

Analyzing the Emotional Purpose and Linguistic Characteristics of Modern Pastoral Poetry the Twentieth Century - Taking Frost and Heaney as an Example

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Abstract:

Pastoral poetry, since its inception, has shown a distinct creative characteristic that sets it apart from other forms of poetry, uniquely merging the natural landscape with the poet's emotions through unpolished language and philosophical mood. The poets' observations of the various dimensions and depths of pastoral themes construct an imaginative depiction of the individual, the village, and even society. In the twentieth century, modern pastoral poetry's emotional purpose and linguistic features have presented new characteristics. Frost and Heaney stand as the representative poets of this era. By examining their specific poems, the analysis focuses on the expression of emotion and linguistic style to identify the similarities and differences in the creative content and methods of the two poets. The comparative analysis reveals that the main emotional object of their works is the distinction between the individual and the hometown, which also shapes the poets' different attitudes on similar objects, while in the two poems, they seem to be in the same pursuit of 'the pursuit of the village' and 'the pursuit of the society'. In their shared quest for the 'sound of meaning,' Heaney absorbed and innovated upon Frost's concept of creative language, leading to the emergence of a new linguistic identity for Northern Ireland's pastoral poetry.

Keywords: Emotional destination; linguistic characteristic; Robert Frost; Seamus Heaney; modern pastoral poetry.

1. Introduction

Pastoral poetry has been a long-lasting genre in the history of world poetry, characterized by the freshness and simplicity of language, the purity and simplicity of imagery, and the directness and fluency of emotion. The richness of its creative texts has attracted a multitude of scholars to conduct comprehensive research and comparative studies from perspectives such as literature, political science, and philosophy, leading to numerous specialized studies on individual poets and those who share the genre's characteristics.

In the 20th century, pastoral poetry experienced the impact of war, urbanization, and modern literary trends, which gave rise to new directions in thought and modern pastoral poets. The 19th-century English Lakeside Poets, represented by Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey, have been criticized for using over-idealized language that whitewashes and obscures the class gap in the countryside [1]. Meanwhile, technological developments in society have gradually increased the distance between humans and nature, and past pastoral poetry has been criticized for its use of idealistic language. Furthermore, the development of science and technology has also gradually separated humans from nature, and the beautiful scenes depicted in past pastoral poetry seem to have become increasingly distant, alongside the over-exploitation associated with industrialization.

The American modern poet Robert Frost conveys his modern philosophical thoughts through the pastoral scenery of New England, where he lives, and the concise language of his poems which possess the beauty of classical poetry on one hand, and on the other, the sentiments conveyed are modern and personal. The Nobel Prize laureate Seamus Heaney is a writer who portrays Northern Ireland with the hue of a strong 'post-pastoral' poetry, and he is also known as a poet of 'Northern Ireland.' Nobel Laureate Seamus Heaney, an Irish poet with a strong 'post-pastoral' hue, describes the countryside of Northern Ireland, leaving behind the traditional pastoral poetry's agricultural attributes and adopting the poet's viewpoint to examine and document the countryside of Northern Ireland. Their creative periods are similar, but due to different personal experiences and the social environments in which they lived, their creative characteristics differ in many ways.

Although scholars have analyzed Frost's influence on Heaney and the latter's inheritance and innovation of the former's linguistic traits, they generally remain within this dimension of analysis. The author believes that textual analysis can be further combined with the analysis of emotional intent, which would reveal more similarities and differences between the two poets when compared

from new perspectives.

2. Analysis of the Emotional Destination of Pastoral Poetry

2.1 Emotional Destination in Frost's Poetry

The purpose of emotion encompasses the analysis of emotional manifestations, the questioning into the origins of emotion, the generalization of the principles of emotional realization, and finally, the reflection of the system of emotional connotations. For Frost, a poet whose creative career has produced numerous masterpieces, he mostly depicts scenes and objects from the pastoral farm of his personal life, imbuing them with substantial philosophical reflection on the examination and contemplation of life.

As Frost aged and his wife passed away, he frequently addressed sentimental emotions in his works; for example, in "Into My Own," he mentioned,

"Or those should not set forth upon my track
To overtake me, who should miss me here
And long to know if still I held them dear.[2]"

"A Late Walk" notes that:

"The whirl of sober birds
Up from the tangle of withered weeds
Is sadder than any words.[2]"

and "Tree at My Window" discusses:

"And if you have seen me when I slept,
You have seen me when I was taken and swept
And all but lost.[3]"

For the poet, the autumnal winds are not the only time when a plant faces the metabolism of life and death; it is difficult not to associate the surrounding desolation with their own loneliness. Love is given to the scene described, and the sadness of the scene intensifies the expression of this loneliness in the narrative, with the poet's inner sadness radiating outward, coloring the works with the gray and yellow hues of a bleak mood.

However, this single emotional analysis does not present the poet's emotional depth. At the end of "Into My Own," the poet declares, "Only more sure of all I thought was true.[2]" and turns to the bleakness of walking through dark forests, boundless wildernesses, and long avenues. He then affirms the positive significance of specific images when his own pessimistic emotions radiate to them, pushing the scale of emotion to a mirror-like projection of emotions. In this mirrored emotional projection, the emotional scale is set to a positive value. Similarly, the gray and sentimental scene that the poet observes in the field and by the thatched cottage in "A Late Walk" is paused at: "By picking the faded blue

Of the last remaining aster flower,
To carry again to you.[2]"

condensing the sorrow and lamentation spreading in the text into a kind of romance. It seems as though all the sadness that the poet's gaze reaches is 'broken' by the appearance of 'you,' cleansing the scene of sorrow. Both instances present an unintentional romanticism. The poet, amidst the pastoral poetry landscape, is not only moved by the objects and scenery of the countryside but also capable of regulating the emotions evoked by the environment with thought.

Another aspect of the poet's expression of emotion emerges from the scene but is dominated by reflection. In "Now close the windows" the poet mentions the sound of bird-song and the swaying of leaves brought by the wind, then suddenly turns to observing what the wind brings rather than listening to it, transforming the poem into a philosophical realm that transcends the literal, speaking subtly in the simple landscape, 'plucking' the vision out of the swamp where it bubbles to look at the farther landscape. This reflective writing is most evident in the poet's "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening"; as many scholars have analyzed, the richness of metaphors and symbols in the poem enriches the writing of nature with reflective flavor, and words like cold, dark, and sleepy actually refer to a multitude of death imagery [4], diversifying the directions of interpretation in the poem. The author believes that this poem echoes "The Road Not Taken," where the poet reflects on past life experiences in his twilight years, expressing the release of darkness as he looks down on the unchosen path of his youth. However, the ending of the poem, "And miles to go before I sleep,[5]" highlights the poet's profound understanding of the past and the future, as well as his ability to control personal emotions. It also demonstrates that the poet's control of personal emotions can be sensed by objects, but the heart can also prevail over them.

2.2 Emotional Destination in Heaney's Poetry

Heaney, a poet active in the mid to late 20th century, focused his works not on the same emotional connotations as the modern mainstream topics such as rebellion and freedom, but rather on the rural narratives and intricate social politics of his homeland, Ireland, from which the poet's further reflections also originate.

The poet develops a spectrum of emotions over time, but the emotional part is quickly taken over by rational and abstracted into philosophical musings that transcend personal sentiments. The poet's early works, including the masterpiece "Death of a Naturalist" encapsulate a complex depiction of the epiphanies and cruelties of mat-

uration during the nascent phase of his writing career. The flaxen pool under the venomous sun and the bloated frogspawn symbolize the contradiction between survival and nature, love and loathing in childhood, culminating in the act of reaching for the frogspawn. This act is abstracted by the poet into a complete destruction of naturalism, poignantly highlighting the irreconcilable divide between humanity and nature, an inevitable stage in human evolution. As mentioned in "Blackberry-Picking" the berries decay rapidly once removed from their natural habitat, and despite the arduous trials to pluck them from the thorns, the yield is a far cry from expectations. There is a natural contradiction between the urgency to secure sustenance and the appreciation and conservation of natural beauty, a contradiction that is destined to be lost as humans mature or evolve. Human will be in a state of numbness, mechanization, and eventual unconsciousness in the face of and confrontation with nature

The poet also expresses a profound love and appreciation of the land through idyllic scenes in pastoral poetry. Works such as "Bogland" and "Anahorish" serve as direct geomorphological or historical allusions, expressing a tracing of Ireland's history and the innocence, goodness, and perpetuation of these virtues among the local populace. The Cyclops, the world's first mountain, and the ubiquitous bogs cast a light on the tenacity and perseverance that define the Irish aboriginal character. Conversely, the poet has chronicled the malevolence of the land and resources plundered by England throughout Ireland's history. "Wintering Out" recounts the daily quest for oak firewood by the Irish under the yoke of English colonial rule, reflecting the disintegration of historical traditions. The poet, deeply nurtured by English literature, imbues the text with a silent and inexorable atmosphere, interweaving the grace bestowed upon the individual with the intertwined emotions of national animosity. This interplay of conflicting sentiments—personal favor and national enmity—shapes a silent and relentless emotional narrative. Such emotional concern for people and objects also reflects a romantic tendency, where nature and humanity are interwoven.

In addition, an important part of the poet's emotional origin comes from a profound concern for the socio-political backdrop of his homeland. The pivotal work "Station Island" through twelve parts, constructs a personal reinterpretation of the social subject, successfully constructing the image of a modern artist unbound by religious constraints, through the structural emulation and personal adaptation of Dante's *Divine Comedy* [6]. This figure evolves into a singular creative ethos through self-awareness of a path fraught with adventure, where the paths of light and darkness alternate, in line with the poet's aspiration for Irish culture to break free from the domineering

influence of English culture. This desire is a testament to the poet's fervent emotion for Irish culture to shed the heavy yoke of English cultural colonization and to revive and forge its own national identity. This personal societal concern has permeated the poet's creative journey.

3. Analysis of the linguistic characteristics of pastoral poetry

3.1 Linguistic Characteristics of Frost's Poetry

Rost's thoughts of writing poetry with 'the sound of meaning' suggests that the beauty of poetic language does not need to rely excessively on the rigid changes of rhyming vowels and consonants. Instead, it can combine poetic rhymes with the meanings conveyed by the poems, thereby bestowing upon them the beauty of meaning through the constant variations in tones and words[7]. This approach to language creation appears to merge practicality and functionality, and it is posited that it could be analogous to the effects of the dissolution of paganism and parallelism. The author believes that this concept can be likened to the impact of the elimination and transformation of pagoda and parallelism.

The poet's role as an educator brings a distinct quality to his poetic language. With many years of teaching experience, Frost's position as an educator offered great opportunities to observe students learning and appreciating poetry. Consequently, he discerned that visual readers differ from auditory or phonetic readers, and thus, he proposed that visual readers are at a disadvantage [8]. A quick glance is an effective way for learning or reading literature, but poetry encompasses not only visual text but also rich rhythms and specific vocabulary combinations that enhance the meaning conveyed by the poem. For example, the dialogue between the rain and the wind in the poet's "Lodged" may seem to consist of only four sentences at a glance, but when read aloud, it transforms into six sentences along with a natural shift in perspective. Another example is the poem "Pertinax" which, despite being only three lines long, imparts a sense of the reader's composure amidst a tumultuous storm when read in stanzas, surpassing the information conveyed by a single glance.

Frost's masterpiece "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" has been previously mentioned. As a masterpiece, the poem excels not only in conveying emotions, images, and philosophical thoughts but also in its use of language. Initially, the poet employs an 'aaba bbcb ccdc dddd' structure in the sentence formation, and the volume of voice gradually diminishes under the reverberation of similar

sentences, mirroring the poet's final departure on horseback amidst pauses and hesitations. The sentence structure of the poem harmoniously corresponds to the poem's connotation and blends into a cohesive whole [9]. The utilization of consonants and vowels also amplifies the auditory experience of this chanting. The poem commences with consonants, and the appearance of only three vowels in the penultimate five lines evokes the sensation of a journey from a distant place, followed by a departure after a prolonged period of agitation. This simple variation outlines the poet's complete journey and perfectly embodies the poet's creative concept of 'the sound of significance' within the language of the poem. The poet's concept of 'the sound of meaning' is thus exquisitely realized in his creation of poetic language.

3.2 Linguistic Characteristics of Heaney's Poetry

As analyzed earlier, Heaney's poems are inherently emotional, imbuing pastoral poetry and accessible imagery with profound reflections on history, humanity, and nature, across both his early and late works. His linguistic style, particularly in describing pastoral objects and other matters, is deeply inspired by Frost's 'voice of meaning' [10]. A distinctive feature of his poetic language is the employment of simple and natural language to chronicle rural life; for example, the detailed and vivid depiction of the father's potato digging and the grandfather's turf mowing in "Digging" are rich in life, recreating the laboring scenes of farmers with diverse forms and shapes across different divisions of labor during farming times. These descriptions include visual representations of the digging action as well as auditory portrayals of the coherent actions, reproducing the imagery without sacrificing the beauty of the rhyme and sound conveyed.

The poet's use of stanzas and rhymes is spontaneous but remains within bounds. In "North" for example, the poet describes what he sees and feels in a language of freeze-frames, with the poem divisible into a first half that adheres to the 'aa bb cc' structure and a second half that is written more freely. The first part, in a neat and epic format, objectively recounts the failures of the colonizers and the tragedies of their remains in the wilderness. In the sixth stanza, subjective expressions add contrast to this scene and pave the way for what follows. The latter part refers to this tragedy in a playful tone, with the proportion of vowels and consonants at the beginning of stanzas varying from '50%, 75%, 50%, 25%' to '75%, 75%, 75%, 25%', and the proportion of words beginning with a plosive at the end of stanzas following a similar curve from '75%, 75%, 75%, 25%' to '75%, 75%, 75%, 25%' [11].

The proportion of words beginning with a plosive at the end of the sentence also follows the pattern of ‘75%, 75%, 75%, 75%, 25%’. This regular rhythmic rise and fall underscores the author’s shifting attitude, from sweeping derision to eventual reasoning, creating the poem’s language with a complete pattern of rise and fall, thus achieving its wholeness and uniqueness.

4. Comparative Analysis

Both poets, as modern pastoral poets of the 20th century, have been active for a similar period, but each possesses distinct authorial characteristics. In terms of rhyme usage, each poet maintains a unique approach; Frost employs the ‘sound of meaning’ to carry the language of the poem throughout, ensuring the fluency of recitation is not compromised, and simultaneously achieving significant depth in connotation. Conversely, Heaney, throughout his creative career, has also produced a multitude of ‘paradigm’ poems with square rhymes, aligning with the ‘sound of meaning’ requirement. However, Heaney more frequently opts for modern poetic forms that do not pursue sound steps, making his format more characteristic of a modern poet.

In terms of specific poetic phrasing, both are adept at using concise language and excel at depicting daily farm life in their works. Their early pieces, “The Road Not Taken” and “Death of a Naturalist” effectively showcase the richness of succinct language, with all emotions and profound meanings of the poems condensed within the words.

Following the characteristics mentioned above, for Frost, the complexities of life and the richness of rural encounters are calmly presented in his poems, with rare instances of excessive emotional outbursts or verses with significant fluctuations. Instead, they often contain great energy within a straightforward narrative, as exemplified by the moment of hesitation and resolution in “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” which portrays a period of uncertainty in the poet’s inner journey. In contrast, Heaney’s poems tend to favor concise language and rich meaning. Additionally, Heaney’s poetry often emphasizes the dramatic or epic nature of the scenes he observes or hears, highlighting that the events recounted in his poems are not trivial but deliberate. This approach stems partly from a stronger sense of family and country, from the individual to the community, which Heaney possesses more than Frost. Heaney is accustomed to reinforcing his personal poetic expression with the aid of classics, particularly the enduring national canon of his own people. On the other hand, there is a considerable difference in their geographic locations and times; Frost’s New England developed rapidly after the Second World War, with industrialization

progressing swiftly, while Ireland faced a complex and fragile socio-political culture, whether due to historical events like the potato famine or the civilizational crisis following the Second World War. Thus, the differing emotional purposes of the two poets during the same period largely arise from their vastly different backgrounds of time and space.

5. Conclusion

Above all, both poets tend to express emotions by blending scenes with emotions, and both incorporate the philosophical sensibility and rationality of their own experiences to infuse their works with unique emotional connotations. At the same time, despite being in the new century, their works still contain elements of romanticism and creative tendencies. The difference lies in the origin of the emotion, that is, the final emotional attribution; Frost is more inclined to reflect personally on the situation of existence, while Heaney focuses on systematic reflections on the social and political situation of Northern Ireland.

In terms of linguistic features, although both poets share the same English poetic language, Frost, active in the modern era, chooses a more traditional meter and rhythm, incorporating personal meanings, which are both classical and modern; comparatively, Heaney’s poetic language aligns more with the qualities of modern poets, prioritizing meaning, yet retaining the sound steps and rhyming lines in an attempt to show a return to the tranquil nature of pastoral poetry.

Comparing the two, it is not difficult to find that in 20th-century modern pastoral poetry, the depiction of pastoral nature is no longer idealized or romanticized scenery writing and glorification, but rather more philosophical thinking about the relationship between man, society, and nature is interwoven with the drastic changes brought by wars or industrialization. This approach is closer to reality and represents the main theme of creative work during this period.

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