

Chapter 10 The Environmental Humanities and the Pastoral Tradition

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If ecocriticism's treatment of the pastoral tradition¹ can be described as a roller coaster ride, it is one riddled with ironies. A key proto-ecocritical text in the US, Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden* (1964), sought to establish an American pastoral tradition, while a decade later a key proto-ecocritical text in the UK, Raymond Williams' *The Country and the City* (1973), sought to denigrate the tradition of British pastoral as class-interested idealisation. Almost mirroring this opposition, the recent book *The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism* (2014) has two index entries: "pastoral" and "critiques of." While Classics scholars such as Charles Martindale have been "greening" the *Eclogues* (Martindale 1997), ecocritics such as Greg Garrard, in the definitive book titled *Ecocriticism* have been rejecting pastoral as "outmoded" (Garrard 2012, 65). Actually the history of the reception of pastoral in the emerging environmental humanities is more complex than such stark contrasts suggest. But the ultimate irony is that so few ecocritics who endorse, or critique, the European pastoral tradition and its American version actually quote from the writers of antiquity. One is entitled to suspect that they do not know their *otium* from their *negotium*, despite the fact that this would require so little reading. It follows that they do not know the nuances and complexities of the classical texts and actually base their knowledge of pastoral upon Shakespeare's pastoral dramas, perhaps, or eighteenth century pastoral poetry, or, worse, an unquestioning reading of the critique of Raymond Williams. Given the resurgence of New Nature Writing in Britain, it is interesting to see the eclogue quoted recently as an example of a defunct form,² – old fashioned technology like last year's iPhone – despite its being a favourite form of Seamus Heaney in the twenty-first century.³

Of course, the *Eclogues* of Virgil from the first century CE were preceded by the Greek texts of Hesiod's *Work and Days* and the *Idylls* of Theocritus from the eighth and third centuries BCE respectively as the foundational texts of the pastoral tradition. It is unfortunate that the word 'eidullion,' which in classical Greek actually referred to a brief, intricate, descriptive poem, has given us the word 'idyllic,' which would be a misrepresentation of the complex tensions of realism and myth, the rural and the urban, romantic courtship and raw sexual desire that actually characterise the *Idylls*. It was this complexity arising from dialogues between herdsmen that Virgil was imitating in his *Eclogues*, set in a time of disorder following a civil war where dispossession, as much as connection with the land and with nature, is a constant presence. So it was the reading of this Classical literature that informed the Renaissance enthusiasm for a pastoral tradition that it first named and in this sense created. By the eighteenth century a sophisticated tradition became the mode in which playful critiques could be made of a reading society that both depended upon and despised nature and English rurality. For the Romantics there was an opportunity for a fresh rediscovery of values embedded in living close to nature, an enthusiasm which the Victorians found hard to maintain in the face of the competing values and pressures of the Industrial Revolution. By the end of the nineteenth century pastoral in England had the role of a rearguard action against modernity in the novels of Thomas Hardy and the poetry of Edward Thomas. At this point the editors of *The Penguin Book of English Pastoral Verse*, writing from the vantage point of 1974, could declare the pastoral to be dead since in England the country could no longer be experienced as distinct from the city (Barrell and Bull 1974, 432). On the other hand, in the USA the European pastoral tradition was given an American distinctiveness which provided a sense of continuity that could be claimed by emerging ecocriticism as an essential frame for reading texts that explored the meanings of nature, wilderness, nation and even postmodernity itself. So what actually happened to bring us to

this point in the environmental humanities' engagement with the pastoral tradition of antiquity?

US Pastoral Ecocriticism

Leo Marx's identification of an American pastoral tradition in *The Machine in the Garden* (1964) offered a distinction between "sentimental pastoral" and "complex pastoral" (25) which was strangely left unused by ecocritics until 2011.⁴ Marx began with the *Eclogues*, using the edition of E. V. Rieu, to identify the fact that "by his presence alone Meliboeus reveals the inadequacy of the Arcadian situation as an image of human experience" (23). He continues, "in 1844 Hawthorne assigns a similar function to the machine" (ibid.); thus the noisy world of the present disturbs the tranquillity of the ideal. The best works of pastoral, claimed Marx after discussing the *Eclogues*, "manage to qualify, or call into question, or bring irony to bear against the illusion of peace and harmony in a green pasture" (25). So when Marx argues for a distinctly American tradition of pastoral in which technology disrupts an idealised landscape as in the work of Beverley, Crèvecoeur, Jefferson, Hawthorne, Melville, Twain, Thoreau, Frost and Fitzgerald, he claims this as an "unmistakable sophistication" that echoes that of Virgil. Of course, Leo Marx came to be a great supporter of the emergent ecocriticism which he expected, under the pressure of a growing awareness of environmental crisis, to be able to critique "new versions of pastoral" that would be "brought forth" by the "wholly new conception of the precariousness of our relationship with nature" (1992, 222). This was to be prophetic as the number of what I have called "prefix pastorals" (urban pastoral, gay pastoral, etc.) (Gifford 2014, 29) was to proliferate by the end of the twentieth century.

In 1972 Joseph Meeker, taking his notion of comedy (*comus*) from antiquity (Aristophanes), argued in *The Comedy of Survival: Studies in Literary Ecology*, for what he called “the comedy of biology” (Meeker 1972, 26); “biological evolution itself shows all the flexibility of comic drama” (27) and developed a position which distinguished between pastoral and picaresque modes of “survival against odds in a world that is indifferent or hostile” (81). While the picaresque rogue was an adaptable “manipulator of conditions for his own welfare in accordance with the laws of nature” (104), the pastoral quester was caught in the paradox of the unachievable ideal: “The emotional cycle of pastoral experience normally moves from nostalgia to hope, to disillusionment, to despair” (113). The remarkable line of thinking in this book leads finally to a reductive notion of pastoral as “a domestic and tamed landscape swept clean of dangers and discomforts” that “leads necessarily toward ecological damage and toward human dissatisfaction” (189). However, in his final sentences, Meeker appears to propose a comic mode that draws from both pastoral and picaresque: “Mankind cannot afford the consequences of human self-aggrandizement, but fulfilment may lie in a knowing and spirited immersion in the processes of nature, illuminated by the adaptive and imaginative human mind” (192). In many ways this statement represents the starting position from which ecocriticism was to emerge – exposing hubris, studying both the immersion of nature writing and explorations of adaption in creative writing.⁵ Although Meeker was not cited by the early ecocritics, including Lawrence Buell, most will have had to catch up with this 1972 text when it was quoted in *The Ecocriticism Reader* in 1996.

Lawrence Buell began what many now regard as a founding text of ecocriticism, *The Environmental Imagination* (1995), with a chapter titled “Pastoral Ideology” in which he reviewed “American Pastoral Scholarship.” Buell confronted revisionist critiques of American pastoral literature, as listed by Marx, with a case for recognising “pastoral’s multiple frames” by which pastoral can achieve the paradox of being both

“counterinstitutional and institutionally sponsored” (Buell 1995, 50). Buell found an echo of Virgil’s first eclogue in the tension within *Walden* between a rejection of the protestant work ethic and its re-enactment in a ritual pioneer experience: “More often than not, accommodationism and reformism are interfused [...] These two faces are the Tityrus and Meliboeus of modern pastoral” (52). Like Marx, Buell believed that pastoral would adapt in forging new forms, acting less as “a theatre for human events” and more as “an advocacy of nature” (ibid.).⁶ Key to being open to such advocacy was, in Buell’s view, a certain stance that had its defining moment in Virgil: “By freeing Thoreau from some of the curse of purposefulness, however, pastoral *otium* opened up for him the experience of place, of self as continuous with place” (154). In the age of climate change such a sense of the fate of place being continuous with the fate of self is obviously crucial to modern environmentalism. Yet Buell’s unease with the term “pastoral” is revealed in an endnote where, in explaining that his “elastic” use of pastoral does not refer to “the specific set of largely obsolete classical conventions that started to break down in the eighteenth century,” he declares his preference for the term “naturism” as having “less ideological and aesthetic baggage” than “pastoral” (439, n4). But this is a term which was never taken up, even by Buell himself in his subsequent books.

It was only a year after Buell’s influential book that Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm published *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996), reprinting an essay by Glen Love that had first been published in 1990 which called for a redefinition of pastoral. Love shared Buell’s anxiety about the anthropocentric focus of pastoral and called for a redefinition that would offer “a new and more complex understanding of nature” (231), while also agreeing on “the importance of pastoralism as a literary and cultural force in the future” (234). It should be noted here that a specific tradition of pastoral literature has somehow mutated into the cultural force of “pastoralism”, a term also used by both Buell and Marx. There is no

reference to Theocritus or to Virgil in *The Ecocriticism Reader*, the first wave of ecocriticism having apparently cut itself adrift from the ancient world of Europe. “Indeed,” Love wrote, “the western version of pastoral [here he surely means Western in American terms] may be said to reverse the characteristic pattern of entry and return so that it is the green world which asserts its greater significance to the main character, despite the intrusion of societal values and obligations” (235). Also declaring the distinctiveness of American pastoral in the *Reader* was Annette Kolodny, in an excerpt from her book *The Lay of the Land* of 1984. Kolodny observed that American pastoral “hailed the essential femininity of the terrain in a way European pastoral never had” and “explored the historical consequences of its central metaphor (the idyllic garden) in a way that European pastoral had never dared” (173). Again, one does have to wonder if such critics had actually read the *Eclogues*. And again, the claim is for an American “revitalising permutation” of the European traditional mode.

Hot on the heels of the *Reader* came a collection of essays from the first conference of ecocriticism’s professional organisation, the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE), in 1995 at Fort Collins. *Reading the Earth* (1998), which also contains no reference to the writers of European antiquity, announces perhaps the first and most predictable of “prefix pastorals” in Dana Philips’ assertion that Don DeLillo’s *White Noise* was a postmodern pastoral. Philips’ argument with the authority on Classical pastoral, Paul Alpers, (whom he significantly fails to include in his Works Cited) is indicative of the brazen ignorance of some critics empowered by the new ecocriticism. Against Alpers’ insistence on pastoral’s focus upon representative herdsmen rather than idealised nature, Philips loftily formulates what he thinks is a grand put-down of the authority on classical pastoral: “With all due respect to herdsmen, the interest of the pastoral for me lies more in the philosophical debate it engenders about the proper relations of nature and culture and less in its report on the workaday details of husbandry or the love lives of shepherds” (236). The multiple

dimensions of misrepresentation in this sentence would offer it as a possible examination question in a number of subjects.

Of course, Dana Philips came to be known as one of the instigators of what Lawrence Buell defined as the third wave of ecocriticism in which its first internal critiques shook up the first wave celebration of American nature writing in the pastoral tradition of retreat and return, typified perhaps by Annie Dillard's *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (1975), a book that Philips delights in patronising in *The Truth of Ecology* (2003). Philips doubts whether "ecocriticism will find the pastoral congenial over the long haul" (17), declaring it "an ideologically compromised form" (16). Philips doubts Buell's claim that pastoral can "register actual physical environments as against idealized abstractions of those," suggesting that to argue thus is to propose "a pastoral that has had its imaginative arc flattened out" (17). His conclusion is that ecocriticism has placed "a false confidence in fusty categories like the pastoral" (19). By definition, one assumes, the postmodern pastoral is less "fusty," although how it manages to represent a fusty tradition of which it is still a part is less than clear, especially when an idealisation of the pastoral itself is used as a false comparison: "The postmodern pastoral, unlike its predecessors, cannot restore the harmony and balance of culture with nature" (245). Such misrepresentations of the founding texts of the European pastoral tradition provide straw men which can be easily dismissed by the lazy postmodern ecocritic. And "fusty" seems a strange word to use of a tradition which, as Buell points out, is "a species of cultural equipment that western thought has for more than two millennia been unable to do without" (1995, 32).

However, Philips' anxieties about the pastoral mode were also reflected in an overview of "the geography of ecocriticism" by Michael Bennett in *The ISLE Reader: Ecocriticism 1993-2003* (2003) and first published in *ISLE* just two years earlier. Noting the tendency for American ecocritics to be based in Western or rural states, based upon ASLE

membership records, Bennett drew attention to a later essay by Glen Love, also published, significantly for Bennett, in *Western American Literature* a decade earlier, in which Love extended his vision of a new role for pastoral. Bennett quoted Love: “Pastoral’s ancient and universal appeal – to come away – requires new examination in an age in which there is no away. Pastoral, rightly understood, has always been a serious criticism of life. Ecocriticism, I think, can give us a serious criticism of pastoral” (303). Bennett takes this to mean a slightly different form of the reversal of the traditional function of pastoral as he sees it: “While in classic pastoral the city dwellers took a refreshing trip to the country in order to return to their home rejuvenated, this new pastoral sees the remaining American wilderness as offering a radical challenge to the eco-unfriendly ways of urbanites” (ibid.). The simplification of “rejuvenated” for the complex lessons learned on the contested ground of the *Eclogues* is itself a typical idealisation of “classic pastoral” by many ecocritics in the evidence that is accumulating here.⁷ But what is also in evidence is the belief in the capacity of pastoral to provide a literary vehicle for challenging hegemonic notions of nature, and cultural representations of our relationship with it, in all its unstable, human influenced modes. Whether this challenge is called “postmodern,” as in Gretchen Legler’s essay in *The ISLE Reader*, “Towards a Postmodern Pastoral: The Erotic Landscape in the Work of Gretel Ehrlich,” or, more accurately, “renewed pastoral” in a more recent essay in *ISLE*,⁸ may turn out to be a matter of ecocriticism’s obsession with continuously renewing the terms of its discourse.

Perhaps most characteristic of US ecocriticism’s sense of the continuity of the American pastoral, embraced and predicted by Marx and Buell, is Don Scheese’s book *Nature Writing: The Pastoral Impulse in America* (1996). Scheese identifies in antiquity two modes of writing that combine in the American tradition: classical pastoral (he quotes the first *Eclogue*) and classical natural history which he locates first in the writings of Aristotle and

then in Pliny the Elder's *Natural History* (77 CE). With injections along the way from travel writing, transcendentalism, Darwinism, ecology and finally radical environmentalism a case is made for the adaptive imagination that Meeker had demanded to be found in "key tensions in the dialectic of nature writing" (Scheese 1996, 38) from Thoreau to Annie Dillard. One of those tensions borrows a distinction first made by the American critic Herbert Lindenberger,⁹ and later applied to Thoreau by Daniel Peck,¹⁰ between the "soft" pastoral of domesticated landscapes and the "hard" pastoral of wild landscapes which seems to be a way of accommodating the European pastoral tradition to the American wilderness experience (5).¹¹

It is curious that another writer on American nature writing, Randall Rooda, whilst deferring, in passing, to Buell's discussion of pastoral ideology, should choose not to deploy the frame of pastoral for his study *Dramas of Solitude: Narratives of Retreat in American Nature Writing* (1998). In making a "positive" case for narratives of retreat, Rooda seeks to distance himself from what Buell had called the "vulnerabilities" of pastoral ideology (Rooda 1998, 168). Whereas, in 2012, Jennifer Ladino's boldly titled *Reclaiming Nostalgia* was prepared to characterise her notion of "progressive nostalgia" as "post-pastoral" (Ladino 2012, 198), more of which below. But Ladino's book might represent the current radical revisionism of American ecocriticism in its pursuit of what Buell called "the ecocentric repossession of pastoral" (52). Without reference to classical originals, Ladino presents a well-documented case for the forward-looking potential of pastoral nostalgia: "Too long considered antithetical to politically progressive movements, nostalgia could be enlisted to visualize new kinds of natures and cultures" (231).

UK Pastoral Ecocriticism

The British equivalent of *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996) was *The Green Studies Reader* (2000) edited by Laurence Coupe to represent a rather different tradition of ecocritical evolution, as its title indicates. While Glotfelty and Fromm took their starting point in Lynn White's 1967 essay "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," Coupe began with "Romantic Ecology and its Legacy" followed by earth-orientated critiques of modernity before featuring aspects of what Coupe called "Green Theory" which included within it "Ecocritical Principles." Interestingly, Coupe included a few American writers and critics in every section of the book, acknowledging the influence of Thoreau, for example, as well as that of American ecocritics. There are three British writers on pastoral represented in *The Green Studies Reader* – Raymond Williams, Greg Garrard and the present writer – whose rather different perspectives are necessarily elaborated more fully in their own books. But it is perhaps fair to say that it remains the case that these three critics have had most influence on the reception of pastoral in British ecocriticism, which is quite distinct from that sense of continuity in American ecocriticism.

The single most significant mediation of pastoral in British ecocriticism was a book which might be thought of as a parallel to Leo Marx's proto-ecocritical *Machine in the Garden* – Raymond Williams' *The Country and the City* (1973). It is not well known that they were friends in their shared interest in the pastoral, Marx meeting Williams in the UK when Marx had a Fulbright year at the University of Nottingham, following which Marx invited Williams to give a lecture series at MIT.¹² Indeed, they shared a respect for the tensions explored by the founding pastoral texts of the ancient world together with a frustration at the simplification and elision of those tensions. In reading Williams' first discussion of pastoral in his book, it is hard not to feel that he is implicitly addressing his Cambridge colleagues who taught, like him, English country house literature from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries and not just Renaissance translators of the classics: "The retrospect of Meliboeus,

on the life he is forced to leave, becomes the 'source' of a thousand pretty exercises on an untroubled rural delight and peace. Even more remarkably, the famous second Epode of Horace – the *Beatus Ille* to which a thousand poems of happy rural retreat are confidently traced – had its crucial tension commonly excised” (Williams 1973, 29).

“Academic gloss,” Williams argued, had deflected discussion of material and historical representation in English pastoral literature by claiming that these texts were based upon eviscerated versions of classical texts that were revered as if from “the Golden Age in another sense” (Williams 1973, 29). So Williams declared the purpose of his book: “It is time that this bluff was called” (ibid.). Williams intended to demonstrate that the English poets of the courts and the aristocratic houses adopted pastoral under the “‘vaile’ of allegory” for political purposes – “the internal transformation of just this artificial mode in the direction and in the interest of a new kind of society: that of developing agrarian capitalism” (33). But actually Williams’ complaint about English pastoral verse in *The Country and the City* was a quite narrow and specific one, aimed at country house literature of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and based upon his respect for the pastoral of antiquity, which, significantly, he thought of in the present tense: “Virgil, like Hesiod, could raise the most serious questions of life and its purposes in the direct world in which the working year and the pastoral song are still there in their own right” (32).

The influence of Williams’ critique was immediate and long lasting. In the following year, as already mentioned, John Barrell and John Bull, the editors of *The Penguin Book of English Pastoral Verse* (1974) took Williams’ critical approach in their section introductions and declared English pastoral poetry to be dead after Edward Thomas. A decade after Williams’ book, his former student, Roger Sales, summarised, in *English Literature in History 1780-1830: Pastoral and Politics*, pastoral in the “five Rs”: “refuge, reflection, rescue, requiem, and reconstruction” (Sales 1983, 17). In British literary discourse pastoral

had become synonymous with idealised escapism of the kind F. R. Leavis had earlier dismissed as characterising “the crowd of Georgian pastoralists” writing about the English countryside during the First World War in his influential *New Bearings in English Poetry* (1932, 61). Actually, Williams was more sympathetic to the war-influenced tensions behind the Georgian impulse, although his judgement was uncompromising: “The respect of authentic observation [is] overcome by a sub-intellectual fantasy” in which “history, legend and literature are indiscriminately enfolded in a single emotional gesture” (Williams 1973, 308-9). Williams asserted that, after the Georgian poet Edward Thomas, country writers of the twentieth century could not escape the tension between respect and idealisation. Writers like George Ewart Evans, who expressly saw themselves in a continuity with Virgil (Williams quotes Evans: “A way of life that has come down to us from Virgil has suddenly ended” (18)), entwine “observation, myth, record and half-history” (313). Sadly, Williams regrets, the distortions of this simplified pastoral have ironically clouded the fact that “the real history, in all that we know of it, would support so much more of the real observation, the authentic feeling, that these writers keep alive” (ibid.). The personal disappointment expressed at the end of *The Country and the City* is both intellectually sustained and deeply moving. Williams’ devastating analysis had not revealed a complex pastoral, in Marx’s sense, but a complexity of compromise that left the term “pastoral” as a pejorative in British literary discourse thereafter.

It is against this background that Greg Garrard’s chapter on pastoral in his book *Ecocriticism* should be read. Garrard will surprise classicists by designating the term “classical pastoral” to include all pastoral up to the eighteenth century (Garrard 2012, 38), wanting to argue that, following this, Romantic pastoral had the potential to offer radically new, if ultimately inadequate (being pre-ecological), relationships with nature in response to the Industrial Revolution. Garrard’s concern in discussing Theocritus and Virgil alongside

Thomas Carew's poem "To Saxham" (1640) is with "the distortion of social and environmental history" noted by Williams (Garrard 2012, 44). For the Romantics, Garrard argues, pastoral offered a vehicle for an elegy overlaid by utopian radicalism that was flawed by its historical sense of nature that is static and barely endangered by human activity. In an odd sentence concluding his case for John Clare as having "decidedly thought further ahead than his fellow Romantics," Garrard writes: "Just when it comes closest to being 'ecological' [...] Romantic pastoral starts to seem both un-Romantic and post-pastoral" (Garrard 2012, 53). He does not consider that, perhaps, at its best, it might be both these things. Garrard's interest in what he calls "pastoral ecology" leads to his rejection of the mode as "wedded to outmoded models of harmony and balance" that he curiously traces back to Cicero's remarks on the suitability of the elephant's trunk for its dietary needs (63-65). If it is fine to observe that ecology had rejected the notion of a stable, balanced web in favour of chaos theory, it seems remarkable to presume that the natural and social ecology of the *Eclogues* were characterised by "harmony and balance." The remaining five chapters of *Ecocriticism* would be devoted, Garrard declared, to finding alternatives to "popular pastoral ecology" (65) and we hear no more of the post-pastoral, which is not indexed. "The ancient trope of pastoral," he concludes, with its "liability to anachronism in the postmodern era," requires to be "profoundly shaped by scientific thought" if it is to serve as a metaphor "adequate to the novelty of our predicament" (201-2).

In 2014 Garrard edited *The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism* which contains the work of thirty-five ecocritics, two of whom, whilst referencing Garrard on pastoral, took a rather different view, significantly, perhaps, both from outside British culture. Australian Kate Rigby actually suggested that the Romantic post-pastoral of both Wordsworth and Clare offered a genuine resistance to "the growing commodification and nascent industrial exploitation of the earth" (Rigby 2014, 69). In her analysis, qualified by some reservations,

the search for Romantic holism, and journeys into Keats' "material sublime," can achieve a sense of living "respectfully amongst a diversity of more-than-human others, without seeking always to subsume them to our own ends and understandings" (71). Astrid Bracke, who is from Holland, confronted what she calls "the central question": "Why does contemporary Western culture continue to rely so much on 'anachronistic' tropes such as pastoral?" (Bracke 2014, 435). Bracke accused ecocritics of having avoided this question and in doing so having avoided much English fiction that raises it in narratives of retreat and return. In an implicit criticism of the influence of Raymond Williams, Bracke suggested that ecocritics, in assuming pastoral to be about escapist retreats, have neglected the lessons, compromises and qualifications of the return. "This contrasting movement is particularly suitable to contemporary Western circumstances" (ibid.) of compromised and threatened actual environments. She went on to discuss a number of novels that do just this. However, in her published PhD thesis (2012) Bracke had more space to discuss "ecocriticism's problems with pastoral" and to explore the potential of the notion of "post-pastoral" in relation to English fiction.

My initial introduction of the idea of the "post-pastoral" began as a rather weak academic joke in a conference paper presented at a time of the rise of postmodernism, post-structuralism, postcolonialism, post-feminism, post-Marxism and even posthumanism, which, at a time when Mrs Thatcher held the office of Prime Minister, I suggested might lead to the Post Office finding itself a political theory. But then I found that it not only worked, but was much needed to counter the pejorative legacy of Williams and to be able to seriously suggest that Ted Hughes's poetry of nature and culture, of both myth and husbandry, was indeed, in the European pastoral tradition whilst having avoided Sales' "five Rs." Preceding, but perhaps anticipating, the emergence of British ecocriticism, my book *Green Voices* (1995) deployed "post-pastoral" to make the case for a number of British and Irish poets of nature,

most significantly Sorley MacLean and Seamus Heaney as well as Hughes, to be viewed in a continuity with the complex pastoral works of Blake and Wordsworth. Leo Marx has since told me that he finds my “post-pastoral” to be the same as his category of “complex pastoral,” which I happily accept. My problem was threefold: in critical discourse in the UK the pastoral was so strongly pejorative that a term was needed to go “beyond” it; “complex pastoral” had not been adopted by critics, even in the US; “post-pastoral” could be defined by suggesting that it raised some or all of six questions for the reader, most fully explicated in the final chapter of my book *Pastoral* (1999) which takes an ecocritical approach. So rather than the temporal notion of, say, postmodernism, post-pastoral was not temporal but conceptual – a knowing going beyond Marx’s sentimental or simplistic idealised pastoral whilst not being merely an anti- or counter-pastoral corrective.

But it was Jonathan Bate who formulated a call for a British ecocriticism in his book *Romantic Ecology* (1991) where he argued that Wordsworth’s version of hard working northern pastoral owed more to the *Georgics* than the *Eclogues* and that this was in part due to an engagement with a particular ecology. Indeed, Bate intended this book to be “a preliminary sketch towards a literary ecology” (Bate 1991, 11). Unaware, as we all were at this time, of the development of American ecocriticism, Bate’s claim for Ruskin as one of the “fathers of our environmental tradition” (61) led to Michael Wheeler’s edited book *Ruskin and Environment: The Storm-Cloud of the Nineteenth Century* (1995) in which Ruskin is quoted, in his prescient lecture of the book’s sub-title, as seeing himself in a line of “ancient observers” going back to Homer and Virgil (181). In the Conclusion to Wheeler’s book I outlined five features of Ruskin’s environmental vision that have much in common with the post-pastoral. Of course, Bate’s fully fledged ecocritical work *Song of the Earth* places pastoral at the centre of the ecocritical project, quoting Paul de Man on the pastoral theme as “the only poetic theme, that it is poetry itself” (Bate 2000, 75). If Wordsworth values

moments of “mute dialogue” with nature when, as Bate puts it, “the poet *is* nature,” then his linguistic expression of that silence is, paradoxically, nature speaking through pastoral poetry (ibid.). Herein lies the possibility of “re-enchanting the world” (78). There is a sense in which Bate’s work provides the counter to the scepticism of his former student, Greg Garrard, on the potential for pastoral in British ecocriticism, a potential that is perhaps upheld by the rigour of the six questions of the post-pastoral.

Current International Pastoral Ecocriticism

There are several strands of American, British and Irish intersections of pastoral and ecocriticism that have demonstrated that not only is pastoral literature currently being written, but that ecocritical postcolonial, period, and regional studies have much to contribute to these continuities with the classical pastoral tradition. In Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin’s *Postcolonial Ecocriticism* (2010), for example, the pastoral mode is a recurring theme, with the variants of counter-pastoral, mock-pastoral and post-pastoral in use for the discussion of particular texts. Their judgement is that “the evidence suggest that pastoral will continue to be of interest to postcolonial writers, whether they are attacking its reactionary tendencies or are reworking it into more socially and/or environmentally progressive forms” (Huggan and Tiffin 2010, 120).

Ecocritics in period studies have also contributed to revising our notions of pastoral, as exemplified by Ken Hiltner’s *What Else Is Pastoral?: Renaissance Literature and the Environment* (2011). Punning upon Paul Alpers’ famous study *What Is Pastoral?* (1996), which argued that, as political allegory, pastoral had little to say about the actual environment, Hiltner demonstrates that, on the contrary, Renaissance pastoral in particular was directly concerned with contemporary environmental concerns such as air pollution,

deforestation, agricultural use of commons, the drainage of fens and the expansion of cities. The result is a brilliant redefinition of pastoral that begins by demonstrating that Alpers' reading of the first *Eclogue* was too restrictive and ends by claiming that environmental justice was an issue present in texts that have not previously been considered as pastoral. In eighteenth century studies David Fairer has also begun to take an ecocritical approach in essays on Wordsworth (2015) and what Fairer calls the "Eco-Georgic" (2011). In *Ecocriticism and Early Modern English Literature* (2011), Todd Borlik (an interesting case of an American ecocritic moving to a UK university) not only uses Meeker's sense of hard and soft pastoral, together with Marx's division of simple and complex pastoral, but he proposes his own distinction between "contemplative" and "consumptive" pastoral (Borlik 2011, 145). Furthermore, he concludes his book with a striking reference to Seamus Heaney's claim for the "staying power" of the pastoral: "The pastoral's 'staying power', its adaptability, is precisely what we need" (209).

In Ireland, where the teaching of Classics in schools persisted longer than in England, the literature of antiquity is available even to contemporary writers, who, like Seamus Heaney, John Montague and Michael Longley, can feel themselves to be writing in a continuous tradition of pastoral. So it is not surprising that critics in Irish Studies focus upon pastoral, even if they occasionally misrepresent the writers of antiquity as Oona Frawley does in *Irish Pastoral: Nostalgia and Twentieth-Century Irish Literature* speaking of early religious Irish texts: "The adoption of eremitic masks suggests that, like Virgil and Theocritus, the unknown authors of these poems are engaged in a nostalgic exercise of imaginatively creating lives they have never lived" (Frawley 2005, 10). However, a few pages later Frawley writes that in *Buile Suibhne* Sweeney laments "not loss of nature but loss of *culture*" in contrast to the Virgilian tradition in which "pastoral life is under siege by a not too distant urbanism and the Roman equivalent of enclosure" (14). Donna Potts' book

Contemporary Irish Poetry and the Pastoral Tradition has a more accurate and constant reference to Theocritus and Virgil as well as a more theoretically informed ecocriticism, including the argument that several of her contemporary poets are engaged in exploring the possibilities of post-pastoral. Her final chapter “The Future of Pastoral” endorses the Irish engagement in a continuing tradition: “In all genres, various versions of pastoral will continue to unearth the immanence in the local landscape” (Potts 2011, 178). Even studies of individual authors have discovered ecocriticism in Ireland, as, for example, in the recent book edited by Robert Brazeau and Derek Gladwin, *Eco-Joyce: The Environmental Imagination of James Joyce* (2014), which has three chapters engaging with pastoral. It is this sense of participating in a living tradition that Seamus Heaney explains in his late essay “Eclogues ‘In Extremis’: On the Staying Power of the Pastoral” (2003). Indeed, perhaps such staying power is nowhere more evident than in the fact that “post-pastoral” is now one of a multiplicity of “prefix-pastorals” that includes radical pastoral, neo-pastoral, postmodern pastoral, gay sex pastoral, urban pastoral, metapastoral, black pastoral, vellum pastoral, ghetto pastoral, frontier pastoral, militarized pastoral, new pastoral, decolonised pastoral, domestic pastoral, necro/pastoral, neo-pastoral, ecopastoral, renewed pastoral, and revolutionary lesbian feminist pastoral. With the expansion of prefix pastorals the pastoral has completed a shift from genre to mode, and from mode to concept. It is possible to observe ecocriticism deploying each of these conceptions of pastoral as appropriate to different modes of analysis. It would be a denigration of early texts to regard this shift as teleological, as Ruth Blair does by suggesting that my characterisation of this shift implies ‘a development from a simpler to a more complex form’ (4). The very diversity of current conceptions of the pastoral partly explains its persistence and its attraction for contemporary ecocritics.

So some ecocritics on both sides of the Atlantic, and beyond, have recently developed a renewed interest in the pastoral in its wide diversity of forms. In France the ecocritic

Thomas Pughe leads a research group that publishes in English, with a book resulting from their first conference, *Poetics and Politics of Place in Pastoral: International Perspectives* (2015). Pughe has also guest edited the second special issue devoted to pastoral of the UK journal *Green Letters: Studies in Ecocriticism* (20.1, 2016) (cf. also *Green Letters* 4, Spring 2003, “Questioning the Pastoral”). The papers from a conference in Australia in 2014 significantly titled “The Afterlives of Pastoral” have been published in *Australian Literary Studies* 30.2 (2015) which is exemplary in its contributors’ references to the texts of antiquity. Meanwhile Classical scholars have themselves been exploring ecocritical approaches, as in Charles Martindale’s pioneering essay “Green Politics: the *Eclogues*” in his edited book *The Cambridge Companion to Virgil* (1997) and Timothy Saunders’ *Bucolic Ecology: Virgil’s Eclogues and the Environmental Literary Tradition* (2008). Although the latter is not explicitly ecocritical, it is an indication of a welcomed coming into alignment of the fields of environmental humanities and classical studies. Such a realignment should be fostered by brilliantly contemporary translations such as Peter Fallon’s *The Georgics of Virgil* (2004), written as though by an Irish farmer, and Ted Hughes’s *Tales from Ovid* (1997), the “Four Ages” section of which Jonathan Bate described as having been given “a profoundly ecological spin” (2000, 28).

Finally, perhaps an example of the sophistication of contemporary ecocriticism’s engagement with pastoral is offered by Chris Coughran’s essay in *The Journal of Ecocriticism* titled “Sub-versions of Pastoral: Nature, Satire and the Subject of Ecology” which discusses two American novelists who write what Coughran prefers to term “satiric [as opposed to “idyllic”] pastoral” (Coughran 2010, 14). Invoking Marx’s, Meeker’s and especially Buell’s sense of the ideological multivalence of American pastoral, Coughran sees the mode as “the progenitor [...] of various fantasies of national or regional identity as these are routinely enacted, improvised, and – as the case may be – parodied and burlesqued” (17).

The central character of Gilbert Sorrentino's novel *Blue Pastoral* (1983) believes that Ovid's *Metamorphosis* parodies Theocritus and Virgil, providing a model for his own chapters of narrative that are "variously styled as 'ecclogues' or 'eglogues' or 'pastourelles'" (18). Coughran writes: "Transposing the inherited pastorals of antiquity into the discordant modalities of contemporary America, *Blue Pastoral* demonstrates that there is no definitive pastoral mode, just as there is no singular American voice or perspective" (18). Coughran goes on to argue that "this subversion of 'American' pastoral is also a sub-version" (20) and that, as it satirises Marx's sentimental pastoral, it also implies an alternative ideal. When he turns to Richard Brautigan's *Trout Fishing in America* (1967) Coughran detects behind the author's irony an undermining of "the distinction between 'imaginative' and 'sentimental' forms of American pastoral identified by Leo Marx" (24). These two postmodern novelists, Coughran concludes, writing about degraded landscapes in an age of ecological awareness, both disrupt and invigorate American pastoral with "a relative lack of complacency with respect to their inherited modes of discourse" (27).

The 2011 conference of the US branch of ASLE hosted a round table titled "Cosmopolitics and the Radical Pastoral" that attracted a standing-room-only crowd of 150 people. Pre-conference position statements had been posted at <http://radicalpastoral.blogspot.co.uk> and a transcript of the discussion featuring Lance Newman, Laura Walls, Lawrence Buell, Hsuan Hsu, Anthony Lioi, and Paul Outka was subsequently published in the online journal *The Journal of Ecocriticism* 3.2, July 2011. Whilst the usual dangers of the pastoral were rehearsed, the general consensus of these prominent ecocritics was not only that pastoral has the capacity to take us in radical directions, but that it constantly asks us to redefine the terms with which we consider our current and historical environmental crisis. As Theocritus himself put it in the *Idylls*, "No one

can be saved by ignorance when the thread / Unwinds on the fateful bobbin” (“The
Childhood of Heracles,” 124).

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1Notes

- . See Laura Sayre's chapter for a thorough discussion of the georgic aspect of the pastoral tradition.
2. Philip Hensher, "The long tale of the British short story," *The Guardian*, 6 November 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/nov/06/british-short-story-philip-hensher-anthology>
3. Heaney's collection *Electric Light* (2001) includes his "Bann Valley Eclogue" and "Glanmore Eclogue" together with a translation he titles "Virgil: Eclogue IX."
4. Todd A. Borlik, *Ecocriticism and Early Modern English Literature* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011).
5. Which are all features of Thoreau's *Walden* and explain why it was, and remains, a key ecocritical touchstone.
6. Buell's three reservations about Marx's book are instructive: environment only as cultural symbol, and too sharp a distinction between middle landscape and wilderness, as also between complex and facile pastoral texts (Buell 1995, 440 n.7).
7. Andrew Furman's discussion in *The ISLE Reader* of Philip Roth's novel *American Pastoral* uncritically assumes that the irony of Roth's title is based upon, in Furman's words, "the utterly uncomplicated, pastoral existence." please include title in Works Cited "No Trees Please, We're Jewish," 49-71: 59.

8. Kirsten Ernst, "Brazilian Pastoral? Nature, Nation, and Exile in Ana Maria Machado's *Tropical sol da liberade*," *ISLE* 22:2 (2015): 353. (see above)
10. Herbert Lindenberger, "The Idyllic Moment: On Pastoral and Romanticism," *College English* 34.3 (December 1972): 337-38. (see above)
11. H. Daniel Peck, "The Crosscurrents of *Walden*'s Pastoral" in *New Essays on Walden*, ed. Robert F. Sayre. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, 73-94. (see above)
12. Coincidentally, the Classics scholar Richard Jenkyns uses these terms rather differently in *The Legacy of Rome* (1992, 159).
13. Per. com. Leo Marx.

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