ABSTRACT

ELIZABETH ANNE COOPER. English Pastoral in Milton’s *Lycidas* and Wordsworth’s *Michael* (Under the direction of Professor John N. Wall.)

As a genre that represents a retreat into an imagined, idyllic rural environment, pastoral has initiated debates among centuries of English scholars and writers. English academia, questioning the place of the genre in art and society, has redesigned the shape of classical pastoral on more than one occasion. Poised between Renaissance pastoral and current forays into the genre, John Milton’s *Lycidas* and William Wordsworth’s *Michael* introduce startling methods into the traditional elements of pastoral poetry. Analyzing style, imagery, theme, and narrative point of view in these two poems, this essay locates similar technique in the poems despite differences in the authors’ historical and philosophical perspectives. This technique reflects the classical origins of pastoral poetry while posing particular challenges to classical (and even earlier English) forms. In particular, *Lycidas* and *Michael* contribute to the development of a pastoral form directed primarily toward English audiences and situated in Anglicized settings.

Arising from this use of classical form with localized innovations, *Lycidas* and *Michael* demonstrate the possibility for flexibility within the genre. Currently, scholars and artists alike are once again questioning the relevancy of the genre and, in the process, testing its limits by utilizing techniques never before associated with pastoral. A study of these two works, written by two of academia’s favorite poets and pivotal in the shaping of English pastoral, illumines the raw literary materials available in pastoral tradition, the provocative connection between pastoral and politics, and the potential for individual expression in this highly public art.