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GREENING THE ANGLO-SAXONS IN PAUL KINGSNORTH'S *THE WAKE*

ABSTRACT

The essay argues that Paul Kingsnorth's novel *The Wake* is written in the spirit of the eighteenth-century pastoral tradition. The medievalist trope of primitivism is used in reference to the Anglo-Saxon culture and language. What characterizes the medievalism of the novel is presentism. Buccmaster represents both the Wild Man and the Noble Savage type. In the pastoral manner, Kingsnorth writes in the spirit of anthropocentrism and focuses on the social classes in the early medieval world that he "greens" in the novel.

KEYWORDS: medievalism, the pastoral, primitivism, landscape, anthropocentrism

STRESZCZENIE

Artykuł proponuje odczytanie powieści *The Wake* Philipa Kingsnortha w świetle XVIII-wiecznej tradycji pastoralnej. Medievalistyczny w swej naturze prymitywizm jest tu użyty do opisania kultury i języka Anglo-Sasów. Inną cechą medievalizmu tej powieści jest prezentyzm. Buccmaster jest w niej zarówno „dzikim człowiekiem”, jak i „szlachetnym dzikusem”. Kingsnorth na sposób pastoralny pisze w duchu antropocentryzmu i skupia się na podziałach klasowych we wczesnośredniowiecznym świecie, który przedstawia na sposób „zielony”, ekologiczny.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: medievalizm, pastoralizm, prymitywizm, krajobraz, antropocentryzm

Paul Kingsnorth's neomedievalist novel *The Wake*, published in 2013, presents the idealized existence of Anglo-Saxons upon the arrival of Normans in Lincolnshire after their invasion in 1066. Such representation may have been motivated by the author's own pro-Brexit nationalistic beliefs, since he seems to be in earnest when he writes in his Historical Note to the novel: "Historians tend to sniff at the old radical idea of the 'Norman Yoke.' History, like any academic discipline, has its fashions. In my view the Yoke was very real, and echoes of it can still be found today" (2015: 358). The novel is written in the style of the eighteenth-century pastoral tradition. Characteristically, there is primitivism embedded in it, the landscape is not aestheticized, and Buccmaster is a character constructed both according to

the medieval Wild Man and the sentimental tradition with its Noble Savage. The novel seems to be deeply anthropocentric and focused on the division into social classes, again in the manner typical of Sentimentalism. As Erica Wagner has noted, Kingsnorth has “years of involvement in environmental activism” behind him (2016). His position is very much retrospective and nostalgic, with strong overtones of nationalism. He highlights his political views on contemporary England by constructing a pastoral vision of the villagescape, ideologizing it, anthropocentrizing it, inserting “green” deities into it, and ultimately making the protagonist, who goes by only the name Buccmaster, and embodiment of the “Noble Savage” trope despite the violence he inflicts on others.

What may be interesting is the primitivism that Kingsnorth assigns to his mythical Anglo-Saxons. Yet, this is fully explicable once we realize that such a manner of characterization is inseparable from the pastoral conventions of the eighteenth century, particularly as they were fueled by Sentimentalism.¹ Furthermore, the deep primitivism with which Kingsnorth portrays his Anglo-Saxon characters is very much ideological. It appears to favor “naturalness” over “artificiality,” nature over culture, simplicity over sophistication. It is also indispensable for presenting the Anglo-Saxons as “Noble Savages” of the type familiar from eighteenth-century culture.² The effect of primitivism is enhanced by the use of what Kingsnorth calls “the shadow tongue,” the language invented by the author in order not to write the novel in modern English.³ Buccmaster’s language, which David Matthews calls “a challenging version of Anglo-Saxon” (2015: 130), defies the rules of Old English grammar, leans on a generous helping of timelessly garbled phrases such as “I is,” and often includes swear words that are decidedly more modern than any known from authentic Old English texts.⁴ The effect of simplicity may be purposeful, since it enhances the impression that Buccmaster is English and participates in a culture that is alien to the complications brought by the Normans, with their decidedly foreign language, culture, and even religious practices. Language becomes another element that may ennoble Buccmaster in the eyes of his readers and justify rebellion against the French.

The landscape that Buccmaster inhabits is neither pastoral nor idyllic, but this is widespread in early medieval literature.⁵ Kingsnorth’s central character lives in

¹ The idea of medieval visual arts as “primitive” in contrast with modern art was developed by Laura Morowitz (2014: 189–198).

² For the relationship between primitivism and the Noble Savage type see, for example, Tzvetan Todorov (1993: 277).

³ A direct relationship between the ideology of the novel and the language in which it is written was elaborated on by Dr. Chris Jones in his plenary “Anglo-Saxon: ‘Pure English’ and Fossil Poetry” at the Middle Ages in the Modern World (MAMO) III conference organized by the University of Manchester in 2017.

⁴ The inconsistencies of the “shadow tongue” that produce the effect of primitivism have been discussed by Gretchen McCulloch and Kate Wiles (2016).

⁵ Siewers views all early medieval literature as suffused with considerations of the landscape (2009).

a marginal, semi-wilderness world of the North, among lakes and marshes, but the fact that this is landscape is not aestheticized, but “primitive,” does not mean that it does not suit the pastoral model. Like all landscape according to theoreticians of ecocriticism, it is “a representation of a structured way of seeing,” as Simon Pugh states it (1988: 135), and it may be used “to emphasize the artificiality of a text’s presentation of a natural setting,” to quote Rebecca Douglass (1998: 144). In *The Wake* the landscape is seen through the eyes of the point of view character and its artificiality hinges on the assumption that the land is beautiful, but its destruction through the technological interventions of the Normans, who will very likely built castles there, is imminent. The landscape of Lincolnshire is not a pastoral garden, but it belongs to the tradition since its description performs an ideological function. After all, Annabel Patterson wrote about “the profound treatment that Western culture has made in the concept of pastoral” and the use of the convention was always ideological (1988: 29). Kingsnorth artistically recreates the English landscape upon the arrival of the Normans to a political end: with nostalgia he looks back to the times when the land was untainted, which was not respected by the Norman invaders at all. His view of the Northern English marshes is therefore radically different from the manner in which Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (2015) writes about stone in nature and the stone that was used by humans in medieval architecture. In the neomedieval novel the fens and the swamps are political, while Cohen writes about stone in the context of the past, memory, and the lasting quality of the environment and cultural artifacts that use the environment as a source of material.⁶ This is how Cohen overcomes the nature/culture divide, which is what ecocritics always strive to do.⁷ In turn, Kingsnorth dwells on the old division, since it is indispensable for his pastoral perspective. His vision that the Anglo-Saxons lived an existence close to nature and the existence was detached from culture, is idealistic, or rather ideological, and departs from ecocritical tenets.⁸

Kingsnorth's medievalist perspective is definitely characterized by presentism. This is how Elizabeth Emery and Richard Utz define this critical position:

⁶ To cite Cohen, “rock communicates story across the linguistically insurmountable gap separating prehistory from technologies of narrative inscription” (2015: 103).

⁷ To quote Greg Garrard in Ecocriticism, “the challenge for ecocriticism is to keep eye on the ways in which ‘nature’ is always in some ways culturally constructed” (2012: 10).

⁸ Here I will use “nature” and “environment” interchangeably, which is in accordance with what Nils Lindahl Elliot writes in *Mediating Nature*: “I should like to begin with the notion of ‘nature.’ Some readers may be surprised that I use ‘nature’ and not ‘the environment.’ Does the word ‘nature’ not suggest the kind of old opposition between human and non-human nature, between the city and the country, between nature and culture, that is arguably the philosophical (and not so philosophical) underpinning of the current environmental crisis? Surely ‘the environment’ would provide a more up-to-date understanding of ‘nature,’ i.e. one that recognizes the so-called ‘human’ and ‘non-human’ natures are ineluctably intertwined, parts of a proverbially inseparable whole? If so, why stay with ‘nature’?” and answers this question with “nature has stayed with us,” the nature is “preferred by the mass media,” and “the ‘non-human’ nature … informs many representations of the modern environmentalist movement” (2006: 1–2).

“an individual’s interpretation of the Middle Ages always reveals as much about that person’s present concerns as about whatever the Middle Ages may actually have been” (2014: 1–10). Medievalist texts are shaped by not only the historical or imagined Middle Ages, but also by the political views of the texts’ authors. In the case of Kingsnorth, his own pro-Brexit views, supported by the belief in the nineteenth-century doctrine of the Norman Yoke, must have shaped the division into the noble Anglo-Saxons and the atrocious Normans that he makes and even lead to his choice of the pastoral mode in writing the novel. His is a version of stage dressing medievalism, where we are made to believe that the Middle Ages in the text are historical, but it is all pretense, here performed to a specific political end. After all, this presentist novel evaluates “the past according to the values, standards, ambitions, and anxieties of a later ‘present’” (D’Arcens 2014: 181). Kingsnorth’s own ambitions and anxieties appear to be reflected in the novel, which means that the novel departs from the pastist ambition of reflecting what the historical past was like in the Anglo-Saxon times.

The presentism of *The Wake* leads to the effect of neomedievalism. There exist various attempts at defining this subcategory of medievalism. Emery and Utz state that “neomedieval creations appropriate and transform elements thought to be ‘medieval,’ often flaunting their historicity or verisimilitude to achieve a particular aesthetic” (2014: 6–7). In Kingsnorth’s novel the aesthetic is ultimately used ideologically and politically, since the “medieval” image of England at the time of the Norman Conquest is deeply biased. Scholars associated with the Medieval Electronic Multimedia Organization (MEMO) define yet another dimension of neomedievalism: it “engages alternative realities of the Middle Ages, generating the illusion into which one may escape or even interact with and control” (<http://medievalelectronicmultimedia.org/definitions.html>; as quoted in: Matthews 2015: 39). The image of the post-Conquest England in the novel is an illusion into which its pro-Brexit part of the reading audience may escape. The ideological message is more prone to being controlled than the intellectually complex political reality around the referendum time. The convention of the pastoral is particularly useful for such a presentation.

Garrard distinguishes between three temporal associations of the pastoral: “the elegy looks back to a vanished past with a sense of nostalgia, the idyll celebrates a bountiful present; the utopia looks forward to a redeemed future” (2012: 42). The *Wake* is both an elegy for the Anglo-Saxon past that gradually disappeared upon the arrival of Normans and an idyll in the sense of celebrating the present, even though the present is not always presented as bountiful. Nature in the novel is as hostile as that in Old English poetry. In the magisterial *Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* Leo Marx defines the pastoral as a mode of writing that postulates a return to a more “natural” existence (1964: 13). For Kingsnorth the Anglo-Saxon existence was more “natural,” even if contact with nature could be a source of hardship, in contrast to the military and technological culture of the invaders.

This effect of “naturalness” is enhanced by the author when he ultimately presents Buccmaster as a type of the medieval Wild Man.⁹ This is how Carolyne Larrington writes about them: they were “creatures covered in long shaggy hair, who lived in the forest and were actually thought to be lacking in human language. Only their faces, hands and breasts (especially in the case of wild women) were devoid of hair … They usually carry clubs, are strong enough to uproot large trees and can tame savage beasts, with whom they have an unspoken bond” (2015: 223). Douglas Grey evokes Ralph of Coggeshall’s twelfth-century account of the “wild man of Orford,” nude, looking like a man, and bald despite the hairy chest and bushy beard (2015: 31, 33). The Wild Men were not purely imaginary: various real-life people were seen as representatives of the type. In the novel Buccmaster gradually goes wild as he lives in the forest as an outlaw. He separates himself from the world of humans and starts to see himself as Woden, a wild god responsible for creativity, inspiration, and perhaps even divine frenzy. He becomes a savage, which is an identity both of medieval provenance due to the likeness to images of Wild Men, hence medievalist, and of sentimental origin.

After all, Kingsnorth’s perspective does not resort to the historical Middle Ages. Instead, it is taken from the eighteenth-century Sentimentalism, as Alina Mitek-Dziemba postulates in reference to all representations of the pastoral nowadays (2014: 82). In a sentimental manner *The Wake* divides the characters into the nature-loving Anglo-Saxons and the destructive Normans, which is anachronistic in the light of the fact that later the pastoral evolved into the ecocritical; pastoral themes themselves became outdated. In *The Environmental Renaissance: Emerson, Thoreau, and the Systems of Nature*, Andrew McMurry argues that the sentimental ideas of nature were considerably modified in the nineteenth century, which for us here means that Kingsnorth does not even use the nineteenth-century ideas, but the eighteenth-century ones (2003: 20).

Already Romantic thinkers understood the human-centeredness of nature, since the environment does not exist independently from humans, who live in it, observe it, and incorporate it into their culture. Despite the pastoral, that is idealistic, vision that Kingsnorth demonstrates in *The Wake*, he cannot escape from this human-centeredness of nature, either. After all, we observe the “green” Anglo-Saxons with the eyes of one of them, Buccmaster of Holland, “a socman of three oxgangs” (112), which is identification that already underlines the relatedness to the natural world, but also his need to cultivate the land.¹⁰ Like his ancestors, including his grandfather, Buccmaster is a tree worshiper and a believer in pagan gods. He perceives nature as something that is useful for humans and considers such anthropocentrism natural.

⁹ Interestingly, Lorraine K. Stock makes an association between the Wild Man myth and the Robin Hood legend (2000: 239–250).

¹⁰ All the references to the novel will be followed by page numbers in brackets and will be taken from the following edition: Kingsnorth (2015).

Laurence Buell's thesis that "grounding in place patently does not guarantee ecocentrism" appears to be correct here, since the novel grounded in the Anglo-Saxon village in the North of England does not become any more ecocritical in its descriptions, since it is consistently focused on the human perspective (1995: 253). Buell writes that place is "by definition perceived or felt space, space humanized" (1995: 253). One of the first passages in the novel is when Buccmaster describes the villagescape he inhabits:

the ground was blaec and good and deop. our ham was an ealond in the fenns on all sides the wilde on all sides the dabcic the water wulf the lesch and the deorc waters. our folc cnawan this place lic we cnawan our wifmen and our cildren (10)

On the one hand, people are described as surrounded by the picturesque landscape and immersed in it, as if the landscape dominated them. On the other, there is practical use to which nature needs to be put for the sake of human survival, hence the "picturesque" quality of the landscape is not admired, but the place is rather methodically exploited in order to provide food to the people who inhabit it. The Anglo-Saxons are described as those who know the landscape in the manner they know their wives and children, which initially may imply love, care, and a sense of responsibility. Nevertheless, the landscape turns out to be exploited by them as well, and the subsequent characterization of Buccmaster as someone who beats his wife proves that he subjugates the land to him in the manner he subjugates his wife whenever she disobeys him.

Buccmaster does not hail the fact that both the land and the animals that live in it are used, but he accepts it, even though killing animals with his grandfather's sword is too much for him, since "it was not for cwellan wihts for mete" (162). The Anglo-Saxons in the novel treat the landscape as part of their own bodies:

it is early in the mergen it is gan eostur now when the land waecens from winter all the land is cuman open all is grene and waecan ... my folc was in the fenns before the crist cum to angland this ground is in our bodigs deep (17–18)

Importantly, the incorporation of landscape into the bodies of those who have inhabited it longer than since the arrival of Christianity onto the island is also related to the idea of conquest. As Buccmaster summarizes this story: "anglisc folk cum here across the sea many years ago. wilde was this land wilde with ingengas with wealsc folc with aelfs and the wulf" (34–35). This demonstrates the double standards that characterize Buccmaster: the conquest of the "wealsc folc," since this is what he calls strangers that inhabited the place before the Anglo-Saxons, was a positive event for the wild land. The land was "macd good" (35) and the centuries of living there transformed the land into cultured space. Yet he does not adopt the same perspective on the Norman Conquest that is in progress during the time when the novel is set. Buccmaster comments on the new conquest in the following manner:

"our fathers was freer than us our fathers fathers stalced the wilde fenns now the fenns is bean tamed efry thing gets smaller" (4). Buccmaster ideologically relates the arrival of the English in England to the onset of freedom in the land. Normans take away the freedom from them, while the question whether the English were not the ones who in some way took away liberty from the "strangers" is not considered at all. After all, the landscape that is described in the novel is beautiful even though it is wild, which means that the changes the English introduced were only for good. If we as readers see the landscape in the descriptions as "picturesque," it either means that Kingsnorth indeed idealizes it in the eighteenth-century manner or that our own perspective is tainted by the concepts taken from Sentimentalism. The former view could perhaps be subscribed to more willingly, which confirms the statement that the author practises the eighteenth-century approach to nature in the novel. However, as has been stated above, the pastoral is a good vehicle for conveying political content.

In order to prove that *The Wake* is a text written with the eighteenth-century ideas in mind, Terry Gifford's definition of the pastoral could be quoted. In *Pastoral* he defines the concept as "delight in the natural" and "a celebratory attitude towards what it describes" (1999: 2). Kingsnorth is a pastoral writer in his attempt to describe the Anglo-Saxon communion with nature, which must be very much influenced by his own delight in the natural environment. The writer has a celebratory attitude to the object of his interest and he imposes this perspective on Buccmaster as his literary character. Still, one cannot resist the impression that this celebration is doubled as a form of resistance when England is invaded by the Normans, who, according to Buccmaster, bring with them destructive technology. After all, the first reference to plowing in the text is not to cultivating the soil, but it is a metaphor of Normans plowing the land with their violence: "deofuls in the heofon all men with swoerd when they sceolde be with plough the ground full not of seed but of my folc" (2). The image of Normans plowing the Anglo-Saxon people with swords is striking. It refers to the use of instruments, but the instruments are inappropriate. They are the tools of warfare that bring nothing good to the land, which should be dealt with by means of husbandry tools for growth. Instead, violence is inflicted on the landscape and the people who inhabit it. The ideological division into the good Anglo-Saxons and the bad Normans is established here, which demonstrates to what extent the pastoral may be used ideologically.¹¹

The Anglo-Saxons in the novel live "in the wild" and the conquest means subjugation of this wilderness along with its inhabitants.¹² They believe in the gods of nature, who will also "die," as Buccmaster claims, under the influence

¹¹ Importantly, Patterson (1988: 214–262) devoted one whole chapter of her study to the pastoral and social protest in the eighteenth century.

¹² What is interesting is that the Old English concept of "wilderness" etymologically includes animals as food; to quote Garrard, "the word 'wilderness' derives from the Anglo-Saxon 'wildeoreen,' where 'deoren' or beasts existed beyond the boundaries of cultivation" (2012: 67).

of the Normans. For the Anglo-Saxons in the novel nature is an indelible part of their culture: they work surrounded by nature, cultivate it, and worship it in the figures of pagan gods. The work is not excessively hard, which again reminds one of Virgil's Georgics with their assumption that husbandry cannot be too hard if it is to make humans happy (Patterson 1988: 229). This is a very idealistic vision and in *The Wake* it is heavily laden with ideology. The specific god who is firstly referred to is Woden: "the ealdor of these [my grandfather] saes was woden also called grim who walcced the duns and the high hylls" (52). It is not surprising once we note Buccmaster's final identification with the deity. The whole pantheon of Germanic gods is specified in the text, they are related directly to the natural environment, and those elements in the cult of Christ that are associated with nature, such as Christ hanging on the rood as a piece of wood, are described as deriving from the Germanic mythology. The pagan cult derives directly from the "natural" existence of humans, while Christianity only repeats certain elements of it that may be appealing to the believers due to this original closeness to nature that they entail. Not only Woden, but also Frig is a "natural" deity, as she connotes childbirth and thus stays close to the biological aspects of human life. The gods who are Woden and Frig's children only complement the image. The juxtaposition of pagan "natural" gods and the Christian cultural and artificial system is strengthened by the lengthy characterization of specific deities.

In *The Environmental Imagination* Buell claims that the pastoral may be a bridge that can lead modern culture from anthropocentrism to ecocriticism (1995: 129–130). Nevertheless, Kingsnorth does not abandon this anthropocentrism or get to the stage of writing ecocritically in his novel. After all, to quote Gifford, ecocriticism is "concerned not only with the attitude to nature expressed by the author of a text, but also with its pattern of interrelatedness, both between the human and the non-human and between the different parts of the non-human world" (1999: 5). The interconnectedness between the parts of the natural world themselves cannot be noticed in the text. There are links between the human and the non-human world in *The Wake*, but again the manner in which they are presented is very much pastoral due to the strategy of idealization rather than it is ecocritical in tracing the actual relationships between humans and the environment. The historical Anglo-Saxons must have lived in close contact with animals, even if this contact was similar to the one described in other medieval or medievalist texts. Already in the postmedieval, as it is generally identified, Lyttel Geste of Robyn Hode there appear animals and the primary role they play is that of food for the characters, which is similar to the "fiscan and fowlan" (10) in *The Wake*.¹³ On the farms of the Anglo-Saxons the contact was guaranteed by the husbandry practised and by the necessity of eating plants and animals in order to survive. Kingsnorth's pastoral vision is very much

¹³ In A Lyttel Geste of Robyn Hode animals function as food, opportunity to practise hunting as sport, and a metaphor; see Czarnowus (forthcoming).

anthropocentric and he does not try to transcend these limitations in order to achieve a more ecocritical effect. The ultimate purpose of nature is then to serve a human.

What matters for Buccmaster is genealogy, which reflects the historical Anglo-Saxons' concern with descent and the transfer of values that is reflected in Old English texts, to mention only the catalogue of rulers in *Deor*.¹⁴ In his mind Buccmaster returns to his father and grandfather. The green land that he inhabits “was good land good ground it was the land of my father i will not spec of my father to thu” (10). Even though Buccmaster refuses to discuss his father with the novelistic audience, he openly identifies the place he inhabits with the figure of his parent. Ancestry in the text refers primarily to the question of ownership and cultivating the soil, which gives this ownership more validity, since not only is the land transferred from one generation to another, but also a set of values associated with husbandry is subject to this transfer. Behind Buccmaster there stands a “green” tradition, which is referred to whenever he mentions his grandfather, a worshiper of the old gods: “and these gods saes my grandfather these gods was lic our folc lic my edith to me and thy good mothor to thu before she was tacan” (53). The grandfather delineates continuity between the lives of pagan gods and the lives of their worshippers. Before the mythical flood gods lived within nature, since they were the deities of trees and soil, and the present “green” lives of the Anglo-Saxons give them a sense of descent from the gods, since imitating their one-time lifestyle must be good and praiseworthy. That gives the Anglo-Saxon existence a spiritual dimension, particularly if this is connected with the idea of the deities being “of England”: “and ofer all these gods he saes ofer efen great woden was their mothor who is mothor of all who is called erce. erce was this ground itself was angland was the hafoc ad the wyrmfeloge and the fenn and the wid sea and the fells of the north and efen the ys lands.” (53)

If Erce personifies England, the country was originally green, fertile, and open to benign cultivation. The goddess encompasses all that the world of nature stands for: “great erce modor of all who is grene and balec who is wind and snow who is water and stan who is hafoc and craw and blud who is lif of the bodig and death of the bodig who is efry lifan thing in the wid fenn and the wid world cum to us” (109). The list of Erce’s constitutive elements practically exhausts the range of things that humans require from nature. Destruction of the old gods through Christianity that in the text is ahistorically brought to England for good by the Normans means that greenery with the gods deposited in it will also suffer. Christianity and technology are presented here as elements of the “civilization” that is so harmful for England, to use “civilization” as an eighteenth-century term.¹⁵ The

¹⁴ Michael Swanton calls *Widsith* and *Deor* “cleverly constructed catalogues, as it were, of the scop’s materials of trade” (1987: 32).

¹⁵ Lynn White, Jr.’s (1996: 3–14) perspective was criticized by George Ovitt, Jr., who noted that the periods of fascination with technology and of “return to nature” were interspersed in Western history (1994: 71–94).

use of the term “civilization” is very evocative, since it confirms the interpretation of Kingsnorth’s pastoral as an eighteenth-century vision, even if he writes “against civilization.” The novelist claims that before the invasion the Anglo-Saxons were not involved in the cult of Christianity too much and that the abandonment of the pagan gods was a part of the cultural conquest.

Characteristically, even though Buccmaster is pagan by choice, he does use the idea of sin whenever he speaks of the Normans (whom he calls devils). This shows the character’s actual religious syncretism. He calls England a green land, therefore stainless, while the sin brought by the invaders corrupts the place: “synn is upon this grene land biscops moccis the word of god earls fucc in the sight of the crist ceorls drincs ealu and is druncen. there is a deop synn all through this land and thu ill be strac down o angland for what thu has done” (15). Paganism (and possibly pantheism, since Buccmaster consistently located his deities in the world of nature) appears to be an untainted religion, while the hypocrisy of the Christian newcomers is noticed. The clergy are inconsistent in what they say and what they do, princes are dissolute, and other members of aristocracy get inebriated, all practically in front of the crucifix. What is puzzling is that Buccmaster uses the language of preaching when he addresses England as a green land that will be “struck down” due to the sins of the invaders and those who support them. This means that either Buccmaster wrongly identifies himself as a pagan or he uses the church language he is vaguely familiar with for rhetorical effect, as he knows no other discourse that would underline the downfall of England under the Norman rule.

Yet another element of characterization that derives from Sentimentalism is the manner in which Kingsnorth describes Buccmaster’s attachment to nature: “i cum out of my hus early in the daeg the grasses is wet with dew lic hwilt silc ofer my land the sunne risan to the heofon” (25). The peaceful contemplation of the place stands in stark contrast with the unromantic characterization of Buccmaster in his household, where he is simply presented as a wife-beater:

loc at me when i is specan to thu wifman i saes i is the man in this hus i has lost two sons and a gebur to sum cunt in a helm ... i stricks her again and she falls then and she strics her heafod on the stans what is weightan down the warp threads of her loom and she is on the flor hwinan lic a cat in a water pael of al blud and spit and annis runnan round her lic an ael on a glaif and she is weac waec it is a sad sight to see (48)

Those two passages are very much in conflict. The contrast that they create demonstrates that ascribing very humane qualities to Buccmaster due to his sensitivity towards the landscape would be premature. This is rather the eighteenth-century characterization of a noble savage, who feels nature that surrounds him, but can otherwise turn into a cannibal-like character, brutal, ruthless, and atrocious, particularly in contact with women, which demonstrates his other side, that of a savage as a brute. As for communion with nature, in his article on Ann Radcliffe’s early nineteenth-century fiction James Kirwan comments on it in the following

words: “To commune with nature. To be alone with nature. This is perhaps the last great myth of unmediated experience” (2002: 224). Kingsnorth replicates this myth when writing about Buccmaster and his kinsmen, somehow imposing this unmediated experience onto this ethnic and cultural group and denying this experience to Normans, the descendants of Vikings.

Communion with nature is an element of the Noble Savage characterization of Buccmaster. Regardless of whether Jean-Jacques Rousseau or John Dryden actually used the term “Noble Savage” for the first time, this was a mode of writing about the Natives that was very much practised in the eighteenth century (Ellingson 2001: 2). Despite referring to Buccmaster’s violence towards his wife, Kingsnorth appears to cling to that stereotype of a savage as a positive figure. Ter Ellingson writes that “savage violence and cruelty … seem incompatible with the Noble Savage myth,” but the strategy adopted in *The Wake* appears to deny it (2001: 5). Buccmaster has the sense of being morally superior to the Normans, which is similar to how the mythical Noble Savages related to the Europeans (Ellingson 2001: 46). He is sensitive to the landscape that surrounds him and is even able to find some mysticism in the world of nature. As someone close to nature he is described as fragile, in contrast to the Normans who are armed in technologies that ultimately allow them to win in the confrontation with the Anglo-Saxons.

The Wake presents not only an ideologized vision of ethnicity and language as expressing ethnicity, but also that of class divisions. Already Walter Scott’s *Ivanhoe*, which David Matthews identifies as “the 1817 novel that is foundational in any consideration of modern medievalism,” includes the division into Anglo-Saxons as labourers and franklins and Normans as generally aristocrats (2015: 25). Matthews calls *Ivanhoe* the ur-text of medievalism, since indeed it is an instance of the Anglo-Saxonist medievalism, but also as a classic text of the outlaw canon (2015: 124). The novel may have inspired Kingsnorth to divide the characters into the simple Old English speakers and the vicious aristocratic Normans. Replication of this simplistic division produces a puzzling effect once the convention of pastoralism is present, since aristocratic authors of the postmedieval pastoral used to fantasize about the peaceful life of labourers in the countryside, as it is done for instance by Philip Sidney in the Countess of Pembroke’s *Arcadia* ([1590]1985). The tradition was continued well into the eighteenth century, which again allows us to see Kingsnorth as a writer deeply involved in the sentimental perspective. In the eighteenth century aristocratic authors of the pastoral started to express the need for farmers, who had so far been only the object of description, to produce similar writing themselves.¹⁶ Kingsnorth’s point of view character, Buccmaster, is not a country labourer, but a sokeman, a small independent landholder, so he belongs to the proto-middle class with all its inspiration rather than to the working

¹⁶ An example of this could be Stephen Duck, the “Thresher Poet,” who wrote about the hardships of farming the poem *The Thresher’s Labour* published in 1730; see Duck (2017).

class. According to the novel's rationale, however, he is pushed towards the folk in his fight for independence from the Norman invaders. As a consequence, his perspective is remote from that of aristocratic writers writing within the convention of the pastoral. This is how the dream of pastoral writers is materialized: a person that actually cultivates the land speaks about his infatuation with the landscape that surrounds him. In the manner of the medievalist Ivanhoe, a class conflict between Anglo-Saxons and Normans is presented, but in Kingsnorth's novel the society is diversified: it also includes its individualistic proto-middle class, such as Buccmaster.

Gifford emphasizes the political purpose of the pastoral in any text woven around this idea (1999: 8). Kingsnorth's vision entails an embellished portrait of the Anglo-Saxons for the sake of arguing that the Norman invasion led to what was termed the "Norman Yoke" by the nineteenth-century historians. The aestheticization produces the effect of excusing the violence committed by the Anglo-Saxon rebels on the invaders. If, to quote Patterson writing about the pastoral, ideology can simply be treated as "the singular view (heterodox, subversive, maverick)," the subversiveness of Kingsnorth's vision is explainable (1988: 6). His subversive perspective is visible in the rejection of all that comes from the outside in his Anglo-Saxon world. In the eighteenth-century manner he praises primitivism, husbandry as an activity, describes the "picturesque" quality of the landscape seen with Buccmaster's eyes, rejects the Norman "civilization," and presents his central character as both as a Noble Savage and a brute, which here paradoxically is not mutually exclusive.

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