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 continued 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 propensity 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 confusion of definitions to pastoral. Accordingly, pastoral “is a double longing after innocence and happiness” (Poggioli, The Oaten Flute 1); it is based on the philosophical antithesis of art and nature (Kermode, English Pastoral Poetry 37; Marx, The Machine in the Garden 35) and has been drawn upon in the founding of ecocriticism (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 enduring literary norms and conventions, or in a specific (if perennial) subject, or in some continuity of feeling, attitude, “philosophical conception,” or mode of consciousness 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 historical 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, Shakespeare’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

he 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 combinations 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), “enigmatic pastoral” (Tew, “Jim Crace’s Enigmatic Pastoral” 2010), “black pastoral” (Grene 2000) and “radical pastoral” (Newman 2011).