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Introduction: Pastoral Sounds

Bénédicte CHORIER-FRYD, Charles HOLDEFER and Thomas PUGHE

- 1 Echoes of Arcadia come in many shapes and forms. The resilience of pastoral resides not only in its broad appeal but also in its mutability. Pastoral has been variously described as nostalgic or forward-looking, politically suspect or potentially radical, a version of false consciousness or a source of vital nuance. All of these descriptions have merit, depending on the context, example and reading—and now, a growing awareness of the anthropocene has reinvigorated the conversation. In the current circumstances, there is a renewed sense that however you encode or interpret it, the pastoral is *actual*. As Glen A. Love observed, “Pastoral’s ancient and universal appeal—to come away—requires new examination in an age in which there is no away” (67).
- 2 What’s more, the call to “come away” remains remarkably adaptive and polyphonic. It both refers to and goes beyond the traditional Arcadian model and includes anti- or post-pastoral attitudes which question the idealized dialogue between humans and nature, or what might be called the “Us” and “It” dichotomy. Pastoral echoes can also be heard in works that make no explicit claim to share in the pastoral ideal or to participate in the tradition of nature writing. Yet the call still resonates, across ever greater distances, in a globalized culture.
- 3 How do we hear this call? What critical approaches facilitate our hearing? Nowadays, what does pastoral sound like?
- 4 These seemingly simple questions have animated the ongoing joint research project of FoReLL (Poitiers) and REMELICE (Orléans), reinterpreting pastoral from a 21st century perspective. Earlier work focused on pastoral place.¹ Now, we have looked at pastoral in a different light—or, more precisely, we have tried to *listen* to pastoral, in seminars and at an international conference devoted to pastoral sounds. The articles in this issue are a selection and distillation of this work, ranging across centuries, genres and a wide variety of locales.
- 5 Given this scope, it quickly becomes apparent that pastoral is more than a formal genre or a theme. It’s also more than a matter of local or global politics, an awareness of

environmental crisis, or shifting fashions or ideological trends, as important as those may be.

- 6 Pastoral arises from discursive artifacts, from the processes of language, and it constitutes itself in the act of reading (Pughe 5). More specifically, in regard to pastoral sounds, this reading will rely on interpretative practices which require, as Terry Gifford has emphasized, “listening deeply.” A non-exhaustive list of these practices would include the domestic, self-ironic, anti-pastoral, post-pastoral and dialogic, and all of them remind us not to oversimplify the pastoral (8-19).
- 7 Pastoral sounds do not call out to a passive receptor; rather, they are heard by dint of critical attentiveness. Moreover, listening for them involves identifying and confronting tensions: between harmony and discordance; between social constructs and an environment perceived and constructed as “natural”; between human and non-human sounds, to name only a few major examples. In this volume, reader and listeners have listened deeply while engaging with a wide array of sources, including music, text and film.
- 8 Part One of this collection addresses pastoral’s relation to music. Rustics, shepherds and shepherdesses, echoes of the syrinx and aulòs—these traditional markers have their place, to be sure. But they are also questioned, contextualized and formally dissected in light of recent understandings of pastoral. Also heard, in the “sound mix,” are less familiar sources, including voices from the American backwoods, and orchestrations of disharmony and atonality from the 20th century avant-garde.
- 9 Jeffrey Hopes begins this section with the sounds of early 18th century pastoral as found in the work of George Frideric Handel, who drew on pre-existing conventions but also manipulated and subverted them, developing his own meta-pastoral for an English audience which was less familiar with Italian precedents. Poets Alexander Pope, John Gay and John Hughes joined with Handel—sometimes in direct collaboration on the libretto—in creating a new and consciously English pastoral language which would exert an influence for generations to come.
- 10 Allan Kulikoff also focuses on the 18th century, but he takes us to North America and to the remote corners of Carolina backcountry, and to the sounds of “rough music,” as defined by the historian E.P. Thompson. The diary of a genteel Englishman, Charles Woodmason, who lived in the colony as a planter, preacher and occasional poet, provides insights into class antagonisms. The tropes of class privilege from English pastorals stand in stark contrast with Woodmason’s “counter-pastoral” experiences in the Carolina backcountry among Presbyterian and Baptist farmers. Moreover, the silence and seeming absence of slaves points to Woodmason’s southern identity.
- 11 Catherine Hoffmann charts a musical dynamic across several centuries, comparing pastoral masques by Henry Purcell and Benjamin Britten, from the 17th and 20th centuries, respectively. With particular attention to rustics and shepherds, she explores the mise-en-abyme of the pageantry of royal occasions, and the ingredients that make it possible to hear music as being pastoral. Like Jeffrey Hopes, she also addresses the question of “Englishness,” in light of Purcell and Britten’s national status as composers, and how these artists reflect the values of their age.
- 12 Kristina Knowles finishes Part One with a study of the post-modern composer George Crumb. She notes how Terry Gifford’s conception of post-pastoralism can inform Crumb’s post-modernism, especially in Crumb’s chamber work, *An Idyll for the Misbegotten*. She also

addresses the question of how music, a temporal art form existing in and through time, evokes the timelessness, stasis or cycles of sacred time associated with pastoral. In an era of environmental anxiety, industrialization and urbanization, Crumb's music can be heard as permeated with ecological and pastoral concerns.

- 13 Part Two of this issue discusses pastoral sounds in poetry, fiction and film. Here, too, a common thread emerges in various arguments demonstrating pastoral's engaging powers. Pastoral adapts to the extreme circumstances of war and to other radically recalibrated understandings of a nation or an individual's place in nature. In the process, it highlights the reader or listener's responsibility to negotiate sense, in circumstances of flux, bewilderment or even danger.
- 14 Stéphanie Noirard traces pastoral echoes in Scottish war poems, with particular attention to their emergence from a tradition of nature writing and how these expressions evolved over the course of the First and Second World Wars. From nostalgic reminiscences or patriotic pleas to a ruined world of bombed cities and human atrocities, Scottish poets reinvent pastoral in an array of circumstances. Harsh circumstances spur writers to experiment with new poetic forms, even in a waste-land. Pastoral can thus assert a subversive quality, in conjunction with the potentials of resistance conveyed by "carnavalesque" sounds.
- 15 Amy Wells investigates the intriguing figure of the modernist shepherdess in the work of Gertrude Stein, who is also writing against the backdrop of war. Wells demonstrates that Stein's challenging language contains elements of a mechanized pastoral soundscape, which is available to the attentive listener. Key texts by Stein reveal a highly intertextual performative pastoral in which the readers assume roles in a countryside afternoon promenade led by the shepherdess herself.
- 16 Charles Holdefer addresses the fundamental distinction between sound and meaning, and how an aural *locus amoenus* is encoded by Kurt Vonnegut and other writers. In a text "pastoral sound" can function as a sub-category of personification, and in such cases, nature speaks our language and tells us something we want to hear. This perception runs the risk of indulging in sentimental pastoral but it can also participate in a "dialogic listening mode" which serves as an opening to a more nuanced appreciation of our species' place in nature.
- 17 Lastly, Bénédicte Chorier-Fryd discusses the role of sound as environment in the urban poetry of Tom Konyves, a Canadian "Vehicule Poet" whose work is grounded in city life. With attention to a tension between "ecophenomenological" vs. "environmental" poetry, she examines particular qualities of Konyves' work and how they inform a pastoral experience, notably in regard to sound. The multimedia approach of Konyves' "environmental poetry" brings its own premises to the problem of how to listen deeply, and it highlights the instability of the idea of the "natural."
- 18 This issue on "Pastoral Sounds" attests to the continued fascination with pastoral, how it reinvents itself and remains a vital mode of understanding. Listening for pastoral deploys various strategies, applies itself to many kinds of media, and enlists an eclectic array of readers and listeners. In sum, it is a vast project and an ongoing critical challenge. As Fanny Quément, who took part in the "Pastoral Sounds" conference in Poitiers, writes: "[There's] the necessity to be all ears in all circumstances, to find the right balance between abandoning oneself to the mesmerising power of sound and educating one's ears" (44).²

- 19 These articles are an early sounding out of possibilities, an attempt to strike that balance. We look forward to hearing more.
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NOTES

1. See Bénédicte Chorier-Fryd, Charles Holdefer and Thomas Pughe, eds., *Poetics and Politics of Place in Pastoral: International Perspectives* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2015).
 2. Quément is referring specifically to Seamus Heaney but the observation also applies generally.
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