

Wordsworth's Pastoral Poetry: Search for the Renewal of a Genre

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I. Introduction: The Nature and Function of Pastoral Poetry

The pastoral has shown remarkable resilience in transforming itself into various modes of literary expression during its two thousand five hundred year history. Since Theocritus's *Idylls* established itself as the model for Virgil's pastoral poetry, the pastoral has adapted itself to various times and various literary genres: there arose the pastoral drama (Shakespeare's *As You Like It*), the pastoral romance (Philip Sidney's *Arcadia*), the pastoral elegy (Milton's *Lycidas*), and even the pastoral novel like George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*. Its protean metamorphosis, however, does not entail any radical change in its fundamental nature and function. That is the reason why one can call a modern poet like Robert Frost a pastoral poet

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(Toliver 334), relating him to the great tradition of pastoral poetry in Western literature. Wordsworth is an important link connecting the classical English pastoral tradition with the modern one.¹⁾ Wordsworth modernized the traditional genre of the pastoral with refreshing realism and creativity to express his own vision of the world and compassion for other human beings, which constitute the backbone of his poetry. An attempt to clarify the nature and function of the pastoral leads the reader to a better understanding of Wordsworth's attitude toward the genre and his own contribution to it.

Pastoral, in its simplest definition, means a poem treating of shepherds and rustic life, after the Latin word for shepherd, *pastor*. However, until the eighteenth century or even much later on, pastoral more specifically meant a form of poetry strongly associated with the highly literary topoi of Arcadia and its regional variants, and a certain set of favorite themes and conventions like love, leisure, poetry, and singing matches. This may be the reason why one might object to calling Wordsworth a pastoralist like Vigil or Spenser—a seemingly anachronistic term. But there is strong evidence that Wordsworth was attempting to revive the tradition of serious pastoral poetry, rejecting the outgrown, insipid, and artificial pastoral which reached its nadir in the eighteenth century.

In its deeper sense, pastoral embodies man's longing for a more simplified life—a free, natural, and spontaneous life unhampered by artificial constraints and restrictions brought by the advance of civilization. That was the starting point of Theocritus, whose complicated life in the bustling cosmopolitan city of Alexandria in the third century B. C. compelled him to long for his leisurely childhood life in Sicily. In spatial terms, pastoral expresses overworked city-dwellers' wish to escape to the natural surroundings of the country. In temporal terms, pastoral is deeply related to the idealized past; the Golden Age—its chief classical expression—characterized by innocence and spontaneity is sharply contrasted with the present Iron Age filled with all the embarrassing experiences and harsh realities; in an individual's life, the dichotomy is expressed by the contrast between his childhood and adulthood.²⁾ Moreover,

1) For example, Michael Squires discusses Wordsworth's influence on George Eliot's early fiction (49-52).

2) Peter V. Marinelli in his introduction to the pastoral illuminates the point: "Essentially the art of pastoral is the art of the backward glance, and Arcadia from its creation the product of wistful and melancholic longing. The pastoral poet reverses the process (and the 'progress') of history" (9).

metaphorically speaking, the pastoral landscape conjured up by the poet's memory and imagination can be seen as an emblem of his inner mental world. Thus, generations of pastoral poets until the eighteenth century did not much care about the actual locality of their pastoral world, which is usually called Arcadia. Withdrawal to this world forms the first step to the poet's pastoral sojourn.

The real importance of the pastoral does not lie in providing a place to escape from the harsh realities of the present life but in offering a space to contemplate the meaning of life in the present world. Virgil's attack on the greed of the upstart Roman citizens after the Civil War in his *Eclogue 9* and Milton's vehement criticism of the Anglican High Church in his *Lycidas* are good examples of how cuttingly the pastoral can examine the present problems. This satiric or critical mode of the pastoral is only one of the many functions the pastoral performs. At the center of any pastoral there lies the poet's ardent longing for ideal life as conceived by himself or by his generation. Prophecies and visionary moments are an essential part of serious pastoral poetry; Virgil's *Eclogue 4*--his Messianic eclogue--and Spenser's *Faerie Queene* Book 6--the pastoral book--provide the poets with places to reveal their climactic visions to their audiences.

The visionary moment of a pastoral poem, however, is tinged with the imperfection of the world. Herbert Lindenberg explains the dual nature of pastoral:

[Pastoral] takes the form of an isolated moment, a kind of island in time, and one which gains its meaning and intensity through the tensions it creates with the historical world; further, it uses the devices of language to exhibit itself as achieved and triumphant; yet the very self-consciousness of its language betrays its essential precariousness and ultimately forces it to give way to another mode of reality. ("The Idyllic Moment" 338)³

The Fall is the major pre-condition of pastoral poetry with all the implications of mutability, death, and toil (Marinelli 20). Death suddenly strikes at a young bright shepherd, causing both Nature and fellow shepherds to lament his untimely departure; the pastoral elegy becomes an

3) See his more detailed discussion on the question (*On Wordsworth's Prelude* 157-204).

important sub-genre of the pastoral. The brutal fact of mortality, though horrifying and saddening, is alleviated and overcome by shared suffering between man and Nature in the face of their common enemy. The literary convention of pathetic fallacy admirably suits the purpose of solace. Sympathy, by which the mind of man is wedded to this universe, is a major theme of the pastoral elegy, and this sympathy or compassion is impossible without the pastoral vision in which one sees himself deeply integrated into Nature and the universe. Paradoxically, death tests the strength of his vision.

Wordsworth's successful modernization of the traditional genre was possible because he so clearly understood the basic nature, functions, and fundamental themes of pastoral poetry.

II. Wordsworth's Idea of Pastoral Poetry

Wordsworth's Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1802) is an important document revealing his idea of the pastoral; the idea takes a crucial position in his theory of poetry in general. The Preface contains an interesting passage expressing not only the core of his poetic manifesto but his obvious preference for a pastoral mode of poetry:

Low and rustic life was generally chosen, because in that condition, the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language. (156)

His preference for "low and rustic life" to "the influence of social vanity" (156) lies in the heart of the pastoral. Behind this passage runs Wordsworth's firm belief in the value of rural life. He boldly asserts that "such men [leading a rustic life] hourly communicate with the best objects from which the best part of language is originally derived (156)." These passages clearly reveal that pastoralism is a mode thoroughly congenial to the poet.

His tendency to idealize rural life is balanced with his penchant for realism. For example, he insists on using real language used by common people in their daily life, rejecting the showy and pedantic diction cultivated by many eighteenth century poets. Not only language but pastoral

life should be charged with a breath of realism. Wordsworth attempts to transform conventional pastoral into a form of pastoral heavily mingled with real rural life.

Wordsworth's attitude toward the pastoral is no more explicitly stated than in his *Prelude* Book 8. Sharply contrasted with the preceding book giving a sordid picture of London, the archetype of the City, Book 8 exudes freshness and spontaneity; the narrator welcomes pastoral life, which he recollects with enthusiasm amid his unhappy experience in London:

With deep devotion, Nature, did I feel,
In that great city, what I owed to thee,
High thoughts of God and Man, and love of Man
Triumphant over all those loathsome sights
Of wretchedness and vice; (70-74)

His sense of relief soon changes into an enthusiastic praise of the Lake District of his childhood, which verges upon an image of the Golden Age:

But lovelier far than this, the paradise
Where I was reared; in Nature's primitive gifts
Favoured no less, and more to every sense
Delicious, seeing that the sun and sky,
The elements, and seasons in their change,
Do find their dearest fellow-labourer there-
(144-9)

The inhabitants of this idyllic world too represent an ideal image of human community--"The fragrance breathing of humanity" (151). Their life is that of freedom, simplicity, and work; it is devoid of any constraint, exploitation, and sophistry, by which the life of the City is characterized.

Pastoral is an ideal place for a poet to contemplate on the nature of his art (Tonkin 281); for example, in *Lycidas* Milton asks what kind of reward his poetic endeavors will bring in the

extremely uncertain and thankless world (64-76). In Book 8 Wordsworth also employs the convention as his predecessors did. He is much concerned with the difference between his pastoral and traditional pastoral poetry. He does not approve of the classical pastoral sung by "ancient poets" (185); he simply rejects "the golden age" (185). Moreover, he also repudiates the kinds of pastoral poetry created by native English poets like Spenser and Shakespeare. "The May-pole dance" (198) symbolizing idealized English rural life is gone:

This, alas!
Was but a dream; the times had scattered all
These lighter graces, (203-5)

He presents his pastoral world as one permeated with ruggedness and severity:

the rural custom
And manners which it was my chance to see
In childhood were severe and unadorned,
The unluxuriant produce of a life
Intent on little but substantial needs,
Yet beautiful, and beauty that was felt. (205-210)

Wordsworth announces his own version of the pastoral, which radically changes the traditional topos of the pastoral into a contemporary scene colored with strong realism.

But this does not mean that he completely discards a fundamentally retrospective yearning for an idealized past; the passages quoted earlier amply display this yearning. There lurks some irony behind Wordsworth's idea of pastoral because his pastoral too is replete with idealism. His pastoral, though full of toil and suffering, never forgets to exalt a shepherd, making him a noble and dignified figure (415-417). The narrator concentrates upon an individual figure's hard lot in life and magnifies him into a figure of titanic proportions, an emblem of general Humanity (Marinelli 6). A mixture of idealism and realism contributes to creating the peculiar

atmosphere of Wordsworth's pastoral world.

Wordsworth gives several of his shorter poems the title of pastoral. "The Idle Shepherd-Boys", "The Pet-Lamb", and "Repentance" can be regarded as experiments for a maturer expression of Wordsworth's pastoral bent, which flowers in "Michael." These experimental poems best show how Wordsworth's idea of pastoral gradually matured. "The Idle Shepherd-Boys" is a pastoral poem clearly indicating Wordsworth's dissatisfaction with the traditional pastoral. The idyllic world, where two carefree shepherd-boys lead a leisurely life, comes directly from the neo-classical pastoral cultivated in the eighteenth century. The picture Wordsworth presents at the beginning of the poem is conventional in the extreme.:

The valley rings with mirth and joy;
Among the hills the echoes play
A never never ending song,
To welcome in the May. (1-4)

The two shepherd-boys are depicted as typical shepherds in the traditional pastoral; their life is blissfully devoid of any toil:

Beneath a rock, upon the grass,
Two boys are sitting in the sun;
Their work, if any work they have,
Is out of mind—or done. (12-5)

This seemingly pleasant world of carefree leisure and singing, however, is not completely immune from the intrusion of death. A lamb is lost at the bottom of a dangerous waterfall, and its life becomes at stake. However, at this critical moment it is surprisingly revealed that the shepherd-boys are capable of neither rescuing the poor lamb nor responding with genuine compassion for the endangered creature; the bankruptcy of traditional pastoralism becomes evident. Its vision of idyllic life turns out to be a mere illusion when it is forced to face real life full of unexpected danger and suffering. The sudden appearance of the poet, his rescue of

the lamb, and his gentle rebuke given to the idle shepherd-boys all signify Wordsworth's farewell to traditional pastoralism and his intention to "rescue" and revive its original spirit.

Compared to the previous pastoral poem, "The Pet-Lamb" succeeds in communicating a genuine sense of compassion as the protagonist of the poem, little Barbara Lewthwaite, not only saves a lost lamb but takes it to her home, a symbol of security against the harsh world surrounding it. The little girl's compassion in action and the realistic setting of the poem—not a vague Arcadia but an actual rural farm in Northern England—makes the poem a fresh departure from the traditional pastoral.

"Repentance", a much more realistic pastoral than "The Pet-Lamb," anticipates the themes Wordsworth later fully explores in his "Michael." One of them is a deep sense of loss: the realization that all the virtuous aspects of English rural life are gone. The narrator bitterly regrets the loss of his own inherited field for his "covetous spirit" (1). But it is only after he sells his field that he suddenly realizes the foundation of his life has crumbled. He recollects his former life full of blissful and leisurely images:

There dwelt we, as happy as birds in their bowers;
Unfettered as bees that in garden abide;
We could do what we liked with the land, it was ours;
And for us the brook murmured that ran by its side.

(9-12)

But this idyllic reminiscence is sharply contrasted with the alienation and guilt that the narrator feels as he looks over his former property:

But now we are strangers, go early or late;
And often, like one overburthened with sin,
With my hand on the latch of the half-opened gate,
I look at the fields, but I cannot go in!

(13-15)

The narrator is a real shepherd whose affection for his inherited land and sense of loss are genuine. Wordsworth depicts a rural world destroyed by the onslaught of greed and materialism, injecting social criticism directly to his poem. The three shorter pastoral poems pave the way to "Michael", which best exemplifies "the authentic Wordsworthian mode of pastoral" (Metzger 307).

III. "Michael": A New Pastoral

Wordsworth consciously gives an answer to the question of whether it is worth composing pastoral poetry after its virtual demise in the eighteenth century. The answer is yes. "Michael" is Wordsworth's poetic manifesto, drawing a clear line to classical pastoral poetry; he rescues the genre not by imitating the conventions and imagery of classical pastoral poetry but by radically altering them to suit the realities of contemporary life. There is no mention of Arcadia, no singing matches, and no classical names like Corydon and Tityrus. He attempts to depict the real everyday life of a Westmorland shepherd (Sambrook 129). But despite the meticulous realism setting it off from a classical pastoral, "Michael" preserves all the fundamental issues of the traditional pastoral as expounded at the beginning of this essay. An analysis of the poem indicates that Wordsworth is faithful to the spirit of the traditional pastoral though not to its style.

Pastoral begins with withdrawal or seclusion from the outer world into the inner world charged with new values. "Michael" is no exception. The progress of the poem is directed toward an isolated world, a world strongly colored by childhood memory:

If from the public way you turn your steps
Up the tumultuous brook of Green-head Ghyll,
You will suppose that with an upright path
Your feet must struggle; in such bold ascent
The pastoral mountains front you, face to face.

(1-5)

The contrast between "the public way" and "The pastoral mountains" plays an increasingly significant role throughout the poem. These actually represent two opposite systems of value. The reader is led into "a hidden valley of [his] own" (8). The hidden region signifies "a kind of island in time " isolated from the present age of commerce with its greedy acquisitiveness and changeable fortune.

The next phase of "Michael" presents the rustic life of Michael and his wife in both realistic and symbolic terms. Wordsworth's realism, ironically, charges the pastoral world with symbolic meanings of simplicity and integrity. Michael's stoic endurance and perseverance are beautifully suggested in the following picture of him, which verges on sublimity:

he had been alone
Amid the heart of many thousand mists,
That came to him, and left him, on the heights.
(58-60)

Wordsworth invests the pastoral landscape with the seminal power of shaping the individual's disposition toward the pastoral ethos (Metzer 311). The following passage directly criticizes the traditional pastoral for lacking just that kind of power:

And grossly that man errs, who should suppose
That the green valleys, and the streams and rocks,
Were things indifferent to the Shepherd's thoughts.
(62-64)

Without such interaction it is plainly impossible for the inhabitants to have a deep moral and spiritual character. Wordsworth does not simply praise pastoral landscape and life; they are vitally interrelated. The pastoral landscape of the poem is the moral fountain for their character.

However harsh and toilsome it may be, Michael and his family's life in Grasmere Vale represents an ideal form of human life characterized by such virtues as industry, frugality, and independence of mind. No wonder the light of their old lamp becomes "a public symbol of the

life that thrifty Pair had lived" (130-1). Their house is even named "The Evening Star" (139), a symbolic term indeed, which stands against all the corruptions of the City. Though Wordsworth does not explicitly criticize the vices of the City in his poem, his criticism is inherent in his conscious praise of rural virtues and becomes quite evident when Michael's independent life is directly threatened by a financial disaster in the City: an instance plainly indicative of the essential insecurity of city life.

The focal point of "Michael" comes when the shepherd leads his son Luke to the deep valley near the brook of Green-head Ghyll. Luke's departure for London results from Michael's desire to preserve the inherited field, which not only represents his economic independence but a deep commitment to the pastoral virtues. Michael's Sheep-fold thus becomes a central place in the whole poem; it becomes a symbolic sanctuary against all the corrupting effects from the industrialized outside world. The forging of the covenant between Michael and Luke forms the "links of love" (401), a solemn act not only linking Father and Son but affirming a value system upheld by countless generations of Michaels and Lukes. The loving bond between Father and Son is the very foundation of moral integrity and lasting faith:

Luke, I pray that thou
 May'st bear in mind the life thy Fathers lived,
 Who, being innocent, did for that cause
 Bestir them in good deeds. (409-412)

The covenant scene is where Michael's pastoral vision of life is revealed; it turns out to be the moral and spiritual climax of Wordsworth's narrative.

A true pastoral poem, however, never ends with a sure sense of security and of blissful isolation; this is merely an illusion. The imperfect world with all its crudeness, greed, and malignancy is always ready to engulf the fragile world of innocence and good will.⁴⁾ Sparta is

4) Lore Metzger lucidly explains: "Wordsworth's urgent appeal to save this pastoral tract as the last remaining model of a human community clarifies a central point of reference in the pastoral perspective. Not only does the pastoral narrator identify with the moral values of his fictitious rural inhabitants, but he also perceives these values as disappearing before his eyes" (316).

not far from Arcadia. Not only the outside world is flawed, but the inhabitants of this pastoral world are vulnerable to materialism. Michael's decision to send his son to London causes a profoundly ironic situation as he tries to save the cherished values of his life by the very means to which the values are intrinsically opposed. His wife's recollection of Richard Bateman's success story in the City with all the glittering fantasies of grandeur and wealth presents itself to her as a powerful allurements. But his son's disgrace and fall in London comes as a final blow to the poor couple's deluded hope.

However, the calamity does not mean that the values represented by Michael instantly die out. His compassion for his son and fortitude in bearing the inevitable loss of his land enable him to withstand the onslaught of materialism from the outside. The narrator comments:

There is a comfort in the strength of love;
'Twill make a thing endurable, which else
Would overset the brain, or break the heart:

(448-450)

Love enables a man to endure all the hardships he faces in his life, and that is what Wordsworth offers as consolation. He gives no false promise of restoring the lost Eden at Grasmere Vale. But ultimately true consolation comes from sympathy and compassion shared by those who remember Michael's endurance:

'Tis not forgotten yet
The pity which was then in every heart
For the old man. (462-464)

There remains the grim scene of the estate sold and the cottage, "the Evening Star", vanished; but the memory of Michael survives, too.

A genuine pastoral poem touches on its own limitation. Ultimately, the poet does not allow the reader to linger in the pastoral world, which is already gone. Like Milton's *Lycidas*, "Michael" closes with a strange sense of robustness and new departure despite its tragic

character.⁵⁾ The poem finally gives a picture of "the boisterous brook of Green-head Ghyll" (482), which immediately reminds the reader of the first image in the poem, "the tumultuous brook of Green-head Ghyll" (2); the poet seems to lead the reader back to the starting point. But actually he leads his reader out of the pastoral world. With the final robust image of a brook, he emphasizes the strength of Nature, its restorative power. It is an appeal for spreading the values inherent in the pastoral world over the outside imperfect world.

Moreover, at the beginning of "Michael" Wordsworth invites a few sensitive readers and young poets to follow his step:

although it be a history
 Homely and rude, I will relate the same
 For the delight of a few natural hearts:
 And, with yet fonder feeling, for the sake
 Of youthful poets, who among these hills
 Will be my second self when I am gone. (34-39)

Wordsworth is actually forging a covenant between himself and future poets. Like his great predecessors in the realm of pastoral poetry, Wordsworth uses his pastoral poem as the manifesto of his poetic mission.

5) cf. Milton's *Lycidas*:

Thus sang the uncouth swain to the oaks and rills,
 While the still morn went out with sandals gray;
 He touched the tender stops of various quills,
 With eager thought warbling his Doric lay.
 And now the sun had stretched out all the hills,
 And now was dropped into the western bay;
 At last he rose, and twitched his mantle blue:
 Tomorrow to fresh woods, and pastures new.
 (187-193)

IV. "Tintern Abbey": A Transformation of the Pastoral

The basic structural and thematic patterns of the pastoral observed in "Michael" can also be found in "Tintern Abbey", one of Wordsworth's best poems, which seemingly defies any affinity to the pastoral in the traditional sense; for example, there is no mention of shepherds in the poem. However, as Andrew V. Ettin points out, the pastoral world is implicitly set within a wider world that differs from it and contributes to its significance (81). Wordsworth transforms the traditional concept of the pastoral to such an extent that "Tintern Abbey" loses almost all the outward trappings of a traditional pastoral poem and becomes a new breed of pastoral poetry, opening a new horizon to the outworn genre. "Tintern Abbey" has been generally considered as a poem of strong philosophical bent. But one may ask: What literary foundation underlies Wordsworth's philosophical quest? "Tintern Abbey" as a successful transformation of the pastoral best answers the question.

Like "Michael", "Tintern Abbey" begins with the same gesture of withdrawal from the outside world into a world of seclusion:

--Once again

Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,
That on a wild secluded scene impress
Thoughts of more deep seclusion;

(4-7)

There is given no clear reason for this seclusion at the outset. But the first two lines--"Five years have past; five summers, with the length / Of five long winters!"--amply suggest how unhappy the speaker feels for the last five years; he repeats the number five three times--a clear indication of his troublesome existence during those years. Then the lines 9-10 offer the reason why the speaker has come to this place again:

The day is come when I again repose
Here, under this dark sycamore. . .

The idea of "repose" is crucial to pastoral poems. The pastoral offers a place for rest to those embittered and exhausted by the harsh realities of the world outside. The lush green world of nature immediately refreshes the speaker's weary mind. But this is only the first step. The poem soon moves to another realm of mood. This lovely pastoral region has two kinds of dwellings which have different connotations respectively. One is a pastoral farm (16), and the other, a hermit's cave (21). Interestingly enough, the speaker never mentions any shepherd but introduces a hermit whose mode of life is constant contemplation. "Tintern Abbey" is much more contemplative in mood than "Michael" is. Wordsworth transforms a familiar pastoral scene into a place charged with a deeper spiritual reality.

After establishing a pastoral landscape for his philosophic contemplation, Wordsworth proceeds to the next step: the dichotomy between the Country and the City. What he presents is, of course, not a downright criticism or satire on the City but a pastoral vision amid the noise of cities and towns which wears the poet's spirit. The opposition between the City and the Country is not a literary cliché for Wordsworth; the City is symbolic of an alien environment with the stark implication of sterility and loneliness. The green pastoral world the poet recollects in his mind is sharply contrasted with the dark images of the City—"the many shapes of joyless daylight," "the fretful stir unprofitable," and "the fever of the world" (51-53). To Wordsworth, ultimately, the opposition between the Country and the City is not a topological question but a question of different mental states.

The visionary moment in which he sees "into the life of things" (49) is the best proof that a pastoral world can exist as a state of mind. "Tintern Abbey" begins with an actual pastoral scene, but soon it becomes a recollected "island in time," which in turn is transformed into a "serene and blessed mood" (41). The pastoral world of "the Sylvan Wye" (56) is a recollected spot of time that can be visited any time in one's inner mental world for the restoration and enlightenment of the weary mind.

Wordsworth's climatic vision in "Tintern Abbey" is essentially a vision of the total integration of the universe:

And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy

Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
 Of something far more deeply interfused,
 Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
 And the round ocean and the living air,
 And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
 A Motion and a spirit, that impels
 All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
 And rolls through all things.

(95-104)⁶

To Wordsworth, the universe is not a chaotic flow of atoms but a dynamic process of things fully integrated and interrelated. From this vision of wholeness comes compassion for all human beings and creatures of this universe. In Wordsworth's poetry, vision and compassion are like two sides of one coin. Wordsworth's transcendental vision of *natura naturans* cannot go on forever in this radically flawed world of imperfection. It is compassion's turn to hear the "sad music of humanity" (91).

If one considers how carefully Wordsworth proceeds from "the coarser pleasures of my boyish days" (73) to the youth of "dizzy raptures" (85) then to the mature age of adulthood, the sudden puzzling intrusion of the fact of death will not be so surprising; the poet is deeply concerned with the passing of his life. After an enthusiastic praise of the pastoral world, he suddenly falls to an idea of decay and death:

Nor perchance,

If I were not thus taught, should I the more
 Suffer my genial spirits to decay: (111-113)

6) Compare Wordsworth's vision with Dante's in his *Divine Comedy*:

In its profundity I saw--ingathered
 And bound by love into one single volume--
 what, in the universe, seems separate, scattered:
 (*Paradiso* 33: 91-93)

Wordsworth confronts the fact of mortality as any pastoralist does. What distinguishes him from other traditional pastoralists is the self-elegiac tone (Hogdson 377); Milton writes a pastoral elegy for his dead friend, but Wordsworth writes one for himself. Consolation comes not from his transcendental vision but from his firm trust that he will be part of his sister's mature sympathetic experience. This is the "healing thoughts of tender joy" (145). "Tintern Abbey" ends with a calm note of hope. Wordsworth once again presents a pastoral scene—"these steep woods and lofty cliffs, /And this green pastoral landscape" (157-168). However, as in "Michael" the pastoral scene ultimately does not lead the poet and his sister to the past but to the future. Their temporary seclusion is ended.

V. Conclusion

Wordsworth played an important role in connecting the classical English pastoral tradition with the modern one. An essentially backward glance at the ideal past, the pastoral offers the poet an opportunity to express his highest ideals; it is also deeply conscious of the imperfection of the world that shatters its ideal vision. Ideal vision and shared suffering between man and nature in the face of calamity and death, thus, are rooted in the poetic tradition. An analysis of Wordsworth's pastoral poems, especially "Michael", demonstrates that Wordsworth refreshingly and creatively modernized the traditional genre of the pastoral to express his vision of the world and compassion for other human beings, which constitute the backbone of his poetry. Wordsworth rejects the insipid conventions and images of traditional pastoral poetry and injects vigorous realism charged with symbolic meanings to the worn-out genre, thus giving new vitality to it. A delicate mixture of ideal vision and symbolic realism creates the peculiar moral atmosphere of Wordsworth's pastoral world. Moreover, "Tintern Abbey" proves that the framework of the traditional pastoral can be creatively transformed to serve new demands by the poet. It was possible because the central issues of the poem, vision and compassion, are rooted in the nature of the pastoral itself. Wordsworth's search for the renewal of pastoral poetry opened new possibilities for the genre to his followers.

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Abstract

Wordsworth's Pastoral Poetry: Search for the Renewal of a Genre

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Wordsworth played an important role in connecting the classical English pastoral tradition with the modern one. An essentially backward glance at the ideal past, the pastoral offers the poet an opportunity to express his highest ideals; it is also deeply conscious of the imperfection of the world that shatters its ideal vision. Ideal vision and shared suffering between man and nature in the face of calamity and death, thus, are rooted in the poetic tradition. An analysis of Wordsworth's pastoral poems, especially "Michael", demonstrates that Wordsworth refreshingly and creatively modernized the traditional genre of the pastoral to express his vision of the world and compassion for other human beings, which constitute the backbone of his poetry. Wordsworth rejects the insipid conventions and images of traditional pastoral poetry and injects vigorous realism charged with symbolic meanings to the worn-out genre, thus giving new vitality to it. A delicate mixture of ideal vision and symbolic realism creates the peculiar moral atmosphere of Wordsworth's pastoral world. Moreover, "Tintern Abbey" proves that the framework of the traditional pastoral can be creatively transformed to serve new demands by the poet. It was possible because the central issues of the poem, vision and compassion, are rooted in the nature of the pastoral itself. Wordsworth's search for the renewal of pastoral poetry opened new possibilities for the genre to his followers.