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Pastoral

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2.1 Pastoral as Classical Genre

From the third century BCE, representations of nature in our culture have been framed within a pastoral tradition, even if they have strongly resisted pastoral idealisation in an anti-pastoral mode. Pastoral writing about nature has sometimes gone out of fashion with writers themselves. Late eighteenth-century poets in England came to prefer the more practical georgic mode as appropriate to the intensification of interest in agriculture on the great estates at home and the possibilities of growing profitable new products in the colonies abroad. In the late twentieth century pastoral also went out of fashion with literary critics, some of whom declared pastoral to be dead, although not for the first time in its history. Even ecocritics, who are especially alert to the various implications behind representations of nature, have declared pastoral to be ‘outmoded’ and inadequate to the challenges of our current relationship with nature. But these are notably English ecocritics following the scepticism of Raymond Williams in his influential Marxist critique, *The Country and the City* (1975). One of the early American ecocritics, Lawrence Buell, has pointed out that ‘pastoralism is a species of cultural equipment that western thought has for more than two millennia been unable to do without.’ Just three years earlier, fellow American Leo Marx had predicted that the ‘wholly new conception of the precariousness of our relations with nature is bound to bring forth new versions of pastoral.’ Indeed, the Irish poet Seamus Heaney saw himself as doing just that in his own work and recognised new versions of pastoral in the work of others, often as a mode of resistance to troubled times, as he explained in a late essay titled ‘Eclogues *In Extremis*: On the Staying Power of Pastoral’ (2003). Todd Borlik argues that reviewing the two-millennia history of the pastoral can offer insights into our present environmental crisis when he writes, ‘re-tracing our steps may, nevertheless, empower us to recognise that our current environmental predicament was not a historical inevitability.’ Quoting Heaney, he goes on, ‘The pastoral’s “staying power,” its adaptability, is precisely what we need.’

Heaney’s reference to ‘eclogues’ in his essay title refers back to the

classical origins of pastoral in the *Eclogues* of Virgil in the first decade BCE. Virgil intended his *Eclogues* to be a Latin version, two and a half centuries later, of the Greek poet Theocritus' poem titled simply *Idylls*, written for his patron, the Greek general who colonised Egypt and set up his court at Alexandria. Theocritus wrote a series of poems based upon the shepherds' song competitions that he remembered from his childhood in Sicily. Thus the *Idylls*, from which we derive the word 'idyllic', immediately established several features which have come to be associated with the pastoral: the movement of retreat and return – retreat into nature and a return with new insights to deliver to the court; a location in the past in contrast with the present, which for later writers was associated with a classical Golden Age; the tension of the dialogue mode, originating in song competitions; the heightened language of song that was eventually to become the poetic prose of nature writing; a suggestion of idyllic idealisation rather than accurate realism; the possibility of visions of the ideal as an implicit critique of the present – all this to be expressed in the apparently simple discourse of shepherds who might, on the one hand, represent 'everyman', while, on the other, offer a disguise for the sophisticated poet. No wonder, then, that William Empson could define the pastoral process as 'putting the complex into the simple'. This formulation enabled Empson in *Some Versions of Pastoral* (1935) to include a chapter on Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, where, perhaps surprisingly, no sheep could be found.

As might be suggested by Empson's approach, even in the founding texts of the pastoral tradition things are not what they seem. Nature may, at the end of the summer, be presented as idyllic, with 'Branches pulled earthward by the

weight of fruit', but for the two herdsmen of the *Idylls*, Corydon and Battus, nature is less than idyllic: 'There's nothing left of that calf but skin and bones. / Does she breakfast on the dew like a cicada?' There's even an element of the anti-pastoral in their dry Mediterranean environment, as Corydon warns his friend: 'You shouldn't go barefoot on the hillside, Battus. / Wherever you tread, the ground's one thorny ambush.' With a similar kind of complexity, Virgil's *Eclogues* are set after a civil war when Meliboeus has been evicted from his farm in order for it to be given to returning heroes. Tityrus has been to Rome to successfully petition to keep his land, although it is less than idyllic as Meliboeus reminds him whilst congratulating him on keeping his acres: 'They're broad enough for you. Never mind if it's stony soil / Or the marsh films over your pastureland with mud and rushes.' So, from the beginning, pastoral used the retreat into nature – in both its fertile and harsh aspects, its beauty and its threats – to challenge expectations in the manner of the 'carnavalesque' in Bakhtin's sense of playfully subverting what is currently taken for granted – the hegemony of the urban conception of nature as simply healthful and harmonious. The *Idylls* and *Eclogues* actually present more complex notions of nature, despite their passages of idealisation.

Theocritus himself called his writing *boukolika*, songs by or about herdsmen, and Virgil used the term *bucolica* to refer to his herdsmen's dialogues, of which 'eclogues' means 'selections'. In modern usage 'bucolic' has come to refer to any writing about the countryside. Similarly, Virgil set his *Eclogues* in Arcadia, a real place in the Peloponnesus peninsula of Greece, but the name has become the literary term for the location of idealised pastoral. Indeed, Virgil

imagined an Arcadia where nature needed no labour to bring forth its produce: 'The soil will need no harrowing, the vine no pruning knife / And the tough ploughman may at last unyoke his oxen.' Again, caution is needed in reading this passage from Eclogue IV because here Virgil is imagining a future when the Golden Age of the past will be restored. So this is a knowing exaggeration of a mythical past that might represent an ideal, less demanding future relationship with nature. However, the notion of Arcadia came to define the genre of the pastoral so that works with that title, or that evoked Arcadian nature, could be expected, by readers, to be deploying pastoral conventions. Some critics argue that it was the Italian Jacopo Sannazaro's *Arcadia* (1502) that initiated the notion of Arcadia as a place of ease. Actually, dialogues between shepherds and shepherdesses in English Renaissance Arcadian poetry were often less easeful than might be expected. Sir Philip Sidney, a model Renaissance pastoral poet, explored the grief of disappointed love in his *Arcadia* (1590). In the eighteenth century, when Alexander Pope compared the royal forest to 'the groves of Eden' in the opening of his poem 'Windsor Forest' (1713), he was knowingly evoking an Arcadian nature in order to drive towards his ingratiating punch-line:

Here blushing Flora paints th' enamel'd ground
Here Ceres' gifts in waving prospect stand,
And nodding tempt the joyful reaper's hand;
Rich Industry sits smiling on the plains,
And peace and plenty tell, a STUART reigns.

Such poetry is in complete contrast to that of a modern American anthology of postmodern pastoral poetry that claims the title *The Arcadia Project* (2012) on

the grounds that 'we are living in Arcadia ... a virtual paradise' in which there are mostly hidden environmental catastrophes about to surface: 'We are like Virgil's shepherds on the brink of their violent dispossession.' Here is further evidence of Marx's prediction of 'new versions of pastoral' that would address what he called 'the precariousness of our relations with nature'.

If references to Arcadia indicate writing that is in the pastoral genre, employing all its deceptions and conventions, nowhere is this more conspicuously announced than in Renaissance pastoral dramas such as Samuel Daniel's *The Queen's Arcadia* (first performed in 1606), John Fletcher's *The Faithful Shepherdess* (1610), or the amusingly playful Ben Jonson's *The Sad Shepherd* (1612), in the Prologue of which Jonson sets out his stall: 'But here's an Heresie of late let fall: / That Mirth by no means fits a Pastorall.' The greatest achievements of this form of the genre are Shakespeare's pastoral plays, of which *As You Like It* (1598) is usually taken as typical. The courtiers expect the Forest of Arden, to which they retreat, to be an Arcadia, and in some respects it is. But they soon learn that nature in Arden can be humbling for a courtier such as Duke Senior who says:

[The] churlish chiding of the winter's wind
Which when it bites and blows upon my body
Even till I shrink with cold, I smile, and say
That this is no flattery: these are counsellors
That feelingly persuade me what I am.

Duke Senior intends this to be a positive statement – 'Sweet are the uses of adversity', he goes on to say – but as the play progresses it becomes clear that

contact with raw nature and the shepherds whose rough lives the courtiers learn from leads to a final humility that enables a return to court with an enlarged sense of humanity. In the liminal space of the Forest of Arden notions of sexuality and love have also been tested so that the characters are ready for marriage; Shakespeare's image of harmony and sustainable relationships have as much, now, to do with nature itself as with each other.

Leo Marx took Shakespeare's colonial play, *The Tempest*, which he called 'Shakespeare's American fable', to be his exemplary text of pastoral complexity in its process of emerging from storms with a wiser humility to the extent that finally Prospero drowns his books of magic and relinquishes his powers over the island and its inhabitants. Human 'art', Marx argues, has been moderated by 'nature' so that the play ends in 'a symbolic middle landscape created between art and nature'. The same process, although to more extreme degrees, is enacted in *King Lear*, which is not generally regarded as a pastoral play. Certainly it is a tragedy because humility is learned too late to save Cordelia, but what Lear learns from the experience of the storm on the 'blasted heath' is clearly recognisable as the result of Shakespeare working within the pastoral genre of retreat into direct experience of nature that results in a changed return. In *Lear* the 'bucolic' experience is an extremely traumatic one in which Lear's horrific curses against nature's fertility return upon his human vulnerability to dramatically subdue his hubris.

But in a more conventional way the bucolic writing established by Virgil's *Eclogues* has offered a genre that has been taken up by more recent poets. In the 1930s Louis MacNeice used the eclogue form four times to critique an unfeeling

urban society that had become separated from the values of individuality, decency, and community that had traditionally been associated with living close to nature. In 'An Eclogue for Christmas' the urban speaker called 'A' – he is not allowed the dignity of a personal name – complains that he is a disembodied symbol in the poetry of the times. In 'Eclogue by a Five-barred Gate' the surface vanity of the verse of modern 'shepherds' is mocked by Death. In the tradition of the genre, the values of contemporary society are undermined from a position of the reality of nature and its deeper sense of living.

Seamus Heaney used the genre with an opposite strategy in the three eclogues in his eighth collection, *Electric Light* (2001). Rural language and wisdom are celebrated in these dialogues, but doubts intrude as to their effectiveness as resistance to the injustices of the times. 'Bann Valley Eclogue' begins with an appeal to the 'Bann Valley Muses' to 'give us a song worth singing' for a 'child on the way', but ends with the ominous image, 'they're sluicing the milk-house floor'. The violence of 'sluicing' echoes the 'sluicing' of blood after a killing elsewhere in Heaney's poetry of the Northern Irish Troubles. Later in the collection, a translation titled 'Virgil: Eclogue IX' throws into question the possibilities of songs that would 'hymn the earth' adequate to the 'shocking times', despite lyrical attempts, as in 'Here earth breaks out in wildflowers, she rills and rolls / The streams in waterweed.' This poem is followed by 'Glanmore Eclogue' in which, although 'small farmers here are priced out of the market' and the poet speaker shares the state of 'backs to the wall and empty pockets', he produces 'a summer song for the glen' in the mode of the Old Irish nature poems: 'Early summer, cuckoo cuckoos, / *Welcome, summer* is what he sings.'

The founding classical genre of pastoral deserves to be more widely respected and quoted instead of being lazily dismissed by critics who have sometimes clearly not taken the trouble to actually read the original texts in translation. Far from being outmoded, they are complex and subtle explorations of human relations with nature from which values are derived that might address current uncertainties and instabilities with a tenacity and understanding that is misrepresented by reductive escapist notions of a simple idealised Golden Age. These texts feel their way toward a sustainable ideal, but with a guarded recognition of the pitfalls along the way. It is when the classical genre was broadened into a pastoral mode that it became important to distinguish escapist, sentimental, nostalgic pastoral writing from that which retained the complex qualities of the founding texts, if no longer their original conventions of herdsmen's dialogues in the eclogue form.

2.2 Pastoral as Mode

The term 'pastoral' obviously can refer to the classical genre of its founding texts, but it expanded into a mode that includes Shakespeare's pastoral dramas, Edmund Spenser's critique of commercial values in Elizabethan England in his long poem *The Faerie Queen* (1595), James Thomson's poetic celebration of landscapes from the English countryside to African savannahs in *The Seasons* (1744), and William Morris's utopian novel *News From Nowhere* (1890). Paul Alpers has argued that if a genre is constrained by a set of conventions (shepherd dialogues in poetic form), a mode takes those shepherds to be representative figures (the poet, but also Everyman) relating to nature. Writing in which the writer explores, indirectly or directly, the human relationship with nature is in the pastoral mode. So 'pastoral' can now have three further ranges of reference in addition to the original classical genre. First, it can refer to any writing that is set in the countryside as opposed to the town – rural literature rather than urban writing, although it may address a largely urban readership. Richard Powers's novel *The Overstory* (2018) is not exclusively set in the countryside but comes to focus upon the importance of trees in different ways to the lives of nine characters who eventually come together to fight to preserve the few

remaining acres of virgin forest in America. Each character has a personal reason for having retreated into a slightly unconventional position in which a tree, or a forest, has special meaning in their lives. Communicating this sense of ecological value to a largely commercially orientated society becomes the driving force of the narrative. Although far from the eclogue form, this novel is clearly working in a contemporary pastoral mode.

Climate change fiction encourages readers to consider their relationship with nature from the perspective of their contribution to climate change that is in a mode of retreat and return, often critiquing idealisations of various kinds. Sometimes such a retreat might be into a dystopian future in order to return insights to readers, such as Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy (2003–2013). Sometimes a more conventional retreat, such as the one to Antarctica in Ian McEwan's novel *Solar* (2010), produces a satire on the politics of climate change itself. Axel Goodbody and Adeline Johns-Putra's collection of studies *Cli-Fi: A Companion* (2019) provides a rich resource for considering the pastoral mode of climate fiction.

In Caryl Churchill's play *Escaped Alone* (2016) four middle-aged women talk in a garden – since Marvell's garden poems of the seventeenth century the archetypal pastoral location of reflection in repose. But the talk turns to environmental disasters, and one of them suddenly stands to deliver a shocking vision of apocalypse that transforms the play. At a recent performance of Lucy Kirkwood's play *The Children* (2016) in Dublin, the setting was a holiday cottage retreat for a reunion of three nuclear physicists who worked together at a nuclear power plant that has since suffered a meltdown, contaminating the Irish coast. The play's title announces that their conversation is focussed upon their legacy of the toxic nature their society has bequeathed their children. Steve Waters's play *On the Beach* (2009) shows a glaciologist returning from Antarctica to his father in Norfolk determined to raise awareness of the forthcoming coastal flooding. Each of these recent plays could be regarded as working in the pastoral mode, but the most explicit example is Tom Stoppard's *Arcadia* (1993), which is set in the country house of the Duchess of Devonshire,

Chatsworth House, in two alternating periods. In 1809 the landscape is about to be designed in the fashionable manner of the picturesque, and in the present the fashionable notions of understanding nature by physics are about to be revised. So the notion of the construction of an Arcadia is applied to both physical and theoretical nature in the two time periods, the parallels between which are brought dramatically to the fore at the end of the play as the characters from each time period appear on stage together and speak continuous sense in their parallel conversations.

The third use of the term 'pastoral' is to refer to any literature in which grazing animals play a dominant role. The discussion of some Australian literature, for example, is complicated by the tension between an early reliance upon a pastoral economy and a desire to resist European modes in the formation of a national identity on a challenging land that has actually tended to produce anti-pastoral responses. This is a point made by Ruth Blair and others in the 2015 'Afterlives of Pastoral' special issue of *Australian Literary Studies*. Of course, the association in the earliest pastoral texts with shepherds, goat herders and cattle men has led to the Latin word *pastor* becoming synonymous with 'caring for' and hence the religious role of a 'pastor' in the Christian tradition. Thus the great Western novels of Cormac McCarthy are pastoral in both senses in that they are about cowboys who ultimately care not only for cattle but also for each other amidst the violence of their culture. This core sense of caring values is what McCarthy allegorises when, in his later novel *The Road*, he has the boy say to his father, 'nothing bad is going to happen to us ... because we're carrying the fire.' Even in his bleakest anti-pastoral novel, McCarthy invites, in his final

paragraph, a caring for nature by the reader for whom it has not yet been destroyed.

The fourth use of pastoral in literary criticism is as a pejorative, implying idealised falsification – ‘viewing through rosy-tinted spectacles’, as in the verb to ‘pastoralise’. In Britain especially, this can be traced back to Raymond Williams’s *The Country and the City* (1975), in which what began as a critique of the eighteenth-century country house poetry Williams was required to teach for the Cambridge undergraduate exams expanded into a demand for social realism in literature that represented real work and the lived experience of rural labourers. Even when such labourers wrote their own memoirs of rural life, such as George Bourne’s *The Wheelwright’s Shop* (1923), they fell short for Williams by offering a ‘part-imagined, part-observed rural England’. On the other hand, Williams revealed what he sought when he praised Fred Kitchen’s *Brother to the Ox* (1939) as ‘one of the very few direct and unmediated accounts of a rural labourer’s life’. To seek an ‘unmediated account’ of rural life is to completely misunderstand how the pastoral tradition works. As I argued in the first chapter of *Green Voices* (2011), which is titled ‘The Social Construction of Nature’, no unmediated account of nature, or of living in touch with nature, is possible since our very language carries assumptions and values. Before Williams, F. R. Leavis had dismissed the idealised and escapist constructions of nature by ‘the crowd of Georgian pastoralists’ writing about the English countryside during the First World War in his influential *New Bearings in English Poetry*.

The question of evaluating representations of nature in the pastoral mode is raised by the critiques of Leavis and Williams, the former for ‘false simplicity’

and 'country sentiment' and the latter for 'an unreflecting celebration of mastery – ... man's mastery of nature – as if the exploitation of natural resources could be separated from the accompanying exploitation of men'. In *The Machine in the Garden* (1964) Leo Marx offered a distinction between 'the complex and sentimental kinds of pastoralism'. What Leavis had called 'country sentiment', Marx described as the 'illusion of peace and harmony in the green pasture'. When the Georgian poet W. H. Davies began the poem 'Leisure' with the lines, 'What is this life if, full of care, / We have no time to stand and stare', he was exemplifying what Marx characterised as 'the simple, affirmative attitude we adopt toward pleasing rural scenery'. Complex pastoral, on the other hand, requires 'an effort of mind and spirit' and an ability to see the complexity with which 'the pastoral design, as always, circumscribes the pastoral ideal'. The supposed idyll of retreat, in other words, is qualified by the lessons brought back upon the return inevitably built into the pastoral design. Sadly, Marx's criteria for the evaluation of representations of nature in the pastoral mode went unused on both sides of the Atlantic until the American Borlik's 2011 book *Ecocriticism and Early Modern Literature*, quoted earlier. The movement away from nostalgic pastoral in British nature writing between 1960 and 1980 to more environmentally aware nature writing pioneered by Richard Mabey's *Common Ground* (1980) provides a good example of Leo Marx's distinction.

Questions of sentimental or complex pastoral can, of course, be addressed in literature through the three kinds of time found in the pastoral mode of writing: the pastoral elegy regretting the passing of the past, the pastoral idyll of the present, and the utopian pastoral of the ideal future. Victorian poets loved

the pastoral elegy to the point where sentimentality could become absurd, as in Matthew Arnold's poem "Thyrsis" (1865) in which Arnold mourns the death of his student friend, Arthur Clough, describing how they roamed the fields outside Oxford in the roles of Sicilian shepherds. A more complex pastoral of the present is to be found in the poetry of Gary Snyder, who thinks of himself as so at one with nature that he titled his collected poems *No Nature* (1992). The classic example of utopian pastoral is Morris's novel *News from Nowhere*. Published in 1890, *News from Nowhere* is set in the year 2102 in which its narrator has suddenly woken up one morning, when the industrial cities of Victorian England have been dismantled and people again live in villages or scattered houses surrounded by gardens. It is a socialist utopia, although a peculiarly English one, derived mainly from a marriage of the ideas of Karl Marx and John Ruskin. When ownership of land was abolished, "people flocked into the country villages" and "yielded to the influence of their surroundings, and became country people; and in their turn, as they became more numerous than the townsmen, influenced them also; so that the difference between town and country grew less and less." Morris called his novel "a Utopian Romance" because he had in mind a medieval society of craftsmen and women (the headstone carver in the novel is female). "All the small country arts of life," which turn work into art and make it such a delight that there is no distinction between work and leisure, have been revived in this neo-medieval village culture. Of course, all the images of this artistry are, like Morris's famous wallpaper designs, taken from nature.

2.3 Anti-Pastoral

There is a tradition of anti-pastoral literature that acts as an explicit corrective to perceived idealisations in the pastoral mode. Reference has already been made to anti-pastoral moments within some complex pastoral texts – the less-than-idyllic thorny ground in the *Idylls*, for example. The anti-pastoral poetic line includes Oliver Goldsmith's *The Deserted Village* (1770), George Crabbe's *The Village* (1783), and William Blake's *Songs of Experience* (1794), and runs from John Clare's poem 'The Mores' in the nineteenth century, to Patrick Kavanagh's *The Great Hunger* (1942) in the twentieth century, to Peter Reading's austere anti-pastoral climate change poetry of the twenty-first century. Within the anti-pastoral tradition there is a strain of satires of the pastoral that runs from Sir Walter Raleigh's poem 'The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd' (1600) through Byron's *Don Juan* (1819) to Stella Gibbons's novel *Cold Comfort Farm* (1932) and McEwan's novel *Solar* (2010).

Perhaps the first major work of anti-pastoral was written by the Wiltshire farm labourer Stephen Duck. The purpose of *The Thresher's Labour* in 1736 was to give a worker's reply to the idealisation of the reaper by Alexander Pope at the end of 'Windsor Forest' where 'Ceres' gifts in waving prospect stand, / And nodding tempt the joyful reaper's hand.' Imitating Pope's Augustan form and classical references, Duck speaks of sweat, dust, and dirt working in a nature that defies idealisation:

No Fountains murmur here, no Lambkins play,
No Linnets warble, and no Fields look gay;
'Tis all a gloomy, melancholy Scene,
Fit only to provoke the Muse's Spleen.

One can almost hear the sarcastic tone of those verbs – 'murmur,' 'play,' and 'warble'. But Duck, in turn, had a rejoinder from Mary Collier in her poem *The Woman's Labour: An Epistle To Mr Stephen Duck* (1739). Duck had written that after a day's haymaking 'Next Day the Cocks appear in equal Rows.' Mary Collier replied that it was the women who made them suddenly appear next day. The anti-pastoralist was thus himself subject to correction.

American anti-pastoral is partly accounted for by Leo Marx's notion of the counter presence of technology in American pastoral texts, which offers him the title of his study *The Machine in the Garden*. But in 2016 Richard J. Schneider's edited book *Dark Nature: Anti-Pastoral Essays in American Literature and Culture* (2016) aligned Thoreau's unease at Walden Pond (with its railway running past it) with Timothy Morton's notion of 'dark ecology', which seeks to explore, in Morton's words, 'negativity and irony, ugliness and horror' with which we might have 'compassionate coexistence' if only we could accept such representations of nature. Schneider says that the essays in his book are 'exploring a natural world full of "strange strangers" [Morton's term], an anti-pastoral world full of paradox and mystery and, yes, even horror'. This he calls 'The Dark Side of the American canon'. But since any complex pastoral will have its 'dark side', this is not quite the same as the explicitly corrective texts of the British and Irish anti-pastoral tradition.

2.4 Pastoral as Concept

When William Empson formulated his 'versions' of pastoral based upon his observation that pastoral texts were simply 'putting the complex into the simple', pastoral had become a literary concept. If, as Raymond Williams had argued, the complex tradition emerging from the founding pastoral texts had become so debased by simplified idealisations that 'pastoral' became in the late twentieth century a pejorative term, a new concept was then needed to refer to those works that were obviously in the pastoral tradition but retained their complexity, were aware of the dangers of idealisation but did more than act as anti-pastoral correctives. Thus the concept of 'post-pastoral' literature came into being, at first to account for the work of Ted Hughes (Gifford 1994) but then also to refer to important qualities in a story by Rick Bass (Gifford 2001); a novel by Charles Frazier (Gifford 2002); essays by John Muir (Gifford 2006); and poetry by Seamus Heaney, Sorley MacLean, Gillian Clarke, Adrienne Rich, and Debjanee Chatterjee (all in Gifford 2011).

Post-pastoral literature implicitly raises all or some of the following six questions for the reader. These six questions are not boxes to be ticked, but implications embedded in the texts to be pondered upon further. Each question is illustrated by an example of the way the poetry of Gary Snyder implicitly suggests such a question:

- 1 Can awe in the face of natural phenomena, such as landscapes or weather, lead to humility in our species? This is the process of wonder reducing human hubris, which Snyder evokes in the line, 'I'll sleep by the creek and purify my ears.'
- 2 What are the implications of recognising that we are part of the creative-destructive process that Ted Hughes called 'the elemental power circuit of the universe?' Snyder recognised that, even as we are being productive, we may be unintentionally destructive to the subtle natural processes of our home: 'Shaving soils, paving fields'.
- 3 If the processes of our inner nature echo those in outer nature in the ebbs and flows of growth and decay, how can we learn to understand the inner by being closer to the outer? Snyder captures this in his simple formulation, 'creek music, heart music'.
- 4 If nature is culture, is culture nature? If nature is mediated by culture when we speak or write about it, is that writing also our natural imagination at work? Snyder asserts, 'We *are* it / it sings through us.'
- 5 How, then, can our distinctively human consciousness, which gives us a conscience, be used as a tool to heal our troubled relationship with our natural home? 'The log trucks remind us, / as we think, dream and play, / of the world that is carried away.'
- 6 How should we address the ecofeminist insight that the exploitation of our planet emerges from the same mind-set as our exploitation of minorities or the less powerful in the world? Snyder refers to 'North America, Turtle Island, taken by invaders who wage war around the world'.

Some critics have misunderstood 'post-' as meaning 'after', but it is intended to mean 'beyond' in the sense of 'beyond the closed circuit of idealisation and its correction'. It is really a more precise, practical, and ecologically aware formulation of Leo Marx's 'complex pastoral'. So I would argue that Marvell's

poem 'The Garden' and Blake's *Songs of Experience* raise for readers some of the questions of the post-pastoral, as well as some elements of anti-pastoral, and even idealised pastoral, before problematising them in a post-pastoral manner. It could, however, be argued that these questions are precisely those needed to address nature in the Anthropocene and that, in its contemporary forms, post-pastoral literature can be seen as exemplifying pastoral's 'staying power'. Indeed, the adaptability of pastoral as concept is demonstrated by the explosion, from the late twentieth century onwards, of what I call 'prefix-pastorals'.

'Post-pastoral' itself must now be seen as one of a multiplicity of 'prefix-pastorals'. An indication of the range of new conceptions of nature in the continuing pastoral tradition is glimpsed by a list that is by no means complete but includes radical pastoral (Garrard 1996), neo-pastoral (Ryle), postmodern pastoral (Philips 1998), gay sex pastoral (Tait), urban pastoral (Berman), black pastoral (Greene), plantation pastoral (Brown), vellum pastoral (Crane), frontier pastoral (Heaney 1980), militarized pastoral (Burriss), new pastoral (Boland), avant-pastoral (Corey 2009), necropastoral (McSweeney), narcopastoral (Goldberg), ecopastoral (Lynch), agropastoral (Crumley), chocked-pastoral (Selby), renewed pastoral (Ernst), toxic pastoral (Farrier), dark pastoral (Sullivan), feminine pastoral (Potts), and revolutionary lesbian feminist pastoral (Buell 1995). Ann Marie Mikkelsen devotes a book to an exploration of American 'pragmatic pastoral' in the work of Robert Frost, William Carlos Williams, Wallace Stevens, John Ashbery, and Gertrude Stein. These prefix pastorals presuppose that pastoral is now a conceptual term that is obviously seen as adaptable and vital to confront contemporary concerns in the Anthropocene.

However, it is important to note that what is obviously an evolution of pastoral from genre to mode to concept through time is not an evolution of quality, or of the ability to deal with complexities. Indeed, this very diversity of current conceptions of pastoral representations of nature only demonstrates pastoral's persistence and attraction for contemporary critics, some of whom, such as Patrick Curry, might regard the post-pastoral as the 're-enchantment' of nature. As Theocritus simply put it in the third century BCE, 'Those who cherish / The divine powers live more happily here on earth.'