

Chapter 5 ~

EATING ROMANTIC ENGLAND: THE FOOT AND MOUTH EPIDEMIC AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

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When the green field comes off like a lid
Revealing what was much better hid . . .
—W. H. Auden, “The Witnesses”¹

England in 2001. The “Foot and Mouth” epidemic leads to the slaughter of millions of animals. The farming community is in crisis, and disruption extends throughout the country. National Parks and National Trust properties are no-go areas. In Devonshire, “all moorland, public footpaths and bridleways” are closed to the public; in Cumbria, tourists are cautioned that they “should not . . . go onto farmland (including the high fells).”² The tourist industry has slumped, and the Wordsworth Trust issues a circular, warning that “if footpaths on the hills are still closed [the annual Wordsworth Summer Conference] will have to do without the walks on the fells that were so much a part of the Wordsworths’ lives and have become so much a part of ours.”

Which was perhaps an odd thing to announce. Although walks and fells had been part of the Wordsworths’ lives at Grasmere, the “public footpaths” so prominently mentioned were not. Paths, tracks, roads, OK. The “public way” and “upright path” in *Michael*. But not “footpaths”—a word used only once by William Wordsworth’s poetry, in an unfrequented corner of

Book 8 of *The Excursion*. “Footpath” dates from the sixteenth century, but it was not until the nineteenth century that the word gathered its modern association with “public right of access.” The *OED* notices, between “public domain” and “public nursery,” “some fields near Manchester . . . through which runs a public footpath to a little village some two miles distant.” The quotation comes from Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Mary Barton* (1848), and the location “near Manchester” is significant. Footpaths are features of the new suburbanized landscape of nineteenth- and twentieth-century England, and increasingly, in the age of the motor car, a way of time-traveling away from the present into an idealised rural past, “so much a part of the Wordsworths’ lives and . . . so much a part of ours.” It was not a coincidence that Wordsworth’s only use of the word “foot path” was in a passage that deplors an “inventive Age” of “potent engineering . . . / Industrious to destroy” supplanting a scene of “romantic interest” in which “The foot-path faintly marked, the horse-track wild . . . / Have vanished” (*The Excursion* 8.85–111). Wordsworth, author of a *Guide to the Lakes*, shows us the footpath as a route into landscape as Romantic “heritage”: the National Footpath Preservation Society was founded in 1892, less than twelve months after Dove Cottage first opened to the public.

In April 2001 the Cumbria Tourist Board Web site proclaimed that although the “high fells” were closed, “the Lake District is not shut.” Visitors were reassured that they might go to towns, villages, seaside resorts, and join “heritage walks” on footpaths around towns like Whitehaven; visitors may “drive, walk, run, ride horses [and] cycle on or beside tarmacked roads,” and they can “travel by public transport of all types.” The “markets, museums and visitor attractions” like Dove Cottage are accessible, as are “shops, pubs, restaurants.”³ Forget about Wordsworth and the “Lakers,” John Ruskin at Brantwood, and Norman Nicholson at Millom. The poet of the Lake District in our time is John Betjeman, the Milton of Metroland who was delighted to discover that one could ascend Snaefell, on the Isle of Man, by electric train. Indeed, Philip Larkin remarked that his poetry was a Wordsworthian “spontaneous overflow of natural feeling.”⁴ In his poem “Lake District” we find him at a restaurant table in Grasmere:

I pass the cruet and I see the lake
 Running with light, beyond the garden pine,
 That lake whose waters make me dream her mine.
 Up to the top board mounting for my sake,
 For me she breathes, for me each soft intake,
 For me the plunge, the lake and limbs combine . . .

Reluctant to plunge too, the poet reaches for a “soft intake” more readily to hand:

I pledge her in non-alcoholic wine
And give the H.P. Sauce another shake.⁵

John Betjeman gives us the Lake District as it is now—a suburban prospect from a footpath or restaurant window, where the Wordsworthian take-in of “something far more deeply interfused” has been transformed into the secular eucharist of comfort eating. Anyone for Gingerbread?

The Foot and Mouth crisis has uncovered the extent to which consumer industries like tourism and agriculture are entwined with a Romantic idea of England and English landscape: “Wordsworth’s Lake District.” The crisis has also brought into the open the ruthless methods of modern farming, the so-called “industrial production of meat” in “factory farms” (where the intensive rearing of animals was largely responsible for the rapid spread of this disease). And, by the way, the Foot and Mouth epidemic followed the BSE scandal in England, in which it emerged that instead of grazing on grass, cows had been fed high protein meal manufactured from the remains of sheep and cows. The huge pyres and pits which defaced the landscape were needed not merely to dispose of carcasses but to reassure the public that all of this infected meat would not get into food for human consumption. This scandal revealed in turn how the large supermarkets control and manipulate the so-called “food chain”: what is produced and where; how much the farmer earns; the price the consumer will pay in the stores. What we eat is intricately and immediately linked with production processes alien to but dependent upon Romantic ideas of the English landscape as a pastoral idyll. The chicken raised with millions of others in a stinking broiler-house reaches the supermarket in a packet depicting pastoral meadows. Sunshine. Fresh grass. You’ve eaten it.

This chapter is in some respects an experiment, a foray into newspapers and across the internet in quest of England at the start of the twenty-first century. I want to explore responses to the Foot and Mouth crisis, and to show how ideas of eating and the consumption of the English landscape may be related to Romantic perceptions at another time when England, and the rural way of life, had seemed threatened. Romantic and present-day responses alike conform to deep-rooted, even archetypal, patterns in which the “pleasant pastures” of William Blake’s England have always been a paradise lost, and a utopian “new age” yet to come. In our own time the suburbanization of the countryside—overwhelmingly apparent in the

Cumbria Tourist Board's list of things one can "still do," while "doing without," has continued and, ironically, actually reinforced the idea of an idyllic scene which can be "taken in" and consumed. Anyone visiting the Lake District from Penrith will have noticed the bizarre attraction, "Rheged... the village in the hill," which promisingly announces itself: "The land as never seen." Too right. Situated inside a man-made, turf covered hummock, described as "Europe's largest grass-covered building," "Rheged offers an all-weather world of legends and myths, family fun and excitement, shopping and restaurants—all in the village in the hill." Inside are "waterfalls, limestone crags, a babbling brook and lakes... shops with the finest local food, restaurants where you can combine local dishes with panoramic views" and take a cinematic flight "over the lakes and mountains... The Lake District—all from the edge of your cinema seat." The blurb quoted from the local newspaper "News & Star" is "Eat your heart out, Hollywood."⁶

The "Foot and Mouth Panic" was above all an urban response to a picturesque idea perceived to be under threat, and it was fomented not by farmers or other immediately interested and suffering groups, but by the London-based Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries (MAFF) and the media. "Where did it go," Neal Ascherson asked in the *Observer*, "Where did it go, that rosy vision of the farmer and his virtues, of the farmyard and its wholesome produce?"⁷ The answer, presumably, must be over the hill—or under it—for this is "the land as never seen." He might better have asked, "where did [that rosy vision] come from?" One would expect an article about Foot and Mouth to deal with "the farmer and the farmyard" but, as this article indicates, Foot and Mouth has involved much more than an illness of cloven-hoofed animals. As we know, the disease is mild in its effects on livestock. Animals will recover from it given time. It is rarely passed on to humans. The disease is endemic in many parts of the world, and it was so in Britain until the 1920s when no one thought of postponing a General Election (as in 2001) because of an outbreak. Michael's sheepfold would have encircled a sick flock. A. E. Housman's "blue remembered hills," Edward Thomas's fields of "willows, willow-herb, and grass, / And meadowsweet, and haycocks dry" were stocked with diseased cattle and sheep. Rupert Brooke's country of "gentleness, / In hearts at peace, under an English heaven" was a plague zone. Millions of sheep and cattle have been killed (or "culled" as the euphemism goes) in the hope of preserving the disease-free status required by European Community marketing policies. The "culling" was intended to eradicate the disease, and, by the same token, to retrieve an England that never was—a "far country" of

“lost content” to which Housman, Thomas, and Brooke look back in their poems, and which newspapers in 2001 represented by photographs of pet lambs and references to Romantic poets. What was at stake in all of this was an idea of England fit for human consumption—an “all-weather world,” “that rosy vision of the farmer and his virtues, of the farmyard and its wholesome produce.” Healthy hens in the yard. Free Range.

The outbreak of the disease has highlighted competing interests in agriculture, and it has done so in a way that raises questions about “vision” and “virtues”—cultural ideas of the English landscape inheriting the aesthetics of the Romantic period, including the picturesque. An article in the *Observer* newspaper warned that Foot and Mouth would finally deliver control of the landscape from the farmer (who by implication is “virtuous”) into the hands of “big business.” In a significant realignment of the political and biological landscape, “big businesses” are the new “Levellers”:

the transnational, commercialised world of the East Anglian “barley barons” with their quasi-prairies, enemies of bio-diversity; the folks who brought you BSE through their industrial cultivation of meat. These are the men who have long dominated the national council of the National Farmers’ Union, and through it, wielded overwhelming influence in Maff.⁸

Under threat here is the new picturesque of biological—one might say genetic—particularity and diversity. England is confronted with a faceless “transnational” threat. An ancient landscape of varied scenery is at risk of reduction to the “quasi-prairies” of grain producers. The multiplicity of inhabitants, animal and human, is besieged by the “enemies of bio-diversity” advocating the dangerous and inhumane “industrial cultivation of meat.”

In *Rural Rides* William Cobbett had reflected in similar terms, albeit from a different political perspective, on the rural depredations of “tax-eaters and monopolisers”:

All these mansions, all these parsonages, aye, and their goods and furniture, together with the clocks, the brass-kettles, the brewing vessels, the good bedding and good clothes and good furniture, and the stock in pigs, or in money, of the inferior classes, in this series of once gay villages and hamlets; all these have been by the accursed system of taxing and funding and paper-money, by the well-known exactions of the state, and by the not less real, though less generally understood, extortions of the *monopolies* arising out of paper-money; all these have been, by these accursed means, conveyed away, out of this Valley, to the haunts of the tax-eaters and the monopolizers.⁹

Cobbett's monopolizers devouring the rural community are thriving today among "the men who have long dominated" in agribusiness. In Cobbett's time as in the twenty-first century in England, agri-monopolizers are responsible for rural depopulation and for the transformation of the English landscape into a chemically fed monoculture to supply a voracious urban market:

The mansions are all down now [Cobbett continues] and it is curious enough to see the former *walled gardens* become *orchards*, together with other changes, all tending to prove the gradual decay in all except what appertains merely to *the land* as a thing of production for the distant market.¹⁰

To put that in slightly different terms, in the modern "transnational, commercialised world" the English landscape is literally being eaten away by "the distant market" of consumers and by the encroachments of "property developers."

Cobbett's England of "changes" and "gradual decay" survives into John Betjeman's "Middlesex," "Where a few surviving hedges / Keep alive our lost Elysium,"¹¹ and it is dwindling, still, in Philip Larkin's poem "Going, Going":

I thought it would last my time—
The sense that, beyond the town,
There would always be fields and farms,
Where the village louts could climb
Such trees as were not cut down;
I knew there'd be false alarms

In the papers about old streets
And split-level shopping, but some
Have always been left so far;
And when the old part retreats
As the bleak high-risers come
We can always escape in the car.

Things are tougher than we are, just
As earth will always respond
However we mess it about;
Chuck filth in the sea, if you must:
The tides will be clean beyond.
—But what do I feel now? Doubt?

Or age, simply? The crowd
Is young in the M1 café;

“And that *will be* England gone.” England has always been going, going, and has lingered on in books, stirring feelings of uneasiness. Here is Leigh Hunt, unsettled, like Larkin, at the demise of “Merry Old England.”

[England] is very bustling, very talkative, and, as the phrase is, very successful in the world; but, somehow or other, she is not happy. Nor has she been so, from her birth; though, to hear her talk, one would suppose that all her griefs began with the French Revolution. She was very rich and melancholy before that . . . Merry Old England died in the country a great while ago; and the sport, the pastimes, the holidays, the Christmas greens and gambols, the archeries, the may-mornings, the May-poles, the country-dances, the masks, the harvest-homes, the new-year’s-gifts, the gallantries, the golden means, the poetries, the pleasures, the leisures, the real treasures,—were all buried with her.¹³

In Hunt’s wonderful essay from *The Examiner*, Merry Old England has been “buried”—and yet, again, “bustling” and “talkative” continues prosperous yet melancholy and aware of another country, “a great while ago.” Haunting Cobbett’s landscape of “changes” and “the gradual decay of all,” Betjeman’s “rural Middlesex,” Larkin’s “England gone,” and the death of Merry Old England “a great while ago” is the memory of a land of lost content: the English paradise, a land of equality and justice where “Adam delved, and Eve span,” the “green and pleasant land” which for William Blake was lost and also an imminent utopian prospect.

The song from the era of the Peasants’ Revolt in the fourteenth century reminds us that England has always been idealized in response to perceived threats: “tax-eaters and monopolizers,” the “Business Page,” the French Revolution, Wars, environmental crisis, the French, the EU, even asylum-seekers. Presently the enemy is the commercialized agribusiness that has brought upon us the plagues of BSE and Foot and Mouth. As in Cobbett, Larkin, and Hunt, another idea of England has emerged to set against industrial farming. This is the England of smallness and variety, now, according to the *Observer*, threatened with destruction: “The consequences of small farming’s collapse [will be] visible and keenly felt—not just by farmers, but by everyone who uses the countryside: as tourists and providers of tourism; as ramblers, climbers and picnickers, those of us who love the land of Wordsworth, Ruskin, and Constable.”¹⁴ Within this materialist discourse of “providers” and “users,” small farms are explicitly paralleled with a Romantic England of writers and painters, and William Gilpin’s picturesque. The small scale inherits Burkean ideas of the beautiful;

and ranged against it is a shadowy manifestation of the Burkean sublime, the powerful oppressors, agribusiness, and the “barley barons.”

On 19 March 2001, the *Guardian* newspaper reported that the Foot and Mouth disease outbreak was costing the English tourist industry £250 m a week and farmers £60 m a week in lost agricultural production. Drawing attention to the disparity between these figures, the article went on to question the British government’s focus on “minimising the impact on agriculture,” pointing out that the cost to other businesses (“pubs, shops, hotels and restaurants”) far exceeded the damage to livestock farming. But, according to the *Guardian*, the “power to move” released by the crisis had less to do with the balance sheets of profits and losses on the Business Page than with violation of the English “sense of identity [being] invested in the pastoral landscape”:

The grazing of animals has acquired symbolic meaning. The English landscape is a tamed and cultivated one, shaped over centuries by men and animals, medieval drove roads, by generations of ploughing and hill farming and the enclosures. Despite being one of the most industrialised and urbanised countries in the world, we cling to agricultural rituals because they give us our sense of place and season.¹⁵

This is on the right path, except that I want to suggest that “we cling to agricultural rituals [for] our sense of place and season” because England has become one of the most industrialized countries. Or, to put that the other way round, heightened sense of “place and season” is itself a condition of industrial and urban blight, much as the wish that “the walks on the fells that were . . . part of the Wordsworths’ lives [might be] part of ours” is a symptom of national crisis. Compare Edward Thomas’s poem “Lob,” for example, where the sense of the elusive is actually about living in a time of war:

The man you saw,—Lob-lie-by-the-fire, Jack Cade,
Jack Smith, Jack Moon, poor Jack of every trade,
Young Jack, or old Jack, or Jack What d’ye-call,
Jack-in-the-hedge, or Robin-run-by-the-wall,
Robin Hood, Ragged Robin, lazy Bob,
One of the lords of No Man’s land, good Lob,—
Although he was seen dying at Waterloo,
Hastings, Agincourt, and Sedgemoor too,—
Lives yet. He never will admit he is dead . . .¹⁶

Foot and Mouth has disrupted the “sense of place and season,” leaving “empty fields in a silent spring” and, as the *Guardian* called it, a “Green,

Unpleasant Land.”¹⁷ Broad swathes of the countryside were transformed into battlegrounds, and the border country north of the English Lake District was renamed “the killing fields.” At the end of March 2001, this area was hazy with the smoke of dozens of pyres of burning carcasses. Screened from public view on an abandoned wartime airfield (the location is significant) gigantic burial pits were excavated at Great Orton just to the west of Carlisle. The *Guardian* article goes on:

Tourists, accustomed to a Gainsborough vision of the English countryside in which all is pastoral peace, have had their view shattered. The order turns out to have been an illusion; with the arrival of foot and mouth, a hellish scene of fire and slaughter has erupted instead, more Hieronymus Bosch than 18th-century landscape portrait.

“The green field comes off like a lid / Revealing what was much better hid.” Not “the village under the hill,” but cranes and grabs feeding carcasses into the flames, shattering the pastoral scene in which, according to William Gilpin’s picturesque aesthetic, deformities must be overlooked and decorously concealed. The juxtaposition of “pastoral peace” and “order” with a terrifying “eruption” of “fire and slaughter” also takes us back to the Burkean contrast between the beautiful and the sublime. I want now to investigate this Romantic aesthetic dimension in a little more detail.

For Burke beauty was associated with smallness—remember those “small farms” about to be consumed by agribusiness—with “smooth slopes of earth in gardens,” with “gradual ascents and declivities,” and variation and change which is only a “very insensible deviation.”¹⁸ These are the forms of the English landscape which, during the traumatic years following the French Revolution, Wordsworth sensed might provide “food for future years.” We might think that Wordsworth had in mind the “forms perennial of the ancient hills” at the Wye valley and in the English Lake District, but gentler pastoral landscapes—akin to Housman’s and Thomas’s—also provided spiritual and national sustenance during the alarm of an invasion:

here we are once more.

The Cock that crows, the Smoke that curls, that sound
Of Bells, those Boys that in yon meadow-ground
In white sleeved shirts are playing by the score,
And even this little River’s gentle roar,
All, all are English. Oft have I looked round
With joy in Kent’s green vales; but never found

Myself so satisfied in heart before.
Europe is yet in Bonds; but let that pass . . .¹⁹

It's important that this is a revisit poem, that the scene is familiar. This landscape "satisfies" now, more than it did before, inasmuch as it is created by, and is about, the idea of a Napoleonic threat.

This danger, as yet obscure and "[t]hought for another moment," as Wordsworth says, takes us back to the "hellish scene of fire and slaughter" and to Burke on the sublime in *Paradise Lost*—the exemplary instance of which is the portrait of Death in Book 2 line 666:

The other shape,
If shape it might be called that shape had none
Distinguishable, in member, joint, or limb:
Or substance might be called that shadow seemed,
For each seemed either; black he stood as night;
Fierce as ten furies; terrible as hell;
And shook a deadly dart. (2.666–72)²⁰

"In this description," Burke remarks, "all is dark, uncertain, confused, terrible, and sublime to the last degree." The sense of a hidden menace was conveyed powerfully in reports (harking back to the Cold War) presenting Foot and Mouth as an insidious pestilence borne "through the air" and, under the ground, infecting the water supply.²¹ This kind of panic gained further impetus after the events of 11 September 2001, when fears about the water supply became acute in the United Kingdom and in the United States. In the *Guardian*, Milton's "Death" reappeared "Under the dark shadow of the slaughterman," armed now with a state of the art deadly dart: "a captive bolt-gun."²² I've already suggested how depictions of the "deeper struggle" between agribusiness and the "small farmer" replicated Burke's sublime and the beautiful: compare, for another instance, this report in which a picturesque Devonshire scene is placed against a baleful backdrop:

The pink-washed farm sits on a small rise to the west of the town. In better days the views would be stunning. In these altered times the scene is marred by smoke from giant pyres, like preparations for some monstrous feast . . . behind . . . the line of fire on the horizon is coming closer. The time for killing is almost here.²³

Perhaps most appropriate of all to the "hellish scene of fire and slaughter" is Burke's observation that the "cries of ANIMALS" can often have sublime

effects. The “natural inarticulate voices of men, or any animals in pain or danger” are “capable of causing a great and awful sensation” and are “productive of the sublime.”²⁴ These are “altered times” indeed. The idea of a “pink-washed” pastoral becomes more alluring because the actuality formerly overlaid, or displaced, has been disclosed with apocalyptic force: the mass production of animals and crops. Accordingly, the “monstrous feast” prepared on the pyres of dead cattle and sheep appears as a grotesque suburban barbecue, such as might take place in the garden of Hieronymous Bosch.

Week after week, doom-laden reports filled the newspapers: “Why farming will never be the Same Again”; “Fear grows in plague village”; “there is an anticipation of doom.”²⁵ All of this was reminiscent of millenarian and apocalyptic Romantic period verse which interpreted such terrifying upheavals as retribution visited on a corrupt state. Coleridge’s “Fire, Famine, and Slaughter,” for example (the unspoken prospect of “famine” lurks in the newspaper report quoted above), or “Fears in Solitude”:

Like a cloud that travels on,
 Steamed up from Cairo’s swamps of pestilence,
 Even so, my countrymen! have we gone forth
 And borne to distant tribes slavery and pangs,
 And deadlier far, our vices . . . /
 Therefore, evil days
 Are coming on us, O my countrymen! (47–51, 123–4)²⁶

The same ominous note is sounded in Lord Byron’s *Darkness*, Anna Barbauld’s *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*, and in Mary Shelley’s plague-ridden epic, *The Last Man*. By seeing plague, famine and death as a judgement on England, Romantic writers were invoking the bigger picture of Biblical retribution which James Thomson had also used to sublime effect in the torrid zone of “Summer” in his poem *The Seasons*. For Thomson, such disasters had emerged from “Ethiopia’s poisoned woods, / From stifled Cairo’s filth and fetid fields”—breeding “inclement skies” and accompanying “plague” (“Summer” 1055–6).²⁷ The winter of 2000–01 was the wettest on record in England, with widespread flooding. Journalists were not slow to follow Thomson in linking the weather and the onset of plague with paranoid fears about aliens, illegal immigrants, asylum seekers, the East, and poisonous food. So, the outbreak of Foot and Mouth was blamed on “infected meat, probably smuggled from the Middle East or East

Asia” which “went to a restaurant in north east England and the waste ended up in swill fed to pigs at a British farm, where the disease was first detected.” A Professor Wallace Lim, from Hong Kong University’s Department of Zoology, gave the theory scientific credibility by pointing out that the Foot and Mouth virus was a “Type O,” which is found “mainly in Asia and . . . persists in meat products for a long time.”²⁸ The message was that the unsightly “filth and fetid fields” of the East have infected the green fields of England, and adulterated and poisoned the food. In 2003 think SARS, think China.

Against the invisible, global hazard of plague, Thomson articulated the sensibility of a nation of so-called animal lovers when he presented livestock as dumb victims:

In rueful gaze
The cattle stand, and on the scowling heavens
Cast a deploring eye . . . (“Summer” 1123–5)

A tempest “rolls its awful burden on the wind,” and the scene is transformed:

A lifeless group the blasted cattle lie:
Here the soft flocks, with that same harmless look
They wore alive, and ruminating still
In fancy’s eye, and there the frowning bull
And ox half-raised. (“Summer” 1152–6)

Just as Thomson’s plague arrived like “Nemesis,” Easter in 2001 in England brought comparisons—admittedly, garbled ones—with the Passover in Egypt. Neil Ascherson quoted this from a “farmer’s wife” sitting at the kitchen table:

“The first week after it started was like Passover in Egypt. The angel moving at nights from door to door, smearing some with blood. I lay awake listening.”
She laughed grimly, and she and her husband knocked on the table for luck.²⁹

This fearful picture is, however, contained at the end of Thomson’s “Summer” which closes with a hymn to “Happy Britannia” and her (uninfected) “Power of Cultivation.” For Thomson, “the stretching landscape into smoke decays” as the epitome of Italian pictureseque composure, the smoke in this case being the blue haze of a Claude landscape and not a pyre of burning pigs.

All of this represents what might be thought of as the “gothic” strand of Foot and Mouth reporting. At another extreme we find pictures of Phoenix the calf, the white heifer reprieved from the cull and rising again, as it were, from the griddle. The *Observer* offered an image of a muddy and bedraggled lamb, confined to a single field since birth because of restrictions on animal movements, but added the happy news that the lamb “has now been saved by the farmer’s son, four-year-old William.” Both instances epitomize the Burkean beautiful—weak, tottering, soft, feminine—drawing the eyes of at least some of the New Labour cabinet, prompting a change in policy and encouraging Tony Blair, like a Burkean patriarch, to take personal charge of the crisis.

So the Foot and Mouth episode revived Romantic ideas of the countryside; it has mobilized some key aspects of picturesque aesthetics; and it has stirred deeper ideas of English landscape encapsulated and projected by William Blake’s “green and pleasant land.” The idea of English landscape as a haven, a blessed sanctuary, is particularly strong—and even a condition of—times of stress, according to Jeremy Paxman in his book *The English*.³⁰ One of his examples cites John Major’s description of an England in fifty years’ time which “will still be the country of long shadows on county grounds, warm beer, invincible green suburbs, dog lovers and pool fillers and—as George Orwell said—‘old maids cycling to holy communion through the morning mist.’” To which Paxman comments: “Where on earth did all this stuff come from?” (142).

It came, he argues, from Major’s need to offer the Tory electorate an image of England’s security against takeover by Brussels. As if a pint of warm beer and holy communion will always keep out Jacques Delors. Foot and Mouth has provoked a comparable resurgence of “the country of long shadows,” pubs, pink cottages, and pastoral peace. In twenty-first-century suburban England, the England of “dog-lovers and pool fillers,” the idea of an idyllic countryside has become, if anything, even more necessary than in Larkin’s day, an elegy for elegy. Except that now England is packaged and marketed by the National Trust and English Heritage, purveyors of the national identity associated with the mansion houses and park landscapes whose going was regretted 200 years ago by William Cobbett. The English idyll, England’s “green and pleasant land,” has become a commodity to be consumed by tourists in cars and coaches, latest descendants of the picturesque travelers of the Romantic period. Which is why the Foot and Mouth panic was never anything to do with the disease or its effects on livestock. This was a suburban nightmare, projected by the media, revealing to the “invincible green suburbs” their own rampant consumption of

England. Hence the Cumbria Tourist Board's urgent reassurance that the "Lake District is still open for business," a "thing of production," as Cobbett put it, "for the distant market." Or, in John Betjeman's bleak summary:

Long stony lanes and back at six to tea
And Heinz's ketchup on the tablecloth. (13–14)

Notes

1. W. H. Auden, "The Witnesses," *The English Auden: Poems, Essays, & Dramatic Writings, 1927–1939*, ed. Edward Mendelson (London and New York: Random House, 1977), 130.
2. *Sunday Telegraph* (15 April 2001); Cumbria Tourist Board Web site, 13 April 2001.
3. Cumbria Tourist Board Web site, 13 April 2001.
4. Philip Larkin, review of John Betjeman, *The Collected Poems of John Betjeman* (London: John Murray, 1958), *Guardian*, 19 November 1959.
5. "Lake District," from John Betjeman, *Collected Poems* (London: John Murray, 1958, 1979), 73.
6. "RHEGED: Discover the village in the hill," publicity leaflet (Penrith, 2001).
7. *Observer* (25 March 2001).
8. *Observer* (15 April 2001).
9. William Cobbett, "The Valley of the Avon" in *Rural Rides*, ed. George Woodcock (1830; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), 313.
10. *Rural Rides* 321.
11. *Collected Poems* 163.
12. "Going, Going," *Philip Larkin: Collected Poems*, ed. Anthony Thwaite (London: Faber and Faber, 1988).
13. "Christmas and other old National Merry-makings," *The Examiner* (21 December 1817).
14. *Observer* (15 April 2001).
15. *Guardian* (19 March 2001).
16. Edward Thomas, *Collected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979).
17. *Guardian* (19 and 24 March 2001).
18. See *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. Adam Phillips (Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 1990), 103–4, 141, 140.
19. "Composed in the Valley, near Dover, On the Day of landing."
20. *Paradise Lost*, ed. Alastair Fowler, Longman Annotated English Poets Series (London: Longman, 1968).
21. MAFF web site, 7 April 2001.
22. *Guardian* (24 March 2001).
23. *Guardian* (24 March 2001).

24. *A Philosophical Enquiry* 55, 77. The passage from *Paradise Lost* is also quoted from this edition of Burke's treatise.
25. *Observer* (15 April 2001); *Observer* (4 March 2001).
26. Quoted from S. T. Coleridge, *Poems*, ed. John Beer (London: Dent, 1999 (1963)).
27. James Thomson, "The Seasons" and "The Castle of Indolence," ed. James Sambrook (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1984).
28. CNN web site, 27 March 2001, paraphrasing an article from the *London Times*.
29. Neal Ascherson, "Scorned Cultivators of a Fool's Paradise," *Observer* (25 March 2001).
30. Jeremy Paxman, *The English: A Portrait of a People* (London: M. Joseph, 1998), 145.