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## **Geographic Transgression and Epic Theatre: The Subversiveness of the Pastoral Idyll in Edward Bond's *Lear***

**Abstract:** The pastoral has often been defined in terms of an idyllic retreat where man can regain his former unity with nature, from which he has been alienated as a consequence of urban life. At the same time, however, the pastoral is not merely escapist, but explores the very problems of the city, contemporary society, politics and the human condition in general. It can thus be called a subversive form, serving as a vehicle to question contemporary values, roles and morals by offering a context where these issues can be freely scrutinised and criticised. A similar interest in contemporary affairs underlies the concept of the epic theatre, which, by definition, intends to create an awareness of existing social plights in the audience, thus aspiring to political reforms.

This article analyses the overlap between pastoral elements and the notion of the epic theatre using Edward Bond's *Lear* (1971). Not only will it be demonstrated how Bond uses the king's retreat into a pastoral idyll to convey his views about the origins of extreme behaviours like cruelty and violence in modern societies but also to what extent this attempt at a redefinition of received standards fits the notion of the epic theatre. Contrary to the opinion expressed by some scholars that the pastoral has become obsolete in modern times, this paper hence argues that this mode is a broad and flexible category that has survived up to the dramatic tradition of the twentieth century and is, due to its oscillation between evasiveness and subversiveness, capable of being incorporated in such a "radical" concept as Brecht's theatre.

Although many critics have already pointed out the subversive potential of Edward Bond's plays, which explore the dangers of current developments in society and question what he terms the "social morality" of his time, none of them have so far investigated how he achieves this aim by making use of features associated with the pastoral mode. While some have analysed the general function of nature in his play *Lear* (1971), they have nevertheless, in spite of mentioning the term "pastoral idyll" several times, examined neither what pastoral elements he precisely uses nor the role they play within his aim of exploring and subverting contemporary values, roles and morals (cf. Coult, Ahrens). In the following, it will be demonstrated that Edward Bond makes use of the retreat into a natural idyll to convey his views about the origins of extreme behaviour like cruelty and violence in modern societies by employing motifs specifically assigned to the pastoral. Contrary to some scholars who claim that

this mode has become obsolete in modern times,<sup>1</sup> this paper will argue that the pastoral is in fact a broad and flexible category that has survived up to the dramatic tradition of the twentieth century and is, due to its oscillation between evasiveness and subversiveness, even capable of being incorporated in such a “radical” concept as Brecht’s epic theatre. In order to achieve this aim, the most important traits characterising the pastoral since its first occurrence in antiquity will be discussed. Against this background, the combination of pastoral and epic elements used by Edward Bond in his play *Lear* will then be analysed. Finally, conclusions will be drawn as to the extent of the overlap between pastoral modality and the notion of the epic theatre.

The pastoral has a long tradition in western literature, the roots of which can be found in ancient times. In the poems of Theocritus and Virgil, pastoral poetry is primarily concerned with the lives of shepherds and their flocks in the countryside. Typically, herdsmen meet in a so-called *locus amoenus* (“lovely place”), which is secluded from the demands of society and defined by the simplicity of the setting and people as well as its idealised surroundings. In many texts, this idealisation of country values is made explicitly as a criticism of life in the city. Usually, a tension is established between rural simplicity and innocence on the one hand and urban sophistication and corruption on the other (cf. Williams 46). Related to this idea of escapism resulting from the dissatisfaction with life in the city is the notion of the Golden Age. The dominant idea is a search for simplicity away from either a particular place (e.g., the city or the court) into the rural retreat of Arcadia or from a particular period (e.g., adulthood) into the age of childhood. The pastoral hence represents a longing for the original condition of human life in an idealised surrounding. Here, man attempts to regain his former unity with nature, from which he has been alienated as a consequence of his urban and courtly way of living (cf. Marinelli 15–36).

However, there have always been doubts regarding the possibility of such a retreat. They have been present in pastoral writings from their very beginnings taking the form of elements working against the harmony and permanence associated with life in a pastoral idyll. In Virgil’s *Eclogue 1*, for instance, two shepherds meet against the background of a rural scenery. While Melibeus complains about his dispossession and subsequent expulsion from his native country, Tityrus praises a young man whom he refers to as deity and who allowed him to keep his land. The poem thus paradoxically establishes a tension between the celebration of the retreat into the tranquillity of a peaceful enclave

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<sup>1</sup> Barrell and Bull, for instance, argue that pastoral writing has become impossible in the late twentieth century; according to them, there is no contrast between city and country anymore, which has always been one of the basic premises of this mode (432). However, as the analysis will show, this opposition is only one of several pastoral features that have survived since antiquity.

and the mourning for the loss of this way of living, accompanied by the knowledge that the stay in this rural context can only be a temporary one. This dichotomy between pastoral and anti-pastoral elements, the longing for a retreat into a harmonious nature and doubts about its realisability, has been a typical feature of the pastoral mode since Virgil's times.<sup>2</sup>

The incorporation of opposing elements already suggests that the pastoral is not a purely escapist mode celebrating simple virtues in the seclusion of a retreat completely removed from the problems of the larger world. In fact, it contains an oscillation between escapism from and, at the same time, exploration of the conditions of the city/the court. In a recent discussion, Paul Alpers argues that the pastoral has consciously modal interests insofar as it explores the strength of the shepherd, and thereby of the reader, relative to his world. In his view, "the figure of the shepherd is felt to be representative precisely in figuring every or any man's strength relative to the world" (Alpers 50). Accordingly, he sees the major function of this mode in the exploration of contemporary issues as well as the human condition in general in a distant Arcadia with the help of representative figures.

Thus, besides being an escapist form resulting from an underlying desire to escape the confinements of the modern world, the pastoral also has subversive potential. It can serve as a vehicle to question contemporary values, roles and morals by offering a context where these issues can be freely scrutinised and criticised. In the English pastoral tradition, this is often done by the motif of retreat and return: the city-dweller (or court-dweller) travels into the natural context, where he gains an insight into the larger world or the human condition in general and where the problems of the larger world are finally resolved (cf. Gifford 81–82). Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, for instance, which features a retreat from the hostility of the court into the forest of Arden, ends in the reconciliation of the brothers Orlando and Oliver, the marriage of four couples and the restoration of the throne to the exiled Duke Senior.

The search for unity and wholeness traditionally associated with the pastoral mode seems to stand in stark contrast to the concept of the epic theatre, which primarily aims at dissociation and alienation regarding both its content and form. Bertolt Brecht, who, among others, developed this kind of theatre, proclaimed its consciously political and reforming purpose. For him, its interest, unlike in earlier forms of drama, is less in what happens than in how and why it happens, a technique known as the *Verfremdungseffekt* (alienation effect). It is an effect

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Leo Marx's influential work *The Machine in the Garden*, where he notes that the idyllic state associated with the pastoral ideal is often threatened by an anti-pastoral counterforce which originates either in the city or the surrounding wilderness (24–26). Likewise, Peter Lindenbaum argues that the pastoral mode posits the "pastoral ideal" as a preliminary working hypothesis which is only used as the basis for further discussion; he therefore comes to the conclusion that there is "considerable criticism and questioning of the pastoral ideal in all pastoral writing" (xi).

“which prevents the audience from losing itself passively and completely in the character created by the actor, and which consequently leads the audience to be a consciously critical observer” (Willett 91). This estrangement is achieved by a range of dramatic techniques, e.g., the direct address of the audience or a reduction of the stage equipment to only a few properties. Furthermore, despite the displacement of the action to a setting remote in time and space, the audience can be confronted with contemporary issues concerning their own society. The characters are often “everyman” figures, allegorical types that can be exchanged at random and show exemplary traits in their behaviour. With this distancing method, which prevents the viewer from submerging passively in the play and having a cathartic experience in the Aristotelian sense, the viewer is forced to assume a critical, analytical attitude, which serves to free him from the assumption that what he is watching is really a self-contained narrative (cf. Cuddon and Preston 20). Brecht hereby pursues didactic intentions; he wants the play to teach the viewer not to take its content and form for granted, since the medium itself appears, due to its extreme artificiality, dependent on many socio-cultural conditions.

The question now arises what happens when both elements co-occur, or, more specifically: if an epic play contains pastoral elements, how are they used to achieve the aim of this kind of theatre, i.e., of exposing and subverting current social and political problems? How are these elements combined with the Brechtian alienation effect? Besides, where are the overlaps between these apparently divergent forms? In the following, answers to these questions will be given by placing the focus of the analysis on Edward Bond’s *Lear*, which is an adaption of Shakespeare’s tragedy in a twentieth-century epic form. The play explores the origins of violence and cruelty as a result of factors such as capitalism, mass production and the anonymity of modern societies, showing how modern man, due to the estrangement from his original biological condition, subsequently turns violent. Here, the king is a paranoid monarch who builds a wall to keep out alleged enemies. When his daughters Bodice and Fontanelle rebel against him, he initially flees to the countryside; however, he soon becomes their prisoner. After being blinded, he is haunted by the ghost of the Gravedigger’s boy, a countryman who has been killed by the soldiers of Lear’s daughters. The wife of this boy is Cordelia, who in the course of the play starts a civil war and eventually becomes a dictator herself. In the end, Lear, who has realised the pointlessness of the system he once represented, makes a gesture towards the destruction of the wall he once began, but is killed during his attempt.

At the heart of Bond’s play, there is a traditional pastoral dissatisfaction with current developments in modern society and a longing for a reunion with the original world of nature. The basic assumption is that man has been alienated

from his natural conditions due to his life in a capitalist society. Consequently, as social and political developments as well as technological progress have removed him from his natural environment which he was originally designed for, he lives in a kind of prison and turns aggressive. Bond states this explicitly in the preface to his play, where he draws a comparison between humans and animals:

In normal surroundings and conditions members of the same species are not dangerous to one another, but . . . when they are kept in adverse conditions, and are forced to behave unnaturally, their behaviour deteriorates. This has been seen in zoos and laboratories. Then they become destructive and neurotic and make bad parents. They begin to behave like us. (lvii)

This world of violence and aggression is represented by the people at Lear's court. In the beginning, the king is depicted as a typical representative of a production-oriented, capitalist society which is not interested in the value of the individual but merely in his efficiency. He does not, for example, take pity on a worker who has just been killed but even complains about the delay in the building of the wall that is caused by the accident and has another worker executed because he thinks the working progress has been too slow (1.1). Further instances are Bodice's and Fontanelle's torture of Warrington in 1.4 or the brutality of the prisoner in 2.6, who removes Lear's eyes with a cold, scientific detachment and hopes that he will be promoted because of his eye-removing device. The usual image of a corrupted and hostile court as typical of the pastoral tradition has thus been consciously aggravated by Bond, who depicts a world that is defined by its extreme inhumanity and cruelty for the purpose of revealing the atrocities that are the result of humanity's dissociation from a more "natural" condition.

The rural enclave of the Gravedigger's boy that Lear enters after his expulsion from power at the end of act one stands in stark contrast to this courtly world of violence and corruption. Here, the typical pastoral dichotomy between country and court is used to reveal the shortcomings of the latter. After the initial scenes of violence and hostility (1.1–5), the setting already indicates the harmless and innocent character of this environment by evoking an atmosphere of natural simplicity. This becomes obvious in the stage directions at the beginning of scene 1.6: "*Wooden house upstage. A few steps to the front door. A well. A bench with bedding on it,*" and the fact that there is a forest in the background as well as a herd of pigs. It is a place where man still lives *from* nature and does not, as is the case at court, try to interfere with and control it, which is symbolised by the catalogue of technical equipment used to build the wall and hence modify nature in scene 1.1: "*A stack of building materials – shovels, picks, posts and a tarpaulin.*" Moreover, unlike at the court, where the

setting mostly consists of closed rooms, e.g., in the prison scenes in act two, which epitomises the injustice of the system of “law and order,” the openness of this place conveys an atmosphere of pastoral freedom devoid of the restraints of a repressive society (cf. Ahrens 360). The Gravedigger’s boy is portrayed with a natural, paradise-like happiness which is, in contrast to Lear, without violence but has also naïve and childish traits. He and his wife, who live a simple life and are caring and honest towards each other, are the opposite of the royal family, where lies are the rule and no-one can be trusted. For Lear, as well as for Bond, this setting, reminiscent of a classic *locus amoenus*, constitutes the ideal world, a Golden Age, in which people can live in accordance with nature. It has thus been consciously opposed to the human alienation and cruelty characteristic of the courtly system. Consequently, the two fundamental aspects of the epic theatre and the pastoral, i.e., alienation from and return to an unspoilt world of nature, are incorporated within one play and put into a dichotomous relation in order to show the atrocities of an inhumane system in contrast to an alternative, more “natural” existence.

Interestingly this rural context, despite its clearly idyllic description, also contains an anti-pastoral element, a poisoned well, where the dead Warrington is found. This works against the image of a natural world that has restorative powers by suggesting that the very life source of this world (water) is in fact a source of death. The image of a natural context that refuses to nurture man and kills him instead is furthermore supported by Lear’s dream, in which a king has a fountain in his garden but one morning finds out that there is a desert beneath it (1.7). The fact that the king finds a helmet and a sword in the desert sand in this dream symbolises not only the hostility and emptiness of a pseudo-idyllic nature that has no healing powers in the traditional pastoral sense anymore but also anticipates the inevitable destruction of this retreat by the representatives of a larger world (the soldiers), which will occur at the end of act one. This existence of an anti-pastoral element within the idyllicism of a *locus amoenus* certainly suggests that Bond himself had, like many of his pastoral predecessors, doubts about the possibility of the flight from a powerful system into the purity of an unspoilt nature, which he perceives as an ideal but, on the whole, impossible world when it comes to the question of whether it can actually be realised. It must also be seen within the context of the epic theatre, whose fundamental aim is not to provide a pleasing context far away from any sorrows but to show the impossibility of life within such an environment in the face of a hostile and repressive system. However, this does not mean that the initial image of a pastoral idyll and a Golden Age is completely subverted. Rather, Bond’s retreat shows the same oscillation between pastoral and anti-pastoral elements that has been typical of this mode since Virgil’s Eclogue 1. Similarly to the ancient author, Bond probably realised that the withdrawal into the bucolic

environment can only be a temporary one but that the very act of escapism into the world of an idealised nature can nevertheless be a powerful means of undermining and transgressing the boundaries of notions associated with the contemporary system. For this purpose, he created the ambivalent image of an alternative natural context that is both subverted and subversive.

Accordingly, the rural context here serves not only as a refuge from the cruelty of modern society but also as the place where problems of this society are explored. The dichotomous relation between evasion and subversion typical of the pastoral mode becomes especially obvious in the motif of retreat and return, which reveals the way Bond combines pastoral and epic elements in order to convey his views about current issues. The movement from court to country and vice versa is made by two figures in the play, Lear and Cordelia.

Having been expelled from the court, the king enters the pastoral context for the first time at the end of act one. Here, he is suddenly depicted as extremely fragile and vulnerable. He looks, for example, so dirty and ragged that the countrymen do not recognise in him the former king anymore and the Gravedigger's boy's wife even thinks he is a tramp (1.6). Moreover, he cannot prevent the soldiers from devastating the pastoral idyll or killing the Gravedigger's boy and raping his wife. This portrayal of a vulnerable figure who was some acts before still the most powerful person is significant. Although the confrontation of two classes of people, the courtly and the rural class, is a characteristic pastoral feature and can already be found in Shakespeare's pastoral plays, e.g., *As You Like It* or *The Tempest*, it must be seen in the context of the alienation effect here, of which the interchangeability of roles and the depiction of everyman figures is typical and which reveals a major difference between Shakespeare's and Bond's version.

In the Elizabethan play, where everyone still has his firm place assigned in the chain of being, Lear remains king until the end. Although this is partly refuted by the fact that Cordelia questions the divine and patriarchal order or that Goneril and Regan undermine Lear's position as a king, the social hierarchy is not questioned as a whole or entirely subverted in the course of the play; on the contrary, chaos results from the deviation of the given structures, which are finally reconstituted by the crowning of either Albany or Edgar (depending on whether one follows the Quarto or the Folio version). Since man has no free will, he is eventually punished for his attempt to rebel against the divine order, which is epitomised by the death of Lear and his daughters. According to Lappin, Shakespeare does not aim at any social or institutional change: "The Shakespearean vision of tragedy resists the idea of revolution . . . it does not question the hierarchical reordering of power or the legitimacy of authority" (121).

In Bond's epic rewrite, the situation has changed. The king not only loses his royal status but even turns into one of the humblest figures of the play. By showing the vulnerability of the king, who is initially at the height of power but is then put into the traditional role of the pastoral farmer and unable to fight against the forces of the larger world, Bond emphasises the fact that in his play, the social order has been set up by human beings and is therefore neither unalterable nor perfect in itself. This godless world, which Lappin calls "a finite universe whose design is embodied in man-made, artificial institutions" (121), is subject to rapid changes as well as the laws of arbitrariness. The indifference of an anonymous and cruel system where individuals are easily exchangeable and dispensable prevails, which is also underlined by the speed with which Lear changes from a powerful monarch (1.1) to a weak, old man (1.5).

But the play also shows the reverse movement from country to court: Cordelia, who is raped at the end of act one by the soldiers who destroy the paradise-like idyll, is at first depicted as an innocent country wife, worried about the future with her husband and extremely vulnerable. However, after being raped and with the Gravedigger's boy having been killed, she initiates a civil war and becomes the new ruler. This again underlines the arbitrariness of a man-made system where even the humblest and most innocent person can become a representative and perpetrator of its cruelty.

Lear and Cordelia are thus figures who undergo contrary pastoral movements in the course of the play. Whereas the king is shown as powerful in the beginning, after the movement to the rural retreat he appears as a vulnerable countryman cherishing simple virtues typical of the pastoral. Cordelia, on the other hand, is initially portrayed as extremely vulnerable but has emerged as a powerful ruler of the courtly world in the end. Bond's play, despite initially portraying a simple and idyllic country that is strongly opposed to the corrupted court, reveals the closeness of both categories by showing, with the help of the Brechtian alienation effect, the ease with which one can move from one world to the other. This proximity of innocent nature and the corrupt urban society is also emphasised by the image of a vulnerable pastoral environment, e.g., when the soldiers rape Cordelia and kill the Gravedigger's boy at the end of act one.

At first sight, this combination of pastoral and epic elements seems to reveal a severe pessimism. The play appears to suggest that the escape from the restraints of the repressive system of modern society to the purity of nature in a Golden Age has become impossible, since sooner or later the forces of the larger world will invade and spoil this natural retreat. This is supported by the fact that the rural environment already contains a poisoned well, which is an anti-pastoral element and consequently works against the belief in the restorative powers of this enclave. Moreover, by depicting an innocent country wife who turns into the powerful perpetrator of an inhumane system, Bond's play implies that even



uncorrupted and simple people can quickly fall victim to this system. Even worse, the propensity for violence and cruelty is shown as an integral part of every human being. Unlike Shakespeare's play, there is no retributive justice that punishes man for deviating from a given order; instead, since no one is bound to a fixed structure anymore, everybody can fill and change any role at any time – be it the leader or the victim within a repressive system.

However, the pastoral movement of retreat and return also reveals a covert optimism or at least a suggestion of how to change the system of an inhumane society. As has been mentioned before, in the pastoral mode, the rural retreat is the place where the intruding court-figure gains insight that he or she will take back to the larger world. In Bond's play, this lesson learnt in the country is linked to the didactic aims of the epic theatre. Here, the former king, who is at first portrayed as extremely cruel and the perpetrator of a system of violence and aggression, is taught pity and compassion in the natural retreat. This becomes obvious, for example, when Lear, who ordered the execution of an innocent worker shortly before, now refers to the Gravedigger's boy's wife as "poor woman" when she cries (1.6). Not only is the Gravedigger's boy the first to show pity and compassion towards the king in the pastoral context, but he will even stay with him in the form of a ghost for nearly the rest of the play in order to offer him comfort for his sorrows, e.g., during his imprisonment. As Bond said in an interview in 1972, this illustrates that Lear, despite the destruction of the natural idyll at the end of act one, nevertheless keeps "this clear vision of a golden age" in mind (qtd. in Stratmann 295). The former king learns that the real problem is the fact that violence has become institutionalised and taken for granted in society. This in turn produces new violence, either when people try to fight against it to come into power themselves, as is the case with Cordelia, or when they have to adapt to the "morals" of this society by force (cf. Ahrens 365).

Lear finally realises that the retreat into the comforting idyllicism of a bucolic context can only be a temporary one and must be followed by a return to the courtly world of politics. He has learnt that the only way to break through the vicious circle of this depraved system is neither the quiet acceptance of its rules nor a passive withdrawal into a pastoral idyll but an active involvement in public matters: "Men destroy themselves and say it's their duty? It's not possible! How can they be so abused?" (2.7). Consequently, he turns the bucolic context into a place where revolutionaries gather and listen to his thoughts. He now becomes an active representative of a place where there is still a greater unity between man and nature and which undermines the current ideas of society as represented by the court. He finally tells Cordelia, who is about to make the same mistakes that he and his daughters made before, the final lesson he has learnt: "Our lives are awkward and fragile and we have only one thing to keep us sane: pity, and the man without pity is mad" (3.3). Despite appearing more powerless after the

removal of his eyes, Lear even demonstrates how to put into action the ideas he has learnt in the pastoral retreat. He is the first one to seek change and digs a shovel into the earth in order to remove the wall, the symbol of the inhumanity and pointlessness of the courtly ideology. His step is of course merely symbolic and more will have to follow. However, by doing this, despite being killed in the end, he shows the way that others will have to go in the future if they want to break through the vicious circle of the current system. This final gesture in which a simple figure shows exemplary behaviour that results from its retreat into the pastoral idyll must, besides the pessimism conveyed by its death, be seen within the didactic function of the epic theatre; similarly to Lear, who returns from the rural context in order to become politically active, the audience is supposed to be roused into political awareness and, in the ideal case, even aspire to social change as well as reforms.

To sum up, Edward Bond uses traditional pastoral elements in his play to construct a counter-world of an unspoilt nature which, despite its incorporation of an anti-pastoral component resulting probably from the playwright's somewhat ambivalent attitude towards the possibility of such a retreat, stands in contrast to the corrupt, capitalist society where people have turned violent and aggressive. Besides revealing an underlying escapist longing for the flight from a repressive system into the freedom of an Arcadian idyllicism, the portrayal of this retreat shows a typical pastoral tension between evasion and negotiation of contemporary issues. One of the most striking aspects is the combination of the pastoral motif of retreat and return with the Brechtian alienation effect, which emphasises Bond's view of an arbitrary, violent and godless system where individuals are dispensable and social roles easily interchangeable. In spite of the pessimistic impression that is given by the modification of this traditional motif, the rural retreat is also the place where the former representative of the cruel system gains important insights into its fallacies and an idea of how to initiate a change. In *Lear*, the pastoral enclave is thus not only the place to escape from the restraints of the modern world but also the environment where the false ideology and morals of this system are subverted and hints at the ways of how to improve its conditions are given, which corresponds to the didactic intentions of the epic theatre.

It becomes clear that the epic theatre, despite the superficial differences, shows interests similar to those of the pastoral mode by providing a displaced context where the reader/the audience can explore contemporary issues concerning an urbanised society whose system as well as politics are conceived of as the result of an alienation from a more "original" condition. In general, the form of the epic theatre itself, which aims at the dissociation from the unity and wholeness of the traditional Aristotelian theatre, represents the very estrangement it wants to expose and can thus be seen as a conscious alienation

from a “blissful” state of mere entertainment where the audience is supposed to give an emotional but also unreflecting response to the scenes it encounters on the stage. In fact, the term “alienation,” by definition, establishes a dialectic relation between something that is conceived of as an original state on the one hand and something that estranges itself from it on the other. The opposition of alienation versus search for unity associated with the epic theatre and the pastoral respectively must hence be seen not as an irreconcilable discrepancy but rather as different ways of dealing with the same dilemma, since both concepts are concerned with the dissociation of man from his more “original” condition due to the system he lives in. While the pastoral deals with this alienation in terms of geographic transgression by its attempt at finding a former unity in the rural world in an idealised past, the epic theatre works at the other end of the spectrum, emphasising the very estrangement and dehumanisation of man by its use of the alienation effect in order to make the audience aware of current social plights; if both forms are combined, the resulting synthesis shows, as is the case in *Lear*, a paradoxical combination of extremely hostile and violent with idyllic and innocent elements.

Therefore, it has been exemplarily demonstrated how pastoral elements are used in the epic theatre to explore as well as challenge contemporary issues concerning society and politics. Moreover, it has become evident that the pastoral mode is not, contrary to some critics’ view, an obsolete form, but a flexible category that shows interests similar to those of Brecht’s epic theatre and can therefore still be found in twentieth-century drama. With its continuous oscillation between escapism on the one hand and transgression as well as subversion on the other, the pastoral is still a productive form, being an important literary means for western culture not only to negotiate its desire for an escape from an ever faster-moving, urbanised world into the purity of an unspoilt nature but also a medium to question the course this culture is taking in displaced form.

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