



Volume 30

Number 2

June 2015

Afterlives of Pastoral

In Memoriam

Paul Alpers  
(1932–2013)

Editors

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## Ecopastoralism: Settler Colonial Pastoral Imaginary in the US West and Australian Outback

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As Lawrence Buell has observed, the pastoral, which in the 'old' worlds of Europe was a type of symbolic allegory not expected to be taken literally, became in Europe's 'new' worlds of settler colonialism, such as the United States and Australia, 'a vehicle of national self-definition' as well as a template for the construction of an idyllic settler colonial pastoral way of life (52). The settler colony was often envisioned as a type of Arcadia. Martin Mulligan and Stuart Hill argue that the earliest European settlers in Australia, for example, 'were bent on carving out familiar farms in unfamiliar settings; radically transforming landscapes into approximations of the Arcadian visions they had in their minds' eyes' (21). Similarly, in the United States Thomas Jefferson 'saw America as a paradise of small farms, a rural arcadia with every freeholder secure under his own vine and fig tree' (Schlesinger 221). Thus we note how, manifest in various settlement and homesteading schemes in both the United States and Australia, the allegorical discourse of the European pastoral mode became ideological and materially manifest. The purported discovery of new lands as yet untainted by the urban and court vices that the pastoral mode critiqued, and that Enlightenment-era political philosophers hoped to supersede, provided an opportunity for Europeans to fashion the discourse of Arcadian fantasy into a material reality that would influence the lives of millions of people and alter the ecology of millions of acres of land up to the present day. In its afterlife the pastoral would seem to be surprisingly vital.

I would like to examine how the pastoral imaginary functioned in settler colonial societies, the ecological consequences of this role, and a possible bioregionally informed alternative that seeks to develop a more sustainable and just version of that imaginary. By doing so I hope to show how the ancient

pastoral mode, even and perhaps especially in settler colonial circumstances, inspires new forms of not just literary but also literal pastoralism and how, in Buell's phrase, we might envision an 'ecocentric repossession of pastoral' (52).

### **Shock Troops of Empire**

One of the most common and ecologically significant settler colonial practices in both the West and Outback was the replacement of native herbivores with herbivore species imported from the colonial homeland, primarily sheep and cattle. As a number of scholars, such as Tom Dunlap, Helen Tiffin, Tom Griffiths, Libby Robin, Alfred Crosby, and Jay Arthur, have noted, a defining feature of the settler colonial process is the wholesale removal or marginalisation of not just the Indigenous people but also the native flora and fauna and their replacement by varieties imported from the settler homeland. Jay Arthur refers to this as a 'botanical ethnic cleansing' (98), although, since the process replaced animals as well as plants, it might more accurately be referred to as *ecovide*, the intentional destruction of a bioregion's entire ecology. In the settler colonial pastoral imaginary, undomesticated wild herds of native animals must be replaced with domesticated herds of imported species, and the ecosystem-wide assemblages of co-evolved plants and animals must be altered to accommodate the needs of the domestic species. Needless to say these changes have not proven to be sustainable and have often contributed to massive degradation, including dust bowls, extinctions, and the escape of damaging feral animals and plants.

Ecologically dubious as it was, such an approach nevertheless abetted the conquest of new territories. The elimination and replacement of Native peoples and the elimination and replacement of native plants and animals were synergistic processes, especially on the North American Great Plains. Terry Jordan-Bychkov notes that 'cattle-ranching provided an innovative land-use strategy that facilitated the advance of the Euroamerican settlement frontier at the expense of the native peoples' (7). In Australia, Tom Griffiths has claimed that 'sheep and cattle were the shock troops of empire' (Martin and Griffiths 45). This is indeed a far remove from the bucolic pastoral mode of grazing sheep and singing shepherds, but neither is it entirely unrelated. Those two quintessentially pastoral animals, sheep (primarily in Australia) and cattle (in both the United States and Australia), as well as the many cultural, political, and economic institutions that celebrate, and sustain them, have become pervasive and surprisingly resilient structures of settler colonialism. And the more they are normalised and naturalised the more effective they become in their cultural work of perpetuating the settler colonial agenda.

In the settler colonial pastoral imaginary, the land seems unfulfilled without the presence of livestock. Australian author and pastoralist Kerry McGinnis expresses this view well. When her family was considering

purchasing ‘Yeldham’, a property in northern Queensland, she drove in to investigate its potential:

Country without cattle, I thought, glancing through the dusty timber as I drove, looked empty somehow, like an untenanted house. It needed those dark, scattered shapes, feeding or stringing to water along the pads, to turn wilderness into property. If we bought Yeldham, we would be buying nothing but land. Only stocking would make of it first a station and then a home. (34–35)

Such a statement encapsulates several key features of the settler colonial pastoral imaginary: cattle, rather than, in her case, northern brown bandicoots, spectacled hare wallabies, frilled lizards, bustards, or emus, bring a landscape to life. The ‘wilderness’ of the original inhabitants is transformed into the property of the settlers through the agency of livestock. What had previously been, in the telling phrase ‘nothing but land’ (a pernicious phrase that, as I have discussed elsewhere, is pervasive in settler-colonial discourse) could, through the pasturing of cattle, be transformed into a home.<sup>1</sup> It is through the agency of cattle and the activity of pastoralism that the settler comes to belong.

The corollary of this idea is that removal of the cattle threatens the settler’s identity and claim to authentic belonging. Hence pastoralism is not felt to be simply one of many possible ways of making a living in the West or the Outback, but undergirds the very foundation of one’s entitlement to possession and residency. No one has a stronger claim to belonging than do the pastoralists, not even, in the settler colonial imaginary, the Indigenous peoples. In the US West, claiming to be a third- or fourth- generation rancher confers a moral authority on matters of land use vastly superior to that of any other possible identity.

Ironically, however, this place-specific belonging is brought into being not by the integration of the settler into the local ecology, but rather by a wholesale replacement of that ecology. It is notable that in both the United States and Australia, while the pasturing of livestock and its associated culture are understood as the locus of distinct icons of national identity, it is typically *English* or at least *European* livestock, black Angus and Hereford cattle (from England) and merino sheep (reputedly from Spain), that they are pasturing. Australian cultural geographers Nicholas Gill and Kay Anderson have noted that ‘few practices were as intimately implicated in effecting the extension of British selves and surfaces to the colonies of Australia, as agricultural and pastoral pursuits’. In the US context, from the position of an ecocritically informed settler colonial analysis, one might invert historian

1 See Tom Lynch, “‘Nothing but Land’: Women’s Narratives, Gardens, and the Settler-Colonial Imaginary in the US West and Australian Outback,” *Western American Literature* 48 (2014): 375–99.

Frederick Jackson Turner's durable suggestion that the frontier was the crucible in which Europeans were transformed into Americans; it is more plausible to argue that the frontier was the crucible in which the original American landscape was transformed into, if not Europe, then at least, to borrow Alfred Crosby's useful term, a neo-Europe. And the replacement of elk, pronghorn, wolves, coyotes, prairie dogs, grizzlies, and, of course, bison, with the British black Angus and Hereford is as obvious an example of this process as one is likely to find.

Within these neo-European pastoral zones all other plants and animals are judged, and often convicted and sentenced to death, on the basis of their ability to enhance or to injure the favoured animals of the settler colonial pastoral imaginary. This is indeed far from the pastoral mode's idealisation of human harmony with nature, but seems a logical extension of the harnessing of that mode by the combined powers of a nationalist settler colonial imaginary and the logic of capitalism. What role, after all, can the wolf or dingo have in Arcadia?

In the past few decades the American cowboy and the Australian stockman have gone from being the heroes of the settler colonial frontier to, for many people, its villains, not only because of their treatment of Indigenous people but also for their treatment of the land. The trajectory of US writer and environmentalist Ed Abbey's career suggests the dimensions of the change. In two of his earliest novels, *The Brave Cowboy* (1956) and *Fire on the Mountain* (1962), the cowboy is the hero, a rugged, honest, plain-spoken, independent individual who stands outside the decadent, conformist, corrupt, and hyper-sophisticated industrial society, a figure distantly yet recognisably related to the shepherds of the pastoral mode. Within a few years, however, after his environmental consciousness began to grow, Abbey was denouncing cattlemen, as in this devastating portrait:

The rancher (with a few honorable exceptions) is a man who strings barbed wire all over the range; drills wells and bulldozes stockpounds; drives off elk and antelope and bighorn sheep; poisons coyotes and prairie dogs; shoots eagles, bears, and cougars on sight; supplants the native grasses with tumbleweed, snakeweed, povertyweed, cowshit, anthills, mud, dust, and flies. And then leans back and grins at the TV cameras and talks about how much he loves the American West. ('Free Speech' 17–18)

Abbey and like-minded individuals began a campaign to remove cattle from as much of the public range as possible. Over the next decades this anti-ranching movement produced a number of important texts, the most influential of which is George Wuerthner and Mollie Matteson's edited collection, *Welfare Ranching: The Subsidized Destruction of the American West* (2002). Wuerthner and Matteson argue that 'there is overwhelming evidence

that livestock production has impoverished the West's biological capital' (xiii). They note that cattle graze roughly 300 million acres of public land in the West, and then suggest that these

300 million acres is what potentially could be restored if public lands livestock production were eliminated. Nowhere else in the United States is there such potential for large-scale ecosystem restoration at so little cost – and ultimately affecting so few people – as in the termination of domestic livestock production on our public lands. (xiii)

At the same time, comparable if less widely disseminated critiques were being made in Australia, where they have more recently been compounded by an Aboriginal native title movement, something that US ranchers have not had to contend with. Nicholas Gill, for example, observes that

The arid and semi-arid grazing lands of Australia are in a state of flux and contention. Since European settlement the dominant land use of these rangelands has been extensive pastoralism, mainly involving grazing of cattle and sheep. Over the 1980s and 1990s, however, the pastoral landscape is showing cracks in the face of reassertion of Aboriginal rights to land, the conservation movement and questions regarding the economic returns from pastoralism relative to benefits from alternative uses and tenure regimes. (50)

Yet, despite these critiques and challenges, the settler colonial Arcadian pastoral dream (being, perhaps, archetypal) is nothing if not potent, persistent, and surprisingly adaptable. The evident failure of the dream to fully materialise, and the ecological damage that resulted from the effort, have led many people to attempt to reimagine rather than outright reject the pastoral dimension of the settler colonial tradition.

### **The New Ranch**

Some of those 'few people' Wuerthner and Mattesson claimed would be negatively affected by an end to public land ranching had an alternative solution. The legitimate critiques of pastoral practice, coupled with personal witness, spurred many of them to seek to refine pastoralism into a bioregionally integrated form of livelihood that could restore rather than damage the health of the land. One of the leaders of this movement in the United States, Courtney White, calls this approach the 'New Ranch', which he defines as

an emerging progressive ranching movement that operates on the principle that the natural processes that sustain wildlife habitat, biological diversity and functioning watersheds are the same processes that make land productive for livestock. New Ranches are ranches where grasslands are productive and diverse, where erosion has diminished, where streams and springs, once dry, now flow, where wildlife is more abundant, and where landowners are more profitable as a result. (xix)

Proponents of new ranching agree that livestock grazing has in the past done great damage, but they argue that rural settler communities are a valuable population to sustain. Indeed for those who believe in the merits of a more bioregionally attuned society, one more deeply rooted in place, the preservation of these multi-generational pastoral communities seems appealing. I would caution, however, that the common pastoralist rhetoric in which people who can trace their family heritage back three or four generations in a place can thereby claim some deep belonging serves the settler colonial imaginary by normalising the settler presence in its creation of a time-scale that only begins with the arrival of the settlers, effacing tens of thousands of years of prior Indigenous presence.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to the value of maintaining multi-generational ties to the land, the New Ranch proponents argue that livestock grazing can be done in an ecologically sustainable way; in fact they often argue that such grazing is actually necessary to restore damaged lands. Such healing, they propose, can be achieved through the implementation of some version of the Holistic Range Management techniques advocated by Allan Savory, which involve high intensity but short duration grazing that mimics the passing of a herd of bison or other large, nomadic herbivores with which the grasslands had co-evolved. These beliefs have led to the formation of groups such as the Quivira Coalition and the Malpais Borderlands group in the United States and Australia's LandCare movement.

I should note that Savory's grazing methods have not been as influential in Australia as they have been in the United States since the argument for their use, that they mimic the behaviour of native grazers, does not fit the circumstances. Cattle can be made to mimic the grazing of bison or possibly even elk, but the native animals in Australia graze in an entirely different way, with quite different effects on the land. Nevertheless, Gill and Anderson report the widespread belief among Australian pastoralists that livestock grazing is good for the land. They cite, for example, Judy Robinson's biography which reports that her grandmother would proudly explain how the cattle had a beneficial influence on the local ecology. Once the cattle had been introduced, her grandmother noted 'an improvement in grasses and a slow but steady greening and developing density of shrubbery'. Gill and Anderson report that the belief in the "gardening" effect of stock remains widespread among pastoralists today'.

In the United States, New Ranching groups draw on the bioregional idea of reinhabitation, that is, on the idea of learning to live in and restore

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2 See, for example, Deborah Bird Rose's *Reports from a Wild Country: Ethics for Decolonisation* (Sydney: U of New South Wales P, 2004) especially the chapter 'The Long Transitive Moment', as well as the chapter 'Writing a Colonial Calendar' in Jay Arthur's *The Default Country*.

a place that has been ‘disrupted and injured through past exploitation’ (Berg and Dasmann 35). Admitting that poorly managed cattle grazing has been a major cause of that injury, they argue that better managed cattle grazing can restore it. A number of books have been produced by and about these projects that seek to demonstrate that ranching is ‘one of the few western economies that approaches sustainability and has multigenerational ties to the land’ (Pritchett, Knight, Lee xiii). For example in *Home Land: Ranching and a West that Works*, the editors say that

The premise of our book is that conservation is compatible with ranching and farming. For evidence of this, go out and look at the land. In watersheds, basins, rangelands, and mountains across the West, livestock are being managed differently, in innovative and progressive ways. And the land is responding. Vegetation is more diverse and productive, soils are more stable, and there is less bare ground, streams and springs have come back to life, and biodiversity thrives. (Pritchett, Knight, Lee ix)

In Australia, the artist Mandy Martin has developed a series of collaborative art and writing projects located in the Channel Country of New South Wales and Queensland that seem analogous and that seek, in an indirect way, to simultaneously reveal, reinforce, and inculcate ecological values within pastoralist culture. These projects include *Tracts: Back O’ Bourke* (Martin and Sinclair); *Watersheds: The Paroo to the Warrego* (Martin and Griffiths); *Inflows: The Channel Country* (Martin *et al.*); and, most substantially, *Desert Channels: The Impulse to Conserve* (Robin, Dickman and Martin). In his contribution to *Desert Channels*, pastoralist and environmentalist Guy Fitzhardinge explains how collaboration between government, non-profit environmental organisations, and pastoralists is essential to environmental restoration. He notes, for example, that ‘Apart from the small area of national parks, land tenure in the [Channel Country] is mostly leasehold and used for livestock grazing. If conservation is to be undertaken on a large and more appropriate regional and catchment scale, the pastoral community has to be involved in the activities’ (289). Working in close collaboration with the pastoral communities and families, Martin and her many collaborators have used artwork, photography, and narrative to stimulate an informed pride of place that will result in motivating the sort of ecologically responsible pastoral practices that Fitzhardinge describes.

Such projects in both the Outback and the West have a certain undeniable appeal, but there are reasons to be cautious. For one, the purported efficacy of Savory’s grazing methods does not appear to have been scientifically supported. Most evidence is anecdotal, and professional range scientists have typically been sceptical of Savory’s claims. Responding to a recent TED talk by Savory, David D. Briske *et al.* argue that ‘we find all of Mr. Savory’s major claims to be unfounded and we express deep concern that they

have the potential to undermine proven, practical approaches to rangeland management and restoration that are supported by a global community of practitioners and scientists' (72). In *The Last Ranch* Sam Bingham describes a community of ranchers in Colorado's San Luis Valley who attempted to implement Savory's techniques. They met, however, with limited success. The amount of labour involved, as well as the social and political complexities and personal toll, seemed disproportionate to the results. In an Epilogue to the book, Bingham notes that 'much ... had not turned out well' (344). Discouraged by what he had witnessed, he reports that he even considered 'recalling my manuscript [from the publisher] and destroying it' (345).

Gill and Anderson counsel caution for another reason, one more pertinent to my concerns regarding the settler colonial dimensions of the pastoral imaginary. In their analysis of the rhetoric used by LandCare participants in Central Australia, Gill and Anderson highlight a point that applies in many cases to the rhetoric of America's New Ranchers, noting that 'they articulate a stewardship role for pastoralism that further naturalises the presence of cattle and which strengthens the naturalness and the morality of the pastoral landscape' (4). That is, the idea that cattle can be integrated fully into the local ecology, that they can even be used to help restore it, serves to further their utility in the settler colonial project of naturalising, normalising, and justifying settler presence.

### **Buffalo Pastoralism**

In all of these New Ranch texts published in North America I notice a puzzling absence. It is curious that so many people, inspired by Savory, are so invested in figuring out how to get cattle to graze like bison and go to great and sometimes unmanageable lengths to do so, but none of them, in any of the many case studies in these various New-Ranch-promoting books, thinks it might make sense to just raise the bison themselves. Indeed they sometimes scoff at bison ranching as a fad, or as a hobby of wealthy tycoons like Ted Turner, who owns numerous ranches on which he has restored bison and other native animals. Bingham, for example, cannot conceal his disdain as he drives past a ranch where 'an absentee Japanese owner raised bison, partly for export'. And he even refers to these bison as 'exotic livestock', noting that 'after years of being handled and fed like cattle without ever having seen a pack of wolves or a mounted Indian with a lance, they had become cattle' (316). In this passage, bison, native herbivores of the San Luis Valley, are, with their foreign owner and domesticated ways, figured as alien, inauthentic, and wholly unsuitable as pastoral animals. Notably, several years after Bingham published his book the Nature Conservancy introduced a herd of bison onto its Zapata Ranch, also located in the San Luis Valley only a few miles from the ranches Bingham examined in his book. This herd, now numbering

some 2,000 animals, is maintained in as wild a condition as possible, not at all like the pampered bison that Bingham sneered at. Zapata Ranch bison are the heart of a thriving ecotourism business and are also culled for meat production (Nature Conservancy).

Based on the argument I am developing here, I would suggest that the contemptuous attitude toward bison ranching among the New Ranch proponents indicates the degree to which cattle ranching remains deeply implicated and invested in the settler colonial pastoral imaginary. European cattle are so much a part of the identity of the settler culture, and serve so much as powerful evidence of its achievement of belonging, that the introduction of buffalo feels like an attack on the settler colonial project and a challenge to the identity of the settler's pastoral culture. To replace cattle with bison feels too much like a turning back of the clock – an admission of failure – to be tolerable, particular as bison are so closely identified with the Native American cultures that settler colonialism displaced. On that note, it is also interesting that in none of the many volumes I have read devoted to the American New Ranch is there any involvement of, or even reference to, the local Native communities.



Buffalo on the Bottom Spring. (Photo Credit: Jill O'Brien, Wild Idea Buffalo Company LLC.)

Not all ranchers, however, are so hostile to bison. A book that eschews cattle as a basis for new ranching, that champions bison as an alternative, and that also works in collaboration with Indigenous communities, is Dan O'Brien's *Buffalo for the Broken Heart*. In this memoir O'Brien describes his efforts to transform his cattle operation in western South Dakota into a

buffalo operation. In the process he would seem to have achieved all of the positive environmental benefits the New Ranchers are trying to attain without having to figure out how to mimic native herbivores with labour intensive management. Rather than trying to get cattle to act like buffalo, he just uses the buffalo themselves.

Early in the book, O'Brien describes his first visit to the region as a young boy on a family vacation to the Black Hills:

My first vision of the northern Great Plains was a romantic little kid's dream of cowboys, horses, and big sunsets. But it stuck with me. Now, no matter where I am, I can still close my eyes and see the sight from the north slope of the Black Hills: grass swaying in the wind to infinity and a sky that takes up half the world. It is the vision that has set the direction for my life. (6)

As a child, O'Brien had glimpsed his personal Arcadia, however naïvely and romantically perceived. As an adult, his goal is to recreate that vision in spite of the economic and social realities that stand in his way. He managed to purchase a small ranch near the Black Hills and began to raise cattle. Being an environmentalist and hence inclined to New Ranch ideas, he worked his cattle according to Savory's holistic management techniques (9). But over time he grew dissatisfied both with the effort and the results. In his memoir he contrasts his idyllic pastoral vision with the realities of economic hardship, divorce (including his own), alcoholism, and suicide he saw among his neighbours. Eventually, he 'came to hate cattle' which, he notes, are 'just the only way anyone out here had ever thought to try to pay the bills' (8).

Inspired by a chance encounter with a buffalo bull on a remote dirt road (3), as well as by the example of one of his neighbours, O'Brien decided to try raising buffalo instead. This, he hoped, would prove not only economically viable but would also help to restore the much abused local ecology. 'My plan,' he says, 'was to restore the valley to something resembling what might have been there when wild buffalo were' (74). He acquired a small herd, built new, stronger boundary fences, removed the intervening cross fencing that is an essential feature of the Savory method, and let the herd graze as it chose across his land. The previously overgrazed land responded: 'In just one summer of buffalo grazing,' he exclaims with some surprise, 'the bushes grew more lush than I'd ever seen them and our grouse and songbird populations seemed to soar' (166). As this passage indicates, O'Brien is not interested in raising buffalo just because they are more suited to the climate and ecology, not just because they graze in ways that sustain the grassland, not just because he seems to be able to make good money with them, but also, and primarily, because buffalo on the land serve to restore the ecosystem for all the creatures who dwell there. He measures success not just by how much money he has in the bank (though that is a real concern that runs through the book) but also by how many songbirds nest in the grasses and

shrubs. ‘Only buffalo,’ he claims, ‘are a force that can match the scale of this land. Only buffalo have the power to massage this land back to health’ (166).

O’Brien notes that most of his ranching neighbours are indifferent to, if not at times downright hostile toward, his bison experiment: ‘The lives and pedigrees of my friends and neighbours’, he explains, ‘were heavily vested in the belief that this land is “cattle country”’. His analysis links their perspective with my earlier observation regarding the role of the settler colonial imaginary in fostering hostility to buffalo ranching:

In the view of some, their progenitors sacrificed everything to wrench the northern plains away from the dark forces of wildness, and they do not want to hear that the salvation of the land, and perhaps of the economy, might lay in a retrenching, a falling back to the greater wisdom of evolution. (168)

Unlike the New Ranch proponents, O’Brien has also managed to work with his local Indigenous neighbours, in particular the Lakota on the nearby Pine Ridge Reservation. At the beginning of his project he admits to being inspired by the realisation, a bit romanticised to be sure, that buffalo meat ‘was the food of Crazy Horse, Sitting Bull, and Red Cloud’ (37), three iconic Lakota warriors who lived in the vicinity. Indeed it is not much of a stretch to suggest that the nineteenth-century Lakota and Cheyenne cultures function as a sort of Golden Age in O’Brien’s pastoral imagination. He is, in a very real sense, trying to restore the landscape to something resembling the one they inhabited. By the book’s conclusion O’Brien’s Great Plains Arcadia would seem to have been restored. Strolling around his property to check on his herd he observes

the bounty of the wet summer come to fruition in the form of tall grass and bumper crops of young birds and animals. Baby badgers and foxes peered at me from the mouths of the dens. Young grouse and partridge clucked and gurgled in the buffaloberry bushes. I found handfuls of soft, dun-colored deer mice nestled warm into wads of buffalo fur they had stashed under clumps of sagebrush. Baby antelope, little bigger than jackrabbits, moved at their mothers’ sides as if they were glued there. The pairs, exotic as impalas or gazelles, moved coolly through the buffalo herd without soliciting a glance. Blackbirds rolled in the air as the herd moved. They were eating insects stirred up by the grazing herd and often rested on the big woolly backs of the buffalo. (233–34)

This is a vision of a bucolic pastoralism in harmony with the natural world that harkens back to the idyllic scenes of the ancient pastoral mode.

In *The Penguin Book of English Pastoral Verse*, John Barrell and John Bull argue that the pastoral mode is no longer tenable as a contemporary art form because ‘the separation of life in the town and in the country that the Pastoral demands is now almost devoid of any meaning. It is difficult to pretend that the English countryside is now anything more than an extension of the

town' (432). Even if we grant, for the sake of argument, that the distinction between city and countryside has indeed been so thoroughly effaced, not just in England but in the United States and Australia, it is worth noting that a new and not unrelated dichotomy has emerged, between what I will short handedly refer to as industrial agriculture and sustainable agriculture. The city has indeed invaded the country, and one of its most striking manifestations is the factory model of farming. Set against that model are a host of alternative expressions of sustainable agriculture that have been explored in considerable depth and detail by many recent writers, including Wendell Berry, Barbara Kingsolver and Michael Pollan.

In *Buffalo for the Broken Heart* this dichotomy is mainly between cattle ranching, which has been heavily industrialised, and bison ranching, which can still be conducted in a more natural fashion, reminiscent of the herding practices in the ancient pastoral mode. O'Brien observes that for most of his western South Dakota neighbours, 'this land is a sort of factory and it should produce wheat and beef' (115). In contrast, his goal is to produce biodiversity and a healthy ecology while also making a reasonable living. Bison are a way to do this, both by their beneficial impact on the land and by the fact that he can sell their meat. O'Brien's example would seem to be both ecologically and economically sustainable, as well as serving as model of contemporary pastoral in both the literary and literal sense.

At the end of his book *Pastoral*, Terry Gifford considers new directions – afterlives, as it were – for the pastoral tradition. He offers (rather unoriginally, I think) the term 'post-pastoral'. He explains that 'fundamental to post-pastoral literature is an awe in attention to the natural world. Such a respect derives not just from a naturalist's intimate knowledge or a modern ecologist's observation of the dynamics of relationships, but from a deep sense of the immanence in all natural things' (151–52). Based on such criterion, I think it is much more accurate to refer to this mode as ecopastoral, a form that enacts Buell's 'ecocentric repossession of the pastoral'. And I would offer Dan O'Brien's *Buffalo for the Broken Heart* as an especially notable manifestation of this new version of pastoral. Might one viable afterlife of the pastoral be bison ranching on the Great Plains?

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