abundantly about such novels, including *The Road* (2006) by Cormac McCarthy, and Don DeLillo’s *White Noise* (1985).\(^{11}\)

This brief survey of pastoral’s myths, motifs and origins has shown that the nature of the mode is truly complex, and thus it is not surprising that critics have tried to do justice to this complexity by using various frames of literary criticism. Annabel M. Patterson regards pastoral as an “ideology” with a locus very specific to the historical and social backdrop in which its texts were written: “By ideology,” Patterson explains, “I mean both a more capacious and a less totalizing concept than is sometimes invoked by that term: not only the dominant structure of beliefs in a society, but also the singular view (heterodox, subversive, maverick)” (*Pastoral and Ideology* 8, original emphasis). Each age, according to Patterson, thus interprets the pastoral in terms of those values held dear by that age’s context of interpretation. Similarly, Lawrence Buell concludes that pastoral, with its multiple frames, “cannot be pinned to a single ideological position” (*Buell, The Environmental Unconscious* 44). Lastly, Terry Gifford offers yet another explanation for the protean nature of the mode:

> It is this very versatility of the pastoral to both contain and appear to evade tensions and contradictions – between country and city, art and nature, the human and the non-human, our social and our inner selves, our masculine and our feminine selves – that made the form so durable and fascinating. (Gifford, *Pastoral* 11)

Binary oppositions, contradictions and dialectics reveal the truly complex nature of the pastoral mode, as the next section of this study will attempt to show.

### 2.3 Pastoral Nature and the Nature of Pastoral

There have always been two kinds of arcadia: shaggy and smooth; dark and light; a place of bucolic leisure and primitive panic. – Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory*

Nature did not exist until we invented it one eighteenth-century morning radiant with Alpine light. – John Banville, *Ghosts*

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Pastoral’s Dialectics and Dichotomies

Duality, ambiguity and the consequent dialectics, whether between town and country, idealisation and realism, celebration and regret, or retreat and return, are fundamental to pastoral. The nature of the mode is such that it has been marked by tension and ambivalence from the beginning: already in its earliest forms, it was written for an ‘urban’ audience as a testing ground for hitherto concepts of town and country, the life of the court and the life of the shepherd, and various other contexts of retreat and return (Gifford, *Pastoral* 15–16). Naturally, tension feeds on ambiguity, and the *Idylls* of Theocritus readily testify to this symbiotic relationship. Whether in an Arcadian society of peace and plenty or in a secluded place of enclosed quiet, any pastoral scene is also likely to be exposed to various opposites, including invasive industrialisation, death, unrequited love, unjust property division, or simply opposing ideas of beauty and perfection.

Indeed, pastoral is a mode of dichotomies that structures and expresses itself dialectically, and throughout its development in literature, the resultant dualities have manifested themselves differently, exhibiting various dialectical potentials. Harold Toliver provides a first table of such juxtapositions for several of pastoral’s most ostentatious “contrasts,” in his *Pastoral Forms and Attitudes* (1984), starting with ‘nature’ and ‘society,’ and concluding with ‘nature’ and ‘celestial paradise’:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nature</th>
<th>Society</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>freedom</td>
<td>constriction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>organism</td>
<td>mechanical formality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>democracy</td>
<td>hierarchy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>plainness and honesty</td>
<td>masked artificiality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>innocence, simplicity</td>
<td>experience, complexity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>barbaric violence</td>
<td>cultured order</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*When opposed to art, nature becomes something quite different:*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nature</th>
<th>Art</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>rough, inchoate</td>
<td>ordered, ornate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>open, indefinite</td>
<td>timeless, permanent, enclosed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>existential, immediate</td>
<td>artificial, imitative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Divided against itself, it becomes:

**Idyllic Nature**  
*vernal or cyclical*  
*humanised*  
*place of love and renewal*

**Anti-Pastoral Nature**  
*wintry*  
*indifferent or cruel*  
*place of unrequited love, age*

*Or finally, if divided into levels:*

**Nature**  
*temporal garden or Gorden Age*  
*lesser gods (Venus, Pan, Cupid)*  
*shepherds and rustics*  
*mechanical or botanical nature*

**Celestial Paradise**  
*apocalyptic sacred place*  
*Hebraic or Christian God*  
*angels*  
*sublime nature*

*(Toliver, “Pastoral Contrasts” 11)*

Toliver argues that “such contrasts permeate the pastoral tradition from Theocritus to the eighteenth century” (“Pastoral Contrasts” 2), and although the nature of pastoral is such that any one or several of these dichotomies may be expressed in any given example of the mode, Toliver’s concept is too susceptible to criticism. First, Toliver fails to provide specific examples to illustrate the validity of his table of “contrasts.” Second, the table’s juxtapositioning of “nature” variously to “society,” “art,” “itself” and as “divided into levels” is an oversimplification; pastoral’s dichotomies are, after all, expressed dialectically, whereby each ‘contrast,’ by virtue of antithesis, creates something new, explaining much of the mode’s inventiveness and longevity. Lastly, Toliver’s table [of contrasts] does not take into account that the mode also utilizes dichotomies that have little or nothing to do with a traditional understanding of “nature.” Binary oppositions proliferate in the pastoral, after all, including, but not restricted to, the following:

- town, city, court  
- farm, countryside, forest

- urban citizens  
- rural shepherds

- *negotium* (work, duty)  
- *otium* (leisure, rest)

- art, ornament, artificiality  
- nature, natural beauty

- literacy, reading, intellect  
- creativity, song, dance
ambition, disappointment    contentment, happiness
order, prohibition, predictability    disorder, license, spontaneity
crime, corruption, war    innocence, tranquility, peace
restraint, respectability    freedom, fecundity, sexuality
sophistication    simplicity
conflict, crisis    escape, exploration
adulthood, ageing    childhood, youth
winter, autumn    spring, summer
machine, technology, future    garden, wilderness, past
mortality, loss, death    immortality, rebirth, memory

Any analysis of how certain dichotomies modulate pastoral must also take into account that the mode’s binary nature is often expressed as part and parcel of the dynamic of retreat and return. In other words, what happens in Arcadia cannot stay in Arcadia: “there must in some sense be a return [...] to a context in which the results of the journey are to be understood” (Gifford, Pastoral 81). Even in the purely escapist pastorals that convince the reader to resist return, in an attempt to perennially extend their elaborately constructed retreat – such as in the Georgian poetry of the First World War, the retreat is expressed intrinsically within the text in the address to an ‘urban,’ ‘courtly’ or otherwise removed audience:¹²

[W]hether the author’s choice of Arcadia is classical Greece, the only-just-disappeared Golden Age, the present Golden Age, a utopian future, an Alpine summit, Antarctica, Arden or the garden, that choice will be made with its contemporary audience in mind. The discourse of retreat will exploit the location in order to speak to the cultural context of its readership. If the pastoral is successful, the audience will know that what is perceived to be happening in Arcadia has relevance for them in their own time and (urban place), with its own anxieties and tensions. (Gifford, Pastoral 81–82)

The dynamic of retreat and return which makes up the pastoral sojourn, moreover, affects the mode itself dialectically: on the one hand, the retreat acts upon the reader as a force that drives an implicit desire to escape the present by cre-

ating an Arcadian space-time of wish-fulfilment islanded from conflict, crisis and uncertainty. On the other hand, the return, equally inescapable, acts upon said audience and forces, through the artificial lens of the Arcadia created, an *exploration*, a re-evaluation of the self-same tensions, struggles and ambiguities that govern the target audience’s present.

We see this dialectic played out, perhaps for the first time, in *As You Like It*. Uncertainties abound, from the beginning of the play, as three groups of courtiers are exiled to an Arden of generosity, first, and of harsh economic realities, second. Corin the shepherd, for example, has to admit that he is “shepherd to another man,” does “not shear the fleeces that [he] graze[s],” and that his master’s “cote, his flocks and bounds of feed / Are now on sale” (*As You Like It* 2.4.74–80). In stark contrast, when Orlando stumbles upon the Duke Senior’s invitation for food, he is eloquent in his defence:

**Orlando**

Speak you so gently? Pardon me, I pray you.
I thought that all things had been savage here,
And therefore put I on the countenance
Of stern commandment.

(*As You Like It* 2.7.107–110)

These contrasts serve a dual function, though criticism has focused primarily on the first. The Forest of Arden runs both concurrent with and contrary to the pastoral settings and conventions of Elizabethan England; it is at once an idyll removed from the realities of the court and a testing ground for previously accepted Elizabethan social codes, issues of love, gender and identity. As such, *As You Like It*’s pastoral setting holds up a mirror to the political power relations and to the cultural conventions of its age. For, by the end of the play, each character has not only discovered who they are and returns to court married to their ‘true love,’ but each returns also reconciled with their true self.

**The Relative Nature of Pastoral**

As for contemporary pastorals, many critics believe pastoral to be dead after Hardy, because the ‘nature’ of pastoral no longer relies on the traditional inter-

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13 See in particular Empson’s “‘They that have power’: Twist of Heoric-Pastoral Ideas in Shakespeare into an Ironic Acceptance of Aristocracy” in *Some Versions of Pastoral Forest: A Study of Shakespeare’s Pastoral Plays*. London: Yale University Press, 1972 or Kronenfeld, Judy Z. “Social Rank and the Pastoral Ideals of *As You Like It*.” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 29.3 (1978): 333–348.
pretation of pastoral nature, and because the fundamental distance between town and country, between urban and rural, has been eroded away by modern technologies and urbanisation. Perhaps none state this more clearly than Barrel and Bull in their *Penguin Book of English Pastoral Verse* (1974):

The separation of life in the town and in the country that the pastoral demands is now almost devoid of any meaning. It is difficult to pretend that the English countryside is now anything more than an extension of the town; that the industrial and technological processes of urban production differ at all significantly from those of the ‘Factory-Farm’; that the function of the modern farm-manager is essentially any different from that of his urban counterpart; that the Pastoral has not become in fact just another trip, another Sunday afternoon drive. (Barrell and Bull, *The Penguin Book of English Pastoral Verse* 433)

It is indeed difficult to pretend that the pastoral as defined by Barrell and Bull is still being written in the Ireland and Britain of today. The editors go further to suggest that pastoral as envisioned through these traditional dichotomies persists only “in the Third World, or in North America perhaps – where there are still occasional frontiers to confront the regulating effect of urban development” (*The Penguin Book of English Pastoral Verse* 433).

The situation (and thus the presumed death of pastoral) is compounded by the fact that, all over the world, the idea of wilderness and of a rural human existence sympathetic to nature is continuously threatened by urban development. As Bill McKibben argues in *The End of Nature*, “We have changed the atmosphere, and thus we are changing the weather, [...] and by changing the weather, we make every spot on earth man-made and artificial” (*The End of Nature* 54). Although pastoral has always been an artificial mode, it is thus difficult to sustain a traditional pastoral vision, because there is no such nature, by humans untouched, no ‘original’ to modify into the pastoral purpose, which, after all, is to reflect human concerns. Pastoral is nothing if it cannot look to nature in order to understand human nature and our place within the world. Pastoral cannot be called pastoral if it cannot reclaim that distance between itself and reality, between natural and human existence.

An understanding of pastoral as propagated by Barell and Bull, thus relies on the distinction between the non-human and the human, between the urban and the rural. Modern and contemporary pastoral is marked by an imaginatively more productive perspective, as propounded by John Gray: “Cities are no more artificial than the hives of bees. The internet is as natural as a spider’s web” (Gray, *Straw Dogs* 16). What the pastoral mode relies upon, then, is not just a
distinction or dichotomy between two oppositions, but a relativistic duality of presence and absence. As Iain Twiddy astutely observes:

The parameters of the desirable and the immutable create a large imaginative range, in which pastoral may be rural or urban. It can be as simple as life rather than death. It can be the past: two days ago, a holiday last year in France, a less industrialized century.” (Twiddy, Pastoral Elegy 3)

This is to say, then, that the pastoral is not characterized by absolute dichotomies, but by dualities that express themselves within the mode in relative terms – relative to the author and the target audience.

Perhaps this is best observed in the many transformations that pastoral space and time have undergone in literature: Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* paint a Golden Age different from Theocritus, Virgil or all their descendants, and each is imbued with characteristics contemporary to the author’s own time and place. The pastoral landscapes mapped out by Jonson, Pope, Wordsworth or Hardy find little resonance in Irving’s “sleepy hollow” (1844) or Thoreau’s frontiered wilderness, and yet each has been variously called and analysed as pastoral:

For some, […] ideal nature is clearly the pristine wilderness […] for others ideal nature is the pastoral countryside or the small town, while others would celebrate the suburb or even the city as the natural home of humankind. It hardly needs saying that nothing in physical nature can help us adjudicate among these different visions, for in all cases nature merely serves as the mirror onto which societies project the ideal reflections they wish to see. (Cronon, *Uncommon Ground* 36)

It is precisely this relativism that has contributed greatly to pastoral’s range and flexibility, simultaneously creating a constitutional openness within the mode that is not always unproblematic or easy to understand. In all cases, however, pastoral is but a “mirror onto which [authors] project the ideal reflections [of society] they wish to see” (Cronon 36).

Pastoral’s relativistic nature, moreover, highlights the artificiality that is so fundamental to the mode, and the dialectic between reality and the pastoral text is part and parcel of this relativism, itself a fictional construction capable of reshaping nature in(to) art. To make poetic is to pastoralize, ultimately, and a crucial aspect in the development of the pastoral mode is the ever-shifting relationship between the mode’s poetically imagined enclosures and the reality of the world exterior to it. An inherent distance is created between the poet and his efforts to imagine it, so that the description itself becomes a self-conscious artifice. Thus, pastoral implicitly suggests that its paradise is beyond the reach even of poetry. As W.H. Auden writes, “Every good poem is very nearly a
Utopia,” an “idyllic community of substances forced to yield their disagreements for the sake of the poem,” and therefore “an attempt to present an analogy to that paradisal state in which Freedom and Law, System and Order are united in harmony” (Costello, *Auden at Work* 283).

**Towards a Contemporary Pastoral in Andrew Marvell’s “The Garden”**

One English lyric deserves a special mention at this point, namely Andrew Marvell’s “The Garden” (1681). This poem warrants a close reading not only for its significance and quality as a pastoral poem, but also because it documents the historical development of the mode with that unparalleled brevity and dense complexity so paradigmatic of the metaphysical tradition. Crucially, Marvell’s nature poetry, and “The Garden” in particular, should be classified as neither traditional nor concurrent with nature poetry of his contemporaries, because, as Andrew McCrae argues, “nature is rarely – if ever – just nature for Marvell.” Indeed, “[i]n the tradition of pastoral poetry, the natural world provides an avenue [for Marvell], with its own rich and highly stylized stock of imagery, for reflecting on wider issues of human life, ranging from love and sexuality through to matters of state. (McRae, “The Green Marvell” 122).

As such, “The Garden” presents a masterly poetic cross-section of the history of pastoral, and uses metaphysical conceits and imagery to come to terms with the mode’s complex, often contradictory collusion with motifs of innocence, escapism, wishful thinking and identity – as expressed by the universal idyll that is Arcadia, and by the dialectical dynamic of retreat and return. According to William Empson, “The chief point of [“The Garden”] is to contrast and reconcile conscious and unconscious states, intuitive and intellectual modes of apprehension” (*Some Versions of Pastoral* 119). “The Garden” is a poem ahead of its time, moreover, as it also anticipates the mode’s encounter with post-/modernist identity discourse. For “The Garden” contains some of the seventeenth century’s “most sensitive reflections,” not only “on relations between humanity and the natural world[,]” as McRae observes, but it also showcases Marvell as an astute “observer of the process of thought itself” (McRae, “The Green Marvell” 123; Friedman, “Andrew Marvell” 278).

Marvell opens “The Garden” with a meticulously constructed conceit; his poetic voice takes up the commonplace tropes of the original pastorals and, by functionally turning them upside down, adversely uses their arguments to his own advantage. With what zeal and passion—the first lines complain rhetorically—does man exert himself, the warrior to win his palm, the statesman his oak, the poet his laurel, that “single herb or tree,” in short, the symbolic reward
for their efforts (1–4). Yet the shadows projected by these emblems of fame are not nearly as lasting, the voice observes sententiously, as the shadow produced by a grove where all plants conjoin to weave not meritocratic coronets of glory but “garlands of repose” (5–8). And such a grove can only be sought in a garden, a hortus conclusus into which the poet has withdrawn from the world. There he has found not only the two sister nymphs “Quiet” and “Innocence,” but also their sacred plants, which, unlike the symbolic flowers of human vanity, are genuine flora of nature. It is in their midst that the poet is now enjoying a state of “solitude” more “delicious” than the most refined fellowship or “society” could offer:

Fair Quiet, have I found thee here,
And Innocence thy sister dear?
Mistaken long, I sought you then
In busy companies of men:
Your sacred plants, if here below,
Only among the plants will grow:
Society is all but rude,
To this delicious solitude. (9–16)

Up to the second stanza the poet’s withdrawal is treated as a flight from society, but in the consecutive stanzas the poetic voice claims that the main motivation for such a retreat is to find rest and relief from the labours and sorrows of love. In unison, the figurative devices paradox and personification mark out the poet’s own retreat from love as if it were love’s retreat from itself: “When we have run our passions’ heat, / Love hither makes his best retreat” (25–6). Having succeeded in his withdrawal from love, the poet finds in the garden new (and different) objects of love—not fair women but “fair trees,” whose beauty far exceeds that of his “mistress” (20–22). And, when indulging in the pastoral pastime of engraving the trunks, the letters will not evoke a sweetheart but merely spell out the names by which these trees are known (22–4).

Marvell builds his next metaphysical comparison into a striking anticlimax: the poet compares his new-found ‘botanical’ love to those gods of Greek and Roman mythology who pursued a maid or a nymph only to see her transformed into a flower or a tree. Unlike the disappointed gods, however, the poet treats these metamorphoses as if they were a consciously expected or wilfully provoked outcome, and thus the fulfilment, rather than the frustration of the gods’ desire:

The gods, that mortal beauty chase,
Still in a tree did end their race;
Apollo hunted Daphne so
Only that she might laurel grow;
And Pan did after Syrinx speed
Not as a nymph, but for a reed. (27–32)

Thus Marvell expertly creates a garden as “metaphor for integrating passion, mind and soul in an image of order that resolves the human relationship with the natural” (Gifford, Pastoral 71). This represents a first master-plot of the pastoral of retreat, namely to sublimate and transform the traditional manifestations of love and passion into the creation of the arts, of poetry and song. The poetic speaker further reinforces this metamorphosis by submerging the hues and colours that traditionally connote amorous acts in the anonymity of green, the most dominant colour of the hortus of Arcadia. The poetic speaker further insists that nature’s colours are more lovable than the skin tones of feminine beauty: “No white nor red was ever seen / So amorous as this lovely green” (17–8). Thus surrendering to the garden, the “wondrous life” the poet consequently describes is itself an enactment of the very sensations of the (lost) golden age:

The luscious clusters of the vine
Upon my mouth do crush their wine;
The nectarine and curious peach
Into my hands themselves do reach; (35–8)

And though the poet stumbles, “insnared” by the bounteous flora, his “fall on grass” is harmless (33, 39–40). Indeed, there is an ascent from this acme of pre-lapsarian innocence, from these ingenuous “pleasures less” onto a fresh plane of thought to which the mind “withdraws.” Both figuratively and literally, nature remains all too fenced in, a true hortus conclusus. Though its maintenance may not require any human labour, every garden’s beauty still needs the artifices of wit and the mind, “that Ocean” which can retreat further into itself, and thereby be more imaginative than anything the “happy Garden-state” (57) of Arcadia could offer:

Yet it creates, transcending these,
Far other Worlds, and other Seas,
Annihilating all that’s made
To a green Thought in a green Shade. (45–8)

Marvell’s lines applaud the transcendent and creative faculties of the mind, whereby he anticipates the self-reflective and imaginative tendencies of the post-/modern imagination. What are the “other Worlds” to the ones we know, for example? Is Marvell’s annihilation a process of artistic distillation which
serves to clarify or intensify the meaning of things and their place in the world, or is it rather a narcissistic, self-aggrandising, and ultimately destructive process? Then, in true metaphysical fashion, and as if to pre-empt such dialectics, Marvell constructs a conceit that turns his *hortus conclusus* into that abode most suited to the soul, for if in the ‘golden age’ man could proudly wander in the splendid nakedness of his body, in “The Garden” he may linger outdoors in the pure and luminous nudity of his spirit:

Here at the fountain’s sliding foot,
Or at some fruit-tree’s mossy root,
Casting the body’s vest aside,
My soul into the boughs does glide. (49–52)

Although “The Garden” uses conventional pastoral imagery, its speaker does not think in conventional pastoral terms. By now, the poem’s Arcadia has undergone several metamorphoses, from an all too Italian garden, to an orchard of joy and plenty, to a celebratory peregrination through the transcendent mind, and finally to the neo-Platonic dove by which the soul prepares for its destined ascent:

There, like a bird, it sits and sings,
Then whets and combs its silver wings,
And, till prepared for longer flight,
Waves in its plumes the various light. (53–6)

This metaphysical conceit is steeped in Renaissance Platonism and philosophy, which saw the physical body as inessential, as a kind of temporal clothing for the eternal soul. Accordingly, the rational Platonic lover should not only aspire to rise above the baseness of sensuality, but hope to advance beyond even the purely spiritual union with the soul of a woman, progressing up the steps of the ‘Stair of Love’ until his love is finally consummated by a spiritual union with God in the ‘Mystic Experience.’

To an opposing school of thought, one that found its main literary exponent in Ovid, love was bodily passion, unbridled by reason. True love, according to the Ovidian tradition, was the irrational and satisfying consummation of lust. Marvell’s use of the dove, turning the poet’s soul into a bird, is significant because the dove is an originally religious emblem and Marvell’s is a bird of a decidedly different feather than that which symbolises the Christian soul. This is shown by its main concern – to groom its gorgeous plumage and make it shine like a rainbow in the changing light. Indeed, far from being an allegory for the religious soul, which trains itself in the *viva contemplativa* to return to its eternal
abode, Marvell’s bird-soul stands for a neo-platonic “green Thought” retreating from the world of society into “Far other Worlds” as to contemplate its self. Thus, Marvell turns his “Garden” into a vehicle for the secularisation of the Christian soul in order to argue for the neo-platonic spiritual union with God in the ‘Mystic Experience,’ thereby anticipating the pastoral mode’s own secularisation in contemporary literature.

This ‘secularisation of pastoral’ continues as the tripartite metamorphosis ends and the speakers places the reader outside the garden, whence to take a wistful, almost nostalgic look back:

Such was that happy Garden-state
While man there walk’d without a mate:
[...]
But ’twas beyond a mortal’s share
To wander solitary there:
Two paradises ’twere in one,
To live in Paradise alone. (57–8, 61–4)

The poetic speaker likens his own retreat to man’s state in the Garden of Eden before the Fall, thereby suggesting that pastoral’s Arcadia has existed from the beginning of human life itself. Or perhaps the the speaker’s experience is not a representation itself, but time textualised, and thus transformed, and the “Garden-state” either marks the story of Eden, or is it simply an utterance the reader mistakes for a version of Eden.

The comparisons Marvell offers in his last stanza are particularly powerful when read as metaphysical conceits that prefigure the post-/modernist concerns of narrative and temporal authenticity. At first, the poet creates a continuity that is held together by its insistence on the purity of solitude and on the disruption caused by passion. Then, a discontinuity is created in that newly imagined floral sundial, more “real” in the poem than the remembered glories of the golden age, as it is perceived by sight, touch and smell (63–4). Indeed, the measurement of time (hours, minutes, seconds) may be a human invention, but the sun runs through this “fragrant Zodiack” with equal measure; and the bee “Computes its time as well as we” (68, 70), thereby unknowingly teaching a sense of practicality and modesty as it simultaneously honours and uses the work of the “skilful Gard’ner” (65). In brief, though pastoral’s “delicious solitude” can be realised within such an Arcadian “Garden-state,” it can only be a momentary experience, and hence must always hover between the mode’s inherent contradictions, in a pastoral purgatory of otherwhile and elsewhere.