

Tribhuvan University

Pastoralism in William Wordsworth's Selected Poems

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by

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Letter of Approval

The thesis, entitled "Pastoralism and William Wordsworth's Selected Poems" submitted by Mrs. Amrita Rijal to the Department of English Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Ratna Rajya Laxmi Campus Tribhuvan University, in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in English has been approved by the undersigned members of the research committee:

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## Abstract

William Wordsworth takes an abundance of ideas regarding nature's ability to preserve one's memories as well as past and present perception. Wordsworth conveys his experiences with nature to readers through his poems using vibrant imagery, a narrative-like structure and abstract metaphors. When readings poems own my think that Wordsworth poetic composition in solely best on the expression of emotion. In Solitary Reaper Wordsworth represent the portrays and Irish girl working and singing Solitarily in a field. This poem fully reflects the loneliness of the poet. He uses varying wording and phrasing, the lonely image of the reaper, the expanding of the lonely music and the way of expressing his loneliness to set the lonely atmosphere. Therefore, it is necessary to thoroughly illustrate the diction and rhetoric devises which helps to convey the sense of loneliness of the poet.

## **Introduction: Pastoralism In William Wordsworth's Selected Poems**

The term pastoralism is connected with the branch of agriculture that is chiefly concerned with the raising of livestock. In this process, there comes caring, tending, feeding of the animals primarily moving the herds in search of fresh pasture and water.

It is an economic activity involving the care of herds of domesticated livestock. This is summed up by Terry Gifford with the phrase, "No shepherd, no pastoral" (11). In its traditional forms it is either practiced as the main mode of subsistence or combined with agriculture. Pastoralists maintain herds of animals and use their products to support themselves directly and to exchange with other civilizations. It is especially associated with such terrain as steppes, rolling hills, grasslands, and the like-areas of low rainfall where cultivation is difficult without irrigation, but where grasses are plentiful enough to support herds of animals. Pastoralists are generally nomadic and usually follow their herds in search of food and water as Emilio Moran quotes, "In savannas, pastoralists and their animals gather when rainwater is abundant and the pasture is rich, then scatter during the drying of the savanna" (52). Pastoral civilizations tend to be war like and they have a difficult time trying to live at peace with settled agricultural population. Wild sheep, horses, and camels have territories of their own and change their grazing places in an annual round.

Early farming communities had to learn how to make best use of the land which they occupied. For some, this meant focusing more on crops than animals; for others, in less fertile landscapes, it meant focusing more on raising livestock. Animals, particularly sheep and cattle, require large amounts of grazing land to feed on, and need to be regularly moved from place to place to find fresh pastures. A

pastoral economy therefore demands much more land than one based on crop-growing, and supports a smaller population. Most pastoral societies, therefore, consist of small groups which tend to follow a nomadic or semi-nomadic way of life. In many cases, there is an annual cycle of grazing the herds in cooler, mountain pastures during the summer and bringing them down to warmer grasslands in winter.

Pastoralism probably originated in early Neolithic times, when, in areas not suited to arable farming, some hunter-gatherer groups took to supplement their traditional way of life with keeping domesticated cattle, sheep and goats. These lived on the less fertile grasslands or uncultivated lands on the margins of the irrigated areas. An exchange system grew up in which pastoralists swapped their hides, wool, milk, meat, horn and bone, or even live animals, for the villagers' grain, peas, and so on; and probably for some professionally-produced craft goods as well as Daniel G. Bates mentions, "Pastoralism occurs in uncultivated areas. Wild animals eat the forage from the marginal lands and humans survive from milk, blood, and often meat of the herds and often trade by-products like wool and milk for money and food" (187). This exchange allowed the animal herders to specialize more on their pastoral activities.

Pastoral tribes became an important element in the ancient Middle East. Most of the time, relations between city-dwellers and farmers, on the one hand, and pastoralists on the other, were probably reasonably harmonious. It is likely that animosity was never far away, however. The differences in lifestyles bred mutual suspicion and contempt.

At regular intervals, open hostilities broke out between them. In these, the nomads, despite their fewer numbers, had a military edge because of their mobility. Coalitions of nomadic groups could quickly bring concentrated force to bear on

certain points, and as quickly disperse. Farmers would have found this harder to deal with, tied as they were to their own plots of land. Also, the nomadic lifestyle was a hard one, and competition between nomadic groups for scarce resources made low-level warfare endemic between them: they were inured to warfare in a way that farmers were not. This too would have given them an advantage when it came to fighting. As a result, Middle Eastern history was characterized by frequent nomadic raids, migrations and outright conquests. Hundreds of pastoral groups have made themselves known to world history, each with its distinctive culture; however, some features are common to many such societies.

Nomadic societies are based on small groups made up of extended families, or clans, moving their herds from place to place at regular intervals. A number of such clans form a tribe. The clans of a tribe congregate in one location at regular intervals – perhaps once a year – to trade with one another, forge marriage alliances, and deal with matters concerning the entire tribe. They then disperse again to their various ranges.

For nomads, control of strategic resources, particularly watering places and good pasturage, was vital. Each tribe and, within this, each clan, claimed privileged access to certain of these; and if this access was denied, disputes resulted as L. Keeley mentions, “It has often been argued that only farmers, with their fields, had territories and resources worth fighting over. However, water-holes, fishing stations, plant gathering patches, hunting territories and the like were equally essential to nomadic pastoralists” (15). When a dispute arose between two clans of the same tribe, the tribal elders would try to deal with it. They often failed to prevent low-level hostilities and violent vendettas lasting several generations. If a dispute between two or more tribes arose, tribal warfare would result.



Because nomadic groups travelled comparatively long distances, they were in a good position to trade with the settled population in which they came into contact. This may have taken the form of gift exchanges, to maintain peaceable relations between the different groups.

The nomadic way of life clearly alters the landscape less overtly than does arable or mixed farming, but this does not mean it has no impact at all. Over generations, grazing herds tend to favour certain plants over others so that the plant covered in pasturelands becomes less varied. Also, pastoralists sometimes use fire as a way of turning forest into pasture, and of rejuvenating pasturelands as Ayana Angassa & Gufu Oba say, “Pastoralists maintain the quality of fodder in rangelands is fire. Controlled burning suppresses the encroachment of woody species, and promotes the growth of palatable grasses creating a favourable environment for livestock” (36). This can have a significant impact on the type of plants present in such a landscape. Fire and grazing can also prevent forests from growing, and if on mountain slopes, this can lead to erosion.

When nomadic pastoralists encroach on farmland their impact can be devastating for farmers. This is especially so on the marginal agricultural land on the frontier zones bordering the deserts. The grazing of herds can quickly reduce plant cover. This makes the soil unstable, and erosion soon follows.

One modern problem, overgrazing, has tended not to occur on a significant scale in the past, in that nomads have been skilled in culling unwanted animals and keeping their herds to optimum sizes. It has mainly been when the population amongst the herders themselves have expanded, as has occurred after the introduction of modern medicines that their herds have ballooned in numbers too, beyond the capacity of their environment. This has been a particular problem in regions with

fragile ecosystems, such as is found for example in the Sahel, on the southern margins of the Sahara desert.

In literature, as quoted in *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, “Pastoral is a deliberately conventional poem expressing an urban poet’s nostalgic image of the peace and simplicity of the life of shepherds and other rural folk in an idealized natural setting” (141). It illustrates that it is a style or type that presents a conventionalized picture of rural life, the naturalness and innocence of which is seen in contrast to the corruption and artificiality of city and court.

Although pastoral works are written from the point of view of shepherds or rustics, they are always penned by highly sophisticated, urban poets. Some major related concerns in pastoral works are the tensions between nature and art, the real and the ideal, and the actual and the mythical. English Renaissance pastoral has classical roots, but contains distinct contemporary English elements, including humanism, sentimentality, depictions of courtly reality, a concern with real life, and the use of satire and comedy.

In this regard, there are several poets with pastoral theme in their poems. Here, I examine William Wordsworth’s selected poems to focus the presence of pastoral theme in them so as to relate his works with pastoralism.

William Wordsworth (1770-1850) is one of the greatest poets in England, known as the poet of nature. Mostly, his writings focus on nature and his love for nature is probably truer, and tenderer than that of any other English poet, before or since. He conceived nature as a living personality and believed that there is a divine spirit pervading all the objects of nature. Wordsworth believed that the company of nature gives joy to humans and looked nature as a healing influence on sorrow.

Wordsworth also emphasizes moral influence on nature in his poetry. He spiritualises

nature and regards her as a great moral teacher, as the best mother, guardian and a nurse of man. He believes that humans who grow up in the lap of nature are perfect in every aspect. Next feature of Wordsworth's poetry is memory, the power of the human mind which is really important for human beings. He believed that when humans are disturbed and in the daily gloom of the city, they will be able to remember the time spent in nature and make themselves happy, they don't have to leave the memories behind. Even after the death of humans, they will remain fresh in the memory of their friends and relatives.

In the same way, Wordsworth also includes mortality in his writings. Humans can be mortal only through the communion with nature. In his poems, morality doesn't necessarily stem directly from religion but rather from doing what is right by oneself, by humanity, and by nature. These days people are being inhuman, do not value each other. As man moves further and further away from humanity, he seems to be losing his soul and it's because the world is full of people who have lost their connection to divinity, and more importantly, to nature. He makes use of religious images and language in his poems in order to convey his ideas about the power of nature, the human mind, and global interconnectivity.

Wordsworth centers pastoralism in many of his poems. For example, "Solitary Reaper" is one of the pastoral poems that best describes country life. The poet depicts a girl in the Highlands of Scotland as she stands alone in the field, harvesting grain. Her solitude is emphasized by her singing of a "melancholy strain" (line-6). Isolated from society, the girl is tied intimately to the earth; as the girl sings and the melody fills the lonely valley, she virtually becomes submerged in nature.

It is a short lyrical ballad, composed of thirty-two lines and divided into four stanzas. As the title suggests, the poem is dominated by one main figure, a Highland

girl standing alone in a field harvesting grain. The poem is written in the first person and can be classified as a pastoral, or a literary work describing a scene from country life. The eyewitness narration conveys the immediacy of personal experience, giving the reader the impression that the poet did not merely imagine the scene but actually lived it.

Transfixed by the melody, which seems to traverse all time and space; the speaker associates the girl's voice with birds and thinks that hers is sweeter. For a time, in the third stanza, the speaker transcends his existence as he, too is meditative and one with nature. This transcendence is typically with Wordsworth, who felt that the mind was the main haunt and region of his song. Thus, the tension between the objective describer of the natural scene and the subjective shaper of sensory experience is at the heart of the poem.

The poem is rich in its pastoral features. The poem begins with the speaker asking the reader to "behold" the girl as she works in the field. The first stanza is a straightforward description of the scene. The girl is standing alone in the field, cutting grain, and singing a "melancholy strain." Wordsworth emphasizes the girl's solitude by using words such as single, solitary, by herself, and alone. Solitaries are common figures in Wordsworth's poetry and are usually surrounded by a natural environment. The act of reaping alone in the field binds the girl intimately to the earth. Also, as the girl sings and the melody fills the lonely valley, she becomes almost completely merged with nature.

The next two stanzas describe the speaker's reaction to the maiden's song. The words of the song are in a language unknown to him, but he remains transfixed by the melody, which seems to stretch the limits of time and space. He associates the sweetness of the reaper's song with the beautiful cries of the nightingale and the

cuckoo, both familiar images of transcendence in Romantic poetry. As he allows the song to engulf his consciousness, he envisions far-off places and times of long ago. His imagination transports him from the field in which he stands to the edge of infinity.

Finally, in the fourth stanza, he abruptly shifts his attention to the scene before him of the reaper. As he mounts the hill, the transcendent is past and his observations are again objective: whatever theme the maiden sang, I saw her singing at her work, but the speaker bears “the music in my heart” (31) long after he hears it.

Similarly, “Tintern Abbey” is one of the first poems of Wordsworth that can avail him the tag “worshipper of Nature”. Most of his early poems show his first hand experience of the country life with all its spontaneity, hardships, and the beauty of its natural surroundings. However, in “Tintern Abbey” the poet, for the first time, gives a passionate account of the effect of the outer world upon his inner self. The different stages of his intellectual and spiritual development as a man are intimately connected to his understanding of the outer world of Nature.

Pastoral qualities in the poem are, the “beauteous forms” (24) of nature recollected “mid the din of towns and cities” (27) in the “hours of weariness” (29) bring to the poet “sensations sweet” (29) felt in the blood, and felt along the heart. Here, Wordsworth takes recourse to the dominant philosophical ideas of sensationalism and associationism. The senses absorb sensations, which then get transformed into feelings. The feelings leave their impression in the mind by purifying and elevating it to the blessed spiritual mood. It is the conceptualization of the blessed spiritual mood availed through Nature that marks Wordsworth’s philosophy of Nature as distinct from that of others.

Nature has remained a decisive influence in all the three stages of his life that Wordsworth describes in this poem. Of the three stages of the poet's life, the first is the boyhood days of pure physical sensations – “the coarser pleasure of my boyish days, and their glad animal movements” (73). The second stage is the adolescent or early youth when Nature was all in all and its colours, forms and phenomena a passion, an appetite for the young lover boy. This stage is marked by the feverish, passionate, unreflecting and sensuous absorption of Nature. The third and last stage is the stage of maturity; it is a stage of thought and meditation and of mystic realization of “a sense sublime of something far more deeply interfused” (37). It is the mystical understanding of the character of the universe that marks this stage of maturity. It is a vision into the all-pervading spirit of Nature based on grand unity and harmony.

It is this moment of spiritual enlightenment that wipes out all the coarse pleasures of childhood and the passionate sensuous appetite of the thoughtless youth and comes to the realization of “The still, sad music of humanity” (90). Wordsworth correlated the tragedy or ‘sad music’ of humanity with his vision of Nature. This correlation makes them melt, and blend into a supreme harmony. This harmony helps the poet to feel “a presence that disturbs him” (93) with joys of elevated thought. He realises the existence of a presence that encompasses both the outer and the inner world – “the round ocean”, “the living air”, “the blue sky” and “the mind of man” (97-99). Because of this sense of harmony, human sufferings and tragedies lose their sharp edges. The harmony between life with its reality and the all-encompassing presence of Nature creates music - ‘sad’ and ‘still’ - in the poet's mind. In the matured life, the experience widens with the intimate knowledge of human evil and suffering. The “dizzy raptures” (84) of the “thoughtless youth” (89) vanishes as the poet tries to integrate his old love for Nature by looking at it more thoughtfully. He discovers a

vaster harmony in the vision of Nature, which takes in the still, sad music of humanity.

If “Tintern Abbey” is Wordsworth’s first great statement about the action of childhood memories of nature upon the adult mind, the “Intimations of Immortality” ode is his mature masterpiece on the subject. The poem, whose full title is “Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood,” makes explicit Wordsworth’s belief that life on earth is a dim shadow of an earlier, purer existence, dimly recalled in childhood and then forgotten in the process of growing up as he expresses in the fifth stanza, “Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting.../Not in entire forgetfulness, / And not in utter nakedness, /But trailing clouds of glory do we come / From God, who is our home” (58-65).

While one might disagree with the poem’s metaphysical hypotheses, there is no arguing with the genius of language at work in this Ode. Wordsworth consciously sets his speaker’s mind at odds with the atmosphere of joyous nature all around him, a rare move by a poet whose consciousness is so habitually in unity with nature. Understanding that his grief stems from his inability to experience the May morning as he would have in childhood, the speaker attempts to enter willfully into a state of cheerfulness; but he is able to find real happiness only when he realizes that “the philosophic mind” has given him the ability to understand nature in deeper, more human terms—as a source of metaphor and guidance for human life as Gilles Deleuze says, “Tintern Abbey posits both nature and memory as constants because its effects, exerted through memory, are mechanically inexorable and permanent” (94). This is very much the same pattern as Tintern Abbey’s, but whereas in the earlier poem Wordsworth made himself joyful, and referred to the “music of humanity” only

briefly, in the later poem he explicitly proposes that this music is the remedy for his mature grief.

Wordsworth's linguistic strategies are extraordinarily sophisticated and complex in this Ode, as the poem's use of metaphor and image shifts from the register of lost childhood to the register of the philosophic mind. When the speaker is grieving, the main tactic of the poem is to offer joyous, pastoral nature images, frequently personified—the lambs dancing as to the tabor, the moon looking about her in the sky. But when the poet attains the philosophic mind and his fullest realization about memory and imagination, he begins to employ far more subtle descriptions of nature that, rather than jauntily imposing humanity upon natural objects, simply draw human characteristics out of their natural presences, referring back to human qualities from earlier in the poem.

So, in the final stanza, “the brooks fret down their channels” (191), just as the child's mother “fretted” him with kisses earlier in the poem; they trip lightly just as the speaker tripped lightly as a child; the Day is new-born, innocent, and bright, just as a child would be; the clouds “gather round the setting sun” and “take a sober coloring,” (195-196) just as mourners at a funeral (recalling the child's playing with some fragment from “a mourning or a funeral” earlier in the poem) might gather soberly around a grave. The effect is to illustrate how, in the process of imaginative creativity possible to the mature mind, the shapes of humanity can be found in nature and vice-versa. (Recall the “music of humanity” in “Tintern Abbey.”) A flower can summon thoughts too deep for tears because a flower can embody the shape of human life, and it is the mind of maturity combined with the memory of childhood that enables the poet to make that vital and moving connection.



With the evidences mentioned in the paragraphs above, "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood" can be interpreted as a poem rich in pastoral qualities.

Thus, the illustration of the poems above clarifies the manifestation of pastoral lifestyle of the characters in the texts. So, all these three poems portray pastoralism in their focal point as they center around conventionalized picture of rural life, the naturalness and innocence, natural environment, purity of people and so on.

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