

**THE NEW PASTORAL IN CONTEMPORARY
BRITISH WRITING**

DEBORAH LILLEY

Royal Holloway, University of London

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DECLARATION OF ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

I hereby declare that the work presented in this thesis is my own.

Deborah Lilley

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the appearance of pastoral in contemporary British writing and argues that a transformed version of pastoral can be seen to emerge in the period since 1990 in relation to ecological considerations. The work addresses the proposition that the representation and interpretation of environmental concerns calls up new circumstances for the pastoral to operate within, posing both an opportunity for the application of the conventions of the mode, and a threat to the principles upon which they are based. Analysing work by Robert Macfarlane, Roger Deakin, Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts, Ali Smith, Jim Crace, Kathleen Jamie, Liz Jensen, Brian Clarke, Christopher Hart and John Burnside, the thesis explores both pastoral responses to ecological concerns and the impact of ecological concerns upon the form and scope of the pastoral, contending that in these examples, the pastoral is necessarily altered by their intersection.

The thesis begins with a theoretical exposition of the premises of the work, locating the emergence of new versions of pastoral in relation to the legacies of the tradition, the development of environmental criticism and the influence of environmental anxieties upon recent British writing. Three thematic chapters then each identify a key aspect of the pastoral tradition employed and transformed in contemporary writing. The first, 'Escape into Nature', examines the ways that the pastoral dynamic of retreat into nature is approached as a response to environmental uncertainty using narratives of estrangement and reconciliation. The second, 'Pastoral Relations', discusses the treatment of the pastoral relationships between conceptions of urban and the rural and the human and the natural alongside environmental concerns. The third chapter, 'Crises in Pastoral', analyses the uses of pastoral in contemporary writing inspired by environmental crises. The final chapter concludes the study and argues that as the certainties of pastoral are called up and challenged by cognisance of environmental uncertainties in contemporary British writing, the key components of the mode are reimagined and reshaped. These adaptations mark new contemporary versions of the mode, provoking fresh consideration of the possibilities, as well as the limitations, of pastoral writing in relation to ecological concerns.

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The New Pastoral in Contemporary British Writing

Introduction

This wholly new conception of the precariousness of our relations with nature is bound to bring forth new versions of pastoral.¹

Leo Marx

This study argues that the pastoral is used in contemporary British writing to represent and to reflect upon environmental concerns, and that in the process, adaptations are made to the conventions of the mode. Identifying these adaptations and their impact upon the form and effects of the pastoral in this context, this thesis argues that new versions of the mode can be seen to emerge. In so doing, this study brings together a corpus of recent British writing which displays direct and sustained interest in the surroundings that they depict, or more specifically, in the ways that those surroundings are imagined and perceived, and what the implications and effects of these interpretations may be. Using the pastoral mode to access conceptions of and relations to their environments, these texts both adopt and question its themes and conventions to represent and to reflect upon the ways that their environments may be understood. Analysing these uses of pastoral, this thesis argues that the mode itself is found in new configurations in these instances.

I will begin by addressing the terms of these propositions. This thesis explores the appearance of environmental concerns in contemporary British writing through the framework of the pastoral mode, and identifies the ways that the form of that framework is orchestrated around those concerns. As I will discuss in depth in the next chapter, neither the content nor outcomes of pastoral are certain, and both critical and creative interpretations of the mode offer various and conflicting accounts of its defining form. However, in this study the pastoral is recognised by a number of identifying characteristics that may be arranged in differing ways and to differing effects according to the concerns to which it responds. These distinctively pastoral characteristics are found in the mode's themes and conventions, which represent a central core that appears

¹ Leo Marx, 'Does Pastoralism Have a Future?' in John Dixon Hunt, ed. *The Pastoral Landscape* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1992), p. 222.

across generic and formal boundaries. Thematically, the pastoral is concerned with conceptions of ‘the human’ and ‘the natural’, and their interstices and interrelations, which extend to the identification and relative understanding of places, times and attitudes associated with these conceptions. These themes find expression through a series of interlinking relationships, formed of both connections and contrasts, between these extended conceptions. The conventions of pastoral rely on the tensions between ideas of the human and the natural, the urban and the rural, and the past and the present. These tensions are maintained by the perspectives attributed to these ideas, and by the possibility of productively moving between them in order to obtain relief, insight or a combination of both. Accordingly, the pastoral offers methods of orientation, of relatively mapping places, times, expectations and responses according to particular patterns of thought or understanding.

It is the ways that these core components of the pastoral are arranged in contemporary British writing, and the ways that these arrangements are treated, that signal the new approaches to the mode uncovered by this study. As I will discuss later, the correlation between the themes and conventions of the pastoral, and the leanings towards which they may be moulded, have been variously interpreted throughout the mode’s long history. Here, it is the impact of contemporary environmental conditions upon those correlations and orientations, and the concerns that such conditions raise in relation to the themes of the pastoral that underpin them that is under scrutiny.

In the texts examined in the following chapters, awareness of changing environmental conditions due to interrelated ecological, economic, industrial and political factors are registered through, for instance, the evidence of pollution, the contemporary and potential causes and effects of climate change, and the shifting uses and habitation of particular places by humans and non-humans alike. These issues raise concerns over the effects of human actions upon the environment, the impacts of degrading environmental conditions upon their inhabitants and the abstraction of human actions from the consequences they may have. In turn, these concerns call up questions about the alienation of humans from their environments, and the loss of traditional ways of life and association with particular environments. Concurrently, they also open up the

possibilities of re-establishing connections with the natural world and re-addressing the ways that these connections are understood.

The environmental concerns which interest the examples of contemporary British writing discussed in this study are made manifest through the relationships of the pastoral. As I have explained above, the pastoral is concerned with the interfaces between conceptions of the human and the natural, of people relative to place and place relative to people, of the effects of the human upon the non-human and the inverse. These relationships are brought into focus in circumstances in which their parts are considered to be under new pressures. These formations of pastoral are familiar, however, I suggest that the topic provokes them to be represented, and interpreted, in new ways. It demands consideration of the terms by which it is expressed and understood. Against these concerns, the relationships of pastoral appear to offer a contrasting set of harmonious conditions that may be counterposed to present a means of provocation towards recuperative and reparative action: an ideal to be recovered. Conversely, the space opening up between pastoral's ideal conditions and those to which it is compared may appear irrecoverable, and its ideal perceived instead as an escapist distraction. Alternatively, I argue that different approaches to and uses of the themes and tensions of the pastoral can be seen to emerge in contemporary British writing.

The recognition of changing environmental conditions and the concerns that they raise highlight the themes and conventions of the pastoral from new angles: affording perspectives which challenge the ideas upon which they are based altogether. Conceptions of and distinctions between the human and the natural are disrupted by changing conditions that point to additional or contradictory connections and disjunctions between these ideas. Pastoral relationships are maintained by the stable understanding of these concepts and of their interrelations. As the foundations of the form are destabilised, the effects that they support are made uncertain. The understandings of particular places and experiences based on pastoral relationships are made less clear. Intentions of retreat and return and expectations of relief and restoration, clarification of perspective or achievement of critical insight are troubled by these circumstances.

In the examples examined in this study, the environment and the ways that it is experienced and understood are brought to the fore by a sense of crisis. This is experienced on personal, social and ecological levels, but most pervasively, and persuasively, appears as a crisis of understanding that reaches back into the past and threatens to stretch far ahead of the present. Framed through the pastoral, attention comes to focus upon the methods and implications of the ways that human-nature relations are relayed and considered, leading to the examination of the perspectives from which those relations are discerned, the ideas that contribute towards them and the attitudes that maintain those perspectives. In the process, pastoral themes and conventions are shown to be less certain. Its relationships appear more fragile, but also appear in more complex forms as a result.

In this way, the ‘precariousness of our relations with nature’ that Marx points to above is reflected in the versions of pastoral that it generates, and this thesis accounts for its effects in contemporary British writing in a number of ways. The texts discussed in this study display a common desire to look more closely at places and the interrelations that comprise them, with an emphasis upon addressing the ways of looking and of interpreting those observations. Familiar, pastoral passages of thought are pursued questioningly, and in the process, new pathways are opened up. Furthermore, the themes and conventions of the form are supplemented with additional means of interpreting and relating to particular environments and the interconnections between human and non-human influences that they comprise. Ecological, archaeological, geographical, sociological and anthropological ideas are brought to bear upon pastoral conceptions of landscapes and the relationships that they represent, offering further insights upon pastoral interpretations and establishing new points of tension in the relationships of the mode. Technically, certain common features can be found in the new approaches to pastoral writing traced here. In particular, there is a self-consciousness towards the forms and effects of pastoral and reflectiveness towards the relationships and implications of the tradition. These texts display attention towards the materiality of the pastoral landscape, and to the materiality of pastoral representation: the methods by which environments may be analysed, understood and represented. The temporalities of the pastoral are scrutinised through experimentation with narrative structure and form.

By these means, new pastoral writing flexes away from the tradition by challenging its assumptions and their effects, yet engages with its typical movement of retreat and return and its potential to provide illuminative experience and insight. At the same time, it avoids explicit didacticism in light of those insights, and resists the appeal of the climactic outcomes of recuperation. Instead, it produces more unsettling effects: opening up the problems that it depicts through their effects upon the themes and conventions of the tradition.

This study focuses upon texts that have emerged in the period since 1990, and sees a continuing trend in subsequent British writing towards engaging with the themes and conventions of the pastoral. The mode is being employed and developed to represent and to explore contemporary environmental topics and their implications for the ways that the concepts of the human and the natural and their interrelations may be understood. Drawing on examples from literary fiction, genre fiction and nature writing, the thesis identifies an escalating interest in the material world and the ways that it might be interpreted. These forms of writing intersect in their treatment of human-nature relations through the pastoral, and their innovative usages of the mode to address this topic. In circumstances that range from holiday retreats to widespread ecological disasters and locations that span remote islands and superstore car parks, pastoral themes and conventions are adopted and adapted to depict and interrogate the ways that such experiences and places may be understood.

A sense of urgency is present in these writings that appears contemporaneous to the local and global development of interest in the intersection of the human and the natural over this period: in the environmental outcomes that have arisen at this time, and the potential effects that may be experienced in the future. Over the course of the period during which the texts in this study were published, events including the formation of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in 1988, the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio and the subsequent UN Climate Change Conferences, the 1997 Kyoto agreement, Al Gore's and the IPCC's Nobel Peace Prize in 2007, numerous international environmental disasters from earthquakes and hurricanes to the Gulf of Mexico oil spill in 2010, not to mention a steady stream of Hollywood environmental disaster movies,

contribute towards the cultural climate against which these texts must be considered, and which their concerns surely reflect.

Concurrently, the emergence of the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment in the United Kingdom and Ireland (ASLE-UKI) in 1998 and the growing field of British ecocriticism must also be noted. As I will discuss below, the intersection of pastoral and environmental concerns has attracted considerable attention in British ecocriticism, and within the field more broadly. As new examples of pastoral writing have emerged in conjunction with environmental concerns in the last twenty years, new theorisations of the mode intended to capture and delimit its adaptation in this context have also appeared. In the same period, new assessments of contemporary British writing have identified the growing interest in and significance of environmental concerns. This thesis accounts for and interrogates these theorisations. Alongside, and in addition to these ideas, my contribution to these fields presents an account of pastoral in British writing concerned with the environment published in the last twenty years that demonstrates in particular the ways that this topic manifests in recent work and the ways that the mode is adapted towards it in the contemporary period.

Through the following five chapters, this thesis pursues the propositions made here. Chapter One, 'Pastoral and Ecology in Contemporary British Writing', presents a theoretical exposition of the premises of the work, locating the emergence of contemporary versions of pastoral in relation to the legacies of the tradition, the development of environmental criticism and the influence of environmental anxieties upon recent British writing. I argue that a peculiarly contemporary version of pastoral appears in the writing of this period, in which the mode is necessarily altered by its intersection with environmental concerns, drawing on early examples of pastoral experimentation in the period in Jim Crace's *Arcadia* (1992), *Ulverton* by Adam Thorpe (1992) and *The Rings of Saturn* by W. G. Sebald (1995).

In the following three chapters, I interrogate the premise of contemporary versions of pastoral from three perspectives, each identifying a key aspect of pastoral employed and transformed in contemporary writing. These chapters build up a composite picture of the ways in which the pastoral tradition appears in contemporary

British writing, and the ways in which the tradition is adapted towards environmental concerns in these instances.

Chapter Two, 'Pastoral Care: Escape into Nature', examines the ways that the pastoral retreat into nature is approached as a response to environmental uncertainty using narratives of estrangement and reconciliation. The chapter argues that these narratives are challenged and reconceived in various ways in response to such concerns, demonstrating the need to reconsider the terms of pastoral in this context. Initially examining the appearance of retreat and escape in pastoral, the chapter then examines in detail the treatment of these themes in several examples of contemporary nature writing: *Waterlog* by Roger Deakin (1999); *The Wild Places* by Robert Macfarlane (2007); *Edgelands* by Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts (2011); and *Sightlines* by Kathleen Jamie (2012).

Chapter Three, 'Natural Connections: Pastoral Relations', discusses the treatment of the essential pastoral relationships between the urban and the rural and the human and the natural alongside environmental concerns. The chapter uncovers the uses and effects of pastoral's animating forces in this context, finding new and redefined scope for pastoral writing. The chapter firstly looks at the form and effect of pastoral ideas of place, engaging with Christopher Hart's *The Harvest* (1999) and Ali Smith's *The Accidental* (2005), before turning to look at relations to place through close readings of *Being Dead* by Jim Crace (1999) and *Findings* by Kathleen Jamie (2005).

Chapter Four, 'Uncertain Nature: Crises in Pastoral', analyses the uses of pastoral in writing inspired by crisis, and traces the reconfigured appearance of pastoral conventions, form and effect. The chapter examines approaches to the intersection of pastoral and crisis put forward by a number of critics of the mode alongside its usages in *The Stream* by Brian Clarke (2000), *The Rapture* by Liz Jensen (2008), and *Glisters* by John Burnside (2009).

Chapter Five, 'The New Pastoral in Contemporary Writing' concludes the analysis and argues that as the certainties of pastoral are called up and challenged by cognisance of environmental uncertainties in contemporary British writing, the key

components of the mode are reimagined and reshaped. These adaptations mark contemporary versions of the mode, provoking fresh consideration of the possibilities, as well as the limitations, of pastoral writing in relation to ecological concerns.

I hope to show that in various guises and contexts, versions of pastoral are emerging in contemporary British writing in the last two decades that signify new ways of using the mode. These new versions are both inspired and influenced by environmental concerns; these concerns open up new critical and creative applications for the themes and conventions of the mode and demand new considerations of them. Analysing the relationship of the pastoral to these applications, and exploring in depth some of the key ways that the mode can be recognised through these uses, I hope to demonstrate that the mode is reinvigorated in these instances, and continues to offer the means to represent and to reflect upon the intersection of conceptions of the human and the natural in the twenty-first century.

Chapter One
Pastoral and Ecology in Contemporary British Writing

Since ecology is concerned with the interdependencies of different life forms which inhabit and constitute the same environment, an ecological approach to culture will search for the hidden interdependencies between areas of life usually seen as opposites: nature and artifice, pastoral and nature, leisure and work, fantasy and reality.²

Richard Kerridge

The urban/rural quandary is always relevant. It's always contemporary.³

Jim Crace

Marx's plural prediction of 'new versions' of pastoral gestures not only towards the multiple possibilities generated by the uncertain conditions of environmental crisis, but also towards the heterogeneity associated with pastoral writing. As this chapter will demonstrate, pastoral's intersection with environmental concerns has been variously imagined and interpreted, adding to the compliment of complex and often contradictory social, economic and political perspectives to which the conventions of pastoral have been attributed and from which they have been understood. Its multifarious legacy contributes towards its interpretation as a frequently 'contested term', as Bryan Loughrey succinctly puts it: a classification not only reiterated but also escalated by Terry Gifford to 'a deeply suspect one' in the context of ecological concern.⁴ The capacity of the mode to represent and respond to environmental concerns jointly rests upon its relationship to the natural world, and its critical function, both of which, as this chapter will explore, are far from certain foundations.

Accordingly, the development of 'the ecocentric repossession of pastoral' anticipated by Lawrence Buell has been tempered by what Greg Garrard has described

² Richard Kerridge, 'Ecot Thrillers: Environmental Cliffhangers' in Laurence Coupe, ed. *The Green Studies Reader: From Romanticism to Ecocriticism*, (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 242-252, (p. 242).

³ Jim Crace, 'Interview', (2000), www.jim-crace.com, n. pag.

⁴ Bryan Loughrey, *The Pastoral Mode: A Casebook* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1984), p. 8, Terry Gifford, *Pastoral*, (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 147.

as the ‘problematic’ character of the tradition.⁵ Despite this, the continued interest in writing and reading the mode alongside and within the emergence of environmental criticism also indicates the potential that Garrard attributed to the pastoral ‘as a questioning, as itself a question’.⁶ It is worth noting that though Marx imagined that the developing awareness of environmental instability would generate new pastorals, the perspectives of these versions upon the conditions of their making is left open to speculation: he described their potential forms as ‘unpredictable’.⁷

In order to understand the appearance of contemporary versions of pastoral identified in this study, both pastoral’s ‘contested’ status and the ambivalence it has presented to ecocritical reading deserve considerable attention. In this chapter, I will examine the critical background against which new versions of pastoral have emerged, and against which they must be considered, and explore the ways that these considerations may be accounted for in relation to recent interpretations of pastoral and contemporary British writing. Throughout the last two decades, several critics have put forward readings of the intersection of pastoral with environmental concerns. Here, I will examine these readings alongside key criticism of the pastoral tradition and the new versions of pastoral that this thesis describes. In recovering what these readings of pastoral reveal about the environmental orientation of the mode, I explore the critical opportunities that their insights open up, and argue the case for the new pastorals identified in this study. Looking at the development of environmental concerns in British writing in the same period, I argue that a trend towards using and adapting the themes and conventions of pastoral alongside these concerns can be seen. In so doing, I establish the context against which the new pastorals that this study explores are produced and locate these new pastorals in relation to the changing shape of the tradition. Whilst my intention in this chapter is not to provide an exhaustive account of the pastoral mode, I present a critical analysis that demonstrates the ways that the premise of environmental crisis corresponds to and challenges its conventions, and the

⁵ Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing and the Formation of American Culture* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1995) p. 52; Greg Garrard, ‘Radical Pastoral?’, *Studies in Romanticism*, 35.3 (1996): p. 459.

⁶ Garrard, ‘Radical Pastoral?’, p. 464.

⁷ Marx, ‘Does Pastoralism Have a Future?’, p. 223.

different ways that it has may be understood. I intend to show the connections between contemporary and historical interpretations of the form and to explore their divergences, in order to illustrate the development of recent new versions of pastoral writing.

1. Pastoral and Ecology

To begin, I will continue with Buell's influential linkage of the pastoral to environmental concerns. Though Buell effectively locates the amenability of pastoral to depict and to address such concerns, his approach also flags up a number of problematic considerations associated with their intersection. In his 1995 work, *The Environmental Imagination*, Buell acknowledges that the 'ambiguous legacy of Western pastoralism [...] interposes some major stumbling blocks in the way of developing a mature environmental aesthetics'.⁸ However, he is keen to 'stress its constructive potential rather than its role as a blocking agent or inducer of false consciousness', emphasising the possibilities of the ecocritical recovery of 'a species of cultural equipment that Western thought has for more than two millennia been unable to do without'.⁹ Though Buell takes account of some of pastoral's social and political obfuscations and the 'astringency' with which they have been recognised, he focuses his attention upon the possibility of 'pastoral ideology functioning as a bridge, crude but serviceable, from anthropocentric to more specifically ecocentric concerns'.¹⁰ In so doing, Buell provides a gloss over pastoral's complexities that Gifford finds inadequate in *Pastoral* (1999), as I will examine in more detail later in the chapter, arguing that 'despite Buell's complaint [...] we cannot ignore the evidence of the anti-pastoral and the development of the pejorative use of the term'.¹¹ Buell justifies doing so on account of the longevity and flexibility of pastoral's cultural application, and pastoral's malleability is both crucial to and integral in its appearance in contemporary writing and to its capacity for dealing with environmental concerns in those appearances. However, merely noting the critical 'vulnerabilities' that characterise its history, as Buell does here, is not sufficient to

⁸ Buell, *The Environmental Imagination*, p. 22, 32.

⁹ Ibid, p. 33, p. 32.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 52.

¹¹ Gifford, *Pastoral*, p. 147.

establish the ‘positive case’ for the ‘ecocentric’ pastoral that he proposes.¹² His approach in fact opens up some of the problems that he sought to avoid.

Reconfiguring pastoral’s contrasts between concerns perceived to be human or non-human in order to align them towards environmental issues, Buell’s proposition leaves the conditions of the contrasts themselves and the causes and effects of their legacy aside. Writing that ‘the “retreat” to nature *can* be a form of willed amnesia [...] but it means something different when held up self-consciously [...] to appeal to an alternative set of values over and against the dominant one’, it appears that that despite highlighting its equivocal history, Buell effectively demands a selective reading of the apparent selectivity of pastoral vision from an environmentally-oriented viewpoint, or to facilitate environmentally-oriented ends.¹³ Championing both the ‘luminous ideal’ of pastoral and the illuminative qualities of its ‘oppositional forms’, Buell advocates for the ‘repossession’ of aspects of pastoral that have been rigorously interrogated for their legitimacy, value and relevance in the context of environmental concern.¹⁴ It is to these questions that I will now turn in order to establish the critical background against which contemporary versions of pastoral must be considered, and the implications of the environmental issues towards which they may be directed.

In *The Penguin Book of English Pastoral Verse*, John Barrell and John Bull predicted a ‘revival of interest in the Pastoral’ alongside ‘the current concern with ecology’.¹⁵ The connection made here between pastoral and ecological concern can be unpicked in a number of ways. Principally, Barrell and Bull identify weaknesses in the proposed links between pastoral writing and the understanding of ecological issues. Additionally, their critique can be used to access some of the criticism of the mode and its application to environmental concern that Buell pointed towards. Their expectation is based upon the renewed appeal of the idealised conditions associated with the contrasts of pastoral, envisaging ‘Industrial Man looking away from his technological wasteland to an older and better world’ that would serve a palliative function in the context of

¹² Buell, *The Environmental Imagination*, p. 33.

¹³ Ibid, p. 50, original emphasis.

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 51.

¹⁵ John Barrell and John Bull, eds. *The Penguin Book of Pastoral Verse* (London: Penguin, 1974), p. 432.

environmental damage.¹⁶ The relieving action that Barrell and Bull imagine pastoral to effect here recalls the appeal offered by Tityrus's farm in Virgil's First Eclogue, where the contrasting connection between the pastoral world and the hardships outside of it is instituted into the tradition. In this instance, though, pastoral relief is obtained not only by its contrast to present difficulties, but by their avoidance altogether. The remedy of pastoral alleviates the experience of ecological concern by directing attention away from its causes towards an ideal created in opposition to its effects.

The issue that underpins Barrell and Bull's critique is the relation of such pastoral writing to its subject. It is 'concern' itself that powers the 'revival' of pastoral anticipated here rather than the topic that elicits that concern. The 'older and better' world that concern generates does not necessarily correspond to experience or recollection but rather to an idea of a previous version of nature privileged by its distance from present conditions. Recalling Marx's conception of 'sentimental' pastoral, found 'whenever people turn away from [...] hard social and technological realities' and characterised by 'an inchoate longing for a more "natural" environment', at issue here is the absence of connection to ecological detail.¹⁷ As Friedrich Schiller suggested: 'our feeling for Nature is like that of an Invalid for Health', and like Schiller's 'sentimental poet', 'in search of nature but as an idea and in a perfection in which it never existed' and limited to 'reflection' upon the 'impression' of such ideas, the version of pastoral described here is similarly constrained by the ideals according to which it is conjured.¹⁸

In Barrell and Bull's reading, the consolations of pastoral are dangerously close to obfuscation. Pastoral's capacity to look aslant towards its ostensible object, or even to overlook it altogether, is given stringent treatment. Cautioning against the allure of fabricating a sense of connection to nature to supplement its supposed absence from contemporary life, Barrell and Bull warned that 'such a revival [...] is not, however, something that can be looked for with anything other than alarm. For today, more than

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 432.

¹⁷ Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and The Pastoral Ideal in America*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 5.

¹⁸ Friedrich Schiller, *On the Naive and Sentimental in Literature*, (Manchester: Carcanet New Press, 1981), p. 35; 42.

ever, the pastoral vision simply will not do'.¹⁹ Here, the problematic connection to nature made by pastoral writing is combined with attention towards the viability of the relationships upon which it operates. Drawing attention to the gulf between pastoral writing and its apparent subject, Barrell and Bull write that 'the separation of life in the town and in the country that the pastoral demands is now almost devoid of any meaning'.²⁰ Furthermore, from this angle, the use of 'revival' is telling. The incarnation of pastoral sparked by ecological concern does not just bring to life a dormant connection, but reanimates one that cannot be sustained by present conditions.

In Barrell and Bull's formulation, then, pastoral written in response to environmental concerns deliberately constructs a contrasting alternative vision without intention or expectation towards addressing the issues from which it originates. The turn to pastoral in the context of environmental concern brings up the notion that pastoral arises in uncertain circumstances, as a 'response to an unacceptable world', written when 'an ideal or at least more innocent world is felt to be lost'.²¹ The pastoral in this interpretation presents an opportunity to recover that world, by offering an idyllic refuge from 'a harsh present' and providing the charms of a remembered past in soothing contrast.²² Exhibiting what Gifford has termed the 'pejorative' understanding of pastoral's idealising character, T. G. Rosenmeyer suggests that it is knowingly distinct from those issues:

We can enjoy pastoral because it enables us to live, on our own terms, with a nature we have abandoned; pastoral relieves our sense of loss without forcing us to give up on our new gains as beneficiaries of the industrial age.²³

¹⁹ Barrell and Bull, p. 432.

²⁰ Ibid, p. 432.

²¹ Joseph Meeker, *The Comedy of Survival: Literary Ecology and a Play Ethic*, 3rd edn, (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1980, p. 50; Peter V. Marinelli, *Pastoral*, (London: Meuthen, 1971), p. 9.

²² Marinelli, p. 4.

²³ Gifford, *Pastoral*, p. 2; T. G. Rosenmeyer, *The Green Cabinet: Theocritus and the European Pastoral Lyric*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969), p. 17.

To borrow a term used by both Kate Rigby and Garrard, the pastoral world in this context offers ‘compensation’.²⁴ Not, however, in the sense of an equivalent, but rather by way of amends, exchanging the experience of or concern for a degraded landscape for an alternative conceived in opposition to it.²⁵

Environmentally-oriented pastoral writing so conceived effectively upscales Alexander Pope’s description of the evasive practices and idealising functions of pastoral. Following Fontanelle’s missive that ‘the pleasure of Pastoral arises from the use of “Illusion”, or half-truths’, which “consists, in exposing to the Eye only the Tranquillity of a Shepherd’s Life, and in dissembling or concealing its meanness, as also in showing only its Innocence, and hiding its miseries’, Pope suggested that ‘we must therefore use some illusion to render a pastoral delightful; and this consists in exposing the best side only of a shepherd’s life, and concealing its miseries’.²⁶ Written in response to the ‘miseries’ of ecological concern, pastoral would present a cultural and material landscape consciously orchestrated around their absence. Far from ‘constructive’, pastoral here is understood to be at best ineffectual in response to ecological concern. Further, implicit in Barrell and Bull’s dismissal of pastoral is the notion that the mode could potentially contribute towards those concerns by mitigating for the effects rather than confronting their causes, allowing them to continue unheeded. As Joseph Meeker succinctly put it in dispensing with the possibility of productive pastoral writing in response to ecological crisis, ‘escape into fantasies is not a workable solution to urban and existential ills’.²⁷

However, as the following chapters will illustrate, these kinds of approaches to pastoral are difficult to locate in a straightforward form in contemporary writing. Yet

²⁴ Kate Rigby, ‘Ecocriticism’ in Julian Wolfreys, ed., *Introducing Theory at the 21st Century*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002), p. 11; Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, 2nd Edition, (London: Routledge, 2012), p. 44.

²⁵ “compensation, n.”. OED Online. June 2013. Oxford University Press. 3 July 2013
<<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/37549?redirectedFrom=compensation>>.

²⁶ Cited by Aubra and Williams in their Introduction to Alexander Pope, *Essays on Poetry and Criticism*, London: Methuen & Co LTD, 1961, as ‘from Motteux’s translation of Fontanelle’s *Discours*, which appears at the end of the English translation of Le Bossu’s *Treatise of the Epick Poem* (1695), under the title of *Of Pastorals*’, p. 16; Alexander Pope, ‘Discourse on Pastoral Poetry’ in *Essays on Poetry and Criticism*, ed. E. Aubra and Aubrey Williams, London: Methuen & Co LTD, 1961, lines 63-65, p. 27.

²⁷ Meeker, *The Comedy of Survival*, p. 73.

other, more complex engagements with the mode in relation to environmental crisis can be found which develop, contest and question the readings set out above. The context of environmental concern at once calls forth and resists such pastoral responses, problematising the very distinctions between then-and-now, or here-and-there, that versions of the pastoral so conceived must rely on.

At this point, though, it is necessary to note that the pastoral itself cannot be so easily defined either. Elsewhere, pastoral's succour can also be understood as a more practical kind of assistance in response to difficult conditions. From these perspectives, the loose connections between the pastoral and the material world actually maintain a productive tension. Whilst the 'vision that will not do' focuses upon a purely escapist conception of the mode, other interpretations perceive a more reflexive, and reflective, dynamic at work within the interrelationships of pastoral that can be traced back to its earliest examples. According to Kathryn Gutzwiller, it is imperative to acknowledge that 'Theocritus' pastorals are *representations*' in which 'the tension between what is being represented and the act of representation' is 'fundamental'.²⁸ The pastoral world can therefore be understood to represent more than an ideal in comparison to the contemporary world; the version of Sicily presented in the *Idylls* is significant not only as the 'cartographical [...] cipher for the *locus amoenus*' as Rosenmeyer suggests, but for the 'part played by [its] transformation' into 'literary form'.²⁹ Marx similarly suggests that the realities hidden within the pastoral:

Are rarely purported to be presenting a literal, naturalistic or realistic account [...] On the contrary, the tendency to idealisation might be seen [...] not as a failed attempt to transcribe reality, but rather as a vehicle for quasi-utopian aspirations without which no critique of existing culture can be effective or complete.³⁰

Charles Martindale calls this the 'discontinuously mimetic' character of the mode, writing of its 'landscape setting' that 'the depiction (like any representation of nature)

²⁸ Kathryn J. Gutzwiller, *Theocritus' Pastoral Analogies: The Formation of a Genre*, (Wisconsin and London: Wisconsin University Press, 1991), p. 5, original emphasis.

²⁹ Rosenmeyer, p. 231, original emphasis; Gutzwiller, p. 5.

³⁰ Marx, 'Does Pastoralism Have a Future?', p. 223.

involves selection but what seems most distinctive is not the element of idealisation (one should not forget the bare rock and bog that surrounds Tityrus' farm in I.48-49) but again the discontinuity and disjunction'.³¹ As these critics suggest, the relationship between the form and the content of the mode is significant.

As George Puttenham notably proposed, the pastoral contains a critical function: 'not of purpose to counterfeit or represent the rustically manner of loves and communication: but under the vaile of homely persons, and in rude speeches to insinuate and glaunce at greater matters'.³² Though Renato Poggioli argues that 'the psychological root of the pastoral is a double longing after innocence and happiness, to be recovered not through conversion or regeneration but merely through a retreat', Meliboeus's sojourn at Tityrus's farm provides not only the opportunity for relief from, but also for consideration of the political situation of which he is a victim.³³ W. W. Greg's influential description of pastoral's animating force highlights the significance of both the contrast, and its recognition, to pastoral writing: 'a constant element in the pastoral as known to literature is the recognition of a contrast, implicit or expressed, between pastoral life and some more complex type of civilisation'.³⁴ The illuminative potential of pastoral's 'perspective by incongruity' appears to go beyond the notion of escape by way of reflection upon the conditions that make such escape possible.³⁵ The 'ideal middle ground' of the pastoral offers the opportunity to both look away from and towards the conditions from which it is approached, providing a critical distance from which to view and even evaluate the tensions by which it is maintained.³⁶ In this way, using Andrew V. Ettin's suggestion that 'its point of view is significant largely because

³¹ Charles Martindale, *The Cambridge Companion to Virgil*, ed. Charles Martindale, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 119.

³² George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie*, ed. Gladys Doidge Willcock and Alice Walker, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1936), p. 36.

³³ Renato Poggioli, *The Oaten Flute: Essays on Pastoral Poetry and the Pastoral Ideal*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), p. 1.

³⁴ W. W. Greg, *Pastoral Poetry and pastoral Drama*, (New York: Russell & Russell, 1959 [1906]), p. 4.

³⁵ Harold E. Toliver, *Pastoral Forms and Attitudes*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), p. 124.

³⁶ See Marx, *The Machine in the Garden*, p. 23; Scott Hess, 'Postmodern Pastoral, Advertising and the Masque of Technology', *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, 11.1 (2004), pp. 71-100. (p. 74); Marinelli, p. 37 and Meeker, *The Comedy of Survival*, p. 58 for contrasting perspectives upon the 'middle ground' of Arcadia.

it contrasts with some other point of view, or that its real subject is something in addition to, or perhaps even instead of, its ostensible subject', the indirectness condemned by Barrell and Bull may be reconceived from a critical perspective.³⁷ Frank Kermode similarly writes that '[i]t is pastoral [...] which [...] complicates the simple town-country contrast with serious reflections upon that contrast; which cultivates simplicity in decorated language; and which uses the country scene and rustic episode for allegorical purposes'.³⁸ Rather than a means of escape, these perspectives emphasise the capacity of pastoral to provide the opportunity to look at things differently, and its potential to provoke alternative understandings.

However, though Loughrey writes that Puttenham's 'contention [...] [is] almost universally accepted by scholars', others highlight the possibility that the critical potential of pastoral is compromised by its relation to literary, social and political convention, and draw attention to its implications.³⁹ Here, the means of transformation and their consequences are held up to scrutiny, in so doing, questioning the value of its insights. Such perspectives can be seen to inform the evasive understanding of pastoral responses to environmental crisis condemned by Barrell and Bull above, and provide the 'astringency' that Buell attempted to negotiate. Pastoral's malleability to different influences makes the integrity and objectivity of its criticism problematic. Turning back to Pope's description of pastoral's intentions, its subjectivity is often influenced by commitment to the cultivation of particular constructions of form over content, and that content itself often orchestrated around appeals to particular individuals or ideas. In addition to the criticisms of pastoral's dubious connections to its apparent subject outlined above, as Empson explains, the reasons behind its ambivalences can also be variously compromised, 'the convention was, of course, often absurdly artificial; the praise of simplicity usually went with extreme flattery of a patron'.⁴⁰

³⁷ Andrew V. Ettin, *Literature and the Pastoral*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, (1984), p. 12.

³⁸ Frank Kermode, *English Pastoral Poetry: From the Beginnings to Marvell*, (London: George G. Harrap, 1952), p. 25.

³⁹ Loughrey, p. 17.

⁴⁰ William Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral*, (London: Penguin, 1995), p. 18.

From a more contemporary perspective, the compromised viewpoint offered by the pastoral is more commonly associated with consumerism. Marx identifies the ‘convincing testimony to the continuing appeal of the bucolic [...] supplied by advertising copywriters’.⁴¹ Similarly, Scott Hess has described the curious expectation of the reassuring effect of ‘natural’ products and ‘plastic foliage’ in what he calls the ‘technologized version’ of ‘postmodern pastoral’. Here, the mode ‘is no longer set against the [...] complexities of modern society but offers a consumer-friendly interface with that society’, where shepherds equipped with mobile phones are used to both emphasise and naturalise the reach of human influence.⁴² Barrell and Bull suggested that the pastoral may now be ‘of service only to decorate the shelves of tasteful cottages: to furnish nostalgia’, and Garrard in particular also counsels that:

An aesthetic construct that, like English pastoral [...] *must be treated with great caution by ecocritics*, and may turn out to be amenable today only to the promotion of ‘country’ products, as the complex, conflicted pastoral of Romanticism descends over two centuries to the status of generic logo for pastoral kitsch.⁴³

Developing these ideas further, a particularly significant criticism of the pastoral’s critical viewpoint and the authenticity of its representations of its subject can be drawn out from another of Empson’s insights: that the ‘pastoral though “about” is not “by” or “for”’.⁴⁴ Empson’s criticism is given new bite in the context of environmental crisis. As Meeker notes, though apparently about nature and the rural, ‘the pastoral tradition flourishes in times of urban crisis’.⁴⁵ Raymond Williams’s critique in *The Country & the City* (1973) highlighted the ‘enamelled’ world of pastoral, based on the artificially orchestrated relationships between the places and the people of pastoral. Williams’s innovative criticism importantly offset the idyllic and idealised landscapes of pastoral with the political and social realities that facilitated their creation and

⁴¹ Marx, *The Machine in the Garden*, p. 6.

⁴² Hess, p. 89; p. 80.

⁴³ Barrell and Bull, p. 433; Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, 2nd edn, (London: Routledge, 2012), p. 53, original emphasis.

⁴⁴ Empson, p. 13.

⁴⁵ Meeker, *The Comedy of Survival*, p. 54.

maintenance, memorably observing that ‘it is not easy to forget that Sidney’s *Arcadia* [...] is written in a park which had been made by enclosing a whole village and evicting the tenants’.⁴⁶ Despite the critical perspective afforded towards certain cultural directions, its facilitation involved overlooking or even obscuring others. Furthermore, Williams also highlighted the darker motivations behind pastoral’s preference for the glories of the past set in contrast to the conditions of the present. Williams described ‘the idea of an ordered and happier past set against the disturbance and disorder of the present’ as ‘an idealisation [which] served to cover and to evade the actual and bitter contradictions of the time’.⁴⁷ Following Williams, pastoral’s more problematic characteristics were brought to the fore. The subordination of pastoral’s representations of nature to the service of other concerns sharpened the focus upon its abstraction from the material world altogether. Roger Sales, writing in 1983, challenged the distinction between the pastoral and anti-pastoral presentations of the conditions of the landscape and of the pastoral contrast, arguing that both subscribed to the same selective, partial viewpoint upon their subjects.⁴⁸

As these perspectives show, the ‘alternative set of values’ that Buell suggests that the pastoral offers must themselves be held up to scrutiny. Furthermore, the desire for those values also deserves attention. Returning to the criteria outlined earlier, the arguments explored above can be summarised thus: the pastoral’s legitimacy may be questioned as its ideal is based on an imaginary rather than the material world; the pastoral’s value may be compromised by possibility that the contrasts it sets up are either subjectively illuminative or compensatory; and the pastoral’s relevance may become limited by the increasingly untenable distinctions that it makes between the contemporary and the pastoral world.

Buell acknowledges the perspectives upon pastoral given above but expresses concern that in emphasising the mode’s relationship to ‘economic, political and class interests’ and its problems, ‘what is troubling [...] is the implication that the biota itself

⁴⁶Raymond Williams, *The Country & The City*, (London: Chatto & Windus, 1973), p. 22.

⁴⁷Ibid, p. 45.

⁴⁸Roger Sales, *Pastoral and Politics*, (London: Hutchinson, 1983), p. 17.

is not likely to be anyone's primary concern'.⁴⁹ Though he notes the significance of such critiques, he suggests that nevertheless they draw attention away from nature and trap the topic that he sees to be the mode's primary concern in issues of representation and criticism: a practice 'tending to efface the world'.⁵⁰ This is of central importance to the problem with Buell's account of pastoral itself: the multiple thematic concerns of the mode cannot really be separated out from one another, and in attempting to do so, the interconnected character of those concerns may be missed. The natural world that the mode depicts is part of the same world as the 'interests' listed above, and the interconnections between them are only intensified in the context of environmental crisis.

As my argument in this chapter and throughout this study will make plain, the composite nature of environmental issues and of the pastoral mode is key to the versions of the latter shaped by the former that I am aiming to highlight. Furthermore, Buell's initial approach failed to account adequately for the demands presented to the pastoral tradition by the problem of environmental crisis, lacking sufficient engagement with criticism of the mode or a practical approach for recovery of certain aspects in light of such criticism. The argument that pastoral's 'centre of energy has begun to shift from representation of nature as a theatre for human events to representation in the sense of advocacy of nature as a presence for its own sake' overlooks the human-nature interrelations that are made plain by environmental crisis.⁵¹ The emphasis on the dualism of anthropo- and ecocentric modes of thought and the abstraction of nature from 'human events' in this context is untenable, as is the abstraction of nature from 'human events' in the tradition of the pastoral more broadly. It is the interrelationship between the 'natural' and the 'human' that generates and perpetuates the pastoral, and this interrelationship that is both intensified and complicated in the context of environmental instability.

To this end, Williams's politically and socially motivated pastoral criticism can be understood to also show how environmental concerns are interlocked with these

⁴⁹ Buell, *The Environmental Imagination*, p. 14.

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 5.

⁵¹ Ibid, p. 52.

considerations. Unveiling critical perspectives blinkered by a pastoral viewpoint, Williams's criticism also exposed the consequences of an anthropocentric regard for the non-human world. Williams exposed the inaccessibility of an idealised version of nature based on an anthropocentric opposition between the country and the city. Contradicting the notion of a distance between the country and the city by highlighting the evidence of human action on both sides, Williams's perception of the effects of human intervention upon the landscape revealed a specifically ecological viewpoint. Williams's emergent environmental criticism indicates some of the ways that environmental uncertainty applies new pressures to pastoral's relations, in so doing, comes to show those relations from new perspectives, illuminating them from new angles:

Some of the earliest and most remarkable environmental effects, negative as well as positive, followed on from agricultural practice; making land fertile but also, in places, overgrazing it to a desert; clearing good land but also, in places, with the felling of trees, destroying it or creating erosion.⁵²

Williams's observations revealed that the version of nature idealised in pastoral was reflective of human wishes because it was the product of them: it was physically sculpted to work for agricultural, industrial and social needs and ideologically shaped to reflect what we desired to see in it. Addressing the ideological distinction between the urban and the rural, the text undermines the 'conventional contrast between agricultural and industrial development: the country as cooperation with nature, the city and industry as overriding and transforming it'.⁵³

Consequently, Williams's critique reconstituted the pastoral natural world in purely anthropocentric terms, or rather, unveiled its anthropocentric construction and purpose. Revealed in this way, as Williams rightly suggested, the myth of the pastoral relationship between nature and humans could no longer effectively operate. By revealing the fantasy of pastoral escape to be just that, Williams opened up the opportunity to explore and untangle the complicated relationship between humans and nature from alternative angles:

⁵² Williams, *The Country & The City*, p. 293.

⁵³ Ibid, p. 293.

Powerful images of the country and city have been ways of responding to a whole social development [...] we must not limit ourselves to their contrast but go on to see their interrelations and through these the real shape of the underlying crisis.⁵⁴

The ‘interrelations’ that Williams pointed to are supplemented by the signs of environmental crisis, illustrating the connections that exist in relation and in addition to the social and political connections upon which his criticism of the pastoral was based. Williams’s critique of pastoral has led to both the destabilisation of the conventions upon which the pastoral mode is based and pointed towards the re-examination of the relationship between humans and nature, and its consequences, from an ecological angle. The harmonious and reciprocal relationship suggested by a pastoral understanding of the interaction between humans and nature has been revealed to exist on a mainly anthropocentric level. The effects of this relationship from an ecocentric perspective were necessarily overlooked. By opening up an ecological angle upon this relationship, Williams reframed the intersection of the human and the non-human in pastoral.

For Williams, the obfuscations of the pastoral and its distance from reality makes its critical viewpoint ultimately untenable. However, his approach to this realisation arguably opens up the possibility of an environmentally oriented perspective upon the interrelationship of town and country, by drawing attention to its ecological effects. Though his work aimed at exposing the limitations of pastoral by highlighting issues that its approaches necessarily obscured, Williams opened up a new frontier of pastoral criticism. Recognising this effect, Rigby describes Williams’s approach as ‘eco-social critique’, suggesting that his work ‘demonstrates that pastoral is potentially far more than an expression of conservative nostalgia for a lost agrarian past’. She explains that ‘[i]n the ‘green language’ of romantic neopastoral [...] Williams finds an important locus of resistance to the increasing commodification and degradation of the land’.⁵⁵ In this way, as Rigby suggests, it may be interpreted to anticipate Jonathan Bate’s work on Romantic pastoral and environmentalism.

⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 297.

⁵⁵ Kate Rigby, ‘Ecocriticism’, p. 10.

Taking a different angle from Buell that accounts for some of the concerns raised by Williams's work, Bate approaches the issue of the abstraction of pastoral criticism from nature from another viewpoint. In *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (1991), he sees pastoral's political and ecological potential combined in the work of Wordsworth. Highlighting in particular the attitudes to the representation of nature in pastoral writing as interpreted by New Historicists Alan Liu and Jerome McGann, Bate takes issue with the notion that 'Wordsworth was *not* a nature poet, or that there is no such thing as nature, or that if there is such a thing and Wordsworth was interested in it then that interest was very suspect on political grounds'.⁵⁶ As Bate and later Garrard observe, such criticism overlooks aspects of pastoral of its own, namely the representation of the environment and the relationship between the human and non-human evidenced therein. Identifying their approaches as 'utilitarian', Bate sees in Wordsworth a 'georgic' sensitivity to the workings of the landscape and its inhabitants, and that moreover, it is one that is critically connected to the city beyond it. Reading Wordsworth's version of pastoral as an environmentally and politically engaged development of the critical side of the pastoral tradition pointed to by Puttenham, Bate argues that 'an important point about the function of the pastoral' is 'to bring about the melioration of the court, the overthrow of a corrupt regime'.⁵⁷ 'According to this model', Bate suggests, 'pastoral poetry as redefined by Wordsworth begets both reverence for nature and political emancipation'.⁵⁸

From this perspective, Bate champions an ecocritical revival of pastoral that would address and seek to remedy contemporary environmental concerns, arguing that 'Romantic Ecology [...] is in fact an attempt to enable mankind to better live in the material world'.⁵⁹ However, Bate's reliance on the oppositional appeal of notions of 'entering into harmony with the environment' here, and his subsequent emphasis upon the recuperative power of 'ecopoesis' in *The Song of the Earth* (2000) are compromised

⁵⁶ Jonathan Bate, *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition*, (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 4, original emphasis. See also Alan Liu, *William Wordsworth: The Sense of History*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989) and Jerome McGann, *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation*, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

⁵⁷ Bate, *Romantic Ecology*, p. 32.

⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 25.

⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 40.

by an idealised sense of ecology that appears to blur into more pastoral conceptions of nature.⁶⁰ In this way, the version of pastoral that he describes is ultimately limited along the same lines as Buell's: by failing to adequately account for the critical and conceptual challenges posed to the mode by environmental considerations.

Garrard also highlights the mistake of distinguishing between socially and ecologically oriented pastoral criticism in his 1998 essay 'Radical Pastoral?', building upon the amalgamated understanding of such concerns found in Williams's work above.⁶¹ However, Garrard also notes that the constructed nature of pastoral 'nature', used to detach the mode from environmental concerns and identify instead its social and political links, is of course the case, despite the error of attempting to separate out the concerns that influence its construction in particular instances.⁶² As he explains, "nature" is never simply available to us "as such".⁶³ Therefore, the political and ecological effects that the pastoral might engender could go in different directions to those suggested by Bate. Furthermore, despite Bate's insights into Wordsworth's environmental sensitivities, as Garrard also points out, 'Romantic nature is never seriously endangered'.⁶⁴ For Garrard, this leads to the 'problematic' character of the mode in relation to environmental concerns with which I began this chapter. He explains: 'thus the radical problem of pastoral: it may cloud our social vision, or open out a human ecological one; it may help in the marginalisation of nature into "pretty ghettos" or engender a genuine counter-hegemonic ideology'.⁶⁵

I argue that environmental crisis puts the relationships of the pastoral under new pressures, and that they must be understood in new forms as a result. As Williams's work suggested, environmental concerns put the relationships of pastoral into new contexts. Further, the impact of those concerns upon the themes and conventions of the pastoral must be recognised. The pastoral definitions of 'the human' and 'the natural' and their interrelations are challenged. The distinctions and the connections between

⁶⁰ Bate, *The Song of The Earth*, (London: Picador, 2000), p. 245.

⁶¹ Garrard, 'Radical Pastoral?', p. 453.

⁶² Ibid, p. 459.

⁶³ Ibid, p. 458.

⁶⁴ Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 43.

⁶⁵ Garrard, 'Radical Pastoral?', p. 464.

these definitions that underpin the relationships of the pastoral are both destabilised and shown to exist in different and additional forms. The stability and harmony of nature is disrupted. Turning back to the issue that underpinned Barrell and Bull's dismissal of the relevance of pastoral in contemporary times, the interconnections between the urban and the rural which invalidated their contrast for Barrell and Bull are given new intensity. The contrasts between the past and the present now require reconsideration. New understandings of pastoral are needed to account for its usages in these redefined contexts. I suggest that in contemporary accounts of the form, the ways that the mode intersects with the causes and effects of environmental crisis, and the possibilities opened up by the application of the critical potential of pastoral to such crises and their relationship to the mode itself are explored. In the next section, and throughout the chapters to follow, I will argue that the 'radical problem' of pastoral is part of its critical composition in contemporary writing, which is imbued with a self-reflexivity that enables the pastoral impulse, the distinctions by which it is made and the relationships through which it is pursued to be deployed and questioned at the same time.

2. The Nature of Pastoral

A number of other contemporary theorisations of pastoral have attempted to respond to the situation described above, by accounting, in different ways, for the opportunities and the challenges posed to the pastoral by the consideration of environmental concerns and the legacies of the various permutations and interpretations of the tradition. Marx's anticipated 'new versions of pastoral' also recalls William Empson's 1935 title *Some Versions of Pastoral*, and effectively employs Empson's argument that the defining characteristics of the mode are compatible with numerous and various ends that it is possible to draw together by detecting the use of the principle of 'putting the complex into the simple'.⁶⁶ The question of what defines pastoral underpins both the heterogeneity of the mode and its 'contested' status that I described above. It also forms the foundations of numerous attempts to pin down the key characteristics of pastoral,

⁶⁶ Empson, p. 17.

and so to delimit its scope, drawing a line between pastoral thus defined and its multiple and conflicting outliers. As Paul Alpers comments, ‘there are as many versions of pastoral as critics who write about it’, and Rosenmeyer contends that ‘in all probability a tidy definition of what is pastoral about the pastoral tradition is beyond our reach’.⁶⁷ In this second section of the chapter, I aim to identify the features of pastoral by which it has been recognised in contemporary writing and in relation to environmental concerns.

Empson’s influential reading of pastoral emphasises the mode as a ‘trick of thought’ that may take ‘very different forms’.⁶⁸ Numerous critics of the pastoral have been reluctant to engage with this feature of the mode, and indeed attempt to classify the pastoral as a particular set of features and uses that are thematically and temporally distinct. To summarise very briefly, for critics including Poggioli, Kermode, Rosenmeyer and James Sambrook, for instance, the pastoral is understood to concern shepherds, and to correspond to a specific form and function. This is marked by certain changes at points throughout its history: in Virgil’s social and political developments of the mode, in the Renaissance formalisation of the mode into a particular set of poetic conventions, and at the end of the eighteenth century, where the pastoral died a ‘natural death’ when the contrasts by which it was pursued began to fall significantly out of step with the contemporary world.⁶⁹ Though Sambrook and Rosenmeyer acknowledge later, altered versions of pastoral, they distinguish them from the tradition proper: Rosenmeyer describes the form being ‘resuscitated [...] on entirely new premises’.⁷⁰ Lerner suggests that acknowledging these later versions of the form demands diverging from the original components of the mode, and that in so doing, ‘we could be said to be knocking away the scaffold we are standing on’.⁷¹

Others follow Empson’s understanding of pastoral more closely, and see the mode as capable of appearing in various forms and to various ends at particular times.

⁶⁷ Paul Alpers, ‘What is Pastoral?’ *Critical Inquiry* 8.3 (1982), pp. 437-460 (p. 437); Rosenmeyer, p. 3.

⁶⁸ Empson, p. 25.

⁶⁹ Poggioli, p. 1; Kermode, p. 15; Rosenmeyer, p. 202; James Sambrook, *English Pastoral Poetry*, (Boston, MA: Twayne, 1983), *preface* (n. pag.)

⁷⁰ Rosenmeyer, p. 202.

⁷¹ Laurence Lerner, *The Uses of Nostalgia: Studies in Pastoral Poetry*, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1972), p. 39.

From such perspectives, the mode is recognisable according to a number of identifying characteristics, the manifestation of which is tied to the cultural context in which they are called up. Indeed, Lerner goes on to write that ‘pastoral is a literary convention that conforms to a social contrast and a psychological attitude’ which ‘outlived the death of the form in the eighteenth century’, and ‘therefore a good deal of the pastoral impulse [is] in literature that is not pastoral in form’.⁷² Loughrey suggests that pastoral may be understood as a ‘structural relationship’ since Empson, identified by an ‘animating impulse’ which exists ‘outside of the shepherd of literary convention’.⁷³ Similarly, David Rosand describes the ‘operational form’ of pastoral, which transcends the difficulties of ‘definitional’ considerations of the mode and instead recognises the uses of pastoral as what John Dixon Hunt has called ‘habits of mind’.⁷⁴

I argue that the contemporary manifestation of pastoral corresponds in part to both sides of these broad arguments for its form and function. In my reading, the mode is both identifiable by a number of key characteristics and is capable of hinging at points due to relative tensions and influences pertaining to the thematic and temporal conditions of its use. By these means, it may be manipulated to respond to different concerns. Understood in this way, connections may be drawn throughout the various incarnations and persuasions of the form, as the mode appears relatively to the conditions in which it is written. At the same time, its differing manifestations must be understood in the knowledge of its previous forms, as I explained in the previous section.

This flexible understanding of pastoral and the notion of its sensitivity towards the cultural concerns against which it is conjured are familiar to the criticism of the mode. Dixon Hunt goes on to argue that ‘pastoralisms vary with their period, the culture

⁷² Ibid, p. 39. See also Marinelli, p. 4.

⁷³ Loughrey, p. 21; p. 20. See also Gutzwiller, Alistair Fowler, *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genre and Modes*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*, (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000), Heather Dubrow, *Genre*, (London: Methuen, 1982); Frederick Garber, ‘Pastoral Spaces’, *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 30.3 (1988), 431-461.

⁷⁴ David Rosand, ‘Pastoral Topoi: On the Construction of Meaning in Landscape’, in Dixon Hunt, ed. *The Pastoral Landscape*, pp. 161-178 (p. 162); John Dixon Hunt, ‘Pastorals and Pastoralisms’, in *The Pastoral Landscape*, pp. 11-20 (p. 14).

that produces them, and the medium and genre of their representation', suggesting that pastoral is capable of 'renegotiation' at different times towards 'elective affinities'.⁷⁵ Indeed, Marinelli goes further to posit that 'constancy with change is precisely the history of pastoral as an informing idea', and, describing pastoral as 'a method or perspective', Elinor Leach documents a periodised historical development of the pastoral over the course of which varying elements or effects were favoured around a central core of the mode.⁷⁶

Importantly, other critics have emphasised the transformation that takes place between different permutations of the mode at particular times and in particular circumstances. Not only are 'pastoral authors [...] inescapably of their own culture and its preoccupations, thus the pastoral construct always reveals the preoccupations and tensions of its time', as Gifford suggests, but as Dominic Head additionally argues, 'each generation will interrogate the relevance of pastoral writing [...] as human needs change, so does the function of pastoral evolve'.⁷⁷ Gutzwiller usefully describes these developments as 're-formations', explaining that as 'the inner structure' of the form is 'reproduced', it is 'in the sense that it is *formed again* through the complementarity of a different, but somehow analogous, form and content'.⁷⁸

Taking these ideas into account, I argue that in its recent appearances, the pastoral is formed around environmental concerns. In addition, I argue that its contemporary forms are further affected by the impact of environmental concerns upon its themes and conventions. Pastoral's relationships and their usages are challenged by the uncertainties that are inherent in contemporary environmental concerns, uncertainties which throw their forms out of alignment. Pastoral connections and contrasts between ideas of the human and the natural, the country and the city and the past and the present are shifted, breaking some of the presumptions of the form and

⁷⁵ Dixon Hunt, p. 13, 15.

⁷⁶ Marinelli, p. 12; Elinor Winsor Leach, *Vergil's Eclogues: Landscapes of Experience*, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1974), p. 33.

⁷⁷ Gifford, *Pastoral*, p. 52; Dominic Head, *An Introduction to Modern British Fiction 1950-2000*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 190.

⁷⁸ Gutzwiller, p. 12, original emphasis.

showing them to exist in different ways. As this study will show, its contemporary formations are newly adapted to both account for and to begin to address these effects.

Accordingly, though Buell's 'ecocentric repossession of pastoral' discussed earlier recognises the adaptability of pastoral to approach various concerns, it fails to account for the challenges posed by the problems of environmental crisis to the structures and relationships of the mode. Bate's 'ecopoesis' is compromised along similar lines. The call to effectively *read* pastoral differently in light of environmental crisis contrasts with Glen A. Love's proposition of the need to *write* pastoral differently in order to both account for and respond to environmental concerns. The proposition of the environmentally critical possibilities of pastoral is shown to depend upon a conception of the mode that is necessarily altered by its subject matter, or by its particular orientation towards that subject matter. Like Buell, Love highlights the longevity of the appeal of pastoral's 'impetus', however, he acknowledges that 'we need to redefine pastoral in terms of the new and more complex understanding of nature'.⁷⁹ Therefore, Love is more specific in the account of pastoral needed to approach environmental concerns:

A pastoral for the present and the future calls for a better science of nature, a greater understanding of its complexity [...] and a more acute questioning of the values of the supposedly sophisticated society to which we are bound.⁸⁰

Love's approach can be seen to develop Buell's critique; the possibility of practical and methodological versions of pastoral can be understood to formally explicate the notion of 'strategized' uses of pastoral alluded to in *The Environmental Imagination*.⁸¹ For Love, the critical potential of the mode depends on its content and its viewpoint being reimagined according to refreshed criteria.

However, like Bate's reading of pastoral in this context discussed above, Love's proposition is also limited by the approach that he takes towards the concept of

⁷⁹ Glen A. Love, 'Revaluing Nature: Towards an Ecological Criticism' in Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, eds. *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1996), pp. 225-240 (p. 231).

⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 235.

⁸¹ Buell, *The Environmental Imagination*, p. 44.

‘ecology’ and its relationship to pastoral: the ‘radical awareness of its primal energy and stability’ threatens to undermine his appeal to science by relying upon outmoded notions of equilibrium ecology, and his simplistic opposition of ‘eco-consciousness as a corrective to ego-consciousness’ is overly reductive.⁸² Love’s approach here risks couching the awareness of changing environmental conditions within the familiar boundaries of the idealised conceptions of nature and the presumption of the possibility of a harmonious relationship between the human and the natural that Williams’s critique discussed above so effectively exposed. As Daniel Botkin evocatively explains, ‘whenever we seek to find constancy we discover change [...] The old idea of a static landscape, like a single musical chord sounded forever, must be abandoned, for such a landscape never existed except in our imagination’.⁸³ In the versions of pastoral identified in the following chapters, I argue that this desire and its potentially obfuscatory effects are recognised and themselves questioned as part of the reflexive approach to the appeal and challenges of pastoral modes of thought in this context.

Despite this, Love’s approach usefully highlights the ways that pastoral may be combined with or supplemented by concepts and ideas that are not typically part of its make-up: to ‘make strange bedfellows’, as Frederick Garber has put it.⁸⁴ As Marinelli suggests, it is a feature specific to the mode, ‘capable of assuming a form peculiar to itself and also of interpenetrating other forms [...] to marry, frequently and bigamously, above itself’.⁸⁵ As the following chapters will discuss, in contemporary writing the pastoral is tempered by the presence of other methods of understanding its themes and conventions. Ecological knowledge, as well as social and political concerns supplements the mode, and the interconnections between these considerations recognised by Williams, Bate and Garrard above lead to the combination of the relationships of pastoral with further techniques of relating to and representing the material world, from ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ sciences to history and archaeology.

⁸² Love, p. 233; p. 235.

⁸³ Daniel Botkin, *Discordant Harmonies: A New Ecology for the 21st Century*, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 62.

⁸⁴ Garber, p. 432.

⁸⁵ Marinelli, p. 8.

The idea of pastoral's 'flexibility' has much currency in contemporary work on the mode, and is accompanied by efforts to identify, label and quantify the form, its uses and their effects in conjunction with environmental concerns.⁸⁶ In their recent collection *New Versions of Pastoral: Post-Romantic, Modern and Contemporary Responses to the Tradition* (2009), David James and Phillip Tew describe the mode as 'capable' of 'fluid and complicated ideological negotiations' and suggest that realising the possibilities of 'recognising the propensity for pastoral to elicit a variety of political and aesthetic adaptations' requires a 'more flexible yet particularising account of pastoral'.⁸⁷ In *Pastoral and the Humanities: Arcadia Re-Inscribed* (2006), Mathilde Skoie and Sonia Bjørnstad Velázquez argue that environmental concerns have made 'the question "whither pastoral?" all the more pressing', and stress the possibilities of 'the space offered by pastoral [...] for convening and addressing [...] questions about humanity itself and its relationship to an indifferent world'.⁸⁸

The interest in naming and differentiating the pastoral by theme and period is not new. The question of the definition of pastoral has been subject to measures of both theme and quality, and efforts to mitigate for its heterogeneity and contrasting theoretical applications and orientations. As Martha Hale Shackford observes, 'pastoral has, in many cases, justly been a word of reproach and ridicule [...] Pastoral, idyll, eclogue, bucolic are used interchangeably for productions that range from exquisite poetry to sustained doggerel'.⁸⁹ Buell uses an endnote in *The Environmental Imagination* to explain his 'elastic sense' of the term 'pastoral' to refer to 'all literature that celebrates an ethos of rurality [...] over an ethos of metropolitanism'. Buell states a preference for the term 'naturism' over 'pastoralism', firstly as a means of negotiating the latter's 'ideological and aesthetic baggage' and secondly as 'referring unequivocally

⁸⁶ Alpers, *What is Pastoral?* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 44; Rosenmeyer, p. 3.

⁸⁷ David James and Phillip Tew, 'Reenvisioning Pastoral' in David James and Phillip Tew, eds. *New Versions of Pastoral: Post-Romantic, Modern and Contemporary Responses to the Tradition*, (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2009), p. 1.

⁸⁸ Mathilde Skoie and Sonia Bjørnstad Velázquez, *Pastoral and the Humanities: Arcadia Re-Inscribed*, (Bristol: Bristol Phoenix Press, 2006), p. xi; p. xv.

⁸⁹ Martha Hale Shackford, 'A Definition of the Pastoral Idyll', *PMLA* 19.4 (1904): 583-592, p. 583.

to the material nonhuman environment'.⁹⁰ Similarly, the suspicion directed towards the pastoral leads Timothy Saunders to differentiate between 'pastoral' and 'bucolic' in favour of the latter in the introduction to *Bucolic Ecology* (2008).⁹¹ Marx and Rosand also distinguish contemporary accounts of pastoral from their predecessors by using new names, describing the difference between 'pastoral' and 'pastoralisms' by the ways that the latter 'privileges the mode, the perspective or the mentality that is brought to bear on material'.⁹² Dixon Hunt posits that from this position, the conventions of pastoral can be queried, and that 'other circumstances of pastoral' can be confronted.⁹³ These definitions allow for Marx's explanation that:

The new pastoralism that I am trying to imagine surely will be very different in viewpoint and in tone. But the difference will, I believe, prove to be less significant, finally, than the persistence of those underlying concerns that always have given the mode its distinctiveness.⁹⁴

However, for the purposes of this study I will use the term 'pastoral'. The definitions of the terms 'pastoral', 'bucolic', 'eclogue' all converge upon 'pastoral', and as Rosenmeyer effectively summarises, 'the terms [...] shift about so much that their usefulness as distinguishing labels has become questionable'.⁹⁵ Whilst this thesis identifies a specific adaptation of the pastoral in relation to particular temporal factors and realised through particular thematic developments, by keeping the term 'pastoral' I intend my usage to encompass its divergent meanings and interpretations according to context, and to emphasise that my reading is conceived with the multifarious critical and creative legacies of the term in mind. I argue that pastoral needs to be used in name and in recognition of the complex and contradictory histories with which the term and the

⁹⁰ Buell, *The Environmental Imagination*, p. 439.

⁹¹ Timothy Saunders, *Bucolic Ecology: Virgil's Eclogues and the Environmental Literary Tradition*, (London: Duckworth, 2008), p. 8. For more on the distinctions between 'pastoral' and 'bucolic' see Anthony Verity and Richard Hunter, ed., *Theocritus' Idylls*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. xvii; E. Kegel-Brinkgreve, *The Echoing Woods: Bucolic and Pastoral from Theocritus to Wordsworth*, (Amsterdam: J. C. Gieben, 1991), p. 1.

⁹² Dixon Hunt, 'Pastorals and Pastoralisms', p. 14.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁹⁴ Marx, 'Does Pastoralism Have a Future?', p. 222-3.

⁹⁵ "pastoral, n. and adj.". OED Online. June 2013. Oxford University Press. 11 July 2013 <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/138625?rskey=WF4VB9&result=1&isAdvanced=false>>. See also Rosenmeyer, p. 8; Marinelli, p. 9, for similar arguments.

form are freighted in order to understand the critical background against which its contemporary forms must be taken, and to take full advantage of the multiplicity and reflexivity of the form whilst acknowledging the positive and negative ways in which these characteristics may be appropriated. In this way, my understanding of the mode can be interpreted to develop the historical consciousness of Marx's 'complex pastoral' in a self-reflective capacity.⁹⁶ In so doing, I acknowledge Judith Haber's insight that the pastoral must be understood as 'a mode that worked insistently against itself, problematizing both its own definition and stable definitions within its texts'.⁹⁷ Harry Berger Jr. calls this 'metapastoral': the understanding of the way that 'pastoral [...] presents itself in the act of (mis)representing the pastoral that fathered it'.⁹⁸

At this point, it is also worth noting that the importance of the surroundings of pastoral in the tradition at all has been argued against. Addressing the multiplicity of interpretations of the mode that I mentioned at the beginning of this section, Alpers criticises both the 'ungoverned inclusiveness' of the usages of the mode and the 'modern misunderstanding' of 'landscape' as 'the definitive phenomenon of pastoral'.⁹⁹ In his attempt to pin down the 'representative anecdote' of the pastoral, recalling some of the perspectives described above, Alpers suggests that the focus of the tradition is in fact shepherds, or more specifically, shepherds as representative of men.¹⁰⁰ In attempting to clarify the characteristic interest of the pastoral, Alpers offers a response to the complex and contested status of the form.

In contrast, Dana Phillips takes issue with the apparent reductiveness of Alpers's argument, writing that though there is value to be had in 'heeding' efforts to pin down the characteristics of the form, the definition proposed here limits its critical application to a specific context. He contends that such limitation 'would prevent altogether the heuristic use of the term I wish to make', arguing that 'with all due respect to herdsmen,

⁹⁶ Marx, *The Machine in the Garden*, p. 363.

⁹⁷ Judith Haber, *Pastoral and the Poetics of Self-Contradiction: Theocritus to Marvell*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 1.

⁹⁸ Harry Berger Jr, 'The Origins of Bucolic Representation: Disenchantment and Revision in Theocritus' Seventh Idyll', *Classical Antiquity*, 3.1 (1984), pp. 1-39, (p. 2).

⁹⁹ Paul Alpers, *The Singer of the Eclogues: A Study of Virgilian Pastoral*, (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1979), p. 6.

¹⁰⁰ Alpers, 'What is Pastoral?', p. 456.

the interest of the pastoral for me lies more in the philosophical debate it engenders about the proper relation of nature and culture and less in its report on the workaday details of animal husbandry or the love lives of shepherds'.¹⁰¹

Yet, Alpers's 'insistence' on 'shepherds' does not actually limit his conception of the pastoral in the way that Phillips describes above.¹⁰² In fact, it may be understood to further Garrard's comment mentioned above regarding the relationship of pastoral to nature: arguing that the pastoral is about people rather than nature is surely on the same spectrum as the understanding that the version of nature that pastoral presents is necessarily mediated by the means by which it is perceived and represented. As Simon Schama suggests, 'nature is culture before it is nature', and it is this relationship that concerns the pastoral.¹⁰³ Rosenmeyer links Alpers's line of thought to Samuel Johnson, who suggested that the form may be recognised by the 'representation of an action or passion, by its effects upon a country life'.¹⁰⁴ Alpers's account of pastoral as concerned with 'the human imagination and the home it finds and makes for itself in the world' can be seen to correspond to the understanding of pastoral that I have been outlining in this chapter, focusing on the ideas of the human and the natural and their representation and interpretation.¹⁰⁵

Rather than limiting the pastoral to a particular temporal or thematic set of conditions, Alpers's definition of pastoral can be understood to extend to various periods and concerns, focusing upon the representation and interpretation of human actions. In this way, as Ken Hiltner suggests, versions of 'environmental consciousness' can be gleaned from the appearance and treatment of nature and human-nature relations in pastoral not in spite of, but as another facet of, its interest in human concerns.¹⁰⁶ In this

¹⁰¹ Dana Phillips, 'Don DeLillo's Postmodern Pastoral' in Michael P. Branch, ed. *Reading the Earth: New Directions in the Study of Literature and Environment*, (Moscow, Idaho: University of Idaho Press, 1998), p. 236.

¹⁰² Ibid, p. 236.

¹⁰³ Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, (London: Harper Collins, 1995), p. 7.

¹⁰⁴ Rosenmeyer, p. 179; Samuel Johnson, 'The Rambler No. 36, Saturday, July 21, 1750' in *The Rambler*, ed. W. J. Bate and Albrecht B. Strauss, Vol VI, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1969), pp. 195-200 (p. 196).

¹⁰⁵ Alpers, *What is Pastoral?*, p. 65.

¹⁰⁶ Ken Hiltner, *What Else is Pastoral? Renaissance Literature and the Environment*, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2011), p. 38. See also Saunders, Leach and Gutzwiller for similar perspectives.

way, even apparently reductive interpretations of pastoral can be useful in shedding further light upon the emergence and the forms of contemporary versions of pastoral. That said, picking up and developing Phillips's objections, I argue that Alpers's distinction between the human and the natural is the problem with the definition that he offers here, which fails to account for the issues against which pastoral must be measured in the context of environmental uncertainty. As I have explained throughout this chapter, the interconnectivity between these distinctions is brought to the fore in this context.

In his theorisation of 'post-pastoral', Terry Gifford presents a definition for versions of pastoral that account for and respond to these issues. Gifford acknowledges the allure and the limitations of the pastoral, the existence of the 'corrective' anti-pastoral, and the contemporary challenges posed to the tradition by 'a new kind of concern for "environment"'.¹⁰⁷ In so doing, Gifford offers a more direct means of dealing with these difficulties, contrasting with the approaches discussed above. In particular, dealing with the difficulties that he observes are implied by Buell in a more practical way, Gifford argues that "a mature environmental aesthetics" would need to recognise that some literature has gone beyond the closed circuit of pastoral and anti-pastoral to achieve a vision of an integrated natural world that includes the human'.¹⁰⁸ Gifford proposes 'post-pastoral' as 'a new term to refer to literature that is aware of the anti-pastoral and of the conventional illusions upon which Arcadia is premised but which finds a language to outflank these dangers with a vision of accommodated humans'.¹⁰⁹ However, he explains that 'this is not a temporal term, but a conceptual one: its "post" is not "after", but "beyond"': the considerations of 'post-pastoral' address and develop upon the concerns of the tradition.¹¹⁰ Accordingly, Gifford defines his 'post-pastoral' by way of six criteria which range from 'the recognition of a creative-destructive universe' and the interconnected 'awareness of nature as culture and culture as nature' to 'an awe in attention to nature' in which 'consciousness becomes conscience – awe becomes humility' and the 'ecofeminist realisation that the exploitation of the

¹⁰⁷ Gifford, *Pastoral*, p. 147.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, p. 148.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, p. 149.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, p. 149.

planet is of the same mindset as the exploitation of women and minorities'.¹¹¹ He locates these criteria in various literary forms and periods, highlighting in particular its modern and contemporary appearances.¹¹²

Gifford notes the parallels between the distinct concept of a 'post-pastoral' mode of writing and previous distinctions made between different forms and functions of pastoral, highlighting in particular that:

Marx had already given us his definition of 'complex pastoral' [...], itself a variation perhaps on Schiller's 'naïve/sentimental idyll' [...], Harry Berger's 'weak/strong' (or 'metapastoral') distinction [...], Auden's 'Arcadian/Utopian pastoral' and Alpers's earlier 'soft/hard' pastoral.¹¹³

However, he separates out the key development of 'post-pastoral' as its relevance to 'today's cultural environmental crisis'.¹¹⁴ Gifford sees 'post-pastoral' as performing an active environmentalist function. He argues that 'it is because environmental crisis is also a cultural crisis that we need to re-examine what insights pastoral can offer us in its mode of dialogue across our conventional separations of categories of knowledge and their discourses'.¹¹⁵ He continues: 'the environmental crisis is also a crisis of human relations – that is, how some forms of shepherding are not only detrimental to other shepherds, but also to the very existence of shepherds themselves'.¹¹⁶ In so doing, he recalls Alpers's definition of the 'representative anecdote' of 'true pastoral' as concerning 'shepherds', dealing with the term in the extended metaphorical form

¹¹¹ Ibid, p. 162-165.

¹¹² See Gifford, *Pastoral*, p. 147-165; 'Biosemiology and Globalism in *The Rapture* by Liz Jensen', *English Studies*, 91.7 (2010), pp. 713-727; 'Afterword: New Senses of "Environment," New Versions of Pastoral' in Tew and James (eds), *New Versions of Pastoral: Post-Romantic, Modern, and Contemporary Responses to the Tradition*, (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2009), pp. 245-257; 'Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* and a Post-Pastoral Theory of Fiction', in Martin Simonson, David Rio and Amaia Ibarra, eds., *A Contested West: New Readings of Place in Western American Literature*, (London: Portal Editions, 2013), pp. 43-60; 'Post-Pastoral as a Tool for Ecocriticism' in *Pastoral and the Humanities: Arcadia Re-Inscribed*, eds. Mathilde Skoie and Sonia Bjørnstad Velázquez, (Bristol: Bristol Phoenix Press, 2006), 14-24; *Reconnecting with John Muir: Essays in Post-Pastoral Practice*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006).

¹¹³ Gifford, 'Post-Pastoral as a Tool for Ecocriticism', p. 18.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, p. 18.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, p. 16.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, p. 16.

alluded to in Alpers's original sense to refer to human beings in general. Gifford aligns his reading of pastoral and his proposition of 'post-pastoral' with Alpers's influential critique whilst re-appropriating Alpers's extended use of the term to environmentalist purposes, combining its understanding as a critical tool with its interpretation as a form of writing that encounters natural world, and the ways that it is represented and understood. As I have suggested, environmental uncertainty puts the conventions of pastoral into new contexts. Similarly, Gifford sees the mode reanimated by its relevance to representing and exploring environmental concerns. Gifford sees pastoral's contribution here as a kind of 'healing work', positioning 'the notion of the pastoral as an image of an accommodated way of living'.¹¹⁷ In this way, Gifford can be seen to develop the critical recovery of pastoral proposed by Buell, Love and Bate by identifying the re-orientation of the mode required by the premise of environmental concerns.

Also championing the critical potential of the pastoral to address environmental concerns through acknowledging and developing the challenges that its recognition poses to the themes and conventions of the mode, Martin Ryle has outlined a contemporary version of 'neo-pastoral' in contemporary fiction.¹¹⁸ 'Neo-pastoral' adds a similar awareness of the interconnectivity between the contrasts of the pastoral demonstrated by the recognition of environmental concerns to the critical perspective that they may offer, along with a self-conscious approach to the representation of that perspective. Ryle has described the 'eco-didactic' value of 'neo-pastoral', understood as 'a self-reflexive mode of writing that is aware, and makes its readers aware, of its indebtedness to pastoral, and has adopted elements of that convention to intervene in current culture and politics'.¹¹⁹ In Ryle's theorisation, Alpers's 'representative anecdote' is recalled in the emphasis upon pastoral's focus upon human actions and interpretations over its representation of nature, or the material world more generally, in combination

¹¹⁷ Ibid, p. 24.

¹¹⁸ See Martin Ryle, 'Neo-Pastoral Eco-Didactics: Ali Smith's *The Accidental*' *Green Letters: Studies in Ecocriticism*, 10 (2009), 8-19 and Martin Ryle, 'The Past, the Future and the Golden Age: Some Contemporary Versions of Pastoral' in *The Pleasures and Politics of Consuming Differently*, ed. by Kate Soper, Martin Ryle and Lyn Thomas (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

¹¹⁹ Ryle, 'Neo-Pastoral Eco-Didactics: Ali Smith's *The Accidental*', p. 16.

with the active capacity of the mode to challenge and to change accepted modes of thought and behaviour.

Gifford's and Ryle's interpretations indicate that such versions of pastoral demand new understandings of its scope and function. In different ways, both describe the conventions of pastoral re-configured around imperatives of environmental consciousness and accountability. Others have been more tentative in their interpretation of the intersection of pastoral and environmental concerns and its potential impact upon the forms and effects of the mode. For instance, Phillips reads a version of 'blocked pastoral' in Don DeLillo's *White Noise* (1985) in relation to environmental concerns in which the challenges to the mode posed by the uncertainties of environmental crisis are recognised as impediments to its execution. Phillips's reading positions the failure of pastoral as a critical development in itself, the analysis of the terms of which holds the potential to explore and understand further the causes and effects of environmental crisis through the themes and conventions of the pastoral mode.¹²⁰ Phillip Tew describes an 'enigmatical pastoral' emerging in the fiction of Jim Crace in particular, in which the themes and conventions of pastoral, particularly the relationship between the urban and the rural, are understood as 'abrasive [...] antagonisms', 'unalleviated' tensions that at once structure and trouble the environments of Crace's fiction.¹²¹ In these examples, the pastoral is used to access and to complicate the ways that environments are experienced and understood, its themes and conventions positioned as means of representing and interrogating the relationships that they comprise.

Offering an approach that both recognises the impact of environmental concerns upon the pastoral in form and approach and the possibilities of new versions of pastoral that resist and develop its traditional forms, Nick Selby reads a version of 'choked pastoral' in the works of contemporary poets Harriet Tarlo and Richard Caddel.¹²² The version of the form that Selby seeks to identify in these examples is based on the understanding that 'the very pressure to describe the landscape is threatened by the ways

¹²⁰ Phillips, 'Don DeLillo's Postmodern Pastoral', pp. 235-246.

¹²¹ Philip Tew, 'Jim Crace's Enigmatical Pastoral' in Tew and James, eds., *New Versions of Pastoral*, p. 231.

¹²² Nick Selby, 'Reading England: pastoral, elegy and the politics of place in Richard Caddel and Harriet Tarlo', *Textual Practice* 25.5 (2011), pp. 893-911, (p. 897).

in which the human translates the land from a thing perceived into a sign or signal of our presence on the land'.¹²³ Selby argues that this understanding manifests as 'a significant 'opening out' of the pastoral tradition that operates as a kind of act of 'writing *away*' from the traditions in which the writers find themselves: 'although their preoccupation with the English landscape recalls a lyric, pastoral, tradition, this also expressly provides them with a means to challenge and deconstruct traditional ways of experiencing "Nature"'.¹²⁴ He suggests that such work 'enables a re-envisioning of that tradition that attends to a set of delicate interrelations between text and land rather than merely marking an apparently irreconcilable gap between the two as is often found in pastoral and anti-pastoral traditions'.¹²⁵

In all of these readings, the pastoral emerges as a flexible and reflexive form that is capable of adapting towards differing sets of conditions and concerns by responding to the ways that such conditions and concerns impinge upon its themes and conventions. Each of these conceptualisations responds to Marx's speculation for 'new versions of pastoral' in combination with environmental concerns, and contributes, in different ways, to an emerging picture of the premises for and possible outcomes of the form in this context. These ideas register the effect of the recognition of environmental crisis upon the pastoral, see the critical potential of this recognition and develop the potential of understanding new versions of pastoral that account for and respond to it. As these critics suggest, it is the relationship between the human and the natural, and the interpretation of the definitions and the scope of each in relation to environmental concerns that preoccupies new experimentation with pastoral.

The reading of the features and effects of contemporary versions of pastoral presented in this thesis shares and challenges aspects of the ideas outlined above. As Gifford suggests, an emphasis on the importance of the representation of the simultaneously distinct and interconnected definitions of the human and the natural is significant, though not necessarily in adherence to the formulation set out in his criteria for such representations. As Ryle has suggested, the stipulations themselves can have a

¹²³ Ibid, p. 897.

¹²⁴ Ibid, p. 904, original emphasis.

¹²⁵ Ibid, p. 898.

limiting effect, and I would add that they are not necessarily applicable to the complex and diverse forms that contemporary pastoral is taking.¹²⁶ A common feature or effect of these forms is the critical capacity of the mode, as Ryle points out, but the didactic manner that he envisages is not always in evidence, or indeed required for the illuminatory effects of the tensive reconfigurations of pastoral to occur. Furthermore, understood as ‘post’, ‘neo’, ‘blocked’, ‘enigmatical’ and ‘choked’, though the impact of environmental considerations upon uses of the pastoral are acknowledged, the opportunities opened up by the ways that the mode may be adapted to deal with this impact are obscured. By distinguishing these identifications using classificatory terms that point to the form, effect or temporality that characterises their particular reading, though effectively making the case for specialised interpretations of pastoral, risk becoming exclusive and therefore reductive, as explored above.

In addition, as I will explain in the following chapters, the environmentalist connection between the emergence of new pastorals in conjunction with environmental concerns present in Gifford’s and Ryle’s theorisations presents difficulties. I am wary of attributing to the pastoral an orientation towards a particular agenda or methodology in this respect. I suggest that rather, contemporary versions of pastoral use the tensions inherent in the connections and the contrasts of the mode to illuminate and to interrogate the environmental associations and implications of its relationships. I suggest that it used more commonly as a means to explore, than to instruct, with regards to environmental concerns and responses to those concerns. The thematic and ideological constraints that Gifford and Ryle apply to their interpretations of contemporary pastoral limit the exploration of the uses of pastoral in recent writing, which may exceed or conflict with these ideas, whilst still presenting new applications and appearances of the conventions and attitudes of pastoral in conjunction with environmental considerations.

Borrowing from Gifford’s ‘thematic’ distinction between pastoral, anti-pastoral and ‘post-pastoral’, I suggest that the multiplicity of new versions of pastoral may be understood using Williams’s concept of the ‘emergent form’, existing concurrently but distinctively alongside ‘prevailing’ and ‘residual’ forms: in this case, the various and

¹²⁶ Ryle, ‘Neo-Pastoral Eco-Didactics: Ali Smith’s *The Accidental*’, p. 16.

conflicting legacies of the pastoral tradition.¹²⁷ Phillips offers the notion of ‘displacement’ in the case of the appearance of new versions of pastoral that is also helpful to this understanding. He argues that ‘it is not so much the replacement as it is the displacement of older forms by newer ones, and the potential overlapping or even the merger of all those forms in an increasingly crowded cultural and natural landscape’.¹²⁸ A deconstructive sense of closure can be seen to be at work here in pastoral’s sequential but also overlapping stages of demise, reformulation and rebirth.

I argue that new versions of pastoral can be seen to emerge in relation and in response to concerns about environmental crisis. This context brings the themes and conventions of pastoral into new focus, from new perspectives, but it also forces them into new alignments. The recognition of the causes and the effects of pastoral reveal connections and disjunctions in addition and in contrast to the ones supposed to exist. Ideas of ecology that correspond to pastoral are outmoded, and ideas of pastoral that reflect them are too. However, the ecological awareness of the ‘interdependencies’ that comprise our environments can also be used to shed new light upon the interrelationships of the pastoral: between the human and the natural, the urban and the rural, and the past and the present. With these ideas in mind, I argue that contemporary versions of pastoral contain a number of key features of the mode. These features appear in forms specific to the treatment of environmental concerns in these versions, connecting contemporary pastoral to previous incarnations of the form, but at the same time marking a new development in pastoral writing. New understandings can be seen in the treatment of the contrast between everyday and pastoral landscapes and the impulse to move from one to the other, alongside the idea that the latter can offer relief from and perspective upon the former are present. The relationships between the human and the natural, the urban and the rural and the past and the present are shown from alternative perspectives. The ideas that the experience of the pastoral world can be illuminative, instructive or transformatory are reinvigorated but also complicated. These features gain new appeal, significance and potential in the context of environmental uncertainty, but at the same time, are made vulnerable by its recognition, causes and effects. In the

¹²⁷ Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press., 1977), p. 125.

¹²⁸ Phillips, ‘Don DeLillo’s Postmodern Pastoral’, p. 239.

following section, I will outline the ways that new versions of pastoral can be seen to emerge in contemporary British writing, and demonstrate some of the ways that these versions can be recognised.

3. The New Pastoral in Contemporary British Writing

It is in contemporary British writing that this thesis tracks the development of new versions of pastoral. The specialisation of this enquiry traces an emergent trend in writing that is concerned with the environment. I argue that the pastoral is a particularly prevalent form in British writing and culture, owing to the interconnected sense of the material and historical environments of the country and its dense literary history of writing concerned with human-nature relations. A relative sense of the enmeshing of the human and the non-human across time and space is inherent in British writing about the environment. Furthermore, as the editors of the recent collection *Ecocritical Theory: New European Approaches* (2011) suggest, there is a peculiar sensitivity towards ‘cultural landscapes, with the pastoral rather than wilderness, given the shaping impact of relatively large populations on the land over the centuries, and hence with a largely domesticated and [...] even ‘artificial’ nature dependent for its survival on human agency [...] and to conceiving of nature as a cultural responsibility and project’.¹²⁹

An emerging interest in human-nature relations can be seen in British writing and criticism throughout the 1990s, a trend that can be seen to continue and develop in the 2000s, and to exist in burgeoning form in the 1980s. As Kerridge notes, throughout the fiction of the 1980s and 1990s, the environment may be noticed in examples such as Graham Swift’s *Waterland* (1983), Jenny Diski’s *Rainforest* (1987), Ian McEwan’s *The Child in Time* (1987), Julian Barnes’s *History of the World in 10½ Chapters* (1989) and A. S. Byatt’s *Angels and Insects* (1992). However, he observes that ‘these books do not approach environmentalism directly’.¹³⁰ Rather, the environment and the relationships

¹²⁹ Axel Goodbody and Kate Rigby, *Ecocritical Theory: New European Approaches*, (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2011), p. 3.

¹³⁰ Richard Kerridge, ‘Environmental Cliffhangers’, p. 243. See also Richard Kerridge, ‘Nature in the English Novel’ in Patrick D. Murphy, Terry Gifford and Katsumari Yamazato, eds., *The Literature of*

between the human and the natural by which it may be understood begin to be approached with a new intensity that can be seen to appear in such examples. Interest in the depiction and interpretation of environmental concerns can also be registered in the discussions of space, place and the relationships between the past and the present that figure in key publications addressing contemporary British writing in this period, including Philip Tew and Rod Mengham's *British Fiction Today* (2006), Tew's *The Contemporary British Novel* (2007), Richard Bradford's *The Novel Now: Contemporary British Fiction* (2007) and Nick Bentley's *British Fiction of the 1990s* (2005), where instances of these topics are framed as 'millennial concerns' and 'narrative geographies'.

Though versions of the tense structures of pastoral can be seen in many of these examples discussed in these works, these features are not explored directly in these instances. I suggest that a trend towards using and adapting the pastoral to represent and to reflect upon environmental concerns can be detected in examples of writing recognised to be dealing with such concerns at this time. For instance, in Jim Crace's *Arcadia* (1992), Adam Thorpe's *Ulverton* (1994) and W. G. Sebald's *The Rings of Saturn* (1995), pastoral relationships between the country and the city, the human and the natural, and the past and the present are both depicted and reflected upon within the works, innovatively using the conventions of the mode to explore the assumptions and the implications of the relationships upon which it is based.

Arcadia experiments with the themes and conventions of the pastoral mode, as both Tew and Doris Teske have observed.¹³¹ The novel focuses on pastoral perceptions of place, exploring the tensions between conceptions of the country and the city, and the ways in which they may be understood. Contrasts between imagination and experience are made apparent in the representation of both poles of the pastoral demarcation of the landscape. In the novel, the selectivity of pastoral vision is played out from different perspectives. City dweller Victor inherits the pastoral nostalgia for the countryside that

Nature: An International Sourcebook, (Chicago and London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1998), pp. 149-157, (p. 155).

¹³¹ See Philip Tew, *Jim Crace*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006); James and Tew eds., *New Versions of Pastoral*; Doris Teske, 'Jim Crace's *Arcadia*: Public Culture in the Postmodern City' in *London in Literature: Visionary Mappings of the Metropolis*, ed. Susana Onega and John A. Stotesbury, (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag, 2002), 165-182.

his displaced mother Em is unable to overcome, and transposes the idealised version of nature that it represents into an urban frame. From his 'simple country meal' at the top of a skyscraper, adorned with 'country' traditions unrecognised by rural characters to his desire to 'rise above' the inconveniences of 'the pigeons and the flies', Victor identifies with a version of nature far abstracted from the material world.¹³² In the construction of Arcadia, the idealisation of nature and the countryside is repackaged into the ultimate shopping mall, in the process, the novel uncovers the dislocated understanding of human-nature relations that the mode can promote. In its depiction of the resulting marketplace, the ecological implications of such understandings are shown.

Thorpe's approach to pastoral in *Ulverton* reveals the common idealisation of nature and the past, creating a sense of distrust of both which is rooted in their vulnerability to distortion through the processes of their construction. The novel depicts a succession of appropriations and interpretations of the village and its landscape over time, working through pastoral distinctions between the past and the present and the human and the natural and in so doing, establishing connections across and between these understandings. In the section 'Here 1988', through the description of the 'preservation' of the rural practices of the past in 'style' and 'look', the idealisation and simplification inherent in the pastoral relationships called up in the novel are exposed.¹³³ The fragmented structure of the novel allows conflicting accounts to be presented concurrently and those relationships are disrupted. As Dominic Head and Ingrid Gunby have observed, in *Ulverton*, the constructed character of the mode is in full view.¹³⁴

In *The Rings of Saturn*, Sebald presents a new take on the pastoral movement of retreat and return. Here, the scope of the mode is expanded to deal not only with the effects of the landscape upon the pastoral escapee, but also with the land that it covers itself, and the interconnectivity with other places, people and times that it represents. The text unravels the themes and conventions of pastoral by revealing additional understandings, connections and interrelations between people and places, the past and

¹³² Jim Crace, *Arcadia*, (London: Picador, 1992), p. 4; p. 49.

¹³³ Adam Thorpe, *Ulverton*, (London: Minerva, 1992), p. 354.

¹³⁴ Ingrid Gunby, 'History in Rags: Adam Thorpe's Reworking of England's National Past', *Contemporary Literature*, 4.1 (2003), pp. 44-72, (p. 62); Head, p. 75.

the present, and ideas of here-and-now that are held within the pastoral form. By focusing upon the pastoral environment in this way, Sebald establishes an ecological perspective upon the relationship between nature and humans which instigates a process of re-evaluation, changing the balance and focus of the relationship to challenge appropriations of nature and history which are based on idealistic and manipulative manifestations of nature.

In Head's *Introduction to Modern British Fiction 1950-1980* (2002), the appearances of the relationships between the human and the natural and the ways that particular places may be understood in contemporary writing are explored through the lens of pastoral itself, from the 'death of the nature novel' to 'the re-evaluation of pastoral', with reference to Gifford's work on the topic.¹³⁵ Head draws attention to works including Bruce Chatwin's *On the Black Hill* (1982), Christopher Hart's *The Harvest* (1999) and Raymond Williams's *People of the Black Mountains* (1989 and 1990). However, Head sees an awkward fit troubling the development of the connections between pastoral and contemporary fiction. As both he and Kerridge have observed, accounting for environmental concerns challenges narrative strategies to new issues of time and scale, requiring adaptations in approach.¹³⁶ Yet, in the ways that the themes and conventions of pastoral are employed in the examples discussed above, I argue that the pastoral is being used and adapted in contemporary writing in order to approach these issues and their implications for the form itself.

Furthermore, and in spite of these reservations, pastoral tensions can be seen in relation to environmental concerns in further examples of recent British writing. As Peter Boxall has recently suggested, 'the contemporary novel is engaged in an extraordinarily intimate refashioning of the ties which bind us in our environments'.¹³⁷ The development of literary fiction concerned with environmental issues and attentive to material world and human-nature relations is accompanied by interest in the topic across various generic forms and styles. As Ursula Heise and Adam Trexler and Adeline Johns-

¹³⁵ Head, p.189.

¹³⁶ Ibid, p. 194; Kerridge, 'Environmental Cliffhangers', p. 243.

¹³⁷ Peter Boxall, *Twenty-First-Century Fiction: A Critical Introduction*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 14.

Putra, for example, have argued, environmental issues have appeared in science and speculative fiction and the thriller.¹³⁸ Additionally, new environmental concerns in Britain have begun to emerge with the development of the ‘new nature writing’. Furthermore, different aspects of these forms and styles have appeared in new combinations as environmental concerns are registered through innovative uses of aspects of fictional and non-fictional techniques. I argue that these instances of writing about environmental concerns are connected by the emergence of new experimentation with pastoral themes and conventions.

In the texts discussed in the subsequent chapters, as well as examples such as Maggie Gee’s *The Ice People* (1999) and *The Flood* (2004), David Mitchell’s *Cloud Atlas* (2004) and Jeanette Winterson’s *The Stone Gods* (2007), Richard Mabey’s *Nature Cure* (2005), Mark Cocker’s *Crow Country* (2008), Olivia Laing’s *To The River* (2011), Sylvain Tesson’s *Consolations of the Forest* (2011) and Jean Sprackland’s *Strands* (2012), the adoption of and experimentation with pastoral can be detected. In these works, the themes and conventions of the pastoral are employed and used to explore attitudes towards and appropriations of ideas of nature and the human, providing the means to represent and to query these conceptions, the relationships that they underpin and the traits and behaviours that they engender.

In the examples that this thesis will examine, a specifically pastoral tension is present, in varying degrees, in the relationships between the country and the city, the human and the natural, and the past and the present. These writings are not simply concerned with nature, the rural, or even ‘the environment’, but with the relationships that comprise the material and interpretive understandings of the simultaneously human-natural surroundings in the context of developing environmental uncertainties. There is of course a danger of reducing pastoral to writing about nature, and attributing all writing that is concerned with nature as pastoral. In the context of the pastoral that I have attempted to set forth in this chapter, the pastoral is concerned not only with ideas

¹³⁸ Heise, *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global*, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 19; Adam Trexler and Adeline Johns-Putra, ‘Climate Change in Literature and Literary Criticism’, *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change* 2.2 (2010), pp. 185-200 (p. 186).

of nature, but with the interrelated cultural factors that impinge upon those ideas, and newly, with the effects and implications of those ideas themselves. As the examples I've suggested here show, this kind of pastoral writing can be found across genres and working towards different effects and outcomes, linked by a common awareness of extra-pastoral factors and a sense of introspection or self-consciousness.

The proliferation of versions of pastoral in contemporary writing and criticism surely exceeds the 'occasional twitches' that Barrell and Bull allowed for future manifestations of the mode following their conclusion of its now 'lifeless form'.¹³⁹ Critically and creatively, the pastoral continues to be re-imagined and re-evaluated, suggesting that Love's proposition that 'we need to redefine pastoral in terms of the new and more complex understanding of nature' is still underway.¹⁴⁰ Garrard appends his 2004 conclusion regarding pastoral in *Ecocriticism* that 'ecocritics have tended to be highly suspicious of pastoral, albeit unwilling to dispense entirely with the implicit critique of contemporary society that it may offer' in his 2012 revised edition with acknowledgement of the continued ecocritical interest in the mode. Observing that 'the ambivalence of pastoral will not be eliminated by rather enhanced by ecocritical readings', Garrard maintains his perspective towards the uncertain ecocritical value of pastoral yet effectively leaves open the possibilities to be gleaned from such 'enhanced ambivalence'.¹⁴¹ Acknowledging that '[t]he pastoral has long been deemed unsuitable and escapist', Astrid Bracke posits questioning 'what such problematic texts reveal about our experience and perceptions of the (natural) environment' within 'a mature ecocritical practice'.¹⁴² Paraphrasing Buell's call for pastoral to form the basis for a 'mature environmental aesthetics' in *The Environmental Imagination*, Bracke's suggestion here points towards the increasingly self-reflexive formulation of contemporary versions of pastoral.¹⁴³ Pastoral provides not only the opportunity to temporarily escape from instances of crisis but also the possibility to reflect upon and

¹³⁹ Barrell and Bull, p. 433.

¹⁴⁰ Love, p. 231.

¹⁴¹ Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, 2nd edn, p. 62.

¹⁴² Astrid Bracke, 'Redrawing the Boundaries of Ecocritical Practice', *ISLE Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, 17.4 (2010): 765-767, (p. 766).

¹⁴³ Buell, *The Environmental Imagination*, p. 32.

address those issues. In this way, Marx's influential definition of 'complex pastoral' can be understood to underpin numerous contemporary readings of the pastoral:

Most literary works called pastorals [...] do not finally permit us to come away with anything like the simple, affirmative attitude we adopt toward pleasing rural scenery. In one way or another [...] these works manage to qualify, or call into question, or bring irony to bear against the illusion of peace and harmony in a green pasture.¹⁴⁴

Conclusion

Through the arguments presented in this chapter, I have established that the pastoral appears in new forms in contemporary writing, and that these appearances call up and adapt the themes and conventions associated with the tradition. As several recent critics have observed, the mode is capable of reflecting and responding to environmental concerns, and is being used in new contexts and new configurations in order to do so. Acknowledging these contributions towards the recognition and theorization of the recent developments in pastoral writing, I have argued that the pastoral operates in ways that reflect but also ways that exceed and trouble these readings in contemporary British writing that is concerned with or inspired by environmental considerations. Such considerations have begun to emerge in British writing and criticism, and I have argued that in the period since 1990, a growing trend can be detected in which the pastoral is used in new ways to represent and to reflect on these considerations. As I have described, in new nature writing, genre fiction and literary fiction, environmental concerns are both registered and explored through the themes and conventions of the pastoral.

In the following three chapters, I explore recent versions of pastoral through three key areas of the mode that are refashioned in these instances. Addressing the

¹⁴⁴ Marx, *The Machine in the Garden*, p. 25.

concept of the pastoral retreat into nature in Chapter Two, the relationships of pastoral and their uses in Chapter Three, and the application of pastoral to environmental crisis in Chapter Four, I examine the intersection of the themes and conventions of the mode with environmental concerns and draw out the ways that the appearance and consideration of the latter directs the former into new configurations. By way of these analyses, I hope to illustrate and develop the understanding of pastoral established in this chapter, demonstrating the emergence of new versions of the mode in contemporary British writing that approaches environmental concerns.

Chapter Two

Pastoral Care: Escape into Nature

Our brains, after all,
are always at work on some quivers
of self organisation, however faint,
and it is from this that an order
arises, in places beautiful
and comforting, though more cruel, too,
than the previous state of ignorance.¹⁴⁵
W. G. Sebald

Contemporary environmentally-oriented literature and criticism are enmeshed with the afterlives of the traditions of nature writing and the pastoral mode. In recent years new examples of nature writing have proliferated, drawing fresh attention to the tensions between pastoral and ecological perspectives upon the environment, and our relationships with it. This chapter investigates the appearance of pastoral in contemporary British nature writing and the usages of the motif of an escape into nature. The allure and the impossibility of the concept and the potential for reflection that it generates can be seen to be the starting point of numerous recent explorations of human-nature relations and the principles that found them. Accordingly, it presents a challenging place from which to begin to unravel some of the uses of pastoral in contemporary versions of the form. Looking at several examples of contemporary nature writing, I address the topics of pastoral and escape in relation to their treatment of the themes of nature, nostalgia, wilderness and place. I argue that contemporary British nature writing presents versions of pastoral that are shaped around their interest in ecological considerations, and in particular, through the engagement with the theme of escape.

In this chapter, I examine the emergence of contemporary nature writing and identify its key features, drawing out its relationship to the pastoral mode and the ways in which the conventions of pastoral are adopted and challenged in order to respond to

¹⁴⁵ W.G. Sebald, *After Nature*, (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2002), p. 83.

ecological concerns. With reference to Roger Deakin's *Waterlog* (1999) and Kathleen Jamie's *Sightlines* (2012), I argue that the topic of nature is in contention in contemporary nature writing, as is the relationship of the writers to the versions of nature that they address. At once using and querying the pastoral notion of a retreat into nature, examples of the form can be seen to adapt this aspect of pastoral in order to explore the premises upon which it is predicated: specifically, the concepts of the location and the effects of pastoral nature and the dynamic of escape. In so doing, the implications of these premises themselves are questioned. In particular, I examine the treatment of escape and the conception of nature in Robert Macfarlane's *The Wild Places* (2007) and the transposition of the location of pastoral nature and its effects in Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts's *Edgeland*s (2011). Through analysis of these examples, the chapter demonstrates that new experimentation with the pastoral mode can be found in contemporary nature writing that addresses the concept of the 'flight from the city' and examines the ways that the pastoral dynamic of retreat into nature is approached and challenged as a response to environmental uncertainty using narratives of estrangement and reconciliation.¹⁴⁶

1. Contemporary Nature Writing and Pastoral

In *Green Letters 10*, Stephen E. Hunt discusses the recent abundance of new examples of British nature writing and their emergence in parallel with 'revelations about the quickening threat to global ecosystems and biodiversity', identifying 'a moment when the genre of nature writing flourished'.¹⁴⁷ Linking this contemporaneity further, in his introduction to *Granta 102*, 'The New Nature Writing', Jason Cowley sees an ecological consciousness common to the works included in the issue, and in addition, he observes a particular kind of engagement with their subject in light of this consciousness, explaining that:

¹⁴⁶ Marx, *The Machine in the Garden*, p. 5.

¹⁴⁷ Stephen E. Hunt, 'The Emergence of Psychoecology: The New Nature Writings of Roger Deakin, Mark Cocker, Robert Macfarlane and Richard Mabey', *Green Letters 10* (2009)70-77, (p. 70).

They share a sense that we are devouring our world, that there is simply no longer any natural landscape or ecosystem that is unchanged by humans. But they don't simply want to walk into the wild, to rhapsodize and commune: they aspire to see with a scientific eye and write with literary effect.¹⁴⁸

Cowley connects 'new nature writing' to the tradition of the form and highlights the ecological concern that inspires and influences its contemporary incarnations. In his classic study of nature writing, *The Rural Tradition*, W.J. Keith emphasises 'the premium put on truth and accuracy by most rural writers' and contends that a 'verifiable connection' to their subjects is a key component of the texts which correspond to his definition of the form.¹⁴⁹ In addition, the awareness of the impacts of human action upon the non-human that Cowley points to adds a socially as well as scientifically informed sensitivity to the new nature writers' perspectives, and gives a self-reflexive character to its contemporary vision. Not only is the natural world under scrutiny, but the viewpoint from which it is seen is also subject to analysis. Cowley's description both supplements and complicates the 'verifiable connection' described by Keith. The clarity associated with nature writing is not only oriented towards both ecologically and socially reflective functions, but also couched within a particular form. The shape of the form gestured towards here follows a clearly pastoral model of retreat and return, with a development or insight between the two with which the latter is supplemented. Significant also in Cowley's description above is the understanding of the 'literary effect' with which contemporary nature writing is intended, and through which it is pursued. The return journey is freighted with that experience and pursued with the intention to make use of it.

The connection between nature writing and pastoral writing has been recognised elsewhere, though from different angles. Don Scheese observes their structural similarities, summarising that 'the typical form of nature writing is a first-person, nonfiction account of an exploration both physical (outward) and mental (inward), of a

¹⁴⁸ Jason Cowley, ed. *Granta: The Magazine of New Writing 102: The New Nature Writing*, (London: Granta, 2008), p. 9.

¹⁴⁹ W. J. Keith, *The Rural Tradition: William Cobbett, Gilbert White and Other Non-Fiction Prose Writers of the English Countryside*, (Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1975), p. 15; p. 4.

predominantly non-human environment, as the protagonist follows the spatial movement of pastoralism from civilisation to nature'.¹⁵⁰ However, as Phillips notes, Scheese's schema omits the 'return to home'.¹⁵¹ Phillips suggests that this 'seems to naturalize the form', reducing the pastoral to a mode of representation that fails to account for its formal aspects.¹⁵² Furthermore, the 'place-consciousness of pastoral' that Scheese suggests is combined with the 'scientific curiosity of natural history' in nature writing corresponds to a reduced version of pastoral: the literary effect of the understanding and representation of its places is unacknowledged.¹⁵³

The problematic connection between pastoral and nature writing extends towards the question of the 'nature' that nature writing concerns. Phillips suggests that 'the word "natural" plays a double role in characterisations of nature writing', giving rise to the danger of 'taking nature writing as a given, and ignoring its cultural peculiarity and particularity'.¹⁵⁴ The reductive version of pastoral that can be identified in Scheese's definition above facilitates this effect: using the conventions of pastoral to present a version of nature supposed to be both sensitive and direct in its attention, understood more as a means of access to nature rather than a mode of writing about nature. The amalgamation of the two forms here appears to effectively re-name nature writing as pastoral, in so doing, selling both short: losing the reflective potential of pastoral and compromising the rigour of nature writing with the suggestibility of pastoral. Phillips identifies Buell's 'pastoral project', discussed in Chapter One, as an instance of such conflation to its cost.¹⁵⁵

The accounts of the connections between pastoral and nature writing above can be understood to illustrate what Patrick D. Murphy describes as the 'nonfiction prejudice', propped up by the 'fiction of nonfictionality'.¹⁵⁶ Murphy explains that:

¹⁵⁰ Don Scheese, *Nature Writing: The Pastoral Impulse in America*, (London: Prentice Hall, 1996), p. 6.

¹⁵¹ Dana Phillips, *The Truth of Ecology: Nature, Culture, and Literature in America*, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 187.

¹⁵² *Ibid*, p. 187.

¹⁵³ Scheese, p. 38.

¹⁵⁴ Phillips, *The Truth of Ecology*, p. 186.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p. 16.

¹⁵⁶ Patrick D. Murphy, *Farther Afield in Nature-Oriented Literature*, (Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 2000), p. 62.

The fiction of nonfictionality consists not so much of the belief that information can be presented in some unmediated way, but rather of the treatment of works that are labelled nonfiction as if they contain no fabrications and the pretence that objective facts when personally experienced have greater validity than speculations or fictive events in representing natural processes or generating truth.¹⁵⁷

Murphy is keen to caution against using the fiction of nonfictionality as the benchmark by which effective or authentic writing about nature may be judged because of the ‘danger of universalising ideas about discourses and writing’, privileging the viewpoint from which it is composed and that which it disseminates over other, alternative means of describing, interpreting and representing particular environments.¹⁵⁸ Furthermore, Murphy argues that privileging such viewpoints misdirects the issue of the various ways of seeing and understanding particular environments towards the question of accuracy, when in fact ‘the really salient feature of an environmental literary work may be its impact on the reader’s point of view’, that is, ‘the accuracy of the culturally located point of view’.¹⁵⁹

As discussed in Chapter One, the understanding of the pastoral as a mode of direct representation does not account for the complexity with which it is employed in contemporary British writing about nature. In this case, the ecological awareness and the intentions that it comes with that Cowley describes demand new approaches to the structure and expectations of contemporary British nature writing. The literary effects of the pastoral tradition are given fresh opportunities, and cast in a self-reflective light that illuminates their deliberate use and function. The interpretation and relation of experience in nature are held to account: emphasising experience and understanding rather than sustaining an impression of directness.

Taking pastoral nature as a given of course opens up the possibility of misdirection and compromise. In his influential text *Ecology without Nature*, Timothy

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 50.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 51.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 52.

Morton argues that both nature writing and ecocriticism are ‘too enmeshed in the ideology that churns out stereotypical ideas of nature to be of any use’.¹⁶⁰ The association of nature writing with the pastoral tradition is problematised here: specifically, the idea of a defining understanding of ‘nature’ in both form and effect. In contrast, Keith defines the treatment of its subject in nature writing as essentially at odds with the idealised version of nature that is associated with pastoral writing.¹⁶¹ Owing to the apparently empirical viewpoint of its writers and their direct representation of their subject, Keith argued that nature writing is distinct in form and approach from the pastoral tradition. Both Keith and Morton challenge the pastoral mode for the same reason: the version of nature that it conjures up. Despite this, Morton considers nature writing to be as idealised and thus as compromised ecologically as the pastoral writing that Keith seeks to distinguish it from. Morton’s critique is based around the understanding of ‘nature’ as a term which he calls ‘a Pandora’s Box, a word that encapsulates a potentially infinite series of disparate fantasy objects’.¹⁶² The ecological value of writing about ‘nature’ is here understood to be diminished by the ambiguity of the term.

As Morton points out, constructing and communicating a particular version of nature while purporting it to be a realistic representation can be considered to be ecologically unhelpful. By training the focus upon such a representation and generating a version of our relationship with and impact upon nature through its lens, the actual condition of the natural world and our influence upon it remain at a distance. Shrouded from view in this distance resides the possibility of ecological irresponsibility and its consequences. Morton explains:

As well as producing arguments, ecological writers fashion compelling *images* – literally, a *view* of the world. These images rely upon a sense of *nature*. But nature keeps giving writers the slip. And in its confusing, ideological intensity, nature ironically impedes a proper relationship with the

¹⁶⁰ Timothy Morton, *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*, (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 13.

¹⁶¹ Keith, *The Rural Tradition*, p. 4.

¹⁶² Morton, *Ecology Without Nature*, p. 14.

earth and its life-forms, which would, of course, include ethics and science.

Nature writing itself has accounted for the way nature gives us the slip.¹⁶³

In short, Morton proposes that the term ‘nature’, and by association, nature writing, must be dispensed with in order to effectively approach the issues inherent in our relationship with the non-human world. Nature writing, and the idealisation of nature, sits between the environment and our experience and understanding of it.

Indeed, as Bill McKibben, for example, suggests, the notion of ‘nature’ conveys ‘a certain set of human ideas about the world and our place in it’ whose abstraction from ‘the reality around us’ is challenged by the ecological ‘changes’ that such ideas may facilitate, obscure or evade, ‘until, finally, our sense of nature as eternal and separate is washed away, and we will see all too clearly what we have done’.¹⁶⁴ Similarly, Bruno Latour argues that emphasis upon the construction, development and implications of ‘human representations of nature’ means that ‘what is really happening in nature [...] is left aside’.¹⁶⁵

But, is it necessary to dismiss nature writing due to the subjectivity of its viewpoint, and the slipperiness of its object? The understanding of the contingency of the categories of nature and nature writing is familiar. As Williams famously described in *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, ‘nature’ can be understood as ‘perhaps the most complex word in the language’.¹⁶⁶ In *Problems in Materialism and Culture*, he explains further:

We have got so used to it, in a nominal continuity over more than two millennia, that we may not always realise quite all that it commits us to. A singular name for the real multiplicity of things and living processes may be held, with an effort, to be neutral, but I am sure it is very often the case that

¹⁶³ Morton, *Ecology Without Nature*, p. 2, original emphasis.

¹⁶⁴ Bill McKibben, *The End of Nature: Humanity, Climate Change and the Natural World*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2003), p. 7.

¹⁶⁵ Bruno Latour, *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy*, trans. Catherine Porter, (Cambridge, MA & London: Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 33.

¹⁶⁶ Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, (London: Flamingo, 1983), p. 219. See also Kate Soper, *What Is Nature? Culture, Politics and the Non-Human*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995); Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1991).

it offers, from the beginning, a dominant kind of interpretation: idealist, metaphysical, or religious.¹⁶⁷

Exploring the ‘commitment’ made by ‘nature’ does not necessarily make its meanings and influences clearer. In the context of nature writing, the mediation provided by the form has been variously understood. As Frank Stewart notes, *Walden* (1854) both thematically and stylistically acknowledges the implications of the term: ‘Thoreau wanted not only to see nature accurately but also to see “the nature of nature” [...] scrutinising not only his mind as it perceived the world but also his language’.¹⁶⁸

Addressing the empirical approach of Gilbert White’s *The Natural History of Selborne* (1789), Richard Mabey acknowledges that ‘apparently objective description (that is, description based on *our* definitions and categories), can also suffer from a kind of backdoor human-centredness’.¹⁶⁹ From another angle, Gifford points out the reception of nature writing and its effect upon its audience, which yields additional and particular interpretations of the form and its subject, complicating further the relationships between ideas of nature and nature writing.¹⁷⁰

Each of these accounts suggest the necessity of accepting nature writing to be a version or representation of its subject, and that in so doing, we must accept that some things are left out, or changed. And furthermore, those omissions and alterations are influenced by particular viewpoints. As William Cronon asserts:

‘Nature’ is not nearly so natural as it seems. Instead, it is a profoundly human construction. This is not to say that the nonhuman world is somehow unreal or a mere figment of our imaginations – far from it. But the way we describe and understand that world is so entangled with our own values and assumptions that the two can never be fully separated. What we mean when

¹⁶⁷ Raymond Williams, *Problems in Materialism and Culture: Selected Essays*, (London: Verso, 1980), p. 69.

¹⁶⁸ Frank Stewart, *A Natural History of Nature Writing*, (Washington D. C: Island Press, 1995), p. xx.

¹⁶⁹ Richard Mabey, *The Oxford Book of Nature Writing*, (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. Vii, original emphasis.

¹⁷⁰ Gifford, *Pastoral*, p. 73.

we use the word 'nature' says as much about ourselves as about the things we label with that word.¹⁷¹

In these respects, Phillips describes the form as 'selfish': more to do with nature writers than writing nature.¹⁷² Citing Stewart's point that 'what we always see when we look at nature is our own eyes looking back at us, filtering and altering what we choose to perceive, what we emphasise or ignore, what questions we ask and pursue', Phillips describes the awareness of the subjectivity of the perspective of nature writing as the 'ecocritic's epiphany'.¹⁷³ Questioning its implications, Cronon asks:

What happens [...] once we acknowledge the deeply troubling truth that we can never know at first hand the world 'out there' – the 'nature' we seek to understand and protect – but instead must always encounter that world through the lens of our own ideas and imaginings?¹⁷⁴

The 'lens of our own ideas and imaginings' described above appears to be inherently limited. As we have seen, both nature writing and the pastoral often represent a retreat into a particular version of nature which is subject to specific criteria. That retreat and the selection of its location demonstrate a distinction between what the term 'nature' is perceived to constitute, and everything else. In this respect, nature writing represents a specific and selective perspective upon nature and of the conditions and features that the term is intended to signify in this context. The argument against the idea of 'nature' that pastorally-inflected writing appears to communicate is powerfully made through these examples and refuelled by Morton.

Yet, the subject and the form of contemporary nature writing are trickier than Morton's wholesale critique above acknowledges, which threatens to fall into the category that Murphy identifies of 'prescriptive criticism [that runs] the risk of killing the genre through baking it into a rigid mould'.¹⁷⁵ In recent examples of the form, the

¹⁷¹ William Cronon, 'In Search of Nature', *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, (London & New York: Norton, 1996) pp. 23-56, (p. 25).

¹⁷² Phillips, *The Truth of Ecology*, p. 198.

¹⁷³ Stewart, p. 229; Phillips, *The Truth of Ecology*, p. 4.

¹⁷⁴ Cronon, 'In Search of Nature', p. 25.

¹⁷⁵ Murphy, *Farther Afield in Nature-Oriented Literature*, p. 54.

‘stereotypes’ of nature and nature writing are attended to and challenged through both the perspective and the scope of the writing and the consideration of the topic of ‘nature’ itself. For instance, as this chapter will examine in more detail later, questioning both the definition and the location of nature through the concept of ‘wildness’ is central to Robert Macfarlane’s *The Wild Places*. Attention to what falls within the scope of nature writing can be seen in *Edgelands*, where Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts express their intention to examine the ‘unobserved parts of our shared landscape’ that are unaccounted for in ‘the duality of rural and urban writing’.¹⁷⁶ Preceding these recent examples is Mabey’s *The Unofficial Countryside* (1973), in which he examines the ‘cohabiting’ human and non-human forces within and between urban and rural landscapes.¹⁷⁷ These examples of British nature writing occupy the contested ground between pastoral and ecology, directly engaging with the clarifying effect of ecological awareness upon both the conventions of nature writing and the legacy of pastoral idealisation. Self-consciously employing and questioning ideas of nature, contemporary writers are highlighting the ways in which ecological concerns have been imagined, distorted and obfuscated through such ideas.

Linking these works is an emphasis upon seeing the interrelationship between the human and the non-human differently. The ‘naturalness’ of nature is in question in contemporary British nature writing, and so it what Phillips describes as the double understanding of the form as a ‘natural’ depiction along the same lines. The ‘cultural peculiarity and particularity’ that Phillips suggests remains unacknowledged in representations of nature is itself in view.¹⁷⁸ Noting the prevalence of the idea that “‘nature’ is a way of thinking”, Gifford stresses that in addition to its understanding as a social construct and a mediating force, the idea of nature begins with the experience of the material world: ‘there has to be a nature to be called “nature”’.¹⁷⁹ Acknowledging that there is no ‘innocent’ reference to nature, Gifford argues this is not to abstract it from its material basis, but rather to observe and open up the space to interrogate its

¹⁷⁶ Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts, *Edgelands: Journeys into England’s True Wildernesses*, London: Jonathan Cape, 2011), p. 6.

¹⁷⁷ Richard Mabey, *The Unofficial Countryside*, (Wimborne Minster: Little Toller Books, 2010), p. 22.

¹⁷⁸ Phillips, *The Truth of Ecology*, p. 186.

¹⁷⁹ Terry Gifford, ‘The Social Construction of Nature’, *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, 3.2 (1996), 27-35, (p. 30, p. 32).

social and cultural meanings in its literary manifestations.¹⁸⁰ Gifford sees in contemporary writing this closer, more critical view of nature as ‘a matter of unease’ with the concept, referring to Bate’s assertion that “‘Nature’ is a term that needs to be contested, not rejected’.¹⁸¹ In so doing, Gifford contributes a compelling case for the usefulness of further and closer attention to the term and its usages. To critically sift the implications of its appearance embraces the multiplicity of meaning that the term entails, ready to be unravelled, resisting the temptation to be lulled by its ubiquity and extending it beyond a ‘placemark’ for ‘out there’.¹⁸²

Accordingly, Morton is right to question the supposed objectivity of nature writing, and the transparency of its representation of its subject. A similar effort is taking place in contemporary accounts of the form. Recent versions of nature writing are additionally concerned with the viewpoint towards and experience of nature, and the effects of the former on the latter. Furthermore, they are also aware of the influence that their viewpoints bring to their experiences. Morton suggests that:

Nature writing tries to be ‘immediate’ – to do without the processes of language and the artful construction of illusions. It wants to maintain the impression of directness. But this can only be a supreme illusion, ironically, in a world in which one can find Coke cans in Antarctica. The immediacy that nature writing values is itself as reified as a Coke can.¹⁸³

However, as Garrard observes: ‘ecomimesis already is not what it used (or Morton uses it) to be; while wilderness epiphany no doubt lurks in some corners, nature writing is capable of demonstrating a sophistication (a certain urbanity in both senses?) and self-consciousness’.¹⁸⁴ The ‘immediacy’ that Morton anticipates is contrasted with the recognition and questioning of the construction of ‘illusions’. Neither ‘nature’ nor

¹⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 33.

¹⁸¹ Ibid, p. 32. See also Jonathan Bate, *Romantic Ecology*, p. 56.

¹⁸² Morton, *Ecology Without Nature*, p. 14.

¹⁸³ Ibid, p. 125.

¹⁸⁴ Greg Garrard, ‘Ecocriticism’, *The Year’s Work in Critical and Cultural Theory*, 18.1 (2010): 1-35, p. 14. See also Hannes Bergthaller, ‘Review: Timothy Morton, *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* and Kate Soper, Martin Ryle and Lyn Thomas, eds., *The Politics and Pleasures of Consuming Differently*’, *Green Letters* 12.1 (2010): 77-82, p. 80; Greg Garrard, ‘Ecocriticism’, *The Year’s Work in Critical and Cultural Theory*, 18.1 (2010): 1-35, p. 14.

‘nature writing’ are taken to be direct. As this chapter aims to illustrate, in contemporary versions of nature writing the practice and its effects are in question. Acknowledging the materiality of nature writing enables this, as it is recognised to be neither wholly a mirror nor a window. The subjectivity of both is held in view.

Evidence of this line of thought can readily be found in recent British nature writing. For example, Kathleen Jamie’s interpretation of language in the context of representing the world encompasses the impossibility of immediacy that Morton points out. Nature writing is something different from the physical world with which it is concerned, and its mediatory character can be understood as at once an opportunity to reflect upon the relationship between humans and nature that it depicts and as a representation of that relationship in itself. Central to her writing is consideration of the method and the mode of that encountering and its relation through language. She delineates her sensitivity towards the means of observation, engagement and communication with her subject as a practice of writing ‘towards’, not ‘about’, explaining: ‘I couldn’t even say what I write “about,” because I distrust the relationship expressed by the word “about”. I’d rather say that I write “toward”. Or perhaps “within”. At the moment, I’m writing a lot “toward” the natural world’.¹⁸⁵ For Jamie, ‘toward’ infers a kind of negotiation with her subject, rather than its direct representation. She attributes this to the medium of writing and the means of language: Kirsty Scott writes that in a 2005 interview, Jamie calls writing ‘a sort of connective tissue where myself meets the world, and it rises out of that, that liminal place’. Jamie continues: ‘I used to think that language was what got in the way, that it was a screen, a dark glass. That you could not get at the world because you were stuck with language, but now I think that’s wrong. Now I think language is what connects us with the world’.¹⁸⁶

The notion that nature writing is not just about nature, but also about writing and the processes of observation, representation and interpretation that it encompasses, is a key aspect of the approaches of contemporary British nature writers. The understanding

¹⁸⁵ Kathleen Jamie, “Author Statement” *British Council Literature*, (2010), <http://literature.britishcouncil.org/kathleen-jamie>, n. pag.

¹⁸⁶ Kathleen Jamie, “Kathleen Jamie Interview with Kirsty Scott” *Books from Scotland*, (July 25 2010), www.booksfromscotland.com/Authors/Kathleen-Jamie/Interview, n. pag.

of 'nature writing [as] culturally and socially constructed [...] in a thoroughgoing fashion' that Phillips suggests is in fact central to the form and effect of its contemporary British incarnations, rather than pursued as such uncritically, the subjectivity of their perspective unaccounted for.¹⁸⁷ The usages of the form and functions of pastoral in contemporary British nature writing take advantage of its reflective character that Phillips has elsewhere described as crucial to the critical function of the mode.¹⁸⁸ The 'commitment' made by 'nature' has been more subtly, and more closely, examined.

The pastoral movement into nature that Cowley describes above is also more complex in these forms. Accounting for the difficulties of experiencing and representing nature means that the shapes and styles of nature writing are changing. Whilst Scott Slovic describes the pattern of retreat and return as a 'telescoping process' of 'going away to think' and then coming home to see the familiar anew', what's being seen in this process, and how, attract attention in contemporary British versions of nature writing, and the smooth process of retreat and return is altered.¹⁸⁹

Escape into nature in pastoral narratives operates on several levels. Firstly, the location of the escape is perceived to be outside of the human or urban environment. The escape functions as to assuage what are considered to be the negative effects of the human world by exploring what lies beyond it, the realisation of which is a restorative process representing the unburdening of culture. Secondly, the natural world is understood to exist in contrast to the human world. Pastoral escape takes the form of a retreat from culture and society into nature, based on an idealistic opposition between the versions of nature sought after and the interpretation of the culture left behind. Importantly, it is also a reflection of that culture. Pastoral nature is restorative due to its contrast to the human world, and the contrast is created by the human world. The pastoral environment works as an opposition to the urban environment because it has been created by and for the urban audience. Thirdly, and in contrast to its remoteness and simplicity, but reflective of its physical and ideological opposition to the city, the

¹⁸⁷ Phillips, *The Truth of Ecology*, p. 186.

¹⁸⁸ Phillips, 'Don DeLillo's Postmodern Pastoral', p. 253-246.

¹⁸⁹ Scott Slovic, *Going Away to Think*, (Reno, Nevada: University of Nevada Press, 2008), p. 12.

pastoral environment provides the location and the perspective from which to consider and criticise the urban environment. The opposition set up by the ideological movement of the text from the city to the country generates a critical perspective from which to contrast the two distinctions. The rural environment is characterised by simplicity, honesty and clarity, the immersion into which allows the pastoral escapee to adopt these characteristics and apply them critically to their original location.

In summation, pastoral escape functions because it reveals exactly what the escapee desires from the escape. Nature is suggested to exist in perfect symmetry with human desires of its own accord. Most importantly, the reflection of the escapee's desires in nature demonstrates a reciprocation that establishes an inherent interrelationship between humans and nature. This pattern can be seen to be replicated in contemporary writing about nature. Yet in the context of environmental crisis, the simple reflection of expectations in nature is problematised. Experiencing within the framework of retreat and return versions of nature and human-nature relations that run counter to pastoral attributions or expectations can be anticipated as a kind of inversion of pastoral. However, I suggest that examination of contemporary writing about this relationship reveals that this assumption is not the case.

As another example from Jamie's writing shows, the 'telescoping process' has both shifted, and multiplied, in scale. Jamie's writing is directly concerned with the difficulties of 'nature'. By looking at nature from multiple perspectives, through her writing Jamie engages with the slipperiness of the term and of its representation described above. The composite view of nature that is built up from these different perspectives negotiates the limitations of the kind of prescriptive 'view' of nature that is in question in Morton's critique. In the chapter 'Surgeon's Hall' in *Findings* (2005), it is the preserved specimens which provoke awareness of this understanding: 'we consider the natural world as "out there", as "environment", but these objects in their jars show us the forms concealed inside, the intimate unknown'.¹⁹⁰ In her essay 'Pathologies', published in *Granta 102* and in her latest collection, *Sightlines*, Jamie discusses the

¹⁹⁰ Kathleen Jamie, *Findings*, (London: Sort Of Books, 2005), p. 141.

meanings of 'nature' further.¹⁹¹ In particular, she takes issue with the familiar concept of a hubristic estrangement from nature forming the root of current ecological uncertainty, its supposed antidote being a process of reconnection with nature which itself represents the inception of the resolution of that uncertainty. For her, this concept is based upon a 'foreshortened definition of "nature"', which emphasises an external, restorative concept of nature.¹⁹² Beginning with a consideration of the term in the context of the death of her mother, Jamie reflects on the segmented meanings of the word and its contradictory interpretations and uses:

What was it exactly, and where did it reside? [...] There's our own intimate, inner natural world, the body's weird shapes and forms, and sometimes they go awry. There are other species, not dolphins arching clear from the water, but bacteria that can pull the rug from under us.¹⁹³

Her consideration leads her to visit a pathologist's laboratory, where she sees the workings of our own nature dissected for disease, and the evidence of our interconnectivity with 'other' nature within the organs of our own bodies in the case of bacteria at work in a patient's stomach. Pastoral imagery is used to convey the nature encountered here, both by Jamie, describing 'the unseen landscapes within', and by the pathologist guiding her across the internal landscapes they access through the microscope: "'isn't that a pastoral scene? They're grazing!'" I had it: six or seven oval dots, still tiny, despite the magnification, were ranged across the blue valley, like musk oxen on tundra, seen from far above'.¹⁹⁴

However, Jamie reminds us that this is 'nature we'd rather do without': in this case, the bacteria responsible for causing stomach ulcers.¹⁹⁵ Jamie's examination of nature on a visceral scale challenges conceptions of nature as external or stable: reminding us of the transience and temporality of its forms; demystifying that transience

¹⁹¹ Kathleen Jamie, 'Pathologies' in Jason Cowley, ed. *Granta: The Magazine of New Writing 102: The New Nature Writing*, (London: Granta, 2008), pp. 35-53; Kathleen Jamie, 'Pathologies' in *Sightlines*, (London: Sort Of Books, 2012), pp. 21-41.

¹⁹² Jamie, 'Pathologies', p. 36.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 44; p. 45.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

and temporality as indicative of its construction of interconnected processes and reactions; and drawing parallels between the different scales and frames within which these processes and reactions can be understood. In another way, by drawing attention to nature as disease, she highlights its ‘otherness’. In explaining our innate sameness with the rest of nature, that ‘WE are “nature”’, she takes care to maintain attention to our difference; in this example, that difference that is demonstrated by our means of seeing that sameness: the pathologist’s microscope.¹⁹⁶ The question of responsibility is raised here again by drawing attention to the fact that human beings are also subject to nature, and the rest of nature is subject to human action. Kate Soper comments that the complexity of this interconnectivity ‘must be conceptually distinguished and observed as a condition of imputing ecological accountability’.¹⁹⁷

As Hunt and Cowley attest above, contemporary versions of nature writing have emerged in conjunction with increasing ecological concern, and have responded in form and viewpoint to that concern. Jamie addresses the effect of ecological knowledge upon the understanding of nature directly in a 2011 ‘Diary’ essay for the *London Review of Books*, tracing the intersection between nature writing and ecological threat back to the 1960s. Reflecting upon Gavin Maxwell’s *Ring of Bright Water* (1960), she compares Maxwell’s conception and treatment of nature to Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* (1962) and J.A. Baker’s *The Peregrine* (1967), identifying through their contrasts a turning point in the relationship between humans and nature, or in our perception of that relation. Jamie describes Maxwell’s writing as idealised, nostalgic and ‘hardly about otters’: in comparison, Carson’s text is ‘a plea, a scientific observation, and a call back from the brink’ and Baker’s work offers an ‘eco-lament’.¹⁹⁸ For Jamie, nature is redefined through these landmark texts as ‘a web of interdependencies, which may be damaged through our acts’, and writing about nature must be redefined accordingly: ‘something ended with *Ring of Bright Water*, and not just for Maxwell. With nature in crisis, there was no chance now of conjuring an earthly paradise and cavorting there

¹⁹⁶ Jamie, ‘Kathleen Jamie Interview with Kirsty Scott’, n. pag.

¹⁹⁷ Soper, *What is Nature?* p. 161.

¹⁹⁸ Kathleen Jamie, ‘Diary’, *London Review of Books* 33.14 (2011), p. 39.

with otters'.¹⁹⁹ Key to the change in viewpoint that Jamie draws attention to in Carson and Baker is the understanding of nature as 'a web of interdependencies' which includes the human. Recognised as integral components of the ecosystem, neither we nor our actions can be separated out or partitioned off. This recognition carries a sense of responsibility and a sense of vulnerability: the 'web of interdependencies' both sustains our actions and is subject to their consequences. Nature writing that is mindful of these senses is not about a 'nature' that is external, but about the interrelationship between the human and non-human elements that comprise 'nature'.

In the same essay, Jamie describes one effect of environmental crisis since this period as a feeling of 'constant culpability'.²⁰⁰ The watershed that Jamie sees between the examples of nature writing here is maintained by this effect: as she suggests, 'whatever nature writing is now, it's not "an otter asleep upon its back among the cushions on the sofa, forepaws in the air"'.²⁰¹ Kerridge proposes that 'environmentalism calls for a new nature writing, clearly differentiated from the conservative tradition and aware of its appeals and dangers'.²⁰² As Hunt, Cowley and Jamie make clear, nature writing, in terms of the interface between the human and the natural that it seeks to depict and the interface that it represents between the world and the page, is both made urgent, and to some extent, remade by the awareness of ecological threat. In conversation, Jamie describes the genre as appearing 're-cast and re-formed' in its contemporary incarnation, calling it 'fresh, engaging, and necessary'.²⁰³

For Macfarlane, it is the recognition of the 'lens of our own ideas and imaginings' that refreshes contemporary nature writing, and sets it apart from such criticism. Rather than a limitation, the awareness of its human perspective is the starting point: nature writing is understood as composed of and addressed towards the complexities of our current and future engagement with the non-human world:

¹⁹⁹ Ibid, p. 39.

²⁰⁰ Ibid, p. 39.

²⁰¹ Ibid, p. 39.

²⁰² Richard Kerridge, 'Ecological Hardy', in *Beyond Nature Writing: Expanding the Boundaries of Ecocriticism*, edited by Karla Armbruster and Kathleen R. Wallace, (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 2001), pp. 126-142, (p. 138).

²⁰³ Kathleen Jamie, 'Conversation with Deborah Lilley', recorded at the School of Advanced Study, University of Durham, February 7 2012.

The real subject of landscape writing is not landscape, but a restructuring of the human attitude towards nature - and there can be few subjects more urgent or necessary of our attention than this.²⁰⁴

Macfarlane argues that nature writing itself is attempting to highlight and question received conceptions of the world around us and our attitudes towards those conceptions: the ambiguity of its subject and the plurality of its representation are directly approached and emphasised from an ecological standpoint. Here, Macfarlane parallels Morton above by acknowledging that nature writing is not a direct representation of nature, and furthermore, suggests it is not intended as such. In stark contrast, though, Macfarlane instead posits the form as an ecological tool: a means of drawing attention to the natural world and most importantly, to the ways that we imagine and interpret that world. The contingencies of nature writing and its subject are intensified in contemporary versions of the form.

The stylistic and formal adaptations of contemporary examples of nature writing bring the definition of the form itself into question. As Randall Roorda notes, ‘coincident with the recent surge of interest in “nature writing” is contention over what the term entails’, from its formal qualities and generic attributions to its relation to previous related forms such as natural history and thematically and temporally contiguous yet disciplinarily distinct works in science, geography and cultural studies, and its relation to contemporary ecological concerns.²⁰⁵ Tim Dee notes that:

Until recently [...] the British branch of Nature Writing was mostly about the countryside, its landscape and creatures; it was non-fiction, non-scientific prose characterised by close attention to living things [...] Nature Writing was nice writing and it walked – stout shoes and a knapsack – a thin

²⁰⁴ Robert Macfarlane, ‘Only Connect’, *The Guardian*, Saturday 26 March 2005, n. pag.
<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2005/mar/26/featuresreviews.guardianreview33>

²⁰⁵ Randall Roorda, *Dramas of Solitude: Narratives of Retreat in American Nature Writing*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), p. 2; see also Thomas J. Lyon, ed. *This Incomparable Land: A Book of American Nature Writing*, (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1989); Patrick D. Murphy, *Farther Afield in Nature-Oriented Literature*, (Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 2000); David Barnhill, ‘Surveying the Landscape: A New Approach to Nature Writing’, *ISLE Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, 17.2 (2010): 273-290.

green lane between the hedges of science on one side and a wild wood of poetry on the other.²⁰⁶

Murphy suggests that a new classification may be required to account for the emergence of new approaches to writing the environment, and the human-nature relations that comprise and influence it. He identifies a 'shift away from a detached nature writing to an increasingly engaged environmental writing in regard to nonfiction', positing a new distinction between 'two different modes of writing about nature and human-nonhuman relationships', labelled as 'nature writing' and 'environmental literature'.²⁰⁷ Explaining his delineation further, Murphy writes:

We often find in nonfiction prose the implicit authorial belief that a reader will be moved to deepen or change his or her views about nature and human nature through learning more information and through being presented with the author's own epiphanies. There is a faith in the contagiousness of nature appreciation and a belief in the timelessness of epiphanic experience throughout much nature literature. Environmental literature, in contrast, does not presume contagion by shared experience and tends to be more concerned with timeliness rather than timelessness. It does presume a high degree of self-consciousness about ecological relationships and environmental crises, while sharing the other attributes of nature literature.²⁰⁸

Murphy usefully identifies the way that writing concerned with nature and human-nature relations is shaped differently around the ecological issues by which it is provoked. However, I argue that the distinctions made between 'nature writing' and 'environmental literature' are less clear. Murphy uses the terms 'writing' and 'literature' to distinguish between specifically non-fiction prose and a broader range of environmentally-engaged forms. Yet, as the examples from Jamie's work above demonstrate, more complex accounts of nature can be found within the form. Furthermore, the criteria by which Murphy makes the distinctions above can be located

²⁰⁶ Tim Dee, *Archipelago* 5, (London: Clutag, 2011), p. 12.

²⁰⁷ Murphy, *Farther Afield in Nature-Oriented Literature*, p. 49.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid*, p. 47.

in combination in contemporary nature writing. With this in mind, I suggest that the term and its ambiguities are integral to the contemporary versions that I approach in this chapter. Its designations, as Stewart suggests, go beyond ‘a vague appreciation for nature, pastoral sentimentality [and] purely subjective musings’.²⁰⁹

For example, Roger Deakin’s *Waterlog* adopts and extends the scope of nature writing, including within a familiar retreat into nature some of the issues and perspective that Murphy locates beyond the form. Based on a presumption of estrangement and intended to be restorative, Deakin presents a version of nature writing that can be understood to be ‘nature-endorsing’, that is, ‘which direct[s] us to the “nature” that we are destroying, wasting and polluting’, using Soper’s terminology.²¹⁰ However, the premise of an escape into nature cannot be imagined directly, and instead can be seen to involve turning towards the complex and interconnected meanings of ‘nature’ discussed above.

Deakin’s work addresses the issue of a contemporary disconnection between humans and nature through the undertaking of a pastorally-informed escape into nature, exploring the causes and effects of those breaks and attempting their renewal in the process. Deakin’s vision of pastoral escape is based upon an idealised interpretation of nature that is fuelled by a distinction between human and natural spaces, and the privileging of nature as an alternative or antidote to the apparently negative aspects of the human world, based on a nostalgic understanding of a previous incarnation of nature, and a previous kind of relationship between the human and the natural.

The propositions that greater intimacy with and knowledge of our immediate environments can lead to a new privileging of and respect for nature are familiar in ecological writing. Contact with nature is considered to present remedies of participatory recovery from contemporary alienation by offering experiential reconciliation with the natural world. As Morton puts it:

²⁰⁹ Stewart, p. xviii.

²¹⁰ Soper, *What is Nature?*, p. 4.

Ecological writing wants to undo habitual distinctions between nature and ourselves. It is supposed not just to describe, but also to provide a working model for a dissolving of the difference between subject and object, a dualism seen as the fundamental philosophical reason for human beings' destruction of the environment. If we could not merely figure out but actually *experience* the fact that we were embedded in our world, then we would be less likely to destroy it.²¹¹

Similarly, Heise notes in *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet* (2008) that physical interaction with nature is often suggested to help people to 'reconnect with nature' and provide a means of 'overcoming the alienation from nature that modern societies generate'.²¹² Heise observes:

A fundamental investment in a particular kind of 'situated knowledge', the intimate acquaintance with local nature and history that develops with sustained interest in one's immediate surroundings, recurs across [...] discourses. This type of knowledge is often portrayed as arising out of sensory perception and physical immersion, the bodily experience and manipulation of nature [...] are some the ways the human body is perceived to reintegrate itself into the 'biotic community'.²¹³

Such perspectives have been interpreted to perpetuate certain erroneous ideas. To use Williams's terms again, the potential ecological consequences that the unquestioned idea of nature 'commits us to' have been well documented, and its ostensible 'neutrality' has been stringently critiqued.

The notion of a return to nature may be connected with doctrines of rootedness and their dubious historical legacy, and with deep ecological ideas of nature without or preceding human influence, as Soper and Cronon, for example, have discussed.²¹⁴ The selectivity inherent in ideas of getting back to a particular version of nature or human-

²¹¹ Morton, *Ecology Without Nature*, p. 64, original emphasis.

²¹² Ibid, p. 28

²¹³ Heise, *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet*, p. 30.

²¹⁴ See Soper, *What is Nature?*, p. 19; Cronon, *Uncommon Ground*, p. 87.

nature relations imagined to exist in the past also warrants suspicion, as Garrard and Heise argue.²¹⁵ The selective definition of ‘nature’ can lead to the partitioning of the understanding of nature based on particular criteria, at once privileging some environments over others and inferring that environments outside of these criteria are not under threat.²¹⁶ The pairing of environmental alienation with increased experience of particular versions of nature limits responses to ecological crisis to attitudinal rather than lifestyle change, avoiding addressing the causes of the problem. Simultaneously the scope of the ecological impact of particular activities and equivalent responsibilities may be underplayed or misrepresented. The selective depiction of nature and attribution of environments as ‘natural’ risks fragmenting the understanding of ecology disseminated in such writing. Underpinning these interpretations is the certain distinction between the human and the natural, or culture and nature. The pastoral basis of examples of nature writing appears to perpetuate these assumptions; Phillips suggests that ‘the pastoral [...] buys wholesale the distinction between natural environments and the institutions of a technological culture’.²¹⁷

As Deakin’s text suggests, the idea of experiencing nature as a socially and ecologically informed means of reconnection is a seductive prospect. In the text we can also see, though, that the allure of a restorative escape into nature depends upon a selective understanding and representation of nature and of the past. Importantly, this is evident within the text itself. Deakin recommends wild swimming as a means of overcoming everyday abstraction from nature and of recovering a more natural perspective upon the world:

You see and experience things when you are swimming in a way that is completely different from any other. You are *in* nature, part and parcel of it, in a far more complete and intense way than on dry land, and your sense of the present is overwhelming. In wild water you are on equal terms with the

²¹⁵ See Heise, *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet*, p. 140; Garrard, ‘Heidegger, Heaney and the Problem of Dwelling’ in *Writing the Environment: Ecocriticism and Literature*, eds., Richard Kerridge and Neil Sammells, (London: Zed, 1998), pp. 167-181, (p. 179); Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, p. 43.

²¹⁶ See Garrard, ‘Heidegger, Heaney and the Problem of Dwelling’, p. 179; ; Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, p. 43.

²¹⁷ Phillips, *The Truth of Ecology*, p. 19.

animal world around you: in every sense, on the same level.

(W, p. 4, original emphasis.)

Here, water appears to act as a kind of levelling agent or equalising medium. Once immersed, the distinction that Deakin perceives between humans and nature is temporarily erased: Deakin's description of his submerged state as '*in nature*' clearly underlining the separation that he sees as the convention. His sense of self and his sense of perception are fundamentally altered by this transition, conveying a feeling of clarity that is achieved once beyond the boundaries and influence of the human world. Deakin here accentuates the notion that our relationship with our surroundings has been obscured by our own actions, and indicates that these connections can be restored, or uncovered: the immersion of oneself into nature is akin to a resumption of an original reality.

However, the claims made about the advantages of being '*in*' nature are compromised by the fact that in some places, the nature that is sought after exists in different, difficult or troubling forms. The historical assumption that previous conditions and relations with nature were better, more respectful and more direct are shown to contrast with the legacies of historical industrial practices and shown to be compromised by the historical sources used to make such comparisons. Though he imagines a return to the idealistic condition of the landscape recorded in the 1830s in William Cobbett's *Rural Rides* (1830), 'a future without fish farms or watercress beds, where the river could flow as sweetly as ever it did in Cobbett's day, and there could be bathing again in Gunner's Hole' (W, p. 37), he also describes the continuing pollution of Cornish rivers due to the legacy of mining effluent, where 'the river's metallic gleam went deeper than metaphor. Where the Red River is concerned, 'The Cornish Heritage' means cadmium, copper, zinc, lead, as well as arsenic; all the toxic heavy metal by-products of the deserted tin-mines upstream' (W, p. 134). In this way, Deakin's journey then comes to reveal the impact of the human interpretation and appropriation of nature, rather than escape from it.

Waterlog is about the longing for escape into version of nature couched in past, but based on a selective view of both past and present. However, the longing it depicts

cannot be realised, and the text pivots on the desire for it rather than its experience. In Deakin's text, the motif of escape is used to some extent to highlight and question the conventions upon which it is based. The text points to the existence of multiple and contrasting understandings of nature, and their implications. It demonstrates a clear sense of interconnectivity between the human and non-human, showing that we are already 'in' nature and that the concept of an escape into nature is challenged by evidence of this: not just in the polluted rivers but in the encounter with the culverted and buried River Lark. As Peter A. Fritzell suggests, rather than 'relations to nature', of significance is 'what man or humankind [...] does, or has done, *in* nature'.²¹⁸

Deakin's text is not a simple narrative of re-territorialisation based on the premise of a pastoral escape 'back' into nature. Nor does it lead to simple 'reintegration' into the 'biotic community'. Interrelations and responsibility are mutually expounded. Deakin is provoked to question his understanding and expectations of nature through the revelations of his experiences. At the same time, he is also provoked to question the human treatment of nature more broadly by the evidence of its effects upon the landscape that he encounters, and its contrast to his expectations. Deakin's image of pastoral water flowing uninhibited across the land, making and maintaining an organic network of connections across the landscape is interrupted unceremoniously by human action:

I stood outside the Bury St Edmunds Tesco. Here, the Lark had been treated with something less than reverence as it flowed through the forecourt car park. Pure Spring Water may be highly valued on the shelves inside, but outside, the real thing was ignored. The hapless Lark, which once meandered gently through water meadows here, had been neatly packaged in an outsized concrete canyon. No water vole would dream of venturing here, nor otter, purple loosestrife or figwort. (*W*, p. 67)

Questioning the adaption of the watercourse, Deakin works around a straightforward nostalgic contrast between then-and-now, lamenting not the loss of the ancient river but

²¹⁸ Peter A. Fritzell, *Nature Writing and America: Essays on a Cultural Type*, (Iowa: Iowa State University, 1990), p. xii, original emphasis.

instead opening up considerations of its consequences. By looking backward to its reworking, and past that to its previous flow, then forward to its current state, Deakin demonstrates the contingency of actions, effects and their consideration. In so doing, this example taps into what Soper has called an ‘avant-garde nostalgia’, in which she reconsiders Williams’s warning against both the “‘simple backwards look” of nostalgia and the “‘simple progressive thrust” of industrial progress [...] in order to capture a movement of thought that remembers, and mourns, that which is irretrievable, but also attains to a more complex political wisdom and energy’.²¹⁹ Deakin’s evocation of pastoral nature in this instance offers a version of ‘radical nostalgia’ that is ‘not a futile pining for a vanished world’ but perhaps a call to the past that presents the opportunity to ‘re-establish our roots in a less domineering way’.²²⁰

In this instance, the premise of a pastoral escape into nature is used to challenge and explore the conceptions upon which it is based, rather than to realise a prescribed version of its structure and form. In this way, the process of pastoral escape operates as a means of highlighting and questioning the idealisation of nature. The text asks what is being escaped from and what is being escaped to, highlighting and subjecting to scrutiny these terms themselves. Deakin’s ‘endorsement’ of nature is more tentative as a result, qualified by an attention towards the multiple meanings and implications that the term entails.

From the perspectives explored above, the stereotypical pastoral nature that Morton uses to justify his condemnation of the concept of nature and its consequences is itself firmly in question, rather than taken as a given. To sidestep the complexities of ‘nature’ is to circumnavigate these issues, a task that potentially leaves them unconsidered, and may itself be impossible to realise in practice. Perhaps, though, Morton’s intention is to highlight this very situation, in so doing, not leaving these considerations aside but in fact bringing them into view. In contemporary nature writing, I argue that this is already underway.

²¹⁹ Soper, ‘Passing Glories and Romantic Retrievals: Avant-Garde Nostalgia and Hedonistic Renewal’ in *Ecocritical Theory: New European Approaches*, eds. Axel Goodbody and Kate Rigby, (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2011), pp. 17-29 (p. 23).

²²⁰ James Hopkin, ‘In the Green Team’, *The Guardian*, Saturday 12 May 2001, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2001/may/12/scienceandnature.highereducation>, n. pag.

Returning to Cowley's and Keith's definitions described earlier, in the versions of nature writing identified in this chapter, the literary effects of pastoral are employed in combination with close observation informed by ecological knowledge in order to create through these layered and interconnected attributes accounts of nature writing that respond to awareness of environmental crisis and display a sense of the imperatives of raising and reacting to that awareness. Further, I argue that new examples of nature writing do so in the knowledge of the contested statuses of both pastoral and nature writing in terms of their relation to ecology, using the premises and effects of pastoral to their creative and critical advantage, rather than allowing it to gloss over the difficulties inherent in their undertakings. Pastoral offers a means of addressing the necessity of nature writing as being about, and embodying, the way that 'nature' simultaneously 'directs us to the world' and is 'historically mediated'.²²¹

2. Nature Lost and Found: Contemporary Pastoral Escapes

In contemporary nature writing, the pastoral emerges as a point of contention, rather than as a means of escapism. It is the treatment of the notions of estrangement and disconnection counterposed with retreat and reconciliation that comprise pastoral's dynamic of escape that are depicted, but not simply realised, in recent nature writing. Neither a definitive 'view' of the world or of 'nature' are easily given. Williams highlighted the 'interrelations' between humans and nature that are overlooked in pastoral and indicated that effective exploration of those interrelations must begin in that gap between the idea of the relationship between humans and nature and its reality.²²² From the same angle, I argue that in contemporary nature writing, this viewpoint can be used to look afresh at the construction of pastoral and at the conventions of nature writing, focusing directly upon what is revealed and hidden by these constructions and conventions. The next sections of the chapter examines in detail two examples of recent work in which the premise of pastoral escape is used as a means of questioning the idea of nature and its effects. What I am keen to establish in the following sections is how

²²¹ Soper, *What is Nature?* p. 4.

²²² Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 297.

these assumptions are engaged with, and in the process challenged, in contemporary nature writing.

In Robert Macfarlane's *The Wild Places*, a familiar pastoral contrast between the urban and the rural foregrounds the text, which relates a journey from the former to the latter provoked by a sense of disconnection between the two and motivated by a sense of lack in the experience of the environment of the former in contrast to the anticipated conditions of the latter. However, the contrast is not simply experienced and the movement from one to the other is hampered by a series of factors which stem from the parallel disconnections between the expectations and experiences of the environments encountered in the text. From the evidence of the negative effects of human action upon the local countryside to the idealised interpretation of nature and the expectation of its existence outside of the supposed boundaries of the social and industrial world, the premise of an escape into nature and the understanding of nature upon which it is based are raised and questioned within the framework of a retreat and return. In Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Robert's *Edgelands*, the idealisation of a version of nature that exists in pleasing contrast to the urban environment is firmly in question, and the journeys undertaken in the text aim to pull apart the pastoral demarcations of the English landscape: escaping from its confines in order to experience and celebrate the areas that exist, unrecognised, between the understandings of the urban and the rural. Their journeys transpose the expectations and effects of pastoral escape onto alternative landscapes that conflict with conceptions of the natural or the ideal, in so doing, questioning what is really sought after in an escape from the city.

In these examples, the principles of an escape into nature, based on the premises of pastoral contrasts, are used to explore impressions of estrangement and alienation. Yet, in *The Wild Places*, the reconciliation that appears to occur does not correspond to the expectations upon which it was sought. In *Edgelands*, the adaptation of the location of escape in some senses reconciles the pastoral desire for an escape into nature with the environment that exists beyond the boundaries of the city, but at the same time, leads to the questioning of the expectation of reconciliation and the presumption of estrangement itself. Using ideas of looking at nature and at the past through concepts of the wild and

of nostalgia, nature and culture are shown to be intertwined and interpretable from numerous, simultaneous and even contrasting perspectives. These versions of contemporary nature writing demonstrate the ways that ecological concerns direct and influence its content and form, and illustrate some of the ways that the principles and dynamics of the pastoral tradition are employed and adapted in response to those concerns.

These texts acknowledge pastoral designations of particular environments and then explore their limitations. In so doing, they also employ the principle of escape from one designation to another, and the illuminative experience of their contrast. Pastoral habits of mind are used self-reflectively to explore attitudes towards different environments and conceptions of the elements of their composition. The artistry of pastoral is used to explore the multiple ways in which particular environments can be viewed, interpreted and represented. The framework of the mode allows degrees of reflexivity and responsiveness in the versions of nature and their understandings. Through the idea of the wild, *The Wild Places* is able to contextualise different conceptions of nature and their effects within the framework of pastoral. In *Edgeland*s, the ideas of nostalgia and multiple perspectives are used to reflect upon differing conceptions of and responses to nature.

A Contemporary Escape into Nature? *The Wild Places* by Robert Macfarlane.

Macfarlane's text is constructed using the familiar pastoral framework of a retreat into nature in search of restoration from a sense of disillusionment and detachment found in the human world to establish the premise and explore the possibilities of an escape into nature. Macfarlane first foregrounds the conditions that have created the necessity for escape, before approaching the means of that escape. Nature is characterised at the outset of the text in opposition to the human world of the city. The opposition established here facilitates immediate criticism of the city and its influence upon its inhabitants. Prior to departing from the city and into nature in search of realisation of his vision of wildness, Macfarlane employs the pastoral method of using this opposition between the urban and the rural to offer a critique of the former, 'Anyone who lives in a

city will know the feeling of having been there too long. The gorge-vision the streets imprint on us, the sense of blockage, the longing for surfaces other than glass, brick, concrete and tarmac'.²²³ By comparing the limited urban perspective to that of a gorge Macfarlane puts the contrast between the country and the city within his criticism of the latter: the city's landscape feels like a gorge, but it is understood to be an inherently unnatural space. The city is depicted as a containing force, the formality of the division of its space acting as an imposition upon movement and perception. The typical textures of the surfaces used to describe the city's landscape evoke impressions of smoothness, rigidity and impermeability, further adding to the senses of claustrophobia and constriction created by an environment of artificiality.

Accordingly, nature is introduced as a positive alternative in the form of a beech tree, offering a distinctly pastoral combination of both a viewpoint from which to observe and consider the city at a simultaneously geographical and ideological distance and an ensuing sense of restoration: 'Climbing the tree was a way to get perspective, however slight; to look down on a city that I usually looked across. The relief of relief. Above all, it was a way of defraying the city's claims on me'. (*WP*, p. 6) The existence of the tree and the version of nature it represents open up the possibility of its use as a location for escape; the perspective of the human world that it offers confirms this status.

The viewpoint that Macfarlane desires here appears to be selective along pastoral lines, adopting a vantage point that allows the landscape to be surveyed apparently wholesale, vulnerable to ideological glossing due to the detached perspective from which it is seen. As Barbara Bender suggests, 'the overall impression, the total design, is supposed to take precedence over detail, so that the landscape becomes a vehicle for meditation'.²²⁴ In this case, though, the glossing effect of an elevated perspective, smoothing the features of the landscape into a presupposed and idealised form, is interrupted by the evidence of the contrivances and effects of human activity that do not correspond to expectation. The distinction between the urban and the rural is further

²²³ Robert Macfarlane, *The Wild Places*, London: Granta, 2007, p. 6-7. Further references to this text will be given parenthetically using the abbreviation (*WP*).

²²⁴ Barbara Bender, *Stonehenge: Making Space*, (Oxford and New York: Berg, 1998), p. 31.

partitioned by the interpretation of human influence upon nature. In this way, Macfarlane points to the difficulty of making an escape from the human world in the natural world. Here, the pastoral polarisation of nature and culture is complicated by his interpretation of their intersection:

The beechwood could not answer my need for wildness. The roar of the nearby roads was audible, as were the crash and honk of the trains that passed to the west. The surrounding fields were treated with fertiliser and herbicide to maximise productivity. And the hedgerows were favourite locations for fly-tippers. (*WP*, p. 7)

An ecological sensitivity is suggested in Macfarlane's explanation of the factors which compromise the natural environment of his home city: a threefold threat of pollution caused by human action surrounds the beechwood. The road and the railway are described in terms of the noise pollution they contribute to the wood alongside the more controversial pollution of industrial agricultural practices and the antisocial and irresponsible pollution of illegal waste disposal. All three types of pollutants are described equally in terms of the threat they pose to the beechwood. From an ecological perspective, the noise of the travel network would surely be superseded by the impact of their emissions. However, in this description, the environmental costs of cars and trains are discounted in favour of their aesthetic impact upon the sounds of the wood, undermining the suggestion of ecological sensitivity. Instead, the experience of nature provided by the wood is impeded by its proximity to and interrelationship with human culture alone; the ecological consequences of these factors are overlooked by virtue of their existence. Although this description suggests an awareness of the vulnerability of the surrounding environment to the threats posed by human activities that take place within it, ecological concern is identified only as a subsidiary reason for the intense focus upon the natural world undertaken at this point in the text. The key element in Macfarlane's dismissal of the beechwood as the alternative to the city is the desire for 'wildness'.

The difficulty in realising pastoral nature leads not to reflection upon the situation, its causes or their effects, but rather pursues the concept of an oppositional

version of nature beyond the rural landscape. The movement of the text is diverted around the recognition of the intersection of the human and the natural, rather than towards it. The contrasts that Macfarlane develops here, from the desire to ‘defray’ the ‘claims’ of the city to the woodland perspective cluttered with the traces of human activity, appear to be underpinned by an understanding of pastoral nature, described by Ettin to be held up as ‘the original condition of human life, from which we have fallen by our uncontrolled meddling in the nature of things’.²²⁵ At this point, the recognition of the misalignment of the landscape with ideal expectations leads towards alternative landscapes, rather than invoking an alternative perspective upon the one at hand. The ideal of the wild appears to precede the rural ideal of the pastoral. As Gifford has observed, wilderness can be construed to circumvent the tensions between the country and the city by pre-existing such issues.²²⁶

Wilderness narratives and pastoral writing are conceptually linked, however are traditionally separate in terms of the version of nature that they purport and their ideological intentions: as Garrard concludes, the forms appear similar but are typically quite different in terms of their constructions of nature.²²⁷ At the same time, though, by collapsing the distance between humans and nature prized in pastoral, the search for a version of nature that exists in contrast with the human world can be understood to have widened. Pastoral nature must now be re-imagined. In this way, the version of pastoral that can be drawn out here can be seen to replicate the intentions, form and structure of previous versions of the mode with an altered objective. Both the association between nature and humans and its obfuscation are unravelled in an attempt to uncover what exists prior. It is disillusionment and crisis in the contemporary world which drives the search for an untouched nature: nature is proposed as the antecedent antithesis of the human world and the realisation of that nature is held up as its antidote.

Macfarlane explains: ‘I live in Cambridge, a city set in one of the most intensively farmed and densely populated regions of the world.’ (*WP*, p. 6) As such, the relationship between nature and humans in the region is described as one made

²²⁵ Ettin, p. 45.

²²⁶ Gifford, *Pastoral*, p. 42.

²²⁷ Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, p. 59.

inextricable through the processes of industry and settlement and which is blighted by its own consequences: the perceptible and imperceptible marks of the impact of human activity upon our environment. The recognition of the existence of these marks leads Macfarlane to judge his natural environment in favour of their absence; different versions of nature are discerned and defined by their proximity to human activity and value is firmly placed on distance:

I had felt the familiar desire to move, to get beyond the event-horizon of the city's ring-road. And up there in the crow's-nest that day, looking down at the roads, the hospital and the fields, and the woods cramped between them, I felt a sharp need to leave Cambridge, to reach somewhere remote, where the starlight fell clearly, where the wind could blow upon me from its thirty-six directions, and where the evidence of human presence was minimal or absent. (*WP*, p. 8)

The principle of wildness appears to allow Macfarlane to reinstate the pastoral flattening of the features of the landscape to fit particular expectations. The appeal of the version of nature imagined here can be clearly understood in Garrard's terms 'as a stable, enduring counterpart to the disruptive energy and change of human societies': the 'enduring' qualities of the starlight and the wind are set up in direct contrast to the busy human landscape of the city and its surrounds.²²⁸ The sense of disillusionment evoked by the city is repeated by the rural landscape outside it: both are seen as the product of human action. The wood is positioned as a kind of hinterland between the city and the industrial cropland and is compromised by its location. It is envisaged as a kind of in-between space, where the fantasy of an escape to a world outside of human influence can be indulged but not realised: it is physically and imaginatively 'cramped' by the human world. The landscape desired is a different kind of hinterland, somewhere beyond the borders of human influence where nature can be experienced 'clearly' from 'thirty-six directions'; developing further Macfarlane's initial discomfort in the city, the human world itself is cast as a blocking force between people and nature, inhibiting our experience and impeding our connections with the natural world. The 'remote'

²²⁸ Ibid, p. 56.

landscape imagined here is one of clarity and purity, purged of the clutter of human influence where nature and its restorative qualities can be directly experienced. This description can be understood to represent both the location of the escape and to signify its desired effects.

Wildness, then, is at this point privileged as an aesthetic ideal venerated for its visual and psychological effects upon humans rather than as an ecological ideal. Macfarlane's escape is driven by his desire to get away from the traces of human activity and in so doing, restore his belief in nature as the antithesis of human culture by finding its existence, and thus the proof of its restorative qualities. The ecological concerns which could be considered to accompany the aesthetic ones are raised by virtue of their interrelationship, but not addressed directly. It represents both the criteria for the location of Macfarlane's escape, and is its object. William Cronon dissects the fantasy of the wild in his essay 'The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature'. Acknowledging its appeal, he sets out the imagined location and function of the wild in nature writing:

It is an island in the polluted sea of urban-industrial modernity, the one place we can turn for escape from our own too-muchness. Seen in this way, wilderness presents itself as the best antidote to our human selves, a refuge we must somehow recover if we hope to save the planet.²²⁹

Cronon's definition elucidates its oppositional ecological potential as an 'antidote' to the causes and effects of human hubris. Cronon's use of language can be understood to precisely describe the ideological positioning of the wild as both a salve for the ills of the contemporary world, an 'island' for 'escape', and as its salvation, the 'antidote' or 'refuge'. This vocabulary can also be understood to communicate the vulnerability of the wild, suggesting its fragility and elusiveness: it is also an 'island' to be 'recovered'. A further interpretation can be gleaned from Cronon's pertinent use of language here; that wildness is an antecedent or primordial state from which we have moved disastrously away, the return to which would 'recover' the world from the folly of

²²⁹ William Cronon, 'The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature', in Cronon ed., *Uncommon Ground*, pp. 69-90 (p. 69).

human actions. At the same time, the fantasy of the wild described here highlights the danger of making distinctions between different versions of nature based on their perceived restorative value and the environmental irresponsibility inherent in such distinctions. As Cronon explains further, ‘wilderness poses a serious threat to responsible environmentalism [...] if we accept the wilderness premise that nature, to be natural, must also be pristine – remote from humanity and untouched by our common past’.²³⁰ If the value of nature is decreased by the impact of human action, questioning and addressing the causes and consequences of that action may be overlooked in favour of finding a version of nature whose value can be interpreted to remain relatively intact. The aesthetic privileging of the fantasy of escaping to the wild could be construed in this way: the recognition of the negative effects of human action on the landscape provoke not ecological concern but the abandonment of that landscape in favour of a more aesthetically pleasing one. By partitioning off the wild from the effects of humans upon nature and privileging the experience that can be gained there by such criteria, a dangerous effect of the escape into the wild is the bracketing off of the social and ecological problems that have led to its veneration. The notion of the wild can be seen to compound the issue that Ettin describes in his argument that ‘the danger of pastoral is isolationism. Not only does it breed complacency, it also encourages the belief that nothing can be done about the larger troubles of life’.²³¹

Soper argues that ‘ecological writing [...] very frequently works implicitly with an idea of nature as a land of pristine otherness to human culture, whose value is depreciated proportionally to its human admixture’.²³² Heise makes a similar connection between the ‘elements of pastoral’ concerned with ‘an antidote for the corruptions of modern, industrial and urban society’ and the understanding of ‘wilderness and natural spaces untouched by humans’ as ‘a galvanising force’.²³³ As Soper and Heise highlight, the idea of a pristine, wild nature existing outside of human influence is problematic, depending on a necessary separation between nature and humans at a basic level and fetishising human influence upon the natural world as essentially negative and

²³⁰ Ibid, p. 81; p. 83.

²³¹ Ibid, p. 176.

²³² Soper, *What is Nature?*, p. 16.

²³³ Heise, *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet*, p. 30.

destructive. The idea also depends on a partitioning of nature based on its perceived pristineness, judging the value of its restorative qualities based on an interpretation of their distance from human influence and thus creating a hierarchy of versions of nature which are more or less ‘natural’ and as such more or less useful or useable as sites of retreat and restoration.

Though the text overcomes a strictly pastoral understanding of nature, the perspective upon the landscape remains reductive: based on particular idea of nature. Though the environments encountered point to multiple and contrasting understandings of nature, a presupposed version is sought after. It is with recognition of this understanding that Jamie attacks *The Wild Places* in her review published in *The London Review of Books* in 2008. Jamie takes particular issue with the concept of ‘wildness’ and undertakes its demystification from the outset. Her central point is ‘how unwild the wild places are’: Jamie is keen to emphasise the ‘contested’ character of the British and Irish landscapes that Macfarlane explores and to highlight how the wild and the domestic are irrevocably entangled.²³⁴ Nature, for Jamie, is about the past and the present, about community and conflict and the processes and application of learning and imagination. Her point draws out also the subjectivity of the imagined category of wildness in this instance: the places encountered are not really ‘wild’ in the sense of being outside of human influence and the idea by which they are judged is not either: it is predicated on a contrast with the understandings of the urban and the rural and conceived in opposition to these categories. In contrast, Jamie expounds the importance of responsibility towards the subjectivity of seeing and communicating. Its partiality must be acknowledged:

There is a lot of ‘I’ [...] and because almost no one else speaks, this begins to feel like an appropriation, as if the land has been taken from us and offered back, in a different language and tone and attitude [...] What’s being reduced is not the health and variety of the landscape, but the variety of our engagement, our ways of seeing, our languages.²³⁵

²³⁴ Kathleen Jamie, ‘A Lone Enraptured Male: Review of the Wild Places by Robert Macfarlane’. *London Review of Books* 30.5 (2008), pp. 25–27, (p. 26).

²³⁵ Ibid, p. 26.

From Jamie's perspective, nature writing, then, must account for this understanding of nature, and the criticism of *The Wild Places* focuses upon Jamie's perception of its failure to do so.

However, further examination of Macfarlane's text shows that the idealistic versions of nature sought by both forms are not as easily experienced as imagined. Specifically, the escape from the human world into an idealised 'wild' natural world is impeded by the disparity between the version of nature encountered and the experience that it provokes, and that which has been anticipated. Describing his experience at the summit of Ben Hope, Macfarlane writes: 'this was one of the least accommodating places to which I had ever come [...] this place was not hostile to my presence, far from it. Just entirely, gradelessly indifferent' (*WP* p. 157). The narrative begins to challenge the perception of the distance between humans and nature upon which the journey was originally based. Firstly, in recognising the existence of wild nature outside of his own terms, Macfarlane is provoked to readdress the distinction made between humans and nature, and also to address the different versions of nature in terms of their wildness. By reconsidering the distinctions between the human and the non-human, and between different versions of nature, a sense of overlapping and even enmeshing across these distinctions are discerned:

I had started to refocus. I was becoming increasingly interested in this understanding of wildness not as something which was hived off from human life, but which existed unexpected around and within in: in cities, backyards, roadside, hedges, field boundaries or spinnies [...] The hedgerows, the fields and the little woods that I had once been so avid to leave behind for the far west and north, had come slowly to seem different to me – filled with a wildness I had not previously perceived or understood. (*WP*, p. 226, 317)

The pastoral and wild senses of nature that Macfarlane begins with demonstrate awareness of the selectivity with which the environment may be interpreted and the multiple ways in which such selectivity may be made manifest. However, as the text

develops, a more productive understanding can be seen to ensue, which additionally acknowledges the influence of desire and perspective upon those interpretations.

The perspective recognised here recalls Bender's description of the parallel specificity of ways of looking at and discerning the features of particular environments, where 'not just the landscape, but my reaction, my desire to unpack a sequence of events, was quite culturally specific. Looking through the window – framing, looking out, standing back from, eliminating, in ways that are easily done, all the bits of landscape that did not conform to my vision, was also part of an historically specific way of "seeing"'.²³⁶ In this respect, the viewpoint focused through the notion of 'wildness' can be understood as the imposition of what Bender calls 'normative landscapes' that rely on 'only one way of telling or experiencing'; their recognition a means of accounting for and attempting to resist such appropriation.²³⁷

It also calls up the notion of 'situated knowledge' from a viewpoint closer to Donna Haraway's use of the term in relation to the partiality of perspective than the connection made by Heise that I mentioned earlier between such knowledge and 'intimate acquaintance with local nature and history [...] with sustained interest in one's immediate surroundings'.²³⁸ Haraway insists upon 'the embodied nature of all vision' that underpins 'a doctrine of embodied objectivity' or 'situated knowledges', arguing that 'only partial perspectives prioritise objective vision'.²³⁹ The acknowledgement of the located character and specificity of perspective counters the 'irresponsibility' of unaccounted perceptions that fail to acknowledge the limitations of their viewpoint. Macfarlane's 'situated knowledge' is not so much concerned with local connectivity, as Heise suggests, as with the revelation of the subjectivity and partiality of perspective.

Secondly, the allure of the wild is grounded by factual and statistical analysis of the negative impact of human actions upon the landscape of Britain, demonstrating, as

²³⁶ Bender, p. 1.

²³⁷ Bender, p. 26.

²³⁸ Heise, *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet*, p. 30.

²³⁹ Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 111.

Gifford suggests, that ‘we now need the statistics as well as the seductions from our writers about nature, together with a responsibility towards nature and ourselves’.²⁴⁰

The statistics of damage are familiar and often repeated, more as elegy now than as protest. In England, between 1930 and 1990, over half of the ancient woodland was cleared, or replaced with conifer plantation. Half of the hedgerow mileage was grubbed up. Nearly all lowland pasture was ploughed out, built on or tarmacked over. Three-quarters of heathland was converted into farmland, or developed. (*WP*, p. 9)

These references to the ecological damage wrought upon the environment can be understood in a more conventionally pastoral way, in terms of the nostalgic way in which the damage is depicted. The elegiac style and tone of lament can be seen to replicate a traditional pastoral approach to the influence of human industry upon the landscape. Additionally, the damage appears to be perceived from an exclusively anthropocentric perspective: the habitats and resources that must be simultaneously altered along with the appearance of the landscape are not addressed. They can also be understood to further the idea that nature has been irreparably damaged by human activity, thus further privileging the wild as the alternative.

On the other hand, though, Macfarlane’s experience and the increasing balance of perspective it presents can further be interpreted in accordance with Gifford’s proposition of the ‘post-pastoral’ mode. Gifford outlines post-pastoral as ‘aware of the anti-pastoral and of the conventional illusions upon which Arcadia is premised, but which finds a language to outflank these dangers with a vision of accommodated humans at home in the very world they thought themselves alienated’.²⁴¹ Gifford’s definition states that ‘fundamental to post pastoral literature is an awe in attention to the natural world’, where ‘awe becomes humility’ and ‘consciousness becomes conscience’. He argues that ‘humbling [...] is a necessary requirement of the shift from the

²⁴⁰ Gifford, ‘Engagement with the Natural World’, *The Guardian*, Monday 30 July 2007, <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2007/jul/30/ruralaffairs.leadersandreply>, n. pag,

²⁴¹ Gifford, *Pastoral*, p. 14.

anthropocentric position of the pastoral to the ecocentric view of the post-pastoral'.²⁴² I suggest that the combination of ecological awareness and the recognition of nature independent of his own expectations and definitions in Macfarlane's text show clear similarities with Gifford's interpretation of the transformation of pastoral in contemporary writing about nature:

a recognition that wildness weaved with the human world, rather than existing only in cleaved-off areas, in National Parks and on distant peninsulas and peaks; maybe such a recognition was what was needed 'to help us end the opposition between culture and nature, the garden and the wilderness, and to come to recognise ourselves at last as at home in both', as an American philosopher, Val Plumwood, had put it. (*WP*, p. 227)

Gifford writes that contemporary versions of pastoral are dealing with the complexity of the relationship between humans and nature beyond anthropocentrism: 'the problem is to find a language that can convey an instinctive unity that is at once both prior to language and expressed in a language that is distinctively human'.²⁴³ Through the transformation of pastoral escape that it represents, Macfarlane's narrative effectively conveys this difficulty.

In *The Wild Places*, the experience of wildness shatters the pastoral illusion and brings into sharp perspective the reality of nature outside of human influence, causing Macfarlane to begin to refocus his interpretation of nature in all forms. Furthermore, the mediatory systems of idealisation associated with pastoral and wilderness are themselves scrutinised. Ettin argues that in pastoral, 'the landscape is emotionally comfortable [...] for its inhabitants, it surrounds them with an unchallenging setting that may actually be a relief from life's troubles, or at least a reminder that such troubles as there are can be measured against the larger scale of nature'.²⁴⁴ Escape in this instance could be interpreted as an escape from the evidence of the negative impact of human action upon the environment, a retreat into an idealised version of nature outside of the

²⁴² Ibid, p. 152.

²⁴³ Ibid, p. 8.

²⁴⁴ Ettin, p. 129.

imprint of human action. However, the escape is actually shown to be from the reductive idealisation of nature itself: in Macfarlane's narrative, a kind of pastoral restoration is achieved through the realisation of the interconnected, reciprocal and multiple relationships between humans and nature. Here, the escapist appeal of pastoral is refigured by ecological crisis; the recognition of the 'the larger scale of nature' is actually representative of 'life's troubles'. Also, the pastoral sense of 'emotional comfort' located in nature is destabilised by the combination of anti-pastoral and ecological understandings of nature: the landscape and the intersection of humans and nature that it comes to represent are both testing to Macfarlane's viewpoint.

It is the experience of the wild that leads Macfarlane towards the pastoral, and it is a version of pastoral that is understood with the complexities of ideas of nature and its representation in mind. Always depending upon an interconnected understanding of the human and the natural, the limited perspective upon this knowledge typified by the pastoral is extended and multiplied to form a version of pastoral that is broader and more reflexive.

The Wild Places presents the re-examination of the ideal of a pastoral escape into nature in several ways. The text uses the notion of an escape into nature to explore the ideas and idealisation by which it is underpinned, unpicking the origins and effects of these in the process. Instead of documenting the escape into nature, the narrative instead represents the escape from the idealisation of nature and its obfuscatory effects upon the relationship between humans and nature. In this way, the text reveals their interrelationship and its reciprocity: the natural world exists independent of our interpretation and understanding, yet remains vulnerable to our actions, the evidence of which in turn is indicative of our own vulnerability and dependence upon the natural world. The retreat into nature represents not escape from the present time and its concerns but a realisation of it: Macfarlane's journey of escape documents not the pastoral fantasy of nature reflecting and thus validating human appropriation of it but the questioning of the causes and effects of these assumptions.

The text addresses the possibility of pastoral escape from the city, in so doing raising and querying the concept of nature. Macfarlane's text demonstrates the

complexities of contemporary perceptions of the relationship between humans and nature, showing the various and often contradictory ways in which pastoral is adopted and altered in attempting to represent and reflect upon the difficulties inherent in understanding that relationship, and the influence of ecological awareness upon that understanding. By exploring the construction of an escape into the wild and the provocations and presumptions upon which it is based, the text is able to explore the ways in which the idealisation of nature is used to both obscure and approach the impact of human action upon the environment, and the consequences of those actions. Macfarlane finds the appeal of an escape into nature in a familiar pastoral contrast between the human and natural worlds, before coming to dissect the factors that have led to this contrast, and to ultimately revise the criteria for and the means by which an escape into nature might be achieved. Macfarlane's text reconfigures the revelatory or epiphanic movement of the motif of pastoral escape, instead representing the loosening of understanding and broadening of experience that transmutes the parameters and effects of pastoral escape into a more recognisable landscape.

Macfarlane's more recent work, *The Old Ways* (2012), develops further the sensitivity towards pastoral ways of looking in the interpretation and representation of a range of different environments. In this text, a commitment to the cultural depth of routes across, and into, various landscapes appears in the form of an attunement to the material and interpretive experiences of particular environments. In *The Old Ways*, the expectation of escape is approached with increasing caution, supplemented by stringent attentiveness to the insights that the landscape in question may offer and the details that may be missed or overshadowed by presumptions to a particular kind of experience. Attending to the material and interpretive complexities of particular places, *The Old Ways* adapts the dynamics of pastoral to encompass cultural, historical and political concerns. As I will discuss in more detail in Chapter Five, *The Old Ways* signifies the continuation and development of the uses of the pastoral discussed in this study.

Pastoral Elsewhere? *Edgelands* by Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts.

The acknowledgement of multiple and selective perspectives upon environments that are shaped by the intersection of their human and non-human components, and in particular, the mutual allure and difficulty of such viewpoints, is central to the premise of the second example of contemporary nature writing to be examined in this section. In *Edgelands*, Farley and Symmons Roberts explain their intention to ‘put aside our nostalgia for places we’ve never really known’ and instead seek out ‘complicated, unexamined places’ and ‘see them afresh’.²⁴⁵ Attempting to resist prescribed and pristine versions of nature, in chapters that run from ‘Paths’ to ‘Landfill’, and ‘Wasteland’ to ‘Woodland’, they explore the ‘interfacial landscape’ between the urban and the rural, areas described by the geographer Marion Shoard as ‘edgelands’.²⁴⁶

The poets are vocal in their criticisms of both the representation of ‘deep, old England’ in traditional nature writing and the absence or misrepresentation of edgelands in contemporary nature writing, where they argue that such places figure as either ‘part of the human landscape that has to be escaped, or transcended’ or ‘merely a backdrop for ‘misanthropy’, secondary to the intentions of the writers themselves (*E*, p. 82; p. 8; p. 9). In contrast, they express their intentions to ‘break out of the duality of rural and urban writing, to explore these unobserved parts of our shared landscape as places of possibility, mystery, beauty’ and highlight ‘an overlooked England’ that exists ‘between our carefully managed wildernesses’ ‘with no obvious artistic or literary analogue’ (*E*, p. 6; p. 10).

Recalling Deakin’s romantic celebration of water and its flow through the landscape, the poets juxtapose the ‘dark, divergent stream’ of a sewage farm with ‘the England of rills and rain on oak leaves’, emphasising both the biodiversity that it attracts and the contribution that it makes to the features of the landscape (*E*, p. 82). Unlike the wild places that Macfarlane hopes to find beyond the extent of human influence upon the urban or rural landscapes, the edgelands that Farley and Symmons Roberts seek are

²⁴⁵ Farley and Symmons Roberts, p. 10. All further references to this text will be given parenthetically using the abbreviation (*E*).

²⁴⁶ Marion Shoard, ‘Edgelands’, in Jennifer Jenkins, ed., *Remaking the Landscape: The Changing Face of Britain*, (London: Profile Books, 2002), pp. 117-147, (p. 117).

understood to exist in the margins that exist between those landscapes, 'where urban and rural negotiate and renegotiate their borders' (E, p. 5). Both appear to be privileged for similar characteristics: their existence outside the designations of landscapes defined by human influence and beyond its scope. The edgelands, like the wild places, are 'underdeveloped, unwatched territories' (E, p. 5). Yet the edgelands are seen to possess a quality that Macfarlane's presumption of the wild indicates it to lack: they are perceived to be 'untranslated landscape' (E, p. 5), without established patterns of attention or mediation. Furthermore, they contrast the pristine and sterile idealisation of 'the wild' with the 'history' and 'proper back-story' of 'the feral', understood as a more complex understanding of environments with a stricter sense of both the subjectivity and temporality of particular interpretations (E, p. 158). It can also be extended to a way of looking itself, viewing from a perspective free of the acquired trait of categorising environments by way of their degrees of relation to familiar urban or rural places. This characteristic is described to be to the advantage of these areas and their experience: 'At their most unruly and chaotic, edgelands make a great deal of our official wilderness seem like the enshrined, ecologically arrested, controlled garden space it really is' (E, p. 7-8).

Rather than escaping from the areas defined by human intervention, whether urban or rural, the poets of *Edgelands* express their desire to root out the areas of 'nature' that exist between and within them, in order to immerse themselves in the unregulated environments that can be recognised by the neglect of either their cultivation or celebration. They explain that a particular kind of attention is required to re-evaluate the environment according to its edgelands: 'it's easy to miss. This is not a sprawling marsh. Edgelands landscapes grow in gaps, changing as they cross a road, circle a building' (E, p. 79). A more subtle understanding of nature and a more nuanced sense of the ways in which human habitation occurs within rather than outside of its bounds, leaving both slivers and swathes of land untended, emerges.

Accordingly, *Edgelands* appears to embark upon a re-examination of the pastoral with this sense of interconnectivity in mind. Farley and Symmons Roberts write that:

We know that an unseen, untouched English landscape in a myth. We know that a long and complex interaction between constant natural processes and more recent human activity has largely formed all the landscapes we can see today, and that landscape is indivisible from the human world. (*E*, p. 26)

They argue that instead, ‘true pastoral is more likely to be found in the edgelands’ (*E*, p. 103). Understood as the conjunction of human and non-human forces leading to the establishment of a particular landscape, this definition of pastoral can be applied to such places. From this angle, these areas are understood to represent a more genuine version of the kinds of connections between the past and the present and the human and the natural that are typically associated with the pastoral tradition, as:

Places where ruderals familiar here since the last ice sheets retreated have found a way to live with each successive wave of new arrivals, places where the city’s dirty secrets are laid bare, and successive human utilities scar the earth or stand cheek by jowl with one another; complicated, unexamined places that thrive on disregard. (*E*, p. 10)

Here, *Edgelands* appears to take on the ‘post-pastoral’ conception of the landscape described in the previous section above, and seems to begin by embracing places like the fly-tipped copse that Macfarlane struggled with at the beginning of *The Wild Places*.

However, despite the ‘post-pastoral’ character of their locations, idealising and idyllizing tendencies can be picked up in the celebratory style of their explorations. The representation of the edgelands is limited by lack of engagement with the environmental implications of the activities in these areas, and though the ‘presiding spirit’ of Richard Mabey’s *The Unofficial Countryside* is acknowledged, the poets differentiate their work from his environmentally critical approach in their intention to ‘cherish these new habitats in their own right’ (*E*, p. 6).

Their resistance to the conventional idyll of pastorally-inflected nature writing is presaged by their own experiences of the intersection of the urban and the rural in childhood. Questioning the rural idyll as an altogether abstract concept, they explain that ‘for a long time, an entire childhood in fact, we wondered where the countryside

actually was, or even if it existed' (*E*, p. 2). The landscapes of their childhoods, of 'back lanes' and 'waste ground', are contrasted with 'the sunlit uplands of jigsaw puzzles and Ladybird books, the meadowlands and glades in the framed, reproduced pastorals our parents hung on our living-room walls or that we saw on television or read about' (*E*, p. 2). In challenging what could be called the collective nostalgia of the pastoral countryside by exploring what lies between the urban and the rural, the poets frame their experiences of the edgelands within their recollections of such places.

Yet, a sense of nostalgia, understood as the 'acute longing for familiar surroundings', can be detected in the seemingly unquestioning transplantation of pastoral's effects onto a determinedly un-pastoral landscape.²⁴⁷ As Macfarlane comments in a review for *The Guardian*, in their efforts to negotiate the 'routine prejudices' that inform conceptions and representations of natural landscapes, Farley and Symmons Roberts appear to 'also install replacement biases and nostalgias of their own'.²⁴⁸ Though the poets are explicit in their choice of approach, writing that 'we are drawn to the idea of praise, of celebration. And we are equally aware of its difficulty', evidence of such awareness is hard to find (*E*, p. 7). Is their depiction of these post-pastoral landscapes limited by their celebratory approach? Do they in fact relocate the pastoral idyll, and effectively reinstate the selectivity they seek to avoid, by allowing nostalgia to prescribe the edgelands as places of escape?

Nostalgia presents multiple and contradictory interpretations, deriving from what Linda Hutcheon has called its 'semantic slippage' from its original medical usage to describe the potentially fatal mental and physical malaise associated with homesickness observed by Johannes Hofer in 1688, towards less specific spatial, geographical and temporal separations.²⁴⁹ Reinterpreted as an 'incurable condition' predicated upon an imagined past tied irrevocably to the present, nostalgia is often understood negatively;

²⁴⁷ "nostalgia, n". OED Online. September 2013. Oxford University Press. 03 September 2013 <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/128472?redirectedFrom=nostalgia>.

²⁴⁸ Macfarlane, 'Edgelands by Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts: A Review,' *The Guardian*, 19 February 2011. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2011/feb/19/edgelands-farley-symmons-roberts-review>, n.pag.

²⁴⁹ Linda Hutcheon, 'Irony, Nostalgia and the Postmodern,' *University of Toronto English Library*, 19 January 1998: <http://www.library.utoronto.ca/utel/criticism/hutchinp.html>, n. pag.; Roberta Rubenstein, *Home Matters: Longing and Belonging, Nostalgia and Mourning in Women's Fiction* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001) p. 7.

described variously as ‘sentimental’, ‘elitist’ and ‘escapist’, ‘nostalgia is always suspect’: turning away from the present towards an imagined past and using that past to reframe the present.²⁵⁰ However, does nostalgia always signify the ‘withdrawal from any full response to an existing society’ as Williams suggested?²⁵¹

In a recent interview for *Green Letters*, Macfarlane identifies in contemporary nature writing ‘a keen cognisance of the dangers, but also the opportunities of nostalgia’.²⁵² Similarly, Ryle has recently examined pastoral’s backward look ‘as a mode of cultural critique that involves imaginative retrospection’.²⁵³ From these perspectives, compelled by concerns in the present, a futural dimension to nostalgia’s backwards look can be uncovered. To this end, Stuart Tannock suggests that ‘nostalgia [...] can equally function as retrieval’, arguing that ‘nostalgia [...] works to retrieve the past for support in building the future’.²⁵⁴ Similarly, Svetlana Boym has written that ‘nostalgia [...] is not always retrospective; it can be prospective as well. The fantasies of the past, determined by the needs of the present, have a direct impact on the realities of the future’.²⁵⁵ In her influential differentiation between ‘restorative’ and ‘reflective’ nostalgia, Boym identifies in the latter a stronger focus upon the ‘*algia*’ or longing component of the form; rather than emphasising the concept of a ‘*nostos*’ or home, this version of nostalgia addresses the desire for that home, and the form and effects of such longing.²⁵⁶ Within ‘reflective’ nostalgia, for Boym it is possible to explore ‘ways of inhabiting many places at once and imagining different time zones [...] taking time out of time and [...] grasping the fleeing present’.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁰ Svetlana Boym, ‘Nostalgia and its Discontents.’ *The Hedgehog Review, Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007), p. 8; Christopher Lasch, ‘The Politics of Nostalgia,’ *Harper’s Magazine* (November 1984): 65-70, p. 65; David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 25; Nadia Atia and Jeremy Davies. ‘Nostalgia and the Shape of History.’ *Memory Studies* 3.3 (2010), pp. 181-186, (p. 181). <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1750698010364806>.

²⁵¹ Williams, *The Country and The City*, p. 140.

²⁵² Macfarlane ‘Interview’, *Green Letters* 17 (2013), pp. 77-83, (p. 80).

²⁵³ Ryle, ‘The Past, The Future and the Golden Age: Some Contemporary Versions of Pastoral’ in Soper, Ryle and Thomas, eds., *The Pleasures and Politics of Consuming Differently*, p. 44.

²⁵⁴ Stuart Tannock, ‘Nostalgia Critique’, *Cultural Studies* 9.3 (1995), pp. 453-64, (p. 458).

²⁵⁵ Svetlana Boym, ‘Nostalgia and its Discontents’, p. 7.

²⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 13, original emphasis. See also OED ‘nostalgia’ above.

²⁵⁷ Boym, ‘Nostalgia and its Discontents’, p. 13-14.

As these examples illustrate, nostalgia can be both reflective and reflexive. It can operate as a means of putting perceptions of the past and the present into play, and lead to consideration of how and why places can be seen in certain ways. Engaging with a reflective nostalgia, in which neither the past nor its interpretation are singular or fixed, can uncover multiple perspectives and timescales in a moment in place. With the possibilities of such ‘opportunities’ in mind, I suggest that rather than being put aside, as the authors of *Edgelands* suggested, instead a version of nostalgia with a critical dimension can be uncovered in the text itself. Understood as ‘a force that complicates, rather than one that simplifies’, the appearance of nostalgia in this instance of new nature writing illustrates the different ways that places can come to be known.²⁵⁸

In their celebratory and sometimes comic exposition of the areas considered to be excluded from traditional landscape writing, the poets can be seen to favour effect over reflection upon the ecological obfuscations that the landscapes and situations that they highlight must entail. Presaged on their liberating experiences of the edgelands in their childhoods, the counterposing of typically pastoral and edgelands landscapes and their effects can seem to misdirect. The selectivity towards the environment and areas understood to be representative of ‘nature’ and therefore worthy of privilege is arguably replicated in their suggestion to celebrate the fringes of the urban and the rural: ‘Rather than escaping to the forests of the Highlands, park your car at Matalan and have a walk around the edgelands woods’ (*E*, p. 166). Discussing the limitations of the *Edgelands* essays, Shoard suggests that ‘the edgelands now need something beyond a merely subjective celebration of their identity’.²⁵⁹ The importance of ‘learn[ing] to see these zones’, and to ‘see them afresh’ stressed by Farley and Symmons Roberts must be complimented by directing attention towards the ways that we see them.

However, the poets demonstrate awareness of such selective perspectives and in fact dissect their effects, writing that ‘most of us live surrounded by mysterious labyrinths of our own making that we seem unable or unwilling to look into’ (*E*, p. 19). Instances of this kind of awareness can in fact be found in *Edgelands*. For example, in

²⁵⁸ Atia and Davies, p. 181.

²⁵⁹ Shoard, ‘*Edgelands*: Journeys into England’s True Wildernesses: A Review,’ *The Guardian*, 6 March 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2011/mar/06/edgelands-england-farley-roberts-review>, n. pag.

their focus upon the work of the imagination at Swordy Well, they describe the selectivity of pastoralising vision that adapts and manipulates the view:

Standing in the meadowland at Swordy Well, the imagination begins its work, Photoshopping out the modern pylons and telegraph poles, altering the growth of trees in a kind of reverse time lapse, looking for older landmarks. What we should realise, though, is that over time the land itself is in flux. Earth is moved around, shifted, disturbed [...] We want to fix and identify some enduring and underlying aspect, as if there is, in the past, some timeless, ideal condition that lies waiting to be uncovered. (*E*, p. 68)

As the poets explain, ‘the moment is important here [...] such are the constantly shifting sands of edgelands that any writing about these landscapes is a snapshot’ (*E*, p. 7). This kind of awareness of multiple temporalities and viewpoints in which the intersection of human and natural forces, of past and present actions, and of ways of looking, are often captured within extended moments of reflection in the text. The focus of attention on margins and passing moments, demonstrates a committed attentiveness to the possibilities of looking.

In these instances, nostalgia can be seen to be invoked to address our relationship to our environment, rather than simply to alleviate its effects. Forming part of the post-pastoral understanding and representation of the landscape that appears in this example, here, it is used to question both our conception of ‘familiar surroundings’ and the ‘longing’ that conjures them. As Ryle suggests, ‘the cultural traditions of pastoral, nostalgia and retrospect [...] when brought into dialectical and imaginative connection with the new discontents of the contemporary, can still ‘speak something of what is gone’, and thereby imply a critique of what is’.²⁶⁰ Further, the analytical approaches to the use of nostalgia allow the unfolding of the landscape in spatial and temporal senses. A version of the ‘opportunities of nostalgia’ proposed by Macfarlane can be found here. Both the invocation of nostalgia and its intended effects in this case appear to be active rather than passive; the intention is not to restore or simply make visible the connections

²⁶⁰ Ryle, ‘The Past, The Future and the Golden Age: Some Contemporary Versions of Pastoral’, p. 56.

between the past and the present, but to explore them. The text presents the opportunity to reconnect some of the meanings of nostalgia, addressing a perceived estrangement from our environment through examination of our surroundings in search of new or renewed ways of understanding and relating to nature. The perspective upon the experience and the representation of time and space contributes towards challenging the sentimentality of nostalgia in nature writing, and opens up questioning of the causes and the effects of the conjuring of pastoral idylls. The territory of nature writing is shown to be shifting, and requiring a narrative eye that is able to capture this adequately.

In *Edgelands*, Farley and Symmons Roberts dispense with the distinctions between nature and culture that the pastoral traditionally rests upon, but at the same time reinstate its desire for idealisation and escape. Reimagining the terms of its realisation, they can be seen to relocate its effects for an alternatively conceived world. Both extremely uncritical and deeply celebratory of the places it describes, on the one hand, they can be understood to envisage a contemporary version of pastoral that negotiates more complex interpretations of nature and human-nature relations by adopting new parameters by which particular versions of nature might be idealised. That said, at the same time the text also displays a very clear sense of the problems associated with selective celebration. I suggest that in so doing, they are playing with the idea of the celebration of place and on the expectations of what places that are celebrated should be like, or what it is about them that is celebrated. In the process, they can be seen to be drawing out the pastoral impulse towards escape and restoration, questioning its parameters and reimagining them for the contemporary period. Therefore, on the other hand, the text can be seen to offer a version of pastoral that goes beyond the simple idealisation of nature, whether in a conventionally pastoral or more contemporary form. Kerridge provides a useful contribution to this line of thought, suggesting that:

Ostentatiously perverse, in the pleasure they take in writing about landfill sites, car dumps and sewage farms as an antidote to the wilderness tradition, Farley and Symmons Roberts are searching for evidence of concealed

ecological relationships, and for the messy interpenetration of wild nature and human life.²⁶¹

Kerridge describes their version of the 'new nature writing' to 'begin to answer' the contemporary recognition of the complexities of human-nature relations.²⁶² The pastoral is central to this exercise, providing a flexible and reflexive framework in which contrasting conceptions of those relations can be positioned and relatively explored.

Rather than simply transposing the pastoral form into new places in response to the weakening senses of strictly urban or rural, cultural or natural places, Farley and Symmons Roberts bring the desire for pastoral escape into view through their adaptation of the mode, focusing on the principles on which it is based and the outcomes that are expected. In *Edgelands*, the notion of an escape into nature is set against awareness of the subjectivity and malleability of the category of nature. This understanding of its multiple and conflicting forms and corresponding interpretations denotes a sense of responsibility towards the undertaking of the text. Drawn towards versions of nature that appear unremarked, the essays depict accounts of escapes into nature within and between pastoral delineations of space. The connections between these delineations and personal and collective assignations of landscapes and their effects are brought into focus and thoroughly scrutinised.

Conclusion

In contemporary nature writing, the appeal and the effects of pastoral are consciously engaged, and tentatively negotiated. The ecological consequences of the extent of the intersection of humans and nature have resulted in the desires for a new kind of escapes into nature. The dynamics of escape can be problematised and even reshaped into new forms to respond to contemporary understandings of nature, depicting the convergence, rather than the opposition, of notions of the natural and the human. The legacies of the traditions of nature writing and the pastoral are intertwined with those of their reception,

²⁶¹ Richard Kerridge, 'Ecocriticism' *This Year's Work in Critical and Cultural Theory*, 21.1 (2013), p. 14.

²⁶² *Ibid*, p. 14.

and the awareness of changing reactions and responses to those traditions gives a self-referential character to the changed versions of the form that these recent examples represent.

Yet, despite the awareness of multiple and shifting perspectives upon nature and the layered understanding of the interpretations and attributions of the land present in *The Wild Places* and *Edgelands*, these understandings remain limited. Interconnectivity is spelled out from individual (or paired) experiences and first-person narratives, perpetuating what Richard Pickard recently described as ‘non-isolated isolation’, aware of being ‘embedded in the larger society and yet never engaging with it’ in a direct manner.²⁶³

At the same time, though, the understandings of the environments they describe do demonstrate commitment to engaging with the wider world embedded in the land they describe, and acknowledging their positions within it. In this way, the ‘human-centredness’ that Mabey identifies cannot necessarily be avoided, but it can be acknowledged and even employed as a means of reflection. Slovic writes that:

most nature writers [...] walk a fine line (or, more accurately, vacillate) between rhapsody and detachment, between aesthetic celebration and scientific explanation. And the effort to achieve an equilibrium, a suitable balance of proximity to and distance from nature, results in the prized tension of awareness.²⁶⁴

Taking these principles of nature writing further, instances of recent British nature writing seems to go beyond simply ‘paying attention’ as Slovic describes it, and attempt to analyse the concept of attention, how and why and to what effect it might be paid.²⁶⁵ As Soper suggests, recognising the limitations of nature understood through oppositions requires a subtler understanding of difference, aware of responsibility and

²⁶³ Richard Pickard, ‘Book Review: Ashton Nicholls, *Beyond Romantic Ecocriticism: Toward Urbanatural Roosting*’, *Ecozon@: European Journal of Literature, Culture and Environment*, 3.1 (2012), pp. 149-151, (p. 151).

²⁶⁴ Slovic, *Seeking Awareness in American Nature Writing*, p. 4.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

accountability.²⁶⁶ Adrian Ivakhiv argues that although the recognition of ecological crisis is fuelled by the idea that nature no longer exists or can even be imagined outside of human terms, analysis of the causes and possible effects of this situation must transcend these definitions:

The illusion that nature in this sense is a social (and exclusively human) construction, while the real world of nature 'out there' remains meaningless and free of any communication, with a boundary line clearly separating these two realms, can no longer be sustained.²⁶⁷

Ecological responsibility requires both the recognition of the human appropriation of nature, and the physical effects of that appropriation.

Furthermore, the fact that these narratives are the perspective and experience of particular individuals cannot be negotiated, and perhaps does not need to be. The narratives themselves are tentative and questioning, their insights are likewise. As Dee notes, new nature writing is about perspective; as well as about knowledge and understanding, it is concerned with effect. Dee observes that:

if they were dependent on facts alone, these books of new Nature Writing would fail; their strengths and authenticity come from their subjective eye [...] New Nature writing is modest [...] un-possessive and anti-imperial (human and non-), straitened by science but alive to the imagination's needs and discoveries. It is apprehensive in both senses of the word.²⁶⁸

Similarly, their example can also be understood to be illustrative of the 'green pleasures' that Kerridge describes. Kerridge extols the 'need to move freely and frequently between the enraptured contemplation of wild, infinite nature, and the pragmatic measuring and contextualising that the crisis makes necessary'.²⁶⁹ The critical pastoral in which I argue that these notions are invoked and explored stops short of the

²⁶⁶ Soper, *What is Nature?*, p. 19.

²⁶⁷ Adrian Ivakhiv, 'Stirring the Geopolitical Unconscious: Towards a Jamesonian Ecocriticism', *New Formations*, 64, (2008), p. 98.

²⁶⁸ Dee, p. 19.

²⁶⁹ Kerridge, 'Green Pleasures' in Soper, Ryle and Thomas, eds., *The Politics and Pleasures of Consuming Differently*, p. 133.

ecophenomenological or biosemiotic explorations of the interconnections of human-nature relations that Kerridge examines in this context. However, the renewal of the celebration of nature in conjunction with more sophisticated, ecologically informed understanding of the subject that Kerridge describes here appears integral to contemporary nature writing. These instances of pastoral are motivated by the interconnected desires of celebrating human-nature relations as well as, or as part of, establishing what Hannes Bergthaller calls ‘an adequate response to the ecological crisis’.²⁷⁰

Elsewhere, Kerridge describes the possibility of ‘new literary forms [...] capable of revealing what conventional forms obscure’, and the potential of ‘replacing familiar stereotypes with more complicated pictures’.²⁷¹ In these instances, the adaptability of the pastoral can be understood to bridge the gap between new and old: employing, adapting and reshaping its conventions to reflect and respond to alternative understandings of human-nature relations and their representation, emerging in more complex forms that are possibly more fruitful in this context.

In contemporary British nature writing, the framework of pastoral and the premise of an escape into nature is used to install and to analyse the concepts of the human and the natural, and notions of estrangement and reconciliation between the two. In so doing, pastoral is adapted to both celebrate and interrogate material and imaginative appropriations of nature set up in contrast with and in connection to culture, using a firm grounding in ecological detail to recognize the permutations that exist in between these definitions. The accounts of pastoral that emerge are more complex and less certain, working both with and against the tradition from which they stem: reflecting and responding to the ecological imperatives with which they are conceived.

²⁷⁰ Bergthaller, ‘Review’, p. 82; see also Kerridge, ‘Green Pleasures’ in Soper, Ryle and Thomas, eds., *The Politics and Pleasures of Consuming Differently*, p. 152.

²⁷¹ Kerridge, ‘Ecocriticism’, p. 17.

Chapter Three

Natural Connections: Pastoral Relations

Every sensitive person who is not wholly lacking in feeling experiences this when he wanders in the open air, when he lives in the country or lingers among the monuments of ancient times, in short, when in artificial conditions and situations he is surprised by the sight of simple nature.²⁷²

Friedrich Schiller

How revoltingly pastoral of you.²⁷³

John Fowles

Addressing key pastoral relationships – between definitions of the country and the city and conceptions of the human and the natural – through the analysis of a series of examples of contemporary writing and criticism, this chapter traces the emergence of the reconfigured forms and understandings of these relationships in instances that disclose contemporary versions of pastoral writing. Focusing on the ways that these pairings are depicted and challenged, the chapter examines the adaptation of pastoral to approach and to account for environmental concerns that bring the connections upon which the mode is based into view. Attention towards the ecological configurations and implications of these relationships raises and questions demarcations of the past and the present and the links between them. In the process, the structure and interpretation of the landscape is questioned and re-imagined. Accordingly, I will examine the depiction of these relationships in a series of texts that are concerned with pastoral ways of looking.

I argue that these relationships are put under particular pressure when considered in the context of their ecological implications and can be found in new shapes as a result. Investigating the representation of the country and the city in Christopher Hart's *The Harvest* (1999) and Ali Smith's *The Accidental* (2005), I explore the ways that these novels are concerned with the causes and effects of pastoral attributions of their particular environments. The two novels appear to deal with very different versions of the countryside and its interconnections with the city. Yet, despite their differences, both

²⁷² Schiller, p. 21.

²⁷³ John Fowles, *Daniel Martin*, (London: Vintage, 2004), p. 28.

can be seen to adopt and challenge pastoral assignations of urban and rural places, exploring the interconnections between the two understandings of place and examining the ways in which their convergence is registered.

Next, I will discuss the appearance of understandings of the human and the natural in Kathleen Jamie's *Findings* (2005) and Jim Crace's *Being Dead* (1999). Both texts explore the multiple ways that the environments that they depict can be seen, uncovering layers of understanding both within the landscapes themselves and in the ways that they are interpreted. Dealing with the complexities of ideas of nature, the examples discussed in this chapter use the framework of pastoral to explore the different channels into these ideas that their approaches to and perspectives upon the mode open up. In these four texts, the interstices between pastoral's relations are exposed and explored, allowing the spatial, compositional and temporal attributions of particular environments to be uncovered and identified. In the process, these understandings are dislodged and repositioned as the extent of their linkages are uncovered. In so doing, the pastoral connections themselves are shown to exist in several and altered forms, engaging with and resisting the interrelations that they represent.

1. The Country and the City

The first part of the chapter addresses contemporary manifestations of the relationship between the country and the city, or the rural and the urban. In the versions of pastoral traced throughout the chapter, the definitions of these locations are under particular and numerous pressures, as are the terms of the contrast between them, and the representation of that contrast. In the texts examined in this section, the pastoral relationship between the country and the city is re-invigorated by the presence of ecological concerns as well as the social, political and economic issues that have led to, and are raised by, the changing relationship between the country and the city. As this section will demonstrate, this re-invigoration takes the form of the re-animation of recognisable pastoral patterns of response towards and representation of this relationship, and also gives rise to alternative ways of imagining and depicting that relationship. Contemporary pastorals can enact this relationship as a way of turning

away from the recognition of crisis, or a means of turning towards it, re-inscribing its contrasts and connections in new ways.

As I discussed in Chapter One, the distinction between the pastoral concepts of the country and the city has been heavily criticised and thoroughly blurred both in terms of its material appearances and its theoretical interpretations. The viability of the relationship between the urban and the rural that the pastoral's critical movement depends upon has become uncertain. Barrell and Bull argued that 'it is difficult to pretend that the English countryside is now anything more than an extension of the town'.²⁷⁴ Williams suggested that the pastoral had come to embody this pretence, writing that 'the English country had been made and re-made by men, and the town was at once its image and its agent. It was precisely at this point that the 'town and country' fiction served: to promote superficial comparisons, and to prevent real ones'.²⁷⁵ For Williams, as for Barrell and Bull, the conditions for the pastoral contrast were specific and moreover, they had become disconnected with reality. Yet, the distance between the country and the city in the pastoral, and between the pastoral and reality, has never really been as clear cut as Barrell and Bull's dismissal of the pastoral appears to suggest. Williams's argument can be read to attest to this:

Powerful images of the country and city have been ways of responding to a whole social development. [...] We must not limit ourselves to their contrast but go on to see their interrelations and through these the real shape of the underlying crisis.²⁷⁶

The interrelations that Williams points towards illustrate the limitations of the distinctions between the country and the city; however, opening up the critical ground between them does not mean disregarding, but rather complicating the material and theoretical spaces that they are intended to delineate. The possibilities contained in addressing this understanding of the situation suggest that these distinctions remain receptive to analysis. To this end, Gifford argues that the inadequacy of the pastoral

²⁷⁴ Barrell and Bull, p. 432.

²⁷⁵ Williams, *The Country and The City*, p. 54.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p. 297.

towards contemporary understandings of the relationships between notions of the urban and the rural with which Barrell and Bull cut off their analysis of the mode actually produces ‘all the more reason [...] to examine the presence of this false vision’ in more recent writing.²⁷⁷ From this angle, the acknowledgement and interrogation of these categories entails the examination of the manifestation of ‘superficial’ and ‘real’ understandings of particular environments and the implications of both.

The pastoral’s persistence as a mode of writing and the variety of its forms of engagement with the categories of the country and the city demonstrates the complexities that they have come to represent. The mode can be written or read to illuminate the relationships between the country and the city, or the human and the natural, or to obscure them; it can look forward to a redeemed future or back to a lost past. It can point towards and interrogate the spaces in between or gloss over them altogether. Attending to ecological concerns through these categories, or addressing the ways that ecological attention affects them, brings the connections and contrasts that they comprise into focus from further angles. In the process, the pastoral environment is brought into view from additional and alternative perspectives, highlighting not only the interrelations that occur between and beyond its relationships, but also their imbalances and implications. In the two texts that I will discuss in this section of the chapter, the definitions of pastoral places are in question. Both are concerned with the content and the effects of pastoral classifications. *The Harvest* addresses the contradictions and misdirections of pastoral stylisations of the countryside; it maintains and complicates its contrasts with the city and adds to these issues a supplementary undercurrent of environmental crisis. Taking a different approach to the impact of ecological concerns upon the expectations and effects of the tradition, *The Accidental* highlights the ways that pastoral tension between the country and the city may be used reflexively to address such concerns. Significant in each example is the awareness of the relevance and ambivalence with which the ecological issues may be registered within the mode. This awareness is an integral component of the new forms of pastoral mapped in this chapter,

²⁷⁷ Terry Gifford, *Green Voices: Understanding Contemporary Nature Poetry* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p. 26.

representative of the transformed shape in which its relations are made in conjunction with increasing sensitivity towards the spaces that they encompass.

Rural Losses in *The Harvest* by Christopher Hart

Christopher Hart's *The Harvest* ostensibly documents a crisis of rural life, combining the decline of rural work and traditions with the influx of urban influences and the threat of environmental change, from the perspective of an unemployed teenage villager, Lewis Pike. However, the novel subtly questions the concepts of the urban and the rural, and the relations between them, through its treatment of these contrasts and those perceived between the past, the present and the future. Analysis of the appearance of these topics in the novel demonstrates the persistence and persuasiveness of pastoral distinctions based on idealising presuppositions of rural life. At the same time, Hart can be seen to counterpose the allure of such distinctions with the recognition of their tenuous foundations and the disturbing potential of their obfuscatory effects. The novel depicts the structures and expectations of pastoral alongside environmentally, historically and socially oriented sensitivities towards the landscape over which those structures and expectations are cast. Both the distinctions between the notions of the country and the city and their interrelations are integral to the version of pastoral present in Hart's novel.

The Harvest laments a pastoral world now remote in the village's lost agrarian past, its traces understood as absences in the countryside, 'those high downs empty of shepherds, those fields empty of ploughmen and nodding horses. Those lost landscapes'.²⁷⁸ This quietened countryside is neither owned nor worked by locals, instead 'occasionally ploughed and sown and sprayed and reaped, by contract farmers brought in from outside, their vast machines crawling on the lonely downs' (*TH*, p. 214). Using rhythmic and repetitive language, Hart depicts a contemporary rural landscape through which the past echoes, its elegiac tone amplified by the conditions of its present inhabitants. The remaining local farmers 'got poorer yearly', and the labourers are left

²⁷⁸ Christopher Hart, *The Harvest* (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), p. 17. Subsequent references to this text will be made parenthetically using the abbreviation (*TH*).

‘redundant, superfluous, as comically antiquated as a blunderbuss, to be hung up on a rusting hook on the barn wall along with the sickles and scythes’ (*TH*, p. 214).

Setting the past against the present, and the country against the city, the novel presents an elegy for the pastoral environment. The intersection of the urban and the rural is depicted mainly through its negative effects upon the traditions and the conditions of the latter: the loss of jobs through the industrialisation of farming has led to the departure of locals in search of work elsewhere and the arrival of moneyed outsiders or ‘incomers’. The rural landscape and community are being subsumed by the advance of the urban: ‘the village is now what they call a dormitory suburb, inhabited by retired middle classes, or by commuting accountants and solicitors’ (*TH*, p. 151). The description here paraphrases Barrell and Bull’s explanatory justification for the end of pastoral writing due to the disappearance of the rural countryside and its transition into pastoral re-appropriated as aspirational rural living: ‘as the countryside becomes ever more effectively a dormitory for a managerial and executive *élite* [...] so the last sad remains of the pastoral are parcelled up and sold off in semi-detached lots’.²⁷⁹

Meeker suggests that a typical presumption of the pastoral contrast between the urban and the rural dictates that:

The city degrades people and the country restores their sense of power and dignity; in the city we are controlled, but in the country we control. A rural setting symbolises both the purity of nature and the power of people.²⁸⁰

In *The Harvest*, though the depiction of the effects of the city corresponds to the first part of Meeker’s contrast, the country not longer adheres to the second part. The accounts of Lewis’s troubled schoolfriend and his own disorientating experiences in the city are set alongside the disenfranchised and powerless representatives of the traditional rural community, subject to the social and economic contrivances of the city, equally degraded by and estranged from its centre and influence. The city’s encroachment into the countryside threatens its identity as understood by their opposition.

²⁷⁹ Barrell and Bull, p. 432.

²⁸⁰ Meeker, *The Comedy of Survival*, p. 53.

The changes to the industries and communities of the countryside that have left the Pikes in particular alienated from the landscape by which they measure their identities. The novel opens with the image of Lewis as a kind of pastoral last man, a solitary incarnation of the pastoral premise of the existence of an inherent connection between country folk and the land where they live. When ‘over the hill came Lewis Pike, a brace of moletraps in each pocket, dully clanking like some fantastic and redundant machine rusted the colour of the earth’ (*TH*, p. 1), the description is initially difficult to place. However, Lewis’s consignment to anachronism quickly becomes apparent: his connection to the earth is the result of a linkage now seized and its components degrading, fused together in their disjunction from the contemporary world and remaining as signifiers of another, now obsolete, time.

The redundant rural lifestyle of the villagers is reinvented or reappropriated as a commercial attraction at Farmer Gyles’s Old Tyme Farmstead, where Lewis’s former farm labourer father works, now ‘pretending to be a farm labourer’ (*TH*, p. 5). Elsewhere in the village, new residents express their intentions to ‘restore *ceremony* and *ritual* to rural life’ (*TH*, p. 171, original emphasis), by including the sacrifice of a corn doll made from the final sheaf of the year’s crop at the upcoming harvest festival. Hart presents a satirical take on the romantic expectations of rural life from the perspective of outsiders and the transition of rural occupations and traditions into contemporary pastiche. As Head suggests, the text’s depiction of ‘how lifestyle culture generates a false mode of engagement with rural existence is profoundly pessimistic’.²⁸¹

Head reads the apparent crisis of the pastoral environment in the text as ‘a powerful anti-pastoral’ that ‘depicts the catastrophic consequences for rural life when no genuine external regeneration is made available’.²⁸² In his survey of contemporary accounts of pastoral, Head notes that the changing perception of the country and the city has contradictory results for pastoral writing. He writes that ‘the “urban” and the “rural” are both in flux’, subject to ‘hazier and less fertile distinction’ and thus ‘intensely problematic’. Tracing the infusion of pastoral with ‘modern social concerns’ back to

²⁸¹ Dominic Head, *The Cambridge Introduction to Modern British Fiction, 1950-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 195.

²⁸² *Ibid*, p. 195.

Thomas Hardy and D. H. Lawrence, Head highlights that in their writing, 'landscape is an arena of pressing social change, rather than a scenic backdrop or a poetic or contemplative retreat'.²⁸³ The 'scenic backdrop' of the pastoral landscape is both the place in which to contemplate the interrelationship between the country and the city and an active component of that interrelationship. Hart's novel, he argues, elucidates the contemporary escalation of the 'difficulty [...] of finding positive instances of human activity illuminated in a nonhuman context', positing that the negative impression of the countryside depicted in *The Harvest* 'impl[ies] the need for such a link' but stops far short of its realisation.²⁸⁴

The attribution of contemporary rural hardship to external agency and the narrative of decline and loss can also be connected to the pastoral tradition from another angle. Hiltner suggests that Virgil's first Eclogue is also about 'the loss of an environment', 'dramatis[ing] the feeling of loss for the vanishing countryside [...] in the figure of Meliboeus' and demonstrating that we 'become thematically aware of our environment' only 'at the moment of its withdrawal'.²⁸⁵ Such a reading can certainly be applied to *The Harvest* and the situation and experiences of Lewis. The characteristics that Hiltner identifies as the 'exile motif' embodied by Meliboeus in Virgil's poem can be detected in Hart's presentation of Lewis: representative of the loss of his pastoral landscape. Through his depiction of the character Hart is able to repeat and then to question the idea of the 'vanishing countryside'. However, the reliability of what Hiltner describes as the 'environmental consciousness' that emerges from Meliboeus's realisation of his dispossession is subject to question in Hart's novel.²⁸⁶ In this case, Lewis's 'consciousness' of his environment can be understood to point towards the selectivity of pastoral vision.

However, both of these readings are problematised by mining deeper into Lewis's pastoral convictions. Connections can be uncovered between Lewis and the outsiders that he condemns. We find that Lewis is not representative of a lost generation

²⁸³ Ibid, p. 189.

²⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 195.

²⁸⁵ Hiltner, *What Else Is Pastoral?*, p. 38.

²⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 38.

disenfranchised from the agrarian heritage of their village and of his family in particular, but an individual lost from his generation, a generation that bears no direct connection to the agricultural traditions of the rural landscape in any experiential sense. To his contemporaries, the village is 'Hicksville'; 'full of old fossils', 'it hasn't exactly kept up with the twentieth century' (*TH*, p. 30). Left alone by his peers and described as 'one of the old school' by the village vicar, Lewis instead carries an acquired nostalgia for a lifestyle that he cannot remember, inherited from his grandmother and understood as a collective set of memories tied to the village and to its inhabitants:

It seemed to him [...] the memories and stories of others might somehow seep through the years and become her own. She was a river of stories and memories and who could say which were hers and which were not? Something impersonal in that trove of stories and that mythical record of one small village's triumph and cares and small unremarked agonies. (*TH*, p. 88)

For Lewis, his grandmother's relation of her memories colours his own relations with the landscape of the village, and his alienation is influenced by the disjuncture between her recollections and his experiences in the same valley.

The unreliability of Lewis's pastoral fantasies highlights Sales's observation in *Pastoral and Politics* that 'reflection breeds selection'.²⁸⁷ The 'older and better world' is not necessarily connected to the past. The 'false modes of engagement' with the rural are shown not to be limited to 'lifestyle culture', as Head suggests, but to a perception of place that relies more on pastoral than on experience. The anti-pastoral presentation of the struggles of contemporary rural life appears to call into question the 'new gains as beneficiaries of the industrial age' that Rosenmeyer suggests foreground the idealistic look back towards the past in modern pastoral.²⁸⁸ The development of working practices is depicted to have cost the Pikes their traditions and their livelihoods: it is imagined as another pastoral dispossession. Yet at the same time, the contrast between the past and the present is shown to be more complicated than this reading infers. Hart's novel is concerned with the presence of the past, yet it is an imagined past which clouds the

²⁸⁷ Sales, p. 16.

²⁸⁸ Rosenmeyer, p. 17.

present and inhibits the villagers' viewpoints upon their environment. Williams argues that in pastoral:

The common image of the country is now an image of the past, and the common image of the city an image of the future. That leaves, if we isolate them, an undefined present. [...] In what is then a tension, a present experienced as tension, we use the contrast of country and city to ratify an unresolved division and conflict of impulses, which it might be better to face on its own terms.²⁸⁹

In this case, though, the tensions are not ratified but complicated in *The Harvest*. The images of the country and of the past are shown to be unreliable, factoring in idealisation and appropriation. In so doing, the foreshortened viewpoint of pastoral is made clear, and the 'corrective' anti-pastoral is surely compromised along the same lines.²⁹⁰

Further investigation of the 'mode[s] of engagement with rural existence' in the novel indicates that its understanding as a straightforward anti-pastoral doesn't account for the ways that it deals with the construction, application and interpretation of pastoral. Oliver Goldsmith's 'The Deserted Village' is brought up repeatedly throughout the novel in sympathy with the losses suffered by the village and the changes wrought by external agents devoid of connection or understanding of its ways and traditions. The poem presents a romanticised look back towards an idyllic golden age of 'light labour' and pastoral plenty brought to an end by short-sighted and unfeeling development conceived as a foolhardy abstraction from nature.²⁹¹ By invoking the poem in the context of the hardships of the present, Hart sets up a contrast with a pastoral golden age that did not really exist. Through the character of Lewis, Hart depicts the allure and the abstraction of pastoral appropriations of the countryside based on sentiment and nostalgia, without a tempering purchase on reality.

²⁸⁹ Williams *The Country and The City*, p. 297.

²⁹⁰ Gifford, *Pastoral*, p. 133.

²⁹¹ Oliver Goldsmith, 'The Deserted Village', in *The Collected Works of Oliver Goldsmith*, ed. Arthur Friedman, Vol. IV, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), pp. 273-304 (p. 289, line 59).

Recalling Head's critique, the appropriation of pastoral as 'lifestyle culture' is just one of the instances in the novel of how the constructed nature of pastoral and its propensity for misdirection is explored. By destabilising pastoral lament for the past through depicting the questionable reliability of nostalgia, and re-creating the constructed character of pastoral appropriations of country life through the Farmstead, the novel sets up a version of pastoral in crisis. Hiltner's notion of the 'withdrawal of an environment' simultaneously bringing it into view can also be applied here in a new context: the pastoral environment, idealised and retrospectively, imaginatively constructed, becomes discernible as its origins are made clear.

Another perspective upon the novel's environment is 'withdrawing' too, its existence highlighted through the ecological changes that bring it into focus. As Lewis's pastoral vision is broken down, a broader context of ecological change forms a backdrop to the action, subtly impinging upon the lives of the characters that appear oblivious to the potential of its more serious challenge to their way of life. The narrative reveals another threat to the pastoral environment not covered by either Lewis's lament for herdsmen or the villagers' attempts to reinstate supposed traditions of the countryside. Through the effects of unseasonal weather, the fields are becoming unrecognisable and the familiar routines of seasonal changes and the farming calendar are showing signs of disruption:

In the fields they were harvesting already and it was not yet August. By mid August they would be finished, too early, leaving the rest of the month and all of September eventless and empty of all but the long slow dying of the summer. And the wheat was too dry and a poor harvest and the pasture even worse for lack of rain. From the eastern counties the news was worse, the farmers watering their fields under the vast Norfolk and Lincolnshire skies and still the beet leaves shrivelling and the great trees shedding their leaves early so as to save the trunk at least, and the smaller trees in the hedgerows dying stunted and greying with bare bleached branches like trees under a sun far hotter than the English sun was ever meant to be. (*TH*, 179)

Clinging on to pastoral identities for countryfolk and newcomers alike detracts from the landscape over which pastoral ascriptions are laid, and the changes that appear to be taking it further from their interpretations go unremarked. Undergirding the debates concerning urban encroachment and the questions of the reclamation or installation of countryside traditions, the commodification or indeed reassignment of the commodification of the countryside from the purposes of industrial agriculture to agricultural tourism is the land itself. The changing weather and its effects upon the ecosystems of the countryside are traced alongside the pastoral concerns of the novel, subtly running a thread of environmental awareness through the social, economic and imagined implications that are woven between the distinctions of the country and the city.

More than a straightforward anti-pastoral, then, Hart's novel depicts the disintegration of the relations and contrasts that allow pastoral and anti-pastoral constructions to develop: both are inhibited by their mismatch to the social and material realities of the countryside. In going beyond the binaries of pastoral and anti-pastoral in the depiction of the interrelationships between the country and the city, and troubling the presumed connections between the past and the present that substantiate those interrelationships, Hart points to the layers of human-nature relations that contribute to their making and their interpretation. Capturing the persisting influence and appeal of such conceptions, the novel also attends to the environmental implications and obfuscations of the pastoral and the anti-pastoral. Representing the afterlives of these traditions, *The Harvest* demonstrates the ways that the mode can be employed and adapted to continue to represent and also to question its persisting relationships.

City Visions in Ali Smith's *The Accidental*

The continuing potency of the country-city contrast and the illuminative potential of the exploration of its interconnections can be followed through into my next example, Ali Smith's *The Accidental*. An ecological consciousness is also threaded through the pastoral relations in this text. More directly, though, the novel uses what Gifford has

identified as the ‘oppositional potential’ of the pastoral mode in order to recast the pastoral contrast between the country and the city in an illuminative light in the context of environmental awareness.²⁹² Gifford’s term describes the potential of the pastoral, through the means of the movement of retreat and return, to imagine a different way of looking at the situation and the circumstances of the movement: ‘its ability to ‘imaginatively construct an alternative vision [...] an implicit future’.²⁹³ In this case, the ‘opposition’ involved is the shift in perspective from the country to the city, its ‘potential’ is to engender alternative ways of imagining and understanding this relationship. Smith’s novel replays the familiar pastoral scheme of a transition between the urban and the rural as a transformatory change of perspective, the passage from the former to the latter shedding new light upon the understanding of both locations, and the relations between them.

Accordingly, in the novel the techniques of the pastoral are deployed relatively conventionally. Documenting the Smart family’s transformative summer holiday in a Norfolk village, *The Accidental* is recognisably pastoral in both structure and outcome: the characters retreat from the city to the country, during which time their conceptions of these locations and of themselves are subject to contemplation and revelation. Using the separation of the text into a series of discrete narrative strands that are interwoven around a series of common events, the family’s pastoral retreat is fragmented into their individual experiences and ensuing insights. The characters each experience a pastoral interlude or inset in which their eyes are opened to looking differently.²⁹⁴ Pastoral here is constructed as a process of transposition to another place, another perspective, another way of seeing. At the same time, the perspectives that it opens up are shown to be individually relative. In each case, though, the retreat to the countryside and the reflective possibilities it affords are dependent upon the contrasts of the experience from both the locations and the habits of the city. Pastoral, as a means of recognising the countryside and understanding nature, is shown to be based upon a contrast defined in

²⁹² Gifford, *Pastoral*, p. 36.

²⁹³ Ibid, p. 36.

²⁹⁴ The term ‘inset’ is used by Andrew V. Ettin in *Literature and the Pastoral* (New Haven and London: Harvard University Press, 1984) to describe instances when ‘the pastoral is shown to exist within a nonpastoral universe, as an inset within a larger frame of reference’.

relation to the city. The attributes of the rural are understood by their difference from the urban and the familiar. In addition, the layered and interconnected structure of the novel demonstrates the subjectivity of pastoral perception and the multiple possibilities of its insights. Retreat into the countryside takes the family outside of their everyday surroundings and as the familiar elements of the Smart's lives are stripped away, for example, when Astrid's camera is destroyed by Amber, their subsequent experiences challenge their preconceptions of the place and of themselves. Re-focusing their perceptions and interpretations, the Smarts are provoked to question and to refresh their viewpoints through their experiences of the countryside and of each other during their time away.

As the narrative pursues the Smarts' individual accounts of the revelatory effects of their pastoral sequestration, it is in Astrid's strand of the narrative that the relationship between the visitors and their surroundings is under particular scrutiny. A pastoral contrast between the country and the city foregrounds the evaluation of the village provided from Astrid's point of view at the beginning of the novel. However, Smith troubles both the contrast between the urban and the rural and the intended or supposed outcome of pastoral retreat. The relieving effect of the countryside does not register. The country is both 'substandard', and indecipherable according to Astrid: 'it is completely light outside now; you can see for miles. Except there is nothing to see here; trees and fields and that kind of thing'.²⁹⁵ Viewed from the perspective of her city vision, the countryside falls outside of her frames of reference. Astrid's expectations of its appearance are almost anti-pastoral: lacking either idealisation or romanticisation. At the same time, though, her evaluation of her surroundings remains tied to an external interpretation of its construction and their effects; in accordance with pastoral, Astrid's initial understanding of the countryside is abstracted from either experience or close observation. Glossing over the view from the window as a blank and unfamiliar space replicates the imposition of a pastoral scene over the details and interconnections of a particular environment.

²⁹⁵ Ali Smith, *The Accidental*, (London: Penguin, 2005), p. 7; p. 10. Further references to this text will be given parenthetically with the abbreviation (TA).

At this point, then, Smith draws attention to the way in which external impressions are applied to pastoral places and dictate their interpretation, destabilising to some extent the pastoral expectation of the restorative experience of an illuminative perspective uniquely provided by its location. Astrid compares her assessment of the village to her mother's, and questions her repeated enthusiasm for its apparently defining character: 'this is a quintessential place. Her mother keeps saying so, she says it every evening' (*TA*, p. 11). As Smith makes plain, Astrid sees a particular version of the countryside and her mother Eve sees a contrasting one, yet both are more closely connected to the places and the perspectives from which they have arrived there, than to the environment visible from their holiday house. In this way, the novel sets out and questions external and ideological appropriations of place.

Both *The Harvest* and *The Accidental* demonstrate the abstraction of pastoral conceptions of the landscape from its appearance as encountered and interpreted by their inhabitants, whether permanent, in the case of the Pikes, or temporary, in the case of the Smarts. Like Lewis, Astrid receives pastoral understandings of the landscape from other sources. In Astrid's case, her experiences contrast with both her mother's and her own preconceptions of the country village in which she spends the summer. Through the expectations and experiences of Astrid and Eve, Smith challenges the idealisation of rural life and of the nature to which it is supposed to be closer. This comparative construction of the urban and the rural comes to be questioned or undermined as the narrative progresses, and their intersection becomes apparent as the local area is mapped out through the narrative. Concerned with the multiplicity of ways of seeing, the novel highlights and challenges the selectivity of pastoral vision. Forms of knowledge and identification are open and subject to question.

As Ryle puts it, Smith demonstrates how the characters each 'enact an attempt to superimpose "pastoral" habits of seeing on a contemporary rural scene'.²⁹⁶ Describing the depiction of the landscape in the novel, and using in particular the example of Amber and Astrid's picnic in the supermarket car park beside the recycling bins, Ryle explains that the novel 'evokes and subverts pastoral idyll' through the contrast between

²⁹⁶ Martin Ryle, 'Neo-Pastoral Eco-Didactics', p. 16.

the characters' respective evaluation of the location, as 'lovely' and 'horrible' (*TA*, 116).²⁹⁷ At the same time, the episode draws attention to the broader contrast between the presence of recycling bins proclaiming 'Success. Environment' in a car park (*TA*, 116). Highlighting the juxtaposition of the celebration of environmental consciousness signified by recycling facilities alongside the provision for parking cars, Smith provides an image of selective pastoral vision in practice. Through the conscious depiction of the blinkered character of pastoral ways of seeing, the illuminative potential of pastoral retreat comes to be reinstated in ways which challenge previous expectations and question, rather than reinforce, previous experiences. Here, the novel can be seen to be paralleling the selective vision of pastoral discussed above with the selective 'care' of an incomplete environmentalism. For Ryle, 'Smith's writing activates the potential, and also suggests the screening process' of the disparity that it signifies.²⁹⁸ The treatment of the distance between pastoral appropriation and experience can be used both to highlight and to distort that disparity.

As Astrid explores the area with Amber further, the novel continues to test the differences between expectation and experience. Approaching a field, Astrid observes that 'it is all golden' before 'walking straight through all the stuff growing in it' to find that it is 'jabby [...] dry and very uneven, and the field is huge, much bigger than it seemed from the edge of the motorway where it looked like it would be really easy to walk across' (*TA*, p. 110, p. 111). Imagining beforehand that 'she and Amber are giants in a different world', Astrid finds that her experience runs counter to her estimation (*TA*, p. 111). The world she encounters is different to her experience, but she remains subject to the same challenges. At the same time, her mother's advice similarly fails to be realised. More than 'quintessential', Astrid's explorations of the countryside break through her mother's image pertaining both to the ideal image of the countryside and the rural lifestyles that it sustains, their complexities refined by a pastoral gloss. Instead, Astrid's experiences reveal the different textures of the environment and the varying scales from which it can be perceived and understood.

²⁹⁷ Ibid, p. 10.

²⁹⁸ Ibid, p. 16.

Astrid comes to see the limitations of her initial perspective, and to acknowledge others that exist outside of it. Developing an understanding of the simultaneity, the contrasts and intersection of different perspectives, she describes her perception of the passing of a minute in time:

It is actually not true that not a single thing happened in that minute she counted just now. There were birds and things like insects flying. Crows or something probably cawed in the heat above her. They are doing it now. There is a tall white plant over behind the wall, cow something it is called. In sixty seconds it probably moved a bit in the air and it must even have grown but in a way that can't be seen by the human eye. There are bees etc. Everywhere in the shade, working in and out of the flowers, on their way home to their hive where the drones still have their legs because it's still summer, all happening in its own world which exists on its own terms in this one even if someone like Astrid doesn't know about it or hasn't found out about it yet. (*TA*, p. 127)

The complaint of 'nothing to see here' that Astrid makes earlier in the novel is contrasted with a new sensitivity towards the non-human activity within her gaze. Further, she becomes aware of the presence of events beyond the scope of her vision as she acknowledges that which 'can't be seen by the human eye'. Astrid's acknowledgement of the visible and invisible layers of activity in front of her concludes with an incipient awareness of that which is yet to be discerned, that 'exists on its own terms' though remains open to her perception. Becoming aware of the non-human, Astrid's cognition of her environment is extended to encompass levels of life which had previously gone unnoticed. Implicit within her new awareness are the connections between the different 'worlds' that exist within 'this one', and the obligation for responsibility towards those connections.

Similarly, as Astrid's initial assessment of the countryside becomes crowded with newly discerned detail, the blankness left by the absence of her city references is filled in with another scheme of understanding. As such, Astrid's developing environmental consciousness gives new context to her experiences, linking her insights

in the country to her life in the city. She recalls that ‘at school teachers are always going on about the environment and all the species that are dying out etc. It is all everywhere all the time, it is serious’ (TA, p. 128). Reflecting upon her sensitivity towards ways of looking at her environment, Astrid questions how to channel her changing awareness: ‘it is hard to know how to make it actually matter inside your head, how to make it any more important than thinking about the colour green’ (TA, p. 128). Accessing a mode of environmental sensitivity and ecological consciousness, Astrid begins to apply the abstraction of environmental crisis to familiar situations, opening up the potential to see those situations afresh.

Astrid’s enlightening encounters and reflections outside of the city contribute to the formation of her understanding of the interconnectivity between and beyond the pastoral distinctions of the spheres of the country and the city. This understanding contrasts with both Astrid’s and her mother’s expectations of the place, the resistance to which is central to her realisation. The expectation of the demarcation between the country and the city is key to the emergence of Astrid’s environmental awareness, if not to its implications, which dictate both the impossibility of separating such places out and the necessity of acknowledging the connectivity of both to the actions of each. In this way, Smith’s novel is directed towards the present and the future. Her focus on the relationship between the country and the city centres on understandings of the interconnections between the human and the natural, and the embedding and layering of these distinctions within the same spaces. The ways that the pastoral is used and the means by which its transformative effects are enacted resist typical understanding of pastoral or anti-pastoral approaches. Smith’s pastoral is penetratingly critical of the presumptions on which it is based and their implications, as Ryle suggests, in his reading of the novel’s ‘neo-pastoral’ effects.²⁹⁹

Ryle envisages a writing of responsibility in contemporary pastoral. Reading *The Accidental*, Ryle is interested in the ways that the novel resists and re-imagines pastoral to this end. Ryle discovers a version of ‘eco-didacticism’ in the novel, facilitated by its

²⁹⁹ See Ryle, ‘Neo-Pastoral Eco-Didactics’ and Ryle, ‘The Past, the Future and the Golden Age: Some Contemporary Versions of Pastoral’.

method of ‘educative pastoral simplification’, a process which extends from Smith’s use of the pastoral technique of a period of sequestered reflection leading to revelatory cognition to what Ryle sees as the stripped-down construction of the novel’s pastoral world. As the use of the term ‘eco-didactic’ suggests, Ryle emphasises the use of pastoral to approach, understand and inform contemporary conceptions of environmental concern: he explains that the novel ‘represents how we know and deny that we are facing an ecological crisis, of perhaps disastrous proportions’.³⁰⁰

Accordingly, his proposition of ‘neo-pastoral’ writing centres on the critical responsibility of pastoral and its interventionist potential to contribute towards social and political dialogues concerning human-nature relations. Both acknowledging and emphasising Gifford’s recognition of the ‘oppositional potential’ of pastoral, Ryle argues that ‘on the cusp of ecological disaster’, the ecological significance of the experiences imagined by the pastoral in contemporary writing have an irrepressible resonance that must transcend ‘the transience of the pastoral moment’: ‘they are tenacious as well as transient: they will come back, they will continue to haunt us, because they express [...] repressed better knowledge’.³⁰¹

In a similar way, Gifford suggests in his proposition of a ‘post-pastoral’ mode that within writing that ‘is aware of the anti-pastoral and of the conventional illusions upon which Arcadia is based, but which finds a language to outflank those dangers’, it may be possible that ‘with consciousness comes conscience’.³⁰² Both critics appear to suggest that the reflexivity of the pastoral movement of retreat, restoration and return when coupled with ecological awareness can inspire a sense of responsibility. However, distinguishing his version of pastoral from Gifford’s based on the emphasis upon nature and the cultivation of ‘awe’ in ‘post-pastoral’, Ryle questions the need for environmentally oriented pastoral writing to define or represent nature as such. Suggesting that ‘good eco-politically savvy fiction can dispense altogether with “nature writing”’, Ryle points to a version of pastoral that sidesteps the difficulty of negotiating

³⁰⁰ Ryle ‘Neo-Pastoral Eco-Didactics: Ali Smith’s *The Accidental*’, p. 9.

³⁰¹ Ibid, p. 17.

³⁰² Gifford, *Pastoral*, p. 149; p. 163.

the distance between the experience and representation of nature, recalling Morton's argument in *Ecology Without Nature* discussed in Chapter Two.³⁰³

Ryle identifies an ambivalent treatment of pastoral nature within the novel, which he suggests is integral to its critical potential, and indeed helps to facilitate such potential. Ryle argues that the novel's focus lies in what the characters' brief time in the countryside can teach them, rather than in the evocation of celebratory nature in the context of environmental crisis. In the novel, there is 'a liminal sense that worlds are being made and unmade', and for Ryle, the novel's 'eco-political theme develops not so much through representations of landscape and nature (of which there are few) as through this urgent temporality'.³⁰⁴ Drawing out Smith's depictions of nature as illustrative of her innovative take on pastoral, Ryle advocates Smith's sparing approach to the representation of nature and her astringent treatment of typically pastoral idyllicism and romanticisation. Highlighting in particular the passage describing the worker bees' disposal of the drones, Ryle suggests that 'here, "nature" offers no pre-lapsarian harmony counterposed to the fallen world of violence and destruction. Smith refuses the binary opposition between culture and nature [...] and this is one reason why *The Accidental* has a sense of inescapable contemporaneity'.³⁰⁵ Written with environmental crisis in mind, the version of pastoral here is intended to stimulate critical thought and action, and the representation of nature reflects rather than relieves the situation.

Ryle's criticism of the way that Gifford 'implies that post-pastoral texts must include memorable descriptions and evocations of nature' usefully opens up the ambiguity inherent in the criteria by which accounts of nature may be judged to fall within or outside of particular pastoral definitions.³⁰⁶ Yet, I argue that Smith's depiction of nature is direct, and its critical pastoral effect does not rely on celebratory images and experiences of nature. Rather, Smith's depiction of nature is memorable for its distinction from and resistance towards pastoral or anti-pastoral representations. It is

³⁰³ Ryle, 'Neo-Pastoral Eco-didactics: Ali Smith's *The Accidental*', p. 16.

³⁰⁴ Ibid, p. 11.

³⁰⁵ Ibid, p. 11.

³⁰⁶ Ibid, p. 16.

through the understanding of nature both outside of and in relation to human experience that Astrid in particular comes to gain her environmentally oriented perspective through understanding the interconnected or enmeshed ways of seeing and experiencing. The evocation of nature appears to be integral to this contemporary version of pastoral, and the critical potential that it represents. The distinction of 'neo-pastoral' from 'nature writing' misses the opportunity to account for the ways that the novel's depiction of the processes of interpreting and relating conceptions of nature is central to its innovative treatment of the conventions of pastoral writing. Though Ryle discounts the significance of the evocation of nature in this version of contemporary pastoral, Smith's innovative use of the tradition suggests that consideration of the representation of nature and of the effects of such representation remain central to the imperatives of environmental consciousness, critique and accountability to which its conventions are being put. In my reading, Smith's pastoral innovation has much to do with her representation of nature, as well as the ways that it is conceived and interpreted, depicting versions of the environment and its relationships that are contemporarily distinct.

Despite these differences, Ryle's reading of the novel as an ecologically-motivated version of pastoral didacticism effectively identifies the usages to which the conventions of the mode are applied in *The Accidental*. However, there is a further way in which Smith's adaptation of pastoral must be accounted for in the novel. Whilst the text clearly conveys an ecologically informed message of sensitivity and responsibility towards the non-human, Smith's treatment of pastoral also encompasses the subjectivity and limitation of the sensibilities of the mode. Astrid's awakening to her environment is one insight that the Smarts' retreat to the country provides. Her experience of the family's pastoral retreat explores the relationship between the country and the city through her changing awareness of her surroundings, contrasting her preconceptions of the countryside with her experiences in the landscape itself. Addressing her changing perceptions towards the ideas and experiences with which she came, Astrid displays the development of a reflective sense of ecological consciousness.

However, for other members of the family, the pastoral retreat enables different functions. For Michael and Magnus, for instance, the illuminative experience of the

pastoral contrast is dependent upon and in fact reinforces the pastoral distinctions between the country and the city. The country is an escape from the city, outside of the limits of their lives. As such, the experience is able to enact its oppositional effect upon their perceptions of their everyday lives. Yet, despite its role in enabling them to gain perspective, neither the country nor nature are known any better by the end of the novel. In their cases, the boundaries between city lives and country experiences are not extended or made less clear. Perhaps such boundaries become slightly more permeable, but ultimately, the country is somewhere that things happen that could not happen in the city; though the country and the city are connected by way of the comparative reflection that the experience of the former instigates and facilitates, that reflection only goes one way: back in the direction from which the pastoral visitors came. The places and the people of the countryside do not come to be known, and their connections to the city are not realised.

The Accidental uses the pastoral to convey a clear ecological message and engages with the critical and reflective possibilities of its 'oppositional potential'. In so doing, the novel effectively transposes these qualities of the mode onto the context of environmental crisis. To do so involves reiterating the contrasts of pastoral relations in service of its ecological message. The possibility that these contrasts themselves are troubled by this context is not addressed. At the same time, the novel also demonstrates that the 'oppositional potential' of pastoral's relations is not limited to environmental concerns: its contrasts can be used to address the ecological context in which the concepts of the country and the city, and the human and the natural, are implicated, or they can be used to different purposes entirely. On the one hand, this appears to reduce the mode's environmental applicability, diluting its relevance and impact. On the other hand, through interweaving the emergence of Astrid's environmental consciousness with alternative insights gained through the pastoral pattern of retreat and return between the categories of the country and the city, the uses of pastoral in the novel can be seen to reflect some of the impasses of environmental crises. Through familiar patterns of thought and behaviour these issues can be addressed or appear to go unnoticed. As I mentioned above, in Ryle's reading, the 'neo-pastoral' structure of the novel builds upon and exceeds that of pastoral; the ecological 'knowledge and self-

criticism' that its version of retreat generates and with which its return is imbued is 'tenacious as well as transient'. However, by interleaving its ecological insights with the other layers that comprise the pastoral structure of the novel, I argue that Smith's novel reflects the way that awareness of ecological crisis abuts but may not impact upon all aspects of life. Acknowledging its presence though, as the novel does, signifies its potential to permeate those aspects in which it remains unaccounted. In representing the challenges that the representation and interpretation of environmental crisis poses to familiar patterns of thought, the version of pastoral depicted in *The Accidental* conveys a peculiarly contemporary approach to the conventions of the mode.

In *The Harvest* and *The Accidental*, a sense of environmental sensitivity is present that functions to clarify the pastoral attributions of nature and of the country conceived in opposition to the city, adding alternative understandings and establishing further contrasts between interpretations and experiences of these categories. In *The Harvest*, the additional senses of these categories work to put their pastoral versions into new perspective. In *The Accidental*, multiple and contrasting accounts of these categories are interleaved within the novel's version of pastoral, fragmenting the pastoral view and in so doing, creating a composite way of looking at and representing them. These texts demonstrate ways that contemporary approaches to the mode are adding new senses to pastoral understandings of nature and to the relations between the country and the city, the past and the present, and the human and the natural, calling pastoral expectations into question as a result, and in the process, creating more complex versions of these definitions and relationships.

2. Human-Nature Relations

The next section of this chapter turns towards representations of the relationship between the human and the natural in contemporary pastoral writing. Whilst the texts discussed above show different ways of looking at the concepts of the country and the city and the relations between them, the texts that I will examine in this section look more closely at the ways that those concepts and relations are made. Kathleen Jamie's *Findings* (2005) and Jim Crace's *Being Dead* (1999) both look beneath the surfaces of

these ideas, penetrating the fabric of pastoral and examining the ideas that are captured in its weave. These examples complicate further the ways of looking at and understanding the landscape, and the relationships that its form and its interpretation comprise.

These texts are both premised upon a retreat from the everyday and into places that exist outside of them. However, each uses the premise of a retreat into nature to explore the difficulties in its realisation, developing perspectives which resist the idealisation of nature associated with the pastoral tradition, and in so doing, reconfiguring the understanding of human-nature relations in pastoral writing. In these examples, the premise of getting to know nature, or of getting back to nature, provokes further questions, rather than providing the answers that they set out to find. The understanding of nature as external to and independent of the human world is upset in these instances, but presents the opportunity for further and alternative understandings of the enmeshing of the human and the non-human to emerge.

Tracing the Landscape in *Findings* by Kathleen Jamie

Findings is composed of a series of meditations on the natural world and offers accounts of extended moments of retreat that take place outside of the regular patterns of home life. Though these moments appear to occur beyond everyday places and relationships, the series of retreats do not document the repeated transgression of a perceived boundary between humans and nature, or from the realm of culture to that of nature. Rather, the concept of a boundary itself is repeatedly problematised. The idea of the externality of nature is threatened by an historical and ecological awareness of the interrelationship between humans and their environments. In this portion of the chapter, I shall examine the ways that Jamie confronts the pastoral concepts of nature as outside of and distinct from human culture and attempt to map out some of the ways in which the pastoral is challenged. In these ways, I will argue, a new version of pastoral can be seen to emerge, grounded in an informed and questioning knowledge of the mutually human and non-human environment, its workings and relationships.

Expectations and interpretations of particular places are subject to question in the text. Visiting the uninhabited Monach Island of Ceann Iar in the essay entitled 'Findings', Jamie asks: 'What do we imagine, those of us who don't live there, of uninhabited Hebridean islands? Windswept, we might say; remote, all vast skies and seascapes, machair and tiny yellow flowers'.³⁰⁷ The question places a clear distinction between the islands themselves and the place or perspective from which they are being considered by limiting 'habitation' to an exclusively human meaning: it is 'us' that do not live there, therefore, it is 'uninhabited'. Non-human dwelling is thus distinguished from 'habitation', and its location is defined by comparison to 'inhabited' places. Furthermore, Jamie's answer to the question presents the island as distinct from the inhabited world in terms of its location and its topography, yet it is judged by criteria defined by the location from which it is imagined. The language at once conveys the island's inhospitality: it is 'windswept', 'remote' and 'vast', and at the same time confers the anthropocentric aestheticism of this image: it is not just the sea we imagine, but 'seascapes'. Although this description defines the islands as outside of the human world by virtue of their differences, they are nonetheless framed from a human-oriented viewpoint. Her description subtly captures the romanticism that pervades these conceptions, imprinted with traces of both the Romantic sublime and the picturesque.

Jamie complicates further the influence of human action upon this landscape, noting that 'there used to be plenty of people here, crofters and cottars who kept black cows, and the islands were famed for their fertility, but now there is no one left' (*F*, p. 55). Indicating that previous human activity has surely shaped the landscape, Jamie suggests that not only are we viewing the place through an idealising lens, but that its physical appearance is in some ways the product of our own doing. In making problematic the idea of the islands as outside of the human world, Jamie makes permeable both the physical and the ideological distinction between the domains of humans and of nature, and the relationship between the past and the present as evidenced in the land. The land itself shows through our idea of it, and our previous

³⁰⁷ Kathleen Jamie, *Findings*, (London: Sort Of Books, 2005), p. 56. Further references to this text will be given parenthetically using the abbreviation (*F*).

activity shows through the land. Human history and natural history are shown to be intertwined in such a conception.

Here, Jamie perfectly encapsulates the paradox of pastoral: nature is idealised as outside of and distinct from human culture, yet the version of nature that comprises that idealisation must adhere to particular characteristics. These characteristics themselves are the product of human intervention: whether through acknowledged or unacknowledged physical contrivance, or simply viewed through the compromised perspective of the pastoral spectator. In this case, Jamie highlights first of all that we imagine uninhabited islands as outside or external to us, but that in our imaginings of such places, we expect them to look and feel a certain way: how we imagine places that are outside of our world to be. She then reveals that our ideological manipulation of the land is in fact a smokescreen: we create an idealised image of the land, and celebrate the fact that the land reflects those images, whilst at the same time, we are covering up the fact that the land looks a certain way because we have contrived for it to be so, whether as the direct product of our actions to alter it, or as the indirect result of our actions upon it. The restorative effect achieved by the pastoral is the product of a double-bluff.

The description of the island landscape above demonstrates what Morton calls the pastoral practice of using ‘the aesthetic as anaesthetic’. Presenting an edited version of the land allows certain aspects of its appearance to be celebrated in order to blank out others that undermine such celebration, by stimulating us to question how and why the land should appear a certain way.³⁰⁸ Yet, the intervention that this perspective represents can also be viewed in another light. Ettin reframes the situation by arguing that ‘pastoral space [...] indicates how human life is integrated with nature, or how it sees in the natural world its proper field of reference’.³⁰⁹ Ettin goes on to explain that examination of the pastoral space reveals that it is both the product of this integration, and itself the bearer of the evidence of this integration; hence, his phrase ‘proper field of reference’ can be understood to refer to the empirical record that the land represents: ‘the landscape may suggest that somehow the human presence lingers on through the

³⁰⁸ Morton, *Ecology Without Nature*, p. 10.

³⁰⁹ Ettin, p. 130.

contamination of the natural scene that we have lived in [...] and lived our lives as part of'.³¹⁰ In this respect, Ettin's argument can be understood to illuminate the reflective character of pastoral and its potential to reveal, as well as obscure, the details of the interrelationship between humans and nature.

At the same time, though, it may also be noted that Ettin's description implies an imbalance in that interrelationship; his use of 'contamination' infers a detrimental effect of the former upon the latter, the traces of which have sullied its original condition. Despite putting forward a reading of the landscape that acknowledges the indelible marks of human activity that show through its pastoral presentation, Ettin's argument is limited by the idealised conception of an original, pristine version of nature which is defaced by the presence of those marks. Furthermore, the phrase 'proper field of reference' can be understood alternatively to signify a nostalgic conception of nature as our rightful home, where we belong. In this respect, Ettin's version of the appearance of the landscape is more palliative than anaesthetising: rather than relieving the pastoral viewer of certain aspects of the scene, instead those aspects are offset against more favourable ones.

Nevertheless, the value of Ettin's argument still stands in drawing attention to the interrelationship between humans and nature that pastoral represents in itself, and those which it comprises. In so doing, Ettin opens up an alternative way of reading and using pastoral. By acknowledging the physical attributes of the natural world and the traces of human action within them, Ettin introduces an empirical understanding of the environment which exists outside of idealised or romanticised representations. Rather than limited to a version of nature adjusted through a compromised viewpoint, Ettin's interpretation of pastoral presents a far more complex possibility.

The closer, more rigorous look at the environment viewed from a pastoral perspective is taken up and developed further in Jamie's writing. For example, by contrasting the islands' previous 'famed fertility' with their present emptiness, Jamie evokes a typically pastoral sense of loss, specifically, a lost harmony and

³¹⁰ Ibid, p. 131.

synchronisation between the crofters and their animals and the land. Jamie taps into the nostalgia that is conventionally associated with pastoral writing: the concept that the retreat into nature is also a retreat into, and lament for, a previous state of harmony between humans and nature. However, Jamie counters the appeal of nostalgia by indicating that the material remainders of our interactions with and interventions upon our environment contain ethical and ecological signs that should be heeded. She writes: 'these are rarities in human history, the places from which we've retreated. These once-inhabited places play a different air to the uninhabited; they suggest a lost past, the lost Eden, not the Utopia to come' (*F*, p. 63). These remainders call out what nostalgic evocations of the past might miss, and remind us of the mistakes we could repeat should we attempt to approach the future based on a compromised view of the past. Instead of encouraging a 'simple backward look' in which a positive view of the past is framed in contrast to the concerns of the present, here the historical difficulties of the islands are shown through their presence in the land, inhibiting the romantic idealisation of the place.³¹¹ Neither the past nor nature itself is representative of a simpler 'golden age' in this text. In this way, the themes of loss and nostalgia are given new relevance, reflecting back the desires of the present in view of the mismatching traces of the past.

The means and effects of pastoral that can be found in Jamie's undertaking demand reconsideration at this point. The pastoral structure of the narrative both sets out and probes the premise of a retreat into nature, questioning the understanding of the term and its manifestations. The word 'retreat' suggests a 'return' or 'going back' to a location or a way of thinking and living that has been left behind. The location or mindset that was once rejected has gained a new, or renewed, appeal. Yet it is imbued with ideas of surrender and resignation, and compromised by the possibility of disappointment with the present and idealistic nostalgia for the past.³¹² The effects of a retreat defined in these terms are restricted. But 'retreat' can also be understood another way: as 're-treatment' or 'reconsideration', of a place or a way of thinking and living,

³¹¹ Williams, *The Country and The City*, p. 37.

³¹² "retreat, v.1". OED Online. June 2013. Oxford University Press. 30 August 2013
<<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/164427?rskey=wZr6QH&result=2&isAdvanced=false>>.

which need not be limited or compromised by idealisation or nostalgia.³¹³ To consider the action of a 'retreat' in this way opens up the critical potential of pastoral afresh; placing its rules of engagement under scrutiny. Jamie uses the premise of pastoral to re-examine and in so doing, to re-define the understandings of and the relationships between the human and the natural associated with the mode. Used in this way, pastoral itself gains a new, or renewed, appeal, and its critical and restorative effects are reinvigorated.

Jamie's retreat into nature, then, is focused upon the disparity between expectation and experience, evidence and interpretation. Developing the challenge to the idea of 'nature', she takes direct issue with the ethical implications of the distinction between the natural and the not natural along the lines of human intervention, the latter being the result of that human intervention, and the former championed as the original state of things:

Sometimes you hear this land described as 'natural' or 'wild' – 'wilderness', even – and though there are tracts of Scotland north and west of here, where few people live, 'wilderness' seems an affront to those many generations who took their living on that land. Whether their departure was forced or whether that way of life just fell into abeyance, they left such subtle marks. And what's natural? (*F*, p. 126)

Here, Jamie reverses the typical reverence for the 'natural' or the 'wild' found in nature writing by highlighting what is lost, or rather hidden, by venerating a particular interpretation of nature that is defined by the absence of human activity. Such interpretations depend, as I mentioned earlier, upon the hierarchical understanding of the relationship between the human and the natural which infers the presence of the former as an imposition upon or contamination of the latter. As Soper explains:

We may ask what it is exactly that makes a human interaction with 'nature' intrinsically devaluing, where that of other species is deemed to be

³¹³ "retreat, v.2". OED Online. June 2013. Oxford University Press. 30 August 2013
<<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/164428?rskey=wZr6QH&result=3&isAdvanced=false>>.

unproblematic – of the order of nature itself. If humanity is thought to be an intrusion upon the ‘natural’ order, then it is unclear why other creatures should not count as ‘intrusions’ also, and inanimate ‘nature’ hence better off without them [...] we may suspect that this is an approach to the ‘value’ of nature that is too inclined to abstract from the impact on the environment of the different historical modes of ‘human’ interaction with it, and thus to mislocate the source of the problem – which arguably resides not in any inherently ‘devaluing’ aspect of human activity, but in the specific forms it has taken.³¹⁴

By asking ‘what’s natural?’ in this context, Jamie can be understood to be opening up the distinction between humans and nature, by acknowledging the ‘subtle marks’ inherent in the land that belie such a distinction. In dispensing with the blinkering effects of impermeable conceptions of the human and the natural, Jamie is then able to challenge the ‘abstraction’ of human action as exclusively negative by instigating, as Soper proposes, a more nuanced or sensitive examination of the traces it has left upon the landscape.

In this way, Jamie’s question ‘what’s natural?’ dispels both the positive gloss of traditional pastoral pictures of the harmonious relationship between humans and nature and the negative gloss of deep ecological images of nature defiled by human action. Instead, it places the natural and its opposite under question, destabilising their polarisation by implying their conceptual and material permeability. Arguing that ‘it may be that the landscape of the Scottish Highlands or East Anglia [...] was constructed by past human action [...] But now they embody local and national memory, as well as being habitats for the incoming wild things’, S. R. L. Clark indicates the way in which such an integrated conception of the human and the natural can be used to reconfigure ideas of value and conservation.³¹⁵ As Clark explains, it is the interworking of a place’s various meanings that comprise its value, rather than a particular meaning imposed over

³¹⁴Soper, *What is Nature?*, p. 19.

³¹⁵S. R. L. Clark, *How To Think About The Earth*, Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993, p. 52.

any other. Both Jamie's question, and the patchwork of organic and inorganic activity that she envisages as the landscape, reflect Clark's sense of interconnected value.

Furthermore, Jamie's 'retreat' represents the principle of ecological interconnectivity in a way that can be understood to parallel Morton's proposition of interconnectivity that he describes as the 'mesh'. Morton's interpretation of interconnectedness is intended to have a levelling effect, based on and maintained by an awareness of the pitfalls of attributing versions of hierarchy or privilege to any aspect of the human or the non-human. He argues that his metaphor of the 'mesh' suits this understanding of 'the interconnectedness of all living and non-living beings', by effectively signifying the links that are recognised, whilst maintaining space for new or even alternative links to be discovered: "'mesh" can mean the holes in a network and threading between them'.³¹⁶ From this perspective, Morton's interpretation of interconnectedness is one which is open and reflexive. At the same time, it is a conception which destabilises clearly demarcated concepts of the human and the non-human, and the relationships that exists between them: 'the ecological crisis makes us aware how interdependent everything is [...] but in a situation where everything is potentially significant, we're lost'.³¹⁷ Morton's thesis decentres traditional pastoral narratives by questioning the places and perceptions which foreground them, by making space for what they fail, or choose not, to see. The 'mesh' enables the negative effects of interconnectedness to be acknowledged by also representing the points of connection that these negative effects cause and signify.

The understanding of environment as 'mesh' is developed further in *Findings* through Jamie's treatment of the negative effects it discloses. In addition to the recognition of the traces of human action within the land, Jamie considers other examples of material evidence for the interpenetration of human actions within the environment that can be detected across both time and space. Addressing the theme of waste, Jamie further unpicks the seam of distinction between the human and the natural in the pastoral. Here, the scope of pastoral is not only widened to encompass evidence of

³¹⁶ Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, p. 28.

³¹⁷ Ibid, p. 30.

the traces of human action, but also brings Soper's question of the interpretation of the 'specific forms' it has taken into view. Relieving the myth of the contemporary alienation of humans from the rest of nature, Jamie explores the negative as well as the positive ways in which the idea of interconnectivity is exposed. By considering the remnants and traces of life that litter the island, Jamie examines the origins of these artefacts and tests the distinctions between the products of nature and those of human culture. The first point of note is plastic: 'the cleavages between the sand dunes, where the wind and waves had driven it, were choked with plastic [...] It was strewn across the flat of the land' (*F*, p. 59). The presence of the plastic destroys the premise that the islands are outside of the reach of human influence: people may not live there any more, but human activities and their leftovers had nevertheless reached the islands.

As Kerridge has noted, litter is an ambiguous topic in writing about the environment: 'in traditional nature-writing litter, if mentioned, tends to be viewed with distaste, because its presence disrupts the dualistic separations of viewer and spectacle, humanity and nature, subject and object'.³¹⁸ As Kerridge suggests, litter is a pertinent example of the implication of one side of the dualism in the other: it signifies the viewer in the spectacle, and locates human production, and its by-products, in the perceived space of nature. Its presence can be understood to undermine the idealisation of the pristine or remote landscape, hence its omission, or can be used to signify the extent to which a pristine or remote landscape has been sullied by human irresponsibility.

However, Jamie does not seek to condemn the plastic outright, or lament its creeping colonisation of the beaches from the tides. Although her language is emotive, she goes on to present a more nuanced exploration of the relationship between the landscape and traces of human action that are represented by the litter. There is a notable absence of a sense of overt moralising or 'distaste' at its presence, perhaps indicating that her work is directly about the 'disrupt[ion of] dualistic separations' that Kerridge associates with traditional nature writing. In this reading, Jamie's acknowledgement of

³¹⁸ Richard Kerridge, 'Small Rooms and the Ecosystem: Environmentalism and Don DeLillo's *White Noise*', in Kerridge and Sammells, eds., *Writing the Environment: Ecocriticism and Literature*, p. 192.

the litter's presence and her treatment of it can be understood as a marker of Morton's 'mesh'.

Comparison may be drawn here with the treatment of rubbish in *The Wild Places* and *Edgelands* discussed in Chapter Two. Macfarlane suggests that the naturalness, or 'wildness', of his local woodlands has been undermined by the 'fly-tippers'. Farley and Symmons Roberts celebrate the intertwined human and non-human components of edgelands nature as instances of 'true pastoral'. In Jamie's case, her account of the waste that she encounters on the beach is not limited to that of human origin, and does not distinguish between the aesthetic merits of the objects that are found there:

Here in the rain, with the rotting whale and wheeling birds, the plastic floats and turquoise rope, the sealskins, driftwood and rabbit skulls, a crashed plane didn't seem untoward. If a whale, why not an aeroplane? If a lamb, then why not a training shoe? Here was a baby's yellow bathtime duck, and here the severed head of a doll. The doll still had tufts of hair, and if you tilted her she blinked her eyes in surprise. (*F*, p. 60)

Ostensibly, all of the objects described without distinction, equal in their status as remnants, or waste materials. The plastic is assimilated with the other detritus, suggesting equivalence between the waste of humans and of other animals. Yet although the rhythm of this paragraph is balanced by alternate references to non-human and human objects, they do not seem equatable. An oxymoronic sense of incongruity comes from these images placed adjacent to one another. Despite being equivalent in their position on the beach, Jamie comes to distinguish between them:

It seemed that what we chose to take – the orb of quartz, the whalebones – were not the things that endured, but those that had been transformed by death or weather [...] I wondered if it's still possible to value that which endures, if durability is still a virtue, when we have invented plastic, and the doll's head with her tufts of hair and rolling eyes may well persist after our own have cleaned back to the bone. (*F*, p. 66-67)

Jamie's treatment of the presence of human detritus signifies both the implication of human actions in nature and the reverse in the changes made to the objects once they have become litter. In so doing, Jamie can be seen to question the perceived naturalness of the objects that litter the shoreline in terms of the character and origins of those objects that persist over time. In preferring to keep the ones that are subject to change and transformation, is Jamie here paralleling Macfarlane in privileging the objects that can be understood as more 'natural'? By identifying the longevity of plastic, she is making an irrefutable distinction between the objects in terms of their origin and their future. But at the same time, by distinguishing the plastic as that which resists change, Jamie indicates that for this reason it cannot be overlooked. Its presence signifies human presence, and human influence beyond the compromising of the aesthetic qualities of the environment. In this way, the plastic performs an anti-pastoral effect; however, rather than the natural world resisting anthropocentric idealisation, in this case it is the remnants of human action that cause the break between idealisation and experience that the anti-pastoral captures. The plastic reiterates the distinction between the human and the natural, persisting as a man-made intrusion, symbolising the human imposing upon its surroundings in a way that transcends both human appropriations of space and time. The plastic will continue to impact upon that environment long after we are able to appraise its effect upon the aesthetic. The sinister description of the doll places an image of the human directly into the mess of discarded objects.

For Jamie, the presence of human-made rubbish signifies a rupture in idealised interpretations of the relationship between humans and nature, as objects which interrupt such idealisation and prompt questioning: both of their presence and of the idealised view of nature in which they appear so incongruously. Her treatment of the plastic can be seen to signal that its presence communicates something to us that other waste cannot. Taking the concept of rubbish as a rupture or interruption to idealisation, Kerridge sees rubbish or waste as an access point or trigger to overcome the distinction between nature and culture, using Julia Kristeva's concept of the abject. He explains:

Gazing into the abject, redundant material which culture thinks it can be rid of [...] Rubbish is the unmanageable excess, which refuses to disappear or

keep within boundaries, and thus reveals hidden relations. Rubbish is the expelled and used-up parts of the self which signify that this self is not separate and unitary, but involved in constant processes of dissolution and exchange with the world. Rubbish and litter stand as a rebuke and challenge to instrumental systems, and to subject-positions, because rubbish is what is left when the operation of the system is complete and nothing should be left. Ecological pollution is the return of that abject, demanding notice, insisting that the system should open its boundaries and be absorbed in a greater totality.³¹⁹

As Kerridge argues, Kristeva's explanation of the abject can be applied effectively in an ecological context by using the presence of pollution to challenge our rationalisation of waste through the illusion that it can be disposed of and forgotten about. Ecological pollution is the return of that waste which disrupts our rationalisation of disposal, representing the trace of that which we had intended to forget. That trace forces us to acknowledge its presence, and its acknowledgement represents the inception of ecological thinking. Kristeva writes: 'discourse will seem tenable only if it ceaselessly confront that otherness, a burden both repellent and repelled, a deep well of memory that is unapproachable and intimate: the abject'.³²⁰

Can Jamie's treatment of waste be understood to act as the ecological abject that Kerridge suggests? For Kerridge, to acknowledge the presence of the abject is to open up the possibility that we need to think differently about ourselves and our relation to the rest of the world. The abject indicates that our existing modes of thought about the environment and about waste are incomplete, because it is excluded, and that exclusion is belied by its presence.

Jamie writes: 'the islands are a 21st-century midden of aerosols and plastic bottles' (*F*, p. 66). The use of the term 'midden' is intriguing. Although it is a common term in Scotland to describe any kind of mess, Jamie's qualification of the term as a

³¹⁹ Kerridge, 'Small Rooms and the Ecosystem: Environmentalism and Don DeLillo's *White Noise*', p. 192.

³²⁰ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 6.

'21st-century midden' in particular suggests that its use here is intended to evoke other, previous uses of the term. The word is also an archaic term to describe a refuse heap, deriving from the Old English word 'midding', which itself derives from the early Scandinavian term 'mykdyngja', where 'myki' means 'muck' or 'dung' and 'dyngja' meaning 'manure pile'. 'Midden' is also a common archaeological term for a dump site used for domestic waste.³²¹ Jamie thus gives her use of the term an historical context and creates a link between present and past human habits regarding our understanding of what constitutes waste, and how we might treat it. In so doing, Jamie is complicating again the idea of nostalgia for the past, and of past ways of doing things. As Ryle notes, 'our intuitive sense of "environmental sustainability" and our cultural consumption of "nature" images remain tied to the idea of returning to a simpler past – when European societies were less profligate in their consumption and less polluting'.³²² However, Jamie's use of the term 'midden' locates the origins of our treatment of waste and of the environment in that 'simpler past' and suggests that the problems of consumption and pollution are rooted in our history. To describe the islands as a 'midden' suggests a repeated pattern of human behaviour over time.

Of course, there are significant differences between the washing up of litter on a remote beach, and the practice of collecting the waste of a community in a designated area. At the root of these differences appears to be an alternative interpretation of the meaning of the external: the midden is a definitive place located outside of the living space. However, by defining the external as that which exists outside of areas of human habitation, such as the sea, or more contentiously, that which exists outside of areas of habitation by particular people, the ecological and ethical irresponsibility of the definitions of the external in the context of waste are made apparent. By designating a particular area for the collection of waste, that space itself is consigned to the same status. Its use – to store rubbish – means that the space itself is limited to or contaminated by that usage. Yet, the transience of the waste evidenced by its appearance on the island destabilises distinctions of place that are based on the premise of the inside

"midden, n.". OED Online. June 2013. Oxford University Press. 1 September 2013
 <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/118135?redirectedFrom=midden>>

³²² Martin Ryle, 'After Organic Community: Ecocriticism, Nature and Human Nature' in John Parham, ed., *The Environmental Tradition in English Literature*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), p. 19.

and the outside. Transported by water or by the atmosphere, waste can end up anywhere; the distinctions between particular places in the context of waste cannot be upheld in practice. As such, the external location of the rubbish dump has the potential to be anywhere, and everywhere.

As Kerridge suggests, the presence of litter signifies a break in our means of understanding that provides, and provokes, the opportunity to examine and address that break. Jamie's narrative indicates that inherent in the presence of the abject is the process of thought and action that has led to its rejection and expulsion. To acknowledge its presence is to re-encounter those processes and to accept their failure. The persistence of the abject demands its reconsideration, and reconsideration of our treatment of it. It must be 'ceaselessly confronted' to make our processes of thought and action 'tenable'. In Jamie's narrative, waste provokes consideration of our conceptions of ourselves and our environment as inside and outside. Rubbish, as we have seen, can be understood as the implication of the former in the latter, revealing the illusion inherent in the treatment of waste as something that can be 'thrown away.' Jamie points out that the removal of rubbish from one place necessarily means that it must be reappropriated to another: it will be re-encountered at some point in some form or another. The understanding of interconnectivity here is both certain in principle and uncertain in effect. As Timothy Clark explains: 'ecological thinking strives to understand how waste dumped into the sea or the atmosphere does not conveniently disappear but sets off an unpredictable sequence of consequences'.³²³

The 'ecological abject' that Kerridge proposes thus represents another challenge to the distinction between nature and culture, and the possibility of pastoral retreat as traditionally conceived. Jamie's treatment of the presence of litter in the islands can be understood of another example of re-treating or re-examining our expectations and experiences of nature. In the example of litter, the challenge to the understanding of nature as outside of the human is further developed. The acknowledgement of the abject calls for a revised understanding of the relationship between the human and the non-

³²³ Timothy Clark, 'Towards a Deconstructive Environmental Criticism', *Oxford Literary Review*, 30.1 (2008), pp. 44-68, (p. 47).

human that goes beyond the polarisations of inside and outside and instead provides a means of representing, and negotiating, the positive and negative effects of interconnectivity. As Morton comments, 'ecological art is duty bound to hold the slimy in view'.³²⁴

Clark calls the outcome of the challenge to the distinction between nature and culture the realisation of '*the end of externality*', citing David Wood, who argues that the recognition of the impossibility of the external in terms of the physical and ideological understanding of the environment represents a critical break in our means of interpreting and relating to the world.³²⁵ Wood explains:

The world used to contain its own outside [...] Now there is no outside, no space for expansion [...] no 'out' or 'away' when we throw something 'out' or 'away' [...] Yet so much of our making sense, let alone the intelligibility of our actions, still rests on being able to export, exclude, externalize what we do not want to consider. When that externality is no longer available, we are in trouble.³²⁶

Clark explains that the acceptance of the end of externality means that our understanding of the world must be radically re-assessed:

To live in a space in which illusions of externality have dissolved is to see the slow erosion of the distinction between the distant waste dump and the housing estate, between the air and a sewer, between the open road and a car park.³²⁷

Pastoral depends on the illusion of nature as external to the human world. Based on this premise, the pastoral space exists in the transitional gap between the internal and the external. By destabilising the poles of this premise using the evidence of litter, Jamie's text both inhabits and interrogates the space of pastoral. In so doing, the potential of the

³²⁴ Morton, *Ecology Without Nature*, p. 159.

³²⁵ Clark, 'Towards a Deconstructive Environmental Criticism', p. 46, original emphasis.

³²⁶ David Wood, *The Step Back: Ethics and Politics after Deconstruction*, (Albany: SUNY Press, 2005), p. 172-3.

³²⁷ Clark, 'Towards a Deconstructive Environmental Criticism', p. 46.

mode to facilitate cultural criticism is reclaimed. At the same time, in restoring the interconnections between the human and the non-human, previous ways of understanding the relationship between them, and the understanding of the world as a whole that this relationship precipitates, are undermined. The ecological understanding of this relationship reconfigures the world as a finite space made of infinite and intermingling layers of time and experience.

As Morton explains, ‘when you think about where your waste goes, your world starts to shrink’.³²⁸ The principle of the end of externality is described by Wood as the experience of ‘global finitude’. He writes: ‘The experience of global finitude is (negatively) the recognition that the patterns of problem solving we have become used to externalising – finding ways ‘out’ – are increasingly less plausible’.³²⁹ As Heise has argued, rubbish reconnects the local to other places in such a way that undermines their distinction in the first place: ‘global plastic waste functions as a striking trope for [...] the penetration of the local by the global that leads to the loosening of ties between culture and geography’.³³⁰ In examining the interconnectivity of waste, Jamie’s discussion of the beach litter comes into alignment with ideas of the deterritorialising effects of pollution and the global scale that it represents.³³¹ The apparently narrow focus of her short experience on the beach, and the relatively tiny geographical distances upon which her journey is made are dramatically increased in scale when the implications of her observations are brought into consideration.

Through her treatment of the presence of the traces of the past embedded within the fabric of the land, and the connections made between different places and times by the mobility of material objects and the effects of their production, usages and disposal, Jamie presents an account of human-nature relations that are irrevocably interlinked. Accessing these understandings through a pastoral movement between places and perspectives, Jamie uncovers their connections and at the same time underlines the

³²⁸ Morton, *Ecology Without Nature*, p. 1.

³²⁹ Wood, p. 173.

³³⁰ Ibid, p. 135.

³³¹ See Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*, (London: Sage, 1992), Heise, *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet*, Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, Clark, ‘Towards a Deconstructive Environmental Criticism’.

opportunities offered by such movements to see and experience these connections. Jamie's way of 'evoking the environment' engages with Morton's 'mesh' and Wood's 'global finitude' in her acknowledgement of these interconnections. In so doing, the perspective of pastoral is understood to be confined within these limits: the complete or overarching view of the pastoral spectator cannot be achieved. Instead, though, the pastoral movement between places and perspectives within these limits affords different ways of seeing, experiencing and understanding the human-natural environment.

With these ideas in mind, it is worth examining a further aspect of Jamie's treatment of human-nature relations. In addition to questioning the expectations of pastoral perceptions and seeking to address the remainders left behind by such perceptions, Jamie also maintains attention upon the viewpoint from which she is looking. In this sense, the ending of the externality of pastoral places that is performed in the text is accompanied by a corresponding acknowledgement of the position of her viewpoint, within that same environment. Jamie's perspective is shown to be part of the environment that is described, contributing to its appearance and interpretation. In the final section of Jamie's text that I will analyse here, she describes the process of observing and recognising the evidence of the past embedded within the landscape of the island:

Scattered in among the heather were piles of grey stones, left behind, I supposed, by a retreating glacier a long time ago [...] The path – possibly a very old path indeed – led on through knee-deep heather, down a slope, across a rivulet and upwards towards a green knoll. Green, because it was covered not in heather but in short, bright turf. On top of this knoll was a gable-end. This had been my piles of stones [...] Now my eye was in, I could see the other shielings. The green knolls were a giveaway. (*F*, p. 120)

The description of the landscape gestures towards the layers of time and experience that have accumulated upon that tract of land. The layers themselves are demonstrative of multiple scales of time and action: the traces in the fabric of the land of its reworking by the retreating glacier; the fresh presence of the heather and the turf; the path that speaks of human activity long ceased; and the tumbledown stones that once sheltered the

makers of the path. At the same time, the connections that can be made across and between those layers are also suggested in the way that the organic elements interweave with the inorganic ones over time, and the way that the contemporary visitor is able to discern from the interwoven landscape hints of its various previous incarnations. Accounting for this description is an attention to the sensitivity of perception that gives rise to it. Jamie suggests here the adoption of a particular mode of seeing, a technique of perception or ‘eye’ which enables her to learn to discern and understand the landscape in question. Here, Jamie describes not just a process of noticing, but of actually looking differently. Her descriptions demonstrate sensitivity both to what it is possible to see in terms of the natural world and the interrelationships between the human and the non-human within it, and also to the viewpoint itself.³³²

Jamie’s description of her process of looking displays some sense of awareness of the ‘culturally [...] and historically specific way of “seeing” in which it is irrevocably enframed’.³³³ An ethically and ecologically durable understanding of looking at the land acknowledges both the multiple and interwoven character of its creation and development, the parallel character of the process of its reading, and its continuous reworking. As Bender notes, Tim Ingold puts forward the idea of the ‘taskscape’. Ingold intends the term as a conception which could ‘enable us to move beyond the sterile opposition between the naturalistic view of the landscape as a neutral, external backdrop to human activities, and the culturalistic view that every landscape is a particular cognitive or symbolic ordering of the space’.³³⁴ Ingold suggests that this interwoven character of the physical world is reflected by its interpretation, and further, that both are indicative of a particular conception of temporality, wherein both the world and our understanding of it are continually developing, not just as a series of stages or layers imposed upon one another, but stages or layers that relate across and between one another concurrently:

³³² It is worth noting here that Robert Macfarlane also describes a similar experience of detecting the traces of shielings and the paths between them on the Isle of Lewis in *The Old Ways* (2012): ‘blur resolving into comprehension. The pattern standing clear, a cairn sequence, subtle but evident, running up from near Dubh Loch shore’, p. 156. See Chapter Five for an extended discussion of this text.

³³³ Bender, p. 1.

³³⁴ Tim Ingold, ‘The Temporality of Landscape’, *World Archaeology*, 25.2, 1993, pp. 152-174, (p. 152).

Reaching out into the taskscape, I perceive, at this moment, a particular vista of past and future; but it is a vista that is available from this moment and no other. As such, it *constitutes* my present, conferring upon it a unique character. Thus the present is not *marked off* from a past that it has replaced or a future that will, in turn, replace it; it rather gathers the past and the future into itself.³³⁵

Ingold suggests that recognising the multiple ways of understanding or reading the landscape leads to a dialogue of interpretation. He envisages this dialogue as a ‘tapestry’, in which these readings are woven. This fabric of interpretation represents the interconnectivity of different readings of the landscape whilst maintaining the space for further readings or connections to be added. He explains: ‘telling a story is not like weaving a tapestry to *cover up* the world, it is rather a way of guiding the attention of listeners or readers *into it*’.³³⁶

Jamie’s version of pastoral in *Findings* bears relation to Ingold’s ‘taskscape’. Jamie’s pastoral experimentation concerns an understanding of nature that is not separate from the human world, and their present account is not distinct from their past. Instead, these pastoral relations are woven together. Jamie accesses this understanding with narratives of retreat and return, movements that do not enact contrasts as such between the country and the city but rather vacillate between varying textures of human and non-human activity, and these movements between them reveal strands and layers of connection that represent and complicate the expectations of pastoral insights.

Like *The Harvest* discussed above, *Findings* is concerned with ways of looking at particular environments and the complexity and multiplicity of interpretation imposed upon the landscape. By paying attention to its composition and form, Jamie distinguishes the layers of interconnected activity and understanding to which it attests, and by considering the origins and the effects of the traces of activity visible within the landscape, she uncovers links between different places and times. Through these practices, the designations of pastoral relations between the country and the city, the past

³³⁵ Ibid, p. 159.

³³⁶ Ibid, p. 153, original emphasis.

and the present, and the human and the natural, are queried and re-imagined. Further, like *The Accidental*, this text is also oriented towards using the relationships that it depicts and its approach to those relationships to illuminate and to intervene in the ways that they may be understood. A sense of responsibility underpins the treatment of human-nature relations that is apparent in the text:

By the light we have made, we can see that there are, metaphorically speaking, cracks. We are doing damage, and we have a growing sense of responsibility [...] We look about the world, by the light we have made, and realize it's all vulnerable, and all worth saving, and no one can do it but us.
(*F*, p. 25)

In these ways, Jamie generates subtle sense of the continuing possibilities of a self-reflective construction of the pastoral tradition.

Interconnecting Spaces in *Being Dead* by Jim Crace

In both Jamie's and Crace's texts, the pastoral is used to look into the relationship between the human and the natural that it both represents and informs, and outwards, towards the effects of these relationships upon the wider world. Whilst Jamie's analysis of the interconnectivity between the human and the natural looks towards the past and present enmeshing of human and natural elements within particular environments, Crace focuses on the understanding of such interconnectivity on a smaller scale, exploring individual, familial and anatomical connections between attributions of the human and the natural.

In the following section, I will examine the ways in which Crace uses and manipulates elements of the pastoral in order to explore how the pastoral relationships between the past and the present, the human and the non-human, are questioned and complicated in the text. I will argue that through the treatment of pastoral, and anti-pastoral themes, Crace makes permeable the distinctions that foreground the pastoral.

Crace's *Being Dead* explores the relationship between humans and nature at the intersection of life and death. The novel is constructed around the pastoral premise of a retreat into nature and towards nostalgia, documenting a journey into the countryside with restorative intents in a once-familiar landscape. By experiencing the material and biological reminders of their shared past, the characters hope to recall and re-establish their connections with the place and with each other. Yet the premises of retreat and restoration are not easily experienced. Idealisation and empiricism are suspended in uneasy tension as Crace explores the multiplicity and malleability of interpretation between pastoral romanticism and scientific knowledge. The text repeatedly questions the means by which nature, and the relations between humans and nature, are defined and understood. Most powerfully, the text makes plain the interrelationship between humans and nature at the point at which the processes of nature overtake the human capacity to understand and rationalise them.

Crace establishes the pastoral framework of the novel at the outset. The opening sentences set out what Gifford has called 'the fundamental pastoral movement' of retreat and return: highlighting the nostalgic motivation for the journey, the transition from the town to the country and the restorative intentions of the visit:

For old times' sake, the doctors of zoology had driven out of town that Tuesday afternoon to make a final visit to the singing salt dunes at Baritone Bay. And to lay a ghost. They never made it back alive. They almost never made it back at all.³³⁷

At the same time, though, inherent in this description are the challenges to the novel's pastoral framework. Most directly, Crace upsets the suggested pastoral structure by defining the interrupted pattern of retreat, restoration and return depicted in the text. The pastoral cycle is halted by the violent intervention of the deaths of the protagonists. The romantic expectation of the opening sentence is abruptly countered by the following three, where Crace's spare use of language and succinct style conveys unequivocally the

³³⁷ Gifford, *Pastoral*, p. 1; Jim Crace, *Being Dead*, (London: Penguin, 2000), p. 1. Further references to this text will be given parenthetically using the abbreviation (*BD*).

failure of their pastoral intentions. However, by indirectly confirming their final return to the city, Crace promises that the cycle will be completed, albeit in an altered fashion.

More subtle clues to the adherence to and alteration of pastoral themes can be drawn out from the novel's opening page. The ostensible provocation for the movement of the novel from the city to the country is nostalgia; the retreat to the salt dunes is a repeat of a previous journey motivated by their remembered experiences in the place: 'for old times' sake'. Crace complicates both the 'simple backward look' towards a more innocent time and 'essential paradox of pastoral' in which 'a retreat to a place apparently without the anxieties of the town, or the court, or the present, actually delivers insights into the culture from which it originates'.³³⁸ In this case, the simplicity of both the past and its contrast with the present is already under pressure. The 'anxieties' by which they are connected have been made apparent. The nostalgia with which the characters approach their past visit to the coast is compromised by a 'ghost': the death of their colleague, Festa, during the original trip. Although the location of their retreat exists outside of their everyday lives, the illusion of its externality is indicated here; the traces of their lives are embedded in the landscape. Ettin has argued that 'the pastoral setting may be characterized in particular by the presence or memory of friends or relatives because continuity with the past is important to the pastoral'.³³⁹ However, in this case it is not continuity with the past that is sought after. The presence of these traces or 'anxieties' is the reason for their visit. Yet their intention is not just to recall the past or perpetuate its circumstances, but to re-address it. The purpose of their visit is to 'lay a ghost': the restoration expected in this context is the closure of the link between the past and the present that persists in Baritone Bay.

As such, the nostalgia with which they approach the visit and the landscape itself is tempered accordingly. The restorative effect anticipated by a nostalgic retreat is disturbed, and further, its expectation called into question. It is to be achieved not through a resumption of the conditions of the past, but by re-encountering those conditions and in so doing, reconfiguring the influence that they have upon the present.

³³⁸ Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 37; Gifford, *Pastoral*, p. 82.

³³⁹ Ettin, p. 131.

In this way, the interpretation of the journey as a ‘retreat’ in pastoral terms can again be read in terms of a ‘re-treatment’ or ‘reconsideration’, rather than in escapist or idealistic terms, as I suggested earlier in this chapter. The journey to the coast represents a return to the location and to the events of the past; however, rather than an attempt to revisit past events, the intention of the trip is to ‘reconsider’, to come to terms with and to lay to rest both the events of the past, and their interpretations of and relationships to those events in the intervening period.

Another facet of the characters’ nostalgia is presented in the text. As well as the scene of the death of their colleague, the bay is also the location of their first meeting, and the inception of their relationship. The sentiment attached to the past in this instance again is complicated by the characters’ multiple layers of connection to the place. Early in their return visit Joseph recalls with nostalgia the circumstances of his initial connection with Celice, made through their encounter with the sprayhoppers, a shoreline creature imagined by Crace as a kind of sea cricket. He describes returning to the same spot and repeating the experience: ‘the fantasy he had nurtured since he’d watched Celice in bed that morning demanded sprayhoppers. They were his Valentine’ (*BD*, p. 94). However, just as the success of the first encounter was informed by his scientific knowledge of the topography of the coastline and the conditions required by the insects, the nostalgia with which he approaches the proposed second encounter is equally informed. Joseph’s connection to the landscape is academic as well as emotional, and his professional acquaintance with the coast acts as a filter upon his sentimental familiarity. His desire to recreate the past comes to be curtailed by the same pragmatic understanding of the workings of the natural world that fostered the romance he remembers. When the sprayhoppers are nowhere to be found, the failure of his nostalgic intentions is assuaged by confirmation of his science: ‘Joseph was not entirely surprised. As soon as he had seen the steepened disposition of the shore he knew conditions would be wrong for *Pseudogryllidus pelagicus* [...] That’s life’ (*BD*, p. 92).

Additionally, the nostalgia in this example is further offset by the multiple viewpoints and voices from which the two visits to the coast are relayed. Joseph’s rosy recollection is supplemented by the alternative narratives of Celice’s past and present

selves. In splicing together the narratives of both characters in their two encounters at the coast, Crace draws attention to the consequences of time passing: the fleeting experience of the moment is preserved, yet suspended in the unstable solution of memory, perpetually subject to the effects of time and further experience. At the same time, the chance matching of conditions for the sea crickets is contrasted with the continually shifting constitution of the coastline. In creating a parallel between the conditions of the external landscape of the coast and the internal world of the characters' consciousness, highlighting the contingency of nature and of memory over time, the restorative conception of a nostalgic look at the past and of nature is gently, but unquestionably, destabilised. The idea of nature and the past as separate from the present is eroded, replaced with a sense of their interdependence.

As the example I've just discussed indicates, the reading of 'retreat' as 're-treatment' in the novel can be illustrated further through examination of the structure of the narrative. The text is composed of several threads which run concurrently, representing a series of interconnected strands or layers which exist across space and time. As Tew has noted, various critics and reviewers have acknowledged its complexity: multiple narratives and timescales that alternate backwards and forwards.³⁴⁰ He points in particular to Adam Begley's identification of three main 'contexts' through which the narrative unfolds, described by Begley as three ticking clocks measuring different timescales, an idea that I will return to later.³⁴¹ However, like Tew, I want to suggest that the pattern of connection that comprises the narrative is denser. Whereas Tew makes a detailed breakdown of the strands according to chapter, here I will focus upon the effects of their construction.³⁴² In his words, 'there are labyrinthine interrelationships and overlapping chronologies'.³⁴³ The end of the character's lives

³⁴⁰ Philip Tew, *Jim Crace*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), p 136-8. Tew comments on the following articles: Adam Begley, 'A Quiet Brit's Loud Talent: Jim Crace's Corpse Comedy', *New York Observer*, 12 February 2001, n.pag.; Carol Birch, 'Quivering', *The Guardian*, Saturday 18 September 2009, n.pag.; Gary Krist, 'Serendipity', *Salon.com: Online Journal*, 30 March 2003, n. pag.; Jim Shepard, 'Dune', *The New York Times Book Review*, 23 April 2000, n. pag.

³⁴¹ Adam Begley, 'A Quiet Brit's Loud Talent: Jim Crace's Corpse Comedy', *New York Observer*, 12 February 2001, n. pag.

³⁴² For Tew's breakdown of the strands of the narrative by chapter, see Philip Tew, *Jim Crace*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), p 130-140.

³⁴³ Philip Tew, *Jim Crace*, p 137.

initiates two simultaneous beginnings in the narrative: the retelling of their original visit to the coast and the inception of their relationship, and the transformation of their bodies as they begin to decompose. At the same time, the gap between their journey and their deaths is filled in, and their absence from their lives is opened up through the narrative of their daughter and the revelation of their disappearance. The novel creates a sense of repetition as it unfolds, each section going back over a period of time or to a particular place. Gary Krist compares the repetitive character of the structure to a ‘fugue’, a ‘polyphonic composition constructed on one or more short subjects or themes, which are harmonized according to the laws of counterpoint, and introduced from time to time with various contrapuntal devices’.³⁴⁴ Yet this sense of repetition is actually the effect of adding more layers to the narrative, examining and re-examining spaces and events to establish then build upon the connections revealed between each additional layer. The narrative gains depth through this series of re-treatments, each of which forms a new relationship to those which have gone before and invites fresh understanding, both between the different elements of the narrative and of the individual elements themselves. In this way, the structure of the novel itself can be seen to embody a sense of enmeshing, encapsulating the multiple layers of connection between the places and experiences of the characters’ lives. As the past and the present are interwoven, nostalgia is juxtaposed with experience, demonstrating the way in which the pastoral traits of nostalgia and idealisation are used as means of opening, rather than constraint, in terms of the perspective of the narrative.

Crace also innovatively uses the pastoral convention of elegy to convey the interconnected relations between the past and the present and the human and the natural in the novel. The text’s premise itself can be understood as elegiac: the intention to recall and come to terms with the death that haunts the characters’ past suggests a process of mourning or lament. The story that ensues following the deaths of the characters themselves is also introduced as a kind of elegy. Alpers describes elegy as the ‘poetry of loss’, yet the multiple strands of the narrative make up a version of the form

³⁴⁴ Gary Krist, ‘Serendipity’, *Salon.com: Online Journal*, 30 March 2003, n.pag.; “fugue, n.”. OED Online. June 2013. Oxford University Press. 1 September 2013
 <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/75270?rskey=YfXurG&result=1&isAdvanced=false>>

where loss instigates a process of reclamation.³⁴⁵ Crace describes the practice of *quivering*, explained in the novel as a funerary vigil of remembrance and celebration of the dead in which their lives are recalled in reverse order, creating ‘resurrections’ through the ‘backward-running time of the *quivering* in which regrets became prospects, resentments became love, experience became hope’ (*BD*, p. 3-4 (original emphasis)). The recollections are told from the perspectives of all the mourners taking part, creating a multivocal story that echoes Krist’s description of the narrative as a fugue. The practice appears to have a restorative purpose for both the mourners and the dead: a process of memorial and commemoration which moves beyond death by at once returning the dead to life through narrative and in so doing reifying their deaths. The narrator promises to practice a *quivering* for Joseph and Celice by mapping out the lives that have been lost in the opening pages, and describes what is to follow as ‘a dawning death’ (*BD*, p. 5). Loss thus becomes a beginning; the characters’ deaths mark the beginning of the novel and the beginning of their stories. In this way, the complex, layered structure of the narrative that I outlined above can be understood as a reworking of the elegiac form through the multiple voices of the *quivering*: as a process of enmeshing between life and death, experience and reflection.

In short, the premise that Crace sets up at the beginning of the novel indicates both the pastoral conventions upon which it is constructed and the ways in which those conventions are remodelled. In so doing, a pastoral narrative can be seen to emerge; however, it is not a typical one. Whilst the approach to the structure of the novel, the theme of nostalgia and the treatment of death through the means of elegy can be interpreted as both influenced by and posing a challenge to the conventions of the pastoral mode, the presentation of nature and the relationship between humans and nature signify another level of complexity. In the examples that I have just discussed, a sense of enmeshing is central to the reworking of pastoral present in the novel.

However, the perspective upon nature and the relationship between humans and nature presented from both the scientific viewpoints of the characters and the graphic, unromantic descriptions of their deaths appear to be resolutely anti-pastoral. Such

³⁴⁵ Alpers, *What is Pastoral?*, p. 30.

perspectives appear to challenge both the reworking of pastoral that I have been sketching out so far around the idea of interconnection. Science ostensibly appears as a foil to the pastoral idealisation of nature. We are initially introduced to this relationship through Celice's stringently anti-pastoral description of nature given to her zoology students:

Anyone who studies nature must get used to violence. You'll have to make yourselves companionable with death if any of you want to flourish as zoologists [...] This is Natural Science. Prepare for death and violence [...] We'll take you to the forest or the beach. You only have to turn a log or rock to see at once more violence and more death than you'll discover in a hundred years. (*BD*, p. 40, 42)

Here, Celice attempts to explode for her students the illusion of nature as benevolent or attuned to anthropocentrically oriented expectations. In this capacity, the scientific perspective set out her profession focuses upon the neutrality of nature, destabilising the pastoral at a primary level. The description emphasises the necessary exchange between life and death as the connections which comprise the ecosystem are made and lost. Highlighting the stakes of these exchanges, Celice focuses upon the violence of the processes by which an ecosystem is perpetuated, in so doing eliminating the possibility of a romantic interpretation of an ecologically informed understanding of nature. Her words can be easily be allied with Gifford's definition of the anti-pastoral mode, in which the 'natural world can no longer be constructed as a 'land of dreams', but is in fact a bleak battle ground for survival without divine purpose'.³⁴⁶

In *Being Dead*, Crace uses the scientific perspective attributed to the couple's profession to emphasise the illusory conception of the stability of nature, explaining: 'Zoologists have mantras of their own: change is the only constant' (*BD*, p. 87). The setting of the sand dunes on the coast is used repeatedly to illustrate their point: 'dunes shift [...] and dunes migrate' (*BD*, p. 56, 59). The characters' scientific training here certainly acts as a 'corrective', in Gifford's sense, to the conventions of pastoral.³⁴⁷

³⁴⁶ Gifford, *Pastoral*, p. 145.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p. 120.

Furthermore, in its 'corrective', anti-pastoral capacity, science is used to introduce, and to set in opposition to pastoral, an ecologically aware understanding of the physical world. In challenging the conception of nature as 'stable' or 'enduring', as Garrard suggests is typical of pastoral, the novel fulfils one of Buell's criteria for the identification of environmentally oriented literature: the 'sense of the environment as a process rather than a constant or given is at least implicit'.³⁴⁸ In the text, we are told that the natural world is a process of cause and effect, action and reaction: without coherent purpose or design, beginning or end, the ecosystem is necessarily inchoate and in perpetual flux.³⁴⁹ In this reading, the characters' scientific knowledge directly undermines the foundations of the pastoral by questioning the representation of nature upon which it is based. At the same time, it adds a dimension of ecological awareness to the representation of nature in the text.

As the novel develops, it is not from the scientifically trained perspectives of the zoologists that we are given the opportunity to know and understand the ecology of the coastline further. Instead, the event of their murders causes a change in viewpoint. The focus of the narrative shifts from the zoologists' knowledge of and desire for nature to approach the characters themselves *as* nature. Krist describes this narrative strand as 'a fourth line to this fugue – an ostinato played by nature itself'.³⁵⁰ The conception of the treatment of nature in the novel as an 'ostinato' is valuable: meaning 'a melodic or rhythmical figure or phrase: continuously repeated'.³⁵¹ However, I shall come to suggest that its repetition throughout the narrative supersedes Krist's allocation of nature to just one of the voices that comprise the 'narrative fugue' of the novel. At this point, though, it is the descriptions of the deaths of the central characters and the subsequent decomposition of their bodies that directs the focus of the narrative upon the relationship between and understanding of the human and the natural:

³⁴⁸ Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, p. 56; Buell, *The Environmental Imagination*, p. 8.

³⁴⁹ See, for instance, Botkin, *Discordant Harmonies*; John Kricher, *The Balance of Nature: Ecology's Enduring Myth*, (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009).

³⁵⁰ Krist, 'Being Dead by Jim Crace', *Salon.com: Online Journal*, n. pag.

³⁵¹ "ostinato, adj. and n.". OED Online. September 2011. Oxford University Press. December 06, 2011, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/133156?redirectedFrom=ostinato>.

The plain and unforgiving facts were these. Celice and Joseph were soft fruit. They lived in tender bodies. They were vulnerable. They did not have the power not to die. They were, we are, all flesh, and then we are all meat. (*BD*, p. 12)

The anti-pastoral tone of Celice's description of the processes of nature discussed above appears to continue here. However, a change in register can be discerned. Joseph and Celice are now included within the anti-pastoral description of nature. Crace vividly highlights the vulnerabilities inherent in human physical attributes. By comparing human bodies to both 'soft fruit' and 'meat', Crace emphasises the shared features of these kinds of flesh: subject to the same threats of death, decomposition and consumption. The instructive, factual tone here is accentuated by the short, repetitive sentence structure, lecturing the point that pastoral, romantic nature is in fact simultaneously violent, vulnerable and irrefutable. As the description of their deaths develops in detail, Crace focuses on why they have died; the physical effects of the blows are gruesome, but the clear, descriptive tone detaches the narrative from indulgence or gratuitousness. The act of their murders and their subsequent deaths are depicted and explained in reasoned, logical style, the metre of the narrative is relaxed and even. The description of their attack and subsequent deaths presents a perspective upon nature without illusion or romance.

The change in register is accentuated further through the description of Celice's final moments. In describing the loss of the significance and consequences of consciousness, thought is rendered superfluous to the fundamental and elemental processes of nature:

Calcium and water usurped the place of blood and oxygen so that her defunct brain, almost at once, began to swell and tear its canopies, spilling all its saps and liquors, all its stored immersions of passion, memory and will, on to her scarf, her jacket and the grass. (*BD*, p. 7)

Celice's character and consciousness are shown to be synonymous with the physical and chemical processes of her body. However, whereas the physical remainder of her body

persists and shifts into the landscape, the internal contents of her mind and self are lost instantly and forever. This acutely pragmatic understanding of the end of life and the finality of death is reiterated as the perspective of the natural world: 'Their characters had bled out on to the grass. The universe could not care less' (*BD*, p. 11). Crace here transposes Celice's account of life and death given to her students into an account of the end of her own life. Celice's thoughts and feelings, whether imparted to the world in life or death, are shown to have no consequences alongside the certainty of death and the processes of nature: 'This was the world as it had always been, plus something less which was once doctors of zoology' (*BD*, p. 68).

By focusing upon the moment of death as part of a process, rather than solely as a point of closure, Crace depicts death as re-appropriation of the rudiments of life through the processes of nature. The elemental understanding of the interrelationship of all life in Crace's anti-pastoral version of nature reflects Naess's deep ecological assertion of the intrinsic worth of human and non-human life; here, life and death become a transfer of values which are 'independent of the usefulness of the non-human world for human purposes'.³⁵²

Accordingly, the viewpoint of the narrative enables us to see the human inhabitants included within the ecology of the coastline. Furthermore, we are given insights into the way in which they, and the other components of that ecology, are enmeshed as the bodies are assimilated into the ecosystem. The failure of Joseph and Celice to survive reconfigures their parts in the struggle for survival for other creatures. In this way, the relationship of the bodies to their surroundings is immediately transformed. The perspective from which they are seen is radically altered: 'The bodies were discovered straight away. A beetle first' (*BD*, p. 36). Crace describes how the bodies have been become food:

Her body made good pickings for the glucose-hungry flies [...] The crabs,
when they arrived and climbed the gradients of flesh and cloth, did not

³⁵² Arne Naess, 'The Deep Ecological Movement: Some Philosophical Aspects', in George Sessions, ed., *Deep Ecology for the 21st Century: Readings on the Philosophy & Practice of the New Environmentalism*, (Boston & London: Shambhala, 1995) pp. 64-84, (p. 68).

compete with the flies for blood. They grazed for detached skin and detritus,
the swarf and dross and jetsam of animals with lives cut short.
(*BD*, p. 38, 40)

The narrative here no longer defines the human characters from the other animals or their surroundings, again expounding Buell's ecological criteria: 'human interest is not understood to be the only legitimate interest'.³⁵³ They have become animal and landscape simultaneously; their bodies are 'gradients' and 'grazing' for the crabs.

At the same time, in the reappropriation of the components of the bodies within the ecosystem of the beach, Crace can again be interpreted to enact the kind of inversion of pastoral that I described earlier in this section. By re-positioning the physical remainders of the human characters as a resource for other elements of the ecosystem, Crace can be seen to be reversing the pastoral construction of nature as a bountiful idyll for human consumption.

Indeed, Andrej Gasiorek argues that 'everything within this text is considered in terms of the human organism's corporeality and its inevitable disintegration'.³⁵⁴ However, this anthropocentric perspective is challenged by the understanding of 'corporeality' and 'disintegration' as part of a greater system of natural processes. Life and death are re-imagined in relation to, and at times from the perspective of, other creatures. The text repositions the human characters in relation to the non-human inhabitants and their surroundings; it is about 'corporeality' and 'disintegration', but also transition and reappropriation on a scale that includes, but is not limited to, the human. As Tew writes:

The underlying sense of a primeval, natural quality of the environment recurs throughout Crace's fiction [...] This repeated trope counters the anthropomorphic view of the human world, as do the decaying corpses in *Being Dead*.³⁵⁵

³⁵³ Buell, *The Environmental Imagination*, p. 7.

³⁵⁴ Andrej Gasiorek, 'History, Death & Flight From Reality in Contemporary Writing' in Nick Bentley, ed., *British Fiction of the 1990s*, London & New York: Routledge, 2005, pp. 42-56, (p. 46).

³⁵⁵ Tew, *Jim Crace*, p. 7.

The ecological implications of the treatment of pastoral and anti-pastoral in the novel belies the reading of the text as a simple inversion of the pastoral. Crace's ecological focus is broader than the desecration of the bodies in their refigured position in the food chain, instead noting the shift in their roles as a shift in the wider ecosystem itself:

The waiting gull [...] went to work and started on the unexpected feast of crabs, which were already labouring through their exaggerated countryside towards the corpses. More violent death. The sudden downward beating of a beak. (*BD*, p. 37-38)

By comparing the violence of the deaths of Joseph and Celice to the action of the gull catching crabs, Crace seems to reduce the act of their murder to a natural process: a violent act which leads to death. The idealisation of the relationship between humans and nature, and of nature itself through human terms, is destroyed through the harsh reality of this image. From an ecocentric perspective, the comparison is not the reduction of a senseless criminal act to the natural inevitability of the food chain; it is a process of cause and effect. The attack on Joseph and Celice meant that the natural processes of their bodies were unable to continue, and the attack of the gull on the crabs had the same result. In terms of nature as process and survival as the successful continuation of that process, both examples of death are the same. Accentuating further the notion of natural process as both innate and inevitable is the parallel use of imagery describing each attack; the 'piston blows' of the murderer's granite and the 'sudden downward beating' of the gull both convey rapid, reactionary violence with certain consequences. Tellingly, though, the language used to describe the repeated action of the blows reframes the purely physical description of the action of the gull through the mechanised adjective of the 'piston' for the action of the killer. The anti-pastoral and ecocentric readings of the deaths of the characters give way to something else.

Rather than eradicating the distinctions between the human and the natural through the depiction of the deaths of the protagonists, Crace creates the potential to consider their definitions and the interfaces between those definitions afresh. The assimilation of the bodies into the ecosystem can be interpreted through Haraway's proposition of the destabilisation of deterministic boundaries and conceptions of

certainty in favour of ‘*pleasure* in the confusion of boundaries and *responsibility* for their construction’ through the concept of ‘relationality’.³⁵⁶ It is this ‘relationality’ that is captured in the novel through the narration of the deaths of the characters, and its aftermath. As the bodies begin to decompose and be dismantled by other creatures and processes, in a way they appear to become, or begin to be shown to be, ‘more’ than visitors to the landscape, and ‘more’ than finite bodies. They become part of the landscape, or begin to be shown to be part of the landscape, as the permeability of the perceived boundaries between the humans and their environment is made apparent. In this sense, in death they become ‘more’ than human. By changing the perspective of the narrative at the point of the characters’ deaths, Crace could be seen to be highlighting a change in ‘relationality’. However, the adjustment to the viewpoint is just that: the interface between the human and the non-human has not become permeable at this point, it has simply begun to be shown as such. In so doing, the interface, and the ‘relationality’ that it represents, is highlighted.

The implications of the narrative strand of the novel dealing with nature can be understood further, in conjunction with another of Haraway’s ideas. Haraway describes the conception of ‘nature’ as a ‘commonplace’. This ‘commonplace’, she proposes, overcomes the polarisation of culture and nature or human and non-human. These distinctions are overcome through incorporation: in Haraway’s words, ‘it means that nature for us is *made*, as both fiction and fact’.³⁵⁷ She explains further:

If the world exists for us as ‘nature’, this designates a kind of relationship, an achievement among many actors, not all of them human, not all of them organic, not all of them technological. In its scientific embodiments as well as in other forms, nature is made, but not entirely by humans; it is a co-construction among humans and non-humans.³⁵⁸

Haraway argues that through re-fashioning the relationship between humans and nature through the idea of the ‘commonplace’, the perception of their interface as a boundary is

³⁵⁶Haraway, *The Haraway Reader*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 8, original emphasis.

³⁵⁷Ibid, p. 65, original emphasis.

³⁵⁸Ibid, p. 66.

re-imagined as a borderland.³⁵⁹ Here, the understanding of nature as a ‘commonplace’ chimes well with Morton’s ‘mesh’ and Wood’s concept of ‘global finitude’ discussed earlier in this chapter: these ideas express a sense of the limitedness of the physical world, conveyed through acknowledgement of the interconnectedness of its components.³⁶⁰

The presentation of nature in *Being Dead* appears initially to be anti-pastoral. However, the change in viewpoint provoked by the deaths of the protagonists appears to reconfigure this anti-pastoral presentation to acknowledge the interconnectivity between the human and the non-human. During the period of pastoral retreat, the relationship between the human and the non-human is illuminated from an ecological perspective. Crace re-envisioned the pastoral journey to encompass a transitory period in which the relationship between the human and the non-human is re-imagined. The customary pastoral return in the novel appears to mark the closure of this period. The return from the country to the city, equipped with the restorative effects of the pastoral experience, is complicated in the novel: the bodies of the couple return, but the individuals that undertook the pastoral journey have been ‘lost forever’.

Gasiorek argues that the treatment of death in the novel is ultimately escapist: ‘in spite of the text’s resurrection of Joseph and Celice, this narrative act [...] is implicitly presented as a form of escapism from unpalatable truths’.³⁶¹ The central portion of the novel, between the characters’ journey and their delayed return, can be construed in this way: the change in viewpoint to examine their deaths from an ecological angle, coupled with the retelling of their original visit, could seem obfuscatory: a diversion or digression from, or even a response to, the cold facts of their murders and the decomposition of their bodies. Other critical interpretations could be added to this line of thought. Interestingly, as I mentioned earlier, Krist describes the structure of the narrative as a fugue in the musical sense. In psychiatry, a fugue can refer to a period or interlude spent in a dreamlike state, often in response to extreme stress, which is repressed upon recovery. This meaning of the term comes from its Latin origin, as ‘to

³⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 110.

³⁶⁰ Wood, p. 172.

³⁶¹ Gasiorek, p. 46.

flee' or 'flight'.³⁶² In a similar vein, Tew has described the novel as a 'lacunary state'.³⁶³ Retreating from the reality of the deaths into nature, specifically an imagined version of nature, may be interpreted as an escape into such states. From another angle, the novel's littoral setting could be understood to contribute to this reading. The transient state of the coastline evokes a sense of temporality, the action of the tide alternately retreating and advancing, revealing and obscuring the landscape, continually shifting through a series of configurations. The novel's structure can be seen to enact a similar process: the interweaving strands of the narrative and the pastoral pattern of retreat and return that overarches them can be read as a series of slippages between states, in which glimpses of different viewpoints and interrelationships are made momentarily visible, but without conclusion.

However, as I mentioned earlier, Begley describes the different strands of the narrative as ticking clocks. He explains, 'the novel is a playful narrative exploration of time, mortality's smouldering fuse'.³⁶⁴ E.O. Wilson imagines the effect of biological knowledge as a 'time machine', in which the scientifically informed viewer is able to perceive the different multiples of time that occur concurrently on different scales: from the 'organismic time' of our individual experience and the 'biochemical time' that encapsulates the cellular, chemical and electrical processes which enable and perpetuate that experience to the 'ecological time' of passing epochs and species and finally, 'evolutionary time', which at once transcends and underpins the previous three timescales, discerning the fragments and particles that comprise all matter'.³⁶⁵ The multiple and interconnected strands of the narrative, and the micro and macro scales of the viewpoint from which the strands are narrated, allow a sense of the simultaneity that Wilson describes to be conveyed, giving the novel an ecological depth that resists the idea of escapism.

³⁶² "fugue, n.". OED Online. June 2013. Oxford University Press. 1 September 2013
 <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/75270?rskey=YfXurG&result=1&isAdvanced=false>>

³⁶³ Tew, *Jim Crace*, p. 142.

³⁶⁴ Begley, n. pag.

³⁶⁵ E. O. Wilson, *Biophilia: The Human Bond With Other Species*, (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 42-44.

I argue that the interrelationship between the human and the non-human that the novel documents compromises the possibility of an escapist reading. The period or interlude between retreat and return is also a transformatory one; it is a break in which relations and interpretations are reconfigured, and cannot be returned to their previous state. As Richard J. Lane explains, we are shown a different view of the relationship between the human and the non-human prior to and following the deaths of the central characters. The latter view problematises the former:

Temporality is complex, the narrative being once more a *differentia* where there is a struggle between past meaning (life before death), and post-mortem meaning (the meaning(s) assigned to the life/lives after death.) Embedded within the latter is the possibility that the stain of life can easily be washed away, that death is a fact of life, so to speak, that the universe has long learnt to cope with the event that humanity has so much trouble with.³⁶⁶

The characters' lives have ended, and a re-treatment or reconsideration of the end of life as a kind of ecological beginning can be understood to have opened up; in so doing, the relationship between the human and the non-human has been shown to be permeable. The idea of a transition between the domains of the human and the natural in the novel, therefore, is complicated by this permeability. The interconnectivity signified by the visceral representation of the decomposition of the bodies within the ecosystem of the shoreline is not confined to that location or to those particular circumstances. The return to the city may be the closure of those circumstances, but the illumination they provided will persist. Although it tests the conventions of the pastoral, it is made possible through the use of those conventions. The viewpoint afforded by the pastoral retreat enables the interrelationship between the human and the non-human to be made plain, and opens up the possibility of this perspective to be taken forward in the narrative.

In this way, the restorative experience of the pastoral retreat could be understood to be the simultaneous awareness of the permeability of the distinctions between the human and the natural, and the responsibility that ensues from the recognition of this

³⁶⁶ Richard J. Lane, 'The Fiction of Jim Crace', in Richard J. Lane, Rod Mengham & Philip Tew, eds., *Contemporary British Fiction*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003, pp. 27-39, (p. 35), original emphasis.

permeability. Crace explains in an interview with Tew that the novel is an attempt at reworking the idea of a ‘narrative of comfort [...] which also allows that although death is absolutely final, nevertheless something does survive and that there is a certain immortality of a kind’.³⁶⁷ Crace’s ‘comfort’ can then be understood as the restorative sense of enmeshing between the human and the non-human in the context of death. The presentation of this interrelationship imbues the narrative with a both a pastoral sense of restoration, and an ecological sense of responsibility that is rooted in the enmeshing between the lives and the deaths of both the human and the non-human creatures. As Lane observes, ‘Life may be quickly reduced to a puddle [...] but the reduction does not represent some kind of literary nihilism’.³⁶⁸ In the novel, Syl considers that ‘there is no remedy for death – or birth – except to hug the spaces in between. Live loud. Live wide. Live tall’ (*BD*, p. 171). The affirmation of life here surely parallels the depiction of life after death in the dunes, where the traditional pastoral cycle is transformed to undertake the cycle of life itself which attempts to cement a secular understanding of the end of life within an ecological celebration of renewal and re-appropriation. In turn, Syl’s words here are surely imbued with a significance that goes beyond the human. It is the impossibility of escapism and the emerging sense of responsibility that is raised by the treatment of the enmeshing between the human and the non-human and the past and the present in the novel that I suggest is central to the re-envisioning of the pastoral mode mapped out in this chapter.

Through his engagement with pastoral relations between the past and the present, and the human and the natural, Crace troubles the notion of distinctions between them and instead reconfigures the conventions of the pastoral mode to reflect and to explore these troubled ideas. Using a complex narrative structure, Crace depicts and refutes the influence of the present upon the past by demonstrating the links and breaks between them, disrupting the temporality of nostalgia. The pastoral elegy is upset and reimagined along similar lines, positioning loss as a kind of reclamation or beginning, by redefining the terms of that loss. In so doing, the human and the natural are shown to be enmeshed by a change of narrative perspective. Crace manipulates the structures and relationships

³⁶⁷ Jim Crace telephone interview with Philip Tew, quoted by Philip Tew in *Jim Crace*, p. 136.

³⁶⁸ Lane, p. 27.

of the pastoral into new alignments, revealing alternative perspectives upon and uses of the conventions of the form.

Conclusion

Through examination of a series of instances of contemporary writing in which the pastoral relationships between the country and the city, the human and the natural, and the past and the present are engaged, a number of common themes can be identified which signify the emergence of alternative ways of conceiving and representing these relationships. The texts point to the mutual intensification and destabilisation of these relationships as they are called up and challenged in relation to contemporary environmental sensitivities. The contrasts that these pastoral relations represent are weakened in this context. Through exploring the ways that these contrasts are interconnected and enmeshed and uncovering the multiple scales upon which they may be perceived and interpreted, more complex senses of their meanings and their implications are revealed. In the process, the subjectivity and partiality of these perceptions are underlined. Using multiple narrative strands with differing scales of time and perspective allows a more reflexive version of pastoral to emerge.

Morton suggests: ‘we need a whole new way of evoking the environment’.³⁶⁹ By exposing the workings of pastoral ways of representing and interpreting the relationships upon which it is based, these texts denote responses to Morton’s proposition within the tradition of the pastoral: new ways of evoking the environment through the pastoral. In teasing apart the conventions and expectations of pastoral, these texts can be understood to redirect the ways that pastoral relationships may be approached and interpreted.

Williams argues in *Problems in Materialism and Culture* against the futility of returning to pastoral distinctions:

In this actual world there is not much point in counterposing or restating the great abstractions of Man and Nature. We have mixed our labour with the earth, our forces with its forces too deeply to be able to draw back and

³⁶⁹ Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, p. 15.

separate either out. Except that if we mentally draw back, if we go on with the singular abstractions, we are spared the effort of looking, in any active way, at the whole complex of social and natural relationships which is at once our product and our activity.³⁷⁰

The ‘drawing back’ that Williams describes could be understood to parallel the retreat into the idealised accounts of definitions of and relations between the country and the city, the human and the natural, and the past and the present associated with the pastoral. Conversely, it is the ‘complex of social and natural relationships’ inherent in the premises of the pastoral that these texts can be seen to be grappling with in their versions of pastoral writing in the twenty-first century.

³⁷⁰ Williams, *Problems in Materialism and Culture: Selected Essays*, p. 83.

Chapter Four
Uncertain Nature: Crises in Pastoral

To such a pass has civil
Dissension brought us.³⁷¹
Eclogue I, Virgil.

Thus, we never see the true state of our condition till it is illustrated to us by
its contraries, nor know how to value what we enjoy, but by the want of it.³⁷²
Robinson Crusoe, Daniel Defoe

Sometimes there's a signal, and we don't want to hear it.³⁷³
The Stone Gods, Jeanette Winterson

This chapter examines the appearances of pastoral in contemporary writing that directly addresses environmental crisis. Following the transformed understanding of pastoral nature discovered in Chapter Two, and the reconfigured formations of pastoral relationships found in Chapter Three, this part of the study traces accounts of pastoral that relate and respond to the development of a contemporary understanding of environmental crisis. Exploring a series of textual and theoretical examples, the chapter identifies the uses of the form to depict and to reflect upon environmental crisis and retrieves the ways that the pastoral is necessarily adapted towards the topic. The chapter locates a dialectical version of the mode in this context, in which pastoral and anti-pastoral images are used in combination to explore the ways that human-nature relations may be represented and interpreted in contexts in which those relations lead or have led to dramatically altered environmental conditions. In these versions of pastoral, the challenges posed to the conventions of the mode by scenarios of environmental crisis are negotiated by way of radical re-interpretations of the human and the natural and their

³⁷¹ Virgil, *The Eclogues, The Georgics*, trans. C. Day Lewis, ed. R. O. A. M. Lyne, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), lines 71-72, p. 6.

³⁷² Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, ed. J. Donald Crowley, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 139.

³⁷³ Jeanette Winterson, *The Stone Gods*, (Boston, MA: Houghton, 2008), p. 199.

intersection.³⁷⁴ Backward-looking and idealising images of previous conditions and relationships are resisted and instead the themes and conventions of pastoral are transposed onto alternative surroundings. Environmental conditions, and the events and connections that contribute towards them are presented in evaluative fashion, and the pastoral is re-formed around the understandings of human-nature relations that are generated.

In three sections, this chapter will argue that these new senses of pastoral can be found in contemporary writing of environmental crisis. In conjunction with and in addition to recent theorisations of contemporary writing, environmental crisis and pastoral, it will put forward a case for versions of the mode that correspond to and develop further the emerging new pastorals found in this study. Firstly, it addresses the renewed opportunities to reflect upon human-nature relations envisaged by Buell's connection between pastoral and the representation and interpretation of environmental crisis in the form of 'toxic discourse'.³⁷⁵ Examining Buell's proposition alongside the depiction of environmental disaster in Liz Jensen's *The Rapture* (2009), this section finds that the uncertainties of environmental crisis destabilise the conventions of pastoral and their outcomes, resulting in a form more reflective of its subject that precludes straightforward resolution. Engaging with Phillips's reading of the critical potential of pastoral 'blocked' by environmental crisis, the second section examines the possibilities of negotiating this impediment in Brian Clarke's *The Stream* (2000).³⁷⁶ By attending to the causes and effects of crisis through experimentation with the scale and perspective of pastoral places and the relationships that they comprise, I suggest that the use of pastoral in the text opens up the critical scope latent in the mode in this context. The third part of the chapter explores John Burnside's *Glisters* (2008), and identifies a dialectical formulation of pastoral that is driven by a developing conception of human-nature relations against the backdrop of environmental disaster. Recalling Gifford's application

³⁷⁴ I acknowledge here Gifford's description of anti-pastoral as 'dialectical' and distinguish my usage here by way of the altered conceptions of the themes and conventions of pastoral upon which my argument in this study is based. See Gifford, *Pastoral*, p. 129.

³⁷⁵ See Lawrence Buell, 'Toxic Discourse', *Critical Inquiry* 24.3 (1998), pp. 639-665; Lawrence Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture and Environment in the U. S. and Beyond*, (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2001).

³⁷⁶ See Dana Phillips, 'Don DeLillo's Postmodern Pastoral'.

of 'post-pastoral' to narratives of environmental crisis, I examine the presence of both responsibility for and celebration of human-nature relations in the novel.³⁷⁷ In these examples, I argue that pastoral is used to register and to explore events of environmental crisis, appearing in forms that demonstrate how the mode is challenged by this premise, and how it may be adapted to depict and to respond to it. In these interconnected and layered accounts of environmental crises, the conventions and the effects of pastoral are overhauled. In the process, both the critical and restorative aspects of the tradition are re-imagined to respond to a contemporary understanding of the interrelationships that define the composition and the interpretation of the environments towards which they are directed.

As the previous chapters have shown, environmental uncertainty can refresh the pastoral by provoking reconsideration of its components and pointing towards their redefinition, in the process, opening up new contexts for and angles upon the pastoral for consideration. However, it also holds the potential to derail those components altogether. In this chapter, I aim to explore the ways in which the contemporary versions of pastoral that I have been tracing throughout this study are made to deal with these difficulties. The premise of environmental crisis both intensifies and obstructs the pastoral. Its version of nature and the oppositions by which it is identified become more appealing alongside growing senses of a degrading present and the possible futures towards which it may lead. Yet at the same time, these conditions put the idealisations of pastoral even further out of reach. The possibility of an ideal nature becomes more difficult to imagine. More damagingly, the interconnected understanding of the human and non-human environment that such crises realise threatens to invalidate the pastoral and its contrasts, undermining the potential of their expected critical and restorative effects.

Accordingly, the premise of environmental crisis signifies a crisis for pastoral itself. While pastoral's association with themes of crisis and their explication is long established, the opposition of pastoral nature to those crises and the clarifying, critical

³⁷⁷ See Gifford, 'Afterword: New Senses of "Environment," New Versions of Pastoral'; Gifford, 'Biosemiology and Globalism in *The Rapture* by Liz Jensen'; Gifford, 'Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* and a Post-Pastoral Theory of Fiction'.

and restorative effects that it may offer are newly challenged themselves by the context of environmental crisis. For instance, in Virgil's first Eclogue, the herdsman Meliboeus relates the story of his dispossession and impending departure from the land. The personal crisis that his displacement causes points to the political crisis that precedes it: his dispossession is the result of the transfer of farms to soldiers returning from the Roman Civil Wars.³⁷⁸ However, the pastoral realm that Meliboeus laments having to leave, and in which Tityrus invites him to spend his last night, remains a place of retreat and plenty that appears to be separate from personal or civil strife: 'Yet surely you could rest with me tonight and sleep / On a bed of green leaves here? You're welcome to taste my mellow / Apples, my floury chestnuts, my ample stock of cheese'.³⁷⁹ In the poem, the pastoral countryside offers both respite and distance from the causes and the locations of crisis, and a place and a perspective from which to consider those conditions. The landscape is set against crisis, as a space into which to retreat, and set outside of it: the harmonious countryside that Meliboeus recalls and where Tityrus will remain is unaffected by the hardships of the wider world of the city and their effects upon the 'hapless folk' of the area.

The contrast between the places and systems of the human and the non-human, the city and the country, foregrounds the approach to pastoral writing about crisis instituted in Virgil's first Eclogue.³⁸⁰ Crisis appears to originate on one side and may be assuaged on the other. The version of pastoral nature described by Meliboeus and Tityrus is not only called up in response to crisis but also appears relative to it: the countryside offers up the stability and generosity that Meliboeus's predicament causes him to doubt in the wider world.³⁸¹ As Rosenmeyer puts it, 'Virgil's pastoral is written

³⁷⁸ See E. Kegel-Brinkgreve, *The Echoing Woods: Bucolic and Pastoral from Theocritus to Wordsworth*, (Amsterdam: J. C. Gieben, 1990) for a comprehensive summary of the historical background and allusions of the *Eclogues*. See also Virgil, *The Eclogues, The Georgics*, trans. C. Day Lewis; Sambrook,; Hiltner.

³⁷⁹ Virgil, lines 79-81, p. 6.

³⁸⁰ See Kegel-Brinkgreve, Sambrook above and Meeker, *The Comedy of Survival* on Virgil, pastoral and crisis. See also Martindale on political readings of *Eclogues* and Bruno Snell, *The Discovery of the Mind: The Greek Origins of European Thought*, trans. T. G. Rosenmeyer, (New York: Harper and Row, 1960) on the relationship of the *Eclogues* to contemporary events and ensuing historical influence of their treatment in Virgil's poems.

³⁸¹ Similarly, and as I have quoted elsewhere in this study, Garrard comments that 'at the root of pastoral is the idea of nature as a stable, enduring counterpart to the disruptive energy and change of human societies', *Ecocriticism*, p. 56.

in the comparative mode'.³⁸² Central to this comparative construction of the pastoral world is the relation between the human and the natural. Virgil's *Eclogue* takes the correlation between the human and the natural established in Theocritus's first *Idyll*, through the story of the effects of the death of Daphnis upon the natural world, and uses it to connect 'the iron world of politics and war' to the pastoral garden, creating 'an harmonious pastoral world in the teeth of the almost unbearable disorder'.³⁸³ In this model, the pastoral world provides a relieving counterpoint to crisis in which relief is founded on the stability of nature, or rather, the stability of the interrelationship between the human and the natural.

The premise of environmental crisis unsettles the stability that underpins this formulation of pastoral. Recognition of the causes and the effects of ecological crisis present an impediment to its conventions. In the same way, their inverse form, the anti-pastoral, is equally stalled. If, in anti-pastoral, the harmonious connection supposed in pastoral between the human and the non-human is broken, or rather, shown to be a fabrication, the occurrence of environmental crisis appears to underline this point. It is through the negative effects of the surroundings upon human life that such occurrences are frequently registered. However, this premise in fact reveals levels of connection that exist in contrast, or in addition, to the ones supposed by pastoral. It shows how the human and non-human are irrevocably linked, but at the same time, troubles the pastoral idea that these links are favourable towards the former.

Neither representing nor responding to crises of the environment is accounted for in pastoral or anti-pastoral models. Though examples of nature itself apparently in crisis can be found in the tradition, such as Aemelia Lanyer's pastoral 'The Description of Cooke-ham' (1611) or George Crabbe's defining anti-pastoral, 'The Village' (1783), in these poems neither the conditions of the environment nor the stability of their

³⁸² Rosenmeyer, p. 214.

³⁸³ Sambrook, p. 93. See also 'Thyrsis' Lament for Daphnis' in Theocritus, *Idylls*, trans. Anthony Verity, ed. Richard Hunter, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), lines 131-135, p. 6. Here, the death of Daphnis demonstrates reciprocity between the herdsman and the landscape, and his death is described as a disturbance to the processes of nature: 'Now, you thorns and brambles, bring forth violets, and/ Let the lovely narcissus flower on the juniper. Let / All things run contrary, since Daphnis is near to death. / Let the pine tree sprout pears, let hounds be torn by stags, / Let nightingales cry out to owls at the day's dawn'. See also Snell, p. 285, for background to the Daphnis myth and Theocritus' adaptation of it in 'Thyrsis' Lament for Daphnis'.

association to pastoral expectations are under threat.³⁸⁴ Lanyer's account of the unseasonal decline of the landscape of the estate follows Theocritus' model, where nature's disorder is in alignment with expectation rather than at odds to it, and though Crabbe sets forth a version of the countryside intended to conflict with pastoral expectations and indeed to unmask the hardships that they conceal, the representation of the harsh and unforgiving landscape and its rural occupations remains tied to them.

Disturbed by the premise of environmental crisis, both pastoral and anti-pastoral responses appear out of kilter. The Theocritean correspondence between the human and the natural is both disrupted and instated in new, and newly verifiable, contexts. The contrast between the country and the city, based upon the reciprocity of one towards the expectations of the other, is troubled when the conditions of the country do not meet those expectations and instead signify reciprocity of different kinds. The appearance of signs of crisis in nature, in connection with and in addition to the evidence of urban crisis, calls into question both the contrasts and the connections presumed by the pastoral. The possibility of obtaining either restorative relief or critical perspective through the means of a retreat towards nature is problematised and the concept of pastoral nature itself is put under pressure.

In the following sections, I will discuss the transformed uses of pastoral in a series of examples of and responses to what Heise calls 'a cultural moment in which an entire planet becomes graspable as one's own local backyard'.³⁸⁵ This chapter argues that the mode is being remade in conjunction with the consideration of these problems in contemporary writing, and illustrates the ways that the issue can generate new versions of pastoral that adapt its conventions to approach new configurations of crisis. Exploring the ways that the uncertainties of environmental crisis demand the destabilisation of the expectations of pastoral restoration or resolution, I will argue that a questioning, tentative and reflexive version of the form emerges in light of these factors. I will show the ways that these qualities allow the implications of forms of environmental crisis

³⁸⁴ Aemelia Lanyer, *The Poems of Aemelia Lanyer*, ed. Susanne Woods, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); George Crabbe, *Selected Poetry*, ed. Jem Poster, (Manchester: Carcanet, 1986).

³⁸⁵ Heise, *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet*, p. 4.

upon the relationships of the pastoral to be imagined, and the connections between those relationships and the causes and effects of such forms of crisis to be interrogated.

1. Toxic Discourses

Observing Buell's 'remarkably prophetic' suggestion that 'as ecocatastrophe becomes an increasingly greater possibility, so will the occasions for environmental apocalyptic expression', Boxall identifies a new strain of 'environmental dystopianism' in contemporary writing that addresses the 'dawning apocalypticism' of the 'ongoing, unassailable, slow-motion destruction of the planet heralded by climate change'.³⁸⁶ For my purposes, it is Buell's further association of the writing of environmental disaster with the pastoral tradition that is of particular importance here. For Buell, the pastoral offers a means of representing, interpreting and responding to the situation that Boxall describes. As this chapter will explore, the premise of environmental crisis demands altered conceptions of the scope and effects of the pastoral, to which Buell offers the reading of the mode as 'toxic discourse'.³⁸⁷ In this section, I will examine Buell's reading and, using this analysis, begin to map some of the features that are key to my reading of the intersection of pastoral and the depiction of environmental crisis.

Buell's conception of pastoral here identifies the application and adaptation of pastoral to issues of representing and responding to environmental crisis. The theorisation signifies the critical rationalisation of his proposition of the 'ecocritical repossession of pastoral' outlined earlier in this study, and the reduction of the mode to a specific form and function in this context.³⁸⁸ By 'toxic discourse', Buell refers to literature that contains 'expressed anxiety arising from perceived threat of environmental hazard due to chemical modification by human agency'.³⁸⁹ Tracing its modern origins back to George Perkins Marsh's 1864 'conservationist treatise' *Man and Nature*, Buell's interest in 'toxic discourse' follows the example of Carson's *Silent*

³⁸⁶ Boxall, p. 217, p. 216; Buell, *The Environmental Imagination*, p. 308, cited by Boxall, p. 217. Boxall points to David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*, Sarah Hall's *The Carhullen Army*, Joshua Cohen's *Witz*, Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*, and Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* as examples.

³⁸⁷ Buell, 'Toxic Discourse', *Critical Inquiry* 24.3 (1998), pp. 639-665; Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World*.

³⁸⁸ Buell, *The Environmental Imagination*, p. 52.

³⁸⁹ Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World*, p. 31.

Spring, in which the polluting consequences of the application of pesticides are contrasted with idyllic descriptions of the previous condition of the landscape and of the previously harmonious relationship between its human and non-human inhabitants.³⁹⁰

As Garrard points out, Carson's highly influential work can be interpreted to be pastoral in construction and approach, 'concentrating on images of natural beauty and emphasising the "harmony" of humanity and nature that "once" existed'.³⁹¹ However, though Buell acknowledges that 'this pastoral inset trades strongly on the old dream of the simple life', he argues that it 'is hardly a simple nostalgia piece, since it was intended and was perceived to be a direct challenge to the chemical industry'.³⁹² The version of pastoral employed to environmentalist effect by Carson in Buell's reading is 'more strategized than mystified', and he suggests that 'to read it as regressive fantasy is to read it the same way the pesticide industry's defenders wanted us to read it'.³⁹³

In this formulation, the pastoral is used as an oppositional framework to encounter themes of ecological crisis, at once recalling and re-imagining the 'comparative' construction and application of Virgil's version of pastoral discussed above. Described by Buell as 'narratives of rude awakening', 'toxic discourse' employs the mode in simultaneously affective and critical capacities.³⁹⁴ '[I]ntensifying traumas of pastoral disruption', the form engages with the 'redemptive' recognition of an 'abused Nature', 'degenerated' man and the contrast with a previously 'better' world identified as characteristic of pastoral by Kermode.³⁹⁵ In accordance with the conceptions of active and 'restorative' nostalgia discussed in Chapter Two, here the backward glance of the pastoral is intended to stimulate action: allowing the idea of a previous version of nature

³⁹⁰ Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World*, p. 39. See George Perkins Marsh, *Man and Nature*, ed. David Lowenthal, Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2003). See also J. Donald Hughes, 'Industrial Technology and Environmental Damage' in his *Pan's Travail: Environmental Problems of the Ancient Greeks and Romans* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1994), pp. 112-28, also cited by Buell as illustrative of 'the threat of toxicification [...] since late antiquity' in Buell, 'Toxic Discourse', *Critical Inquiry* 24.3 (1998), p. 641. See also Hiltner, p. 14, where a similar use of pastoral is identified in John Evelyn's 1661 *Fumifugium* pamphlet on air pollution, which Hiltner also links to Carson's *Silent Spring* (see John Evelyn, *Fumifugium*, (The Rota: University of Exeter, 1976) available online at www.archive.org/stream/fumifugium00eveluoft). Also comparable is John Ruskin's *Storm-Cloud of the Nineteenth Century*, (Orpington: George Allen, 1884), as Gifford also mentions in 'Afterword', p. 245.

³⁹¹ Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, p. 1.

³⁹² Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World*, p. 44.

³⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

³⁹⁴ Buell, 'Toxic Discourse', p. 647.

³⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 647; Kermode, p. 14.

and a previous relationship between humans and nature to provoke ecologically-influenced reflection upon the causes and effects of these losses. Based on the understanding of the mode as critical and potentially restorative by virtue of the application of its critical insights, pastoral as ‘toxic discourse’ offers both a means of providing a cautionary tale and of generating a call to action.

This oppositional framework of the mode both looks back to an ideal past and forward to a polarised, disastrous future. Buell explains that in narratives of ‘toxic discourse’, ‘disenchantment from the illusion of the green oasis is accompanied or precipitated by totalising images of a world without refuge from toxic penetration’.³⁹⁶ The ‘totalising images’ and absence of ‘refuge’ here point towards catastrophe, the rhetorical value of which Buell does not underestimate: in *The Environmental Imagination*, he posits that ‘apocalypse is the single most powerful master metaphor that the contemporary environmental imagination has at its disposal’.³⁹⁷

In the writing of ecological crisis, apocalypse can be seen as an inversion of the pastoral dynamic, hinging upon the common starting point of a sense of dissatisfaction with the conditions of the present time. Whilst the pastoral typically looks backwards to an ideal set of conditions in the past which precede the problems of the present, and possibly provide the means of dealing with those problems in the practices of the past, apocalyptic narratives look forward to a point of irreparable damage, in which the problems of the present have culminated in a new set of conditions. However, Buell connects the trope of apocalypse directly to the pastoral, writing of ‘pastoralism’ that ‘one conspicuous mark of its relevance is the contemporary tradition of environmental apocalypse literature’: its ‘logic [...] undergirds environmental apocalypse’.³⁹⁸ Buell’s model here counterbalances the idyllicism of pastoral with the ‘shock tactics’ of apocalypse.³⁹⁹ Apocalypse narratives in this context imagine scenarios of ‘drastic, irreversible damage to human society or the environment’ in order that they may act as

³⁹⁶ Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World*, p. 38.

³⁹⁷ Buell, *The Environmental Imagination*, p. 285, also quoted by Garrard in *Ecocriticism*, p. 93.

³⁹⁸ Ibid, p. 51; p. 300.

³⁹⁹ Jimmie M. Killingsworth and Jacqueline S. Palmer, ‘Millennial Ecology: The Apocalyptic Narrative from *Silent Spring* to *Global Warming*’ in *Green Culture: Environmental Rhetoric in Contemporary America*, eds. Carl G. Herndl and Stuart C. Brown, (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), pp. 21-45, (p. 22).

means of 'revelation or disclosure', bridging the classical and modern meanings of the term.⁴⁰⁰ In such literature, Buell suggests, 'the imagination is being used to anticipate and, if possible, forestall actual apocalypse'.⁴⁰¹ Accordingly, as Heise and Kerridge, for instance, have noted, the employment of images of environmental apocalypse 'assumes that the end of the world can in fact be prevented': 'this is the ecological disaster as warning: the shock we needed, the lesson administered by providence to open our eyes just in time'.⁴⁰² Indeed, as Garrard observes, 'apocalyptic rhetoric [...] is capable of galvanising [...] and ultimately, perhaps, influencing' change, from individual to national and international levels.⁴⁰³

Liz Jensen's eco-thriller *The Rapture* can be understood to illustrate the usages of pastoral that Buell outlines here. At the same time, the novel also points towards its limitations. Examining its convergences with and resistance to Buell's theorisation, I aim to clarify further the connections between pastoral and writing environmental crisis. Set in the indeterminate near-future and culminating at the former 2012 Olympics stadium in East London, *The Rapture* traces the discovery of and the failure to prevent a deep-sea drilling project for frozen methane, which results in a climatic disaster that has been predicted by a teenager, Bethany, who appears to possess a connection to nature that exceeds reason and conventional understanding. Its dystopic account of the near-future accelerates environmental problems caused by pollution and risky technology towards the point at which such problems lead to the destruction of the practices that were their causes, along with the majority of the inhabitants and the features of the world that were shaped by them.

The novel contrasts the present with the past and upsets pastoral imagery in order to depict an aesthetic and ecological landscape in which a neither pristine nor benevolent

⁴⁰⁰ "apocalypse, n.". OED Online. June 2013. Oxford University Press. 27 July 2013
<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/9229?redirectedFrom=apocalypse>. Hulme clarifies that he is referring to the term in its 'popular' meaning rather than its 'original Greek - and Biblical - form' (p. 356), but in Buell's discussion it appears to be used to both ends. Killingsworth and Palmer also note the change of meaning from 'revelation' towards 'the destructive force of the battle of Armageddon, when worldly kingdoms will be swept away', p. 42.

⁴⁰¹ Buell, *The Environmental Imagination*, p. 285.

⁴⁰² Heise, *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet*, p. 141; Kerridge, 'Ecot thrillers: Environmental Cliffhangers', (p. 244).

⁴⁰³ Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, 2nd edn, p. 113.

version of nature is accessible. Used in these ways, the version of pastoral here achieves the comparative insights into environmental crisis that Buell describes in ‘toxic discourse’. The narrative follows Bethany’s therapist, Gabrielle, and relates an unfamiliar account of familiar cultural and geographical landscapes. We are told that ‘that summer [...] the rules began to change’ (*TR*, p. 1). Increasingly dangerous and unpredictable, the natural world appears unsympathetic to the needs of its human inhabitants. The weather is ‘ferocious’ and is becoming resistant to familiar means of interpretation: ‘it’s effectively the second autumn of the year. The first shrivelled the leaves on the branches and sun-blasted the fruit to ripeness back in May’; ‘five years ago, the British seasons made some kind of sense. Not any more’.⁴⁰⁴

Emphasising that pastoral nature is radically changing, the novel reconfigures its understanding as a celebration of the productive interaction of human and natural forces. Here, their interaction is used to convey the negative effects that it appears to be causing. To describe the conditions of unfamiliar weather, Jensen frequently appropriates industrial and mechanical terms. The ‘sky pressed down like a furnace lid’ (*TR*, p. 3), and ‘charcoal clouds erupted on the horizon and massed into precarious metropolises of air’ (*TR*, p. 4); the heat conveyed by the wind is likened to ‘a hairdryer with no off switch’ (*TR*, p. 35). Further, it is through the destruction of pastoral landscapes that the effects of unpredictable weather are registered, where storms are ‘flattening corn, uprooting trees, smashing hop silos and storage barns, whisking up torn rubbish sacks that pirouetted in the sky like the ghostly spirits of retail folly’ (*TR*, p. 4). The description aligns the pastoral images of agricultural activity with the accumulation of waste and consumer culture, blending together pastoral and anti-pastoral signs of the impact of human action.

In its adaptation of pastoral imagery to convey environmental crisis, the novel demonstrates ‘acknowledgement of the like-it-or-not interdependence’ of ‘humanity in relation to environment’ that Buell anticipates.⁴⁰⁵ Through vivid descriptions of the degraded landscape accompanied by ominous signs of impending catastrophe we see a

⁴⁰⁴ Liz Jensen, *The Rapture*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2009), p. 124; p. 160; p. 54. All further references to this text will be made parenthetically in the chapter using the abbreviation *TR*.

⁴⁰⁵ Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World*, p. 54.

landscape in which the interconnectivity between human and non-human elements is irrefutable. The environment bears traces of the evidence of human action, from the ‘Starbucks beakers, gossip magazines, buckled beer-cans, burger cartons gaping open like polystyrene clams’ that clutter the pavements of the seaside town of Hadport to the pollution that litters the atmosphere visible from its shore, where ‘a spritz of bright air meeting water, of delicate chemical auras dancing around one another before mingling and ascending to the stratosphere’ (*TR*, p. 5).

However, this knowledge fails to lead to the emergence of new responsibility towards or reparation of that situation within the novel. Though the use of pastoral in the text bears relation to Buell’s oppositional formulation, the version of the form that the novel constructs is quite different. Rather than inspiring ‘cooperation’ with ‘interdependence’, the degraded landscape is relayed along with a sense of culpability that is accompanied by acceptance or even resignation.⁴⁰⁶ The characters’ eyes are open to the state of the environment, the threat that it is coming to pose to their own futures, and to the collective human role in the development of the situation. Despite this, the understanding of the interconnected environment is described without the possibility of aversion or repair: ‘Cause and effect. Get used to the way A leads to B. Get used to living in interesting times. Learn that nothing is random. Watch out for the tipping point. Look behind you: perhaps it’s been and gone’ (*TR*, p. 4).

The resistance of the version of pastoral presented in *The Rapture* to Buell’s formulation of ‘toxic discourse’ can be identified in the novel in two clear ways: firstly, through the treatment of the theme of apocalypse; and secondly, through the understanding of nature. As Buell proposes, pastoral is given renewed opportunity to represent and reflect upon human-nature relations in the context of environmental crisis. Yet the oppositional forces attributed to the threat of an apocalyptic future and to the appeal of a pristine past in pastoral understood as ‘toxic discourse’ seem out of step with the premise of environmental crisis. The interconnected senses of the human and the natural, and the past, the present and the future that are inherent in the notion of anthropogenic environmental changes must lessen the impact of these contrasts.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid, p. 54.

The lurid depictions of escalating environmental crisis in the novel coupled with the limited effect that its threat appears to register reflect some of the shortcomings of apocalypse. Both its content and their consequences are problematic when conceived as a means of provocation to reparative action. In terms of their content, such approaches can succeed in dramatising, rather than analysing or contextualising, signs of crisis. In the case of environmental crisis in particular, such approaches run the risk of failing to account for the scale and complexity of the problems they seek to address, or at the very least, failing to do so effectively. Mike Hulme identifies the depth of apocalyptic images in ‘deep ecology’, ‘eco-theology’ and ‘mainstream environmentalism’, and whilst noting that ‘it undoubtedly lends a sense of danger, fear and urgency to discourses around climate change’, is critical of the ‘alarmist’ outcomes of its common ‘language of catastrophe’.⁴⁰⁷ Questioning its emotive capacities, Kerridge suggests that ‘there is a temptation [...] to prophesy disaster with a hint of relish’.⁴⁰⁸ Worse, Hulme argues, is that ‘the counterintuitive outcome of such language [...] frequently leads to disempowerment, apathy and scepticism among its audience’.⁴⁰⁹

In terms of the consequences of apocalypse, as these perspectives suggest, increasing awareness of such problems mean that anticipations of worst-case scenarios have become commonplace, and their impact diminished. As Frederick Buell observes:

Since Rachel Carson, environmental crisis has rapidly evolved and substantially changed in form, not just in nature, but also in human discourse about it. Announcing itself as apocalypse [...] The world (as of the writing of this sentence and presumably also the reading of it) has not ended; eco-apocalypse hasn’t happened. Yet people today also accept the fact that they

⁴⁰⁷ Hulme, p. 344; p. 232. See also, for example, the chapter ‘Apocalypse’ in Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, 2nd edn; ‘Environmental Apocalypticism’ in Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing and the Formation of American Culture* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1995); Frederick Buell, *From Apocalypse to Way of Life: Environmental Crisis in the American Century*, (London: Routledge, 2003).

⁴⁰⁸ Kerridge, ‘Ecothrillers: Environmental Cliffhangers’, p. 244.

⁴⁰⁹ Hulme, p. 348.

live in the shadow of environmental problems so severe that they constitute a crisis.⁴¹⁰

Apocalyptic narratives as described above are unable or at least ill-adapted to deal with the situation outlined here. Acceptance of the incipient status of environmental crisis coupled with the delayed possibility of global catastrophe lessens the impact, and the applicability, of apocalyptic narratives to environmental crisis. However, negotiating what Garrard has called the 'failed prophesy' of environmental apocalypticism, Frederick Buell effectively redefines it by demonstrating the way that crisis has shifted from a climax to be avoided to an awareness of its effects as more gradual, already underway and nonetheless catastrophic in the potential of their building collective impact.⁴¹¹

It is this sense of environmental crisis that emerges in the novel. As Boxall suggests, contemporary writing concerned with the topic 'sets out to rethink the narrative texture of the present, in the shadow of ecocatastrophe'.⁴¹² Rather than presenting a narrative of environmental restoration catalysed by the experience of the brink of disaster, *The Rapture* evokes the experience of living with environmental disaster, from the escalating effects of a changing climate to the magnitude of the consequences of the drilling mistake with which the novel closes. Whilst Buell's 'toxic discourse' provides a productive means of recognising the uses of pastoral in its depictions of environmental disaster, the oppositional account of the mode that 'toxic discourse' depends upon, and the restorative effects that such oppositions are anticipated to provoke, are troubled by the topic and its treatment in this example of contemporary writing. Instead, the novel uses pastoral to distinguish crisis and to explicate its causes and effects, focusing not on their avoidance or resolution but upon the reconfigured understandings of human-nature relations that emerge in their wake.

The account of nature presented in the novel contributes towards this effect. In Buell's description of the effects of 'toxic discourse', the threat of apocalypse is set

⁴¹⁰ Frederick Buell, *From Apocalypse to Way of Life: Environmental Crisis in the American Century*, (London: Routledge, 2003), p. ix.

⁴¹¹ Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, 2nd edn, p. 116.

⁴¹² Boxall, p. 217.

against the ‘recognition of the rhetorical appeal and the benefit to human and planetary welfare of the ideal of a purified physical environment’.⁴¹³ His version of the trope both draws attention towards and continues a tradition of writing the ‘mythography of betrayed Edens’, in which pastoral has been used as a means to disseminate ecological awareness: establishing a sense of the value of nature in contrast to the human world, highlighting the negative impact of ecological irresponsibility and creating an ideal that could function to foster ecological responsibility.⁴¹⁴ Yet, the possibility of the image of a ‘purified’ past environment catalysing its recovery in the present is not realised in the novel.

Indeed, when a pristine and harmonious pastoral landscape is imagined, it seems like an anachronistic distraction alongside the degraded landscape that *The Rapture* vividly conveys. Faced with almost unimaginable disaster, Gabrielle re-evaluates the landscape with pastoral eyes. Revelling in ‘the sound of birdsong and the rustle of wind in the reeds’, she imagines a landscape of ‘patchworked farmland, its hills and cliffs and valleys and gorges, its woodlands of oak and birch and beech and pine, its rivers and cattle pastures and bright swathes of hemp and rape’ (*TR*, p. 266). Instead of offering a restorative ideal, the appearance of a pastoral image of an ideal nature seems to present a moment of escapism. Adopting the selectivity of pastoral vision that the previously unromantic descriptions of the environment had avoided, Gabrielle is right to conclude that ‘there is no room for catastrophes’ here, because the perspective from which the landscape is described omits from view the traces that could presage such outcomes (*TR*, p. 266). However, the elements of the environment described at this point surely exist in combination with those depicted earlier. The possibility of such a landscape existing outside of the conditions of crisis set out in the novel seems out of reach. The catastrophe that Gabrielle suggests ‘cannot gain entry’ is already present in the litter, the pollution and the broken remnants of industry (*TR*, p. 266).

The capacity of pastoral nature to misdirect is at issue here. Buell takes pains to emphasise that the ‘purified physical environment’ presented in ‘toxic discourse’

⁴¹³ Ibid, p. 39; p. 44.

⁴¹⁴ Buell, ‘Toxic Discourse’, p. 647.

negotiates the idealising function of a pristine pastoral nature. He explains that ‘toxic discourse’ is informed by an ecological understanding of nature that ‘recognises as the physical environment humans inhabit [...] *not* a holistic spiritual or biotic economy but a network or networks within which [...] humans are biotically imbricated’ and ‘nature has been greatly modified’.⁴¹⁵ Such understanding connects pastoral notions of ‘preservationism’ to ‘environmental justice’, according to Buell, and ‘inverts [...] the pastoral ideal’ by representing and advocating for ‘a nurturing space of clean air, clean water and pleasant uncluttered space that is ours by right’.⁴¹⁶

However, Heise comments that she is ‘less confident than Buell that the longing for a return to precisely such a naturally balanced world (pastoral idealism) does not inform many of these descriptions of exploited, deformed and polluted landscapes and bodies as an imaginary countermodel’.⁴¹⁷ From this perspective, Buell’s qualification of ‘toxic discourse’ ought to be viewed with some trepidation. Certainly, the ‘nurturing’ and ‘pleasant uncluttered space’ that Buell highlights here appears to be more to do with a particularly pastoral conception of an ideal environment rather than the basic qualities of a healthy one. The idea of a ‘right’ to the former as well as to the latter does threaten to blur the distinctions between need and desire. Furthermore, the ‘clean’ could be perceived to be an ideal along with ‘uncluttered’, equally vulnerable to classification as luxuries or privileges that under certain pressures could be done without.

In this respect, Buell’s method of imagining crisis and providing or provoking considerations of strategies for its amelioration and future avoidance could be understood to be an avoidance strategy in itself, along the lines of the versions of pastoral hazarded by Barrell and Bull. The ideal version of nature becomes at once more appealing and more remote when called up in response to conditions of environmental crisis, and could distract or distort attention towards those conditions. Attention is turned away from crisis and its effects, and directed instead towards conditions that, despite providing a potentially useful or instructive contrast, may be too idealised to present an achievable alternative.

⁴¹⁵ Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World*, p. 45.

⁴¹⁶ Buell, ‘Toxic Discourse’, p. 648.

⁴¹⁷ Heise, *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet*, p. 140.

Instead of engendering responsibility, the image of an ideal environment and its contrast with the conditions of the present has quite different effects in the novel. Seeing the potentially devastating effects of environmental crisis leads Gabrielle not to the collective responsibility but the ‘expendab[ility]’ of human beings (*TR*, p. 308). When the post-apocalyptic conditions of the place are made irrefutable at the end of the novel, Gabrielle sees ‘a world I want no part of’ (*TR*, p. 341). Addressing the effects of pastoral in the novel in a recent essay, Gifford argues that:

The Rapture merely exploits current anxieties without a sense of the values by which we might act to avoid its narrative outcome [...] The planet certainly has a future at the end [...] but there are no signs that anyone at any point in the novel is willing to take responsibility for it.⁴¹⁸

On the one hand, Gifford’s echo of Garrard’s observation that ‘only if we imagine that the planet *has* a future, after all, are we likely to take responsibility for it’ can be taken to pertain to the post-apocalyptic conditions at the end of the novel: changed apparently beyond recognition, the planet that has a future is not one that the characters are able to recognise.⁴¹⁹ On the other, though, Gifford’s critique hinges upon the characters’ lack of connection to their surroundings and resulting failure to register its value prior to the crisis event, suggesting that therefore they are comparably unable to do so afterwards either. From this viewpoint, the text fails to evoke a version of nature, or of the relationship between the human and the natural, that is sufficiently convincing in value to call back from the brink.

Despite the understanding of interconnectivity that the threat of catastrophic anthropogenic climate change discloses, the protagonists lack a direct and localised sense of place founded on knowledge and experience. As such, the characters fail to cultivate a connection to nature that would drive the kind of ‘post-pastoral’ outcome that Gifford anticipates. Gifford suggests that the novel lacks a truly ‘post-pastoral’ ‘awe in attention to nature’ and an adequate sense of responsibility for the understanding of the

⁴¹⁸ Ibid, p. 726.

⁴¹⁹ Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, 2nd edn, p. 116, original emphasis.

interrelations between human and non-human that the narrative sets out.⁴²⁰ Though it demonstrates a level of correspondence to his description of ‘post-pastoral’ in its ‘vision of an integrated natural world that includes the human’, Gifford concludes that ‘[i]t would be difficult to argue that Jensen’s novel attempts to raise any of the questions expected of a post-pastoral text’.⁴²¹ The novel both acknowledges and demonstrates resistance to the ‘post-pastoral’ criterion that ‘consciousness becomes conscience’.⁴²² The characters’ resignation depicts a negative version of his ‘vision of accommodated humans’, cognisant of their interconnected place in the world yet lacking the sense of responsibility and the necessity for galvanising change that Gifford couples to it.⁴²³

At the same time, instead of stimulating action towards the recovery of the landscape it conjures, the appearance of Gabrielle’s pastoral fantasy can be taken to signify its incongruity, and the need for revised understanding of environmental conditions and for a version of pastoral that is able to respond to them. I argue that the novel shows that ideal nature is not of its time. Referring to Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road* (2009), Boxall describes the father’s desire to ‘save some [...] fragments of past time’ in order ‘to extend the past world a little longer into this one’; here, Jensen’s novel shows us Gabrielle’s desire to do the same, overlaying the landscape before her with idyllic images of rural England that surely belong to a time that precedes that depicted in its pages.⁴²⁴ Those same images have already been redrawn, used to illustrate the effects of pollution and extreme weather. By returning to such versions of the same landscapes at this point, *The Rapture* conveys the inapplicability of idealising, pastoralising viewpoints to contemporary conditions, and underlines the futility of returning to such visions. Indeed, through the environmental crises that the novel depicts, it can be understood to demonstrate the possible consequences of doing so: not delaying, but delaying cognition of the conditions of the material world and the interconnectivity of the human and non-human components by which it is shaped.

⁴²⁰ Gifford, *Pastoral*, p. 151; Terry Gifford, ‘Biosemiology and Globalism in *The Rapture* by Liz Jensen’, p. 725.

⁴²¹ Gifford, *Pastoral*, p. 148; Gifford, ‘Biosemiology and Globalism in *The Rapture* by Liz Jensen’, p. 725.

⁴²² Ibid, p. 165.

⁴²³ Gifford, *Pastoral*, p. 149.

⁴²⁴ Boxall, p. 220.

The novel doesn't set out to 'heal', as Buell's and Gifford's versions of pastoral in the context of environmental crisis demand.⁴²⁵ Instead, it undertakes questioning of that context, using the parameters of the pastoral innovatively in order to do so. As I mentioned earlier, environmental crisis demands new shapes of pastoral that recognise the connections and the disjunctures between its contrasts that are revealed by the situation: pastorals that find ways to respond to this recognition. It presents a version of the mode that is reshaped around the complexities of this context. The perspective that is offered by pastoral here brings the interconnectivity of the novel's environment into view, on a scale that extends to the global.

In its experimentation with the pastoral, *The Rapture* communicates a need for amended ways of relating to the environment. The novel couples its depictions of environmental degradation and crisis to the acknowledgment of the scientific research that undergirds them in the pages following its conclusion, and offers there an invitation to 'find out more' about the issues that it examines with a list of further references and relevant resources (*TR*, n. pag.). In these ways, the use of pastoral in this novel does present the kind of cautionary tale and call to action that Buell attributes to 'toxic discourse', however, its outcomes are tempered by the scale of the crisis that it addresses.

From this perspective, these aspects of pastoral in the novel not only show the limitations of the interpretation of pastoral in the context of environmental crisis as 'toxic discourse' and 'post-pastoral' but also signify the possibilities of new techniques of writing and reading the form. The failure of the appeal of pastoral nature in *The Rapture* demonstrates the cleavage between expectation and experience, between accepted and familiar conceptions of and responses to the natural environment and the material conditions of the environment encountered. Boxall suggests that 'the dystopian element [...] of the wave of environmental apocalyptic narratives that has emerged in the new century, turns around this sense that the cultural logic of modernity has run aground', leaving in its wake 'a nature that will become unreadable to us' as familiar

⁴²⁵ Buell, *The Environmental Imagination*, p. 51; Gifford, 'Post-Pastoral as a Tool for Ecocriticism', p. 24.

means of relation and interpretation become untenable.⁴²⁶ Yet, this version of pastoral shows the limits of the form, and in so doing, offers a new account of its conventions. Nature has indeed become unreadable according to oppositional idealising models, but different understandings of nature emerge in the novel.

The Rapture demonstrates a contemporary approach to using pastoral and apocalypse to represent environmental crisis: apocalypse does not lead to revelatory or transformatory behaviours, but instead shows how pastoral and anti-pastoral illuminates such situations. In its self-consciousness towards pastoral and anti-pastoral perspectives, the text conveys a sense of their limitations and in so doing, presents an interaction with pastoral that moves beyond those perspectives. In this way, the version of pastoral that the novel comes to represent is certainly transformed through its intersection with environmental concerns. Despite this, neither the cultural nor ecological landscape within the novel are productively altered, at least not within the scope of the text or within the boundaries of the recognisably human society that appears to have ended at the closure of the novel. It can be understood to raise several questions about pastoral and environmental crisis. Its version of pastoral is neither idealising nor corrective with regards to the interrelations of human and non-human elements in the novel. Setting the knowledge developed by the characters throughout the novel alongside typically pastoral traits of nostalgia and idealisation and anti-pastoral hardships, *The Rapture* captures a sense of the difficulty of dealing with and acting upon such knowledge.

2. Blocked Pastoral

As I mentioned earlier, the premise of environmental crisis both intensifies and impedes the pastoral. As the example above shows, the desire for and the difficulty of experiencing or imagining pastoral nature throws the conventions of the mode out of alignment. Buell's interpretation above presents pastoral nature as an ideal against which contemporary conditions may be understood and towards the recovery of which we may aspire and be provoked to take action to restore. Phillips offers a version of

⁴²⁶ Boxall, p. 221.

pastoral that similarly connects the pastoral impulse to conditions of environmental crisis. Alternatively, though, Phillips posits the contrast between contemporary conditions and pastoral nature as a critical opportunity to reflect upon and understand further the desire for the latter in relation to the former. The inaccessibility of pastoral nature that I identified above as an obstruction to the execution of the effects of ‘toxic discourse’ is in this case imperative to the insights that the mode may offer when understood as what Phillips calls ‘blocked pastoral’.⁴²⁷

In instances of ‘blocked pastoral’, the desire to retreat into a restorative nature that exists in contrast to the human world is ‘expressed as a perpetually frustrated impulse’ in ‘a world in which the familiar opposition on which the pastoral depends appear to have broken down’.⁴²⁸ Recalling Poggioli’s definition of ‘modern pastoral’, as ‘an inverted pastoral, presenting a bucolic aspiration only to deny it’, Phillips’s reading here acknowledges and explores the ‘denial’ delivered by contemporary conditions to the pastoral impulse.⁴²⁹ The collision between pastoral expectations and environmental crisis is read here as illustrative of a breaking point, wherein the patterns of pastoral or anti-pastoral are interrupted and can no longer be completed. This impediment is itself environmentally illuminative. Phillips’s conception sees the acknowledgement of environmental uncertainty as a moment of transition in the tradition, severing the connections between the desire for and the experience of pastoral nature. The meeting of pastoral and anti-pastoral in ‘blocked pastoral’ complicates Meeker’s observation that ‘the pastoral tradition flourishes in times of urban crisis’ and instead demonstrates the way that environmental crisis challenges the definitions of and the relations between conceptions of ‘urban’ or ‘rural’.⁴³⁰ Further, Phillips locates its critical potential within the recognition of that challenge, and the demand that it places upon pastoral’s contrasts, their implications, and the ways that they may be reconceived.

Using the example of Don DeLillo’s *White Noise* (1985), Phillips suggests that nature is understood to offer neither a restorative contrast to the human world, nor

⁴²⁷ Phillips, ‘Don DeLillo’s Postmodern Pastoral’, p. 236.

⁴²⁸ Ibid, p. 236.

⁴²⁹ Poggioli, p. 34.

⁴³⁰ Meeker, *The Comedy of Survival*, p. 54.

indifference towards it: both are compromised by the ‘airborne toxic event’ which draws attention towards the seen and unseen connections between the contrasts of the pastoral in the novel.⁴³¹ For Phillips, though pastoral relief is shown to be out of reach in the novel, the ‘blocked’ version of pastoral resists the critical potential of a straightforward anti-pastoral in which the polluting consequences of human action are shown through their negative effects upon the perpetrators. Instead, he highlights the challenge that the pollution represents to the understanding of nature or culture, and of the means and the outcomes of their intersection. Phillips writes that:

One has to adjust one’s sense of nature radically in order to understand how, in *White Noise*, natural conditions are depicted as coextensive with, rather than opposed to, the malaise of postmodern culture. This adjustment is not just a task for the reader or critic: it is something the characters in the novel have to do every day of their lives.⁴³²

As Phillips suggests, environmental crisis demonstrates irrevocably the interconnected status of the human world and the environment of which it is part. At once challenging and bringing the contrasts of the pastoral into new perspective, the scenario offers the opportunity to reconsider the ways that these interconnections may be understood, and represented. The critical potential of acknowledging this ‘adjustment’, and the adjustment that it demands of the expectations of the pastoral, has been received negatively. Gifford has suggested that the ‘blocked pastoral’ that Phillips describes ‘actually serves a fatalistic pastoral function by concluding that there is nothing to be done about its environmental agenda’.⁴³³ In a similar way, Buell argues that the potential ‘awakening’ of environmental consciousness in *White Noise* via the ‘toxic event’ fails to come to fruition directly.⁴³⁴ However, as Kerridge writes, DeLillo’s novel ‘unsparingly dramatizes [...] the impasse between environmental consciousness and the inability of a culture to change’, and the version of pastoral that Phillips identifies reflects this

⁴³¹ Don DeLillo, *White Noise*, (London: Picador, 1986), p. 107.

⁴³² Phillips, ‘Don DeLillo’s Postmodern Pastoral’, p. 236.

⁴³³ Terry Gifford, *Reconnecting with John Muir: Essays in Post-Pastoral Practice*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006), p. 173.

⁴³⁴ Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World*, p. 51.

impasse.⁴³⁵ In so doing, it offers the potential to examine and understand it further. The action that Gifford and Buell suppose to be lacking in this instance is misaligned with the problems that the novel depicts, and the way that pastoral is used to convey those problems, as Phillips accurately discerns.

Accordingly, Phillips's theorisation of pastoral attempts to take account of the 'displacement' of the conventions of the mode by the premise of environmental crisis.⁴³⁶ He explains that:

The postmodern pastoral, unlike its predecessors, cannot restore the harmony and balance of culture with nature, because the cultural distinctions that the pastoral used to make – like that between the country and the city – have become too fluid to have any force and are dissolved in the toxic fog of airborne events.⁴³⁷

As Phillips identifies here, it is the character of environmental crisis that demands an adjusted understanding of nature and the recalibration of the pastoral form: from the understanding of its conventions to the effects that they may have.

Turning back once again to Gabrielle's pastoral fantasy in *The Rapture*, the account of the form that Phillips puts forward here can be illustrated. In the 'blocked pastoral' that Phillips describes, 'an earlier, more natural and more pastoral landscape figures [...] as an absent present of which the characters are still dimly aware'. He suggests that 'fragments of this landscape are often evoked as negative tokens of a loss the characters feel but cannot quite articulate'.⁴³⁸ In the novel, the pastoral landscape serves to put current conditions into perspective and appears untenable in relation to the degraded landscape depicted throughout. As Phillips suggests, the conditions of environmental crisis put the contrasts of the pastoral to new purposes. As I argued above, the evocation of a lost pastoral landscape is used to demonstrate its distance from the conditions against which it is called up, and to question those conditions and the

⁴³⁵ Richard Kerridge, 'Small Rooms and the Ecosystem: Environmentalism and Don DeLillo's *White Noise*', p. 194.

⁴³⁶ Phillips, 'Don DeLillo's Postmodern Pastoral', p. 239.

⁴³⁷ Ibid, p. 245.

⁴³⁸ Ibid, p. 238.

desire to imaginatively escape them. In this way, Phillips's understanding of the mode in this context can be read to respond to the challenge to conventional modes of thought presented by environmental crisis described in the previous section.

As Phillips writes, acknowledging the 'blockage' posed to pastoral by the premise of environmental crisis opens up the critical potential of the mode in this context. Extending the idea further, I suggest that by exploring the parameters of pastoral blocked by crisis, reflecting upon the definitions of and relations between the human and the natural upon which it rests, the impediment may be navigated. In so doing, new configurations of pastoral can be seen to emerge, offering not just new opportunities but alternative versions of the mode adapted towards the theme of environmental crisis. Developing the critical potential of the pastoral impasse identified in *The Rapture* in the previous section, in this part of the chapter I aim to explore how pastoral may be used to think beyond the challenges that environmental crises present to the conventions and expectations upon which it is based. Texts that acknowledge and respond to the 'blockage' that Phillips describes can be understood as new versions of pastoral that investigate and challenge its relationships, negotiating the representation and interpretation of environmental crisis using the framework of pastoral in innovative ways.

Brian Clarke's *The Stream* illustrates some of the opportunities of pastoral opened up by such an understanding of its relationship to environmental crisis. The novel indicates how pastoral may be adapted in response to issues of environmental crisis in order to approach questions of its recognition and the responsibilities that entails. In its concern with the countryside and in its focus upon the relations between the urban and the rural, and the human and the natural, the novel corresponds to Gifford's general definition of the mode.⁴³⁹ However, it also demonstrates the ways that these relations and this definition are becoming less stable. Pastoral landscapes and pastoral perceptions are disappearing in the text, at once reflecting and contributing towards the changing rural environment and relationships that it depicts. Like *The Harvest*, the novel is concerned with issues of loss and dispossession, rural deprivation

⁴³⁹ Gifford, *Pastoral*, p. 1.

and depression, and the ending and afterlives of pastoral lifestyles and landscapes, and like *The Rapture*, it examines the interlinked consequences of seemingly disparate actions and the potential of unseen or overlooked possibilities to produce effects of great magnitude.

Telling the story of the loss of a rural stream, the novel not only uses pastoral to relate and to contextualise its premise but also interrogates the mode itself by exploring the ways that the causes and effects of the environmental changes that affect the stream impinge upon the connections and the contrasts of the pastoral. Using multiple perspectives and constructed through a network of interconnected and concurrent narrative strands, the text establishes complex understandings of nature and of environmental crisis. In so doing, the scope of pastoral is extended beyond the destruction of the idyllic landscape of the stream towards the interrelationships within which it is part, and to which it is subjected. Furthermore, the novel experiments with shifting scales of focus between its narrative strands that attend to both human and non-human interests, conveying the multiple scales of cognition required to relate and interpret environmental crisis. By accessing the landscape from perspectives that include and go beyond the human, the novel can be seen to reconfigure understandings of environmental crisis, highlighting both the negative effects of human action upon the non-human environment and the ways in which crises must be additionally understood as the product of many interconnected and uncertain relationships. In so doing, the text both displays and develops what Buell describes as the ‘pastoral outrage’ of the mode as ‘toxic discourse’.⁴⁴⁰ However, the ways that crisis may be discerned and understood are multiplied and the subtleties by which its signifiers may be recognised are emphasised. The novel forges an alternative route into the topics of interconnectivity and responsibility via the pastoral.

The story of the stream is anchored by the lifespan of a single trout, tracking the events that occur during a period of five years. The apparently narrow focus upon the trout and its watercourse also encompasses the lives and actions of the various human

⁴⁴⁰Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and the Literary Imagination*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), p. 15.

and non-human forces whose influence is felt upon them. In this way, the scope of the novel is extended far beyond its geographical setting through the exploration of the interconnections that make up its ecosystem. Beginning with the local, in terms of the surrounding area, the wildlife that it supports, the human industry that takes place nearby and the effects that it has on the stream, its perspective extends outwards with reference to the social, political and economic networks whose influences can be mapped on a global scale and at the same time filtered back down to the stream.

As the years pass, the changing conditions of the stream are shown through the increasing difficulties faced by the trout. Before they begin to register, though, on a different scale we are told that ‘the current had begun to slow in a way that only a water caterpillar and some of the nymphs that lived on stones [...] could detect’ (*TS*, p. 77). As the gradual pollution of the stream becomes clear, it is shown to be caused by a number of factors. Its flow is affected not only by chemical run-off and spillages from the new practices that are instituted at the neighbouring farm but also by the miscalculation of the impact of industrial water collection further up the valley. Personal and economic difficulties lead to the changes to the farming techniques, whilst the networked international financial obligations of the developers and the complex political responsibilities of the local MP influence the oversights of the resource management in the valley. On another scale again, the liberation of the farmed mink in the neighbouring county further challenges the local species for territory and food already compromised by the dwindling and increasingly contaminated stream.

Using the migration of salmon spawned in the stream to the sea, Clarke takes advantage of the emphasis on non-human perspectives to explore the acknowledged and unacknowledged instances of interconnectivity between actions, places and organisms. Neatly connecting geographically distant places and ecologically contentious practices through the channels of open water and the passage of the fish, the novel is able to link together examples of environmental irresponsibility and to make visible the paths that join them back to the stream:

The salmon that had left the stream as a little fish and was returning as a great fish had stayed close to the coast when he neared it. He had passed the

salmon farm in the bay where the tame fish in the cages were fed on wild fish that had been caught and ground down and processed and pressed into biscuits. He had passed the ship that had its holds full of wild fish on their way to power stations where they would be burned as fuel because they were so cheap and the other ship that had its hold full of wild fish on their way to be turned into fertilizer for spreading on the land. He had passed the ship that was flushing oil was from tanks where no-one could detect it and the nets that had broken away from the trawlers so that they drifted like shrouds, catching fish to no purpose.⁴⁴¹

Here, the novel effectively re-defines the meaning and the assignation of ‘pastoral places’ and re-imagines the scope of the issues upon which they can be used to reflect.

As the human characters in the novel variously struggle with the conception that ‘there has to be a sense of balance’, the account of the wider world, on both microscopic and global scales, demonstrates the futility of their undertaking (*TS*, p. 19). Resisting notions of harmony and balance in the natural world, the depiction of the environment in the novel emphasises the simultaneously certain and uncertain principle of interconnectivity by which it may be understood. Relating the events that contribute to the loss of the stream from multiple perspectives brings together an interconnected picture of the various factors that contribute to the stream’s demise. Events and actions that appear far removed by distance, scale or context from the concentrated environment of the stream and the neighbouring farm and development site are shown to be connected, and connected beyond the linkages understood to exist.

In the sense of the globalised implications of various industrial practices that the novel creates, an understanding of the complexity and scale of culpability is established, and a deterritorialised picture of environmental irresponsibility and incipient crisis that spans geographical and national boundaries is conveyed. This evocation of crisis calls up Ulrich Beck’s description of the appearance of the causes and the effects of risk in the context of environmental crisis:

⁴⁴¹ Brian Clarke, *The Stream*, (London: Black Swan, 2000), p. 78-79. All further references to this text will be made parenthetically in the chapter using the abbreviation *TS*.

In the afflictions they produce they are no longer tied to their place of origin [...] By their nature they endanger *all* forms of life on this planet. The normative bases of their calculation [...] do not fit the basic dimensions of these modern threats [...] They outlast generations. The affected even include those not yet alive [...] but born years later and long distances away.⁴⁴²

Buell engages with Beck's assessment of the implications of risk in his argument that 'toxic discourse' 'refocuses and democratises the pastoral ideal'.⁴⁴³ Here, however, the use of scale and scope here allows the conception of the 'democratising' effect to be extended beyond the human. Clarke's use of perspective also points towards what Beck calls the 'boomerang effect', which describes how 'sooner or later the risks also catch up with those who produce or profit from them. Risks display a social *boomerang effect* in their diffusion: even the rich and powerful are not safe from them'.⁴⁴⁴ In this formulation, as well as those local to the sites of environmentally damaging activities, distant and unconnected people and places are also recognized to be at risk to their effects, even regardless of evasive action taken by those informed by responsibility and privilege. Similarly, the novel extends this principle to non-humans, whether directly related to such activities or not.

The examples above illustrate how the novel encompasses the sense of the multiple scales and frames of environmental crisis described by Timothy Clark. Dealing with what Tom Cohen has described as the 'perpetual cognitive disjunctures that come up against the ecocatastrophic present', Clark addresses the issue, impact and implications of 'scale effects' in this context.⁴⁴⁵ By 'scale effects', Clark refers to the ways in which environmental problems firstly are relative to the scale by which they are measured, and secondly, how 'zooming' between scales in this context is not smooth, as the measurement of the effects is contingent upon the scale – something positive from one metric may be disastrous on another - and their impact differs according to

⁴⁴² Beck, *Risk Society*, p. 22.

⁴⁴³ Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World*, p. 38.

⁴⁴⁴ Beck, *Risk Society*, p. 22, original emphasis.

⁴⁴⁵ Tom Cohen, *Telemorphosis: Theory in the Era of Climate Change*. Volume 1. (Michigan: MPublishing, Open Humanities Press, 2012), p. 17.

perspective, requiring multiple, concurrent scales of comprehension in order to attempt to map accurately the scope and complexity of the problems.⁴⁴⁶ As Clark explains:

Scale effects in relation to climate change are confusing because they take the easy, daily equations of moral and political accounting and drop into them both a zero and an infinity: the greater the number of people engaged in modern forms of consumption then the less the relative influence or responsibility of each but the worse the cumulative impact of their insignificance. As a result what is self-evident or relational at one scale may well be destructive or unjust at another.⁴⁴⁷

Accommodating these considerations then raises questions of representation. The scope and flexibility of narrative perspective and timescale come under particular pressure. With reference to *White Noise*, Buell suggests that ‘the traditional protocols of protagonist-centred fiction prevent ecodiscourse from becoming much more than a plot function and symbolic character marker’.⁴⁴⁸ Similarly, Kerridge locates environmental crisis often ‘treat[ed] as background or period-colour, or as a subsidiary to the main concerns’, and Head argues that the topic ‘demonstrates a broader difficulty for the novel’, putting the ‘characteristic features of the form – the focus on personal development, on social rather than environmental concerns, and on time rather than space’ under particular strain.⁴⁴⁹

Addressing these demands, Kerridge uses the work of Barbara Adam to contemplate the temporal challenges of crisis, observing that Adam:

Argues that in order to take environmental problems seriously, we need what she calls a ‘timescape perspective’, in which the timespans of ordinary life, onto which we map out personal hopes and plans, are viewed alongside drastically longer and shorter distances [...] Such a perspective would enable us to ‘see the invisible’, and begin to take some account of the concealed

⁴⁴⁶ Timothy Clark, ‘Derangements of Scale’ in Cohen, ed. *Telemorphosis: Theory in the Era of Climate Change*, pp. 148-166, (p. 149-150).

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 151.

⁴⁴⁸ Buell, ‘Toxic Discourse’, p. 663.

⁴⁴⁹ Kerridge, ‘Environmental Cliffhangers’ p. 243; Head, p. 196.

hazards of industrial life. Timespans would momentarily contract, enabling us to imagine the distant and uncertain consequences of an action. Events too large and slow for the scale of ordinary human perception (such as climate-change), or too small and quick (the activities of micro-organisms, or of the nervous-system) could begin to register.⁴⁵⁰

Kerridge can be seen to anticipate Clark here, who writes that ‘with its multiple scales, more or less invisibility, global scope, unpredictability and alarming menace, climate change seems more germane to modes of representation that involve unfamiliar non-human agencies, multiple or perhaps elliptical plots’.⁴⁵¹ Such experimentation within the pastoral tradition recalls the discussion of perspective, timescale and narrative structure in Chapter Three. The parameters of pastoral are compelled into altered shapes due to the problems to which they are directed. In the case of addressing these issues in relation to environmental crisis, if *The Rapture* illustrates the occasion for such experimentation, by demonstrating the limitations of the form, this example points towards the possibilities experimentation opens up. The attempt to negotiate the topic here generates narrative experimentation that manipulates the understanding and effects of eschatology within altered frameworks of pastoral: it is adapted towards the subject matter of environmental crisis.

The discontinuity between the measurements of the effects of certain actions according to different metrics of scale that Clark, Kerridge and Adam outline can be seen in the novel. Between the concurrent narrative threads that allow the text to cover the same events from different perspectives and according to alternative scales, the disparity in effect and interpretation of particular actions are made evident. For instance, throughout the text the increasingly hot and dry weather is picked up across the threads to differing ends. Whilst the nymphs in the river struggle to find appropriate habitats as the conditions alter around them, and the spawning fish are hampered by the slowing current, the developers note that the unusual weather - the ‘fraction of the rain we

⁴⁵⁰ Kerridge, ‘Environmental Cliffhangers’, p. 243. See Barbara Adam, *Timescapes of Modernity: The Environment and Invisible Hazards*, (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 19.

⁴⁵¹ Clark, ‘Some Climate Change Ironies: Deconstruction, Environmental Politics and the Closure of Ecocriticism’, *Oxford Literary Review*, 32.1 (2010), pp. 131-149, (p. 144).

usually get', the 'bone-dry summer' and the 'forecast [...] for a second dry winter' - means that their completion schedule will 'break all records at this rate' (*TS*, p. 94-5). The lack of connection between the strands of the narrative demonstrates, and emphasises, the contrasts between the perspectives that they represent.

The version of eschatology depicted in this example accounts for environmental crisis as a composite problem at once impacting upon and arising from an environment of interconnected elements, illustrating how the trope can be used differently in this context. Recalling Hulme's description of the 'apathy and scepticism' with which the frequency and ubiquity of apocalyptic imagery can be received, Clark describes the use of such 'tired formulae' as a kind of 'scale framing': the use of an 'habitual mode of thought' that, while making the issue of environmental crisis intelligible, also potentially enacts a 'strategy of evasion and containment' that limits the understanding, and therefore the interpretation, of the problem.⁴⁵² In the case of the resort to apocalyptic narratives in particular, Garrard explains that 'complex long-term issues are reduced to monocausal crises'.⁴⁵³ Frederick Buell observes: 'people tend to speak of *the* environmental crisis – as if "it" were a clear, stable, and ahistorical concept. To do so, however, is unfortunate, because it suppresses the complexity, diversity, and dynamism of accumulating environmental problems'.⁴⁵⁴ As Clark comments, in the case of environmental crisis, 'there is no "it"'.⁴⁵⁵ In the case of *The Stream*, through its narrative complexity and multiple perspectives, simplistic or reductive understandings of environmental crisis are avoided and apocalypse is shown to be cumulative, multi-faceted and faced not only by the human world, but by humans as part of an interconnected environment of threatened parts.

The novel's multiple strands and viewpoints allows for a sense of the complexity of representing, and also recognising and accepting, the signs of environmental crisis. As I mentioned earlier, environmental crisis comprises of problems that are themselves difficult to comprehend and therefore, present difficulties for representation. Climate

⁴⁵² Ibid, p. 144; p. 142.

⁴⁵³ Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, 2nd edn, p. 114.

⁴⁵⁴ Frederick Buell, p. ix.

⁴⁵⁵ Clark, 'Some Climate Change Ironies', p. 145.

change, for instance, is often recognised to be resistant to conceptualisation as a coherent problem; due to the complexity, multiplicity and unpredictability of both its effects and their causes. As Clark notes, on top of the uncertainty of the effects of climate change is the multiplicity of speculative outcomes to this uncertainty.⁴⁵⁶ The effect of speculation is to increase rather than temper uncertainty; bringing uncertainty into focus can make the problem seem more remote.⁴⁵⁷ Concurrently, the enormous scales of time and effect in climate change can make its consequences appear incommensurate to the here and now, allowing its present signs to fester without due attention, or to go undetected altogether. At the same time, as David Wood points out, the certainty that changes have already taken place indicates the illusionary nature of this sense of remoteness: ‘potentially disastrous environmental change may not be obvious until it is too late to change it. The ‘always already’ can be the ‘sometimes too late!’⁴⁵⁸ As numerous critics have noted, the distancing effect of the uncertainties of climate change is not reflected in its material outcomes or in the potential we may have to mitigate for them.⁴⁵⁹ Accounting for this ‘future discounting’, as Anthony Giddens describes it, is a challenging prospect.⁴⁶⁰ As Kerridge suggests, ‘for readers in the West’ in particular, the ‘potentiality’ and ‘intangibility’ of climate change mean ‘their very reality is constantly in question’.⁴⁶¹ In *The Stream*, the cumulative effects of environmental change and the subtlety with which they may be detected, and connected, is effectively conveyed. We are told that:

At first, nothing. Then a change, a change so subtle that by the time you realised it was there you knew it had been there a while. You tried to ignore it or hope it would go away. Some symptoms and omens. A low gnawing, maybe. Or a sudden stab of pain. Diagnosis. (*TS*, p. 70).

⁴⁵⁶ Clark, ‘Towards a Deconstructive Environmental Criticism’, p. 45.

⁴⁵⁷ See also, for example, Cohen, ‘Introduction’ in Tom Cohen, ed. *Telemorphosis*, p. 13; Anthony Giddens, *The Politics of Climate Change*. (London: Polity, 2009), p. 2; Slavov Žižek, *Censorship Today: Violence, or Ecology as a New Opium for the Masses: Part II*. 2008, (n. pag.).

⁴⁵⁸ Wood, p. 174.

⁴⁵⁹ See, for example, Wood, p. 174; Giddens, p. 2; Latour, *Politics of Nature*, p. 58; Slavov Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), p. 35; McKibben, p. 7.

⁴⁶⁰ Giddens, p. 2.

⁴⁶¹ Kerridge, ‘Environmental Cliffhangers’, p. 244.

In this way, the novel presents another version of the cautionary tale or call to action discussed in the previous section. However, in its depiction of ‘environment’ and of ‘crisis’, it offers understandings that are attuned to the scale and the complexity of the problems that the terms in combination must entail. In order to confront the obstruction of crisis to the pastoral celebration and idealisation of the landscape, the novel explores the challenge that it poses to the contrasts and connections of the pastoral. In developing and extending the understanding of pastoral relations between the human and the natural, and the country and the city, the novel offers a version of pastoral that is able to approach the scale and scope of environmental crisis.

The Stream further supplements its usages of pastoral in this context with its uses of close observation. The novel includes detailed descriptions of the animals that inhabit the waterway, layering up a series of intimately refined expositions of behaviour and interaction, creating through overlapping images a composite picture of an environment of independent yet interlinking elements. In its close observation and attentive representation, *The Stream* bears comparison with J. A. Baker’s innovative and finely observed nature writing in *The Peregrine*, inspired by an emerging sense of crisis in the interconnectivity of modern farming techniques and the peregrine falcon in Britain. Similarly, *The Stream* addresses the catastrophic consequences of the meeting of rural industrial development and the habitats and behaviours of local species. The novel maps their convergence, observing and considering the diminishing effect of human action upon other animals and their shared habitat, imagining its possible outcomes and in so doing reflecting upon and reconsidering the practices of thought and action that contribute towards those outcomes.

As the narrative develops, its connection to the structure and viewpoint of *The Peregrine* gives way to a structure of simultaneity and interconnectivity. The novel’s division into months and years recalls the epistolary style of Baker’s text; however the breadth of focus attempted in *The Stream* diverges from the rigorous attention achieved in *The Peregrine*. The chapters begin with specific foci that become intertwined as the impression of the ecosystem is built up. The months of the first year mainly follow a pattern of specific attention upon either human or non-human incidents alternately. As

the years progress, the foci of the monthly chapters begins to mix, depicting the simultaneous and interconnected events that occur. In the fourth year, the emphasis swings back towards non-human action as the novel explores the complex set of events that ensue in connection with the enormous changes instituted through the development of an industrial park and the modernisation of the nearby farm. In the fifth and final year, which concludes in August with the dwindling of the stream, the depiction of human and non-human elements is fully enmeshed in each of the chapters, pointing to the apparent impossibility of separating out the changes in the stream from the changes wrought by and experienced by people.

Throughout, the text attends to the spawning of the stream's trout, an event that punctuates the turning of the years, and as I mentioned above, the declining success of which comes to signify the changing conditions of the stream. Clarke describes in detail the behaviour of the fish and the development of the spawn, demonstrating, as Gifford has observed, the scientific understanding upon which much of the detail of the novel is based. In contrast to his assessment of *The Rapture*, Gifford judges the novel's treatment of nature as illustrative of 'post-pastoral' writing. He argues that *The Stream* exemplifies 'the need for new forms of pastoral that are scientifically informed and are actively engaged on behalf of the environment [...] *The Stream* is a scientifically researched pastoral that tries to be adequate to our newly nuanced sense of environment'.⁴⁶² Gifford links the emergence of alternative forms of the pastoral to the need for 'pastorals of responsibility', suggesting that 'in the first decade of the twenty-first century, we might discover in this definitive pastoral text a new version of pastoral that serves as an environmental elegy informed by our new sense of environmental guilt and responsibility'.⁴⁶³

Gifford's emphasis on science and responsibility here recalls Love's speculation that 'a pastoral for the present and the future calls for a better science of nature, a greater understanding of its complexity [...] and a more acute questioning of the values of the

⁴⁶² Gifford, 'Afterword: New Senses of "Environment," New Versions of Pastoral', p. 255.

⁴⁶³ Ibid, p. 248.

supposedly sophisticated society to which we are bound'.⁴⁶⁴ Love defines ecocritical practice as relative to the findings of science and argues that it is necessary:

To affirm its methods of investigation as the best means we have for understanding our world, and for thinking our way toward solutions to the problems of pollution, population, and despoliation, problems which have given rise to ecocriticism as an aspect of growing, worldwide environmental awareness.⁴⁶⁵

More recently Garrard has similarly asserted his view that 'ecocriticism is (dare I say it?) a [...] pursuit with a primary allegiance not to philosophy, ethics or literary theory, but to biological science'.⁴⁶⁶

Clarke's novel certainly frames the issues of interconnectivity and responsibility from a non-human perspective and adds an extra component of biological knowledge to the treatment of nature in the pastoral. In this way, the text presents a means of accessing a fresh perspective upon pastoral concerns, reframing the concept of environmental crisis by illustrating the relativity of the term through its application outside of human-oriented parameters and subjecting to scrutiny the measures by which crisis is classified and interpreted. By presenting an in-depth knowledge of the development and life-cycles of the fish and of the ecosystem of which they are part, Clarke also demonstrates a commitment to the clear and accurate representation of his subject. However, this sense of responsibility towards the representation of nature is combined with an additional responsibility towards its communication. The descriptions of nature in the novel are constructed to not only provide greater knowledge of the environment and its workings including the human, but also to inspire particular feelings of connection to that environment.

Accordingly, Clarke also mixes the addition of affect with the scientific base of the narrative. Describing the aftermath of its fertilisation, Clarke imagines that 'the egg

⁴⁶⁴ Love, 'Revaluing Nature', p. 235.

⁴⁶⁵ Love, 'Ecocriticism and Science: Towards Consilience?' *New Literary History* 30.3 (1999), pp. 561-576, (p. 561)

⁴⁶⁶ Garrard, 'Ecocriticism as a Contribution to Consilient Knowledge', *Ecozon@* 1.1 (2010), pp. 22-26, (p. 22).

deep in the gravels might have been lying in a womb', 'safe and dark' (*TS*, p. 20). He compares the gestating fish to a human foetus in shape and the stream's current to the 'roarings and sluicing within some mother's belly', likening the sound of the rocking motion of the surrounding stones to 'the distant, measured beat of some mother's heart' (*TS*, p. 20). In so doing, Clarke taps into the mythology of nature as woman and mother, and adds feelings of sympathy and connection to the developing fish by establishing equivalences between the development of human and trout life through making anthropocentric comparisons.⁴⁶⁷ The narrative follows the lifespan of the fish onwards, foregrounding its experiences of the increasingly degraded environment of the stream with the affective understanding of its origins.

As this example illustrates, through the melding of scientific research and affective force, the novel adopts and builds upon the pastoral convention of reciprocity between human and non-human forces. Through the progressive decline of the conditions of the stream, and the death of the trout, Clarke creates a perspective upon nature in crisis, locates connections between human experience and both the causes and the effects of crisis, and in so doing, by factual and emotive means engenders a sense of urgency for responsible action in accordance with this knowledge.

The wildlife in the stream are described as occupying a kind of perfect fit between the medium and its inhabitants, an elemental tessellation between almost constitutive parts: 'the young fish that angled and darted, splashed and rolled, was water itself in a firmer form' (*TS*, p. 51). In vivid contrast, the appearance of farm chemicals in the water is depicted as an intrusion and their continued presence described as 'stains', disrupting previous connections and establishing new ones: 'the fertilizer that had been in the soil where the bank collapsed was beginning to leach out and the slow-water plants inhaled it as though in delirium. The nuclei in the cells of chokeweed drew it in and rejoiced' (*TS*, p. 162). Clarke's description here couches the chemicals and their effects within the parameters of nature, as an addition to the environment leading to changes in its conditions that are more suited to certain organisms than others. Yet the

⁴⁶⁷ See, for example, Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution*, (London: Wildwood House, 1982); Louise Westling, *The Green Breast of the New World: Landscape, Gender, and American Fiction*, (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1996).

emotive language used to describe the changes denotes a sense of imbalance. The chemicals are pollutants; their effects are corrupting. The relation of the effects upon creatures differently sensitive to the changes follows this line of thought: the influx is experienced as ‘stinging’, its effects are terminal and the response is desperate: ‘they fought and scrabbled with their legs at nothing in the water above them and they bit and clawed at nothing in the water near their heads’, and then finally ‘were rocking in harmony in the deep dip [...] liling in the current that turned there’ (TS, p. 163).

These descriptions both express the means and the effects of the pollution within the terms of nature, as cause and effect, reaction and interrelation and convey that pollution as an intrusion, a sully, an infringement. In this way, the novel again converges with *The Peregrine*, in terms of the description of pollution, the factual knowledge of its effects and the dramatic depiction of the responses to its interlocation: ‘few peregrines are left, there will be fewer, they may not survive. Many die on their backs, clutching insanely at the sky in their last convulsions, withered and burnt away by the filthy, insidious pollen of farm chemicals’.⁴⁶⁸ In the death throes of the creatures, and the contaminating irruption of the chemicals, the texts are comparable; Baker’s use of language echoes through Clarke’s novel.

Like *The Rapture* discussed above, Clarke’s novel continues to employ pastoral and apocalyptic imagery to emotive and provocative ends. In so doing, the text takes an idealising approach to the depiction and description of nature. Though these are founded in factual knowledge, this approach potentially undermines the scope of its insights and the impact of the environmental concern it clearly seeks to impart. Despite this, the novel clearly presents a version of pastoral writing that encounters crisis through eschatological themes in a way that is adapted to the environmental context that it approaches.

For instance, in its description of the ecosystem of the stream, the novel taps into Buell’s notion of the ‘mythography of betrayed Edens’.⁴⁶⁹ The emphasis on biotic understanding of the interrelationships and dependencies that comprise the ecosystem on

⁴⁶⁸ J. A. Baker, *The Peregrine*, (New York: New York Review, 2005), p. 15.

⁴⁶⁹ Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World*, p. 31.

the one hand appears to resist this reading; however, the narrative evokes a sense of lament for how things used to be, and a feeling that things are now wrong. Of course they are, from the perspective of the survival of the animals in the stream for whom the conditions are now unsuitable, but Clarke grapples with the difficulty of conveying this whilst managing the idea that the conditions were better, or even correct, in their previous arrangement.⁴⁷⁰

The division of the novel into years and months that are unclassified in time can also be understood to contribute towards this effect. The novel's prologue, titled 'Before Year 1' and describing the seemingly timeless establishment and practice of the 'law of continuing', is followed by the monthly breakdown of the events beginning with 'Year 1', which can be characterised as events which challenge the 'law': imposing a sense of 'before' and 'after' that is ecologically misleading. The title 'Year 1' suggests a new phase or beginning, which there is, in the sense that many new developments are conceived at this point that affect the stream, but in terms of the way that interconnected ecosystems must relate, then these new developments must not be understood any differently than those that took place previously. Alternatively, the heading can be understood to indicate a turning point, or rather a point of no return, in terms of the effect of human action upon the interconnected ecosystem, the moment at which the culmination of associated pressures led to developments that threatened the stream.

To some extent, though, Clarke's manipulation of the multiple factors behind the environmental changes that the text documents tempers the appeal to nostalgia for or idealisation of previous conditions by setting forth a clear sense of interconnected factors that have always been at work here. By using an innovative version of pastoral writing, Clarke attempts to reconfigure conceptions of environmental crisis, placing the collapse of the ecosystem of the stream on the same cultural and political map as the redevelopment of the valley, the modernisation of the farm and their related effects. For example, a significant contributor to the altered conditions in the stream is the switch to chemically-assisted practices at the farm. The circumstances that lead to the changes at

⁴⁷⁰ For a comparable example of ways of dealing with this difficulty, see Roderick Nash, *The Rights of Nature: A History of Environmental Ethics*, (Madison and London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989).

the farm which affect the stream are not new. The old farmer's reluctance to move beyond conventional techniques have played their part in influencing the conditions of the stream in the past, as does their modernisation, at the behest of both financial pressures and the ambitions of the farmer's son, though with particular consequences during the course of the narrative. The struggle to balance environmental and economic concerns, tradition and innovation depicted in the text applies to its past, its present and will continue to apply in its future. In so doing, Clarke is able to convey an effective message of interconnectivity and responsibility.

The Stream can be seen to respond to environmental crisis using the same pastoral understandings as *The Rapture* and Buell's 'toxic discourse'. Yet, it does so in a way that is additionally tempered by the premise and its effects upon the pastoral. Like Phillips's 'blocked pastoral', the premise obstructs a simple pastoral celebration of or lament for the landscape under threat, and instead explores what else may be opened up in relation to that threat and the limitations that it imposes upon the conventions of pastoral. The novel also displays a commitment to accuracy that corresponds to conceptions of pastoral and environmental concern put forward by Gifford and Love. At the same time, it exploits typically emotive pastoral imagery to depict the effects of environmental crisis. However, by supplementing the appeal to pastoral with the extended understandings of its contrasts and connections in the context of environmental crisis, and displaying close attention to and knowledge of the environment that it depicts, the novel offers an account of pastoral that responds to the challenges and the opportunities posed to the tradition by environmental crisis. Clarke's novel presents a version of pastoral that is innovatively adapted in form and viewpoint in order to approach the topic of environmental crisis. The novel explores the pastoral landscape, and the mode itself, from new perspectives, extending its scope and adding to its depth.

3. Dialectical Pastoral

In the previous sections of this chapter, I have examined the ways that pastoral and anti-pastoral may be used to relate and respond to conceptions of environmental crisis, and

the ways that pastoral may be understood in this context. Taking account of theorisations offered by Buell, Phillips and Gifford, I have established that the pastoral is re-imagined and re-configured by both the occasion of environmental crisis and the challenges that it poses to the themes and conventions of the mode. Through these analyses, I have suggested that the mode is not only being used to capture, but also to query and to evaluate this premise and its implications for the tradition. In this section, I argue that its uses and adaptations towards the topic of environmental crisis can be understood as a dialectical form of pastoral writing. Here, the impacts of the topic upon the mode are accounted for reflexively. As the causes and effects of environmental crises and their implications for the mode are registered, its themes and conventions are reconsidered, in the process, shifting into new alignments upon which those causes, effects and implications must then be considered afresh. I argue that the representation and interpretation of environmental crisis through the themes and conventions of pastoral is an on-going process that takes full advantage of the plasticity of the mode to depict and explore the complexities and uncertainties of environmental change.

To illustrate this proposition, I will discuss the presentation of pastoral in John Burnside's *Glisten*. The novel disrupts the pastoral contrast between the past and the present in the context of environmental crisis and reconfigures the notion and the effects of pastoral nature against its aftermath. Resisting and questioning the appeal to a past version of nature and human-nature relations, *Glisten* instead locates the desire for and the experience of pastoral nature in the present: it is placed alongside the evidence of environmental disaster and balanced by it. Whereas the examples discussed above in this chapter rely on a previous and 'better' version of nature and human-nature relations to illustrate and respond to environmental crisis, *Glisten* moves towards a better understanding of the nature that the characters experience, from their surroundings to the workings of their own bodies. I argue that the novel reconfigures the emotive imagery of the pastoral altogether in its adaptation of the mode to depict and respond to environmental crisis. The novel reinstates hope in nature, yet it is an adjusted pastoral nature that makes this possible. The nature encountered and celebrated in *Glisten* is not pristine or separate from the reach of human influence. Instead, it is recognised within the same world and subject to the same threats. Despite this, there is a wonder in nature

in the novel that exists alongside the un-idealised understanding of the human-natural environment.

The novel engages with the pastoral tradition in these ways in order to address themes of environmental crisis, culpability and responsibility. Coming into alignment with Ryle's 'eco-didacticism' discussed in Chapter Three, Burnside has said of the novel that: 'I did want to write something about the way we have damaged our environment, and continue to do so in all kinds of inventive and subtle ways'.⁴⁷¹ In this section, I want to draw out the comparably 'inventive and subtle' ways that Burnside uses the pastoral in order to do this, and in particular, the ways in which the mode is used in the novel to both depict and reflect upon the tensions inherent in representing the causes and the effects of environmental crisis and the ways in which they may be negotiated. The treatment of pastoral in the novel can be read to illustrate how it can both draw out and add to the pressures that complicate the relationship between pastoral and ecological responsibility.

In *Glisters*, the conventions of both pastoral and apocalyptic narratives are challenged, negotiating the 'reliance' on these narratives critiqued by Heise.⁴⁷² The shadow of environmental apocalypticism is present in the novel, yet its ambivalent treatment resists the traditional appearance and outcomes of apocalyptic themes. Here, we are made irrefutably aware that the environmental crisis faced by the town is already underway, and both the activity that led to its causes and the collective blindness towards the potential dangers of those causes and their ensuing effects were long ago set in motion. Its effects and their consequences are indistinct, and the townspeople are resigned to this indeterminacy. The gradual and uncertain poisoning of the land and its people resists the 'shock tactics' of apocalypticism and instead presents an uncertain crisis paired with an inactive response, establishing a sense of stasis in the polluted conditions of the town and in the uncertain future that it portends.

⁴⁷¹ John Burnside, 'Interview with John Burnside', *Scottish Book Trust*, 2011, <http://www.scottishbooktrust.com/booktalk/john-burnside-glisters-interview>, n. pag.

⁴⁷² Heise, *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet*, p. 205.

Through the depiction of pollution in the bleak, post-industrial community of Innertown, dominated by the decaying presence of the disused chemical plant that was once its 'best hope' and now the source of the toxic legacy that has led to its decline, many of the conventions of pastoral are unsettled or even defamiliarised in *Glister*.⁴⁷³ The novel depicts the pastoral allure of an idealised version of nature in the past or in a distant location alongside an anti-pastoral awareness of the interconnectivity between the human and the natural and its effects that can be traced across different times and locations. These perspectives are offset by an ecologically aware self-reflexivity which frustrates and questions the adoption of straightforward pastoral or anti-pastoral viewpoints.

The novel describes the 'poisoned tract of industrial ruin and coastal scrub' with, in Jane Housham's words, 'the unrelenting evocation of toxicity' (*G*, p. 8).⁴⁷⁴ Lurid images of the effects of the plant's pollution include forests of blackened trees, sightings of mutant animals and prolific incidences of cancers and unexplained illnesses amongst town's population. Burnside's depiction of the conditions of the town recall Carson's *Silent Spring*, described by Jimmie Killingsworth and Jacqueline Palmer in their influential essay as 'mythically and topically charged'.⁴⁷⁵ In the descriptions of the degraded state of the environment and the apparently corresponding ill health of its inhabitants, the novel evokes a sense of the gothic, a genre that Heise connects to 'accounts of risk' as 'a consequence of pollution'.⁴⁷⁶

In *Glister*, the interconnectedness between humans and nature that Buell describes in 'toxic discourse' is made evident through the contiguous effects of poisoning throughout the land and its inhabitants. However, the contrast between this present state and its previous condition that he envisages and that Heise suspects, as I discussed above, is disrupted. The novel complicates the contrast between then-and-now, muddying the distinction between past and present by locating a blinkered

⁴⁷³ John Burnside, *Glister*, (London: Vintage, 2008), p. 12. All further references to this text will be made parenthetically in the chapter using the abbreviation *G*.

⁴⁷⁴ Jane Housham, 'The Spun Yarn': *Glister* by John Burnside', *The Guardian*, 23 May 2009, n. pag. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2009/may/23/glister-john-burnside-review>

⁴⁷⁵ Killingsworth and Palmer, ' ', p. 28.

⁴⁷⁶ Heise, *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet*, p. 139.

perspective upon the effects of the chemical plant in the town prior to the acknowledgement of its pollution. Return to or even evocation of an ideal world is not possible in *Glistar*, contesting what Hulme has termed ‘the lament for Eden’ in environmentalist discourse by the ambiguous presentation of the past in the novel and resisting the allure of their oppositional usages in this context.⁴⁷⁷

The traditional pastoral contrast between the past and the present is troubled by the inconclusive versions of the past that we are given. The simple ‘backward look’ with which Williams characterised the pastoral is problematised by Burnside’s treatment of the past, and the characters’ relationships with it.⁴⁷⁸ The sense of a pristine nature and harmonious relations between human and non-human is undermined by the images of the past presented by the memories of the characters and the insights of the narrator.

For instance, Morrison, the town policeman, describes the nostalgic version of the town that he remembers as ‘an old-fashioned town with a police house and a library’, with ‘soft autumn days of leaf drifts along the high street and girls playing hockey in the fog, summer fetes and white Christmases’. But in the next line, we are told that ‘it is, in other words, a good town, a town where people have detailed and carefully nurtured memories’ (*G*, p. 51). This qualification of his memory suggests both the malleability of the past from the backward-looking perspective of the present and the way in which the preservation of a rosy version of the past has become valuable for the town to help offset its current miseries.

The hint that we are given here that the past that Morrison remembers was not all that he described it to be, and that his description was given in the knowledge, and perhaps the necessity, of this deception, is developed elsewhere in the narrative. Here, the description of town’s and the chemical plant’s heyday is tempered by the suggestion that even then, its negative environmental effects were suspected and put aside in favour of its economic advantages for the town, by both the plant’s owners and the local people it employed. We are told that ‘the people believed, through sheer force of will, that the chemical plant was essentially safe. They believed, of course, because they *had* to

⁴⁷⁷ Hulme, p. 344.

⁴⁷⁸ Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 37.

believe: the Innertown's economy depended almost entirely upon the chemical industry', and 'they worked hard on being convinced' (*G*, p. 10-11, original emphasis.). The origins of Morrison's rosy version of the past are suggested here through the description of the active adoption of a blindfold of pastoral idealisation by the people. The desperation of their complicity is made painfully clear when we are told that 'in the early days, some of them even smuggled home bags of the stuff they were making out at the plant so they could spread it on their gardens' (*G*, p. 11). The novel here again recalls *Silent Spring*: echoing the final lines of its opening section, 'The Fable for Tomorrow': 'the people had done it themselves'.⁴⁷⁹

The damning description of the habit of looking and seeing only that the plant and its associated effects – both economic and environmental – were beneficial to the town is persuasive here. Failing, or choosing not to see the negative effects appears to have become a matter of course until it was too late to do anything about them. In so doing, *Glisters* parallels the selective gaze of an unquestioning pastoral representation with environmentally irresponsible behaviour.

The retrospective awareness of the complicity of the townsfolk in the acceptance of the plant and its negative effects upon the town complicates the pastoral distinction between the past and the present. The visible poisoning of the town's environment and its people that characterises the condition of the present can also be detected in its infancy in the past. Morrison's dubious nostalgia aside, the idealisation of the past is absent in *Glisters*. The chemical plant maintains a constant connection to that past, in its visible presence and invisible effects that evades any oppositional use in the present time. At the same time, the oppositional timescale of apocalypse is also upset. The crisis of the town's pollution has either already peaked, or perhaps more likely, has already reached the point at which it has become pervasive. Accordingly, the 'awakening' that Buell proposes that the awareness of present toxicity might instigate is undermined in the novel by the suggestion that the polluting effects of the chemical plant have long been known and allowed to continue. The version of pastoral as 'toxic discourse' that we find in *Glisters* resists the movement from ignorance to realisation and the possibility

⁴⁷⁹ Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*, (London: Penguin, 2000), p. 22.

for restorative action that Buell envisages. Instead, it suggests one of the ways in which Burnside places both an idealised perspective upon the relationship between humans and nature and an awareness of its potential to mask and even distort the ecological reality of the situation within the pastoral framework of the novel.

Simon Kovesi highlights Burnside's didactic efforts in the novel in its unflinching emphasis upon interconnectivity and the imperative for responsibility for that interconnectivity:

Glister is a novel of ecology, of a lyrical comprehension of the breath and breadth of nature. It confirms that, all too quickly, nature's lungs can clog into a choking wheeze [...] The novel is [...] broadly directed at the amoral irresponsibilities of big business in its abuse of nature. Even more effectively, it points to the secret abuses of the environment carried out by us all.⁴⁸⁰

The novel's environmental agenda is approached obliquely. The 'secret abuses' that Kovesi highlights are shown through the attitudes of the majority of the characters. The extent of the plant's polluting effects is accompanied by a general sense of apathy amongst the town's inhabitants. Like the people of Hadport, the pollution and its associated negative effects upon their daily lives, and their health and wellbeing, is accepted to be part of the landscape for Innertown. Their inattention and inaction towards the pollution could also be interpreted to be one of its effects; however, the suspected awareness of the plant's employees of the dangers of its produce and its practices suggests that the town's apathy could also be understood, to some extent, to be one of the pollution's causes.

Burnside describes a town that was trapped by its economic dependence upon the plant and the fear of the potential consequences of its closure for the prospects of its

⁴⁸⁰ Simon Kovesi, 'Review, *Glister* by John Burnside', *The Independent*, 05 June 2008, <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/reviews/glister-by-john-burnside-840344.html>, n. pag.

people. But the real entrapment faced by the people of the town by the plant is the legacy of its polluting industry. As Burnside describes:

There are also things that we know we don't *want* to know [...] here *everyone* doesn't want to know what's going on. They feel powerless and don't know what they can do about it anyway. But they don't want to acknowledge what's happened, because they'll feel culpable. And I think penitence is important, because the first step towards action is to say *mea culpa*.⁴⁸¹

The apathy of the townsfolk can be understood as a kind of penitence already underway in the novel: the acceptance of their fate of suffering the negative effects of the plant can be seen as an admission of responsibility, and of accepting its consequences. On the other hand, in the case of the older generation, their apparent acceptance also seems to be an act of denial, a refusal to consciously acknowledge their parts, and their past, in the situation faced in the present.

However, there is still more to uncover in the experimentation with pastoral in the novel. The anti-pastoral premise of the polluted landscape is itself contrasted with the pleasure and beauty that protagonist Leonard finds in the 'the clumps of wild flowers and grasses that grow amid the broken glass and rubble' and 'the hedges dotted with pale, brave-looking flowers' (G, p. 66; p. 62). His pastoral experiences encompass not just the celebration of the seeming tenacity of nature in the unlikely location of the poisoned ruins, but also a backward-looking elegiac consideration of the previous condition of the place that precedes the plant altogether, called towards by the persistence of the flowers. He explains:

The chemical plant is always beautiful, even when it's frightening, or when you can see how sad it is, when all the little glimmers of what was here before – the woods, the firth, the beaches – show through and you realise it must have been amazing, back in the old times. Sometimes you can still get

⁴⁸¹ John Burnside, 'Interview with John Burnside', *Scottish Book Trust*, (2011), <http://www.scottishbooktrust.com/booktalk/john-burnside-glisters-interview>, n. pag., original emphasis.

that feeling. Like when it's early on a summer's day: half-light, ruined buildings looming out of the shadows, the last owls calling to one another from hedge to hedge on the old farm road that runs past the east woods and down to the water. (*G*, p. 62)

Alongside this apparently nostalgic image of the landscape prior to its industrialisation is the resistance towards its idealisation in contrast to the present. In *Glister*, Leonard's approach to the plant can be understood as the overcoming of the privileging of a particular version of nature, whether it exists in the past or in another, more distant location, and instead points to the value of seeing and understanding the environment that he has for what it is. He describes this process of noticing as a kind of tuning in to a new mode of perception: a technique of looking differently at the same environment and understanding it afresh. Leonard achieves a new kind of pastoral restoration here, in the sense that the celebration of nature that he experiences is not the result of a pristine environment but is inspired by the post-industrial landscape itself. This is also a kind of pastoral retreat in miniature, where the distance between the signifiers of the town and the country, or the human and the non-human, is the movement of the eye from the ruins of the plant to the flowers that grow in and amongst them.

However, Leonard's pastoral experiences at the chemical plant are also staunchly self-reflexive. He is well aware of the allure of making idealising contrasts: 'the world looked more than usually beautiful to me, but I knew it was partly because of the contrast with how ugly things were back in the town' (*G*, p. 213). In another way, Leonard reflects further on the limitations of this contrast, questioning the idealisation of nature traditionally associated with pastoral restoration, and reconsidering the means and the effects of pastoral experience: 'they say every place has its own spirit, but when they talk about it in books and poems and stuff, they always mean places like bosky groves [...] but why not an old warehouse, or a cooled furnace? Why not a landfill?' (*G*, p. 211).

Echoing Gifford, Burnside has suggested that 'awe is central, is vitally necessary, to any description of the world', as David James also notes in a recent essay

on his fiction.⁴⁸² Leonard's celebratory experiences in nature reflect the attitude of 'awe' that Gifford specifies in his classification of 'post-pastoral' writing. In its depiction of the environment of the town, and the causes and effects of its present condition, *Glister* also evokes the 'integrated' sense of human-nature relations and the necessity of responsibility for such knowledge that appears in 'post-pastoral'. However, diverging from Gifford's interpretation of the shape and effects of 'post-pastoral', the account of nature and the response to its understanding in the novel does not lead to the adaptation of behaviour or the inception of efforts to restore a particular version of nature to the town. Furthermore, the nature that inspires Leonard's 'awe' and 'integrated' understanding belongs to a specifically contemporary version of pastoral.

In a 2012 interview in *Granta*, Burnside explains: 'I think I do take solace in the natural world – though I hope that's not an easy solace'.⁴⁸³ It is certainly an uneasy 'solace' in nature that is depicted in *Glister*. The novel produces a challenge to the sentimentality of pastoral, both through the awareness alluded to throughout the novel of the town's active role and complicity in its pollution, and in Leonard's knowing and questioning deployment of pastoral idealism. I argue that the celebration of nature that Leonard conveys relates to Morton's description of the outcomes of the direct and un-idealised understanding of human-natural environments engendered by what he describes as 'the ecological thought'. Morton explains: 'it is far more affirming to wake up in the darkness of ecological thought than to continue dreaming of life destroyed forever'.⁴⁸⁴ The understanding of nature that he sets out here is one in which depends on being seen outside of idealisation or sentimentality. In a comparable fashion, Leonard is able to look at and understand the environment of the town and the implications of its pollution for the past, present and future relations between the human and the natural. His knowledge of these relationships and the potential of their effects are depicted alongside his enjoyment and celebration of the non-human. The 'solace' that Leonard

⁴⁸² John Burnside, 'A Science of Belonging: Poetry as Ecology' in Robert Crawford ed., *Contemporary Poetry and Contemporary Science*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 95; David James, 'John Burnside's Ecologies of Solace: Regional Environmentalism and the Consolation of Description', *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 58.3 (2012), pp. 600-615, p. 605.

⁴⁸³ John Burnside, 'Interview: John Burnside', *Granta*, 06 March 2012, <http://www.granta.com/New-Writing/Interview-John-Burnside>, n. pag.

⁴⁸⁴ Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, p. 100.

obtains is balanced upon the unflinching and empirical understanding of his environment and the enmeshed historical, ecological and social interrelationships that it comprises.

The novel's innovative presentation of environmental disaster can also be compared to another of Morton's ideas here. Demanding the radical reinterpretation of human-nature relations implied by the acceptance of 'the ecological thought', Morton is suspicious of the intentions and the potential effects of images of environmental apocalypse. He argues that:

Eco-apocalypse is always for someone. It presupposes an audience. What kinds of sadistic 'you asked for it' fantasises does it promote? To what extent does it leave everything the same as it ever was, the day before the day after tomorrow?⁴⁸⁵

The depiction of the plant's environmental disaster can be read to respond to Morton's questions. Its insidious character resists the climactic outcome of apocalypse understood as 'the day after tomorrow', and in so doing, reconfigures the premise of environmental disaster towards the understanding of human-nature relations encountered in 'the ecological thought'. Rather than resulting in a cataclysmic collision of cause and effect, the crisis related in the novel occurs on multiple planes and scales, across interconnected and continuing timeframes. It cannot be reduced to a particular action, or a single event.

Accordingly, the understanding of nature in the novel is 'the same as it ever was': the interconnections that it represents lead to the situation both before and after the crisis began to emerge. The ways that those connections are understood, however, are different. In this case, crisis is registered by new configurations of and new implications for the enmeshed and interconnected ecology of the town. Leonard explains:

With every breath I take the world into my lungs, with every swallow I take in, not just food and drink, but everything that it contains, all the traces and

⁴⁸⁵ Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, p. 100.

smears and soot falls, all the threads of copper and nickel and 2,4,5-T and who knows what else. People say we are what we are, the future is written in our blood – and you have to admit, there's no avoiding chemistry. If you lived out here, I don't think you'd argue with that. (*G*, p. 70)

Burnside suggests that 'the most urgent problem facing us is environmental degradation [...] we must remind ourselves that as human beings we are part of nature'.⁴⁸⁶ The 'nature' that *Glisten* depicts is firmly enmeshed with the human.

In its experimentation with the themes and conventions of the pastoral, *Glisten* draws attention towards ways of looking, suggesting a way of seeing that is mindful of the interrelations of the human and the non-human and the multiple and contradictory ways that these interrelations may be perceived. In this respect, the text recalls the discussion of Jamie's version of pastoral in Chapter Three. At the end of the novel, the real crisis in Innertown is explained as the town's collective action of turning away from the difficulties that they face, and looking aslant at the causes and the effects of those difficulties, described as 'the sin of omission: the sin of averting our gaze and not seeing what was going on in front of our eyes. The sin of not wanting to know; the sin of knowing everything and not doing anything about it' (*G*, p. 250). In *Glisten*, the failure to acknowledge or address the understanding of the interrelationships between the human and the non-human is offset by the realities of the environmental crisis faced by the town, and the evidence that the ways that these connections may be understood has already altered.

Through pastoral and anti-pastoral means, the novel depicts and explores these altered connections. The themes and conventions of the mode are unsettled by this technique. Rather than revealing a crisis of pastoral perception, however, the consideration and re-consideration of the mode demanded by the understanding and reception of environmental crisis here opens it up in new ways. Forced into new contexts, pastoral means of relating to and representing the material world are configured differently. The identification and celebration of pastoral nature occurs in

⁴⁸⁶ John Burnside, quoted in Attila Dósa, 'John Burnside: Poets and Other Animals', in *Scottish Cultural Review of Language and Literature*, Volume 12, (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), n. pag.

relation to the influences of human action and interpretation, and the seductions and idealisations of the mode are consciously engaged alongside awareness of their contrasts to and implications upon the material world. This version of the mode is more tentative as a result, remaining open to the dynamic understanding of the environments to which it relates.

Burnside's novel can be read as an example of a contemporary version of pastoral that works together the tensions between idealisation and experience, highlights awareness of the interconnectivity between the human and the natural, or the urban and the rural domains of the pastoral contrast, and tests the balance between celebration of and responsibility towards this awareness. The version of pastoral that the novel presents shifts throughout the narrative and defies clear or conclusive interpretation. It encounters the uneasy relationship between pastoral, ecology and criticism, and reflects the precarious character of both environmental crisis and of the possibility of a mode of pastoral writing that attempts to respond to it. Burnside takes advantage of the proximity of productive environmental awareness to familiar means of interpretation, and suggests the possibility of their convergence when:

You realise how much of the world is invisible, or just on the point of being seen, if you could only find the right kind of attention to pay it, like turning the dial on a radio to the right channel, the one where everything is clearer and someone is talking in a language you understand right away, even though you know it's not the language you thought you knew. (*G* p. 64)

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored the ways that the pastoral mode is employed and adapted in order to represent and to respond to scenarios of environmental crisis. Arguing that the topic presents both opportunities and challenges to the mode, I have examined the appeal of the themes and conventions of the pastoral in contrast to the conditions of environmental crisis, and the ways that those themes and conventions may be applied critically to analyse its effects. Reading three examples of contemporary British writing,

I have argued that this dualistic reading of pastoral diffuses in contemporary versions of the mode into a means of questioning the relationship between the pastoral and environmental crisis. Establishing that the impact of environmental crisis and its implications upon the pastoral result in experimentation with the mode and lead to reflective approaches to the topic and to the mode itself, I have argued that that the pastoral takes on a dialectical form in these instances. By resisting the wholesale adoption or rejection of the techniques of the mode and instead moving between typically pastoral and anti-pastoral understandings, these versions of pastoral are able to achieve insights that move beyond these formulations upon the relationships between the human and the natural that underpin them.

Ettin asserts that ‘the idyll is what it is because it is clearly set apart from something different’.⁴⁸⁷ In the contemporary versions of pastoral discussed in this chapter, the distinctions between pastoral places and ways of looking are destabilised, and the possibilities of additional and alternative ways of understanding and employing its themes and conventions are opened up. The versions of pastoral encountered in contemporary writing engage with and also problematise the idea of ideal nature, and the possibility of its restorative effects. The outcomes of relief and restoration, and critical illumination, are not given in the texts discussed here but are themselves questioned alongside the conditions against which they are imagined and contrasted. In the narratives discussed above, the idea of nature and the balance of human-nature relations, and its effects, are firmly in question. The shape and scope of pastoral in these instances is re-formed as a result, and its spatial and temporal relations are made more fluid and less certain. As this chapter demonstrates, the critical potential of a pastoral that acknowledges and develops the challenge brought by environmental crisis to the contrasts upon which it is based signifies new opportunities for its use.

⁴⁸⁷ Ettin, *Literature and the Pastoral*, p. 11.

Chapter Five

Conclusion: The New Pastoral in Contemporary Writing

Pastoral is a key component in the re-imagining of the environment in contemporary British writing. Its reflexivity is central to this position: enabling the mode to adapt and develop, and providing the unique flexibility that it offers to support the complex understandings of this subject that are demanded of contemporary representations of and reflections upon human-nature relations. The pastoral has always been a heterogeneous form, existing within and in response to cultural concerns and changes, and in the last two decades in particular, as cultural developments and their material effects have impinged more clearly upon its principles, it has been shaped into new contexts, affected by new considerations. Its central relationships, though altering in form, function and effect, remain in place throughout its permutations. In the twenty-first century, it is towards environmental concerns that its themes and conventions are being re-orientated.

Throughout this study, the versions of pastoral that I have examined have come into contact with a series of ideas regarding the need for new ways of relating to and representing the environment, and the interrelationships that it signifies. They indicate the problems that are associated with familiar ways of doing so, and the possibility that despite reaching the end of their terms of tenability, these familiar forms of understanding and depicting the world around us persist. I have argued that the pastoral is being used to demonstrate and interrogate this situation, and that in the process, the mode itself is being altered. The familiar forms of the pastoral have become compromised; however, in addressing and questioning the ways that its themes and conventions are challenged by the recognition of environmental crisis, these forms can be seen to be capable of adapting to the demands of the situations in which they are employed, and to be emerging in new forms as a result.

Contemporary pastoral writing encounters environmental concerns through becoming attentive to the detail of an environment, and demonstrating awareness that such detail pertains to a particular moment in time. This contrasts with ideas of nature as stable or external: ideas that are typically associated with pastoral. As the certainties of

pastoral are eroded by knowledge of the uncertainties that comprise an environment, the mode itself becomes more precarious: its conventions appearing in various and differing forms, combinations and orientations. Its structure becomes uncertain, because the premises upon which it rests have become understood to be uncertain themselves.

As the certainties of pastoral are called up and challenged by cognisance of environmental uncertainties in contemporary British writing, the key components of the mode are reimagined and reshaped. These adaptations mark contemporary versions of the mode, provoking fresh consideration of the possibilities, as well as the limitations, of pastoral writing in relation to environmental concerns. Diverging from other recent approaches, including ‘post-pastoral’ and ‘neo-pastoral’, I have argued that ecological recovery or didacticism is not an essential component of new pastoral writing. This is not to say that environmentally positive messages are absent from these texts, but instead, that they appear more in the sense of questions than prescriptions. Rather than healing the fractures in the relationships between the human and the natural, and the ways that they are perceived, or providing instruction for methods of setting its parts back into previous alignments, I argue that the form is being used to query and to test its themes and conventions alongside new concerns for and understandings of the material world. The conditions in which the pastoral is being used have changed, and the ways that it is itself used and manipulated have changed also. In the process, the mode is worked into new places and new scenarios.

These new versions of pastoral are characterised by their environmental sensitivity, reflecting the new contexts into which they are being written. The presumptions of the pastoral, in terms of its themes and conventions, and the effects they are expected to provoke, are being shown from new angles that are influenced by this increased sensitivity. For instance, as we have seen in the previous chapters, the pastoral structuring of the landscape according to interpretations of the effects and scope of human activity appears alongside the possibilities of moving between the demarcations of this structure. Further, within that movement lies the potential of achieving new perspectives, establishing new connections, and enabling restorative experiences by way of such movements. Yet, as we have seen in Chapter Two, the pastoral attribution of

particular places according to the density of human influence is gradually overwritten by the experience and interpretation of the landscapes encountered, in which the understanding and the effects of particular places are shown to contrast with and reconfigure the preceding pastoral expectations with alternative conceptions. In Chapter Three, we have encountered instances in which the potential of pastoral to provide critical insight through these means is transposed onto a series of different environments and occasions of retreat, opening up the scope of the mode to encompass numerous supplementary ways of understanding and relating to the material world in addition to and in combination with the tradition. In Chapter Four, pastoral relationships are imagined in scenarios of catastrophic strain, in which idealised understandings of the environment and the human-nature relations that it represents are stripped away. At the same time, though, new ways of revering and even celebrating the revised understandings of the interrelationships that remain can be seen.

In these instances, the themes and conventions of pastoral are tested against new metrics, and perform new functions, in new formulations, as a result. The mode is key to the querying of the ways that environments are represented and understood in these examples of contemporary British writing. I suggest that the pastoral becomes more important as these considerations move to the fore in recent works. As Gifford and Soper, for example, have pointed out, when we look at ‘landscape’, it is something more than ‘land’ that we see.⁴⁸⁸ What these texts remind us too, is that the distinction between these terms is more complex than a human viewpoint and the unadulterated view: the ‘land’, especially the British land, is unavoidably a ‘landscape’: it is shaped by a long and complicated history of interrelationships that are present in its contemporary composition. These texts demonstrate through their experimentations with pastoral a peculiar sensitivity towards ways of looking at the landscape, and the interrelationships that it holds within it. It is through the relationships of the pastoral that these ways of looking may be interpreted, and communicated, resulting in new configurations of those relationships in the process.

⁴⁸⁸ Gifford, ‘Pastoral, Anti-Pastoral, Post-Pastoral’ in Coupe, ed. *The Green Studies Reader*, pp. 219-222, (p. 219); Soper, *What is Nature?*, p. 151. See also Schama, p. 7.

The contemporary texts discussed in this study open up the possibilities contained within an environmentally aware dimension of the mode. Through experimentation with the conventions of the pastoral, the tradition is being adapted to different purposes: by questioning its conventions and turning its critical viewpoint in upon itself, the pastoral is given further potential. In Virgil's First Eclogue, the country provides a relieving contrast for the herdsmen adversely affected by the 'civil dissension' of the distant city and the consequences of political and military action. Several centuries later, in *The Village* George Crabbe rejects Virgil's idyllic model in his suggestion that 'From Truth and Nature shall we widely stray / Where Virgil, not where fancy, leads the way'.⁴⁸⁹ In contemporary versions of pastoral, the relationships between the country and the city are challenged differently. The distinctions between the country and the city are unclear and the negative environmental effects of human action transgress such boundaries. It is harder to abstract contemporary incarnations of Virgil's herdsmen from the external discord to which they are subjected. Written in the context of environmental crisis, the connections between pastoral, 'truth' and 'nature' have become reflexive. The 'new versions of pastoral' anticipated by Marx are written with these difficulties in mind.

This study points towards some further considerations that are opened up through the analysis of contemporary versions of pastoral, and towards which it could be extended to pursue. The potency of the topic is reflected in the accretion of writing that offers continuing and developing opportunities for its analysis. In addition, the frames by which I have examined the appearance of recent examples of the form in this study can be complimented by exploration of further aspects of the mode.

For instance, the sensitivity towards the opportunities and the potential dangers of pastoral modes of thought may be examined alongside concerns for the presentation of the past and the present in Macfarlane's recent work, *The Old Ways* (2012). The text is keenly attuned to the allure of selective perception associated with the mode, and frequently emphasises a commitment towards the direct and open representation of the

⁴⁸⁹ Virgil, p. 6; Crabbe, 'The Village' in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, Vol. 1, ed. Stephen Greenblatt et al, (London and New York: Norton, 2000), pp. 2867-2874.

experience and the understanding of the landscapes through which it moves. Explaining that ‘one may too easily take the natural world as companion, friend and salve’, the text instead delights in the disjunctures of contemporary pastoral experiences.⁴⁹⁰ We are told that:

A cuticle moon showed in the sky. A pheasant rattled in a far-off wood.
Rooks flapped past on their roost flights. The sun dropped, reddened. What I
thought was the first star turned out to be the night light for a plane coming
into Luton. (*OW*, p. 52)

Similarly, the text describes its interest in the ‘*now*’ of the landscape, the enmeshing of ‘the distant past’ with ‘the debris and phenomena of the present’ in the land (*OW*, p. 33, original emphasis). Using the specific experience of walking, the text explores the possibilities of connection and communication with the landscape through its material features. Drawing on history and archaeology, it resists romanticising such experiences by attempting to register the past and the present in all senses, from tumuli to ‘the pylon’s lyric crackle and the crop-sprayer’s hiss’: this is not a glorified or idealised look at landscape (*OW*, p. 11). Macfarlane explains that ‘these are the consequences of the old ways with which I feel easiest: walking as enabling sight and thought rather than encouraging retreat and escape’ (*OW*, p. 24).

The text is wary of conforming to ideas of environments as external or inert. Their formulation influences the ways that they may be experienced and understood. The experiences that the text relates cannot be disentangled from the places that enabled them to occur. Discussing Nan Shepherd’s observations of landscape, Macfarlane writes that ‘landscape is still often understood as a noun connoting fixity, scenery, an immobile painterly decorum. I prefer to think of the word as a noun containing a hidden verb: landscape scapes’ (*OW*, p. 255). He continues: ‘I prefer to take “landscape” as a collective term for the temperature and pressure of the air, the fall of light and its rebounds, the textures and surfaces of rock, soil and building, the sounds [...], the scents

⁴⁹⁰ Robert Macfarlane, *The Old Ways*, (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2012), p. 339. Further references to this text will be given parenthetically using the abbreviation (*OW*).

[...] and the uncountable other transitory phenomena and atmospheres that together comprise the *bristling* presence of a particular place at a particular moment' (*OW*, p. 255, original emphasis) From this perspective, the interconnected human and non-human components of and influences upon these places are part of the active 'presence' of the landscape. The pastoral effect of the natural upon the human is thus reconfigured to accommodate a more contemporary understanding of the form and substance of an environment, comprising of the interconnected effects of both parts.

Alongside its sensitivity towards ways of looking at and interpreting the features and experiences of different landscapes, and the human-nature relations that they signify, the text maintains a pastoral sense of understanding particular places and the insights and effects they may engender. The journeys depicted relate 'not only means of traversing space, but also ways of feeling, being and knowing' (*OW*, p. 24). The text depends upon a sense of movement between different kinds of landscapes and the understanding that the experience of such movement will lead to a change of feeling effected by particular places. These places and effects that are defined by their contrast from somewhere else: somewhere from which such journeys are undertaken, and to which they will return, refreshed and supplemented by the intervening events.

The text displays an acute awareness of the need for and the experience of new ways of relating to and representing environments. Macfarlane suggests that:

We lack – we need – a term for those places where one experiences a 'transition' from a known landscape [...] somewhere we feel and think significantly differently. I have for some time been imagining such transitions as 'border crossings'. These borders do not correspond to national boundaries, and papers and documents are unrequired at them. Their traverse is generally unbiddable, and no reliable map exists of their routes and outlines. They exist even in familiar landscapes [...] Such moments are rites of passage that reconfigure local geographies, leaving places outlandish or quickened, revealing continents within counties. What might we call such incidents and instances – or, rather, how to describe the lands that are found beyond these frontiers? 'Xenotopias', perhaps, meaning 'foreign places' or

‘out-of-place places’, a term to complement our ‘utopias’ and ‘dystopias’.
(*OW*, p. 78)

The Old Ways, in its attention to ways of looking and of interpreting the landscape, brings the relationships of the pastoral into view as a path or thread that may be followed through space: a formula or set of coordinates by which the landscape might be understood or discerned. Importantly, it is understood to be one of many, and the sensitivity towards the multiplicity of ways of looking at and understanding the interconnected human and non-human, past and present configurations of spaces, is developed through the exploration of these modes of cognition. The dissonance of pastoral is important here. Aware of ‘consolations of landscape’ and ‘the fractures and queer junctures’ that it represents, Macfarlane strikes a kind of balance, or establishes a conversation, between pastoral and more empirical ways of understanding a landscape and his own expectations and experiences of particular landscapes (*OW*, p. 325). In so doing, he folds them into one another, consciously celebrating and evaluating the places he explores, the experiences that take place, and the ways that they may be represented.

Another topic of consideration is conceptions of the future, and the appearance of children. Recent work in contemporary fiction has yielded an emerging attention towards childhood and the figure of the child. These images are also prevalent in pastoral criticism that attends towards the futures of the form, from Empson’s work on *Alice in Wonderland* to Marinelli’s interest in childhood as an emerging new dimension of the pastoral’s thematic and temporal conventions.⁴⁹¹ This topic can be picked up in several of the examples discussed in this study. Smith and Burnside rely on child characters to explore new ways of considering and understanding the relation between the human and the non-human in *The Accidental* and *Glisters*. These characters are singled out by their understanding of their relation to their environment, and their impressions of the responsibilities that such understandings entail. In *The Accidental*, Astrid’s urgent sense of self-definition at the outset of the novel describes her as a ‘millennial person’, distinguished from the past century in a way that the rest of her family cannot be. She is defined by the future, and displays consciousness of the choices

⁴⁹¹ Empson, p. 200; Marinelli, p. 81.

and perceptions to which she is open with this futural consideration in mind. For Leonard, it is his unique relationship to the legacies of the plant, severed from the conflicted relations of his elders and defined instead by its material and ecological remainders that leaves him open to find a way to understand the human and non-human relations that these traces communicate: to find ways to deal with these relations in view of these traces. In *Being Dead*, though Syl is a grown-up child, she offers a means of understanding and perspective not afforded to her parents: in outliving them, she is able to see life and death, and the human and the non-human, from a way illustrated but not consciously conveyed by them. In *The Rapture*, it is the teenage Bethany that is able to perceive the impending break in human-nature relations as previously understood, and though she is unable to follow this revelation through to its aftermath, she leaves the novel with the parting gift of the knowledge of Gabrielle's pregnancy, and the possibility of a new future within new human-nature parameters. There is a new sense of hopefulness in these instances of pastoral, recalling its futural orientation identified by Puttenham in the sixteenth century, given fresh opportunities here by the contemporary intersection of the mode with environmental concerns.

Intertwined with environmental concerns, the themes and conventions of pastoral are reimagined and reshaped in contemporary British writing, adapting in response to changing understandings of the material world and the interrelationships between the human and the natural that such understandings signify. The pastoral is used to represent and to reflect upon these concerns, emerging in new forms as a result. The relevance of its themes and conventions to environmental concerns, and the mutability of its forms and theoretical orientations enable such adaptations, and offer new possibilities to relate and to respond to these topics as the ways in which they are understood shift, develop and continue.

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