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***‘Experiments in Form and Genre’: Dark Pastoral in the
Poetry of William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge***

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Abstract

This thesis explores the use of the pastoral genre in the poetry of William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Taking its cue from William Empson's *Some Versions of Pastoral*, this study interrogates the idea of the romanticised rural idyll. It argues for a variegated and dynamic generic landscape that is underpinned by a new subgenre called the dark pastoral. Examining Wordsworth and Coleridge's early poetry as well as Wordsworth's epics, this thesis charts the experimentation, rehabilitation and evolution of the pastoral across 55 years. Through the approach of new formalism, this study reveals the poetic techniques and innovations of two Romantic poets committed to generic advancement.

The first chapter introduces the idea of generic experimentation in its analysis of the lyric 'I' in *Lines Written a few miles above Tintern Abbey, on revisiting the Wye during a Tour. July 13, 1798*, 'The Old Cumberland Beggar, a Description' and 'The Nightingale'. The second chapter investigates pastoral anxiety in Coleridge's 'Conversation Poems' and notes the transformative effect of the imagination in lyrics including 'This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison' and *Fears in Solitude*. The third chapter investigates Coleridge's hybridisation of the pastoral with myth narrative in its exploration of self-consciousness in 'Kubla Khan', *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and 'Christabel'. Chapter four discusses how Wordsworth manipulates genre to produce his epic tale of suffering, *The Excursion*. The final chapter reveals the new poet-hero in its examination of pastoral trial in *The Prelude*.

Although the word 'pastoral' rarely appears in Wordsworth and Coleridge's works, the genre underpins their poetic thoughts. Both poets relish the challenge of reinventing the pastoral, figuring it as an opportunity to modernise and liberate key axioms such as the return, Arcadia and nostalgia. Through their unique approaches to generic experimentation, Wordsworth and Coleridge drastically alter the style, form and content of the bucolic landscape, ultimately revealing two distinct but imaginative types of pastoral poetry.

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Declaration

I, the author, confirm that the Thesis is my own work. I am aware of the University's Guidance on the Use of Unfair Means (www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/unfair-means). This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, university.

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Introduction: Wordsworth, Coleridge and the Pastoral

The pastoral genre plays a vital role in the poetry of William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. According to J. E. Congleton, pastoral is defined as ‘a fictionalised imitation of rural life, usually the life of an imaginary Golden Age in which shepherds and shepherdesses play a prominent part; its ends are sometimes sentimental or romantic’.¹ Yet, for Wordsworth and Coleridge, pastoral does not straightforwardly function as an artificially mimetic art form, nor does it always display a fascination with irony or nostalgia.² As shown from the time of their earliest works, such as ‘Easter Holidays’ (1787) and *An Evening Walk* (1793), their version of the pastoral concerns itself with the subjective experience in nature, distinctive, multi-layered and unprecedented. Uninterested in reproducing pastoral’s ‘mindless repetition of tricks and tropes’, Wordsworth and Coleridge embark upon a lifelong task to rehabilitate what had become an antiquated, over-polished and limited genre.³ In an era shaped by the upheaval of the Agricultural, French and Industrial revolutions, pastoral becomes the primary mode of understanding man’s complex and sometimes confusing relation to the world.

Living through mass rural depopulation, large scale industrialisation and changing attitudes towards the countryside gave these poets a certain resilience and perspective, both of which inform and influence their depiction of rural scenes. Wordsworth and Coleridge’s pastorals do not function as ‘discourse[s] of retreat’, but individual experiences captured within the context of a changing natural world.⁴ Reading the landscape anew, these Romantic poets discover new meaning in a genre that, in their hands, refuses to adhere to the eighteenth-century fixation with high artifice, neo-

¹ J. E. Congleton and T. V. F. Brogan. *Pastoral*, in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. by Alex Preminger, et al. (Princeton; NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993) *ProQuest* <<https://www.proquest.com/encyclopedias-reference-works/pastoral/docview/2137909010/se-2?accountid=13828>> [Accessed 26 July 2021].

² William Empson, ‘They That Have Power’, in *Some Versions of Pastoral* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1935), pp. 89-115 (p. 111).

³ Fiona Stafford, ‘Plain Living and Ungarnish’d Stories: Wordsworth and the Survival of Pastoral’, *The Review of English Studies*, 59.238 (2008) <<https://doi.org/10.1093/res/hgm00>> [Accessed 26 July 2021] (p. 122). ‘Tricks and tropes’ encompasses the fascination with irony, the use of the double plot, the return to the Golden Age, the retreat/return and nostalgia. For further information see William Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1935)

⁴ Terry Gifford, ‘The Discourse of Retreat’, in *Pastoral, The New Critical Idiom*, ed. by John Drakakis (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 45-80 (p. 46).

classical imitation and the literary elite. Distinguishing themselves from poets such as Alexander Pope, James Thomson and William Cowper, Wordsworth and Coleridge reimagine the ‘archaic and irrelevant’ pastoral as the contemporary genre of common man.⁵ The first study of its kind, this thesis contends that Wordsworth and Coleridge are master innovators of the pastoral genre, not least because of their deployment of a unique subgenre that I term the ‘dark pastoral’. ‘It must be not be forgotten that when a new kind [of genre] is founded its literary momentum may carry it far beyond the particular situation from which it took its origin’ writes Frank Kermode.⁶ Accurately capturing the progressive and even radical nature of Wordsworth and Coleridge’s thought, Kermode reminds us that genres evolve: they are not static entities. For these poets, the pastoral is not simply ‘any literature that describes the country with an implicit or explicit contrast to the urban’.⁷ Genre and generic development are defined by the presence of an experimental subgenre: the dark pastoral. Driven by a strong and distinctive lyric ‘I’, the dark pastoral is a subcategory of pastoral that is characterised by a darker, heightened and paradoxical type of artifice. Where nature used to be lustrous and pleasant, it is now jagged and obscure. Tapping into the artist’s imagination, the dark pastoral prioritises personal experience over inherited archetypes to reveal a natural world that is dynamic, variegated and crucially, imperfect. Genre is no longer about land husbandry, the British Empire or the melancholic shepherd swain, but rather the artist’s subjective vision.⁸ Through the dark pastoral, Wordsworth and Coleridge are able to order and express their own reflections, memories and anxieties, grounding their poetry in ‘reality’ as opposed to ‘convention’.⁹ With a pastoral that is much more diffuse, these poets reconstitute key generic axioms while simultaneously bringing to the fore a type of poetry that allows

⁵ Stafford, ‘Plain Living and Ungarnish’d Stories: Wordsworth and the Survival of Pastoral’, p. 125.

⁶ Frank Kermode, ‘Introduction’, in *English Pastoral Poetry from the Beginnings to Marvel*, ed. by Frank Kermode (London: George G. Harrap & Co, 1952), pp. 11-44 (p. 12).

⁷ Terry Gifford, ‘Three Kinds of Pastoral’, in *Pastoral* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 1-12 (p. 2).

⁸ See for example, Terry McCormick, ‘Wordsworth and Shepherds’, in *The Oxford Handbook of William Wordsworth*, ed. by Richard Gravil and Daniel Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 629-644, Samuel Baker, ‘The Maritime Georgic and the Lake Poet Empire of Culture’, *ELH*, 75.3 (2008) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/27654625>> [Accessed 10 December 2019] (p. 532) and James Holly Hanford ‘The Pastoral Elegy and Milton’s Lycidas’, *PMLA*, 25.3 (1910) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/456731>> [Accessed 14 August 2021].

⁹ My reading follows on from Stuart Curran’s claim that a ‘true pastoral will find its impetus in reality, not convention’. See Curran, ‘Pastoral’, in *Poetic Form and British Romanticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 85-127 (p. 108).

us to ‘see into the life of things’ (*Tintern Abbey*, l. 50).¹⁰ Reverting back to the ‘pastoral’s traditional meaning as a form of lyrical poetry’, Wordsworth and Coleridge mobilise genre through the dark pastoral.¹¹ Though eco-critics such as Terry Gifford, Greg Garrard and Timothy Morton argue for Romantic ‘post-pastoral’, ‘radical pastoral’ and the anti-humanistic pastoral, this thesis reads the dark pastoral as central to Wordsworth and Coleridge’s personal and artistic development.¹²

In a recently published article Heather Sullivan argues that the dark pastoral is ‘an ecocritical trope adapted to the “new nature” of climate change’.¹³ Sullivan’s timely essay introduces the newly coined term ‘dark pastoral’ as a symptom of the modern global ecological crisis, specifically relevant to the events of the twenty-first century. Despite its various green insights, this anthropocentric approach reduces the dark pastoral to a contemporary ‘trope’, failing to identify its broader usage across the seventeen centuries since Theocritus’ *Idylls*. By reading the dark pastoral as a generic and not an ecological product, this thesis places new importance on the lyric ‘I’ as deployed in the context of the pastoral genre. Genre gives Wordsworth and Coleridge the capacity to evaluate the full breadth of experience—both light and shade—at a particular moment in time. The dark pastoral operates as an indicator and marker of personal growth, capturing key spots of time from childhood through to adulthood. This subgenre is fundamentally about personal transformation through reflection. As Coleridge details in a notebook entry dated May 1825, ‘Reflection is the *name* for Understanding’.¹⁴ The dark pastoral is the vehicle through which such understanding takes place. Rather than retreating to a ‘distant past of comparative innocence’, Wordsworth and Coleridge construct idiosyncratic pastorals that confront subjects

¹⁰ William Wordsworth, ‘Lines Written a Few Lines above Tintern Abbey, on revisiting the Wye during a Tour. July 13, 1798’, in *Wordsworth and Coleridge Lyrical Ballads 1798 and 1802*, Oxford World’s Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 193-198 (p. 193).

¹¹ Heather I. Sullivan, ‘The Dark Pastoral: Material Ecocriticism in the Anthropocene’, *Ecocene: Cappadocia Journal of Environmental Humanities*, 1.2 (2020) <<https://doi.org/10.46863/ecocene.16>> [Accessed 26 June 2021] (p. 20).

¹² Terry Gifford, ‘Post-pastoral’, in *Pastoral* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 146-174 (p. 150), Greg Garrard, ‘Radical Pastoral’, *Studies in Romanticism*, 35.3 (1996) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/25601184>> [Accessed 1 August 2021] and Timothy Morton, ‘Romanticism and the Environmental Subject’, *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (London: Harvard University Press, 2007), pp. 165-184.

¹³ Sullivan, ‘The Dark Pastoral: Material Ecocriticism in the Anthropocene’, p. 19.

¹⁴ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Entry 5209 [20.38], f19, in *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge 1819-1826: Entries 4505-5471*, Volume 4, ed. by Kathleen Coburn and Merton Christenson (London: Routledge, 1990).

from their own recent pasts.¹⁵ They use genre to understand themselves. The dark pastoral works as more than just a stylistic device in that it relays an entirely new personal ethos centred on lived experience. Omitting the ‘lofty sentiment, sweet rhythm, ornate rhetoric, elaborate description, and high-flown oratory’ of Sir Philip Sidney’s *Arcadia*, the dark pastoral provides an opportunity to explore gritty emotion, dissonance and even unconventional natural beauty.¹⁶ As Peter V. Marinelli observes, ‘In confronting the literary tradition of pastoral then, in opposing to it a world of contemporary or just-outgrown pastoral reality, [Coleridge and] Wordsworth...in effect draw a line, apparently for ever, between the classical and the modern pastoral’.¹⁷ The modern Romantic pastoral, distinguished by its darker generic undercurrent, blurs into lyric to reveal the crisis and development of self in a time of mass social, economic and political change.

To confine the dark pastoral to the twenty-first century as Heather Sullivan does is to deny the cultivation of a subgenre that found its roots in the 1790s. Wordsworth and Coleridge are conscious of the dark pastoral from the very beginning of their literary careers, never shying away from its presence. Being so well acquainted with pastoral’s history, these poets are aware that they are experimenting with a long-established genre, enlisting the dark pastoral not just as a composite function of pastoral but as a complex mode of expression. To reframe Sullivan’s argument, the dark pastoral is not simply about the ‘decay and horror’ of modern age, but an opportunity to explore the more challenging aspects of Wordsworth and Coleridge’s lives.¹⁸ It is used to confront and work through difficulty. As demonstrated in the *Dream of the Arab* in Wordsworth’s *Prelude* and Coleridge’s *Fears in Solitude*, the parameters of pastoral are expanded in order to accommodate a new range of experience. There is a self-consciousness attributed to the poets’ full experience of the world where nature no longer appears ‘pantheistically as the nurse of all life’.¹⁹ Nor does it twinkle ‘like Bambi’s glittering eyes’.²⁰ The countryside is now a source of tension and struggle.

¹⁵ Peter V. Marinelli, ‘Perspectives on Pastoral’, in *Pastoral* (London: Methuen & Co, 1971), pp. 1-14 (p. 3).

¹⁶ Congleton and Brogan, *Pastoral*.

¹⁷ Marinelli, ‘Perspectives on Pastoral’, p. 4.

¹⁸ Sullivan, ‘The Dark Pastoral: Material Ecocriticism in the Anthropocene’, p. 2.

¹⁹ William Empson, ‘Milton and Bentley’, in *Some Versions of Pastoral* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1935), pp. 149-191 (p. 188).

²⁰ Timothy Morton, ‘Romanticism and the Environmental Subject’, in *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2009), pp. 79-139 (p. 121).

Genre, by consequence, is spliced to encapsulate the full breadth and darkness of experience as recalled through the imagination. In keeping with William Hazlitt's comment in 'My First Acquaintance with Poets', Wordsworth and Coleridge's use of the dark pastoral brings 'the sense of a new style and a new spirit in poetry...[that has] something of the effect that arises from the turning up of fresh soil, or the first welcome breath of Spring'.²¹ Though not necessarily regenerative or restorative, the dark pastoral foregrounds the true depth of Wordsworth and Coleridge's generic prowess during the period of 1790-1850.

Despite this mutual interest in generic advancement Wordsworth and Coleridge have very separate and distinct pastoral identities.²² Though equally radical, Wordsworth's experimentation with pastoral is much more subtle and cumulative in comparison to Coleridge. The pace of the Wordsworthian pastoral is slower and yet the level of detail is astounding. From *Descriptive Sketches* to *The Prelude*, one notes an artist who writes like a landscape painter, building and layering his pastorals with confidence and precision. Even where darkness is concerned, the poet is keen to give us shade, writing into the poetry intricate landscapes that are inflected with nuance upon nuance. When in *An Evening Walk* Wordsworth speaks of the 'wan noon brooding still' (*An Evening Walk*, l. 47), we sense a poet who not only observes the landscape but reads into its behaviours with intense interest.²³ Nature becomes a stimulus as Wordsworth fully immerses himself in genre. The verb 'brooding' hints at the dark pastoral with its undertone of anxiety, indicating the poet's awareness of the subgenre even in 1793. From his first published works, Wordsworth is already interested in generic interplay, subjectivity and rehabilitation.²⁴ With such an impressive generic portfolio in tow, Wordsworth's pastorals from childhood through to adulthood track the poet's

²¹ William Hazlitt, 'My First Acquaintance with Poets', in *Selected Writings of William Hazlitt*, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 211-229 (p. 223).

²² This reading contradicts Wordsworth's own observation in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* where he states, 'though there would be found no difference, there would be found no discordance in the colours of our style'. See William Wordsworth, 'Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, with Pastoral and Other Poems (1802)', in *The Major Works including The Prelude*, ed. by Stephen Gill, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 595-615 (p. 595).

²³ William Wordsworth, 'An Evening Walk', in *The Oxford Handbook of William Wordsworth*, ed. by Richard Gravil and Daniel Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 1-12 (p. 2).

²⁴ As Charles Mahoney states, 'Wordsworth did not suddenly begin experimenting with poetic forms when he set to work on the poems collected in *Lyrical Ballads*'. See Charles Mahoney, 'Wordsworth's Experiments with Form and Genre', in *The Oxford Handbook of William Wordsworth*, ed. by Richard Gravil and Daniel Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 533-546 (p. 534).

maturation of thought and feeling, ultimately operating as a roadmap of his personal and literary development. We, along with the poet, learn to admire the ‘form and hue’ (*An Evening Walk*, l. 99) of nature across sixty years, indulging in its ever-changing contours with curiosity and admiration. As Nicholas Roe comments, Wordsworth’s pastorals demonstrate an ‘elated awareness of landscape, space, and creative excitement’.²⁵ Nature is not simply a muse, but rather a source of inspiration, meditation and evaluation that Wordsworth repeatedly returns to over the course of his life.

At a more granular level, the Wordsworthian bucolic is primarily defined by the revision of two key conventions: character and place. As Fiona Stafford observes, Wordsworth’s poetry ‘often includes the contrasting perspectives of travellers, natives, and returning sons, whose varied perceptions all contribute to the deeper understanding of his special places’.²⁶ The traditional figures of the shepherd swain and fair maiden become redundant in favour of a series of new, unorthodox rural characters. As Wordsworth mentions in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1802), his aim is to ‘sketch characters...such as exist now, and will probably always exist’.²⁷ Pastoral, as the genre of the countryside, is the perfect vehicle for these hitherto unvoiced narratives. Indeed, the deployment of the dark pastoral in poems such as ‘The Old Cumberland Beggar, a Description’, ‘The Female Vagrant’ and ‘The Convict’ elucidates the labour and hardship of the alienated individual, bringing to the fore a series of new generic profiles that are grounded in reality. Pastoral works with the dark pastoral to formulate imperfect but sensitive human beings who are worthy subjects of the genre. Their value comes from their struggle. We learn to appreciate emotional adversity through characters such as the widowed Margaret, troubled Wanderer and single mother Ellen in *The Excursion*. ‘By avoiding the nymphs and swains, Wordsworth was able to recover some of Virgil’s original pathos as well as his moral and social concerns, and to recreate different points of view in language that might seem simple, but had the capacity to convey profound truths’ observes Fiona

²⁵ Nicholas Roe, ‘The Early Life of William Wordsworth, 1770-1800’, in *The Oxford Handbook of William Wordsworth*, ed. by Richard Gravil and Daniel Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 35-50 (p. 46).

²⁶ Fiona Stafford, ‘Wordsworth’s Poetry of Place’, in *The Oxford Handbook of William Wordsworth*, ed. by Richard Gravil and Daniel Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 309-324 (p. 311).

²⁷ Wordsworth, ‘Preface to Lyrical Ballads, with Pastoral and Other Poems (1802)’, p. 599.

Stafford.²⁸ These ‘profound truths’, relayed through the intensity of the dark pastoral, allow us to appreciate each and every human being for their worth. Questioning William Empson’s assertion that ‘if you choose an important member the result is heroic; if you choose an unimportant one it is pastoral’, this thesis shows how Wordsworth uses genre to attribute newfound significance to apparently unimportant members of society.²⁹

Wordsworth’s second major contribution to pastoral reformation concerns place or what J. E. Conington refers to as ‘scene’.³⁰ Abandoning the Greek climes of Virgil’s *Eclogues* and even the fictional Britain of Oliver Goldsmith’s *The Deserted Village*, Wordsworth reclaims pastoral as the genre of his own experiences in England. Driven by a desire to validate his lyric ‘I’, Wordsworth’s pastorals frequently feature locations close to the poet’s heart: Tintern Abbey, Salisbury Plain, Grasmere. The outmoded ‘pastoral idyll to which the poet cannot return’ is seamlessly exchanged for poems that are inspired by ‘real, identifiable spots’ such as the Wye Valley, Cumberland and the Lake District.³¹ The vales, groves and brooks that Wordsworth knows and loves are used to formulate a series of authentic and multi-faceted backdrops that bring the pastoral into the modern era. Enriching nature with both perspective and substance, genre becomes accessible for both poet and reader. With a new range of images in place, one observes a natural landscape that is coloured by light as well as shadow, reflective of Wordsworth’s own experiences in nature. We see the seasonal and even annual change of a specific place through the eyes of the poet. Working in ‘the spirit of genuine imagination’, the deployment of setting helps to produce pastorals that each have a ‘worthy purpose’.³² In ‘Home at Grasmere’ for example, place is used to reinterpret the Virgilian concept of home. Rather than seeing the ‘beauty of the home...through the eyes of loss’, Wordsworth explores the changes of his home from

²⁸ Stafford, ‘Plain Living and Ungarnish’d Stories: Wordsworth and the Survival of Pastoral’, p. 123.

²⁹ William Empson, ‘Double Plots’, in *Some Versions of Pastoral* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1935), pp. 27-86 (p. 81).

³⁰ J. E. Conington, ‘Scene, Characters’, in *Theories of Pastoral Poetry in England 1684-1798* (New York: Haskell House Publishers Ltd, 1952), pp. 179-224 (p. 179).

³¹ David Fairer, ‘Pastoral and Georgic’, in *English Poetry of the Eighteenth Century 1700-1789* (London: Longman, 2003), pp. 79-101 (p. 99) and Stafford, ‘Wordsworth’s Poetry of Place’, p. 319.

³² William Wordsworth, ‘Essay, Supplementary to the Preface to *Poems* (1815)’, in *William Wordsworth The Major Works including The Prelude*, ed. by Stephen Gill, Oxford World’s Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 640-662 (p. 651) and Wordsworth, ‘*Preface to Lyrical Ballads, with Pastoral and Other Poems (1802)*’, p. 598.

boyhood to adulthood.³³ The dark pastoral is deployed to demonstrate the poet's appreciation for Grasmere in all its guises: day and night, spring and winter, growth and decay. Equally, the dark pastoral reveals the terror of the unknown as demonstrated in the boat stealing incident in *The Prelude*. In chapter five I explore how place stimulates fear, where the untamed dark pastoral works to magnify the terror of night-time childhood exploration. By overhauling character and place, Wordsworth devises an entirely new framework for genre that brings subjective vision and sensibility into play.

In a marked contrast to Wordsworth, Coleridgean pastoral is fundamentally governed by the limitless capacity of the imagination and its ability to concoct new and inventive ecosystems. Renowned for his depressive moods and anxious disposition, one always notes the mind at work in Coleridge's figuring of natural landscapes. The dark pastoral in particular offers us some insights into a poet who was greatly troubled by his challenging domestic situation as well as creative frustrations. Yet Coleridge's deployment of genre must not be read solely in light of the poet's biographical history. Coleridge's key objective in his rendering of the dark pastoral is to test the limits of nature through the inexhaustible profusion of the artist's imagination. He does this by introducing a series of unprecedented and often enigmatic ideas. In 'Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement' and 'The Eolian Harp' for example, Coleridge presents a constant tension in nature. As detailed in chapter two on the 'Conversation Poems', nature never reaches a point of total stasis but moves between different states of being. Equally, in 'Frost at Midnight', 'The Nightingale' and *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, Coleridge pushes the imagination to its limits as he contemplates the unconventional nocturnal pastoral. Nature offers unending possibility in that it allows the poet to move beyond what Wordsworth calls 'pre-established codes of decision'.³⁴ Aware of the limitations of the physical world, Coleridge chooses to push his version of the earthly into the realm of the metaphysical as a way of introducing new material into pastoral. No two pastorals of Coleridge's are the same. The extent and interest in

³³ Laurence Lerner, 'On Nostalgia', in *The Uses of Nostalgia: Studies in Pastoral Poetry* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1968), pp. 41-62 (p. 41).

³⁴ William Wordsworth, 'Advertisement to Lyrical Ballads (1798)', in *Wordsworth and Coleridge Lyrical Ballads 1798 and 1802*, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 591-592 (p. 591).

generic range is evidenced in Chapter III of *Biographia Literaria* when Coleridge comments on the successes of Robert Southey's poetry:

from the pastoral charms and wild streaming lights of the "Thalaba," in which sentiment and imagery have given permanence even to the excitement of curiosity; and from the full blaze of the "Kehama,"...—to the more sober beauties of the "Madoc"; and lastly, from the Madoc to his "Roderic," in which, retaining all his former excellencies of a poet eminently inventive and picturesque, he has surpassed himself in language and metre, in the construction of the whole, and in the splendour of particular passages.³⁵

The language employed in this excerpt speaks to Coleridge's own achievement as a poet who is committed to unrestricted and varied generic experimentation. Coleridge is enamoured by and actively advocates for difference. Motivated by a strong interest in myth and alternative realities, Coleridge is entranced by the 'excitement of curiosity' as opposed to tradition or even earthly possibility. As explored in the first half of this thesis, Coleridge's pastorals frequently juxtapose inventiveness and splendour with wildness and terror, championing movement over inertia. Nature is never static; Coleridge's oscillation between pastoral and dark pastoral allows him to represent such movement through his use of genre. What ensues are a series of poems that are uneven and unpredictable but thoroughly exhilarating. Even in a seemingly 'quiet' poem such as 'This Lime Tree Bower My Prison', Coleridge uses the dark pastoral to inject regret and agitation, but gently juxtaposes this tension against moments of natural beauty. We see the poet deftly toying with generic boundaries. Through topical analysis of the dark pastoral in selected lyrics, this thesis uncovers the extent of the Coleridgean mind at work, at once terrifying and brilliant.

In Book IV of *The Excursion*, Wordsworth speaks of the soul being underpinned by 'dark foundations' (*The Excursion*, Book IV, l. 970).³⁶ This short phrase underscores much of Coleridge's thought, particularly his early work of the 1790s. Pastoral, for this metaphysical poet, is about probing and exploring dark themes that are centred on the limits of creative power, personal expression and the imagination. Coleridge

³⁵ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'Chapter III', in *Biographia Literaria*, ed. with his Aesthetical Essays by J. Shawcross, Volume I (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 34-49 (p. 46).

³⁶ William Wordsworth, 'Book IV', in *The Excursion and The Recluse*, HEB Humanities E-Books (Tirril: Humanities E-books, LLP, 2014), pp. 178-215 (p. 205).

channels this focus through a very clear dark pastoral aesthetic that relies on bold and original natural imagery, intricate narratives and idiosyncratic settings. He is much more explicit in his experimentation and execution of the dark pastoral than Wordsworth. Coleridge is principally interested in the more terrifying aspects of beauty, always keen to go where no other poet dare venture: ‘Reality’s dark dream’ (‘Dejection: An Ode’, l. 95).³⁷ Flitting between the earthly and the abstract, his pastorals reinterpret the concept of beauty as pleasure. Where Edmund Burke considers ‘beauty as distinguished from the sublime’, Coleridge unites terror and beauty to produce obscure and complex pastorals that arrest the reader’s attention.³⁸ From the narrative poems to ‘Dejection: An Ode’ and beyond, Coleridge transforms nature into an unrecognisable phenomenon that refuses to resemble the Virgilian, Miltonic or Augustan pastoral. Experimenting with the metaphysical pastoral, Coleridge radically overhauls his poetry by purporting an entirely new theory of genre that is based on self-consciousness, the occult and transgression. The dark pastoral helps to scaffold unconventional utopias, manic adventures and indiscretions that introduce an entirely new breed of pastoral. We are very rarely comforted by nature. As Norman Fruman attests, Coleridge’s pastoral, much like his career, is ‘spectacular, mysterious, fragmentary, and intensely productive of controversy’.³⁹ The dark pastoral, itself a provocative and fraught thing, revolutionises generic artifice while contemplating broader concerns fundamentally related to immortality.

‘It is not simply that we cannot slough off our everyday worries when we enter a timeless bower: those worries are continually present, in microcosmic form, within the pastoral itself’ observes Stuart Curran.⁴⁰ Such an insight reminds us that the pastoral, right from its inception, has never been a one-dimensional, unblemished, ‘stagnant genre of necessity’.⁴¹ It has always been a genre of development, complexity and malleability. As Peter V. Marinelli comments, the pastoral ‘is capable of assuming

³⁷ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ‘Dejection: An Ode’, in *The Complete Poems*, Penguin Classics (London: Penguin, 2004), pp. 307-311 (p. 309).

³⁸ Edmund Burke, ‘Part III., Sect. I., Of Beauty’, in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (Menston: The Scolar Press Limited, 1970), pp. 161-163 (p. 161).

³⁹ Norman Fruman, ‘Kubla Khan’, in *Coleridge: The Damaged Archangel* (Trowbridge: George Allen & Unwin, 1972), pp. 334-350 (p. 334).

⁴⁰ Curran, ‘The Pastoral’, p. 88.

⁴¹ Curran, ‘The Pastoral’, p. 88.

a form peculiar to itself and also of interpreting other forms as a creative element'.⁴² To acknowledge that the genre is far less stationary than is generally assumed is to refresh the perception of the pastoral as a merely superficial and idealised phenomenon. Crucially, each pastoral since Hesiod's *Works and Days* has been defined and motivated by a unique type of nature and tension, specific to both poet and age.⁴³ Wordsworth and Coleridge cannot be considered sole innovators of the dark pastoral as they magnify elements of the genre that have always existed, sometimes in implicit form, in pastorals predating 1790. Theocritus and Virgil, often deemed the founding fathers of the genre, use the pastoral to explore challenging and controversial themes such as unrequited love, homosexuality and death. Where their *Idylls* and *Eclogues* neatly tend towards unity by resolving problems within each composite pastoral, Coleridge's standalone bucolics are always left wanting solutions they cannot reach. Frustrations are rarely solved, and nature frequently remains agitated. To borrow Seamus Perry's term, Coleridge's dark pastoral thrives on turbulent 'division'.⁴⁴

Likewise, Wordsworth reworks the agricultural approach to the seasons taken in Edmund Spenser's *The Shepherdes Calendar*. By reading human life as out of sync with the shepherd's routine and nature's rhythms, Wordsworth expertly desynchronises the pastoral, drawing attention to the haphazardness of personal trial and tribulation.⁴⁵ Pre-established notions of time and space continue to be challenged through the prism of Sir Philip Sidney's pastoral romance, *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia* (1593). Where Sidney's *Arcadia* relies on preconceived notions of the Hellenistic Golden Age, Wordsworth and Coleridge create new visions of paradise that are underpinned by personal experience. Their dark pastoral depicts *Arcadia* as a flawed but private space, designed to capture human toil as well as respite. No study of pastoral would be complete without a mention of Christopher Marlowe's

⁴² Marinelli, 'Perspectives on the Pastoral', p. 5.

⁴³ I am aware that Hesiod's *Works and Days* is not defined as a pastoral. I reference these works to acknowledge that The Golden Age was borne out of Hesiod's concept of The Five Ages of Man. Raymond Williams makes a similar point in his chapter, 'Pastoral and Counter-Pastoral', in *The Country and the City* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1973), pp. 13-35 (p. 14).

⁴⁴ Seamus Perry, *Coleridge and the Uses of Division* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

⁴⁵ It is also useful to note that grief, sadness and decay are not just associated with the winter months as detailed in *The Shepherdes Calendar*. For Wordsworth, these more depressing experiences are equally as likely to occur during regenerative periods such as spring and summer. I make this point in relation to Thomson's *The Seasons* rather more explicitly on p. 12.

‘The Passionate Shepherd to His Love’ and Sir Walter Raleigh’s ‘The Nymph’s Reply to the Shepherd’. Two centuries on, Wordsworth and Coleridge move beyond the nominal idea of the pastoral love song by constructing a definitive dark pastoral that finds its impetus in grief, dejection and empathy. The high notes of their dark pastoral are felt in these stronger and more sombre strains of feeling, delivered through an apparently franker and more intimate style of conversational poetry. The intensity of such melancholic and at times, grave sensibility, owes much to the experimental pastorals of John Milton. It is in poems such as ‘Arcades’, *Il Penseroso*, *Lycidas*, ‘L’Allegro’ and *Paradise Lost* that we see the forerunners of the metaphysical dark pastoral. Wordsworth and Coleridge advance the metaphysical pastoral by using it to articulate experience as perceived by the individual artist. Their version of the metaphysical dark pastoral is a comprehensive mode of expression designed to prompt fear, anxiety and hostility.

As detailed over the course of this thesis, it is John Milton, Alexander Pope and James Thomson who have the greatest influence on Wordsworth and Coleridge’s dark pastoral. Milton, Pope, and Thomson all experiment with a more meaningful, conscious and intellectual strand of genre that is designed to provoke thought. Pastoral, for them, is underpinned by idiosyncratic vision, the anxious lyric ‘I’ and contemporary events. No longer do we see the pre-lapsarian, perfect world of Eden, but the fallen, broken world of modern man. It is these new and progressive tenets of pastoral that govern the direction of the Romantic dark pastoral. Where William Empson argues that the primary role of pastoral is to put the complex into the simple, for this trio of poets, genre provides an opportunity to problematise both human life and the natural world.⁴⁶ The world is ambiguous, less friendly and far more complicated than Empson assumes. In Milton’s *Lycidas*, for example, the speaker views the natural world as ‘ultimately deceptive and empty of hope’.⁴⁷ Nature is not man’s permanent, trustworthy aide but a reflection of the poet’s inner turmoil. The unkempt ‘wild thyme and the gadding vine o’ergrown’ (*Lycidas*, l. 40) remind us of the stark reality of loss and grief, anticipating the elegiac tones of Wordsworth’s

⁴⁶ William Empson, ‘Marvell’s Garden’, in *Some Versions of Pastoral* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1935), pp. 119-145 (p. 137).

⁴⁷ Richard F. Hardin, ‘The Pastoral Movement’, in *Survivals of Pastoral*, ed. by Richard F. Hardin (Lawrence: University of Kansas Publications, 1979), pp. 1-18 (p. 6).

Excursion.⁴⁸ Pope's fascination with rendering nature in the present tense places a new importance on generic vision and perspective. His neo-classical *Pastorals*, translation of Homer's *Iliad*, *The Dunciad*, and 'Windsor Forest' do more than simply invoke tradition. Although Pope explicitly imitates Virgil and Theocritus, he does so from a contemporary eighteenth century perspective. Despite the grandiose claims made in his 'Discourse on Pastoral Poetry', namely that 'Pastoral is an image of what they call the golden age', Pope champions the concept of past and present double vision.⁴⁹ For Wordsworth and Coleridge, retrospective vision always sits alongside prospective vision, suggesting that there is no such thing as a pure or consistent genre. Genres evolve and adapt. As *Lyrical Ballads* attests, the true testament of the artist's imaginative prowess lies in his ability to blend and balance genres. The structural and formal possibilities that emerge from Wordsworth and Coleridge's hybridisation of pastoral with epic, lyric, ballad, narrative and elegy steer poetry into a new direction. Through the dark pastoral, these Romantic poets successfully rehabilitate not one but several literary genres.

'Although James Thomson's *The Seasons* was early admired for its fine sentiments, its greatest influence was clearly a work of natural description' writes Patricia Meyer Spacks.⁵⁰ Though Spacks goes on to detail Thomson's various accolades as a writer of nature, she does not acknowledge the poet's contribution to the evolution of pastoral. *The Seasons* expands and sophisticates Spenser's notion of the shepherd's calendar. Thomson's intricate descriptive passages take blank verse to greater heights as they use genre to spotlight tension and movement. Though seemingly understated, it is these elements of pastoral that come to dictate the trajectory of the later Romantic pastoral. However, unlike Thomson, Wordsworth and Coleridge refuse to view uncertainty and strife as a winter condition. Discord and anguish, for them, are a yearlong, even lifelong, occurrence. Where Thomson's pastoral strives for peace and order, Coleridge's pastorals never quite banish chaos. Nature is always met in a state

⁴⁸ John Milton, 'Lycidas', in *The Complete Poems*, ed. by John Leonard (London: Penguin, 1998), pp. 41-46 (p. 42).

⁴⁹ Alexander Pope, 'A Discourse on Pastoral Poetry 1717' (London: Literature Online, 2021) <<http://ezproxy.lib.le.ac.uk/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/books/discourse-on-pastoral-poetry/docview/2138578705/se-2?accountid=7420>> [Accessed 10 April 2022].

⁵⁰ Patricia Meyer Spacks, 'Vision and Meaning in James Thomson', *Studies in Romanticism*, 4.4 (1965) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/25599645>> [Accessed 10 October 2021] (p. 206).

of disarray, ready to overturn expectation. The dejected Wordsworthian dark pastoral also finds its impetus in Thomson's more self-conscious and solemn writing. When the speaker summons 'Welcome, kindred glooms! / Congenial horrors, hail!' (*The Seasons: Winter*, l. 5-6), there is a sense that Thomson is almost pre-empting Wordsworth's exploratory rustic poems.⁵¹ Thomson establishes the dark pastoral in principle. By rereading texts in light of this subgenre, we begin to question the romantic perception of the pastoral. It becomes increasingly difficult to accept J. E. Congleton's affirmation that 'Only when poetry ceases to imitate actual rural life does it become distinctly pastoral'.⁵² On balance, one reevaluates and even rebuffs the utopian perspective put forward in John Clare's seemingly idealistic lyric, 'Pastoral Poesy':

True poesy is not in words,
 But images that thoughts express,
 By which the simplest hearts are stirred
 To elevated happiness.⁵³

('Pastoral Poesy', l. 1-4)

As we approach the end of the eighteenth century, the notion of 'elevated happiness' almost seems frivolous, even naive. The macabre tones of Thomas Grey's 'Elegy Written in A Country Churchyard', Oliver Goldsmith's *The Deserted Village*, and William Cowper's *The Task*, push pastoral into the depressing era of mechanisation and urbanisation. The darker ideas that underscore these poems—elegising the dead, rural depopulation and man's disregard for nature—all formulate a solid base for a more introspective, unconventional but fundamentally honest pastoral. Nature has been ruined and the pastoral affected as a result. Although it is true then, that by 1800 'the literary conventions [of pastoral] were worn out', Wordsworth and Coleridge do not simply overlook or reject tradition.⁵⁴ They identify and transform embedded features of pastoral that find their roots in the classical, renaissance and Augustan bucolics.

⁵¹ James Thomson, 'The Seasons: Winter', in *James Thomson The Seasons and the Castle of Indolence*, ed. by James Sambrook (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), pp. 128-158 (p. 128).

⁵² Congleton and Brogan, *Pastoral*.

⁵³ John Clare, 'Pastoral Poesy', in *The Poems of John Clare*, ed. by J. W. Tibble, Volume 2 (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Limited, 1935), p. 49.

⁵⁴ Stafford, 'Plain Living and Ungarnish'd Stories: Wordsworth and the Survival of Pastoral', p. 125.

This study on generic development is indebted to, and seeks to depart from, the ideas explored in William Empson's *Some Versions of Pastoral*. Despite its frequently perceived 'obliqueness in argument', Empson's study has been a cornerstone for many subsequent socio-historic, new historic, political and ecocritical works of pastoral that have sought to define or categorise the genre.⁵⁵ *Some Versions of Pastoral* offers the most dynamic and lateral approach to pastoral, largely because it is framed as a study of culture as opposed to convention. This thesis takes inspiration from Empson's methodology, viewing the dark pastoral as a product of personal, social and cultural change as opposed to a checklist of generic characteristics, axioms or features. It takes a new formalist approach to genre, employing close reading language and imagery with a view to create discussion that is illuminating of how carefully Wordsworth and Coleridge work with and transform the genre. Ultimately, this study aims to broaden the scope and tradition of pastoral by arguing for generic versatility and richness. Although critics often spotlight Empson's class-based approach to pastoral, it is his exploration of unconventional texts that brings some of his most insightful readings. By examining the use of genre in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*, John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* and Lewis Carol's *Alice in Wonderland*, Empson lays the groundwork for a new type of genre study. He refuses to confine pastoral to a specific form of literature, and he does not shoehorn the genre into an exclusive set of principles. Empson's work suggests a more flexible, open and charismatic pastoral that is underpinned by subjective vision. This thesis advances Empson's by formulating a new theory of genre that is specifically centred upon experimentation and the notion of the artist as self.

Unlike later critics, imitation and shepherds are not of immediate importance to Empson; it is the artist's interpretation of genre that is his main concern. Indeed, when he spotlights and investigates themes such as the fascination with irony, the double plot and mock heroism, he does so with a view to show off pastoral's breadth and depth as a full-bodied and intuitive genre. Empson reads pastoral in texts where other writers do not: he notices what is generally left unnoticed. In doing so he takes steps to unlock the genre's full potential beyond the traditional and self-limiting swain's

⁵⁵ Paul Alpers, 'Empson on Pastoral', *New Literary History*, 10.1 (1978) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/468307>> [Accessed 16 October 2021] (p. 102).

song. In *Some Versions of Pastoral*, genre is a fluid and interactive entity, a premise that is central to Wordsworth and Coleridge's poetic achievement as innovators of the dark pastoral. This thesis builds upon Empson's progressive style of study by introducing Wordsworth and Coleridge's temperamental and raw dark pastoral as a significant version of pastoral. The ensuing chapters pay homage to Empson's vital work, but also detail the extent to which Wordsworth and Coleridge radicalise and modernise genre to a much greater extent than has been previously argued. By focusing on personal experience, this thesis reveals how two extremely perceptive poets deconstruct and then reconstruct a pastoral where nature feels as it looks, at times menacing and overcast, but equally glorious and luminous. Wordsworth and Coleridge evolve the pastoral genre by immersing themselves in a natural landscape that is able to experience pain as well as represent beauty. Such diversity actively nurtures a type of poetry that is designed to question the status quo. This version of pastoral is not bound up with observation alone. Crucially, this study shows how pastoral can ebb and flow in a text in accordance with what the poet chooses to see. Empson's commentary, though at times tangential and indirect, hints at the idea of the personally determined pastoral.

Following Empson, there are a number of critics who have been instrumental to the design of this thesis. J. E. Conington's *Theories of Pastoral Poetry* offered a comprehensive overview of theoretical practice and convention from the classical period right up to the twentieth century. Laurence Lerner's *The Uses of Nostalgia: Studies in Pastoral Poetry* and Paul Alpers' *What is Pastoral?* helped to frame arguments on wistfulness, Arcadia and representation. Harold Toliver's *Pastoral Forms and Attitudes* informed the chapters on *The Excursion* and *The Prelude*. Toliver's ability to read pastoral in conjunction with epic and romance encouraged a more holistic and hybridised approach to genre.⁵⁶ Raymond Williams' *The Country and the City*, long hailed as a hallmark of pastoral scholarship, contributed to debates around the challenges of urbanisation and country living. Richard Hardin's *Survivals of Pastoral* and Roger Sales' *English Literature in History, 1780-1830: Pastoral and*

⁵⁶ Toliver's chapters on post Romantic pastorals also enriched my knowledge of genre beyond the nineteenth century. He creates a generic continuum that transgresses the timescales purported in traditional studies of pastoral. Toliver sees pastoral as a much more modern and continuous genre than any other twentieth century critic, a proposition that has helped me to view Wordsworth and Coleridge's experiments in genre as a catalyst for later works of pastoral.

Politics provided context around the challenges of the French Revolution and the Whig government. John Barrell's *The Dark Side of the Landscape: The Rural Poor in English Painting 1730-1840* prompted recognition and articulation of the dark pastoral artifice. Although a study of painting, Barrell provides a useful approach to underprivileged and marginalised rustic populations, a particularly fertile resource for the *Lyrical Ballads* chapter. Stuart Curran's *Poetic Form and British Romanticism* and David Duff's *Romanticism and the Uses of Genre* have been indispensable for understanding genre theory. Curran and Duff's work have helped to position this thesis as a genre study as opposed to a study of influence. Although scholars such as Harold Bloom, Jerome McGann and Christopher Ricks have contributed to the critical climate of this thesis, their work leans towards poetic imprisonment rather than generic liberation. Bloom's idea that 'great writing is always at work strongly (or weakly) misreading previous writing' ignores the significance of careful reading as informing innovative writing.⁵⁷ While influence is important, my research is focused on the development of a single genre through the intervention of Wordsworth and Coleridge's uniquely formulated dark pastoral.

A secondary concern of this thesis is ecocriticism. As a new critical movement, green or ecological writing offers a contrasting perspective on pastoral, largely because its focus is man's relationship with nature. Ecological consciousness promotes an awareness of the environment from an interdisciplinary perspective, often reading literary texts through a scientific lens. Ecological theories have been helpful about thinking through poetry from the stance of nature first. That being said, this thesis considers poetry, and not nature, as its primary concern. The broad ranging discussion of genre relates specifically to the formal and generic decisions that Wordsworth and Coleridge made when writing and publishing pastoral poems. Ecocritical theories encourage a healthy debate around the parameters and intricacies of pastoral as a genre, helping to breathe new life into the dark pastoral as a subgenre of impact. Jonathan Bate's *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition*, for example, offers a more realistic and deromanticized interpretation of pastoral. Bate's ecological model explores broader topics such as economics, morality and geography,

⁵⁷ Harold Bloom, 'Preface', in *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. xi-xlvii (p. xix).

adding both texture and variety to twentieth century genre theory. Terry Gifford's *Pastoral*, with its novel concept of 'Three Kinds of Pastoral', also introduces a new reading strategy. Gifford's 'anti-pastoral' and 'post-pastoral' introduce alternative or antithetical versions of genre, helping to advance and even alter representations of nature. Finally, Timothy Morton's *Ecology Without Nature* presents an entirely new image of nature and art in an attempt to recover what pastoral has fundamentally lost: the real version of nature. Morton's study has enhanced the generic discourse of this thesis thanks to his radical, antihuman position. Alongside scholars such as Ralph Pite and Greg Garrard, ecocritics have helped to distinguish and define the Romantic pastoral from any preceding or succeeding versions of pastoral, and this thesis is indebted to their helpful paradigms.⁵⁸

In his article on 'Dark Interpreters' Jonathan Wordsworth writes, '[William Wordsworth] valued darkness in an unusual way, and found it in unusual places'.⁵⁹ The idea of valuing unfamiliar kinds of darkness suggests high regard for unprecedented experiences, and it is the latter part of this statement that is most intriguing. The phrase 'unusual places' indicates both an awareness and sensitivity to new or previously unexplored literary avenues. As demonstrated in my naming of Wordsworth and Coleridge's pastorals as 'dark pastoral', darkness can be attributed to somewhere as simple and unassuming as a lime-tree bower or even the home. The dark pastoral works with the premise that ordinary circumstances have the ability to produce the most extraordinary results. These Romantic lyricists become the ultimate generic opportunists as they delve into the world beyond the familiar. They constantly find new opportunities to revive the dulled 'spontaneity of pastoral song' by championing what is undiscovered.⁶⁰ In doing so, they modernise and reprioritise pastoral as the genre of the moment. What James H. Averill refers to as 'Wordsworth's obvious fascination with suffering', might be also interpreted as an intense curiosity with place, experience and memory.⁶¹ Wordsworth and Coleridge's eyes are

⁵⁸ Ralph Pite, 'How Green Were the Romantics?', *Studies in Romanticism*, 35.3 (1996) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/25601179>> [Accessed 25 May 2021] and Greg Garrard, 'Pastoral', in *Ecocriticism* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 37-65.

⁵⁹ Jonathan Wordsworth, 'Two Dark Interpreters: Wordsworth and De Quincey', *The Wordsworth Circle*, 17.2 (1986) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/24040514>> [Accessed 29 October 2021] (p. 41).

⁶⁰ Curran, 'The Pastoral', p. 101.

⁶¹ James H. Averill, 'Suffering and Calm in the Early Poetry, 1788-1798', in *Wordsworth and the Poetry of Human Suffering* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 1980), pp. 55-83 (p. 56).

constantly scanning for physical, psychological, ethical and visual difficulty, not just emotional hardship. As Geoffrey Hartman notes, the ‘eye is pitted against itself or confounded by anagogical contrast’.⁶² With such an antagonistic perspective in sight, the parameters of the imagination become much more fluid. It is through the expansive imagination that Wordsworth and Coleridge are able to conjure a dark pastoral world that is uncomfortable, jarring and exclusive. To rehabilitate genre, Wordsworth and Coleridge pay attention to the unforeseen. This means departing from the dated generic model of the eighteenth century championed by Alexander Pope, James Thomson and William Cowper.

As Nicholas Roe points out in *Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Radical Years*, the period of 1770-1798 was pivotal to the poets’ development as political revolutionaries. His sense of revolutionary thinking carries equal weight when we consider Wordsworth and Coleridge’s career as generic innovators. The 1790s, in particular, offer insight into two poets who are determined to make pastoral their work. Wordsworth’s *Salisbury Plain*, noted for reviving the apparently outmoded Spenserian stanza, is one such poem that demonstrates his early interest in pushing the boundaries of literary and generic structures. By finding darkness at the unlikely site of Salisbury Plain, Wordsworth unlocks the potential of pastoral in the context of the topographical poem. He experiments with loco-descriptive poetry in order to introduce a new dark pastoral artifice, alternative character types and a broader range of feeling. Wordsworth fundamentally lays the foundation for his and Coleridge’s individual approaches to pastoral. *Salisbury Plain* contains elements of genre shared by both poets, namely the ambivalent, searching and meditative aspects of pastoral. Though Wordsworth and Coleridge move in different directions, we see the seeds of self-consciousness, anxiety and the new pastoral hero emerge in *Salisbury Plain*, pre-empting the extended development of these ideas in the Conversation Poems, Narrative Poems and *The Prelude*. Where Kurt Fosso argues that *Salisbury Plain* is a romance, the poem is rather more explicitly a conceptually experimental pastoral lyric.⁶³ With a refreshed take on genre, *Salisbury Plain* moves beyond the parameters

⁶² Geoffrey Hartman, ‘From “Salisbury Plain” to “The Ruined Cottage”’, in *Wordsworth’s Poetry 1787-1814* (London; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), pp. 116-140 (p. 122).

⁶³ Kurt Fosso, ‘The Politics of Genre in Wordsworth’s “Salisbury Plain”’, *New Literary History*, 30.1 (1999) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/20057528>> [Accessed 7 November 2021].

of being considered as ‘the most sustained exhibition of sorrow by a tragically defeated woman’.⁶⁴ It operates as an early indicator of Wordsworth and Coleridge’s dark pastoral vocation.

Salisbury Plain fractures the conventional pastoral to ultimately re-imagine nature, sowing the seeds for further generic development and interplay:

Hard is the life when naked and unhoused
 And wasted by the long day’s fruitless pains,
 The hungry savage, ‘mid deep forests, roused
 By storms, lies down at night on unknown plains
 And lifts his head in fear, while famished trains
 Of boars along the crashing forests prowl,
 And heard in darkness, as the rushing rains
 Put out his watch-fire, bears contending growl
 And round his fenceless bed gaunt wolves in armies howl.

(*Salisbury Plain*, l. 1-9)

With their lack of verdure and splendour, these opening lines shatter any preconceived ideas about genre. Primarily they show complete disregard for what William Empson terms as pastoral’s fascination with irony.⁶⁵ As in Coleridge’s *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, we are thrust into the heart of the dark pastoral with the allusion to night-time, melancholia and noise. Nature is no longer innocent: it only projects pain, anxiety and fear. This new dark pastoral artifice sets the tone for Wordsworth and Coleridge’s poetry, instating a clearly defined vision that is darkly realistic because of the genre’s ‘radically altered mood’.⁶⁶ That the first word of the poem is ‘Hard’ points toward a pastoral that is defined by struggle, a concept that resonates with both Wordsworth and Coleridge as poets who see value in affliction. Wordsworth then goes on to detail the nocturnal pastoral, the more sinister counterpart to the pleasant daytime pastoral so often favoured by Coleridge. The ‘storms’, ‘unknown plains’ and ‘rushing rains’ create a dreary, combative and volatile atmosphere, reinforced by the prowling

⁶⁴ Quentin Bailey, ‘The Salisbury Plain Poems (1793-1842)’, in *The Oxford Handbook of William Wordsworth*, ed. by Richard Gravil and Daniel Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 135-151 (p. 138).

⁶⁵ Empson, ‘They That Have Power’, p. 111.

⁶⁶ Kenneth Eisold, ‘Section III: “Salisbury Plain”’, in *Loneliness and Communion: A Study of Wordsworth’s Thought and Experience*, ed. by Dr James Hogg (Salzburg: Universität Salzburg, 1973), pp. 17-24 (p. 17).

boars, growling bears and howling wolves. Unlike the opening stanza of *An Evening Walk*, *Salisbury Plain* offers no nostalgic prologue or natural equilibrium. We are catapulted into a present-tense dark pastoral scene. The attention to detail with the onomatopoeic *c* rhymes ‘prowl’/‘growl’/‘howl’ completely eradicates any sense of pastoral comfort, with the predatory verbs and aggressive noises forming an unwelcoming and frightful natural setting. The ‘watch-fire’ emphasises that we are in a cutthroat environment, in the territory of beast and not man. We are not in a safe space, nor are we retreating or escaping from present worry.

We then encounter a new figure, the ‘hungry savage’, ‘naked and unhouzed’. Stripped down to bare skin, this man is vulnerable as he is forced to take refuge in the most terror inducing environment. A far cry from the Marlowe’s passionate and carefree shepherd, the savage presents the alternative dark pastoral character, a peer to Wordsworth’s old Cumberland beggar and Coleridge’s convict. Rejecting the idea that ‘men ought to be treated as if they had not yet fallen’, Wordsworth uses genre to show the true extent of the destitute and marginalised rural poor.⁶⁷ As the savage ‘lifts his head in fear’ one cannot help but feel sympathy for this impoverished individual, his palpable trepidation sandwiched between his pitiable circumstances and the quasi-maniacal beasts of the plain. The ‘fenceless bed’ leaves this man utterly exposed to the elements, the later affirmation, ‘the wet cold ground must be his only bed’ (*Salisbury Plain*, l. 63) indicative of his plight as a victim of circumstance. Yet it is the ‘female wanderer’ (*Salisbury Plain*, l. 138) that successfully redefines generic characterisation. Although she participates in the ‘economy of mourning and exchange’, the vagrant rather more crucially introduces the female perspective to pastoral.⁶⁸ This becomes an integral part of Wordsworth’s agenda as demonstrated on numerous occasions in *The Excursion*. The female wanderer’s account of grief, and particularly the death of her father and personal decline into poverty, is startling because Wordsworth effectively details the full extent of her fall. We first hear of a bygone pastoral, so beautifully articulated through personal memory:

My garden stored with pease and mint and thyme,
And rose and lilly for the sabbath morn;

⁶⁷ Empson, ‘Milton and Bentley’, p. 189.

⁶⁸ Fosso, ‘The Politics of Genre in Wordsworth’s “Salisbury Plain”’, p. 194.

The church-inviting bell's delightful chime,
The merriment and song at shearing time,

(*Salisbury Plain*, l. 236-239)

Wordsworth offers a deliberate contrast to his opening dark pastoral act by re-establishing the terms of Arcadia as a personal and tangible experience, an idea that is explored in greater detail in my analysis of *Lines Written a few miles above Tintern Abbey, on revisiting the Wye during a Tour. July 13, 1798*. The local association with Arcadia is relayed through the reference to 'My garden', itself an integral and fruitful part of the vagrant's home. The personal pronoun 'My' reinforces the idea that we are in a private and familiar space, chipping away at Sidney's idea of the far-removed Old Arcadia. The 'pease and mint and thyme', reinstall some much-needed greenery into pastoral. There is something restorative about these homely vegetable and herbs, the smell of the mint and thyme at once domestic and comforting. The 'rose and lilly for the sabbath morn' add a sense of wholeness and colour to pastoral, as religion is inextricably linked to this scene of near perfection. The 'church-inviting bell's delightful chime' demonstrate faith's positive and happy power, the adjective 'delightful' reinforcing the sense of ease and joy. Ordinary rural activities such as 'shearing time' take on an entirely new significance in their association with 'merriment and song'. The lightness of the lines is conveyed through the soft iambic pentameter as pastoral assumes its familiar guise. We feel the vagrant's nostalgia as she recalls happier times.

Pastoral then undergoes a radical transformation as the woman begins to reflect upon the death of her parents and her own process of bereavement as a child. This internal shift from light to darkness is characteristic of Wordsworth and Coleridge's pastoral as they both prioritise change over stability. This relates to both natural and human life. Where Timothy Morton argues that in Romantic literature the 'human being is progressively sidelined', Wordsworth allows his vagrant to take centre stage.⁶⁹ The human being, and particularly the pastoral maiden, are equally as important as nature. The poet adds a philosophical quality to pastoral in his consideration of heavy subject matter, recalling an essence of the classical pastoral. The self-indulgent quality of Daphnis' death in Theocritus' *Idyll I* is converted to a humbler but more intense type

⁶⁹ Timothy Morton, 'Romanticism and the Environmental Subject', p. 87.

of grief that is articulated through a shift in pastoral ideology. The movement from the vagrant's beloved Arcadia to an episode of visible mourning demonstrates an ability to temper genre to accommodate a shift in personal feeling and experience. Darkness is embedded in almost instantaneous manner, as the natural world and the vagrant's personal life fall into disarray:

‘The suns of eighteen summers danced along
 Joyous as in the pleasant morn of May.
 At last by cruel chance and wilful wrong
 My father's substance fell into decay.
 Oppression trampled on his tresses grey:
 His little range of water was denied;
 Even to the bed where his old body lay
 His all was seized; and weeping side by side
 Turned out on the cold winds, alone we wandered wide.

(*Salisbury Plain*, l. 253-261)

The most poignant line of this section, ‘My father's substance fell into decay’, sees the last three words in particular emphasise physical deterioration. The sincere female voice completely dominates pastoral, the darkness of her experience matched with the darkness of description. Genre acquires a sensibility that is unique to the rhythms of this particular woman as we move from happiness to hurt, grief to pain. The passive tense adds a mortal quality to human life, the reference to ‘substance’ an uncomfortable interpretation of the human body. Wordsworth expertly quashes the aforementioned pastoral calm, the ‘suns of eighteen summers’ are quickly eclipsed by the death of the vagrant's father. The verb ‘trampled’ enacts the motion of careless compression, the grey tresses a visual indicator of an aged man. Geoffrey Hartman's impression that ‘landscape is more intriguing than its people’ seems more than a little unfitting.⁷⁰ Wordsworth uses genre, and particularly the female perspective, to foreground the ethical injustice of political circumstances. We hear of the ‘wilful wrong’ that has been done unto a father from a daughter's perspective, giving a voice to the unheard. The vagrant's pain is felt through the loss of a parent as well as the loss of home, a double blow for the poor woman. Her attention to detail, and particularly the denial of basic amenities such as the ‘little range of water’ and the bed

⁷⁰ Hartman, ‘From “Salisbury Plain” to “The Ruined Cottage”’, p. 118.

demonstrate both her grief and the total lack of sympathy on the part of the oppressors. The closing line, with its soft allusion to the poem's opening dark pastoral, establishes a bleak sense of injustice, the 'cold winds' a drab reminder of the family's pitiable circumstances.

In his chapter on pastoral and georgic David Fairer argues that pastoral is a 'punch-bag for hundreds of poets-in-training to test their powers on'.⁷¹ This statement undermines the true purpose of pastoral, not so much as a genre of training but as a genre of achieved merit and considered experimentation. Aside from its commitment to character development, the pastoral in *Salisbury Plain* is used to show Wordsworth's awareness of and interest in the supernatural.⁷² As detailed in the Narrative Poems chapter, Coleridge's dark pastoral is underpinned by the supernatural, not least because of the poet's desire to create exciting and interesting poems. He champions literary and generic diversity to a point of polyphonic brilliance. Coleridge's 'unavoidable estrangement from eighteenth-century habits of thought and feeling' sees him cultivate a type of artistry that pushes the limits of creative power.⁷³ The transgressive pastoral that reveals itself in *Christabel* finds its roots in *Salisbury Plain*, a poem that is rarely considered in the light of its innovations in the metaphysical arena. Key moments in *Salisbury Plain* suggest the nature of Wordsworth's influence on Coleridge as the experimental imagery and artifice form an early source of inspiration for the Coleridge's later exercises in the dark pastoral:

Not thus where clear moons spread their pleasing light.
 —Long bearded forms with wands uplifted shew
 To vast assemblies, while each breath of night
 Is hushed, the living fires that bright and slow
 Rounding th'aetherial field in order go.
 Then as they trace with awe their various files

⁷¹ David Fairer, 'Pastoral and Georgic', in *English Poetry of the Eighteenth Century 1700-1789* (London: Longman, 2003), pp. 79-101 (p. 79).

⁷² Tom Duggett speaks of *Salisbury Plain*'s 'uncanny landscape and supernatural vision' in his chapter 'Radical Gothic, Politics and Antiquarianism in *Salisbury Plain* (1794)', in *Gothic Romanticism: Architecture, Politics, and Literary Form* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 67-95 (p.93).

⁷³ Elizabeth Chadwick, 'Coleridge's Headlong Horseman: Insinuating the Supernatural', *The Wordsworth Circle*, 8.1 (1977) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/24039379>> [Accessed 15 November 2021] (p. 47).

All figured in the mystic plain below,
 Still prelude of sweet sounds the moon beguiles
 And charmed for many a league the hoary desert smiles.

(*Salisbury Plain*, l. 190-198)

To borrow M. H. Abrams term, pastoral here exhibits a type of ‘natural supernaturalism’.⁷⁴ The nocturnal pastoral provides new opportunities to explore the metaphysical as natural possibility enters a new dimension. Wordsworth sets the scene much in the same way as Coleridge does in ‘Frost at Midnight’ and *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, allowing the supernatural to gather pace through description. What Simon Jarvis terms as the ‘*speculative element* in Wordsworth’s verse’ operates as a testing site for Coleridge’s interest in the imagination and the supernatural.⁷⁵ As noted by F. W. Bateson, Anne Janowitz and Mark Offard, this passage invokes ancient Druidism as a result of its association with Old Sarum and Stonehenge.⁷⁶ In the context of pastoral, Wordsworth hints at a historical type of supernatural that is closely linked to pagan tradition. However, Coleridge does not follow in this line of poetic practice as he is more boldly engaged with the supernatural than Wordsworth. Coleridge is fascinated by the creative potential of the supernatural as a generic and not a historical device. *Salisbury Plain* gives an indication of Coleridge’s dark pastoral preferences in its experimentation with the natural world and its supernatural possibilities.

Although Mark Offard draws a direct parallel between *Salisbury Plain*’s ‘radically contemporary vision of the state of nature’ and the work of the young Coleridge, he chooses not to investigate the poet’s generic motivations.⁷⁷ Coleridge is intrigued by the limitless possibility of nature, not just as a political backdrop but as a site of visual experimentation. The transgressive pastoral of *Salisbury Plain* makes for an unsettling atmosphere as we encounter ‘the sacrificial alter fed / With living men’ (*Salisbury Plain*, l. 184-185). This darkness is offset by the ‘clear moons’ with their ‘pleasing

⁷⁴ M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971).

⁷⁵ Simon Jarvis, ‘Introduction: poetic thinking’, in *Wordsworth’s Philosophic Song* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 1-32 (p. 21).

⁷⁶ F. W. Bateson, ‘Sturm und Drang’, in *Wordsworth: A Re-Interpretation* (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1968), pp. 82-113 (p. 110), Anne Janowitz, ‘Out of the Wasteland: Wordsworth’s Repair of Ruins’, in *England’s Ruins: Poetic Purpose and the National Landscape* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), pp. 92-144 (p. 95) and Mark Offard, ‘*Salisbury Plain*’, in *Wordsworth and the Art of Philosophical Travel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 20-36.

⁷⁷ Offard, ‘*Salisbury Plain*’, p. 25.

light', with nature's beautiful continuity set against alongside man's errant behaviour. The 'long bearded forms with wands' imbue the scene with a supernatural feeling, underscoring Coleridge's otherworldly fascination. Wordsworth's use of personification adds a mystical element to the supernatural, 'each breath of night' hushed into submission. The use of rhyme, particularly in 'the living fires that bright and slow / Rounding th'aetherial field in order go' sounds incantatory, as poetry is drawn into the world of the occult.⁷⁸ Pastoral is bewitched by the imagination. The 'aetherial field' and 'mystic plain', both fragile and abstract entities, see the natural and the metaphysical intermingle. The familiar pastoral seems worlds away. When Wordsworth advises us to 'pursue your toils, till not a trace / Be left on earth of Superstition's reign, / Save that eternal pile which frowns on Sarum's plain' (*Salisbury Plain*, l. 567-589), he adds an almost authoritarian element to the supernatural, insisting it be purged from modern life with urgency. Coleridge's dark pastoral takes its cue from this type of generic experimentation as it insists upon a category of supernatural that is boundless and at times, terrifying.

This thesis is divided into five chapters. The first chapter explores generic experimentation in *Lyrical Ballads*. Through the subjective lyric 'I', it introduces Wordsworth and Coleridge's dark pastoral, itself an exploratory and shifting subgenre of pastoral. The chapter focuses on a trio of thematically contrasting poems, *Lines Written a few miles above Tintern Abbey, on revisiting the Wye during a Tour. July 13, 1798*, 'The Old Cumberland Beggar, A Description' and 'The Nightingale'. Central to the chapter's discussion is the finding of self, a quest that reveals itself through the lyrical ballad. In *Tintern Abbey* Wordsworth uses a familiar landscape to redefine key generic axioms such as Arcadia and nostalgia. Rather than focusing on the new historicist's 'strategy of displacement', I show how Wordsworth modifies pastoral's lyric 'I' to reflect on personal experience.⁷⁹ By attributing darkness to nature, memory and growth, the poet fundamentally redefines the terms of the pastoral

⁷⁸ Coleridge uses a similar technique in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* when he adopts the *abba* stanza form. There is also an incantatory quality attributed to his quatrains which adds a supernatural element to the poem. |

⁷⁹ Jerome McGann, 'Wordsworth and the Ideology of Romantic Poems', in *The Romantic Ideology* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 72-90 (p. 90). I am also referring to Marjorie Levinson's argument in her chapter 'Insight and oversight: reading "Tintern Abbey"', in *Wordsworth's Great Period Poems: Four Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 14-57.

return and retreat. The chapter also disassociates the pastoral from its bourgeois roots by introducing an entirely new character philosophy in its analysis of ‘The Old Cumberland Beggar’. This lyrical ballad, with its fluctuation between character and natural setting, demonstrates appreciation rather than pity for the marginalised rural poor. Adding a strong moral fibre to pastoral, Wordsworth rewrites the script for the true hero of society pre-empting Stuart Curran’s declaration that ‘a true pastoral will find its impetus in reality, not convention’.⁸⁰ The certainty of Wordsworth’s generic mission is counteracted by the instability of Coleridge’s ‘The Nightingale’. Introducing the twilight pastoral, ‘The Nightingale’ attempts to dislodge the bird’s conventional association with melancholia. We are introduced to the supernatural nocturnal pastoral in a bid to demonstrate the anxiety inherent in rejecting both literary and generic tradition. With such an unstable lyric ‘I’ at the heart of his genre, Coleridge shows how pastoral can accommodate movement and uncertainty.

The conversation poem has long interested critics for its formal and generic innovation. Chapter two continues in this line of thinking through its exploration of anxiety in Coleridge’s early poetry. Unearthing the perils of the mind’s transforming gaze, this chapter shows the extent to which Coleridge paradoxically enjoys psychological disquiet in the poetry. The imagination transforms nature into an external projection of the tormented mind, facilitating a more psychological type of dark pastoral. Initially focusing upon ‘Frost at Midnight’ and ‘The Eolian Harp’, the chapter sketches out Coleridge’s obsession with the otherworldly. The supernatural becomes an integral part of the poet’s dark pastoral agenda, a feature that we see spotlighted in Coleridge’s verse. Nature accommodates and stimulates tension, inciting more dubious emotions such as fear, exclusion and terror. In ‘Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement’, ‘This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison’ and *Fears in Solitude*, we see how pastoral becomes a robust mode of lyric. Coleridge destabilises the concept of the perfected natural idyll by subtly drawing on the imagination and nature’s darker possibilities. In ‘Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement’ genre is dynamic, flitting between convention and innovation. Through a new dark pastoral philosophy Coleridge diversifies genre by introducing new concepts such as the sublime, emotional sensibility and philanthropy. In ‘This Lime-Tree Bower My

⁸⁰ Curran, ‘The Pastoral’, p. 108.

Prison' the dark pastoral is deployed to enhance feelings of isolation and at times, envy. Pastoral is always interrupted by the dark pastoral as the perceptive and self-aware speaker never seems to be soothed by nature. This sentiment reaches its climax in *Fears in Solitude*, a temperamental and full-bodied lyric that uses the dark pastoral to foreground both personal and social anxiety in light of challenging political circumstances. Coleridge's active and turbulent pastoral discourse shows the extent to which Britain has become, and will always remain, a place of ruin. This fraught pastoral disrupts different types of generic unity including the city/country contrast, religion and the fascination with irony.

Chapter three focuses on self-consciousness in Coleridge's narrative poems. In its analysis of 'Kubla Khan', *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and *Christabel*, the chapter explores Coleridge's inability to reach his own seemingly impossible creative apotheosis. Through different variations of the mythical dark pastoral, I show how Coleridge self-consciously draws attention to both the limits of his own creative power and the limitless possibilities of the imagination. Landscape, narrative and human relationships are completely reworked through genre, led in a large part by the poet's more explicit application of the supernatural. In 'Kubla Khan' Coleridge explores the oriental pastoral of the 13th and 14th century Mongolian era. With a new and unfamiliar backdrop in place, the poet experiments with the idea of a personally determined paradoxical paradise. Genre accommodates and destroys an entirely new contradictory idyll that revolves around a mysterious pleasure dome. In *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, Coleridge spotlights micro episodes of pastoral embedded within a sea voyage to deliberately disfigure traditionally positive images of pastoral. The dark pastoral is defined by bursts of repulsive fictional images including natural and marine decay as well as the distorted female body. Genre is simultaneously underpinned by the incantatory ballad stanza wielded to sponsor the maniacal dark pastoral. The ongoing psychological complexity of creative endeavour reaches its apotheosis in *Christabel*, a poem which self-consciously foregrounds the transgressive pastoral. Coleridge introduces us to a cast of new dark pastoral features including the ominous nocturnal pastoral, the evil pastoral maiden and unsettled dog to incite generic disruption. Qualifying his own assertion that, 'Self-consciousness...is *the Form* and indispensable *Mark* of the Individuality', this chapter shows how the elusive

metaphysician devises a series of self-aware, mythical dark pastorals that render the traditional pastoral obsolete.⁸¹

To redesign the pastoral is to carve out new routes for genre, an ethos that is apparent in Wordsworth's later exercises in epic. *The Excursion* offers a particular brand of dark pastoral that complements the poet's earlier experiments in genre, not least because of its emphasis on suffering. Chapter four capitalises on this line of thought in its exploration Brandon C. Yen's statement, '*The Excursion* remains fraught with tensions that resist final reconciliation'.⁸² Wordsworth uses epic to bring pastoral into a modern context by infusing it with a deeply moral and contemplative quality. In Book I 'The Wanderer', genre foregrounds the destructive effect of loss through the figure of Margaret and her cottage. The loss of a husband leads to the physical and emotional deterioration of the female maiden and her home, inciting a gross fissure between man and nature. Maternal suffering dominates the dark pastoral, redirecting the eye towards the figure we do not usually see. Book IV 'Despondency Corrected' posits an equally radical premise in its exploration of the psychological and internalised dark pastoral. Deep feeling and solitude dominate the Solitary's thoughts as he sees no certainty in nature's ability to endure. The pastoral fundamentally fails to work as an antidote to despondency. The dark pastoral becomes a mode of comprehending a sad contemporary reality, ultimately foregrounding the perils of the Solitary's overactive mind. The chapter terminates with a discussion of suffering as a loss of joy and virtue. In Book VI 'The Churchyard Among the Mountains' we see the injustice of the dark pastoral fallen maiden Ellen, a victim of cruel circumstance. Building on Margaret's plight, Wordsworth shows the countryside to be a hostile and unwelcoming space where unvirtuous behaviour leads to undeserved suffering.

The final chapter of this thesis explores heroism in *The Prelude* (1850). Wordsworth rehabilitates pastoral through the larger framework of epic by specifically focusing on the definition and premise of individual heroism. The chapter charts nature's involvement in the development and growth of self as poet-hero, rereading canonical

⁸¹ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Entry 5377 [26.23], f44v, May 1826, in *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge 1819-1826: Entries 4505-4571*, Volume 4 Text, ed. by Kathleen Coburn and Merton Christenson (London: Routledge, 1990).

⁸² Brandon C. Yen, 'Flowing and Reflecting', in *The Excursion and Wordsworth's Iconography* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2018), pp. 256-290 (p. 285).

passages of *The Prelude* through the lens of personal trial. In Book I ‘The Wanderer’ Wordsworth details his renowned childhood boat-stealing encounter and explores the experience of ‘vulgar joy’.⁸³ Through the nocturnal dark pastoral we see how landscape provokes tension and terror. Through an externally induced type of fear, genre shows how the child learns to work through trial and recognise his own strength. Pastoral captures the young Wordsworth’s challenge in and through nature as an experience of growth. The second part of the chapter focuses on Book II ‘School Time’, a section of *The Prelude* that reinterprets the poet’s idea of dual consciousness. The pastoral and the dark pastoral work in tandem with one another to purport a new generic philosophy centred around self-perception and external action. Adolescent epic trial manifests through theoretical reasoning, notably around ancient and contemporary pastorals, the soul and ambivalent human emotion. We learn to appreciate the spiritual power of nature as it stimulates scholarly growth. This segues into the concluding discussion of the chapter, centred upon Book V ‘Books’. Through the Dream of the Arab and the Drowning Man episodes, genre foregrounds difficulty through vision and discovery. The limitless capacity of the dream and emotional trial unearth a hero who is perfected by struggle. Ultimately the chapter shows how Wordsworth plays with landscape and action to produce a more introspective hero who feels and experiences deeply.

This thesis offers a vital and rigorous examination of the uses and versions of pastoral in Wordsworth and Coleridge’s work. As Stephen Maxfield Parrish argues, ‘the programme Wordsworth [and Coleridge seem] to recommend for all great poetry—is a programme centered on the pastoral mode’.⁸⁴ This study takes Parrish’s assertion seriously, introducing the dark pastoral subgenre as an integral component of Wordsworth and Coleridge’s literary agendas at large. These poets exhibit a strong desire to reinvigorate the seemingly bland pastoral of the eighteenth century so as to bring a new element of creativity and imagination to genre. As Fiona Stafford argues, ‘Traditionally, pastoral was the mode for low and rustic life and the proper language for such poems was, as Pope argued, plain’.⁸⁵ Left with a variety of opportunity,

⁸³ William Wordsworth, Book I, ‘Introduction, Childhood and School Time’, in *The Prelude: The Four Texts (1798, 1799, 1805, 1850)*, Penguin Classics (Penguin: London, 1995), pp. 37-73 (p. 69).

⁸⁴ Stephen Maxfield Parrish, ‘The Ballad as Pastoral’, in *The Art of Lyrical Ballads* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1973), pp. 149-187 (p. 162).

⁸⁵ Stafford, ‘Plain and Ungarnish’d Stories: Wordsworth and the Survival of Pastoral’, p. 120.

Wordsworth and Coleridge choose to add dynamism to the pastoral to chip away at the fascination with irony, the outmoded double plot and stock singing swain. Through revision and rehabilitation of pastoral, we see a series of poems that spotlight the power of experience and imagination, ultimately carving out an entirely new approach to genre. The pastoral, for Wordsworth and Coleridge, is defined by personal experiences, new character types and an ability to debate deeply complex and philosophical ideas. Pastoral is much more than the perfected idyll. Darkness gives way to limitless possibility, whether in the form of memory, myth or heroism. Indeed, as Coleridge states in a 1796 Notebook entry,

Inward desolations—
 an horror of great darkness
 great things that on the ocean
 counterfeit infinity—⁸⁶

Wordsworth and Coleridge expand their poetic vision and generic repertoire by constantly seeking out new ‘Inward desolations’ to push the pastoral to its greatest and often most uncomfortable limits. This thesis reveals Wordsworth and Coleridge as poets who were committed to generic experimentation, who were unafraid of challenging the status quo and sought to make a name for themselves as pastoral innovators. The dark pastoral is a testament to Wordsworth and Coleridge’s knowledge of tradition, but equally their desire to surpass generations of pastoral writers. As Michael O’Neill so eloquently argues, ‘Genres matter to [Wordsworth and] Coleridge’.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Entry 273 [G. 270], f78, 1796, in *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge 1794-1804: Entries 1-1842*, Volume 1, ed. by Kathleen Coburn (London: Routledge, 1957).

⁸⁷ Michael O’Neill, ‘Coleridge’s Genres’, in *The Oxford Handbook to Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 375-391 (p. 377).

Chapter One: Subjectivity and the Lyrical Ballads

In the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* Wordsworth affirms that the purpose of his and Coleridge's collaborative project is experimentation.⁸⁸ However, since the publication of the 1798 edition, critical attention has focused predominantly on the hybrid achievement of the lyrical ballad with little discussion focused upon the Lake Poets' use of pastoral. Indeed, as the title of the 1802 edition announces, *Lyrical Ballads* includes 'Pastoral and Other Poems', self-consciously asking readers to view the collection as an exercise in a specific genre.⁸⁹ This chapter will explore Stephen Maxfield Parrish's assertion, '[i]t is on the whole surprising that anyone could overlook the importance to Wordsworth [and Coleridge] of the pastoral mode'.⁹⁰ From 'Expostulation and Reply' to *Michael*, *Lyrical Ballads* uses the pastoral as a way of finding self, drawing on the lyric 'I' in order to convert the genre into a personal and subjective mode. By entering the georgic mode in such a novel way, the poets rehabilitate the pastoral, instigating a more sensitive, nuanced and original genre that deliberately rejects the baroque and regimented bucolics of the Augustan era. With the lyric 'I' at the helm of their poetic mission, Wordsworth and Coleridge change both the tradition and observer of pastoral, placing a new importance on perspective.⁹¹ The didactic element of classical pastoral is equally compromised for a new generic premise that is predicated upon personal experience. Much like John Milton's *Il Penseroso*, *Lyrical Ballads* does not teach us how to husband the land but rather creates a new pastoral vision that is centred upon thinking through a unique series of ideas. *Lines Written a few miles above Tintern Abbey, on revisiting the Wye during a Tour. July 13, 1798*, 'The Old Cumberland Beggar, a Description' and 'The Nightingale' all stage this idiosyncratic type of lyrical pastoral, exploiting the narrative

⁸⁸ William Wordsworth, 'Preface to Lyrical Ballads', in *Lyrical Ballads 1798 and 1802*, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 95-116 (p. 96).

⁸⁹ William Wordsworth, 'Lyrical Ballads, with Pastoral and Other Poems in Two Volumes, Vol. I 1802', in *Lyrical Ballads 1798 and 1802*, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 94-116 (p. 94). Please note that all further references to *Lyrical Ballads* will be from this edition (1802) unless otherwise stated.

⁹⁰ Stephen Maxfield Parrish, 'The Ballad as Pastoral', in *The Art of the Lyrical Ballads* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1973), pp. 149-187 (p. 159).

⁹¹ As Jonathan Culler has noted, 'Lyric was finally made one of three fundamental genres during the romantic period, when a more vigorous conception of the individual subject made it possible to conceive of lyric as mimetic: mimetic of the experience of the subject'. See Jonathan Culler, 'Lyric, History, and Genre', *New Literary History*, 40.4 (2009) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/40666452>> [Accessed 11 October 2020] (p. 884).

element of the ballad in order to shatter the superficially elevated pastoral of the eighteenth-century Georgics.⁹² Pastoral is a vital part of *Lyrical Ballads* and its achievement and legacy.

‘We begin by doubting if Wordsworth today is *read*’, writes John F. Danby.⁹³ This statement is no more relevant than when considering a poem originally unintended for *Lyrical Ballads*: Wordsworth’s *Lines Written a few miles above Tintern Abbey, on revisiting the Wye during a Tour. July 13, 1798*. Rarely studied as a pastoral poem despite its direct mention of ‘pastoral farms’ (*Tintern Abbey*, l. 17), *Tintern Abbey* has been re-read by a series of new historicist critics that see the poem as fundamentally concerned with articulating a ‘strategy of displacement’.⁹⁴ By reconsidering the poem as a pastoral enterprise, the critic might alleviate the apparent pressure of its absences by redirecting attention towards its success as a generic experiment. Inspired by his own walking tours of the Wye Valley, Wordsworth writes a meditative pastoral grounded in personal experience. Crucially, such beauty is interfused with moments of tension, reflective of the poet’s own deep-seated anxieties.⁹⁵ Eschewing the idea of pastoral as solely idealised, *Tintern Abbey*, with its fluid blank verse and contemplative tone, advocates for a variegated and intuitive pastoral, drawing upon

⁹² William Wordsworth, ‘Lines Written a Few Lines above Tintern Abbey, on revisiting the Wye during a Tour. July 13, 1798’, in *Wordsworth and Coleridge Lyrical Ballads 1798 and 1802*, Oxford World’s Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 193-198, William Wordsworth, ‘The Old Cumberland Beggar, a Description’, in *Wordsworth and Coleridge Lyrical Ballads 1798 and 1802*, Oxford World’s Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 264-269 and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ‘The Nightingale’, in *Wordsworth and Coleridge Lyrical Ballads 1798 and 1802*, Oxford World’s Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 153-155. Please note that all further references to these three poems will be quoted from the 1802 edition. In regard to the superficial pastorals of the eighteenth century, Wordsworth refers to ‘very different expectations’ for authors such as ‘Cowley, or Dryden, or Pope’ in the *Preface* to *Lyrical Ballads* (1802) suggesting that he is aware of how unprecedented *Lyrical Ballads* was as a both a poetic venture and experiment. The same notion could be applied to his concept of pastoral. See William Wordsworth, ‘*Preface* to *Lyrical Ballads*’, in *Lyrical Ballads 1798 and 1802*, Oxford World’s Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 95-116 (p. 96).

⁹³ John F. Danby, ‘Prologue’, in *The Simple Wordsworth: Studies in the Poems 1797-1807* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960), pp. 1-14 (p. 14).

⁹⁴ Jerome McGann, ‘Wordsworth and the Ideology of Romantic Poems’, in *The Romantic Ideology* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 72-90 (p. 90). I am also referring to Marjorie Levinson’s argument in her chapter ‘Insight and Oversight: Reading “Tintern Abbey”’, in *Wordsworth’s Great Period Poems: Four Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 14-57.

⁹⁵ As John F. Danby has remarked, ‘The period 1760-1830 sees the beginning of ‘Angst’’. Though he does not specify what type of angst, *Tintern Abbey* was written during political, social and personal upheaval for Wordsworth and these anxieties translate directly into the poem. See John F. Danby, ‘Prologue’, in *The Simple Wordsworth: Studies in the Poems 1797-1807* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960), pp. 1-14 (p. 10).

the Wordsworthian selves of 1793 and 1798. As James McKusick has argued, *Tintern Abbey* ‘evoke[s] a dynamic awareness of the natural world through the vivid sensory imagery of its beholding by an engaged participant’.⁹⁶ Such ‘vivid sensory imagery’, established at the poem’s onset, draws the reader directly into the realm of private sensory experience:

Five years have passed; five summers, with the length
Of five long winters! and again I hear
These waters, rolling from their mountain-springs
With a sweet inland murmur.

(*Tintern Abbey*, l. 1-4)

Wordsworth uses the lyric ‘I’ to renegotiate the relationship between two key generic axioms: time and the concept of return. In recalling ‘Five years have passed’, the poet configures a broad timeline that relates to two distinct exploratory experiences in the Wye Valley (1793 and 1798). Where James Thomson’s *The Seasons* adheres to nature’s annual cycle (spring, summer, autumn, winter) Wordsworth avoids any such seasonal organisation, preferring to experiment with temporal boundaries instead. As Mary Jacobus comments ‘Wordsworth can take up where Thomson leaves off’ though this is not just in relation to what she terms, perhaps too generally, ‘nature poetry’.⁹⁷ In experimenting with a longer time frame Wordsworth liberates the pastoral by removing Thomson’s conventional and at times restrictive twelve-month natural cycle from his poem. Working within his own terms of reference, the poet exploits genre in order to indulge in a more exclusive and extensive exploration of his own past and present. This makes for a distinctly unique type of return:

—Once again

Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,
Which on a wild secluded scene impress
Thoughts of a more deep seclusion; and connect
The landscape with the quiet of the sky.
The day is come when I again repose
Here, under this dark sycamore, and view

⁹⁶ James McKusick, ‘Ecocritical Approaches to *Lyrical Ballads*’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Lyrical Ballads* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp. 211-229 (p. 217).

⁹⁷ Mary Jacobus, ‘Nature, Self, and Imagination: The Eighteenth-Century Legacy’, in *Tradition and Experiment in Wordsworth’s Lyrical Ballads (1798)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), pp. 38-58 (p. 44).

These plots of cottage ground, these orchard-tufts,
 Which, at this season, with their unripe fruits,
 Are clad in one green hue, and lose themselves
 Among the woods and copses, nor disturb
 The wild green landscape. Once again I see
 These hedge-rows, hardly hedge-rows, little lines
 Of sportive wood run wild; these pastoral farms
 Green to the very door; and wreathes of smoke
 Sent up, in silence, from among the trees,
 With some uncertain notice, as might seem,
 Of vagrant Dwellers in the houseless woods,
 Of some Hermit's cave, where by his fire
 The Hermit sits alone.

(Tintern Abbey, l. 4-23)

Classical notions of the return to the Golden Age are exchanged for an Eden that is both closer to home and familiar to the poet. In referencing specific features of an actual place ('These waters', 'these steep and lofty cliffs') Wordsworth reconfigures both the purpose and effect of the pastoral return, omitting the hyper imaginative and remote elements of classical Arcadia in favour of a much-admired nook of the Wye Valley. Rather than choosing to imagine an idyll from a time gone by, Wordsworth returns to a particular spot of affection to ground himself in his own past and then discover who he is in the present tense. In adding a reflective undertone to a key axiom, pastoral is less about what has been lost and needs to be recovered, and more about the growth of the poet's mind. Genre becomes expansive. By relocating his Elysium to England, Wordsworth also makes us realise that it is possible to visit, create and access one's own utopia.

Though lines 4-23 may seem to contain beautiful pastoral overtones flecked with deep moments of contemplation, they are underpinned with a tension that dominates *Tintern Abbey*. The seamless homogeneity and warmth of the 'one green hue' is offset by both the wilderness and seclusion of the scene, the vibrancy of the green subdued by isolation. Complicating the pastoral with an implicit but discernible dark pastoral undercurrent, Wordsworth redefines generic binaries by introducing 'two

consciousnesses' (*The Prelude*, Book II, l. 31) to his genre.⁹⁸ Where William Empson sees the ironic 'double plot' as the genre's defining binary, the Lake Poet appoints natural beauty and angst as his primary dyad.⁹⁹ 'Once again' implies that this dual consciousness has been detected before: the 'wild green landscape' is the same in 1793 and 1798. Wordsworth advances his notion of pastoral retreat effectively as he observes a beautiful landscape that is crucially imperfect even from his first visit. The poet's first experience of it seems to mesh with present experience, the repeated mention of 'again' suggesting that this tension is ongoing. Rather than presenting his reader with an unrealistic and unreachable utopia, our speaker chooses to show how domestic 'forms of beauty' (*Tintern Abbey*, l. 25) have been, and continue to be, accompanied by a 'sad perplexity' (*Tintern Abbey*, l. 61). The regret that the poet later expresses in his address to his sister Dorothy alters slightly as his fears about not being able to experience the naïve joy of his younger years are accompanied by the fear of not being able to re-experience this individualised pastoral. Though in 1798 he observes this pastoral scene, he is acutely aware that he may not always be able to return to this site in its current state. It could worsen and lose its beauty entirely as a result of 'industrial and commercial activity'.¹⁰⁰ The poet is perhaps trying to do more than simply 'make sense of, his movement from a past period of innocent happiness into the perilous world of self-knowledge and self-consciousness'.¹⁰¹ Wordsworth deliberately broadens his application of genre in order to chip away at the irony of pastoral, imbuing his poem with real and immediate social concerns.

John E. Jordan writes, '[*Tintern Abbey*] was the last poem to go into the first edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* and has to be regarded as more of an afterthought than part of the core of the experiment'.¹⁰² Even in these opening lines one can dispute Jordan's claim on the basis that *Tintern Abbey*'s programme is centred entirely on evaluating,

⁹⁸ William Wordsworth, 'The Fourteen-Book Prelude of 1850', in *The Prelude: The Four Texts (1798, 1799, 1805, 1850)*, Penguin Classics (Penguin: London, 1995), pp. 36-538 (p. 71).

⁹⁹ William Empson, 'Double Plots', in *Some Versions of Pastoral* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1935), pp. 28-86.

¹⁰⁰ Levinson, 'Insight and Oversight: Reading "Tintern Abbey"', p. 29.

¹⁰¹ Scott McEathron, 'Wordsworth and Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*', in *A Companion to Romanticism*, ed. by Duncan Wu (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), pp. 155-168 (p. 163).

¹⁰² John E. Jordan, 'Introduction and Conclusion', in *Why the Lyrical Ballads? The Background, Writing, and Character of Wordsworth's 1798 Lyrical Ballads* (Berkeley; London; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976), pp. 1-8.

modernising and revolutionising the pastoral. The idealised vision of country life is replaced with a more complex and intricate rural portrait, adding newfound breadth and depth to the genre. The ‘wild secluded scene’ that impresses ‘[t]houghts of a more deep seclusion’ for example, introduces us to a natural world that is initially aesthetically varied but also highly influential on man. Nature, in its uncultivated state, provokes profound, pensive thoughts, though it must be noted that ‘more deep’ suggests that Wordsworth was already in a state of seclusion; nature has only exacerbated this state. His present angst, rather than being soothed by the balm of pastoral, is aggravated by the tension that the poet detects in nature. Anticipating *The Excursion*, in *Tintern Abbey* Wordsworth transforms the pastoral into a psychological phenomenon as his mind absorbs elements of the darkness that lies before him. While it may be easy to assume that this is a negative trait, it is this very obscurity that allows Wordsworth to reflect and grow both as an artist and as an individual. Pre-empting the traditional pastoral in lines 9-15 with such a strong philosophy transforms the genre into a much more proactive and progressive mode, taking it away from its prescriptive and often reactive arrangement. It is not that the ‘dark sycamore’, ‘plots of cottage ground’ and ‘orchard-tufts’ lose their nostalgic charm, but rather that these stock pastoral features assume a more pronounced profile as they sit alongside the darker pastoral consciousness. The ‘pastoral farms / Green to the very door’ give the reader the opportunity to visit familiar pastoral haunts, providing a brief moment of respite before we encounter the lonely hermit.

Interspersed amongst the greenery of the opening stanza is the sombre recluse, sat alone next to a fire. Though not directly involved in the main narrative of *Tintern Abbey*, this isolated figure, with his unknown circumstances and unconventional lifestyle adds both tension and contrast to pastoral. Against the nostalgic and inviting image of Wordsworth reposing under a tree, the hermit in his cave represents an easily overlooked concern with social marginalisation, a preoccupation that is expressed in other *Lyrical Ballads* such as ‘The Old Cumberland Beggar, a Description’ and ‘The Foster-Mother’s Tale’. As Alan Rawes comments, *Tintern Abbey* is ‘a poem that sets out to dramatise a tension between an interest in private visionary experience and an ongoing concern with—anxiety about, perhaps—social actualities and that brings these into dialogue and confrontation with each other, allowing each to clash, modify

and counter the other'.¹⁰³ Neatly redressing Marjorie Levinson's argument that *Tintern Abbey* is obsessed with the 'suppression of the social', Rawes draws our attention to Wordsworth's ability to draw in social inequity.¹⁰⁴ To expand on Rawes' reading, in *Tintern Abbey*, Wordsworth uses genre to make different modes of isolation clash with one another. Channelling a 'private visionary experience' through the lens of the pastoral, the poet asks his reader to make an informed decision about which preoccupation is more pressing: the anxiety of not being able to re-experience natural pleasures or a hermit's indeterminate solitude. Exploiting the deliberate ambiguity of 'uncertain notice', Wordsworth fashions a genre that encourages compassion and also responsive action. This emphasis on philanthropy carries through to the second stanza:

Though absent long,
 These forms of beauty have not been to me,
 As is a landscape to a blind man's eye:
 But oft, in lonely rooms, and mid the din
 Of towns and cities, I have owed to them,
 In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,
 Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart,
 And passing even into my purer mind,
 With tranquil restoration:—feelings too
 Of unremembered pleasure: such, perhaps,
 As may have had no trivial influence
 On that best portion of a good man's life;
 His little, nameless, unremembered acts
 Of kindness and love.

(*Tintern Abbey*, l. 23-36)

In these fourteen lines Wordsworth completely overhauls pastoral's philosophy by allowing the lyric 'I' to dominate *Tintern Abbey* in a new way. Private experience fundamentally transforms the nostalgic impulse of the poem as personal memory is brought to the forefront of the poet's creative agenda. In longing for his own experiences of natural beauty Wordsworth devises a very personal type of nostalgia

¹⁰³ Alan Rawes, 'Romantic Form and New Historicism: Wordsworth's "Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey"', in *Romanticism and Form*, ed. by A. Rawes, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 95-115 (p. 102).

¹⁰⁴ Levinson, 'Insight and Oversight: Reading "Tintern Abbey"', p. 37.

that does away with abstract utopias. The allusion to the Wye Valley adds both a charm and a note of authenticity to *Tintern Abbey*, helping to construct a generic philosophy that is focused on personal truth rather than imagination. Wordsworth looks beyond the purely aesthetic. Genre takes on an almost confessional tone as the speaker details how these particular memories have soothed him from the chaos of the urban metropolis. The ‘hours of weariness’ have been relieved by the sweet sensations triggered by these ‘forms of beauty’, the sibilance soothing any fatigue that the poet may have once felt. These sensations are also felt ‘in the blood, and felt along the heart’ showing how this new type of nostalgia is experienced predominantly as a physical, rather than a visual sensation. Reclaiming such a crucial and even cliched element of pastoral gives Wordsworth a certain artistic license in that he can direct the genre according to his own lights. The metaphysical for example, so often associated with Coleridge, is explored in fleeting but significant detail. The ‘purer mind’ is pacified by memory, almost as if it was in a state of nervous agitation before these visions of nature passed through it. The phrase ‘tranquil restoration’ carries with it a weight of meaning. Nature has become a mental oasis for Wordsworth, one that frequently restores emotional and spiritual equilibrium. In affirming personal feeling, pastoral becomes the genre of the self and personal intuition.

Inspired by his own strong and affecting memories, Wordsworth moves pastoral further into the terrain of ‘unremembered pleasure’. Genre, with its ability to stir up feeling, provides an opportunity for man to remember positive deeds. When the poet speaks of the good man’s ‘little, nameless, unremembered acts / Of kindness and love’, he injects a deeply sincere grain of altruism into pastoral. He details what he finds of paramount importance in an increasingly unstable political environment. The beauty of Wordsworth’s phrasing and syntax is felt in the underplayed and seemingly insignificant adjectives ‘little, nameless, unremembered’, all of which ironically contribute to true acts of ‘kindness and love’. Pastoral is now the genre of the unsung hero, a principle that we see play out in ‘The Old Cumberland Beggar, a Description’. Wordsworth reworks pastoral into a genre of benevolence, expressing his own desire to recognise unremembered philanthropic action. Though William Empson argues that the purpose of pastoral is to ‘take a limited life and pretend it is the full and normal one’, Wordsworth advocates for a new type of life, one which is dominated by

humanitarianism irrespective of whether it is perceived as limited or full.¹⁰⁵ It is through such acts that the ‘heavy and weary weight / Of all this unintelligible world / Is lighten’d’ (*Tintern Abbey*, l. 40-42). The Lake Poet’s homage to this type of unconventional, silent pleasure continues to dominate *Tintern Abbey* through a softer, more sentimental pastoral consciousness:

—that serene and blessed mood,
 In which the affections gently lead us on,
 Until, the breath of this corporeal frame,
 And even the motion of our human blood
 Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
 In body, and become a living soul:
 While with an eye made quiet by the power
 Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
 We see into the life of things.

(*Tintern Abbey*, l. 42-50)

Despite Wordsworth arguing in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* that ‘all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling’, he whispers rather than shouts his own transformation of pastoral through the expression of such feeling.¹⁰⁶ A higher philosophical truth is realised in *Tintern Abbey* as a result of the quasi-epiphanic ‘serene and blessed mood’ that the poet experiences. The power of such a mood is encapsulated in Wordsworth’s insistence on the use of collective pronouns ‘us’ and ‘we’, adding a sense of inclusivity to pastoral. Though Stephen Prickett argues that ‘Wordsworth was in a state of depression—perhaps even feeling suicidal’ when he wrote *Tintern Abbey*, in these tranquil lines there is not a sense of any straightforwardly negative feeling.¹⁰⁷ Instead, Wordsworth uses the narrative to guide the reader onwards. The ‘affections gently lead us’, as well as Wordsworth and Dorothy, into uncharted waters. Likewise, Marjorie Levinson’s view that ‘Wordsworth’s pastoral prospect is a fragile affair, artfully assembled by acts of exclusion’ excludes Wordsworth’s social purpose.¹⁰⁸ Pastoral becomes the genre of

¹⁰⁵ William Empson, ‘They That Have Power’, in *Some Versions of Pastoral* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1935), pp. 89-115 (p. 114).

¹⁰⁶ Wordsworth, ‘Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*’, p. 98.

¹⁰⁷ Stephen Prickett, ‘Unity with Diversity’, in *Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Lyrical Ballads* (London: Edward Arnold, 1975), pp. 22-50 (p. 43).

¹⁰⁸ Levinson, ‘Insight and Oversight: Reading “Tintern Abbey”’, p. 32.

humankind rather than the genre of the elite. Acknowledging that we will all die, our ‘human blood’ will stop flowing and our bodies will be buried, the speaker reveals the higher purpose of life: to ‘become a living soul’. Through those ‘little, nameless, unremembered acts / Of kindness and love’ the soul will live on. Our presence will endure. With a revised pastoral philosophy, the lines, ‘While with an eye made quiet by the power / Of harmony, and the deep power of joy, / We see into the life of things’ acquire new significance. The ‘eye’ or visual element of pastoral is quietened by the ‘power / Of harmony, and the deep power of joy’ as positive affections inaugurate a new generic vision. In Stephen Prickett’s words, ‘we perceive not merely scenes, we perceive *values*’.¹⁰⁹ To ‘see into the life of things’, while seemingly abstract, is to experience nature, people and life in as full a capacity as possible. Pastoral does not fail in its promise in *Tintern Abbey* to provide us with new experiences, leaving us profoundly affected by what we read.

‘I have not ventured to call this Poem an Ode; but it was written with a hope that in the transitions and the impassioned music of the versification, would be found the principle requisites of that species of composition’, writes Wordsworth in his ‘Note to the poem on Revisiting the Wye’.¹¹⁰ Though Stuart Curran and J. Douglas Kneale make compelling arguments for features of the ode in *Tintern Abbey*, they do not emphasise the importance of the lyric in Wordsworth’s exploration of pastoral. By hybridising the pastoral with the ode’s ‘attendant balance of tone and sentiment’, Wordsworth successfully creates a poem that is constantly subject to swift and often unexpected transitions, making for a dynamic and exploratory poem.¹¹¹ The lyric ‘I’ tempers the pastoral to flit between a state of optimistic and reflective composure to periods of angst. As Stuart Curran observes, ‘no movement in the poem is without counterflow’.¹¹² The vacillation of the lyric ‘I’ is best exemplified in stanza four, where we see the speaker’s mood fluctuate repeatedly:

And now, with gleams of half-extinguish’d thought,

¹⁰⁹ Prickett, ‘Unity with Diversity’, p. 48.

¹¹⁰ William Wordsworth, ‘Note to the Poem on Revisiting the Wye’, in *Lyrical Ballads 1798 and 1802*, Oxford World’s Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 200.

¹¹¹ Stephen F Fogle and Paul H. Fry, *Ode.*, in *The Princeton Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. by Alex Preminger, et al. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993) *ProQuest* <<https://www-proquest-com.sheffield.idm.oclc.org/docview/2137920585?accountid=13828>> [Accessed 18 April 2022].

¹¹² Stuart Curran, ‘The Hymn and the Ode’, in *Poetic Form and British Romanticism* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 56-84 (p. 77).

With many recognitions dim and faint,
 And somewhat of a sad perplexity,
 The picture of the mind revives again:
 While here I stand, not only with the sense
 Of present pleasure, but with pleasing thoughts
 That in this moment there is life and food
 For future years. And so I dare to hope
 Though changed, no doubt, from what I was, when first
 I came among these hills; when like a roe
 I bounded o'er the mountains, by the sides
 Of the deep rivers, and the lonely streams,
 Wherever nature led: more like a man
 Flying from something he dreads, that one
 Who sought the thing he loved.

(*Tintern Abbey*, l. 59-73)

In verse paragraph three, Wordsworth revisits the darker pastoral consciousness, using it as a mood that represents the 'sad perplexity' that he experiences. Pastoral is initially suspended in a melancholy state of transition as the speaker experiences 'gleams of half-extinguish'd thought'. That these thoughts are semi-discernible sees Wordsworth writing a pastoral that is able to accommodate ambiguity. The concrete image of idyllic pastures is an almost lost memory as genre now modulates between different and uncertain modes of being. It is in this specific state of 'sad perplexity' that the 'picture of the mind revives again'. Genre here relies on key mental and emotional transitions in order for the poet to reach a higher state of 'present pleasure'. Promptly moving *Tintern Abbey* into the realm of contentment, Wordsworth adds an unprecedented element of certainty to pastoral: 'in this moment there is life and food / For future years'. The aforementioned perplexity and even flickering thoughts completely vanish as the promise of spiritual and physical nourishment is etched into the poetry. When Wordsworth slips into memory, genre seems to recoil unexpectedly into a state of despondency. Although there is nostalgia implied in the image of a roe bounding over mountains amongst 'deep river, and the lonely streams', the final lines swiftly undercut any feelings of warmth. To fly from something one dreads suggests that Wordsworth came to this pastoral out of fear rather than love, re-introducing an emotional tension into *Tintern Abbey*. The verb 'flying' suggests rapid movement, an

urgency to leave behind some kind of horror that does not seem to be salved by this landscape. These lines evoke a hint of the sailor's mania in Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* as Wordsworth revisits the dark pastoral of his youth, while implying that this memory is still very much a part of his present. Against Timothy Morton, pastoral does not exclude any form of 'negative ambiance' but rather actively creates it.¹¹³

To name *Tintern Abbey* a 'loco-descriptive meditative landscape poem' as Kenneth Johnston does, is to downplay Wordsworth's status as a generic innovator.¹¹⁴ Through pastoral, Wordsworth puts forward a philosophy based on strong and unique feeling, adding a freshness to *Lyrical Ballads* that had previously been less apparent. Though *Tintern Abbey* does not attend a great deal to the dark pastoral aesthetic as *The Prelude* does, its episodic focus captures a mood that moves the poem beyond the 'loco-descriptive':

The sounding cataract

Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock,
The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
Their colours and their forms, were then to me
An appetite: a feeling and a love

(*Tintern Abbey*, l. 77-81)

Where Timothy Morton argues that Romantic ecosystems become an 'immersive, impersonal matrix', Wordsworth transforms his natural landscapes by inviting us to experience an unconventional and personal bucolic.¹¹⁵ In this passage the lyric 'I' is reworked to instil a sense of welcomed fear that once dominated Wordsworth's youth. The poet is 'haunted' by the sound of a cataract 'like a passion', the quasi-oxymoron suggestive of an odd feeling that was weirdly embraced. The daunting 'tall rock' and 'deep and gloomy wood' also seem strangely welcomed, described as a 'feeling and a love'. Tuning into the dark pastoral in such a visual, even disturbing manner, demonstrates how life's greatest loves can often be shadowy, rendering this version of the pastoral unquestionably Wordsworth's alone.

¹¹³ Timothy Morton, 'Romanticism and the Environmental Subject', in *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2009), pp. 79-139 (p. 124).

¹¹⁴ Kenneth Johnston, 'The Politics of "Tintern Abbey"', *The Wordsworth Circle*, 14.1 (1983) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/24041014>> [Accessed 13 September 2020] (p. 11).

¹¹⁵ Morton, 'Romanticism and the Environmental Subject', p. 103.

The poet's closing address to his sister changes once we read it through the dark pastoral lens:

Oh! yet a little while
 May I behold in thee what I was once,
 My dear, dear Sister! And this prayer I make,
 Knowing that Nature never did betray
 The heart that loved her; 'tis her privilege,
 Through all the years of this our life, to lead
 From joy to joy: for she can so inform
 The mind that is within us, so impress
 With quietness and beauty, and so feed
 With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues,
 Rash judgments, nor the sneers of selfish men,
 Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all
 The dreary intercourse of daily life,
 Shall e'er prevail against us, or disturb
 Our cheerful faith that all which we behold
 Is full of blessings.

(*Tintern Abbey*, l. 120-135)

Pastoral enters into a precarious phase as we encounter one of the most controversial passages in *Tintern Abbey*. Indeed, Jerome McGann reads Wordsworth as writing madness as the poet explores ‘the famous “absolute recompense” that issues from “loss”’.¹¹⁶ Genre appears duplicitous as it states one thing but implies another. As Fred V. Randel comments, a ‘binary opposition is here implied: something never did betray vs. something which indeed did betray’.¹¹⁷ The self-conscious statement ‘Knowing that Nature never did betray / The heart that loved her’ returns genre back to its fascination with irony as we might wonder if Wordsworth is lying to himself. Nature has betrayed the heart that loved her; we have seen this in the aforementioned episodes of dark pastoral musing. Nature has not led Wordsworth from ‘joy to joy’—it has

¹¹⁶ Jerome McGann, ‘Byron and Romanticism, a dialogue (Jerome McGann and the editor, James Soderholm)’, in *Byron and Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 288-305 (p. 299).

¹¹⁷ Fred V. Randel, ‘The Betrayals of “Tintern Abbey”’, *Studies in Romanticism*, 32.3 (1993) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/25601020>> [Accessed 17 April 2021] (p. 386).

impressed his mind with anguish as well as ‘quietness and beauty’. Genre in *Tintern Abbey* fails to commit to a wholeheartedly pure state of being because pastoral is directed by the poet’s varied life experiences. Wordsworth’s political and social concerns have revealed themselves through a literary landscape that accommodates moments of astounding beauty but also spots of tension. Though we may have encountered ‘lofty thoughts’, the prayer that ‘neither evil tongues, / Rash judgments, nor the sneers of selfish men... Shall e’er prevail against us’ seems an overtly idealistic proposition. As demonstrated in ‘The Mad Mother’ and ‘The Old Cumberland Beggar, a Description’, evil tongues and rash judgement have prevailed against man: they are inevitable. Part of Wordsworth and Coleridge’s purpose in *Lyrical Ballads* then is to force their reader to question how much they believe in the ironised pastoral. To suggest a world ‘where no kindness is’, where ‘cheerful faith’ is ‘full of blessings’ is utopian rather than realistic. *Tintern Abbey*, among other lyrical ballads, questions the efficacy of traditional pastoral from an ethical perspective.

With such strong questioning in place, it is important that Wordsworth appoints a beneficiary for his radical generic project. The recipient of such an important mission is his sister, Dorothy, whom he addresses in the latter part of the poem:

Nor wilt though then forget,
That after many wanderings, many years
Of absence, these steep woods and lofty cliffs,
And this green pastoral landscape, were to me
More dear, both for themselves, and for thy sake.

(*Tintern Abbey*, l. 156-160)

Wordsworth encourages Dorothy to not only recall his pastoral poetry, but to forge her own relationship with the genre so that she can write her own experimental and experiential poetry. He wants her to continue the work that he has already started. Since Wordsworth already respected Dorothy’s writing at this point, particularly her perceptive accounts of nature in her *Journals*, he encourages his sister to be his heir much in the fashion that Christopher Ricks describes in *Allusion to the Poets*.¹¹⁸ Gifting his own process to his sister transforms *Tintern Abbey* into a form of

¹¹⁸ Christopher Ricks, *Allusion to the Poets* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

inspirational pastoral, attempting to motivate her to emulate and go beyond his poetry rather than consider his dark pastoral perfected and complete.

Wordsworth's experimental and unorthodox expansion of pastoral in *Tintern Abbey* provides us with a new way of seeing the world. As detailed in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, the poet chooses to draw upon 'incidents and situations from common life', to prioritise observation over imagination in order to encourage his reader to see correctly, albeit through a very personal lens.¹¹⁹ 'The Old Cumberland Beggar, a Description' sees his theory at work again, written in 1798 but only circulated in the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*. Critics of 'The Old Cumberland Beggar', following Gary Harrison, have tended to view the poem as an exercise in and consideration of sympathy.¹²⁰ However, as Stephen Gill and Celeste Langan attest, such readings reduce the poem to the 'single self-definition "Woe is me"', detracting from its success as a generic endeavour.¹²¹ In focusing upon an ostracised figure of society Wordsworth anticipates and challenges William Empson's assertion that, 'if you choose an important member the result is heroic, if you choose an unimportant one it is pastoral'.¹²² Through the lyric 'I' Wordsworth depicts the beggar as a figure of 'virtual decency' ('The Old Cumberland Beggar', l. 126) as opposed to a social parasite. If we cut through the sympathy and prioritise the pastoral as 'The Old Cumberland Beggar's' driving force, we realise that the poem does more 'than oppose an entrenched attitude about sympathy for the poor'.¹²³ Much like the Wanderer in *The Excursion*, the marginalised figure of pastoral becomes heroic because rather than in spite of, his relative perceived unimportance. It is his 'little, nameless, unremembered acts / Of kindness and love' (*Tintern Abbey*, l. 35-36) that allow the beggar to attain such a status. Though Quentin Bailey insists that Wordsworth stages a defence against

¹¹⁹ Wordsworth, 'Preface to Lyrical Ballads', p. 97.

¹²⁰ Gary Harrison, 'Wordsworth's "The Old Cumberland Beggar": The Economy of Charity in Late Eighteenth Century Britain', *Criticism: A Quarterly for Literature and the Arts*, 30.1 (1988) <<https://www-proquest-com.sheffield.idm.oclc.org/scholarly-journals/wordsworths-old-cumberland-beggar-economy-charity/docview/1311737728/se-2?accountid=13828>> [Accessed 12 May 2021].

¹²¹ Celeste Langan, 'Money Walks: Wordsworth and The Right to Wander', in *Romantic Vagrancy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 59-138 (p. 74). See also Stephen Gill, 'Wordsworth's Breeches Pocket: Attitudes to the Didactic Poet', *Essays in Criticism*, 19.4 (1969) <<https://doi-org.sheffield.idm.oclc.org/10.1093/eic/XIX.4.385>> [Accessed 29 November 2020] where Gill mentions that 'A figure is presented for our sympathy' (p. 387).

¹²² Empson, 'Double Plots', p. 81.

¹²³ Joshua King, "'The Old Cumberland Beggar": Form and Frustrated Sympathy', *The Wordsworth Circle*, 41.1 (2010) <<https://search-proquest-com.sheffield.idm.oclc.org/docview/366017370?accountid=13828>> [Accessed 23 November 2020].

Jeremy Bentham's distaste for beggary, through pastoral, the poet rather more significantly challenges his reader to see this type of vagrant anew.¹²⁴ This is apparent from what Michael O'Neill terms as the poem's 'unsentimental opening':¹²⁵

I saw an aged beggar in my walk,
 And he was seated by the highway side
 On a low structure of rude masonry
 Built at the foot of a huge hill, that they
 Who lead their horses down the steep rough road
 May thence remount at ease. The aged Man
 Had placed his staff across the broad smooth stone
 That overlays the pile, and from a bag
 All white with flour the dole of village dames,
 He drew his scraps and fragments, one by one,
 And scann'd them with a fix'd and serious look
 Of idle computation. In the sun
 Upon the second step of that small pile,
 Surrounded by those wild unpeopled hills,
 He sate, and eat his food in solitude:
 And ever, scattered from his palsied hand,
 That, still attempting to prevent the waste,
 Was baffled still, the crumbs in little showers
 Fell on the ground, and the small mountain birds,
 Not venturing yet to peck their destin'd meal,
 Approach'd within the length of half his staff.

('The Old Cumberland Beggar', l. 1-21)

The power of the lyric 'I' is felt in the very first word of the poem, an opening gambit which asserts poetic authority through the pronoun. We are immediately made aware that it is the speaker's perspective that matters. Wordsworth wastes no time in penetrating the seemingly perfect veneer of pastoral, identifying his unconventional

¹²⁴ Quentin Bailey, 'Idle and Disorderly Persons in the 1798 *Lyrical Ballads*', in *Wordsworth's Vagrants: Police, Prisons, and Poetry in the 1790s*, First Edition (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 143-168.

¹²⁵ Michael O'Neill, 'Lyrical Ballads and "Pre-Established Codes of Decision"', in *1800: The New Lyrical Ballads*, ed. by Nicola Trott and Seamus Perry (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), pp. 123-140 (p. 136).

hero, an 'aged beggar'. Bringing subjective vision into play, the poet draws an invisible link between the beggar's age, an indicator of his strength and endurance, and the 'rude masonry' that lies before him. Delicately weaving an element of resilience into this unforeseen generic character, we find the first indication of the beggar's rather unexpected valour. Redirecting attention away from the removed and even outmoded shepherd swain on the hills, Wordsworth writes an original script for a pastoral hero that is centred upon a new lived experience. Though beggars live an unconventional and unsettled existence, they nevertheless exhibit admirable and desirable traits. In 'The Old Cumberland Beggar', it is the altruistic, marginalised figure that is championed and not the seasoned agriculturist. It is the humanitarian who catches Wordsworth's eye. Genre now offers 'an impressive portrayal of the old man's enigmatic human dignity'.¹²⁶

The almost unnoticeable simplicity of the beggar placing 'his staff across the broad smooth stone, / That overlays the pile' draws the man and the natural world together seamlessly. Walking aide and nature seem to connect organically, almost as if the stone is the natural resting place for the staff. Wordsworth successfully matches an extension of the beggar's being with the continuity of the natural world, unearthing a protagonist who is as much a part of an 'organic economy' as he is a symbol of comfort and permanence.¹²⁷ When he draws 'his scraps and fragments' and scans them with 'a fix'd and serious look / Of idle computation' there is a mechanical routineness attributed to his actions. Though David Simpson argues that the 'idle beggar is actually at work constantly', his reading reduces the beggar down to his socio-economic position.¹²⁸ In this seemingly insignificant moment Wordsworth more crucially allows us to see the beggar working through a process (scanning) that will benefit the 'small mountain birds' later on. Similarly, where Harold Bloom argues that the beggar 'is all process, hardly character, and yet almost stasis', he overlooks how this process imbues the beggar with a strength of character.¹²⁹ It is the 'still' in 'still attempting to prevent

¹²⁶ Heather Glen, 'The Real Language of Men', in *Vision and Disenchantment: Blake's Songs and Wordsworth's Lyrical Ballads* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 57-109 (p. 83).

¹²⁷ James Mulvihill, 'Wordsworth's OLD CUMBERLAND BEGGAR', *Explicator*, 49.4 (1991) <<https://search-proquest-com.sheffield.idm.oclc.org/docview/1290260918?accountid=13828>> [Accessed 24 November 2020] (p. 213).

¹²⁸ David Simpson, 'At Home with Homelessness', in *Wordsworth, Commodification and Social Concern* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 54-82 (p. 64).

¹²⁹ Harold Bloom, 'William Wordsworth: Natural Man', in *The Visionary Company: A Reading of English Romantic Poetry* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), pp. 173-179 (p. 175).

the waste' that reveals the exact nature of this process. The beggar is being frugal, first in his scanning and second in his scattering suggesting a need to first economise and second to nourish. The intervening burst of conventional pastoral in lines 12-14 draws attention to the beggar's selfless, thoughtful and idealistic character. Even with a 'palsied hand', this man pursues what seems to be a duty to his fellow creatures. When the crumbs fall 'in little showers' there is a sense that the birds are receiving a similar type of nourishment that the ground obtains when it rains. All elements of nature work in harmony. As the birds approached 'within the length of half his staff' the beggar has, at the very least, piqued their interest. In using the second person pronoun so prominently Wordsworth creates an understated but impressive character profile of the beggar, marking out his pastoral hero as a feeling and compassionate being regardless of his economic circumstances.

For J. E. Congleton, pastoral characters 'should conform to the shepherds of [the Golden Age], when persons of the highest rank engaged in this occupation'.¹³⁰ In 'The Old Cumberland Beggar' Wordsworth not only dispels the notion that worthy subjects of pastoral belong to an elite class, he completely overhauls his character philosophy. We see the poet reverting to Samuel Johnson's claim that 'pastoral admits of all ranks of persons, because all ranks inhabit the country'.¹³¹ Wordsworth is keen to incorporate an egalitarian streak into pastoral, ultimately unshackling the genre from a specific class. Respect, for the poet, is earned rather than inherited, a distinction which chips away at the aristocratic aspect of the genre. Pastoral as a consequence becomes more democratic, and this objective is revealed in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*. In 'The Old Cumberland Beggar' Wordsworth deftly uses the lyric 'I' to emphasise his admiration of merit and humility rather than privilege, focusing on both personal (the poet) and external perspectives. Similar to his 1815 poem 'Beggars', in 'The Old Cumberland Beggar' Wordsworth depicts the beggar as a regal figure, and yet in the latter poem we never see any begging activity. We are mainly privy to the beggar's status as a respected man of the people. We see this in the way his fellow villagers treat the beggar:

¹³⁰ J. E. Congleton, 'Scene, Characters' in *Theories of Pastoral Poetry in England 1684-1798* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1952), pp.179-224 (p. 197).

¹³¹ Samuel Johnson, 'Ramblers Papers on Pastoral', quoted in J.E. Congleton, *Theories of Pastoral Poetry in England: 1684-1798* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1952), pp. 210-211 (p. 211).

She who tends

The Toll-gate, when in summer at her door
 She turns her wheel, if on the road she sees
 The aged Beggar coming, quits her work,
 And lifts the latch for him that he may pass.
 The Post-boy when his rattling wheels o’ertake
 The aged Beggar, in the woody lane,
 Shouts to him from behind, and, if perchance
 The old Man does not change his course, the Boy
 Turns with less noisy wheels to the road-side,
 And passes gently by, without a curse
 Upon his lips, or anger at his heart.

(‘The Old Cumberland Beggar’, l. 32-43)

The effortless nature of the beggar’s life is captured in the way he is able to move through the landscape unhindered. Wordsworth refrains from altering the description of his vagabond, deliberately and consistently referring to him as the ‘aged Beggar’ and ‘old Man’. This helps to maintain a continuity in terms of the pastoral hero’s profile, reiterating the fact that those around him adapt their behaviour to suit the beggar as opposed to the other way round. The toll-gate tender ‘quits her work’ on seeing him, suggesting that the beggar has some form of status in this rural community. The simple action of lifting the latch attributes nobility to the beggar, as he is deemed worthy of being attended to with such care. Through such a small act Wordsworth reveals his pastoral hero as an important symbol. Against the backdrop of summer there is something wholesome about the scene. Though David Simpson has argued, ‘[w]hat looks like pure charity in this poem...is not quite so since there is a tangible benefit to the givers in terms of immediate self-respect’ his reading suggests an overt selfishness on the part of the givers.¹³² Read through a pastoral lens, the givers rather more significantly demonstrate both an awareness and appreciation of the beggar, drawing us towards the warmth of this unlikely hero even further. As Stephen Gill

¹³² Simpson, ‘At Home with Homelessness’, p. 64.

comments, there ‘is no disguise, no retreat into poetic fancy’, but rather a candid portrait of vagrant life.¹³³

The ‘Post-boy’ is another character who chips away at the aristocratic pastoral by dint of his boyish charm. Representative of youth, the boy is equally as mindful towards the beggar, suggesting that age is not an indicator of respect. The efforts that he goes to in order to avoid interrupting the beggar’s path seem all the more enchanting because of the boy’s unexpected compassion and maturity. At first the boy ‘shouts’ to the beggar ‘from behind’ in a child’s naïve and joyous manner, and yet if he is ignored, he bears no malice, but simply ‘Turns with less noisy wheels to the road-side’. The boy’s attentiveness makes for a pastoral that is benevolent but secondly, demonstrates an unmatched consideration towards the vagrant. That the boy turns with ‘less noisy wheels’ also suggests that he does not want to disturb the beggar. He makes a conscious decision to slow down. The beggar is protected further by the boy’s refusal to utter a ‘curse’ or to express ‘anger at his heart’. Respect is administered from both a physical and emotional perspective, suggesting a genuine quality on the part of the boy. With such a strong humanist philosophy in tow, the pastoral of ‘The Old Cumberland Beggar’ smoothly transitions into rhetoric:

But deem not this Man useless.—Statesmen, ye
 Who are so restless in your wisdom, ye
 Who have a broom still ready in your hands
 To rid the world of nuisances; ye proud,
 Heart-swoln, while in your pride ye contemplate
 Your talents, power, and wisdom, deem him not
 A burthen of the earth. ’Tis Nature’s law
 That none, the meanest of created things,
 Of forms created the most vile and brute,
 The dullest or most noxious, should exist
 Divorced from good—a spirit and pulse of good,
 A life and soul to every mode of being
 Inseparably link’d.

¹³³ Stephen C. Gill, ‘Wordsworth’s Breeches Pocket: Attitudes to the Didactic Poet’, *Essays in Criticism*, 19.4 (1969) <<https://doi-org.sheffield.idm.oclc.org/10.1093/eic/XIX.4.385>> [Accessed 29 November 2020] (p. 392).

(‘The Old Cumberland Beggar’, l. 67-79)

In just 66 lines Wordsworth successfully exploits the lyric ‘I’ in order to make a ‘gritty appeal to utility’, an appeal which certifies the beggar as a valued member of society.¹³⁴ The poet transforms pastoral into a mode of persuasive discourse as he uses ‘The Old Cumberland Beggar’ to address the ‘Statesmen’ in an impassioned and urgent speech. Genre is used to fight for the pastoral hero. The ballad narrative is intensified through pastoral as Wordsworth takes storytelling to new levels, hybridising high and low genres in order to convey his dismay. He critiques the behaviour of English political leaders, darkening the pastoral by drawing attention to the statesmen’s ignorance and self-importance. Each comma between lines 68-73 reveals some new anti-humanitarian monstrosity, subtly scolding the ruling classes for their inability to recognise alternative heroism. We are reminded of Wordsworth’s letter to Charles James Fox in 1801 where he stated: ‘men who do not wear fine cloaths can feel deeply’.¹³⁵ Feeling is a common human condition, regardless of social class. The use of the archaic ‘ye’ emphasises how backward these figures of authority are in that they seem to be stuck in an antiquated ideology. The accusatory tone, particularly the lines ‘ye / Who have a broom still ready in your hands / To rid the world of nuisances’ reiterates the statesmen’s lack of human touch, as vagrants are considered mere specks of dirt that can just be swept away. The reference to a ‘broom’ is reminiscent of the domestic pastoral space, suggesting that the beggar has no place in the personal or social spheres. One cannot be house-proud with a lowly beggar around.

When the speaker protests ‘deem him not / A burthen of the earth’ we see the lyric ‘I’ transform the pastoral still further. Man has chosen to operate beyond the bounds of nature that has led to prejudice and discrimination: the beggar’s worth has been denied for too long. The strength of the formal instructive ‘deem him not’ transforms the genre into a social manifesto as Wordsworth calls for a complete reassessment of the old Man. ‘Burthen of the earth’ not only links the beggar to the natural world but also suggests that in referring to him in this manner, the statesmen degrade and insult both the beggar and the earth. Taking us back to ‘Nature’s law’, Wordsworth reminds

¹³⁴ Carl Woodring, ‘Ballads and Other Simplifications’, in *Wordsworth* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1968), pp. 20-53 (p. 26).

¹³⁵ William Wordsworth, ‘Appendix 2: Wordsworth’s Letter to Charles James Fox, 14 January 1801’, in *Lyrical Ballads 1798 and 1802*, Oxford World’s Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 306-309 (p. 308).

officials and the reader alike that it takes a wide variety of people to make up a society. Each ‘spirit and pulse of good’, each ‘life and soul to every mode of being’ are eternally connected. From the perspective of the human community, Wordsworth encourages us to seek the best in people, even of the ‘meanest of created things’ that exist. Wordsworth uses genre to foreground a new type of transformation that is specifically linked to introspective vision. As Michael O’Neill comments, the poem ‘moves from celebrating the Beggar’s uniqueness (one form of singleness) to assert the existence of ‘one human heart’ (another form of singleness)’.¹³⁶ In allowing the pastoral to adopt such a strong and personal emotional sensibility, Wordsworth makes his reader recognise his desired state of unity: the ‘one human heart’ (‘The Old Cumberland Beggar’, l. 146). Rather than removing beggars from the streets as Jeremy Bentham suggested, we should recognise their ability to bring society together through acts of kindness. Pastoral should record and remember everyone’s ‘Past deeds and offices of charity’ (‘The Old Cumberland Beggar’, l. 83), not just the conventionally noble (i.e. the aristocracy) because that is how we become ‘living soul[s]’ (*Tintern Abbey*, l. 47). We are remembered by what we do. This is explored in more detail midway through the second stanza:

Among the farms and the solitary huts,
Hamlets and thinly-scatter’d villages,
Where’er the aged Beggar takes his rounds,
The mild necessity of use compels
To acts of love; and habit does the work
Of reason; yet prepares that after joy
Which reason cherishes. And thus the soul,
By that sweet taste of pleasure unpursu’d,
Doth find itself insensibly dispos’d
To virtue and true goodness.

(‘The Old Cumberland Beggar’, l. 88-97)

The relative sparseness of the pastoral landmarks is expertly juxtaposed against the fullness of the beggar’s heart. The ‘solitary huts’ and ‘thinly-scatter’d villages’ seem dormant and lifeless until the beggar appears with his well-wishing and virtuousness.

¹³⁶ O’Neill, ‘*Lyrical Ballads* and “Pre-Established Codes of Decision”’, p. 136.

Nature, community and pastoral are reclaimed through the beggar.¹³⁷ The disconnected countryside is revitalised with the appearance of the beggar, as each 'round' invigorates every rural place with a much-needed tenderness. 'The mild necessity of use compels / To acts of love' graces the genre with a warmth that permeates through to subsequent lines. The soft sibilance combined with the yielding consonantal sounds calms the pastoral. Wordsworth is fascinated by the unruffled spirit of his own pastoral rather than by the boisterous heroes of classical epic. The syntax of the epithet combined with the phrase 'mild necessity' intimates that the beggar is coerced into acts of love through compulsion as 'habit does the work / Of reason'. He cannot help but be benevolent. The image of the beggar as a drain on society is dispelled. To act in such a charitable manner through habit alone suggests that the beggar has adopted kindness as a regular tendency and that he would struggle to give it up. Charity is his calling. Through genre Wordsworth redefines what constitutes as commendable work, not from an economic perspective but from a spiritual one. In doing so, he replaces the shepherd swain of traditional pastoral with a modern pastoral hero.

Writing about symbolism in 'The Old Cumberland Beggar' Sam Cooper contends, 'the beggar becomes an archetype and image of authenticity'.¹³⁸ The caesura in line 93 qualifies such authenticity as habit 'prepares that after joy / Which reason cherishes'. Pastoral now justifies rational behaviour on the basis that it produces happiness. Genre swells with positive emotion, diluting any sadness that may have been detected in previous lines. The abstract soul, not pursued by the fleeting and superficial 'sweet taste of pleasure' finds itself 'insensibly dispos'd / To virtue and goodness'. The lyric 'I' triumphs as pastoral knits together the metaphysical with the moral. The soul cannot help but pursue virtue and goodness: it is compelled to do so. When we reread the lines 'He travels on, a solitary Man, / His age has no companion' ('The Old Cumberland Beggar', l. 44-45) we are less inclined to detect isolation and

¹³⁷ I am aware that James Mulvihill makes a similar argument as he mentions that 'Wordsworth attempts here to reclaim economy in the name of nature'. My argument differs by stating that nature and pastoral are reclaimed, and indeed through the beggar. See James Mulvihill, "Wordsworth's OLD CUMBERLAND BEGGAR.", *Explicator*, 49.4 (1991) <<https://search-proquest-com.sheffield.idm.oclc.org/docview/1290260918?accountid=13828>> [Accessed 24 November 2020] (p. 213).

¹³⁸ Sam Cooper, 'The Peculiar Romanticism of the English Situationists', *The Cambridge Quarterly*, 42.1 (2013) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/42966893>> [Accessed 29 November 2020] (p. 33).

sadness. We recognise a sense of autonomy in the beggar's nomadic lifestyle. As a traveller, he is free to dispense kindness wherever he so wishes, his soul unrestricted by location. To call the beggar 'unproductive' as David Simpson does is to deny Wordsworth's innovation in terms of the pastoral character.¹³⁹ The beggar's lifestyle allows him to pursue an unorthodox but much-needed occupation. Through such a unique role he is able to affect more people positively than the conventional shepherd swain. The beggar imparts kindness and knowledge, much like the Wanderer of *The Excursion*, making for a didactic protagonist rather than an agronomist. Wordsworth makes a case for the beggar's integral role in society:

—But of the poor man ask, the abject poor,
 Go and demand of him, if there be here
 In this cold abstinence from evil deeds,
 And these inevitable charities,
 Wherewith to satisfy the human soul.
 No—man is dear to man: the poorest poor
 Long from some moments in a weary life
 When they can know and feel that they have been
 Themselves the fathers and the dealers out
 Of some small blessings, have been kind to such
 As needed kindness, for this single cause,
 That we have all of us one human heart.

('The Old Cumberland Beggar', l. 135-146)

In this third impassioned verse paragraph Wordsworth manipulates the pastoral to emphasise his own perception of 'virtuous decency' ('The Old Cumberland Beggar', l. 126). In preceding lines, we are made aware of men who abide by the law but only look after their own families. While this is admirable from a self-preservation perspective, these men elide their duty as citizens of the community, a decision that is discordant with Wordsworth's humanitarian philosophy.

The em dash in line 135 is somewhat of a rude awakening as the monosyllabic 'But' suggests disagreement and even disapproval of this behaviour. Genre is used to critique society subtly. One is instructed to ask the 'abject poor' if their wealthier

¹³⁹ Simpson, 'At Home with Homelessness', p. 65.

counterparts have refrained from ‘evil deeds’, if they have paid their taxes (‘inevitable charities’) to alleviate poverty. The full stop at the end of line 139 suggests not, with the aphoristic rejection at the beginning of line 140 reinforcing such a failure. The pastoral checks itself as the poet affirms ‘man is dear to man’, once again reiterating the idea of the brotherhood. What confirms the status of the pastoral hero is his longing for recognition, those ‘small blessings’ and instances when he has ‘been kind to such / As needed kindness’. His mission is to propagate the ‘single cause’, that all of us have ‘one human heart’. Wordsworth’s subsequent plea converts this philosophy into proposed action:

Then let him pass, a blessing on his head!
 And while in that vast solitude to which
 The tide of things has led him, he appears
 To breathe and live but for himself alone,
 Unblam’d, uninjur’d, let him bear about
 The good which the benignant law of heaven
 Has hung around him; and, while life is his,
 Still let him prompt the unletter’d Villagers
 To tender offices and pensive thoughts.
 Then let him pass, a blessing on his head!

(‘The Old Cumberland Beggar’, l. 155-165)

Opening and closing this excerpt with the instruction ‘Then let him pass, a blessing on his head!’ reinforces the need to overturn the misconception of the vagabond as a burden on society. Though Wordsworth asks for the beggar to be accepted into society, he concurrently advocates for his new hero to be recognised and incorporated into pastoral. The allusions to religion in ‘blessing’ and ‘benignant law of heaven’ not only reinstate Christianity into pastoral, they also associate the beggar with divinity. Jesus and the Classical gods often appear in this guise, so the beggar is subtly etched with an element of the religious and epic heroism. Indeed, that solitude is the main attribute of Wordsworth’s pastoral hero elevates the beggar to the status of saviour rather than social parasite. It is the reason why the beggar can positively affect the villagers with the language of benevolence. Wealth, status and power are exchanged for humility, freedom and kindness, a generic trade off that the Lake Poet sees as imperative if we are to strive for a better society.

Bolstering pastoral with the strong spirit of humanity, Wordsworth builds a compassionate genre that glorifies the poor for their modest charity:

And, long as he can wander, let him breathe
 The freshness of the vallies; let his blood
 Struggle with frosty air and winter snows;
 And let the charter'd wind that sweeps the heath
 Beat his grey locks against his wither'd face.
 Reverence the hope whose vital anxiousness
 Gives the last human interest to his heard.
 May never HOUSE, misnamed of INDUSTRY!
 Make him a captive; for that pent-up din,
 Those life-consuming sounds that clog the air,
 Be his the natural silence of old age.
 Let him be free of mountain solitudes;
 And have around him, whether heard or not,
 The pleasant melody of woodland birds.

(‘The Old Cumberland Beggar’, l. 165-178)

The lyric ‘I’ has already emboldened the pastoral with a strong sense of purpose, and yet here we see Wordsworth reworking genre to express his distaste for the workhouse. To the Lake Poet this is not industry but punishment. He sees the workhouse as a prison, a ‘pent-up din’ with ‘life-consuming sounds that clog the air’. The phrases ‘pent-up’ and ‘life-consuming’ reiterate the sense of entrapment, literally taking the air and life out of the beggar’s lungs. No human should have to undergo any anxiety because of their socio-economic position, let alone this joy-giving wanderer. Lines 165-169 depict a pastoral that offers clear support for a man who deserves to be free, to experience the ‘freshness of the vallies’ and the ‘charter’d wind’. Just as nature revitalises man, the beggar has revitalised his fellow man and pastoral. One detects utter happiness in the image of the beggar on the heath, existing alongside the ‘pleasant melody of woodland birds’. The sweetness of the birds’ tune reflects the beggar’s wholesome character, smoothly integrating him into nature. The only way to retain pastoral and human integrity is to allow the beggar to continue with his itinerant lifestyle. The heartfelt sincerity and conviction of the Lake Poet’s words immortalises the beggar as the ultimate hero of pastoral and true embodiment of the natural world:

And let him, *where* and *when* he will, sit down

Beneath the trees, or by the grassy bank
 Of high-way side, and with the little birds
 Share his chance-gather'd meal: and, finally,
 As in the eye of Nature he has liv'd,
 So in the eye of Nature let him die.

(‘The Old Cumberland Beggar’, l. 184-189)

Though Heather Glen maintains that at the end of ‘The Old Cumberland Beggar’ the vagrant collapses into ‘an object of edification’, her reading might undervalue generic characterisation.¹⁴⁰ If the beggar teaches the value of vagrancy, he is more crucially a part of the natural ecosystem as a physical presence, companion and aide. His role as pastoral hero is not limited to action alone. Wordsworth asks for the beggar to be allowed to move freely through nature, just as freely as he has moved through this pastoral. The italicisation of ‘*where*’ and ‘*when*’ emphasises how important it is to give the beggar full autonomy, to let him continue a life that has thus far caused no harm and has only wrought good. The poignancy of the closing couplet, with its allusion to life and death suggests that Nature is the beggar’s true home, the ultimate abode and resting place for the altruistic pastoral hero of ‘The Old Cumberland Beggar’. In the ‘eye’ of pastoral he has lived, so in the ‘eye’ of pastoral he must be allowed to die.

Lyrical Ballads grafts the lyric ‘I’ into the pastoral genre by prioritising the subjective mode, often voicing what appear to be deeply private musings. Underlying every poem is a strong and personal ideology that seeks to radicalise genre through the introduction of new and at times, controversial matter. As Nicholas Roe points out, the 1790s was a decade dominated by the poets’ growing interest in the French Revolution.¹⁴¹ The revolution brought with it new ideals that were adopted by each of the Lake Poets with a slightly different emphasis. Coleridge, for example, was heavily influenced by the work and involvement of progressive Bristol dissenters such as Humphry Davy, Thomas Wedgwood and James Watt, Jr. Crucially, the links that Davy drew between science and poetry fascinated the young reformist, particularly with regards to ‘the

¹⁴⁰ Heather Glen, ‘The Real Language of Men’, in *Vision and Disenchantment: Blake’s Songs of Innocence and Wordsworth’s Lyrical Ballads* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 57-109 (p. 83).

¹⁴¹ Nicholas Roe, ‘New Introduction’, in *Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Radical Years*, Second Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 1-17.

subjective agency of the enquirer as experimentalist author and speaker'.¹⁴² The poet shares with the scientist a need to pursue the subjective in order to innovate and invent. Both seek evolution through personal discovery. In *Lyrical Ballads* Coleridge achieves this by fashioning each of his four lyrics as intellectual spaces that are specifically designed to test a series of different and original ideas. In keeping with Davy's view of science, Coleridge's pastoral disregards 'idealist assumptions about unity in nature' because the poet recognises and champions division, experimentation and darkness.¹⁴³ His poems are grounded in personal experiential reality. Rather than viewing pastoral as a 'fictional world...or a peaceful rural location with flowing water and shady trees', Coleridge reframes the genre as a complex expression of the self and its experiences through a particularly niche and erratic version of nature.¹⁴⁴ He views *Lyrical Ballads* as a series of trials in pastoral that draw together the radical nature of his own thought.

'The Nightingale' is one such lyrical ballad that exemplifies this philosophy of the self experiencing nature, not least because of its complex relationship with John Milton's *Il Penseroso*. Written in April 1798, 'The Nightingale' experiments with genre in order to express Coleridge's desire but also his anxieties about breaking away from the tradition of interpreting the nightingale's song as melancholic. In keeping with William Empson's theory of genre, in this poem 'pastoral though "about" is not "by" or "for" [anybody specific]'.¹⁴⁵ At one level, the poet insists upon the bird's song as a new and joyful experience of nature and yet, at a secondary level, the very melancholia Coleridge seeks to exclude from the poem cannot quite be exorcised. Unlike *Tintern Abbey* and 'The Old Cumberland Beggar', the lyric 'I' of 'The Nightingale' is used to express the poet's anxieties about the development of new ideas; Coleridge is, at times, tentative about departing from custom. With its swift transitions and conversational

¹⁴² Tim Fulford, 'Science and Poetry in 1790s Somerset: The Self-Experiment Narrative, The Aeriform Effusion, and The Greater Romantic Lyric', *ELH*, 85.1 (2018) <<https://doi.org/10.1353/elh.2018.0003>> [Accessed 2 April 2020] (p. 89).

¹⁴³ Mark Kipperman, 'Coleridge, Shelley, Davy, and Science's Millennium', *Criticism* 40.3 (1998) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/23124249>> [Accessed 14 March 2021] (p. 416).

¹⁴⁴ M. Payne and M. M. Gaylord, *Pastoral.*, in *The Princeton Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. by Stephen Cushman, et al., Fourth Edition (Princeton; NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012) *ProQuest Ebook Central* <<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/leicester/detail.action?docID=913846>> [Accessed 18 April 2022], pp. 1005-1008 (p. 1005).

¹⁴⁵ William Empson, 'Proletarian Literature', in *Some Versions of Pastoral* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1935), pp. 3-23 (p. 6).

tone, ‘The Nightingale’ presents us with an oscillating consciousness that reveals itself through a complicated and incomplete pastoral aesthetic. Against Kelvin Everest’s notion of ‘connective consciousness’, the poem exploits genre as a means of highlighting disconnection rather than connection with history and self.¹⁴⁶ Coleridge adapts pastoral to accommodate this entirely unique idea, ultimately expanding the genre’s parameters to include literary and personal debate. Considering the radical nature of ‘The Nightingale’ as a pastoral project, it is surprising that the poem has been so frequently neglected. There are only a few cursory mentions of the poem in the *Cambridge Companion to Lyrical Ballads*, with little extended discussion of the poem outside of its biographical context and relationship with ‘Lewti’.¹⁴⁷ Nevertheless, such an oversight presents an opportunity to explore ‘The Nightingale’ as a generic endeavour that is designed to do more than simply renegotiate the terms of a longstanding myth.

Viewed through the lens of pastoral, ‘The Nightingale’ moves away from any easy assertion of Coleridge as rejecting outright Milton’s melancholic birdsong in favour of claiming the bird’s song as joyful.¹⁴⁸ Suggestive of the poet’s uneasy political and creative disposition in 1798, the poem flits between different shades of pastoral to embody Coleridge’s anxieties about departing from the path established by Milton’s predecessors. What Tim Fulford reads as the conversation poems’ ‘wandering form and their textualization of speech’ can be interpreted, in the light of ‘The Nightingale’, as a deliberate attempt to destabilise pastoral’s familiar axioms.¹⁴⁹ However, rather than viewing the poem as a conversation poem as Gene M. Bernstein argues, ‘The Nightingale’ appears more like a conversation within a lyrical ballad. Coleridgean pastoral reflects a particular type of poetic consciousness that is frustrated, always denying its reader of clarity and direction. The wayward lyric ‘I’, established at the

¹⁴⁶ Kelvin Everest, ‘The Nightingale’, in *Coleridge’s Secret Ministry: The Context of the Conversation Poems 1795-1798* (Sussex; New York: The Harvester Press; Barnes & Noble, 1979), pp. 280-290 (p. 281).

¹⁴⁷ See for example Polly Atkin, ‘Collaboration, Domestic Co-Partnership and Lyrical Ballads’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Lyrical Ballads* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp. 32-48 (pp. 33-34).

¹⁴⁸ See for example Susan Luther’s precedential article “‘A Different Lore’: Coleridge’s “The Nightingale””, *The Wordsworth Circle*, 20.2 (1989) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/24042842>> [Accessed 14 March 2021].

¹⁴⁹ Fulford, ‘Science and Poetry in 1790s Somerset: The Self-Experiment Narrative, The Aeriform Effusion, and The Greater Romantic Lyric’, p. 87.

beginning of 'The Nightingale' offers readers an insight into an interesting but strained conversation with self initially represented through the twilight pastoral:

No cloud, no relique of the sunken day
 Distinguishes the West, no long thin slip
 Of sullen Light, no obscure trembling hues.
 Come, we will rest on this old mossy Bridge!
 You see the glimmer of the stream beneath,
 But hear no murmuring: it flows silently
 O'er its soft bed of verdure. All is still,
 A balmy night! and tho' the stars be dim,
 Yet let us think upon the vernal showers
 That gladden the green earth, and we shall find
 A pleasure in the dimness of the stars.
 And hark! the Nightingale begins its song,
 'Most musical, most melancholy'* Bird!
 A melancholy Bird? O idle thought!
 In nature there is nothing melancholy.

('The Nightingale', l. 1-15)

'The Nightingale' begins with a pastoral that is defined by absence rather than presence, stillness rather than movement. This 'scene of sensory deprivation' offers its reader a 'material world conditioned by negation', stripping pastoral of its familiar bright summery tones.¹⁵⁰ We, as proxies for Wordsworth and Dorothy, are invited to join Coleridge on this balmy, cloudless night, and yet typically of Coleridge's poetry, the lines fail to convince us that 'In nature there is nothing melancholy'. The 'sunken day', the 'long thin slip / Of sullen light', and the 'obscure trembling hues' prevent any easy accession to the speaker's claim. Though it is a clear night, by drawing attention to the potential existence of dark pastoral features, Coleridge points to the possibility of a natural world defined by what is not present. That his pastoral even accommodates any suggestion of melancholia is a testament to the futility of the final quoted line. The intensity and precision of the adjectives 'long', 'thin', 'sullen' and

¹⁵⁰ Onno Oerlemans, 'Sing and Be Heard', *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal*, 51.2 (2018) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/90021963>> [Accessed 16 March 2020] (p. 8) and Ewan James Jones, "'Less Gross than Bodily" Interruption in the Conversation Poem Sequence', in *Coleridge and the Philosophy of Poetic Form* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 12-55 (p. 44).

‘obscure’ distinguish this particular bird song as one which has the possibility of portending darkness; we are not immediately assured by the blissful, conventional pastoral as we are at the beginning of ‘Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement’.

After alluding to a clear sky at sundown, Coleridge beckons his companions Wordsworth and Dorothy to rest on ‘this old mossy Bridge’. ‘Come’, with its gentle insistence, alters the dynamic of pastoral in that we move from quite a colourless scene into a more welcoming environ. Unlike in *Il Penseroso*, Coleridge switches to the second person pronoun to create a tone of inclusion, bringing the pastoral and this nightingale’s song into communal territory. The shared experience, albeit directed by Coleridge’s subjective vision, moves ‘The Nightingale’ away from Milton’s solipsistic vision of poetic melancholy. The lyric ‘I’ is working with someone besides the poet alone. ‘You see the glimmer of the stream beneath, / But hear no murmuring’ gestures towards a nocturnal pastoral that is aesthetically beautiful, the ‘glimmer’ suggesting wavering, twinkling light. The lack of murmuring gives the scene an ethereal, quasi-subliminal quality as the stream ‘flows silently / O’er its soft bed of verdure’. With pastoral’s characteristic blue and green hues in place, the calm serenity of conventional daytime pastoral is seamlessly transferred to night. Coleridge is at his most playful here as he cleverly reconstitutes generic tradition by allowing pastoral to transcend its orthodox diurnal setting. There is also a looseness implied at this point in ‘The Nightingale’ that is noticeably absent from the beginning of *The Eolian Harp* and ‘Frost at Midnight’. The caesura between ‘All is still, / A balmy night’ reinforces the stillness with the alliterative l’s relaxing the blank verse to a point of complete calm. Pastoral then changes course as Coleridge draws attention to the dim stars, redirecting the eye towards the sky. He encourages thoughts of ‘vernal showers / That gladden the green earth’ in order to underscore the lack of brightness that lies before him. The promise of spring, with its ability to ‘gladden’, adds a contrast to the twilight pastoral and brings with it the idea of regeneration. Though the stars are no brighter, nature continues to offer tantalising possibility. Through his own version of the nocturnal pastoral, Coleridge teaches his companions to appreciate nature in all its guises by returning to a season of promise. The poet embeds an element of hope into his unconventional bucolic as he seeks a new perspective of the natural world.

Though Robert Koelzer argues that ‘The Nightingale’ ‘powerfully conveys the illusion of speech that is at once improvised and provisional’, when Coleridge says ‘And hark! the Nightingale begins its song’ we know this to be an overtly self-conscious moment.¹⁵¹ We are already eleven lines into this nightingale’s song: Coleridge reveals the artifice of poetry, even poetry purportedly of nature. The exclamation sees the poet use this declaration to remind himself of his own mission: to write his own pastoral song even if it is self-aware and contradictory. In the rest of ‘The Nightingale’ Coleridge will attempt to radicalise an antiquated ‘symbol of tragic poetry’ through a potentially outmoded but highly relevant genre.¹⁵² Literary custom is renegotiated at two levels: at the level of allegory and pastoral. The direct allusion to Milton’s *Il Penseroso* gives Coleridge’s pastoral a benchmark in that he makes his reader aware of exactly what he wishes to differentiate himself from. The repetition of ‘melancholy Bird’ however, pre-empts the interlude that traces the nightingale myth’s origins:

—But some night-wandering Man, whose heart was pierc’d
 With the remembrance of a grievous wrong,
 Or slow distemper, or neglected love,
 (And so, poor wretch! fill’d all things with himself,
 And made all gentle sounds tell back the tale
 Of his own sorrows) he and such as he
 First named these notes a melancholy strain:

(‘The Nightingale’, l. 16-22)

To label ‘The Nightingale’ a parody as R. H. Hopkins does is to diminish the poem’s success as an exercise in genre.¹⁵³ At this point in the poem Coleridge uses melancholia to indicate a disturbed and frustrated state of mind. The poem opens with a clear and defined nocturnal pastoral aesthetic and yet by line 16, such an aesthetic is countered by a darker pastoral from the past. We are catapulted back to the time of the classical nightingale’s song. If we had not fully realised it before, Coleridge and his pastoral are always preoccupied with Milton’s nightingale. Milton is what Harold

¹⁵¹ Robert Koelzer, ‘Abrams Among the Nightingales: Revisiting the Greater Romantic Lyric’, *The Wordsworth Circle*, 37.2 (2006) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/24044130>> [Accessed 16 March 2020] (p. 70).

¹⁵² Aara Suksi, ‘The Poet at Colonus: Nightingales in Sophocles’, *Mnemosyne*, 54.6 (2001) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/4433273>> [Accessed 16 March 2020] (p. 646).

¹⁵³ R. H. Hopkins, ‘Coleridge’s Parody of Melancholy Poetry in ‘The Nightingale: A Conversation Poem, April 1798’’, in ‘Notes and news’, *English Studies*, 49 (1968) <<https://doi.org/10.1080/00138386808597313>> [Accessed 2 April 2021] (p. 436).

Bloom refers to as a 'Covering Cherub', an obstruction that absorbs Coleridge's attention, never fully allowing the romantic poet to free himself from tradition.¹⁵⁴ Consequently, pastoral is locked in an equally problematic conundrum. As Kelvin Everest notes, there 'is no dominant organising principle at work in the poem', a problem which we can attribute in part to Coleridge's fixation with his predecessor.¹⁵⁵ One observes a lyric 'I' that contains a certain undirected agency, that repeatedly trips over itself as Coleridge attempts to progress through his own uniquely constructed pastoral.

The allusion to 'some night-wandering Man' temporarily removes Milton from pastoral as Coleridge attributes the origins of the nightingale myth to an unidentified person. We return to 'some' past pastoral that is seemingly undefined and unspecific but nevertheless clouded by darkness and unease. The reflective quality of the genre transforms into one of regret and woe, with the blank verse acquiring a newfound heaviness as Coleridge revisits a pivotal moment in literary history. The poem focuses on the memory of negative emotion as it describes a man whose heart was 'pierc'd / With the remembrance of a grievous wrong, / Or slow distemper, or neglected love'. All joy is sapped from pastoral. 'Pierc'd', with its monosyllabic brevity, carries with it a painful emotional sharpness that penetrates the human heart. This is reinforced by the strong 'g's in 'grievous', 'wrong' and 'neglected'. We see a turning point in the pastoral of 'The Nightingale' as the lyric 'I' becomes sympathetic, even jealous as Coleridge might never have had this kind of significance. The severity implied in 'grievous' suggests that this poet has made a grave mistake in inaugurating the nightingale tradition. Nature, birdsong and poetry have all been marshalled into a single meaning by this artist's narrowly egotistic perspective. That this man 'made all gentle sounds tell back the tale / Of his own sorrows' shows the extent to which poetry and pastoral have been negatively affected by this one 'poor wretch'. The word 'distemper', meaning 'a being out of humour; ill humour; ill temper; uneasiness; disaffection' carries particular significance in light of this realisation.¹⁵⁶ Distemper accurately describes the mood of Coleridge's present pastoral. Despite the poet's

¹⁵⁴ Harold Bloom, 'Clinamen or Poetic Misprision', in *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 19-48 (p. 25).

¹⁵⁵ Everest, 'The Nightingale', p. 283.

¹⁵⁶ "distemper, n.1." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, March 2021, www.oed.com/view/Entry/55608. Accessed 27 March 2021.

attempts to create a song of joy, he is always drawn back to the melancholic timbre of Milton's nightingale. Coleridge establishes a lyric 'I' that is haunted by the past tradition as the poem re-experiences different versions of implicit and explicit darker pastorals. Subjective vision ultimately causes nature and man in 'The Nightingale' to constantly move in and out of sync with one another, thereby denying generic coherence and assuredness to the poetry.

In 1798 we see the radical poet produce lyrics that accommodate a difficult and complex desire, with the driving focus being the self experiencing a different and often inconsistent type of nature. He chooses to facilitate this ambition through pastoral because of its relative malleability as a genre, but also because of its potential to imagine a subjective and individualised world. 'The Nightingale' sees this relationship at work through episodes of darker pastoral musing that are followed by periods of apparent idyllic pastoral awakening. But such episodes invite more scepticism than assurance; they do not dissipate the dejection we see in the poem. As James Holt McGavran notes, 'Coleridge overtly opts for pleasure as the contrary of melancholy, singing a nocturnal "L'Allegro" that intentionally fails to convince'.¹⁵⁷ As such, the speaker's effort to achieve joy offers only temporary respite from the dominating melancholic principle at work:

And many a poet echoes the conceit;
 Poet, who hath been building up the rhyme
 When he had better far have stretched his limbs
 Beside a brook in mossy forest-dell
 By sun or moon-light, to the influxes
 Of shapes and sounds and shifting elements
 Surrendering his whole spirit, of his song
 And of his fame forgetful! so his fame
 Should share in nature's immortality,
 A venerable thing! and so his song
 Should make all nature lovelier, and itself
 Be lov'd, like nature!

¹⁵⁷ James Holt McGavran, Jr., 'Coleridge, the Wordsworths, and Androgyny: A Reading of "The Nightingale"', *South Atlantic Review*, 53.4 (1988) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/3200671>> [Accessed 10 December 2020] (p. 58).

(‘The Nightingale’, l. 23-34)

Though Susan Luther reads this passage as ‘an impassioned aesthetic prescription’, when one considers these lines in light of pastoral, one rather more importantly detects yet another shift in the poem’s consciousness.¹⁵⁸ Acknowledging that Coleridge has followed the precedent set by the ‘night-wandering Man’ (‘The Nightingale’, l. 16), the poet transforms the ‘conceit’ of melancholy poetry into a lyric ‘I’ that brings into play a traditional and more optimistic pastoral aesthetic. Crucially, the poet does this by elevating the pastoral from nature alone to a spiritualised type of nature. His use of genre evokes what Nicholas Halmi refers to as ‘Coleridge’s Ecumenical Spinoza’ as the poet nods to pantheism but does not fully commit to it.¹⁵⁹ Like ‘Religious Musings’, in this section of ‘The Nightingale’ Coleridge versifies Spinoza’s concept of divinity and nature through the medium of pastoral. Though an atheist, Spinoza’s monist philosophy consisted of one infinite substance known as God or nature, a theory which resonates with Coleridge in ‘The Nightingale’. Nature is enlightened by ‘sounds and shifting elements’, the poet’s ‘whole spirit’ and ‘nature’s immortality’, gesturing towards the idea of ‘The One Life’. As a consequence, pastoral acquires a new power in that it interacts with the metaphysical in order to make ‘all nature lovelier’. The poet’s song is now infused with a transcendent element, transforming genre into a three-dimensional phenomenon.

Yet so good a theologian as Coleridge is not interested in reproducing natural idylls, as lyrics such as ‘Kubla Khan’ and *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* attest. Coleridge experiments with pastoral in a remarkably confident and unrestrained manner with a view to demarcate and then test his own generic boundaries. The idealistic proposition in these lines, in the context of genre, suggests a safe but perhaps contrived antidote to melancholia. Joy is an important remedy to sadness but not one that necessarily works. As in ‘Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement’, Coleridge uses this technique to encourage us to question whether or not conventional pastoral is too easy a solution to the poem’s opening premise. Equally, he throws into question if rural Arcadia offers the only route to poetic immortality. *Il Penseroso* stands the test of time

¹⁵⁸ Susan Luther, “‘A Different Lore’: Coleridge’s “The Nightingale””, *The Wordsworth Circle*, 20.2 (1989) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/24042842>> [Accessed 14 March 2021] (p. 93).

¹⁵⁹ Nicholas Halmi, ‘Coleridge’s Ecumenical Spinoza’, *Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net*, 61 (2012) <<https://doi.org/10.7202/1018604ar>> [Accessed 17 April 2022].

because of Milton's experimentation with the nocturnal pastoral, and Coleridge aims at understanding this achievement and then securing it for himself. With such an ambitious objective in tow, the pleasant proposition that the poet 'had better far have stretched his limbs / Beside a brook in mossy forest-dell / By sun or moon-light' then adds some welcome colour to genre. It offers some light relief to the toil of the aforementioned passage on strained and internally destructive emotion. The 'brook', 'forest-dell' and 'sun' are reminiscent of the Wordsworthian pastoral in the opening lines of *Michael*, a classic triad of images that evoke nature as an escape from more painful realities. The familiar colours of blue, green and yellow bring into focus a pastoral that is nourishing and glorious, situating the reader in familiar territory. There is also something self-consciously quaint about the poet stretching his limbs beside such a scene, evoking feelings of classic pastoral nostalgia.

But even within what appears to be a more traditional episode of pastoral, Coleridge is still keen to unsettle genre. Immediately after the allusion to 'moon-light' Coleridge follows this with an abstract passage that fuses pastoral with the metaphysical. While relaxed, the poet has the potential to experience 'the influxes / Of shapes and sounds and shifting elements / Surrendering his whole spirit, of his song / And of his fame forgetful!' The overwhelming sibilance of these lines allows the lyric 'I' to be engulfed along with fame, prioritising the metaphysical over the physical. The lack of tangibility implied in 'shifting elements' moves pastoral into a new dimension as Coleridge implies that we are not in the space of the purely material. Genre acquires a new flavour in that 'The Nightingale' introduces us to a deeper and more personal philosophy into poetry. When Coleridge equates fame with 'nature's immortality', there is a sense that he is elevating fame, a wholly human concept, to the heights of nature. Nature, as a guaranteed and permanent fixture, sets the precedent for everything that happens in life. This is reinforced by the reference to such unending existence being a 'venerable thing'. With a refreshed ideology at the helm of his poetic agenda, the poet's song should 'make all nature lovelier, and itself / Be lov'd, like nature!' His lyric should ameliorate the natural world. Whether or not Coleridge achieves this in 'The Nightingale' is impossible to gauge. The use of 'lovelier' and 'lov'd' adds a deeply pleasant tone to pastoral, ultimately allowing us to bask in the joy of sweeter thoughts. Love also carries with it a suggestion of genuine tenderness, contrasting with the perhaps fickle and self-indulgent fame that had been previously

sought. Coleridge imbues generic irony with a more personal credo in that the poet should be looking to enhance nature's beauty rather than principally pursue fame.

With an enhanced pastoral irony firmly in place, 'The Nightingale' shifts direction. The dream of an enriched and lovelier nature is swiftly curtailed by the realisation that this proposition is both romantic and impossible:

—But 'twill not be so;
 And youths and maidens most poetical
 Who lose the deep'ning twilights of the spring
 In ball-rooms and hot theatres, they still
 Full of meek sympathy must heave their sighs
 O'er Philomela's pity-pleading strains.

('The Nightingale', l. 34-39)

The em dash cuts into the idyllic pastoral with a near acerbic power, almost enacting a sigh as the speaker realises the futility of his earlier suggestion. The semicolon at the end of line 34 operates as a reflective pause, an opportunity to review the various pastorals that we have encountered thus far. We are subsequently transported back to traditional pastoral with the allusion to 'youths and maidens', once again denying the poem any generic progression. The modernity of 'The Nightingale' is quickly compromised as stock generic characters invade the stanza, reminding us of the power of custom. Consequently, the lyric 'I' retreats into the past, once again suggesting Coleridge's anxieties about pursuing subjective generic vision. The juxtaposition of nature ('deep'ning twilights of the spring') against urban spaces ('ball-rooms and hot theatres'), rather than reminding us of the safety of the countryside, more significantly demonstrates a missed opportunity. The youth are preoccupied with the frivolity of entertainment, the verb 'lose' suggesting deprivation, particularly with regards to the twilight pastoral. They are '[f]ull of meek sympathy', beguiled by literary tradition as they remain accessories to the stagnated melancholic pastoral. Coleridge's hopes to revive and renew the genre fall flat even within his own poem.

The reference to the Greek mythological figure Philomela and her 'pity-pleading strains' offers yet another reminder of the potency and danger of the nightingale's sorrowful lament. Misrepresentation has come at a cost; pastoral cannot free itself if it

constantly returns to a particular interpretation of birdsong. To liberate the genre from its own restrictions, the poet must use his personal experience to create and define his own literary apologue. Philomela's presence also highlights the dangers inherent in silencing the individual voice. As demonstrated earlier in this chapter, Wordsworth and Coleridge use *Lyrical Ballads* to show how integral the subjective voice is in producing unique, idea-driven poems. To silence such a voice would mean silencing the self. The frustrated lyric 'I' then also subtly encapsulates this anxiety around self-censorship, always asking us to welcome the open and frank pastoral voice even if it is uncomfortable and confusing. As 'The Nightingale' progresses, Coleridge is keen to replace orthodox inherited ideas with a new tradition:

My Friend, and my Friend's Sister! we have learnt
 A different lore: we may not thus profane
 Nature's sweet voices always full of love
 And joyance! 'Tis the merry Nightingale
 That crowds, and hurries, and precipitates
 With fast thick warble his delicious notes,
 As he were fearful, than an April night
 Would be too short for him to utter forth
 His love-chant, and disburthen his full soul
 Of all its music!

('The Nightingale', l. 43-49)

In a notebook entry dated September 1820, Coleridge writes '(generally) *all* Consciousness is necessarily conditioned by Self-consciousness'.¹⁶⁰ As we return to the self-conscious, dramatic lyric voice, the speaker of 'The Nightingale' determines an entirely new and more concrete pastoral consciousness that is markedly different to the one in lines 23-34. The complex and disturbed pastoral terrain that we have encountered seems worlds away as genre here acquires an exquisite, clear and sincere type of joy. We enter into a phase of pastoral musing that seems devoid of any anxiety. The lyric 'I' is, for the first time, at peace with itself as the blank verse relaxes into a state of pure tranquillity. The poem almost seems to restart as we enter into an entirely new phase of pastoral speculation. Genre finally disburdens itself from literary

¹⁶⁰ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Entry 4717 [29.201], f129v, September 1820, in *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge 1819-1826: Entries 4505-4571*, Volume 4 Text, ed. by Kathleen Coburn and Merton Christenson (London: Routledge, 1990).

tradition. The affirmative statement which begins ‘we may not thus profane / Nature’s sweet voices’ is so resolute in tone that it brings an assuredness to ‘The Nightingale’ that has hitherto been absent.

This section is reminiscent of the opening lines of ‘The Nightingale’. For a second time, the ‘different lore’ manifests as a shared experience for Coleridge, Wordsworth and Dorothy. The speaker wants his confidants to share in his happiness but also in his new ideology as he wholeheartedly commits to viewing nature as joyful. ‘Nature’s sweet voices’ completely eradicate any trace of darkness that ‘The Nightingale’ once accommodated, as ‘love / And joyance’ dominate the poem with a renewed and full vitality. We see a willingness to embrace a new type of pastoral signalling a complete U-turn in the poem’s philosophical direction. The melancholy bird has transformed into ‘the merry Nightingale / That crowds, and hurries, and precipitates / With fast thick warble his delicious notes’. Coleridge finds a new tradition whereby nature is wholeheartedly pure and optimistic. The energy of this nightingale contrasts greatly with the aforementioned ‘neglected love’ (‘The Nightingale’, l. 18) and even ‘Philomela’s pity-pleading strains’ (‘The Nightingale’, l. 39) as all we hear now are ‘delicious notes’. The lack of punctuation at the end of these lines reinforces this sense of overwhelming joy as positive emotion saturates ‘The Nightingale’. The adjectives ‘sweet’ and ‘delicious’ add a sensual enjoyment to pastoral. The speaker perceives nature as a multi-sensory experience. The verbs ‘crowds’, ‘hurries’ and ‘precipitates’ help to establish a sense of urgency and movement, almost as if the opportunity to overhaul tradition is limited. That ‘an April night / Would be too short for him to utter forth / His love-chant, and disburthen his full soul / Of all its music’ emphasises the pressing nature of the speaker’s mission. There is simply not enough time to relay the full extent of the nightingale’s joyous melody. The allusion to ‘love-chant’ and ‘music’ highlight the importance of sound ‘The Nightingale’, and in doing so, anticipates the final lines of stanza two:

And I know a grove
Of large extent, hard by a castle huge
Which the great lord inhabits not: and so
This grove is wild with tangling underwood,
And the trim walks are broken up, and grass,
Thin grass and king-cups grow within the paths.

But never elsewhere in one place I knew
 So many Nightingales: and far and near
 In wood and thicket over the wide grove
 They answer and provoke each other's songs—
 With skirmish and capricious passagings,
 And murmurs musical and swift jug jug
 And one low piping sound more sweet than all—
 Stirring the air with such an harmony,
 That should you close your eyes, you might almost
 Forget it was not day.

(‘The Nightingale’, l. 49-64)

Against Peter Knox Shaw’s assertion that in this passage Coleridge ‘is soon launched into the recovery of a memory’, these lines transport us to a darker pastoral realm situated elsewhere.¹⁶¹ The lyric ‘I’ swings back to its perplexed posture, muddying ‘The Nightingale’ with its familiar frustrated consciousness. Coleridge draws upon his imagination in new and fascinating ways, reminiscent of *Christabel* and his flirtation with the transgressive pastoral. The speaker works through a darker pastoral aesthetic before going on to explore the dominance and intricacies of birdsong as an aural experience. True to form, ‘The Nightingale’ once again abandons the aforementioned definitive lore, regressing into melancholia. However, this time Coleridge uses the technique to highlight something new. No matter how uninviting and nature might appear, with it being overgrown and a victim of human neglect, nightingales will continue to sing their songs. With this moment, Coleridge suggests that poets will continue to ‘answer and provoke’ each other’s pastorals, regardless of circumstances or tradition.

The allusion to ‘grove / Of large extent’ and ‘castle huge’ draws genre into precarious territory as we encounter a neglected and forlorn natural world. This explicit type of darker pastoral amplifies and solidifies the implicit tenets of darkness that we see in the poem’s opening. By this point in ‘The Nightingale’ we know that genre is forever

¹⁶¹ Peter Knox-Shaw, ‘Coleridge, Hartley, and “The Nightingale”’, *The Review of English Studies*, 62.255 (2011) <<https://academic.oup.com/res/article/62/255/433/1596956>> [Accessed 3 April 2021] (p. 438).

being constructed and deconstructed, producing a lyric 'I' that is chaotic and convoluted as its voice jumps from perspective to perspective. The speaker's shifting perspective suggests why, according to this poem, the natural world flits between moments of hostility to partial or total friendly quality. In this bleaker scene, the adjectives 'large' and 'huge' rather than suggesting openness and endless possibility point towards a natural world that is daunting. The castle itself is vacant, unmanned as the 'great lord' no longer inhabits it. That this grove 'is wild with tangling underwood' insinuates a lack of cultivation, the twisting alliterative 'w' reinforcing the knotted quality of the poem's consciousness. This scene of natural decay also resembles Book I of Wordsworth's *The Excursion*, reminding us that the natural world is also subject to change that is aesthetically unattractive. Nature is not always perfect and blooming. Coleridge broadens his application of genre by including this vision of a darker pastoral; he wants us to see nature in all its different guises. Colour is fittingly sapped from pastoral as the reader detects hues of browns and diluted, dirty greens. The 'grass / Thin grass', neglected from an abundance of water and sunlight, offers a strong contrast to the exuberant merry nightingale: it seems to be at the end of its life. The 'king-cups' growing in the paths offer a splash of yellow to an otherwise dishevelled scene, offering a small amount of hope.

Despite such an unruly pastoral, the speaker acknowledges the presence of numerous nightingales. The caesura in line 56 anticipates a shift in gear as the lyric 'I' moves from a state of pessimism to one of streamlined optimism. The 'wood and thicket' add some welcome detail to the now 'wide grove', creating a more convivial environment whereby birdsong rather than the pastoral aesthetic dominates. At this point in 'The Nightingale' sound becomes increasingly more integral to genre as language is adapted to facilitate a more metrical composition. The 'skirmish and capricious passagings' initially indicates conflict and inconsistency with the hard 'c' exacerbating the atmosphere of verbal combat. This is juxtaposed to the conversational iambic pentameter line. The active and busy tones heard by the 'night-wandering man', Milton, and even Coleridge, reach their apotheosis in this line, only to be softened by the musical murmur and swift 'jug jug'. The change in cadence shows off pastoral's dexterity, but also calms the tension latent in 'The Nightingale'. The sibilance in line 60, combined with the near onomatopoeic 'jug jug' introduces a sweet rhythm to pastoral, which helps to isolate the 'one low piping sound more sweet than all'. The

soft 'p' in 'piping' introduces the joyful voice as the saving grace of pastoral. The word 'sweet', used so often in 'The Nightingale', acquires newfound savour as the low birdsong overshadows the abandoned grove. That this one sound has the ability to stir 'the air with such an harmony', to fill the open grove with the sweet voice of the nightingale, points toward a new tradition that accumulates power through subtlety. The 'choral minstrelsy' ('The Nightingale', l. 75) amplifies this harmony to a symphony, swelling the sweet tones of the one voice to a concerto. As 'Nature's sweet voices always full of love / And joyance' ('The Nightingale', l. 42-43) turn into 'tipsy Joy' ('The Nightingale', l. 82) pastoral settles into a calmer rhythm. After completing numerous cycles of experimentation, Coleridge seems ready to wind down the lyric 'I' to a point of tolerable stasis.

Mary Jacobus draws attention to 'Wordsworth's discovery of a personal voice in the lyrics of spring 1798'.¹⁶² Though Jacobus points up the significance of the lyric 'I' to Wordsworth, her argument seems equally valid for that of Coleridge's personal voice. As Stephen Maxfield Parrish maintains, 'the program of *Lyrical Ballads*...is a programme centered on the pastoral mode'.¹⁶³ To reread these poems in light of Maxfield Parrish's assertion is to open up new ways of seeing, apprehending and experiencing both the world and the self. The Lake Poets use this collection of lyrics to experiment, challenge and redefine genre in ways that reflect their own meditative practice as lyricists. Despite the self-conscious nature of the Preface, each of the *Lyrical Ballads* bring to the fore a new subjective lyric 'I' that prioritises the individual and often imperfect experience. In doing so, they reveal the joyful freshness of new perspective. *Tintern Abbey* with its reflective overtone renegotiates pastoral tradition in order to demonstrate the growth of self, ultimately redefining the concept of Eden. 'The Old Cumberland Beggar, a Description' with its rich narrative thread, uses genre to prioritise compassion rather than sympathy, formulating a lyric 'I' that is empowering rather than self-deprecating. Finally, Coleridge's 'The Nightingale' experiments with genre in order to break free from an entrenched tradition but simultaneously express the anxieties inherent in pursuing the road less taken. Despite their idiosyncrasies, all three of these pastoral lyrics bring to the fore a new vision of

¹⁶² Mary Jacobus, 'The Lyric Voice of Spring 1798', in *Tradition and Experiment in Wordsworth's Lyrical Ballads (1798)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), pp. 83-103 (p. 84).

¹⁶³ Parrish, 'The Ballad as Pastoral', p. 162.

the natural world by disrupting the precedent established by the eighteenth-century Georgics. As Timothy Webb comments, *Lyrical Ballads* ‘was not designed to outrage traditional readers rather than those who were inattentive or lazy’.¹⁶⁴ For Wordsworth and Coleridge, the pastoral genre is a way of making those who were ‘inattentive or lazy’ appreciate the world in a new way.

¹⁶⁴ Timothy Webb, ‘Wordsworth and Coleridge: *Lyrical Ballads* and Other Poems’, in *The Cambridge History of English Poetry*, ed. by Michael O’Neill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 456-469 (p. 457).

Chapter Two: Coleridge's 'Conversation Poems' and the Anxiety of the Mind

Samuel Taylor Coleridge was an individual ridden by anxiety. Troubled by the ghost of a difficult childhood, the toxicity of his unhappy marriage to Sara Fricker and strained political alliances, his poetry always foregrounds an element of unease. The so-called 'Conversation Poems', an octet of poems written and published between 1795 and 1807, demonstrate this angst in a variety of ways, but no more effectively than in their usage of the pastoral genre.¹⁶⁵ Introducing the subjective mode, Coleridge teases out an early definition of the dark pastoral subgenre, specifically focusing on the mind's transforming gaze. His poetry repeatedly shows how the mind can concoct a darker embodiment of pastoral, shadowing objects and experiences to the point of anxiety, epitomising his own concept in *Table Talk*, that 'sensation produces...the external object'.¹⁶⁶ Consequently, a struggle arises in Coleridge's verse as a result of the tension between the pastoral and dark pastoral, or as Ann Mathieson describes it, 'light and shade'.¹⁶⁷ Experimenting with both the function and tone of genre, Coleridge presents the pastoral as a vacillating and highly fraught mode, which comes into existence through memory, a disturbed psyche and an active imagination. Particularly prevalent in 'Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement' (1796), 'This Lime-Tree Bower my Prison' (1797) and *Fears in Solitude* (1798), Coleridge challenges eighteenth century notions of pastoral as an objective mode tending towards a wider truth by prioritising focus on the subjective self.¹⁶⁸ Foregrounding Percy Bysshe Shelley's notion of the 'human mind's imaginings', Coleridge uses this trio of poems to demonstrate the effect of the mind on personal experience,

¹⁶⁵ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'Conversation Poems', in *The Major Works including Biographia Literaria*, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 29-128.

¹⁶⁶ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'Table Talk', in *The Major Works including Biographia Literaria*, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 591-603 (p. 591).

¹⁶⁷ Ann Mathieson, 'The Influence of Cowper's *The Task* on Coleridge's Conversation Poems', in *New Approaches to Coleridge: Biographical and Critical Essays*, ed. by Donald Sultana (London: Vision Press, 1981), pp. 137-150 (p. 142).

¹⁶⁸ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement (1796)', in *The Major Works including Biographia Literaria*, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 29-31, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison (1797)', in *The Major Works including Biographia Literaria*, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 38-40 and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'Fears in Solitude (1798)', in *The Major Works including Biographia Literaria*, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 92-98. Please note all further references to these 3 poems will be from this edition. For Coleridgean subjectivity see Michael Genovese, 'An Organic Commerce: Sociable Selfhood In Eighteenth-Century Georgic', *Eighteenth Century-Studies*, 46.2 (2013) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/23524252>> [Accessed 13 July 2019].

deconstructing the category of pastoral, whilst simultaneously injecting the genre with the darker effects of the mind's transforming gaze.¹⁶⁹ Renegotiating the pastoral genre as a subjective mode coloured by his own experiences, Coleridge becomes the pioneer of the dark pastoral.

Obvious starting points for the dark pastoral in the 'Conversation Poems' are 'Frost at Midnight' (1795) and 'The Eolian Harp' (1798), the critics' favoured pairing in terms of Coleridge's chief accomplishments.¹⁷⁰ Renowned for its overt supernaturalism and interest in gothic themes, 'Frost at Midnight' accelerates the pastoral into dark pastoral hyperbole, being physically set in the darkness and detailing an extremity of bleaker natural and domestic features. The contrast between nature's darkness and the sleeping babe in particular, an anxiety in itself, showcases how this new dark pastoral knows no boundaries as it threatens to pervade the familiar domestic sphere. Surrounding Coleridge's home, the dark pastoral is a threatening force that engulfs both the physical and literary spaces. Marking a tension between natural and domestic spaces but also 'the poet's extreme emotion and his natural, conversational language', the reader is exposed to Coleridge's dark pastoral philosophy.¹⁷¹ Nature, in the form of the frost, a formerly mundane natural feature, is transformed by the mind's ability to grant it agency through personification. The poem, as summarised by William Christie, stages an invasion: '[t]he poem begins with the landscape in the grip of a frozen calm-ness that, for the poet, is almost preternatural, Gothic—in the sense of the invasion of the home or *homely* by the uncanny (the *unheimlich* or unhomely)'.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁹ Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'Mont Blanc: Lines Written in the Vale of Chamouni (Version B)', in *Percy Bysshe Shelley: The Major Works*, ed. by Zachary Leader and Michael O'Neill, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 124-127 (p. 127).

¹⁷⁰ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'Frost at Midnight', in *The Major Works including Biographia Literaria*, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 87-89 and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'The Eolian Harp', in *The Major Works including Biographia Literaria*, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 27-29. All further references to these two poems will be from this edition. For favoured critical pairings see Paul Magnuson, 'The 'Conversation' Poems', in *The Cambridge Companion to Coleridge*, ed. by Lucy Newlyn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 32-44, A. Gérard, 'The Systolic Rhythm: The Structure of Coleridge's Conversation Poems', in *Coleridge: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. by Kathleen Coburn (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1967), pp. 78-87 and Nicholas Halmi, 'Coleridge on Allegory and Symbol', in *The Oxford Handbook of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 345-358.

¹⁷¹ Ronald A. Audet, "'Frost at Midnight': The Other Coleridge", *The English Journal*, 59.8 (1970) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/813517>> [Accessed 24 April 2019] (p. 108).

¹⁷² William Christie, 'Crossing Over: Samuel Taylor Coleridge and the Conversation Poems', *Mystery and Interpretation in Romantic Literature* (2016) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1d10h2h.8>> [Accessed 17 April 2022] (p. 70).

Defining its own sense of the uncanny, the frost becomes a source of major anxiety, its ‘secret ministry’ (‘Frost at Midnight’, l. 1) a threat to domestic bliss. Coleridge also shuts out any attempt of a pastoral escape or retreat, a discourse that erects ‘a different kind of world to that of realism’.¹⁷³ The poet instead favours realism, forcing his reader to confront the dark pastoral in its full capacity, goaded by its curious lure but simultaneously fearful of its powers.

Coleridge provides us with different instances of the uncanny throughout ‘Frost at Midnight’, demonstrating the mind’s various interpretative abilities. The film for example, the ‘sole unquiet thing’ (‘Frost at Midnight’, l. 16) is depicted in its present moment as it ‘[s]till flutters there’ (‘Frost at Midnight’, l. 16), but then later the speaker recalls:

But O! how oft,
How oft, at school, with most believing mind,
Presageful, have I gazed upon the bars,
To watch that fluttering stranger!

(‘Frost at Midnight’, l. 24-27)

The phrase ‘most believing mind’ encapsulates Coleridge’s view of the dark pastoral succinctly, as it gestures towards the self-conscious aspect of the poet’s mind. The verb ‘believing’ suggests that the mind has an ability to accept that something is true, potentially without evidence. Coleridge opens up the possibility that the mind may alter pastoral experience without any rational basis. Recalling the ‘sooty films’ of William Cowper’s *The Task*, Coleridge reinterprets the dark coals of the eighteenth-century pastoral first as a ‘fluttering stranger’, then as an ‘unquiet thing’.¹⁷⁴ Dehumanising the film from a stranger to a thing within a few lines conjures an aesthetic type of uncanny as we move from implicit anthropoid form to a more ambiguous entity. The pastoral hearth, a conventionally welcoming feature, is transformed by personification and then deformed by objectification. The mind’s ability to first warp such a comfort, and second, to alter its physical properties, displays

¹⁷³ Terry Gifford, ‘The Discourse of Retreat’, in *Pastoral* (London; New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 45-80 (p. 45).

¹⁷⁴ Rachel Trickett’s article explores the direct link between Cowper’s poetry and Coleridge’s ‘Conversation Poems’ and specifically ‘Frost at Midnight’. See Rachel Trickett, ‘Cowper, Wordsworth, and the Animal Fable’, *The Review of English Studies*, 34.136 (1983) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/515547>> [Accessed 13 June 2019] (p. 475).

the dexterity of Coleridge's art as he reifies only to destabilise key generic axioms. The verb 'fluttering' embodies the subtleness of this art, that soft, unsteady flap demarcating Coleridge's role as the nuanced artist of dark pastoral composition. Carving out what Stuart Curran terms 'antipastoral reality', 'Frost at Midnight' suggests the development of a new pastoral theory that, in part, relies upon the traditional pastoral revealing its darker formal shadow.¹⁷⁵

'The Eolian Harp', written in an altogether different mode to 'Frost at Midnight', functions as a secondary site for Coleridge to introduce and 'experiment with a new role, the mind playing with further possibilities of experience'.¹⁷⁶ As a poem that adheres to the 'predictable artifice' of conventional pastoral, 'The Eolian Harp' draws upon, but then darkens the heightened artificiality of the genre.¹⁷⁷ In the opening lines, Coleridge initially champions the 'pastoral humility' of Edmund Spenser's 1579 epic *The Shepherdes Calendar*, while simultaneously drawing upon notes of the 'enamelled pastoral of the eighteenth century, that has self-consciously "cultivated" nature'.¹⁷⁸

My pensive Sara! thy soft cheek reclined
Thus on mine arm, most soothing sweet it is
To sit beside our cot, our cot o'ergrown
With white-flowered jasmín, and the broad-leaved myrtle,
(Meet emblems they of Innocence and Love!)
And watch the clouds, that were rich with light,

('The Eolian Harp', l. 1-6)

The marriage dynamic, introduced with nostalgic overtones and physical tenderness, appears to be completely blissful. Coleridge's rendering of the pastoral idyll imbues the lines with bold confidence, as the poet lulls us into a false sense of security with

¹⁷⁵ Stuart Curran, 'The Pastoral', in *Poetic Form and British Romanticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 85-127 (p. 110).

¹⁷⁶ Frederick Garber, 'The Hedging Consciousness in Coleridge's Conversation Poems', *The Wordsworth Circle*, 4.2 (1973) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/24039121>> [Accessed 21 February 2019] (p. 127).

¹⁷⁷ M. Payne and M. M. Gaylord, *Pastoral.*, in *The Princeton Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. by Roland Greene, et al., Fourth Edition (Princeton; NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012) *ProQuest Ebook Central* <<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/leicester/detail.action?docID=913846>> [Accessed 18 April 2022], pp. 1005-1008 (p. 1006).

¹⁷⁸ William Empson, 'Double Plots', in *Some Versions of Pastoral* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1935), pp. 27-86 (p. 71) and Curran, 'The Pastoral', p. 108.

the uplifting abstractions of 'Innocence and Love'. Even the overgrown foliage encasing the cottage is endearing, the white of the jasmin and the freshness of the myrtle a sign of vivacity and rural beauty. Capitalising on the sensory experience, Coleridge transports the reader by the exquisite 'scents / Snatched from yon bean-field! and the world so hushed!' ('The Eolian Harp', l. 9-10). The soft sibilance of 'scents' and 'snatched' first implies a distinctive smell, and second, its immediate eager seizure. There is a sense that the speaker cannot hold back and must consume the smell immediately. The quick movement of snatching, though physical, betrays something of the speaker's character, as he greedily smells the bean-field's fresh aroma. The silence in the surrounding world is reinforced by the verb 'hushed', heightening the noise produced by Coleridge's inhalation. Recalling classical pastoral escapism and the serenity of Arcadia, Coleridge leads us further into contentment, with the lute governing the scene with its 'sweet upbraiding' ('The Eolian Harp', l.6) mirroring the musical aspect of the swain's song.

However, pastoral sentimentality is soon undercut by a series of formal transitions as Coleridge subtly weaves darkness into the scene. The first anxiety lies in the poem's attempt to engage the addressee, the silent interlocutor, Coleridge's wife Sara. Introducing a sinister tone to 'The Eolian Harp', the silence operates as an anxious life form that the reader is aware of, with Sara's reproof constantly suspended in the centre of the poem. The radical instability of pastoral becomes apparent, as Coleridge exchanges humility for quasi-arrogance, retuning the timbre of pastoral to accommodate a much more subjective, even oppressive voice. Coleridge is very aware that his 'pensive Sara' with her soft cheek is unable to respond to him or defend herself. Her voice is prevented first by Coleridge's speech, and second by the poem's fixed recollection of her. The disturbing usage of the pronoun 'my' insinuates possession, objectifying Sara as Coleridge constructs his scene of familial joy. Although Coleridge wants Sara to engage with him, the poet is keen to draw attention to her purposeful silence. In refusing to speak, Sara's perspective remains dangerously hidden, and her role as muse a great deal more ominous. Her lack of voice also operates as an unnerving reminder that there are, and always will be conversations, but also tenets of the dark pastoral that remain hidden and incommunicable. The one-sided perspective provided by Coleridge always draws attention to Sara's absent voice, which has the potential to overthrow and spoil Coleridge's poem.

The poet's second venture into pastoral transition and division concerns the harp, originally perceived as the 'simplest lute' ('The Eolian Harp', l. 13) projecting a 'sweet upbraiding'. Although this latter epithet is slightly contradictory as upbraiding insinuates reproach, the use of the adjective 'sweet' leavens the unpleasantness of such an action, tempering the harp's music. However, before long, there is a disconcerting shift in atmosphere:

And now, it springs
 Boldlier swept, the long sequacious notes
 Over delicious surges sink and rise
 Such a soft floating witchery of sound
 As twilight Elfins make, when they at eve
 Voyage on gentle gales from Fairy-Land,
 ('The Eolian Harp', l. 17-22)

Rejecting Timothy Morton's notion of poetry being 'a balm for hurt minds and even bodies', the harp and indeed the poetry become vexatious as they descend into a series of what John Beer terms 'unstable images'.¹⁷⁹ The music the harp produces becomes heavier, as the wind sweeps it 'boldlier' and the notes appear laboured but free flowing, channelling a new type of darker artifice. The harp is now an eerie aural agitation as it emits a 'soft floating witchery of sound'. Although not outwardly unnerving or displeasing, the apparent supernatural, Gothic overtones offsets the pastoral calm we were originally promised in the opening eighteen lines of the poem. The sibilance, alongside the polysyllabic phrase 'floating witchery' and jaunty iambic pentameter, embodies the movement of floating but it is that elusive term 'witchery' which commands a sense of the occult, unknown and the abstract. The new complexity of the harp, its movements and objectives, overturns William Empson's concept of the pastoral as a means of putting the complex into the simple.¹⁸⁰ Here we see an instrument reliant upon nature to function, and yet it develops into an intricate, multifaceted entity. Drawing upon Jentsch's concept of the uncanny imposing 'doubt

¹⁷⁹ Timothy Morton, 'Romanticism and the Environmental Subject', in *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (London; Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2009), pp. 79-139 (p. 114) and John Beer, 'Coleridge and Wordsworth: Influence and Confluence', in *Coleridge's Variety Bicentenary Studies*, ed. by John Beer (Basingstoke; London: Macmillan Press, 1974), pp. 192-211 (p. 195).

¹⁸⁰ William Empson, 'Marvell's Garden', in *Some Versions of Pastoral* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1935), pp. 119-145 (p. 137).

as to whether...a lifeless objective might perhaps be animate', the harp seems to come alive, to function as a being in its evocation of music.¹⁸¹ Mobilising a twist in the perception of the harp as a manmade object to now a mythical, organic being, Coleridge draws the instrument into the realm of the supernatural, underscoring 'The Eolian Harp' with a thread of fear.

The crux of dark pastoral anxiety in 'The Eolian Harp' occurs just after the halfway point of the poem where the speaker again indulges in philosophising. Against Timothy Morton's concept of the worker and encrypting labour "disappearing" from pastoral as a result of capitalism, Coleridge chooses to reinvigorate the pastoral speaker by omitting the shepherd swain entirely.¹⁸² Crucially, the type of labour that Morton speaks of does not disappear entirely, as is revealed by poems such as Wordsworth's *Michael* and *The Ruined Cottage*. Uturning the idea that 'natural man is conventionally a shepherd', Coleridge's subject is the unique mind of the poet.¹⁸³

And what if all of animated nature
Be but organic harps diversely framed,
That tremble into thought, as o'er them sweeps
Plastic and vast, one intellectual breeze,
At once the Soul of each, and God of all?

('The Eolian Harp', l. 43-47)

Although the lines suggest Frederick Garber's concept of the movement of the mind, with it having 'energies within itself, waterfalls which stir its own yellow leaves', they counter the same critic's idea that the mind is 'unmoved by gales from outside'.¹⁸⁴ The harp, a physical object now with altered properties, moves the mind into a state of melancholic musing, operating then as a stimulant, a gale from outside. In a departure from James McKusick's ecocritical reading of this conversation poem, the harp metaphor operates as more than just the 'basis for environmental awareness'.¹⁸⁵ The mind hypothesises an alternative, terrifying vision of the natural world, transforming

¹⁸¹ Freud, 'The Uncanny', p. 133.

¹⁸² Morton, 'Romanticism and the Environmental Subject', p. 92.

¹⁸³ Frank Kermode, 'Introduction', in *English Pastoral Poetry: From the Beginnings to Marvell*, ed. by Frank Kermode (London: George G. Harrap & Co., 1953), pp. 11-44 (p. 13).

¹⁸⁴ Garber, 'The Hedging Consciousness in Coleridge's Conversation Poems', p. 135.

¹⁸⁵ James McKusick, 'From Coleridge to John Muir: The Romantic Origins of Environmentalism', *The Wordsworth Circle*, 26.1 (1995) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/24042952>> [Accessed 6 October 2019] (p. 36).

it into the form of a manmade object. Coleridge reintroduces the disruption of pastoral idyll, juxtaposing the natural and the unnatural, and ‘animated nature’ against the ‘organic harps’. The dynamism and exuberance of nature, against the oxymoronic organic harps, which are wooden, restrictive and reliant on the wind to function, is another example of pastoral being undercut by an unnatural, sombre grain of dark pastoral. The scene becomes ever more disturbing as nature is hypothesised as trembling into thought, introducing an element of fear and instability into pastoral enclosure. The personification of the harps is unsettling, as they no longer occupy just a musical faculty, showing how the mind has altered the harp to the point of independence. The strange line between an instrument being something tangible and familiar, to now invading and subsuming nature’s personality is uncomfortable, as nature seems to lose its own agency.

However, it is the potency of the intellectual breeze, its ‘[p]lastic and vast’ power which is most concerning. The idea that there could exist a moulding, infinite power—an elusive breeze—signals potential danger. The ‘as’ in line 45 indicates that nature may be trembling into thought because of this very breeze, almost as a reaction to the uncertainty. As the blank verse tumbles onwards, the epithet closes with a rhetorical question drawing in ideas of omnipresence, the religious and the spiritual. Blank verse feels spontaneous at this point in the poem, and even organic in its delivery. The ‘[p]astoral of the Christian era’ is toyed with here, though in this instance, does not seem redemptive.¹⁸⁶ The question here denotes uncertainty, but may also function as a challenge to religious authority, particularly in the context of pastoral. Coleridge shows that while his ‘Conversation Poems’ speak to each other, they are also designed to converse with and challenge wider generic presuppositions.

Written one year after ‘The Eolian Harp’, ‘Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement’ functions as the experimental successor to Coleridge’s earlier exercises in the dark pastoral. Often marginalised by its more canonical counterparts, ‘Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement’ takes a more conservative and nonlinear approach to its interpretation of genre. The poem is centred upon returning to a place with a sense of heightened awareness, a concept that Christopher R Miller

¹⁸⁶ Kermode, ‘Introduction’, p. 14.

discusses in his article ‘Coleridge and the Scene of Lyric Description’.¹⁸⁷ Although Miller’s article focuses on ‘This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison’, the idea of ‘Conversation Poems’ as lyrics is interesting, particularly when considering Coleridge’s use of pastoral. To extend Miller’s premise, pastoral becomes a mode of lyric in ‘Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement’, and the pastoral alters to become an opportunity to see the world refracted through the self and its past, as opposed to a two-dimensional unified bucolic idyll. The darkening and lightening of rural pasture throughout time mirrors the rejection and conformity of pastoral tropes, while simultaneously embodying flickers of the poet’s varied thoughts. Coleridge wants to emphasise that his bucolic relies upon exploring the personal pain and angst of the pastoral journey, the uncomfortable sense of moving from the beginning to the end of the poem, but not necessarily seamlessly or logically. Coleridge suggests the terror of the Greek pastoral anti-strophe, where the pastoral fragments and ruptures unpredictably in the middle part of the journey. Distorting nature’s cyclical operation, alongside ideas around the guarantee of renewal and regeneration, Coleridge toys with both the timeline and framework of the pastoral genre.

‘Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement’ provides its reader with a tangible sense of an extended past, capturing reflections in a seemingly random order, mimicking the natural process of recollection rather than universal chronology. The poem relies upon a rejection of the conventional pastoral cycle of regular and clear seasonal change (spring, summer, autumn, winter) that we see in pastorals such as Edmund Spenser’s *The Shepheardes Calendar* and Oliver Goldsmith’s *The Deserted Village*. The poem is even devoid of the Golden Age pastoral, the era of the unattainable glorious past, as seen in the works of Hesiod and Virgil. Noting Coleridge’s ‘complex, wayward, and ephemeral perceptions of time’, the sporadic nature of the poem’s pastoral episodes reflects an unfocused, unsettled mind that is obsessed with returning to a site of affection.¹⁸⁸ Though Coleridge claims that his moral duty to humanity supersedes his admiration of nature, the repeated return to his beloved Nether Stowey suggests otherwise. As the poem progresses, the pastoral is

¹⁸⁷ Christopher R. Miller, ‘Coleridge and the Scene of Lyric Description’, *The Journal of English and German Philology*, 101.4 (2002) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/27712275>> [Accessed Tuesday 2 July 2019] (p. 520).

¹⁸⁸ Miller, ‘Coleridge and the Scene of Lyric Description’, p. 521.

increasingly altered by the poet's decision to join the 'vision-weaving tribe' ('Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement', l. 56). Each return to his Clevedon cottage brings with it a changed or enhanced perception of the natural landscape, as Coleridge's mind delicately builds upon and expands the genre in subtle but moving ways. Though not as dramatic or explicitly dark as 'Frost at Midnight' and 'The Eolian Harp', 'Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement' still triumphs in its experimentation with genre through its focus on finessing, rather than outwardly rejecting or undercutting convention. In doing so, Coleridge's pastoral obtains a 'greater intensity of mental life', as it shows a mind working through pastoral memory.¹⁸⁹

With a philosophical agenda to the fore, Coleridge begins 'Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement' with a technique that seems to dominate the 'Conversation Poems'—conventional pastoral idyll. He does this to establish a clear starting point, to provide a canvas for himself to build, weave and edit his bucolic. In wistful, nostalgic tones, he begins:

Low was our pretty Cot: our tallest rose
Peeped at the chamber-window. We could hear
At silent noon, and even, and early morn,
The sea's faint murmur. In the open air
Our myrtles blossomed; and across the porch
Thick jasmins twined: the little landscape round
Was green and woody, and refreshed the eye.
It was a spot which you might aptly call
The Valley of Seclusion!

('Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement', l. 1-9)

The quaint spot of the homely cottage nestled amongst luscious greenery and foliage conveys a past dominated by life in the domestic sphere. Coleridge speaks of the spot with real affection, drawing attention to the everyday sounds and sights he experienced. The poet chooses not to focus upon the eye, but rather draw attention directly to the cottage, marking it out as the key feature amongst this scene of pastoral

¹⁸⁹ Kelvin Everest, 'The Conversation Poems 1795-1798: Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement', in *Coleridge's Secret Ministry: The Context of the Conversation Poems 1795-1798* (Sussex: The Harvester Press Limited, 1979), pp. 222-241 (p. 238).

bliss. Drawing in the sea, the landscape and the valley, we see the poet capturing a panoramic view, adopting the same approach he uses in 'Frost at Midnight'. As Kelvin Everest notes in his study of the poem, the lines are, in part, also reminiscent of 'The Eolian Harp' where Coleridge speaks of:¹⁹⁰

...our cot o'ergrown

With white-flowered jasmin, and the broad-leaved myrtle

('The Eolian Harp', l. 3-4)

The homely cottage generates warmth, and the rose peeping at the chamber-window in 'Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement' is a joyful reminder of nature's bounties and potential. Coleridge enlists simple past participles, 'peeped'/'blossomed'/'twined', to express feelings of contentment, again capturing a specific past experience. There is a real sweetness about nature peeping and blossoming, a quaintness that is enjoyed but is seemingly transitory as the poem progresses. Even speaking of 'our tallest rose', Coleridge adopts nature as a child, proud of its ability to have grown and now able to see inside his home. That the greenery refreshes the eye draws human consciousness into the poem, attributing optical renewal with the freshness of landscape. The use of the modal verb 'could' suggests possibility and draws upon the hopefulness of pastoral as an escape, while also providing a sense of continuity with the sea's murmur throughout key touch points of the working day.¹⁹¹

Coleridge extends upon and modifies the fairly simple description of jasmin and myrtle that he details in 'The Eolian Harp', choosing to attribute more active qualities to them in 'Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement'. The myrtles 'blossomed' and the jasmin becomes 'thick' and twines, being indicative of a much more fruitful and prosperous type of nature. Unlike the dangerous plastic power of 'The Eolian Harp', the vibrancy of the natural world complements the scene of domestic bliss, exemplifying why this lowly cottage is situated in 'The Valley of Seclusion'. 'The Valley of Seclusion' itself suggests a pastoral retreat or a countryside

¹⁹⁰ Everest, 'The Conversation Poems 1795-98: Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement', p. 223.

¹⁹¹ Roger Sales draws attention to the 5 Rs of 'pastoralism', one of which is 'refuge...the desire for escape, pure and simple', evident at this point in the poem. See Roger Sales, 'The Propaganda of the Victors', in *English Literature in History 1780-1830: Pastoral and Politics* (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1983), pp. 15-35 (p. 15).

utopia, drawing upon John Milton's poetry.¹⁹² Such an explicit statement gestures towards the dramatization of pastoral idyll, the performance of seclusion, qualifying the hyperbolic tone of the rest of the opening. Unlike the darker seeds of tension that stir in 'The Eolian Harp' when we hear of 'the clouds, that late were rich with light, / Slow saddening round' ('The Eolian Harp', l. 6-7), the opening of 'Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement' epitomises rural bliss. The memory of the 'wealthy son of commerce' ('Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement', l. 11) that follows simply adds to the marvel as he brands the cottage a 'Blessed Place' ('Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement', l. 17). Now pastoral place also takes on a religious connotation. Having successfully constructed pastoral idyll, Coleridge can now experiment with convention:

But the time, when first
 From that low dell, steep up the stony mount
 I climbed with perilous toil and reached the top,
 Oh! what a goodly scene! Here the bleak mount,
 The bare bleak mountain speckled thin with sheep;
 Gray clouds, that shadowing spot the sunny fields;
 And river, now with bushy rocks o'er browed,
 Now winding bright and full, with naked banks;
 And seats, and lawns, the Abbey and the wood,
 And cots, and hamlets, and faint city-spire;
 The Channel there, the Islands and white sales,
 Dim coasts, and cloud-like hills and shoreless Ocean—
 It seemed like Omnipresence!

('Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement', l. 26-38)

The second stanza of 'Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement' registers a shift in the pastoral, since we are plunged into descriptive poetry. Renowned for its focus on the deep depiction of a specific object, descriptive poetry here moves the pastoral out of an aesthetic, shared memory ('our pretty cottage') to a subjective, personal experience (the climb). There are two key distinctions to note between the pastoral and the descriptive. Firstly, the descriptive is not a genre, it is a 'strategy' that

¹⁹² Terry Gifford speaks of 'retreat and return' in pastoral as a generic convention. See Terry Gifford, 'Three Kinds of Pastoral', in *Pastoral* (London; New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 1-12 (p. 1).

aims to ‘evoke the scene of an action or the situation of an object’.¹⁹³ Thus pastoral can make use of the descriptive, but can never be synonymous with it. Secondly, the pastoral is defined by artifice and objectivity, despite pastoral scenes appearing to be descriptions of beautiful places. By deploying the subjective mode in the descriptive, the mind is able to exchange careful nostalgia for an unrestrained, changeable and personal moment of private rural pleasure, capturing the ‘sensational presence of nature’.¹⁹⁴ The natural world here is coloured by the ordinariness of everyday life—the sheep, the grey clouds, a boisterous river and a village—reminiscent of the Georgic pastorals of the late eighteenth century. C. G. Martin and Kelvin Everest have noted that ‘Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement’ resembles William Crowe’s 1788 lyric ‘Lewesdon Hill’. However, both critics do not acknowledge the centrality of pastoral in these two poems, and Coleridge’s individual artistry in terms of his approach to genre. Unlike Crowe who begins with and subsequently maintains the mode of descriptive poetry, Coleridge moves from conventional pastoral into the descriptive in order to exhibit both an enhanced bucolic, but also a new type of memory.

Acknowledging that this is not the quasi-naïve blissful memory of Clevedon but a more investigative approach to an instance of natural splendour, Coleridge’s pastoral is always subjective, even where it is apparently descriptive. Veering between description and feeling, the Lake Poet is able to personalise the pastoral, allowing genre to capture both his action and reactions. The ‘perilous toil’ of the ascent for example, ‘steep up the stony mount’, seems thoroughly worthwhile with the profound exclamation, ‘Oh! what a goodly scene!’ Despite the joyous overtones, the adjective ‘goodly’ denotes a more conservative, pragmatic reaction, ultimately making the Coleridgean pastoral relate to the average reader.¹⁹⁵ The poem then returns to the descriptive, as the mind fixes upon a more desolate feature of the landscape: the ‘bleak mount, / The bare bleak mountain’. The repetition of ‘bleak’ alongside the extension

¹⁹³ Ruth Helen Webb and Philip Weller, ‘Descriptive Poetry’, in *The New Princeton Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. by Alex Preminger and T. V. F. Brogan (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 283-288 (p. 284).

¹⁹⁴ Everest, ‘The Conversation Poems 1795-1798: Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement’, p. 238.

¹⁹⁵ For further clarification, see "goodly, adj." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, September 2019, www.oed.com/view/Entry/79964. Accessed 31 October 2019 where ‘goodly’ denotes ‘of good or pleasing appearance.’

of ‘mount’ to ‘mountain’ registers an important shift in the poet’s mental activity. Coleridge seems to check himself, as he enhances the mountain’s uninviting aesthetic with the addition of ‘bare’. The mind works through this angst quickly, self-correcting, while simultaneously editing the descriptive pastoral. The caesura in line 29 then operates not so much as a tool to emphasise contrast, but a means by which Coleridge can stress the significance of finer detail in this enriched snapshot of pastoral. The subsequent contrasts in objective and subjective images, notably the seats, lawns, cots, and hamlets against the ‘Channel there’ and ‘the Islands’ help to reiterate the mind’s fixation upon natural features. Coleridge exploits the conversation element of the ‘Conversation Poem’ to emphasise this point effectively, bundling up the manmade features in lines 35 and 36 with the simplicity of anaphora. Minimising the importance of community dwellings but not ignoring their presence completely, Coleridge shows how the mind can wander, but ultimately always return to contemplate the natural world it can see, and the possibility evident in ‘Dim coasts, and cloud-like hills and shoreless Ocean’.

The descriptive mode provides further insights into the intricacies of Coleridge’s mind, a concept that interests C. G. Martin. Introducing a secondary reading to ‘Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement’, Martin comments: ‘[Coleridge’s] descriptions act also as metaphors for different conditions of mind, and his poem as a whole expresses, not simply opinions, but a mind actively coping with its own complex impulses’.¹⁹⁶ Preoccupied with the regret of leaving such a beautiful landscape, Coleridge works through different renditions of the pastoral in order to calm his troubled mind. In this particular instance, he realises that although the nostalgic pastoral is pleasant, it is simply inadequate as the sole memory of rural pleasure. The poet is keen not to simply recall a microcosm of the natural world, but to extend his reflections beyond the site of the lowly cottage. The reader observes an augmented pastoral, defined by aspects wholly different to the peeping rose and faint sea murmur of the poem’s opening. Though not explicitly dark pastoral, Coleridge’s mind fixates upon the ‘bright and full’ river and ‘[g]ray clouds’, always aware of nature’s darker potential. Though beautiful, there is a strand of hostility, potential

¹⁹⁶ C. G. Martin, ‘Coleridge and William Crowe’s “Lewesdon Hill”’, *The Modern Language Review*, 62.3 (1967) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/3722130>> [Accessed 01 October 2019] (p. 402).

danger and looming interference present, as nature is not depicted as simply timidly picturesque. Coleridge's mind notes danger as well as beauty, identifying potential challenges in nature almost as a risk assessment exercise. Renegotiating the high artifice of the poem's opening with a much more balanced depiction of the natural landscape, the poet reveals a pastoral reliant upon the potential for darkness as well as light.

Though Coleridge affirms that this is a 'goodly scene', the formal structure of this second stanza reveals an anxious undertone. The poet suddenly increases his usage of caesurae significantly, punctuating short lines that detail brief observations. No longer do his sentences organically flow from one line to the next with ease. The construction of this pastoral, much like the mind's rhythms, is much more complex. The poet's eye darts around the landscape quickly, with the ideas almost bouncing off the semi-colons in a quasi-neurotic fashion. Contrary to Kelvin Everest's reading of this section, Coleridge appears to lack 'remarkable control in the gradual acceleration of pace in the verse'.¹⁹⁷ Unable to focus or dwell on an idea for too long, it is the 'completely open form of the conversation [poem]' that masks this apprehension.¹⁹⁸ Lines 36 to 38 are particularly key in demonstrating this point. The word 'and' is used seven times as Coleridge rapidly comments upon his local territory (the abbey, the wood, the cottage) before moving further afield to the 'faint city-spire', the channel and the 'Islands and white sales'. Pastoral here becomes choppy and exploratory as the mind scrutinises aspects of the city, other islands and objects in the sea. The poet is in awe of as much of the landscape as his eyes can bear, and he frantically mutes the aesthetic and physical aspects of the pastoral as far as possible. There is also a distinct lack of adjectives used in these lines, figuring the mind's movement from its enrapture with nature to mere identification of buildings. Hybridising the descriptive with the pastoral, Coleridge demonstrates that his interest lies in the intricate workings of nature and not in the realm of human existence.

¹⁹⁷ Everest, 'The Conversation Poems 1795-1798: Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement', p. 238.

¹⁹⁸ Walter Jackson Bate, 'Wordsworth's Arrival: Coleridge as Poet', in *Coleridge* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969), pp. 36-54 (p. 50).

Directly contradicting the central premise of ‘Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement’, the duty to the brotherhood, nature’s sensational presence overrides the mind’s rational impulse. The closing image of the scene, with its mixture of greys, whites, blues and greens, once again subtly sketches an imperfect, but gorgeous rustic portrait. Lifting pastoral out of its generic artifice, Coleridge liberates the experience of nature as beyond the earthly, beyond even articulation, as he alludes to omnipresence. The dim coasts in the distance are an optimistic sign of nature elsewhere, further opportunities for natural experiences, the ‘cloud-like hills’ effortlessly amalgamating the sky and land and the ‘shoreless Ocean’ inciting endless possibility. Rather than observing pastoral as simply the English countryside, Coleridge is keen to include the sky and the ocean in his observations, extending the genre beyond national boundaries. The allusion to the scene as omnipresence adds a spiritual dimension to the pastoral, which, although positive, does imply uncertainty. Though the poet admits to an experience of heightened awareness, omnipresence implies limitless power, once again subtly drawing upon nature’s darker possibilities. This holistic inventory of the natural landscape shows a mind unwilling to explore only the aesthetically sound features of nature, thus allowing ‘Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement’ to function as the pastoral precursor to ‘This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison’ and *Fears in Solitude*. Coleridge subtly gestures to his reader to always consider the potential of the pastoral, and not just take its beauty for granted.

The religious interlude which follows the blurred vision of ‘[d]im coasts, and cloud-like hills’ triggers the key moment where Coleridge returns to deliberate upon the cottage and ‘mount sublime’ (‘Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement’, l. 43). The poet draws upon the sublime in order to consider nature as an entity that is not simply physical, elucidating his dark pastoral philosophy. Rather than embodying a ‘spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings’, Coleridge strategically alters his perception of the mountain following the religious epiphany he experiences at the end of stanza two.¹⁹⁹ Anticipating only to challenge Timothy Morton’s idea that ‘[n]ature wavers between the divine and the material’, reflection causes pastoral to assume a

¹⁹⁹ William Wordsworth, ‘Preface to Lyrical Ballads (1802)’, in *William Wordsworth: The Major Works including The Prelude*, ed. by Stephen Gill, Oxford World’s Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 595-615 (p. 598).

much more arbitrary quality.²⁰⁰ This new vision of sublime however, is not reliant upon Edmund Burke's pleasure/pain principle so often drawn upon in Wordsworth's poetry. Coleridge's sublime favours Longinus' earlier theory because of his emphasis on intensity. Longinus' concept of heightened awareness or 'high Flights' allows Coleridge's dark pastoral to acquire an intensity as it foment in the mind, transforming and darkening memory.²⁰¹ The mind becomes a volatile incubator as it nurses and expands memory, once again revealing a new psychological impulse.

Having gradually darkened aspects of the pastoral, Coleridge decides to flee nature suddenly, confessing in regretful tones, 'I was constrained to quit you' ('Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement', l. 44). It seems that the experience of the sublime triggers his departure, demonstrative of the mind's terrifying ability to create certain behaviours. Deploying the second person pronoun suggests that Coleridge is directly addressing the mountain, letting it know how compelled he feels to leave the space. There is a double meaning here, for although Coleridge is speaking about fulfilling a moral obligation to humanity, at a literary level, it also suggests that this more intense, balanced pastoral is simply too overwhelming to continue to develop. This results in both a physical departure from the cottage and its surrounding milieu, as well as an intellectual departure from the pastoral in the poem. Coleridge now has space to contemplate moral issues:

Was it right,
 While my unnumbered brethren toiled and bled,
 That I should dream away the entrusted hours
 On rose-leaf beds, pampering the coward heart
 With feelings all too delicate for use?

('Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement', l. 44-48)

Here we reach the crux of Coleridge's ethical dilemma as he argues that it would be incorrect to muse upon these scenes while his fellow countrymen toil. The dainty 'rose-leaf beds' reiterate this point, as aesthetic pleasure seems irrelevant compared to the work of the 'unnumbered brethren'. Although there is a suggestion of natural

²⁰⁰ Morton, 'Introduction', p. 14.

²⁰¹ Cassius Longinus, *An Essay Upon Sublime* (Oxford: Leon, Lichfield, 1698), *ProQuest Ebook Central* <http://gateway.proquest.com.ezproxy3.lib.le.ac.uk/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:image:109629:11> [Accessed 19 July 2019] (p. 4).

regeneration here, Coleridge is quick to embed a turn, reconsidering the ‘overwhelmed heart’ (‘Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement’, l. 41) a ‘coward heart’. Where ‘overwhelmed’ suggests a strong emotional effect, ‘coward’ shows the attendant feelings of weakness and retreat. Pastoral then accommodates a change in sentiment, as we shift from the evocation of excessive emotional enlightenment as positive, to now scorning feelings ‘too delicate for use’. Aesthetic contemplation or pastoral nostalgia is now considered ineffectual. Coleridge chooses to modify the pastoral to accommodate a different, more humane type of emotional sensibility:

Sweet is the tear that from some Howard’s eye
 Drops on the cheek of one he lifts from earth:
 And he that works for me good with unmoved face,
 Does it but half: he chills me while he aids,
 My benefactor, not my brother man!

(‘Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement’, l. 49-53)

The mind seeks to justify its departure from pastoral musing to philosophical meditation. The reference to prison reformer John Howard implicitly alludes to the business of philanthropy. Exchanging his regret for a demonstration of strong moral character, Coleridge encourages reformatory action, reworking the consolatory properties of pastoral in the poem’s opening into the desired benevolent qualities of mankind. This is demonstrated by the use of the verb ‘lift’. Just as the previous exploration of pastoral has lifted Coleridge out of his contrite mood, this physical lifting operates as a true gesture of kindness. The subtle but affecting physical link between the tear and the cheek adds a softness to the argument, paring emotion down to a small but effective moment.

The direct reference to earth also draws the basic presence of nature into the poem, stripping the pastoral down to its most raw form. With emotion and pastoral presented in their simplest forms then, there appears to be something unfulfilling about the ‘unmoved face’. It is clear that Coleridge seeks a life-giving brother, not a benefactor, observing his preference for pure selflessness. However, the poet soon appears to change his mind:

Yet even this, this cold beneficence
 Praise, praise it, O my Soul! oft as thou scann’st
 The sluggard Pity’s vision-weaving tribe!

Who sigh for wretchedness, yet shun the wretched,
 Nursing in some delicious solitude
 Their slothful loves and dainty sympathies!

(‘Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement’, l. 54-59)

The poet’s half-hearted and willed praise of ‘cold beneficence’, recalls his earlier confession: ‘he chills me while he aids’ (‘Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement’, l. 52). Beneficence, the act of ‘[d]oing good, the manifestation of benevolence or kindly feeling, active kindness’, is undermined by the hostility of the adjective ‘cold’.²⁰² This contradiction is typical of dark pastoral’s often unsettled, anxious character. Coleridge encourages praise for any type of help, even if it is without good intention or warmth, as though it might be all we can expect. The extent of Coleridge’s will, his near desperation, is emphasised by the apostrophe ‘O my Soul!’ Delving into the depths of his spiritual being, the poet calls for all aspects of his life form to join in this praise. Pastoral, whether conventional or not, becomes inadequate as an escape or as William Empson notes, ‘a source of relief’ from everyday struggles.²⁰³ Rather, pastoral exacerbates the need to join the ‘vision-weaving tribe’ in the ‘bloodless fight / Of science, freedom, and the truth in Christ’ (‘Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement’, l. 62). It is here that Coleridge reveals his dark pastoral philosophy, scorning those ‘[w]ho sigh for wretchedness, yet shun the wretched’. The polyptoton helps to emphasise the familiar feeling of sympathy simultaneously being overridden by repulsion as a result of antipathy. The sigh is onomatopoeic, the heavy exhalation emphasised by the stress of the iamb falling on ‘sigh’. The ‘shun’, which also falls on the stress of the iamb then enacts the motion of turning away from someone, the brutal starkness of the action reinforced by the monosyllable. Though in the pastoral, men are ‘dependent on society’, the sense of duty to their brothers is not always fulfilled.²⁰⁴ The almost ironic phrases, ‘delicious solitude’ and ‘slothful loves’ gesture towards a narcissistic self-indulgence, insinuating that the pastoral is immoral and perverted.

²⁰² "beneficence, n." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, June 2019, www.oed.com/view/Entry/17679. Accessed 19 July 2019.

²⁰³ William Empson, ‘Milton and Bentley’, in *Some Versions of Pastoral* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1935), pp. 149-191 (p. 187).

²⁰⁴ William Empson, ‘The Beggar’s Opera’, in *Some Versions of Pastoral* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1935), pp. 195-292 (p. 202).

The final stanza of ‘Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement’, attempts to complete a cycle with a return to pastoral artifice and the marital cottage. In accordance with Albert Gérard’s revision of G. M. Harper’s reading, the ending of ‘Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement’ does not simply embody ‘a return, for the self to which the poet finally turns back to is not the same self from which he had started: he has been enriched, heightened and uplifted by the various inner and outer experiences’.²⁰⁵ Rereading the ending illustrates Gérard’s point:

Yet oft when after honourable toil
Rests the tired mind, and waking loves to dream,
My spirit shall revisit thee, dear Cot!
Thy jasmin and thy window-peeping rose,
And myrtles fearless of the mild sea-air.

(‘Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement’, l. 63-67)

Followed by ‘[a]nd I shall sigh fond wishes—sweet abode! / Ah!—had none greater!’ (‘Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement’, l. 68-69), the scene appears to be one of traditional pastoral wonderment. With the toil complete, it is time to recuperate. However, the erratic journey that we have weathered, in tandem with the transformation of pastoral, suggests that this ending is too contrived: ‘the concept of the “return” over-simplifies the matter’.²⁰⁶ Returning to the pastoral idyll does not dilute the intensity of the pastoral episodes that Coleridge returns to over the course of ‘Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement’. Now with the changeability of pastoral, the challenges that the untamed river and sublime mountain present, there is a sense of the dark pastoral’s potential. We are not removed from ‘the immediacy of the rustics in real fields’, but rather forced to consider both the darkness and lightness of those fields.²⁰⁷ The irony implied in the ‘fearless’ myrtles becomes all too immediate, as Coleridge forces us not to forget the toil of the journey in favour of the seemingly blissful beginning and ending of ‘Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement’. We have returned to ‘The Valley of Seclusion’ with a new awareness of nature’s dark and terrifying characteristics. Pastoral artifice was earlier overlaid by a

²⁰⁵ Albert Gérard, ‘The Systolic Rythm: The Structure of Coleridge’s Conversation Poems’, *Essays in Criticism*, 10.3 (1960) <<https://doi.org/10.1093/eic/X.3.307>> [Accessed 20 July 2019] (p. 314).

²⁰⁶ Gérard, ‘The Systolic Rythm: The Structure of Coleridge’s Conversation Poems’, p. 314.

²⁰⁷ Lerner, ‘What Pastoral Is’, p. 20.

much more unnatural, erratic pastoral, exposing the potential toxicity of the mind's transforming gaze, particularly on a place close to the poet's heart.

The mind continues to torture the ambience of pastoral in other 'Conversation Poems', no more so than in 'This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison', a lyric dominated by Coleridge's intense affection for his friend Charles Lamb. Following a different formula to 'Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement', the dark pastoral expresses and enhances the poet's feelings of isolation and exclusion in light of his absence from a countryside walk. Nevertheless, Coleridge's precise fashioning of pastoral gives him a certain presence in the poem, since he operates as an expository spectator, and at times, imagined participant. Despite varied critical analyses, there appears to be little scrutiny of the pastoral's role in the poem and the significance of genre despite the poem being set in the English countryside.²⁰⁸ While Michael Schmidt argues that 'This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison' lacks the 'dark mystery' of 'Frost at Midnight' and *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, the triumph of this conversation poem lies in its subtle vacillation between the pastoral and the dark pastoral.²⁰⁹ Nature is in a constant state of flux as Coleridge flits between nostalgic memories of his own familiar experiences to glimpses of a darker, imagined natural landscape. Preoccupied with his own imprisonment, the poet's mind dismantles a pleasant, familiar walk to a point of high anxiety, ultimately constructing a fluctuating pastoral that incorporates a foreign and dangerous bucolic. Situating an understated strain of dark pastoral against a more conventional pastoral, a more nuanced type of tension arises, produced by an unsettled mind that is constantly preoccupied with isolation.

As noted by Anne K. Mellor, 'Coleridge begins the poem by recording his profound conviction of loss: the loss of his friends and their companionship...and equally painful, the loss of aesthetic pleasures':²¹⁰

²⁰⁸ See for example Albert Gérard, 'The Systolic Rythm: The Structure of Coleridge's Conversation Poems', *Essays in Criticism*, 10.3 (1960) <<https://doi-org.sheffield.idm.oclc.org/10.1093/eic/X.3.307>> [Accessed 25 July 2019] and R. A. Durr, "'This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison" and Recurrent Action in Coleridge', *ELH*, 26.4 (1959) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/2871803>> [Accessed 25 July 2019].

²⁰⁹ Michael Schmidt, 'Coleridge: 'This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison'', *Critical Survey*, 6.1/2 (1973) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/41553909>> [Accessed 21 July 2019] (p. 45).

²¹⁰ Anne K. Mellor, 'Coleridge's "'This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison" and the Categories of English Landscape', *Studies in Romanticism*, 18.2 (1979) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/25600183>> [Accessed 21 July 2019] (p. 253).

I have lost
 Beauties and feelings, such as would have been
 Most sweet to my remembrance even when age
 Had dimmed mine eyes to blindness!

(‘This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison’, l. 2-5)

Coleridge first converts nature into the pastoral as he makes it so literary: he chooses to talk about loss through the lens of genre. However, the poet’s presentation of loss is not as straightforward as Mellor implies. Coleridge grieves for an experience that he will never have, memories that he will never be able to remember, all because he has missed this walk.²¹¹ Considering he has merely been temporarily injured, this seems a strange premise with which to open ‘This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison’. There will undoubtedly be future opportunities for Coleridge to enjoy nature and friendship. Despite such an oddity, the memory of pastoral is prefigured as a healing balm for old age. Invoking a distinctly Wordsworthian formula that memory is all, pastoral is depicted as an antidote that has the potential to reconcile physical blindness with experiential recollection. Associating such nostalgic and quasi-therapeutic pastoral in a time past, Coleridge triggers the first turn in ‘This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison’:

They, meanwhile,
 Friends, whom I never more may meet again,
 On springy heath, along the hill-top edge,
 Wander in gladness, and wind down, perchance,
 To that still roaring dell, of which I told;
 The roaring dell, o’erwooded, narrow, deep,
 And only speckled by the mid-day sun;
 Where its slim trunk the ash from rock to rock
 Flings arching like a bridge;—that branchless ash,
 Unsunned and damp, whose few poor yellow leaves
 Ne’er tremble in the gale, yet tremble still,
 Fanned by the water-fall!

²¹¹ Coleridge reiterates these sentiments in a letter written to Robert Southey of 17 July 1797 where he claims that ‘dear Sara accidentally emptied a skillet of boiling milk on my foot, which confined me during the whole time of C. Lamb’s stay & still prevents me from all *walks* longer than a furlong.’ See Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. by Earl Leslie Griggs, Volume I 1795-1800 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), pp. 332-337 (p. 335).

(‘This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison’, l. 3-13)

The pronoun ‘they’ immediately denotes this pastoral as exclusive. Isolated from companionship, the poet identifies how nature is still a social space but only for the physically mobile, and yet not necessarily in a positive way. Departing from simple aesthetic and emotional pleasure, Coleridge constructs a more dynamic pastoral that operates on contrasts: light and shade, calmness and kinetics, sparseness and abundance.²¹² The artifice and nostalgia of the pastoral is reworked into a darker portrait of what was once considered a pleasant countryside amble. Reimagining nature as a vacillating space, Coleridge projects his own angst onto the landscape, swerving away from pastoral’s former remedial qualities. Standing as the isolated spectator, the poet draws this sketch from afar, allowing the dark pastoral, much like the lime tree’s presence, to be ‘invoked across absence’.²¹³ Though initially the friends ‘[w]ander in gladness’ through the ‘springy heath, along the hill-top edge’, they descend into darkness, literally ‘wind down’ to a ‘still roaring dell’. The buoyancy and freshness of the ‘springy’ heath juxtaposed against the vigour of the dell offers a contrast in nature’s features and its temperament, exacerbating the feeling of tension as the friends approach the ‘o’erwooded, narrow, deep’ dell. The inherent danger suggested by the dell’s overgrown and narrow structure is reminiscent of the ‘bushy rocks o’er browed’ in ‘Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement’, with the same sense of an ever present underlying anxiety.

Yet in ‘This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison’, the fact that Coleridge imagines nature’s potential to destroy and harm his friends is still more disconcerting because he is unable help them avert danger. Against Anne K. Mellor’s reading of this passage as exemplary of Burke’s ‘picturesque’, the poet does not simply find comfort in the beauty of landscape. On the contrary, Coleridge ‘displays a new keenness of visual

²¹² I am aware of Anne K. Mellor’s allusion to contrasts in ‘This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison’. Where this study differentiates is through distinguishing contrasts beyond simply ‘light and shade’ in nature. See Anne K. Mellor, ‘Coleridge’s “This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison” and the Categories of English Landscape’, *Studies in Romanticism*, 18.2 (1979) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/25600183>> [Accessed 21 July 2019].

²¹³ Peter Larkin, ‘Coleridge Conversing: Between Soliloquy and Invocation’, *The Wordsworth Circle*, 38.3 (2006) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/24045134>> [Accessed 26 February 2019] (p. 114). Ewan James Jones also discusses the importance of experience through ‘self-absenting’ in his article “‘Less Gross Than Bodily’: Materiality in Coleridge’s Conversation Poem Sequence”, *The Review of English Studies*, 64.264 (2013) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/42003624>> [Accessed 21 February 2019].

awareness', tapping into a previously unexplored pastoral defined by darkness.²¹⁴ The poet imagines natural obstacles, strange movement and eerie behaviours as a by-product of his anxious mind, always allowing any pleasure in nature to be insulted by the underhand strain of the dark pastoral. Consequently Coleridge and his reader become fearful of the landscape, no longer seeing it as a salvation but an unappealing spot for a countryside amble. Muddying Mellor's reading of the picturesque then, the poet mingles the pastoral with the dark pastoral to incorporate a genre that is defined by unpredictability, vulnerability and variance. Being the poem's 'built in spectator', the Lake Poet channels the hostility of his mind into his perception of nature, repeatedly glimpsing at dark spectral presences.²¹⁵ Giving the pastoral a broader artistic and physical repertoire, Coleridge creates new conventions for the pastoral, ultimately fashioning a new generic blueprint.

The nostalgic midday sun speckled on the dell adds a much needed calmness and warmth to the scene, the word 'only' reiterating it as the single source of light. Against the volatility of the 'roaring dell', the sun seems a welcoming presence, as Coleridge attempts to reinstate the conventional pastoral once again. Although R. A. Durr argues that the noonday sun 'functions in Coleridge frequently as an intensity of stark light hostile to the imagination', its appearance in 'This-Lime Tree Bower My Prison' sees it operate as an interlude between separate instances of dark pastoral interference.²¹⁶ This is reinforced by the caesura at the end of line nine, which signals a turning point in both subject matter and tempo. Coleridge redirects his attention to the singular ash tree, moving from the overwhelming dell to a seemingly calmer source of contemplation. Genre is once again defined by a contrast in physical qualities, the 'slim trunk' of the ash initially spanning from 'rock to rock' arching 'like a bridge', denoting breadth. Yet in the same line, the use of the semi colon and em dash mobilises a twist, as the dark pastoral seamlessly creeps into the poem with the 'branchless ash, / Unsunned and damp'. The plosive 'd' in '[u]nsunned' and 'damp' bluntly reinforces the dreariness of the pastoral, stifling the softer sibilance of the 'ash' with nature's

²¹⁴ Kelvin Everest, 'The Conversation Poems 1795-98: This Lime Tree Bower My Prison', in *Coleridge's Secret Ministry: The Context of the Conversation Poems 1795-1798* (Sussex: The Harvester Press Limited, 1979), pp. 242-258 (p. 242).

²¹⁵ Garber, 'The Hedging Consciousness in Coleridge's Conversation Poems', p. 127.

²¹⁶ Durr, "'This Lime--Tree Bower my Prison" and a Recurrent Action in Coleridge', p. 523.

suffocating blanket of darkness. The speckles of midday sun seem instantaneously removed, eclipsed by an area devoid of natural exuberance.

While the section shows Coleridge subsuming ‘Cowper’s love of trees’, more significantly, it highlights a key point in the process of natural regeneration: decay.²¹⁷ Pastoral is no longer an idealised condition attributed to the bloom of summer. Instead, we see a tree that has degenerated in winter’s grip. The mention of the ‘few poor yellow leaves’ demonstrates how bare nature is at this point, a glum nook alien to the aforementioned ‘springy heath’. The contradictory closing image of the still and yet trembling leaves epitomises the anxiety of the dark pastoral, carrying with it a grain of ‘the frightening, of what evokes fear and dread’.²¹⁸ Initially the leaves ‘[n]e’er tremble in the gale’, indicating that they are resilient to any prompting of movement from the wind. However, the use of the comparative ‘yet’ introduces a disparity between the leaves’ stillness and the fanning caused by the waterfall.²¹⁹ Though the wind has direct contact with the leaves, it is the waterfall that is able to prompt the trembling through indirect activity. Showcasing the dark pastoral’s ominous tenor, the waterfall’s means of stimulating terror in such a torturous fashion demonstrates nature’s malevolent qualities. Ultimately rendering the dark pastoral as scheming, Coleridge weaves into the fabric of his pastoral a subgenre that has the ability to invade and alter from afar.

Having successfully imbued pastoral with an element of terror and contradiction, the natural world is ‘an area in which a person [becomes] unsure of his way around’.²²⁰ Coleridge is keen to constantly assemble and disassemble pastoral tropes, oscillating between convention and experimentation, light and shade, as a means of resisting linearity. Constantly unsettling his reader through what Michael Schmidt terms ‘shifting perspectives: to and fro in space...and back and forth in time’, Coleridge’s pastoral desists monotony.²²¹ One such example where we can see this at work can be

²¹⁷ Mathieson, ‘The Influence of Cowper’s *The Task* on Coleridge’ Conversation Poems’, p. 142.

²¹⁸ Freud, ‘The Uncanny’, p. 123.

²¹⁹ Coleridge references this disparity in his Notebooks as he writes ‘Waterfall—tiny—& Leaf—still attracted still repelled’. See Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Entry 1158 [6.149], f36v, March-April 1802, in *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge 1794-1804: Entries 1-1842*, Volume 1 Text, ed. by Kathleen Coburn (London: Routledge, 1957).

²²⁰ Freud, ‘The Uncanny’, p. 125.

²²¹ Schmidt, ‘Coleridge: ‘This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison’’, p. 45.

found at the beginning of stanza two. No sooner has Coleridge settled into a scene of ‘long lank weeds’ (‘This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison’, l. 16) before we are thrust into the familiar vista of pastoral calmness:

Now, my friends emerge
 Beneath the wide wide Heaven—and view again
 The many-steepled tract magnificent
 Of hilly fields and meadows, and the sea,
 With some fair bark perhaps, whose sails light up
 The slip of smooth clear blue betwixt two Isles
 Of purple shadow!

(‘This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison’, l. 20-26)

After overcoming the tribulations of the dell, the friends seem to emerge beneath heaven. The religious allusion couples pastoral with spiritual unity, drawing upon Coleridge’s ‘One Life’ principle, a concept that has been noticeably absent in the first nineteen lines of the poem. With God on the friends’ side now, calmness has once again been restored. The ‘[b]eauties and feelings’ outlined in the opening of ‘This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison’ have made their way back to the Coleridge, reinstating pastoral’s ‘naïve freshness’.²²² The surfacing of the friends seems near-heroic; they have battled through the toil of the dark pastoral to be rewarded with the safe and welcoming hallmarks of the pastoral. The pleasant return to ‘hilly fields and meadows, and the sea’ fills the poem with a lush greenness, and the endlessness of the sea, a metaphor for optimism and possibility. As Stuart Curran points out, ‘Coleridge’s version of a pastoral pleasance leaves little room for sorrow: melancholy is banished from nature’.²²³ The image of the sails lighting up the ‘slip of smooth clear blue betwixt two Isles / Of purple shadow’ adds a light note of nostalgia to the end of the scene, the blue and purple a mellow comfort to both the poet and rambler.

With such a positive representation of nature at the forefront of ‘This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison’, it seems apt that Coleridge affectionately introduces his ‘gentle-hearted Charles’ (‘This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison’, l. 28). The apostrophe follows the line, ‘they wander on / In gladness all’, continuing the idea of the pleasant pastoral

²²² Empson, ‘Marvell’s Garden’, p. 141.

²²³ Curran, ‘The Pastoral’, p. 109.

journey. However, Coleridge does not linger long on positive effusions, as he is keen to recount Charles' toil in the city:

...for thou hast pined
 And hungered after Nature, many a year,
 In the great City pent, winning thy way
 With sad yet patient soul, through evil and pain
 And strange calamity! Ah! slowly sink
 Behind the western ridge, thou glorious sun!

('This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison', l. 28-33)

The sombre timbre of the section contrasts with the friends' gladness in previous lines, supporting Frederick Garber's reading of Coleridge's poetry as ambivalent since it foregrounds 'a persistent uneasiness that [is] only occasionally appeased'.²²⁴ Drawing upon pastoral's typical contrast between the country and the urban, the city appears to have been a place of 'evil and pain'.²²⁵ Noting that Lamb was 'city bred and [a] city lover', it appears that Coleridge purposely misrepresents his friend's feelings towards London for the purpose of poetic consistency.²²⁶ Coleridge uses the pastoral to distort truth with severe, unwavering conviction. Factual details aside, nature is still presented as an escape for which Lamb pines and hungers. Crucially however, Coleridge has shown us that nature, while it has the ability to be beautiful, also has a darker, less favourable side. The contrast between the urban and the rural then is less distinct than pastoral conventions originally demanded. The 'sad yet patient soul' in the city matches the poet's own sadness and patience at the beginning of 'This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison', as he draws upon a fraught landscape that exhibits his personal 'persistent uneasiness'. Coleridge's distressed plea for the glorious sun to 'slowly sink / Behind the western ridge' suggests an attempt to ease both his own and Charles' pain, to cure both of their longing with the antidote of beautiful nature. We are reminded that although the 'purple heath-flowers' ('This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison', l. 35) and 'distant groves' ('This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison', l. 36) exist, indeed they too will undergo the same decay as the branchless ash. As James D. Boulger argues, the 'darkness-city imagery expresses the poet's latent fear of a lifeless,

²²⁴ Garber, 'The Hedging Consciousness in Coleridge's Conversation Poems', p. 125.

²²⁵ Gifford, 'Three Kinds of Pastoral', p. 2.

²²⁶ Richard Haven, 'The Romantic Art of Charles Lamb', *ELH*, 30.2 (1963)
 <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/2872086>> [Accessed 9 September 2019] (p. 145).

unsympathetic universe’, but also reinforces the prevalence of the dark pastoral in the natural world.²²⁷

Despite his desire to prolong the pastoral’s pleasurable state, Coleridge still remains ambivalent in his faith in nature’s redemptive power.²²⁸ Owing to the conversation poem’s lack of ‘a protected, superimposed form’, the poet is able to explore his contradictory feelings, adding ‘a degree of introspection or self reflexiveness’ to his pastoral.²²⁹ Redefining the pastoral swain’s notion of the ‘contemplative’ life, Coleridge introduces a more perceptive and self-aware speaker to his poem.²³⁰ There also exists a reconsideration of the effectiveness of genre. Experimenting with the emotional tension in the ‘This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison’, Coleridge exposes the pastoral’s inability to banish evil and pain. This dichotomy is demonstrated in the final stanza of the poem:

A delight
Comes sudden on my heart, and I am glad
As I myself were there! Nor in this bower,
This little lime-tree bower, have I not marked
Much that has soothed me.

(‘This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison’, l. 43-47)

Following the reintroduction of the ‘Almighty Spirit’ (‘This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison’, l. 42), Coleridge reaches a familiar point of spiritual calm again. The sudden but genuine delight transports the poet to the scene, so much so that he feels as if he himself were there, blurring the distinction between imagination and reality. The exclamation in the middle of the line reiterates the sense of true joy, the iambic pentameter of line 44 organically running onto the next line with ease. Yet halfway through the line, Coleridge introduces the word ‘[n]or’, a term that anticipates a negative statement. Characteristic of the changeable mind, the bluntness of the monosyllable helps to split the line cleanly, pre-empting the contradictory sentiments

²²⁷ James D. Boulger, ‘Imagination and Speculation in Coleridge’s Conversation Poems’, *The Journal of English and German Philology*, 64.4 (1965) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/27714733>> [Accessed 21 February 2019] (p. 704).

²²⁸ Frank Kermode notes that man has abused nature to such an extent that his ‘only hope for a fresh start...[is]...redemption’. See Kermode, ‘Introduction’, in *English Pastoral Poetry: From the Beginnings to Marvell*, ed. by Frank Kermode (London: George G. Harrap & Co., 1953), pp. 11-44 (p. 14).

²²⁹ Bate, ‘Wordsworth’s Arrival: Coleridge as Poet’, p. 48 and Vallins, ‘Introduction’, p. 1.

²³⁰ Kermode, ‘Introduction’, p. 17.

that follow. The poet admits that he has ‘not marked / Much that has soothed’ him, introducing a strong element of dissatisfaction. Moving through the unstable, anxious terrain of the pastoral, we have seen the dark pastoral provoking danger, fear and pain, suggesting the genre’s inefficiency as a cure for isolation. Against Stuart Curran’s assertion that the bower is ‘charged, a compressed chamber for imaginative play and, even in absence for shared fellowship’, it seems the poet remains unchanged in his feelings of irreparable loss.²³¹ It is not possible, as Michael Simpson suggests, for Coleridge to ‘figure a current alternative to [his] current deprivation’.²³² Rather, pastoral can only offer temporary relief from deprivation, always returning Coleridge back to the isolation of his imprisoned bower.

Noting the inefficacy of pastoral, it seems strange that we return to contemplate the image of a sunny leaf. Yet another attempt to instil pastoral harmony and soothe Coleridge’s dejected spirit, the poet once again focuses his attention on a specific micro-feature of the natural world:

Pale beneath the blaze
Hung the transparent foliage; and I watched
Some broad and sunny leaf, and loved to see
The shadow of the leaf and stem above
Dappling its sunshine!

(‘This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison’, l. 47-51)

The sun returns to pastoral, its bright ‘blaze’ injecting life into the vegetation. The mind seems to have returned to a state of harmony. Unlike the earlier speckles of sunshine, there appears to be a full illumination through the ‘transparent foliage’, amplifying the light, warmth and energy in this enclosure. There is a holistic appreciation of both the ‘shadow’ and the dapple of the sunshine on the leaves, as well as the full organism, ‘leaf and stem’. The contrast in the ‘blaze’ and the ‘dappling’ gives the sun a distinctive quality, in that it operates as both a physical source of nourishment and vehicle to elucidate the leaf’s exquisite beauty. That Coleridge picks on ‘some broad and sunny leaf’ is significant, since despite his former dissatisfaction,

²³¹ Curran, ‘The Pastoral’, p. 110.

²³² Michael Simpson, ‘Coleridge’s Swinging Moods and the Revision of “This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison”’, *Style*, 33.1 (1999) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/style.33.1.21>> [Accessed 21 July 2019] (p. 26).

he now appears to draw pleasure from a generic, unremarkable leaf. Flitting back to the ‘innocent freedom of the pastoral idea’, ‘This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison’ unshackles its reader from the poet’s own anxieties, through Coleridge’s devising of his own familiar pastoral motifs.²³³

Musing upon a walnut tree, Coleridge continues to appreciate the sun’s handiwork. The sun seems to lure the poet’s eye through to the ivy, operating as an optical guide, further heightening the beauty of the pastoral aesthetic. However, before long we see the emergence of a downcast, troubled pastoral:

And that walnut-tree
 Was richly tinged, and a deep radiance lay
 Full on the ancient ivy, which usurps
 Those fronting elms, and now, with blackest mass
 Makes their dark branches gleam a lighter hue
 Through the late twilight: and though now the bat
 Wheels silent by, and not a swallow twitters,
 Yet still the solitary humble bee
 Sings in the bean-flower!

(‘This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison’, l. 53-59)

This section is perhaps the most overt example of the dark pastoral in ‘This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison’ because of its affinity with ‘Frost at Midnight’. The ivy, much like the ordinary frost, is personified to a point of anxiety, in which it appears to also perform a secret ministry. However, where the frost seems to wield a strong imaginative presence, Coleridge’s emphasis on the physical presence of the ivy seems even more destructive. Firstly, the ivy is introduced by the presence of the sun, which, elsewhere in the poem only has positive associations. That the dark pastoral is now linked with the sun suggests a deliberate attempt to taint pastoral pleasure. The ‘deep radiance’ gives way to an eddy of sinister possibilities. Secondly, the personification implied in the act of usurpation attributes arrogance to the ivy, as it unjustly claimed the elms through force. Here we see the mind’s tortuous qualities arise once again, as Coleridge renegotiates the relationship between natural features. There is something completely immoral and unjust about the usurpation as the woody climber

²³³ Curran, ‘The Pastoral’, p. 96.

camouflages the elms' branches with its own 'blackest mass'. Since ivy is usually dark green, reducing its colour down to black insinuates a bleakness, suggesting that the elms are now a victim of austerity. Ivy is also associated with fidelity, so Coleridge's inversion of both colour and symbolism disfigures the plant to a point that it becomes a part of the dark pastoral. Dimming the hue of the already dark branches then seems to make a mockery of the elms' helplessness. This is the epitome of the mind's angst, as the imagination exhibits 'a 'modifying' power which colours objects of sense with the mind's own [dark] light'.²³⁴ The silent bat and innocent 'solitary humble bee' singing function as a fearful reminder of victims yet to be captured by the dark pastoral's wrath.

With the impending threat of the dark pastoral rife, Coleridge's claim that, '[h]enceforth I shall know / That Nature ne'er deserts the wise and pure' ('This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison', l. 59-60) seems laced with insincerity. These lines are reminiscent of William Wordsworth's *Tintern Abbey* where the poet states that 'Nature never did betray / The heart that loved her'.²³⁵ Both *Tintern Abbey* and 'This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison' epitomise a key pastoral trope: irony.²³⁶ Nature is not indebted to affection; nature is self-directed and its moods are changeable. Coleridge has attempted on numerous occasions to invoke the pastoral as an antidote, but has always been affected by the intrusion of the dark pastoral or the pastoral's inadequacy. Just in the poem's title alone do we realise that while the bower offers a Coleridge a place of contemplation, it by no means reconciles his loss of physical experience: it is still imprisoning. By the time we reach the end of 'This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison', we are more than a little dubious of any attempt to achieve consolation:

My gentle-hearted Charles! when the last rook
 Beat its straight path along the dusky air
 Homewards, I blest it! deeming, its black wing
 (Now a speck, now vanishing in light)
 Had crossed the mighty orb's dilated glory,

²³⁴ John Spencer Hill, 'Introduction', in *Imagination in Coleridge*, ed. by John Spencer Hill (Basingstoke; London: Macmillan Press, 1978), pp. 1-26 (p. 3).

²³⁵ William Wordsworth, 'Lines written a few lines above Tintern Abbey', in *The Major Works including The Prelude*, ed. by Stephen Gill, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 131-135 (p. 134).

²³⁶ Empson, 'The Beggar's Opera', p. 206.

While thou stood'st gazing; or when all was still,
 Flew creaking o'er thy head, and had a charm
 For thee, my gentle-hearted Charles, to whom
 No sound is dissonant which tells of Life.

('This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison', l. 68-76).

The closing lines of the poem have received much critical attention, with the image of the rook perceived as an attempt to instate unity.²³⁷ Invoking Charles once again, we are enticed into what seems like a pleasant departing image, a bird making its way homeward, a fine close to a pastoral tale. However, the rook is traditionally associated with death, a strange image to end a poem that spends 76 lines attempting to reconcile itself with loss. Its flight across the 'mighty orb's dilated glory' emphasises the bird's blackness, the contrast of the bright sunshine darkened by the rook's presence. Rather than operating as an 'apt symbol for the poet's loving and soaring spirit', the bird symbolises a final attempt to muddy the optimism of the life-giving sun, a permanent mark upon the pastoral's glory.²³⁸ A symbol for the dark pastoral's ubiquitous nature, the rook operates as a reminder of the certainty of danger, decay and death. The eerie quasi-Gothic 'charm' exacerbates such negativity, embodying M. H. Abrams's reading of 'Coleridge's nature-philosophy [as] a strange and daunting area of his thought'.²³⁹ The departing line, that '[n]o sound is dissonant which tells of Life' operates as a shrewd reminder that the pastoral is always imbued with beauty as well as pain.

Pastoral dissonance saturates other 'Conversation Poems', and none more so than *Fears in Solitude*. Initially published alongside 'Frost at Midnight' (February 1798) and 'France: An Ode' (April 1798), *Fears in Solitude* bears a thematic semblance to its counterparts, exploring the pastoral through the lenses of religion, the Gothic and the imagination. Following a conventional pastoral opening, the poem assumes a complex and troubled tone, mirroring Coleridge's personal conflict in terms of his distaste for the Pitt government and simultaneous support for the French Revolution.

²³⁷ See Curran, 'The Pastoral', p. 45 and Schmidt, 'Coleridge: "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison"', p. 45.

²³⁸ Durr, "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison" and Recurrent Action in Coleridge', p. 530.

²³⁹ M. H. Abrams, 'Coleridge and the Romantic Vision of the World', in *Coleridge's Variety Bicentenary Studies*, ed. by John Beer (Basingstoke; London: Macmillan Press, 1974), pp. 101-134 (p. 116).

Despite such political ambivalence, *Fears in Solitude* is positioned as a political defence of Britain, an admonition for the public to join the resistance in light of the imminent French invasion. Where in 'France: An Ode', the pastoral harbours feelings of disappointment and regret at the betrayal of the French, *Fears in Solitude* recruits the genre to express the mind's angst, ultimately writing a tale of nationalism. Speaking to the public, the poet enlists the dark pastoral to heighten his political rhetoric and relay the urgency of patriotic action, scorning his countrymen for their hedonism. The dark pastoral operates as an inconsistent, unsettled presence that flares up at key points in the poem, allowing Coleridge's address to acquire a certain severity and intensity. Reinterpreting Paul Magnuson's concept of 'turns' in the poem as explosions of dark pastoral episodes, *Fears in Solitude* explores the anxious mind of an individual fixated with political conflict.²⁴⁰

Like 'Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement' and 'This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison', *Fears in Solitude* opens in the familiar, conventional pastoral mode. The nostalgic prologue advocates for solitude as a positive state of being as the 'humble man' (*Fears in Solitude*, l. 14) appears to be the only figure present in the scene. Basking in the glory of a 'quiet spirit-healing nook' (*Fears in Solitude*, l. 12), the solitary is surrounded by lush green hills, the 'small and silent dell' (*Fears in Solitude*, l. 2) and warm, glimmering sunshine. The presence of the lone skylark gives pastoral a unifying quality, as man and nature exist side by side, in a state of ultimate peace. The skylark itself, a symbol of divine spirit, appears thrice in the opening 28 lines, its presence a reminder of 'hope, joy and inspiration'.²⁴¹ Invoking Coleridge's concept of 'The One Life', the pastoral appears to embody spiritual harmony, a reminder of nature's redemptive qualities. When the poet states, '[o]'er stiller place / No singing sky-lark ever poised himself' (*Fears in Solitude*, l. 3-4), he captures both the tranquillity of the scene, and the superiority of the pastoral as a space for rest. The skylark's subsequent virtuous singing adds a sweet timbre to *Fears in Solitude*, a pleasant accompaniment to man, the 'minstrelsy that solitude loves best' (*Fears in Solitude*, l. 19). The preamble ends with an apostrophe, 'O singing lark; / That singest

²⁴⁰ Paul Magnuson, 'The Shaping of "Fears in Solitude"', in *Coleridge's Theory of Imagination Today*, ed. by Christine Gallant (New York: AMS Press, 1989), pp. 197-210.

²⁴¹ Diana Hendry, 'Up with the Lark(s)', *Critical Survey*, 4.1 (1992)
<<https://www.jstor.org/stable/41555625>> [Accessed 29 August 2019] (p. 67).

like an angel in the clouds!’ (*Fears in Solitude*, l. 27-28), drawing the sky into the periphery of the pastoral, the religious overtones a complementary balm to the scene of wonderment.

The second stanza of *Fears in Solitude* however, observes a completely different pastoral mood. As Nicholas Roe observes, the ‘tone abruptly changes as another voice intervenes’.²⁴² Preoccupied with the alarm of an invasion, Coleridge’s mind obsesses over the imminent threat, drawing upon the dark pastoral as a means of relaying such intense angst. It is here that we first see ‘the volcanic power and molten transfusions of the great poems of conflict’.²⁴³ Where Roe sees the emergence of another voice, the tonal shift can also be read as a darkening of nature as a response to, and absorption of, the threat of the French:

My god! it is a melancholy thing
 For such a man, who would full fain preserve
 His soul in calmness, yet perforce must feel
 For all his human brethren—O my God!
 It weighs upon the heart, that he must think
 What uproar and what strife may now be stirring
 This way or that way o’er these silent hills—
 Invasion, and the thunder and the shout,
 And all the crash of onset; fear and rage
 And undetermined conflict—even now,
 Even now, perchance, and in his native isle:
 Carnage and groans beneath this blessed sun!

(*Fears in Solitude*, l. 29-40)

The heightened emotional register here presents readers with what seems like an entirely new poem dominated by a chaotic dark pastoral. The opening premise, that man maintains calmness but is simultaneously obligated to empathise with his brethren, draws the pastoral into both the domestic and public spaces.²⁴⁴ Coleridge

²⁴² Nicholas Roe, ‘Epilogue: Daring to Hope’, in *Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Radical Years*, Second Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 261-272.

²⁴³ Allan Rodway, ‘Coleridge’, in *The Romantic Conflict* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1963), pp. 159-174 (p. 163).

²⁴⁴ I am aware of Nicholas Roe’s argument which sees *Fears in Solitude* as a culmination of ‘France: An Ode’ and ‘Frost at Midnight’, the drawing together of domestic and public worlds. My reading

uses the subjectivity and objectivity of the pastoral to relay both the significance and severity of this national emergency. Observing a certain frivolity in the nostalgic pastoral of the opening, the poet attunes his mind to more pressing concern: the threat of invasion. Projecting his unease onto nature, Coleridge introduces the dark pastoral through the realm of imagination. The hills, a large natural feature, seem to be the main source of this angst. Formerly the backdrop of the spirit-healing nook, the hills now separate the familiar bucolic from the dark, unknown pastoral, reinforced by the bluntness of the caesura at the end of line 35. Marking a tension between the perceived and the imagined pastoral then, Coleridge's mind exhausts new possibilities in contemplating what lies 'o'er' there, in amongst the 'undetermined conflict' that he crucially cannot see.

The ambivalent verb 'may' destabilises the genre, suggesting that at any moment, the comforting pastoral of the prologue could be ruined by the impending onslaught. Man and his serenading skylark seem fatally doomed, as does their solitude. Coleridge's use of prepositions is key in relaying this tension. Initially we are introduced to a 'green and silent spot, amid the hills, / A small and silent dell!' (*Fears in Solitude*, l. 1-2). Now Coleridge contemplates what lies 'o'er these silent hills'. Where 'amid' denotes an amicable spot protectively surrounded by the hills, 'o'er' pushes the pastoral beyond the hills, into new territory. Even the soothing sibilance relayed in the first reference to the hills' silence loses its wistful tone, shifting to a much more pensive silence, enunciating the poet's apprehension. The shift from generic article ('the hills') to specific article ('these hills') recalls the subjective mode. This is an emergency affecting a specific community, a microcosm of Britain's larger national crisis. The stakes are high. The phrase '[t]his way or that way', while seemingly conversational, actually demonstrates the extent of the mind's fixation with the surrounding danger. Solitude now becomes hazardous, both for the humble man and Britain at large.

The dark pastoral wields its familiar powerful authority, wreaking a cacophony of jarring sound into the atmosphere, obliterating the sweet singing of the skylark

extends upon this premise in that it associates this culmination directly with the pastoral. See Roe, 'Epilogue: Daring to Hope', p. 261.

completely. There is a sense that nature physically groans amongst the carnage, the ‘thunder and the shout’ and ‘the crash of onset’ bellowing into the poem with force. The juxtaposition of thunder, a natural, meteorological condition, against the human shout not only creates a contrast in unruly sound, but also depicts nature and humanity in tension with one another. The anxious mind has renegotiated the terms of the harmonious natural milieu. The repetition of ‘and’ adds a certain competitive quality to the dark pastoral, insomuch as it seems that the thunder attempts to overshadow the invasion, and the shouts attempt to rival the thunder. Fracturing the natural unity originally conceived in the poem’s opening, Coleridge shatters his ‘One Life’ principle in his rendering of the dark pastoral, pitting nature and man as ambassadors for physical and spiritual dissonance. The poet continues to orchestrate his scene of natural disarray, enlisting anaphora and caesura to heighten the aural conflict. The poetry seems at war with itself, the emotional ‘fear and rage’ running into the ‘undetermined conflict’. The lines themselves embody a ‘crash of onset’ where the images spill over one another, tensely halting and then running on through the blank verse. The ‘silent hills’ now no longer seem at peace, but rather ominously apprehensive of this violence, a dam containing the uproar. The closing image of the ‘blessed sun’ looking over such carnage demonstrates the pastoral’s relative uselessness, in that the sun is unable to appease the conflict.

Registering the terrifying strength of the imagined dark pastoral, Coleridge redirects his grief towards man’s apathy and lack of moral fibre, a central focus of his dark pastoral philosophy. The poet denounces, in strained tones, ‘my countrymen! / We have offended very grievously, / And been most tyrannous.’ (*Fears in Solitude*, l. 41-43). Reminiscent of Wordsworth’s ‘London, 1802’, pastoral now becomes a vehicle for a polemic on man’s heinous crimes against man, both past and present. Rather than look after his native land, man as an individual has egoistically sought his own comfort by rejecting the pleas of his brethren. Historically, men as a collective have unjustly exercised colonial power by practicing slavery. Revising the portrait of the British pastoral then, it becomes apparent that Britain is, and always has been, a place of ruin. Pastoral is now not only tainted with the physical presence of the French invasion, but also imbued with the negative effects of Britain’s dark and troublesome political history. Coleridge’s mind transforms the pastoral, projecting man’s lengthy shame and guilt as a weighty reminder of how greed has led to ethical blindness, and consequently

sacrificed the safety of nature. Reminding us that these ‘vices, whose deep taint / With slow perdition murders the whole man, His body and his soul!’ (*Fears in Solitude*, l. 51-53), we realise that such offences go beyond breaking the law, they have destroyed man’s entire being, both physical and spiritual. The ‘deep taint’ suggests an intense contamination, which, much like the dark pastoral, has the ability to radically deface a ‘whole’ being. The pain of the ‘slow perdition’ demonstrates the dark pastoral’s brutality and vindictive personality as it kills through gradual decline, rather than immediate death. Indeed, the slow perdition has caused by man’s gluttony has even led to a symbolic decline of integrity and humility:

Meanwhile, at home,
 All individual dignity and power
 Engulfed in courts, committees, institutions,
 Associations and societies,
 A vain, speech-mouthing, speech-reporting guild,
 One benefit club for mutual flattery,
 We have drunk up, demure as at a grace,
 Pollutions from the brimming cup of wealth;

(*Fears in Solitude*, l. 53-60)

The collective pronoun ‘we’ in this section is highly significant since it reconfigures a key pastoral trope, the genre’s typical city/country contrast. Unlike Wordsworth who, in ‘London, 1802’, seems to criticise the urban commercial world, Coleridge notes that man’s offences are both an urban and rural issue. Crucially, ‘individual dignity and power’ is engulfed in a guild, an organisation associated with the city, yet those who prosper are not exclusively city folk. Writing *Fears in Solitude* in Nether Stowey, the ‘we’ of the poem—the ‘benefit club for mutual flattery’—also refers to the village dwellers of Britain. The rural communities appear to be equally as inebriated by the ‘brimming cup of wealth’ as the inhabitants of the city. Exposing man’s vanity, pastoral sheds its status as pure, admitting that the city and the country are equally as polluted as one another, the latter no longer functioning as an escape or retreat. Dark pastoral exposes how man has been ensnared by the city’s wealthy charm, willingly participating in its immorality. The incantatory quality of the repetitive ‘speech’ in ‘speech-mouthing, speech-reporting’ emphasises the city’s intoxicating effect, and negates the impact of speech—words lose their import. The danger is reinforced through the verb ‘mouthing’, a term which denotes voicelessness. Where

in ‘The Eolian Harp’, Sara has no voice by choice, in *Fears in Solitude* the lack of voice but presence of speech seems markedly more dangerous. Words are deployed in a superficial manner, vainly passed on from one man to another, rendering language useful only for wielding power. Weakening the urban/country contrast, Coleridge wields the genre to recognise man’s susceptibility to corruption irrespective of his place of residence.

Corruption is a theme that infiltrates other areas of Coleridge’s dark pastoral thought, no more so than in his ideas around religion. The perversion of religious language is a central concern in *Fears in Solitude*, with Coleridge expressing his gross distaste for preachers in an emotionally intense harangue. Once again, Coleridge uses the pastoral to discuss a very controversial subject, critiquing men who appear to be falsely propagating Christianity. The poet berates religious crusaders in a brief verse:

The sweet words
Of Christian promise, words that even yet
Might stem destruction, were they wisely preached,
Are muttered o’er by men, whose tones proclaim
How flat and wearisome they feel their trade:

(*Fears in Solitude*, 63-67)

As Christopher Stokes notes, here we see the emergence of one of Coleridge’s major fears, ‘disincarnated language’.²⁴⁵ Appropriately returning to the ‘language of the pulpit’, the poet scorns the misuse of religious text.²⁴⁶ The ‘sweet words / Of Christian promise’ seem radically altered when employed by these vacuous preachers, no longer proliferating the word of God, but something more sinister. That Coleridge begins with the term ‘sweet words’ only to compress them down to a ‘flat and wearisome’ state once again demonstrates the potency of the mind’s darkening gaze. Where religion was, at the beginning of *Fears in Solitude*, a warm reminder of the comfort of pastoral, here we see the complete disfigurement of religion through false oration,

²⁴⁵ Christopher Stokes, “‘The Self-Watching Stabilizing Mind’: the Impassioned Self in the 1798 *Fears in Solitude* Quarto”, in *Coleridge, Language and the Sublime: From Transcendence to Finitude* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 29-61 (p. 45).

²⁴⁶ Paul Magnuson, ‘The Shaping of “Fears in Solitude”’, in *Coleridge’s Theory of Imagination Today*, ed. by Christine Gallant (New York: AMS Press, 1989), pp. 167-196 (p. 201). Coleridge alludes to the misuse of religious texts in his Notebooks where he says ‘The pars maxima of religious people...remind me of exquisite Music set to nonsensical Words’. See Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Entry 627 [3½.83] 1799-1803, in *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge 1794-1804: Entries 1-1842*, Volume 1 Text, ed. by Kathleen Coburn (London: Routledge, 1957).

fashioning a more malevolent pastoral mode. Indeed, the verb ‘mutter’ denotes both a low tone and dissatisfaction, further critiquing the preachers for giving themselves away by their evident boredom. Acknowledging Coleridge’s near career as a preacher, it seems this point is a personal one, as he seems genuinely disillusioned by an occupation he saw as a ‘less evil than starvation’.²⁴⁷ Exposing the dangers of uncontrolled language then, pastoral epitomises Coleridge’s fears in solitude, reawakening the subjective presence of the poet with determination.

Coleridge continues to use the pastoral to express further agitation in *Fears in Solitude*, maintaining the use of the religious metaphor. The poet is keen to showcase the extent to which the Church has been compromised, ultimately destroying the institution. Once again critiquing society for its poor religious conviction, Coleridge brings his dark pastoral philosophy to the forefront of *Fears in Solitude*:

The rich, the poor, the old man and the young;
All, all make up on scheme of perjury,
That faith doth reel; the very name of God
Sounds like a juggler’s charm;

(*Fears in Solitude*, l. 77-80)

The first two lines of this section epitomise Paul Magnuson’s point that the ‘inadequacy of actual public discourse is that it lies’.²⁴⁸ Now pastoral exposes the moral inadequacy of society, noting that all people, irrespective of their class or age actively participate in the ‘scheme of perjury / That faith doth reel’. Coleridge’s use of the verb ‘reel’ shows the extent to which he perceives religion to have faltered. The idea that this horrific scheme of lies is whirling or wheeling around in a continuous loop, suggests that this present state of affairs is both continuous and unstoppable.²⁴⁹ The final allusion to God’s name as a ‘juggler’s charm’ adds an almost farcical, supernatural element to religion, ultimately denigrating Christianity to a form of entertainment. Having successfully degraded one of society’s key institutions, Coleridge continues to use religion as a metaphor for man’s idiocy:

²⁴⁷ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Collected Letters of STC*, ed. by Earl Leslie Griggs, Volume I 1785-1800 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), pp. 343-344 (p. 343).

²⁴⁸ Magnuson, ‘The Shaping of “Fears in Solitude”’, p. 209.

²⁴⁹ “reel, v.1.” *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, September 2019, www.oed.com/view/Entry/160644. Accessed 5 October 2019.

...and, bold with joy,
 Forth from his dark and lonely hiding-place,
 (Portentous sight!) the owlet Atheism,
 Sailing on obscene wings athwart the noon,
 Drops his blue-fringed lids, and holds them close,
 And hooting at the glorious sun in Heaven,
 Cries out, 'Where is it?'

(*Fears in Solitude*, l. 82-86)

Moving from theoretical debate to explicit dark pastoral artifice, Coleridge explores new generic territory by hybridising pastoral with satire. Reconfiguring the supernatural, gothic image of the 'owlet's cry' in 'Frost at Midnight', the poet enlists the religious term of atheism in order to convey man's intellectual blindness. Mocking the type of person who claims to want to see the sun, but closes his eyelids and refuses to see it, Coleridge fears that his countrymen will listen to such hooting blindness and thence degenerate further. Judging by his previous fears around language and religion, the poet at this point seems genuinely fearful of society's demise. The danger of man's blindness has become a key perturbation, the 'obscene wings' a metaphor for man's gross indecency. Despite such melancholy musing, the poet wants us to note that despite the owlet's blindness, the sun and its glory do indeed exist. The discrepancy between the pastoral and the dark pastoral allows for change, as we have seen, just as the owlet will blossom into an owl. With possibility at the helm of pastoral, man can similarly liberate himself, overcome his blindness and once again see the light.

Noting the veiled optimism at the end of the second stanza, stanza three follows suit, in that Coleridge champions a much more fortified and active pastoral discourse. A patriotic agenda appears at the helm of the verse as the poet asks his countrymen to ignite their passion for war. Shunning society for being entertained by war, '[t]he best amusement for our morning-meal' (*Fears in Solitude*, l. 107), the poet asks for men, himself included, to exchange their cowardice for courage. Coleridge warns, with Miltonic overtones, that 'evil days / Are coming on us, O my countrymen!' (*Fears in Solitude*, l. 123-124). With the threat of no redemption, the pastoral is presented as harsh and unforgiving. However, a solution is at hand. Calling out to God, Coleridge pleads 'Spare us yet a while, / Father and God! O! spare us yet awhile!' (*Fears in Solitude*, l. 129-130). Recalling the lines from Book VII of Milton's *Paradise Lost*,

‘though fall’n on evil days, / On evil days though fall’n’, Coleridge appears to have faith in dispelling the onset of any religious vengeance.²⁵⁰ Desperately begging for mercy, Coleridge affirms a remedial action plan:

Stand we forth;
 Render them back upon the insulted ocean,
 And let them toss as idly on its waves
 As the vile sea-weed, which some mountain-blast
 Swept from our shores!

(*Fears in Solitude*, l. 146-150)

The pastoral is dominated by a hostile and dark imagination, which, at this point in *Fears in Solitude*, is preoccupied with the uncouth slaying of the French. Coleridge fixates upon the ocean, a natural feature not usually associated with pastoral verse, indicative of his obsession with retribution. The ocean is conventionally symbolic of endless possibility, so warping it through personification exposes the darkness and vengeful quality of the mind’s present transforming gaze. It also becomes a source of dark pastoral malaise. Insult denotes disrespect, marking a tension between the contaminated ocean and the land that Coleridge and his countrymen stand forth on. The arduous task of resistance seems achievable, the simplicity of instruction and forthrightness of the verse, an aid to the poet’s confidence. Yet another example of nature’s ‘secret ministry’, the enemy are compared to ‘vile sea-weed’, reduced to mere lifeless algae carelessly flung back into the sea. Stripping the human enemy down to such an unfamiliar and unique offering, Coleridge amplifies his contempt towards the betrayal of the French. The verb ‘toss’ combined with ‘idly’ foregrounds Coleridge’s state of mind, utterly convinced to overthrow the enemy, with no care whatsoever. The final image of the ‘mountain-blast’ sweeping the French from the shores figuratively annihilates the French, enacting the defeat of the ‘impious foe’ (*Fears in Solitude*, l. 139).

Affirming that ‘[w]e have been too long / Dupes of a deep delusion’ (*Fears in Solitude*, l. 159-160), Coleridge successfully uses the pastoral to navigate the British out of their apathetic haze into intellectual emancipation. Nationalism is at the heart of the poet’s

²⁵⁰ John Milton, ‘Paradise Lost: Book VII’, in *The Complete Poems*, ed. by John Leonard, Penguin Classics (London: Penguin, 1998), pp. 268-284 (p. 269).

manifesto for success, positing Britain as his ‘sole / And most magnificent temple’ (*Fears in Solitude*, p. 194-195). Unlike the isolating solitude in the opening of *Fears in Solitude*, sole here is less a reductive term, as it is an expansive one. Coleridge believes that Britain is his only source of comfort. Registering the latent religious overtones then, the pastoral returns to its role as benevolent and spiritually redemptive. When the poet refers to ‘dear Britain’ (*Fears in Solitude*, l. 176), and ‘Mother Isle’ (*Fears in Solitude*, l. 176), there is a nurturing, protective quality instilled in the pastoral. We are in familiar territory once again. Drawing in an element of calmness, *Fears in Solitude* appears to have tackled Coleridge’s anxieties, and has overcome the ‘undetermined conflict’. Where in ‘Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement’ and ‘This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison’, the closing pastoral seems contrived, in *Fears in Solitude* there is a genuine sense of hope. When Coleridge states, ‘May my fears, / My filial fears, be vain!’ (*Fears in Solitude*, l. 197-198), he hopes that the anxieties expressed in his poem have simply been futile. As he walks to his lowly cottage, remembering the green and silent dell, his thoughts are motivated by love. While it is true, as Timothy Morton argues, that nationalism ‘continues to motivate environmental art seeking to re-enchant the world’, it more importantly recognises personal motivation as a means of tackling an objective, countrywide problem.²⁵¹ It is not about simply re-instilling calmness into the world; it is living through adversity that allows the pastoral and the dark pastoral to reign supreme.

Coleridge’s ‘Conversation Poems’ re-evaluate and redefine various pastoral axioms through experimentation with the dark pastoral subgenre. Underpinned by a mind preoccupied with the past, solitude and conflict, there exists an underlying angst in ‘Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement’, ‘This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison’ and *Fears in Solitude* that gives way to a natural tension in Coleridge’s rendering of the pastoral. The imagination and the mind’s transforming gaze change the apparatus of genre, ultimately revealing a new host of pastoral lyrics that champion uncertainty and emotional volatility. Drawing the pastoral into darker, unstable areas of thought, the poet redefines the genre not as a ‘closed system’ as Timothy Morton suggests, but an open and volatile incubator that gives rise to a troubled, fomenting

²⁵¹ Morton, ‘Romanticism and the Environmental Subject’, p. 97.

and violent natural landscape.²⁵² Unfixing the pastoral's apparently fixed characteristics, Coleridge's exploration of genre oscillates between convention and experimentation, never allowing his reader to experience a consistent strain of pastoral. Identifying the subjective mode and personal experience as his subject, the 'I' of the poet dictates the direction of the pastoral. Pre-empting Stuart Curran's assertion that 'a true pastoral will find its impetus in reality, not convention', Coleridge's 'Conversation Poems' function as the harbinger for early stirrings of the dark pastoral subgenre.²⁵³ Epitomising John Milton's claim in Book I of *Paradise Lost* that, 'The mind is its own place, and in itself / Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n', the poet sketches out a new blueprint for his future dark pastoral endeavours: 'Kubla Khan', *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and *Christabel*.²⁵⁴

²⁵² Morton, 'Romanticism and the Environmental Subject', p. 109.

²⁵³ Curran, 'The Pastoral', p. 106.

²⁵⁴ John Milton, 'Paradise Lost: Book I', in *The Complete Poems*, ed. by John Leonard, Penguin Classics (London: Penguin, 1998), pp. 120-141 (p. 127).

Chapter Three: Self-consciousness and Coleridge's Narrative Poems

In a notebook entry dated May 1826 Samuel Taylor Coleridge writes that 'Self-consciousness...is *the Form* and indispensable *Mark* of the Individuality'.²⁵⁵ The power of this private musing both summarises and infiltrates much of Coleridge's earlier poetic thought, no more so than in his execution of, and experimentation with genre. Throughout the 1790s, we see the Lake Poet exploring aspects of the epic, the lyric, and the drama, experimenting with different genres through the lens of his own poetics. Yet it is Coleridge's skilful manipulation of pastoral which is perhaps most impressive. Much like William Wordsworth, Coleridge is interested in 'the fact and act of poetic creation', and his poetry through the period of the 1790s demonstrates a movement through and maturation of, pastoral devising.²⁵⁶ Innovating upon and separating the genre from its eighteenth-century predecessors, Coleridge refuses to conform to a conventional pastoral which champions rational and idealised heightened artifice. Nor does he see pastoral as a safe area of imaginative play, a place that excludes what Timothy Morton terms a 'negative ambience'.²⁵⁷ The poet transforms his natural landscapes, darkening the swain's song into an abyss of chaotic disarray. The climax of this achievement is revealed in the narrative poems, 'Kubla Khan' (1798), *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1797-8) and *Christabel* (1798, 1800), a trio of works that experiment with the pastoral using myth.²⁵⁸ Through the narratives of a tyrannical ruler, a mad sailor and a medieval maiden, Coleridge displaces and obscures the pastoral into a series of disturbing and frightening portraits, exploiting the limitless capacity of the mythological narrative. With such creative license, these bold endeavours 'allow [Coleridge] to demonstrate what a poem is capable of', ultimately

²⁵⁵ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Entry 5377 [26.23], f44v, May 1826, in *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge 1819-1826: Entries 4505-4571*, Volume 4 Text, ed. by Kathleen Coburn and Merton Christenson (London: Routledge, 1990).

²⁵⁶ Michael O'Neill, "'That Dome in Air": Coleridge', in *Romanticism and the Self-Conscious Poem* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), pp. 62-89 (p. 62).

²⁵⁷ Timothy Morton, 'Romanticism and the Environmental Subject', in *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2009), pp. 79-139 (p. 124).

²⁵⁸ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'Kubla Khan (1798)', in *The Major Works including Biographia Literaria*, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 103-104, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner (1797-8, 1817)', in *The Major Works including Biographia Literaria*, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 48-68 and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'Christabel (1798, 1800)', in *The Major Works including Biographia Literaria*, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 68-86. Please note that all further references to these poems will be from this edition.

producing a series of new generic models.²⁵⁹ Elucidating the ‘horrid shapes, and shrieks, and sights unholy’ of John Milton’s *L’Allegro*, Coleridge’s narrative poems use myth to craft a testing and self-conscious dark pastoral vision.²⁶⁰

Coleridge’s concern with pastoral design is revealed in ‘Kubla Khan’, a poem fundamentally about poetic creation. Since the publication of John Livingston Lowes’ *The Road to Xanadu* (1927), critics have continued to prioritise both the dream and the consumption of opium as central to the success and terror of ‘Kubla Khan’, delving into Coleridge’s personal experiences of nightmares to elucidate this reading.²⁶¹ As Alan C. Purves has admitted, ‘too often the critical attention has centred on the preface and not the poem’s structure’.²⁶² Notwithstanding the importance of the prefatory biographical writing, the poem’s structure is concerned first with fashioning and then distorting an orientalist, imagined and distinctive pastoral. Coleridge’s attention to detail enables him to explode the genre, allowing ‘Kubla Khan’ to obtain its status as the narrative of ‘pain and disease’.²⁶³ Although Lowes and John Beer identify several sources of inspiration for ‘Kubla Khan’, in particular travel writing (James Bruce’s *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile* and William Bartram’s *Travels*) and John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, neither critic acknowledges the direct effect of such reading on Coleridge’s development of genre.²⁶⁴ Bruce, Bartram and Milton venture into the unknown, exploring foreign geographical and controversial literary territory, notably North Africa, and the American South. Their works stimulate both an awareness and refusal of the limits of the natural world as well as pastoral and they catalyse Coleridge’s creative and genre-focused drive already evident in his ‘Conversation

²⁵⁹ O’Neill, “‘That Dome in Air’: Coleridge”, p. 63.

²⁶⁰ John Milton, ‘L’Allegro’, in *Complete Shorter Poems*, ed. by John Carey (Harlow: Longman, 1984), pp. 132-139 (p. 132).

²⁶¹ John Livingstone Lowes, *The Road to Xanadu: A Study in the Ways of the Imagination* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1927). For readings on the link between ‘Kubla Khan’ and Coleridge’s dreams/opium addiction see James Bramwell, “‘Kubla Khan’ – Coleridge’s Fall?”, *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 53.4 (1952) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/43341644>> [Accessed 14 October 2019] and Grevel Lindop, ‘Romantic Poetry and the Idea of the Dream’, *The Keats-Shelley Review*, 18.1 (2004) <<https://doi.org/10.1179/ksr.2004.18.1.20>> [Accessed 14 October 2019].

²⁶² Alan C. Purves, ‘Formal Structure in “Kubla Khan”’, *Studies in Romanticism*, 1.3 (1962) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/25599555>> [Accessed 14 October 2019] (p. 187).

²⁶³ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ‘Preface to Kubla Khan; or, A Vision in a Dream’, in *The Major Works including Biographia Literaria*, Oxford World’s Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 102-103 (p. 103).

²⁶⁴ John Livingstone Lowes, ‘The Sleeping Images’, in *The Road to Xanadu: A Study in the Ways of the Imagination*, Second Revised Edition (London: Constable and Company Ltd., 1951), pp. 356-402 and John Beer, ‘Fountain of the Sun’, in *Coleridge the Visionary* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1959), pp. 213-257.

Poems'. This new, darker subject matter triggers the transformation of a new pastoral vision, blending natural possibility with myth in order to expose the 'precarious achievement of the human imagination'.²⁶⁵ The product of this fusion is revealed in the opening lines of 'Kubla Khan':

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
 A stately pleasure-dome decree:
 Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
 Through caverns measureless to man
 Down to a sunless sea.
 So twice five miles of fertile ground
 With walls and towers were girdled round;
 And there were gardens bright with sinuous rills,
 Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree;
 And here were forests ancient as the hills,
 Enfolding sunny spots of greenery.

(*Kubla Khan*, l. 1-10)

With the reference to Xanadu, Coleridge immediately displaces the pastoral from its classical Greek, and even contemporary eighteenth-century British landscape, in favour of the distant climes of the 13th and 14th century Mongol Empire. Surpassing both the geographical and temporal formalities of the genre, 'Kubla Khan' announces itself as an ancient oriental pastoral. When considered with Oscar Wilde and Edward Saïd's concepts of Orientalism in mind, Coleridge's choice of setting immediately disregards the imitative quality of the decorative arts, as the mimetic is deemed relatively insignificant for a poem with such a strong philosophical focus.²⁶⁶ The exotic nature of the Orient as the 'other' to western thought gives Coleridge a certain level of artistic freedom in that he is able to investigate his personal anxieties in an aesthetic form that might be unknown to his readership. With such a novel approach to pastoral, creativity and expression become limitless. Combined with the poet's

²⁶⁵ Walter Jackson Bate, "'The Ancient Mariner,'" "Christabel," and "Kubla Khan", in *Coleridge* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968), pp. 55-84 (p. 78).

²⁶⁶ Oscar Wilde, in his prose works 'The Decay of Lying', writes that the history of the decorative arts 'in Europe is the record of the struggle between Orientalism, with its frank rejection of imitation, its love of artistic convention, its dislike to the actual representation of any object in Nature, and our own imitative spirit.' See Oscar Wilde, 'The Decay of Lying', in *Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* (Glasgow: Harper Collins 1994), pp. 1071-1092 (p. 1080) and Edward Saïd, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003).

heightened imaginative powers, the Orient allows Coleridge to rebuild his pastoral vision through ‘a sort of surrogate and even underground self’.²⁶⁷ It is in this alternate reality that Coleridge can experiment with the complexities of poetic creation in a genre that is able to go ‘beyond achieving a tolerable representation of the physical world’.²⁶⁸ By reinterpreting Elinor Schaffer’s concept of the ‘oriental idyll’, we can see that it is the eastern pastoral of *Kubla Khan* that allows Coleridge to express his personal angst.²⁶⁹

Owing to Coleridge’s reading of Samuel Purchas’s book *Purchas His Pilgrimage*, the poet anoints Kubla Khan, a long-deceased Mongol ruler, as the poem’s central character. Effacing the shepherd swain from his pastoral, Coleridge resurrects a historical character through myth in order to instate a new series of generic considerations. Rather than contemplate matters around the life of a herdsman, or even celebrate country over city living, Coleridge enlists a powerful, prophetic figure to tease out a personal issue, notably the challenge of and threat to poetic creativity. To extend Jonathan Beer’s reading, Kubla’s ‘commanding genius’ is both a strength and a hindrance, not only to Kubla’s artistic drive, but also in terms of his pastoral vision.²⁷⁰ Rather than viewing ‘Kubla Khan’ as a ‘vision of a paradoxical paradise’, reading the poem as a self-conscious study of genre brings broader personal themes into focus.²⁷¹ For example, through this new pastoral figure, Coleridge is able to articulate his own struggle to balance his creative power, prioritising the self. Understanding the poet’s intensive creative but vulnerable political situation in 1797, ‘Kubla Khan’ takes its inspiration from contemporary socio-political conditions. With the subjective mode at the heart of pastoral, ‘the self...[is] subsumed in the aesthetic form or the vision itself’.²⁷² The genre attains further reflexivity since Coleridge

²⁶⁷ Edward Saïd, ‘Introduction’, in *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003), pp. 1-30 (p. 3).

²⁶⁸ Brad Bannon, ‘Joyce, Coleridge and the Eastern Aesthetic’, *James Joyce Quarterly*, 48. 3 (2011) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/23342956>> [Accessed 01 November 2019] (p. 497).

²⁶⁹ E. S. Schaffer, ‘The Oriental Idyll’, in *Kubla Khan and The Fall of Jerusalem: The Mythological School in Biblical Criticism and Secular Literature 1770-1880* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), pp. 96-144 (p. 96).

²⁷⁰ Beer, ‘Fountain of the Sun’, p. 216.

²⁷¹ Rosemary Ashton, ‘Nether Stowey and “Kubla Khan” 1796-1797’, in *The Life of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), pp. 88-122 (p. 115).

²⁷² Bannon, ‘Joyce, Coleridge and the Eastern Aesthetic’, p. 497. This reading also follows in *The Princeton Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics* definition of myth as ‘a kind of ineradicable anthropological and ideological substrate in humanity’s self-understanding and self-representation’. See J. Nohrberg, *Myth: I. Myth and Society*, in *The Princeton Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. by Roland Greene, et al., Fourth Edition (Princeton; NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012)

fashions a self-directed, authoritative protagonist in a way that is seemingly absent from more conservative pastorals such as James Thomson's *The Seasons*. Where Thomson's pastoral is overwhelmingly didactic, Coleridge's is expressive. Kubla's governance of a large geographical area (China and Mongolia) not only functions as a macrocosm of the shepherd swain's more modest farming territory, it provides an arena in which one can debate various elements of the creative process. Focusing on the role of the poet, changeable vision and the consequences of personal artistic expression, Kubla's pastoral ultimately resists being an 'impersonal matrix' of an ecosystem.²⁷³ Instead, 'Kubla Khan' uses character to channel a subjective vision of a temperamental bucolic landscape underscored by the poet's personal anxieties.

Imbuing the pastoral with a more robust, self-aware version of the classical shepherd, Coleridge embarks upon what Rosemary Ashton terms his 'poetical and pastoral excursion' by establishing the poem's unique generic framework.²⁷⁴ The first ten lines of the poem self-consciously construct an alternative, mythical pastoral, dissimilar to the conventional opening of pastoral lyrics such as 'Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement' and *Fears in Solitude*. Though paradisaic, Coleridge tempers the idyllic in favour of a pleasant and at times quasi-supernatural rustic portrait. Redressing H. W. Piper's view that the 'general resemblance between the landscape of Xanadu and the geography of paradise is obvious enough', there exists an underlying tension in the first stanza that demonstrates a latent reconsideration and reformation of pastoral paradise.²⁷⁵ This begins with Kubla's decree of the 'stately pleasure-dome'. Though the dome has been read as a literal source of pleasure, a 'quasi-geometrical shape' and a '[fragment] of the inner world', critics have yet to discuss its relevance as a generic device.²⁷⁶ Kubla orders the pleasure-dome to be erected, as Kathleen Wheeler has

ProQuest Ebook Central

<<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/leicester/detail.action?docID=913846>> [Accessed 18 April 2022], pp. 906-910 (p. 906).

²⁷³ Morton, 'Romanticism and the Environmental Subject', p. 103.

²⁷⁴ Ashton, 'Nether Stowey and 'Kubla Khan' 1796-1797', p. 121.

²⁷⁵ H. W. Piper, 'The Two Paradises in Kubla Khan', *The Review of English Studies (New Series)*, 27.106 (1976) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/514564>> [Accessed 11 November 2019] (p. 149).

²⁷⁶ See for example, Humphry House, 'Kubla Khan, Christabel and Dejection', in *Romanticism and Consciousness: Essays in Criticism*, ed. by Harold Bloom (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1970), pp. 305-325 (p. 309), Richard Harter Fogle, 'The Romantic Unity of "Kubla Khan"', *College English*, 13.1 (1951) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/372356>> [Accessed 14 October 2019] (p. 15) and Timothy Bahti, 'Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" and the Fragment of Romanticism', *MLN*, 96.5 (1981) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/2906232>> [Accessed 15 October 2019] (p. 1040).

commented, as he ‘builds out of nature’, implying a high level of human control in the outcome of the poem’s pastoral aesthetic.²⁷⁷ Unlike the fixed crag in Wordsworth’s boat-stealing episode in *The Prelude*, the pleasure-dome appears by choice and without it the poem’s anxieties could have been avoided. Secondly, it is this manmade structure, and not a natural feature, which appears to be repeatedly spotlighted in ‘Kubla Khan’. As in ‘The Eolian Harp’, the pastoral’s main source of contemplation and anxiety is brought into being by an unnatural object. This complicates the genre by adding an external creative presence to its infrastructure. The significance of this complication is emphasised in the blunt caesura at the end of line two, a reminder of Kubla’s unchallenged interference with the flora and fauna of Xanadu. Though the dome’s vague description and lack of clear purpose has left ‘Kubla Khan’ open to interpretation, its function in the pastoral remains the heart of creative inspiration, a defining tenet of the poem’s pastoral vista.

Coleridge uses the next eight lines of the stanza to assemble the natural elements of his pastoral. Reminiscent of the extensive biotic descriptions in his *Notebooks*, Coleridge shapes his oriental pastoral with stock rural features, beginning with ‘Alph, the sacred river’. As Timothy Bahti and Seamus Perry have noted, ‘Alph’ has associations with beginnings, with its closeness to the Greek ‘alpha’ meaning ‘the first letter’ or ‘the first of things’.²⁷⁸ Embedded within the mythical context, the river symbolises a new beginning for pastoral creation, its movement a symbol of eternal fluidity and change. The river’s implied intersection with the pleasure-dome and central presence in the natural landscape also allows it to obtain a certain authority as it occupies both constructed and natural spaces. Despite the dome’s prominence in ‘Kubla Khan’, the river subtly carves out its own importance as an understated, integrated feature of the poem’s wider pastoral. This is emphasised by the use of ‘sacred’, which evokes traditional pastoral themes such as natural redemption and the divine spirit. The poem observes Coleridge’s ‘One Life’ concept, drawing together nature and God, a technique he later repeats in ‘The Nightingale’ and ‘France: An Ode’. Also adding an element of the supernatural, Coleridge elevates his pastoral into

²⁷⁷ Kathleen Wheeler, “‘Kubla Khan’ and the Art of Thingifying”, in *The Creative Mind in Coleridge’s Poetry* (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1981), pp. 17-41 (p. 33).

²⁷⁸ Bahti, ‘Coleridge’s “Kubla Khan” and the Fragment of Romanticism’ and Seamus Perry, “‘Kubla Khan’ and the Art of Mingling”, in *Coleridge and the Uses of Division* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), pp. 200-208 (p. 201).

the realm of the paranormal, capitalising upon the idea of a different, otherworldly experience. Revising his representation of Arcadia, Coleridge uses the river to symbolise a new appreciation of nature, one which initially champions the contrast and interplay between human, spiritual and natural life, though how these elements interact with each other in the future is not always symbiotic. The slight off rhyme between ‘Khan’/‘ran’, followed by the more rhythmically composed couplet ‘ran’/‘man’ reiterates this point succinctly. Foregrounding a more dynamic natural landscape then, the Lake Poet already aspires to a new condition of pastoral, self-consciously directing the poem into new generic territory.

Despite constructing such an interactive pastoral, Coleridge is not interested in simply composing a scene of ironized natural harmony.²⁷⁹ He also introduces elements of darkness in order to test the limits of this new paradoxical pastoral. Firstly, the river runs down to a sea, a verb that implies continuous ‘rapid motion’.²⁸⁰ Unlike the river in Wordsworth’s ‘Lines Composed upon Westminster Bridge’ which ‘glideth at his own sweet will’ (l. 12), Coleridge’s river seems to lack composure, as it is forced to navigate its way through the subterranean, uneven and dark caverns.²⁸¹ Where Wordsworth’s river seems calm and self-paced, Coleridge’s appears to ceaselessly rush on. Here we see the first signs of the pastoral’s newly acquired though subtle underlying terror; a self-conscious tactic designed to introduce nature’s darker undercurrent into the poetry. Preparing us for the forthcoming episode of aquatic destruction, the poet whispers the malevolent potential of water. Though the river passes through the ‘stately pleasure-dome’, much like the creative process, its course is not seamless. When the river reaches the ‘sunless sea’, there is a sense that its endurance through the caverns has not been met with any reward. Using genre to heighten the sensitivity that the Lake Poet feels towards the creative process, the pastoral optimises self-conscious expression. The fear that creation could ultimately

²⁷⁹ William Empson refers to the aristocratic fascination with irony as seen in Shakespeare’s pastoral. Pastorals since this period have remained obsessed with irony, often used to accept the aristocratic classes. Here Coleridge removes the class issue completely, once again focusing on the subjective artist’s vision. See Empson, ‘They That Have Power’, in *Some Versions of Pastoral* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1935), pp. 89-115 (p. 111).

²⁸⁰ “run, v.” *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, September 2019, www.oed.com/view/Entry/168875. Accessed 13 November 2019.

²⁸¹ William Wordsworth, ‘Composed upon Westminster Bridge, Sept. 2, 1802’, in *William Wordsworth The Major Works*, ed. by Stephen Gill, Oxford World’s Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 285.

lead to a cold, dark and inconclusive place epitomises what John Beer terms as the ‘Typhonic’ element of the poem, but more crucially outlines the artist’s worst nightmare: stasis.²⁸² Using the pastoral to carve out the poem’s unique fear in solitude, Coleridge allows the genre to move beyond the aesthetic, didactic and primitive. Adopting a philosophical stance, the pastoral can no longer operate as the genre of rich nostalgia, but subtly becomes the genre of angst.

Capitalising on the doom and gloom of ‘Kubla Khan’, Coleridge continues to exploit the image of the river running ‘Through caverns measureless to man / Down to a sunless sea’, a simultaneously expansive and reductive image. The ‘caverns measureless to man’ at once dispel any human sense of quantifiable distance, the alliterative ‘m’ distorting the spatial parameters of pastoral. Where Georgic lyrics such as Oliver Goldsmith’s *The Deserted Village* clearly map out the boundaries of the pastoral in the term ‘village’, Coleridge readily omits spatial specificity, adding further uncertainty to ‘Kubla Khan’. Through pastoral ambivalence, Coleridge shows how volatile the creative process is, in that the artist is subject to bouts of uncertainty, as well as will-driven certainty. More importantly, these contradictory sentiments can and often do operate concomitantly. Coleridge changes the entire experience of pastoral as he uses this moment to observe himself awkwardly posing as both poet and muse. Characteristic of the artist’s shifting gaze, the Lake Poet identifies the river’s determined endpoint, the ‘sunless sea’. Though the sea is an expansive body of water, the slight typographical inset of the line, indefinite article and the lightless, sombre tenor of the image drains the optimism of the pastoral implied in the pleasure-dome and the ‘sacred river’. The complete lack of possibility insinuated in ‘sunless’, coupled with the wispy sibilance, gradually dispels the notion of inspiration, both in terms of creativity and genre, muting any sense of possibility with an overwhelming blackness. That the river connects the dome with the sunless sea also suggests the possibility of such darkness bleeding its way back up to the dome, implying an element of toxicity into pastoral. Using genre to show that an artistic creation is never fully complete and always subject to interference even post-production, the pastoral acquires a new significance.

²⁸² Beer, ‘Fountain of the Sun’, p. 215.

Attempting to revive the poem from the despair of the ‘sunless sea’, Coleridge redirects the eye back up to the surrounding milieu of the pleasure-dome. Expressing the need to fortify creativity with constant inspiration, the poet pieces together a self-contained, enclosed space, diligently applying his pastoral brushstrokes in a technique akin to a landscape painter. Consequently, the next six lines of the stanza resemble conventional pastoral a great deal more with the attention to greenery, foliage and hills transporting the reader to more familiar generic territory. The switch to a more systematic rhyme scheme in lines six to ten (*aabcbc*) reiterates this sense of ease, the closing quatrain rounding off the stanza with a pleasing alternate rhyme. The ‘fertile ground’ immediately signals a high-yielding landscape, the ‘walls and towers’ guarding such precious space from the looming ‘deep romantic chasm’ (‘Kubla Khan’, l. 12). Projecting more colour and motion into the scene, we hear of ‘gardens bright with sinuous rills’ and ‘sunny spots of greenery’, recalling the ‘Valley of Seclusion’ in ‘Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement’ (l. 9).²⁸³ However, Coleridge is keen to individuate his pastoral, adding reflexivity in the introduction of the ‘incense-bearing tree[s]’ and the ‘forests ancient as the hills’. The use of incense transforms the pastoral from an aesthetic genre into an extrasensory experience, the dominance of the sweet, floral smell activating the energy and ambiance of the garden. There is also a strong Miltonic overtone implied, as Coleridge recalls Book IX of *Paradise Lost*, where the ‘sacred light began to dawn / In Eden on the humid flow’rs, that breathed / Their morning incense’ (l. 192-194).²⁸⁴ Both the flowers and trees emit their incense, yet Coleridge’s lack of reference to time makes his pastoral appear timeless. The trees seem to blossom continuously, keeping Kubla’s pastoral constantly alive and present, unlike Milton’s flowers that appear at morning only. The reference to the ancient forests distorts the poem’s perception of time further, as clock time completely loses its place. Despite such ambivalence, the scene closes with the sun’s natural warmth speckling through the landscape, recalling conventional pastoral idyll.

‘Kubla Khan’ takes a sudden turn in the next stanza, ricocheting directly into the grip of the dark pastoral. Beginning with the self-conscious, heightened and abrupt

²⁸³ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ‘Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement (1796)’, in *The Major Works including Biographia Literaria*, Oxford World’s Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 29-31 (p. 29).

²⁸⁴ John Milton, ‘Paradise Lost: Book IX’, in *The Complete Poems*, ed. by John Leonard (London: Penguin, 1998), pp. 303-343 (p. 338).

exclamation ‘But oh!’, Coleridge accelerates the poem into an unstable and frenzied domain, confronting the reader with a demonic landscape.²⁸⁵ The ‘learned and fashionable language’ of old pastoral is ruthlessly disposed of in favour of a much more subjective, chaotic vernacular that complicates and dims the hue of the poem’s opening, redirecting the trajectory of the myth narrative.²⁸⁶ Freeing the pastoral from its association with ‘innocent freedom’, ‘Kubla Khan’ reaches new catastrophic heights as Coleridge ruptures and fragments the genre with unnerving precision and audacity.²⁸⁷ Demonstrating the complexity of the creative process, Coleridge accesses the dark pastoral to expose the more maniacal aspects of the imagination, and the terror that lies beneath. Imagining nature as an unrestrained, tempestuous force, the pastoral itself becomes limitless:

But oh! that deep romantic chasm which slanted
Down the green hill athwart a cedarn cover!
A savage place! as holy and enchanted
As e’er beneath a waning moon was haunted
By woman wailing for her demon-lover!
And from this chasm, with ceaseless turmoil seething,
As if this earth in fast thick pants were breathing,
A mighty fountain momentarily was forced:
Amid whose swift half-intermitted burst
Huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail,
Or chaffy grain beneath the thresher’s flail:

(‘Kubla Khan’, l. 12-23)

The ‘primitivist dream’ staged in the poem’s opening transforms into an apocalyptic pastoral nightmare, eschewing numerous generic conventions in the process.²⁸⁸ Obliterating pastoral’s fascination with irony and redefining William Empson’s notion of the ‘double plot’, Kubla’s oriental pastoral advances the genre’s allegorical subplot

²⁸⁵ This study is aware of Gregory Leadbetter’s chapter on ‘Kubla Khan’, in *Coleridge and the Daemonic Imagination*. Where my reading differs is that it frames the demonic predominantly in the context of the pastoral genre, using myth to manipulate the narrative. See Gregory Leadbetter, ‘Kubla Khan’, in *Coleridge and the Daemonic Imagination* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 183-200.

²⁸⁶ William Empson, ‘Proletariat Literature’, in *Some Versions of Pastoral* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1935), pp. 3-23 (p. 11).

²⁸⁷ Stuart Curran, ‘Pastoral’, in *Poetic Form and British Romanticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989) pp. 85-127 (p. 96).

²⁸⁸ O’Neill, “‘That Dome in Air’: Coleridge”, p. 87.

into an explicit and literal dark vision.²⁸⁹ Through myth, Coleridge blends the hostility evoked in paintings he most admired (Michelangelo's *Last Judgement* and Washington Allston's *Diana and her Nymphs in the Chase*) with the experimental imagery of *Paradise Lost* and descriptions inspired by the Lake District to produce a pastoral with a vindictive profile, highlighting the darker side of the imagination.²⁹⁰ The genre is used to heighten self-consciousness. The tranquillity and creative potential of the pleasure-dome is suddenly threatened by the enigmatic 'deep romantic chasm', the ironic use of 'romantic' twisting the pastoral into perversity. Against James Bramwell's reading of the chasm as a 'nostalgic chord', all joy is precluded by the hostility of this 'savage place', 'holy and enchanted / As e'er'.²⁹¹ Savage denotes a 'wild, undomesticated, untamed' space, adding a brutal coarseness to nature.²⁹² Sowing the seeds for the ensuing crumbling landscape, Coleridge assigns a devilish authority to nature, demonstrating the degradation of the poet's muse. The strange concoction of religion and the supernatural in 'holy and enchanted' self-consciously exploits this power further, simultaneously questioning Coleridge's 'One Life' principle. With a religious element in the background of 'Kubla Khan', the poem tests Coleridge's Unitarian beliefs, suggesting an alternative understanding of the divine in nature. Contemplating the addition of a new mystical darkness, Coleridge redefines the pastoral, reframing the concordant relationship between nature and God. Elevating the dark pastoral into the realm of the occult, nature is now subject to an undefinable, alternate spiritual force. The addition of the 'woman wailing for her demon-lover' exacerbates this new triangulation in nature, her piercing cry an aural agitation to the ambient 'pleasure-dome'. The demon-lover, out of sight, represents a supplementary encroaching dark pastoral threat, his absence and silence a potential indication of being banished, whether by choice or force, from Kubla's pastoral arena.

²⁸⁹ Empson, 'They That Have Power', p. 111 and William Empson, 'Double Plots', in *Some Versions of Pastoral* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1935), pp. 27-86 (p. 27).

²⁹⁰ See for example Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Entry 2828 [15.215], f92v, April-May 1806, in *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge 1804-1808: Entries 1834-3231*, Volume 1 Text, ed. by Kathleen Coburn (London: Routledge, 1962) and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Entry 2831 [15.218], f95, April-May 1806, in *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge 1804-1808: Entries 1834-3231*, Volume 1 Text, ed. by Kathleen Coburn (London: Routledge, 1962).

²⁹¹ James Bramwell, "'Kubla Khan"—Coleridge's Fall?', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 53.4 (1952) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/43341644>> [Accessed 14 October 2019] (p. 453).

²⁹² "savage, adj. and n.1." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, September 2019, www.oed.com/view/Entry/171433. Accessed 19 November 2019.

Stylizing the bucolic with a focus on capricious movement, Coleridge distorts the genre into chaos, clearly distinguishing between the worlds of ‘art and nature’.²⁹³ The oblique chasm is grotesquely personified ‘with ceaseless turmoil seething, / As if this earth in fast thick pants were breathing’. Exploiting the pastoral’s malleability as a genre, Coleridge animates nature to such an extent that it seems to react against the erection of the pleasure-dome. Kubla’s interference with the ecosystem of Xanadu is noted and condemned. The chasm is depicted as riled up, exhausted from hours of angry contemplation as it anticipates the eruption of the ‘mighty fountain’. The poet works astutely with metrical composition to convey this fury, using the polysyllables and iambic hexameter in line 17 to mimic the effervescent, chaotic turmoil, and the monosyllables in line 18 to enact the sense of panting. The use of metaphors pertaining to the respiratory system help to conjure up a deep seated, innate reaction, in that nature seems to project feeling from the deepest recesses of its internal organs. When the fountain itself erupts it mimics this sense of human impulse as it ruptures both the chasm and the verse in a climactic fashion. The blunt caesura at the end of line 19 emphasises the fountain’s incredible strength, as it forces its way ‘momently’ through the chasm’s epidermis. The terror of the dark pastoral matches those subliminal feelings in Wordsworth’s boat-stealing episode in *The Prelude*, as the boy realises the craggy steep’s endless potential to keep growing in stature. Catalysing the darkness of the imagination as a contagious force, Coleridge enlivens the fountain, ‘Amid whose swift half-intermitted burst / Huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail’. The manic ‘half-intermitted burst’ reiterates the chasm’s panting motion, generating a lower timbre of the palpable anger nature exhibited earlier. The juxtaposition between the ‘Huge fragments’ vaulting around like ‘rebounding hail’ exposes nature’s malevolent streak in that large sections of earth take on the agility and impact of hail. That these fragments rebound also insinuates repeated destruction, attributing a deep-seated malicious intent and damaging quality to nature. Reworking the pastoral’s static heightened artifice into self-conscious terror, Coleridge magnifies the ‘antipastoral of the eighteenth century’ to such an extent that the genre unfetters itself from dignity.²⁹⁴

²⁹³ Perry, “‘Kubla Khan’ and the Art of Mingling”, p. 204.

²⁹⁴ Curran, ‘Pastoral’, p. 93.

With nature now obtaining an inherent and explicit turbulence, Coleridge moulds the pastoral into a multifunctional, layered genre that is able to create, accommodate and then annihilate the construction of its own idyll. Devising a self-conscious subgenre in the dark pastoral that goads, provokes and destroys nature, the Lake Poet ruptures the soft sensibility of conventional pastoral. As Norman Fruman comments, in the wake of nature revealing her darker powers, the lines move with ‘an almost hypnotic force’.²⁹⁵ Though the pleasure-dome and Kubla’s creativity initially remain intact, the inevitability of the dark pastoral as an encroaching threat seems all too immediate. When the ‘dancing rocks’ (‘Kubla Khan’, l. 14) fling up the sacred river, nature’s threatening, destructive qualities reveal themselves, directly sabotaging the Alph’s flow. Intercepting the key channel between the pleasure dome and its exterior landscape, the dark pastoral symbolises the bleaker, concealed recesses of the imagination. That Coleridge can envisage and articulate such obscurity also points towards an innate darkness in the mind of the poet, anticipating Kathleen Wheeler’s assertion that ‘the activity of the imagination has a further, ominous aspect to it. It can degenerate from the creation of new metaphors and symbols into a faculty manipulating fixities and determinates, or it can mistake such a faculty’.²⁹⁶ Rather than ‘mistake’ itself, the imagination recognises the potential for antithetical metaphors and symbols to those that were established in the poem’s opening pastoral. Coleridge’s imagination can express the dark pastoral as something revealed and concealed in his poetry. Despite Charles I. Patterson Jr’s reading that ‘the delineation of the nature of daemonic poetry and its effects upon people is more nearly central in the poem than what it reveals about the process of its creation’, the dark pastoral communicates its effect on people through its revelation of the creative process.²⁹⁷ Through the explosive, violent pastoral, ‘Kubla Khan’ demonstrates that poetic creation is itself a dark, impulsive and at times, challenging prospect. Reimagining pastoral’s capabilities, Coleridge frightens his reader with a genre that is aware of itself as a representation of poetic creation. Ultimately, this narrative poem uses the dark pastoral to maniacally externalise the intensity and challenge of being an artist.

²⁹⁵ Norman Fruman, ‘Dreams’, in *Coleridge: The Damaged Archangel* (Trowbridge: George Allen & Unwin, 1972), pp. 365-412 (p. 397).

²⁹⁶ Wheeler, “‘Kubla Khan’ and the Art of Thingifying”, p. 34.

²⁹⁷ Charles I. Patterson Jr., ‘The Daemonic in Kubla Khan: Toward Interpretation’, *PMLA*, 89.5 (1974) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/461375>> [Accessed 14 October 2019] (p. 1033).

Recognising that one never feels only a single sensation, but ‘a thousand others in a darker shade, or less light’, Coleridge amplifies the sharpness of his dark pastoral to highlight further menaces to creative expression.²⁹⁸ Politics, a subject close to Coleridge’s heart, is one such menace that is illuminated with the return of Kubla to the pastoral. After a twenty-eight-line hiatus, the poem’s main character returns to the fore, no less with a heavy message of warning that ‘’mid this tumult Kubla heard from far / Ancestral voices prophesying war!’ (‘Kubla Khan’, l. 29-30). Rather than continuing to explore the ‘most obvious and determinate’ objects of the landscape, Coleridge fixates upon a background event in order to stress the potential for political disarray.²⁹⁹ Urging his reader to consider the pastoral as a wider space that is not restricted to the artist’s limited aesthetic representation, the Lake Poet once again dispels the fixed spatial parameters of genre. Consequently, the dark pastoral, much like politics, becomes all-consuming and omnipresent, an inescapable force, both in terms of its physical presence and then also in terms of its temporal faculties, with the past encroaching on the present. Placing Kubla at the heart of the dark pastoral allows the ancestral voices to acquire more gravitas as they amplify the pre-existing terror of the earth. A physical threat to Kubla’s ability to express his creativity and to the pleasing existence of the dome, these ‘ancestral voices’ declare an impending unrest that shakes the poem’s opening pastoral to its very core. Aside from the physical, this violence also attacks the imaginative drive, as, should a war occur, there is a danger that the poet’s creative abilities will descend into further mayhem, inspired by any potential conflict and turmoil. Suggesting Coleridge’s angst about a potential French invasion in 1797, war would mean that the pastoral would reach a point of crisis, possibly darkening this already fearful, dichotomous landscape.

Echoing the despondent tone of the prophecy, Coleridge places the pastoral into a new, ominous realm of representation exploiting the myth narrative’s ‘elusive and variable’ qualities.³⁰⁰ Revelling in the ambiance of calmer waters, the poet dilutes the acidity of the dark pastoral, focusing the lens back on the dome. Though ‘Kubla Khan’ still self-

²⁹⁸ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Entry 2370 [21.550], f121, December 1804, in *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge 1804-1808: Entries 1843-3231*, Volume 2 Text, ed. by Kathleen Coburn (London: Routledge, 1962).

²⁹⁹ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ‘Biographia Literaria: Chapter XVI’, in *The Major Works including Biographia Literaria*, Oxford World’s Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 326-332 (p. 328).

³⁰⁰ Nohrnberg, *Myth: I. Myth and Society.*, p. 906.

consciously redefines its pastoral axioms, Coleridge chooses to address the concept of transformation, both as a stylistic and generic feature. Speculating upon the changed landscape, the speaker muses:

The shadow of the dome of pleasure
 Floated midway on the waves;
 Where was heard with mingled measure
 From the fountain and the caves.
 It was a miracle of rare device,
 A sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice!

(‘Kubla Khan’, l. 31-36)

The third stanza epitomises a new aspect of self-consciousness in ‘Kubla Khan’ directly related to the concept of return. Much like in ‘Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement’, each return to the dome brings with it a refreshed perspective, largely due to the evolving pastoral conditions of the text, a concept which gives the dome its enigmatic but crucial status in the poem. Revealing that the creative process itself is repetitive, but also that these repetitions bring with them a heightened awareness, the pastoral becomes the genre of enlightenment. The image of the dome floating ‘midway’ on the waves embodies this notion of heightened awareness, as the manmade defining feature of pastoral is modulated in its shadow form. The darkness of the shadow and implied dimming of light suggests changeability as genre accommodates a new perspective of Kubla’s dome. Pastoral is no static genre. The crux of the poem’s responsiveness to its genre lies in the ‘miracle of rare device’, the ‘sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice!’ Where William Empson sees the introduction of ‘magical idea(s)’ in pastoral as liberating, this contradictory image suggests otherwise.³⁰¹ The dome itself seems somehow afflicted as the ice inhabits what was once a grand cupola. The contrast insists that although creation and pastoral may superficially appear to be inviting, their infrastructures, certainly in the mythical context, are treacherous. The dome does not function as a haven to which the artist can return for repose or spiritual nourishment. The beauty of Kubla’s creation is underpinned by some of nature’s darkest features, reminding us that nature is the primary and dominant being in pastoral, not man. The speaker’s subsequent inability

³⁰¹ William Empson, ‘Marvell’s Garden’, in *Some Versions of Pastoral* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1935), pp. 119-145 (p. 120).

to recreate his vision operates as a reminder of man's ineptness in nature, as though he has 'drunk the milk of paradise' ('Kubla Khan', l. 54), poetic creation has ultimately led him into a maniacal, intoxicated state. The self-conscious evolution of Kubla's chaotic pastoral is a testament to the abject state of the artist and his product, a recurring preoccupation that Coleridge was never able to resolve.

Problematizing the pastoral to the extent that nature refuses to be loved for 'its vastness, beauty and endurance', Coleridge becomes fascinated with the possibilities of genre, so much so that he is able to apply tenets of his new dark pastoral to other narrative poems such as *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*.³⁰² Noted for its 'allegorical and moralizing routes...which...often lead into cul-de-sacs', *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* prefigures a new series of self-conscious considerations where the pastoral is deployed in a series of micro episodes embedded within a sea voyage narrative.³⁰³ Michael O'Neill's decision to move away from a study of the poem's moral destination and into the realm of genre opens up *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* as a complex undertaking, returning the reader back to Humphry House's notion that the 'poem's richness at once tempts and defeats definiteness of interpretation'.³⁰⁴ The poem relies upon generic self-consciousness to amplify the terror of the mariner's hellish journey and frightful apparitions, dragging the pastoral into the unknown waters of the ocean. It is the brutality of the dark pastoral that gives rise to the mariner's apocalyptic vision of nature, as Coleridge masterfully manipulates different aspects of the genre in a bid to showcase his 'anathema against artificiality'.³⁰⁵ Samuel Baker's historicist essay 'The Maritime Georgic and the Lake Poet Empire of Culture' sees him prioritise genre as fundamental to our understanding of ocean imagery in Coleridge and Wordsworth's poetry. Through the lens of the Georgic, Baker argues for the overwhelming effect of the 'new science of political economy', a school of thought that enabled the Lake Poets to '[characterize] literary work as in its own right a national tradition of production, one that evoked the land all the more ardently

³⁰² Greg Garrard, 'Pastoral', in *Ecocriticism, The New Critical Idiom*, ed. by John Drakakis, Second Edition (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), pp. 37-65 (p. 48).

³⁰³ O'Neill, "'That Dome in Air": Coleridge', p. 79.

³⁰⁴ Humphry House, 'The Ancient Mariner', in *English Romantic Poets: Modern Essays in Criticism*, ed. by M. H. Abrams, Second Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 214-239 (p. 221).

³⁰⁵ Curran, 'The Pastoral', p. 108.

because it spanned the seas'.³⁰⁶ Reinterpreting this reading in terms of pastoral, Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* extends the tempestuous climes he evokes in 'Kubla Khan', projecting the dark trepidation of Kubla's paradoxical pastoral landscape right into the very depths of the 'sunless sea' ('Kubla Khan', l. 5). Much like the Georgic, the pastoral helps to produce an enriched seascape that pushes the dark pastoral of Xanadu into new territory, redefining and extending nature's physiognomies through the medium of myth. *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* displays itself as a reflexive study of genre that redefines the scope and role of the imagination in the tradition of poetic production.

Unlike 'Kubla Khan' where the pastoral displays itself explicitly from the poem's onset, in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, Coleridge resists such a technique, opting for a cumulative effect instead. The poet self-consciously inserts the pastoral into the poetry to steer the poem through its supernatural narrative, relying on genre for aesthetic and dramatic effect. Coleridge concentrates his efforts on the dark pastoral, with the mariner only briefly alluding to pastoral in the opening stanzas of the poem. Self-consciously drawing attention to subtle aspects of the landscape, the ship departs from an ordinary pastoral locale as the crew merrily drop 'Below the kirk, below the hill, / Below the lighthouse top' (*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, Part I, l. 23-24). This fleeting reference establishes the pastoral as a vital element of the narrative, ensuring that its presence is noted very early on in the poem. Rather than deploying the pastoral as the poem's primary genre, Coleridge consciously enlists it as a secondary, even tertiary genus, though its effect is no less striking. The lack of detailed description and factual register refuses to set any form of clear precedent for pastoral, so by the time we reach the 'storm-blast' (*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, Part I, l. 41) five stanzas later, the contrast between the poem's opening pastoral and newly emerged dark pastoral is far less pronounced.³⁰⁷ Like the poet's prose work, 'The Wanderings of Cain', the pastoral in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* has little to no reference point and is presented as predominantly fallen from the poem's introductory

³⁰⁶ Samuel Baker, 'The Maritime Georgic and the Lake Poet Empire of Culture', *ELH*, 75.3 (2008) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/27654625>> [Accessed 10 December 2019] (p. 532).

³⁰⁷ As has been detailed in 'Kubla Khan' and elsewhere in the 'Conversation Poems' chapter, Coleridge frequently establishes pastoral idyll before overturning it with the dark pastoral, inaugurating a pastoral spectrum within the poem's structure. With a fallen pastoral in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, he confronts his reader with the possibility of a lone dark pastoral world, deflecting the possibility of pastoral retreat or reward.

stanzas. Nature quickly transitions into a ‘tyrannous and strong’ (*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, Part I, l. 42) force that dictates the maniacal tenor of the poem, as the ship drives directly into a dark pastoral black hole:

And now there came both mist and snow,
 And it grew wondrous cold:
 And ice, mast-high, came floating by,
 As green as emerald.

And through the drifts the snowy clifts
 Did send a dismal sheen:
 Nor shapes of men nor beasts we ken—
 The ice was all between.

The ice was here, the ice was there,
 The ice was all around:
 It cracked and growled, and roared and howled,
 Like noises in a swound!

(*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, Part I, l. 51-62)

Effectively reworking pastoral’s country/city contrast into a new land/sea binary, Coleridge locates the mariner in a hostile environ, differentiating between the ‘merry din’ (*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, Part I, l. 8) of the wedding and the arctic conditions at sea. Instigating reflexivity through this implicit contrast, Coleridge broadens the scope of the pastoral, using the sea as a medium in which he can still experiment with the genre without fully committing to its extensive usage. The sea often sits at the periphery of pastoral landscapes and is rarely commented upon as a component of the genre, despite its presence in pastorals such as Alexander Pope’s *Windsor Forest* and James Thomson’s *The Seasons*. In establishing the land/sea binary, Coleridge deliberately changes the application of pastoral, allowing the poet to relocate generic setting while simultaneously prioritising the sea as an important and testing space. Where conventional eighteenth-century pastorals depict the countryside as the safe, reflective sanctuary and the urban realm as the toxic, commercial world, in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, being on land only exacerbates the mariner’s nautical terrors. Though the sea is physically and spiritually dark, being

on land evokes the raw and painful memory of the sea voyage, ultimately rendering both spaces bleak.

As James McKusick has argued, ‘Coleridge’s use of language in “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” provides crucial evidence of his endeavour to construct a new ecolect’.³⁰⁸ The poet self-consciously creates a new dark pastoral ecolect, reliant upon adverse weather conditions in order to overhaul pastoral’s idyllic, artificial vernacular. Understanding that the inspiration behind *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* originally came from Wordsworth’s reading of Captain George Shelvocke’s *A Voyage Round the World by Way of the Great South Sea* (1726), Coleridge’s interpretation of pastoral was, at the very least, influenced by the prospect of polar voyaging. A barren and desolate landscape offers a new series of generic possibilities, taking Coleridge away from the safe and familiar green pastures of the Quantock Hills. By interacting with subjects that expose the more frightening and disturbing type of imagination, the dark pastoral unearths a more convoluted vision, prioritising the hidden drive of the artist. With genre operating as a vehicle for expression, Coleridge is able to devise a more pressured, supernatural and fragmented subgenre that is able to rupture and turn on itself as a result of the flexibility of the myth narrative. Much like ‘Frost at Midnight’, the poet uses the dark pastoral to swamp the central feature of his narrative—the ship—with anxiety, simultaneously introducing an element of fear-inducing tension. The freezing temperatures at sea implied in the ‘mist and snow’ constructs a glacial climate, the extensive use of anaphora thickening the atmosphere with unnerving apprehension. Distorting the naïve, wintry ‘pure virgin-snows’ of Thomson’s *The Seasons*, the snow in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* catalyses the cold and icy conditions of the voyage, a cutting introduction to the mariner’s tale.³⁰⁹ Though the subsequent allusion to ‘snowy cliffs’ subtly gestures towards traditional pastoral, it more importantly introduces contrast and variety to the snow, relieving pastoral of its innocent, superficial and fixed veneer. Genre deliberately alters nature from a state of aesthetic wholesomeness to potentially destructive and changeable, radically shifting the physical properties of the natural environment. Coleridge uses language to amplify

³⁰⁸ James McKusick, ‘Coleridge and the Economy of Nature’, *Studies in Romanticism*, 35.2 (1996) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/25601180>> [Accessed 10 December 2019] (p. 388-389).

³⁰⁹ James Thomson, ‘The Seasons: Winter’, in *The Seasons and The Castle of Indolence*, ed. by James Sambrook (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), pp. 128-158 (p. 128).

the pastoral's reflexivity, while simultaneously adding an expressive depth to his sinister dark pastoral. The Lake Poet deploys a similar technique with his treatment of the ice.

On its first appearance, the ice is typified by a series of imagined, mystical traits: it floats by, 'green as emerald'. Against Roger Scruton's reading that '[n]o image changes the meaning of its predecessor', Coleridge takes the usual characteristics of ice—its frozen structure, transparency and ability to melt, and deliberately attributes a new series of animate and primal instincts in order to change its function.³¹⁰ Attuning the pastoral to his tale, genre self-consciously gives the ice its threatening quality, taking an unassuming feature of nature, altering its characteristics and magnifying its presence. Since green is the colour associated with rural pastures, combining it with a rare, expensive gemstone (emerald) adds an element of natural grandeur to the ice. The pastoral also exploits the luminosity of emerald to amplify the dominating, regal quality of the ice as it looms 'mast-high', floating by in an ethereal fashion. With emerald being a naturally occurring mineral produced on land, Coleridge implicitly blends an underlying feature of landscape with this newly emerged seascape, cleverly weaving pastoral into the undercurrent of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. Much like the frost in 'Frost at Midnight', the ice continues to assume an intimidating profile, it is described as 'all between' and 'all around', suffocating the mariner with its omnipresence. The quasi-onomatopoeic use of bestial verbs ('growled', 'roared', 'howled') attributes a frightening consciousness to the ice, heightening the already-present fear of the scene with sudden aural disjuncture. These uncharacteristic, piercing noises epitomise Coleridge's attention to dark pastoral detail, as he deliberately vivifies the ice, so much so that it becomes a threatening predator rather than a docile component of the natural world. Bolstering the pastoral to display a bleaker type of natural phenomena, Coleridge completely dispels the idea that the genre can help man to 'return once again to the primal innocence of the garden of Eden'.³¹¹ At this point in the poem, there is grave doubt that the garden of Eden even exists: what lies beyond the storm and these unknown waters remains a mystery.

³¹⁰ Roger Scruton, 'Imagination and Truth: Reflections after Coleridge', in *Coleridge and Contemplation*, ed. by Peter Cheyne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 77-87 (p. 82).

³¹¹ James McKusick, 'John Clare's Version of Pastoral', *The Wordsworth Circle*, 30.2 (1999) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/24044700>> [Accessed 10 December 2019] (p. 81)

Anticipating the tragic shooting of the albatross, Coleridge removes the basic certainty of the Golden Age from his rendition of pastoral, self-consciously pre-empting a new dark pastoral whose parameters are unconventional and unfixed.

With the pastoral now knowingly ‘in possession of its own kingdom’, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* accrues confidence in its handling of genre, constantly surprising the reader with its unpredictable and even eccentric appearances.³¹² The dark pastoral has ensured that the sea is no longer ‘the great sweet mother, to the poets’, but rather a psychological and physical monstrosity that the mariner is forced to endure, giving rise to the interplay of obscurer themes.³¹³ As has been widely remarked upon, death and decay feature heavily in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, with the gruesome Life-In-Death figure haunting the poem with her supernatural, ambivalent presence, yet any link between decay and pastoral remains hitherto undetected.³¹⁴ Coleridge’s distortion of the pastoral through the unmaternal Life-in-Death character unsettles generic axioms, tainting aspects such as the sun and even the female body with disease. With a new visage for pastoral, Coleridge self-consciously strips the genre of key fixities, revealing a disturbing and menacing female character, a far cry from the grief-stricken passivity of Margaret in Wordsworth’s *The Excursion*:

Are those her ribs through which the Sun
Did peer, as through a grate?
And is that Woman all her crew?
Is that a Death? and are there two?
Is Death that woman’s mate?

Her lips were red, her looks were free,
Her locks were yellow as gold:

³¹² Michael O’Neil, ‘Coleridge’s Genres’, in *The Oxford Handbook to Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 375-391 (p. 382).

³¹³ William Empson, ‘The Ancient Mariner’, *Critical Quarterly*, 6.4 (1964) <<https://onlinelibrary-wiley-com.sheffield.idm.oclc.org/doi/epdf/10.1111/j.1467-8705.1964.tb01250.x>> [Accessed 4 December 2019] (p. 305).

³¹⁴ See for example, Edward E. Bostetter, ‘The Nightmare World of “The Ancient Mariner”’, *Studies in Romanticism*, 1.4 (1962) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/25599564>> [Accessed 4 December 2019] and

Scott McEathron, ‘Death as “Refuge and Ruin”: Shelley’s “A Vision of the Sea” and Coleridge’s “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”’, *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 43 (1994) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/30210474>> [Accessed 4 December 2019].

Her skin was white as leprosy,
 The Night-mare Life-in-Death was she,
 Who thicks man's blood with cold.

(*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, Part III, l. 185-194)

Coleridge stages one of many dark pastoral transitions and modulations, blackening the mood of the narrative following the appearance of the grotesque 'slimy things' (*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, Part II, l. 125). Rejecting Timothy Morton's assertion that the 'Romantic environment twinkles and glitters like Bambi's glittering eyes', the poet exchanges what William Empson terms as pastoral's 'naïve freshness' for a display of the bodily grotesque.³¹⁵ Coleridge introduces this representation of the Life-in-Death figure through the image of the sun, self-consciously tempering and distorting a central feature of pastoral in order to dramatize the terrifying arrival of this alien character. The sun in pastoral is generally a protective, life-giving body, a symbol for summer's vibrancy as exhibited in the opening line of Wordsworth's *The Ruined Cottage*, 'Twas summer, and the sun had mounted high' (l. 1).³¹⁶ In *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, Coleridge refrains from providing any such certainty. As Humphry House has concluded, one does not 'know whether the sun is good or bad', '[a]t the naturalistic level, both for the mariners and for Coleridge, the tropic sun changed from being a beautiful, pleasant, 'good' thing to being an unpleasant, evil thing: this change is a natural quality of the tropic sun, irrespective of the eye of the beholder'.³¹⁷ Notwithstanding the more complex oscillation of the sun's moral status, the sun displays no sign of malice. Unlike the explicitly malevolent 'bloody sun, at noon' (*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, Part II, l. 112), the sun appears to be peering through the woman's ribs. It becomes a subordinate to Life-in-Death. The unsightly, gaunt ribs of the woman block and intersperse the sun's light 'as through a grate', literally killing the sun's life-emitting rays through the obstacle of bone. Through the sun's newfound inferiority, Coleridge self-consciously shows that pastoral obtains a 'natural quality' for change, sometimes involuntarily so. Collapsing the idea of continuous pastoral unity in the 'One Life', *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*

³¹⁵ Morton, 'Romanticism and the Environmental Subject', p. 121 and Empson, 'Marvell's Garden', p. 141.

³¹⁶ William Wordsworth, 'The Ruined Cottage', in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, ed. by Stephen Greenblatt, Ninth Edition, Volume 2 (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2012), pp. 309-320 (p. 309).

³¹⁷ House, 'The Ancient Mariner', p. 225 and House, 'The Ancient Mariner', p. 227.

reflexively champions discordancy, ‘bearing witness to a range of contradictions’ that expose the dark intensity of the imagination and perceiving mind.³¹⁸

The questioning of the woman, her crew and ‘a Death’ adds further disruption to this disturbing dark pastoral spell, effectively imposing self-doubt into what is proving to be a traumatic experience for the mariner. The ‘Night-mare Life-in-Death’ figure resembles part corpse, part goddess, and is directly referred to as a woman, suggestive of an ambivalent, female being. Considering the ‘fantasied landscape, in which woman repeatedly and insistently serves as *ground* to man’s *figure*, constitutes one of the founding tropes of the pastoral’, Coleridge yet again amplifies the self-conscious aspect of genre by deliberately rejecting and then redefining convention.³¹⁹ Though indistinct, the Life-in-Death figure no longer serves as ground. She becomes a key figure in this sea voyage, embodying and foregrounding death through her fatal yet beautiful appearance. Blending the supernatural with the bodily, Coleridge self-consciously injects an element of the dark pastoral in order to imagine a character who wickedly infects life with death, questioning the poet’s pantheistic dogma. Exploiting Michael O’Neill’s idea of contradictions, on the one hand, this woman is ridden by disease: she has red lips, and skin as ‘white as leprosy’. Embodying the life aspect of ‘Life-in-Death’, she also possesses free looks and locks that were ‘yellow as gold’. Uprooting the idea that the pastoral character ‘moves among fundamental truths’, Coleridge self-consciously questions the ‘scope and limitation’ of genre by first introducing an integral, autonomous female character and second, refusing to provide any clear philosophical or didactic message through her presence.³²⁰ Questioning ideas around mortality, punishment and religious conviction, Coleridge skews and degrades human consciousness through a being that absconds generic categorization, carving out a strong female contender to man’s ‘*figure*’. Hinting towards a matriarchal dark pastoral, the Lake Poet self-consciously dictates new gender positions in his subgenre, rejecting the exclusive notion of the shepherd swain as the main amiable, male

³¹⁸ O’Neill, “‘That Dome in Air’: Coleridge”, p. 82.

³¹⁹ Marie-Chantal Killeen, ‘Pastoral Womanscapes’, *The Modern Language Review*, 113.2 (2018) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5699/modelangrevi.113.2.0321>> [Accessed 29 December 2019] (p. 322).

³²⁰ William Empson, ‘The Beggar’s Opera’, in *Some Versions of Pastoral* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1935), pp. 195-250 (p. 210) and Paul Alpers, “‘The Philoctetes Problem’ and the Poetics of Pastoral”, *Representations*, 86.1 (2004) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/rep.2004.86.1.4>> [Accessed 29 December 2019] (p. 4).

protagonist. The spine-chilling, closing sentiment that she ‘thicks man’s blood with cold’ demonstrates the extent to which the dark pastoral has inured such a frightful token of despotic female power through genre.

Coleridge’s inchoate, multivalent dark pastoral continues to develop in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, capitalising on the gruesome and uninviting image of natural decay following the death of the mariner’s crew. Mobilising what has been a largely ‘stagnant genre of necessity’, Coleridge self-consciously uses the dark pastoral to interfuse opposite states of being (good/evil, light/dark, life/death), toxifying the moral fibre of his dystopian nightmare.³²¹ With genre now unable to provide any possibility of natural redemption or order, the mariner is forced to fixate upon natural decay in order to introduce new philosophical ideas. The evocation of this widespread dark pastoral malaise naturally feeds into issues around human existence, particularly since the mariner is continuously immersed in death, both as a theoretical concept and a physical presence. With such lowly subject matter at hand, Coleridge deliberately eschews pastoral’s promise of redemption through poetic reverie, opting for a morose, macabre dark pastoral philosophy that relies upon the repeated, deeper collapse and decomposition of the natural world. With such a self-aware, chaotic and disorderly dark pastoral, the poet creates a fissure between man and religious faith, conjuring up a gothic atmosphere akin to ‘Fire, Famine and Slaughter’. Positing the poem in the realm of the devil, the mariner cries out:

I looked upon the rotting sea,
And drew my eyes away;
I looked upon the rotting deck,
And there the dead men lay.

I looked to heaven, and tried to pray;
But or ever a prayer had gusht,
A wicked whisper came, and made
My heart as dry as dust.

(*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, Part IV, l. 240-247)

³²¹ Curran, ‘The Pastoral’, p. 89.

The image of the ‘rotting sea’ carries with it an essence of the ‘insulted ocean’ (l. 147) in *Fears in Solitude*, where the French enemy are labelled ‘vile sea-weed’ (l. 149) tossed on the waves.³²² The verb ‘rotting’ is particularly telling as it provides Coleridge with an occasion to completely infect the mariner’s surrounding milieu, offering no escape from the infinite, decaying natural world. Where the sea was once the sun’s departure point of pastoral calm (‘The sun came up upon the left, / Out of the sea came he’, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, Part I, l. 24-25), it here self-consciously occupies an entirely unappealing presence, participating in the degenerative process of ‘natural decomposition, typically by action of bacteria and other microorganisms’.³²³ Unlike *Fears in Solitude* where the sea symbolises the potential for political and personal emancipation, Coleridge’s self-conscious insistence on the sea’s volatile changeability and further, its infection, symbolises physical and psychological imprisonment. Exposing the terrifying result of creative innovation, the diseased dark pastoral elucidates Coleridge’s fears about the unchecked potential of artistic endeavour. Though Coleridge maintained in March 1818 that ‘If the Artist painfully *copies* nature, what an idle rivalry!’, in authenticating his own version of nature through the dark pastoral, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* pushes nature into the realm of unrestrained, destructive dynamism.³²⁴ The prospect of being consumed and surrounded by infection and death, particularly in a natural world which offers no hope of renewal or light, is completely nihilistic and antithetical to pastoral’s conventions. Compared to Coleridge’s later insistence on metaphysical logic, the growth of the poet’s imagination is here stiflingly terrifying, completely effacing pastoral’s former occupation as the ‘nurse of all life’.³²⁵ When the mariner confesses that he ‘drew [his] eyes away’, it serves as a metaphor for Coleridge’s inability to confront the product of his own distorted creation, the sight of human death another reminder of the dark potential of poetry. Having devised a dark pastoral that is, by his own admission, ‘knotty and contorted, as by its own impatient strength’, Coleridge uses the ‘rotting sea’ to expose the dangerous, cumulative effect of

³²² Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ‘Fears in Solitude (1798)’, in *The Major Works including Biographia Literaria*, Oxford World’s Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 92-98 (p. 96).

³²³ “rot, v.” *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, December 2019, www.oed.com/view/Entry/254475. Accessed 30 December 2019.

³²⁴ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Entry 4397 [22.73], f50v, March 1818, in *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge 1808-1819: Entries 3232-4504*, Volume 3 Text, ed. by Kathleen Coburn (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973).

³²⁵ William Empson, ‘Milton and Bentley’, in *Some Versions of Pastoral* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1935), pp. 149-191 (p. 188).

philosophical and poetic thought, gesturing towards a defeatist view of the artist and the natural world.³²⁶

No study of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* can elide discussion of Coleridge's infamous deployment of the ballad form, a feature which heightens generic self-consciousness to a point of concentrated and yet limitless anxiety. Since the ballad is a traditional oral phenomenon, its usage in these particular quatrains adds a certain dramatic, performative quality to the dark pastoral, characterising the subgenre's erratic, devilish personality. As Michael O'Neill has remarked, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* 'transforms the balladic genre, turning it into a vessel that carries an unprecedented freight of significance', reviving the form from its stalemate Broadside association.³²⁷ In popularising the dark pastoral through a conventional form, Coleridge transforms genre through verse. Heightening the demonic effect of the pastoral, Coleridge places metrical stresses on doing verbs ('looked', 'tried' and 'pray'), underscoring the mariner's desperation to flee the dark pastoral, even if only spiritually. No longer does pastoral embody the good and full life, it operates as the genre of divine angst.³²⁸ The mismatched rhyme in 'pray' and 'made', adhering to the ballad's *abcb* formation, demonstrates the futility of faith in this situation, with the 'I' collapsing under the strain of the dark pastoral's oppressive fog. God's salvation is nowhere to be found. Religious ineffectuality is reinforced by Coleridge's aversion to the ballad's trimeter and quatrameter lines, opting instead for two nine-foot metrical lines in the stanza's opening couplet. The dark pastoral has even managed to push the ballad stanza out of sync, throwing the mariner's rime into syllabic disarray. The intrusive 'wicked whisper' brings with it a horrible alliterative overtone, as the iambs entrap the relentless, evil dark pastoral within the quatrain. The closing simile, housed in a curtailed, monosyllabic trimeter line embodies the piercing quality of the dark pastoral with its cutting brevity, a complete contrast to the free-flowing blank verse of William Cowper's *The Task*. The line enacts the motion of the subgenre self-consciously draining any moisture or feeling from the mariner's being, alluding to a pastoral that functions in an almost vampiric capacity. The *b* rhyme of 'gusht' and

³²⁶ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'Biographia Literaria (1815-17): Chapter IV', in *The Major Works including Biographia Literaria*, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 158-482 (p. 200).

³²⁷ O'Neill, 'Coleridge's Genres', p. 6.

³²⁸ Empson, 'They That Have Power', p. 114.

‘dust’ captures the subgenre’s polar extremities, gesturing towards a more kinetic, robust and volatile genre. Through the ballad’s metrical arrangement, Coleridge rejects the restorative effect of nature and religion, leaving man to endure the dark pastoral in the absence of God.

Though steeped in the dark pastoral’s varying shades, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* does attempt to instil pastoral harmony, even if fleetingly. A pocket of pastoral musing occurs in Part V, when the ‘ghastly crew’ (*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, Part V, l. 340) arise to steer the ship, shortly before the ship eerily steers itself. At a superficial level, Coleridge lulls the reader into a false sense of security by introducing the presence of the skylark, one of his favoured pastoral birds of choice.³²⁹ In amidst the supernatural awe of the dead men’s song, the mariner reminisces:

Sometimes a-dropping from the sky
I heard the sky-lark sing;
Sometimes all little birds that are,
How they seemed to fill the sea and air
With their sweet jargoning!

And now ‘twas like all instruments,
Now like a lonely flute;
And now it is an angel’s song,
That makes the heavens be mute.

(*Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, Part V, l. 358-366)

The perversity of the self-conscious dark pastoral here reaches its climax, as although the mariner attributes a sweetness to the dead men’s song, he momentarily forgets that he is still suspended in a nightmare. Following the recollection of ‘sweet sounds’ (*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, Part V, l. 342), the presence of the skylark’s ‘sweet jargoning’ seems either a random narrative mishap or an attempt to instil pastoral harmony into what has proven to be a hellish episode. In either case, Coleridge forces the pastoral to ‘re-constitute its habit’, offsetting the beauty and quaintness of the skylarks’ singing with the weird, inverse melody of the dead men.³³⁰ Considering the

³²⁹ See also Coleridge’s ‘Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement’.

³³⁰ Gregory Leadbetter, ‘The Rime of the Ancient Mariner’, in *Coleridge and the Daemonic Imagination* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 163-182 (p. 179).

voices of these ‘little birds’ cease shortly after this episode, Coleridge’s insistence on traditional pastoral stirs up feelings of retrospective melancholia. The sibilance throughout these verses self-consciously alludes to a deceitful pastoral, one which is able to disguise itself through the beauty of skylarks, tricking both the mariner and the reader into an apparent calmness. Coleridge adds reflexivity to pastoral by changing the dynamics of the genre’s fascination with irony, using it instead as a deceptive façade to emphasise the dark pastoral’s dominating power. The shift in the second stanza, ‘And now ’twas like all instruments’, much like ‘The Eolian Harp’, offers little promise of pastoral accord, particularly with the possible reprisal of the ‘spectre-bark’ (*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, Part III, l. 202) floating in the ether. Defying specificity, it is unclear whether the ‘all’ refers to the dead men and the skylarks, or just the skylarks themselves, introducing yet another wave of uncertainty into pastoral. The sighting of the ‘lonely flute’ refutes any final attempt to instil pastoral harmony, exploiting the genre to exacerbate the mariner’s loneliness as the only human marooned in a supernatural world. Considering the chaos that this underworld has wreaked, the prospect of muting the heavens only adds to the degradation and despair of the poem. With God’s evident silence, muting the heavens seem to only reiterate the evil presence of the fiend in the dark pastoral’s grip.

Even as *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* draws to a close, Coleridge continues to detail the overwhelming hold of the self-conscious dark pastoral over the mariner, while also foregrounding the peril of creative acts. Devising a subgenre in the dark pastoral that characterises Coleridge’s affirmation in his *Notebooks* of 1821-1822, ‘Hell? but whence came the description of its Torments? From the imagination?’, the reader is privy to the dark pastoral’s haunting, gothic presence.³³¹ The psychological stain left by the dark pastoral is revealed in two short bursts in Parts VI and VII:

Like one, that on a lonesome road
Doth walk in fear and dread,
And having once turned round walks on,
And turns no more his head;
Because he knows a frightful fiend,

³³¹ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Entry 4846 [20.50], f45, 1821-1822, in *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge 1818-1826: Entries 4505-5471*, Volume 4 Text, ed. by Kathleen Coburn and Merton Christenson (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1990).

Doth close behind him tread.

(*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, Part VI, l. 446-451)

Since then, at an uncertain hour,

That agony returns:

And till my ghastly tale is told,

This heart within me burns.

(*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, Part VII, l. 582-585)

Releasing the pastoral from its ‘gaudiness and inane phraseology’, Coleridge crystallises his unique, self-conscious approach to the subgenre by shunning most, if not all, of the genre’s conventions.³³² The social, religious and aesthetic guises are exchanged for a subgenre that evokes ‘fear and dread’, one that walks with man, constantly intimidating him with the threat of its physical and psychological presence. Where pastoral once offered an escape from everyday worries, Coleridge refuses such a possibility. The dark pastoral now becomes an overbearing worry in itself. To ‘know’ a ‘frightful fiend’ suggests an intimacy, a close familiarity with the dark pastoral that goes beyond mere aesthetic familiarity, as has been demonstrated by the closeness of the mariner to the dark pastoral’s varying shades of antagonism. Coleridge’s conscious decision to expand his four-lined metrical arrangement to a sestet is a testament to the sustained, long-term effect of the dark pastoral as it smugly and rather unnecessarily distorts the poem’s stanzaic regularity. The *b* rhyme in ‘dread’/‘head’/‘tread’ reiterates the psychosomatic threat that the dark pastoral poses, with the head physically and literally trapped between present dread and the dark pastoral’s looming tread. As in ‘Kubla Khan’, Coleridge uncovers the lethal minefield that is the imagination, its spontaneity and unrestrained creativity a hazard to his blueprint of pastoral. Unlike its logical counterpart fancy, the imagination champions synthesis, allowing for the dark pastoral to return at any ‘uncertain hour’. The unpredictable nature of this subgenre brings with it an ‘agony’ of mental distress.

Imbuing the pastoral with a new psychological element enables Coleridge to push the genre beyond its conventional mode, ultimately challenging the idea that the pastoral

³³² William Wordsworth, ‘Advertisement to Lyrical Ballads (1798)’, in *The Major Works including The Prelude*, ed. by Stephen Gill, Oxford World’s Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 591-692 (p. 591).

purports a seamless ‘laminated vision’ of nature.³³³ Reworking the genre into a raw and exposed psychosomatic phenomenon, Coleridge self-consciously dramatizes the pastoral, individuating his version of the bucolic to frame the poet as a poetic and ideological explorer. *Christabel* features this type of self-conscious psychological pastoral. Often read through a gothic, moral or psychosexual framework, *Christabel* has not attracted much consideration of its generic innovativeness.³³⁴ Notwithstanding the poem’s overt supernaturalism, *Christabel* occupies an unusual space in the pastoral spectrum as a result of the unconventional relationship between Christabel and Geraldine. Coleridge displaces preconceived notions of platonic female friendship with his suggestive narrative, forcing the reader to confront new possibilities. The pastoral self-consciously reinforces this dissonance with its strange appearances, never committing to being exclusively pastoral or dark pastoral poem, but always blurring the boundaries of an undefined generic hinterland. Using the imaginative possibilities of myth, Coleridge forces the pastoral genre out of its comfort zone, choosing to omit the sweet harmonies of the swain. The natural world of *Christabel* is oddly transgressive, with the speaker nervously checking himself throughout and in between the pastoral’s appearances. As Claire B. May notes, ‘a certain unintelligibility remains, problems and ambiguities that challenge [the reader’s] abilities to understand the poem itself and, perhaps, even to understand [the reader’s] response to it’.³³⁵ These ambiguities are underpinned and exacerbated by Coleridge’s tense pastoral. Gesturing towards a type of poetic creation that is tormented as a result of constant self-questioning and disunity, Coleridge demonstrates the ongoing psychological complexity of artistic endeavour through his exploration of genre.

As Walter Jackson Bate has remarked, *Christabel* is a preternatural, and not a supernatural poem, exploring ‘not what is necessarily *above* nature...but only what is

³³³ Thomas McFarland, ‘Romantic Imagination, Nature and the Pastoral Ideal’, in *Coleridge’s Imagination: Essays in Memory of Pete Laver*, ed. by Richard Gravil, Lucy Newlyn and Nicholas Roe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 5-21 (p. 13).

³³⁴ See for example, Arthur H. Nethercot, ‘Coleridge’s “Christabel” and Lefanu’s “Carmila”’, *Modern Philology*, 47.1 (1949) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/435571>> [Accessed 15 January 2020], Jonas Spatz, ‘The Mystery of Eros: Sexual Inhibition in Coleridge’s “Christabel”’, *PMLA*, 90.1 (1975) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/461353>> [Accessed 16 January 2020] and Karen Swann, ‘“Christabel”: The Wandering Mother and the Enigma of Form’, *Studies in Romanticism*, 23.4 (1984) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/25600515>> [Accessed 15 January 2020].

³³⁵ Claire B. May, ‘“Christabel” and Abjection: Coleridge’s Narrative in Process/on Trial’, *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 36.4 (1997) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/451067>> [Accessed 15 January 2020] (p. 699).

outside the ordinary course of it or inexplicable by ordinary means'.³³⁶ Read in the light of *Christabel*'s transgressive pastoral, the statement exemplifies the inexplicable sense of something being amiss, distinguishing the poem from the dystopian *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. In *Christabel* Coleridge returns the pastoral back to land, but in doing so, emphasises a more 'carnal, worldly reality'.³³⁷ Where the mariner exploits the pastoral to demonstrate the bleakness of his own imagination, in *Christabel* Coleridge suggests a more viable version of pastoral in the context of the medieval ballad. The poet etches a nervous tension into the genre, creating an uneasy atmosphere that haunts the poem with its subtle but malevolent presence. Much like 'Kubla Khan', the pastoral is widely diffused in the background of *Christabel*, emerging into view at key points for emphasis and effect. The first of these emphases is exhibited in the anxious opening of the poem:

Is the night chilly and dark?
 The night is chilly, but not dark.
 The thin gray cloud is spread on high,
 It covers but not hides the sky.
 The moon is behind, and at the full;
 And yet she looks both small and dull.
 The night is chill, the cloud is gray:
 'Tis a month before the month of May,
 And the Spring comes slowly up this way.

(*Christabel*, Part I, l. 14-22)

Though critics often appreciate Coleridge's deployment of the Gothic in these lines, there is little scholarly attention to the presence and compelling power of the pastoral.³³⁸ Coleridge's reflexive pastoral establishes and sustains the strange atmosphere of *Christabel*, producing what Christian La Cassagnère refers to as a 'ghost-text, hovering as it does between presence and absence, between existence and

³³⁶ Walter Jackson Bate, "'The Ancient Mariner,'" "Christabel," and "Kubla Khan"', in *Coleridge* (London: Macmillan, 1969), pp. 55-84 (p. 66).

³³⁷ Edward Dramin, "'Amid the Jagged Shadows", Christabel and the Gothic Tradition', *The Wordsworth Circle*, 13.4 (1982) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/24041602>> [Accessed 15 January 2020] (p. 225).

³³⁸ See for example, Edward Dramin, "'Amid the Jagged Shadows", Christabel and the Gothic Tradition', *The Wordsworth Circle*, 13.4 (1982) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/24041602>> [Accessed 15 January 2020] and Christian La Cassagnère, 'The Strangeness of "Christabel"', *The Wordsworth Circle*, 32.2 (2001) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/24044790>> [Accessed 15 January 2020].

virtuality'.³³⁹ Pre-empting the dire fate of *Christabel*, the poet exchanges the bloom of a glorious summer's day for the dark eeriness of night-time, exploring the pastoral that we do not usually see: the nocturnal pastoral. Here we are privy to darkness, coldness and a 'gray cloud', and yet there appears to be nothing overtly menacing for the scene to be classified as dark pastoral, nor anything beautifully laminated to be pastoral. However, there is something calculatedly odd at work. The stanza opens with a question-answer sequence, establishing two conventional terms associated with midnight, 'chilly' and 'dark'. As La Cassagnère points out, Coleridge quickly disassociates these terms, with the second line observing a 'potent rhetoric of unrealisation'.³⁴⁰ Rather than simply 'heighten suspense' as George Watson argues, this 'unrealisation' reveals a new form of genre, in that *Christabel* from its very onset champions a pastoral that is ambivalent and unanticipated.³⁴¹ As H. W. Piper has argued, the ambiguity of the poem's natural setting mingles 'darkness with moonlight and glimmerings', self-consciously creating a new series of pastoral qualities attributed to the natural world of the night.³⁴² The 'temporal confusion' of the poem's opening, combined with the allusion to there being some form of light ('The night is chilly, but not dark') suggests a pastoral that seeks to disrupt the norm, upsetting the natural order of the ecosystem with its preternatural agency.³⁴³ Circumventing the greenery and visibility of the daytime pastoral, *Christabel* suggests a new theory of genre that relies upon an ominous and indeterminate twilight setting.

The pastoral's newly acquired instability also operates as a metaphor for Coleridge's ongoing poetic and creative anxieties that were particularly rife during the late 1790s. Constantly tormented by the potential of his own complex imagination, the poet's neurosis and self-doubts persisted in the most relentless of ways, so much so that he refers to himself in a Notebook entry of 1803 as a '*Tantalus*'.³⁴⁴ Noting that Coleridge 'could not carry enough of his ideas to completion; he was always beginning some

³³⁹ La Cassagnère, 'The Strangeness of "Christabel"', p. 84.

³⁴⁰ La Cassagnère, 'The Strangeness of "Christabel"', p. 85.

³⁴¹ George Watson, 'Christabel', in *Coleridge the Poet* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), pp. 105-115 (p. 113).

³⁴² H. W. Piper, 'The Disunity of Christabel and the Fall of Nature', *Essays in Criticism*, 28.3 (1978) <<https://doi.org/10.1093/eic/XXVIII.3.216>> [Accessed 30 January 2020] (p. 217).

³⁴³ May, "'Christabel' and Abjection: Coleridge's Narrative in Process/on Trial", p. 701.

³⁴⁴ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Entry 1609 [21.369], f471, October 1803, in *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge 1794-1804: Entries 1-1842*, Volume 1 Text, ed. by Kathleen Coburn (London: Routledge, 1957).

new production', his work always displays a level of fragmentation and disunity, and *Christabel* is no exception to this rule.³⁴⁵ Not only did Coleridge complete the two parts separately (1797, 1800), he also failed to finish the poem, leaving him in grave doubts about his own poetic power. The transgressive pastoral of *Christabel*, with its indeterminacy, repeatedly spotlights this sense of incompleteness and inadequacy, drawing attention to Coleridge's aversion to poetic and psychological closure. The remainder of the stanza showcases this disorder through its repeated insistence on pastoral contradictions. Speculating upon the weather and the sky, Coleridge self-consciously splices aspects of the pastoral with the dark pastoral's malevolence, beginning with the 'thin gray cloud'. Unlike the cloud in 'The Nightingale' which completely conceals the moon, the cloud in *Christabel* rather ominously 'covers but not hides the sky'. This part concealment, part revelatory function adds a duplicitous quality to the cloud, but also suggests some scope for light infiltrating the scene. Similarly, the moon, 'behind, and at the full', appears to be 'both small and dull'.³⁴⁶ Diluting the potential supernatural, haunting presence of the moon, Coleridge self-consciously diminishes its stature as the night-time equivalent of the sun. The nervous repetition of 'The night is chill, the cloud is gray', before the allusion to Spring suggests that this unhinged pastoral is still stuck in winter, stagnating the genre with the stark iambic tetrameter line.

Coleridge's unconventional pastoral formula continues to play out during and after *Christabel* and Geraldine's much anticipated acquaintance. After stealing to the other side of the oak tree, *Christabel* recounts seeing a 'damsel bright, / Drest in a silken robe of white, / That shadowy in the moonlight shone' (*Christabel*, Part I, l. 58-60). Fusing the angelic vulnerability of the conventional pastoral maiden with an element of the dark pastoral's imagined supernaturalism, Coleridge creates a female figure in Geraldine who initially appears to be ethereal and yet subtly enigmatic. Two stanzas later however, these beatific terms are revised, as Geraldine is referred to as the 'lady

³⁴⁵ Kristine Dugas, 'Struggling with the Contingent: Self-conscious Imagination in Coleridge's Notebooks', in *Coleridge's Imagination: Essays in Memory of Pete Laver*, ed. by Richard Gravil, Lucy Newlyn and Nicholas Roe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 53-68 (p. 53).

³⁴⁶ This reading follows in the vein of Humphry House's assessment of *Christabel* which affirms that the 'cloud and moon are behaving oddly and ominously, just out of the way of ordinary behaviour, as if proportion is thrown out and normal vision perplexed'. See Humphry House, 'Kubla Khan, *Christabel* and *Dejection*', in *Coleridge: The Clarke Lectures 1951-52* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1969), pp. 114-141 (p. 124).

strange' (*Christabel*, Part I, l. 70). Overturning the luminous image of the bright damsel, Geraldine's modified title both darkens and mystifies her aesthetic and character, so much so that she becomes an emblem and extension of the transgressive pastoral. No longer does the genre subscribe to the view that women occupy subordinate or domestic roles, but this poem affirms a new shepherdess of high social standing, and now a seemingly undefined, changeable character. Geraldine's peculiar entrance also heightens nature's preternatural agency, amplifying the tension of the already unhinged pastoral atmosphere. The journey across the landscape to the anticipated safety of Sir Leoline's castle is tinged with an impending sense of doom, as the 'lovely lady, Christabel' (*Christabel*, Part I, l. 23) willingly joins forces with the mysterious Geraldine, volunteering herself as sacrificial bait. The praising of the 'Virgin all divine' (*Christabel*, Part I, l. 139) with its suggestion of a Catholic pastoral, seems a premature statement of personal relief on Christabel's part, eerily gesturing towards the possibility of more danger and fear to come. Oscillating between pastoral and dark pastoral conventions then, Coleridge iterates the role of the femme fatale with Geraldine, pre-empting the onset of natural and moral impropriety.

Having established his wayward transgressive heroine, Coleridge oddly redirects the narrative to contemplate the Baron's aforementioned 'toothless mastiff bitch' (*Christabel*, Part I, l. 7). Originally introduced as part of the poem's supernatural, cacophonous trio (cock, owls, mastiff), the dog is deployed for a second time to intentionally underscore the pastoral with a specific type of paranormal unrest related to the concept of transformation. Carefully modifying the stock features of his transgressive pastoral, Coleridge commits to producing a meta genre that flourishes because of internal revision and reinterpretation. Where in the poem's opening, the mastiff's appearance is marked by sixteen unnerving 'short howls, not over loud' (*Christabel*, Part I, l. 12), when it resurfaces during Christabel's rescue mission as guard keeper, it appears to be alone and asleep. The dog undergoes a shift in both behaviour and status. The transgressive pastoral, with its inclination towards unpredictable change, stirs and reveals a nocturnal watchdog who appears to act 'just

out of the way of ordinary behaviour', altered by the darkness of Geraldine's ominous presence.³⁴⁷ The speaker, in his characteristic tone of self-questioning, remarks:

Outside her kennel the mastiff old
Lay fast asleep, in moonshine cold.
The mastiff old did not awake,
Yet she an angry moan did make!
And what can ail the mastiff bitch?
Never till now she uttered yell
Beneath the eye of Christabel.
Perhaps it is the owlet's scritch:
For what can ail the mastiff bitch?

(*Christabel*, Part I, l. 145-153)

While Rosemary Maier reads the mastiff as a 'fearsome animal, rendered comic by its lack of teeth', the dog's presence more significantly demonstrates the extent of the transgressive pastoral's transformative qualities.³⁴⁸ Where in the poem's opening the mastiff contributes to the evocation of the tense, supernatural atmosphere, the dark pastoral genre allows it to assume a stronger role as instinctive ombudsman and narrative aide. Overseen by the moon's hostile light, the energetic, repetitive howls are exchanged for a single 'angry moan', the use of the passive voice helping to isolate this expression of disapproval in the middle of the line. Though the dog is asleep, this moan suggests a level of intuitive natural consciousness, reconsidering the aforementioned premise, 'right glad they were' (*Christabel*, Part I, l. 144). Geraldine's arrival has triggered an understated biological disturbance.³⁴⁹ Through the concept of transformation, Coleridge's choice of genre allows for a complete reassessment of *Christabel's* pastoral features, as well as a reconsideration of narrative assurance. We see the return of Coleridge's reflexive psychological pastoral. Experimenting with the psychosomatic once again, the speaker attempts to negate the obvious threat of both

³⁴⁷ Humphry House, 'Kubla Khan, *Christabel and Dejection*', in *Coleridge: The Clark Lectures 1951-52* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1969), pp. 114-141 (p. 124).

³⁴⁸ Rosemary Maier, 'The Bitch and the Bloodhound: Generic Similarity in "Christabel" and "The Eve of St. Agnes"', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 70.1 (1971) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/27705973>> [Accessed 15 January 2020] (p. 73).

³⁴⁹ This reading follows in Arthur H. Nethercot's reading which insists upon the dog having 'some occult power which responds immediately and spontaneously to the presence of any demonic or inimical element.' See Nethercot, 'Miscellanea, Natural and Supernatural', in *The Road to Tryermaine: Study of the History, Background, and Purposes of Coleridge's "Christabel"* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939), pp. 153-162 (p. 153).

Geraldine and the transgressive pastoral by asking ‘what can ail the mastiff bitch?’ These repetitions self-consciously reinforce the strength of the transformative, transgressive pastoral: we know that it is Geraldine causing such affliction. The subtlety of the ‘owlet’s scritch’, a tempered version of the owls ‘Tu—whit! Tu—whoo!’ (*Christabel*, Part I, l. 3), mirrors this notion of subdued but equally disconcerting natural transformation. With inevitable change at the genre’s centre, Coleridge reconfigures the pastoral through myth to produce the genus of ‘natural perversity’.³⁵⁰

Coleridge realises a new level of generic self-consciousness. Creating a genre that is defined as much by its complex psychological and philosophical modulations as its aesthetic, Coleridge constructs a more responsive pastoral that relies upon unforeseeable external factors in order to darken its guise. Using myth to incorporate one dissonant feature (Geraldine), the transgressive pastoral self-adjusts in the most unpredictable of ways, resisting the genre’s characteristic yearning for sustained irony and even humility. Coleridge forces the pastoral to evolve beyond its theoretical one-dimensional status, since he refuses to take ‘a limited life and pretend it is the full and normal one’.³⁵¹ The Lake Poet’s bucolic theory in *Christabel* is defined by its attention to alteration rather than complete transformation, offering readers a more comprehensive overview of life. This technique allows for a much more wholesome type of pastoral which can accommodate unique spots of time, retrospectively reflecting upon and reviewing events in the poem’s unseen history. In Part II for example, the speaker is able to take the opportunity to discuss Sir Leoline and Lord Roland’s former friendship, still taking heed of the transgressive pastoral’s errant philosophy:

Alas! they had been friends in youth;
 But whispering tongues can poison truth;
 And constancy lives in realms above;
 And life is thorny; and youth is vain;
 And to be wroth with one we love,
 Doth work like madness in the brain.

³⁵⁰ Bate, ‘“*The Ancient Mariner*,” “*Christabel*,” and “*Kubla Khan*”’, p. 73.

³⁵¹ Empson, ‘They That Have Power’, p. 114.

(*Christabel*, Part II, l. 408-413)

That Sir Leoline and Lord Roland had been friends suggests a human equivalent of the lost Golden Age, their amiable relationship in youth severed by the toxicity of ‘whispering tongues’. The distinction between the friendship and pastoral is made by the way in which Coleridge explicitly mentions the positive relationship that Sir Leoline and Lord Roland once possessed, whereas there is no allusion to any form of pastoral Arcadia. This is reiterated in the use of the tight *a* rhyme in ‘youth’/‘truth’. The self-conscious reference to life being ‘thorny’ then, with its strong overtone of the dark pastoral’s sadistic power, draws the transgressive pastoral into the heart of a personal relationship. The truth that two men found in youth is fragmented by an act of distress (hearsay) that causes a psychological and physical disturbance. Mirroring the subconscious shift in the mastiff’s behaviour, Sir Leoline and Lord Roland succumb to the transgressive pastoral’s disorderly effect. Noting the toxic power of the pastoral, one doubts the prospect of constancy living in the ‘realms above’, since God, if He exists, has permitted the fragmentation of both human and natural life. Insinuating the onset of a quasi-anti-pantheistic pastoral world, Coleridge creates a fissure in the benevolent strand of the genre, self-consciously suggesting a natural world that prides itself on being self-seeking.

Seeing how anger can alter the brain’s internal workings suggests the dangerous and affective power of the psychological, transgressive pastoral, but also reflects Coleridge’s turbulent mental struggle in terms of his pursuit of poetry. Genre takes on the poet’s creative psychosis, drawing *Christabel* into the fraught and hostile realm of the imagination through the medium of myth. The pastoral of *Christabel* takes on a new and personal contemplative role, guiding the genre away from its conventional state of idealism. The thorns that have infected both truth and the brain in *Christabel*, operate as a metaphor for the toxic effect of transgressive thought on natural and anthropological spaces for both the characters and Coleridge himself. Retuning the pastoral to foreground the personal crisis of the artist, Coleridge conveys the destructive effect of his own lethal self-whisperings, a toxin that jeopardised his faith in his own creative abilities. Genre, much like Coleridge’s artistic impetus, refuses to adhere to narrow and ‘formal geometric patterns’.³⁵² Instead, the pastoral strives to

³⁵² McKusick, ‘John Clare’s Version of Pastoral’, p. 81.

establish its own organic structures and ideologues. This premise obtains particular gravitas in Coleridge's deployment of animals. Owing to the myth narrative's lack of 'natural limitations of...sentient creatures', the pastoral of *Christabel* projects animals as an enigmatic natural phenomenon.³⁵³ The preternatural, transgressive pastoral, with its tendency towards mythical possibility, constantly seeks to question convention and tradition. The Bard Bracy's dream for example, experiments with reptile and bird:

I stooped, methought, the dove to take,
When lo! I saw a bright green snake
Coiled around its wings and neck,
Green as the herbs on which it couched,
Close by the dove's its head it crouched;
And with the dove it heaves and stirs,
Swelling its neck as she swelled hers!

(*Christabel*, Part II, l. 548-455)

The poet uses the fantastical nature of myth to establish an intimate relationship between a snake—an animal that Edward Dramin associates with an evil moral reality—and the dove, a symbol of pure Christian spirit.³⁵⁴ Melding a symbol of the supernatural dark pastoral with the pantheist pastoral, Coleridge self-consciously evokes an entirely new natural dynamic between two unlikely and opposing species of the animal kingdom. Housed in the space of a dream, Coleridge has the freedom to imagine this relationship in as unconventional a mode as possible, adding a third, even a fourth dimension to his pastoral. Amplifying the strangeness of natural encounter in Part II of *Christabel*, this pastoral-dream sequence adds reflexivity to genre by moving the snake image beyond its conventional wicked association.

Kathleen Wheeler has remarked that 'the snake and serpent are just as often symbols of wisdom as a good thing, and symbols of self-knowledge as the spiritual goal of humankind'.³⁵⁵ Notwithstanding the coiling and the bizarre mirroring of the dove's behaviour ('And with the dove's its head it crouched; / And with the dove it heaves and stirs'), the snake never exhibits any sign of malice. Unlike the snakes in Book X

³⁵³ Nohrnberg, *Myth: I. Myth and Society.*, p. 906.

³⁵⁴ Dramin, "Amid the Jagged Shadows", p. 225.

³⁵⁵ Kathleen M. Wheeler, 'Disruption and Displacement in Coleridge's "Christabel"', *The Wordsworth Circle*, 20.2 (1989) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/24042841>> [Accessed 15 January 2020] (p. 88).

of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, the snake in *Christabel* seeks unity with nature, never asserting its power as antagonist. To reconsider Wheeler's reading, the preternatural pastoral self-consciously attributes an unprecedented pacifistic quality to the snake, creating a new symbol: unconventional unity as the spiritual goal of the natural world. Coleridge is not insisting that snakes are harmless, but rather that they, like the dove, have the capacity for altruism. Speculating upon a non-farming animal allows for a new type of poetic creation, in that the poet is able to transcribe a pastoral that relies upon wild animals to demarcate new generic reference points. The snake's mirroring of the dove's behaviour, with its strange mimesis, seems a curious attempt to achieve oneness, the complementary white and green reiterating the purity and vibrancy of the natural world. Pastoral continuity is also marked by the matching of the 'bright green snake' with the green 'herbs in which it crouched', allowing the former to function as an extension of the latter. The strong effect of this inverted pastoral image is iterated in the Bard's subsequent confession, 'This dream it would not pass away— / It seems to live upon my eye!' (*Christabel*, Part II, l. 458-459). Read with reference to Coleridge's transgressive pastoral, the permanence of the snake-dove interaction renegotiates the terms of the 'return' in pastoral, stepping away from the idea of the lost Golden Age.³⁵⁶ That the Bard re-experiences this unconventional pastoral situation repeatedly suggests a new type of retreat, one which is defined by a preternatural agency as opposed to nostalgic and restorative ability. The Bard also has exclusive access to his own pastoral vision, taking the concept of universal access out of the genre. With its unique spin on animal relations and dreaming, *Christabel's* various shades of pastoral sometimes prioritise the individual over the collective experience.

Modernising the pastoral to operate as a tailored and inconsistent genre means that Coleridge refuses 'to hold, that every possible thought and image is traditional'.³⁵⁷ Even as *Christabel* progresses, Coleridge is always conscious of reinventing and redirecting his pastoral, never allowing for generic or poetic predictability. The opening couplet of Part II is particularly telling in relation to the concept of revision, with the lines, 'Each matin bell, the Baron saith, / Knells us back to a world of death'

³⁵⁶ Terry Gifford, 'Three Kinds of Pastoral', in *Pastoral* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 1-13 (p. 1).

³⁵⁷ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'Preface to *Christabel*', in *The Major Works including Biographia Literaria*, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 68.

(*Christabel*, Part II, l. 323-324), alluding to more than just the death of Sir Leoline's wife. Self-consciously relocating the pastoral from a generic medieval setting to Windermere, the morning bell symbolises the death of Part I's pastoral, pre-empting the onset of an adjusted version of the genre. It is in Part II where we see the evocation of the medieval transgressive pastoral embedded within the Lake District, with the mention of local landmarks such as Langdale Pike and Knorren Moor drawing the poem into Coleridge's world of 1797. Fusing an older period of history with the Cumbrian landscape, Coleridge blends past with present, as well as myth with reality, allowing the pastoral to transgress fixed conceptions of time and space. Sir Leoline's ensuing infatuation with Geraldine, Geraldine's serpentine glance and the Bard's bizarre dream are all fired by the preternatural dynamic implied by this spatially transgressive pastoral. The atmospheric pause which follows the repetitive knell intensifies the strength of consciousness in *Christabel*, signalling a new era in the poem's pastoral chronology:

The air is still! through mist and cloud
That merry peal comes ringing loud;
And Geraldine shakes off her dread,
And rises lightly from the bed;

(*Christabel*, Part II, l. 360-363)

Alerting the reader that 'The devil mocks the doleful tale / With a merry peal from Borodale' (*Christabel*, Part II, l. 358-359), we enter into the second phase of the transgressive pastoral's nonlinear journey. With the deriding devil at the genre's helm, Coleridge self-consciously reintroduces the satanic figure of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* into *Christabel*, observing a smug, rather than a grotesque and violent presence. The 'merry peal', laced with insincerity, awkwardly dominates the 'mist and cloud', its disconcerting happiness juxtaposed against the eerie stillness of the air. Just as the *Mariner's* devil knows how to row, *Christabel's* devil knows how to unsettle. Adding a strong grain of religious immorality to the pastoral, Coleridge wills the genre into defiance, pre-empting the awakening of Geraldine. There is a feeling that while Geraldine can shake off her own dread, she is about to wreak havoc on her saviours, with Christabel's grand confession 'Sure I have sinned!' (*Christabel*, Part II, l. 381) the first sign of moral incongruity. The angelic manner in which Geraldine 'rises lightly from the bed' is designed to lure readers into thinking we are dealing with a

fair pastoral maiden, and yet the ‘dread/bed’ rhyming couplet suggests quite the opposite.

H. W. Piper sees Geraldine ‘as representing the complex, dark-sided Nature of the setting’, a premise which gains traction in the stanzas following the Bard’s dream.³⁵⁸ Concentrating his efforts on resurrecting the serpent image, Coleridge turns the philanthropic snake metaphor completely on its head, no longer advocating for unity in the natural world. Pushing the notion of Geraldine as the transgressive shepherdess, the poet works outside of the boundaries of a pre-established metaphor, playing with the transgressive pastoral’s meta-imagery. Admitting a concord between animal and human, *Christabel* acquires an essence of the dark pastoral in its affinity of the snake with Geraldine, aligning two spirits of evil moral reality with one another. Where in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* the snakes appear to consistently embody the supernatural, in *Christabel* Coleridge manipulates the snake’s presence to amplify the terror and manipulation of the evil Geraldine. With an emphasis on sight and seeing, the speaker redoubles his pastoral efforts, capturing the trepidation of the dark pastoral through Geraldine’s dark and uncanny behaviour:

A snake’s small eye blinks dull and shy,
And the lady’s eyes they shrunk in her head,
Each shrunk up to a serpent’s eye,
And with somewhat of malice and more of dread,
At Christabel she looked askance!—

(*Christabel*, Part II, l. 583-587)

The use of the indefinite article earmarks the episode as separate to the snake-dove interlude, introducing an element of covert uncertainty through the ‘dull and shy’ blinking eye. The ‘bright green’ snake has dwindled to a microcosmic, isolated ‘small eye’, the intensity of the creature captured in the disturbing image of a motile optic. However, it is when Geraldine’s own eyes shrink to the size of a serpent’s eye that we see the true power of the metamorphic, transgressive pastoral reach its full potential. Not only does this image insinuate that Geraldine looks snakelike, the line ‘Each shrunk up to a serpent’s eye’ transforms woman into snake. Fusing the human and natural worlds, Coleridge allows the strange dynamic of the pastoral to infiltrate the

³⁵⁸ Piper, ‘The Disunity of Christabel and the Fall of Nature’, p. 222.

very being of *Christabel*'s antagonist, her demonic look 'of malice and more dread' an indication of Geraldine's complete submission to a darker moral philosophy. The infliction of a 'dizzy trance' (*Christabel*, Part II, l. 589) on Christabel externalises Geraldine's internal dark art, projecting the transgressive pastoral's wayward philosophy onto a peripheral object. Just as Geraldine looks 'askance' at Christabel, Coleridge forces his reader to look askance at any notion of the fair pastoral maiden. Through the union of the snake and Geraldine into one transgressive being, Coleridge inaugurates a new pastoral female lead who thrives off her status as a 'vivid, intense and often frightening' being.³⁵⁹ Geraldine's disruptive serpent-like nature, underscored by the self-conscious, unhinged pastoral, deforms the role of women in *Christabel*, rewriting new gender roles that see men as submissive and weak.

James McKusick comments that the 'historical development of the pastoral mode during the Romantic period entails more than simply an increased degree of "realism" in the depiction of scene landscapes'.³⁶⁰ Owing to Coleridge's inventive use of myth, 'Kubla Khan', *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and *Christabel* challenge the notion of a realist pastoral by fashioning three fictional, individual and self-conscious dark pastoral visions. Setting up narratives that redefine key generic axioms such as setting, the role of the swain and the purpose of poetry, Coleridge pushes poetic creation beyond the realms of the synthetic imagination. Engaging with his own debate around reason and understanding, the poet combines myth and pastoral to tease out a number of personal issues related to the role of the poet and the true potential of imaginative expression. Against Claude Lévi-Strauss's argument that mythical thought 'always progresses from the awareness of oppositions toward their resolution', Coleridge's self-conscious fashioning of dark, transgressive pastorals reveal the turmoil of the artist and the inability to discover and be content with resolution.³⁶¹ The artist can never achieve perfection or completion, rendering the generic notions of Arcadia, retreat and return, obsolete. Kubla's struggle to maintain a self-directed pastoral kingdom, the mariner's inability to cure himself of his dark pastoral experience and

³⁵⁹ Grevel Lindop, 'Romantic Poetry and the Idea of the Dream', *The Keats- Shelley Review*, 18.1 (2004) <<https://doi.org/10.1179/ksr.2004.18.1.20>> [Accessed 14 October 2019] (p. 21).

³⁶⁰ McKusick, 'John Clare's Version of Pastoral', p. 83.

³⁶¹ Claude-Lévi Straus, 'Chapter XI: The Structural Study of Myth', in *Structural Anthropology*, Volume 1 (New York: Basic Books, 1963) <<https://soth-alexanderstreet-com.sheffield.idm.oclc.org/cgi-bin/SOTH/hub.py?type=getdoc&docid=S10021413-D000012>> [Accessed 2 January 2021].

Christabel's exposure to the transgressive pastoral maiden, Geraldine, all tend towards a new dark generic vision. In refiguring the nostalgic pastoral, Coleridge boldly challenges the frameworks of John Milton, Christopher Marlowe and William Cowper, devising a self-conscious pastoral theory that provokes terror, sometimes in the most covert of ways. To create such a unique pastoral vision not only shows Coleridge's range, but also his audacity as he articulates his creative frustration through a dynamic, obstructive and complex genre.

Chapter Four: The Excursion and Suffering

In his chapter ‘Flowing and Reflecting’ Brandon C. Yen remarks, ‘*The Excursion* remains fraught with tensions that resist final reconciliation’.¹ Intended to form Part II of Wordsworth’s longer unfinished project *The Recluse, The Excursion* (1814) dwells in a state of despondency, never able to ease completely the reader’s experience of the dull, melancholic ache that ebbs and flows throughout its nine books.² This despondency derives from Wordsworth’s deployment of dark pastoral verse, a formal tactic that elucidates the harrowing tales of various marginalised solitaries. Using the pastoral to explore the devastating effect of the agricultural, French and Industrial Revolutions on rural communities, Wordsworth writes an epic that focuses on both individual and collective suffering. Throughout each book the poet uses the dark pastoral to reveal different personal hardships, lingering upon the toil of isolation, absence and wandering with no clear destination. With its rich descriptive verse, *The Excursion* evolves the pastoral through its exploration of various permutations of loss. Through his episodic insistence on dark pastoral musing, Wordsworth’s characters pine for an unfallen version of England rather than a prehistoric Greek Golden Age, expressing their pain about the loss of family centred countryside living. Reliant on a new ‘form doomed to experience emotional pain in a physical way’, *The Excursion* exposes the dark consequences of economic prosperity and national crisis, presenting its reader with an extended study of deep human suffering and pain.³ Departing from seminal studies undertaken by Judson Stanley Lyon, Alison Hickey and Sally Bushell who maintain that the poem ‘falls well within established forms’, this chapter will argue for a new, experimental type of epic which recentres itself around the pastoral rather than the dramatic, focusing upon Books I, IV and VIII to reveal Wordsworth’s subtle reinvention of genre.⁴

¹ Brandon C. Yen, ‘Flowing and Reflecting’, in *The Excursion and Wordsworth’s Iconography* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2018), pp. 256-290 (p. 285).

² William Wordsworth, ‘*The Excursion*’, in *The Excursion and The Recluse*, HEB Humanities E-Books (Tirril: Humanities E-books, LLP, 2014), pp. 84-353. Please note that all further references to *The Excursion* will be quoted from this edition.

³ Michael O’Neill, ‘Ebb and Flow in *The Excursion*’, *The Wordsworth Circle* (“*The Excursion*”: *A Bicentenary Celebration*), 45.2 (2014) <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/24045887>> [Accessed 09 February 2018] (p. 98).

⁴ Judson Stanley Lyon, ‘Sources and Analogues’, in *The Excursion* (London: Yale University Press, 1970), pp. 29-60 (p. 30). In the preface to *The Excursion* Wordsworth states that in the poem, ‘the intervention of Characters speaking is employed, and something of a dramatic form adopted’ which has formed the basis of Sally Bushell’s study. See William Wordsworth, ‘Preface’, in *The Excursion*

Matthew Arnold, S. T. Coleridge, William Hazlitt and Francis Jeffrey's negative evaluations of *The Excursion* and particularly its 'failure of dramatic representation' triggered a disdain towards the poem that has persisted well beyond the nineteenth century.⁵ For this reason, *The Prelude* has often eclipsed *The Excursion*, with the latter earning relatively little attention from scholars because of the perception that its subject matter is tame and, at times, dry. Though Alison Hickey and Sally Bushell have argued for it as an ambivalent poem that is deeply rooted in the dramatic, they have side lined discussion of Wordsworth's use of epic and pastoral, viewing *The Excursion* as a rendition of various ideological narrative voices.⁶ Brandon C. Yen's more recent work *The Excursion and Wordsworth's Iconography* recovers a small amount of ground in terms of genre, tangentially touching upon aspects of pastoral through allusions to Arcadia and *Paradise Lost*, but its focus remains *The Excursion*'s pre-1789 literary and pictorial influences. But it is Wordsworth's desire to re-experience loss through pastoral which allows *The Excursion* to achieve its status as what Michael O'Neill terms a 'masterpiece'.⁷ Journeying through both a fraught natural and emotional landscape, Wordsworth challenges Greg Garrard's view that pastoral 'need not always be nostalgic, but may be utopian and proleptic' through his exploration of the darker aspects of the human condition.⁸ Shedding any form of consistent utopia, Wordsworth prioritises his new, localised British pastoral, reconfiguring an entirely unique generic framework that projects human trauma onto the natural landscape. Owing to Wordsworth's inventive use of blank verse, suffering and pain are encouraged to linger in the text, since the verse form actively discourages 'symmetries and closures'.⁹ Aided by an irregular rhyme scheme and oscillating

and *The Recluse*, HEB Humanities E-Books (Tirril: Humanities E-books, LLP, 2014), pp. 85-86 (p. 86).

⁵ Sally Bushell, 'Impertinent Babbling: Hazlitt and Jeffrey', in *Re-Reading The Excursion* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), pp. 27-33 (p. 33).

⁶ Alison Hickey, *Impure Conceits: Rhetoric and Ideology in Wordsworth's 'Excursion'* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997) and Sally Bushell, *Re-Reading The Excursion* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002).

⁷ O'Neill, 'Ebb and Flow in *The Excursion*', p. 93

⁸ Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2011) ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/leicester/detail.action?docID=738705> [Accessed 10 December 2019] (p. 42).

⁹ T. V. F Brogan, R. B. Shaw, E. R. Weismiller, G. T. Wright, *Blank Verse.*, in *The Princeton Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. by Roland Greene, et al., Fourth Edition (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012) ProQuest Ebook Central <<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/leicester/detail.action?docID=913846> [Accessed 18 April 2022], pp. 145-150 (p. 146).

metrical registers, blank verse gives Wordsworth the breadth and depth to explore the full experience of grief, capturing the non-linear trajectory of the bereavement process.

The height of this experience is felt most poignantly in Book I, ‘The Wanderer’, in perhaps the most affecting passage of the poem. Book I sees Wordsworth focus upon the traumatic narrative of Margaret, a housewife abandoned by her husband Robert, and provides readers with an initial foray into the dark pastoral milieu. Preceded by the speaker and the Wanderer’s meeting, the tragic demise of Margaret is pre-empted by an overgrown, lacklustre pastoral: a ‘garden-ground run wild’ (*The Excursion*, Book I, l. 486), ‘gooseberry trees that shot in long lank slips’ (*The Excursion*, Book I, l. 488) and ‘currants hanging from their leafless stems / In scanty strings’ (*The Excursion*, Book I, l. 489-490). Exhibiting a natural landscape that is submerged in decay and disarray, Wordsworth refuses to view nature as an aesthetic ‘organic whole’ but rather a disjointed, rotting entity that mirrors both Margaret and the Wanderer’s dejection.¹⁰ The pessimistic speech that follows this description embeds death as a vital theme of *The Excursion*’s pastoral, underscoring the text with a strong note of melancholia. Noting the death of Wordsworth’s children Thomas and Catherine in 1812, as well as the deterioration of the poet’s creative relationship with Coleridge, the Wanderer’s words retain a personal, as well as a narratorial significance:

“I see around me here

Things which you cannot see: we die, my Friend,
Nor we alone, but that which each man loved
And prized in his peculiar nook of earth
Dies with him, or is changed; and very soon
Even of the good is no memorial left.”

(*The Excursion*, Book I, l. 501-506)

Reconfiguring the pastoral song into an elegiac lament, Wordsworth reveals the sadness of both human and non-human death, noting that ‘Even of the good is no memorial left’. A once thriving rural society has fallen completely, which leads the Wanderer to contemplate the bleak prospect of human mortality. In the case of Margaret, the Wanderer’s speech also alludes to the degeneration of the housewife’s

¹⁰ Timothy Morton, ‘Romanticism and the Environmental Subject’, in *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2009), pp. 79-139 (p. 109).

beloved cottage, her ‘peculiar nook of earth’ neglected because of her own relentless grief. Indeed, ‘solitude...is not a singular thing’.¹¹ As Peter Manning summarises, ‘unable to reconcile herself to her loss, Margaret becomes trapped in her past, her dwindling commitment to life manifesting itself to the slow disintegration of her surroundings’.¹² With the cottage functioning as an extension of Margaret’s disconnection from life, Wordsworth traces a different form of grief through the process of physical decay. The loss of home is a classic pastoral mainstay, so its inclusion in *The Excursion* provides a stable generic reference point to Virgil’s First Eclogue. However, where in Virgil the reader sees the ‘beauty of the home...through the eyes of loss’, in Wordsworth’s pastoral we never see Margaret’s cottage in a wholesome state.¹³ The presentness of the dark pastoral captures the cottage at a specific stage of ruin, allowing the reader to experience suffering concurrently while only being able to imagine the cottage in its pre-lapsed condition.

The decision to focus on the cottage image is not atypical of the period, since ‘in post-1789 Britain, trees and cottages became ‘symptoms’ of longing for rootedness and belonging’.¹⁴ However, as in Robert Southey’s *English Eclogue VI: The Ruined Cottage*, Wordsworth’s decaying cottage symbolises a lack of stability and homeliness, operating as a permanent emblem of a holistic type of loss. Though this overarching type of loss reveals the ‘traumatic effects of rural depopulation’, it more significantly shows how grief permeates every aspect of human life.¹⁵ Through the loss of home Wordsworth also uncovers Margaret’s loss of a husband and companion, her role as a wife, as well as Robert’s thriving industry. The negative impact that economic prosperity had on the domestic sphere is galvanised in the image of the ruined cottage, countering William Empson’s assertion that pastoral ‘is not dependent on a system of class exploitation’.¹⁶ In *The Excursion*, the labouring class suffer

¹¹ Willard L. Sperry, ‘Nature’, in *Wordsworth’s Anti-Climax* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1935), pp. 165-184 (p. 126).

¹² Peter J. Manning, ‘Wordsworth, Margaret, and the Pedlar’, *Studies in Romanticism*, 15.2 (1976) <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/25600008>> [Accessed 03 November 2017] (p. 209).

¹³ Laurence Lerner, ‘On Nostalgia’, in *The Uses of Nostalgia: Studies in Pastoral Poetry* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1972), pp. 41-62 (p. 41).

¹⁴ Brendon C. Yen, ‘Introduction’, in *The Excursion and Wordsworth’s Iconography* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2018), pp. 1-36 (p. 13).

¹⁵ James Mulvihill, ‘The Last Woman in Wordsworth’s *Excursion*’, *English Studies*, 95.8 (2014) <<https://doi.org/10.1080/0013838X.2014.946802>> [Accessed 14 January 2020] (p. 879).

¹⁶ William Empson, ‘Proletarian Literature’, in *Some Versions of Pastoral* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1935), pp. 2-23 (p. 6).

brutally and the dark pastoral depends upon the exploitation of this demographic in order to thrive. The cottage thus functions as a repository for the loss of home, with the decaying dark pastoral at the helm of this endeavour:

The honeysuckle, crowding round the porch,
 Hung down in heavier tufts: and that bright weed,
 The yellow stone-crop, suffered to take root
 Along the window's edge, profusely grew,
 Blinding the lower panes. I turned aside,
 And strolled into her garden. It appeared
 To lag behind the season, and had lost
 Its pride of neatness. From the border lines
 Composed of daisy and resplendent thrift,
 Flowers straggling forth had on those paths encroached
 Which they were used to deck:—Carnations, once
 Prized for surpassing beauty, and no less
 For the peculiar pains they had required,
 Declined their languid heads—without support.
 The cumbrous bind-weed, with its wreaths and bells,
 Had twined about her two small rows of pease,
 And dragged them to the earth.

(*The Excursion*, Book I, l. 748-764)

Though Sally Bushell argues that as 'a dramatic text, then, the poem is not absolutely stable in terms of a distinct voice', she neglects to note how epic and pastoral come together in order to convey the message of suffering.¹⁷ Hybridising two genres, Wordsworth elevates the pastoral to the heroic heights of epic, suggesting that the decay of a cottage is equally as valuable subject matter as the growth of the poet's mind. Like Oliver Goldsmith's *The Deserted Village* Wordsworth uses the dark pastoral to encourage his reader to consider altruism as opposed to egotism, devising an epic in *The Excursion* that sees suffering as a principal condition. When the reader sees how the honeysuckle hanging in 'heavier tufts' obstructs the porch, there is a deep sense of sadness at the implication of aesthetic negligence and lack of domestic pride.

¹⁷ Sally Bushell, 'In Which They Resemble Each Other: Textual Transposition', in *Re-Reading The Excursion* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), pp. 68-73 (p. 73).

Denying the genre of its conventional fascination with irony, Wordsworth proceeds to show the full extent of the decay on the cottage's exterior.¹⁸ The stonecrop which takes root along the window's edge shows how an unruly feature of the natural world has penetrated the unnatural space of the cottage, stubbornly rooting itself and growing profusely. Domestic harmony has been compromised as nature transforms into an oppressive, overbearing force. That the stone-crop blinds the lower panes also suggests a much more vindictive pastoral where the natural world is in conflict with itself. One part of nature is deliberately obstructing another, with the vegetation preventing natural light—a lifegiving source—from entering the cottage. In doing so, the warmth of this domestic space is effaced. The dark pastoral, with its destructive grip, mirrors the disorderly and inhibitive nature of grief, converting emotional trauma into physical decay, destroying the serenity of the 'green world of field and forest'.¹⁹

The garden also displays signs of gross negligence, throwing into question Alison Hickey's notion that *The Excursion* seeks to 'regulate errancy'.²⁰ Wordsworth chooses to deliberately disrupt the pastoral's seasonal chronology (the garden appeared to 'lag behind the season') to demonstrate the extent to which human anguish has stilted nature's cyclicity. Just as Margaret loses her 'pride of neatness', so does the garden. To reinforce this message, the Wanderer provides us with a happier memory of Robert tending to his garden as a pastime:

...They who passed
 At evening, from behind the garden fence
 Might hear his busy spade, which he would ply,
 After his daily work, until the light
 Had failed, and every leaf and flower were lost
 In the dark hedges.

(*The Excursion*, Book I, l. 558-563)

¹⁸ William Empson, 'They That Have Power', in *Some Version of Pastoral* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1935), pp. 89-115 (p. 111).

¹⁹ James McKusick, 'John Clare's Version of Pastoral', *The Wordsworth Circle*, 30.2 (1999) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/24044700>> [Accessed 10 December 2019] (p. 80).

²⁰ Alison Hickey, "'The Mine of Real Life": Economies of Narrative', in *Impure Conceits: Rhetoric and Ideology in Wordsworth's 'Excursion'* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), pp. 69-104 (p. 71).

This pastoral memory conveys a man who even after his ‘daily work’ still chooses to maintain his garden, evoking a flavour of the Golden Age, the glorious past.²¹ The light, conversational tone conjures up an aura of bounteous contentment, with the blank verse carrying the pleasant, minimal detail through the lines with ease. The ‘busy spade’ implies steady and enthusiastic working, a far cry from the straggling flowers that now confront the Wanderer. The carnations, ‘once / Prized for their surpassing beauty’ can be envisaged in Robert’s bygone blooming garden, and yet their boldness and vivacity are completely lost: they now decline ‘their languid heads—without support’. The dark pastoral displays another instance of ‘ecological reciprocity’ to human behaviour, with the carnations obtaining Margaret’s depressive feelings, declining their heads in grief.²² The ensuing twisting alliterative ‘w’ in ‘bind-weed’, ‘wreaths’, ‘twined’ and ‘rows’ reinforces the slow process of emotional and physical decay, embodying the unsteady process of trauma. The image of rows of pease being dragged to earth terminates this turbulent dark pastoral episode, the verb ‘dragged’ brutally enacting the motion of life being painfully seized. The truncation of the metrical lines’ regular iambic pentameter (lines 758 to 763) to the terser iambic trimeter of line 764 reiterates the rapid decline of life dwindling to a close. Through metre, Wordsworth converts the pastoral from being a space of infinite imaginative play into a restrictive and death inducing genre. It is the dark pastoral which then anticipates the onset of more ‘calamitous years’ (*The Excursion*, Book I, l. 580) for Margaret.

The solemn figure of Margaret, described as a ‘Woman of a steady mind, / Tender and deep in her excess of love’ (*The Excursion*, Book I, l. 544-545) is integral to the exploratory nature of Wordsworth’s representation of loss in Book I. Her physical and emotional decline offers an opportunity for sympathy as the Wanderer recounts the shift from a woman of glorious warmth to the ‘Last human Tenant of these ruined Walls’ (*The Excursion*, Book I, l. 951). Though Margaret’s story is relayed through the Wanderer and framed by the poet speaker, her role in this pastoral tale is highly significant in terms of considering the genre. Instating a woman as one of the poem’s

²¹ Laurence Lerner, ‘Arcadia and Utopia’, in *The Uses of Nostalgia: Studies in Pastoral Poetry* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1972), pp. 63-80 (pp. 63-67).

²² Jonathan Farina, “‘The Excursion’ and ‘The Surfaces of Things’”, *The Wordsworth Circle*, 45.2 (2014) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/24045888>> [Accessed 1 May 2021] (p. 100).

key characters shifts the focus away from the male shepherd swain, the conventional narrator and participant of the pastoral song. Beyond simply providing an opportunity for ‘philosophical dialogue’, Wordsworth uses Margaret to specifically foreground maternal suffering and female hardship.²³ Altering the pastoral to accommodate the story of the figure that we do not usually see—the wife at home— Wordsworth transforms loss into a domestic and feminine sentiment. As Peter J. Manning concludes, ‘Margaret’s decline is an exemplum extended to illustrate the proper attitude to human suffering’.²⁴ Redefining what it means for the pastoral character to move ‘among fundamental truths’, Wordsworth recharges the pastoral with a new purpose: the process and effect of grief from the perspective of a woman.²⁵ The success of this renegotiation relies upon introducing Margaret as a stable character and then charting her gradual decline to death. When the housewife is first introduced to us, the Wanderer refers to her in an affectionate, paternal manner, speaking of her as a daughter. The heartfelt confession which follows, ‘I loved her / As my own child’ (*The Excursion*, Book I, l. 531) reiterates this closeness, ultimately allowing the reader to view Margaret’s death as a personal loss for the Wanderer too. His sympathy is detailed in the earliest description of Margaret as the docile, loving pastoral maiden:

Many a Passenger

Hath blessed poor Margaret for her gentle looks,
 When she upheld the cool refreshment drawn
 From that forsaken Spring; and no one came
 But he was welcome; no one went away
 But that it seemed she loved him.

(*The Excursion*, Book I, l. 533-538)

The word ‘poor’ here elicits a certain amount of sympathy, and when combined with Margaret’s ‘gentle looks’ and unerring, unconditional love, posits the widow as someone whose imminent suffering is undeserved. The repetition of ‘no one’ and the anaphoric ‘But’ reiterates Margaret’s giving nature despite the apparent lack of incoming and outgoing company. However, Wordsworth is also keen to link Margaret with the dark pastoral, even if implicitly. The ‘forsaken Spring’, though a source of

²³ Sally Bushell, ‘Ventriloquizing Through Another Man’s Mouth: Coleridge’, in *Re-Reading The Excursion* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), pp. 23-27 (p. 26).

²⁴ Manning, ‘Wordsworth, Margaret and the Pedlar’, p. 207.

²⁵ William Empson, ‘The Beggar’s Opera’, in *Some Versions of Pastoral* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1935), pp. 210-250 (p. 210).

refreshment, simultaneously represents pastoral desertion; it sits isolated within the line as well as within the imagined natural landscape. At a subtle level, the spring's presence functions as a prophetic warning of Margaret's fate. Associating the natural world with Margaret's impending neglect, pastoral operates as an internally prospective genre rather than simply a retrospective, reflective mode.

Subsequent references to Margaret's emotional toil and relentless melancholy are often linked to pastoral. After overcoming two seasons of poor harvest and then Robert's depression, Margaret is cruelly subject to abandonment. During her conversation with the Wanderer, she bitterly weeps over her husband's desertion, speaking with a 'face of grief / Unutterably helpless' (*The Excursion*, Book I, l. 688-689). The Wanderer notes that it was 'the time of early spring' (*The Excursion*, Book I, l. 723), again reading nature's cyclicity alongside his narrative of pain. Though spring is a period associated with regeneration and growth, it does not seem to encourage any emotional recovery or consolation. Regardless of the season, Margaret's suffering persists. When the Wanderer leaves the humble countrywoman 'busy with her garden tools' (*The Excursion*, Book I, l. 724), a concerted effort is being made to return to normality. With the echo of Robert's 'busy spade', Wordsworth suggests an attempt to revive conventional pastoral nostalgia by evoking a once familiar domestic routine. Yet when the Wanderer returns to Margaret's cottage in the summer, this wish is denied. The uncharacteristic glumness of the season is conveyed in the allusion to the dark pastoral: 'Deeper shadows fell / From these tall elms' (*The Excursion*, Book I, l. 783-784), a foreboding prelude to Margaret's dishevelled arrival. Much like the profound shadows, Margaret exhibits physical signs of withdrawal, 'Her face was pale and thin, her figure too / Was changed' (*The Excursion*, Book I, l. 786-787). Working through her tribulations with 'preternatural slowness', the Wanderer proceeds to relay Margaret's physical decline:²⁶

Her eyelids drooped, her eyes were downward cast;
And, when she at her table gave me food,
She did not look at me. Her voice was low,
Her body was subdued. In every act

²⁶ Geoffrey Hartman, 'The Excursion', in *Wordsworth's Poetry 1787-1814* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1971), pp. 292-323 (p. 295).

Pertaining to her house affairs, appeared
 The careless stillness of a thinking mind
 Self-occupied; to which all outward things
 Are like an idle matter. Still she sighed,
 But yet no motion of the breast was seen,
 No heaving of the heart. While by the fire
 We sate together, sighs came on my ear,
 I knew not how, and hardly whence they came.

(*The Excursion*, Book I, l. 827-838)

Following the deeply traumatic confession, ‘I have slept / Weeping, and weeping I have waked’ (*The Excursion*, Book I, l. 804-805), the pastoral suddenly acquires a terrible ‘haunting inwardness’ through the evocation of a gaunt and jaded Margaret.²⁷ Where William Empson remarks that in pastoral ‘man ought to be treated as if they had not yet fallen’, Wordsworth seeks to expose man’s emotional deterioration in full.²⁸ The fair, unseen pastoral maiden transforms into a very visible, exhausted presence; no longer are we in the realm of *Michael*’s ‘woman of a stirring life’ (l. 83).²⁹ The pastoral’s vivacity is completely dispelled by Margaret’s lack of energy, with her drooping, downward cast eyes now rejecting any possibility of optimism. Epitomising the dejected spirit of the dark pastoral, the depressed figure of Margaret signals the dawn of a new pastoral woman defined by suffering. Though she gives the Wanderer food, Margaret’s lack of eye contact indicates active disengagement with her fellow rural dweller. Silently breaking the pastoral code which sees man as ‘dependent on society’, Margaret seeks to isolate herself from any form of communal bonding.³⁰ This lack of proactivity is reiterated in the word ‘stillness’, a word which brings the blank verse to a deliberate standpoint with its implication of motionlessness. Yet the ‘thinking mind / Self-occupied’, with its continuous activity, seems uncomfortably juxtaposed against such ‘careless stillness’. Despite mechanically tending to her ‘house affairs’, the contradictory state of Margaret’s mind points

²⁷ John F. Danby, ‘Wordsworth and ‘Nature’’, in *The Simple Wordsworth: Studies in the Poems 1797-1807* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968), pp. 89-127, (p. 109).

²⁸ William Empson, ‘Milton and Bentley’, in *Some Versions of Pastoral* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1935), pp. 149-191 (p. 189).

²⁹ William Wordsworth, ‘Michael: A Pastoral Poem’, in *William Wordsworth: The Major Works including The Prelude*, ed. by Stephen Gill, Oxford World’s Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 224-236 (p. 226).

³⁰ Empson, ‘The Beggar’s Opera’, p. 202.

towards an inability to find psychological peace. Exposing both the internal and external deterioration of the dark pastoral figure, Wordsworth brings to the fore the narrative of the bereft and heavily afflicted woman.

In her assessment of Wordsworth and Byron's poetry, Jane Stabler comments that 'both poets depict human suffering as a form of decay which sets in early: a single cataclysmic shock [that] leads to a long series of almost imperceptible adjustments'.³¹ In the case of Margaret, the shock of Robert's disappearance leads to her long waning state, with the dark pastoral's insistence on ill health and death at the forefront of Wordsworth's agenda. When Margaret sighs and 'no motion of the breast was seen, / No heaving of the heart', it seems that grief has consumed her person. Genre takes on an element of John Milton's pastoral elegy *Lycidas*, the 'Bitter constraint and sad occasion dear' reverberating through *The Excursion* at a very literal level.³² The bitter constraint of Margaret's breathing reiterates the 'sad occasion' of her desertion, but also triggers her slow decline to death. The pastoral underscores the gruelling physical effect of grief on the human body, once again using epic to elevate suffering as important and pressing subject matter. Where Sally Bushell argues that *The Excursion*'s dramatic mode is an 'attempt to employ some kind of active dynamic of sympathy or alienation with the reader', Wordsworth's epic pastoral more crucially articulates how grief destroys human life, wearing away at the body day by day.³³ The infectious nature of this type of suffering is conveyed in the Wanderer's later avowal:

Her infant Babe

Had from its Mother caught the trick of grief,

And sighed among its playthings.

(*The Excursion*, Book I, l. 864-866)

The dark pastoral's central philosophy of grief sadly infiltrates the life of a naïve baby, cruelly tainting what should be a sweet scene. That grief seems to be inherited, without choice, questions Bushell's concept of alienation. In highlighting the injustice of congenital grief, Wordsworth draws his reader closer to this babe, and moreover

³¹ Jane Stabler, 'Transition in Byron and Wordsworth', *The Wordsworth Circle* Vol 9.2 (1798) <<http://jstor.org/stable/24039252>> [Accessed 05 November 2017] (p. 317).

³² John Milton, 'Lycidas', in *John Milton: The Major Works including Paradise Lost*, ed. by Stephen Orgel and Jonathan Goldberg, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 39-44 (p. 39).

³³ Sally Bushell, 'Defining the Dramatic Poem', in *Re-Reading The Excursion* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), pp. 42-46 (p. 45).

encourages one to contemplate the potential sadness of the child's fate. The baby cannot enjoy its childhood without the presence of melancholia. That grief is labelled a 'trick', a 'crafty or fraudulent device of a mean or base kind', also suggests that the baby has been unfairly duped.³⁴ Its innocence somehow seems inhibited. Seeing how 'uncontrolled grief [has crazed] Margaret mildly', it remains certain that her death will have a detrimental effect on the future life of her baby.³⁵ Stabler's point about 'imperceptible adjustments' then not only applies to Margaret but also to her child. Using the pastoral as a means by which loss can operate as both a present and forthcoming issue, Wordsworth imbues the genre with a strong contemplative note.

The final sighting of Margaret brings her suffering to a sad but timely close. Wordsworth winds down both natural and human life, exploiting the death drive of the dark pastoral. Emphasising what James Mulvihill refers to as the 'after-vacancy of suffering', the poet widens the emotional fissure he has created in the text by forcing his reader to confront the end of human life.³⁶ Using genre to paint Margaret's death alongside the further deterioration of her cottage, Wordsworth enfolds his epic with two different but equally as affecting types of loss. Grief gains a poignant, dual emotional subjectivity as we see the decline of the pastoral setting with character. Exposing the reality and extent of human grief, Wordsworth declines the genre's deceptive offer of taking 'a limited life and [pretending] it is the full and normal one'.³⁷ The normal life, as Margaret has shown, is both full because of the emotion she has had to endure, but is also limited through loss. Upending James Thomson's affirmation in *The Seasons* that 'The storms of wintry time will quickly pass, / And one unbounded Spring all', Wordsworth lingers over this painful moment in order to 'preserve [a] written [memorial] of goodness and suffering':³⁸

Meanwhile her poor Hut

Sank to decay: for he was gone—whose hand,

At the first nipping of October frost,

³⁴ "trick, n." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, March 2020, www.oed.com/view/Entry/205842. Accessed 27 March 2020.

³⁵ F. B. Pinion, 'The Excursion', in *A Wordsworth Companion: Survey and Assessment* (London: Macmillan, 1984), pp. 192-210 (p. 196).

³⁶ Mulvihill, 'The Last Woman in Wordsworth's *Excursion*', p. 882.

³⁷ Empson, 'They That Have Power', p. 115.

³⁸ James Thomson, 'Winter', in *The Seasons by Mr Thomson 1730* (Menston: Scolar Press, 1970), pp. 191-230 (p. 230) and Michael O'Neill, 'The Words He Uttered...': Wordsworth', in *Romanticism and the Self-Conscious Poem* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), pp. 25-61 (p. 27).

Closed up each chink, and with fresh bands of straw
 Chequered the green-grown thatch. And so she lived
 Through the long winter, reckless and alone;
 Until her House by frost, and thaw, and rain,
 Was sapped; and while she slept the nightly damp
 Did chill her breast; and in the stormy day
 Her tattered clothes were ruffled by the wind;
 Even at the side of her own fire.

(*The Excursion*, Book I, l. 935-945)

Through language, Wordsworth creates a memory which not only ‘allows links between the past and present’, but more significantly, allows links between past pastoral nostalgia and present dark pastoral feelings of loss.³⁹ The cottage, now relegated to a ‘poor Hut’, sinks into decay because it no longer undergoes routine maintenance. In the memory of Robert fixing up ‘each chink’, Wordsworth references a pastoral where nature and man were once in harmony. When October brought with it the early stirrings of natural deterioration, Robert dutifully tended to them and prevented them from taking hold. In turn, he secured Margaret’s personal and domestic wellbeing. The abrupt transition from conventional nostalgia to the dark pastoral in line 939 snatches away such security, as the subgenre annihilates any possibility of pastoral unity. Exploring Thomson’s ‘storms of wintry time’ in full, the Wanderer relays how Margaret ‘lived / Through the long winter, reckless and alone’. Fixating upon the darkest pastoral season, language is retuned to convey the intensity of natural and human deterioration, with a special focus on different forms and images of water. Reducing the cottage to an impersonal ‘House’, we see how Margaret’s dwelling is ‘sapped’ by ‘frost, and thaw, and rain’. ‘Sapped’, with its sharp, monosyllabic brevity, enacts the movement of life being quickly drained away, paralleling the rapid decline of the cottage’s last remaining tenant. With such weather forms attacking the cottage, there is no means of preventing the relentless erosion and saturation. The ‘nightly damp’, affecting her breast, sees Margaret succumb to the grip of the dark pastoral. With the subgenre quashing human agency, we see Margaret completely lose her fight for life.

³⁹ Sally Bushell, ‘Narrative Memory’, in *Re-Reading The Excursion* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), p. 211.

In his assessment of self-consciousness in *The Excursion* Michael O'Neill speaks of a 'continual doubleness in the poem's outlook and texture'.⁴⁰ The story of Margaret offers one such opportunity for 'doubleness' as Wordsworth is able to write an authentic script for a primary type of pastoral loss through the engaging narrative of a fictional but relatable character. Similar to his deployment of blank verse, Wordsworth takes the genre for an 'apparently rambling yet ultimately terrifying walk', exposing the horror and sadness of grief and death.⁴¹ By the time we reach the end of Book I, Wordsworth not only creates 'awareness of death', but he appoints death as an integral component of the dark pastoral.⁴² Against such macabre sentiments lies a parallel current of pastoral pleasantness, most apparent at the beginning and end of Margaret's tale. Designed to provide the pastoral with both texture and moral awareness, these episodes underscore the importance of generic convention as well as experimentation. Before we are introduced to Margaret, the poet speaker recounts the Wanderer's noble character in an endearing profile:

—And surely never did there live on earth
 A Man of kindlier nature. The rough sports
 And teasing ways of Children vexed not him,
 Nor could he bid them from his presence, tired
 With questions and importunate demands:
 Indulgent listener was he to the tongue
 Of garrulous age; nor did the sick man's tale,
 To his fraternal sympathy addressed,
 Obtain reluctant hearing.

(*The Excursion*, Book I, l. 444-452)

Through the character of the Wanderer, Wordsworth accesses a tone that is reminiscent of the restorative pastoral in Alexander Pope's *Spring. The First Pastoral* where 'All nature laughs, the groves fresh Honours wear, / The Sun's mild lustre warms the vital air'.⁴³ With his 'kindlier nature', our swain is presented as earth's

⁴⁰ O'Neill, 'The Words He Uttered...': Wordsworth', p. 27.

⁴¹ O'Neill, 'Ebb and Flow in *The Excursion*', p. 94.

⁴² O'Neill, 'The Words He Uttered...': Wordsworth', p. 26.

⁴³ Alexander Pope, 'Spring, The First Pastoral', in *Pastorals, With a Discourse on Pastoral Written in the Year 1704* (London: W. Bowyer, 1717) pp. 11-17 (p. 15).

<https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CB0132847918/ECCO?u=su_uk&sid=ECCO&xid=e1e32bfb&pg=4> [Accessed 2 January 2020].

saviour, never vexed by the energy and curiosity of children. An ‘indulgent listener’, he offers the perfect sounding board for Margaret. Reproducing what Aaron Santesso refers to as Pope’s ‘conscious swain’, Wordsworth formulates an intuitive and responsive pastoral character that prioritises ‘fraternal sympathy’.⁴⁴ Evolving the pastoral beyond its eighteenth-century political framework, Wordsworth revitalises the swain with philanthropic and selfless characteristics. The poet is then free to recast the Wanderer in a secondary, supportive role when he meets Margaret. It is the Wanderer’s depth of character that allows loss to be re-experienced in such an extensive capacity: he also shoulders the burden of grief. Wordsworth uses this passage to demonstrate that despite absence, isolation and death, human and natural benevolence exists. Though pastoral cannot simply operate as a permanent ‘balm for hurt minds’, by telling and sharing Margaret’s loss, the genre can work as a temporarily therapeutic remedy.⁴⁵ Loss is always framed in the wider context of natural continuity, but this does not always mean that the reader has to subscribe to this approach. At certain points in the text and in life, we can reject the usual pastoral balm and keep the darkness.

With a pastoral continuum firmly in place, Wordsworth rejects Timothy Morton’s claim that ‘we *are* the world, if only in the negative’.⁴⁶ The poet even seems to question Alison Hickey’s assertion that *The Excursion* derives ‘false strength from a specious either-or binarism’.⁴⁷ In pre-empting an extended period of melancholia with a micro episode of refined pastoral idealism, Wordsworth stresses the importance of human virtue. The ‘sick man’s tale’, though harrowing, accumulates sympathy and gravitas because of the very fact that the Wanderer—man’s universal confidant—exists. In choosing to listen to Margaret’s tragic plight, the Wanderer displays the rare and ‘secret spirit of humanity’ (*The Excursion*, Book I, l. 962) that keeps hope alive. Similarly, the dark pastoral acquires a strong presence in *The Excursion* because the familiar, idyllic pastoral exists. Rather than an ‘either-or binarism’, this pastoral operates on a system of checks and balances where suffering and the natural world

⁴⁴ Aaron Santesso, ‘The Conscious Swain: Political Pastoral in Pope’s Epic’, *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 37.2 (2004) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/25098046>> [Accessed 31 March 2020].

⁴⁵ Morton, ‘Romanticism and the Environmental Subject’, p. 114.

⁴⁶ Morton, ‘Romanticism and the Environmental Subject’, p. 84.

⁴⁷ Alison Hickey, ‘Introduction’, in *Impure Conceits: Rhetoric & Ideology in Wordsworth’s ‘Excursion’* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), pp. 1-24 (p. 7).

self-regulate, though not always symbiotically. Taking a broader approach to genre, Wordsworth dilutes the artificiality of pastoral with the revised sense that we are the world, encompassing both negative and positive aspects. A strand of this positivity is revisited at the tail end of Margaret's story when we encounter a second instance of natural calm. However, unlike the glowing testimonial on the Wanderer's character, the pastoral functions rather differently. Encouraging his reader to overcome Margaret's 'impotence of grief' (*The Excursion*, Book I, l. 959), the poet speaker concludes:

He ceased. Ere long the sun declining shot
 A slant and mellow radiance, which began
 To fall upon us, while beneath the trees
 We sate on that low Bench: and now we felt,
 Admonished thus, the sweet hour coming on.
 A linnet warbled from those lofty elms,
 A thrush sang loud, and other melodies,
 At distance heard, peopled the milder air.
 The Old Man rose, and, with a sprightly mien
 Of hopeful preparation, grasped his Staff:
 Together casting then a farewell look
 Upon those silent walls, we left the Shade;
 And, ere the Stars were visible, had reached
 A Village Inn,—our Evening resting-place.

(*The Excursion*, Book I, l. 985-998)

Reminiscent of the end of *Nutting* and *Michael*, these lines attempt to invoke the 'magical idea' that nature heals all.⁴⁸ The shift in terms of narrator, from the Wanderer to the poet speaker, helps to nurture this idea of pastoral as redemptive, reinstating the more distanced but philosophical perspective that we had at the beginning of Book I. Relaxed with his companion, the poet speaker bathes in the afterglow of the sun, awaiting the 'sweet hour' in amongst melodic birdsong. As 'external phenomena' are transformed into 'heartfelt lingering sensations', it seems that *The Excursion* reaches a point of emotional calm as it enacts the elegiac movement from 'grief to

⁴⁸ William Empson, 'Marvell's Garden', in *Some Versions of Pastoral* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1935), pp. 119-145 (p. 120).

consolation'.⁴⁹ Yet there is something amiss in the poet speaker's admission that he and the Wanderer have reached their 'Evening resting-place'. After hearing of Margaret's death, it seems too flippant that these two swains can cast a 'farewell look / Upon those silent walls'. This concluding passage, with its strong hints of pastoral irony, undermines itself since the consolatory aspect feels overplayed. It is asserted rather than felt. Book I finishes on a polished but contrived note. Though the reader is assured that Margaret 'sleeps in the calm earth' (*The Excursion*, Book I, l. 971) we have seen how the Wanderer and poet speaker have been badly affected by her death, particularly since they have re-experienced loss together. The closing couplet, with its iambic pentameter arrangement and strategic use of punctuation, points towards diction that has been shaped for the purpose of consolation but without having achieved it. The psychological and physical torment that grief has inflicted upon both direct and indirect victims renders this ending too pat, questioning any sense of natural redemption, consolation and transcendence. The dark pastoral is not banished. This too easy victory for pastoral consolation might render the reader more wary than soothed.

As *The Excursion* progresses the narrative becomes increasingly convoluted, making it difficult for the reader to determine which voice is speaking. As a result, generic distinction becomes equally as problematic as Wordsworth struggles to determine a clear route to cure despondency. Time and again we see the poet adhering to conventional pastoral, only to undercut it with the dark pastoral, and it is the dark pastoral that ultimately ends up crippling *The Excursion*. Pastoral consistently fails to work as an antidote to suffering, and this inefficacy gives rise to conflicts in the natural world and in the human heart. The genre is made to feel irrelevant and sometimes diffuse, never able to provide clarity or direction for the poem's troubled characters. The height of this diffusion is revealed in Book IV 'Despondency Corrected', a section of *The Excursion* that Kenneth Johnston reads as a 'typological version of

⁴⁹ Jim Springer Borck, "'The Bitter Language of the Heart'" in Wordsworth's *The Excursion*, *The Wordsworth Circle*, 9.2 (1978) <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/24039252>> [Accessed 5 November 2017] (p. 182) and Peter M. Sacks, 'Interpreting the Genre: The Elegy and the Work of Mourning', in *The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats* (Baltimore; London: John Hopkins University Press, 1985), pp. 1-37 (p. 2).

Wordsworth's own story of imaginative crisis'.⁵⁰ Dominated by the Wanderer's failed attempt to administer consolation to the Solitary, Book IV enacts a generic shift away from a physical landscape into the highly fraught psychological landscape or 'the mind of man' that the poet promised to explore in the Prospectus. Wordsworth pioneers a type of pastoral that moves beyond high artifice, revealing genre as a key means of exploring and probing man's deepest fears. As we move beyond the ruined physical dark pastoral of Book I, the poet uses genre to lay bare the hostile landscape of both the Wanderer and the Solitary's discordant minds, bringing to the fore a unique type of mental struggle. Having heard the lengthy account of the Solitary's dejection in Book III, 'Despondency Corrected' ironically roughens anything too consolatory through its insistence on prolonging and exacerbating pain. Book IV is full of conflicting information about nature, darting between hyperbolic attempts to reinvigorate man with the glorious opportunity available in the natural world, only to find the dark pastoral ghosting the poetry as a shadow in the background. It begins with the Wanderer's plea for salvation, followed by a disturbing dark pastoral epithet:

—By thy grace

The particle divine remained unquenched;
And, mid the wild weeds of a rugged soil,
Thy bounty caused to flourish deathless flowers,
From Paradise transplanted. Wintry age
Impends; the frost will gather round my heart;
And, if they wither, I am worse than dead!

(*The Excursion*, Book IV, l. 50-56)

As pastoral moves into a metaphysical space, Wordsworth makes felt the Wanderer's fraught mental state. The verb 'unquenched' carries with it a weight of meaning as it simultaneously denotes 'not extinguished' but also 'unassuaged, unsatisfied'.⁵¹ Much like the 'particle divine' that rests inside of man, the Solitary's emotional temperament remains disaffected, no thanks to the Wanderer's continuous meandering between despondency and consolation. Wordsworth uses dark pastoral metaphor to reveal the Wanderer's anxious psychological disposition. Capitalising upon what Elizabeth Geen

⁵⁰ Kenneth Johnston, 'Wordsworth's "Excursion": Route and Destination', *The Wordsworth Circle: "THE EXCURSION": A BICENTENARY CELEBRATION*, 45.2 (2014) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/24045889>> [Accessed 04 April 2020] (p. 106).

⁵¹ "unquenched, adj." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, March 2020, www.oed.com/view/Entry/216758. Accessed 18 May 2020.

terms as the ‘power in sorrow’, the dark pastoral latches itself onto man’s internal faculties, exposing the terrifying consequences of suffering.⁵² The mind becomes both fractured and uneven, a ‘rugged soil’ full of ‘wild weeds’ that gives rise to ‘deathless flowers’. The adjectives ‘rugged’, ‘wild’ and ‘deathless’ insinuate natural decay and decline, reiterating the toxic trajectory that Margaret subjected herself to in Book I. However, where Margaret’s suffering was largely self-directed and physical, the Wanderer’s suffering is internal. Further his angst appears, at least in part, to come from an unlikely external source. The ‘deathless flowers’ are transplanted from ‘Paradise’, a feature of pastoral that is usually associated with Arcadia. Drawing inspiration from John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, *The Excursion* implies a new theory of genre that sees Eden as impure. Corrupted by the dark pastoral, Wordsworth makes us see that ‘sorrow is inherent in Eden itself’ and by consequence, generic setting is fundamentally changed.⁵³ Paradise is now a breeding ground for the end and not the start of life. To force such bleak sentiments into the mind of man not only seems counter intuitive, but also gestures towards a type of Christian faith that is despoiled. The awkward caesura in line 54 reiterates this dissonance as the Wanderer prospects upon ‘Wintry age’, the season associated with degeneration and death. Contemplating the thought that ‘frost will gather round my heart’, it seems the Wanderer has reached his emotional nadir, right in the heart of the dark pastoral. Vulnerability is signalled in the image of the susceptible heart encased in the seemingly harmless but potentially destructive coat of the frost. Suggesting the potential for both physical and emotional damage, Wordsworth writes a hyper apocalyptic dark pastoral that pits something unknown beyond death as man’s worst state of being.

Though genre reaches a point of dangerous and uncertain tension in the early stages of Book IV, the Wanderer attempts to depict the natural world as a repository of optimism. Progress is a value that the Wanderer seems to admire and tries to ascertain, both for himself and the Solitary. Throughout ‘Despondency Corrected’ the sage attempts to instil ‘Faith absolute in God, including hope’ (*The Excursion*, Book IV, l. 22), even if at times such faith is found wanting. Following an emotional opening

⁵² Elizabeth Geen, ‘The Concept of Grace in Wordsworth’s Poetry’, *PMLA*, 58.3 (1943) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/458829>> [Accessed 19 May 2020] (p. 706).

⁵³ Empson, ‘Milton and Bentley’, p. 187.

harangue, Wordsworth ushers pastoral into its conventional role as the genre of aspiration:

And let thy favour, to the end of life,
Inspire me with ability to seek
Repose and hope among eternal things—
Father of heaven and earth! and I am rich,
And will possess my portion in content!

(*The Excursion*, Book IV, l. 61-65)

The end of life takes on a completely different connotation here as the full span of life right up until death is depicted as an opportunity for the Wanderer to seek ‘Repose and hope among eternal things’. That hope is matched with repose suggests that pastoral is once again trying to return to a state of calm, to draw some form of peace and joy into the poem’s unsteady lines. Driving positive energy back into pastoral with the mention of God, it seems that despite the toil of suffering, the Wanderer still seeks personal fulfilment, to possess his ‘portion in content’. There is an active will in pastoral to unfix the ‘seat / Of suffering’ (*The Excursion*, Book IV, l. 18-19), to secure life’s greatest wealth: unerring hope. The allusion to ‘Father of heaven and earth’ also gestures towards prospective faith in pantheism. Restoring a world where God, heaven and earth are interconnected and exist symbiotically, the Wanderer sketches out a traditional vision of pastoral.

Returning to the abyss of despair, Wordsworth drags genre back into the dark pastoral, careful to demonstrate his own reluctance to achieve any form of consolation. Book IV brims with more than a hint of ‘Tartarian darkness’ (*The Excursion*, Book IV, l. 298) as genre is constantly suppressed after periods of apparent calm and solace. Just when a pattern is established, Wordsworth reinvigorates the pastoral with a new perplexity, recoiling from any sense of certainty with newfound vigour. The psychological aspect of pastoral is exploited to its full potential as Book IV works through the Wanderer’s various preoccupations: the French Revolution, the effects of morbid solitude, and religious doubt. Genre intensifies as man’s anxieties are worked into the poem, producing an enriched type of pastoral epic that is subjective and relevant. Continuing to pursue a line of worry, Wordsworth depicts the dark pastoral’s unruly presence through the Wanderer’s observations on suffering:

Oh! no, full oft the innocent Sufferer sees

Too clearly; feels too vividly; and longs
 To realize the Vision with intense
 And overconstant yearning—there—there lies
 The excess, by which the balance is destroyed.

(*The Excursion*, Book IV, l. 173-177)

These lines, with their philosophical and emotional heaviness, capture the essence of suffering. The self-conscious ‘Oh!’ plunges pastoral back down into the depths of sadness, highlighting the potent effect of suffering on man as he ‘sees / Too clearly; feels too vividly’. Demonstrating how sight and feeling are distorted by grief, Wordsworth adjusts the pastoral, recalibrating its role as the genre of high artifice in favour of a new function: the genre of deep feeling. The detrimental consequences of grief are conveyed in the idea that the sufferer longs but is unable to ‘realize the Vision with intense / And overconstant yearning’. ‘Overconstant yearning’ points towards a desperate, self-indulgent type of suffering that prolongs pain, destroying man’s emotional and psychological wellbeing. Wordsworth’s use of punctuation and particularly the em-dashes which bookend the word ‘there’ isolates and stresses how the sufferer’s desire to wallow in his own self-pity ultimately causes such a gross imbalance. Rather than pastoral being artificially measured, *The Excursion* models a genre defined by excess of dark and perturbing emotion.

The difficulty in navigating *The Excursion* centres upon how genre never appears to be clear or simple. The poem ‘defies linear notions of temporality, not just on the level of composition history, but, more important, on a thematic or figural levels’.⁵⁴ Frustratingly, no one genre encapsulates its achievement: not epic nor lyric, not pastoral nor dark pastoral. The erratic shifts in the Wanderer’s temperament and philosophy help to stage this generic hybridity, ultimately pointing towards both a text and a type of suffering which is layered and complex. With such a conflicted pastoral featuring so prominently in *The Excursion*, Wordsworth questions the efficacy of genre. Where pastoral used to promise a ‘simple logic of compensation’, in *The Excursion* such logic is completely abandoned.⁵⁵ In a time ‘where all the aspects of misery / Predominate’ (*The Excursion*, Book IV, l. 330-331) it seems that pastoral also

⁵⁴ Alison Hickey, ‘Wordsworth’s Doing and Undoing’, in *Impure Conceits: Rhetoric & Ideology in Wordsworth’s ‘Excursion’* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), pp. 1-24 (p. 8).

⁵⁵ Garrard, ‘Pastoral’, p. 45.

awkwardly imposes on epic. The Wanderer, so often disliked because of his ‘inflexible moralism’, fails to embody the outstanding hero of *The Prelude* or *Paradise Lost*.⁵⁶ Jaded by the Solitary’s countless woes, the Wanderer exemplifies a new pastoral hero who is defined by pessimism and emotional regression. As Kenneth Johnston writes, Book IV drastically fails to ‘displace the Solitary’s disillusionment in the larger context of natural cycles of life and death’.⁵⁷ The cycle of life is inhibited because:

...those dark, impervious shades, that hang
 Upon the region whither we are bound,
 Exclude a power to enjoy the vital beams
 Of present sunshine.

(*The Excursion*, Book III, l. 302-306)

The intrusion of ‘dark, impervious shades’ into pleasant sunshine shows how the dark pastoral is omnipresent, a constant reality that is integrated into the very structure of rural life. Aware of such perversity, it seems that the countryside can no longer function as a sanctuary for the shepherd swain, ‘an artificial construct’ that champions a sense of community and aesthetic pleasure.⁵⁸ Where the countryside was once seen as an escape from the ‘obstreperous City’ (*The Excursion*, Book IV, l. 372), in Book IV it presents something perhaps worse: morbid solitude. In a rare but poignant interlude, the Solitary swings the pastoral away from the Wanderer’s talk of love to contemplate the bleak ‘loneliness of this sublime Retreat!’ (*The Excursion*, Book IV, l. 375). The bucolic realm is deemed beautiful, and yet when loneliness and sublimity are juxtaposed against one another, a tension brews in the natural world. Nature is both aesthetically pleasing and isolating, and this combination seems irreconcilable. Adding a deep unease to pastoral, Wordsworth upends preconceived ideas about rural living as somehow spiritually nourishing and socially enriching.

In her assessment of internalised dramatic conventions Sally Bushell remarks of *The Excursion*, ‘the text...anticipates the nature of its own reception’.⁵⁹ The genre also anticipates the nature of its own reception as Book IV sets up a deeply rooted self-

⁵⁶ Jacob Risinger, ‘*The Excursion* as Dialogic Poem’, in *The Oxford Handbook of William Wordsworth*, ed. by Richard Gravil and Daniel Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 430-446 (p. 436).

⁵⁷ Johnston, ‘Wordsworth’s “Excursion”: Route and Destination’, p. 111.

⁵⁸ McKusick, ‘John Clare’s Version of Pastoral’, p. 82.

⁵⁹ Sally Bushell, ‘Internalised Dramatic Conventions’, in *Re-Reading The Excursion* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), pp. 45-56 (p. 55).

aware psychological pastoral that always returns to feelings of inadequacy and dejection. In changing the parameters of a ‘stagnant genre of necessity’ Wordsworth writes a new pastoral song that refreshes tradition by foregrounding the toil and failure of the mind at work.⁶⁰ The presentness of Wordsworth’s writing is felt most affectingly when the pastoral and the dark pastoral blend together when we see the Wanderer disputing the continuity that nature was once able to provide. Following another deliberation on the dangers of an unbalanced heart, the Wanderer embarks upon a short but piercing episode of questioning:

These craggy regions, these chaotic wilds,
Does that benignity pervade, that warms
The Mole contented with her darksome walk
In the cold ground; and to the Emmet gives
Her foresight; and the intelligence that makes
The tiny Creatures strong by social league;
Supports the generations, multiplies
Their tribes, till we behold a spacious plain
Or grassy bottom, all, with little hills—

(*The Excursion*, Book IV, l. 429-437)

Here, genre is successfully diffused. The dark pastoral’s ‘craggy regions’ exist alongside pastoral’s ‘spacious plain’ and what happens in between them questions the idea that nature was to Wordsworth ‘one sure witness to “enduring things”’.⁶¹ From the Wanderer’s state of mind, we can see that there is very little certainty in nature’s ability to endure or at least leaven man’s angst. Where nature in *Michael* endures despite the ‘unfinished Sheepfold’, in *The Excursion* benignity may well exist but it cannot stave off the dark pastoral. There is a generic idealism implied in the image of tiny creatures producing generations to populate the ‘spacious plain / or grassy bottom, all, with little hills’ which sits uncomfortably against the aforementioned ‘plaintive Spirit of the Solitude’ (*The Excursion*, Book IV, l. 414). The quaintness of the ‘little hills’ seems to be threatened by the looming presence of the dark pastoral, the ‘chaotic wilds’ posing too much of a challenge for the natural world to simply blossom into pastoral buoyance. Though the Wanderer’s mind gravitates towards opportunity, the

⁶⁰ Curran, ‘The Pastoral’, p. 89.

⁶¹ Willard L. Sperry, ‘Nature’, in *Wordsworth’s Anti-Climax* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1935), pp. 165-184 (p. 172).

reader knows that it will only return to contemplate discontinuity and obstruction, both in the mind and in the natural world.

In his chapter on ‘Composite Orders’, Stuart Curran remarks, ‘a mixed form does not abandon conventional expectation: on the contrary, the precision of generic signals is all the more an imperative if the poet seeks to combine disparate forms for a larger end than can be achieved from a narrower generic construction’.⁶² By exploring the darker end of the pastoral spectrum and integrating it into bucolic reverie Wordsworth destabilises the genre’s fascination with irony, asking his reader to weigh up whether or not idealism is a solution to suffering or a mere distraction. Toying with the idea of the pastoral façade, Wordsworth revisits unease, writing poetry that, at times, seems flippant. Chipping away at the humility of the genre, we see the Wanderer making frequent futile attempts to distract the Solitary from his pain, using the idea of a physical excursion as therapy. As Book IV progresses the Wanderer’s tone becomes increasingly more insistent and yet his words challenge the idea that the idyllic rural setting can offer a rich and fulfilled life to the lonely spirit. His impassioned speech on climbing explores this concept in detail:

Rise with the Lark! your Matins shall obtain
 Grace, be their composition what it may,
 If but with her’s performed; climb once again,
 Climb every day, those ramparts; meet the breeze
 Upon their tops,--adventurous as a Bee
 That from your garden thither soars, to feed
 On new-blown heath; let yon commanding rock
 Be your frequented Watch-tower; roll the stone
 In thunder down the mountains: with all your might
 Chase the wild Goat; and, if the bold red Deer
 Fly to these harbours, driven by hound and horn
 Loud echoing, add your speed to the pursuit:
 So, wearied to your Hut shall you return,
 And sing at evening into sound repose.”

⁶² Stuart Curran, ‘Composite Orders’, in *Poetic Form and British Romanticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 180-203 (p. 181).

(*The Excursion*, Book IV, l. 491-504)

These lines, with their hyperbolic insistence on a revitalising type of pastoral, draw attention to the Wanderer's state of delusion as Wordsworth's 'syntax flows one way, while his overt meaning goes another'.⁶³ Fooled by the promise of a new day, the Solitary is ordered to 'Rise with the Lark!' and climb to his heart's content. On review of Book IV's oscillating generic register the idea that man can solve his problems by simply 'eschewing more mental pursuits' in nature seems both unfeasible and impracticable.⁶⁴ Pastoral's consolatory function is always threatened and offset by the presence of the 'disconsolate and black' (*The Excursion*, Book IV, l. 1053) dark pastoral. Even when it is not explicitly detailed, the dark pastoral looms in the background of the blank verse, even if by implication. A daily climb, though maybe physically nourishing, cannot cure the psychological despondency that the Solitary feels with regards to deeply personal issues. Pastoral falters: such a self-conscious portrait of sublime nature seems futile and insensitive. The resolute tone adopted by the Wanderer verges on frivolity, as he comes to see like the Solitary's failed therapist. Judging by the Solitary and the Wanderer's incessant and anxious thoughts, it would be difficult to be as 'adventurous as a Bee', with the simplicity of the simile emphasising the Wanderer's aberration. To imagine the Solitary who stated in Book III, 'how languidly I look / Upon this visible fabric of the World' (*The Excursion*, Book III, 969-970) as strong enough to 'roll the stone / In thunder down the mountains' seems absurd. The days where the pastoral swain functioned as an integral part of nature seem long gone. The closing image of the swain returning home and singing contently provides a final opportunity for the pastoral to undercut itself. The scene recalls the closing of Book I with Margaret's ruined cottage and the painful reminder that there exists no 'Evening resting-place' (*The Excursion*, Book I, l. 998) that can alleviate the toil of suffering. This foray into pastoral eclogue suggests its own obsolescence.

Alison Hickey poses the following question: 'Does [*The Excursion*] forsake one kind of social imagination for an easier, more impersonal one?'⁶⁵ On evaluating how the

⁶³ O'Neill, 'Ebb and Flow in *The Excursion*', p. 96.

⁶⁴ Richard Gravil, "'Is *The Excursion*' a 'metrical Novel?'" *The Wordsworth Circle*, 42.2 (2011) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/24045850>> [Accessed 6 June 2020] (p. 149).

⁶⁵ Hickey, 'Wordsworth's Doing and Undoing', p. 7.

Wanderer converts the Solitary's tale of woe into his own discordant narrative, there is a sense that 'Despondency Corrected' posits not a social, but a personal imagination that gives us exclusive access to an overactive mind. By using the pastoral to relay a layered type of mental angst, Wordsworth reconfigures genre as a mode of apprehending a contemporary, and not an alternative reality. In rejecting the 'pompous show / Of Art' (*The Excursion*, Book IV, l. 724-725) Wordsworth is able to devise a new generic maxim: suffering and conflict are inexorable, repetitive and deeply subjective experiences and form part of pastoral's structure. Though the Wanderer wants us to believe in the 'tranquillizing power of time' (*The Excursion*, Book IV, l. 545), the vacillating vision of pastoral in Book IV has dispelled faith of any such hope being realised. Genre double backs upon itself because, rather than providing us with a form of escapism, pastoral imposes on the lonely imagination of man. When the Wanderer remarks, 'You dwell alone; / You walk, you live, you speculate alone' (*The Excursion*, Book IV, l. 557-558) there is both a presentness and permanence in pastoral's nihilistic vision of living. The repetition of the iamb 'alone' with its cutting stress on the second syllable enacts a motion of segregation, isolating the Solitary through metrical precision. Where suffering is posited as a prerequisite of the dark pastoral, isolation is here pitted as the unwelcomed by-product of suffering. In moulding genre into a model of pain, Wordsworth is able to write new generic axioms that centre upon the psychological landscape of man. As in 'The Mad Mother', the dark pastoral of Book IV is defined by more obscure conventions, one of which is monomania.⁶⁶ The Wanderer becomes obsessed with varying shades of depression, dwelling and analysing the effects of particular states of suffering with special attention paid to morbid solitude. Through genre Wordsworth demonstrates how isolation is a gateway condition to further and more permanent forms of psychological and physical damage:

Or if the Mind turn inward 'tis perplexed,
 Lost in a gloom of uninspired research;
 Meanwhile, the Heart within the Heart, the seat

⁶⁶ As in the *Lyrical Ballads* chapter, this study views monomania as 'A form of mental illness characterized by a single pattern of repetitive and intrusive thoughts or actions'. See 'monomania, n.' *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, June 2020, www.oed.com/view/Entry/121474. Accessed 7 June 2020.

Where Peace and happy Consciousness should dwell,
 On its own axis restlessly revolves,
 Yet nowhere finds the cheering light of truth.

(*The Excursion*, Book IV, l. 621-626)

Pastoral returns to its erstwhile metaphysical state, hypothesising over the destructive effects of isolation on the mind, the heart and consciousness. Genre is tempered to uncover the debilitating effect of the dark pastoral on the human body, as isolation has caused the mind to brood upon itself. Rather than thriving in the realm of limitless and outward-looking imagination, the mind is ‘Lost in a gloom of uninspired research’, a stagnant faculty that is now perplexed by its new state of being. Where pastoral once promised creativity, the dark pastoral inhibits any such possibility. The Wanderer is also keen to show how feelings are affected by solitude, contemplating the ‘Heart within the Heart’. Wordsworth’s suggestion that there is a smaller, more concentrated receptacle within the heart shows how deeply isolation has cut into the body. Dark feeling has removed ‘the seat / Where Peace and happy Consciousness should dwell’, ultimately causing chaos and sadness to ensue. The Wanderer’s resigned tone culminates in a central tenet of Wordsworth’s dark pastoral philosophy, that ‘nowhere finds the cheering light of truth’. Apparently convinced that pastoral can no longer offer access to happiness or verity, Wordsworth foregrounds the debilitating effect of physical seclusion on the metaphysical faculties.

Wordsworth’s tendency to throw pastoral off kilter reflects an innate desire to challenge preconceived notions of genre. Through suffering the poet is able to transform and progress genre beyond the limited capacity of poems such as Thomas Gray’s ‘Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard’ or Thomas Chatterton’s ‘Narva and Mored: An African Dialogue’. Wordsworth opts to add shade and drama to his pastoral by adhering to, neglecting and then reinventing convention, always working to keep dejection at the core of his poetry. ‘*The Excursion* experiments with the less comfortable, less permanent, less individual experience of changes of place, attitude and company’ writes Jonathan Farina.⁶⁷ Realising that despondency can never be corrected in England, Wordsworth makes a bold decision to relocate pastoral back to a classical setting: the hills of Greece. Yet such a formal decision is not simply

⁶⁷ Farina, “‘The Excursion’ and ‘The Surfaces of Things’”, p. 102.

designed to return the reader to the idyllic ‘Rivers, and fertile plains, and sounding shores’ (*The Excursion*, Book IV, l. 715) of Theocritus, Bion and Moschus’s poetry. Returning to the ‘unenlightened Swains of pagan Greece’ (*The Excursion*, Book IV, l. 846) Wordsworth seeks to show how despondency has been an atemporal condition:

—Sunbeams, upon distant Hills

Gliding apace, with Shadows in their train,
 Might, with small help from fancy, be transformed
 Into fleet Oreads sporting visibly.
 The Zephyrs, fanning as they passed, their wings,
 Lacked not, for love, fair Objects, whom they wooed
 With gentle whisper. Withered Boughs grotesque,
 Stripped of their leaves and twigs by hoary age,
 From depth of shaggy covert peeping forth
 In the low vale, or on steep mountain side;
 And, sometimes, intermixed with stirring horns
 Of the live Deer, or Goat’s depending beard;
 These were the lurking Satyrs, a wild brood
 Of gamesome Deities! or Pan himself.
 The simple Shepherd’s awe-inspiring God.”

(*The Excursion*, Book IV, l. 869-883)

This scene reinterprets the role of the swain, his community and nature, scrupulously editing the classical pastoral portrait. In appointing Pan as pastoral’s ‘awe-inspiring’ shepherd, Wordsworth adds both a superhuman heroic element and a narcissistic streak to his swain. Personal despondency transforms into a type of sympathy for the degradation of the natural world. The Greek pastoral is no longer redemptive. Judging by this decaying pastoral—the ‘Withered boughs’ and the ‘shaggy covert’—it seems that Pan has moved away from his role as protector of the natural world. Even the ‘lurking Satyrs, a wild brood / Of gamesome Deities’ seem to be preoccupied with merriment and not philanthropy, the term ‘wild’ suggesting unpredictability and untamedness. The dark pastoral comes into its own as nature suddenly becomes both threatening and threatened. ‘Grotesque’, with its deeply penetrating guttural emphasis, demonstrates a distant world that is ugly, thus upending the idea that pastoral is aesthetically pleasing. The Zephyrs and their ethereal presence seem oddly displaced in this scene as they flit between the dark pastoral landscape and the sunbeams ‘upon

distant Hills'. With a natural world that has withered and been stripped of its greenery, pastoral becomes unrecognisable just as it did in Book I. The 'stirring horns / Of the live Deer' operate as a metaphor for both the presence and threat of violence, a reminder of the dangerous power of suffering and melancholia.

The successful degradation of the pastoral aesthetic reminds us that *The Excursion* is not, as Geoffrey Hartman claimed, a 'second-rate poem'.⁶⁸ Its value lies in Wordsworth's ability to redesign and reconceive of genre in a way that is entirely different to the satirical and political writing of John Gay and Alexander Pope. Through a varied pastoral, Wordsworth investigates both the physical and psychological causes and effects of suffering, tracing how grief leads to permanent states of dejection. The Wanderer's 'near-apocalyptic displacement of hope', as well as highlighting of one man's lifelong struggle to correct despondency, simultaneously offers a new and broader vision of a world that is predicated on sadness.⁶⁹ This dark vision alters slightly as *The Excursion* progresses, particularly as we enter what Kenneth Johnston terms the 'Grasmere graveyard tales' i.e. Books V-VIII.⁷⁰ Having exhausted the notion of intense personal suffering, pastoral enters a secondary phase where suffering is interpreted through a more philosophical lens. This exploration is particularly present in Book VI 'The Church-Yard Among the Mountains', a section of *The Excursion* which sees the Pastor come to the fore. Relaying examples of 'abused talents, irresolution and weakness', the Pastor, the Solitary, the Priest, the Vicar and the poet speaker all depict suffering as a loss of joy, a feeling which arises as a result of a loss of virtue.⁷¹ If, as Friedrich Nitsch, in his interpretation of Immanuel Kant, wrote, 'complete virtue can produce complete happiness', the strained pastoral of Book VI works to show how a lack of virtue in society ultimately leads to a lack of personal and natural happiness.⁷² In exploring the devastating consequences of moral

⁶⁸ Geoffrey Hartman, 'The Excursion', from *Wordsworth's Poetry 1787-1814* <<http://www.jstor.com/stable/j.ctt1bh4bg4.19>> [Accessed 18 June 2020] (p. 292).

⁶⁹ Hartman, 'The Excursion', p. 295.

⁷⁰ Johnston, 'Wordsworth's "Excursion": Route and Destination', p. 110.

⁷¹ Wordsworth, 'Summary of Contents', p. 92.

⁷² Friedrich Nitsch, 'Influence of Kant's Principles on Religion', in *A General and Introductory View of Professor Kant's Principles Concerning Man, the World and the Deity* (London: J. Downes, 1796), pp. 219-234 (p. 219).

inadequacy, Wordsworth shatters the idea of ‘man’s undated joy in the external world and...his love of song’:⁷³

Yet the sigh,
Which wafts that prayer to Heaven, is due to all,
Wherever laid, who living fell below
Their virtue’s humbler mark; a sigh of pain
If to the opposite extreme they sank.

(*The Excursion*, Book VI, l. 275-279)

These lines, with their slow and heavy pauses, show how difficult it has been for humanity to attain virtue both in life and in death. The transformation of the sigh from a vehicle for prayer to a ‘sigh of pain’ once again initiates the dark pastoral’s affiliation with suffering. Positive emotion is scarce: even the ‘prayer to Heaven’ seems ephemeral. Each line terminates with the oppressive and melancholic notes of the dark pastoral (‘sigh’/‘below’/‘pain’/‘sank’), each time depressing the blank verse into a further state of disrepair. Genre is deepened and darkened as virtue is no longer able to operate as ‘the guiding vein of hope’ (*The Excursion*, Book VI, l. 269) for man. The darker tone of the section culminates in the monosyllabic verb ‘sank’; the weight of this darker pastoral vision felt in the motion of a downward drop to a point of desultory stasis. Man and pastoral remain stuck in a postlapsarian state, unable to redeem themselves from their fall.

Though Jonathan Bate writes that the ‘primary attraction of *The Excursion* for readers from its first reviewers through Ruskin to Leslie Stephen was its ethical content; it appeared to be Wordsworth’s crowning achievement because it was the fullest embodiment of his philosophy’, he does not note how integral genre is to the poet’s exploration of such a fraught moral landscape.⁷⁴ Wordsworth’s ethical argument in ‘The Church-Yard Among the Mountains’ relies upon an interpretation of pastoral that refuses to prioritise visions of nature but instead spotlights various strands and examples of man’s unethical behaviour. In broadening the scope of the genre by

⁷³ Martha Hale Shackford, ‘A Definition of the Pastoral Idyll’, *PMLA*, 19.4 (1904) <<http://www.jstor.com/stable/456511>> [Accessed 28 June 2020] (p. 584).

⁷⁴ Jonathan Bate, ‘The Moral of Landscape’, in *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013) pp. 62-84 (p. 64). <<http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/sheffield/detail.action?docID=1520952>> [Accessed 2 January 2021]

pushing it beyond the bounds of the aesthetic Wordsworth is able to introduce a new type of suffering—man’s predominantly self-inflicted fall—as equally as damaging as Margaret’s grief and the Solitary’s psychological torment. The poet simultaneously breaks the cycle of continuity between man and nature that pastoral so heavily relies upon. Book VI instead envisions a fractured world that sees man and nature in constant tension with one another, with the latter frequently displaying signs of degradation. Where in previous books pastoral offered a ‘path back to nature’ in its purest and most revitalising form, in ‘The Church-Yard Among the Mountains’ no such hope is offered.⁷⁵ We have reached the graveyard of pastoral. The dark pastoral takes precedence because the loss of virtue fundamentally makes for an agitated public and private life, wearing down the veneer of pastoral to a point of ‘overpowering Fatality’.⁷⁶ The line ‘The Stream, that bears thee forward, prove not, soon / Or late, a perilous Master’ (*The Excursion*, Book VI, l. 454-455) reminds us that man’s behaviour, much like the stream, sooner or later comes to affect the path that he chooses to pursue in life.

Though pastoral poetry is usually associated with farming and the labouring poor, in Book VI Wordsworth extends his application of the genre in order to critique the wealthy. Ellen, an unwed working-class mother referred to as ‘a rueful Magdalene’ (*The Excursion*, Book VI, l. 1008) suffers because she falls pregnant outside of wedlock. A ‘sternly-broken vow’ (*The Excursion*, Book VI, l. 872) leads to heartbreak, the ‘unconquerable pang of despised love’ (*The Excursion*, Book VI, l. 924) and embarrassment, all of which culminate in Ellen’s search for employment outside of the home. The deceptively ‘simple Vales’ (*The Excursion*, Book VI, l. 968) mask a web of complex emotional torment as the ‘natural feeling of equality’ (*The Excursion*, Book VI, l. 969) so prevalent in pastoral is compromised for the heavy and degrading feeling of social inequity. Though Ellen initially loses her virtue because of her bastard child, her fall is exacerbated by the poor treatment that she is subjected to when she undertakes a role as a foster mother for the infant of a rich couple:

In selfish blindness, for I will not say
In naked and deliberate cruelty,

⁷⁵ Bate, ‘The Moral of Landscape’, p. 65.

⁷⁶ Wordsworth, ‘Summary of Contents’, p. 92.

The Pair, whose Infant she was bound to nurse,
 Forbad her all communion with her own.
 They argued that such meeting would disturb
 The Mother's mind, distract her thoughts, and thus
 Unfit her for her duty—in which dread,
 Week after week, the mandate was enforced.
 —So near!—yet not allowed, upon that sight
 To fix her eyes—alas! 'twas hard to bear!
 But worse affliction must be borne—far worse;
 For 'tis Heaven's will—that, after a disease
 Begun and ended within three days' space,
 Her Child should die; as Ellen now exclaimed,
 Her own—deserted Child!—Once, only once,
 She saw it in that mortal malady:
 And, on the burial day, could scarcely gain
 Permission to attend its obsequies.

(*The Excursion*, Book VI, l. 976-993)

Already dejected by a heavy 'sense of degradation, not the less / The ungentle mind can easily find means / To impose severe restraints and laws unjust' (*The Excursion*, Book VI, l. 972-974), poor Ellen experiences a level of 'naked and deliberate cruelty' that seems wholly inhumane. 'Naked' implies total exposure, which, when combined with 'deliberate' suggests severe and malicious intent on the part of 'The Pair'. Pastoral is repelled by unwarranted acts of unkindness, slowly but surely effacing the utopian idea of a united and compassionate rural community. Inviting a new contrast into the genre, Wordsworth distinguishes the abusive rich from the maltreated poor, laying bare the power dynamics of class. Where Ellen's morality is initially lost because of her pregnancy, she gains strength of character because of the struggle she is forced to endure. However, where the rich could have provided Ellen with sympathy and kindness, they chose to abandon such philanthropy. When one hears of the 'Thoughts, which the rich are free from' (*The Excursion*, Book VI, l. 960) there is a sense that Ellen's emotional and psychological suffering occur solely because of her class: she is wounded by the mental, social and financial struggle of being a poor, single mother. When she is forbidden from 'all communion with her own' child, the poetry takes yet another turn when both physical and emotional intimacy between

mother and son are prohibited. The severing of the maternal bond mirrors the fissure that is driven between man and nature throughout *The Excursion*, the sadness reiterated in the notion that such a ‘mandate was enforced’. Suffering is actively exacerbated by the unthinking rich, giving rise to a splintered pastoral.

The fear that Ellen’s mind would be disturbed if she were to engage with her child seems severe, particularly in light of the suffering that she has already had to endure. The judgement in lines 980-983 and the assumption that the foster-mother would be unfit for duty renders her employers both condescending and discriminatory. In establishing a rural social hierarchy Wordsworth complicates the perception of the countryside as the liberating space of the humble shepherd swain. The swain’s new companions are less than favourable. The fear that Ellen’s thoughts could be distracted, that she could indeed turn into ‘The Mad Mother’ reveals the heartlessness of her patrons. With such a deep-seated issue embedded into pastoral it seems that Ellen’s ordinary life is not ‘buried life and missable by definition’ but conditioned by the very fabric of society.⁷⁷ Demoralised by such a sad, unjust and externally inflicted fate, Ellen’s absence from her child during his ‘mortal malady’ seems ever more tragic, worsening her condition as fallen dark pastoral maiden. Unlike Margaret who has to assume that Robert has died, Ellen not only sees her child in sickness, but she also has to bury him, albeit in trying circumstances. Genre highlights a different type of injustice by foregrounding the pain of a different type of absence. The brief but life-threatening disease that the child is forced to endure without the care of its mother brings new meaning to the term ‘selfish blindness’, initiating a long and painful process of bereavement:

—At length the Parents of the Foster-child
 Noting that in despite of their commands
 She still renewed, and could not but renew,
 Those visitations, ceased to send her forth:
 Or, to the garden’s narrow bounds, confined.
 I failed not to remind them that they erred:
 For holy Nature might not thus be crossed,

⁷⁷ William Galperin, ‘The Essential Reality of *The Excursion*’, *The Wordsworth Circle*, 45.2 (2014) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/24045890>> [Accessed 4 April 2020] (p. 115).

Thus wrong in woman's breast: in vain I pleaded:
 But the green stalk of Ellen's life was snapped
 And the flower drooped; as every eye could see,
 It hung its head in mortal languishment.

(*The Excursion*, Book VI, l. 1013-1024)

Pastoral briefly comes to life again as Wordsworth expertly relays Ellen's ongoing grief through natural metaphor. The 'commands' of the rich pair become too much to bear as their harsh behaviour sends the mother into a spiral of depression. After hearing that Ellen is 'sent abroad' (*The Excursion*, Book VI, l. 1005) to undertake any manner of errand for the couple, it seems that any consideration for her emotional state of being is actively ignored. The lack of empathy and compassion is relayed in Ellen's confinement to the 'garden's narrow bounds'. Withdrawing access to nature's usually limitless bounties, Wordsworth removes both personal and generic autonomy by shrinking the geographical parameters of pastoral. The poet simultaneously denounces the decision of the 'Parents of the Foster-child' take to prohibit Ellen from accessing 'holy Nature'. Deemed 'wrong in woman's breast' there is a moral irritation as well as an imbalance in the natural world. As the 'green stalk of Ellen's life' snaps, Wordsworth insinuates the return of the dark pastoral with the image of the drooping flower. It is almost as if Wordsworth is anticipating the onset of natural decay and human death. 'Languishment', with its elongated polysyllables, implies a loss of strength as well as a pensive sadness, grinding the pastoral to a halt. With such a disconsolate genre in play, pastoral's typically positive 'visitations' disappear into the dark ether of 'The Church-Yard Among the Mountains'.

The remarkable quality of Book VI lies in Wordsworth's ability to envision a pastoral where woman is 'a social victim of [her] world'.⁷⁸ *The Excursion* succeeds as an exercise in genre because the poet gives equal weighting to female characters, at times prioritising them over men in order to show the full scope of rural folk. In telling the unheard story of an oppressed labouring-class countrywoman Wordsworth enriches the tapestry of his pastoral cast, evolving the genre beyond the shepherd swain and his fair maiden. Through genre and Ellen's plight, the reader is forced to question their

⁷⁸ John Stevenson, 'Arcadia Re-Settled: Pastoral Poetry and Romantic Theory', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 7.4 (1967) <<http://www.jstor.com/stable/449530>> [Accessed 8 August 2020] (p. 635).

own moral standards by reading a new truth in this novel type of maternal struggle. The impropriety of the rich vitiates their status as servants of God as their indulgence in bad behaviour leads to contempt. The debate between the Wanderer and the Priest gives some indication of the negative impact of such behaviours:

—Still less, far less am I inclined to treat
Of Man degraded in his Maker's sight
By the deformities of brutish vice:
For, though from these materials must be framed
Harsh portraiture, in which a vulgar face
And a coarse outside of repulsive life
And unassuming manners may at once
Be recognized by all!"

(*The Excursion*, Book VI, l. 588-595)

Pastoral's tendency to champion the swain's humility is supplanted in favour of the dark pastoral's predisposition towards cynicism. Reacting against the Sceptic's sympathy for 'poor humanity's afflicted will / Struggling in vain with ruthless destiny' (*The Excursion*, Book VI, l. 571-572), the Priest argues that while faith is consolatory, it by no means acquits man of his selfishness and grave moral defects. Though it is important to test faith and providence, the dark pastoral shows how the 'deformities of brutish vice' have ultimately led to sadness and grave disapproval by man's 'Maker'. In a quasi-Miltonic fashion, Wordsworth uses genre to encourage man to consider the Christian dictum, yet his approach differs because of the universal recognition of morally reprehensible behaviour. The different shades of unvirtuous action have led to different types of personal sadness and suffering, transforming the pastoral into a traumatic genre. The true nature of fallen society is relayed through the exposure of man's 'vulgar face', 'repulsive life' and 'unassuming manners'. Wordsworth's attention to adjectives is particularly telling, as there is a sense of disgust relayed in these brief but vivid descriptions. The verb 'degraded' is of particular significance in this section as it means to 'reduce from a higher to a lower rank, to depose *from* a position of honour or estimation'.⁷⁹ The pastoral has tumbled from the heroic heights of the Golden Age into the hellish milieu of nineteenth century

⁷⁹ "degrade, v." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, June 2020, www.oed.com/view/Entry/49100. Accessed 11 August 2020.

rural society. Absorbed by self-will, the rural populations now also assume the narcissistic guise of the city dwellers.

The Excursion, with its insistence on empathy charts a unique type of poetic and moral philosophy that *The Prelude* does not explore. Where the growth of the poet's mind focuses on the development of the self, in *The Excursion* Wordsworth uses genre to promote moral worth by reflecting on the society of 1814. In Book VI especially, we see Wordsworth seeking out a readership keen to understand his new and rehabilitated version of the pastoral that concentrates not on any specific crime committed, but the consequences of that crime. By giving England the pastoral it deserves, Wordsworth reflects upon the state of affairs in his country, rather than reworking the earlier fictitious farming life of Virgil's *Georgics*. Refusing to give any final ethical word on the subject, Wordsworth encourages his reader not to judge these fallen figures but to ground the self by becoming more ethical readers and citizens. Through the various characters in 'The Church-Yard Among the Mountains' the poet encourages his reader to think themselves into different positions, seeing similarity within difference rather than just straightforward similarity. Against William Hazlitt's view that contends that the poet speaker, Wanderer, the Solitary, the Priest and the Pastor are all dramatic mouthpieces for Wordsworth, the multiple voices of Book VI give *The Excursion* a deeply moral and contemplative quality that allows the pastoral to be brought into a modern context.⁸⁰ The opening lines of Book VII suggest this vantage point:

And, when the stream
Which overflowed the soul was passed away,
A consciousness remained that it had left,
Deposited upon the silent shore
Of memory, images and precious thoughts;
That shall not die, and cannot be destroyed.

(*The Excursion*, Book VII, l. 25-30)

The strength of the stream metaphor qualifies much of Wordsworth's earlier musings with regards to virtue as the poet refuses to see death as the end of life or consciousness. By experimenting with water imagery, Wordsworth subtly

⁸⁰ William Hazlitt, 'The Round Table: On Mr Wordsworth's Excursion', in *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. by P. P. Howe, Volume 4 (London; Toronto: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1930), pp. 111-125 (p. 113).

manipulates one of his favourite bucolic features to bring to the fore a new reading of natural permanence. Even when the physical presence of water ceases to exist, consciousness still remains, though crucially it relocates to the ‘silent shore’. The ominous quality of the silence suggests that there is something unsettling about the recorded memory of man’s life as nature refrains from being an artistic generic aide. Nature operates as a depository for ‘memory, images and precious thoughts’, capturing both the disgraceful and virtuous behaviours of rural people, sometimes surprisingly so. Pastoral is transformed into a uniquely personal genre. The eternal awareness of pastoral implied in the idea that consciousness ‘cannot be destroyed’ not only implies natural permanence, it suggests that man’s actions or more specifically, these churchyard narratives, also have historical longevity. Ellen’s story, as one of many, endures in *The Excursion* because it is in itself an exemplar of human consciousness.

The ethical value of Ellen’s tale puts into perspective the selfish and reckless behaviour of other characters in Book VI. With such a strong paradigm of virtuous struggle, one cannot help but read the story of the earlier referenced adventurer with more than a little contempt. This individual, seduced by the ‘guilty bowers’ (*The Excursion*, Book VI, l. 366) of the city is figured as a fickle and malicious ingrate. Shedding the humble ways of the rural swain, he is tempted by the numerous opportunities for ‘knavish purposes’ (*The Excursion*, Book VI, l. 365), lured by ‘aught / That was attractive—and hath ceased to be!’ (*The Excursion*, Book VI, l. 330-331). Through such a direct contrast, pastoral points up how false perception first fools man, then destroys his sense of inner peace. The suffering that the adventurer endures through the shame that he brings back to his parents’ door shows how utterly worthless and fleeting joy can be, while simultaneously compromising the dignity of his parents. Through the dark pastoral Wordsworth is able to show the extent to which this ‘fallen Spirit’ (*The Excursion*, Book VI, l. 356) inflicted suffering not only on himself but on his wider community because of his jaunts. The darker consciousness that stirs in pastoral steers the reader away from such seemingly ‘attractive’ city ventures and instead encourages:

That Virtue, like the fumes and vapoury clouds
Through fancy’s heat redounding in the brain,
And like the soft infections of the heart,

By charm of measured words may spread through fields
 And cottages, and Piety survive
 Upon the lips of Men in hall or bower;
 Not for reproof, but high and warm delight,
 And grave encouragement, by song inspired.

(*The Excursion*, Book VII, l. 396-403)

Warning us against selfish impulses, pastoral reprises its role as the genre of hope by using natural metaphor to instate the rural sphere as the home of righteousness. Coming from the Pastor this message acquires a religious importance as well as a wider moral significance as Wordsworth identifies a link between virtue, compassion and piety. In attributing newfound meaning to the presence of religion in pastoral, Wordsworth renegotiates the boundaries of both the pastoral song and the religious song. Christianity and its maxims must no longer be used as a means of ‘reproof’ but as a source of ‘high and warm delight’ to encourage good and kindly behaviour. The ‘lips of Men in hall or bower’ must be encouraged to take heed of ‘measured words’, to no longer be seduced by the power of the Senate nor wealth. The adjective ‘measured’, with its reference to steady pragmatism, attempts to administer some level of self-control and self-regulation in this hopeful pastoral arena. As sincerity and integrity are the central pillars of a thriving society, pastoral must adapt to embody these traits. Although the ‘fumes and vapoury clouds’ and the ‘fields / And cottages’ may not return to that blessed time before Margaret and Robert’s deaths, there is an aspiration for a better day where man and the natural world can recuperate, even if in part, from their fall.

In constructing an English pastoral that engages with such a deep, enriched and contemporary philosophical debate, Wordsworth creates an entirely new generic vision that is centred around compassion. Geoffrey Hartman’s perception that *The Excursion* is weighed down by a ‘burden of vision’, seems to miss how, in the closing books of the poem, we see a clear and prospective vision of humanity that is insightful but simultaneously frightening.⁸¹ Though pastoral is used to encourage the reader to become more empathetic, to concentrate on the consequences of situation rather than action, there is a sense that society has progressed to a point of no return. By the time

⁸¹ Hartman, ‘*The Excursion*’, p. 293.

we reach Book VIII ‘The Parsonage’, this concept acquires renewed significance. Though the Wanderer initially ‘asserts the hollowness of all national grandeur if unsupported by moral worth’ he subsequently draws attention to the ‘[i]gnorance and degradation of Children among the agricultural Population’.⁸² Exposing the detrimental effect of the Industrial Revolution on the rural youth, Wordsworth uses genre to evoke sympathy for the upcoming generation by anticipating a new series of problems. Pastoral refuses to adhere to the apparent optimism implied in Book VI’s ending where

The younger Offspring, through the busy world,
Have all been scattered wide, by various fates;
But teach departed from the native Vale,
In beauty flourishing, and moral worth.”

(*The Excursion*, Book VI, l. 1305-1308)

The dejected Wanderer, returning to the low mood of earlier books, outlines the reasons for which this new generation suffer and will continue to suffer:

I have lived to mark
A new and unforeseen Creation rise
From out the labours of a peaceful Land,
Wielding her impotent Enginery to frame
And to produce, with appetite as keen
As that of War, which rests not night or day,
Industrious to destroy!

(*The Excursion*, Book VIII, l. 91-96)

Altering Geoffrey Hartman’s claim that ‘the Wanderer only occasionally makes us feel the earth he stands on’, instead, the reader sees how a once ‘peaceful Land’ has been transformed by the aid of mechanical innovation.⁸³ The dark pastoral reappears with the mention of the unprecedented ‘Creation’, an unwelcomed addition to pastoral’s previously undisturbed fields. The ‘ravages of revolution and war’ come to negatively affect the children of the countryside, stripping them of the opportunity of learning how to farm using traditional methods.⁸⁴ Though arduous, manual labour teaches moral worth because of the emphasis on responsibility and routine: Robert’s

⁸² Wordsworth, ‘Summary of Contents’, p. 93-94.

⁸³ Hartman, ‘*The Excursion*’, p. 293.

⁸⁴ Yen, ‘Introduction’, p. 9.

presence has attested to this possibility. Removing such a fundamental experience of rural life seems unjust, particularly since there was no consideration for the wider effect of the British Agricultural Revolution on countryside communities. As pastoral waves goodbye to the old English farming life, there is a sense that a dark, unfulfilling and unattractive future awaits the next generation. Pre-empting compassion for a fallen society that will continue to fall because of industrialisation, Wordsworth reveals prospective sympathy, almost beckoning pastoral into the territory of tragedy.

Kenneth Johnston argues that ‘the *route* [of *The Excursion*] is more important than the destination, which it does not reach’.⁸⁵ Johnston’s reading unfairly dismisses the ending of the poem, denying its full success as poetry. When read in light of pastoral’s ethical argument, Book IX’s closing lines inspire rather than confound the reader in a refreshing and novel way. Wordsworth uses genre in order to encourage us to think for ourselves, to rely not on the ethical direction posited by a poet but to use our own judgement to become principled and just citizens. In doing so there is a suggestion that we become more virtuous and therefore more content. In exploring the effect of the French and the Industrial Revolutions, the poet effectively transforms the neo-classical pastoral of the late eighteenth century into a deeply meditative genre far more in keeping with the cultural climate of 1814. Through *The Excursion*’s nine books, Wordsworth shows that a rural society that shuns kindness and embraces egotism will always hinder any opportunity for mutual joy. As we reach the end of the poem’s various excursions then, the poet is keen to terminate his epic pastoral with the implication of a central and ‘*active principle*’ (*The Excursion*, Book IX, l. 3):

To enfeebled Power,
 From this communion with uninjured Minds,
 What renovation had been brought; and what
 Degree of healing to a wounded spirit,
 Dejected, and habitually disposed
 To seek, in degradation of the Kind,
 Excuse and solace for her own defects;
 How far those erring notions were reformed;
 And whether aught, of tendency as good

⁸⁵ Johnston, ‘Wordsworth’s “Excursion”: Route and Destination’, p. 106.

And pure, from further intercourse ensued;
 This—(if delightful hopes, as heretofore,
 Inspire the serious song, and gentle Hearts
 Cherish, and lofty Minds approve the past)
 My future labours may not leave untold.

(*The Excursion*, Book IX, l. 783-795)

These lines, complicated by Wordsworth's simultaneously intense and vague philosophy, are perplexing. Meaning is not obvious as pastoral is engineered into a cryptic genre as *The Excursion* draws to a close. Nature's previously 'erring notions' have come undone first through the insistence on suffering and second, through a type of pastoral that has neglected an ironic vision for a dark and perturbed one. The 'wounded spirit', dejected by grief, anxiety and moral ineffectuality can only be renovated and reformed if man can learn to empathise with his fellow man. Bringing to our attention a type of pastoral that calls for 'further intercourse' beyond the 'storied landscape' of *The Excursion*, the Wanderer departs Book IX with the inspiration for future serious songs that seek the presence of 'gentle Hearts'.⁸⁶ The acknowledgement that 'lofty Minds' should 'approve the past' suggests that man's behaviour and pastoral's previously inconceivable 'good and pure' visage are defects that must be accepted but crucially, should not continue to dictate the landscape of the future. As Coleridge writes in *Biographia Literaria*, 'in consequence of the film of familiarity and selfish solicitude, we have eyes, yet we see not, ears that hear not, and hearts that neither feel nor understand'.⁸⁷ The objective of *The Excursion* is to make man see, to make man hear, feel and understand by recognising that suffering and the displacement of hope are opportunities for personal growth. What we read in 'The Wanderer', 'Despondency Corrected' and 'The Church-Yard Among the Mountains' is a pastoral that seeks to 'record, recall, resolve, prognosticate [and] prepare' the willing reader for a future defined by self-awareness and a broader perspective of human life.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Hartman, 'The Excursion', p. 299.

⁸⁷ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Chapter XIV, in *Biographia Literaria* (Auckland: The Floating Press, 2009), pp. 269-281 (p. 271)
 <<http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/sheffield/detail.action?docID=441234>> [Accessed 2 January 2021].

⁸⁸ Danby, 'Wordsworth and 'Nature'', p. 108.

'*The Excursion* is haunted by a wish to preserve written memorials of goodness and suffering; its characteristic posture is that of the poet, or his surrogates', writes Michael O'Neill.⁸⁹ As O'Neill concentrates his discussion on specific moments of self-consciousness in Book VI, he does not focus upon how the wider acts of suffering help to rehabilitate what was before 1814, an antiquated and even conservative pastoral genre. Wordsworth uses *The Excursion* as an opportunity to open up the pastoral by inviting ostracised characters into the reader's personal space. Through the darker shades of pastoral, the poet is able to reflect upon the present state of rural England, giving genre a refreshing presentness as he delves into the narratives of ordinary country folk. Through pain, struggle and loss, the poet also attributes a newfound moral value to this genre. The ethical value placed on maternal grief, psychological anxiety and empathy brings to *The Excursion* unique and contemplative matter, redefining the terms for epic as well as pastoral. Through such an innovative manipulation of genre Wordsworth encourages us, as he claimed in the 1802 Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* to think and feel 'long and deeply' about our existence, the natural world and the future.⁹⁰ His choice to pursue such an endeavour indicates both a curious and novel poet that is interested in more than the performative or the philosophical. Reconfiguring Alison Hickey and Sally Bushell's concept of the dramatic, one sees in the poet speaker, the Wanderer, the Solitary, the Priest and the Pastor a series of viewpoints that argue for compassion. Since 'naturalistic language is not as consoling as the listener would hope it to be', language and genre must adapt to convey an entirely new truth.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Michael O'Neill, "The Words He Uttered...': Wordsworth", in *Romanticism and the Self-Conscious Poem* (Oxford: Clarendon Park Press, 1997), pp. 25-61 (p. 27).

⁹⁰ William Wordsworth, 'Preface to Lyrical Ballads, 1802', in *Wordsworth and Coleridge: Lyrical Ballads 1798 and 1892*, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 95-116 (p. 98).

⁹¹ Borck, "'The Bitter Language of the Heart'" in Wordsworth's *The Excursion*, p. 186.

Chapter Five: The Prelude and the New Poet-Hero

‘Romantic poetry thrives on transformations of genre, on a remodelling of past works in the interest of the new, often hybridised forms, resulting in what Stuart Curran refers to as the ‘composite orders’ favoured by Romantic poets’ writes Michael O’Neill.¹ Wordsworth’s *Prelude* (1850) exemplifies this notion of generic hybridisation in that it rehabilitates the pastoral through the larger framework of epic.² Where *The Excursion* is a pastoral epic centred upon suffering, *The Prelude*’s generic composition and purpose are markedly different. Wordsworth draws upon the pastoral intermittently in *The Prelude*, using the genre in the fashion of an ‘ebb and flow’ as opposed to a consistent thread.³ With such an unconventional approach in tow, the poet is able to use genre as a means of spotlighting nature’s involvement in the development of the self. An exercise in what Seamus Perry refers to as ‘Wordsworth’s Heroics’, *The Prelude* uses pastoral to demonstrate the growth of the individual not just as artist, but also as poet-hero.⁴ In looking at Books I, II and V, this chapter will explore how strategic use of the pastoral ultimately helps to establish a new theory of heroism based on human trial. Boat stealing, schooltime escapades and the Dream of the Arab are all incidents where we see the speaker challenged by unique and testing situations. Each of these life affirming events draws upon the dark pastoral to highlight different elements of confrontation, specifically embedded within the natural setting. Indeed, it is in these early books where we see the first signs of the young artist as hero, with the child-self acquiring strength of character through trial. Unlike the more mature and politically inclined later Books (IX-XI) of *The Prelude*, Books I, II and V experiment with a more nuanced and singular type of pastoral that brings to the fore the early seeds of the contemporary and human hero.

¹ Michael O’Neill, ‘Romantic re-appropriations of the epic’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Epic*, ed. by Catherine Bates (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 193-210 (p. 193).

² William Wordsworth, ‘The Fourteen-Book Prelude of 1850’, in *The Prelude: The Four Texts (1798, 1799, 1805, 1850)*, Penguin Classics (Penguin: London, 1995), pp. 36-538. Please note that all further references to the 1850 *Prelude* will be quoted from this edition.

³ Michael O’Neill, ‘Ebb and Flow in *The Excursion*’, *The Wordsworth Circle* (“*The Excursion*”: A Bicentenary Celebration), 45.2 (2014) <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/24045887>> [Accessed 09 February 2018].

⁴ Seamus Perry, ‘Wordsworth’s Heroics’, *The Wordsworth Circle*, 34.2 (2003) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/24044946>> [Accessed 11 June 2021] (p. 65).

‘Traditionally, the epic focused on the heroic deeds of great public figures, but the Romantics remade the genre into something more personal, making the poet himself the hero of their epics’ writes Paul A. Cantor.⁵ The idea of the poet-hero defines *The Prelude*, largely because of Wordsworth’s desire to reconsider the terms of heroism and trial through the lens of self. Personal struggle, as opposed to physical combat alone, dominates in this epic. It is the learning and growth acquired from human challenges that produces the poet-hero’s status. Unlike Homer, Virgil, Shakespeare and even Milton, Wordsworth refrains from using the great warrior or verbose political leader as his protagonist. Having drastically altered the perception of the shepherd swain in *Lyrical Ballads* and *The Excursion*, Wordsworth produces a poet-hero in *The Prelude* who is virtuous and flawed as well as defined by an ability to work through and learn from experiential trials. The poet creates a hero who feels human rather than a cold avatar of perfection. The Wordsworth that we see in Books I, II and V, albeit fashioned for poetic effect, is a sensitive and intellectual being who works through fear, philosophical ambivalence and visionary trial. His heroism is built out of an ability to endure the most terrifying but life affirming experiences, and this endurance brings to the fore the hero as patient and contemplative poet. With its emphasis on retrospective dark pastoral experimentation, *The Prelude* prioritises failure, incompleteness and uncertainty to produce a poetic protagonist that is inspiring because of rather than in spite of his shortcomings. This poet-hero has unique substance. Through extraordinary articulation of some of the most intense experiences, genre devises an unconventionally strong and feeling human hero.

Experience comes to define the key elements of the self in *The Prelude*. Self-defining experience begins with ‘vulgar joy’ (*The Prelude*, Book I, l. 581), a term encountered repeatedly in Book I, ‘Introduction, Childhood and School Time’. A central emotion associated with the dark pastoral, ‘vulgar joy’ comes into being in the boat stealing incident. This oxymoronic feeling, defined in this instance as a spectrum of experience that encompasses gleeful emotion without nuance or sophistication, recalls the unrefined ‘glad animal movements’ in *Lines Written A Few Miles Above Tintern*

⁵ Paul A. Cantor, ‘The Politics of the Epic: Wordsworth, Byron, and the Romantic Redefinition of Heroism’, *The Review of Politics*, 69.3 (2007) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/20452900>> [Accessed 16 April 2022] (p. 375).

*Abbey, on revisiting the Wye during a Tour. July 13, 1798.*⁶ Playful experience is both natural and integral to childhood excursions, and Wordsworth is keen to postulate such events as central to the process of self-development. Although recent critics such as Anthony John Harding, Mark J. Bruhn and Louise Joy have provided refreshed and insightful readings on this episode of boat stealing, drawing on aspects of Wordsworth's linguistic subtlety, supernatural inflections and the child-self, there appears to be little exploration of the full effect of the darker overtones of nature, specifically in relation to the notion of 'vulgar joy', underlying this passage. Set against infant desire, 'vulgar joy' reaches its fullest expression through the use of the dark pastoral, whereby the subgenre creates an ominous, dramatic atmosphere before, during and after this awe-inspiring yet frightening personal experience. Recalibrating the pastoral implied by the 'Romantic tale by Milton left unsung' (*The Prelude*, Book I, l. 169), Wordsworth details the crucial early stage conception of the child's physical and mental development within the full scope of the natural world. In foregrounding his own experience of 'vulgar joy', at times an anxious and all-encompassing experience, Wordsworth prioritises childhood memory as integral to personal, and heroic, development.

In order for 'vulgar joy' to be identified and emphasised appropriately, Wordsworth constructs a broad pastoral continuum. Where Timothy Morton argues that 'nature writing often excludes [a] negative ambience', Wordsworth devises his own generic spectrum to administer and explore the effects of a darker strain of nature on childhood trial.⁷ In Book I, this is achieved through the wistful philosophical opening, akin to the foreword of *The Ruined Cottage*. Opening with what Stephen Gill terms 'an apparently free-flowing, personal meditation', the speaker recalls, 'Oh, many a time have I, a five years' child, / In a small mill-race severed from his stream, / Made one long bathing of a summer's day' (*The Prelude*, Book I, l. 288-290).⁸ The nostalgia created by such a simple but satisfying image suggests that the speaker's early years were spent in carefree bliss. Gill's claim, however, is quickly challenged as the dark

⁶ William Wordsworth, 'Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey, on revisiting the Wye during a Tour. July 13, 1798', in *The Major Works including The Prelude*, ed. by Stephen Gill, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 131-136 (p. 133).

⁷ Timothy Morton, 'Romanticism and the Environment Subject', in *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2009), pp. 79-139 (p. 124)..

⁸ Stephen Gill, 'The Verse', in *Wordsworth: The Prelude* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 19-38 (p. 23).

pastoral encroaches upon the apparently calm narrative. The speaker remembers, ‘I heard among the solitary hills / Low breathings coming after me, and sounds / Of undistinguishable motion, steps / Almost as silent as the turf they trod’ (*The Prelude*, Book I, l. 322-325). Notwithstanding the gothic overtones of this description, the ten-year-old child, as recalled by the speaker, suddenly appears to be surrounded by a foreboding, abstract presence, dwarfed by the physical power of ‘solitary hills’ and the fear of being pursued. Although there are human traits—‘breathings’, ‘steps’—there appears to also be no confirmation of any specific source, breeding further uncertainty and apprehension into pastoral. ‘[U]ndistinguishable’ adds to this sense of confusion and growing feelings of trepidation as we hear the steps are ‘almost as silent as the turf they trod’. Punctuated with the subsequent comment, ‘How strange terrors, pains, and early miseries / Regrets, vexations, lassitudes interfused / Within my mind’ (*The Prelude*, Book I, l. 344-347), the dark pastoral begins to assume an authoritative power, both within the narrative and as a threat to the speaker’s psychological state.

Returning to a simple narrative free of darker sentiments, there begins a quasi-prosaic description of boat stealing:

One summer evening (led by her) I found
 A little boat tied to a willow tree
 Within a rocky cave, its usual home.
 Straight I unloosed her chain, and stepping in
 Pushed from the shore.

(*The Prelude*, Book I, l. 357-361)

That such an action is relayed in a relatively uncomplicated manner, both in terms of the sentence structure and the actual action of boat stealing, suggests that from both a juvenile and adult perspective, such an action was fairly insignificant. Pastoral adapts to become the genre of the simple narrative. Reviewing *The Prelude*’s editorial history, we can also see that the 1850 version omits the excessive contextual detail of the same segment in the 1805 *Prelude*. Rather than, as Jonathan Arac notes, ‘[clarifying] ambivalence by reducing blurring and blending’ then, Wordsworth’s editing practice shows that he chooses to focus the crux of the encounter elsewhere.⁹

⁹ Jonathan Arac, ‘The Prelude and Critical Revision’, *Boundary 2*, 7.3 (1979) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/303163>> [Accessed 29 August 2018] (p. 35).

The poet's editing process triggers a shift in generic emphasis. Thus, recalling ideas of the Original Sin and St Augustine's pear-stealing incident, the idea of undertaking the forbidden, more than activating 'one's own store of images', allows the reader to relish the speaker's roguish behaviour, as we await details of the consequences of the activity.¹⁰ However, unlike in St Augustine's *Confessions*, we are never explicitly informed that the act is forbidden; it is only ever implied. Dismissing the experience as part of childhood learning, pastoral proceeds with a minimal outline of events. Through such a formal and narratorial understatement, Wordsworth is able to layer such sparse detail with further significant activity, allowing for more complex and strained sentiments to ensue. We see the beginnings of such an emotional and formal anxiety among the text in the lines immediately preceding the act of boat stealing:

...It was an act of stealth
 And troubled pleasure, nor without the voice
 Of mountain-echoes did my boat move on;
 Leaving behind her still, on either side,
 Small circles glittering idly in the moon,
 Until they melted all into one track
 Of sparkling light.

(*The Prelude*, Book I, l. 361-367)

Reflecting upon the event, we hear that the act is referred to as one of 'troubled pleasure', reminiscent of that unrefined dark pastoral emotion, 'vulgar joy'. Nature seems to control or dominate human movement, as we are notified that it is the 'voice / Of mountain-echoes' that allows the boat to move. The *of*-adjunct, a syntactical device identified by Frances O. Austin in Wordsworth's work, not only helps to create a 'dual vision' where 'past and present have become fused and the direct experience is recreated', it prioritises specific features of dark pastoral childhood experience and testing, as integral to heroic success.¹¹

Wading through the colder, alienating pastoral, forces the child not to overcome fear, but to learn to live with fear, a characteristic that strengthens him as he grows. This is

¹⁰ Gill, 'The Verse', p. 24.

¹¹ Frances O. Austin, 'Time, Experience and Syntax in Wordsworth's Poetry', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 70.4 (1969) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/43342445>> [Accessed 29 August 2018] (p. 733-734).

achieved through the child's perspective upon his surrounding environment. The personification of the mountain-echoes, alongside the subtle supernatural undertones, gives nature a particular mystical agency, where its presence seems to be a necessary prerequisite for the child's act of boat stealing. The phrase 'move on' also implies that the mountain-echoes or nature, is the driving force physically behind the boat, willing it to move forward. The viewing angle then widens before shrinking again, incorporating the 'small circles glittering idly in the moon, / Until they melted all into one track / Of sparkling light'. The nocturnal dark pastoral acquires a quasi-supernatural streak as light contracts and dissipates in an inexplicable manner. That the light transitions, from 'circles' to 'one track', but also an idle glitter to 'sparkling light' registers yet another change in perspective, activating both the brightness and movement of the light, as we retract from the scene. The lacklustre idleness of the light moving to a much more enticing sparkle not only adds a small element of drama to the dark pastoral, it also helps to isolate the boat in amongst the water. The speaker begins detailing the journey:

She was an elfin pinnace; lustily
 I dipped my oars into the silent lake,
 And, as I rose upon the stroke, my boat
 Went heaving through the water like a swan;
 When, from behind that craggy steep till then
 The horizon's bound, a huge peak, black and huge,
 As if with voluntary power instinct
 Upreared its head. I struck and struck again
 And growing still in stature the grim shape
 Towered between me and the stars, and still,
 For so it seemed, with purpose of its own
 And measure motion like a living thing,
 Strode after me.

(The Prelude, Book I, l. 373-385)

The opening couplet is reminiscent of the quasi-sexual encounter with the hazel bush in 'Nutting', where the speaker relishes the unvisited scene, recalling, 'the hazels rose / Tall and erect, with milk-white clusters hung, / A virgin scene!' ('Nutting', l. 17-

19).¹² However, the difference between the two passages lies in Wordsworth's manipulation of the pastoral setting as overtly inviting. In 'Nutting', sexual desire is interlaced with the protruding splendour of a sighted, glorious, mature bush; the speaker desires a physical object of nature that he sees and to which he is within relatively close proximity. In *The Prelude*, although the speaker identifies the 'summit of a craggy ridge' (*The Prelude*, Book I, l. 370), he hungers for the potential of a new, undefined experience. There appears to be no definite trajectory in terms of his initial point of departure: the 'willow tree' (*The Prelude*, Book I, l. 358), and the uncertain destination of the craggy ridge. Wordsworth, in part, relies upon the reader's imagination to construct this image. The child, like the reader, is propelled by the ambivalence and potential thrill of the dark pastoral setting, pre-empting an experience that will exceed Christopher Clausen's notion of boat stealing as a 'minor childhood transgression'.¹³ Similarly, the deployment of dark pastoral counters readings provided by critics such as Gordon K Thomas, who read the scene as a display of 'the guiltiness of what [the poet] did or thought, but which over the years came to seem relatively innocent and more important for what it taught him'.¹⁴ It seems that the representation of infant desire is sharpened by the adult poet recounting it through the dark pastoral. Such desire is depicted as equally as strong as adult desire, though crucially the temptation is initially offset against the serenity of nature, the 'silent lake'.

The childhood epic trial continues into a vortex of subliminal description as the tempo of the narrative gains pace. As Book I develops then, the dark pastoral gathers even more momentum. This part of the passage has received a series of acute readings by M. H. Abrams, John Jones and Lucy Newlyn, all of which prioritise Edmund Burke's concept of the sublime as foundational to an understanding of nature's presence in the boat stealing episode.¹⁵ Notwithstanding, as Abrams argues, that 'the sublime

¹² William Wordsworth, 'Nutting', in *The Major Works including The Prelude*, ed. by Stephen Gill, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 153-154 (p. 153).

¹³ Christopher Clausen, 'From the Mountain to the Monsters', *The Sewanee Review*, 115.2 (2007) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/40211799>> [Accessed 29 August 2018] (p. 239).

¹⁴ Gordon K. Thomas, 'Whither Wordsworth on his Elfin Pinnacle?', *The Wordsworth Circle*, 9.1 (1978) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/24039642>> [Accessed 27 August 2018] (p. 96).

¹⁵ M. H. Abrams, 'The Prelude as a Portrait of the Artist', in *Bicentenary Wordsworth Studies in Memory of John Alban Finch*, ed. by Jonathan Wordsworth (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 1970), pp. 180-237 (p. 210-11), John Jones, *The Egotistical Sublime: A History of Wordsworth's Imagination* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1924) and Lucy Newlyn, "'The Noble Living

subsumed scenes which are vast (hence suggestive of infinity), wild, tumultuous, and awful and which are associated with pain and evoke ambivalent feelings of terror and admiration', in the context of the passage, it seems that the sublime in the context of the dark pastoral, is not an end in itself.¹⁶ Rather, the sublime is a means for the child to grow. In the first instance, the sublime is tracked through the challenge that the transformative feature of the dark pastoral presents. The child's confidence to endure the sublime tests his limits within the natural world while settling his initial curiosity to see what exists beyond the lake. '[H]eaving through the water like a swan', the confident occupant of the boat seems to move from being the owner of a delicate 'elfin pinnace' to the proprietor of a much more elegant and self-aware mode of marine transport. With the suggestion of a weightier vehicle, Wordsworth is able to successfully eclipse the serene 'stars and the grey sky' (*The Prelude*, Book 1, l. 372) with a much more aggressive, threatening pastoral landscape.

Rather than operating as a 'stagnant genre of necessity', pastoral now functions as the genre of the developing hero.¹⁷ It modulates and adapts to each phase of testing, providing us with new experiences of childhood in nature. With a darker artifice in tow, Wordsworth unveils the portrait of a natural world that is obtrusive, dominating and semi-deformed, revealing a child-speaker who is dazzled by nature's scale. The plosive monosyllables present in the epithet 'huge peak, black and huge', combined with the repetition of 'huge' convey the brute power of the peak, a direct contrast to the relatively small 'rocky cave' (*The Prelude*, Book I, l. 359) enclosure where the boat was originally stowed. That the word 'huge' end-stops the line further adds to this sense of overwhelming size. The darkness of the peak, its total blackness, is overshadowed by the sheer vastness of its structure, as the child-speaker struggles to understand the possibility of such a natural feature. The speaker seems to move the narrative backwards in a clever manipulation of both tense and events, experimenting with time and genre. He notes that such a peak upreared its head, a singular operating part of its full structure, 'with voluntary power instinct'. The use of the simple past tense combined with personification, implies that nature has upreared itself as a direct

and the Noble Dead": Community in *The Prelude*', in *The Cambridge Companion to William Wordsworth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 550-69 (p. 60).

¹⁶ Abrams, 'The Prelude as a Portrait of the Artist', p. 206-207.

¹⁷ Curran, 'Pastoral', 89.

response to the child's approach. The term 'voluntary' also suggests that nature may have reacted in such a fashion because it was being disturbed. The autonomy implicit in 'voluntary' alongside the personification of the peak inferred by the word 'instinct', suggests that on reflection, the child put himself in grave danger, as he is ultimately at the mercy of nature's faculties. The caesura between 'head' and 'I' in line 380 registers such fears as we see the panic in the boy's reaction as he 'struck and struck again'. Nature does not, as Timothy Morton argues, remain 'a reified object, "over there"' but rather an integral part of the speaker's anxiety inducing trial.¹⁸

Anthony John Harding discusses this pivotal moment, the child's panic, as symptomatic of an individual 'haunted by vague fears of retribution, and punishment by nameless preternatural beings'.¹⁹ While there is an element of retribution and punishment here, more significantly, Wordsworth gestures towards the positive acknowledgement of fear. Accepting fear as an innate human trait removes the epic 'great warrior' status of the hero, showing how Wordsworth's hero is not simply born into greatness.²⁰ Rather, he is made. Testing one's limits, as both a child and an adult, physically and mentally, is crucial to this development. The poet adds 'a spiritual-ethical dimension to the treatment of sublimity', using the child's exposure to the sublime as a pedagogical experience.²¹ As Willard Spiegelman notes then, 'fear itself, along with Beauty, is the prime ingredient and preparation for heroic testing, and...self-forgetfulness, not self-consciousness, is the basis for childhood learning'.²² Temporarily, the boy allows himself to be lost in the awe of nature, raising his consciousness of the world rather than his self-consciousness. Such consciousness is evident in the ensuing description of the peak, described as 'growing still in stature'. The phrase seems self-contradictory, since 'stature' is defined as 'the height or (more generally) size of a thing', suggesting that such a height is predetermined and

¹⁸ Morton, 'Romanticism and the Environmental Subject', p. 119.

¹⁹ Anthony John Harding, 'The 'I' in *The Prelude*', in *The Oxford Handbook of William Wordsworth*, ed. by Richard Gravil and Daniel Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 379-396 (p. 384).

²⁰ Brian Wilkie, 'Wordsworth: The Way of the Hero', in *Romantic Poets and Epic Tradition* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1965), pp. 59-111 (p. 74).

²¹ Lucy Newlyn, "'The Noble Living and the Noble Dead': Community in *The Prelude*", in *The Cambridge Companion to William Wordsworth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 55-69 (p. 60).

²² Willard Spiegelman, 'The Autobiographical Hero in *The Prelude*', in *Wordsworth's Heroes* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 112-165 (p. 123).

unchangeable.²³ The idea that such a fixed entity could still grow implies a sense of infinity, foreshadowing the child-speaker's physical minuteness in relation to his surroundings. With a dark pastoral that is full of subtle incongruities, Wordsworth enters into new generic and heroic territory.

The hostile quality of the dark pastoral is then intensified, as we hear of a 'grim shape' towering between the lone traveller and the stars. That there seem to be only three objects in view—the stars, the peak and the boy—helps to isolate the child as the focus and victim of a disconcerting surrounding environment. The terrifying quality of the peak, alongside its growing, unstoppable height, presents the boy with his most intimidating challenge. Its physical presence seems a test of the boy's nerve. The force of the recollection of his childhood imagination then almost overpowers the adult poet, who then appends, in a tone that almost admits to the overwhelming quality of the memory, '...so it seemed'. Astounded by the peak, the child, according to the adult poet, felt an unsettling notion that the peak moved with 'measured motion like a living thing'. The disturbing simile initially suggests that the peak is alive and active, yet it is the subsequent short phrase, '[s]trode after me' that sponsors a much more sinister atmosphere. The syntax, with 'strode' at the beginning and 'me' at the end of the line, figuratively mimics the motion of being pursued, emphasising the chase. The peak, a looming threat, seems to hunt the boy down, amplifying the dramatic quality of the dark pastoral in the aforementioned confession, those '[l]ow breathings coming after me' (*The Prelude*, Book I, l. 323). The soft alliterative 'm' in 'measured motion', combined with the loose, meandering 'l' sounds in 'like' and 'living', mimic the enticing but twisting quality of the dark pastoral, as it physically engulfs the landscape and infects the boy's mental composure. Transforming from the black and huge peak to a now abstractly threatening force, the sublime facilitates dark pastoral transitions, allowing the child to recognise his own strength as he battles through this experience.

The events following the perceived ambush are swift. The terrified child returns the boat and makes a hurried dash homeward through the meadows. Although at this point in the poem, the protagonist rejects the opportunity to prove his traditional heroic

²³ "stature, n." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, June 2018, www.oed.com/view/Entry/189352. Accessed 31 August 2018.

valour, Wordsworth draws out a more human reaction as he represents the child's inability to contend with larger, superhuman forces.²⁴ The boy's susceptibility to fear awakens a consciousness within the reader, as we recognise that the attractive prospect of engaging in the forbidden often ends in regret. The feeling of irrational panic relayed in the lines 'With trembling oars I turned' (*The Prelude*, Book I, l. 385), demonstrates the mental and physical agitation of the boy as his body is consumed by fear. As soon as the boy returns the boat, he regains composure and returns home in a 'grave / And serious mood' (*The Prelude*, Book I, l. 389-390). Despite the apparent calmness, Wordsworth is keen to foreground the traumatic nature of the incident, but more importantly, shows that such an incident was so significant it was remembered in detail all the way through to adulthood. Fear is not overcome: the boy simply learns to live with his experiences. The adult-poet recalls:

...but after I had seen
 that spectacle, for many days, my brain
 Worked with a dim and undetermined sense
 Of unknown modes of being, o'er my thoughts
 There hung a darkness, call it solitude
 Or blank desertion. No familiar shapes
 Remained, no pleasant images of trees,
 Of sea or sky, no colours of green fields;
 But huge and mighty forms, that do not live
 Like living men, moved slowly through the mind.
 By day, and were a trouble to my dreams.

(*The Prelude*, Book I, l. 390-400)

As Morris Dickstein notes, in this passage, 'there is nothing casual, benign or picturesque about this vision of nature working through his mind, nothing animistic or quasi-human'.²⁵ The child's inability to rid himself of morose thoughts demonstrates both the effect and active persistence of the dark pastoral as it infects the mental faculties of the youth. Referring to the incident as a 'spectacle', the boy registers the

²⁴ J. B. Hainsworth discusses traditional epic valour as encountering and overcoming 'the heat of the battle', where 'the hero's prowess displays itself in athletic contests'. See Hainsworth, 'Ancient Greek', in *The Traditions of Heroic and Epic Poetry: Volume One The Traditions* (London: W. S. Maney & Son, 1980), pp. 20-47 (p. 25-26).

²⁵ Morris Dickstein, 'Wordsworth and Solitude', *The Sewanee Review*, 95.2 (1987) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/27545741>> [Accessed 01 September 2018] (p. 268).

experience as a display, he remembers it as ‘something presented to the view especially of a striking or unusual character’.²⁶ Juxtaposed against the view of the events as awe-inspiring though unusual, the passage is also dominated by a sense of the melancholic. Akin to the dejection of John Milton’s *Il Penseroso* and Wordsworth’s 1822 sonnet ‘Mutability’, the boy’s feelings are suspended in their own misery. There exist ambivalent ‘unknown modes of being’ and ‘huge and mighty forms’ that trouble him ‘for many days’. The lack of specific identity oppresses the boy; he is unable to understand the exact profile of the emotions he is dealing with, even in adulthood. The predominance of the word ‘no’ also adds to the idea that the mind is devoid of that conventional soft pastoral, the blissful image of that ‘long bathing of a summer’s day’. There are now ‘no pleasant images’ or conventional irony, only a reel of anxious thoughts. With this newly saddened hero, an individual who exhibits real inner life, Wordsworth presents a case for the hero being formed by nature as much as he is by fate. The Homeric hero lacks this type of depth, and is characterised by his external actions, measured by the extent of his physical courage and bravery. Constructing a more introspective hero, Wordsworth evolves the epic precedent to now include the dark pastoral mode, distinguishing the suffering protagonist from his antecedents.

The operations of the child’s mind reiterate the sense of unknown, as the brain works with ‘a dim and undetermined sense’. The heavy ‘m’ and harsh, ‘d’ consonants add a sense of heaviness to the mind, as it is depressed under the burden of the child’s memory. The lack of, or muted light implied by the adjective ‘dim’, alongside the authoritatively unsettled ‘undetermined’, give an insight into a mind that is not content as it remains constantly active and thinking. While it is true, as Lucy Newlyn says, that ‘natural forms are remembered speaking to the child and touching him with their power’, this ‘touching’ is not always positive.²⁷ Natural forms have caused the boy’s thoughts to be oppressed by a hanging ‘darkness’, identified as ‘solitude / Or blank desertion’. No longer are we privy to pastoral’s ‘artful constructions of illusions’.²⁸ The use of the preposition ‘o’er’, alongside the syntactical placement of the phrase

²⁶ "spectacle, n.1." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, June 2018, www.oed.com/view/Entry/186057. Accessed 1 September 2018.

²⁷ Newlyn, “‘The Noble Living and the noble dead’: Community in *The Prelude*”, p. 63.

²⁸ Morton, ‘Romanticism and the Environmental Subject’, p. 125.

‘o’er my thoughts’, literally over the darkness and the poetic line itself, functions as a physical obstruction to thought, trapping any movement or thoughts from escaping. The compression of the lines reinforces the sense of isolation, but the term ‘blank desertion’ also presents the reader with an apocalyptic sense of terror. The adjective ‘blank’ suggests complete bleakness, which coupled with the complete erasure of pastoral enclosure (‘no pleasant images of trees, / Of sea or sky, no colours of green fields;’) forces thought into the territory of the unknown, a mental abyss. Three lines later, this vacant abyss is wholly disturbed by ‘huge and mighty forms, that do not live / Like living men’. Wordsworth once again returns to the prosaic mode to detail the orientation of these forms as they ‘moved slowly through the mind’. There is something disturbing about an unidentified form moving ‘slowly’; it suggests that the mind has been colonised by a darker, predatory, almost heavy, element. The child, no longer privy to the azure ‘sea’ or ‘green fields’, becomes a victim of a tempting but taunting dark pastoral, disturbed and yet transfixed by its presence.

Although the boat-stealing episode takes up only 43 of the 646 lines of Book I, it attracts critical interest for being a vital event in *The Prelude*. From the perspective of genre development however, the boy’s excursion fundamentally maps out an aesthetic benchmark for the dark pastoral in the rest of the Book, and *The Prelude* as a whole. It also demonstrates that early curiosity was necessary for the child to grow and develop. That the next section begins with a completely different apostrophe, ‘Wisdom and Spirit of the universe!’ (*The Prelude*, Book I, l. 401) does not erase the importance of boat stealing and its lessons. Instead, it acknowledges a silent understanding of ‘[t]he passions that build up our human soul’ (*The Prelude*, Book I, l. 407), where passions are varied and not always enjoyable. The reader learns, or recognises, that

...with enduring things—
 With life and nature, purifying thus
 The elements and of thought,
 And sanctifying, by such discipline,
 Both pain and fear, until we recognise
 A grandeur in the beatings of the heart.

(*The Prelude*, Book I, l. 409-414)

Despite the obvious pantheistic undertone of Wordsworth's moralising, the poet speaker recognises 'pain and fear' as the essential pair of emotions. The dark pastoral, a colder, and perhaps more testing version of pastoral, allowed fear to materialise as a result of inquisitiveness, and in doing so, builds a more rounded human whose heart beats with a refreshed vitality. As David Ferry argues, 'it is the limits of mortality that define man as what he is', an idea that comes to the fore in the retrospective aftermath of boat stealing.²⁹

Registering such a heightened perception of the dark pastoral so early on in Book I gives Wordsworth a certain breadth to work with, one which allows him to develop the dark pastoral as a subgenre in less extreme, and very different, circumstances. Speaking in the wake of 'November days' (*The Prelude*, Book I, l. 416), the speaker recalls,

And in the frosty season, when the sun
Was set, and visible for many a mile
The cottage windows blazed through twilight gloom,
I heeded not their summons: happy time
It was indeed for all of us—for me
It was a time of rapture!

(*The Prelude*, Book I, l. 425-430)

The scene is reminiscent of Coleridge's 'Frost at Midnight', not least because of the deployment of the word 'frosty', but also in the use of a cottage existing in an apparent calmness. The crispness of the cold English twilight is relayed with attention to detail; the contrast of the bitter 'frosty season' pitted against the enticing, warm dusk of sunset. Conjuring up a rural panorama of a lone cottage emitting light, a beacon of hope amongst murkier surroundings, Wordsworth presents us with a snapshot of the conventional pastoral. Recollecting a November evening, the dark pastoral transitions from the fear-inducing awe of a childhood experience to a snapshot of a domesticated rural backdrop. Again, the draw of the dark pastoral, despite its distinctly different faculties, is felt with the phrase 'for me / It was a time of rapture!' That the speaker distinguishes his rapture from the happiness of 'all of us' defines him as an individual

²⁹ David Ferry, 'Some Characteristics of Wordsworth's Style', in *Wordsworth: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. by M. H. Abrams (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1972), pp. 35-44 (p.36).

both distinct from and yet part of a wider group. The self-validation also demonstrates how the boy's mind works. The scene does not simply display, as Carol Landen notes, his 'unquiet state of mind'.³⁰ The boy is stimulated and entranced by his surroundings; he is not simply happy because of it. He revels in the excitement of the dark pastoral in all its gradations, '[p]roud and exulting like an untired horse / That cares not for his home' (*The Prelude*, Book I, l. 432-433). The quaint use of the prefix 'un' in 'untired' inadvertently also uncovers the boy's alertness, aided by the triumphant verb 'exulting'. Comparing one's self to a horse suggests a likeness between child and animal in strength, alongside bold, mammalian spirit. Extending Landen's notion of an unquiet state of mind, the horse analogy also denotes a fortified, well rounded being with unquiet passions. It is in this frostier environment where such unquiet passions materialise and are explored.

Acknowledging his own stirring passions, the speaker proceeds to identify himself as a composite function of his surrounding milieu, nonchalantly confessing '[w]e were a noisy crew' (*The Prelude*, Book I, l. 399). Absorbed as a part of the dark pastoral now, the poet retreats back into philosophical rumination, questioning nature's ministry, though this time with the boat stealing episode as one of his formative experiences. In a distinctly mature, retrospective tone, the speaker revisits the idea of 'troubled pleasure' or 'vulgar joy', relating such feelings specifically to that of childhood. He muses,

Thus oft amid those fits of vulgar joy
Which, through all seasons, on a child's pursuits
Are prompt attendants, 'mid that giddy bliss
Which, like a tempest, works along the blood
And is forgotten...

(*The Prelude*, Book I, l. 581-585)

Beginning the section with '[t]hus', immediately adds an evaluative tenor to the section, gesturing towards a conclusion. Boat stealing functioned as a singular fit of 'vulgar joy', one of many 'prompt attendants' to the childhood pursuit of adventure.

³⁰ Carol Landen, 'Some Sidelights on *The Prelude*', in *Bicentenary Wordsworth Studies: In Memory of John Alban Finch*, ed. by Jonathan Wordsworth (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 1970), pp. 359-376 (p. 362).

Now, the speaker chooses to discuss numerous ‘fits’ as a collection of experiences. The use of the noun ‘attendant[s]’ carries with it a certain air of stewardship, suggesting that fits of joy naturally tend to a child’s pursuits. It also suggests that these fits are only present at particular occasions, not every occasion, again identifying the idea of specific experience. As Noel B. Jackson’s reading shows, these ‘fits of vulgar joy’ are defined by ‘vivid sensory experience and the power that such moments hold over the human mind’.³¹ Both the child and human mind dwell upon such experiences, circulating and re-circulating over them. The ‘giddy bliss’ reinforces this idea of re-experiencing, since it denotes the sensation of overjoyed fulfilment. It is also likened to a tempest, implying a sense of unruly madness as it infects the blood. That such a sensation is ‘forgotten’ suggests that these fits are only temporary, transitory feelings. However, what is memorable is the specific pursuit where such a fit was experienced. It is through nature’s varied landscapes and temperaments, that ‘chance collisions and quaint accidents’ (*The Prelude*, Book I, l. 589), ‘not vain / Not profitless’ (*The Prelude*, Book I, l. 591-592), are able to arise. Identifying, exploring and deliberating over experiences contained in the dark pastoral setting fundamentally ‘impregnate and...elevate the mind’ (*The Prelude*, Book I, l. 596). An elevated mind is a desired trait of a hero, but it can only be achieved through rigorous testing.

In his analysis of *The Excursion*, Edward Bostetter sees Wordsworth as the creator of an entirely new type of protagonist, using the Wanderer as exemplary of his motto: the ‘common man as hero’.³² As in *The Prelude*, the poet appoints himself and not a gladiatorial god-like figure as his lead character in order to create a more modern and sympathetic hero. Using pastoral to enrich epic, Wordsworth strategically renegotiates the terms of the epic protagonist. Crucially, it is the narratives of his youth and not the tales of others that are integral to the poet’s new manifesto for and claim to heroism. As we move from the dramatic opening of *The Prelude* into the more philosophically inclined Book II, Wordsworth’s desire to create a hero distinct from the ‘paradigm...folkic exemplar...specialized model...[or] recreational agent’ becomes

³¹ Noel B. Jackson, ‘Rethinking the Cultural Divide: Walter Pater, Wilkie Collins, and the Legacies of Wordsworthian Aesthetics’, *Modern Philology*, 102.2 (2004) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/431554>> [Accessed 23 December 2018] (p. 215).

³² Edward E. Bostetter, ‘Wordsworth’, in *The Romantic Ventriloquists: Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Shelley, Byron* (London; Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1975), pp. 12-81 (p. 67).

apparent.³³ A structurally different operation to Book I, Book II introduces a more anxious blank verse, saturated with passages that demonstrate the emergence of the unstable, maturing, human hero. This is achieved through an examination of the effect of childhood experience, alongside the probing of wider ideas around philosophical reasoning. This ideology is evident in Wordsworth's deployment of pastoral verse, itself an inconsistent and often troubled presence. With the speaker positioned in a more speculative, observant role then, the journey into adolescence is marked by lessons, deliberations and new deductions, though the manner in which these are achieved is not necessarily linear or pragmatic. Combined with a deeper interest in the idea of solitude, the notion of physically being secluded in nature, and then seeking 'truth in solitude' (*The Prelude*, Book II, l. 461), Book II challenges the idea of the traditional hero being born into his epic warrior-like status.

The young hero of Wordsworth's tale is presented as a work in progress, an ambivalent individual who fluctuates between the physical and the spiritual, constantly existing in a state of uncertainty. The lines '...often do I seem / Two consciousnesses, conscious of myself / And some other Being.' (*The Prelude*, Book II, l. 31-33) speak to the poet's self-conscious manufacturing of the self as protagonist. Applied to Wordsworth's own interpretation of pastoral, we see the speaker flitting from scenes of pastoral calm to perturbed landscapes that reflect and encourage debates of a theoretically strained nature or vice versa. With the retrospective echo of a mature voice, the narrator's journey to adulthood seems evermore profound and affecting. Foregrounding a more human and contextual hero, Wordsworth adds a new depth to his protagonist, constructing a human hero who reflects on the full extent of his experiences, oscillating in his own unquiet mind. We see,

...o'er all that glides
Beneath the wave, yea, in the wave itself,
And mighty depth of waters.

(*The Prelude*, Book II, l. 407-409)

Wordsworth's preamble into the workings of a hero with this sketch of aquatic features, is not designed to simply outline the boundaries of his pastoral landscape; he

³³ Paul Meadows, 'Some Notes on the Social Psychology of the Hero', *The Southwestern Social Science Quarterly*, 26.3 (1945) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/42879945>> [Accessed 02 January 2019] (p. 239).

uses such a powerful natural image to relay a subsidiary metaphorical message. What occurs beneath the wave, whether good or bad, predictable or unpredictable, are of equal interest to the wider natural world. Likewise, a childhood or adolescent event, the aftermath or consequence of said event and its wider impact on human and heroic development carry the same level of significance on an individual's adult life. It is this full sequence and all sentiments associated with this process, as has been demonstrated with boat stealing, that allows a child to experience, develop and understand feeling. In this way, the hero becomes a fully achieved creation. The ability to experience emotion underpins Wordsworth's view that 'feeling has to him imparted power' (*The Prelude*, Book II, l. 255). The supremacy of feeling is also 'the first / Poetic spirit of our human life' (*The Prelude*, Book II, l. 260-261) and the driving force behind Wordsworth's dark pastoral.

Uncertainty and contradictory sentiments manifest in numerous forms in Book II. Significantly, dark pastoral is underpinned by the toil of personal isolation and solitude, helping to graft a more introverted and contemplative hero. A frequent theme in Wordsworth's poetry, the isolation of the individual in nature often operates as a case study for the human condition, yet in Book II is used to show how the hero grows through trial and error, reasoning and understanding. Wordsworth manipulates genre to create a hero who creates and then moves among new 'fundamental truths'.³⁴ Having located his 'infant sensibility' half way through the book (*The Prelude*, Book II, l. 270), the speaker suddenly assumes a perturbed and anxious disposition triggered by a psychological imbalance as he confesses, '[f]or now a trouble came into my mind / From unknown causes' (*The Prelude*, Book II, l. 276-277). The haphazardness of such a mood, particularly after the mother and babe episode, triggers the evocation of an introspective scene:

...I was left alone
 Seeing the visible world, nor knowing why.
 The props of my affections were removed,
 And yet the building stood, as if sustained
 By its own spirit! All that I beheld

³⁴ William Empson, 'The Beggar's Opera', in *Some Versions of Pastoral* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1935), pp. 195-250 (p. 210).

Was dear, and hence to finer influxes
 The mind lay open to a more exact
 And close communion. Many are our joys
 In youth, but oh! what happiness to live
 When every hour brings palpable access
 Of knowledge, when all knowledge is delight,
 And sorrow is not there.

(*The Prelude*, Book II, l. 277-288)

Pastoral's contemplative drive reaches its climax here as the speaker is 'left alone / Seeing the visible world'. Firmly placing us in the realm of the physical, Wordsworth brings to the fore a new interpretation of generic vision. The uncertainty of not 'knowing why' indicates a speaker who is learning through new encounters and discovery. He is vitally aware of this process. Wordsworth hints at the dark pastoral with the allusion to the metaphysical, as the building he is looking at stands 'as if sustained / By its own spirit!' Exchanging pastoral irony for a stronger and more spiritual presence, *The Prelude* reconsiders the solely physical and aesthetic nature of genre. At this point in Book II we are not merely observing 'an object of value as seen by a window shopper'.³⁵ Nature, or the visible world, is not to be simply admired or commended in *The Prelude*. Though the speaker holds everything that he sees as 'dear', his mind lies 'open to a more and exact communion'. External action leads to internal change. Though in youth one can experience numerous joys, 'every hour brings palpable access of knowledge'. It is the darker hours in which the speaker acquires his heroic strength. Through Wordsworth's experimentation with pastoral, we learn that 'all knowledge is delight', and that sorrow cannot exist because all experiences lead to growth. The 'naïve freshness' so often associated with pastoral converts into a learning curve that carries with it a strong grain of personal and human integrity.³⁶

'[S]ilent inobtrusive sympathies, / And gentle agitations of the mind' (*The Prelude*, Book II, l. 298-299) continue to appear in Book II as the narrator recounts his journey through adolescence. As he experiences the different seasons, the speaker notes a

³⁵ Morton, 'Romanticism and the Environmental Subject', p. 139.

³⁶ William Empson, 'Marvell's Garden', in *Some Versions of Pastoral* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1935), pp. 119-145 (p. 141).

contrast where ‘transitory qualities’ (*The Prelude*, Book II, l. 290) unfold alongside ‘a register / of permanent relations, else unknown’ (*The Prelude*, Book II, l. 294). The fleeting impermanence of the seasons against the intransience of relations mirror the speaker’s own uncertainties and changing behaviours, pre-empting a transition in imagery. Not long after we encounter tangible pastoral pleasure, ‘I would walk alone, / Under the quiet stars’ (*The Prelude*, Book II, 302-303) are we thrust into dark pastoral milieu, as we hear the gothic ‘notes that are / The ghostly language of the ancient earth’ (*The Prelude*, Book II, l. 308-309). Moving from a human to a supernatural and even historic consciousness, the speaker assumes a double personality, now able to understand an ancient vernacular. Wordsworth uses the speaker to connect the ‘ancient’ pastoral with his contemporary dark pastoral, denoting the continuity of the pastoral genre but also its evolution. Genre is not static. The ambivalence of the speaker’s identity is further exacerbated when he seems to transport himself into the realm of the imagination:

Thence did I drink the visionary power;
 And deem not profitless those fleeting moods
 Of shadowy exultation: not for this,
 That they are kindred to our purer mind
 And intellectual life; but that the soul,
 Remembering how she felt, but what she felt
 Remembering not, retain sane obscure sense
 Of possible sublimity, whereto
 With growing faculties she doth aspire,
 With faculties still growing, feeling still
 That whatsoever point they gain, they yet
 Have something to pursue.

(*The Prelude*, Book II, l. 311-322)

Exemplary of adolescent epic trial, the speaker indulges in consuming ‘visionary power’, gesturing towards full recognition of, and an ingestion of, visionary experience. As Barbara Schapiro notes, ‘the perceptual and psychological processes of the mental world’ are key to Wordsworth’s visionary passages, yet in this context

the symbolism extends further.³⁷ Through visionary testing, crucially embedded within the dark pastoral setting, the speaker—the hero—learns the importance of experiencing ‘shadowy exultation’ in order to obtain a ‘purer mind’ and an ‘intellectual life’. That Wordsworth strives for such faculties distinguishes his hero from his predecessors, as he relishes a deeper sense of the self as born out of self-satisfaction and scholarly growth. In contrast to Ancient Greek epic, where ‘nowhere is the intellectual level of the heroes represented as any higher than plain common sense’, Wordsworth uses pastoral to shape a genuinely intelligent hero who has a thirst for knowledge, thereby redefining the parameters of epic heroism.³⁸ Sounding an elegiac note, the speaker demonstrates that there will always be something to pursue.

The speaker moves from the ‘visible world’ to a state of dream-like submission, where the notion that all knowledge is delight is conveniently forgotten. Now ‘fleeting moods / Of shadowy exultation’ are revered, with the soft vowels and iambic pentameter adding a light, floating ambiance to the dark pastoral. The hero acknowledges the importance of such moods, the term ‘shadowy exultation’ a more mature and refined extension of the childhood notion of ‘vulgar joy’. Exchanging knowledge and all its delights for a more intuitive discussion of the abstract soul, the speaker inhabits a new realm, the physically invisible, though mentally accessible world. In entering the mystical dimension, Wordsworth embarks upon what Schapiro terms a quest for ‘invisible wholeness’, where ‘deep, dynamic structures of mind and nature’ give way to a ‘holographic reality’.³⁹ However, he also identifies a need for his hero to be able to occupy two spaces in order to become whole. This episode resembles an out-of-body experience, but crucially demonstrates the importance of the speaker experiencing himself and ‘some other Being’. The dark pastoral triumphs in allowing this duality to exist, but also permits the hero to reflect on himself, develop inner strength and grow as a result of experiencing both states of being. Unlike in traditional epics, where the ‘warrior’s ability is inborn, natural, untaught’, the hero of *The Prelude*

³⁷ Barbara Schapiro, ‘Wordsworth’s Visionary Imagination: A New Critical Context’, *The Wordsworth Circle*, 18.3 (1987) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/24042773>> [Accessed 31 December 2018] (p. 137).

³⁸ Hainsworth, ‘Ancient Greek’, p. 25.

³⁹ Schapiro, ‘Wordsworth’s Visionary Imagination: A New Critical Context’, p. 138.

acquires his heroic traits, traits which Wordsworth makes heroic rather than those conventionally accepted to be heroic.⁴⁰

Lingering on the numinous soul, Wordsworth moves the speaker's mind beyond sheer wonder. The metaphysical aspect of the dark pastoral grows exponentially, building up a certain depth of genre that has been previously hitherto undetected. Wordsworth expands upon ideas around the supernatural and the spiritual that he first touches upon in Book I. Transforming the sombre, isolated and definitive '[s]ouls of lonely places' (*The Prelude*, Book I, l. 466) to the singular, ambivalent, adolescent soul of self-discovery, *The Prelude* becomes a literary arena for a spiritual breakthrough. The soul is first personified, and specifically feminised, adding a dainty elegance to its presence, reinforced by the focus on feeling; '[r]emembering how she felt, but what she felt'. Feeling becomes paramount to the dark pastoral, but it is 'what' and not 'how' that is important. It is not the way that the soul feels, or the condition or quality of feeling, but the specific feeling itself in which our hero is interested. Dark sentiments creep into Wordsworth's framework, triggered by the grand anaphora in lines 316 and 317. Much like the child of Book I, the soul is able to 'retain sane obscure sense / Of possible sublimity'. The phrase is saturated with two slight contradictions: sane/obscure and sense/obscure. Revisiting the idea of contradictions in the dark pastoral, the syntax of this sentence gives the soul unconventional characteristics in that it is linked to rationality and the sublime. Sanity is not often associated with obscurity and equally, obscurity and sense seem an incompatible pairing since sense denotes logic and rationality and obscurity harbours feelings of quite the opposite. The overpowering sibilance in the sentence adds an unsettling undertone, producing an unstable undercurrent in the text. Wordsworth seems to embrace the dark pastoral at a pivotal moment in Book II, in order to prioritise the growth of the spiritual being.

Drawing the dark pastoral out of physical description and into the realm of philosophical enquiry reveals the subgenre to be a multifaceted, evolutionary mode and not just a static subcategory of pastoral. Sponsoring Stuart Curran's assertion that 'Wordsworth both creates a self-reflexive pastoral mode and questions its value', the poet broadens his exercise in epic by simultaneously interrogating the value of his own

⁴⁰ Miller, 'The Heroic Biography', p. 17.

interpretation of pastoral epic verse.⁴¹ Using the speaker's fascination with the soul, Wordsworth questions the value of his dark pastoral in particular relation to his epic hero by entering into conversation with Coleridge. In *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge notes that the poet 'brings the whole soul of man into activity, with the subordination of its faculties to each other according to their relative worth and dignity'.⁴² The soul hangs at the epicentre of dark pastoral and epic writing because it drives the speaker's epiphanies about spiritual power, as well as his own character. This passage also highlights an inherent ambiguity in the speaker's spiritual development, as a result of the contradictions, lack of specificity, and vagueness of its terminus. The 'growing faculties' add a sense of uncertainty because of the lack of qualification or quantification. There also seems to be no limit ('faculties still growing'/'whatsoever point they gain') to the soul's powers, suggesting the idea that the soul has the potential to be harmful in amongst its supremacy. Its relative worth is infinite, but the point Wordsworth makes is that there is 'something to pursue'. The ambivalence of this final line, the reference to 'something', suggests that the speaker's soul has an objective, though the focus of this objective is undefined. Where the dark pastoral of the physical, natural world is relative, with its 'leafless trees and every icy crag / Tinkled like iron' (*The Prelude*, Book I, l. 441-442), the dark pastoral of the theoretical sphere where the soul is central, is more challenging. Wordsworth asks the reader to reconsider his earlier assertion that feeling determines human life, as the metaphysical begins to dominate the poetry.

Compared to Coleridge's extensive account of the soul in Chapter XIV of *Biographia Literaria*, Wordsworth's more elusive attitude towards defining the soul undermines his spiritual philosophy, showcasing his uncertainty even as a mature man. Although Coleridge is not directly considering heroism, his account of the soul is integral to and underpins his view of what makes us human. With Wordsworth, his hazy depiction of the soul and its functions construct the human hero who interacts with and is governed by a fairly loose, abstract faculty. Oscillating in the realm of unclear and nervous disposition, the speaker delves deep into the unstable terrain of the spiritual:

⁴¹ Stuart Curran, 'Pastoral', in *Poetic Form and British Romanticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 85-127 (p. 103).

⁴² Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'Chapter XIV', in *Biographia Literaria*, ed. with his Aesthetical Essays by J. Shawcross, Volume II (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1949), pp. 5-13 (p. 12).

...But let this
 Be not forgotten, that I still retained
 My first creative sensibility;
 That by the regular action of the world
 My soul was unsubdued. A plastic power
 Abode with me; a forming hand, at times
 Rebellious, acting in a devious mood;
 A local spirit of his own, at war
 With general tendency, but for the most,
 Subservient strictly to external things
 With which it communed.

(*The Prelude*, Book II, l. 358-367)

Following a quasi-pantheistic episode where the speaker recalls moments of 'a holy calm' (*The Prelude*, Book II, l. 348) over his soul, Wordsworth introduces a new factor at play in the speaker's experience of the soul. The use of 'holy' now triangulates the religious realm against the physical and imaginative, destabilising the speaker's initial concept of the soul by now implying direct communion with God. The hero's judgment introduces religion, questioning his affirmation that he still retained his 'first creative sensibility'. The ambivalent confession which follows line 348, 'what I saw / Appeared like something in myself, a dream, / A prospect in the mind' (*The Prelude*, Book II, 350-351) might imply a religious lucid dream, neatly linking Book II and Book V's dream of the Arab. In this case, Wordsworth uses the ambivalence of dreaming to derail his verse and unsettle his hero, pre-empting a new disturbance as he confesses '[m]y soul was unsubdued'. The 'spirit of religious love' (*The Prelude*, Book II, l. 357) soon acquires new meaning, as religion triggers a dismemberment of the speaker's initial understanding of the soul. The restlessness implied by 'unsubdued' is then juxtaposed against the 'regular action of the world'. The unsettled, ethereal soul is synchronised with the world of industrialisation, as it flits in between the monotony and rigor of mechanical production. The odd co-existence reiterates the dark pastoral's ability to infect the physical world, rupturing the stability of one realm with the foreign faculties of another. It reveals the dark pastoral hero as one who must live with the frustrations and contradictions of these odd co-existences. Living through the uncertainty, and never truly overcoming it, defines the evolving dark pastoral hero.

Disjuncture looms at the forefront of the second half of Book II, as the speaker uses unconventional imagery to describe his newly acquired range of feeling. Broadening the spectrum of emotion associated with the pastoral genre, Wordsworth presents us with a more rounded and contemplative hero. Where William Empson argues that the trick to the heroic-pastoral lies in ‘extreme courtly flattery’ and irony, the Lake Poet deliberately turns his gaze towards the more uncertain and even ambivalent human emotions.⁴³ Tuning into a restlessness that resides within him, the protagonist of *The Prelude* is far more progressive than his epic counterpart because he is unafraid of exploring the full magnitude of his ‘first creative sensibility’. He does not rely on his own ‘moral grandeur’ to carry him through the epic, but instead relies on introspective vision to identify the depth of his own strength.⁴⁴ Pastoral becomes far more self-reflective. The ‘plastic power’ that resides within the speaker denotes a power that is ‘easily moulded or shaped’ indicative of a hero who experiences different waves of feeling.⁴⁵ The ‘forming hand’, itself a microcosm of the dark pastoral, rebels and acts ‘in a devious mood’ suggesting a tendency towards defiance rather than conformity. ‘Devious’ also questions the moral impetus behind the poem as Wordsworth delves into a more malevolent generic landscape. This power, so changeable in shape and quality, affects the speaker with its ‘local spirit of his own’. An unknown entity, it is ‘at war / With general tendency’, fighting the conventional ironic pastoral with its scheming ways. The poet’s creative sensibility tends towards a more experimental type of pastoral, for the most part ‘Subservient strictly to external things / With which it communed’. With an undertone of the metaphysical, the dark pastoral helps to formulate a hero who recognises the need to pursue the unprecedented, to allow one’s creative outlet to gravitate towards the unorthodox.

‘Protagonists of a pastoral story carry with them the seeds of corruption, which is the reason to seek a pastoral refuge in the first place. Their sins remain forever with them, like a virus, and the fresh air of a country setting cannot kill it’ writes Baktygul Aliev.⁴⁶ Aliev’s interpretation of pastoral heroism is notably pessimistic, depicting the

⁴³ William Empson, ‘They That Have Power’, in *Some Versions of Pastoral* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1935), pp. 29-115 (p. 98).

⁴⁴ Empson, ‘Marvell’s Garden’, p. 141.

⁴⁵ ‘plastic, n. and adj.’ *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, March 2021, www.oed.com/view/Entry/145291. Accessed 26 May 2021.

⁴⁶ Baktygul Aliev, ‘Desacralizing the Idyll: Chekhov’s Transformation of the Pastoral’, *The Russian Review*, 69.3 (2010) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/25677249>> [Accessed 14 May 2021] (p. 473).

protagonist as a villain trapped by his own experience. Wordsworth's *The Prelude* however, in a marked contrast to Aliev's model, uses the pastoral genre, amongst other genres, to create a hero who is tested, defined and eventually liberated by personal trial. In each of the fourteen books, genre is adapted and complicated in order to highlight various phases of testing and growth. In Book V, Wordsworth creates a modern version of conflict and challenge much in the vein of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*. Imagination and symbolic landscape work hand in hand to produce a turbulent, experimental and dark series of events that significantly accelerate the pace of the poem. Drawing upon dream and vision, 'Books' displays a clashing of genres where no one genre dominates. The pastoral that was so clear in Books I and II is abandoned in favour of a much more threatening aesthetic where nature is not stable, static, or merely symbolic. By changing his interpretation of natural artifice Wordsworth fashions an entirely new and conflicted generic landscape that teaches the poet about endurance. Genre is expertly fragmented into pastoral, lyric, narrative and epic as a trial through which the speaker becomes the hero and master of genre, and thereby a poet perfected by struggle. By representing intense personal difficulty through vision, Wordsworth explores not one but many genres. In doing so, he makes the quiet but significant claim of the hero as artist while simultaneously refuting any notion of the safe generic category.

With generic fragmentation at the forefront of 'Books', *The Prelude* rejects Timothy Morton's assertion that 'environmental art [seeks] to re-enchant the world'.⁴⁷ Likewise, Brian Wilkie's view that the 'true epic imitates in order to dramatize' also comes under scrutiny.⁴⁸ *The Prelude* provides readers with a uniquely personal though aestheticized experience that relies on the freshness of experimentation rather than guileless imitation. Wordsworth focuses on the challenging story of the self rather than the drama of a noble figure to distinguish his epic from his predecessors. Like his first collaborative project *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), such an innovative undertaking relies upon exploring the more horrifying and even alienating aspects of genre laced with darkness. The Dream of the Arab, one of the most significant passages in *The Prelude*, stages a fearful experience through its rich narrative and careful application of

⁴⁷ Morton, 'Romanticism and the Environmental Subject', p. 97

⁴⁸ Brian Wilkie, "'Epomania": Southey and Landor', in *Romantic Poets and Epic Tradition* (Madison; Milwaukee: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1965), pp. 30-58 (p. 58).

pastoral. Housed within the limitless imaginative capacity of the dream, this episode plays pastoral against the epic and lyric genres in order to create the ultimate heroic trial. This begins with the dark pastoral described in its opening lines:

I saw before me stretched a boundless plain
 Of sandy wilderness, all black and void,
 And as I looked around, distress and fear
 Came creeping over me, when at my side,
 Close at my side, an uncouth shape appeared
 Upon a dromedary, mounted high.
 He seemed an Arab of the Bedouin tribes:
 A lance he bore, and underneath one arm
 A stone, and in the opposite hand a shell
 Of a surpassing brightness.

(*The Prelude*, Book V, l. 71-80)

After reading the ‘famous history of the errant knight / Recorded by Cervantes’ (*The Prelude*, Book V, l. 60-61), the speaker recalls passing into a nightmarish dream. Influenced by *Don Quixote*, Wordsworth imagines a foreign Arabian space wholly dissimilar to the calm pastoral that immediately precedes it (the ‘stillness of summer’s noon’, *The Prelude*, Book V, l. 57). Like Coleridge’s ‘Kubla Khan’, the power of the lyric ‘I’ brings generic subjectivity into play as we are transported to an imagined Middle Eastern desert. *The Prelude*, up until this point, is set in England, and this shift to an imagined oriental setting provides a new space for Wordsworth to test his ideas around genre and trial. The description of landscape completely opposes traditional pastoral splendour and vibrancy, as the speaker recalls a ‘boundless plain / Of sandy wilderness, all black and void’. The terrifying hostility of this environment is conveyed in the bleak description of nature, completely devoid of colour or life. Wordsworth uses language to craft a natural world that is unstable in order to tailor a unique backdrop for the speaker’s trial. In her reading of these lines, Theresa M. Kelley draws parallels with similar archetypes in Genesis, *Metamorphoses* and *Paradise Lost*.⁴⁹ Although these all have pastoral elements, from a generic perspective there is something far more intricate at work in *The Prelude*. In ‘Books’ Wordsworth

⁴⁹ Theresa M. Kelley, ‘Spirit and Geometric Form: The Stone and the Shell in Wordsworth’s Arab Dream’, *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1990*, 22.4 (1982) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/450180>> [Accessed 1 May 2021] (p. 575).

combines epic with pastoral and lyric to create a new hybridised archetype of personal struggle relayed through an imagined and fraught natural world. As Geoffrey Hartman argues, the speaker ‘must now come face to face with the “desert-shape” of imagination’.⁵⁰ Nature is as much physical as it is figurative. That this struggle tends toward apocalypse, and particularly an apocalypse that is not biblical but grounded on earth, suggests a type of visionary trial that deliberately seeks to rupture all types of poetic unity. Reminiscent of what Seamus Perry refers to as ‘the more “Coleridgean” aspects of Wordsworth’, genres are splintered to reveal the dark artistry of the imagination.⁵¹

As the *Dream of the Arab* progresses, genres diffuse in an expert formation to position this particular trial as a confrontation of, rather than an escape from, reality. The shell, as the poet’s chosen representative for poetry, functions as a symbol for many creative endeavours. Amongst book learning and natural beauty, the shell also symbolises the need to protect genre from destruction. The *Dream* operates as a test of generic, not just heroic, endurance. Beyond its aesthetic value alone, ‘so beautiful in shape, / In colour so resplendent’ (*The Prelude*, Book V, l. 90-91), the shell provides a physical and philosophical contrast to the desert setting. With its prophetic abilities, the shell’s uses extend beyond mere ornamental value. This higher truth is juxtaposed against the speaker’s fluctuating mental state of mind. Crucially, the natural world still threatens the protagonist with its ominous power. The ‘night-calm felt / Through earth and sky’ (*The Prelude*, Book V, l. 2-3) is extinguished as ‘distress and fear’ creep over the speaker. Nature no longer ‘appears pantheistically as the nurse of all life’ but operates as a trigger for personal anguish.⁵² When the ‘uncouth shape’ appears, this only adds further apprehension to an already tense setting. ‘Uncouth’ denotes improper, an adjective which subtly links the dark pastoral with this ambiguous figure. But the mysterious shape on a ‘dromedary’ quickly transforms into the cavalier Arab, a man who emerges with a ‘lance’ and two seemingly random objects. The speaker is almost

⁵⁰ Geoffrey Hartman, ‘The Prelude’, in *Wordsworth’s Poetry, 1787-1814* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), pp. 208-259 (p. 229).

⁵¹ Seamus Perry, ‘Coleridge, the Return to Nature, and the New Anti-Romanticism: An Essay on Polemic’, 4 (1996) <<https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/005726ar>> [Accessed 18 May 2021].

⁵² William Empson, ‘Milton and Bentley’, in *Some Versions of Pastoral* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1935), pp. 149-191 (p. 188).

instantaneously relieved by the prospect of not being alone in this bewildering desert landscape:

At the sight
 Much I rejoiced, not doubting but a guide
 Was present, one who with unerring skill
 Would through the desert lead me;

(The Prelude, Book V, l. 81-83)

Reminiscent of Dante's *Inferno*, these lines remind us of Virgil guiding Dante through hell. Wordsworth uses genre to question perceptions of heroism inherited via genre. The Arab resembles the heroic knight of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*; he is elevated on a camel, carries a lance and is on a mission to protect two books from destruction. Thanks to genre, we understand why the speaker places great faith in him. Yet after the dream is over, it is the speaker who lives through and beyond the dream, in a feat more impressive than the Arab's 70-line appearance. It is the protagonist of *The Prelude* who reexperiences the Arab dream vision and then endures further 'strong entrancement[s]' (*The Prelude, Book V, l. 162*) of pastoral, dark pastoral and epic. Upending the idea that the hero can only be a figure of noble standing, Wordsworth diverts our attention to the poem's underdog: the poet-speaker. He also anticipates and challenges William Empson's assertion that the hero stands for 'pride rather than humility'.⁵³ The speaker is heroic because of his modest ability to express his apprehensions about past and present trials. As Paul A. Cantor notes, 'The Romantics sought to make epic into a vehicle of their own self-expression' and yet in this section, the speaker does not realise his own strength.⁵⁴ Such self-expression relies on 'recollection in tranquillity' to identify and highlight the speaker's heroic qualities. Heroism seems retrospective, teaching us to prize something different from epic valour.

The matter of the stone and shell, 'poetry and geometric truth' (*The Prelude, Book V, l. 5*), has been much debated since the publication of Geoffrey Hartman's *Wordsworth's Poetry, 1787-1814*. Studies undertaken by critics such as Michael

⁵³ William Empson, 'Double Plots', in *Some Versions of Pastoral* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1935), pp. 27-86 (p. 85).

⁵⁴ Cantor, 'The Politics of Epic: Wordsworth, Byron, and the Romantic Redefinition of Heroism', p. 400.

Ragussis and J. Robert Barth revisit similar themes: symbolism, death and immortality.⁵⁵ Though these readings are insightful, they lose sight of Wordsworth's abilities as generic innovator. At the most basic level the stone and the shell represent natural objects of land and sea. They present a link with pastoral because they suggest the contours of the relationship between man and nature. In the context of Book V, Wordsworth uses these small but significant features of nature to draw an implicit but integral link between pastoral and epic trial. The shell provides us with the first indicator of tragic fate: 'An Ode, in passion uttered, which foretold / Destruction to the children of the earth / By deluge, now at hand' (*The Prelude*, Book V, l. 97-99). Where nature in pastoral is typically deployed for decorative purposes, Wordsworth uses the shell to convert nature into an active and central symbol of the speaker's quest. He deconstructs and then reconfigures pastoral through epic in order to provide us with a new type of artifice. The shell's song, though destructively menacing, is the catalyst for the Arab's decision to bury both books. Although this has often been read as Wordsworth's search for immortality, the passage on books that ensues carries a wider significance in terms of generic progression:⁵⁶

The one that held acquaintance with the stars,
And wedded soul to soul in purest bond
Of reason, undisturbed by space or time;
The other that was a god, yea many gods,
Had voices more than all the winds, with power
To exhilarate the spirit, and to sooth,
Through every clime, the heart of human kind.

(*The Prelude*, Book V, l. 103-109)

As the pace of the dream accelerates, Wordsworth becomes increasingly more experimental with pastoral, touching upon themes such as divinity and the metaphysical. Nature resists being what Timothy Morton refers to as an 'immersive, impersonal matrix' as Wordsworth works with genre to transform nature into an oblique but personal ecosystem.⁵⁷ The natural world becomes a part of the speaker's

⁵⁵ Michael Ragussis, 'Language and Metamorphosis in Wordsworth's Arab Dream', *Modern Languages Quarterly*, 36.2 (1975) <<https://doi-org.sheffield.idm.oclc.org/10.1215/00267929-36-2-148>> [Accessed 1 May 2021] and J. Robert Barth, 'The Poet, Death, and Immortality, The Unity of The Prelude, Book V', *The Wordsworth Circle*, 10.1 (1979) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/24040824>> [Accessed 1 May 2021].

⁵⁶ Barth, 'The Poet, Death, and Immortality, The Unity of The Prelude, Book V'.

⁵⁷ Morton, 'Romanticism and the Environmental Subject', p. 103.

self-expression, particularly with reference to the distinction between logic and poetry. One book holds ‘acquaintance with the stars’ and represents the ‘purest bond / Of reason’. The allusion to the stars gives logic a very tangible link with the natural world of night. However, there is a flaw evident in the speaker’s thought process. If the acquaintance is held at night, logic cannot be ‘undisturbed by space or time’. It is restricted by reason of both named things. Conversely, poetry, the much prized other book, ‘was a god, yea many gods, / Had voices more than all the winds’. The freedom implied by the transient wind demonstrates both nature and the power of a creative endeavour that has no limitations. Wordsworth manipulates pastoral in the most understated of ways here to underscore the importance of originality and artistic licence. Pastoral, epic and lyric all have the ability to ‘exhilarate the spirit, and to soothe, / Through every clime, the heart of human kind’ because they are a form of poetry. For such poetry to be associated with the metaphysical ‘spirit’ suggests a culmination of nature, poetry and the mystical, where each come together in Wordsworth’s exploratory generic framework.

As the *Dream of the Arab* progresses, we see a new mutation of the ‘pensive feeling’ (*The Prelude*, Book IV, l. 241) that Wordsworth experiences in Book IV. The pace of generic transformation slows down considerably, altering the tempo of *The Prelude* to a point of near stasis. Lyric dominates dark pastoral philosophy, with the poem’s protagonist resembling common man rather than a mythical god or privileged aristocrat. Overwhelmed by the visual ambivalence of the stone and the shell, the speaker confesses, ‘Far stronger, now, grew the desire I felt / To cleave to this man’ (*The Prelude*, Book V, l. 115-116). The transformation of the Arab to ‘the knight / Whose tale Cervantes tells; yet not the knight, / But was an Arab of the desert too; / Of these was neither, and was both at once’ (*The Prelude*, Book V, l. 123-124) reminds us of the tormenting power of subjective vision. The speaker perceives a hero who simultaneously conforms to and defies generic stereotypes. An instance of what Paul A. Cantor refers to as ‘generic ambivalence’, the Arab becomes a cause of concern.⁵⁸ Wordsworth destabilises the clear identity of the traditional epic hero by introducing a more unstable figure with a dual identity. We become sceptical of his intentions.

⁵⁸ Cantor, ‘The Politics of Epic: Wordsworth, Byron, and the Romantic Redefinition of Heroism’, p. 400.

Significantly, the Arab's countenance grows 'more disturbed' (*The Prelude*, Book V, l. 126), a tactic which amplifies the tension and anxiety of the dark pastoral setting. This perturbed mood is reinforced in the closing lines of the dream:

'It is,' said he, 'the waters of the deep
Gathering upon us;' quickening then the pace
Of the unwieldy creature he bestrode,
He left me: I called after him aloud;
He heeded not; but, with his twofold charge
Still in his grasp, before me, full in view,
Went hurrying o'er the illimitable waste,
With the fleet waters of a drowning world
In chase of him; whereat I waked in terror,
And saw the sea before me, and the book,
In which I had been reading, at my side.

(*The Prelude*, Book V, l. 130-140)

As we reach the end of the speaker's turbulent visionary trial, *The Prelude* gathers momentum. The lyric 'I' becomes increasingly tormented and even desperate as the speaker is abandoned by his so-called guide. The blank verse harbours an intense energy, mirroring the motion of the water gathering upon the two men. Underpinned by a natural world that is unforgiving and harsh, this epithet dispels any notion of the pastoral as a soothing and restorative genre. Certainly, there are no 'magical ideas' to entice or pacify the reader.⁵⁹ The imminent threat of the deluge or 'waters of the deep' see pastoral transform nature into a life-threatening, destructive and divisive force. Water becomes a dangerous element and a key landmark of the dark pastoral. Offset against the uncertainty of the Arab/knight figure, the inevitability of the flood carries with it the unnerving promise of the death of the conventional hero, the speaker, nature and books. Confronted with such a bleak fate, the speaker contemplates a nihilistic future. Even the 'dromedary' has now turned into an 'unwieldy creature'. The dark pastoral, with its terror, unpredictability and chaos, forces the speaker to face up to a shocking and unprecedented reality.

⁵⁹ Empson, 'Double Plots', p. 69.

Notwithstanding the obvious biblical link to Noah's Ark, the flood has a wider significance in the context of heroic trial. As Geoffrey Hartman argues, the symbol of the deluge is developed as a function 'of the dreamer's ambivalent desire for *confrontation*'.⁶⁰ To expand upon Hartman's reading, from the perspective of pastoral, the deluge represents the poet-speaker's desire to confront nature as ruinous. Where in previous books pastoral has fluctuated between its conventional utopian façade and episodes of dark pastoral as a result of real-life experiences, within the space of the dream Wordsworth can exploit the dark pastoral according to his own lights. The speaker hears of the impending disaster and is forced to endure it while the Arab flees the scene to pursue his own agenda. Where William Empson argues that 'the heroic individual has an enormous effect on everything in sight, gods and men, and yet finds everything of manageable dimensions', this optimism seems defunct when it comes to the Arab.⁶¹ The speaker, on the other hand, is forced to observe his own abandonment and terror, indicative of a much stronger human hero. Though he may be perceived as a passenger in the dream, he does manage to withstand both the trauma of vision and the threat of nature. The extent of his anguish is relayed in the poignant lines, 'He left me: I called after him aloud: / He heeded not'. Overwhelmed by this fear-inducing vision, the speaker sees 'full in view', the Arab pressing on ahead. Against the hostile backdrop of the oriental dark pastoral, the speaker's terror seems all the more urgent. His abandonment, much like his later orphaning, is a prerequisite to the making of the artist as human hero.

'Resistance to genre was a rallying-cry of the nineteenth century Romantic movement' writes David Duff.⁶² Duff's claim simplifies the central goal of the Romantic poets. If the eighteenth century was a 'century of dramatic developments', the nineteenth century was one of bold generic developments.⁶³ In 'Books' Wordsworth takes this experimentation to new heights as lyric and dark pastoral intermingle in new and testing ways. As the Dream of the Arab approaches its climactic terminus, genres fuse to show the true power of a darker and more severe type of nature. The natural world

⁶⁰ Hartman, 'The Prelude', p. 230.

⁶¹ Empson, 'Marvell's Garden', p. 141.

⁶² David Duff, 'Romantic Genre Theory', in *Romanticism and the Uses of Genre* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 58-95 (p. 58-59).

⁶³ Tim Fulford, "'Nature" Poetry', in *The Cambridge Companion to Eighteenth Century Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 109-131 (p. 109).

becomes an increasingly integral part of the speaker's lengthy visionary trial, a test of his ability to comprehend the unfathomable limits of his own imagination. The former 'boundless plain, / Of sandy wilderness, all black and void' (*The Prelude*, Book V, l. 71-72) is reduced to an 'illimitable waste'. Though its meaning is the same, language becomes far less expressive. 'Waste' denotes something unwanted, demonstrating the speaker's distaste towards the now thoroughly repellent desert. This newly evoked brutal, even hostile dark pastoral suggests that the speaker's fate has been sealed: nature's physiognomy is fixed. When the poet refers to the 'fleet waters of a drowning world', the natural world reaches its full potential as a visual and physical threat. 'Fleet' carries with it associations of the naval armament, intimating that nature is operating in a military fashion as it hunts down the Arab like prey. Suggestive of what Cynthia Chase refers to as the 'imagination of calamity in an insistently literal mode', lyrical subjectivity here fuses with the dark pastoral to produce a type of language that strips nature back to mere function: Armageddon.⁶⁴ The word 'drowning' also anticipates the fatalistic narrative of the Drowning Man. It is at this point that the speaker confesses, 'I waked in terror, / And saw the sea before me, and the book, / In which I had been reading, at my side.'

'The mixture of genres naturally calls attention to its larger purposes, the world view it serves, the contexts from the past it invokes as guidelines, the vision of the future that will result' observes Stuart Curran.⁶⁵ When the speaker awakes directly next to the sea, the very thing that threatened to kill him in the dream, one denotes a future and a hero that is markedly changed by this nightmare. Pastoral is no longer about the Golden Age, the swain in the field or beautiful rural landscapes, it is the mode within which the speaker can confront his own personal demons. Through the Dream of the Arab and its associated events, pastoral has transformed so as to fashion a natural world that is distressed and distressing. To tolerate such an apocalyptic vision is to battle through the dark power and potential of the artist's imagination. The cyclical nature of the dream with its return to *Don Quixote*, fear and water provides us with a startling reminder of what the speaker has been through. If living nature is '[g]reat and

⁶⁴ Cynthia Chase, 'The Accidents of Disfiguration: Limits to Literal and Rhetorical Reading in Book V of "The Prelude"', *Studies in Romanticism*, 18.4 (1979) <<http://www.jstor.com/stable/25600210>> [Accessed 1 May 2021] (p. 547).

⁶⁵ Stuart Curran, 'Composite Orders', in *Poetic Form and British Romanticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 180-203 (p.182).

benign' (*The Prelude*, Book V, l. 166), imagined nature is threatening and malignant. The dark pastoral, as exhibited in the Dream of the Arab, teaches the speaker about misperception, abandonment and suffering, themes which are revisited throughout the rest of Book V. Such personal and emotional trials are documented through different versions of genre to show how the speaker develops and maintains emotional resilience. When Wordsworth chronicles the death of his mother and the Boy of Winander, these experiences are deliberately framed within the context of the dark pastoral to show how the speaker works through pain and suffering. When W. G. Stobie comments, the 'logical relationship between the verse paragraphs in Book V is often unclear', he does not recognise that Wordsworth isolates specific experiences as part of a broader creative endeavour.⁶⁶ Different verse paragraphs provide Wordsworth with new opportunities to constantly reconfigure the pastoral as the genre of self-awareness.

By using genre as the link between the verse paragraphs, the focus of 'Books' shifts towards something greater than grief, 'the fear of death and the desire for immortality': trials are faced in and through nature.⁶⁷ Although Michael Raggusis is correct in affirming that in Book V 'nature is built upon inner strife', his idea that nature's 'laws are perfect and unchanging' is questionable.⁶⁸ In the episode of the Drowning Man, Wordsworth explores a much more erratic pastoral that depicts nature as imperfect and mutable. Throughout Book V nature is 'Fierce, moody, patient, venturous, modest, shy' (*The Prelude*, Book V, l. 415), a testament to a poet who is unafraid of pushing genre to its limits. Wordsworth is daring because he wants to give his reader a new kind of protagonist. With the tragedy of the Drowning Man, nature is not so much a 'pristine wilderness beyond all trace of human contact' then, but more a dynamic and turbulent arena where the speaker is very much present.⁶⁹ This presentness reveals itself predominantly through observation. Wordsworth uses this calamity as another trial and opportunity to observe and learn from a new type of test. This journey begins with the peaceful pastoral of youth:

⁶⁶ W.G. Stobie, 'A Reading of *The Prelude*, Book V', *Modern Language Quarterly* (Seattle), 24.4 (1963) < <https://doi-org.sheffield.idm.oclc.org/10.1215/00267929-24-4-365> > [Accessed 17 April 2022] (p. 366).

⁶⁷ Barth, 'The Poet, Death, and Immortality, The Unity of *The Prelude*, Book V', p. 73.

⁶⁸ Raggusis, 'Language and Metamorphosis in Wordsworth's Arab Dream', p. 159.

⁶⁹ Morton, 'Romanticism and the Environmental Subject', p. 109.

Well do I call to mind the very week
 When I was first intrusted to the care
 Of that sweet Valley; when its paths, its shores,
 And brooks were like a dream of novelty
 To my half-infant thoughts; that very week,
 While I was roving up and down alone,
 Seeking I knew not what, I chanced to cross
 One of those open fields, which, shaped like ears,
 Make green peninsulas on Esthwaite's Lake:

(*The Prelude*, Book V, l. 426-434)

Few critics who have written on Book V comment on Wordsworth's dexterity as a creator of the pastoral mode, preferring to direct their attention to the poet's use of imagination.⁷⁰ But this passage, with its nostalgic undertones, establishes a natural equilibrium that has been missing for the most part of 'Books'. The 'hectic rhythms' of *The Prelude* pause momentarily as the poet-speaker catches his breath.⁷¹ Genre provides some light relief from the speaker's numerous challenges, functioning almost as a literary oasis. The 'sweet Valley' with its 'paths, its shores, / And brooks' injects a much-needed hint of simple freshness to Book V.

Colour returns to the pastoral as the speaker identifies a landscape of luscious greens and aquatic blues. The allusion to 'half-infant' reminds us of the freedom of childhood exploits, where nature indulges the curious youth with its limitless bounties. The lyric 'I' instates a positive and personal pastoral, where Wordsworth is free to rove 'up and down alone' in the 'open fields'. There is a level of comfort attributed to the blank verse as nature feels liberated. The fields, 'shaped like ears', carry with them a hint of Spinoza, as man and nature connect organically through a subtle but perhaps easily overlooked simile. Yet the 'dream of novelty' soon wears off as twilight approaches, along with the dark pastoral:

Long I watched,

⁷⁰ See for example Susan Wolfson, 'The Illusion of Mastery: Wordsworth's Revisions of "The Drowned Man of Esthwaite," 1799, 1805, 1850', *PMLA*, 99.5 (1984) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/462144>> [Accessed 22 May 2021].

⁷¹ Mary Jacobus, 'Wordsworth and the Language of the Dream', *ELH*, 46.4 (1979) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/2872482>> [Accessed 3 May 2021] (p. 237).

But no one owned them; meanwhile the calm lake
 Grew dark with all the shadows on its breast,
 And, now and then, a fish up-leaping snapped
 The breathless silence. The succeeding day,
 Those unclaimed garments telling a plain tale
 Drew to the spot an anxious crowd; some looked
 In passive expectation from the shore,
 While from a boat others hung o'er the deep,
 Sounding with grappling irons and long poles.
 At last, the dead man, 'mid the beauteous scene
 Of trees and hills and water, bolt upright
 Rose, with his ghastly face, a spectre shape
 Of terror;

(*The Prelude*, Book V, l. 438-451)

The final trial of 'Books' sees the emergence of a new generic hybrid: narrative and dark pastoral. Lyric takes a backseat as Wordsworth's storytelling abilities come to the fore of *The Prelude*. As with the Dream of the Arab, nature dominates narrative and yet this time, the speaker is only an observer and not an active participant in this boyhood trial. Against Timothy Morton who states, '[a]s soon as the narrator drags the background into the foreground, [landscape] loses its coherence', nature rather more significantly allows landscape and the dark pastoral to assume a much higher profile.⁷² This creates a new setting for another type of quest. Through genre, Wordsworth makes us realise that heroic trial can take several different forms. Conflict need not always be physical or visionary. It can also be about the challenge of discovery. Discovery, at this point in Book V, relies on narrative to configure an unstable environment that ultimately leads to the shocking exposé of a dead man.

As Marie-Laure Ryan states, narrative is about problem solving, conflict, interpersonal relations, human experience and the temporality of existence, all themes that are exploited in the Drowning Man episode.⁷³ With such a broad ranging narrative in play, Wordsworth is free to reconfigure the dark pastoral to suit his theme of discovery. This

⁷² Morton, 'Romanticism and the Environmental Subject', p. 133.

⁷³ Marie-Laure Ryan, 'Toward a Definition of Narrative', in *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, ed. by David Herman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 22-35 (p. 23).

starts with the deployment of setting and pathetic fallacy. The macabre, sombre mood is established by the ‘calm lake’ growing ‘dark with all the shadows on its breast’. Steering the reader into the seemingly peaceful waters of night, the speaker observes a different trial that takes place at dusk. The nocturnal dark pastoral is intensified by an undertone of the supernatural ‘shadows’ as night seems eerily calm.⁷⁴ When Wordsworth mentions ‘now and then, a fish up-leaping snapped / The breathless silence’, nature is jolted into being by the sudden noise of a lone fish. The verb ‘snapped’ adds a sharpness to the blank verse, as the fish seems to jump out of the line literally. Silence, at both the literary and physical level, is disrupted. With no mention of the drowned man besides those ‘unclaimed garments telling a plain tale’, the speaker then begins a complex process of code deciphering through narrative. The implication of a death attracts an ‘anxious crowd’, some of which observe from a distance and others on a boat. The ‘grappling irons and long poles’ add an unwelcomed contrast to the dark pastoral. It is at this point that the ‘dead man’ reveals himself. The juxtaposition of the lifeless body against the ‘beauteous scene / Of trees and hills and water’ smears pastoral with death, spoiling nature in both beauty and form. The image of the corpse ‘bolt upright’, rising ‘with his ghastly face, a spectre shape / Of terror’ brings an element of the Coleridgean dark pastoral to *The Prelude*. Although deceased, the man holds a ‘ghastly face’, insinuating a certain level of bizarre consciousness through the suggestion of a facial expression. ‘Ghastly’, ‘spectre’ and ‘terror’ unify fear and the metaphysical, demonstrating the speaker’s utter horror at what he has just seen. Encountering death at such an early age in such an unexplained and horrifying manner teaches the speaker about experiencing and handling negative emotion from childhood. Genre explores the advantages of psychological challenges as well as visionary power.

Rather than serving as ‘a counterpoint to representations of modern urban life’, pastoral in Book V reinforces the reality, as well as sadness of modern rural life.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ In her discussion of revisions, Susan Wolfson notes that in the 1799 version the lake was described as ‘still’. The use of ‘calm’ in the 1850 version adds a different temperament to the lake, attributing a living consciousness to the dark pastoral. This is an example of how Wordsworth subtly refines his application of pastoral in *The Prelude* through different editions of the poem. See Susan Wolfson, ‘The Illusion of Mastery: Wordsworth’s Revisions of “The Drowned Man of Esthwaite,” 1799, 1805, 1850’, *PMLA*, 99.5 (1984) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/462144>> [Accessed 22 May 2021] (p. 920).

⁷⁵ Rebecca Ruth Gould, ‘Enchanting Literary Modernity: Idris Bazorkin’s Postcolonial Soviet Pastoral’, *The Modern Language Review*, 115.2 (2020) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5699/modelangrevi.115.2.0403>> [Accessed 22 May 2020] (p. 403).

Though distinctly unpleasant, the Drowning Man incident also demonstrates the importance of experiencing emotional trial through the terrible fate of another human being. The speaker, having battled through all manner of visionary and physical trials, acquires real strength of character as well as a rich portfolio of experience. The sheer volume of activity documented in 'Books' is remarkable. The closing lines of Book V offer a testament of this comprehensive journey:

There, darkness makes abode, and all the host
Of shadowy things work endless changes,- there,
As in a mansion like their proper home,
Even forms and substances are circumfused
By that transparent veil with light divine,
And, through the turnings intricate of verse,
Present themselves as objects recognised,
In flashes, and with a glory not their own.

(The Prelude, Book V, l. 598-605)

Visionary power has accommodated darkness in the most extraordinary of ways. It has worked 'endless change' into the broader lifespan of the hero, helping him to learn about his own strength. The 'turnings of intricate verse' through the dark pastoral have revealed an artist who is courageous and inspiring. His toil has been worth the struggle because he becomes a new type of role model. Visionary power has a glory of its own because it builds a different type of resilience in the speaker. The dark pastoral ironically becomes a 'light divine' in that it helps to exhibit the full extent of the speaker's emotional trials of self.

From the beginning of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth focuses upon creating a new human breed of hero who is built upon and defined by personal struggle. The dark pastoral is integral to the construction of this new hero as it reveals and shapes different eras of the poet's life. In Books I, II and V, Wordsworth uses the dark pastoral to draw upon particularly edifying experiences, highlighting key phases of personal development. Challenging William Empson's bold claim that 'if you choose an important member the result is heroic; if you choose an unimportant one it is pastoral', *The Prelude*

presents its reader with an entirely new theory of heroism.⁷⁶ Bringing together a number of themes explored in previous chapters of this thesis, *The Prelude* uses the pastoral to award newfound importance to a regular member of society. In doing so, Wordsworth chooses an apparently ‘unimportant’ member and the result is heroic. Boat stealing, adolescent experience and the Dream of the Arab all provide an opportunity to develop pastoral as the genre of self going through before emerging from struggle. The natural world in all three of these cases explores instances whereby a hero emerges from personal trials in fear, curiosity and bravery. Though Timothy Morton argues that ‘[a]mbience is really an externalized form of the beautiful soul’, Wordsworth sees ambience in *The Prelude* as an externalised form of the tormented and anguished soul.⁷⁷ The dark pastoral, amongst other genres, works to produce a speaker and poet-hero who is himself ‘Of quality and fabric more divine’ (*The Prelude*, Book XIV, l. 454) because of, rather than in spite of, his own struggles. *The Prelude*’s commitment to producing a new hero is a testament to a poet who dedicated his life to reimagining the pastoral genre.

⁷⁶ Empson, ‘Double Plots’, p. 81.

⁷⁷ Morton, ‘Romanticism and the Environmental Subject’, p. 121.

Conclusion: ‘Signs and Wonders of the Element’

Throughout their separate yet entwined poetic careers, Wordsworth and Coleridge self-consciously spotlight, reconsider and rehabilitate the pastoral. With their contrasting approaches to poetry, both poets revise the definition and purpose of a genre that had come to be associated with imitation, political rhetoric and unity.¹ If pastoral is characterised as a ‘literary work portraying rural life or the life of shepherds, esp. in an idealized or romanticised form’, then Wordsworth and Coleridge paint a very different portrait of country life.² Landscape, for these ambitious poets, stimulates thought as a result of troubling and sometimes perplexing personal experience. Genre provides a vehicle to work through and understand lived and imagined experience. Through sustained experimentation with the pastoral genre Wordsworth and Coleridge construct a lyric ‘I’ that considers self before nature and art. Indeed, it is their deployment of the dark pastoral subgenre that promotes an appreciation and awareness of what it means to be a poet, a friend, and a human being. The darker and more complex narratives of poems such as Wordsworth’s *The Ruined Cottage* and Coleridge’s ‘Dejection: An Ode’ point towards a natural world that is unpredictable but ultimately grounded in tradition. The pastoral, for Wordsworth and Coleridge, is less about ornament and replication as it is innovation and clarity.

Peter V. Marinelli affirms, ‘[i]f the decorative pastoral is really the province of appreciation, the serious pastoral is that of appreciation and what Rossetti called some fundamental brain-work’.³ Throughout his poetic corpus Wordsworth’s innovations in pastoral exhibit a particular type of ‘brain-work’ that is closely linked to lived experience. Where critics such as John Beer and Howard Hinkel read Wordsworth as nature poet and re-confer upon him the epithet ‘prophet of nature’, that he chose in *The Prelude*, this thesis argues for Wordsworth as a focused and experimental pastoral poet.⁴ Through simple but effective revisions to key conventions such as nostalgia and

¹ See for example, Penny Pritchard, ‘Pastoral and Anti-Pastoral Poetry: Thomson, Goldsmith, Crabbe and Cowper’, in *The Long 18th Century: Literature from 1660 to 1790*, York Notes Companions (London: York Press, 2010), pp. 117-149.

² "pastoral, n. and adj." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, December 2021, www.oed.com/view/Entry/138625. Accessed 13 February 2022.

³ Peter V. Marinelli, ‘Perspectives on the Pastoral’, in *Pastoral: The Critical Idiom*, ed. by John D. Jump (London: Methuen & Co, 1971), pp. 1-14 (p. 6).

⁴ John Beer, ‘The Paradoxes of Nature in Wordsworth and Coleridge’, *The Wordsworth Circle*, 40.1 (2009) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/24045257>> [Accessed 19 February 2022] and Howard Hinkel,

the return, Wordsworth fundamentally contributes to the both the evolution and contemporaneity of the pastoral genre. In *Lyrical Ballads* and *The Excursion*, he experiments with a more subtle and implicit strain of the dark pastoral to introduce new characters via an alternative human philosophy. The old Cumberland beggar, the Wanderer and the Solitary provide a contrast to the traditional shepherd swain as they give an insight into the life of real rural figures. Pastoral accommodates the human struggle for acceptance, consolation and philosophical certainty, expressing the value of more difficult and often less desired feelings. An appreciation for self and growth is also introduced to genre via *Lines Written a few miles above Tintern Abbey, on revisiting the Wye during a Tour* and his epic, *The Prelude*. Reflective practice, childhood exploits and visionary trial revitalise pastoral as Wordsworth insists on layered as opposed to one-dimensional experience. Where William Empson argues that pastoral is about putting the complex into the simple, Wordsworth uses detailed narrative and intricate emotion to teach both resilience and self-awareness to retain complexity.⁵ What ensues is a more modern and psychologically inflected approach to genre. Wordsworth's measured exercises in pastoral lead to a better understanding of self by spotlighting imperfection and uncertainty.

Just as Jonathan Wordsworth argues for 'The New Wordsworth Poem', this thesis contends that Wordsworth and Coleridge write the new pastoral poem.⁶ Wordsworth's experience-based pastoral explores a broader spectrum of human characters, experiences and emotions that are designed to encourage contemplation. Nancy Yousef argues that Wordsworth, among other Romantics, primarily advocates for sentimentality, but his pastoral rather more significantly seeks to promote and understand the trials and tribulations of the individual.⁷ Lyrics such as 'Simon Lee: The Old Huntsman', 'The Mad Mother' and 'She Dwelt among the Untrodden Ways', while gesturing towards sympathy, more importantly provide case studies for different types of survivors. This genre champions turbulence, challenge and strength. The dark

'Prophets of Nature: Wordsworth's Environmental Second Selves', *The Wordsworth Circle*, 34.1 (2003) <<http://www.jstor.com/stable/24044921>> [Accessed 19 February 2022] (p. 49).

⁵ William Empson, 'Marvell's Garden', in *Some Versions of Pastoral* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1935), pp. 119-145 (p. 137).

⁶ Jonathan Wordsworth, 'The New Wordsworth Poem', *College English*, 27.6 (1966) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/374019>> [Accessed 31 March 2022].

⁷ Nancy Yousef, 'Coda: Sitting with Strangers', in *Romantic Intimacy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), pp. 148-167.

pastoral, as a site of experimentation, always positions affliction as an opportunity for growth. It is for this reason that Wordsworth's pastoral, and his characters, endures. 'The Solitary Reaper' for example, a poem often perceived as purely melancholic, brings to the fore a new vision for the maiden in its exploration of a robust solitary female labourer. Although Bette Charlene Wener argues that the poem explores the 'simple, basic aspects of human experience and nature's more familiar views', this poem more significantly challenges the stereotype of the domesticated country wife:⁸

Behold her, single in the field,
Yon solitary Highland Lass!
Reaping and singing by herself;
Stop here, or gently pass!
Alone she cuts, and binds the grain,
And sings a melancholy strain;
O listen! for the Vale profound
Is overflowing with the sound.⁹

('The Solitary Reaper', l. 1-8)

The statement 'Behold her' adds an urgency to pastoral, almost as if there is a strong need to draw our attention to Wordsworth's version of genre. The stock pastoral maiden figure is converted into an agrarian, challenging the idea of the housebound wife. A working figure, this 'Highland Lass' provides a great contrast to the infatuated narrator of Sir Walter Raleigh's 'The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd'. The reference to 'Highland' indicates that we are in rural Scotland, in a drastically different environment to Cumberland or the Lake District. A harsher northern location and remote setting naturally inspires a more resilient and self-sufficient protagonist. The pastoral must equally stand up to this change. 'Single in the field', the maiden reaps and sings 'by herself', independent of company. The allusion to cutting and binding the grain draws attention to farming practice, usually the work of men. Wordsworth subtly reinterprets the Virgilian model of pastoral as he replaces the male cultivator with a female one. Genre officially enters the nineteenth century. The 'melancholy strain' converts the pastoral's customary green and sunny vale into an arena that

⁸ Bette Charlene Wener, 'Romantic Lyrics in Landscape: Constable and Wordsworth', *Comparative Literature*, 36.2 (1984) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/1770599>> [Accessed 16 April 2022] (p. 110).

⁹ William Wordsworth, 'The Solitary Reaper', in *William Wordsworth The Major Works including The Prelude*, ed. by Stephen Gill, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 319-320 (p. 319).

houses and stimulates dejection. The ‘spontaneity of pastoral song’ is now underscored by a strong female lead, ultimately providing a refreshed narrative for genre.¹⁰

Although Robert Pack argues that the solitary’s ‘notes are welcome to Wordsworth because they embody a spiritual possibility for him that will be a source of strength to endure physical loneliness and old age’, he overlooks the purpose of the song in the context of genre.¹¹ Wordsworth fundamentally refuses to ‘take a limited life and pretend it is the full and normal one’.¹² Through the figure of the solitary reaper the poet teaches us to appreciate the beauty of adversity in a similar vein to the old Cumberland beggar. Through these tales of hardship, pastoral works to correct the preconceived idea that we must escape from our woes. For Wordsworth, we must face challenges head on and see them as opportunities for development. As ‘The Solitary Reaper’ progresses, we hear that ‘A voice so thrilling ne’er was heard’ (‘The Solitary Reaper’, l. 13). The closing lines of the poem are equally as touching: ‘The music in my heart I bore, / Long after it was heard no more’ (‘The Solitary Reaper’, l. 31-32). The use of the adjective ‘thrilling’ suggests that despite the melancholic content, the solitary’s voice is enchanting. In the midst of pain we see beauty, adding permanence to Wordsworth’s deeply emotional pastoral. The strength of human emotion and experience also carries through to *Michael*, a poem that culminates with a similarly nostalgic note:

The Cottage which was named The Evening Star
Is gone, the ploughshare has been through the ground
On which it stood; great changes have been wrought
In all the neighbourhood, yet the Oak is left
That grew beside their door; and the remains
Of the unfinished Sheep-fold may be seen
Beside the boisterous brook of Green-head Ghyll.¹³

¹⁰ Curran, ‘The Pastoral’, p. 101.

¹¹ Robert Pack, ‘William Wordsworth and the Voice of Silence’, *New England Review* (1978-1982), 1.2 (1978) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/40355795>> [Accessed 1 April 2022] (p. 174).

¹² William Empson, ‘They That Have Power’, in *Some Versions of Pastoral* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1935), pp. 89-115 (p. 114).

¹³ William Wordsworth, ‘Michael: A Pastoral Poem’, in *The Major Works including The Prelude*, ed. by Stephen Gill, Oxford World’s Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 224-236 (p. 236).

(*Michael*, l. 485-491)

Michael is perhaps the most touching of Wordsworth's pastoral poems. These lines, carrying an essence of melancholia in them, hint at absence, change and decay, all key components of the Wordsworthian dark pastoral. The 'boisterous brook of Greenhead Ghyll' reminds us of the importance of local setting, the 'unfinished sheepfold' an indicator of an abandoned project and broken home. Where Frank Kermode argues that one must 'not allow the hard view of Nature as crude and rough to upset the dreamier view of it as uncorrupt', Wordsworth actively tends towards the 'crude and rough' to reinvigorate the pastoral.¹⁴ Over the course of 60 years Wordsworth writes a new script for the considered and personal pastoral.

Coleridge was no less innovative. From as early as 1787, Coleridge expresses an interest in the pastoral. Aged 15 he writes 'Easter Holidays', a short lyric which warns of future sorrows while simultaneously speaking of nature 'clad in green' ('Easter Holidays', l. 3).¹⁵ As Alba H. Warren writes, Coleridge 'rejected the doctrine of central forms', particularly the 'three fundamental positions, the perfectionist, the realist, and the idealist'.¹⁶ The use of 'clad' suggests that Coleridge recognises that nature, and by inference the pastoral, has been hitherto dressed up and possibly rendered disingenuous. The Coleridgean pastoral works to correct this misrepresentation to reveal nature's darkest and, at times, most terrifying potential. The 'pastoral of happiness' that accommodates a 'land of innocence and beauty alone' is now obsolete.¹⁷ Imagination, fancy and vision bring to the fore a more intense and disturbed pastoral that prioritises storytelling and new ideas over traditional shepherd narratives. In *Lyrical Ballads* Coleridge manipulates numerous genres to contemplate punishment and redemption in poems such as 'The Convict' and 'The Dungeon'. In 'The Nightingale' the darker, more perturbed pastoral works to show the benefits and

¹⁴ Frank Kermode, 'Introduction', in *English Pastoral Poetry from the Beginnings to Marvell*, ed. by Frank Kermode (London: George G. Harrap & Co, 1952), pp. 11-44 (p. 18).

¹⁵ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'Easter Holidays', in *The Complete Poems*, ed. by William Keach, Penguin Classics (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 3-4 (p. 3).

¹⁶ Alba H. Warren, Jr, 'The Topics of English Poetic Theory, 1825-1865', in *English Poetic Theory 1825-1865* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950), pp. 3-34 (p. 16).

¹⁷ Peter V. Marinelli, 'The Golden Age', in *Pastoral: The Critical Idiom*, ed. by John D. Jump (London: Methuen & Co, 1971), pp. 15-36 (p. 25) and Robert Faggen, 'Frost and the Questions of Pastoral', in *The Cambridge Companion to Robert Frost* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 49-74 (p. 49).

dangers of experimenting with tradition. Genre becomes a discursive arena for the most troubling of poetic endeavours.

The ‘Conversation Poems’ exhibit a different strain of generic division and splicing as Coleridge redeploys the imagination for contemplative effect. ‘Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement’, ‘This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison’ and *Fears in Solitude* all acquire new significance when read through the lens of genre. Poetic and personal anxiety runs through these reflective poems, adding an intimacy and sense of unease to the conversational lyric ‘I’. Pastoral sheds its status as unified and stable monolith as Coleridge reconfigures key axioms such as the return, the perfected idyll and the fair pastoral maiden to unrecognisable effect. Genre now prioritises fragmentation and disruption, an indicator of an unsettled and constantly active mind. Coleridge also completely reworks the pastoral through his ‘Narrative Poems’. Inspired by the limitless potential of myth, Coleridge as theologian constructs new worlds that house abstract and even foreign pastoral realms. ‘Kubla Khan’, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and *Christabel* use the narratives of an oppressive Mongolian tyrant, a mad sailor and medieval maiden to unshackle the pastoral from its Greek, Italian and even British roots. With style and dynamism, Coleridge propels the pastoral into the depths of his own abstract imagination. Through the dark pastoral he reinvents Arcadia and nostalgia, moulding them to fit his sometimes absurd, dramatic tales. More so than Wordsworth, Coleridge’s ‘thinking is so strange because it reverses usual expectations’.¹⁸ The exploration of vision, the sea and the nocturnal pastoral upend genre, inviting us into the mind of the contemporary and provocative poet. Where Frank Kermode argues that all pastoral is concerned with the ‘contrast between cultivated and natural behaviour’, Coleridge is drawn towards all possibilities.¹⁹

Although he is often commended for his insightful and philosophical ‘notes, comments, reflections, marginalia, and lectures’, rarely is Coleridge acknowledged for his contributions to the extensive advancement of specific poetic genres.²⁰ Versed in

¹⁸ Ralph Pite, ‘How Green were the Romantics?’, *Studies in Romanticism*, 35.3 (1996) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/25601179>> [Accessed 26 June 2021] (p. 368).

¹⁹ Frank Kermode, ‘Introduction’, in *English Pastoral Poetry from the Beginnings to Marvel*, ed. by Frank Kermode (London: George G. Harrap & Co, 1952), pp. 11-44 (p. 34).

²⁰ Theodore Leinwand, ‘Shakespeare, Coleridge, Intellectualization’, *Studies in Romanticism*, 46.1 (2007) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/25602087>> [Accessed 27 February 2022] (p. 77). Michael O’Neill recovers some ground in this debate in his chapter ‘Coleridge’s Genres’ where he reprioritises

the lyric, ode, sonnet, ballad, satire and hymn genres, Coleridge is unafraid to experiment with new and unorthodox forms. He is both a learned student and master manipulator of single and hybridised genres. Coleridge's expert ability to blend and balance genres reaches its climax in a short but poignant lyric, 'Hymn Before Sun-rise, in the Vale of Chamouni'. Following the publication of Thomas De Quincey's 1834 article in *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine*, rumours of plagiarism plagued Coleridge's once admired poem, questioning its status as a credible piece of work.²¹ Unlike poems such as 'Limbo' and 'Frost at Midnight', 'Hymn Before Sun-rise' has since struggled to gain praise as a multi-dimensional and innovative work. Even in the twenty-first century the poem still suffers from critical neglect. In the context of genre however, 'Hymn Before Sun-rise' occupies an important and rare space between two distinct genres: the pastoral and the hymn. Coleridge manipulates two genres in such a manner that he completely redefines transcendence, appreciation of nature and contemplative thought. With its layered and interspersed approach to genre, the poem actively administers and promotes possibility and unexpected outcomes. Where Terry Gifford argues that the first condition of pastoral is that it is an urban product, Coleridge rather more significantly uses this particular poem to create a pastoral that is more internalised.²² In 'Hymn Before Sun-rise' we see the pastoral of self ironically 'clad' in the protective cloak of the hymn, where nature serves only to accentuate a personal drama.

Following the hymn's popularity in the eighteenth century, Coleridge repurposes the genre to accommodate a personal need. Through the pastoral, the poet establishes a self-conscious lyric 'I' that flits between an appreciation of the external world to acknowledging the commotion of an internal dialogue. 'Hymn Before Sun-rise' is not simply about admiring a dawn scene. Coleridge instigates a tension between pastoral and hymn by building an experience of nature that stimulates an alternative conversation pertaining to self. We see a bespoke and subjective strand of pastoral at work where nature serves as a distraction rather than a source of deliberation.

discussion of Coleridge's love, satirical and imaginative poems. See Michael O'Neill, 'Coleridge's Genres', in *The Oxford Handbook to Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 375-39.

²¹ Thomas De Quincey, 'Autobiography of an English Opium-Eater: Samuel Taylor Coleridge [I] [September 1834]', in *The Works of Thomas De Quincey*, Volume 10 Articles from Tait's Edinburgh Magazine 1834-8, ed. by Alina Clej (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2003), pp. 287-308 (p. 290).

²² Terry Gifford, 'Three Kinds of Pastoral', in *Pastoral* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 1-12 (p. 2).

Although hymn ‘refers to a song, poem, or speech that praises gods and sometimes heroes and abstractions’,²³ it is important to note that during the eighteenth century the genre

was never confined to meeting churches and meeting houses, to uniform tetrameter stanzas, to biblical paraphrase or scripture-anchored meditation, or to the eyes and voices of worshipping British Christians. Quite to the contrary, it was a dynamic, shape-shifting, aspirant genre, often prized for its novelty, that could be found as well in streets, studies, and coffeehouses.²⁴

When combined with pastoral, the hymn genre allows for a unique type of meditation, one that prioritises personal rather than religious transcendence. For Coleridge, nature is a way to God, a belief that we see play out in numerous works including *Biographia Literaria* and poems such as ‘To Nature’. This is also one of the core principles that we see in the Coleridgean pastoral, particularly through his concept of ‘The One Life’. The openness of the hymn genre lends itself to pastoral because hymns are also a way to God. In this way, the hymn and the pastoral blend extremely well together as they tend towards the same goal. However, in the case of ‘Hymn Before Sun-rise’, there is something far more sinister at work. Coleridge exploits this generic similarity in order to bring himself into the poem. Rather than choosing to find God, the poet leans on the hymn genre to find himself, albeit in the most covert of ways. Coleridge exploits generic hybridity in ‘Hymn Before Sun-rise’ in order to convey a personal drama that is at once about viewing Mont Blanc but more specifically about the poet himself. As we watch the poet react to the mountain, we see a whipped-up version of pastoral play out before us, inviting us into the complex landscape of Coleridge’s mind.

The poem’s quasi-theatrical arrangement of scenes offers a new type of transcendence that is centred upon an experience of the sublime in nature rather than a spiritual connection with God. As John Knapp argues, British Romantic poets recognised the hymn’s ‘compatibility with the sublime’ and particularly its appeal to ‘educated and

²³ R. O. Evans, T. V. F. Brogan and A. W. Halsall, *Hymn*, in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. by Roland Greene, et al., Fourth Edition (Princeton; NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012) *ProQuest Ebook Central*
<<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/sheffield/detail.action?docID=913846>> [Accessed 18 April 2022], pp. 647-645 (p. 645).

²⁴ John Knapp, ‘Isaac Watts’s Unfixed Hymn Genre’, *Modern Philology*, 109.4 (2012)
<<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/665976>> [Accessed 29 December 2021] (p. 465).

demanding readers'.²⁵ The sublime is an element of aesthetics also favoured by Wordsworth in Book I of *The Prelude*, and yet in 'Hymn Before Sun-rise' it dictates the shape of the pastoral poem. Edmund Burke's reading of the sublime is particularly useful when considering the opening lines of the poem. Burke maintains that distance is necessary in order to fully appreciate something that may initially present itself as dangerous or painful. At this point in 'Hymn Before Sun-rise' distance is integral to genre as it gives Coleridge the space and perspective to contemplate questions of existence. Imagination and artifice completely take over in the poem, to such an extent that Coleridge is able to evoke a self-conscious and intense atmosphere similar to 'Frost at Midnight' or 'Kubla Khan'. Our eyes are guided over a complex internal and external landscape where the pastoral intermingles with the dark pastoral to amplify a triggering experience of the sublime. Burke argues,

When danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are delightful, as we every day experience.²⁶

From the opening lines of 'Hymn Before Sun-rise' we see an appreciation for this distanced and modified pastoral sublime at work:

Has thou a charm to stay the morning-star
 In his steep course? So long he seems to pause
 On thy bald awful head, O sovran Blanc,
 The Arve and Arveiron at thy base
 Rave ceaselessly; but thou, most awful Form!
 Risest from forth thy silent sea of pines,
 How silently! Around thee and above
 Deep is the air and dark, substantial, black,
 An ebon mass: methinks thou piercest it,
 As with a wedge!

('Hymn Before Sun-rise, in the Vale of Chamouni', l. 1-10)

Although Sally West speaks of the 'chattering speed' and 'light-hearted fluency' of the lines, she overlooks the section's supernatural overtones of this pastoral.²⁷ Stuart

²⁵ Knapp, 'Isaac Watts's Unfixed Hymn Genre', p. 468.

²⁶ Edmund Burke, 'A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful' (London: R and J Dodsley, 1747) (p. 13-14).

²⁷ Sally West, "'An Unremitting Interchange": The Voices of Mont Blanc', in *Coleridge and Shelley* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2007), pp. 73-98 (p. 74).

Curran rightly notes that the hymn ‘begins in an interrogative mode’ but from the perspective of generic experimentation, what Coleridge interrogates is the pastoral itself.²⁸ It is in these opening lines that Coleridge lays the groundwork for a new form of pastoral. The apostrophe to the mountain draws nature directly into conversation with the poet, establishing a relationship between speaker and addressee. Coleridge makes a decision not to engage primarily with God but with a feature of the natural world. The reference to ‘a charm’ adds an element of the mystical to pastoral, almost as if Mont Blanc has bewitched a different part of the ecosystem with its incomprehensible lure. The ‘morning-star’, with its oxymoronic inflection, lingers strangely for ‘So long’, conjuring up a mix of dark and pre-dawn colours in the transition to morning. Mont Blanc’s ‘bald awful head’ eradicates the natural beauty of the mountain, as pastoral irony is nowhere to be seen. The personification of the mountain alongside the use of the adjective ‘awful’ inspires both admiration and dread, hinting at the dark pastoral and the sublime with the ominous mood and suggested stillness. ‘Bald’ also insinuates nakedness, suggesting that the speaker is viewing an almost primitive and raw side of the natural world. The use of ‘soveran’ injects an air of magnanimity and splendour into nature as Coleridge simultaneously appreciates and fears the overwhelming natural structure that lies before him.

Coleridge then intensifies his dark pastoral with a strong attention to detail, namely the reference to the estuaries the ‘Arve and Arveiron’. Where in ‘Mont Blanc: Lines Written in the Vale of Chamouni’ Shelley gradually builds an atmosphere around the ‘Ravine of Arve’ through powerful and compelling description, Coleridge relies purely on his imagination to concoct his dark mountain scene.²⁹ This is all the more impressive as Coleridge had never seen Mont Blanc himself. ‘Hymn Before Sun-rise’ is based on creative vision alone. The estuaries ‘Rave ceaselessly’, with the verb and adverb combining to produce relentless dynamic action. Much like in *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, nature observes a destructive as well as a commanding force. The caesura after ‘ceaselessly’, with its syntactical abruptness, pre-empts the repetitive statement, ‘most awful Form!’ Poetry no longer works as a ‘balm for hurt minds’ but

²⁸ Stuart Curran, ‘The Hymn and the Ode’, in *Poetic Form and British Romanticism* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 56-84 (p. 60).

²⁹ Percy Bysshe Shelley, ‘Mont Blanc: Lines Written in the Vale of Chamouni’, in *Percy Bysshe Shelley: The Major Works*, ed. by Zachary Leader and Michael O’Neill, Oxford World’s Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 124-127 (p. 124).

rather as an active stimulant for the sublime.³⁰ The reader must pause in order to take in the grandeur of the Swiss landscape, equally as sublime as the Lake District. Coleridge's focus on source exacerbates the darkness of nature as we hear that the mountain rises 'from forth thy silent sea of pines / How silently!' The eerie silence, repeated with aural precision, adds a further terrifying aspect to the scene. The exclamation mark, Coleridge's punctuation of choice, ironically drains sounds from this panorama. All is disturbingly calm. The speaker then insinuates a first allusion to greenery with the reference to 'pines'. The beautiful green, blue, golden and brown hues of pastoral idyll seem a distant memory as the deep air and 'dark, substantial, black' surroundings haunt genre with their oppressive thickness. The dark pastoral is at its most concentrated here, the 'ebon mass' adding to an already overwhelming and hostile environ.

As Jennifer Keith argues, in the nineteenth century 'Nature is a betrayer rather than an ordering foundation for man and art'.³¹ The pastoral of Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley and Keats anticipate Keith's reading, no more so than in their exploration of natural disorder and disunity. Where Shelley and Keats's fractured pastorals frequently rely on classical allusion, Coleridge prefers to re-image a renowned site of literary and physical exploration: Mont Blanc. By providing us with a new and imagined interpretation of the mountain, Coleridge unsettles preconceived ideas around genre, nature and source. In addition to creating yet another strand of the dark pastoral, he also questions the certainty and even the irony of the bucolic idyll. As 'Hymn Before Sun-rise' progresses we realise that Coleridge is not looking to produce 'environmental art...[that seeks] to re-enchant the world'.³² His is the art of disruption and questioning. As we move one from stanza to the next, 'Hymn Before Sun-rise' begins to resemble a dark pastoral nightmare:

And you, ye five wild torrents fiercely glad!
Who called you forth from night and utter death,
From dark and icy caverns called you forth,

³⁰ Timothy Morton, 'Romanticism and the Environmental Subject', in *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2009), pp. 79-139 (p. 114).

³¹ Jennifer Keith, "Pre-Romanticism" and the Ends of the Eighteenth Century', in *The Cambridge Companion to Eighteenth Century Poetry*, ed. by John Sitter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 271-291 (p. 278).

³² Morton, 'Romanticism and the Environmental Subject', p. 97.

Down those precipitous, black, jagged Rocks,
For ever shattered and the same forever?

(‘Hymn Before Sun-rise, in the Vale of Chamouni’, l. 39-43)

This chaotic and dark pastoral scene visibly troubles the speaker as verse becomes entangled with harsh consonants, dark imagery and blunt punctuation. The pastoral sublime we encountered in the poem’s opening has been eclipsed by an aggravated and hostile natural environment. As Coleridge argues in *Biographia Literaria*, pastoral, much like the poetic Psyche, ‘in its process to full development, undergoes as many changes as [the] Greek name-sake, the butterfly’.³³ As we transition into this new space, it becomes apparent that Coleridge’s goal is to mould the dark pastoral into being. The repetition of ‘called you forth’ implies that the speaker is unsure about where this jarring and fragmented natural world has come from. As Sally West writes, these lines exhibit a ‘distinct suspicion towards the easy assignment of origins’.³⁴ Nevertheless, Coleridge presses on with his experiment in genre. There is a maniacal quality attributed to nature as the torrents are described as ‘fiercely glad’, almost as if they are happy to inflict bedlam upon the mountain. Nature transforms into a premeditative force, a clear perturbation to Coleridge’s thought and the bygone unruffled pastoral.

‘Even the poet’s more normal relation with Nature in Wordsworth and Coleridge assumes that his main business is to reconcile nature to his tribe’ argues William Empson.³⁵ As ‘Hymn Before Sun-rise’ draws to a close we realise that there is nothing normal about Coleridge’s relationship with nature or the pastoral. Although Craig W. Miller argues that Coleridge’s concept of nature is grounded in scientific practice, in ‘Hymn Before Sun-rise’ we see the frenzied imagination dominate.³⁶ The natural world, in all its guises, offers tantalising possibility. While it is true that Coleridge’s ‘intensity of thought cannot be long sustained’, the intensity of his genre most certainly

³³ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ‘Chapter IV, *Biographia Literaria* (1815-17)’, in *The Major Works including Biographia Literaria*, Oxford World’s Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 155-482 (p. 200).

³⁴ West, “‘An unremitting interchange’”: The Voices of Mont Blanc’, p. 78.

³⁵ William Empson, ‘The Beggar’s Opera’, in *Some Versions of Pastoral* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1935), pp. 195-250 (p. 207).

³⁶ Craig W. Miller, ‘Coleridge’s Concept of Nature’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 25.1 (1964) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/2708086>> [Accessed 2 April 2022].

can.³⁷ As Tim Milnes argues, the ‘underlying idea, as usual with Coleridge, is akin to that of an exercise in intellectual and spiritual mountaineering’.³⁸ The penultimate stanza of the poem offers an insight into this intellectual mountaineering as Coleridge reworks the pastoral to dynamic effect:

Ye living flowers that skirt the eternal frost!
 Ye wild goats sporting round the eagle’s nest!
 Ye eagles, play-mates of the mountain-storm!
 Ye lightnings, the dread arrows of the clouds!
 Ye signs and wonders of the element!

(‘Hymn Before Sun-rise, in the Vale of Chamouni’, l. 64-68)

Coleridge’s manipulation of language here is exceptional as the poem’s ecosystem aspires to new heights. Nature is active and alive, the overwhelming use of exclamation marks adding to the sense of wonder and movement. The beautiful image of the ‘living flowers that skirt the eternal frost’ gives the pastoral an edge as we see a delicate feature of nature withstanding a potentially destructive winter condition. Strength is derived from resilience. The wild goats, animals of the East, add an oriental component to the poem as the pastoral becomes slightly more unfamiliar. The predatory eagle equally adds a power to pastoral as strong-willed animals dominate nature. Through these two animals Coleridge transforms the ideal rural setting into an amphitheatre of robust spirit and commotion. The dark pastoral is reintroduced in the image of the ‘mountain-storm’ and the ‘lightnings, the dread arrows of the clouds!’ Trapped in this strange vision, the poem slips into a tale of survival and endurance of the elements. The harmony and peace that pastoral Arcadia once promoted is now completely lost as life seems inextricably linked with death (flowers/frost), wilderness with domestication (wild goats/eagle’s nest). A tale of opposites, Coleridge’s pastoral rejects the doctrine of unity and permanence.

In ‘Hymn Before Sun-rise’ Coleridge teaches us to appreciate the complexity of the imagination as well as the value of nature’s darker art. As demonstrated in his wider portfolio, the pastoral is about much more than farming, beauty and rural pastimes.

³⁷ George H. Gilpin, ‘Coleridge and the Spiral of Poetic Thought’, *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 12.4 (1872) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/449957>> [Accessed 2 April 2022] (p. 646).

³⁸ Tim Milnes, ‘Eclipsing Art: Method and Metaphysics in Coleridge’s *Biographia Literaria*, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 60.1 (1999) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/3654003>> [Accessed 2 April 2022] (p. 125).

Genre accommodates toxicity, disturbance and anxiety but always with a view to challenge its reader. Coleridge's pastorals chart the growth of a lyric 'I' that constantly evolves thanks to the ambition of the artist. Imagined experience dictates the rhythms of a dynamic pastoral and dark pastoral consciousness that seeks to obliterate custom. As Coleridge deliberates over the 'signs and wonders' of the world in 'Hymn Before Sun-rise', he simultaneously assesses the prospect of his own creative and generic enterprise. In reimagining a Mont Blanc scene, he transports the pastoral into the depths of his own uncertain but equally riveting creative faculties. Like Wordsworth, Coleridge uses poetry as an opportunity to bring himself into genre, to refurbish the tired traditions of pastoral. As Wordsworth argues in the preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, his and Coleridge's experiments in genre produce a class of poetry 'well adapted to interest mankind permanently, and not unimportant in the multiplicity, and in the quality of its moral relations'.³⁹ Wordsworth and Coleridge's pastorals continue to interest readers because they are grounded in subjectivity, imagination and experience.

In his article on paradoxes of nature John Beer writes, 'Coleridge and Wordsworth, especially in the late 1790s, are rather loosely thought of as having been primarily "nature poets"'.⁴⁰ The term 'nature poets' has distorted the achievement of Wordsworth and Coleridge, largely because scholars see nature and not genre as integral to their success as poets, thinkers and intellectuals. As this thesis demonstrates, Wordsworth and Coleridge are primarily pastoral poets, individuals who strive to push a longstanding genre to its limits and beyond. Where the pastoral had 'fallen to a tarnished name', these Lake Poets seek to reinvent, refresh and revitalise the genre to a point of near unrecognizability.⁴¹ They see possibility in invention and innovation. The dark pastoral as a subgenre defined by experimentation, is an opportunity to refresh the lyric 'I' of pastoral, to introduce new ideas around character profiles, the metaphysical and the imagination. Darkness gives access to the subconscious and the concealed realm of self but also to a different, hidden and underexplored side of nature. Nature's darker shadow reveals the true depth of human

³⁹ William Wordsworth, 'Preface to Lyrical Ballads, with Pastoral and Other Poems (1802)', in *William Wordsworth The Major Works including The Prelude*, ed. by Stephen Gill, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 595-615 (p. 595).

⁴⁰ John Beer, 'The Paradoxes of Nature in Wordsworth and Coleridge', *The Wordsworth Circle*, 40.1 (2009) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/24045257>> [Accessed 20 March 2022] (p. 4).

⁴¹ Edmund K. Chambers, 'Introduction', *English Pastorals: Selected and with an Introduction by Edmund K. Chambers* (London: Blackie & Son), pp. xv-xlvi (p. xv).

and poetic experience, itself a fraught and uncertain thing. Although Stuart Curran argues that ‘Nothing better exemplifies the intractability of generic definition than pastoral’, such ‘intractability’ spurs Wordsworth and Coleridge to create a series of pastoral poems and themes that encourage reflection, debate and conversation.⁴² No longer are we in the realm of the static pastoral. Where Michael O’Neill refers to ‘Shelley as a poet of intellectual beauty, Keats of the physical’, this thesis views Wordsworth as a pastoral poet of personal experience and Coleridge as pastoral poet of imagination.⁴³ Their work contributes to a more cultured and dynamic generic landscape that informs later Romantic and even Victorian pastoral poetry. If ‘genre theory has usually been considered marginal to the British programme’, this thesis considers it central to not only the British programme, but Wordsworth and Coleridge’s entire careers.⁴⁴

⁴² Curran, ‘Pastoral’, p. 85.

⁴³ Michael O’Neill, ‘Second-generation Romantic poetry 2: Shelley and Keats’, in *The Cambridge History of English Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 524-541 (p. 524).

⁴⁴ David Duff, ‘Romantic Genre Theory’, in *Romanticism and the Uses of Genre* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 59-95 (p. 60).

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