

Pastoral Place and Violence in Contemporary British Fiction

John Armstrong

Department of Applied Foreign Languages
National Formosa University, Taiwan

Abstract

This paper close-reads Jon McGregor's *Reservoir 13* (2017), Graeme Macrae Burnet's *His Bloody Project* (2016) and Jim Crace's *Harvest* (2013) as exemplars of a larger wave of fiction reimagining the British village as a microcosm of global violence. Against a backdrop of theories on pastoral from Raymond Williams's *The Country and the City* (1974), Paul Alpers, Terry Gifford, and John Kinsella, and ideas on violence, the essay considers in each novel the dynamics of pastoral and violence, testing whether existing critical ideas on the pastoral have the scope and reach to encompass the darkest and most visceral elements of contemporary rural fiction. The study finds that 1) McGregor's *Reservoir 13* is a quintessential post-pastoral text, engaging with all of Gifford's tenets of the mode, yet with suggestions of child-murder and pedophilia that create a tense relationship between the novel and post-pastoral's predominantly eco-critical bent; 2) Macrae Burnet uses a remote Scottish estate to attack the pastoral in nearly all of its historical forms, de-romanticizing lives of shepherds and crofters through representation of a traumatized place of structural and physical violence and sexual abuse; 3) Crace's anti-pastoral novel *Harvest* presents a nameless, timeless English village, where enclosure for pasture is a catalyst for destruction rather than development. The study concludes that while these novels engage the pastoral in various extant forms, their elements of extreme violence denote a globalized, twenty-first-century development of the mode.

Keywords

pastoral, anti-pastoral, post-pastoral, violence, contemporary British fiction, Jon McGregor, Graeme Macrae Burnet, Jim Crace

Introduction: A Brief Survey of the Landscape

If one makes a brief survey of recent prize-winning, nominated, and shortlisted books of the “big” awards for fiction in Britain, such as the Man Booker Prize, the Walter Scott, the Costa Novel Award, and the Goldsmiths (to name a few), with a little reading and consideration, it is possible to notice amongst the myriad styles and genres a swathe of fiction which may denote a new wave of writing about the countryside. Of course, fiction has to be set somewhere, whether in alternative galaxies, thinly veiled dystopian versions of our own world, or in the city or countryside of the present or past. That many recent novels are set in the last of these is nothing to get excited about. However, what we see on closer inspection is that many of these rural or agricultural settings are depicted as troubled landscapes in which the deep fault-lines of historical, economic, social, familial, and sexual unrest and violence are not only present but amplified by the condensation of their village locations. Exploring a similar trend in a recent *Guardian* article on fiction, television, and theater, Xan Brooks calls his chosen works “part of an extended family of contemporary village and small-town stories; a set of thematically linked cousins that spotlight the tensions at work within England’s hidden corners” (n. pag.).¹ His article, while little more than a surface survey, highlights what may well become an important, emergent mode of British writing, a new breed of countryside story that has fully assimilated the bleak and even apocalyptic global outlook of the twenty-first century, a century thus far of terror attacks, international financial meltdown, immigration crises, austerity, the Arab Spring’s descent into civil war, a rise of neo-fascist far right politics in Europe and America, and an increased pervading sense of the ubiquity of violence against women in all tiers and corners of society.

Out of this twenty-first century zeitgeist, then, has come a brand of fiction that we might usefully call (for now) contemporary pastoral fiction, novels which take as their settings villages, farms, and countryside communities in any form and couple them with violence, sometimes subtle, embedded in the fabric of community, and sometimes extreme, visceral, and even apocalyptic. In *Turning Blue* (2016), for example, by Benjamin Myers (an award-winning author of rural noir), a deranged farmer disposes of women’s bodies for a secret group of snuff movie-making

¹ The works discussed in Brooks’ article “Road to Nowhere” are Amanda Craig’s novel *The Lie of the Land* (2017), Mackenzie Crook’s television show *Detectorists* (2014-2017), Matt Hartley’s play *Here I Belong* (2016), Jon McGregor’s novel *Reservoir 13* (2017, also discussed here), and Melissa Harrison’s novel *At Hawthorn Time* (2015).

businessmen and keeps a murder victim in a drain beneath a reservoir on the Yorkshire Penines. Cynan Jones's *The Long Dry* (2006), less full-frontal than Myers, explores the intrinsic, bestial violence of farming and its profit-driven exploitation of rural space. Fiona Mosely's *Elmet* (2017) (shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize) sees a dysfunctional family attempting a rural retreat in the woods of Yorkshire, only to be bullied and brutalized by a local fat-cat gangster who owns most of the once-common land. And Adam Foulds's *In the Wolf's Mouth* (2015) (shortlisted for the Walter Scott Historical Fiction award), set partly in Sicily (pastoral's original setting) during its World War II liberation, combines the stories of a British aesthete security officer, a traumatized American infantryman, and a shepherd forced to confront a local *mafioso*. What links these works, which are very different from each other in style, is their treatment of pastoral settings, and particularly their representation of those pastoral settings as violent places.

The three novels chosen for this study are examples of this larger wave. *Reservoir 13* (2017) by Jon McGregor creates an environment and atmosphere of suggested violence in its story of a Derbyshire village traumatized in the wake of a teenage girl's disappearance. Writing in the *Times Literary Supplement*, Sarah Crown called it a "work of intense, forensic noticing," aligning the novel with Dylan Thomas's *Under Milkwood* (Crown n. pag.). The story of a vicious triple murder in a remote village in the West Highlands of Scotland, *His Bloody Project* (2016) came from the relative obscurity of a little-known author (Graeme Macrae Burnet) and a small, independent publisher (Saraband) to be shortlisted for the prestigious Man Booker Prize (2016) and compared in the *New Statesman* to Lewis Grassie Gibbon's Scottish classic, *Sunset Song* (Myers 47). Another Man Booker nominee and winner of the James Tait Black Memorial Prize, described in the *London Review of Books* as "a historical novel which takes place outside of history" (Mars-Jones 18), Jim Crace's *Harvest* (2013) presents the bloody demise of a nameless village on the cusp of feudalism and profitable pasture. Considered together, these novels constitute a significant triptych of works reconfiguring rural and pastoral landscapes of Britain as settings for stories which condense and amplify the violence of our global times.

A Short Note on Violence

Simon Springer and Philippe Le Billon argue that there "is no one single definition of violence, and its usage has continued to evolve across space and time" (1). Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Philippe Bourgois say something similar: "It'

[violence] cannot be readily objectified and quantified so that a ‘check list’ can be drawn up with positive criteria for defining any particular act as violent or not” (2). Therefore, before continuing, a short note on my own usage of violence is required. Primarily, this paper is exploring the nexus of rural locations and instances or presences of violence. By instances, I mean actual occurrences of physical violence, committed by human against human, human against animal, or even animal against animal. By presence, I mean suggestions, atmospheres, or threats of physical violence. But as several theorists and cultural critics have pointed out, physical violence is rarely meaningful in and of itself. Springer, for example, says that “[v]iolence as a mere fact is largely meaningless. It takes on and gathers meaning because of its affective and cultural content, where violence is felt as meaningful” (92). Thus, the instances and presences of violence explored here are endowed with meaning through questions pertaining to their geographical and cultural locations: To what extent are they informed by their rural, village places? How do they (dis)engage with extant theories of pastoral, anti-pastoral, and post-pastoral? Are we seeing a current increase in the level and intensity of rural violence in contemporary fiction?

Of course, the threat or occurrence of physical assault does not nearly account for the full semantic reach of the word *violence*. This paper is also interested in the presence of structural or systemic violence within and around the communities of the novels. The term “structural violence” was made famous in 1969 by the founder of Peace and Conflict Studies, Johan Galtung, who theorized the major difference between “personal violence” and “structural violence” in terms of their (in)visibility. Personal violence “shows” through its “somatic actual realization” whereas “the general formula behind structural violence is inequality, above all in the distribution of power” (173-75). This understanding is perhaps closer to common knowledge now, but Galtung’s clear separation of these two types of violence has been essential to later critics exploring the machinations of late capitalism and globalization.

Slavoj Žižek’s “systemic violence,” for example, or what he calls “the often catastrophic consequences of the smooth functioning of our economic and political systems” (1), is a development of Galtung’s “general formula” of “inequality.” Žižek’s adjectival opposition (“catastrophic”/“smooth”) is a précis of one of the twenty-first century’s global contradictions, the appearance of unchecked progress obscuring realities of poverty, war, and suffering. In her work on violence and globalization, Jessica Srikantia lays out an even clearer version when she says, “structural violence is present when social arrangements created and/or maintained

by one set of people enable harms for a different set of people while marginalizing the ability of the harmed people to transform those arrangements in ways that protect, preserve or restore their well-being” (227). Coming from a more eco-critical perspective, Rob Nixon’s *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011) acknowledges Galtung’s “widening of the field of what constitutes violence” (Nixon 10) while arguing that “[s]low violence, by contrast, might well include forms of structural violence, but has a wider descriptive range in calling attention, not simply to questions of agency, but to broader, more complex descriptive categories of violence enacted slowly over time” (11). As the title of his book suggests, Nixon is particularly concerned with the tension between our “age of degraded attention spans” and “the toll exacted, over time, of ecological degradation” (13). Behind Nixon’s work sits the thinking of the anthropocene, the notion that we are now living in an epoch whose primary force of global and climatic change is man’s industrial and capitalist endeavor of the last several centuries, which has accelerated since the middle of the twentieth century due to technological advances. The anthropocene, it has been argued, is “the culmination of our anthropocentric attitudes . . . an epoch that entails the very palpable risk of humanity’s end and that thus requires a reframing of the role and concept of humanity itself” (De Cristofaro and Cordle 3). The critics mentioned in this short note are working in very different directions. However, their common denominator significant to this paper is their understanding of violence as an invisible force embedded within the power structures of our global world, as well as a spectacular or explosive physical event. While this paper is primarily concerned with instances and presences of actual or personal violence in pastoral and rural locations, these broader spatial and temporal lines of thought are pertinent, as one wider question surrounding these close readings is whether and to what extent these novels’ violent scenarios and atmospheres are nodes of wider social, economic, historical, global, and even epochal forces.

Pastoral and Violence

As much as Paul Alpers may have liked to define the matter in 1982 when he wrote “pastoral landscapes are those of which the human centers are shepherds or their equivalents” (460), pastoral and further developments such as anti-pastoral and post-pastoral are forms or modes whose semantic borders shift as our understanding of the countryside changes, along with the literature set there. While definition is a worthy critical endeavor, the key question attached to the pastoral seems to have

changed from Alpers's "how we can define pastoral in a way that will enable us to say when we are dealing with it and when not" (439), to Terry Gifford's (2012) claim that "the obvious challenge to the contemporary reader of literature that refers to nature in whatever form is to distinguish between the pastoral, the anti-pastoral, and the post-pastoral. Such a reading strategy will help the reader to consider which writing is likely to raise the most useful questions for our time" ("Pastoral" 28). By bringing Alpers and Gifford together we see two important critical shifts occurring in the three decades between their writings. Firstly, the exclusive *is or isn't pastoral* question which concerns Alpers has become an inclusive question in Gifford's thinking, one concerned with mode and usefulness instead of a more conservative *yes or no*. And secondly, Gifford broadens the scope for contemporary readers and scholars by widening the pastoral's catchment area from Alpers's landscapes of "shepherds or their equivalents" to include "nature in whatever form." While both critics are concerned to some degree with classification, Alpers seeks to make a purist academic definition, while Gifford imbues the pastoral with pertinent, contemporary ecological and critical notions.

So while Alpers operates within or close to Leo Marx's famous epithet, "no shepherd, no pastoral" (qtd. in Gifford, *Pastoral* 1), Gifford not only gives the contemporary reader and critic a broader view of the pastoral itself, but also the equally flexible terms of anti- and post-pastoral with which to work. As these two modes are the most pertinent to this paper, I shall briefly outline them here. Gifford shows the traditional pastoral to be mostly a mode of idealization, nostalgia, and an unproblematized view of country life or the natural world ("Pastoral" 8-13) and thus his "features of anti-pastoral" are in direct opposition to these qualities. Anti-pastoral is "Corrective of pastoral, often explicitly; / Unidealized—harsh, unattractive; / Emphasises 'realism'; / Problematic—shows tensions, disorder, inequalities; / Challenges literary constructs as false distortions; / Demythologies [of] Arcadia, Eden, Shangri-La" (19). For post-pastoral texts, Gifford puts forward six questions, of which all or at least some should be asked:

1. Can awe in the face of nature (e[.].g[.,] landscape) lead to humility in our species, reducing our hubris?
2. What are the implications of recognizing that we are part of nature's creative-destructive process?
3. If our inner nature echoes outer nature, how can the outer help us understand the former?
4. If nature is culture, is culture nature?

5. How can consciousness, through conscience, help us heal our alienation from our home?
6. Is the exploitation of our planet aligned with our exploitation of human minorities? (“Pastoral” 21-26)

In contemporizing the critical view of the pastoral, then, through the anti- and post-, Gifford has also given it an eco-apocalyptic urgency which it lacked before. Indeed, he even goes as far as saying, “the very survival of our species depends upon . . . our ability to find the right images to represent our way of living with, and within, what we variously characterize as ‘nature,’ ‘earth,’ ‘land,’ ‘place,’ ‘our global environment’” (“Pastoral” 7). Significantly, Gifford’s questions of post-pastoral are predominantly reconciliatory and environmentalist in their endeavor, and read through together (as above) their overt sense of inter-connection and parallelism (“inner” / “outer”; “nature” / “culture”) between man and his natural environment comes to the fore. To varying extents, the texts explored here engage with all or some of Gifford’s tenets and principles of anti- and post-pastoral, and where necessary the study will point this out. But most important to this paper is the question of human violence and where its representation and suggestion fits into this complex construction of pastorals. Or, if the violence in these novels does not fit fully into these schemata, are we seeing a new mode or degree of pastoral in contemporary fiction, post-environmentalist, apocalyptic, one that has eschewed the idea of a benevolent inter-connectedness between nature and human nature?

Degree is a key word here, as this paper does not claim that pastoral and violence is something new. As John Kinsella and Susan Stewart put it, “[f]rom Virgil’s eclogues forward, the historical opposition between pastoral and violence is inseparable from a concern with the interface of morality and necessity” (8). On the one hand, then, pastoral and violence are separated by their natural “opposition”; pastoral is traditionally a discourse of retreat from the troubles of the city to an Arcadian otherworld that operates outside of the realm of realism. But “morality and necessity” render the pastoral retreat’s boundaries as permeable. Kinsella and Stewart go on to argue that “pastoral is not tied, as tragedy is, to a demand for sacrifice, yet pastoral is shadowed by the slaughter of animals . . . [and] village festivity is often organized around a plenitude of meat” (9). This “shadow” is apparent at the very beginning of Theocritus’s *Idylls* (in essence, the beginning of pastoral itself) when Thyrsis says to the Goatherd, “to thee shall fall the kid; / And toothsome is the flesh of unmilmed kids” (*Idyll* 1, 5-6). This shadow’s presence is fleshed out more fully early in *Harvest* when the arrival of strangers sparks violence

and coincides with a festive roasting of a slaughtered calf (32-33). Indeed, the idea of pastoral's "shadow" becoming flesh is one of the primary drives of this paper. The focus will be on those moments and scenarios when pastoral and its shadows of slaughter and sacrifice are folded into one literary construct, and the place of retreat becomes a site of violence.

Jon McGregor's *Reservoir 13*: Post-Pastoral and the Anomaly of the Missing Girl

Set in a village on the edge of moors in northern England, John McGregor's fourth novel *Reservoir 13* uses the story of a teenage girl's disappearance as a modulating narrative strand around which he explores thirteen years of human drama and coexistence with the natural environment. The novel could be classified as a quintessential post-pastoral text, engaging with all of Gifford's principles of the mode: 1) It expresses both awe and humility in its construction of the natural life of place through time, achieved through myriad descriptions of the ever-changing natural environment. The result is a sublimity reached through an accumulation of imagery, thirteen years (fifty-two seasons) of people, animals, plants and weather. Early in the story, for example, McGregor's description of the rain gives a sense to which life in the village is in part governed by the powerful combination of the nearby moor and its extreme weather systems: "In the morning the rain started up once again. Water coursed from the swollen peat beds quickly through the cloughs and down the stepped paths which fell from the edge of the moor. The river thickened with silt from the hills and plumed across the weirs" (3-4). 2) McGregor's writing recognizes human life and death as part of a creative-destructive universe. The simple story of a couple decorating "the small bedroom in their flat above the converted stables, ready for the twins" (22) is echoed in the details of a "blackbird . . . on its grassy bowl of blue-green eggs as chicks chipped away at the shells" (37) and foxes "earthed down in the dark and wet with pain, the blind cubs pressing against their mothers for warmth" (35); the central trauma of the missing (almost certainly dead) girl reverberates in depictions of farming's intrinsic cruelties and animal violence respectively: farmers separating lambs and ewes, resulting in three days and nights of ensuing "racket" (299), a badger holding down and peeling open a hedgehog (271). 3) The inner life of characters is explored in conjunction with their environment. A troubled and disgraced school caretaker, Jones (convicted of possessing child pornography), for example, is shown "down at the millpond with his fishing tackle. The boatmen and skaters slid across the still

surface and his mind was clear. He could feel the tension lift away as the fish began to rise” (76). 4) The novel inhabits the overlap between nature and culture and vice versa by paralleling the shape of chapters to the seasons, each beginning a new year. Eleven of the thirteen chapters start with an identical dependent clause: “At midnight when the year turned” (chs. 2-12). 5) McGregor constantly reminds his readers’ consciousness and conscience of the troubled relationship human beings have with their natural home. The farming, quarrying, tree-felling, and tourism of the village and its surrounding countryside are globalized with brief interjections of television news of “floods and storms and fires” (255); “forests burning in Malaysia, whole hillsides stripped bare and the topsoil washing off into rivers” (69); “floods across northern Europe: men in waterproofs pulling dinghies through the streets, collapsed bridges, drowned livestock” (37). And finally 6) the novel’s concentric spatial awareness radiating from the habits of insects through suggestions of child murder and pornography, through human destruction of the local environment, to foreign climatic catastrophes, aligns our exploitation of each other with the exploitation of the earth, oscillating between micro- and macrocosm to situate the narrative within the global fears and anxieties of the twenty-first century.

The second of these principles (concerned with human life and death as part of a creative-destructive universe) is perhaps most pertinent to the central story of the narrative. Taken as a whole, the text is a spatio-temporal construction of place, incorporating the births, lives, couplings, illnesses, and deaths of the community, set against and within a seasonal and yearly structure. In its details, McGregor triangulates the dynamics of human, animal, and landscape. In one such episode, the local vicar and the disgraced school caretaker discuss the missing girl:

Jones [the caretaker] nodded at the locked gate to the caves. Reckon she might have ended up in there, he said. Who? Jane [the vicar] asked. The girl, he said. They searched it all before they put the gates up though, didn’t they? Could never search all of it, he said. Jane watched him for a moment. You know if you ever need to talk, about anything, she said, looking out across the river and keeping her voice light. There was a pause while the river moved over the stones and through the reeds. That’s me then, Vicar, he said, standing up. She watched the magpies pull the young wrens out of the hedge while their parents fussed overhead. Jones had started walking away and turned back. I didn’t do it, he said. I didn’t do any of the things they said. (250-51)

Many of the novel's paragraphs weave representations of humanity and nature, both in separation and inter-relation, sometimes incidental but often, like here, reciprocally reflective. The human drama—the vicar, the caretaker, and the missing girl—is placed within the context and network of the natural environment's multiple temporalities. In the “caves” the reader senses the deep time of place, prehistoric and vast in their immovable geology. Against this permanence, the river moves constantly “over the stones,” a reminder of time passing and the ineluctable flow of slow change. And with the magpies' stealing of the baby wrens sharing close textual space with talk of the missing girl (possibly abducted and murdered), McGregor alerts us to the parallel vulnerabilities of children and baby animals, and reduces the anthropocentrism of the narrative by exploring the (in)significance of the violent instant in relation to the geo-temporal life of place. In her review of *Reservoir 13* for *TLS*, Sarah Crown discusses the novel's “formal innovation,” pointing out how its long paragraphs “shift their focus every few sentences,” causing “constant changes of orientation,” leading eventually to “an omniscient shared consciousness” (n. pag.). To some degree then, there are both narratological and poetic outcomes to these long paragraphs; McGregor uses them to sustain multiple narrative threads whilst simultaneously combining, overlapping, and juxtaposing human, animal, plant, and weather in image, sound, and sense.

So up to a point, McGregor's novel (from a critical perspective) would appear contained by Gifford's post-pastoral classification system or “Reading Strategy.” Indeed, with its consistent shift of narrative focus forth and back between human and natural drama, *Reservoir 13* invites an eco-critical reading and even labeling as an environmentalist novel. In a 2017 interview for *The Guardian* newspaper, McGregor says that he is “allergic to trying to make points in fiction” (McGregor, “Interview” n. pag.). While this may be true, it is difficult to see how his meticulous weavings of people and “all the birth and life and death stuff of various different birds, animals, trees” don't do exactly that, i.e., make a point (at least indirectly) about how we share our environment and place with many forms of wildlife. But the unanswered mystery of the vanished thirteen-year-old girl, with its strong suggestions of pedophilia and murder, shares a tense relationship with the predominantly reconciliatory bent of Gifford's post-pastoral tenets. Even though the case is never solved and could be a result of misadventure rather than crime (“She could have fallen into the water and drowned. She could have been trapped in some kind of culvert or sluice deep under there” (40), Becky Shaw's disappearance plays upon our complicit knowledge and media-driven expectations of the predation and murder of children, and seems to occupy an intersection of rural place and human

violence perhaps too pessimistic, bleak, and misanthropic to fit comfortably into Gifford's schema.²

While (as noted already) McGregor uses the four seasons and twelve months of the year for form and temporal structure, the number *13* in the title (the girl's age, a clue to her final resting place, the number of chapters, a play on Wallace Stevens's "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird,"³ a prime number divisible only by itself and one) suggests something left over, a remainder of one, an anomalous element at odds with a harmonized vision of place. Indeed, Becky Shaw haunts the narrative both in the general anxiety over her disappearance (felt by character and reader alike) and in the various sightings of her throughout the novel which act almost as supernatural returns of the past in a traumatized place: "She had been seen in the beech wood, climbing a tree. She had been seen at the railway station. She had been seen at the side of the road" (260).⁴

While much can be gained by reading *Reservoir 13* as a post-pastoral novel, questions of pastoral and anti-pastoral are also pertinent. In his 2012 essay "Pastoral, Anti-Pastoral and Post-Pastoral as Reading Strategies," Gifford comments on his and his wife's regular walks in the countryside:

We're pastoralists—a sadly typical modern urban sub-species of the breed. No, of course we don't herd sheep, in the meaning of being a "pastor" or shepherd, although I've admitted that unrealistically, we'd secretly like to escape the city to that little farm and do just that. But what we've been subconsciously enacting on these evening jaunts, and our weekend walks and climbs, is the ancient pastoral impulse of retreat to a rural landscape and return to the city. (3)

This jokey, self-deprecating comment is still useful as it reflects Gifford's work on the pastoral and its development of the term (pastoral, anti- and post-) beyond sheep

² See Gifford's eventually optimistic "Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* and a Post-Pastoral Theory of Fiction," which omits the novel's most disturbing image of a decapitated and cooked infant. See also Armstrong's discussion of this omission (141).

³ The epigraph is a direct quote from Stevens's famous poem: "The river is moving. The blackbird must be flying." There are precisely thirteen instances of blackbirds in the novel, one in each chapter. Thus Stevens's poem is a formal and aesthetic template for the structure of McGregor's novel.

⁴ See Fred Botting: "returns of the past [and] ghostly recurrences manifest an unease and instability in the imagined unity of self, home or society, hauntings that suggest loss or guilt or threat" (3); also Cathy Caruth discusses the "haunting power" of a traumatic event, and argues that to be "traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or an event" (4-5).

and shepherds into the multifarious applications we have today. Much like the Gothic, pastoral now offers a broad spectrum of critical possibilities, the subject of which need bear no mention of sheep or shepherds.

The writers discussed here, however, are indeed returning to the original figures of the pastoral mode. McGregor's shepherds and dairymen in *Reservoir 13* ride quad bikes to bring their sheep and cows down from the hills, and they are in a constant struggle with the weather, the local landscape, and the continual need to develop, modernize, and mechanize in a competitive, globalized market place: "The prices made no sense. The supermarkets were killing them." (255). The father of the Jackson family (who has had a stroke and is bed-bound and partially paralyzed) spits out the phrase "We—do—sheep" (246) when his son tentatively suggests broadening their farm's practices. In these instances, McGregor engages several "features of anti-pastoral", portraying modern farming as "[u]nidealized—harsh, unattractive; [e]mphasis[ing] realism [and] . . . show[ing] tensions" ("Pastoral" 19). Gifford's reading strategies, then, help to critically categorize the novel as simultaneously anti- and post-pastoral. But one of the main issues being probed here is whether these terms are mutable enough to include the atmosphere and strong overtones of sexual abuse and pedophilia, or whether the current crop of writers directly engaging the pastoral are taking the mode beyond anti- and post- to new, darker places which require another, more precise critical moniker.

The Shepherd as Rebel and Psychopath in Graeme Macrae Burnet's *His Bloody Project*

The literary symbiosis central to this paper, between contemporary novelistic versions of the pastoral and violence, is closer and more visceral in Graeme Macrae Burnet's 2015 novel, *His Bloody Project*. Through documents including a murderer's confession, local witness statements, medical reports, and a psychologist's memoir entitled "Travels in the Borderlands of Lunacy" (159), the reader is told the story of Roderick Macrae, a young crofter charged with a vicious and brutal triple murder. In Gifford's schema, the novel would be classified as primarily anti-pastoral. It takes the remote nineteenth-century setting of Culduie, a fictitious hamlet in the West Highlands of Scotland, and presents us with accounts of hardship, cruelty, and violence that appear to emanate precisely from the very structure of community in which they occur.⁵ As motive for the killings, Roderick

⁵ Ben Myers makes a similar point in his review of *His Bloody Project*, that "[a]t the heart of the novel lies a social system that has subjugated land workers for centuries" (n. pag.).

Macrae details the bullying and harassment of himself, his father (John Macrae) and his sister (Jetta) by Lachlan McKenzie (also known Lachlan Broad), a constable in the employ of the local laird. In one confrontation as witnessed by Roderick, John Macrae, who has been collecting “sea-ware” (kelp) for the purpose of spreading on his crops, is forced by McKenzie to return it to the shoreline. Their exchange reads as follows:

[Macrae] “As you well know, Lachlan Broad, the people have always taken sea-ware for their land, yourself and your father included.”

[Broad] “That is quite true, but it is only through the beneficence of the Laird that we have done so. It is quite contrary to the terms of your tenancy to make use of the fruits of the land or shore without first having sought permission to do so.” (74)

While this may seem a trivial incident, hardly worthy of the term *violence*, it takes the setting of rural shoreline, with all of its symbolism of natural harmony and beauty, and uses it as setting for an abuse of authority reliant upon universal knowledge of land ownership, an example of the endemic structural violence (of the kind Galtung, Srikantia, and Žižek formulate) by which these characters live. Of course, there are other examples of the shoreline being used as a symbolic location of violence. One of the most famous is perhaps Matthew Arnold’s poem “Dover Beach,” in which the sea’s “calm” (1) becomes a “grating roar” (9) against the shoreline that tests the speaker’s faith. But Burnet’s use of the West Highland shoreline here is a subversion of mainstream or public pastoralism of the kind Gifford admits to, the postcard perception of the countryside, ignorant of history. The Macraes’ eventual eviction, the ultimate intention of Lachlan Broad (driven by generational hatred), is played out against the historical background of the Highland Clearances, in which tenants were forcibly removed from the soil (their families had worked for centuries) by hereditary lairds who sought to clear the land for the more profitable rearing of sheep. These clearances were carried out with the support of scientific racism, which helped justify them with theories of Celtic inferiority, alluded to in the novel by Dr. James Thomson’s first impression of Roderick as “certainly of low physical stock, but . . . not as repellent in his features as the majority of the criminal class” (161). While arguments over the Highland Clearances are many and complex, racism was undoubtedly a factor, as Colin Kidd points out: “Some commentators regarded race as a new factor in social, historical and scientific analysis, but one among many significant determinants of character,

culture and behavior. While some Lowland commentators regarded the Highland Celts as a totally distinct race fit only for extinction or emigration, others saw them as a backward race, but capable of improvement” (877-78).

Prior to a full understanding of Roderick’s crimes, then, we are reminded of the intrinsic structural violence concealed by places which (in part) compose the commonly held modern British mainstream “pastoralist” aesthetic perception of the countryside (the kind Gifford admits to). As Macrae Burnet’s novel reveals, such landscapes (no matter how beautiful, wild, or remote) are often historically feudal and have at some stage been cleared or enclosed prior to becoming the romanticized landscapes of shepherds, sheep, and poetry. In Robert MacFarlane’s *The Wild Places*, he reminds himself and his reader of this fact while on his search for the remotest and wildest places of Britain: “There are few trees left now on Skye, as there are few people. The island lost many of its inhabitants during the Clearances of the nineteenth century . . . Skye’s celebrated bleakness is a relatively recent acquisition, one which speaks sadly of its past. Like so much of Scotland’s wildest land, this is not an empty landscape but an emptied one” (51). In its Highland setting alone, then, Macrae Burnet’s novel can draw upon a high level of structural, historical, national, and racial violence, which is then condensed and channeled into extreme incidents.

If the feudal authority exerted hierarchically downward is mostly of an economic and embedded manifestation of structural violence (apart from a pub fight between Roderick Macrae and Lachlan Broad in which Broad is the clear victor [126-27]), Roderick’s reaction to it is personal, physical, visceral, and disproportionate. The murders themselves are foreshadowed and even rehearsed in the “mercy killing” of a sheep with a dislocated leg. Roderick’s account recalls the incident:

The sheep looked at me. I scanned the hillside but there was no-one to be seen. Without further delay I raised the iron above my head and brought it down with as much force as I could muster. The beast must have moved or I may have misjudged the trajectory as my blow only succeeded in catching the beast on the snout, the blade of the iron splintering the bone. The animal snorted, choking on blood and bone, and made renewed pitiful efforts to get to its feet. I took aim for a second time and brought the iron down on top of the beast’s head with such force that my feet left the ground. Blood sprayed into the air, spattering my face. The iron was embedded in the sheep’s skull, and it

took considerable effort to extricate it. This done I turned away and brought up the contents of my stomach, steadying myself on the handle of the tool. By the time I had recovered myself the crow had taken up residence of the dead beast's skull and was making short work of its eyes. (34)

Aside from the brutality of the episode there are several things to note. Firstly, Roderick's scanning of the hillside for anyone watching suggests his actions may well not be purely ones of mercy. And secondly, the crow's eating of the sheep's eyes reminds us of nature's materialist indifference in its dealings with death (in a similar way to McGregor's chick-killing magpies and hedgehog-peeling badger in *Reservoir 13*). This aspect of the incident (for all its gore) could be explained as simply symbolic of a creative/destructive universe (thinking again of Gifford's post-pastoral), the death of one animal becoming carrion for another, a vital feature of survival in the natural world. But Roderick's slaughter of the sheep has poignancy in its relationship with the pastoral given his care for the welfare of other animals. While working on the laird's estate, Roderick scares a deer away from being shot (52-53), and at home in the family's barn he keeps an injured crow fledgling (69-70). This side of his personality (animal lover) increases the significance of the extreme violence of his sheep-slaughter, as not only does it seem out of character, but it also strikes at the very core of pastoral's original idealized life and primary responsibility of the shepherd, that of caring for his sheep.

While Roderick's vicious dispatching of the sheep can be read as an incident of direct anti-pastoral, the murder of Broad's teenaged daughter Flora, his infant son Donnie, and Broad himself would appear more difficult to reconcile with either anti- or post-pastoral mode. The reasons for this are quite simple: 1) unlike the killing of the sheep, their human-to-human violence seems to have nothing in common with shepherding or farming; and 2) the brutality of the murders is such that they appear to occupy a more Gothic pocket of horror in the novel than any form of pastoral. However, the fashion of the murders themselves directly echoes the sheep-killing as Broad, his daughter and son are also killed by blows to the head with farming tools. Indeed, Roderick Macrae is reminded of the incident as he is standing over Flora about to deliver the decisive blow: "I raised the tool above my head and, remembering the sheep at the peat bog, took careful aim. Flora made no attempt to move and I brought the back of the blade firmly down on her skull" (148). While also hideously violent, the killing of Lachlan Broad is almost commensurate with the revenge aspect of the story. Broad uses his position as

constable to bully both Roderick and John Macrae, serving a notice of eviction upon them shortly before the murders. In gossipy village parlance, one could even say “he had it coming,” perhaps not murder but retribution in some form certainly.

But the killings of Flora and Donnie are impossible to incorporate into a straight tale of revenge. Rather, they lead the reader to suspect finally that Roderick is a manipulative psychopath whose narrative cannot be trusted. Reports of the medical examiner reveal that Flora Broad (who had refused Roderick’s advances) was violently raped during the murder: “We observed a number of lacerations and bruising to the pubic region. The soft outer parts had been quite pulverized and the pubic bone was broken on the left side” (157). On the one hand, Roderick’s noble motive of protecting his family becomes highly doubtful, and the reader is left wondering whether his crimes were sexually motivated all along, rather than a rebellion against Broad as a physical embodiment of an oppressive system. Yet on the other, the sexual violence used against Flora and the killing of Broad can both be incorporated into a reading of the text as anti-pastoral: accounts of Flora’s rape and murder subvert the traditional pastoral relationship between the shepherd and his love, the kind seen in English Renaissance pastoral poetry:

Come live with me and be my love,
And we will all the pleasures prove,
That valleys, groves, hills, and fields,
Woods, or steepy mountain yields. (Marlowe 1-4)

Furthermore, the slaying of Broad (foreshadowed in sheep-slaughter) could be read as a direct attack upon the hierarchical system and establishment which profits from pasture and engenders the idealization of rural life. Part of the novel’s success then lies in its duality: it is simultaneously the tale of a rebellion against an oppressive system and the story of a sexually motivated psychopathic killer.

The terrible nature of the injuries to Flora Broad, revealed after Roderick’s account, force the reader to reconsider the story from the perspective of sexual violence against women, and several events and situations in the novel make this a theme worth considering as part of the pastoral-and-violence dynamic. Aside from Roderick’s pursuit and murder of Flora, the story of his sister Jetta Macrae (though mostly a sub-plot) speaks of rife sexual abuse within the community. There is a strong suggestion of incest between John Macrae and Jetta. After the death of Una Macrae (Roderick’s mother) during the birth of twins, “Jetta was obliged to assume the role of mother and wife, preparing the meals and serving our father as our

mother had previously done. It was at this time that Father decreed that Jetta should sleep in the back chamber with him as she was now a woman and merited a degree of privacy from her siblings” (29). Further to this, the reader learns from Roderick’s account that Jetta has had a sexual relationship with Lachlan Broad, though it is never made clear whether it is consensual or in any way forced or governed by Broad’s hold over the family (64-65). Additionally, when the Macraes are served notice of eviction, John Macrae violently assaults Jetta and calls her a “whore” (139) because she is pregnant. Later, after Jetta’s death, when her father is offered condolences, his reply is “I have no daughter” . . . “There is no such person” (182). The reader is left to assume that she has committed suicide, as her last appearance in Roderick’s account finds her sitting in a barn after being beaten, “twisting a length of rope on her lap” (140). Jetta’s story can be viewed as a darker version of Chris’s in Lewis Grassie Gibbon’s 1932 novel *Sunset Song* (now widely regarded as a classic of Scottish literature), in which her mother dies during childbirth to twins, her father tries to commit incest with her, and her husband abuses her after returning from the war. Both Macrae Burnet and Grassie Gibbon, then, use remote Scottish estates (Culduie and Kinraddie, the fictional setting of *Sunset Song*) to attack the pastoral in several of its historical forms, from the romanticized life of shepherds and farmers to idealized perceptions of the countryside and village life which have existed in literary and popular culture for centuries, and through representations of places traumatized by sexual abuse and latent and manifest structural and physical violence.

“Our Woolly Plight”: Pastoral and Village Apocalypse in Jim Crace’s *Harvest*

The anti-pastoral, readable in several scenarios of *His Bloody Project*, is given even fuller exploration in Jim Crace’s *Harvest*, in which an unnamed English village at some unspecified point in the past is on the cusp of feudal subsistence and enclosure for profitable sheep-farming. The simple fact of the novel’s vague geographical and historical representation is perhaps one of its most important features, for it allows Crace to explore the violent possibilities of the tectonic shift from one dominant system of living to another (feudalism to capitalism) without the requirement of historical precision. Enclosure itself gives Crace the freedom of several centuries across which to set his novel, as the Parliamentary enclosures of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were preceded by the Tudor

enclosures of the fifteenth and sixteenth;⁶ and as Raymond Williams points out in *The Country and the City*, “[t]he process had been going on since at least the thirteenth century . . . in history it is continuous from the long process of conquest and seizure; the land gained by killing, by repression, by political bargains” (96). That word “process,” used twice within the same paragraph, is crucial to understanding Crace’s treatment of the pastoral. Rather than a chronologically encapsulated timeframe of a given period, *Harvest* presents the more universal violent death throes of a small community unable to withstand the greater forces of history at work beyond its boundaries, making the novel both *timeless* and connected to present issues of global development.⁷ Ironically, then, the theme of spatial enclosure in Crace’s novel is counterpointed by a loose freedom of history, temporality, and chronology.

In terms of character, “progress” comes to the village in the shape of Master Jordan, an outsider who has taken over the land through heredity. Overheard by the narrator, Walter Thirsk, Jordan lays out a plan to civilize the community. “The commons will be cleared and privately enclosed,” he tells Master Kent (the former lord of the manor),

You’re pasture now. These lands are grass. We’ll never need another plough . . . I will fund at last the building of a church and I will employ a priest. I bring you sheep, and I supply a Holy Shepherd too. There’ll be a steeple higher than the turret of this house, taller than any ancient oak we might fell. This place will be visible from far. And I will have a bell cast for the top of it to summon everyone to prayer. And hurry everyone to work. Those few that can remain, that is. (102-03)

In *Harvest*, religion and sheep-farming are violent forces of change to be feared and resisted. Here, the development of place in a vision of the future is a “process” requiring enclosure, deforestation, enforced religion and work, the loss of privacy, exclusion, and the displacement of people to make way for the profits of “sheep.” Indeed, “sheep” is a dirty word in the mind of Walter Thirsk and his fellow

⁶ Roger B. Manning’s “Patterns of Violence in Early Tudor Enclosure Riots” explores the extent and character of enclosure unrest prior to the Parliamentary Enclosure Act (121) and particularly in the 1530s and 1540s. Trevor Wild’s *Village England: A Social History of the Countryside* is a more general account of rural development which acknowledges earlier enclosure but focuses on the Parliamentary Act and after (22-45).

⁷ Peter Ackroyd’s *The History of England Volume 1: Foundation* tells of “more than 3000 deserted villages in England, mute testimony of a communal past” (151-53).

villagers. He refers to their future as their “woolly plight” (115). Earlier in the novel, at a village celebration of the harvest when Master Kent is giving a speech about the village’s future, Thirsk’s narration elevates the word “sheep” briefly to a kind of Voldemortian taboo (He-who-must-not-be-named): “He [Master Kent] means the clearing of our common land. He means the cutting down of trees. He means this village, far from everywhere, which has always been a place for horn, corn and trotter, is destined to become a provisioner of wool. The word that he and no one dares to whisper let alone cry out is Sheep” (40). The capitalization of the word briefly removes it from its animal referent and gives it a more human or even divine agency. And this is significant, as the village in *Harvest* is as pagan as it is Christian, with its location “far from civil practice” (86) where trust in livestock and the land is equal to any faith in God. “We work cheek to jowl with breeds that cluck and snort and moo,” says Thirsk, “but never with the Father who created us and them. I’ve yet to sense Him standing at our shoulders, sickle in His hand” (36). The apathy toward or fear of religion is further shown by a “neglected pillory” which also serves as a cross, “standing at the unbuilt gateway of our unbuilt church” (37). This combining of “Sheep” and God (“Him”) through the simple capitalization of a letter reveals that one aspect of anti-pastoral in Crace’s novel takes the dualistic form of a resistance to both sheep and pastor, a simultaneous resistance to becoming shepherds or flock.

At times, *Harvest* seems fully aware of the pastoral/anti-pastoral question it invites and even foregrounds for the reader to consider. As part of the procedure to enclose the common ground, a cartographer (whom the villagers dub “Mr. Quill”) is employed to “mark down [the] land” (4), and it is Thirsk’s job to show him around the village’s boundaries. The first place they visit is “the Bottom” (71), the lowest part of the village which serves “not only as a charnel place for carcasses and skeletons and any animal too sick in death to be eaten but also as [an] open privy” known as “Turd and Turf” (70). Choosing not to see or smell the practical realities of this place, Quill is instead enchanted by its “‘humbling’ . . . beauty[,] . . . pointing at the far side of the clearing and a swathe of longpurples, tall and at their strident best” (74). On finding out from Thirsk that the place has no official name, Quill says, “The Blossom Marsh, perhaps,” to which Thirsk replies, “Yes, scratch that down” (76). Quill (whose task it is to make a realistic copy of the land, but whose nickname betrays the artifice of his trade) is a “pastoralist” in one of Gifford’s pejorative senses of the word, seeing and idealizing only the beautiful aspects of the countryside while ignoring the more unattractive, smelly, and

pragmatic features. But counter to Quill's pastoral vision, we have Thirsk's depiction of human relations with the environment:

. . . the land itself, from sod to meadow, is inflexible and stern. It is impatient, in fact. It cannot wait. There's not a season set aside for pondering and reveries. It will not let us hesitate or rest; it does not wish us to stand back and comment on its comeliness or devise a song for it. It has no time to listen to our song. It only asks us not to tire in our hard work. It wants to see us leathery, our necks and forearms burnt as black as chimney oak; it wants to leave us thinned and sinewy from work. It taxes us from dawn to dusk and torments us at night . . . (75)

On the one hand, Thirsk's account is a direct anti-pastoral which "emphasizes realism" (as in Gifford's "features" of the mode) and the reciprocal violence of man's struggle with the land in the form of agriculture. The passage even includes a riposte to pastoral poetry, no time for the laborer to "stand back and comment on its comeliness or devise a song." The pastoral, according to Thirsk, is purely a luxury of the owning class.⁸ But Thirsk himself is originally from the town and admits to being once "'humbled' by the beauty too" (74). And the glaring irony of his portrait is its extended pathetic fallacy ("one of the weapons of pastoral," according to Kinsella and Stewart 11) in which the land is a hard taskmaster that "asks," "wants" and "taxes" the human serf. Whether only seeing aesthetic beauty or personifying the land, neither Quill nor Thirsk can avoid romanticizing place.

Overwriting this idea of the land's equality with and even superiority over its people is Quill's profession of cartography, which extends his role as pastoralist into inadvertent instrument of political power. Enthralled with beauty and color and the aesthetic delights of his own trade, Quill does not seem to understand how his work is the creation (rather than simply demarcation) of a space or territory. Thirsk's reaction to Quill's map of the village is telling:

With his help these coloured papers, unmarked as yet with any names or guides, make sense to me at last. They complicate to simplify. I have translated them. I can tell you where we are on them. I could stub my finger on the spot where I am standing now. But still I'm left to wonder where we'll be on them in days and years to come. And so my

⁸ See Williams, especially 20-21, for a discussion of pastoral as "aristocratic entertainment."

breathlessness. There's something in these shapes and lines, in these casual undirected blues and greens, that, for all their liveliness, seems desolate. (137)

Thirsk's "breathlessness" may connote two things: 1) an astonishment at seeing a map for the first time, one that depicts his own place of living with a demarcated simulacrum that flattens reality into a two-dimensional space, visible all at once; and 2) his fear of the map's prescience, as it offers an image of a landscape without people, a desolation which materializes at the end of the novel. Quill's "desolate" map pre-figures the "desolate" village and indicates the inherent violence and interrelation of both *his* pastoralist and Master Jordan's capitalist imaginations. They both overlay alternative realities, turning existing places into peopled palimpsests, so that they begin to disappear beneath the images of their own "desolate" futures.

In "Off the Map: On Violence and Cartography," Mark Neocleous writes,

the map helps mask the violence that brings the state into being and the interests that sustain the ideological preponderance of the state system. Borders may be drawn in blood, but the blood never appears on the page. It is the repetitive impact of the image of the territory mapped that lends credence to the claims of control; that is the way of myth. From the perspective of myth, the delineation of the state's borders is of the essence. Outside the world of maps, states carry on a precarious existence for . . . to map a state is to assert its territorial expression; to leave a state off a map is to deny its existence. (422)

While Neocleous is thinking in terms of states and countries, it is possible to see how Quill's map acts in the same way, presenting a "myth" of bordered space which paints over the violent clearance ("blood") of people already there. Considered as a "document of civilization," as Quill's map is part of Master Jordan's pasture plans for the village, it is possible here to invoke Walter Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History," where in thesis VII he writes "[t]here is no document of history which is not at the same time a document of barbarism" (256). Directly and indirectly, then, Crace's novel represents the English countryside not as a fixed historical reality, but rather as fluid nexus of competing myths, images, and visions which consistently work to overlap, overlay, and conceal the violence of their own coming into and passing out of existence.

However, while Thirsk and his fellow villagers are suspicious of any form of change, Crace does not fall into a trap of nostalgia for earlier forms of settlement over later ones, feudal over capitalist, for example. He is neither primitivist nor idealist in the style of Oliver Goldsmith, whose famous long poem, *The Deserted Village* (1770) on the subject of enclosure and displacement laments the Golden Age of “Sweet Auburn, loveliest village of the plain / Where health and plenty cheered the laboring swain” (1-2).⁹ In his short essay on *Harvest* entitled “An Anti-Pastoral Novel,” Oliver Neto begins, “Jim Crace’s *Man Booker*-shortlisted novel ostensibly professes nostalgia. It masquerades as an elegy to an idyllic pastoral existence swept away by the advent of enclosure . . . [but] it is far more than a hymnal tribute to the countryside” (n. pag.). I would go further and say it is not a tribute at all. The imposition of enclosed and mapped space is only part of the full picture of violence in the novel. While Master Jordan’s forces of sheep, church, capital, and profit signify modernization and civilization which will displace people and change the face of the land forever, Crace’s *pre-pastoral* (pre-pasture, pre-sheep, pre-shepherd, pre-pastor), ahistorical, rural community is already one of recreational drug use, drunkenness, vandalism, suspicion, malicious gossip, bawdiness, brutality, abuse, misogyny, xenophobia, thuggery, mob violence, torture, and arbitrary punishment.

At the beginning of the novel a fire has been set in Master Kent’s dovecote by some young local men intoxicated on “fairy caps” (magic mushrooms), and the event coincides with the arrival of three strangers (two men and a foreign woman) who ironically prove to be also “fugitives from sheep” (148) and enclosure. These migrants have also lit a fire, one that announces their presence and requests “the right to stay” (1). Though most inhabitants of the village suspect the true culprits of the fire at the manor house, the strangers are blamed and quickly a mob is formed to confront the newcomers. After a stand-off, in which the woman is injured, the heads of all three are shaved and the two men are placed in the pillory (cross) for a week (30). What ensues could be called (at least in tabloid English) an orgy of “violence”: the older stranger is “pig-chewed [and] throttled” (113) to death in the pillory and then thrown into the charnel place (“Turd and Turf”); the female stranger is hunted as sorceress, witch, and sexual prey; the sidemen of Master Jordan kidnap two local women and a girl and torture and abuse them as suspected “she-devils” (155); the village mob attack a groom and slash his face with a “pruning blade” (171); Mr. Quill is found in the manor house stabbed to death (265-66); and finally the

⁹ In Williams’s extended metaphor of the “escalator, a perpetual recession into history” (10-12), he discusses pastoral’s consistent idealization of the past as Golden Age.

cottages and manor are set ablaze by the remaining strangers after all the villagers have looted and left.

In terms of anti-pastoral tradition, Crace is closer to George Crabbe, whose long poem *The Village* was a response to Goldsmith's, and whose speaker, seeking "the simple life that Nature yields," finds instead, "Rapine and Wrong and Fear usurp'd her place / And a bold, artful, surly, savage race" (111-12). In "Patterns of Violence in Early Tudor Enclosure Riots," Roger B. Manning outlines how many instances of violence surrounding the enclosures were often well-organized (by "gentry pursuing quarrels with rival gentry") (121) and "directed at property and rarely touched persons" (133). While Crace's novel begins with an act of vandalism (the burning of the dovecote), when considered together, the head-shavings, beatings, slashings, riots, lootings, witch-hunts, tortures, and rapes that follow form a spatially and temporally unspecific vortex of violence that draws upon several centuries of global history and seems as much connected to the contemporary world of twenty-four hour news as it does to England's agricultural past.

As in McGregor's *Reservoir 13* and Macrae Burnet's *His Bloody Project*, sexual violence and violence against women and girls play a significant part in Crace's representation of this rural place. Prior to reaching the stage when Mistress Beldam (the foreign woman whose nickname is a play on "Bedlam," the famous London asylum) is hunted as a scapegoat witch, and two women and a child are captured and tortured as suspected "she-devils," the village has a latent atmosphere of barely restrained male sexual desire and rape.¹⁰ In the choosing of the Gleaning Queen, "the girls and lasses of the village" are lined up and "brought forward to pout and curtsy" (66) for the male chooser (in this case Mr. Quill).¹¹ Thirsk's description of the event makes for uncomfortable reading. He says "this procedure has taws and undercurrents which would not trouble us if every daughter in the line had yet to grow her breasts. The fathers there are both awkward and seduced themselves. They see their own daughters and their neighbor's daughters in a new and inconsistent light" (66). Further to this ritual of sexual objectification and latent incest and pedophilia, the presence of a new, foreign, punished, and shorn woman (Mistress Beldam) seems to turn the men into potential rapists. While out looking for the stranger at his master's request, Thirsk realizes he is not alone:

¹⁰ Pearson discusses the trope of the witch "sacrificed in order to break the cycle of mimetic violence" (142).

¹¹ Joelle and Eltringham give a full discussion of the significance of gleaning in *Harvest* in their review of the novel.

. . . There is wanting in the air, and sorcery.

Clearly, I am not the only one to think it so. There are men about. I hear the splash of other feet and catch a glimpse of walking figures, too tall and too broad-shouldered to be the woman we are hunting for. . . . I do not have a wife and family to hide it from, like some of these maddened figures in the night. (56)

Each of these elements—women and girls kidnapped and tortured as suspected witches, or ritually displayed as potential wives and sex partners, or hunted for sex for no other reason other than gender and a projected foreign exoticism—would be disturbing enough in itself. But taken together they represent a village society or pastoral place in which violence against women is ubiquitous, permeating individual, familial, ritual, religious, judicial, and agricultural practice.

Coda: Globalized Pastoral

The internationality of the current #MeToo and #Time'sUp campaigns and the strong presences and suggestions of rape and sexual violence in these contemporary novels of rural life suggest that the British village as pastoral place has become a microcosm of the global village, subject to the same sexual, social, economic, and ecological tensions. Jon McGregor's media interjections of foreign climatic catastrophes in his account of contemporary English village life are a simple representation of the fact that no place, no matter how small or remote, can now be considered in total isolation from international issues, but rather as an atom within a larger global network of place. While set in Scotland and England in the nineteenth century and some time before respectively, Macrae Burnet's and Crace's villages are both on the cusp of shift from feudalism to capitalism, both about to disappear as subsistence gives way to profit and common lands are enclosed and cleared for private ownership and business. Thus the physical and sexual violence in these novels is inextricably linked to the structural violence of their settings. In her essay entitled "The Structural Violence of Globalization," Jessica Srikantia "exposes the systematic coercion and violence that globalization wreaks against sustainable communities living on coveted lands and/or resources" (222). Her focus is on present-day multinational corporations, but as Williams says of enclosure, "[t]he process had been going on since at least the thirteenth century . . . in history it is continuous from the long process of conquest and seizure; the land gained by killing, by repression, by political bargains" (96-97). To a degree, while Macrae Burnet and

Crace are concerned with the historical advents of clearance and enclosure, their novels are also *ahistorical*. Their remote and isolated pasts are viewed through lenses of the present, and clearance and enclosure can be seen as allegories and parallels of modern globalization's "systematic coercion and violence" or, as Žižek calls it, "the often catastrophic consequences of the smooth functioning of our economic and political systems" or, from the point of view of business and transnational corporations, "progress and development" (Springer 95).

Earlier, I pointed out that Terry Gifford had widened the frame of pastoral, both with his formulations of anti- and post-pastoral, and with his shift of focus from Paul Alpers's "pastoral landscapes [in] which the human centers are shepherds or their equivalents" to "nature in whatever form." Interestingly, however, in the novels discussed here, "shepherds or their equivalents" (while perhaps not the human centers) play significant roles. In *Reservoir 13*, the Jacksons are a family of shepherds struggling to survive the demands of modern farming. In *His Bloody Project*, Roderick Macrae rebels against the duties of shepherding with the violent slaughter of a sheep that prefigures the murder of his oppressor. And in *Harvest*, it is the threat of sheep, shepherds, pasture, and pastors that triggers an explosion of violence which leads to the unnamed village's desertion. While pastoral and violence are historically not words which combine comfortably, the latent connection of their original opposition (pastoral's shadow of violence) has, in these contemporary works, become an unavoidable, foregrounded presence as the various violences of global development, physical and systemic, permeate Britain's mythological understanding of its own rural past and present.

In a short post-referendum analysis entitled "Britishness and Brexit," Frances Smith writes, "[t]his is a situation in which notions of Britishness and, perhaps more significantly, of unity have been radically destabilized" (n. pag.). "Notions of Britishness," Englishness, and Scottishness are significant here, as these novels' release dates (*Harvest* 2013, *His Bloody Project* 2016, *Reservoir 13* 2017) bookend Brexit and the Referendum for Scottish Independence; they emerge from an atmosphere in which fundamental questions of nation and national identity are being asked and sides are being taken. To some extent, all of these novels are intensely English and Scottish in their make-up. The Highland Clearance backdrop to *His Bloody Project* and the commons enclosure scenario of *Harvest* reflect upon rural communities and ways of life lost from these countries' senses of self. And although *Reservoir 13* is set in a present of mechanized farming, barn conversions, migrant workers, and food banks, its English past is present in repeated yearly rituals such as "Mischief Night" (24, 51, 151, 176, 280) and allusions to vanished

industries like “lead-mining,” which left scars on both people and landscape (248). But Springer argues that “while violence is clearly mediated through and informed by local cultural norms, it is equally enmeshed in the logic of globalized capital,” and that “[w]hile violence sits in places in terms of the way in which we perceive its manifestation as a localized and embodied experience, this very idea is challenged when place is reconsidered as a relational assemblage” (91). It is this article’s contention then that the writers discussed here (McGregor, Macrae Burnet, and Crace) are exemplars of a larger movement of contemporary British novelists exploring the notions and mythologies of Britain’s rural villages “at yet another time of geopolitical and geo-economic flux” (Bachman and Sidaway 47); representing them not as isolated, antiquated, or idealized backwaters, but rather as pastoral places which are simultaneously British *and* global: nodal spaces reflecting the structural and physical violence of Britain’s rural development over the centuries and the precarious instability of its globalized present.

Works Cited

- Ackroyd, Peter. *The History of England Volume 1: Foundation*. Macmillan, 2011.
- Alpers, Paul. “What is Pastoral?” *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 8, no. 3, Spring 1982, pp. 437-60.
- Armstrong, John. “Gothic Matters of De-Composition: The Pastoral Dead in Contemporary American Fiction.” *Text Matters*, vol. 6, no. 6, Nov. 2016, pp. 127-43.
- Arnold, Matthew. “Dover Beach.” *Dover Beach and Other Poems*. Edited by Candace Ward, Dover Publications, 1994, p. 86.
- Bachman, Veit, and James D. Sidaway. “Brexit Geopolitics.” *Geoforum*, vol. 77, Dec. 2016, pp. 47-50.
- Benjamin, Walter. “Theses on the Philosophy of History.” *Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt, translated by Harry Zohn, Schocken, 1968, pp. 253-64.
- Botting, Fred. *Gothic*. Kindle ed., Routledge, 2014.
- Brooks, Xan. “Road to Nowhere: The New Crop of Writers Unearthing the Dark Side of Village Life.” *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media Limited, 3 Mar. 2018, www.theguardian.com/books/2018/mar/03/rural-retreat-dark-side-village-life-detectorists-this-country-lie-land-reservoir-13. Accessed 8 Mar. 2018.
- Caruth, Cathy. Introduction. *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, edited by Caruth, Johns Hopkins UP, 1995, pp. 3-12.

- Crabbe, George. *The Village & the Newspaper*. Kindle ed., Portable Poetry, 2017.
- Crace, Jim. *Harvest*. Picador, 2013.
- Crown, Sarah. "Passive, Tense." *The Times Literary Supplement*, The Times Literary Supplement Limited, 29 Mar. 2017, www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/public/jon-mcgregor. Accessed 15 July 2017.
- De Cristofaro, Diletta, and Daniel Cordle. "Introduction: The Literature of the Anthropocene." *C21 Literature: Journal of 21st-Century Writings*, vol. 6, no. 1, Feb. 2018, pp. 1-7.
- Galtung, Johan. "Violence, Peace and Peace Research." *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 6, no. 3, 1969, pp. 167-91.
- Gifford, Terry. "Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* and a Post-Pastoral Theory of Fiction." *TerryGifford.co.uk*, TerryGifford.co.uk, 2013, www.terrygifford.co.uk/The%20Road.pdf. Accessed 29 Apr. 2017.
- . *Pastoral*. Kindle ed., Routledge, 2001.
- . "Pastoral, Anti-Pastoral and Post-Pastoral as Reading Strategies." *TerryGifford.co.uk*, TerryGifford.co.uk, 2012, www.terrygifford.co.uk/Pastoral%20reading.pdf. Accessed 29 Apr. 2017.
- Goldsmith, Oliver. "The Deserted Village." 1950, *Poetry Foundation.*, Poetry Foundation, n.d., poetryfoundation.org/poems/44292/the-deserted-village. Accessed 3 June 2017.
- Joelle, Natalie, and Dan Eltringham. Review of *Harvest*, by Jim Crace. *Dandelion: Postgraduate Arts Journal and Research Network*, vol. 4, no. 2, Winter 2013, pp. 1-6.
- Kidd, Colin. "Race, Empire, and the Limits of Nineteenth-Century Scottish Nationhood." *The Historical Journal*, vol. 46, no. 4, Dec. 2003, pp. 873-92.
- Kinsella, John, and Susan Stewart. "An Epistolary Pastoral/An Introduction." *TriQuarterly: An International Journal of Arts, Letters, and Opinions*, vol. 116, Summer 2003, pp. 6-13.
- Macfarlane, Robert. *The Wild Places*. Kindle ed., Granta, 2008.
- Macrae Burnet, Graeme. *His Bloody Project*. Contraband, 2015.
- Manning, Roger B. "Patterns of Violence in Early Tudor Enclosure Riots." *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, vol. 6, no. 2, 1974, pp.122-33.
- Marlowe, Christopher. "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love." *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, edited by M. H. Abrams and Stephen Greenblatt, 10th ed., vol. B, W. W. Norton, 2018, p. 678.

- Mars-Jones, Adam. "Beating the Bounds." *The London Review of Books*, vol. 35, no. 4, 21 Feb. 2013, pp. 18-19.
- McGregor, Jon. Interview by Justine Jordan. "Interview." *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media Limited, 7 Apr. 2017, www.theguardian.com/books/2017/apr/07/jon-mcgregor-reservoir-13-novel-interview. Accessed 19 Aug. 2017.
- . *Reservoir 13*. 4th Estate, 2017.
- Myers, Ben. "His Bloody Project Challenges Our Snobbery about Genre Fiction." *New Statesman*, NS Media Group, 19 Oct. 2016, www.newstatesman.com/culture/books/2016/10/his-bloody-project-challenges-our-snobbery-about-genre-fiction. Accessed 7 May 2017.
- Neocleous, Mark. "Off the Map: On Violence and Cartography." *European Journal of Social Theory*, vol. 6, no. 4, Nov. 2003, pp. 409-25.
- Neto, Oliver. Review of *Harvest*, by Jim Crace. *Oxonian Review*, vol. 23, no. 3, 11 Nov. 2013, n. pag., www.oxonianreview.org/wp/an-anti-pastoral-novel/. Accessed 16 Apr. 2017.
- Nixon, Rob. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Harvard UP, 2011.
- Pearson, Jo. "Resisting Rhetorics of Violence: Women, Witches and Wicca." *Feminist Theology*, vol. 18, no. 2, 2010, pp. 141-59.
- Scheper-Hughes, Nancy, and Philippe Bourgois. Introduction. *Violence in War and Peace*, edited by Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, Blackwell, 2004, pp.1-31.
- Smith, Frances. "Britishness and Brexit." *EU Referendum Analysis 2016*, WordPress, 2016, www.referendumanalysis.eu/eu-referendum-analysis-2016/section-5-campaign-and-political-communication/britishness-and-brexit/. Accessed 12 Feb. 2017.
- Springer, Simon. "Violence Sits in Places? Cultural Practice, Neoliberal Rationalism and Virulent Imaginative Geographies." *Political Geography*, vol. 30, no. 2, Feb. 2011, pp. 90-98.
- Springer, Simon, and Philippe Le Billon. "Violence and Space: An Introduction to the Geographies of Violence." *Political Geography*, vol. 52, Mar. 2016, pp. 1-3.
- Srikantia, Jessica. "The Structural Violence of Globalization." *Critical Perspectives on International Business*, vol. 12, no. 3, July 2016, pp. 222-58.
- Theocritus. *Complete Works*. Kindle ed., Delphi Classics, 2016.
- Wild, Trevor. *Village England: A Social History of the Countryside*. I. B. Tauris, 2004.

Williams, Raymond. *The Country and the City*. Kindle ed., Vintage Digital, 2013.
Žižek, Slavoj. *Violence*. Profile Books, 2009.

About the Author

John Armstrong received his PhD from the University of Glasgow in 2008 and has since published articles and reviews on modern and contemporary American poetry, the Gothic in American and Vietnamese war writing, and violence and pastoral in contemporary American fiction. Since 2010, he has lived in Taiwan and currently teaches courses in English academic writing, British and American fiction and Western literature in the Department of Applied Foreign Languages of National Formosa University.

[Received 22 March 2018; accepted 15 June 2018]