

MOTHER-LOVE FOR PLANT-CHILDREN: SENTIMENTAL PASTORALISM AND NINETEENTH-CENTURY PARLOUR GARDENING

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Abstract: *American horticultural and domestic literature of the 1840s through the 1870s represented parlour gardening as a form of sentimental parenting. In these sources, professional writers and amateur gardeners recast the gardener's relationship to the plant so that gardeners were parents to anthropomorphized plants. The gardener-parent relationship with the plant-child was interpreted through domestic sentimentalism's parenting model, which idealized an effortless and empathetic 'mother-love' that worked through invisible influence rather than conscientious, skilled, or strained labour. By extension, gardening was also imagined to be an effortless affective relationship between the gardener-parent and plant-child. I place this metaphor within the contexts of domestic sentimentalism and transatlantic pastoralism, in order to show the combined power of these traditions to naturalize, aestheticize, and misrepresent labour as leisure.*

In the literature of nineteenth-century horticulture, several co-existing and sometimes contradictory beliefs about love circulated. Here are some of the most common: All men, women, and children have an innate fondness for flowers. Anyone who sincerely appreciates plants can grow them well. To love plants is to understand and administer to their individual needs. Plants will respond positively and demonstrably to human affection. Plants teach gardeners how to care for other people, animals, and things. The experience of loving (by seeing or taking care of) plants, especially flowers, is morally and spiritually purifying, an act of self-improvement. Flowers inspire the people who see them to love others and to love God. A home decorated with ornamental plants is a home in which every family member is nurtured and nurturing. The more a person loves plants, the more he or she will buy.

This essay investigates one version of plant love, the version that equated the *activity* of gardening with sentimental parenting. In American horticultural and domestic literature of the 1840s through the 1870s writers represented gardeners, and gardeners represented themselves, as parents who tended their anthropomorphized plant 'children.' Perspectives on why gardeners should think of their plants as children, and how gardener-parents should raise their plant-children, included the ideas that gardeners learn parenting by raising plants; gardeners and parents should study and respond to the plant or child in a rational and individualized style; and, gardeners and parents should be able to raise their plant or child through inherent

empathetic understanding. In this article I focus on the last of these three, the sentimental narrative about parenting plants. It equated gardening with an innate and emotional expression of 'mother-love,' a trope of domestic sentimentalism that Gillian Brown discusses at length in *Domestic Individualism* (1990). Sentimentalism was prevalent in domestic literature written for a female audience, and, as I will discuss, in gardening advice manuals for male and female readers. This discourse of plant love is not limited to parlour gardening, but it is most intense in that genre: books written for women about ornamental gardening in the domestic environment.

I have chosen to describe this phenomenon as sentimental anthropomorphism, rather than personification, because the amateur gardeners and professional horticultural writers interpreted the plants' appearance and reactions to the environment as if the plants were human, logical and emotional beings in concrete relationships with their human owners. Other historians, most notably Beverly Seaton, Ann B. Shteir, and Londa Schiebinger, have explored the personification of plants with human qualities and emotions (such as the semiotic equation of roses and love); the symbolic representations of women and children as decorative, fragile, and ineffectual flowers; and the imposition of human gender traits on plants for ideological purposes.¹ In contrast, it is the interactive anthropomorphic character of the gardener-parent and plant-child metaphor in the context of material activities that I address here.

The garden and its associated texts, images, objects, and practices, are a rich site for cultural discourse on 'nature.' In proximity to the spaces, activities, and representations of gardening, ideologies that naturalize social identities and relationships intensify and reveal themselves to be 'unnatural.' The metaphorical values of 'nature' and the history of human interaction with the organic environment have been a major theme in the field of American Studies since its beginnings. The garden figures prominently as metaphor for wilderness, and as locus for taming that wilderness. In the influential American Studies text *The Machine in the Garden*, Leo Marx theorized a 'complex' and distinctively American version of pastoralism, shaped by the 'counterforce' of industry and wilderness. The historic and transatlantic pastoral was a 'simple' and 'sentimental' popular nostalgic fantasy about rural life, in Marx's analysis.² This transatlantic pastoral 'structure of feeling' is also a culturally powerful tool for capitalism, as shown by Raymond Williams in *The Country and the City*. Williams argues that pastoral English literature provides 'a magical extraction of the curse of labor [that] is in fact achieved by the simple extraction of the existence of laborers.' Work is performed 'by a natural order,' by 'Nature,' rather than by workers.³ When labour is represented as

effortless leisure in bucolic nature, the labourer has been ‘pastoralized’: aesthetically erased. It is Williams’ sense of the pastoral structure and its ideological function that guides this essay.

Nineteenth-century gardening texts are built on a long transatlantic tradition of inserting pastoral and georgic rhetoric into otherwise pragmatic agricultural and horticultural manuals. The pastoral tradition aestheticizes economically significant work by framing it as leisure. In the georgic tradition, manual labour redeems the gardener. Neither the pastoral nor the georgic traditions explicitly acknowledge the economic value of gardening and the gardener’s labour. From the seventeenth century, horticulture manuals have combined and moved between two modes: the pastoral erasure of workers’ labour, and in contrast, the georgic elite redemption through pleasurable work.⁴ An inherently conservative form, nineteenth-century gardening texts repeated these key concepts in multiple versions. The georgic and pastoral subtexts of profit, pleasure, and moral improvement in gardening texts offer many avenues for historians. For example, historians Tamara Plakins Thornton and Marina Moskowitz have focused on the tensions and intersections between self-improvement, commercial improvement, and anxiety about materialism in antebellum American horticulture, topics that I have also found fruitful in earlier and more extensive versions of this work.⁵

I introduce the term *sentimental pastoralism* in order to situate parlour gardening within two related traditions: the pastoral ‘structure of feeling’ that extracts labour from the human-nature relationship, and the nineteenth-century domestic sentimentalism that performed the same magical transformation on women’s unpaid domestic work. The structures of sentimentalism and pastoralism worked together to depict unpaid domestic activities, particularly those performed by women, as natural and effortless. Through sentimental pastoralism, the skill, knowledge and effort of gardening—and parenting—were representationally transformed into leisure and love. This representation naturalized the unnatural practice of parlour gardening, and by comparison, further naturalized the unnatural gendered division of labour under industrial capitalism. I offer here a case study of how sentimental pastoralism worked.

Parlour Gardening

Many factors contributed to the development of middle-class domestic practice of parlour gardening in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Important ones to acknowledge are: the commercialization of horticultural leisure; popular demand for ornamental plantings in the emerging landscape forms of middle-class suburbs, urban parks, and rural cemeteries; the Romantic fashion for nature appreciation; and the increased

availability of glass and cast-iron greenhouse construction. Gardening was fashionable, both generated by and generating a vigorous transatlantic market in greenhouse hybrids and exotics for ornamental display.

'Parlour gardening' consequently developed out of the fashion for floral decorations, combined with the horticultural practices of forcing flowers for winter decoration and protecting exotic plants by potting them and bringing them inside the house during the winter. In the nineteenth century, exotic flowering and ornamental foliage plants, hardy or half-hardy greenhouse shrubs, and 'florists' flowers' were the most common types of plants for indoor gardening. Gardeners displayed the plants in glass cases and on window ledges, shelves, fireplace mantels, hanging brackets, or plant stands in parlours, sitting-rooms, and dining rooms. The plants and their furnishings varied widely in price, and didactic and documentary visual records show diverse economic status among parlour gardeners.

The growth of a competitive ornamental horticulture market in the antebellum period meant that gardening practices that had previously been limited to the wealthy became affordable for the middle class. This led to a spate of amateur gardeners who were struggling to maintain their houseplants without the aid of professionally-trained horticulturists or skilled domestic servants or slaves. In 1839, Boston nurseryman and editor of *The Magazine of Horticulture*, Charles Hovey, indirectly predicted the rise of instructional texts on indoor gardening to accompany the introduction of new plants:

Heretofore, with a majority of those who grow plants, particularly in rooms, it has been supposed that there was but very little necessity to consult books, to learn how to propagate and manage plants so universally cultivated; but within a short time those who have been inclined to such ideas have been convinced that they were in error, and that pelargoniums, though seen in nearly every collection of plants—whether decorating the cottage window, or blooming in the parlor of the wealthy, are found only in their highest perfection, where care and skill have alike been exercised in the treatment of the plants.⁶

It was not coincidental that professional horticulturists answered this need, for they stood to profit from increased public interest.

Between 1840 and 1880, there was a rapid proliferation of gardening manuals, periodicals, and columns written specifically for middle-class women amateur parlor gardeners. This was the zenith of a long process of

feminization of flower gardening and indoor gardening. Late sixteenth and early seventeenth century gardening manuals introduced outdoor and indoor ornamental horticulture as women's work, but until the mid-nineteenth-century, most authors of flower gardening manuals assumed a male readership. Instruction manuals that focused on parlour gardening and assumed a female readership began to appear in the 1840s, and were well established as a genre by the 1860s. In the early 1850s, female amateurs from across the country wrote to Joseph Breck, nurseryman and author of *The Flower Garden*, asking him to add parlour gardening to the second edition of his book, which he did.⁷ These were followed in the 1850s, 1860s, and 1870s by a rush of related publications: *Every Lady her Own Flower Gardener* (1855), *The Parlor Gardener* (1861), *Flowers for the Parlor and Garden* (1863), *The Window Gardener* (1872), *Window Gardening* (1874); *Household Elegancies* (1875), *Ladies' Fancy Work* (1877), *Floral Decorations for the Dwelling House* (1876), *Winter Greeneries at Home* (1878), *Every Woman her Own Flower Gardener* (1878), *Ferns: In their homes and ours* (1878), and others.⁸ Several domestic management and domestic arts (also known as 'fancywork') publications included chapters about the subject of parlour gardening. In fact, some of the new genre of domestic economy periodicals, such as *Ladies Home Journal*, grew out of horticulture or agriculture publications that were trying to reach a female audience by including articles on domestic economy and household arts. Many of the greenhouse or indoor gardening horticulture texts were based on earlier English guides or were first published in England, and so shared in a transatlantic sentimental pastoralism.

These sources reproduced and distributed sentimental and pastoral interpretations of gardening as parental love. The historian's dilemma, when using didactic sentimental domestic and horticultural literature, is that 'the extent to which any manual advice is followed is unknown and there is no necessary relationship between manual advice and cultural acceptance of that advice.'⁹ Here, the limits of space preclude exploration, but in readers' responses and material practices, I have found acceptance, negotiation, and rejection of the attitudes under examination.

While the bulk of the instructional literature is pragmatic, a florid introductory statement or chapter extolling the moral advantages and emotional rewards of gardening became ubiquitous when the subject was domestic ornamental horticulture and the intended audience was middle-class women. It was not unusual that professional horticulturists marketed plants with the sentimental language of love. As Elizabeth White Nelson has argued, sentiment and commerce were deeply entwined in antebellum

middle-class domestic consumption.¹⁰ In these commercial and didactic venues, the sentimental and pastoral discourses of gardening circulated.

Mother-love for Plants

The version of plant love that was most likely to be pastoralized and sentimentalized is the one in which houseplants are represented as universally-adored children that are nurtured by an effortless ‘mother-love.’ In the antebellum anthropomorphic equation of gardening with parenting, the gardener ‘loves’ the plant like a child and assumes that the plant’s physical appearance is a direct emotional response. The metaphor of gardening as parenting (and vice-versa) was actually well-established before the early nineteenth-century, but was intensified in the antebellum literature of domestic sentimentalism, and had a residual effect through the nineteenth-century. While other historians have noted that the gardening/parenting metaphor sheds light on child-rearing, I look here at how ideas of child-rearing were applied in sentimental descriptions of plant cultivation.

In earlier parlour gardening manuals, gardeners without little children at home were more likely to be described as sentimental and loving plant parents. As the genre focused on a female readership, the remarks were increasingly (but not exclusively) addressed to women, who were assumed to need an outlet for their mother-love. ‘They are like our own children; and where there are no children in a family, there are sure to be flowers,’ wrote Walter Elder in 1849.¹¹ While the father in John Clark’s 1856 fable of sentimental anthropomorphism distinguishes between the plants that he ‘fondly cherishes’ and the grown children to whom the plants brought ‘pleasure’ and ‘comfort’ long ago, the ‘fond mother anxiously watches and nurtures them’ as substitutes for her grown human babies.¹² ‘Flowers, plants too, often supply the place of children in bereaved homes,’ wrote Henry T. Williams in the opening chapter of *Window Gardening*, ‘for their soul-refreshing, heart-inspiring, and eye-brightening influences, are joys to wean the thoughts from pain or sorrow.’¹³ Like children, flowers needed skilled attention or, in the sentimental vocabulary, parental care and love.

The sentimental interpretation of the human-plant love relationship remained vital to the end of the century. Eben E. Rexford and his *Ladies Home Journal* horticultural column readers frequently referred to plants as pets, friends, and children, using parenting metaphors for their care. Mrs. Annie C. Brown, wrote “I am a middle-aged woman with only one child, a daughter, who is grown up, so all my spare time is given to my flowers. They are to me as children and there is not a month in the year that some are not in bloom in my garden.’ Brown lavished her affection on a far larger brood than the usual few parlour plants. In her California garden, she had

raised and tended 125 fuchsias and 200 rose bushes, in addition to 'Abutilons, Pelargoniums, Geraniums, Begonias, Cacti, etc.,' all within the prior year.¹⁴ A substantial venture that clearly required horticultural skill and knowledge, Brown's garden was nonetheless the object of her affection. In the texts under consideration from the 1840s through the 1870s, true gardening knowledge and skills existed in tension with the sentimental pastoral sensibility of mother-love.

Houseplants occupied a special status in which they were 'children' entirely dependent upon human care, and yet at the same time, an influential element in the designated emotional centre of the middle-class home: the parlour. According to the aesthetics of domestic sentimentalism and the mechanics of environmental determinism, plants and flowers were essential to the cheerful and sympathetic middle-class home. The flower-garden, the window box, and the parlour plant stand all contributed towards making a home into 'the abode of cheerfulness.' 'Of the pleasant objects' that made the home happy and harmonious, 'what will tend more to this,' John Clark asked rhetorically, 'than a flower-garden, filled with beautiful flowers, imparting their fragrance, elevating and purifying the soul of the beholder?'¹⁵ Harriet Beecher Stowe and her sister Catherine Beecher are the best-known advocates of domestic sentimentalism. In Stowe's works and in her well-known collaboration with her sister, household decorations have the power to influence the residents' morals and emotional affect. This environmental determinism dictated that sympathetic furnishings, correctly used, could make a house look 'happy,' which would actually make the home *be* happy, an equation that Katherine C. Grier describes as 'domestic environmentalism.'¹⁶ Happiness resided in the way furnishings looked, which was a direct result of how they were treated.

In the same way that middle-class women 'naturally' cared for their families, they were supposed 'naturally' to care for their possessions with a nurturing mother-love. This love of domestic objects Gillian Brown calls 'sentimental possession.' 'To be properly owned,' according to the logic of sentimental possession, is to be 'mothered and nurtured and tended.'¹⁷ Brown's larger argument is that sentimentalism located possessive individualism (ownership of one's own labour) in the home, and used emotion to domesticate and de-commodify possessions, thus critiquing market capitalism's alienation of labour and commodity fetishism. Through nurturing, things become possessions that embody and extend the love of their owner/mother. Within the discourse of sentimental possession, consumption is an act of salvation and maintenance is an act of love. The consumer saves and purifies the commodity by turning it from a *thing* into a loved one. When the consumer takes the commodity home and cares for it,

it is removed from the market and purified of its commodity status. In this process, the middle-class home works a new magic of alienation, separating the commodity not only from the workers and process that produced it but also from the market. Nurseryman Thomas Meehan's account of a female consumer who could buy plants from the nursery, but couldn't imagine selling plants because she loved them, is a perfect example of sentimental possession. 'Speaking of a leading nurseryman, said a lady friend to us recently, "I felt sorry for Mr. _____, when at his place, though he wants, I know, to love his flowers, I felt that he could not feel that passionate admiration for them that I did. He would part with them for money, and I would not."' ¹⁸ In a slightly different version, Edward Sprague Rand, Jr., the author of a parlor gardening manual imagined a female reader who declines his advice on the basis that flowers are 'so much trouble!' The author's response ties together the mothering duties of Christian conversion, de-commodification, and plant cultivation: 'Are they not the dearer to us because we have labored to bring them home?' ¹⁹ Here, Rand converts work into love.

Sentimental possession assumes affective mirroring, especially — and most sensibly — in relationships between animate possessions and their owners. The furnishings became extensions of mother-love. So, in response to the owner/mother's affect, chairs are cheerful and the fireplace is sympathetic. According to Lori Merish, who builds on Brown's work, plants and pets are 'exemplary objects' of sentimental ownership because the plants are valued for the emotional opportunities they provide for owners to express and exchange love. ²⁰ Sentimental gardeners who anthropomorphized plants, describing them as children, friends, or pets, imagined that they could sympathize with plants, and that in turn plants would return their love with visible expressions of emotion. In one of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *House and Home Papers* articles from the early 1860s, Stowe suggested that the successful woman gardener sympathized with plants in the same way that mothers should with their children. Her efforts were the extension of heart, of sympathy, of constant care and affection. The successful gardener-parent 'puts into her plants . . . just what she has put into her children, and all her other home-things, her heart. She loves them; she lives in them; she has in herself a plant-life and a plant-sympathy. She feels for them as if she herself were a plant.' Healthy foliage and abundant flowers were signs that the plant was happy and happily loved. Unhealthy plants looked 'forlorn and hopeless,' the victims of neglect. ²¹ Sentimental anthropomorphism implied that an unhealthy plant was either unhappy or rude, and its owner cruel or uncaring, but letters to horticultural periodicals show gardeners anthropomorphizing plants without self-recrimination for its failures. Verbenas, which did not do well as houseplants were 'coquettish': 'When in the right humor they will strike roots into almost any soil with genuine

affection; but many . . . find them too often heartlessly unreliable.²² Mrs. M. D. Wellcome, who became a regular contributor to the *Ladies Home Journal* in the 1880s, wrote that her geraniums ‘do not have the dumps if not petted, but enjoy being cared for and show their appreciation by thriving more luxuriantly.’ Even if they are banished to the cellar for wintering, she continued, ‘They won’t get huffy about it nor break their hearts with grief.’²³ The transformation of gardening into effortless love was most convincing when work was invisible, and the product of that work, healthy blooming flowers and lush foliage, were fully visible. ‘Happy’ plants, like happy children, were the proof of the gardener’s love. Although later in the century John Ruskin and Forbes Watson asked gardeners to love their plants as individuals, to cherish them at each stage of growth and decay, sentimental anthropomorphism favoured plant children only in their most cheerful flowering glory.²⁴

Loving Gardeners’ Invisible Influence

The domestic sentimentalism of the antebellum period characterized the parenting relationship as an effusion of cheerful and sympathetic love in which the parent’s efforts should never be obvious to the child; it was ideal for a parent subtly to influence rather than explicitly instruct children. Parents’ influence, like home décor, subtly made the home happy. This version of parenting, explicitly described in Horace Bushnell’s *Christian Nurture* (1861) ‘entails a manifestly *internal*, even hidden, labor that depends for its efficacy less on what a parent does than on who a parent is.’²⁵ In her study of nineteenth-century domestic literature, Brandy Parris significantly extends Brown’s argument that sentimentalism is about women’s labour by identifying sentimentalism’s emotional regime *as* labour. Parris argues that manufacturing cheerfulness and sympathy while concealing anger, disappointment, and resentment is *emotional labour* that is consistently misinterpreted as natural emotion.²⁶ That emotional labor was sentimentalized, pastoralized, and rendered almost invisible in sentimental literature. Beecher warned women to ‘accommodate’ themselves to the ‘peculiar tastes and habits’ of husband, children, domestic servants, and other demanding and unpredictable figures and conditions of home life.²⁷ However, their influence was to be silent and subtle, the invisible performance of emotional labour, as in this depiction of mother-love:

The writer has known families where the mother's presence seemed the sunshine of the circle around her; imparting a cheering and vivifying power scarcely realized till it was withdrawn. Every one, without thinking of it, or knowing why it was so, experienced a peaceful and invigorating influence as soon as he entered the sphere illumined by her

*smile, and sustained by her cheering kindness and sympathy.*²⁸

The similarities between the Beechers' advice and that offered by Edward Sprague Rand, Jr., in *Flowers for the Parlor and Garden* are striking. Rand admires a male friend who grows flowers for pleasure. Lightening, but still employing the sentimental rhetoric, he 'laughingly' writes that the flowers are 'grateful' 'friends' who 'bloom for him' because he tends them in the same way that women were advised to care for children and spouse. He 'knows their peculiarities, attends to their wants, feeds them properly, [and] affords the requisite light and air' they need.²⁹ In return for good care, Rand writes, such houseplants and flower arrangements would be a blessing to the household, valued 'for their sunny light, for their cheerful teaching, for their insensibly ennobling influence.'³⁰ In both the Beechers and Rand, the hidden efforts of the parent, the affective mirroring of the child or plant, and the extension of the owner's emotions to and through the plant become evident. The plant and mother both emanate light and warmth like the sun. They make others feel cheerful and sympathetic.

Consequently, if plants are children, and mothering is love not labour, then gardening was also—in this context—represented as love, not labour. Above all other household work, gardening most closely approached the naturalized and feminized status of parenting as joyous and easy expressions of love. Rand's reference to a loving male gardener demonstrates the gradual feminization of parlour gardening, and the simultaneous sentimentalization of any unpaid domestic ornamental gardening. It even served as a point of comparison that proved through its implied easiness that other areas of work were relatively difficult. In *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the character Rachel Halliday most embodies mother-love. Cooking breakfast in her affection-animated kitchen is 'a vision of perfect, happy labor' in Gillian Brown's analysis. It is also so easy that it is 'like picking up the rose-leaves and trimming the bushes in Paradise.'³¹ Within Eugene Benson's diatribe that housework makes a woman into a 'monotonous housekeeper' instead of a 'queen' of the home and fit companion for men, he indirectly pointed to gardening as an example of the labour-free life that (white, middle-class) women should lead: 'If we understood the woman question in its domestic and social aspects, we would labor to protect woman from the curse of work and the harassments of want; we would treat them as they treat flowers—with care, with delicacy, with unflinching love; in our turn, we should be rewarded as they are rewarded by flowers—with a fragrant, delightful home atmosphere, with lovely textures, exquisite colours, beautiful forms.'³² In these examples, plant-care is seen as so easy and natural that it is the reference for the ease and naturalness of mother-love's labour free ways. Men 'labor' to protect women from the 'curse of

work,' leaving them free to 'treat' flowers with love. Stowe and Benson extend sentimental possession through the process of plant maintenance, making it out to be a natural and easy expression of mother-love.

The essentialist and aestheticizing ideology of domestic sentimentalism rendered the physical and intellectual demands and economic value of many areas of women's work invisible. The skill involved in parlour gardening became invisible when it was construed as leisure and the natural expression of femininity. Consequently, it shouldn't be surprising to see middle-class women's gardening represented as pure emotional effusion without conscious skill, knowledge or discipline. This is reiterated three times in a row in Stowe's short story 'Raking Up the Fire.' The mother-gardener 'always remembers [the plants] without an effort'; 'she hardly knows when she does the things that make them grow'; and she 'herself doesn't know why her plants grow.'³³ The invisible influence model of parenting and gardening imagined both to be love, not labour.

Sentimental Pastoralism

That nineteenth-century authors represented domestic ornamental gardening as an expression of love should not be surprising to historians. Domestic sentimentalism, most prominent during the antebellum period, relied on an ideological dichotomy of home and work, in which the former was associated with women, emotion, leisure, and individual subjectivity, while the latter was associated with men, commerce, and the alienation of labour and commodities. Recent scholarship has complicated this 'separate spheres' dichotomy. Most significantly, Jeanne Boydston (1990), Gillian Brown (1990), Lora Romero (1997), Lori Merish (2000), Elizabeth White Nelson (2004), and Brandy Parris (2005) all show how interdependent these two realms of activity were, ideologically and materially.³⁴ Whether sentimentality was a hegemonic and commercial manipulation of women's interests or a dissenting and individualistic critique of the market, or a negotiated combination of the two positions is still under debate, but it is clear that the 'spheres' functioned in an ideological dialectic.³⁵ What remains consistent in these historians' analyses are two points of recognition. First, women's work of caring for the family and managing the household, even with the help of paid domestic workers, involved skill, knowledge, and effort. However, middle-class women's domestic work was frequently represented as leisure and a natural expression of feminine love. It is the character of that representation, rather than the question of whether the sentimental was oppressive or liberating, that this article addresses.

In *Home and Work*, Jeanne Boydston's study of how women's unpaid domestic work facilitated industrialization, the book ends with a climactic chapter on the 'pastoralization of housework.' Boydston asks why early-

nineteenth-century writers (women and men, in published and private texts) described women's housework and parenting as a natural and joyful expression of femininity, in contrast to the reality that it was skilled and physically demanding labour of essential economic value. To answer, Boydston turns to Raymond Williams' formulation of the pastoral in *The Country and the City*, where Williams shows that in the context of capitalism's division of labour, the pastoral structure of feeling does the cultural work of erasing rural labour. In literary and visual representations, nobody labours in the pastoral countryside; it is too bucolic for work.

Boydston sees a pastoral counterpart in American antebellum domestic literature. There, pastoralism is the gendered process by which domestic work occurs in the 'sanctified home as an emanation of Woman's nature.' What is extracted is the physical exertion and economic value of women's work; what remains is the idea of moral and emotional influence of 'Woman.' Home was refashioned as a 'New Eden—a paradise delivered up to husband and children from a benevolent and bountiful nature, without the curse of labor.'³⁶ Lori Rotskoff adds to Boydston's discussion, and extends it into the later nineteenth-century by arguing that 'if [still-life] prints . . . reassured *post-bellum* Americans that the values of the pre-commercialized, pastoral past were alive and well, they located those values squarely in women's domestic sphere.'³⁷ If women's work was not really work, then this was doubly true of their 'hobbies,' regardless of the skill or effort required, or the beneficial results.

This was precisely the sensibility which the nurseryman Thomas Meehan both replicated and questioned. A year after his earlier-cited account of the female consumer who loved her plants more dearly because they were not commodities to her, Meehan ruminated on the 'closer analogy between the life of women and a gardener's profession than would strike one at first thought. Neither receive . . . the full credit for refining influences which is so justly their due; and both have to fall back on their work as labors of love.' While employing a sentimental notion of influence and a georgic pursuit of pleasure in work, Meehan also identifies the pastoral invisibility of the unceasing labour of domestic work and gardening. Both are unrecognized and under-compensated. Suffering in the oppressive July heat of Germantown, Pennsylvania, 'a passing thought tempted us to wish we had not the labour to perform, -- that it was not, perhaps, appreciated as the effort should be, --that it brought us no pecuniary reward, --and that we might as well persuade ourselves and our readers that there was nothing worth doing in a garden in July' Meehan then spins a pastoral fantasy of lazing in a shaded hammock, thinking back on the work of the past year as a 'victory we have enabled [Flora and Pomona] to achieve over nature, and the rewards they have in store for us by the success' That daydream—

offered as a ruse to readers who might indulge in pastoral notions of enjoying nature's abundance without human labour—is clearly written with a wink and quickly dissolves into a long list of trimming, training, weeding, moving, and watering plants.³⁸ Meehan recognized that it was misleading to represent either gardening or housework as an effortless act of love.

In this article, I've shown that both gardening and housework were sentimentalized, and I've argued that both were pastoralized. Gardening and housework met, in what we might call an over-determined 'double-whammy' of sentimental pastoralism, in the potted plants of the middle-class parlor. The sentimental comparison of parenting and gardening reinforced the essentialized—*naturalized*—status of each activity. The learned, skilled, and demanding aspects of parenting and gardening were sublimated. Either the parent/gardener nurtured children/plants unconsciously, or they learned that success was measured in part by their ability to make parenting and gardening look easy and 'natural.' That false impression of ease is pastoralism at work. Pastoralism and sentimentalism work *together* to construct capitalism's socially-determined divisions of labour as 'natural,' and within that structure to code women's unpaid domestic work, including parenting, as 'nature.' Parlour gardening exists at an intersection between these traditions, making it a perfect case study for understanding how the articulated relationship of pastoralism and sentimentalism effectively naturalized and aestheticized work.

ENDNOTES

¹ Beverly Seaton, *The Language of Flowers: A History*, University Press of Virginia, Charlottesville, 1995; Ann B. Shteir, *Cultivating Women, Cultivating Science: Flora's Daughters and Botany in England, 1760-1860*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1996; Londa Schiebinger, *Nature's Body: Gender in the Making of Modern Science*, 2nd rev. ed., Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, 2004. See also Annette Stott, 'Floral Femininity: A Pictorial Definition,' *American Art* 6, Spring, 1992, pp. 60-77.

² Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1967, pp. 5-11, 25-26. A weakness in American Studies scholarship is the tendency to lean too heavily on Marx's exceptionalist narrative, missing the transatlantic roots, popular forms, and implicit power relations of the pastoral tradition. Marx recognizes the transformation of labourers into 'Nature' in Virgil's pastoral, but undervalues the significance of this transformation in later manifestations of the pastoral. Marx, *Machine in the Garden*, p. 23. In a significant critique, Jeffrey Louis Decker demonstrated that throughout *Machine in the Garden* Marx evades analyses of how 'nature' is itself a social construction that in turn essentializes and aestheticizes other social constructions of labour and power. Jeffrey Louis Decker, 'Dis-Assembling the Machine in the Garden: Antihumanism and the Critique of American Studies,' *New Literary History* 23, Spring, 1992, 288-91.

³ Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1973, p. 32.

⁴ Rebecca Bushnell, *Green Desire: Imagining Early Modern English Gardens*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 2003, pp. 84-107.

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