In collaboration with these motifs of the shepherd’s song, solitude, a life of leisure and innocence, pastoral begins to take form, both within its poetic origins and in a canon of literary criticism. These first motifs, courtesy of their recurrent and perennial nature, help create a unified terminology for the pastoral mode, whilst elegantly avoiding the constraints of a “traditional” pastoral poetic, within which the mode does not remain for long. It is therefore crucial to take into account and, where necessary, to return to these motifs as we continue to survey the chronology of the mode.

Pan and the Original Arcadians

Although Theocritus’ _Idylls_ suggest a fairly limited and stable sense of pastoral as a literature that portrays, in an idealised manner, “the life of shepherds, or of the country” (_OED online_), they are also already atypical of this ‘original pastoral,’ because “they contain considerable elements of realism and sometimes dwell on the harsher aspects of the lives led by an entire rural community, consisting not just of shepherds, but of farmers, serfs, goatherds, fishermen, neatherds and housewives” (Loughrey, _The Pastoral Mode_ 8). For all the living at one with nature, for example, herdsman Corydon warns Battus he ought to wear sandals, as the ground is one thorny ambush:

_Battus:_ Zeus save thee, Corydon; see here!  
It had at me as thou said’st the word, this thorn, here under my ankle.  
And how deep the distaff-thistles go! A plague o’ thy heifer!  
It all came o’ my gaping after her. […]

_Corydon:_ Aye, aye, and have got him ‘twixt my nails; and lo! Here he is.

_Battus:_ (in mock-heroic strain) O what a little tiny wound to overmaster so mighty a man!

_Corydon:_ (pointing out the moral) Thou should’st put on thy shoes when thou goest into the hills, Battus; ‘Tis rare ground for thorns and gorse, the hills.

(Theocritus, _Idylls_ 4.50–57)

The realism Theocritus gave to his _Idylls_ hints at other origins of pastoral, often ignored in criticism. For Theocritus’s Arcadia has its own origin story, steeped in Greek mythology, and presided over by Pan, whom all ancient sources call Arcadian. Indeed, much of pastoral’s versatility and many of its recurrent motifs must be traced back to the this first and ‘original’ Arcadian:
Pan has long been thought of as the complete product of the Arcadian mountains and pastures, the divine projection of their shepherds and goatherds. Evidently everything follows from this: Pan’s music (the pastoral syrinx); his activity as a huntsman; his erotic solitude (and the perversion it induces); the distance he keeps from urban life. [...] In him, through his primitive homeland, the original life of the Greek countryside speaks to us, and Pan in the end touches something universal. The Greek peasant is still latent in each of us; his ‘experience’ is not extinct. (Borgeaud, *The Cult of Pan*)

In the oral traditions and myths, as collected by Pausanias, the primitive brutishness of Pan and his fellow Arcadians was explained in their immeasurable antiquity. Arcadian Pan presents “a universe radically different from that of the Greece we call classical.” Therefore, it is somewhat difficult, perhaps even impossible, to “understand him while clinging to a humanistic phenomenology that assumes a continuous inheritance from ancient Greece to the people of our times.” Due to his distant origins, and an impulse to face his own past, Arcadian Pan thus “takes on a kind of otherness” (Borgeaud, *The Cult of Pan*), that has remained a stratum of pastoral as we know it today. Arcadians, additionally, were considered to be the oldest inhabitants of the Peloponnese; they were considered autochthonous,

or, if Aristotle’s interpretation is preferred, from elsewhere, but before the moon, the Arcadians never separate themselves from the place where they made their temporal appearance. As compared with their neighbors, they are consequently equivocal beings, at once in time and timeless” (Borgeaud, *The Cult of Pan*).

Although pastoral’s timelessness can thus be traced back to the autochthonous nature of Pan and the original Arcadians, it is not how we usually imagine the Arcadian landscape, largely due to Theocritus’ systematic elimination of almost all features of Pan’s ‘primitive,’ original Arcadia:

Many an aspen, many an elm bowed and rustled overhead, and hard by, the hallowed water welled purling forth of a cave of the Nymphs, while the brown cricket chirped busily amid the shady leafage, and the tree-frog murmured aloof in the dense thorn brake. All nature smelt of the opulent summer-time, smelt of the season of fruit. Pears lay at our feet, apples on either side, rolling abundantly, and the young branches lay splayed upon the ground because of the weight of their damsons. (Theocritus, *Idylls* VII, 105)

Through music, Theocritus softened the brutishness of Arcadian life: “Pan, the nymphs, and the goatherds are still in residence, but the wild notes of the syrinx have been replaced by melodious fluting and endless song contests.” Pan, too,