II Always Pastoral: The Architectonics of Arcadia

The woods of Arcady are dead,
And over is their antique joy;
Of old the world on dreaming fed;
Grey Truth is now her painted toy;
Yet still she turns her restless head:
But O, sick children of the world,
Of all the many changing things
In dreary dancing past us whirled,
To the cracked tune that Chronos sings
Words alone are certain good. — W. B. Yeats

2.1 What is Pastoral? – Problems of Definition

The best actors in the world, either for tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral, pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, tragical-historical, tragical-comical-historical-pastoral, scene indivisible, or poem unlimited. — William Shakespeare, Hamlet 2.2.333–336

It is not what pastoral is that should matter to us. On that, agreement is impossible[.] — Annabel Patterson, Pastoral and Ideology

Pastoral is a problematic poetic. There are, it seems, as many versions of pastoral as there are scholars writing about it. Historically, pastoral has hardly been allowed to settle, provoking relentless and considerable debate among critics and practitioners alike. For Shakespeare, pastoral was either “scene indivisible or poem unlimited” (Hamlet 2.2.336); the bard aptly uses the mode to intensify the catalogue of absurd categories employed by Polonius in his attempt to sell the newly arrived actors to the Danish prince. Alexander Pope, perhaps eager to outdo Polonius, posits pastoral as a paradox: “There are not, I believe, a greater number of any sort of verses than of those which are called Pastoral, nor a
smaller, than of those which are truly so” (“Pastorals” 32). The paradox has con-
tinued well into the twentieth century, as has pastoral, proving an insistent and
versatile form, ready to respond to shifts in culture and ideology to ensure its
survival.

Pastoral, it appears, cannot be made concrete; versatility and a tenacious pro-
pensity to remain relevant are its hallmarks. Especially in its early form, as
deriving from Greek and Roman poetry of shepherds declaiming pentameters
about work, love and the world, modern critics have attributed a happy confu-
sion of definitions to pastoral. Accordingly, pastoral “is a double longing after
innocence and happiness” (Poggioli, The Oaten Flute 1); it is based on the phil-
osophical antithesis of art and nature (Kermode, English Pastoral Poetry37; Marx,
The Machine in the Garden 35) and has been drawn upon in the founding of
eccocriticism (Garrad, Ecocriticism 37). Its universal idea is the golden age (Greg,
Pastoral Poetry 5), and thus it also engenders hostility to urban life (Williams,
The Country and the City 5), wherefore it additionally expresses the ideal of
otium, or, alternatively, of the philosophical vita contemplativa (Bernard, The
Pastoral Epistles 10). Even in the most recent studies of pastoral, the mode has
at once been reduced to “three kinds” and expanded to include a “post-pastoral”,
an “urban pastoral” and an “anti-pastoral” (Gifford, Pastoral 2000). Definitions
of pastoral have become so heterogenous that one scholar concludes, after a
painstaking survey:

Critics are justifiably unsure whether to locate the identity of pastoral in certain en-
during literary norms and conventions, or in a specific (if perennial) subject, or in
some continuity of feeling, attitude, “philosophical conception,” or mode of con-
sciousness which informs the literary imagination but originates outside it. (Halperin,
Before Pastoral 76)

Halperin touches on a key problem: we cannot hope to adequately define the
pastoral if there is no consensus on either a unified terminology, or on how it
affects and is effected by literature. Critics have variously called pastoral a his-
torical tradition or literary ideal (Poggioli, Oaten Flute), a genre and ideology
(Patterson, Pastoral and Ideology 1987), then a mode (Loughrey, The Pastoral
Mode; Alpers, What is Pastoral?, Gifford, Pastoral), and finally, a literary trope
(Garrard, Ecocriticism 2012). And yet pastoral has imbued literature and texts of
all kinds for over two millennia, including the poetic Idylls of Theocritus, Shake-
peare’s pastoral dramas, and John Banville’s post-/modern fictions.
The Pastoral of Form, Genre and Mode

To place side by side Theocritus’ poems, Shakespeare’s plays and Banville’s novels is also to admit that pastoral is neither a genre, nor formally restricted to its traditional beginnings. It is perhaps more fruitful to consider pastoral neither as a historical form nor as a literary genre, but as a mode that sheds light on the very same discourse threatening to eclipse it. Such a shift of the pastoral, away from an oversimple yet overreaching attempt at definition, to a critically informed and consistent terminology, presupposes two steps. First, pastoral needs to put at a distance its historical definition based exclusively on form, genre or literary ideals, and move towards a definition based on what it can do as a mode. Second, it is vital to develop a coherent terminology in order to close the gap between the pastoral mode and contemporary literature, and thereby to develop a new chapter of criticism and analysis that uses the pastoral mode as a lens through which to view post-/modern fictions.

Let us first move away from pastoral as a genre. Presently, genre is often conceived as a “more or less arbitrary form of classification, whose justification is [its] convenience in discussing literatures” (Abrams, A Glossary 116). Some critics, in an attempt to provide a more crisp and tangible definition of the term, have applied Ludwig Wittgenstein’s concept of ‘family resemblances’ to genre instead. The generically grouped family of works constitutive of genre, that is, share no essential defining features, but only a family of resemblances. Each member, moreover, “shares some of these resemblances with some, but not all, of the other members of the genre” (Ginzburg, “Family Resemblances” 541). Therefore, if genre is to be defined by a set of formal relationships and structural principles that govern a taxonomy of literary kinds based on certain combinations of narratives and their attendant tonalities, pastoral is not a genre in the sense that comedy and tragedy have been so classified. Pastoral, after all, can hold together tragedy, comedy and many other typical genres, and it does so without resorting exclusively to a family of forms and resemblances.

Faced with these pressing difficulties, critics such as Northrop Frye have come close to abandoning the concept of genre altogether. His Anatomy of Criticism (1957) talks mostly of modes instead, arguing that genre is at its most useful when highlighting affinities that might otherwise go unnoticed (245). To comb through the Anatomy for a viable definition of mode is to search in vain, however, as even Frye’s glossary entry struggles to satisfy: “A conventional power of action assumed about the chief characters in fictional literature, or the corresponding attitude assumed by the poet toward the audience in thematic literature” (333). Frye’s scheme of five “thematic modes” (49) convinces nonetheless through his extensive use of examples. As Paul Alpers points out in “Mode
in Narrative Poetry,” Frye never elucidates his reasons for using the term, however (27).

Alpers reiterates this criticism in What is Pastoral? (1997) and points out that though the term is in ordinary use today, it remains ordinarily undefined. He proposes a more precise definition of mode that simultaneously corrects Frye’s formalist separation of mythos (plot) and dianoia (thought). In addition, Alpers argues that the acts of the audience are an enhancing dynamic that cannot be left out:

[M]ode is the literary manifestation, in a given work, not of its attitudes in a loose sense, but of its assumptions about man’s nature and situation. This definition in turn provides a critical question we implicitly put to any work we interpret: what notions of human strength, possibilities, pleasures, dilemmas, etc. are manifested in the represented realities and the emphases, devices, organisation, effects, etc. of this work? (Alpers, What is Pastoral? 50)

Given the difficulties with pastoral, its tendency that is, to appear in many literary kinds and still be called something ‘pastoral,’ Alpers’ definition spotlights an interplay among the various elements of a work that is essential to its unity, regardless of the specificities of the kind. Alpers is not the first, however, to highlight how mode interacts with genre, a point that remains to be clarified in order to better understand the nature of pastoral. We must therefore turn to the essays of Angus Fletcher and Alastair Fowler.

Angus Fletcher achieves what Frye did not, namely a justification for the latter’s use of modes as categories. Frye’s use of the term in his scheme of five thematic modes “is appropriate,” Fletcher argues, “because in each of the five the hero is a protagonist with a given strength relative to his world, and as such each hero […] is a modulor for verbal architectonics; man is the measure, the modus of myth” (“Utopian History and the Anatomy of Criticism” 34–5). Fletcher’s sublime “verbal architectonics” have equally subliminal implications for pastoral as a mode. If a mode manifests itself in the protagonists as something ‘modulor,’ it turns itself, quintessentially, into something highly flexible and personal, and as such suddenly becomes reconcilable with all texts and literatures. The modulor, as developed by Le Corbusier, functions as a visual bridge between two incompatible scales, t150

The imperial and the metric system.1 Accordingly, Fowler uses the modulor as a metaphor to show how modes can function like the modulor, capable of

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building a literary bridge between seemingly incompatible literary genres, ideologies and forms. Though structurally dependent on many literary kinds, Fowler argues that the mode is simultaneously “able to enter into new com-mixtures and to continue in combination with kinds still evolving” (Fowler, *Kinds of Literature* 167).

Indeed, one could extend Fowler’s argument to the pastoral mode, and I would like to argue that, in order to develop a new, flexible, yet reliable definition of the pastoral mode, it is particularly fitting (and necessary) to view it as a modulor. The true value of the pastoral mode for contemporary and post-/modern literature is precisely in this modulor quality, which consists in its ability to break old moulds, and to do something new with established conventions and forms of expression. In the light of this adaptability, we can convincingly speak of pastoral as a mode without having to exclude texts or literature it effects or is affected by. As Annabel Patterson argues with a certain prescience in *Pastoral and Ideology* (1987):

> It is not what pastoral is that should matter to us. On that, agreement is impossible, and its discussion inevitably leads to the narrowing strictures of normative criticism, statements of what constitutes the “genuine” or the “true” to the exclusion of exemplars that the critic regards as “perverse.” What can be described and, at least in terms of coverage, with some neutrality, is what pastoral since Virgil *can do and has always done*, or rather, to put the agency back where it belongs – how writers, artists, and intellectuals of all persuasions have used pastoral for a range of functions and intentions that the *Eclogues* first articulated. (Patterson 7)

More than as a mode, we can dwell on pastoral as a new-found modulor for contemporary and post-/modern literature itself. Just as Le Corbusier introduced the mathematical modulor as a scale of visual measures that would unite two virtually incompatible systems – the Anglo-Saxon foot and inch and the French Metric system – I would like to propose that the pastoral mode possesses qualities that enable it to function as a literary modulor, and whereby it can build a bridge of compatibility between the seemingly old-fashioned, outdated version of itself, and postmodern, contemporary fictions. After all, a consistent vocabulary should form the basis of any definition; as Kenneth Burke argues in *A Grammar of Motives*, we seek for vocabularies that will be faithful reflections of reality. To this end, they must develop vocabularies that are selections of reality. And any selection of reality must, in certain circumstances, function as a deflection of reality. Insofar as the vocabulary meets the needs of reflection, we can say that it has the necessary scope. In its selectivity, it is a reduction. Its scope and reduction become a deflection when the given
terminology, or calculus, is not suited to the subject matter which it is designed to calculate. (*A Grammar of Motives* 59)

Burke’s argument that any vocabulary, “in its selectivity […] is a reduction” is uncanny in its prescience of William Empson’s iconic definition of pastoral as a “process of putting the complex into the simple” (*Some Versions of Pastoral* 22). Consequently, it helps to view the pastoral mode itself as a vocabulary ‘sought by men’ as a ‘selection of reality,’ which, “in certain circumstances” – discussed in considerable detail in further sections of this study – “function[s] as a deflection of reality.” The scope of this pastoral ‘vocabulary,’ moreover, has continually widened at crucial literary turns and cultural moments when “the given terminology” was deemed unsuitable to the subject matter which the mode was “designed to calculate.”

The Many Uses of Pastoral

Beyond the discussion of pastoral as a mode, problems of definition have also arisen because the term requires a thorough disambiguation from its many uses, both within the historical scope of the last two millennia, and the various literary and cultural productions indebted to it. In this vein, Terry Gifford sets a convincing precedent, distinguishing between “three kinds of pastoral” (*Pastoral* 1–12). There is, first of all, pastoral as a historical form, with a long-standing tradition in poetry that can be traced back to the *Idylls* of Theocritus:

[T]o refer to ‘pastoral’ up to about 1610 was to refer to poems or dramas of a specific formal type in which supposed shepherds spoke to each other, usually in pentameter verse, about their work or their loves, with (mostly) idealised descriptions of their countryside. […] For the reader or audience, this literary device involved some form of retreat and return, the fundamental pastoral movement, either within the text, or in the sense that pastoral retreat ‘returned’ some insights relevant to the urban audience. (Gifford, Pastoral 1)

Gifford refers to this first kind of pastoral as “a historical form”; his second type of pastoral goes “beyond the artifice of a specific literary form” and uses ‘pastoral’ in a much broader sense “to refer to an area of content” (*Pastoral* 2). Pastoral now encompasses “any literature that describes the country with an implicit contrast to the urban” (2). The third kind of pastoral moves away from the second’s “simple celebration of nature” towards a “sceptical use of the term – ‘pastoral’ as pejorative, implying that the pastoral vision is too simplified and thus an idealisation of the reality of life in the country” (2). In the briefest of summaries, the first kind of pastoral is “a historical form” mired in myth and
poetic tradition; the second kind revolves around dichotomies and tensions, especially between the urban and the rural, and the third kind of pastoral has become a vehicle for the criticism of the comforts and complacences put forth and celebrated by the first two.

While there is an undeniable elegance to Gifford’s ‘three kinds of pastoral,’ he glosses somewhat quickly over these definitions, and the inner workings of his differentiations are not altogether as self-explanatory as the first chapter implies. Indeed, his separation of the pastoral into ‘three kinds’ soon reveals itself to be somewhat arbitrary, as any and all texts and literatures can exhibit any and all of these three kinds of the mode. The consequent sections of his Pastoral, “Constructions of Arcadia”, “The Discourse of Retreat” and “The Cultural Contexts of Return” focus heavily on retreat and return – “the fundamental pastoral movement” (Pastoral 1), and though pastoral tendencies are easily identified by treating the sojourn as the main dynamic, the myths, motifs and critical attitudes that modulate the mode are only implicitly woven into Gifford’s fabric of definitions. Crucially, Gifford’s attempts at defining contemporary pastoral fall short; his section on ‘post-pastoral’ focuses too heavily on twentieth-century ecocriticism and the various parallels it exhibits with the mode. Other discourses heavily linked to contemporary pastorals – of identity, time, memory, nostalgia, postmodernism and parody, to name a few – are neglected in favour of ecocritical and environmental concerns.

Gifford’s achievement, nevertheless, is in the way his Pastoral is very different from Peter Marinelli’s Pastoral (1971), written for the first series of The Critical Idiom. Whereas Marinelli asserts that “all post-Arcadian pastoral is pastoral that has usurped a name,” and that even the “very private Arcadia created by a modern author or discovered by a modern critic really looks back to the original one as the source,” (Marinelli, Pastoral 3) Gifford pleads for an expansion of the “disciplinary boundaries” of pastoral criticism (Gifford, Pastoral 147). Where Marinelli “is devoted largely to the complexities of the older pastoral” (Marinelli, Pastoral 3), Gifford seeks to do justice to the protean nature of the mode by including cultural studies and “modern ecological perspectives,” (Gifford, Pastoral 4) such as those articulated in the works of Laurence Buell, a leading exponent of ecocriticism. This approach, Gifford argues, entails both a re-situating of pastoral within a larger field of criticism, in this case the emerging field of ecocriticism, and “a reversal of focus in the elements of the pastoral” (Gifford, Pastoral 148). His imperative, ultimately, is to endow pastoral with a new term, one “that is aware of the anti-pastoral and of the conventional illusions upon which Arcadia is premised, but which finds a language to outflank those dangers with a vision of accommodated humans, at home in the very world they thought
The six qualities that Gifford identifies are: “an awe in attention to the natural world; [...] the recognition of a creative-destructive universe equally in balance in a continuous momentum of birth and death, death and rebirth, growth and decay, ecstasy and dissolution; [...] the recognition [...] that our inner human nature can be understood in relation to external nature; [...] an awareness of both nature as culture and of culture as nature; [...] that with consciousness comes conscience; [...] the ecofeminists’ realisation that the exploitation of the planet is of the same mind set as the exploitation of women and minorities” (Pastoral 152–153, 156, 160, 164–165). Gifford exemplifies these six qualities of post-pastoral by way of an inclusive analysis of Hughes’ ‘Cave Birds’ (1978), describing it as “perhaps the major achievement of contemporary post-pastoral to date” (Pastoral 171).
this to Andrew Lawson, who argues that “a modern society of sundered selves”, that is to say the very tension between self and community, is what “modern pastoral is incapable, yet oddly prescient of.” This “philosophical pastoral”, Lawson continues, offers a “supreme modernist disenchantment” and “a sensual scepticism pending further illumination” (Lawson, “On Modern Pastoral” 41, qtd. in Gifford, *Pastoral* 173), and is thus consonant with the post-/modernist tenet. Gifford dismisses Lawson’s arguments as soon as he has quoted them, however, because they “will not answer to an ecological crisis” and are reminiscent of “modernist scepticism that is perilously close to ‘sentimental pastoral’” (*Pastoral* 173).

In his concluding paragraph Gifford talks of the “circle of postmodern mobility” which informs a new and “necessary impulse towards retreat, renewal and return” (*Pastoral* 174). It is unfortunate, then, that he does not manage to close this circle. Lawson’s pioneering interrelation of the pastoral with the “sundered selves” of post-/modern literature is deserving of more than such arrested development. If pursued instead of short-circuited to ecocriticism, it may just expand the very same circle into a cornucopia of new criticism and analysis.

**Towards a New Definition of Pastoral**

Current pastoral criticism moves between two polarising principles: exclusion and inclusion. Some critics have operated primarily with the first, arguing for overly specific forms, themes or even moods of pastoral. Elsewhere critics concede, for example, “that we will have a far truer idea of pastoral if we take its representative anecdote to be herdsmen and their lives, rather than landscape or idealized nature” (Alpers, *What is Pastoral?* 22). Such an approach of exclusion did not convince for long, however, as the most recent critics have opted for a more inclusive approach, either, as William Empson or Renato Poggioli, to accommodate a cornucopia of pastoral experiences and styles, or, as Terry Gifford or Greg Garrard, in order to make room for previously neglected or undervalued aspects of the mode. Although both approaches have produced fine studies of pastoral in their own right, the results are either too conventional, and ultimately unoriginal, or rely too ostentatiously on unusual literary examples in order that they might appear original.

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3 This is particularly true of the narrow definitions of pastoral offered by J.C. Scaliger (*Poetics Libri Septem* [1594] – the pastoral is discussed in 1.4 and 5.5). As Rosenmeyer observes, “the quarrel between the camps of Rapin and Fontenelle […] helped to relax the canon” (Rosenmeyer, *The Green Cabinet* 5).
As T.G. Rosenmeyer eloquently observes, “[t]radition, imitation, continuity of artistic purpose: these were the auspices under which the pastoral lyric was transmitted to the modern world” (The Green Cabinet 4). The pendulum appears to have swung the other way in recent pastoral criticism, towards a celebration of the obscure, marginalized strains of the mode. Thus, it has become a bewildering task, for any scholar who desires investigate pastoral aspects in contemporary literature, to establish and operate within a consistent and balanced definition without first retreating into the last two thousand years of pastoral criticism, only to return with yet another regurgitated chronology of the mode.

My own retreat into pastoral criticism has shown that what makes pastoral so fascinatingly complex is the way certain aspects of the mode are expressed in literature only synchronically, while others return diachronically and manifest themselves in texts of all shapes and sizes. To talk of shepherds in pastoral after Thomas Hardy would be more than a little absurd, for example, but to exclude the shepherd from pastoral before the seventeenth century is equally impossible. And yet, transmutations of the shepherd, as a philosopher, as a fool, an artist, a clown, a recluse or even as a successful businessman in a mid-life crisis of identity can be traced from Shakespeare’s comedies to George Orwell’s Coming Up for Air (1939), Isabel Colegate’s A Pelican in the Wilderness (2002), or Don DeLillo’s decidedly postmodern Americana (1971).

Despite this conundrum of pastoral eclecticism, a selection of recurrent features of the mode can be made, as there are aspects of the mode that remain consistently valuable and relevant to literature throughout. Thus, it remains the task of this first section of the study to complement the most contemporary efforts of pastoral criticism with a definition that can reconcile the hitherto neglected aspects of the mode with contemporary texts and fictions. In a search for such consistency, I have already outlined my approach of using a new definition of the pastoral mode as a modulor or bridge between its other, somewhat démodé iterations, and post-/modern literature. Through my research, I have narrowed down my definition to the following crucial features, and I will dedicate a section of my ‘brief history’ of pastoral to explaining each of them: pastoral myths, motifs and origins; notions of pastoral space and time; the dialectic.

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4 In the most recent criticism, pastoral has been subjected to a quietly comical, if bewildering range of designations, including “subversive pastoral” (Reid, “Idylls of Masculinity” 2010), “counterpastoral” (Pilar Blanco, “The Poetics of the Jungle” 2010), “enigmatical pastoral” (Tew, “Jim Crace’s Enigmatical Pastoral” 2010), “black pastoral” (Grene 2000) and “radical pastoral” (Newman 2011).

dichotomous ‘nature’ of pastoral; pastoral death and elegy. Each section of this ‘history’ will, on the one hand, offer a definition of the selected aspects, providing a consistent terminology with which to return to each feature as necessary, while tracing said features’ development to contemporary and post-/modern literary examples.

Lastly, and despite this ambitious endeavour of developing a new definition of the pastoral, it is not the intention of this study to denounce the overt connections that exist between ecocriticism and the pastoral mode. As Laurence Buell has argued, “even if [...] pastoral interposes some major stumbling blocks in the way of developing a mature environmental aesthetics, it cannot but play a major role in that endeavour” (The Environmental Unconscious 32). Literary critics around the world have expanded in abundance upon Buell’s pioneering interrelation of the pastoral mode with ecocritical perspectives. Rather, I wish merely to complement the “ecocentric repossession of pastoral” (The Environmental Unconscious 52) with a critical repossession of my own. Once a consistent definition for the pastoral mode has been developed, moreover, it is essential to use that definition to re-evaluate the pastoral as a mode in post-/modern literature of its own right, with a particular focus on how it affects contemporary identity discourse, concerns of nostalgia, as well as literary treatments of the relationship between identity, memory and time.

2.2 What is Pastoral? – Myths, Motifs, Origins

Der junge Faun war sehr glücklich auf seiner Sommerwiese. Hier gab es kein «Rechtfertige dich!», keine Verantwortung [...] Hier herrschte das Vergessen selbst, der selige Stillstand, die Unschuld der Zeitlosigkeit: Es war die Liederlichkeit mit bestem Gewissen, die wunschbildhafte Apotheose all und jeder Verneinung des abendländischen Aktivitätskommandos. — Thomas Mann, Der Zauberberg

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6 Greg Garrard provides an excellent, up-to-date interrelation of the pastoral mode and ecocriticism, with a particular focus on North American literature, in the chapter “Pastoral” of his Ecocriticism for The New Critical Idiom (2004, 33–58). Other studies that focus on the relation of ecocriticism to the pastoral in twentieth-century literature include Elise Martucci’s The Environmental Unconscious in the Fiction of Don DeLillo (2007) and George Guillemin’s The Pastoral Vision of Cormac McCarthy (2004).

7 Der Zauberberg [The Magic Mountain] vol. 2, no. 13: “The youthful faun was very happy in his summer meadow. Here there was no ‘Justify yourself!’ no responsibility. [...] Here reigned oblivion, the blissful arrest of motion itself, the innocence of timelessness. It was lightheartedness in quiet conscience, the picture-perfect apotheosis of each and every denial of the Western imperative of action” (transl. Daniela Langer, 2009).
The origins of pastoral are among the few aspects of the mode that critics agree on, and they are consistently traced back to the *Idylls* of Theocritus (c. 316–260 BC), who sought to entertain the Alexandrian court of Ptolemy with a number of vignettes about the countryside peasantry of his native Sicily (Loughrey, *The Pastoral Mode* 8). Almost all the motifs appropriated by Theocritus’ immediate successors can be found in the opening lines of this first poetic form of pastoral:

**Thyris:**

Sweet is the whispering music of yonder pine that sings
Over the water-brooks, and sweet the melody of your pipe,
Dear goatherd. After Pan, the second prize you’ll bear away.
If he should take the horned goat for his meed, to you shall fall
The kid; and dainty is kid’s flesh, till you begin to milk them.

**Goatherd:**

Sweeter, O shepherd, is your song than the melodious fall
Of yonder stream that from on high gushes down the rock.
If it chance that the Muses take the young ewe for their gift,
Then your reward will be the stall-fed lamb, but should they choose
To take the lamb, then yours shall be the sheep for second prize.

(Theocritus, *Idylls* 1.1–11)

More than a pastoral with strict formal or poetic constraints, the *Idylls* and their immediate successors are perhaps best defined as containing certain motifs that are continuously re-interpreted and expanded upon, especially when the pastoral enters other genres. It is clear that many critics place more emphasis on the formal constraints of this “traditional” pastoral. This often leads to lamenting the mode’s early inconsistencies. By focusing on the pastoral mode’s shared motifs, however, this can be avoided, and the attendant criticism can do justice to mode’s versatility (as opposed to lamenting its idiosyncrasies as inconsistencies. These motifs include shepherds who indulge in improvised song contests (*Idylls* 1–2), who praise the beauty of country life (*Idylls* 6–7), and who recount anecdotes from folklore and tales from mythology (*Idylls* 3–5; 8–11). Perhaps one of the most elegant commentaries on the origins of this idyllic pastoral of shepherds was formulated by René Rapin, a pioneer of serious pastoral criticism, in his extensive *A Treatise de Carmine Pastorali*:

Yet what beginning this kind of poetry had, I think I can pretty well conjecture: for ’tis likely that first shepherds used songs to recreate themselves in their leisure hours whilst they fed their sheep; and that each man, as his wit served, accommodated his songs to his present circumstances: to this solitude invited, and the extreme leisure that attends that employment absolutely required it: For as their retirement gave pleasure, and solitude a fit place for meditation, meditation and invention produced a verse. (Rapin, *Carmine Pastorali* 13–14)
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,
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 unekempt 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.⁸ 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 opinie 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

the boukolos, or herdsman: “the word ‘bucolic’ [...] can be used to mean ‘of the country,’ but the implications of simplicity of life in this usage have come to be associated with the comic” (Gifford, Pastoral 17). Shakespeare’s contemporaries, among them Christopher Marlowe, Sir Walter Raleigh and Thomas Campion, each produced such pastoral songs of courtship and seduction.9 Pastoral drama and romance of the time was heavily indebted to poems of the Italian Renaissance, including Tasso’s Aminta (1573) and Guarini’s Il Pastor Fido (1590). Examples for pastoral drama and romance of the English Renaissance include Sidney’s Arcadia (1590), Rosalynde, by Thomas Lodge (Shakespeare’s model for As You Like It), The Faithful Shepherdess by John Fletcher (1610) and Ben Jonson’s The Sad Shepherd (1637).

**Pastoral as Social Praise and Implicit Critique**

Elsewhere such pastoral imitations provide both explicit social praise and implicit critique; while Edmund Spenser, in Eclogue 4 of his Shepherd’s Calendar (1579) and Mary Herbert, in “A Dialogue Between Two Shepherds” (1599), both praise Queen Elizabeth, John Milton’s Lycidas (1637) condemns the corruption of the clergy, and Eclogue 10 of Spenser’s Calender denounces those responsible for the demise of poetry.10 Theocritus’ mock-realistic tendencies thus helped produce a “proletarian pastoral” that “gives a natural expression for a sense of social injustice.” The shepherd, “outside society because too poor for its benefits” gains a sort of artistic independence and becomes “a critic of society” (Empson, Some Versions of Pastoral 16). As George Puttenham observes about one of the first English definitions of the mode: “under the veil of homely persons, and in rude speeches [pastoral is able] to insinuate and glance at greater matters, and such as perchance had not been safe to have been disclosed” (Puttenham, The Art of English Poesie 31).

Puttenham’s astute observations on the nature of pastoral are echoed in Wordsworth’s “Michael,” where a traditional setting of “pastoral mountains” and “rocks and stones and kites, that overhead are sailing in the sky” (The Art of English Poesie 5; 11–12), allow the poetic voice to “feel / For passions that were not my own, and think [...] On man, the heart of man, and human life” (30–34). Indeed, Wordsworth’s “Michael: A Pastoral Poem” (1800) is a striking example

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9 Examples include Christopher Marlowe’s “The Passionate Shepherd to His Love,” Sir Walter Raleigh’s “The Nymph’s Reply to the Shepherd,” and Thomas Campion’s “I Care Not For These Ladies.”

10 See also Lindheim, Nancy. The Virgilian Pastoral Tradition: From the Renaissance to the Modern Era. Duquesne University Press, 2005.
of how the shepherd in literature could transform and be used by the poet to challenge pastoral conventions, even if that same poem begins conventionally enough:

> Upon the forest-side in Grasmere Vale
> There dwelt a Shepherd, Michael was his name;
> An old man, stout of heart and strong of limb.
> His bodily frame had been from youth to age
> Of an unusual strength; his mind was keen,
> Intense, and frugal, apt for all affairs,
> And in his shepherd’s calling he was prompt
> And watchful more than ordinary men.

Wordsworth, “Michael” 40–47

Although Wordsworth paints Michael as an ideal shepherd, “stout of heart and strong of limb,” his focus quickly shifts to the “unusual strength” of this shepherd’s “keen” mind, “apt for [more] affairs” and “watchful more than ordinary men.” This elevation of the shepherd’s “mind” above his more traditional strengths echoes Puttenham’s analysis of the shepherd as “able to glance at greater matters.” Thus, “Wordsworth’s shepherd has a maturity, integrity and dignity that is both produced by his work and extends beyond it” (Gifford, Pastoral 6). Wordsworth goes further, addressing the reader as he attacks “the patronising simplification” of other pastoral conventions. Indeed, “Wordsworth has used the pastoral mode to subvert conventional assumptions about the shepherd by making a realistic and broader portrait of an actual person in an actual village” (Gifford, Pastoral 7).

In addition, “Michael” places the shepherd in an intense, partly georgic relation to the land, and focuses on a need for living with misfortune. Like Michael, Wordsworth’s poetic speaker lacks the occasion for song, and instead, as Nancy Lindheim notes, “often becomes a teller of tales.” Although “the poetic theory announced in the preface to Lyrical Ballads places Wordsworth in the pastoral tradition, therefore, […] his characteristic poetic practice is inflected by what is actually an unpastoral emphasis on nature” (Lindheim, The Virgilian Pastoral Tradition 238).

It is due to this “unpastoral emphasis on nature,” moreover, that the circle of pastoral realism – traced to Theocritus’ mock-heroic exchanges between Battus and Corydon – closes prominently with the contemporary ecocritical novel which portrays a dystopian landscape, as devastated by human hand, and to such an extent that it threatens survival. Exponents of ecocriticism have written
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*

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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Idyllic Nature</th>
<th>Anti-Pastoral Nature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>vernal or cyclical</td>
<td>wintry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>humanised</td>
<td>indifferent or cruel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>place of love and renewal</td>
<td>place of unrequited love, age</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Or finally, if divided into levels:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nature</th>
<th>Celestial Paradise</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>temporal garden or Gorden Age</td>
<td>apocalyptic sacred place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lesser gods (Venus, Pan, Cupid)</td>
<td>Hebraic or Christian God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shepherds and rustics</td>
<td>angels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mechanical or botanical nature</td>
<td>sublime nature</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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 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

> Whether 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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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 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 “sol‐
itude” 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 suc‐
cceeded in his withdrawal from love, the poet finds in the garden new (and dif‐
ferent) 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 pro‐
voked 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 con‐
temporary 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 solitory 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 Zodiac” 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.
2.4 Otherwhile and Elsewhere: Pastoral Space and Time

If we reject the present, we must choose between an Arcadian retrospect and a Utopian prospect. The spatial and the temporal distances may prolong one another, as they do in exotic imaginings that took place far away and long ago. [...] Both the expectation of an afterlife and, on a more worldly plane, the resolve to build a heaven on earth through social planning share a common expectancy, which might be viewed as chiliasm or millenialism [...] These are the possibilities that lie open to the visionary, whose area of speculation is bounded only by what a German scholar calls wish-space (Wunschraum) and wish-time (Wunschzeit). — Harry Levin, “The Golden Age”

Virgil’s Arcadia and the Golden Age

After Theocritus, we turn to the next great literary contributor to the pastoral mode, Virgil, for whom the Idylls provided a model upon which he based his earliest known works, the Eclogues. Although the motif of the shepherd’s love returns, Virgil included a number of innovations which would decisively influence later authors of pastoral, widening the mode’s functional vocabulary considerably in the process. Specifically, Virgil transferred his own herdsmen to Arcadia, constructing for pastoral its very own time and space. Yet Virgil did not place his shepherds in the geographically eponymous Arcadia, the central alpine region of the Peloponnesus, encompassed on all sides by mountains, but in an Arcadia of his own artifice, “a poetic landscape whose woods and mountains were haunted by the Olympian Immortals” (Loughrey 1984: 9). The Arcadia of Virgil’s Eclogues was “an imaginary topography where the currents of myth and empirical reality flow into one another and gods mingled freely with men” (Snell, “The Discovery of a Spiritual Landscape” 281).

Virgil’s relocation of Theocritus’ shepherds from Syracuse to Arcadia was also motivated by social and political changes Sicily had undergone when it became a Roman province:
Sicily had become a Roman province, and her shepherds had entered the service of the big Roman landlords. In this new capacity they had also made their way into Roman literature; witness Lucilius’ satire on his trip to Sicily. But they could no longer be mistaken for the shepherds of song and love. Thus Virgil needed a new home for his herdsmen, a land far distant from the sordid realities of the present. Because, too, pastoral poetry did not mean to him what it had meant to Theocritus, he needed a far-away land overlaid with the golden haze of unreality. (Snell, “The Discovery of a Spiritual Landscape” 282)

Using Arcadia as a new home for the shepherds allowed Virgil to create a distance between reality and “unreality”; where Theocritus had provided a realistic, albeit ironic and humorous description of Sicily’s herdsmen, “Virgil regarded the life of the Theocritean shepherds as a sublime and inspired existence” (Snell 282). Corydon and Alexis, the love-entangled protagonists of Theocritus’ first pastoral poem had, to Virgil and his audience, an exotic ring to them, and thus echoed the mythical heroes the Roman poet had elsewhere borrowed from Greek poetry (Snell 283). It comes as no surprise, then, that from Virgil onwards, pastoral became preoccupied with such and similar tensions of reality and the imaginary. Additionally, it is by virtue of this first and decisive dichotomy that pastoral also becomes “self-conscious of its own aesthetic nature, concerned far more with exploring the meaning of its conventions than in depicting any actual countryside” (Loughrey, The Pastoral Mode 9).

Pastoral now became strongly involved with the classical myth of the Golden Age as “a far-away land overlaid with the golden haze of unreality” (Snell 282); the mode began to express an elegiac lament for a lost world of innocence and plenty. Conceived as a locus at the dawn of time, when Saturn and Aestraea ruled in the Garden of the Hesperides, the season of the Golden Age was spring perpetual, rendering clothes superfluous in a nature so fertile that it provided food and sustenance without toil. Ovid, in his *Metamorphoses*, provides one of the most famous renderings of this Golden Age:

The golden age was first; when Man yet new,  
No rule but uncorrupted reason knew:  
And, with a native bent, did good pursue. [...]  
And happy mortals, unconcern’d for more,  
Confin’d their wishes to their native shore.  
No walls were yet; nor fence, nor mote, nor mound,  
Nor drum was heard, nor trumpet’s angry sound:  
Nor swords were forg’d; but void of care and crime,  
The soft creation slept away their time.
The teeming Earth, yet guiltless of the plough,
And unprovok’d, did fruitful stores allow:
Content with food, which Nature freely bred,
On wildings and on strawberries they fed;
Cornels and bramble-berries gave the rest,
And falling acorns furnish’d out a feast.

(Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 1.89–91, 102–113)

The keeping of flocks was deemed to be the original employ of humankind, and thus the life and denizenship of the Golden Age was increasingly equated with the shepherds of Arcadia. As René Rapin eloquently observes:

Pastorals were the invention of the simplicity of innocence of [the] Golden age, if there was ever any such, or certainly of that time which succeeded the beginning of the world: For though the Golden Age must be acknowledged to be only in the fabulous times, yet ‘tis certain that they manners of the first men were so plain and simple, that we may easily derive both the innocent employment of shepherds, and pastorals from them. (Creech, *Rapin’s Discourse of Pastoral* 14–15)

This encouraged poets to develop escapist elements as further central motifs of the mode (Loughrey, *The Pastoral Mode* 10). The geographical distance created by Virgil’s Arcadia between reality and imagination was now accompanied by a chronological distancing that created a space of wish-fulfilment, an always already elsewhere between a happier, idealised past and a problematic, conflicted present. Significant to the development of the pastoral is the way in which the idealised country values and harking back to the Golden Age is explicitly contrasted with urban life. This contrast is best evidenced in Virgil’s *Georgics*:

But happy too is he who knows the gods
Of the countryside, knows Pan and old Silvanus
And the sister nymphs. Neither the people’s gift,
The faces, nor the purple robes of kings,
Nor treacherous feuds of brother against brother
Disturb him, not the Danube plotting raids
Of Dacian tribesmen, nor the affairs of Rome
And crumbling kingdoms, nor the grievous sight
Of poor to pity and rich to envy.
The fruit of his boughs, the crops of his fields, produce
Willingly of their own accord, he gathers.

(Virgil, *Georgics* 2.493–514)
The afore-mentioned distance created by the Golden Age is thus reinforced by Virgil in this dichotomy between the urban life of toil and political instability and the idealised existence in the country. As Gifford observed, “The *Georgics* are not pastoral, taken as a whole. [...] But they reveal the process by which a natural enjoyment of working in harmony with the seasons can become, in the pastoral, an idealisation of stability that provides an implicit criticism of turbulent city affairs” (Gifford, *Pastoral* 20). Furthermore, Virgil relied on his audience knowing of the nature and artifice of the Arcadia he had created in his *Eclogues*, in order that, by contrast, it would create the desired distance necessary to initiate a kind of escape to the past.

The myth of the Golden Age represents “a connection between the spatial and the temporal concepts, between the ideal landscape – Arcady, Sicily, or wherever else – and the ideal epoch, whenever that may have been or might be” (Levin, “The Golden Age” 6). It is the ultimate recollection that looks back towards time immemorial and aims to restore an innocence by later ages blighted. The “pastoral’s celebration of retreat [...] is its strength and its inherent weakness,” for “when retreat is an end in itself, pastoral is merely escapist” and there can be little diversity in such a mode (Gifford, *Pastoral* 47). Nonetheless, out of this interplay of space and time in the myth of the Golden Age, out of pastoral’s dynamic of retreat and return, the mode has borne a series of recurrent motifs, themes and modalities that have remained relevant to literature throughout.

As a prototypical space-time for the ontogenesis of human civilization, the Golden Age has, for example, become more and more embroiled with the joys of childhood, the attendant motifs of innocence, and the impulse for nostalgia. Kenneth Grahame, in his novel *The Golden Age* (1950), refers to his adults as the Olympians, implying that children are the true Saturnians, re-enacting the infantile fantasies of the human race. As Novalis said: “Wo Kinder sind, da ist ein Goldenes Zeitalter” [Where children are, there is a Golden Age] (Novalis qtd. in Richter, *Das Fremde Kind* 21). The child, one can argue, has replaced the shepherd in many instances of modern pastoral literature, and in contemporary pastoral novels in particular.

Thus, “[d]istant time has succeeded distant place as the great focus of pastoral interest, and the golden pastures of Arcadia have yielded to the golden time of childhood” (Marinelli, *Pastoral* 76). It is an essentially Romantic innovation, this emphasis on childhood, and it is based on the notion that the vision of the child is unadulterated, and in its clarity and innocence, is superior to that of the adult man. The motif of the innocence of childhood, more often than not, is “a projection of the author’s imaginings about that earlier state of life, and they are
bound to be coloured by his experience and by his nostalgia” (Marinelli, *Pastoral* 78).

**Pastoral and Nostalgia**

Nostalgia, indeed, is that aspect of pastoral, in which the mode’s collusion with a space-time of desire for a re-instated, balanced identity becomes most apparent. Essentially a looking back, a longing for what one no longer has, nostalgia is neither simply a symptom of pastoral nor does it make pastoral into something exclusively escapist. It is difficult, if not futile, to argue against pastoral as a discourse of retreat; the idealised countryside of the pastoral text is, after all, an Arcadia that uses language to construct a world different from what is perceived to be real. This retreat, however, may function simply as an escape from the complexities of urban life, society, and even the reality of the present, or it may be used as a means to explore possible futures (Gifford, *Pastoral* 46). Harry Levin, more eloquently than any other critic to date, has formulated nostalgia’s force of influence on the poetic voice’s perception of itself within the space-time of Arcadia as follows:

> Nostalgia for a happier day would be a sterile emotion, if it merely sighed for what was not; encouraged by the rotation of the seasons, it is transfigured into a hope for recurrence, [...] and hence [moves] from retrospection to prophecy. [...] If our longing to escape – or more positively, to better our condition – has any goal, however dimly envisioned, it must be located elsewhere or otherwhile. Standing here and wishing to be there, we are given a choice, at least by imagination; we may opt for some distant part of the world, a terrestrial paradise, or for an otherworld, a celestial paradise. (Levin, *The Myth of the Golden Age* 9)

There is a psychological difference, therefore, between what W.H. Auden terms “the backward-looking Arcadian” and “the Utopian dreamer.” For the Arcadian is fully aware of the wishful thinking that has constructed their Golden World as a past idyll, in which the contradictions of the present either have been negated or have not yet arisen. The future-oriented “Utopian,” on the other hand, believes that theirs is a paradise which remains to be realised, and which requires actions that are necessary elements of that dream (Auden, “Arcadia and Utopia” 90). It is with a clear awareness of this fundamental psychological difference that Thomas More defined his own ‘Utopia’:

> *Utopia*, our name for the best-known model of all model commonwealths, means nowhere. Its namer, Sir Thomas More, intended a pun in Greek on *Eutopia*, the good place, that happy realm which never existed on land or sea or in the air. In much the
same fashion, taking up a hint from Charles Renouvier, we might speak of *Uchronia* or *Euchronia* to signify either never or the good time. (Levin, *The Myth of the Golden Age* 8)

Interestingly, nostalgia has the means to meld the ‘uchronian’ glance of the utopian with the ‘euchronistic’ glance of the golden-age pastoralist. For nostalgia is not simply a feeling that urges one to look back at a void, an absence of something or someone, an elsewhere or an-other. Nostalgia is more than a feeling, it is an impulse, a thrust that involves an act, and what nostalgia acts out, or causes to be enacted, is the *nostos*, the act of return. The desire to return home, moreover, is brought about by *algos*, or extreme pain, grief, and distress.

A protagonist in desire of *nostos* is not where they want to be, does not have what they want, and is not at home with the self. It is no coincidence that the opening lines of Book One of *The Odyssey* speak of *algea* and *noston*, the many pains Odysseus “suffered [...] by sea while trying to save his own life and bring his men safely home” (Homer, *The Odyssey* 1.4–5). There is also another sense in which *The Odyssey* exemplifies the meaning of nostalgia – its principles and roots in the pastoral mode in particular. For the pastoral poetic is perhaps further removed from Ulysses’ epic struggles than any other mode imaginable. Yet, with regard to the discourse of return so quintessential to pastoral, it shares with Homer not only the return home, but through this nostalgia also that device of retreat which betokens both with the ability to glance at matters greater than a voyage by sea or a poetic counterfeit of the idyllic country life.

Nostalgia, then, as a device and a discourse saturated in the pain of longing and the attendant (re-)enactment of *nostos*, is driven towards a point of origin, situated both in a space and a time where the protagonist used to ‘be.’ Pastoral also always points to something that is elsewhere, at a condition of absence that comes into being in its narrative forms, fictions, and the linguistic landscapes that construct the artifice of Arcadia. Nostalgia thus conditions pastoral with a subtext of crisis, a crisis of identity, authenticity and memory best encapsulated by the mode’s own epitaph: *Et in Arcadia Ego*.

*Et in Arcadia Ego*: Pastoral Death, Elegy, and Memory

*Et in Arcadia Ego*: no other phrase is more readily associated with the pastoral mode, nor more easily misinterpreted. It permeates the literature of the pastoral mode in many forms: in numerous quotations and misquotations and in just as various translations and mistranslations. Ambiguity is immanent in the Latin wording; where William Faulkner rearranges the inscription to read “Et ego in Arcadia” (*The Sound and the Fury* 41), Lady Croom of Tom Stoppard’s *Arcadia*
famously (mis)translates the Latin into: “Now I am in Arcadia!” (12). Who or what exactly, then, is the “I” in ‘And I too am / was in Arcadia?’

Tracing the etymology of the phrase is best done through art, for *Et in Arcadia Ego* first appears in Giovanni Francesco Guercino’s *The Arcadian Shepherds* (see Appendix, Fig. 2). Here, the phrase is spoken by a lugubriously Christian death’s-head, asserting, with a detectable degree of Counter-Reformational piety, the omnipresence of death. The skull serves as a *memento mori* for two young, shocked shepherds, spellbound by this symbolic yet certain presence of death, even in the ideal, pastoral world of Arcadia. Additionally, Guercino adorned his skull with a fly and a mouse: the former is an age-old symbol of death and decay, and the latter, voraciously gnawing at the skull, is a “very well-known symbol for all-devouring time” (Panofsky, “*Et in Arcadia Ego*” 297).

As Panofsky argues, “According to the rules of Latin grammar the ‘et’ in this epigrammatic and elliptical sentence can refer only to ‘in Arcadia’ so that the sentence must be supposed to be pronounced by Death in person: ‘Even in Arcady,’ says he, ‘there am I’” (Panofksy “*The Tomb in Arcady at the ‘Fin-de-Siècle’*” 298).

If Guercino pictures *Et in Arcadia Ego* through glasses darkly, two paintings by Nicolas Poussin show the Latin phrase in an altered light. The first *Et in Arcadia Ego* (see Appendix, Fig. 3) by the French master still leans heavily on Guercino: the two young shepherds, here accompanied by Alpheius, Arcadia’s river god and a shepherdess, approach the scene from the left (much like the original) and are once again arrested by a skull placed upon a curvilinear sarcophagus inscribed with *Et in Arcadia Ego*. The skull, however, is much smaller here (and thus less distinguishable). Nevertheless, “the picture still conveys, though far less obtrusively than Guercino’s, a moral or admonitory message” (Panofsky, “*The Tomb in Arcady*” 312).

Any traces of Guercino’s influence or of the death-head as moralistic *memento mori* have all but disappeared from Poussin’s second *Et in Arcadia Ego* (see Appendix, Fig. 4). Its three young men and one young woman, easily recognisable as Arcadian shepherds, “are no longer surprised and arrested in their movement but symmetrically poised in calm, reflective attitudes, pointing at or pondering over the enigmatical inscription” (Panofsky, “*The Tomb in Arcady*” 6). The death’s head has been omitted completely. The contemplative absorption with which Poussin replaces the shepherds’ dramatic encounter with Death and the absence of the skull made it increasingly difficult for contemporary interpreters to stay linguistically true to *Et in Arcadia Ego*’s Latin grammar. André Félibien, Poussin’s biographer and well acquainted with him, took the first step towards “bad Latinity and good artistic analysis” by attributing it not to Death, but to
the tomb’s occupant: “Par cette inscription on a voulu marquer que celui qui est
dans cette sépolture a vécu en Arcadie et que la Mort se rencontre parmi les plus
grandes fêlicités” (1740, qtd. in Panofsky, “The Tomb in Arcady” 301). From then
on, the process of Et in Arcadia Ego’s re-interpretation reached its artistically
logical conclusion with surprising speed: Félibien had not bothered with the
Et, he simply left it out, as did Richard Wilson in his Ego Fui in Arcadia (1755),
and thus the phrase slipped into its ubiquitously proverbial usage on the Conti-
tinent. In his Pervonte (1778), Chr. M. Wieland translates it variously into “Auch
ich lebt’ in Arcadia” or “Du arme Vastola. Auch du warst in Arcadia” (211);
Goethe famously used it as a motto for his Italienische Reise (1786): “Auch ich in
Arkadian,” and Schiller even paraphrased it into “Auch ich war in Arkadien
geboren” (Resignation, 1835, qtd. in Panofsky, “The Tomb in Arcady” 303).

As this brief overview of its etymology shows, it is not what Et in Arcadia Ego
translates to that should matter to us, but how it has been variously interpreted
and represented in artistic and literary texts. Notably, although the original no-
tions of Death and memento mori have had to give way to a wistfully elegiac
and nostalgic epitaph for a pastoral idyll once enjoyed and then lost, Et in Arcadia
Ego can simultaneously embody all or none of these ‘original’ associations. What
Et in Arcadia Ego shows, however, is that, love and death have been closely
intertwined in myth and literature since antiquity. The psychoanalyst Rollo May,
in a chapter of his Love and Will entitled “Love and Death,” explains that myth-
ology is the gauge of the extent to which love and death are related in the human
psyche, and thus to the process of identification:

[D]eath is always in the shadow of the delight of love. […] When we love, we give up
the centre of ourselves. We are thrown from our previous state of existence into a
void; and though we hope to attain a new world, a new existence, we can never be
sure. […] The World is annihilated; how can we know whether it is ever built up again.
We give, and give up, our own centre; how shall we know that we will get it back?”
(May, Love and Will 101, italics my own)

Love and death are essential ingredients to the pastoral, whether expressed
through the existential psychology at the heart of every myth, or as the elegiac
nostalgia that characterises many a pastoral’s retreat and return.14 As the
struggle for love is a struggle against death, so the pastoral mode’s retreat is a
struggle against the memento mori that Et in Arcadia Ego represents. This in-
terrelation of love and death makes the pastoral mode and the elegy frequent

14 For a collection of essays on the interrelation of death and love in the pastoral novel of
the late Renaissance, see also Damiani, Bruno Mario, and Barbara Louise Mujica. Et in
cohabitants of one and the same literary landscape. Karen Weisman’s introduction to *The Oxford Handbook of the Elegy* (2010) uncannily echoes many of the tropes of pastoral’s *Et in Arcada Ego*:

When taken in the more contemporary sense as the framing of loss, elegy can be pulled between the worlds of the living and the dead, between the present life of sorrow and the vanished past of putative greater joy. Between the extremes of life and death, joy and sorrow, the receding past and the swiftly moving present, falls the elegy as we know it today. (Weisman, “Introduction” 1)

Where elegy is “the framing of loss,” the pastoral mode expresses a yearning for what is always already elsewhere; both elegy and pastoral test “the limits of our expressive resources precisely at the very moment in which we confront our mortality,” thus throwing into sharp relief “the inefficacy of language precisely when we need it most.” Much like pastoral, elegy “inhabits a world of contradiction” for which “an implicit self-reflexivity is inevitable” (Weisman, “Introduction” 1).

Not surprisingly, then, the pastoral elegy covers a large scope of literature. Traditionally, “the subject matter of elegy ranged from funeral lamentation to political satire to *chagrin d’amour*” (Watterson, “Nation and History” 138); modern iterations include not only texts that lament a human loss, but also those that mourn an ever-endangered environment. In “The Dark Ecology of Elegy,” Timothy Morton argues in dialectical tautologies such as, “If ecology is often elegiac, elegy is also ecological,” or “Elegy works as much against ecology as for it, despite the overwhelmingly environmental quality of elegiac tropes” (Morton, “The Dark Ecology of Elegy” 251, 256). Iain Twiddy’s study of *Pastoral Elegy in Contemporary British and Irish Poetry* even postulates that “pastoral elegy” exists in “three main forms.” In the first – “artificial pastoral elegy” – nature mourns human death, and the dead are “transformed” into a permanent existence or landscape. In “non-pastoral” or “natural” elegy, the role of nature is such that it is neither benevolent nor cruel, and neither is there a “pre-eminent place in nature for humanity. Consolation in a “natural elegy” may instead be derived simply from “the dispassionate changes endemic in natural processes.” The third form, “anti-pastoral” elegy, “differs from non-pastoral elegy, since […] the former suggests a poetics of undermining in which pastoral conventions are deployed or alluded to, in order to suggest or declare the limitations of those conventions, or their downright falsity” (Twiddy, *Pastoral Elegy* 4).

To delve deeper into such and other vague definitions of the ‘pastoral elegy’ is to come to a critical cul-de-sac, however. While it cannot be denied that the pastoral and the elegy exhibit a multitude of parallels, it would be misguided to
give this interrelation its own explicit category in modern literature. “For all intents and purposes,” William C. Waterson notes, “pastoral elegy’ is an academic category invented by scholars seeking to establish a link between Theocritus’ first ‘Idyll’ (Thyrsis’ lament for Daphnis) and all subsequent mourning poems set in the locus amoenus or green world” (Watterson, “Nation and History” 139). Examples of pastoral elegy abound, nevertheless, especially in the early seventeenth century. In 1614, Drummond of Hawthornden published his collection Poems: Amorous, Funeral, Divine, Pastoral in Sonnets, Songs, Sextains, Madrigals. In Song One, a shepherd mourns the death of a nymph at the site of her tomb. And William Alexander’s ‘A Pastoral Elegy on the Death of Sir Anthony Alexander’ bears more than a passing resemblance to Milton’s ‘Lycidas,’ often taken as the prototypical pastoral elegy of its time.

Despite the proliferation of the pastoral elegy in seventeenth-century English literature, studies that focus on the pastoral elegy appear to neglect a crucial difference between the two modes: while elegy sets out to explicitly mourn a loss, pastoral does not, even if Et in Arcadia Ego can function as a memento for an idyll once enjoyed and then lost, and even if the mourning for a loss may be lived out in a pastoral sojourn. Where pastoral is about the past and foregrounds a reality in which all art is about the past, elegy is about the past, but foregrounds that past so as to create a reality in which the mourner(s) may accept their future. Rather, pastoral is often elegiac because, as the dialectical nature of the mode has shown us, it is characterized not by absolute contrasts, but by heterotopia that are governed relativistically by a multitude of contrasts.

The nature of pastoral’s relativism is particularly well expressed in the elegiac iteration of the mode because the elegy, as a poetics of loss, relies on the relative distance between the space-time of that loss and the Arcadian space-time in which its life is relived or re-imagined. “As the presentation and representation of the mourning process,” moreover, “elegy must record change, must demonstrate a progression away from the dead.” Elegy thus “requires a space for communion, a space for memory, and in the production of the memorial image, a space to create consolation” (Twiddy, Pastoral Elegy 31), and it is in pastoral’s Arcadia that writers often find both such a space and such a time. Et in Arcadia Ego thereby becomes a space-time wherein the author or the mourner may contemplate and learn to accept the nature and inevitability of death. Pastoral is so well suited to this task, moreover, because the mourner can create a heterotopia of memory and time according to their own “memorial image” and as a mirror of their own, personalized Arcadia.
2.5 Pastoral, Post-/Modernism, and the Works of John Banville

On sharkskin legs, the lamb gambles with
our gullibility,
floating in formaldehyde, fleecing us for all
its worth.
Brassed off, the art historian turns away.
Rustic simplicity
parodied in woolly counterpoint has no
place on his Earth. — Elizabeth Kay

Pastoral and Post-/modernism

Our retreat into the literary history of the pastoral has culminated in one overbearing conclusion: pastoral is as significant as ever, and the pastoral mode and post-/modernism are historically intertwined and exhibit a multitude of parallels. The most prevalent of these is that of cultural and literary secularization, which shapes both in various ways: where pastoral has undergone a development towards it, postmodernism is defined by it, and is exercising it still. The response to the postmodernist exorcism of subservience to extra-personal metanarratives, however, has been deeply ambivalent: uncertainty and the menace of meaninglessness threaten to usurp the celebration of autonomy, and the “release from systematisation and order” is perceived as sliding too readily “into a nostalgic lamentation for lost certainty and a fear of relativistic anarchy” (Wortthington, “A Devious Narrative” 4).

Pastoral too, can be perceived as having come close to a similar dialectic. The demise of the pastoral of form and convention, on the one hand, has allowed it to be recognised as a mode, liberating it from the mentality it had been designed to cultivate and express. Literary treatments of this ‘secularised pastoral,’ on the other hand, call for a re-evaluation of the semantic field in which the constructs of Arcadia have hitherto been embedded. Critics such as Alpers, Buell, Lawson and Gifford speak “in favour of a more knowing,” albeit more inclusive, “adversarial sense of ‘environment’ rather than ‘nature’” (Gifford, Pastoral 174). This revision is necessary, they argue, in order to save pastoral from being associated with a form of nostalgia or deferment, whence it could ‘fall back’ into modernist scepticism, which not few critics somewhat derogatorily refer to as ‘sentimental pastoral’.

Such an approach is itself a deferment, however, as it ignores issues paramount to the critical reception of the pastoral mode today. For one may confi-
dently declare pastoral dead after Hardy, but if our lives now lack a separation between urban and rural existence, other dialectical caesurae and interdependencies have taken its place. Certain scholars of literature have recognised this, whence their studies by-pass questions of form and mode in order to directly analyse pastoral as a vehicle for the expression of tensions and ambiguous sentiments. Renato Poggioli, for example, begins his study of pastoral by speaking of its “psychological root,” specifically as “a double longing after innocence and happiness,” which can only be regained by means of “a retreat” (*The Oaten Flute* 1). Although Poggioli’s study at first glance promises much, it ultimately delivers too little by way of refined literary criticism. Though his relation of seemingly disparate elements, such as aspects of the “psychological” within the pastoral, is in many ways a first, the resulting reading of the mode is, to say the least, incomplete. Indeed, further reading of *The Oaten Flute* throws into sharp relief several limitations in both Poggioli’s critical approach and argumentation.

Poggioli’s collection of essays, for one, offers next to no critical basis on which to ground its analysis of the pastoral mode. In terms of evaluation it offers even less; the introduction offers all but an aphoristic admonishment that pastoral is inherently vested in limitations, which on its own is too damning of the mode: “Man has walked farther under the burden of Christ’s cross than with the help of the shepherd’s rod” (*The Oaten Flute* 2). Poggioli then goes on to categorise the mode in an index of feelings, and a shallow one at that; he introduces the pastorals of friendship, melancholy, innocence, happiness, mirth, the self, solitude and love, where one half expresses emotions directly and the other half associates with feelings innately: “Shakespeare, for instance, identified the pastoral of solitude with the pastoral of melancholy, and saw in both the opposite of the pastoral of happiness and love” (*The Oaten Flute* 22). This exclusive focus on feelings produces a disagreeably reductive reading of pastoral. The result is a pastoral of sentimentality, the vaporous nature of which Poggioli warns against in his introduction specifically: “the pastoral ideal shifts on the quicksands of wishful thought” (*The Oaten Flute* 2). Poggioli then tries (but fails) to justify his sentimental treatment of the pastoral mode by referring to Friedrich Schiller’s conceptions of sentimental poetry, because he sees Schiller placing the pastoralist among the sentimental poets (*The Oaten Flute* 4).

In an attempt to make more of Poggioli’s own naïveté, Frederick Garber takes up this reference to Schiller’s terminology, on another line of thought. Garber places much emphasis on how Schiller in fact prefigures Poggioli, whereby he “slip[s] quickly past the difficulties of free-floating emotionalism” dogging the latter. To do this, Garber takes up Schiller’s concept of *Empfindungsweise*, which he translates variously as “modes of feeling” or “modes of perception,” and then...
as “modes of feeling as modes of perception,” (Garber, “Pastoral Spaces” 437) attributing to it a particular relevance for his own reading.

Schiller’s *Empfindungsweise*, according to Garber, affects pastoral by means of a reciprocal or “mutual conditioning” that is in turn effected in the “sentimental state” of the mode’s *Innenraum* or “inner topography”. In other words, the pastoral becomes a mode of perception for “that landscape of uncrossable gaps, that unsettling spatiality, which gives the sentimental state its tone and determines its existential status”. Schiller’s arguments and terminology support this ‘spatial pastoral,’ moreover, because he sees the purpose of the idyll as a means “to represent man in a state of harmony and peace with himself and his surroundings, separated out from the artificial relations” or “künstlichen Verhältnissen”. Schiller thereby puts away pastoral in the tradition of sentimental poetry. His terminology stands in stark contrast to such a conclusion, however. The concept of Empfindungsweise prefigures the pastoral as a mode able to express and perceive a particular perspective on human experience where the concept of Innenraum constitutes an “inner topography,” a subtext that constructs within the mode a narrative other (Garber, “Pastoral Spaces” 438).

The ambiguities of pastoral, to put it another way, play against each other in a tense dialectic that has no precise counterpart in the mode’s historical form, but must instead seek a way of expression as something other. For though the conventional pastoral finds stability in the formal expression of the bucolic condition, this stasis and stability—as the pastoral’s development in literature shows—is only temporary. The tense dialectic inherent to pastoral prevails, ever conditioned by the plethora of ambiguities that govern its content, tonality and its expression in language and narrative. Taken together, these engender the mode with a subtext that carries with it always the potential to rise up to the surface and undermine the assertions of the bucolic ideal, its very presence, with lamentations for loss and an irremediable absence (Garber, “Pastoral Spaces” 439–40).

Garber’s essay, if not new, represents a much needed stepping stone towards reading the pastoral mode within post-/modern and contemporary discourse. Its critical approach re-situates pastoral as a mode that, when expressed in narrative, is concerned with the dialectics of presence and absence, of being-in-the-world, and what Jacques Lacan calls the process of identification of the self through “an-other” (Homer, *Jacques Lacan* 25). The pastoral mode, it thus becomes clear, identifies strongly with the post-/modernist concerns of subject and subjectivity. Or, to put it more precisely, the pastoral mode is not only prescient of the post-/modernist transcendental philosophy of the ego, it also anticipates the post-/modern prioritisation of language as a narrative mode
that uses the linguistic landscapes and the constructs of Arcadia as its artifice of expression, to mediate between (and meditate on) the intersubjective consciousness of the self.

Both pastoral and postmodernism facilitated the rise to supremacy of the individual in literature. Pastoral, on the one hand, was ever sentient of the crisis of the “sundered self” (Lawson, “On Modern Pastoral” 41); indeed, one could say the pastoral mode itself, throughout literary history, has been engaged in a socio-cultural process of identification and reification, the very process and concerns the mode has been used to express. Postmodernism, on the other hand, represents the apotheosis of subjectivity in literature and cultural theory. It is consilient with pastoral because, in utilising language and narrative as a “kind of fictional liberation movement” (Worthington, “A Devious Narrative” 4), it turns the pastoral mode, that has up to now expressed a public crisis of identity (by way of social, political, and ecocriticism), into one that can also express the most private identity crises. Moreover, post-/modernism has helped raise the bucolic tradition to a mode that can express a pastoral crisis of intersubjectivity, language, and self. It is the subtext, the narrative landscape of pastoral that allows it to become such a modulor for the acrobatics of post-/modern literature which gives such primacy to the crisis of identity and self-consciousness. This subtext, as Garber expounds, is what constitutes pastoral’s “inner geography, ... a space of gaps and lacunae” (Garber, “Pastoral Spaces” 443).

Post-/Modernism, Nostalgia, and Identity Discourse

Furthermore, postmodernism is consequential because the term has become “the code-name for the crisis of confidence in Western conceptual systems;” this “crisis of confidence” goes well beyond any empirical or social self to include the transcendental self (Holstein & Gubrium, The Self We Live By 56). Postmodernism is at sharp odds with any overarching cultural sensibilities as regards the way we perceive ourselves:

Postmodernism is born out of the uprising of the marginalised, the evolution in communication technology, the fissures of a global multinational hypercapitalism, and our sense of the limits of Enlightenment rationality, all creating a conjunction that shifts our sense of who we are and what is possible. (Lather, “Postmodernism, Post-Structuralism” 102)

Postmodernists differ in how radically they articulate this crisis of confidence, especially in their responses to the question of the existence of the self. James A. Holstein and Jaber F. Gubrium distinguish between “affirmative”
(moderate) and “sceptical” (radical) postmodernists, providing an inclusive yet crisp disambiguation. Affirmatives seek to sustain the notion of reality as something socially constructed, yet evidentiary that includes an experiencing, if equally constructed, self. In this sense, the postmodern condition multiplies and hybridises our identities, resulting in “a polysemic self, a self refracted, but not displaced, by all manner of signification” (Gubrium and Holstein, *The Self We Live By* 57). The self of everyday life is hereby affirmed, not eliminated. In conjunction with this, postmodern commentators such as Kenneth Gergen (*The Saturated Self* 1991) and Noram Denzin (*Images of Postmodern Society* 1991), speak of a world exploding with images and representations of who we are that skews our sense of self (*The Self We Live By* 58).

In contrast, “sceptical” or “radical” postmodernists altogether mistrust modern reality, the reality of the self in particular. For such postmodernists the real is just another myth of Western rationality. Jean Baudrillard speaks of a “hyperreality” where the self is no more than an image for conveying identity that exists in a myriad gallery of others (Baudrillard, *Simulations* 1983). Any conceptual anchors are hoisted as this “reality” removes the self from its traditional moorings, disabling it as an agent of experience altogether. The postmodern thus conditions a world in which objects do not exist distinct or separate from their representation (Gubrium and Holstein, *The Self We Live By* 57).

Depending on which path is or is not taken, the self walks through different stories to different endings. According to Holstein and Gubrium, the postmodern self has two options: The first option entails a range of reactions which correlate with the affirmative/sceptical distinction. Those postmodernists who choose to “react” attempt to “reaffirm familiar renditions of identity, entrenching in ‘tried and true’ versions of the social self formulated by the early pragmatists,” a narrative or plot that formulates a strategy for the social self to “withstand the current siege, adapting to postmodern (or late modern times) … but remaining essentially in tact as it has been known for decades.” Other ‘reactionary’ thinkers, more sceptical, “dismiss the self as an empirical reality, effectively putting an end to its narrative by catapulting it into an altogether different universe” (*The Self We Live By* 57).

The second option desires to transform the crisis of confidence rather than simply relegating it or capitulating to it: “Acknowledging the hard, complex times that confront the social self, this transformation reconceptualises the self as a form of working subjectivity” (*The Self We Live by* 57) The attendant panel of postmodernists, including such commentators as Ludwig Wittgenstein, Jean-François Lyotard, and Michel Foucault, thereby formulate “a self that not only is a polysemic product of experience, but is also a by-product of practices
that diversely construct it in response to varied senses of what it could be, or need be” (*The Self We Live By* 57).

Now to close the circle of argument by relating the two options of the postmodern self to the pastoral mode and its subtexts of nostalgia and identity discourse. As previously discussed, nostalgia is a prevalent impulse that engenders the pastoral mode with a crisis of authenticity, reality and self. It has also been pointed out that pastoral may either use nostalgia as a vehicle to simply escape from this crisis, or as a vessel with which to explore it. Indeed, this is not dissimilar to the postmodernist self that can either capitulate to the crisis of confidence or use it as a catalyst for metamorphosis and development. At the core of both the pastoral of nostalgia and the postmodern debate of self, in sum, is a crisis of identity as expressed within a narrative’s text, space and time.

Indeed, both the pastoral and the postmodern use a continuum of spatial and temporal imagery in their incessant survey of the self, in search of a voice to express themselves within own narratives. “I am therefore I think”: John Banville’s Cartesian inversion (*Birchwood* 3) aptly illustrates both the single most prominent feature of his writing and the singular postmodern obsession with thinking and narrating the self. The technologies of self construction are not only constituted in language, as Madan Sarup succinctly infers, but also within the space and time of the resulting narrative: “We apprehend identity not in the abstract but always in relation to a given place and time” (*Sarup, Identity, Culture and the Postmodern World* 15). The narratology of the self – to invoke Banville’s inversion again – preconditions a modern voice (text, story, narrative) of the modern individual, thrust into a space (I am) they must make sense of (I think).

And it is the pastoral mode, in conjunction with its subtext of nostalgia, its narrative topography, and its constructions of Arcadia that offers the linguistic, spatial and temporal technologies which allow this process of identification to move and progress towards that which is desired.

Nostalgia provides a first and relentless impulse within pastoral that creates a crisis of perceived time discordant to the hitherto experienced self in that time. This causes the self to act, to act out nostalgia, more precisely, and to try and unify the past and the desired future with the present. This reification of one’s experience of time is in turn a necessary part of the process of identification: “The impulse to preserve the past is part of the impulse to preserve the self. [...] The nostalgic impulse is an important agent in adjustment to crisis; it is a social emollient and reinforces public [as well as private] identity when confidence is weakened or threatened” (*Sarup, Identity, Culture and the Postmodern World* 97).

Since it is always in the process of emerging, moreover, the present is by definition always uncertain, and thus it is only through recollections of past
events and experiences that the self can hope to be represented to others. The past, however, consists of a set of selectively chosen and appropriated memories and discourses, which makes the act of recollection—and hence the process of identification—something equally ephemeral, discontinuous and fragmented. Once again, it is the pastoral mode with its linguistic landscapes and attendant constructs of Arcadia that provides a space within which identity can at least hope to move towards a reconciliation with this temporally fragmented kaleidoscope of the self. In John Banville’s later works, for example, the narrative self (“I am therefore I think”) is re-invoked, reversed and re-inscribed as into an anti-Cartesian Arcadian self.

Towards a Post-/Modern Pastoral: John Banville’s Narrative Identities

For John Banville as well as other post-/modern authors, the self-reflexive narrator of the first-person novel is not enough. Relentlessly, Banville’s writing is looking for ways to accommodate the self-reflexive, personalised narrator of the first-person novel without giving up completely the idea of an existential relationship between narrator and character. Traditionally, the first-person novel links narrator to character in an ‘existential’ way as opposed to the ‘functional’ way found in the third-person novel: “The personal narrator is embodied in the world of the characters,” and both a narrating self and an experiencing self are characterised by this “corporeality” (Edmiston, “Focalisation and the First-Person Narrator” 735).

This in turn implies certain characteristics of the first-person narrator. The first-person narrator, for instance, tells a story he calls his own, not someone else’s, and does so in the first person. Such a narrative voice is also “restricted” spatially, temporally and psychologically “to what a fictional human being could logically know”. Furthermore, where the traditional first-person narrator is placed in the here-and-now of the narrating of the story, the character is placed in the here-and-now of the story told. These two loci are connected in time. A standard way to overcome this issue is to distinguish between a ‘narrating I’ (the narrator as narrator) and the ‘experiencing I’ (the narrator as character) (Edmiston 734, 736).

The structuralist treatments of narrative reject such a ‘personal narrator’, however. This tenet of literary theory places the emphasis instead on narrative agents or functions rather than fictional human beings. Character is assigned to the story level and narrator is assigned to the discourse level, and neither story and discourse nor character and narrator should be confused with one another, which is precisely what the idea of a ‘personal narrator’ does. The functions of
the first and third-person narrator, from this point of view, are identical: “There is the same difference between narrator and character, and the same functional relationship between them” (Edmiston, “Focalisation and the First-Person Narrator” 734). Consequently, the first-person novel loses its singularity and unique position in narrative theory.

To return to Banville, by putting the narrator centre stage, he constructs another character in such a way as can perhaps be best explained using Paul Ricoeur’s concept of “narrative identity”. Ricoeur develops the notion of narrative identity from the idea that life is equal to the story (or stories) one can tell about it: “life ... appears to us as the field of a constructive activity ... through which we attempt to recover ... the narrative identity which constitutes us” (Ricoeur, “Life: A Story in Search of a Narrator” 130).

The notions of subjectivity that characterise Ricoeur’s narrative identity call to mind the obsession for a ‘new’ kind of subjectivity relentlessly driving the various—and yet clearly connected—narrative voices of Banville’s novels: “that which we call subjectivity is neither an incoherent succession of occurrences nor an immutable substance incapable of becoming. It is exactly the kind of identity which the narrative composition alone, by means of its dynamism, can create.” To do this, narrative identity mediates between two disparate forms of identity: idem identity (“identity understood in the sense of being the same”) and ipse identity (“identity understood in the sense of oneself as self-same [soi-même]”). Identity as ‘same’ relies on a set of strict and objective criteria of identification which remain immutable through time. Self-same identity, on the other hand, proves more flexible and develops with or in the temporal becoming of personal identity (Ricoeur, “Life: A Story in Search of a Narrator” 437, 439).

Furthermore, Ricoeur develops the concept of “emplotment” as that aspect of narrative which can not only integrate what appears to be the contrary to idem identity (diversity, variability, discontinuity and instability), but can also produce a “dialectic of character which is quite clearly a dialectic of sameness and selfhood” (Ricoeur, “The Self and Narrative Identity” 141). Ricoeur describes the resulting dialectic as a “discordant concordance,” where “concordance” refers to “the principal of order that presides over what Aristotle calls the ‘arrangement of facts’ and “discordance” implies ‘the reversals of fortune that make the plot an ordered transformation from an initial situation to a terminal situation” (“The Self and Narrative Identity” 142).

In Self as Narrative, Kim Worthington provides a crisp synopsis of how Ricoeur’s concept of emplotment, its dialectic of “discordant concordance” in particular, constitutes narrative as a process of identification:
The construction of a subject’s sense of selfhood should be understood as a creative narrative process achieved within a plurality of intersubjective communicative protocols. In the act of conceptualizing one’s selfhood, one writes a narrative of personal continuity through time. That is, in thinking myself, I remember myself: I draw together my multiple members—past and other subject positions—into a coherent narrative of selfhood which is more or less readable by myself and others. (Worthington, Self as Narrative 13)

Worthington’s illuminations also help clarify how Banville’s novels are themselves the “emplotment” of Ricoeur’s concepts par excellence. For the Banvillean œuvre “depends utterly on the drama of voice, a consciousness which feeds off its own imagination and memory, and which consoles itself with its own fictions” (D’hoker, “Self-Consciousness, Solipsism, and Storytelling” 69). His protagonists, first scientists, then art historians or actors, or distinguished academics, are solitary heroes constantly in survey of the self. As the narrative drives towards an established identity, plot is created from and within its characters. The main characters, one could say, are themselves the plots.

Freddie Montgomery lives “amongst ghosts and absences … hungering after other worlds” so that he can “fill them up … with imaginings” (Ghosts 75). Alexander Cleave is “after nothing less than a total transformation … into a miraculous, bright new being” (Eclipse 37). And Max Morden, seeking to assuage the “heaviness of heart” haunting him since the death of his wife, moves within “the waxworks of memory” in search of a narrative to call his own, “if only [he] could make a sufficient effort of recollection” (The Sea 160). The writer, for Banville, “is not a priest, not a shaman, not a holy dreamer. Yet his work is dragged up out of that darksome well where the essential self cowers” (“Fiction and Dream: An Interview” 26). Banville’s characters are themselves such writers, authoring mainly meta-fictional memoirs or autobiographies, to bring into light a self in purgatory, hovering between texts and fictions, between the authenticity of the real and the art of existence.

In monologues of “monotonous murmur” – Banville “is not much interested in dialogue” (“John Banville and Derek Hand in Conversation” 201, 210) – the characters ruminate on ideas that haunt them, speaking in narrative voices that seem to transcend time. For each book represents a “progression from the past to the following one … it’s an absolute logical progression from one to the other” (“Interviewing John Banville” 235). The narrative effectively haunts the characters as perceived within a threefold present: that of the past, that of the present, and that of the future. What is principally at stake, however, is not time, but truth, and through truth, the self. By resorting to first person narratives, in particular, the author’s act of representation is mirrored in the narrator’s adamant...
attempt to frame his life in a story of significance. To reflect on the self, after all, is to reflect on the first-person novel as a genre, and to reflect on the first-person novel as a genre is to question the self.

These notions of narrative (as) identity evoked by “I am, therefore I think” are re-invoked and re-inscribed in Banville as a post-/modern pastoral of the unconscious. This process might best be described as a re-writing of the narrative self into an Arcadian self. Especially in his early texts, Banville stages narrative identities saturated in Beckettian poetics, supreme stylists whose primary “concern [is] with language,” incessantly trying (but ultimately failing) “to find forms that will accommodate the chaos” (Banville, “A Great Tradition” 7). The early Banvillean narrator was a “scientist-like manipulator … ‘the devised deviser devising it all’” (“Fiction and Dream: An Interview” 26). In his later novels, Banville begins to let things happen on the page; the narrative voice returns to a prelapsarian, dreamlike state, invoking a retreat to “childhood, to those Arcadian fields where memory and imagination merge” (Eclipse 137). Banville asserts, accordingly, that “as you sit down to write … it’s important that you get it just right. Then the language starts to do its own thing, it starts to write itself—it starts to write you!” (“John Banville and Derek Hand in Conversation” 208). This dreamlike way of writing, this “getting it just right,” permeates the his works not only in mode of narration and content, but also in the way they are written. It persists throughout the ‘art trilogy’—The Book of Evidence (1989), Ghosts (1993), and Athena (1995)—The Untouchable (1997), the chiastic duo Eclipse (2002) and Shroud (2003), Booker-Prize Winning novel The Sea (2005), The Infinities (2009) as well as his latest novel The Blue Guitar (2015).

Each Banville protagonist, his identity thrown into crisis, embarks on an Arcadian sojourn which “usually entails some psychological adjustment in the characters” (Young, The Heart of the Forest 20) to find and re-write the self. This Arcadian sojourn takes place on various levels; it is a storied process that moves between the various focalisations, fictions, narrative identities and meta-fictional texts Banville and his ‘authors’ present to the reader. Banville’s protagonists—as is the case in many first-person novels—narrate what one might call a peregrination through the courtyards of the brain, the countrysides of the mind, or, to quote Axel Vander in Shroud, “the topography of the mind” (Shroud 25). Banville’s literary artifice is a means of representing the narrative self as meditating on the way modern spaces and the space of imagination (itself an Arcadia of the (un)conscious) are interdependent.

Intimate registers and narratives betoken Banville’s protagonists with a “biofictional” space where a metafictional reconfiguration of contemporary subjectivity and authenticity takes place. The protagonists thus experience a search
for “totality without completeness,” a perfect state of prelapsarian innocence moving towards that “infinite proximity” of the mind to a metaphysical knowledge of existence and self (Izarra, “Disrupting Social and Cultural Identities” 184). Banville uses constant recapitulations of self-disrupting identities to lead his readers towards an awareness of the quintessential inauthenticity that cuts through narrative and self: “There exists neither ‘spirit’, nor reason, nor thinking, nor consciousness, nor soul, nor will, nor truth: all are fictions” (Shroud 6). These recapitulations, moreover, are localised in places and times, feelings and affections that are constantly re-interpreted, re-placed and re-written.

Every location in Banville’s later novels is highly symbolic and resonant of the character’s search for an almost-Arcadian space of metaphysical understanding. Freddie Montgomery, upon his release from prison, immediately seeks out an island, “a place of seclusion and tranquility,” he says, “where I could begin the long process of readjustment to the world” (Ghosts 20). Max Morden suddenly finds himself “in that Edenic moment at what was suddenly the centre of the world, with that shaft of sunlight and those vestigial flowers” (The Sea 90). And Alexander Cleave, before entering Hotel Halcyon, “imagined behind that revolving door a secret world of greenery and plashing water and sultry murmurings” (Eclipse 35). On the one hand, these recurrent pastoral settings act “as a mirror to the action” and as “symbol[s] of the social and psychological harmonies aimed at and attained” (Young, The Heart of the Forest 20–1). On the other hand, Banville simultaneously juxtaposes elements disharmonious to these Arcadianisms, thereby creating a parallel discourse that drives towards discordance, disenchantment and deconstruction.

Banville’s novels often oscillate between postmodernist and modernist concerns, for his writing utilises language as a “kind of fictional liberation movement” (Worthington, Self as Narrative 4). One must, nonetheless, also recognise “the deep sense of critical sympathy in Banville for those ... who dreamed of metanarratives and unifying visions” (McMinn, John Banville: A Critical Study 7). Most of his characters wish there were a convincing master narrative that could explain their place in the world. The rupture thus created in the relationship between human imagination and reality is central to any understanding of John Banville’s art, and the notions of Arcadia and the pastoral sojourn betoken the narrative voice with a means to both meditate on and mediate between these issues. All this, in order to overcome the postmodern rift between narrative and

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15 Axel Vander is citing Nietzsche, but the citation is incomplete: “There exists neither ‘spirit’, nor reason, nor thinking, nor consciousness, nor soul, nor will, nor truth: all are fictions that are of no use” (The Will to Power 480).
experience, reality and fiction, self and other, and “to find forms that will accommodate the chaos” (Banville, “A Great Tradition” 7).