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
2 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).

Gifford’s search for a new term culminates in a chapter on “post-pastoral”, a neologism he coins and reifies, at least in part, with his own research. Though his endeavour is ambitious and his examples somewhat recherché, the chapter is meticulously researched. His aim: “rather than to make firm definitive distinctions,” he desires to show “how much these strands [i.e. the ‘three kinds of pastoral’] can overlap” (Pastoral 146). Overall, he acts on this imperative convincingly. The term ‘post-pastoral’ he defines by six qualities, for example, each of which he illustrates with reference to a work of literature or poem. These qualities, he adds, will not all be present in every post-pastoral text (Pastoral 169), which in turn begs the question, how many, then, must a text exhibit to qualify as ‘post-pastoral’? Gifford, in an attempt to pre-empt such and similar reservations, cautions that his explication of the post-pastoral is an inevitably crude simplification, as its six defining qualities can be expanded and reduced in number (Gifford, Pastoral 170). Nonetheless, he remains inconclusive as to how the notion of post-pastoral, by now a seemingly all-inclusive ‘complex pastoral’ (Pastoral 172), can justify itself on the threshold of postmodernism, which has, as Gifford himself acknowledges, “blurred literary categories” and made “all literature borderland” (Pastoral 173). As Paul Alpers observes in his own study of pastoral, a “literary definition is revealing and useful [...] not when it plants its banner everywhere, but when it is clear about what does and does not count as an example of the phenomenon in question” (Alpers, What is Pastoral? ix).

Furthermore, it is particularly hard to acknowledge these shortcomings when, reading on, one recognizes that, on the verge of a genuine breakthrough, Gifford is blinded by his adherence to ecocriticism. For he begins to connect the concerns towards which pastoral has been driven with those of postmodernist identity discourse, a connection at the very heart of this investigation too. He points for