade in the early empire, but his heavy use of Cicero as a source suggests that much of the system for importing grain that he reviews here was in place in the late Republic as well. Bowman 2013 examines Egypt's grain production in detail. Erdkamp 2005: 206–37 evaluates the necessity of the provinces for sufficient grain supply, looking in particular at Sicily and Egypt. Scheidel 1994 argues that Italian estates and small farms must have contributed significantly to the grain supply for the state, yet acknowledges that such local provision is not well documented while imported grain is (see p. 159).

relationship between humans and herds—just as in Rome, the people, the herds, and the place are bound through the city’s foundation and national ideology. Book Three takes a different approach, emphasizing not the natural relationship between man and land or man and animal as the first two books do, but rather focusing on the extreme monetary benefit derived from the *pastio villatica*. In the *dRR*, produce and profit—the ultimate goal of all of the agronomic sciences—require that the husbandman successfully controls his surroundings, that he adequately counteract adversity, whether its source is poor natural conditions, unfavorable weather, inauspicious events, or just plain bad luck. The interlocutors’ idealizing of the vast wealth to be gained from villa husbandry suggests that control is a foregone conclusion, since lack of control over the land and animals results in ruin not windfalls.

Just as in Book One, the passages that open the conversation in the second and third books subtly undermine their own idealizing veneer—or are called into question by surrounding text. For instance, Varro begins Book Two with a preface that not only introduces the book’s topic and provides its dedication, but also offers a more current rural history of man that conflicts with the positive depiction that shortly follows. Varro opens the preface by explaining that Romans who spend most of their time in the country, earning both health and produce for their work on the land, are better than those who live in the city—and thus Roman ancestors are better than men now, since the former came to the city only rarely while the latter primarily live in useless luxury in the city, relying on others, mostly foreigners, to till fields and import their goods (2.Pr.1-3).³⁴² While Varro’s laments about luxury and the city are typical of contemporary

³⁴² Varro expresses similar dismay at Romans’ current abandonment of agriculture (and past ideals) in the preface of Book Three (*dRR*. 3.1.1-4).

elite discourse,³⁴³ they also follow the more traditional story of generational decline and, more importantly, establish a negative viewpoint of contemporary Romans' relationship with the land and animals. In other words, the preface provides a negative counterpoint to what follows. This lament of present urbanity indicates that the positive spin found in Varro's rustic Ages of Man is either very incomplete or completely unrealistic, even though it is consistent with both the depiction of a bountiful Italy in Book One and Roman ideology of agriculture and pastoralism.³⁴⁴

Similarly, the preface calls into question Varro's account of the endurance of herding in Roman identity: if Romans have largely abandoned the countryside, then animal husbandry is only a part of national identity as a symbol. In essence, the preface sets one common motif, namely that of the modern Romans' desertion of the countryside and their failure to live up to the paradigm of the morally superior farmer-statesmen of Rome's glorious past, against another common literary trope valorizing the ideal of the farmer-statesman, wherein Romans—and most importantly, her rulers—are simple folk, farmers and shepherds, who defend the state when needed and exhibit the moral qualities dear to Rome.³⁴⁵ While the two ideologies often appear together—an author who argues that the first is true, that Romans now have lost the *mos maiorum*, may hold aloft the ideology of the Roman farmer as the way to return—they cannot both be true simultaneously. If Romans now ignore the labor of the fields for the pleasures of the city, then they are not living the ideal established in Rome's past. So the contradiction that Varro himself first as author in the preface then as interlocutor in the dialogue, establishes by putting forth these two views of the state of things, tempers the optimistic tone pervasive at the start of

³⁴³ For more on this passage and elite nostalgia for the loss of the ancestral way of life, see pp. 83-85 above.

³⁴⁴ For more on the Roman ideal of the countryside, see, e.g. Evans 2003: 83–87.

³⁴⁵ Beagon 1992: 161 coins the term “ideology of the soil” for literary moments that set-up the farmer-general as a model for elite behavior and character. See also Terrenato 2001: 24–26.

the discourse and challenges its validity, suggesting that the reader cannot always take what is said at face value.

This is the case with the stories of golden sheep that Varro includes in Book Two. While the stories underscore an idea that pervades the whole opening—that herds are naturally subjugated to human authority, and that possession is sufficient for successful management and the benefits that entail—the content that Varro leaves out when referencing the well-known stories of Thyestes and Atreus, Jason and Aetes, and Hercules and the Hesperides undermines this message. In each of these myths, control of the sheep is not stable, but rather the struggle in each tale centers around the question of who will possess the animal, which switches hands by subterfuge or treachery in every case: Jason steals the Golden Fleece from Aetes, Atreus similarly loses the golden lamb to Thyestes, and Hercules either tricks Atlas into giving him the Golden Sheep of the Hesperides or takes it by force from the garden. Similarly, the snake that Aetes and the Hesperides both use to guard their respective gilded rams reveals not only the exceptional value of the animals, but their vulnerability to external threat, namely human greed. In other words, Varro’s account of the origin and dignity of herding does not take into account anything beyond a herdsman and his herds that may compromise the easy and peaceful control that humans have over their own animals. Yet these stories indicate that maintaining control is not that easy, because—as Varro himself pinpoints in the preface—greed (*avaritia*) threatens rural success (2.Pr.4).

Humans are similarly the weak point in Book Three’s idealizing portrait of the *pastio villatica*. In the course of their acclamation for the financial gains of villa herding, the interlocutors acknowledge that its high returns are dependent upon triumphs and banquets both public and private—in other words, success requires a high demand for luxury items from men

of power in the city (3.2.16). While Axius seems confident that the desire for decadence that supports the *pastio* will continue (there's practically a banquet everyday in Rome! *quodam modo epulum cotidianum*), Varro as interlocutor seems to recognize that reliance upon the current tastes is not a guarantee of success in any given year (3.2.16):

Sed ad hunc bolum ut pervenias, opus erit tibi aut epulum aut triumphus alicuius, ut tunc fuit Scipionis Metelli, aut collegiorum cenae.... Reliquis annis omnibus si non hanc expectabis summam, spero, non tibi decoquet ornithon; neque hoc accidit his moribus nisi raro ut decipiaris. Quotus quisque enim est annus, quo non videas epulum aut triumphum aut collegia non epulari?

But in order to get such a haul you will need either a banquet or someone's triumph, such as the one Scipio Metellus had then, or guild dinners.... If you will not expect this amount [60,000 sesterces] in all other years, I hope your aviary will not go bankrupt; nor, with these fashions, does it happen except rarely that you are cheated of your mark. For how often is there a year in which you do not see a banquet or a triumph or colleges not feasting?

Varro's tone is optimistic, yet how he speaks about the requirements for profit reveal that it is not as certain as the other interlocutors let on. First, he seems to suggest that the revenue figures so far stated might be higher than one might normally expect from the *pastio*—if your expectations are generally lower, then you probably will not be disappointed. Yet he further qualifies his statement that the *pastio* will not bring ruin most years by adding the *spero* as an aside: he can *hope* that the aviary and beehives will regularly turn a profit, but not ensure it. The uncertainty of profit—of enough (and large enough) triumphs and banquets occurring to assure demand is high, or of tastes for such luxury goods continuing to be in vogue—is brought home by Varro's choice of word for describing the sort of high revenue the interlocutors claim it makes: *pastio* profit is a *bolus*, a throw of the dice that earns big when it wins but also comes with the chance of heavy

losses.³⁴⁶ In other words, the *pastio* is as much a gamble as farming is a game of chance (*alea*, 1.4.4), no matter how idyllically or ideally the dialogue participants portray these rural arts.

C. Idealized Instructions

Although there is an evident disparity between the romanticized version of the three sciences of husbandry that the *dRR*'s interlocutors present and the reality of farming and herding in Italy, the idealizing nature of these openings, which segue into their respective discourses, is indicative of the outlook that the men have in the bulk of the work. The rosy tone established in the start of the books continues even as the speakers cover minute details of their sciences, as the instructions continue to portray an idealized relationship between farmer and land, herd and man: the Roman husbandman is in control of his land and animals, and external threats to success, such as abnormal weather and bad soil, are absent.³⁴⁷ Therefore, the idealizing of control as something that land owners have because everything aligns for their success comes across in the body of the *dRR* in the continued idealizing of the natural environment and the circumstances in which the farmers and herders work. The most apparent—and most egregious—idealization in the course of the *dRR* is the continued treatment of Italy as a utopia for the rural arts and the sustained depiction of the land and animals as happily conforming not only to human management, but also to human expectation.

Yet throughout the *dRR*, the idealizing nature of the instructions, which display the control enjoyed by farmer and herder alike as easy, is offset and challenged by the passing comments and inconsistencies and incomplete information that point to a more precarious situation for the husbandman, whose control is in reality much more dubious. The entirety of the

³⁴⁶ *OLD* s.v. *bolus*, 1a.

³⁴⁷ The lack of negative factors and external threats is an additional way to grant power to the farmer or herder—with no difficulties to overcome, he has more control.

dialogue is characterized by this duality between the ideal and the real, the discrepancy between the Roman world as the speakers wish it to be—where knowledge and effort and *Italia* are sufficient for ordering what is naturally disorderly, controlling what is naturally chaotic, and succeeding in what should be a gamble—and the world in which they actually live, where chaos sometimes conquers, where not all things can be controlled, and where success is never guaranteed. Just as the alert reader can see the unreality of the passages in praise of the rustic arts, he can also—if paying attention—see that reality for the farmer and herder is not as simple as the interlocutors would have him believe.

First, the praise that the interlocutors offer Italy and her climate in Book One, when they laud its perfection in fertility and emphasize the peninsula's unity, is tacitly maintained over the course of all three books, as the instructions seem for the most part based on the assumption that Roman farmers and herders operate in a uniform Italian landscape, complete with perfect climate and perfect weather. The interlocutors in all three books routinely fail to consider or acknowledge adversity, such as unfavorable weather (floods, drought, and unseasonable temperatures), bad soil, and unsuitable location and landscape. For instance, Scrofa asserts that the conformity (*forma*) of the land must be taken into account when planning the use of one's estate (1.6.1-6) and acknowledges that the grade of the soil will determine what can or cannot be grown in a given location (1.7.5). In both cases, Scrofa allows for varying degrees of quality, implying that there are significant differences in the topography and soil type within Italy and that, therefore, not all regions—even in *Italia*—are equally productive.³⁴⁸ Yet even as he claims that the formation of the land impacts what can or should be grown on a particular farm—or even how well crops might grow there at all (1.6.5), Scrofa leaves topography out of his

³⁴⁸ The prefaces (see 1.1, 2.Pr., and 3.1.), as well as the frequent mentions of Italian locations in the text itself, demonstrate that the primary audience of the *dRR* is Roman.

instructions altogether when he discusses the planting of various goods, instead focusing on issues of sun exposure and soil moisture and directionality to determine what to plant where (1.23.1-26.1).³⁴⁹ This omission is especially startling because if topography impacts cultivation, as Scrofa asserts in his general overview of the facets of agriculture, the reader would expect its mention in the practical and detailed portion of the discourse. The absence of the lands' formation from these subsequent, specific directions falls in line with the homogenous landscape depicted in the earlier Praise of Italy. In other words, while Scrofa may give lip service to a more complex reality, his actual instructions conform to the ideal.

The question of soil creates similar issues. Scrofa stresses the importance of soil quality for farm production (*a [quali terra] vel maxime bonus aut non bonus appellatur*, “from the quality of the soil especially is [a farm] called good or not good,” 1.7.5),³⁵⁰ again indicating that not all Italian soil is as equally fertile as the idealized version suggests. Scrofa first classifies soil according to its makeup—e.g., chalky (*cretosa*), rocky (*lapidosa*), sandy (*sabulosa*)—and the degree of that makeup (very rocky, moderately rocky, or less rocky; 1.9.1-4). Yet this compositional system ultimately gives way to a broader categorization that Scrofa retains through the remainder of the dialogue, in which all soil is characterized as either rich (*pinguis*), poor (*macra*), or moderate (*mediocris*).³⁵¹ Furthermore, the condition of the soil plays a

³⁴⁹ The three simple types of landscape are flat (*campestre*), hilly (*collinum*), and mountainous (*montanum*, 1.6.2). Outside of section six, these topographical adjectives (and their noun equivalents) appear a total of times in Book One, none used in a context explaining what to plant where: *collinum* and *collis* appear at 1.13.7 and 1.20.2; *montanum* and *mons* appear at 1.7.1, 1.12.1, 1.18.6, 1.20.2; *campestre* and *campus* appear at 1.7.9, 1.7.10, 1.15.1, 1.20.2, and 1.49.2. As Skydsgaard 1968: 17 remarks, we expect to be told where particular plants should be grown, but are not.

³⁵⁰ A sentiment that Varro repeats at 1.9.1.

³⁵¹ Other agricultural writers use the same three classifications for soil, stipulating techniques for ascertaining relative richness. See, e.g., Virg. *Georg.* 2.288ff., Col. 2.2.18, and Pl. *HN* 17.33ff.;

significant part of his individual instructions for where and how to plant which crops. For instance, in rich soil (*pinguis terra*), he recommends planting cabbage (*holus*), wheat (*triticum*), winter wheat (*siligo*), and flax (*linum*), while clover and legumes should be planted in thin soil (*tenuis terra*, 1.23.2).³⁵² The sustained reference to varying soil kinds and qualities initially seems to indicate that Scrofa's practical instructions reflect a more nuanced understanding of the complexities of Italian agricultural production, yet in reality his description of the different categories of soil are so rudimentary and the differences between soil types so unclear that any mention of them are useless: without providing a method for determining whether the earth is rich, poor, or moderate, let alone simply defining them, they cease to be meaningful and distinguishing categories that mark parts of Italy as distinct.³⁵³ Indeed, Scrofa ignores soil type altogether in the instructions he gives in accordance with the agricultural calendar, even though different soils would impact what a farmer needed to do and when. Finally, Scrofa's instructions on planting suggest that the quality of the soil ultimately does not impact fertility, for every soil type accommodates the growth of a set of plants, or even the difficulty of cultivating the crops. So while nominally indicating some basis for variety in produce, all soil types and thus all of Italy are equally and seemingly effortlessly productive.³⁵⁴

however, it is noteworthy that all of these works are later than Varro's *dRR*, and thus could be expanding upon his system.

³⁵² Soil quality is also brought up in terms of what to plant at 1.24.1-2, where Stolo quotes Cato's *de Agricultura* 6.1-2.

³⁵³ Skydsgaard 1968: 15 and 17 emphasizes the highly unscientific nature of Scrofa's soil classifications, concluding that the imprecision of categorization of soil voids it of practical benefit.

³⁵⁴ The comparative word counts of *facilis* (and its derivatives) and of *difficilis* (and its derivatives) underscore the work's emphasis on ease and minimization of the difficulties involved: *facilis* and related forms appear 18 times in Book One, 19 times in Book Two, and 4 times in Book Three, while *difficilis* and related forms appear 3 times in Book One, 3 times in Book Two, and 1 time in Book Three.

Book Two similarly underplays the diversity of Italy's landscape, vegetation, and yield. In the second book, the interlocutors include pasturage in their account of each large herding animal, information that ranges from pen placement to grazing time and location. When Scrofa, who is responsible for systematizing the pastoral science, first explains what pasturage entails, he gives examples that suggest a wide array of landscapes utilized—and even required—by the herds (2.1.17):

...ut capras in montuosis potius locis fruticibus quam in herbidis campis, equas contra. Neque eadem loca aestiva et hiberna idonea omnibus ad pascendum. Itaque greges ovium longe abiguntur ex Apulia in Sannium aestivatum atque ad publicanum profitentur, ne, si inscriptum pecus paverint, lege censoria committant. Muli e Rosea campestri aestate exiguntur in Burbures altos montes.

...So it is better to pasture goats on a shrubby mountain than in grassy plains, the opposite for mares. Nor is the same place suitable to all animals for pasturing in both summer and winter. Thus flocks of sheep are driven a long way from Apulia into Samnium for summering and are reported to the tax collector, lest they commit an offense against the censorial law by pasturing unregistered flocks. Mules are driven in summer from flat Rosea into the high Burbur Mountains.

Scrofa refers here to mountains and fields, which are two of the types of topography he identifies in Book One. Where he claimed—though failed to explain in detail—that topographical differences affect cultivation in *dRR* 1, in *dRR* 2 variety in land formation is necessary for successful herding. Yet when each interlocutor expounds upon the specific pasturing requirements for each animal, the topography of their preferred pasturage is lacking and the primary focus seems to be not on where they should eat, but on when. So sheep graze far and wide in diverse locations, covering great distances between summer and winter (2.2.9), and thus landscape ceases to matter. Similarly, Cossinius downplays the shifting topography that comes with transhumant flocks when he passes over land formation in his account of goats, animals that Scrofa explains have particular topographical requirements in the passage above, focusing

instead on the destructiveness of the animal (2.3.6-7). With pigs, the shape and type of the land is similarly left out, while the speaker instead bases his instructions on temperature and moisture (2.4.5-6). The instructions of Book Two, like those of Book One, fail to bear out the importance placed upon the varied landscapes at play. Location becomes homogenized in the accounts of each animal, interchangeable even if the herds have distinct needs. In other words, the unified Italy of *dRR* 1 can also be seen in Book Two.

The way the interlocutors deal with transhumance in general further reflects the mentality of easy control and productivity displayed in the idealized depiction of Italy found in both the *picta Italia* and in Varro's rural Ages of Man. The movement from one location to another and the changing of pastures that it entails is, in Scrofa's estimation, essential to the well-being and successful herding of some animals. As a practice, transhumance can help ensure that grazing animals maintain a steady diet year round by moving with the seasons: the cooler mountains in summer, warmer lowlands in winter.³⁵⁵ In the course of the instructions for individual animals, however, the interlocutors do not address the impact that transhumance has on pasturing. For instance, Cossinius remarks that goats prefer wooded glades (*silvestre saltus*) to meadows (*prata*), but provides no further indications of favored grazing locations or of when to move the herds where (2.3.3).³⁵⁶ By limiting the instructions, the speaker ignores the issue of available pasturage on the herd trails (*calles*) and thus disregards the fact that a herdsman had no control over what kinds of public pastures are available alongside them.

In Book Three, Appius likewise does not take into account the role that diverse locations have on vegetation availability. In his prescriptions for apiaries, Appius suggests that the estate

³⁵⁵ As Varro says at 1.6.3, *qui colunt deorsum, magis aestate laborant, qui susum, magis hieme*, "those who live in the lowlands suffer more in the summer, those who live high up suffer more in winter." See also Barker 1989: 1 and Williamson 2005: 134–135.

³⁵⁶ Varro indicates that goats are transhumant at 2.10.3.

owner sows crops that are appealing to bees near the hives, urging his audience also to keep in mind the plants that will produce the healthiest bees or the best honey. So, he recommends first and foremost the planting of snail-clover (*cytissus*) or thyme (*thymum*), while listing several other plants that are also suitable (3.16.3-4). Where Scrofa in *dRR* 1 specifies that a number of factors, from topography to soil, dictate what plants a specific plot of land can feasibly grow, Appius' instructions here base that decision upon the presence of bees instead of what the earth is capable of producing. This perspective is entirely fitting with the depiction of the *pastio* as transformative to the fertility of the landscape: if villa herding makes barren coastal land productive, why shouldn't any estate owner be able to grow clover and thyme for his bees? The instructions themselves, then, limit the potential difficulties involved in feeding animals, from lack of control over pasture to the health and abundance of the grazing vegetation. The simplicity and the frequent brevity of their recommendations is part and parcel to the general idealizing tone the interlocutors bring to the work.

Through its treatment of weather, the *dRR* furthers its suppression of the challenges of and incongruities within the Italian landscape that in reality make the rustic arts a complicated affair. As noted above, the interlocutors of Book One praise Italy first for her cultivability, an attribute that they claim stems from the ideal position of the peninsula in the habitable zone of the earth: her climate is perfect for maximum cultivation (1.2.4-5). By following their positive description of Italy's global location and comparing her favorably to other places, which are variously too hot, too cold, or too dark, with a description of her bounty, the speakers imply a causal relationship: the golden age like fecundity stems from the peninsula's weather, perfect and temperate and seemingly uniform, like Italy herself. Of course, Varro's portrayal of climate is as idealized as the rest of the interlocutors' Praise of Italy, as weather is by its very essence

changeable and ever-changing, prone to general patterns yet inconsistent. However, Varro's interlocutors all but ignore the unpredictable and uncontrollable side of weather. When matters of climate do arise in the instructions, they are treated much like the constellations: guiding factors for the farmer's art—when to do what, what to watch for and avoid—that are fixed and regular, the weather as stable as the stars that herald in the seasons.³⁵⁷ So both spring and autumn have dry periods before the rain, when the farmer will root weeds and gather grapes, while spring is sunny enough to dry out earth clods (1.27.2-3). Even then, however, meteorological factors such as heat and rain do not play a significant role in Scrofa's seasonal recommendations. In fact, he mentions weather only four times in his calendar: he instructs farmers to water their fruit trees in the evening if there is a late spring drought (*siccitas*, 1.31.5) and also allows the possibility of drought again in the winter (1.36.1), recommends delaying the pruning of vines in places where frost (*frigora*) comes early (1.34.2), and instructs farmers not to plant violets in autumn as the rains (*pluviae tempestates*) will wash away their beds (1.35.1). In every instance, the weather that Scrofa mentions is seasonally normal, yet the four mentions if anything highlight the inadequacy of Scrofa's weather information.

Stolo, who follows Scrofa's calendric account with his own alternate version, references climatic matters with greater frequency, even allowing for variation in weather. For instance, Stolo allows that locality or weather (*regio aut tempestas*) can impact how long it takes for grain to sprout (1.45.1), specifies how to winter seedlings in a nursery in cold location (*locus frigidiorus*) and explains the dangers of standing water after winter rain (*imber*, 1.45.2), and that fig trees require warm weather (*caldor*, 1.41.1). Yet even while he factors in the weather, Stolo

³⁵⁷ Scrofa provides a calendar for cultivation based on the heavens at 1.29.1-1.37.3, while Stolo provides an calendar for cultivation that is based on the stages of plant development but still references the position of the constellations at 1.37.4-1.69.1. See Spencer 2010: 58–59 and Skydsgaard 1968: 44–63 for Varro's agricultural calendar.

does not grant it much power. It is still predictable, manageable even when not fully consistent. Still idealized, if not entirely ideal. Scrofa and Stolo ignore the potential for destruction inherent in weather, a factor that Columella, considered the best of the Latin agricultural writers, takes fully into account (Col. *dRR* Pr.23).³⁵⁸

Caeli et anni praesentis mores intueatur, neque enim semper eundem velut ex praescripto habitum gerunt, nec omnibus annis eodem vultu venit aestas aut hiems, nec pluvium semper est ver aut umidum autumnus; quae praenosceri sine lumine animi et sine exquisitissimis disciplinis non quemquam posse crediderim.

[The farmer] should watch the ways of the sky and the present season, for they do not always bear the same habit as if according to a set rule, nor do summer or winter come every year with the same mien, nor is spring always rainy or the autumn damp; I would not believe that anyone is able to know these matters beforehand without the light of intelligence or without the most extraordinary training.

As Columella here suggests, the weather is anything but cooperative and the farmer who ignores or downplays its capriciousness cannot be successful.³⁵⁹

The rest of Columella's work bears out this cautionary view of the climate, for the instructions repeatedly take into account the harm it can do. Sometimes he offers ways for the

³⁵⁸ Virgil, in his *Georgics*, similarly emphasizes the power of the weather, and the destructiveness that arises from its extremes (see, esp., 1.311ff.). Henderson 2004: 7 calls Columella's *de Re Rustica* "the most consultable classical text to have come down to us." For more the comprehensiveness and accuracy of Columella's mid-first century CE agricultural text, see Noé 2000.

³⁵⁹ Agricultural (and livestock) production is so dependent upon climatic conditions that an entire branch of meteorology, called agricultural meteorology, is now devoted to analyzing the relationship between the two. While the ability to predict meteorological events and methods for quantifying and dealing with their impact have changed in the two thousand years since Varro composed his work, the unavoidable link between weather and agriculture has not. For studies in agricultural meteorology, see, e.g., Taylor 1967 and Chang 1968, who examine climate's impact on crop production, exploring the general environment, the challenges it presents, its role in specific elements of plant growth (such as photosynthesis and soil temperature), and its connection to productivity. Benedict 2007, in his survey of the role of climate in production of food-source plants in the mountains of Colorado, provides a good reference for understanding the additional impact that high-altitudes, such as existed in the Apennines, have on the interplay between weather and plant production.

farmer to mitigate damage, such as binding grafts sufficiently to withstand damage from storms (Col. *dRR* 4.29), or what methods of tying vines to supports should be avoided due to their susceptibility to inclement weather (4.20.4). Additionally, Columella often takes weather conditions into account, either indicating that the farmer may need to adjust the procedure recommended to accommodate weather conditions (as when he says that the amount of support needed for vines depends upon an area's weather intensity, 4.17.4) or offers multiple instructions based on climatic differences (such as when to harvest plants in cold, moderate, and warm locales, 2.7.2). At other times Columella emphasizes the damage weather can inflict: that a wind-storm can destroy an entire year's grain harvest, 2.20.2; or that there is never a year so temperate that weather will not inflict some damage to the vines (3.20.1).³⁶⁰ By contrast, the consideration that Varro's speakers give to even the most basic and standard of climatic conditions is obviously inadequate and distinctly shortsighted, for the farmer has no power over even predicted and predictable weather.³⁶¹ It, instead, must dictate the farmer's course. By all but excluding it from his account, Varro allows Scrofa and Stolo to maintain the illusion of idealized control for the farmer.

The insufficient treatment of the role of weather extends to Varro's account of herding, where the interlocutors similarly ignore its potential impact upon the herds and herdsman. While instructions take into account the importance of temperature in proper animal care,³⁶² the

³⁶⁰ Leach 1988: 164 also points out the Virgil include scenes of the harvest's destruction in the *Georgics*, comparing him to the more positive and "reassuring predictions of *fructus*" that dominate Varro's presentation of agriculture.

³⁶¹ As the simile at the end of the *Aeneid* also makes clear (Virg. *Aen.* 12.451-55)

³⁶² See, e.g., 2.2.18 (guarding lambs from heat or cold), 2.5.15 (protecting bred cows from chilly air), and 2.7.10 (keeping a pregnant mare in a warm place). Other weather is strangely absent from Book Two, even rain only receiving two mentions: at 2.2.14 to describe the autumnal season in which ewes lamb, and at 2.10.6 in a rather poetic description of droving herdsman, who build shelters against the rain. The rain in neither case is relevant to the instructions.

potential impact of drought on pasturage, or that of heavy rains on conditions of the cattle-trails, or that of unseasonable heat or cold on the movement of flocks.³⁶³ Weather is similarly under-accounted for in Book Three. Temperature again is allowed some importance in the tending of villa animals; thus Merula advises heat and cold are harmful to chickens (Var. *dRR* 3.9.15), while indicating that cold weather will extend hatching time for geese eggs (3.10.3). Heat, cold, and rain are all potentially deadly to bees caught unawares, and Merula provides instructions for reviving bees incapacitated by such conditions (3.17.36-37). Yet beyond these instances, the climate is left out, even though meteorological events would affect the *pastio*, in the supply of feed if not the need for extensive irrigation (during droughts) and drainage (for heavy rains) in the various animal enclosures. But Axius demonstrates the degree to which weather can impact villa herding in his account of fishponds, where he describes Hortensius using salted fish as feed for his fishponds when the rough weather cut off the supply of fresh food from the sea (3.17.7). Because the point of this anecdote is that people dedicate extensive care and energy to their fishponds, not that the villa herder might need to renegotiate feed sources due to climatological issues, this passage effectively highlights both the possible problems that can arise in the *pastio* from the weather and the overall negligence of those problems in the *dRR*.

The natural control that the interlocutors grant to the husbandman by idealizing Italy's landscape and climate is not limited to control of the land and its productivity, but extends to his management of both animals and people. Successful control of traditional herd animals is taken for granted because domestication ensures enough compliance for cows and sheep not to pose any real challenge to the herdsman's authority, give or take a lost lamb. In the Roman world,

³⁶³ For some modern studies that demonstrate the kind of impact of climate and weather can have on pasturage and herding, see Lenart *et al.* 2002, which explores the impact of climatic variations on the quality and quantity of forage for herds; and Kumpula and Colpaert 2003, which examines the correlation between climate and herd reproduction and survival.

such animals are conceptualized as being naturally tame, which we saw in Book Two's rural Ages of Man, while other animals under discussion—primarily those that make up the *pastio villatica* are, as Green puts it, “*fundamentally wild.*”³⁶⁴ According to the Roman law of possession (*usucapio*), animals that have natural freedom are considered a person's legal property so long as they are in that person's possession or, for mobile animals, so long as they retain the intention of returning (*Digest* 41.1.2-7). In other words, legal possession of certain animals, such as bees, peacocks, doves, and men captured in war, depends upon the will of the animal, and by not returning to their possessor they can regain their freedom. An owner's control of such animals is thereby limited, since he has limited power over their intent and must rely on maintaining their captivity to maintain possession.

Yet in the *dRR*, the ease of control of the herds that Varro attributes to humans in Book Two's idealizing opening does not seem limited to animals that are, like sheep, naturally tame. Instead, the interlocutors in all three books include instructions that grant husbandmen an unrealistic degree of power over their living possessions. In Books One and Two, Scrofa and Cossinius both include slaves in their accounts of, respectively, agriculture and herding. The former includes slaves in his list of tools used for cultivation, classifying them as articulate instruments (*instrumenti genus vocale*, 1.17.1), while the latter counts the slaves who herd the cattle as the ninth class of animals comprised in the pastoral science (2.1.12, 2.10.1-11).³⁶⁵ While slaves are possessions, the fact that they are human makes maintaining control of them

³⁶⁴ Green 1997: 438 (emphasis hers) points to the legal difference between naturally domesticated and naturally free animals as the key to Varro's distinction between the animals of Book Two and those of Book Three.

³⁶⁵ Reay 2005: 335 addresses a similar concept in Cato's *de Agricultura*, what he calls “masterly extensibility:” the conception of slaves as prosthetic tools with which a master cultivates his fields. Roth 2005: 312 notes that Romans typically perceived slaves as on par with working animals.

inherently more challenging, much as is the case with the animals deemed to be free by nature under the *usucapio*. But by dehumanizing them in the *dRR*, relegating them either to the same class as plows and cattle, Varro minimizes their basic human agency and infers that one can manage slaves as completely as one manipulates a hoe or drives a flock of sheep.

In reality, slaves control their own movement and actions within the parameters set forth by the overseer (*vilicus*). He can instruct them in what work they must do and hopefully himself demonstrate accurately how a task should be done (1.17.4), but he cannot guarantee uniformity in execution. Indeed, Scrofa's description for the qualities desirable in a *vilicus* highlights the finesse it requires to manage slaves successfully in farm operations: the *vilicus* should possess the experience needed to set an example for the slaves to follow willingly, the ability to control slaves with words rather than whips, and liberality with benefits (like extra food and clothing) so that the slaves will work better (1.17.4-7). If the overseer of the slaves needs to set an example, be persuasive in order to obtain his slaves' compliance, and a generous hand for gaining their productivity, then the slaves are not inherently controllable or inevitably under control. However, this concession to the challenge of controlling such a work force is presented from the perspective of finding the best overseer, and therefore the slaves' behavior is secondary.

Herdsmen, especially those in charge of transhumant flocks, were even more obviously removed from their owner's control, without an overseer to regularly check and correct their performance. Yet Cossinius, in his account of them in Book Two, deals with them as if they were as fully manageable as other herd animals. He prescribes the physical attributes desirable in a herdsman—sturdy, swift, and agile (*formae firmae, veloces, mobiles*, 2.10.3)—just as the other interlocutors described the desired physique of actual herd animals. He also provides instructions for the feeding and breeding of herdsmen, acknowledging that the latter is more difficult for

drovers and recommending that the owner send women along with them for that purpose (2.10.5-7). By following the same parameters of the pastoral science as did the instructions for other herd animals, Cossinius step-by-step aligns the human herdsmen with the animals they keep and thus maintains the impression of natural and easy control that the dialogue seeks to give to the estate-owner: that even if he is in Rome like the dedicatee, Turranius Niger, or campaigning in Greece, he still has sway over his flocks, herdsmen and all.

Even though most of the animals in Book Three fall under the category of fundamentally wild, and so, like humans, are not fully controllable, the interlocutors similarly fail to address the gap between ownership and control. This is most evident in Merula's account of bees, where he prescribes what plants are best for the health of the bee and the taste of the honey (3.16.13-14). While, as discussed above, this passage is idealizing in its disregard for the cultivability of the named plants in any given soil, it is also idealizing in its implication that planting specific crops nearby is tantamount to directing the bees' diet. As much as a master may wish to influence what his bees pollinate—and thus what flavors their honey—he cannot control where his bees fly or what plants they choose to settle upon. Sometimes they will pollinate the *sisera* or the fig and their honey will be watery or unpleasant (3.16.26).

2. Mental Order: the Power of Knowledge

The idealizing nature of the interlocutors' initial presentations of agriculture and herding is particularly striking not only because their portrayals are so evidently part of the national, romanticizing narrative of identity and origins, and because the reality so demonstrably differs from it, but also because their depiction of farming and herding as natural and easy makes a book of instructions unnecessary. If these occupations were really so effortlessly fruitful, anyone—or any Italian, at any rate—could make a fine living in them. While the remainder of the *dRR* takes

a more balanced approach than the three initial scenes might suggest (which, again, reveals the rhetorical nature of these passages), the idealizing tone of these initial descriptions of the arts of agriculture, large animal herding, and the *pastio* carries through the entirety of the dialogue.

While the practice of these sciences may not be as simple as the interlocutors originally suggest, success, it is implied, is still readily achievable—with some effort and, most importantly in the world of the *dRR*, some knowledge. In fact, the premise of the *dRR* is that instruction in these areas is necessary, or at any rate beneficial, for success, as Varro makes clear in the three prefaces of the *dRR*.

In the preface to Book One, which also serves as a prologue to the entire text, Varro sets up the three books that follow as a guide and source of help for not only his wife Fundania in managing her newly purchased *fundus*, but also for all his friends and family. But in establishing the *dRR* as a response to Fundania's request for assistance in her new endeavor, Varro makes a strange analogy between his work and the Sibylline Books (1.1.3):

Neque patiar Sibyllam non solum cecinisse quae, dum viveret, prodessent hominibus, sed etiam quae cum perisset ipsa, et id etiam ignotissimis quoque hominibus; ad cuius libros tot annis post publice solemus redire, cum desideramus, quid faciendum sit nobis ex aliquo portento; me, ne dum vivo quidem, necessariis meis quod prosit facere.

Nor may I allow the Sibyl to have prophesied what was useful to people not only while she lived but even after she had died, and that it was even beneficial to people unknown to her; so many years later we are accustomed to return to her books in the name of the state, whenever we long to know what we should do following some portent; I may not allow this and not myself do something beneficial for my friends and family while I still live.

Kept in the charge of the *decimviri*, a college of priests who under Sulla came to be called the *quindecimviri*,³⁶⁶ the Sibylline Books were a collection of rituals and oracles that were consulted by order of the Senate in response to portents, prodigies, and disasters, and that provided

³⁶⁶ Santangelo 2013: 128

remedies and prescriptions for their expiation. So, in times of national crisis, when prodigies and portents flout the natural order of things, the Sibylline Books offered the Romans a way to return to the proper order of their world. In other words, they provided guidance and control in the face of chaos. In wishing to have even a fraction (temporally speaking) of the Sibyl's long lasting influence, Varro sets his text up as akin to those prophetic books in aim: a source of guidance and instruction for controlling the chaos. Yet, given the Temple setting of Book One, the implications of the association go further than this. In aligning the *dRR* with the Sibylline Books, Varro also turns his book into something religious.³⁶⁷ As the Oracles are kept in a temple by priests who interpret them as needed, the content of Book One of the dialogue is produced in the Temple of the Earth by men named for agriculture: this is the sacred work of farmers,³⁶⁸ followed when in doubt of what one should do.³⁶⁹

Varro's view here is optimistic but balanced: in offering answers, he acknowledges that problems arise, and that control over the land and animals, together with the fiscal success that stems from it, are not a given, but something that can be achieved with the proper know-how, effort, and some devotion to the gods—as his own invocation of the twelve gods of agriculture, which immediately follows this explanation of what the *dRR* is, suggests. Yet while the content of the preface inherently recognizes that farmers face challenges, Varro keeps those dangers and difficulties vague, and, by setting his work up as a sibylline-like book of instructions, he implies that any difficulties that do arise can be overcome, with the proper discernment and knowledge. The *dRR* is a rule-book, an answer to and solution for crisis.

³⁶⁷ As Cancik 1985: 251 notes, there is an intimate connection between religion and politics in Roman world.

³⁶⁸ Linderski 1989: 119 similarly sees the Tellus venue as “a program and a proclamation: agriculture is a hallowed occupation and not merely a private pastime of the urbanites.”

³⁶⁹ Takács 2009: 29 calls religion the “the ultimate sphere of rules and regulations.”

By presenting the *dRR* in this light, the preface acknowledges that the world of farming is not simple and that, by extension, control over the land and animals and the fiscal success that stems from it, are not necessarily easily attainable. The interlocutors' themselves occasionally acknowledge as much in the course of the dialogue, as Scrofa does in Book One: (1.4.4):

Quare ubi salubritas non est, cultura non aliud est atque alea domini vitae ac rei familiaris. Nec haec non deminuitur scientia. Ita enim salubritas, quae ducitur e caelo ac terra, non est in nostra potestate, sed in naturae, ut tamen multum sit in nobis, quo graviora quae sunt ea diligentia leviora facere possimus.

Therefore, where there is not healthfulness, cultivation is nothing else other than a game of dice for the life of the master and the familial possessions. Yet this risk is lessened by science; for as healthfulness, which is brought by the sky and the earth, is not in our power, but in that of nature, so it may depend much yet on us, to the extent that those things which are grievous we are able to make more trivial by care.

There are a few striking elements in this passage. First, *salubritas*, which was one of the qualities attributed to Italy that made the country particularly suited to agriculture (1.2.3), is here not a given. In fact, the healthfulness of the land seems to be a major concern for Scrofa, indicating that lack of healthfulness may not just be possible in Italy, but widespread.³⁷⁰ Furthermore, Scrofa undermines the picture of cohesion between farmer and land by describing farming as a game of dice, where the stakes are possessions and life together.

This passage represents a different perspective on control. Instead of it coming naturally to the farmer or herdsman through the cooperation and consent of the land and animals, the husbandman can earn it by knowledge (*scientia*) and care (*diligentia*). Scrofa maintains his confidence in the power of knowledge later, during the discussion on locating the stading. When Fundanius poses the question of how one can deal with bad land—in this particular case, swampy—Agrius immediately responds, *Istuc vel ego possum respondere, inquit Agrius*;

³⁷⁰ See his brief description of pestilence at 1.4.4-5, as well as discussion of soils (1.9.1-7), and the location of the farm (1.12.1-4).

vendas, quot assibus possis, aut si nequeas, relinquas, “‘Even I am able to answer that,’ said Agrius; ‘you should sell it for as much money as you can, but if you can’t, you should abandon it’” (1.12.2). Agrius’ rather flippant remark reveals a real anxiety about man’s (in)ability to manipulate nature.³⁷¹ It is better to abandon the countryside than to try to fix the problem. But Scrofa then answers Fudandius’ question seriously, providing specific guidelines for how to deal with such a situation, because (in accordance with his statement at 1.4.4), with some knowledge, a farmer can manage a bad natural situation. While the interlocutors in Books Two and Three do not similarly concede the power of nature, they do still emphasize the importance of knowledge for the successful raising of herds (2.5.2, 3.3.1). Throughout the *dRR*, knowledge is tied to control.

In the three books of the *dRR* that follow this preface, control and order are pervasive, emphasized both directly and implicitly not only in the type and content of the instructions that the various interlocutors give, but in the ways that they talk generally about the land and animals, and the highly regimented structure imposed upon the rural sciences under discussion.³⁷² Early in Book One, after the men gathered at the Aedes Telluris decide to pass their time with a discussion on the agricultural art, Scrofa, the current master of the science, insists upon defining what farming specifically entails, whether it is limited to what a farmer plants on the farm or includes animals driven in the country. His concern, he explains, stems from the trend among agricultural writers, whether Greek or Roman or Punic, to wander too far from the subject proper, extending their discourse to embrace grazing as well (1.2.12-13). The lengthy discussion that follows this negotiates the proper categorization of different rustic activities and elements,

³⁷¹ Kronenberg 2009: 90-91.

³⁷² Diederich 2007: 410–19 provides a handy appendix laying out the organizational schemes used in each of the three books of the *dRR*.

eliminating certain topics—such as grazing and the management of clay-pits—as extraneous to the art of farming, though they might be related to or useful in it (1.2.13-28). In carefully and at length explaining both what farming is as well as the rationale for determining what farming is not, Scrofa and the other interlocutors engage in the same sort of penchant for precise classification that Varro himself displays when he justifies his division of pastoralism into two discrete parts—large animal herding (the *pecuaria*) and the tending of villa animals (the *pastio*)—rather than following all previous writings in inexactly grouping *pastio* with either agriculture or transhumant herding (3.1.8-9).³⁷³

The insistence upon carefully and exactly defined categories is part of the greater concern for meticulous organization that the work consistently displays. As mentioned in Chapter One, the hyper-schematization that the interlocutors impose upon whatever rural art is under discussion is ubiquitously commented upon in scholarship on Varro.³⁷⁴ At the outset of the conversations in each of the three books, one of the speakers lays out a highly detailed schema of the science's key parts, which are each further demarcated into subcategories. After determining what the art and science of agriculture *is* (1.3.1), Scrofa explains that cultivation has four parts (*partes*), each of which can be further divided into two subsets (1.5.1-4), and Scrofa uses this breakdown of the parts of farming as an outline for the order and type of information he provides his audience in the instructions that follow. Similarly, in Book Three, the three parts, each with

³⁷³ Martin 1971: 237 argues that the systematization Varro employs is in fact “borrowed” from the historical Scrofa’s agricultural writings. However, as Rawson 1985: 136–137 notes, Varro has the same tendency toward organization in his other works, and there was a general eagerness during his time for writers “to introduce dialectical principles of organization.” Nelsestuen 2011, 336 combines these two views by suggesting that Varro is in fact parodying both himself and Scrofa in the “passion for subdivision” that the interlocutors all display.

³⁷⁴ See pp. 33-34 above.

two subcategories (3.3.1-3), that make up the *pastio* constitute the basic outline for the progression of the information the interlocutors provide: the system provides order.

In Book Two, Scrofa partitions pastoralism into three divisions—small herding animals, large herding animals, and animals that aid in herding—of three parts (in this case, each part is a distinct animal), each of which has nine subcategories (2.1.12). But the insistence upon careful organization extends beyond this precise division into nine parts of nine subsets, for even the nine subcategories have natural groupings and internal divisions, which Scrofa lays out in detail.³⁷⁵ In providing what seems to be a comprehensive organizational system for the science of herding, as well as a framework for the interlocutors to follow when providing instructions on the nine herding animals, Scrofa makes the knowledge that is requisite to turn animal husbandry into a profitable venture quantifiable and concrete, turning the system itself into some sort of check list for herders, whereby success is attainable to those who follow the instructions category by subcategory. In other words, the hyper-categorization pervasive in the dialogue is one facet of the text's preoccupation with control, insofar as meticulous organization can be seen as an attempt to encapsulate, understand, encompass, and thereby control the topics at hand and the natural world they represent—a way to counteract chaos. As Scrofa himself explains in the midst of his instructions in Book One, we should follow *ratio*—a system, a logical method—not chance (*alea*, 1.18.8).

Any text that claims to impart information will do so following some system of organization, yet the regimented structure of the three books of the *dRR* is particularly remarkable because the interlocutors each in turn follow the same system by some sort of tacit agreement. The parts and divisions of each science are presented in each case not as a preview of

³⁷⁵ Nelsestuen 2011: 335 notes that the hyper-systematization Scrofa presents in Book Two has a “clear sense of pedantic overkill.”

what is to come, but rather as an essential component of the discourse itself—that is, the schematization of the science is itself as important a part of the science of farming or herding or villa pasturage as the particular details of steading layout or mule herding or beekeeping. By casting them in this light, the structures the interlocutors outline become a natural part of the sciences under discussion rather than simply external plans imposed on the topics for clarity or ease of discourse. By extension the affinity for control that such categorization indicates is also naturalized, an automatic part of knowing the art of farming or herding. In learning the science and the system that neatly breaks it down into its component parts, the farmer or the herder learns control. Knowledge grants man some semblance of power against the chances and hazards of the natural world.³⁷⁶

However, for all the care and detail that Scrofa in *dRR* 1 and 2 and Merula in *dRR* 3 put into their schema of the rural arts, the information in the texts is presented under a system that often only nominally aligns with the one prescribed. In other words, while the interlocutors maintain the pretense that they are following the established systemization, they frequently stray from it, occasionally even using a different structure altogether. For instance, when he deals in the text with the second of his four proposed subdivisions of agriculture, namely the part of farming that addresses the equipment needed to run the farm (*quae in eo fundo opus sint*, 1.5.3), Scrofa states that the two promised subsets are people (*homines*) and aids for men (*adminicula hominum*, 1.17.1). However, instead of continuing his exploration of this portion of agriculture by expounding upon these two subsets, he proceeds to ignore them and instead provides instructions that follow an alternate system for the subcategories of agricultural tools: articulate instruments, comprising humans; semi-vocal instruments, comprising cattle; and mute

³⁷⁶ As Kronenberg 2009: 83 asserts, the ability to increase a man's control over *tuche* or *casus* is a “distinctive feature of most *technai* or *artes*.”

instruments, comprising inanimate tools (1.17.1).³⁷⁷ Additionally, interlocutors in Book Two frequently shortchange or ignore the rigid structure that Scrofa there supplies. In this manner, instead of giving a full account of the feeding of horses (feeding being one of the nine parts of the proper management of herding animals), Lucienus only specifies the best pasturage for stallions—and briefly at that (2.7.7), while Murrius merely states that asses eat spelt and barley (2.6.4) and that mules eat hay and barley (2.8.4). Indeed, the whole of Murrius' account of mules displays an egregious disregard for Scrofa's organization of the science, for he does not cover the first two subsections of herding—the preferred age and characteristics of the animal in question (2.1.13), but instead offers two distinct accounts of breeding (2.8.2, 2.8.4), though it should only comprise one subcategory, while he discusses kinds of breeds at the very end of his account (2.8.6), when in fact it should have come third (2.1.17). In and of themselves, these regular derivations from the schema provided at the start of each book do not necessarily matter, but in the *dRR*, where knowledge, control, and systemization are tangibly entwined, the discrepancy between prescribed order and the order information actually takes suggests that perhaps neither knowledge or control are as easily obtained as Scrofa might like his audience to think.

The inconsistency between the proposed and the utilized structures is only one of the dialogue's apparent flaws in its ostensible function as a handbook. While the *dRR* claims to be a resource that will provide the knowledge necessary for the successful management of land and animals, the information that the interlocutors offer is repeatedly and regularly deficient for this purpose. Beginning with the limitations of the various accounts in terms of its idealizing portrayal of the landscape, the climate, and the tractability of animals, the dearth of practical information extends to advice for how best to do various activities. In Book One, Scrofa, who is

³⁷⁷ See Skydsgaard 1968, esp. 11–15 for more detail on Scrofa's proposed schema for agriculture, and how his subsequent instructions fail to comply.

introduced as the current master of agriculture (1.2.12), fails not only in following his own schema for presenting agricultural information, but also in providing the information necessary for a farmer to succeed. When he provides an agricultural calendar starting at 1.27, in which he purports to lay out when a farmer should do what and how he should go about doing it, he provides definitions and etymologies for many terms—*seges*, *arvum*, *novalis*, *porca*, *flagellum*, *farrago*—yet he fails to explain how a farmer should actually carry out the operations and activities to which these terms apply.³⁷⁸ For instance, while *arvum* is ploughed land that has not been sown (1.291), Scrofa does not provide instructions for how to properly prepare the soil (are different methods or depths of plowing appropriate depending on what is being planted?) or how to sow various crops in these fields. Indeed, the whole of Scrofa’s calendar feels like an extended display of etymological prowess rather than practical or detailed information.³⁷⁹ In other words, his account of agriculture effectively offers a pretense of knowledge in place of real knowledge.

Stolo, who takes up the agronomic instructions where Scrofa leaves off, improves upon his predecessors’ instructions, for he does explain different methods of carrying out various activities. For instance, he explains different methods of preparing the soil at 1.37.4. He also provides rather detailed instructions for grafting at 1.40.5-6. Yet even where Stolo fills in some of the blanks that Scrofa’s shallow discourse left, he still does not provide the information necessary to be a practical guide—such as what method of soil preparation a farmer should choose in any given instance, or how a farmer should tend his various plants between the periods

³⁷⁸ Skydsgaard 1968: 20 calls Scrofa’s method here a “philological and explanatory commentary” on the agricultural calendar.

³⁷⁹ Kronenberg 2009: 84 has also noted that Scrofa substitutes etymologies for real information.

of sowing and harvesting.³⁸⁰ In making both Scrofa and Stolo inept in the functionality of their instructions, Varro again calls attention to the gap between the ideology of the Roman identity as a citizenry of farmers and shepherds and the new reality, where Romans spend all their time in the city and, thus, no longer know how to be farmers (or statesmen).

The most egregious omission in the *dRR*'s so-called instructions is the specific information needed to transform the rural arts into profit. In Book One, this is most obviously evident in the dearth of information regarding the selling of crops, a key to transforming the fruit of the earth into profit.³⁸¹ Yet more specific and wider ranging instances of this failure appear throughout the work. Scrofa provides an example early in Book One, when he asserts that the profitability of the vineyard (the factor that for some determines whether or not they have one) depends upon the kind maintained (*refert quod genus vineae sit*, 1.8.1). The implication is that if a farmer selects the correct kind of vineyard, it will turn him a profit, while the wrong kind will cost more in upkeep than it will earn. Yet as he proceeds to present different kinds of vineyards, he fails to indicate which are better in terms of profit and which are best avoided (1.8.1-7). By not drawing a conclusion about the circumstances in which wine will be profitable for an agronomist, Scrofa leaves it to the audience to assess that for themselves.³⁸² But in leaving it up to the reader, Scrofa fails in providing the knowledge necessary to give husbandmen an edge over nature and circumstance.

Similarly, in his account of olive production late in *dRR* 1, Stolo states that most people are ignorant of the value (*utilitas*) of *amurca*, a byproduct of pressing, but does not explain the

³⁸⁰ Skydsgaard 1968: 27–28 particularly notes the scantiness of Stolo's instructions for tending plants during their growth period. Kronenberg 2009: 84 views Stolo as akin to Scrofa in the failure of his instructions.

³⁸¹ Rosenstein 2008: 20 notes this, specifically comparing Varro's practice of largely ignoring the sale of crops to Cato's explicit instructions in this aspect of farming.

³⁸² As Skydsgaard 1968: 14 notes.

many uses to which he states it can be put (1.55.7). In other words, he does not offer the information necessary to actually prove to the reader that *amurca* has value, let alone to make it useful to a farmer. In Book Two, the interlocutors distinguish between the profit earned from the herds generally and the revenue that derives from byproducts, such as milk, wool, and cheese. In the first instance, Scrofa claims that the purpose of the science (*scientia*) is to turn the greatest profit (*fructus maximi*) from the herd, directly establishing a link between the systemized knowledge of herding and high financial return. Knowledge will help the herdsmen earn the most. Yet instead of explaining what that profit entails (since we later learn that byproducts represent secondary income), Scrofa merely reiterates the linguistic connection between herd (*pecus*) and money (*pecunia*, 2.1.11). This dearth of information regarding how cattle become profits extends to the instructions themselves, where the only mention of money that arises is in connection to their value as objects to be bought, and the question of butchery (undoubtedly a primary source of profit from some of the herding animals) is left out almost entirely. In fact, butchery of herd animals only arises once in Book Two, when Scrofa indicts as lazy (*ignavus*) and extravagant (*sumptuosus*) those who buy cuts of meat from the butcher rather than slaughtering their own animals (2.4.3). While it is clear from this statement that the slaughter of animals has some connection to revenue, neither Scrofa nor the other interlocutors provide instructions for when or how to butcher animals.

Book Three is likewise lacking in information related to the conversion of villa animals into the extraordinary profits that the interlocutors claim the *pastio* provides. In the case of aviaries (*ornithon*), which provide fowl for the market and bring in great wealth (3.4.1-2), profit depends upon the selling of the aviary birds in the city. While Merula explains the process for removing birds to sell from the aviary without distressing the other birds housed there, he neither

clarifies how the villa herder will know what birds are ready for market, nor what proper procedure is necessary for killing the market-bound birds after they have been extracted (3.5.5-6). In the same book, after a lengthy description of the proper care of bees, Merula turns to the aspect of the hive from which profits derive—and thus for which reason such care is given to beekeeping in the first place: the honey (3.16.32). He proceeds to the signs that will indicate when a comb is ready to be taken from the hive, then continues on to provide recommendations for how *much* honey to take from the comb (3.16.32-33). While both of these instructions are important and useful, he skips over the information most necessary to turn that honey into profit: *how* to extract the honey from the comb.

This overarching failure in the *dRR* to provide the knowledge necessary to achieve the primary goal of farming and herding—namely profit—highlights the general inadequacy of the dialogue as a practical instruction manual (another indication that the *dRR* is not what it seems). Just as the idealized control stemming from an unrealistic view of the world in which the farmer and herdsman works is shown within the work itself to be little more than a dream, the power that the interlocutors grant to knowledge, its ability to give the husbandman the upper hand against nature, similarly collapses in the dialogue. The knowledge that they purport to provide is in fact inadequate for the tasks at hand, insufficient to produce the success they promise. It, like, the idealized Italy, provides little more than the illusion of control. If we remember the political edge that Varro brings to so much of the *dRR*, particularly in conflating the interlocutors with the science they talk about through their names, and then further conflating Rome and Italy and the political world with agriculture, the showcasing of their lack of direct control takes on a different tone. If Italy is the villa, and the interlocutors do not personally have the knowledge needed to run her functionally and turn a profit, but rather can only maintain the semblance of control

while needing to rely on others to do their work, then the *dRR* presents a case in which those men who are inherently and naturally connected to the running of Rome—through agriculture and herding in the dialogue, but through politics by extension—no longer have that power. Nor are they any longer capable of political control. Just as the interlocutors do not see the shortcomings of their so-called agricultural and pastoral knowledge, either the Romans fail to realize that their control is an illusion or they refuse to admit it.

Conclusion

Ideally, Roman farmers have control over their land. It bends to their will and allows them to profit without challenge or question. In the *dRR*, Varro's interlocutors, with their names that conform to the ideology of Roman identity (a citizenry of shepherds and farmers who are statesmen), buy into this illusion of control and present farming and herding as easy tasks with easy profits, natural and national. Yet Varro undercuts their idealized portrayal of control of the land with hints and inconsistencies that reveal control is not free or simple or there for the farmer-citizen's taking. At the same time, through the preface to the work, the highly systematized presentation of the rural arts, and the emphasis that characters such as Scrofa place on *scientia*, Varro suggests that control, while not natural, is obtainable to anybody who has the know-how. Yet, just as he undercuts the impression that control is natural, Varro similarly undermines the role of knowledge in earning a farmer or herdsman control. The dialogue fails as an instruction manual because it lacks the information necessary to provide the knowledge it proposes to offer. While this failure of knowledge reminds the audience that even *scientia* and systemization cannot fully order what is naturally chaotic—the climate, land formation, soil quality, animals, and slaves, it also undercuts the presentation of the *dRR* as a handbook, furthering the notion that it is, instead, a different kind of work altogether.

Control of space and of the land can be used as an analogy for political domination. The ability to manipulate the landscape to one's will is a tangible expression of the ability to control others, the ability to control the state, the ability to control an Empire. In this way, the agricultural identity of the Romans contributes to the discourse that not only gives them some sort of *right* to widespread political control, but also an innate ability: born farmers, born rulers. But the reality that emerges in the text is that the farmer isn't in control, and this metaphorically and ideologically reflects upon the Roman farmer as Roman statesman. The loss of control that emerges in the course of the *dRR* speaks to the shifting paradigm of politics. No longer is Italy a land of small shareholders managing their individual plots, no longer is the farmer the statesman, no longer do even the elite in their luxury villas maintain the control they still pretend they have.

Conclusion: The Way We Live Now

Far from being the simple and simplistic agricultural handbook that so many scholars have dismissed it as, Varro's *dRR* is a complex and carefully constructed dialogue that utilizes husbandry (both of the land and of animals) as a means of discussing Roman identity, Roman cultural values, and the Roman Republic. Because the rural sciences inhabit very clear spaces, landscape is a natural means for exploring this link between agriculture/herding and society. In this study I have focused on Varro's use of landscape as a tool for displaying and confronting social and political problems. While there are numerous distinct aspects to Varro's use of landscape in the *dRR*, in each case there is a disconnect between the ideal view and reality. In Chapter One, the ideological view of Romans as farmers and Italy as a state based on agriculture, and where the city has a purpose but does not impose upon the predominance of the countryside, breaks down into a landscape where most elements are out of joint: Romans have turned away from the land and the city has dominated the countryside. In Chapter Two, the ideal of the simpler life of old, where utility and suitability defined how Roman farmers situated themselves in their land, has been replaced by modern luxury and the goal of pleasure. In Chapter Three, the dream of human control over the landscape and its chaotic forces awakens to the reality of the husbandman whose control is ensured neither by some sort of natural/national right nor by knowledge.

In the dialogue, Varro ultimately connects this disjunction between the ideal and the real with the separation between Then and Now. In all three books, the interlocutors and the prefaces and the moralizing statements laud the way we were—the ancestral ways, their identity as farmer-statesmen, their simple and useful country life, the amount of time they spent laboring in the fields instead of lounging in the city. The work promotes the past as a better time, pointing to

all of these elements as the reasons behind the moral superiority of the *maiores*. At the same time, the three books display the way we live now—the preference for the city over the countryside, for leisure over labor, the turning to pleasure as both an end in itself and a means to earn profit, the violence and fraud that have contaminated the Republic. Yet even as the text participates in this standard privileging of the past as superior to the present, Varro reveals that attempts to regain the past are inevitably flawed and invariably doomed to fail. Retreat from the state to the countryside ignores the fact that social ills don't stay in the city, while embracing *otium* through writing furthers the problem of inactivity that, according to the ideology, marks the city as detrimental. The movement toward the wrong kind of villas and herding—the kind that embodies pleasure over utility—was accompanied by a loss of the knowledge necessary to be a true farmer—and, by extension, a true statesman. Without that knowledge, without the ability to control the land, Romans, no matter how much they might wish to be the farmer-statesmen their ancestors were, cannot hope to reinstate the past.

While Varro wishes his work to be like the Sibylline Books, to be a guide when things go wrong, a response to a state in crisis, it fails as much in providing answers to the social and political problems it identifies as Scrofa fails in providing answers to a farmer attempting to figure out how to farm. The *dRR* is diagnostic not prescriptive, pinpointing where the Republic has failed: in the abandonment of the countryside, in the increased desire for luxury, the neglect of the state, and the diminishing number of hands who hold power—an assessment that is reminiscent of Sallust's own diagnosis of the Republic in the *Bellum Catilinae* (10.1): *Igitur primo pecuniae, deinde imperii cupido crevit: ea quasi materies omnium malorum fuere*, “Therefore at first desire for wealth, then desire for power grew: these became, as it were, the substance of every ill.” The system as a whole has deteriorated—the people, their values, the

power structure, the landscape have all shifted from what they should be. And Varro can offer no solution to fix it.

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