

Dwelling in the Pastoral Poems of William Wordsworth and Tao Yuanming

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore the shared and distinct elements of dwelling in the pastoral poems of William Wordsworth and Tao Yuanming. Employing a qualitative research design and adopting an ecocritical approach, this study scrutinizes a corpus of 10 pastoral poems that represent the quintessence of these two poets’ works. Through a comparative analysis, it investigates how both poets evoke a sense of dwelling in the pastoral, examining the nuanced ways in which they depict the natural environment and reflect on the relationship between humanity and nature. By exploring the pastoral landscapes of Wordsworth, an English Romantic poet, and Tao Yuanming, a poet from the Chinese Jin Dynasty, it is concluded that both William Wordsworth and Tao Yuanming underscore the significance of engaging with natural surroundings as a means of introspection, connection, and rejuvenation. Although they interpret this idea through distinct cultural and literary lenses, their combined poetic works express a shared pursuit of solace, self-discovery, and unity by immersing oneself in the beauty of the natural world.

Key words: Dwelling; Pastoral poems; William Wordsworth; Tao Yuanming

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INTRODUCTION

In the realm of literature, pastoral poetry stands as a timeless genre that transports readers to idyllic landscapes, where nature reigns supreme and the human spirit finds solace in simplicity. Among the masters of this genre are William Wordsworth, a towering figure of English Romanticism, and Tao Yuanming, a revered poet of ancient China. Both poets, though separated by geography, culture, and centuries, share a profound affinity for the pastoral mode, weaving tapestries of rural life, natural beauty, and introspection.

In this study, we embark on an exploration of the theme of dwelling in the pastoral poems of Wordsworth and Tao Yuanming. Dwelling, in this context, encompasses not only physical habitation but also the psychological and spiritual relationship between individuals and their environment. Through their evocative verses, Wordsworth and Tao invite readers to contemplate the concept of dwelling in its myriad forms – from the quietude of rustic cottages to the immersive experience of communing with nature.

This comparative analysis seeks to uncover the ways in which Wordsworth and Tao depict the act of dwelling within pastoral settings, examining the nuances of their poetic imagery, thematic concerns, and philosophical underpinnings. By delving into their respective literary traditions and cultural contexts, we aim to elucidate the similarities and differences in their portrayals of dwelling, shedding light on the universal human longing for rootedness, belonging, and connection to the natural world.

Furthermore, this study endeavors to explore the implications of dwelling in pastoral poetry for

contemporary readers, considering how Wordsworth and Tao's reflections on place, belonging, and environmental consciousness resonate with contemporary concerns about sustainability, community, and the human-nature relationship. As we navigate an increasingly urbanized and technologically-driven world, the pastoral poems of Wordsworth and Tao offer a timely reminder of the importance of cultivating a sense of rootedness, belonging, and ecological mindfulness in our lives.

Through a nuanced analysis of their pastoral verses, we hope to gain deeper insights into the ways in which literature shapes our understanding of place and identity, while also drawing attention to the enduring relevance of pastoral poetry as a source of inspiration, solace, and ecological wisdom. As we embark on this journey through the pastoral landscapes of Wordsworth and Tao, let us pause to dwell in the beauty and tranquility of their verses, and reflect on the timeless truths they reveal about the human condition and our relationship with the natural world.

"Dwelling" in the context of pastoral poems refers to the depiction of living in and interacting with a natural, rural environment.

1. DWELLING IN THE PASTORAL POEMS OF WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

Table 1
Dwelling in the Pastoral Poems of William Wordsworth

No.	Poems	Dwelling
1	I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Dwelling in Solitude •Dwelling in Memory •Dwelling in Nature
2	The Solitary Reaper	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Nature's Beauty and Human Connection •Emotion and Melancholy •Timelessness •Connection to Nature •Harmony and Joy
3	To the Cuckoo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Harmonious Dwelling •Dwelling in the transformative power of nature •Emotional Dwelling
4	L i n e s C o m p o s e d a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Dwelling in Nature •Memory and Dwelling •Dwelling in the Emotional Experience
5	To a Sky-Lark	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Integration in the Landscape •Impact on Human Experience •Connection to Nature's Rhythms •Role in Ecosystem •Sense of belonging and rootedness

William Wordsworth's poems, as summarized in Table 1, illustrate the concept of dwelling in various ways. The poem "I wandered lonely as a cloud" suggests that the speaker is moving through the landscape in solitude, much like a cloud drifting through the sky. As the poem unfolds, the speaker recounts the memory of the daffodils they

had seen. The image of the daffodils becomes a mental dwelling place that the speaker can revisit in their mind whenever they feel the need to escape from the challenges of daily life or to find solace.

For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.

[WW,P1,S1,L4,L1-L6]

These lines convey the idea that the memory of the daffodils brings joy and solace to the poet when he is alone and reflecting on the scene in his mind. The connection with nature provides a sense of dwelling and inner happiness.

Moreover, the poem emphasizes the connection between the speaker and the natural world. The daffodils serve as a source of emotional and spiritual nourishment, and the speaker finds solace in their beauty.

Similarly, the poem "The Solitary Reaper" reflects Wordsworth's characteristic focus on the connection between humanity and nature. The woman's singing is intertwined with her labor and the landscape, evoking a sense of harmony between human activity and the environment.

The woman's song is described as "melancholy," which sets a tone of introspection and sadness. The speaker wonders about the meaning of her song and speculates whether it pertains to distant historical events or contemporary experiences.

The poem contemplates the timeless nature of human experiences. The woman's song transcends time, whether it is about "old, unhappy, far-off things" (WW,P2,S3,L3) or "Familiar matter of today." (WW,P2,S3,L6). This idea aligns with Wordsworth's belief in the universality of human emotions.

In "To the Cuckoo", the poem's speaker addresses the cuckoo as a "blithe New-comer," (WW,P3,S1,L1) expressing joy and excitement upon hearing its call. This immediate connection to the natural world aligns with the Romantic emphasis on the emotional and spiritual bond between humans and nature. The speaker's joyful response to the cuckoo's call reflects a sense of harmony and unity with nature. The bird's call is seen as a source of happiness and inspiration.

The cuckoo's song is described as passing "From hill to hill", (WW,P3,S2,L3) creating a sense of harmony with the landscape. This can be interpreted as the cuckoo and its song dwelling harmoniously within the natural environment, becoming an integral part of the auditory and emotional landscape.

The cuckoo's arrival and song transform the perception of the environment, making the earth appear "an unsubstantial, faery place." (WW,P3,S8,L3) This

transformation of the ordinary into something magical reflects a kind of dwelling in the transformative power of nature.

The poem portrays the speaker's emotional connection to the cuckoo's song and its arrival. The speaker hears the cuckoo and rejoices, indicating a deep emotional resonance. This emotional response can be seen as a form of dwelling within the experience—immersing oneself in the feelings and sensations evoked by the natural world. According to Garrard (2004), dwelling is dynamic; it is a process that involves “the long-term imbrication of humans in a landscape of memory, ancestry and death, of ritual, life and work” (108).

“Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey” describes the speaker's return to the landscape surrounding Tintern Abbey after a five-year absence. The act of returning to a familiar place suggests a form of dwelling, both physically and emotionally. The speaker engages with the natural environment, lying on the grass and observing the river, hills, and woods. This interaction represents a kind of dwelling in nature, where the speaker connects with the environment in a contemplative manner.

The speaker reflects on the memories associated with Tintern Abbey and the landscape. The recollections of the “sensations sweet” (WW,P4,S2,L7) and the “deep power of joy” (WW,P4,S2,L28) are memories that the speaker dwells upon, allowing them to shape their emotional experience in the present. Dwelling in memory is a significant aspect of the poem, as the speaker revisits past experiences and allows them to influence their current perception of the landscape.

The poem captures the speaker's emotional response to the natural landscape. The emotions evoked by the scenery, including “tranquil restoration,” (WW,P4,S2,L10) create a sense of dwelling in the emotional resonance of the environment.

In “To the Skylark”, the skylark's song becomes an integral part of the natural landscape. It is described as a voice that fills the air, creating a sense of the skylark's presence resonating throughout the surroundings. In addition, the skylark's song has a profound impact on human emotions and experiences. It is described as a source of exultation, bliss, and joy for the speaker. This emotional impact can be seen as a form of dwelling in the human consciousness and emotions, inspired by the skylark's presence.

The skylark's song is mentioned in conjunction with the “green earth's end.” This association suggests that the skylark's presence and song are connected to the natural rhythms and cycles of the environment. The song is described as part of the “general song” of nature. This indicates that the skylark's presence contributes to the overall harmony and vitality of the ecosystem, reflecting a form of dwelling within the ecological balance.

Moreover, this line “True to the kindred points of Heaven and Home!” (WW,P5,S2,L6) suggests a connection between the celestial (“Heaven”) and the earthly (“Home”). It implies a sense of belonging and rootedness, emphasizing the idea of being true or faithful to one's home, which is a key aspect of dwelling.

Wordsworth suggests that dwelling goes beyond physical presence; it involves a deep emotional and spiritual connection with the natural world. The environment becomes a source of solace, inspiration, and harmony, contributing to the speaker's sense of belonging in both earthly and celestial realms.

The concept of “dwelling” in a literary analysis often refers to the sense of place, environment, and physical surroundings that are portrayed in a work. Tao's pastoral poems underscore a profound connection between individuals and the landscape, celebrating a simple and unpretentious way of life in rural settings. The act of dwelling becomes a means of escape from the complexities of urban life, embodying a genuine and harmonious way of existence in tranquil natural spaces.

2. DWELLING IN THE PASTORAL POEMS OF TAO YUANMING

Table 2
Dwelling in the Pastoral Poems of Tao Yuanming

No.	Poems	Dwelling
1	Returning to Live in the South (No.1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Return to Nature •Harmony with the Environment •Cultivation of Land •Embrace of Simplicity
2	Returning to Live in the South (No.3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Connection to Place •Interaction with Nature •Harmonious Coexistence •Appreciation for Nature's Beauty
3	Returning to Live in the South (No.5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Integration with Nature •Sense of Place •Coexistence with Nature •Harmony with Natural Rhythms
4	Drinking Wine (No.5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Harmonious Coexistence •Connection with Nature •Integration of Inner and Outer Worlds
5	Drinking Wine (No.7)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Intimate Engagement with Nature •Embracing Simplicity •Appreciation of Nature's Beauty

Tao Yuanming's poems, as summarized in Table 2, illuminate the theme of dwelling through a profound connection with the natural environment.

The poem “Returning to Live in the South (No.1)” explores the speaker's longing to leave the bustling crowd and return to the natural environment of hills and mountains. This desire to live in a more natural setting reflects a sense of “dwelling” in a space that aligns with the speaker's inner nature. The speaker expresses a longing for the familiar, comparing himself to a caged

bird yearning for its old trees and a pond fish yearning for water. This imagery conveys a sense of “dwelling” that involves being in harmony with one’s natural surroundings.

The speaker opens barren ground at the south field’s border and returns to a simple life of farming. This act of cultivating the land and returning to a garden farm signifies a form of “dwelling” through a deep connection with the land and its resources. The description of “a small thatched house” (TY,P1,S1,L10) and the natural elements surrounding it suggests an embrace of simplicity. This kind of dwelling emphasizes living in harmony with the basic elements of the environment.

In the poem “Returning to Live in the South (No.3)”, the speaker’s description of sowing beans below the southern hills and navigating through tall grass under trees implies a sense of connection to their surroundings. This connection to a specific place contributes to a feeling of “dwelling” within that environment.

I sow my beans below the southern hills,
but grass flourishes, while bean seedlings are scarce.
(TY,P2,S1,L1-L2)

Moreover, the speaker’s engagement with the environment, such as clearing space and carrying a hoe, reflects their interaction with the natural world. These activities contribute to a sense of active participation and engagement, further deepening their “dwelling.” The speaker’s actions of sowing beans and clearing space without dominating or disrupting nature suggests a sense of coexistence.

The imagery of the moon and the natural landscape contributes to the speaker’s appreciation of the beauty in their environment. This appreciation is a form of “dwelling,” as it involves finding a connection and resonance with the natural world’s aesthetics.

“Returning to Live in the South (No.5)”, the speaker’s act of washing feet in a mountain stream and using bramble firewood for lighted candles reflect an integration with the natural world.

*A mountain stream, clear and shallow,
is there to wash my feet.*
(TY,P3,S1,L3-L4)
The sun enters a room that’s dark,
where bramble firewood makes do for lighted candles.
(TY,P3,S1,L7-L8)

These actions suggest a physical and practical connection to the immediate surroundings.

Moreover, the poem’s reference to the southern hills and the speaker’s journey along a rugged path emphasizes a specific geographical location. This adds to the sense of place and a particular dwelling within the natural landscape. Furthermore, the portrayal of the speaker’s engagement with the natural environment, such as the mountain stream, suggests a coexistence with

the non-human elements of the ecosystem. The poem’s acknowledgment of the sun, the passage of time, and the cycle of day and night emphasizes a connection to the natural rhythms of the environment.

In “Drinking (No.5)”, the description of birds flying out and returning together suggests a harmonious coexistence between the speaker and the natural world.

In this mountain air, day is beautiful — and night too;
birds fly out, then return together.
(TY,P4,S1,L7-L8)

This sense of harmony and unity with nature contributes to a dwelling characterized by balance and interconnectedness.

It creates a dwelling that fosters a connection between the reader and the natural world. Through the speaker’s activities, readers are encouraged to immerse themselves in the beauty of the environment. The poem’s integration of the speaker’s inner thoughts and emotions with their observations of the natural world creates a dwelling that bridges the gap between human consciousness and the environment.

In “Drinking (No.7)”, the imagery of picking dew-bathed chrysanthemum petals and infusing them with colors suggests a close and personal connection with the natural world. This intimate engagement reflects a form of dwelling in the environment.

Colors infusing autumn chrysanthemums
exquisite, I pick dew-bathed petals,
(TY,P5,S1,L1-L2)

Moreover, the poem’s emphasis on “simple-hearted contentment” (TY,P5,S1,L5-L6) and the appreciation of basic pleasures can be seen as an embrace of simplicity and a form of dwelling within the uncomplicated aspects of life. The act of picking chrysanthemum petals and infusing them with colors showcases an appreciation for the beauty of nature, allowing the speaker to dwell in the moment and observe nature’s intricacies.

Tao’s poems underscore the profound connection between individuals and the landscape, emphasizing a harmonious existence within the natural world. Vivid descriptions of fields, streams, and hills evoke a sense of dwelling in this environment, showcasing a desire for authenticity and a rejection of the artificiality and corruption associated with city life.

His poems celebrate a simple and unpretentious way of life in rural landscapes, symbolizing purity and genuineness in stark contrast to the complexities of urban living. Throughout his pastoral poems, Tao consistently portrays tranquil rural settings as spaces for solace, simplicity, and a profound connection to nature. The act of dwelling serves as a means of escape from the pressures of urban life, embodying a genuine and harmonious way of existence.

Comparing dwelling in the pastoral poems of William Wordsworth and Tao Yuanming, it can be found that both poets highlight the significance of connecting with nature for introspection, renewal, and a sense of unity.

3. COMPARISON OF DWELLING IN THE PASTORAL POEMS OF WILLIAM WORDSWORTH AND TAO YUANMING

Table 3
Comparison of Dwelling in the Pastoral Poems of William Wordsworth and Tao Yuanming
 Dwelling Reflected in the Pastoral Poems

William Wordsworth	Tao Yuanming
Immersion in Natural Landscapes	Retreat to Nature
Reflective Solitude	Simple Rural Life
Communion with Nature	Connection to the Landscape
Nature's Influence on Identity	Solitude and Contemplation
Rejuvenation and Renewal	Rejection of Urban Life
Integration with the Landscape	Celebration of Simplicity
Nature as Teacher and Guide	Nostalgia for the Pastoral Ideal
Deep Sense of Belonging	

Table 3 presents the similarities and differences of dwelling reflected in the pastoral poems of William Wordsworth and Tao Yuanming. According to Bate (2000), "If mortals dwelt that they saved the earth and if poetry was the original admission of dwelling, then poetry was the place where we saved the earth" (qtd in Rigby, 2004: 428). Both Tao Yuanming and William Wordsworth portray a sense of dwelling in their respective pastoral poems, emphasizing the connection between humans and the natural world.

Wordsworth's poems emphasize the act of immersing oneself in natural landscapes, where individuals can experience the beauty and serenity of the environment. Similarly, Tao Yuanming's poems often depict a retreat to rural landscapes, where individuals can escape the complexities of urban life and immerse themselves in the tranquility of nature.

Wordsworth's poems depict individuals dwelling in solitude within nature, often suggesting that such isolation allows for introspection and a deeper connection with one's inner self. Tao's poems also occasionally portray individuals dwelling in solitude, using this isolation as a means of contemplation and self-discovery. Wordsworth's poems frequently emphasize the idea of communion between humans and nature, suggesting a sense of unity and shared experience. While Tao's poems emphasize humans' connection with nature, the focus tends to be more on the emotional and spiritual solace nature provides.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the exploration of dwelling in the pastoral poems of William Wordsworth and Tao Yuanming uncovers a shared appreciation for the connection between humanity and the natural world. Despite cultural and temporal differences, both poets convey a longing for simplicity, introspection, and renewal by immersing oneself in natural landscapes. Wordsworth emphasizes communion with nature, the rejuvenating power of natural beauty, and the integration of humans within the landscape. Tao Yuanming, on the other hand, depicts dwelling as a retreat to rural life, emphasizing the tranquility and simplicity of nature as a source of solace.

The comparative analysis highlights universal themes of immersion in nature, reflective solitude, communion with the environment, and the pursuit of a simple and authentic way of life. Both poets invite readers to appreciate the beauty of nature, find solace in simplicity, and connect with the profound essence of dwelling in the pastoral landscape. The enduring relevance of these themes underscores the timeless and cross-cultural appeal of pastoral poetry, showcasing the power of poetry to capture and convey the shared human experience of dwelling in the natural world.

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