

PASTORAL

pastoral: "...Of literature, music, or works of art: Portraying the life of shepherds or of the country; expressed in pastorals." [since 1581]

Oxford English Dictionary

pastoral: "1. Having the simplicity, charm, serenity, or other characteristics generally attributed to rural areas: *pastoral scenery*; *the pastoral life*. 2. Pertaining to the country or to life in the country; rural; rustic. 3. Portraying or suggesting idyllically the life of shepherds or of the country, as a work of literature, art, or music: *pastoral poetry*; a *pastoral symphony*. 5. Of or pertaining to a pastor or the duties of a pastor...."

Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary
(Barnes & Noble Books 2003)

TRADITIONAL LITERARY PASTORAL

"Pastoral: A poem treating of shepherds and rustic life, after the Latin word for shepherd, *pastor*. The *pastoral* began in the third century B.C. when the Sicilian poet Theocritus included poetic sketches of rural life in his *Idylls*. The Greek *pastorals* existed in three forms: the dialogue or singing-match, usually between two shepherds, often called the *eclogue* because of the number of singing-matches in Virgil's 'Selections'; the monologue, often the plaint of a lovesick or forlorn shepherd lover or a poem praising some personage; and the elegy or lament for a dead friend. The *pastoral* early became a highly conventionalized form of poetry, the poet (Virgil is an example) writing of friends and acquaintances as though they were poetic shepherds moving through rural scenes. The form is artificial and unnatural--the 'shepherds' of the *pastoral* often speaking in courtly language and appearing in dress more appropriate to the drawing room than to rocky hills and swampy meadows.

Between 1550 and 1750 many such conventionalized *pastorals* were written in England. In modern use the term often means any poem of rural people and setting (Untermeyer, for instance, speaks of Robert Frost as a 'pastoral' poet). Since this classification is based on subject matter and manner rather than on form, we often use the term in association with other poetic types; we thus have *pastoral* lyrics, elegies, dramas, or even pastoral epics... Many 20th critics employ a highly sophisticated concept of the *pastoral* which was advanced by William Empson. In this specialized usage, the *pastoral* is considered a device for literary inversion, a means of 'putting the complex into the simple'--of expressing complex ideas through simple personages, for example."

C. Hugh Holman & William Harmon
A Handbook to Literature, 6th edition
(Macmillan 1936-92)

ARCHETYPAL PASTORALISM

The traditional literary pastoral exhibits several elements that transcend convention. They are so recurrent in literature they seem to express almost universal human experience and human nature--that is to say, they are "archetypal." The most comprehensive of these elements are (1) the rural or natural setting, countryside, or garden--the "good place"; (2) the shepherd or shepherdess, pastor, or lover; (3) the implied receptive listener, or flock. One *pastoralism* may be differentiated from another primarily by the location of the "good place." Figuratively, the "good place" is the place of the heart. Archetypal pastoral figures and motifs include sheep, dogs, children, family, friends, lovers, music, intoxication, escape, sanctuary, home, bed, sleep, peace, and love. From the archetypal perspective, everyone has both a *pastoralism* and a *puritanism*, a feminine and a masculine side, a heart and a head. Any particular *pastoralism* is in both binary opposition to and complementary relationship with a particular *puritanism*. They are linked to each other, influence, determine, conflict and harmonize with each other. A *pastoralism* is a diffuse, indefinite, fluid complex of feelings and values; a *puritanism* is a focused, definite, structured belief system, ideology, or mental set.

CHRISTIAN PASTORALISM

The dominant religion in American cultural history since the arrival of Europeans has been Christianity. A religion is a collective or individual *transcendentalism*. A *transcendentalism* is a synthesis of a *puritanism* and a *pastoralism* that is synergistic, holistic, and transcends the limitations of both. Differences among the various denominations of Christianity are differences among Christian *puritanisms*, whereas Christian *pastoralism* tends to be ecumenical, is embodied in Jesus Christ as an exemplary pastor, and is expressed in His birth in a manger, in his parables and especially in his Sermon on the Mount. In Christian *pastoralism* the “good place” is wherever the self-sacrificial spirit of Christ may be found, recalling the garden of Gethsemane. In American literature, Christian *pastoralism* is usually expressed by non-Christian writers as a component and example of *transcendentalism* in general rather than as an affirmation of Christianity, through the recurrence of many Christ-evoking figures that are compared or contrasted to Christ—as in Melville, Faulkner and Alice Walker, who exemplify William Empson’s concept of pastoral “inversion” by using simple characters to express complex ideas.

AGRARIAN PASTORALISM

Until 1800 about 95% of all Americans lived on farms, the opposite of the ratio today, and it was not until 1919 that 51 % lived in urban areas. For the most part, American farmers have been Christians. Hence, a synthesis of *agrarian pastoralism* and *Christian pastoralism* is by far the most important expression of pastoral values in American history. In *agrarian pastoralism* the “good place” is the farm, or the land. The good shepherd is the farmer, and what Leo Marx calls the “counterforces” of the City on the one hand and the Wild on the other are particularly clear. Of all the *pastoralisms*, the *agrarian* is wed to the strongest *puritanism*, because of the hard work required of farmers. In American literature, though *pastoralism* is expressed earlier, as by Anne Bradstreet in the 17th century, the first pastoral classic of some length is *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782), by Crèvecoeur, whose vision is comparable to that of the most influential agrarian pastoralist in American history, Thomas Jefferson.

FOLK PASTORALISM

Folk is the *pastoralism* most often expressed in American literature, especially in local color writing of the late 19th century and wherever ethnicity is emphasized, as in the African-American tradition, by writers such as Jean Toomer and Zora Neale Hurston. In *folk pastoralism* the “good place” is wherever one’s people are together, especially family and friends, but sometimes just good neighbors, as in *The Country of the Pointed Firs* (1896), by Sarah Orne Jewett. The good shepherd or shepherdess is some natural leader or exemplar, such as Alexandra in *O Pioneers!* (1913) by Willa Cather. *Folk pastoralism* is humanistic and affirms tolerance of differences as an especially important value, as in *Huckleberry Finn* (1884). In *The Hamlet* (1942) Faulkner explores the limits of such tolerance. Commonly throughout American history, *folk pastoralism* has been in synthesis with *agrarian* and *Christian pastoralism*. An instructive though not entirely successful mix of such *pastoralisms* with other modes, including Naturalism, is exhibited in *The Octopus* (1901) by Frank Norris.

FRONTIER PASTORALISM

Frontier *pastoralism* is expressed in the western genre, and in literature about pioneers. The “good place” is somewhere further on—imaged as “the garden of the West.” The good shepherd is a guide or mediator between wilderness and civilization, often Indian or Black. Prototypes are Cooper’s romances of Natty Bumppo, Walt Whitman’s “Pioneers! O Pioneers!” and “Song of the Open Road,” and Owen Wister’s *The Virginian* (1902). The most influential example by far is *Huckleberry Finn*. Within her *transcendental* vision, Willa Cather expresses a synthesis of *agrarian*, *folk*, and *frontier pastoralisms*. In writers such as Cooper, Twain and Cather, the frontier symbolizes a transitional stage in the development of consciousness. Their *frontier pastoralism* dramatizes the individuation process and points toward holistic consciousness and the possible attainment of a transcendentalism.

UTOPIAN PASTORALISM

The “good place” is the commune, composed of reformers from the City who usually retreat to the Country, led by a good shepherd or shepherdess who is not good enough. The experiment in communal living fails due to the individualism of the American participants, to their failure to reform themselves before trying to reform others and, ironically, to excessive or deficient *puritanism*. The definitive treatment of *utopian pastoralism* in American literature is Hawthorne’s *The Blithedale Romance* (1852), which focuses on Feminism in particular, the most influential Utopian force in American history.

BOURGEOIS PASTORALISM

This resembles the conventional literary pastoral in being artificial, and like *utopian pastoralism* is an example of what Leo Marx in *The Machine in the Garden* calls “sentimental” as opposed to “complex” *pastoralism*. The “good place” is artificial “nature”: the insular suburb, the singles bar with plastic plants, the fantasy expressed by the beer commercial or the romance novel, wherever the dissociated American tries to be “natural.” The “good” shepherds and shepherdesses, whoever gratifies without threatening security, are numerous in the mass culture from advice columnists and sex gurus to movie stars and athletes who provide vicarious fulfillment, as in pornography. Chopin’s *The Awakening* (1899) is the classic American satire of *bourgeois pastoralism*. Later such satirical classics include Sinclair Lewis’s *Babbitt* (1922) and Don DeLillo’s postmodern *White Noise* (1985).

HIP PASTORALISM

Hip *pastoralism* grew out of the bohemian tradition, the “beatnik” movement of the 1950s, the countercultural revolution of the 1960s, the anti-Vietnam War protests, the mass media, the affluence of middle-class America and the youth of the baby boomers. The “good place” is the high. Insofar as it is authentic, it is a new synthesis of *folk*, *frontier* and in a few instances *agrarian pastoralisms*--witness the popularity of overalls and pioneer clothing. The festival at Woodstock, New York in 1969 became a popular mythic epitome of *hip pastoral* idealism. Significantly, it only lasted three days and was made possible by *puritanism*--the labor of many workers. Insofar as it is inauthentic, or “put on,” this pastoralism too recalls the artificiality of the conventional literary pastoral. For awhile, *hip pastoralism* was *utopian*, and overall in many cases it was a hedonistic variety of *bourgeois pastoralism*, especially when it depended on drugs as it often did in the 1960s, to induce *folk pastoral* feelings and artificially transcendent experience. A representative expression of *hip pastoralism* is *Another Roadside Attraction* (1971) by Tom Robbins and effective satires of it are *All the Little Live Things* (1967) by Wallace Stegner and *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (1968) by Tom Wolfe.

PSYCHOLOGY OF PASTORALISM

“The dis-integration of the psyche as a result of verticality has been one of the major themes of modern literature since Nathaniel Hawthorne in “Ethan Brand” defined the Unpardonable Sin as a separation and tyranny of the head over the heart. Carl Jung diagnosed it as the general condition of the modern mind and T. S. Eliot observed it as a characteristic of poetry in English since the 17th century, calling it “dissociation of sensibility.” More recently, in Margaret Atwood’s *Surfacing* (1972) dissociation is the predicament of a woman so shut into her head that she is “detached, terminal. I was nothing but a head.” Holocaust narratives, in which the ideal of the City has been degraded to a concentration camp, are testimony to the horrors that have resulted from extreme dissociation of the head from the heart. In general, dissociation is suggested by confinement in City-like space, by the absence or scarcity of Garden space, and by aridity or devastation caused by humans in the Wilderness.

The horizontal mode of consciousness escapes the dominance of verticality. It overthrows hierarchy and gives centrality to the heart, returning to the Garden. This mode is pastoral in spirit and often picaresque or episodic in form, as expressed by the poet reclining on the grass in Walt Whitman’s “Song of Myself,” and by Jack Kerouac’s beatnik style of being “on the road.” Pastoral values such as peace and freedom are conveyed by relaxing and by horizontal movement through space in a fusion with Nature. The pastoral can take two general forms. As explained by Leo Marx, “sentimental pastoralism” is simplistic, whereas “complex pastoralism” takes into account the complexities of life.

The most popular genres primarily in the horizontal mode exemplify sentimental pastoralism, such as the western and the formulaic romance, or horse opera and soap opera--expressing predominantly masculine and predominantly feminine values, respectively. With panoramic horizontal imagery, horse operas are set in the mythical Garden of the West. The independent western hero, of either gender, is free of the constraints, pressures and values of vertical consciousness, except in matters of survival. From his or her perspective, marriage is a vertical institution associated with the church in the frontier town. In contrast, the saloon is a wild space. The feminine side of the hero is expressed through a few limited relationships, especially with a horse. Verticality is also represented by the sheriff in town, and usually by the dominant capitalist there, who is associated with the City-like space of his office, often including a locked safe, and sometimes with the railroad, the iconic machine in the Garden. Similarly, with their enclosed spaces and emotional close-ups, soap operas express the feminine sides of both genders and concern matters of the heart, but also status, money and power--combining the horizontal values of the bourgeois Garden with the vertical values of the City.

Complex pastoralism is informed by a puritanism from the vertical mode, often expressed in irony and satire that subverts the sentimental. For example, in Hemingway's "Indian Camp," where the horizontal is imaged by a pastoral lake, sentimental pastoralism is embodied in a boy named Adams, who has not yet fallen into knowledge of the Wilderness, nor risen into an understanding of dissociation as epitomized by his father. At the opposite extreme, complex pastoralism is illustrated in "Big Two-Hearted River" by a traumatized veteran who retreats from the shock of knowledge, epitomized by war, into a pastoral "good place" where the fishing is easy, a sanctuary in which to regain self-control and strength before facing challenges in the Wilderness again by attempting to fish in a swamp.

Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* dramatizes pastoral psycho-dynamics with a plot that roughly follows the paradigmatic order of City/Garden/Wilderness. The egocentric Tom Sawyer has a lot of money in his town/City, wants to be the head of everything, represents immature conventional society--its racism and romantic foolishness--and is dissociated from the humanity of Jim, the enslaved soul. Vertically, Huck is in the middle, representing the heart. As a southern white boy, however, he is conditioned to subordinate Jim and to look up to Tom. He runs away from the puritanism of the upright Miss Watson and the widow Douglas, and from the primitivism of his Pap in the Wilderness, but his alienation leaves him unable to attain the self-knowledge he needs for self-esteem. By helping Jim to escape, he saves his own soul. Yet he thinks, ironically, that he is going to hell as a result. His conditioned thinking is vertical, while his heart rebels and prevails by bonding with Jim on the raft, his "good place."

From the moral perspective that is traditional in American literature since the 18th century, the pastoral horizontal mode of consciousness "elevates" people to equality. Twain's personal morality, his independent vertical thinking, goes farther than that. He turns the racist moral hierarchy of his culture upside-down, putting Jim on top. Yet his style is pastoral. He deploys Huck in a horizontal mode and affirms the triumph of a good heart over social conditioning. In such ways the vertical and the horizontal modes may be simultaneous. Much of the drama in literature is generated by the dialectical tension between and within the different modes of the spatial paradigm.

Huckleberry Finn illustrates all of the four main types of movement in the horizontal mode, the first two sentimental and the second two complex:

- (1) vertical encroachment into the Garden, often represented by a machine such as the steamboat that overturns the raft, and personified in Tom Sawyer;
- (2) escape from the vertical mode into sentimental pastoralism, as represented by popular romance, personified in both Tom and Emmeline Grangerford;
- (3) downward counterpoint in complex pastoralism, conveyed by Twain through irony, satire, problems during the journey down the river, and a pseudo-happy ending;
- (4) progress toward the holistic mode in the individuation process, personified in Huck.

Narratives with unreliable narrators such as *Huck Finn* illustrate how the limited “I” may be transcended by a more comprehensive vision through subtexts and implications beyond the consciousness of the unreliable narrator. The horizontal mode of consciousness is sustained in some popular genres, but psychologically it tends to be transitory. As *Huck* demonstrates, vertical thinking is supplemented by lateral or right-brained thinking, according to which all modes are subject to change. Accordingly, beyond the horizontal mode and often evolving from it, as happens immediately in Whitman’s “Song of Myself,” is the holistic mode of consciousness.”

Michael Hollister
“Model of Metaphors” (1995)