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.\(^4\) 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).\(^5\)

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,

\(^4\) In the most recent criticism, pastoral has been subjected to a quietly comical, if bewildering range of designations, including “subversive pastoral” (Reid, “Idyls 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).