THE BASIC ARGUMENT SET FORTH IN THIS BOOK is a fairly straightforward one. We usually perceive Tennyson and Hardy as poets shaped by tradition, conservers of the past. Yet we also acknowledge that Tennyson and Hardy contribute to a transition in English literary history from nineteenth-century poetics to modernism. This sense of both tradition and modernity in the two poets suggests a value in reading Tennyson and Hardy side-by-side, not to measure the degree of influence the former exerted on the latter, but to explore the ways both poets perceived literary tradition as a problem, a problem out of which emerges their particular contribution to modernity.

For all their differences, Tennyson and Hardy are similar in their sense of partial exclusion from the traditions they draw upon. One of these areas of literary tradition is pastoral. There has been a fair amount of discussion of Tennyson and pastoral, much less so in the case of Hardy. The following chapters read Tennyson and Hardy in the light of pastoral, suggesting the specific ways each poet confronts pastoral as a problem, the larger issues being the rhetoric of tradition and literary history itself. As we read Tennyson and Hardy from this perspective, certain connections become clear. Pastoral as a set of forms provides a model for Tennyson and Hardy to follow, yet the genre limits and constrains their poetic work, especially at the primary levels of figuration and rhetoric. Poetic voices in Tennyson and Hardy are repeatedly lured into the figurative strategies of pastoral, only to be stifled by the duplicity of their own rhetoric. On the one hand, pastoral rhetoric in Tennyson and Hardy exerts inhibitive pressure on their poems. Pastoral forms assume a formulaic or programmatic character in the narrowest sense. What is equally interesting, however, is the way the symptoms of this inhibition, so to speak, emerge to lay bare these figura-
tive strategies and in so doing make available power for the poetic voice.

Tennyson and Hardy deliberately subvert the forms of pastoral by means of the genre’s traditional rhetoric. Out of this subversion, the two poets create a renewal of forms, new kinds of pastoral poetry.

The readings in the following chapters demonstrate the fascination Tennyson and Hardy have for the figurative strategies of traditional pastoral and the specific ways they foreground and thus subvert these strategies. These readings also demonstrate the new kinds of pastoral which the two poets create through these experiments in form. Before we can see how Tennyson and Hardy respond to the pastoral tradition, however, we have to get a sense of what that tradition is. We need to determine the principal figurative strategies of pastoral as a genre. We need, in other words, a working definition of pastoral.

There are many definitions of pastoral, but few of them are entirely satisfactory. Pastoral may be understood as poetry about shepherds or goatherds and their flocks in the countryside. But Theocritus, who is often considered the principal creator of pastoral, wrote poems with a different cast of characters and settings from this. Some of his idylls take as their settings urban centers and take as their characters sophisticated cosmopolitans. A strict literary historian and classicist might place these poems under another category. Such a historian might also exclude several of the mythological poems in Virgil’s *Eclogues*. And yet these poems participate in the values we have come to associate with pastoral. It is not simply country life and shepherds that define the pastoral impulse. Even if we were to limit ourselves to this setting and this group of characters, there would still exist a crucial division between the poet/speaker and his subject. As students of pastoral have observed, much of the genre’s power derives from the tension between the sophisticated (in Theocritus, Alexandrian) speaker and the “naive” subjects whom he describes within the pastoral world.³
Pastoral in its very beginnings moves beyond the bucolic world. In fact the bucolic acquires its definition by interacting with its opposite: the bucolic world cannot exist without its urban counterpart. But to say that pastoral involves a contrast between country and city, naive and sophisticated, does not take us all that far in our search for an adequate definition of pastoral. After all, parts of the Iliad, Odyssey, and Aeneid explore these contrasts, as do Virgil’s Georgics and Horace’s Odes. Yet we do not call these works in their entirety pastoral. All of these texts do, however, explore in part an idea closely associated with pastoral: the retirement theme. Granted that the epic, georgic, and ode share with the pastoral the retirement theme, what then distinguishes pastoral from these other genres? Characters and setting, goatherds and shepherds, flock and countryside—these provide helpful signals but are not definitive. Between pastoral and epic, there are distinctions of length, contrasts between narrative and primarily lyric forms, and the difference between heroic action and acts without heroes (if we omit Renaissance pastoral drama, there are no heroes in pastoral). Despite contiguities of mode in epic and pastoral, few readers have difficulty telling them apart.

The case is more complicated as to the distinctions between georgic and pastoral. If we begin with Hesiod, the georgic is about work within nature, and such is also the case in Virgil’s Georgics, which like its predecessor is a type of farming manual. The setting is the country. But the characters are farmers who transform nature through productive labor throughout the seasons. Virgil extols the farm worker as hero, and we are just a step or two away from the epic heroism of Aeneas and the creation of a new world in the Aeneid. Yet in the other direction, we can observe the differences between the georgic and pastoral. The former is about work and the latter about play. Does this mean that pastoral poems are humorous? Sometimes they are: sometimes pastoral play makes the characters appear to be children of the world, simultaneously naive and calculating. But the play of pastoral has a serious side to it. Play becomes the means through which the characters master a wide range of problems associated with day-to-day life. If pastoral poems differ from the georgic to the extent that they depict a
world of childlike leisure and a world of play, pastoral also involves
the serious value of play in friendship and in language. This value
inheres in the ability to work through differences in emotional life
just as the georgic farmer works through the land to produce the
crops that sustain his existence.

We can better understand the nature of pastoral, then, through
the concept of play. However, viewing pastoral in this way should
not lead us to understand pastoral as an exclusively happy genre.
One need only think of Theocritus's *Idylls* I and VII, the songs of
Thyrsis and Lycidas, or Virgil's first *Eclogue* (Meliboeus's lament of
exile) to realize that happiness is by no means an uninterrupted
presence in the pastoral world. The play in pastoral often draws its
material from events that are sad (the obvious and important vari­
ant of the genre relevant here is the pastoral elegy). Yet even when
the speakers describe events that are sad, the pastoral impulse re­
mains a playful one.

Pastoral tends to be constructed along formal lines, like a game
the rules to which are known in advance. Students of the genre
often describe this quality as its artificiality. The goatherd or the
shepherd, the flock, the country landscape setting, the song con­
test—these are some of the rules. Part of the play of pastoral stems
from departures from the expected pattern. There are rules in
pastoral, but they are not rigid and exacting. They are nonrestric­
tive. The georgic describes rules for the work involved in the main­
tenance and production of the land; the epic describes rules for the
moral conduct of men acting within the dynamics of historical
change. Pastoral holds out certain rules for playing games, but seri­
ous games whose consequences have bearing on the emotional life
of the individual within the social community. Yet paradoxically
one of the aspects of pastoral and one of the qualities of its play
that remains decisive must be the genre's willingness to entertain,
indeed to encourage, respite from rules. Pastoral play opens up imag­
inative space. And it is the connection with imaginative process that
distinguishes play in pastoral from the physical play we find in the
classical epic. Games in the classical epic are physical: contestants
compete in games of physical strength. Pastoral games, on the other
hand, involve imaginative strength. They are contests in language
that take, as their material, emotions such as joy and sorrow, and, especially in Theocritus, lust and remorse. Pastoral involves play through and about language, and the genre takes form around language games, often song contests. Parts of the classical heroic epic may be narrated by singers as a type of framing device. And these epic narratives or songs do have some of the qualities of song contests; but their scope is so broad and the singer’s role so subtle that this element of language play as itself a subject of the discourse is not highlighted. All poetry is about language, obviously, but in pastoral, language assumes a special importance. Within the enclosed pastoral world of imaginative space, the various protagonists explore emotional and erotic attachments, social issues, the question of community, and types of emotional loss. And they explore these problems through the highly self-conscious play of language. In that sense, pastoral’s principal mode of understanding and, in fact, its principal subject is language itself.

We are moving closer to a provisional definition of pastoral. Pastoral is less about work (georgic) or heroism (epic) than about play. Language is the principal mode of play in pastoral. This play can be humorous and light-hearted, but it can also be serious and sad, confronting such problems as unrequited love or the death of a friend. Pastoral is a genre that explores rules and boundaries and the ways the individual transgresses them. Pastoral creates a self-contained world, normally composed of a country setting, with rural simple folk as the principal characters. But it ventures into the city at times, and the tone and style hold in a state of tension rural simplicity and cosmopolitan sophistication. Pastoral makes little effort to disguise or dissimulate the urbane and witty poet who creates the poem.

Pastoral is an eminently dialectical genre. The genre functions in terms of a constant tension between thesis and antithesis, opposites working toward an unfolding synthesis; this is the modality of the form’s progression. Pastoral’s dialectical play takes as its ground the idea of song. In fact, one of the key aspects that distinguishes the genre is the stress on the dynamics of vocal response.

Pastoral, perhaps more than any other poetic form, is about voices: giving voice to something, hearing voices, responding. This quality is particularly salient in such pastoral devices as the
refrain and the call-and-response structure. If we turn back to pastoral beginnings in Theocritus, we note various qualities in the refrain. Refrain creates continuity; it binds sections of the poem together. Conversely, refrain also separates or articulates the sections. Refrain signals voice; it insists on the poetic fact of human, oral production. Refrain tells the reader this is a spoken as well as written artifact. Like the oral-formulaic phrase of the classical epic, refrain creates the sense of a human voice, a speaking voice reciting the poem. As a written text, the pastoral poem explores this dialectic between voice and written word, between what is on the page and what is not. The refrain’s insistence on voice sets up a tension between text and performance and between silence and sound. This tension prevails in all written texts, but pastoral’s self-contained dynamics of song foregrounds the tension.

Call-and-response also gives central importance to human voice. In pastoral song contests, one singer often responds in emulation and departure from the pattern set up by the other speaker. Often the response is given an epistemological turn. The response patterned on the echo is both natural and poetic. The poet structures a play between not only silent text and vocal reading, but between different voices of different origins: human voice and nature’s voice. Call-and-response recapitulates the very dynamics of voice posited by the text’s relation to the reader; that is, it creates silence as well as sound in that pause or break between the two voices. The pause or break again differentiates pastoral from any other genre.

As both visual and spoken text, the division of voice, the articulation of the text into the voices of different speakers, dramatizes the play of language against the silence and blank space which surround it. From this perspective, we see the affinities of pastoral with drama. Yet the pastoral lyric, because of its self-contained brevity and because of the tension between the poet and the speakers in the poem, focuses not on the narrative action of drama but on linguistic action. The drama of the pastoral lyric explores the responsive dynamics of poetic language in ways that drama is less well-equipped to handle. Unlike the divisions of voice in drama, in pastoral the refrain and the call-and-response work through repetition. Word choice, metrical choice, and patterns of language key
the nature of linguistic play rather than the nature of the subject matter the speakers may be exploring. These choices create and constitute the subject matter.

Pastoral is about song and voice. It is also about society. Pastoral explores the nature of social groups. But, paradoxically, pastoral poems often involve just one or two speakers. This paradox reveals another aspect of the dialectics of pastoral: it is social but also solitary. The norms and expectations of the social group—household, community, state—are never far away from the pastoral world. Yet the pastoral world is itself a device if not to escape at least to humanize these expectations. And if the expectations of the larger community bear upon the behavior of the inhabitants of the pastoral world, those same inhabitants through imaginative play create other expectations, other values, and other communities.

Pastoral calls into question the very idea of community itself because it can be the most solitary of modes. One has only to think of Polyphemus’s lament to Galatea in Theocritus to realize how much of both the pathos and comedy of pastoral grows out of the solitary individual; indeed, *Idyll* XI is paradigmatic of the close relation between pastoral play and pathos. Often, the playfulness of the genre stems from the characters’ attempts to moderate feelings of loneliness, expatriation, and loss. Playfulness and pathos are never far apart in pastoral. And this range of emotion is itself never far from the dialectic of solitude and community, individual and society.

The aspect of pastoral concerned with society and community develops a subgenre in English literary history: the country-house poem. While pastoral and country-house poetry are not identical, they share certain themes and concerns. The country-house poem draws upon the ethos of retirement and leisure found in classical writers such as Homer, Theocritus, and Virgil. Country-house poems are pastoral poems in the broad sense that the setting is in nature. The city is never far away, and that is true for pastoral also. Like pastoral, the country-house poem explores the tensions be-
between country and city and between nature and artifice. But these explorations assume an entirely different cast in the country-house poem. While the economic man is part of the pastoral heritage, it is in the country-house poem that economics come to the fore. Pastoral downplays economics through the ideal space it creates and through the imaginative play enacted within this space. The country-house poem often takes as its principal theme the proper building of a stately retreat for the wealthy landowner: the country house imposes the reality of capital and labor on the pleasure principle of idyllic play.

Paradoxically, despite pastoral’s insistence on the values of the imagination and leisure, the genre takes into account the realities of work in a way that the best-known country-house poems do not. As one commentator has pointed out, there is a tendency in the country-house poem to ignore the actual labor that creates the leisure of the country retreat. While pastoral explores leisure, it does so within the dialectics of labor and leisure: the inhabitants of the pastoral world are country workers. On the other hand, the figures within the country-house poem are usually upper-class gentry reaping the profits of the men and women who labor on the land. Despite these differences, in terms of poetry the two genres are closely related. And as one moves into the modern, post-enlightenment period, we find country-house conventions side by side with pastoral conventions, but with the latter shorn of many of the ideas about labor and the dynamics of class out of which the country-house poem originated. In part, this suppression of the economic “ground” of the country house is the result of Romantic ideology and the rise of individualism. In part, it is the result of the increasingly self-referential nature of poetry and poetics in the modern period. In any event, in nineteenth-century England we are less likely to find poems that are, in a strict sense, country-house poems. We are less likely to find poems about the gentry and palatial retreats. We are more likely to find poems that draw upon the conventions of the country house but transform them to a point at which the term itself may no longer seem applicable.

In terms of nineteenth-century literary history and poetics, it may not make sense to follow too closely the distinctions between
pastoral and country-house poetry. In fact, one of the most critical developments in nineteenth-century poetics is the breaking down of rigid genre conventions. Following Fowler’s distinction, one might argue that poems experimenting with mode or modality of poetic discourse begin to displace poems that follow strictly the traditional boundaries of poetic genre. Many of the poems that we will discuss draw upon country-house conventions while exploring the vagaries of the pastoral ideal.

Perhaps the major exception to nineteenth-century experimentation with genre boundaries is the elegy. Major poets produced elegies in nineteenth-century England, elegies which follow quite closely the strictures and norms of the traditional genre. Most of the poems to be examined here are not elegies in a strict sense, but many of them incorporate selected conventions and concerns of the elegy within their experiments with pastoral poetics. If we understand elegy to be formal mourning at the death of someone loved by the singer and the community the singer represents, most of the poems we will discuss cannot be called elegies. Yet most of these poems involve the “work of mourning” that Sacks has described as a central dynamic within the elegy. Before we look at melancholy as psychological affect and as literary idea, before we discuss its relation to pastoral, we need to examine perhaps the most typical aspect of pastoral.

We have mentioned the country setting and the goatherds and shepherds. But what marks out the difference between a pastoral poem and a mere nature poem? Part of the dialectics of pastoral involves the artifice of situation and setting. In Theocritus and Virgil, we are never far away from the consciousness that the pastoral retreat is a constructed fiction. Unlike the conventional nature poem, where the poet presents nature deceptively, as unmediated experience, the true pastoral song insists on the experience as a mediated one: it insists on the reality of boundaries which limit and define natural space. If pastoral song is about the play of language, pastoral nature is about the play between nature as a real experience common to all people, and nature as rhetorical trope, an experience mediated and in fact created by the play of language.

The principal rhetorical trope of pastoral is the locus amoenus.
The *locus amoenus*, or "lovely place," is not exclusive to pastoral. There are pastoral oases in Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, contained natural retreats from the demands imposed on epic heroism. The epic *locus amoenus* is especially interesting in that it highlights the ambivalent value of the retreat. Some of these retreats, such as Circe's island, are deceptive and dangerous to those who enter. This type of epic *locus amoenus* develops in English literary tradition into the dangerous bowers in Spenser. The true pastoral *locus amoenus* does not contain such powers of ethical reduction. It is simply a place secluded from the demands of the larger society. The true pastoral *locus amoenus* is a good place, drawing upon the simplicity of its natural setting and on the simplicity of the people and animals who live within it. In pastoral song, the *locus amoenus* is more a part of the forest of Arden than of the Bower of Bliss.

The distinctive difference between the conventional nature poem and the pastoral poem consists in the artifice and boundaries of natural space in the latter. Since language play is at the heart of pastoral, nature and the natural setting play a secondary role. Nature is not the subject or the main action of pastoral; it is the ground or setting. In fact, when we think of nature in Theocritus, we realize how sparse it is: Theocritus merely sketches in a setting. The pastoral *locus amoenus* is more an idea than a place. Nature becomes fuller and lusher in Virgil's *Eclogues*, yet nature remains mediated and demystified because it is so often described and recounted at second hand by one of the singers within the poem. The *locus amoenus* is a linguistic vision; it is imaginary to the second power by virtue of its creation in the language of the inhabitants within the poem. The poet imagines them, and they imagine the space within which they dwell.

The *locus amoenus* is a rhetorical trope. The history of Western poetics attests to its rhetorical status. Its language derives, we are told, from the tropes of forensic rhetoric in classical theory. Unlike the continuous and apparently unmediated representation of nature in the straightforward nature poem, the *locus amoenus* defines a nature that is discontinuous, fragmented from its surroundings, inherently artificial because it is openly language-constructed. All of these qualities prevail in nature poetry in general, certainly in the work of the romantics, but only after the critical reader has
worked through the poet's claims to unmediated representation. The difference rests in that the pastoral poet and the pastoral singers within the poem openly explore the mediated and artificial status of this nature they represent. The *locus amoenus* constitutes the ground for the full range of rhetorical play that occurs in the pastoral poem. Pastoral singers insist that the trees, brooks, and shady bowers they sing about are not simply created by words; the substance of these natural objects is neither more nor less than words themselves.

One could say the pastoral *locus amoenus* is the paradigmatic example of the arbitrariness of the signifier/signified relation: the play of naming, in pastoral, acts within a poetic language that insists on its own unreality. Pastoral takes life in a language of the signifier without the signified. If the signified were to arrive, we would no longer be within the world of play, the acts of the imagination that define the pastoral experience. The signified is reality's intervention. And pastoral always tries to displace reality with another world.

One would imagine that the characters who dwell within the *locus amoenus* are happy, but more often than not, the *locus amoenus* serves as a foil to their unhappiness. If we think of Theocritean pastoral, we know that the playfulness of the genre is the dialectical antithesis of the melancholy that the characters feel. We now confront the second half of our subject: the confluence of the idea of melancholy with the pastoral genre. Since pastoral is especially about language, it is also about the maker of language—the poet. And the poet or artist figure in Western tradition has often been associated with the idea of melancholy. The connection between melancholy and genius may have originated in the work of Aristotle. But it is in the Renaissance that the idea began to exert a strong fascination among scientists, scholars, and artists of all sorts. Melancholy was thought to be the product of biological and chemical imbalance in the body. According to Renaissance medical and psychological knowledge based on classical sources, the body contained four humors, and a preponderance of one of these was a key factor in the physical and psychological makeup of the individual. But at the same time, melancholy seemed most prevalent among those who possessed a certain type of sensibility: artists and thinkers.

In Dürer's *Melencolia I*, the tools and instruments of scientific
knowledge and discovery surround the bowed and sorrowful figure of Melancholy. She is a solitary figure. She is as much concerned with the heavens above as with the earthly things around her. Dürer's engraving is the emblematic representation of the solitary and melancholy thinker. We find a more earthly depiction of the melancholy man on the frontispiece of Burton's *Anatomy*. A man is standing or rather slouching with arms folded; a broad-brimmed hat overshadows his downturned head. Unlike Dürer's Melancholy, the figure looks down at the ground rather than up toward the heavens.

Part of the irony of melancholy would seem to be that it encompasses both heaven and hell. In the melancholy tradition, we find people concerned with the sublimities of imaginative vision, but we also find people caught in webs of anger, deceit, and violence. In English literary history, the second type of melancholic abounds in drama. In Shakespeare, Marlowe, and the Jacobean poets, the melancholic is one whose brooding often turns to violence (less evident in these writers is the melancholic as thinker). On the other hand, in Shakespeare’s pastoral comedies and romances, the melancholy figure is often comic: he is less a thinker than a jester or clown. Jaques may be the best example of this type. Here we find a figure related to the world of pastoral play. We do not associate this figure with the darker melancholy of mourning in the elegy, yet a figure such as Jaques is a maker of language, one whose ethical commentary on the state of things achieves its force and resonance through the play of language.

It is in lyrical poetry and shorter narrative poetry, however, that we find the idea of melancholy itself becoming both a figure within the poem and its principal idea or theme as well. The touchstones of this tradition are “L’Allegro” and “Il Penseroso.” While not strictly pastoral poems, they contain the dialectic of play and melancholy that will define all pastoral thenceforth. They define the outer limits of conventionalization in both nature and human psychology. That is to say, here the abstract conceptualization of nature as a setting within which the poet explores the psychology of human emotions achieves a synthesis that Theocritus had only begun to sketch out centuries before. Nature is not a fully detailed field. This will come later in the latter half of the eighteenth century,
and it will achieve full realization in the British romantics. Instead of the fullness and “reality” of nature, we have a group of almost abstract forms, a grid or symbolic field within which the personified figures move. This abstraction of nature in “L’Allegro” and “Il Penseroso,” combined with the personified figures or abstract psychological ideas, constitutes a crucial tradition in pastoral, one explored throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Milton interrogates, among other things, the relation between figural language and the representation of literal states of mind. This dialectic is central to pastoral song, and it remains central in the confluence of pastoral and melancholy. Symbolic landscapes and iconographic figures within them stake out a space more imaginary than real. Henceforth, in English literary history we find a type of poem which explores psychic states through personified figures. These personified figures move within a landscape that, despite its claims to naturalness, is in fact a symbolic grid or pattern through which the poet presents fluctuating psychic states. We associate many of these poems with the melancholy tradition.

Perhaps the largest concentration of this type of symbolic landscape poem occurs in post-Augustan eighteenth-century poetry. But melancholy and religious meditations set within a natural landscape were a major presence throughout the seventeenth century. Poets who wrote poems of this type often structured them along the lines of “L’Allegro” and “Il Penseroso.” Even in the lesser versifiers, the melancholy poem is still important and revealing. Such poems juxtapose the physical body, descriptions of the inner emotional life, iconographic objects—nightingale, owl, graveyard, and so forth—with personified figures such as Melancholy. These poems develop out of the epistemological dialogue between melancholy and mirthful play in “L’Allegro” and “Il Penseroso.” The poem that takes as its subject “melancholy,” or addresses Melancholy, or personifies Melancholy, involves an exploration of figural and literal representation, an exploration of whether, in fact, that distinction holds good. It involves this exploration because the idea of melancholy as it attains conventional status in history and poetics is that of an allegorical figure, but one situated within a personal mode. The melancholy poem is usually a fairly short lyric or, if long, an autobiographical narrative (an example of the latter is James Beat-
tie's *The Minstrel*). Paradoxically, melancholy as a literary idea is at once one of the most abstract, external ideas, and one of the most psychologically embodied and internal. Thus, it is fitting that poets experimenting with the pastoral tradition would adopt the idea of melancholy.

The iconographic personification of melancholy becomes one of the main strategies of figural language in this tradition. In addition to the silent and sad figure in "II Penseroso," one thinks of the "goddess of a tearful eye" in Joseph Warton's "Ode to Fancy," and the personified female form in Thomas Warton's "The Pleasures of Melancholy." In these representations of Melancholy, the poet depicts the idea as a female goddess: quiet, bowed in sadness, often tearful. The allegorical dimension of the figure means also that the figure is "sketched in," a composite of symbolic traits rather than a detailed realistic image. In visual terms, these representations of melancholy have a Byzantine quality. They sketch a geometry of forms that stand for the state of melancholy; they do not involve, to any great extent, representations of emotional or psychological realism. The poet represents the emotion through idea more than through psychology and visual portrayal of affect. Something similar is at work in James Thomson's invocation to Melancholy in *Autumn*. At this point in the tradition, Melancholy only partially describes the speaker's state of mind. Melancholy is at the same time a philosophical abstraction, yet none of these figures is entirely disembodied nor entirely abstracted from the real world. Like the bowed figure of Burton's frontispiece, these figures look to the grounds of reality as well as to the ideals of heaven. And the grounds of reality to which they look are the grounds of nature turning from abstraction toward representational realism.

Poets usually set poems of melancholy within a natural landscape. In fact, while seventeenth-century poems of melancholy concentrate on religious and philosophical issues, eighteenth-century melancholy poetry tends more and more toward descriptive nature poetry. This combination affords the poet an opportunity to explore the dialectic of figural and literal language. The language represents melancholy as both an external allegorical figure and an internal psychological state. An area within which these two levels meet is nature—the pastoral landscape scene. The eighteenth-century land-
scape poets constitute a curious turning point in terms of both melancholy and pastoral traditions. From the perspective of the poetry of melancholy which precedes it, the later eighteenth-century poem of melancholy—Thomson and the Warton brothers, for example—appears a radical “naturalization.” Natural description acquires greater detail. The descriptive poem truly is descriptive and not simply an excuse for philosophical or religious musings. From the perspective of English Romanticism, the poems of Thomson and the Warton brothers appear, on the other hand, abstract and nonrepresentational in terms of description and psychology.

Personified figures of Melancholy are rare by the early nineteenth century. Keats's great ode on the subject is really a farewell to the tradition. The tension within the two traditions between two modes of representation, one figural and allegorical and one psychologically and descriptively realistic, is an important feature of the confluence of pastoral and melancholy. The Victorian poets who inherited these traditions also inherited this dialectic: Tennyson and Hardy exploit this dialectic of representation, pursuing its disjunctions in order to create a singular Victorian pastoral.

The task that yet remains is to describe what exactly melancholy was to these poets, what sort of permutations the idea undergoes as we move toward the Victorian period, and what the idea of melancholy means to us today, since we unavoidably read the past in the light of the present. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, poets understood melancholy to mean more than just sadness. It was a part of the chemistry of the body. Melancholies were not merely sad; they were physically sick. Burton's *Anatomy* provides a compendious account of the remedies used to alleviate this illness. Distinctions between body and psyche were much less sharply drawn in the Renaissance and seventeenth century than would come to be the case in the modern period. Thus, people who ate certain foods, who lived in certain climates, who possessed a certain physical type were diagnosed as potential melancholics.

Melancholy was also the focal point for many of the intellectual anxieties of the times, and this became increasingly the case in the later seventeenth century and during the eighteenth century. Death, for example, was one of the great melancholy subjects in these two centuries. Despite the power of religious faith—in certain ways
because of it—death remained a frightening mystery; even with the promise of an afterlife, the prospect of death was a cause for melancholy and pensive thought. Poets were moved to address personified Death. Melancholy was the emotional response to the end of life and also to the absence, the unrepresentable blank, that lay beyond. From earlier religious-oriented melancholy, this strand of the tradition eventually led to the so-called graveyard school. And thence it developed into such key transformations and modernizations of the death theme as Gray’s *Elegy*.

The melancholy response to death occurs obviously in the traditional elegy, but the elegy is a different part of this tradition. The elegy is a poem of mourning. The “death theme” poem is not so much about mourning as about fear for one’s own spiritual fate. In Gray’s *Elegy*, the poet conflates the two traditions: it is a traditional elegy, a poem of mourning, but it is a poem of mourning for the fate of the self. As in the traditional elegy, the melancholy death poem becomes a way of mastering, through representation in language, problems that are frightening by virtue of their unrepresentability. The melancholy death poem attempts to represent and thus domesticate this blankness.

Another strand of the melancholy tradition involves not terror before death but the ennui, the tedium, of life. Here melancholy turns from sublime terror before death to the more subdued tones of lamentation at the daily struggles of life. In its very broadest sense, this tradition in Western poetry goes back to Job and the Psalms. In a narrower sense, *taedium vitae* is a standard theme in the minor versifiers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In the dynamics of its psychology, the poem of ennui and lamentation assumes in those years an artificial quality. This quality leads into a structure of feeling that one associates with the later eighteenth century: the age of sentiment or pre-Romanticism.

At that turning point, the poem of melancholy assumes a programmatic structure or deliberate cultivation of feeling that may have no actual bearing on the mind of the speaker. The sense of artifice relates very much to the dialectic in pastoral whereby the characters appear simple people in a natural setting. But pastoral insists that this world is artfully constructed and much more complex than initially appears. The death theme or life’s ennui as a set
stance enables the poet to explore the dynamics of literary artifice: how can one be sincere within a language characterized by deception and artifice? This theme enables the poet to explore whether sincerity is desirable in poetic language. It enables the poet to ask whether dissimulation may in fact be the poetic mode par excellence.

Keats’s “Ode on Melancholy” is a farewell to this tradition. What could follow it? The dismissal of the melancholy tradition, even if only in its exclusively conventionalized forms, is perhaps a bit premature in the nineteenth century. English poets still drew upon the melancholy tradition, but usually in self-conscious ways. The concerns which motivated the poem on death, tedium vitae, and the retirement theme had not disappeared: they are concerns that all human beings have faced at all times. The very notion of convention itself marks off the nineteenth-century adoption of the melancholy poem. By the latter half of the eighteenth century, melancholy conventions had become routinized. The poem of melancholy had become a predictable configuration of figurative strategies, and it was this predictability to which Keats was responding. But rejection is only one strategy of response. One could instead use this configuration of conventions as a starting point for a renewal of the genre. This renewal would incorporate contemporary concerns, as well as the concerns that the melancholy poem had traditionally addressed.

With the vast increase of scientific knowledge in the nineteenth century and with the crisis in religious faith, the traditional melancholy poem assumed new force and new forms. In conjunction with the Victorian intellectual crisis of belief came a poetic crisis of belief. The Victorians experienced a crisis of belief about the nature of poetic tradition and the nature of language itself. Thus, the Victorian poets who drew upon the melancholy tradition also subverted it through a conscious, insistent interrogation of language’s relation to meaning. Given its extreme conventionalization, the melancholy poem is one through which the Victorian poet could explore the problems of figural language. The Victorian
poets found a similar situation prevailed in their relation to the other genre under discussion; the Victorian pastoral poem became a vehicle for exploring the problematic nature of poetic language.

The best example of this confluence of tradition and crisis is a poem not discussed here in detail—*In Memoriam*. Tennyson is indeed the “master of melancholia,” and his long poem in memory of Hallam is one of the subtlest and most complex explorations of the psychology of mourning in the language. It is also one of the most profound explorations of the Victorian intellectual crisis of faith that we have. This crisis is, not coincidentally, a crisis of language and poetics as well. The combination of narrative long poem and short lyric is a part of this crisis and part of the poem’s experimental greatness. It is both a spiritual narrative in the tradition of *The Prelude* (or, on a lesser level, of Beattie’s *The Minstrel*), and an elegy structured through series and repetition. *In Memoriam* looks back to the great elegies in the English tradition but also looks ahead to the fragmented, disjunctive experiments in the modern long poem. Interwoven through the lyrics of mourning are lyrics in which Tennyson meditates on modern science and its impact on religious belief in his day. Tennyson also interweaves his narrative with self-referential explorations of language and the nature of poetry. The poet conducts many of these explorations by means of the pastoral idea: the metacommentary on language involves frequent allusions to pastoral conventions. Far from being sentimental and emotionally self-indulgent, Tennyson’s major elegy is ironic and acutely self-critical. The melancholia of the poet’s work of mourning is both strengthened and offset by the pastoral allusion. The pastoral themes and conventions represent the poet’s melancholia through the employment of elegiac conventions, and also through the poet’s self-conscious alienation from those conventions. Tennyson himself was aware of the irony in presenting himself as a poet/shepherd in mid-nineteenth-century England, and he was aware of the pathos of exile in such invocations. Tennyson’s melancholy pastoral is invariably ironic.

One of the great Victorian poets of melancholy is excluded from this general discussion: Arnold must be set apart from Tennyson and Hardy in terms of the pastoral and melancholy traditions. Arnold is one of the great poets of Victorian melancholy, but his con-
cern is with the intellectual crisis of the times more than with the poetic crisis. The idea of melancholy in his poems is one that reflects Victorian spiritual anxiety, not anxiety in the face of poetic tradition. Arnold seems undaunted by tradition. Indeed, he sees himself as the great inheritor of the classical tradition, and thus, "Thyris" belongs with the best pastoral elegies in English. But it is an outright imitation of a classical elegy rather than an exploration of the differences between the tradition and the poetry of his time. None of this is to say that Arnoldian melancholy does not merit extensive research and discussion beyond that which it has so far received. But that is a different subject from the one to be explored here.

If Arnold's "Thyris" remains squarely within the traditional genre of pastoral, Tennyson and Hardy wander outside of the genre's conventions. In the texture of their language, Tennyson's and Hardy's poems are very much concerned with figural and generic error; their figurative language turns from the expected norms. In terms of broader formal categories, Tennysonian and Hardian pastoral and melancholy poetry involves departures from the norms as well. One could argue that pastoral and melancholy as discussed here are too broad to serve any useful purpose. This view involves an implicit assumption that genre is only functional when its categories strictly delineate the differences between generic types, and when specific works fit easily within one of these categories. It is a highly problematic view. However much one may admire, for example, Frye's system-building, or Hirsch's idea of "intrinsic genres," recent work in genre theory suggests the arbitrariness of such categories. Students of genre are now more likely to perceive the fluidity and transformativeness of any specific text in its relation to genre categories, no matter how those categories may be defined.

The Victorian poets, and Tennyson and Hardy in particular, provide especially persuasive evidence of the transformativeness of a literary text in regard to generic rules. It is not sufficient to speak of "elegy" or "pastoral" or "melancholy" in Tennyson's work. In Tennyson these categories become areas of experimentation, for Tennyson is always crossing boundaries of genre. When he writes pastoral, he writes ironic pastoral: his pastoral poems question their own status in terms of the demands of the genre. This generic
self-questioning prevails in his elegies and also in his poems that draw upon the melancholy tradition. In this light, the medley form of The Princess no longer appears an aberration but a logical step in Tennyson's ongoing experiment with the boundaries of traditional forms. In terms of social, political, and religious themes, Tennyson is a conservative poet. In terms of poetics and the transformation of tradition, he is arguably one of the most daring poets of the century.

Daring is not a word that we readily associate with Hardy. But Hardy was an experimentalist. His adaptations of traditional poetic forms, and what has been called his "arbitrary metrical choice," type him not as a traditionalist but as a modernist. He is one of the late-nineteenth-century poets who transformed tradition by subverting it from within. In even more subtle and decisive ways than Tennyson, Hardy exploits the prescriptive limits of traditional generic categories and turns from those limits. His pastoral poems draw heavily upon traditional pastoral conventions, but they are not limited to those conventions. Like Tennyson's works, Hardy's poems are "medleys," experiments in language and form. The idea of genre retains its defining power but becomes a starting point for a poetic process of natural selection between generic types. Hardy's poems often depict struggle and transformation within nature. But the deeper struggles, the more crucial transformations, occur in the very language of his text. Tennyson and Hardy cross the boundaries of traditional form.