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## DAPHNIS IN GRASMERE: WORDSWORTH'S ROMANTIC PASTORAL\*

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The two pictures which accompany this article (pp. 363-64) are reproduced from a slender volume entitled *Pastoral Poems, by William Wordsworth, illustrated with numerous engravings* and printed in London in 1860; while no history of English art in the 19th century would ever be pardoned for including them, they may still claim our attention as evidence for a wide-spread Victorian view of the Wordsworthian pastoral.<sup>1</sup> In the illustration for “The Pet-Lamb,” the little girl feeding her little lamb is an oppressively transparent symbol of nurturing innocence. The two figures are bound together by their youth and vulnerability (condensed in the girl’s naked right foot); the girl holds the pail up, quite unnecessarily, to the lamb’s mouth, so that, to drink, the dear animal need not strain to bend down its neck too far; so unselfconscious is her absorption in its absorption in its feeding that both seem to participate equally in a mutually concorded gesture. The poem which the illustration is designed to accompany emphasizes from its very beginning the fact that Wordsworth is watching them,<sup>2</sup> but here any traces of an observer’s presence are rigorously suppressed. The pair’s very obliviousness not only invites, but simultaneously chastens the viewer’s gaze with a power that neither figure alone could possibly achieve (the girl’s bodice can safely be left partly unbuttoned): they themselves do not realize that we are watching them, but nature leans over to protect them, shading them with a thickly maternal tree whose angle and twisting reproduce those of the little maid (just as her arms and disheveled hair are naturalized in its branches and wind-swept leaves). Human fostering and natural sheltering mirror and enforce one another.

The other engraving is clearly intended to illustrate the passage in “Michael” in which the five-year-old boy is entrusted with the responsibility of keeping the flock in the pen.<sup>3</sup> But whereas Wordsworth’s text emphasizes the degree to which that burden exceeds the lad’s capabilities, the sheep in this engraving have become so docile that a shepherd is hardly needed: one of them looks inquiringly at the boy, another rather shame-facedly at us, but the others are too sleepy even to notice that the gate is open. Hence the boy’s gesture of control is deprived of the dramatic context within which alone it would have been meaningful: instead of appearing “to stem or turn the flock,” he seems to

have stumbled upon these strange creatures by accident and to have raised his arms in bewildered astonishment.

[362]Both poems, I shall argue, are dramas of private property, of the failed attempt to appropriate nature to human desire; but in these illustrations all signs of human control, of the separating out of a segment of the natural world and its protection as private property, have been obscured: in “The Pet-Lamb” the animal is indeed bound, but loosely and to a natural object in the landscape, a stone, which, while certainly constraining the lamb’s freedom of movement, fetters it to the world of nature and not to that of man; while in “Michael” the fence that encloses this private tract of land is concealed for most of its length by a hedge that covers it, while the only section identifiable as part of a fence, the gate, so far from obstructing the viewer’s gaze and the animals’ liberty, has instead been left wide open.

Evidently, within a decade of Wordsworth’s death (and presumably much earlier), certain elements of his poetry had been radically sentimentalized. The focus in these illustrations is on individual human characters, young and by preference prepubertal, set in direct contact with harmless and equally young animals within a protective natural setting. Not only are they threatened by no danger from without (tempests, wolves, or brigands, or even mists, mosquitoes, or bankers) or from within (sexual passion, duplicity, shame): they need not work for a living (their youth means that others do this for them) and instead can play at the gestures of work with the joyful self-importance of children. Any hint of the gritty toil of nurturing and protecting which must be their parents’ daily lot is carefully effaced: instead, these functions are distributed in part to nature (where they are rendered infallible by being depersonalized), in part to the children (where they become an optional game). The result is an atmosphere of generalized unreflective cheerfulness, in which differences between man and the non-human environment are minimized.

The apparent naturalness with which these images are proposed should not deceive us: these dainty shepherdesses and frolicsome swains had in fact only recently reemerged after many years of contemptuous neglect and outright hostility. If these engravings had appeared in 1760 rather than 1860, few would have found them remarkable: but already in 1779, when Wordsworth was about the age of the children depicted in them, Dr. Johnson had dismissed even Milton’s “Lycidas” as “easy, vulgar, and therefore disgusting”;<sup>4</sup> while, a few years later, George Crabbe had laboriously urged that the whole genre of contemporary pastoral be sacrificed upon the altar of “the real picture of the poor.”<sup>5</sup> At the beginning of the 18th century, when Pope had published his *Pastorals* (1709), the genre which he had inherited not only from Sidney and Spenser, from Marvell and Milton, but from countless anonymous poetasters, had seemed robust enough to launch a meteoric career; but its decline in the course of three generations was steady and irreversible.<sup>6</sup> Histories of English literature often imply that little was thereby lost, and contrast the tired conventionality of Neoclassicism, its bookish estrangement from the world of perception, with Romanticism’s vibrant anti-traditionality and closeness to

nature. In doing so, they consciously or unconsciously follow the precedent of the Romantic poets themselves, who, in such key texts as the *Prelude*,<sup>7</sup> attack the artificiality of pastoral in the name of a genuine familiarity with real shepherds.<sup>8</sup> This, of course, should suffice to make us wary—we are not likely

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[The two plate images may be downloaded separately.]

Illustration to “The Pet-Lamb”  
from *Pastoral Poems*, by William Wordsworth (London 1860)  
[Glenn W. Most, “Daphnis in Grasmere: Wordsworth’s Romantic Pastoral”]

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[The two plate images may be downloaded separately.]

Illustration to “Michael”  
from *Pastoral Poems*, by William Wordsworth (London 1860)  
[Glenn W. Most, “Daphnis in Grasmere: Wordsworth’s Romantic Pastoral”]

to advance the understanding of Romanticism by simply repeating what the Romantics themselves said about it. And in fact, that there was much more at stake in the decline of the eighteenth-century English pastoral than is sometimes suggested will become clear if we examine closely a text from its beginning, the *Discourse on Pastoral Poetry* which accompanied Pope's *Pastorals* in editions after 1717.<sup>9</sup>

Pope begins by locating the origin of this kind of poetry in the origin of mankind itself: "The origin of Poetry is ascribed to that age which succeeded the creation of the world: And as the keeping of flocks seems to have been the first employment of mankind, the most ancient sort of poetry was probably pastoral."<sup>10</sup> Thereby he not only immediately secures its legitimacy, but also determines its content: for the lack of civil society and of such of its products as science and war in that primordial age left the pastoral poet without the kinds of subject matter required by such later genres as didactic and epic; Pope's elision of the referential function precludes all content other than the poet's emotions.<sup>11</sup> But it is of course inadequate to view the pastoral as though it were the pure self-expression of nature, unmediated by conscious reflection: for no such natural poetry has survived, and all available pastorals are the work of historically discrete individuals, not Golden Age shepherds. Pope does not name this problem directly, but it expresses itself clearly in his attempt to conceal it: "From hence a Poem was invented, and afterwards improv'd to a perfect image of that happy time; which by giving us an esteem for the virtues of a former age, might recommend them to the present."<sup>12</sup> Without a transition we find ourselves in the realm, not of anonymous nature, but of art and of the volition and moral purposes of particular poets. What is more, what we are told of now is no ordinary art, but an art which over the course of time has gradually been refined until it has reached perfection. The apparently innocuous prepositional phrase "From hence" in fact denotes a lapse from the unselfconscious simplicity of the Golden Age into the technical refinements of civilized historicity.<sup>13</sup> But it is the phrase "perfect image" into which the crucial paradox is condensed. For real pastorals may have lost the natural identity of their primeval models, but not the ability to mimic it so successfully that it can still be communicated intact. If the pastoral poem has gradually been improved until it has become "a perfect image of that happy time," then the extreme of artistry in its means has eventually succeeded in transmitting undiminished the extreme of naturalness of its object. To be sure, the pastoral is not nature but merely a "perfect *image*" of nature; but if it were anything less than a "*perfect image*," the fact that it is only an image would obtrude itself upon our consciousness, intolerably reminding us by its defects of our loss of that original innocence. As a "perfect image," the pastoral induces us to forget that it is only an image and instead permits us to see through it to its model in nature. Perfect art conceals itself as art and reveals itself to us as—perfect nature.

If all Neoclassical poetics is based upon the fundamental opposition between art and nature, articulated by the concept of imitation, then pastoral

poetry, as that genre in which the extreme of artifice and the extreme of naturalness are discovered to coincide, as the vanishing point where *artfulness* [366] and *artlessness* become one and the same, is that moment in which imitation can become identity and this identity can be used to ground both categories. The genre's typical themes—harmony between man and nature founding reconciliation between man and man<sup>14</sup>—and its typical poetic devices—the naturalization of human language (simplicity, repetitiveness, metonymic anchoring of metaphors) and the humanizing imposition of a language upon nature (weather signs, the warbling of brooks and birds and the humming of bees)<sup>15</sup>—are modes of formulating this identification of art and nature which legitimates the former and domesticates the latter. Since the theory of mimesis authorizes poetry only insofar as it is subservient to nature, the pastoral could be understood as the very essence of the poetic spirit, for by putting all of its art into the recovery of what art might seem to have precluded, viz. nature, by being a “perfect image,” the pastoral defined the limit of what poetry was capable of achieving: the poetry of poetry, that asymptotic point at which poetry could be about nothing other than itself and simultaneously be about something that had nothing at all to do with poetry. Hence the fate of pastoral could figure the fate of poetry as a whole: despite the many complaints about the lack of a successful English epic poem after *Paradise Lost*, it is in fact in the decline of *pastoral* in the 18th century that English poetry suffers its gravest crisis.

The form this crisis takes is expressed inescapably in the question of the referentiality of pastoral: in what domain are its shepherds to be housed? Pope's express prohibition, in his “Discourse on Pastoral Poetry,” against locating the pastoral world in the contemporary country-side,<sup>16</sup> was inherently risky, for it meant not so much that the pastoral comforts were present in the Golden Age, as rather that they were lacking in the meadows of modern England. The liberating energy released by pastoral's identification of art and nature was too strong to permit sustained belief that their identity could only be located in one domain and not simultaneously in the other. It was Pope himself who, a few years after his *Pastorals*, pointed out the path of decline by violating his own precept in “Windsor-Forest” (1713): applying the Virgilian theme of the return of the Golden Age to the purposes of political panegyric, he claimed that under England's current rulers, economic prosperity secured a pastoral of fact: “Rich Industry sits smiling on the Plains, / And Peace and Plenty tell, a STUART reigns.”<sup>17</sup> But other poets looked at the same country-side with less optimistic, or less disingenuous, eyes. Less than a decade after Pope's poem, John Gay published “The Birth of the Squire. An Eclogue. In Imitation of the Pollio of Virgil” (1720); but instead of imitating Virgil's *Fourth Eclogue*, Gay inverts the model in order ruthlessly to satirize the stupidity and self-indulgence of the landed gentry. Whereas Virgil's miraculous birth reconciles man and nature and renders hunting, agriculture, and commerce obsolete, Gay's leads to a massive consumption and destruction of nature and ultimately to the squire's self-destruction.<sup>18</sup> Nor did later poets

succeed in finding Arcadia in contemporary England. William Collins was driven to transfer the locale of his *Persian Eclogues* (1742) to the exotic East; Oliver Goldsmith, in “The Deserted Village” (1770), projected it back onto the recent English past of his own youth, before the Enclosure Acts had displaced the traditional yeoman farmers [367] and irreversibly destroyed any possibility of rural ease, leaving the peasant, like the poet, only the alternatives of the city (and its corresponding poetic genre, satire) or the American colonies (sublime poetry of the hard primitive variety).<sup>19</sup> Collins’ exoticism, Goldsmith’s nostalgia, and Crabbe’s gloomy realism are equivalent responses to the impossibility of finding acceptable versions of Daphnis in contemporary England. It matters little whether the poet chooses distance in space, distance in time, or distance from pastoral itself: in any case, the Neoclassical pastoral is in jeopardy.

But in that case, the danger arises that the two terms of the antithesis of poetry and nature can no longer be brought to a renewed coincidence but will remain forever incompatible. If contemporary referents are to be excluded for pastoral’s objects, then the paradoxical identity of the extremes of art and nature will be confined to the realm of art, and the opposition between the two domains which was abolished in pastoral’s means will be reestablished in its characters. This is a menace to which the Romantics too could not remain indifferent—after all, the reconciliation between man and nature which was celebrated in the pastoral tradition is also a key element of the ideology of Romanticism. But how could the ideals of the Neoclassical pastoral be rescued from the shipwreck of Neoclassicism?

Comparison with the German situation is instructive. Here the principles of idealizing Neoclassical pastoral were canonized in Gottsched’s *Versuch einer kritischen Dichtkunst* (1730)<sup>20</sup> and were enacted in Salomon Geßner’s popular *Idyllen* (1756), whose prefatory remarks to the reader argue, in terms very reminiscent of Pope’s half a century earlier, for locating such poems in the Golden Age.<sup>21</sup> And, just as the English Romantics attacked their pastoral predecessors as artificial and vacuous, so here too, whatever else they may disagree about, Schiller, Schlegel, Schelling, Jean Paul, Hegel, and Marx<sup>22</sup> are unanimous in the enthusiasm with which they condemn Geßner as overly general, vague, mawkish, and boring. Yet, so far from condemning pastoral poetry as a whole as obsolete and un-Romantic, the Germans tend to accord decisive importance to the pastoral.<sup>23</sup> In literary theory, the pastoral genre becomes one of the paradigmatic objects for German Romantic reflection on poetry, whether because of its moral seriousness, as for Schiller,<sup>24</sup> its dynamic temporal structure, as for Schlegel,<sup>25</sup> or the idealistic harmony of its synthesis of opposites, as for Hölderlin;<sup>26</sup> while, in poetic practice, Romantic idylls, of very different kinds, were to flow from the pens of several generations of German poets, from Goethe, through Schlegel, Hölderlin, Kleist, Tieck and Eichendorff, at least through Mörike.<sup>27</sup>

In Germany, it was a fundamental transformation of the theory of genre from normative to speculative in character<sup>28</sup> which permitted Schiller and others



to generalize pastoral beyond the content markers of traditional bucolic poetry towards an “Empfindungsweise” which could do without shepherds and sheep altogether.<sup>29</sup> In England, matters were different. In their literary theorization, the English Romantics never developed anything like the degree of sophistication of their German contemporaries; they tended either to abandon genre theory or to retain normative versions. Hence, despite a few earlier hints that might have pointed them in this direction,<sup>30</sup> no generalization like the [368]Germans’ was available to the English poets.<sup>31</sup> The inevitable result is that there are few major poems in the English Romantic corpus that label themselves pastorals; and conversely, most histories of the pastoral genre tend to neglect the English Romantics. Of the few studies of pastoral elements in English Romanticism, most of the older ones are handicapped by positivistic assumptions about the nature of literary influence,<sup>32</sup> while some of the more recent ones tend to slide into a conceptual vagueness which permits the term “idyllic” to encompass widely varying poetic modes and forms.<sup>33</sup>

Yet the heritage of the traditional pastoral has a tendency to surface unmistakably at critical points in English Romanticism.<sup>34</sup> Wordsworth provides a particularly interesting and complex example here. Sometimes it is the language of key terms in his literary theoretical texts that betrays a pastoral provenance. For example, Wordsworth’s programmatic definition of his poetic aims in the “Preface” to *Lyrical Ballads*, with his insistence upon “low and rustic life” and “simple and unelaborated expressions,”<sup>35</sup> has no precedents in eighteenth-century English criticism outside of the defence of rusticity in object and (refined) simplicity in manner which characterizes theories of the pastoral;<sup>36</sup> while his classification of poetic genres in the “Preface” to the 1815 edition of his poems, in which he assigns to the category of “the Idyllium” all poetry “descriptive chiefly either of the processes and appearances of external nature ... or of characters, manners, and sentiments,” as well as “[t]he Epitaph, the Inscription, the Sonnet, most of the epistles of poets writing in their own persons, and all loco-descriptive poetry,”<sup>37</sup> leaves little doubt that he himself at that date considered that most of the poems he had written belonged to this genre.<sup>38</sup> But at other times it is the poems themselves that proclaim the connection. Two examples may indicate some of the ways this happens. The epigraph attached to the “Intimations” ode when it was first published in 1807, *paulo majora canamus*,<sup>39</sup> not only explicitly provides a precedent from Virgil’s *Fourth Eclogue* for the ode’s central thematics of the rebirth of man<sup>40</sup> and of nature<sup>41</sup> and of the henceforth indissoluble bond between them;<sup>42</sup> by implication it also declares that Wordsworth’s other early lyrics, shorter and for the most part less philosophical in character, can be assimilated, like Virgil’s other nine *Eclogues*, to the status of unambitious, “normal” pastorals, a preparatory first stage in a poetic career projected towards the monumental didacticism of larger forms.

The second example, one of the most complex and significant passages in Wordsworth’s whole corpus, occurs in one of the most prominent locations of *The Prelude*, at the end of Book 10 in the 1805 version, at the very end of the

chronological narrative.<sup>43</sup> Formally, at this point the process of composition of the poem has finally caught up with the world of events, the work of retrospection has been completed and poetic time and real time can at last coincide: a sufficient foundation has been laid for the last three, systematic books, which will go on to draw the moral conclusions from that narrative. In terms of content, this book had begun with renewed hopes for the progress of the French Revolution but had gone on through a series of bitter disappointments to reach an abyss of bleak despair; the death of Robespierre, ending the Terror, had brought a respite, but England's open declaration of war [369] and France's transformation into an imperialistic military state had so alienated Wordsworth from Nature and his own better nature<sup>44</sup> that he had been driven to violate Nature's laws in his analysis of society, betrayed into errors "By present objects, and by reasonings false / From the beginning, inasmuch as drawn / Out of a heart which had been turn'd aside / From Nature by external accidents, / And which was thus confounded more and more, / Misguiding and misguided" (10.884-89), until eventually he had felt compelled to abandon moral inquiry altogether for the "clear / And solid evidence" (10.904-905) that could only exist in a domain divorced from both man and Nature, in mathematics. What might have been a slight gain for mathematics, Wordsworth evidently regarded as a potentially catastrophic loss for poetry and moral thought: but fortunately he, and we, were saved by the intervention of Coleridge, Dorothy, and above all "Nature's Self, by human love / Assisted" (10.922-23), which so reinvigorated his knowledge and his spirits that nothing, not even the Pope's coronation of Napoleon, could cast him down again. At this point, Wordsworth breaks off his narrative and addresses Coleridge in Sicily with expressions of confident hope which culminate in a remarkable series of images of primal innocence:

Oh! wrap him in your Shades, ye Giant Woods,  
 On Etna's side, and thou, O flowery Vale  
 Of Enna! is there not some nook of thine,  
 From the first playtime of the infant earth  
 Kept sacred to restorative delight?  
 Child of the mountains, among Shepherds rear'd,  
 Even from my earliest school-day time, I lov'd  
 To dream of Sicily... (10.1002-1009)

Wordsworth's language becomes Miltonic as it gears towards a climax:<sup>45</sup> but its mode, with the imagery of rustic landscape, vernal flowers, surviving traces of the Golden Age, childhood, shepherds, dreaming, and above all the implied link between nature's youth ("the infant earth") and man's ("Child of the mountains"), is unmistakably pastoral. That is why the list of famous Sicilians that follows will go on, after briefly mentioning Empedocles and Archimedes, to culminate triumphantly in a third name:

And, O Theocritus, so far have some  
 Prevail'd among the Powers of heaven and earth,  
 By force of graces which were their's, that they

Have had, as thou reportest, miracles  
 Wrought for them in old time: yea, not unmov'd,  
 When thinking on my own beloved Friend,  
 I hear thee tell how bees with honey fed  
 Divine Comates, by his tyrant lord  
 Within a chest imprison'd impiously;  
 How with their honey from the fields they came  
 And fed him there, alive, from month to month,  
 Because the Goatherd, blessed Man! had lips  
 Wet with the Muses' Nectar. (10.1016-28)

The story is taken from Theocritus' *Seventh Idyll*; in this context, it acquires an extraordinary depth of meaning. For Wordsworth interprets it as proof that, [370]though the violence of man to man (which he has emphasized in his account of the French Revolution) once damaged a poet temporarily, it was warded off in the end by the intercession of Nature. Comates' rescue by Nature, to which his being a poet provides him a uniquely intimate access, justifies Wordsworth's optimism not only for Coleridge's sojourn in Sicily, but for his own definitive rescue from the dangers and dejections he has so poignantly depicted: all three are poets, hence all three will be saved—"Our prayers have been accepted," Wordsworth joyously proclaims (10.1032). In the end, what ultimately warrants a vision of poetry that arises from the indestructible love between man and nature is a single poem from the very beginning of the Classical tradition of pastoral poetry.

As these examples suggest, the ideological content of the Neoclassical pastoral is disseminated throughout Wordsworth's writings: instead of being concentrated in a single genre, the theme of the harmony between man and man and between man and nature migrates to forms as diverse as the ode and the autobiographical epic. To be sure, these poems are no longer traditional pastorals; but the ideals which in the 18th century only the pastoral poem had been able to embody, so far from being given up together with the swains and shepherdesses that had figured them, acquire, at least in Wordsworth, a far more central importance than they had ever had before, legitimating large sectors of poetic, and moral, theory. But if this is so, what becomes of the pastoral itself, in the narrower sense, in the Romantic period? Most poets continue to call some of their poems "pastorals": what do they mean? Wordsworth's greatest pastoral, "Michael," can give us an answer.

"Michael" is subtitled "A Pastoral Poem"; and its programmatic importance is suggested not only by its length but also by its original placement as the very last poem of the second volume of the 1800 edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*.<sup>46</sup> In this position it corresponds to the last poem of the first volume, "Lines Written a few miles above Tintern Abbey," which had begun with an allusion to "these pastoral farms, / Green to the very door" (16-17) and ended with one to "this green pastoral landscape" (158). The references which had rounded out the ring of that earlier poem, provoking vague generic associations,

are now concretized by being embodied in a long text with explicitly pastoral characters and narrative.<sup>47</sup>

It is as a shepherd that Michael himself is introduced in the first lines of the narrative after the poet's proem: "Upon the forest side in Grasmere Vale / There dwelt a Shepherd, Michael was his name" (40-41). But what makes a poem a pastoral is not merely its shepherds, but, more importantly, a thematic and stylistic emphasis upon a humanization of the language of nature and a naturalization of the language of man; and both features are abundantly present in "Michael." Nature is humanized, as often in Wordsworth, by its being characterized as a language which speaks, or as a book which can be read, with the transparency of total intelligibility, or as a music richer than any merely human melody.<sup>48</sup> Immediately after describing Michael's profession and physical and intellectual qualities, Wordsworth goes on to say of him:

And in his shepherd's calling he was prompt  
And watchful more than ordinary men.  
[371]Hence had he learned the meaning of all winds,  
Of blasts of every tone; and oftentimes,  
When others heeded not, He heard the South  
Make subterraneous music, like the noise  
Of bagpipers on distant Highland hills.  
The Shepherd, at such warning, of his flock  
Bethought him, and he to himself would say,  
"The winds are now devising work for me!" (46-55)

Michael's scrupulous attention towards nature is rewarded by an extraordinary capacity to recognize its intelligibility:<sup>49</sup> for him, no wind is devoid of its significance, and the noise the South wind makes underground is approximated to a human music.<sup>50</sup> The "distant Highland hills" of the bagpipers not only suggests the faintness of the wind's music, but also legitimates the simile by comparing the natural phenomenon to a human one which, by its primitiveness, is not so far from being a natural one after all; and the simile is naturalized not only metaphorically (wind is compared to breath) but also metonymically (perhaps, weather permitting, one could actually hear Highland bagpipes at Grasmere). To be sure, the message of the winds is threatening: but the important point here is that they have a message, one that Michael can understand (and thereby take steps to protect his flock, averting the threat). Again, a few lines later, Michael's ability to read the winds is said to be applied to the fields and hills as well, which

had impressed  
So many incidents upon his mind  
Of hardship, skill or courage, joy or fear;  
Which, like a book, preserved the memory  
Of the dumb animals, whom he had saved,  
Had fed or sheltered, linking to such acts  
The certainty of honourable gain... (67-73)

For Michael, inanimate nature has become a horn-book of moral instruction teaching by examples: even if the animals are mute, the landscape is not, for it is a text which instils lessons of virtue and reinforces them with the promise of rewards.

Correspondingly, the humans in “Michael” are naturalized as far as possible, in the sense that they are made simple and aboriginal. Michael and his family are given a primordial, almost Biblical stature: the “old man, stout of heart, and strong of limb” (42) seems almost a relic of Old Testament shepherds, especially when we learn a little later that “His Helpmate was a comely matron, old—/ Though younger than himself full twenty years” (79-80).<sup>51</sup> With the late and unexpected birth of a son (Luke), these Old Testament hints locate themselves more specifically in the story of Abraham and Isaac (thereby raising further complications, to which we shall return later). If the human characters become almost Biblical in their reduction to central attributes of profession (shepherd) and kinship (father, son, wife, mother)—it is striking how rarely they are referred to by name, how much more often by category<sup>52</sup>—their tools acquire a quasi-Homeric dignity by being praised with balanced and leisurely exhaustiveness:<sup>53</sup> Wordsworth says not that Isabel had two old [372]spinning-wheels, but rather that “two wheels she had / Of antique form; this large, for spinning wool; / That small, for flax; and if one wheel had rest, / It was because the other was at work” (82-85); their lamp, “An aged utensil, which had performed / Service beyond all others of its kind” (115-16), not only provides light for their evening labors but also makes the family so widely known as a moral example in their own right<sup>54</sup> that their house becomes catasterized as “The Evening Star” (139). This simplicity of the objects of the poem affects its style as well: Wordsworth explicitly takes over the language of shepherds,<sup>55</sup> and indeed affects a chatty, colloquial tone of his own.<sup>56</sup> Such passages function deictically to anchor the text as firmly as possible in the natural world it describes; the same applies to the repeated references to local oral tradition (18-39, 93-95, 129-39, 451-53, 462-69),<sup>57</sup> to the careful description of the locally typical shape of the chimney (110ff.), and especially to the numerous names of real places in the English country-side (40, 144, etc.). For Wordsworth, the naturalization of his poetic text evidently takes the form, not of an idealization, but of referentiality to places and customs he has seen with his own eyes and for the description of which he can therefore vouch.<sup>58</sup> Wordsworth’s fastidious antiquarianism serves an important poetic purpose: it permits him to claim not merely ideality, but also reality for the pastoral world he depicts.<sup>59</sup> After almost a century of English poets who looked at the English country-side without seeing any pastorals in it, Wordsworth is the first major poet after the Pope of “Windsor-Forest” who dares to claim that the pastoral world can be found within walking distance of one’s home.

Or could be: for in fact “Michael” celebrates a pastoral world that is no longer. A shock awaits the reader who encounters the lines that immediately follow the exposition describing Michael’s blissful family:

While in this sort the simple household lived  
 From day to day, to Michael's ear there came  
 Distressful tidings. Long before the time  
 Of which I speak, the Shepherd had been bound  
 In surety for his brother's son, a man  
 Of an industrious life, and ample means;  
 But unforeseen misfortunes suddenly  
 Had prest upon him; and old Michael now  
 Was summoned to discharge the forfeiture,  
 A grievous penalty, but little less  
 Than half his substance. (207-17)

"The simple household" ("simple" is a generic marker for pastoral) had gone on blissfully "[f]rom day to day," apparently obedient only to the rhythms of natural processes: time had moved in a soothing straight line from its primordial origin in the eternal old age of Michael to Luke's eighteenth birthday. These lines rupture that innocuous regularity by suddenly interjecting a flash-back to an even more remote past. What is more, that past lays commercial and legal obligations upon the present: what had seemed at first to be the last bastion of a Golden Age of purely rural simplicity turns out to be undermined by its insertion into a highly organized socioeconomic network.<sup>60</sup> Nor is this the first time: in their climactic conversation, Michael will reveal [373]that "These fields were burthened when they came to me; / Till I was forty years of age, not more / Than half of my inheritance was mine. / I toiled and toiled; God blessed me in my work, / And till these three weeks past the land was free" (374-78). Michael may well have inherited his land: but it had been mortgaged when it came to him and he had almost lost it to creditors; only his unremitting labor until the age of forty had permitted him to regain the other half of his inheritance. "[N]ot more / Than half of my inheritance" (376-76) is a ghastly echo of "but little less / Than half his substance" (216-17): the threat of loss which Michael had thought he had exorcized in his youth returns now in his old age to haunt him. At the beginning of his connection with his lands stood debt, the menace of alienation, and the necessity of work—and now again at what threatens to be the end. Michael's bucolic love for his family and his land, it seems, is not enough: he must defend the integrity of his hopes against the intrusion of a financial sphere—and not with the *omnia uincit amor* of the *Eclogues* but the *labor omnia uicit* of the *Georgics*.<sup>61</sup> How is this to be explained?

The ideology of pastoral posits an essential link between the harmony between man and man and that between man and nature—the shepherd's joy in his mistress' love is the signal for the fields to burst into flower; when Daphnis dies for love all nature weeps. In "Michael," the harmony between man and man takes in particular the form of the unity of the family, while that between man and nature is expressed by the continuous ownership of one's own land. Wordsworth makes this explicit in a letter: "I have attempted to give a picture of a man, of strong mind and lively sensibility, agitated by two of the most

powerful affections of the human heart; the parental affection, and the love of property, *landed* property, including the feelings of inheritance, home, and personal and family independence.”<sup>62</sup> As long as the pastoral persists, these two themes, family and property, are mutually supportive: Michael’s attachment to his son deepens his attachment to his land by projecting it beyond his own death; his love for his son increases his harmony with nature, and this in turn is a source of vitality for himself. As Wordsworth puts it, only a moment before the catastrophic flash-back, Luke

with his Father daily went, and they  
 Were as companions, why should I relate  
 That objects which the Shepherd loved before  
 Were dearer now? that from the Boy there came  
 Feelings and emanations—things which were  
 Light to the sun and music to the wind;  
 And that the old Man’s heart seemed born again? (197-203)

This putative harmony between family and property need not surprise us, for the two concepts are in certain regards interdependent: property is that over which we exercise the control of being able to pass it on to our family after our death, and our family are those who can contest our will should we decide to pass it on to anyone else; under normal circumstances, only family can ensure that our property will not be dispersed with our death, only property will ensure that our family will not go hungry at that time. In the pastoral opening of this poem, old man Michael had needed a son upon whom to bequeath his land; by a [374]Biblical miracle, he had begotten one. Only so will his fields be truly “patrimonial” (224).<sup>63</sup>

Now it turns out that the border between family and property, so far from being harmonious, is mined by tensions and conflicts at every point.<sup>64</sup> When Michael had acquired his fields from his father, he had inherited not only the land but also a debt on it which had meant that it was not entirely really his and did not become his until he had consumed his best years in toil for it. Now his surety for his nephew has exposed him to sudden and undeserved financial loss: again his family tie threatens him with the loss of half his property. And the central dilemma which Michael will have to face in the second half of the poem will be entailed by a radical incompatibility between the claims of family and those of property. For if Michael wishes to keep his family together, he will have to sell off “a portion of his patrimonial fields” (224); but if he prefers to keep all his land, he will have no choice but to ship his son Luke off to the city where he can earn money to pay off the debt.<sup>65</sup> Either Michael will lose part of his fields permanently, or part of his family temporarily: in either case, he can no longer serve both family and property simultaneously.

Of course, Michael’s decision to send Luke to town leads to disaster—Michael himself, Biblical shepherd-prophet as he is, has premonitions of catastrophe very early on (288-93), and we know that he is right: for in a pastoral poem, the city cannot but destroy what it touches. The brevity, indeed the sketchiness with which Wordsworth races through Luke’s fate (442-46) are

quite striking, but perfectly understandable: for this fate comes as no surprise, and, while the missing details would have been quite at home in a satire or a novel, they would have been thoroughly inappropriate in a pastoral.<sup>66</sup> The poem goes on to end with a litany of deaths—the sheepfold is left unfinished, Michael dies, Isabel dies, the estate is sold, even the cottage is ploughed under (472-79). With the setting of the Evening Star, night would seem to have fallen for good.

By attempting to save both his family and his land, Michael has lost both. And yet he can scarcely be blamed for having made the wrong choice: had he sold his fields, he would certainly have earned Wordsworth's condemnation.<sup>67</sup> Michael's problem was in fact an aporia: there was no route of escape that did not lead to disaster. And the reason lay in the very premises for his behavior: for by defining the relationship between man and nature as one of property, he had introduced a commercial element into it from the very beginning. Michael's insistence upon the freedom of his land—"the land / Shall not go from us, and it shall be free; / He [viz. Luke] shall possess it, free as is the wind / That passes over it" (244-47), "And till these three weeks past the land was free" (378)—becomes particularly curious when we realize that what he means by "free" is "under our total control and no one else's."<sup>68</sup> In general, the pastoral tradition tends to occult questions of property as far as possible: when ownership is mentioned at all, the reader is usually left with the vague but reassuring implication that the shepherd probably owns his flocks.<sup>69</sup> Michael's obsession with property in Wordsworth's poem may be psychologically understandable as the consequence of his years of toil to secure his own; but the economization of nature it entails means that his world is only apparently [375]pastoral and in fact already forms part of an integrated system of banking and commerce. Of course, the fateful decision to treat nature in terms of property is not Michael's, but Wordsworth's, and is directly entailed by the poet's desire to locate his pastoral in the real contemporary country-side: but it is striking that Wordsworth treats the incompatibility of his pastoral with such economic issues as being so self-evident that it need not be explained in detail. At the end, Wordsworth mentions with fatalistic brevity that the land speculators have arrived,<sup>70</sup> and it seems that nothing is left but the oak "[t]hat grew beside their door; and the remains / Of the unfinished Sheepfold may be seen / Beside the boisterous brook of Green-head Ghyll" (480-82).

But is this in fact all? The last line varies slightly a verse which had appeared twice before: once at the very beginning of the poem, when Wordsworth had invited the reader, "If from the public way you turn your steps / Up the tumultuous brook of Green-head Ghyll..." (1-2); and a second time at the opening of the climactic scene of the covenant between father and son at the sheepfold "[n]ear the tumultuous brook of Green-head Ghyll" (322).<sup>71</sup> Topographically, nothing has changed; the poem ends where it begins: "Beside the brook / Appears a straggling heap of unhewn stones" (16-17). But at the beginning of the poem, these stones had been simply stones, for we had not known that "to that simple object appertains / A story—unenriched with strange



events, / Yet not unfit, I deem, for the fireside, / Or for the summer shade” (18-21). At the end, we can recognize in that “straggling heap of unhewn stones” (17) “the unfinished Sheep-fold” (481) which is the emblem at once of Michael’s hopes and of their destruction.

Let us consider more closely these unhewn stones, upon which Wordsworth so insists. From the perspective of the end of the poem, we will have learned that they are an unfinished sheepfold; but when we first meet them at the beginning they can certainly not yet have this meaning, but instead must have quite a different one. We find just such a pile of rough stones in the first sentences of Wordsworth’s “Essay Upon Epitaphs” (1810):

It needs scarcely be said, that an Epitaph presupposes a Monument, upon which it is to be engraven. Almost all Nations have wished that certain external signs should point out the places where their dead are interred. Among savage tribes unacquainted with letters this has mostly been done either by rude stones placed near the graves, or by mounds of earth raised over them.<sup>72</sup>

At first reading, the stones in “Michael” cannot but seem to mark a grave.<sup>73</sup> Even Wordsworth’s emphasis upon their location beside a brook,<sup>74</sup> like his opening address to us, whereby he halts our passage along a road (“If from the public way you turn your steps” 1) and brings to our attention an object which otherwise we “might pass by, / Might see and notice not” (15-16) belong to a clearly defined genre: the funerary epitaph.<sup>75</sup> As Wordsworth writes in his “Essay,” discussing the advantages of the Greco-Roman custom whereby the dead “were frequently interred by the way-sides”:

We might ruminare upon the beauty which the monuments, thus placed, must have borrowed from the surrounding [376]images of nature—from the trees, the wild flowers, from a stream running perhaps within sight or hearing, from the beaten road stretching its weary length hard by. Many tender similitudes must these objects have presented to the mind of the traveller leaning upon one of the tombs, or reposing in the coolness of its shade, whether he had halted from weariness or in compliance with the invitation, “Pause, Traveller!” so often found upon the monuments.<sup>76</sup>

In effect, Wordsworth too is saying to us, “*Siste, viator,*” and is directing us not to overlook these stones because they mark a grave<sup>77</sup> and imply, if properly read, an edifying tale. But so primitive is this tomb that it is altogether devoid of an inscription: hence the danger of its being neglected by the passer-by, and hence Wordsworth’s concern to intervene with an explanation of what would otherwise remain, at best, merely an enigmatic heap of stones. His poem as a whole furnishes the epitaph that the monument lacks and that thereby first makes it a true monument. If its length is extravagant, compared with that of normal epitaphs, this is permitted by the fact that it is a fictional surrogate, and Wordsworth may have thought it justified by a moral content intended to have

the same effect as that type of funerary inscription of which he wrote, “An effect as pleasing is often produced by the recital of an affliction endured with fortitude...”<sup>78</sup> But if so, for whom is this epitaph intended? Who is buried in “Michael”’s tomb? Had the sheepfold been completed, Michael would have won his wager that the relations between man and man and between man and nature are mutually reinforcing; but as it is, that pastoral ideal has been revealed to be undermined by economics and incapable of fulfillment. Hence the unfinished sheepfold is a monument not for Michael alone nor for his family, but for his hopes: the death for which this poem provides an epitaph is that of the whole pastoral world in which every aspect of Michael’s life had had meaning and which has now been utterly annihilated.<sup>79</sup>

“Michael” is a pastoral elegy for pastoral.<sup>80</sup> It mourns the loss of a certain kind of poetry, which we may term naive pastoral: the unselfconscious celebration of the union of man with nature and of man with man. But the poem does not simply mourn this loss: it also draws lessons from it.<sup>81</sup> The story it tells—“the first / Of those domestic tales that spake to me / Of Shepherds, dwellers in the valleys” (21-23)—is an anti-literary tale, told first to a “Boy / Careless of books”<sup>82</sup> who has already learned of “the power / Of Nature” (28-29) and can be led now “by the gentle agency / Of natural objects...to feel / For passions that were not my own, and think / (At random and imperfectly indeed) / On man, the heart of man, and human life” (29-33). At the end of the poem, this scene of the instruction of the young Wordsworth is then converted into a vision of the future poets who will come after the poet’s own death:

Therefore, although it be a history  
Homely and rude, I will relate the same  
For the delight of a few natural hearts;  
And, with yet fonder feeling, for the sake  
[377]Of youthful Poets, who among these hills  
Will be my second self when I am gone. (34-39)

Michael has failed, despite his efforts,<sup>83</sup> to perpetuate his family and their ownership of his land: with Luke’s betrayal, his line has come to an end. With Wordsworth, on the other hand, a new line is now coming into being: it begins with him, and will continue among his poetic progeny in this very same landscape, now his own poetic topography, “among these hills.”<sup>84</sup> Michael’s biological son, Luke, has betrayed him: Wordsworth, Michael’s more authentic, because more faithful, son,<sup>85</sup> has substituted himself and has prolonged Michael’s line after all. But what had begun in the past as a family of farmers will become in the future a family of poets: and if those farmers symbolized pastoral, these poets to come can only represent the lament for pastoral. Thus “Michael” asserts the death of Neoclassical pastoral and its resurrection as a Romantic elegy for Neoclassical pastoral.<sup>86</sup> Michael dies, but “Michael” is written; the sheepfold is not finished, but it can be supplemented with an inscription; the house called the Evening Star is ploughed under, but is not the Evening Star the same as the Morning Star?<sup>87</sup>

This may seem an overly sanguine solution; and it must be admitted that Wordsworth's elegy for pastoral, which lets the genre die only so that it may be born anew, does bear the kind of superficial resemblance to the all too easy resurrections of the traditional pastoral elegy which explains (even if it does not justify) the Victorians' sentimentalizations. But in fact the Wordsworthian pastoral is not so optimistic: it refuses to conceal the fact that the price that must be paid is far in excess of the compensation attained. There is a bitter streak in "Michael," a recognition of irreconcilable loss in the death of all of Michael's hopes, all of his family, all of his world, that saves the poem from the mawkishness of its Victorian illustrations. If Wordsworth's foundation of a new line of poets is to be possible, Michael's son must be sacrificed and Wordsworth must take his place. What would have happened if the sheepfold *had* been finished? The integrity of a successful pastoral would have left no room for an interloper. If Michael is indeed a version of Abraham, to whom a son is born in his old age, then Wordsworth's poem becomes a deeply pessimistic, bitterly ironic parody of the Biblical story, for this time no ram gets caught in the thicket: the covenants ("a covenant / 'Twill be between us," 414-15) are broken rather than confirmed, God does not hear the prayers addressed to him (394, 407-12, 428-30), the father sacrifices his son, and his line is extinguished with him.<sup>88</sup> Even in a lesser work like "The Pet-Lamb," a "Pastoral" as neglected in our age as it was popular among the Victorians (and their illustrators), there is an undercurrent of tension and conflict which is concentrated in the animal's unwillingness to accept the comforts and security the girl offers it and its preference for the dangers and uncertainties of freedom; this provokes an anxious perplexity in the girl in which benevolence does not quite conceal resentment. And what of the voyeuristic poet,<sup>89</sup> who puts verses into her mouth<sup>90</sup> but refuses to accept full responsibility for them?<sup>91</sup> The girl's anxiety to make her own property what will never belong to her and the poet's reluctance to acknowledge as his own property what belongs to no one else are inversely related to one another: the two figures represent both sides of the coin [378]of private property, that in which it refuses ultimately to belong to us (in spite of our desires) and that in which we feel guilt for attempting to appropriate it (in spite of our success). Here too, as in "Michael," what calls itself pastoral is in fact structured and undermined by a systematic discourse of appropriation and control of private property. Daphnis is indeed conveyed to Grasmere: but he does not remain unchanged.

There is thus an ambiguity in Wordsworth's relation to traditional pastoral, one which the poet himself seems to have recognized. For, at the climax of his address to Coleridge in Sicily in *The Prelude*, he exclaims,

Our prayers have been accepted; Thou wilt stand  
Not as an Exile but a Visitant  
On Etna's top; by pastoral Arethuse  
Or, if that fountain be in truth no more,  
Then near some other spring, which by the name  
Thou gratelest, willingly deceived,

Shalt linger as a gladsome Votary,  
And not a Captive, pining for his home.(1805:10.1032-  
39)

What if the pastoral Arethusa has dried up? Wordsworth knows so little about the real topography of Sicily that he does not know for sure, and he does not bother to check. Instead, his advice to Coleridge is that he pick some other fountain and, “willingly deceived,” call it by the same name. The classical source of the pastoral tradition may well be exhausted: but poetry can continue, simply attaching its pastoral ideals to other sources of poetic inspiration. The language of alienation in space and time (“an Exile,” “a Captive, pining for his home”) is replaced by that of religious veneration (“a Visitant,” “a gladsome Votary”): if not through Theocritus, then through some other equally effective source, we will be reconciled with our place, in the world and in history. Here is compensation indeed—but it is bought at the price of a conscious self-deception.



## NOTES

\*That this article appears in a volume of essays in honor of Tom Rosenmeyer is a source of great pleasure for me, for I have learned much from his work and his personal example in fields, and in regards, too numerous to list without (mutual) embarrassment. This very article could be read as an extended gloss on one sentence in his seminal book on the pastoral: “Soon thereafter [viz. after Crabbe’s “The Village”] the British pastoral died a natural death, not to be resuscitated until it could be done on entirely new premises” (*The Green Cabinet* [Berkeley 1973] 26). An earlier version of this article was presented to a seminar at Bryn Mawr, Swarthmore, and Haverford Colleges in February 1985: I am grateful to the students and my hosts, and particularly to Kathleen Wright, for their lively and helpful discussion.

[379]1. I know of no systematic study of Victorian views of pastoral. Many useful hints are scattered in such books as D. Bush, *Mythology and the Romantic Tradition in English Poetry* (New York 1963) e.g., 203ff., 224ff., 419, and R. Jenkyns, *The Victorians and Ancient Greece* (Oxford 1980) e.g., 34, 290f. On the Victorians and Wordsworth in general, the cautions of P. de Man, “Wordsworth and the Victorians,” in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York 1984) 83-92 should be borne in mind.

2. “The dew was falling fast, the stars began to blink; / I heard a voice; it said, ‘Drink, pretty creature, drink!’ / And, looking o’er the hedge, before me I espied / A snow-white mountain-lamb with a Maiden at its side. ... I watched them with delight, they were a lovely pair ... Right towards the lamb she looked; and from a shady place / I unobserved could see the workings of her face ...” (1-4, 14, 17-18). All quotations from Wordsworth’s poems are taken from E. de Selincourt and H. Darbishire, eds., *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth 1-5* (Oxford 1940-49), with the exception of *The Prelude*, which is cited from the 1805 edition (unless otherwise indicated) as it is

presented in E. de Selincourt, ed., *The Prelude; or, Growth of a Poet's Mind*, by William Wordsworth (Oxford 1926).

3. "He as a watchman oftentimes was placed / At gate or gap, to stem or turn the flock; / And, to his office prematurely called, / There stood the urchin, as you will divine, / Something between a hindrance and a help; / And for this cause not always, I believe, / Receiving from his Father hire of praise; / Though nought was left undone which staff, or voice, / Or looks, or threatening gestures, could perform" (185-93).

4. Samuel Johnson, *Lives of the English Poets* (Oxford 1952) I.112.

5. H. Mills, ed., *George Crabbe. Tales, 1812 and Other Selected Poems* (Cambridge 1967) 1, from *The Village* (1783) 1.7-26.

6. J. E. Conington, *Theories of Pastoral Poetry in England, 1684-1798* (Gainesville 1952, repr. New York 1968) remains indispensable. Cf. also M. K. Bragg, *The Formal Eclogue in Eighteenth-Century England* (Orono 1926); A. J. Sambrook, "An Essay on Eighteenth-Century Pastoral, Pope to Wordsworth" Part 1, *Trivium* 5 (1970) 21-35, and Part 2, *Trivium* 6 (1971) 103-15; and Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London 1973).

7. "And Shepherds were the men who pleas'd me first. / Not such as in Arcadian Fastnesses / Sequester'd, handed down among themselves, / So ancient Poets sing, the golden Age; / Nor such, a second Race, allied to these, / As Shakespeare in the Wood of Arden plac'd / Where Phoebe sigh'd for the false Ganymede, / Or there where Florizel and Perdita / Together danc'd, Queen of the Feast and King; / Nor such as Spenser fabled" (1805:8.182-91; in the corresponding lines in the 1850 version, 8.128-44, Wordsworth classicizes by adding Latin and Greek references); "Meanwhile, this Creature, spiritual almost / As those of Books; but more exalted far, / Far more of an imaginative form, / Was not a Corin of the groves, who lives / For his own fancies, or to dance by the hour / In coronal, with Phillis in the midst, / But, for the purposes of kind, a Man / With the most common" (1805:8.416-23, cf. 1850:8.282-89). Cf. on these passages H. Lindenberger, *On Wordsworth's Prelude* (Princeton 1963) 244ff.

8. So already in such "pre-Romantic" pleas for the use of rural diction and themes in poetry as an essay in *The Mirror* 3 (1779) No. 79 (on which cf. Bragg [supra n. 6] 115-16), or Burns' preface to the 1786 edition of his poems (in J. Kinsley, *The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns* [Oxford 1968] 3.971).

9. Pope's essay advertises by explicit statement and by numerous authorial footnotes its indebtedness to seventeenth-century English and Continental literary critics: it may fairly be taken as a programmatic expression of the Neoclassical understanding of pastoral poetry. For Pope's sources, cf. E. Audra and A. Williams, eds., vol. 1 of *The Twickenham Edition of the Poems of Alexander Pope*, ed. J. Butt (New Haven and London 1961) 15-20.

[380]10. Audra-Williams (supra n. 9) 23.

11. "'Tis natural to imagine, that the leisure of those ancient shepherds admitting and inviting some diversion, none was so proper to that solitary and sedentary life as singing; and that in their songs they took occasion to celebrate their own felicity" (Audra-Williams [supra n. 9] 23-24).

12. Audra-Williams (supra n. 9) 24.

13. Listened to closely, it almost seems to echo the Miltonic "Ah, how unlike the place from whence they fell!" (*Paradise Lost* 1.79).

14. Cf. Rosenmeyer, *Green Cabinet* 179-203 and 153-67 respectively.

15. Cf. Rosenmeyer, *Green Cabinet* 45-54 and 145-53 respectively.

16. Audra-Williams (supra n. 9) 25: "If we would copy Nature, it may be useful to take this Idea along with us, that pastoral is an image of what they call the Golden age.

So that we are not to describe our shepherds as shepherds at this day really are, but as they may be conceiv'd then to have been; when the best of men follow'd the employment."

17. Audra-Williams (supra n. 9) 152. The lines cited are 41-42.

18. It should be pointed out that Gay himself had formerly written Popian pastorals (*Rural Sports* 1713) and more realistic ones (*The Shepherd's Week* 1714).

19. P. Cunningham, ed., *The Works of Oliver Goldsmith* (New York and London 1900) 1. 63-65: "Where then, ah! where shall poverty reside, / To scape the pressure of contiguous pride? / If to some common's fenceless limits stray'd, / He drives his flock to pick the scanty blade, / Those fenceless fields the sons of wealth divide, / And even the bare-worn common is denied. / If to the city sped—what waits him there? / To see profusion that he must not share; / To see ten thousand baneful arts combin'd / To pamper luxury, and thin mankind; / ... / Ah, no. To distant climes, a dreary scene, / Where half the convex world intrudes between, / Through torrid tracts with fainting steps they go...."

20. J. and B. Birke, eds., *J. G. Gottsched. Versuch einer kritischen Dichtkunst: Anderer Besonderer Theil = Ausgewählte Werke* 6.2 (Berlin and New York 1973) 75-109. A useful anthology is now available: H. J. Schneider, *Deutsche Idyllentheorien im 18. Jahrhundert* (Tübingen 1988).

21. E. T. Voss, ed., *Salomon Gessner. Idyllen. Kritische Ausgabe* (Stuttgart 1973) 15-16: "Diese Dichtungs-Art bekömmt daher einen besonderen Vortheil, wenn man die Scenen in ein entferntes Weltalter setzt; sie erhalten dadurch einen höhern Grad der Wahrscheinlichkeit, weil sie für unsre Zeiten nicht passen, wo der Landmann mit saurer Arbeit unterthänig seinem Fürsten und den Städten den Überfluß liefern muß, und Unterdrückung und Armuth ihn ungesittet und schlau und niederträchtig gemacht haben."

22. Respectively, F. Schiller, *Sämtliche Werke. Fünfter Band: Erzählungen/Theoretische Schriften*<sup>3</sup> (Munich 1962) 749; H. Eichner, ed., *Friedrich Schlegel. Geschichte der alten und neuen Literatur = Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe* 6 (Munich 1961) 372 (hereafter this edition is referred to as *KFSA*); F. W. J. Schelling, *Philosophie der Kunst* (Darmstadt 1974) 305; N. Miller, ed., *Jean Paul. Vorshule der Ästhetik*<sup>2</sup> (Munich 1974) 260f., 283; G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik* 1 = *Werke in zwanzig Bänden* 13 (Frankfurt a.M. 1970) 250, 336, and *Ästhetik* 3 = *Werke* 15.391f.; K. Marx and F. Engels, *Werke*, ed. Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus beim ZK der SED (Berlin 1956-68) 4.337.

23. The more usual term in German theoretical writings is not "pastoral" but "idyll": the difference, which may be ascribed to equal doses of anti-French and philhellenic sentiment, is unimportant for the present argument.

24. "Aber ein solcher Zustand findet nicht bloß vor dem Anfange der Kultur statt, sondern er ist es auch, den die Kultur, wenn sie überall nur eine bestimmte Tendenz haben soll, als ihr letztes Ziel beabsichtigt. Die Idee dieses Zustandes allein und der [381]Glaube an die mögliche Realität derselben kann den Menschen mit allen den Übeln versöhnen, denen er auf dem Wege der Kultur unterworfen ist, und wäre sie bloß Schimäre, so würden die Klagen derer, welche die größere Sozietät und die Anbauung des Verstandes bloß als ein Übel verschreien und jenen verlassenem Stand der Natur für den wahren Zweck des Menschen ausgeben, vollkommen gegründet sein. Dem Menschen, der in der Kultur begriffen ist, liegt also unendlich viel daran, von der Ausführbarkeit jener Idee in der Sinnenwelt, von der möglichen Realität jenes Zustandes eine sinnliche Bekräftigung zu erhalten, und da die wirkliche Erfahrung, weit entfernt, diesen Glauben zu nähren, ihn vielmehr beständig widerlegt, so kömmt auch hier, wie in

so vielen andern Fällen, das Dichtungsvermögen der Vernunft zu Hülfe, um jene Idee zur Anschauung zu bringen und in einem einzelnen Fall zu verwirklichen" (Schiller [supra n. 22] 746). [Editors' note: cf. also the essay of Paul Alpers in this volume.]

25. "Es gibt eine Poesie, deren Eins und Alles das Verhältnis des Idealen und des Realen ist, und die also nach der Analogie der philosophischen Kunstsprache Transzendentalpoesie heißen müßte. Sie beginnt als Satire mit der absoluten Verschiedenheit des Idealen und Realen, schwebt als Elegie in der Mitte, und endigt als Idylle mit der absoluten Identität beider." (*Athenäums-Fragment* 238, cited from H. Eichner, ed., *Friedrich Schlegel. Charakteristiken und Kritiken 1 [1796-1801] = KFSa 2* [Munich 1967] 204); "Das romantische Epos ist eine Art Idylle" and "Das Romantische in Rücksicht auf den Ton die Empfindung nichts anders als ZUGLEICH *Elegisch* und *Idyllisch*. Diese Mischung ist Grundlage der Sentimentalität." (H. Eichner, ed., *Friedrich Schlegel. Fragmente zur Poesie und Literatur 1 = KFSa 16* [Munich 1981] 91 [Frg. 5.66] and 111 [Frg. 5.328]). On the "Idylle über den Müsiggang" in Schlegel's novel *Lucinde* (1799) (H. Eichner, ed., *Friedrich Schlegel. Dichtungen = KFSa 5* [Munich 1962] 25-29), cf. J. Hibberd, "The Idylls in Friedrich Schlegel's *Lucinde*," *DVJS* 51 (1977) 222-46.

26. Cf. in general L. J. Ryan, *Hölderlins Lehre vom Wechsel der Töne* (Stuttgart 1960).

27. A useful survey is provided by R. Böschstein-Schäfer, *Idylle* (Stuttgart 1967) 78-97. The selection in P. Merker, ed., *Deutsche Idyllendichtung 1700-1840 nach stilgeschichtlichen Gesichtspunkten ausgewählt* (Berlin 1934) is quite inadequate.

28. Cf. P. Szondi, *Poetik und Geschichtsphilosophie 2. Von der normativen zur spekulativen Gattungspoetik. Schellings Gattungspoetik*, ed. W. Fietkau (Frankfurt a.M. 1974) 7-183. The precursor is, as often, Kant, this time in the deductions of the Tables of Judgments and of Categories (*Kritik der reinen Vernunft* A70=B95 and A80=B106 respectively).

29. Schiller (supra n. 22) 728 n. 1 and especially 744 n. 2.

30. Especially in Fontenelle: cf. Congleton (supra n. 6) 66-68, 182.

31. The failure to recognize this vitiates much of a recent attempt to examine the "permutations of pastoral in English poetry in the light of Schiller's modes": L. Metzger, *One Foot in Eden. Modes of Pastoral in Romantic Poetry* (Chapel Hill 1986), here xiv.

32. E.g., R. T. Kerlin, *Theocritus in English Literature* (Lynchburg 1910), L. N. Broughton, *The Theocritean Element in the Poetry of William Wordsworth* (1920). K. Lienemann, *Die Belesenheit von William Wordsworth* (Berlin 1908) 212-13, 216-20, provides a useful collection of material but is incomplete and needs to be used with caution.

33. So especially, despite its many suggestive observations, H. Lindenberg, "The Idyllic Moment: On Pastoral and Romanticism," *College English* 34 (1972) 335-51. The most useful study on Wordsworth and pastoral is S. Parrish, "Michael and the Pastoral Ballad," in J. Wordsworth and B. Darlington, eds., *Bicentenary Wordsworth [382] Studies in Memory of John Alban Finch* (Ithaca 1970) 50-75; cf. also Lindenberg (supra n. 7) 243-52, and Metzger (supra n. 31) 79-183.

34. The most recent discussion of pastoral in Blake, Coleridge, and Shelley, and in Keats, is Metzger (supra n. 31) 43ff. and 185ff. respectively.

35. W. J. B. Owen and J. W. Smyser, eds., *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth* (Oxford 1974) 1.122-24. On the other hand, Wordsworth's emphasis in this "Preface" upon strong emotion is derived not from the tradition of the pastoral but from that of the ballad.

36. So for example in Pope's "Discourse on Pastoral Poetry": "...the fable simple, the manners not too polite nor too rustic: The thoughts are plain, yet admit a little quickness and passion, but that short and flowing: The expression humble, yet as pure as the language will afford; neat, but not florid; easy, and yet lively. In short, the fable, manners, thoughts, and expressions are full of the greatest simplicity in nature....As there is a difference between simplicity and rusticity, so the expression of simple thoughts should be plain, but not clownish" (Audra-Williams [supra n. 9] 24-25, 32).

37. Owen-Smyser (supra n. 35) 3.28.

38. Cf. Parrish (supra n. 33) 60. Of the other genres Wordsworth lists in this passage—narrative, dramatic, lyrical, didactic, and philosophic satire—only the lyrical might seem a strong competitor for the idyllium's claim to represent the core of Wordsworth's poetic production (the lyrical does after all include such typically Wordsworthian forms as the ode and the ballad); yet Wordsworth's definition of the lyrical emphasizes that it needs "the accompaniment of music" (Owen-Smyser [supra n. 35] 3.27), something he does not seem to have sought for his own lyrics.

39. Cf. the apparatus *ad loc.* in de Selincourt-Darbishire (supra n. 2) 4.279.

40. "Hence in a season of calm weather / Though inland far we be, / Our Souls have sight of that immortal sea / Which brought us hither, / Can in a moment travel thither, / And see the Children sport upon the shore, / And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore" (165-71).

41. "Then sing, ye Birds, sing, sing a joyous song! / And let the young Lambs bound / As to the tabor's sound!" (172-74, cf. 19-21).

42. "And O, ye Fountains, Meadows, Hills, and Groves, / Forebode not any severing of our loves! / Yet in my heart of hearts I feel your might; / I only have relinquished one delight / To live beneath your more habitual sway" (191-95).

43. On this passage, cf. Metzger (supra n. 31) 161ff.

44. "I was perplex'd and sought / To accomplish the transition by such means / As did not lie in nature, sacrificed / The exactness of a comprehensive mind / To scrupulous and microscopic views / That furnish'd out materials for a work / Of false imagination, placed beyond / The limits of experience and of truth" (10.842-49).

45. Cf. de Selincourt's note *ad loc.* in the commentary. The reference to Enna invokes the rape of Proserpina, one archetype of loss redeemed by natural resurrection.

46. This remains true even if, as Parrish (supra n. 33) 50 suggests, Wordsworth's composition of the poem was due to Coleridge's inability to complete "Christabel."

47. Metzger's discussion of "Michael" ([supra n. 31] 137ff.) has at least the merit of moving the issue of its pastoral quality into the center of the interpretation; contrast, e.g., M. Levinson, *Wordsworth's Great Period Poems. Four Essays* (Cambridge 1986) 58ff. (59 on the poem's sub-title).

48. E.g., in the "Ode. Intimations of Immortality": "The cataracts blow their trumpets from the steep" (25); "Ye blessed Creatures, I have heard the call / Ye to each other make; I see / The heavens laugh with you in your jubilee; / My heart is at your festival, / My head hath its coronal" (36-40); "But there's a Tree, of many, one, / A single Field which I have looked upon, / Both of them speak of something that is gone: / The pansy at my feet / Doth the same tale repeat" (51-55).

[383]49. Cf. Levinson (supra n. 47) 62.

50. Whether or not Wordsworth is committing meteorological nonsense here, what matters is clearly his belief that there are subtle underground rumblings portending consequences still remote in space and time, but eventually to arrive with important effects upon the here and now.



51. Here the metrical suspension before the last line is added has the effect of lending an almost Methuselan length to Michael's own "old" age.

52. Luke is introduced at line 87 but named for the first time at line 103; Isabel is introduced at line 79 but named for the first time at line 226. Even Michael is introduced as a shepherd before being named (41).

53. Cf. G. H. Hartman, *Wordsworth's Poetry 1787-1814* (New Haven 1964) 263.

54. "This light was famous in its neighbourhood, / And was a public symbol of the life / That thrifty Pair had lived" (129-31).

55. "[I]n shepherd's phrase, / With one foot in the grave" (89-90), "Thence in our rustic dialect was called / The Clipping Tree" (168-69).

56. "[A]s you will divine" (188), "I believe" (190).

57. In the earliest version of the poem, Wordsworth claimed to have heard the whole story from Michael himself (cf. Parrish [supra n. 33] 72). Thereby the poem's claim for veracity would be further strengthened; but on the other hand, as we shall see, its elegiac character would have been jeopardized: in the end, Michael had to be killed off.

58. As Parrish (supra n. 33) 51 points out, the reports in Dorothy's journals that William was working "at the sheep-fold" must at least sometimes mean that he was actually composing the poem at the site at which it was set. The verisimilitude of "Michael" was stressed by Coleridge: cf. E. L. Griggs, ed., *Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Collected Letters* (Oxford 1956-71) 2.663-64.

59. Cf. in general D. Perkins, *Wordsworth and the Poetry of Sincerity* (Cambridge, Mass. 1964) 33-60. Oddly, K. Kroeber, *Romantic Narrative Art* (Madison, Wisconsin 1960) 82f., interprets such details as Wordsworth's way of overcoming naturalism.

60. Cf. Levinson (supra n. 47) 66.

61. Cf. K. Heinzelman, *The Economics of the Imagination* (Amherst, Mass. 1980) 222. On the opposition between these two modes, cf. Rosenmeyer, *Green Cabinet* 20ff.

62. To Thomas Poole, 9 April 1801: E. de Selincourt, ed., *The Early Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth (1787-1805)* (Oxford 1935) 166.

63. The phrase in a manuscript variant is even more explicit: "His native vale and patrimonial fields" (de Selincourt-Darbishire [supra n. 2] 2.483).

64. The interpretations of "Michael" offered by Heinzelman (supra n. 61) 215-23 and Levinson (supra n. 47) 58-79 rightly stress the economic issues raised by the poem, but go astray partly by metaphorizing them exaggeratedly, partly by neglecting this specific issue of the conflict between family and property.

65. Oddly, S. Lea, "Wordsworth and his 'Michael': The Pastor Passes," *ELH* 45 (1978) 55-68, here 60, suggests that Michael has culpably neglected a third option: "Why, instead of dispatching Luke, does the father not permit him to work the land, to save it, as he himself has done against similar obstacles?" But such a project would probably exceed the degree of profitability Wordsworth seems to attribute to Michael's sheep-raising (cf. Levinson [supra n. 47] 63, 67f.). Moreover, Lea's suggestion takes no account of the time factor: labor in the city yields liquid capital far more quickly than farming.

66. Cf. R. Feingold, *Nature and Society. Later Eighteenth-Century Uses of the Pastoral and Georgic* (New Brunswick, N. J. 1978) 198-99.

67. Cf. "Repentance. A Pastoral Ballad" probably written at about this time: "The fields which with covetous spirit we sold, / Those beautiful fields, the delight of the day, / Would have brought us more good than a burthen of gold, / Could we but have [384]been as contented as they. / ... / With our pastures about us, we could not be sad; / Our comfort was near if we ever were crost; / But the comfort, the blessings, and wealth that we had, / We slighted them all,—and our birth-right was lost" (1-4, 21-24).

Wordsworth dated this poem to 1804; Parrish (supra n. 33) 54 suggests the date 1801 as “more likely.”

68. For other possible ironies in this usage, cf. Levinson (supra n. 47) 70.

69. Cf. Rosenmeyer, *Green Cabinet* 98-129; in this regard (as in others) Virgil is a brilliant exception.

70. “[G]reat changes have been wrought / In all the neighbourhood” (478-79).

71. This is noted by Metzger (supra n. 31) 145, 155.

72. Owen-Smyser (supra n. 35) 2.49.

73. This is even clearer in the words of an earlier version: “There is a shapeless crowd of unhewn stones / That lie together, some in heaps, and some / In lines, that seem to keep themselves alive / In the last dotage of a dying form” (de Selincourt-Darbishire [supra n. 2] 2.482).

74. Wordsworth himself banalized this feature in a note to the 1802-5 edition by alluding to the water’s utility: “It may be proper to inform some readers that a sheepfold in these mountains is an unroofed building of stone walls, with different divisions. It is generally placed by the side of a brook, for the convenience of washing the sheep...” (de Selincourt-Darbishire [supra n. 2] 2.484-85).

75. On inscriptions and epigrams in Romantic poetry, cf. G. H. Hartman, *Beyond Formalism. Literary Essays 1958-1970* (New Haven 1970) 206-30 (especially 224 on “Michael”). Metzger (supra n. 31) 142 notes in passing this feature of “Michael” but does not develop the point.

76. Owen-Smyser (supra n. 35) 2.53-54.

77. Cf. Hartman (supra n. 53) 261.

78. Owen-Smyser (supra n. 35) 2.66. This parallel explains the phrase in “Michael,” “I will relate the same / For the *delight* of a few natural hearts,” which so troubles Levinson (supra n. 47) 61f.

79. It is of interest in this connection that the lines Wordsworth quotes from Virgil’s *Eclagues* in his 1815 “Preface” are those in which Meliboeus laments that, for him, the pastoral world has passed forever: *non ego uos posthac uiridi proiectus in antro / dumosa pendere procul de rupe uidebo* (*Ecl.* 1.76-77: Owen-Smyser [supra n. 35] 3.31).

80. Pace Heinzelman (supra n. 51) 216. Hartman (supra n. 53) 262, 264-65, suggests that the pastoral quality of “Michael” derives from the consolation offered the old man by nature after his son’s betrayal; Levinson (supra n. 47) 60, 76, seems to endorse a similar reading. Yet if so, we would expect Wordsworth to have devoted more to this episode than the very few, sketchy lines with which he has in fact treated it. Evidently, Michael’s survival for another seven years is of as little concern as Luke’s degradation in the city: Wordsworth’s emphasis is on what comes before.

81. In a contemporary letter to Charles James Fox, Wordsworth explained the moral message of the poem at some length: his attempt “to draw a picture of the domestic affections as I know they exist amongst a class of men who are now almost confined to the North of England” had been designed to counteract “the rapid decay of the domestic affections among the lower orders of society” (14 January 1801: de Selincourt [supra n. 62] 261, 260). But how exactly “Michael” was supposed to achieve this effect is far from obvious: whatever Michael himself was suffering from, it was certainly not a “rapid decay of the domestic affections”; while it is hard to see what moral a reader could derive from the account of Michael’s catastrophe such as to strengthen his own familial feelings. It seems best to regard Wordsworth’s letter not as a useful exegesis of his poem, but rather as a later attempt to impose upon it a political message which the poem itself did not communicate clearly: the letter indicates not what the poem says, but what [385]it does not say. Levinson’s attempt ([n. 47] 58ff.) to put into the center of the

interpretation of "Michael" this letter (or the discrepancy between "Michael" and it) goes nowhere.

82. Thus this pastoral tale parallels the stories of Sicily Wordsworth alludes to in the *Prelude*: "Child of the mountains, among shepherds reared, / Ere yet familiar with the classic page, / I learnt to dream of Sicily" (1850:11.424-26).

83. Speaking to Luke, Michael stresses the continuity between his relations to his ancestors and to his son: "Even to the utmost I have been to thee / A kind and a good Father: and herein / I but repay a gift which I myself / Received at others' hands; for, though now old, / Beyond the common life of man, I still / Remember them who loved me in my youth" (361-66).

84. Lea (supra n. 65) 59 and *passim* suggests that if the young poets bear the same relation to Wordsworth as Luke does to Michael, their potential not only for filiation, but also for betrayal provokes deep anxiety in Wordsworth; a similar interpretation is suggested in Heinzelman (supra n. 61) 218f., 221. But there is no evidence in this poem for any doubt on Wordsworth's part that the poets who will follow him will be true to his legacy. Lea's projection of Michael's failure onto Wordsworth fundamentally misconstrues the poem: for the former belongs to its pastoral, the latter to its elegiac dimension. Cf. also the objections of Levinson (supra n. 47) 148-49, n. 6, to Heinzelman's analogization.

85. Cf. Hartman (supra n. 53) 266.

86. Nevertheless, Wordsworth termed "Michael" a "Pastoral." On the typically Romantic poetic strategy of making poetry out of the material of its self-proclaimed impossibility, of celebrating the ineluctability of its own loss, cf. G. W. Most, "Des verschieden Gesinnten Sinnesverbindung: Zur poetischen Einheit der Alten," pp. 1-29 in K. Gloy and E. Rudolph, eds., *Einheit als Grundfrage der Philosophie* (Darmstadt 1985), here 4, and for an important example "Hölderlin and the Poetry of History," *The Germanic Review* 61 (1986) 154-67. An argument very similar to the present one could be made about Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn": I hope to return to this issue on another occasion.

87. For the poetological implications of the image, cf. G. H. Hartman, *The Fate of Reading and Other Essays* (Chicago 1975) 147-78. Lea (supra n. 65) 67 sees only the bleak aspect of this image and fails to recognize its redemptive hint: cf. supra n. 84. In this regard, Heinzelman (supra n. 61) 222-23 is juster.

88. Cf. H. Bloom, *The Visionary Company. A Reading of English Romantic Poetry* (London 1962) 178, and J. Beer, *Wordsworth and the Human Heart* (London 1978) 181. Levinson (supra n. 47) 59, 67, 68ff., hopelessly muddles the poem by importing into it what she calls "New Testament" elements (for which there is no textual evidence) and construing a (non-existent) conflict between them and its Old Testament aspects.

89. Cf. the verses cited supra n. 2.

90. "If Nature to her tongue could measured numbers bring, / Thus, thought I, to her lamb that little Maid might sing" (19-20).

91. "And it seemed, as I retraced the ballad line by line, / That but half of it was hers, and one half of it was *mine*. // Again, and once again, did I repeat the song; / 'Nay,' said I, 'more than half to the damsel must belong, / For she looked with such a look, and she spake with such a tone, / That I almost received her heart into my own'" (63-68).