has become much more akin to the “custodian of flocks and amiable prankster the Romans would recognise” (Schama, “Arcadia Redesigned” 527).

Two Kinds of Arcadia

Crucially, Theocritus’ lyrics are the product of a much more sophisticated, urbane taste, and it is here that we first see how the pastoral mode was intended for an urban audience. Ultimately, “both kinds of Arcadia, the idyllic as well as the wild, are landscapes of the urban imagination” (Schama, “Arcadia Redesigned” 525). In England, for example, both the wilderness of a primitive Arcadia and the life of bucolic love, simplicity and shepherded idyll were sources of imitation for cityscapes and aristocratic country life alike. The great Palladian villa of Kenwood, for example, supplied with graceful iconic columns, pilasters on the garden facade and an elegant pediment, was considered by many to be the epitome of an ‘Arcadian’ Hampstead:

The beautifully elevated situation of this estate, happily ranks it above all others round London, as the most charming spot where the Gentleman and the Builder may exercise their taste in the erection of Villas, as many of which can be so delightfully placed as to command the richest home views of wood and water and the distant views of the Metropolis with the surrounding counties of Essex, Surrey and Berkshire. (Morning Herald, July 8 1789)

Kenwood was a living catalogue of an aristocratic Arcadia, with almost all the key ingredients carefully orchestrated into the estate (see Fig. 1: Robertson, A View of Kenwood 1781). As Simon Schama observes:

Sheep safely grazed not ten miles from where the objects of the lord chief justice’s attention danced on the Tyburn gallows. The house [...] was full of paintings of itself, or of similar estates that testified to the elegant pastoral taste of the ruling class. In the graceful Orangery a Gainsborough couple posed before their park, beaming with self-satisfaction. [...] Music played from a pavilion on the far side of the lake[.]

(Schama, “Arcadia Redesigned” 521)

Not far from Kenwood “it is an easy thing to stray into the other Arcadia: a dark grove of desire, but also a labyrinth of madness and death” (“Arcadia Redesigned” 522). What is interesting is not that both Arcadias are found in immediate vicinity of each other, but that considerable investments were made to keep pristine the first (Kenwood), and to maintain the heath-adjacent other. The sheep were still there in 1960, Schama notes, and when, in 1829, Thomas Maryon Wilson, “Lord of the Manor,” proposed an enclosure for part of the heath, and
to turn it entirely into a picturesque park, a confrontation between developer and conservationists ensued. While Wilson fiercely fought for precut fencing and a pristine landscape architecture, the conservationist campaigners argued that “the great city needed a wilderness for its own civic health” and that “it was precisely the unkempt and uncultivated nature of the heath that was said to be its special gift to the people” (Schama, “Arcadia Redesigned” 524). Although it is thus tempting to view the two kinds of Arcadia, the wild and the idyllic, as constantly defined against each other – one evoking the ideal of the park, the other civility and harmony, it is just as easy to view them as mutually exclusive and as contentious landscapes. The quarrel between them “even persists at the heart of debates within the environmental movement,” but “their long history suggests that they are, in fact, mutually sustaining” (Schama, “Arcadia Redesigned” 525).

The pristine, constructed Arcadia of Kenwood stands at the polar opposite of the ‘original’ Arcadia of myth, where men looked and behaved like beasts. Thus we can see a mutuality that would become crucial to any further developments of the pastoral mode, namely between town and country, especially when the poetic contradictions of this gardened Arcadia took the form of a country villa like Kenwood. Naturally, such mutual contradictions were also borne from the “ancient ideal of country life as a corrective to the corruption, intrigue and disease of the town,” and thus it was, and would always be a “spur to rustication in a locus amoenus” Indeed, this “redesigned Arcadia” became “a product of the orderly mind rather than the playground of unchained senses” (Schama, “Arcadia Redesigned” 529–30).

The strain of realism witnessed in some of Theocritus’ pastorals is not only at the heart of the mode’s first dichotomies, moreover, but it often also creates elements within the mode that are amusing, elements of what would later become the mock-pastoral. Realism and humour thus produced two main strains of pastoral: first, the shepherd was re-appropriated and turned variously into philosopher, artist, recluse or a fool who could provide comic relief, implicit social critique, and opinion about the nature of love. Shakespeare’s clown Feste (Twelfth Night), his clever, cynical fool Touchstone (As You Like It) or Thomas Hardy’s ‘heathfolk’ in The Return of the Native are but the most often referenced examples of this reappropriation. In such comic spectacles of bucolic love, the simple life is increasingly equated with the bitter-sweet simple-mindedness of

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