The Pastoral Tradition in Les Murray's Selected Early Poems

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Abstract

"Pastoral," as a term, or bucolic, refers to the poems which are set in the countryside and whose subject is herdsmen and their rural existence. It has its origin in the classical times. Theocritus was the first to use this term and then Virgil followed him, within two centuries, designed his Eclogues based on Idylls of Theocritus, where the genre turned to be highly sophisticated and appealing.

Les Murray, an Australian poet, relates the three essential tributaries of Australian culture in his poetry; the Indigenous, the Pastoral, and the Urban. Major part of his poetry concentrated on the rural-urban relationship according to Australian culture. His exceptionally close relationship with the land is obviously specified in his poetry, as his childhood reminiscences are immersed with the beauty of nature. He stated his association with the physical setting and wildlife.

The present paper is about selected poems from Murray's The Ilex Tree (1965), The Weather Cathedral (1969) and Ethnic Radio (1977). In "Noonday Axeman," The axemen's working life is given more importance in the poem than the forests, placing human life value above ecological value. The poem, "Evening Alone at Bunyah," highlights Murray's sense of belonging and legal possession of the Bunyah family house. He also expresses his strong bond

with this place. The poem “The Returnees” celebrates the capacity to re-establish ties to one's own land.

Key Words:

Pastoral, aboriginal, country, city, landscape, culture

التقليد الرعوي في القصائد الاولى لليس موراي

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الخلاصة

يشير مصطلح "الرعوية" أو مصطلح "رعوي" إلى القصائد التي تدور أحداثها في الريف والتي يتمحور موضوعها حول الرعاة ووجودهم الريفي. أصله في العصور الكلاسيكية. كان ثيوكريتس أول من استخدم هذا المصطلح ، ثم تبعه فيرجيل في غضون قرنين من الزمان ، حيث صمم أناشيد الرعاة استنادًا إلى الاناشيد الرعوية لثيوكريتس، حيث تحول هذا النوع إلى درجة عالية من التعقيد والجاذبية.

يروي الشاعر الأسترالي ليس موراي في شعره الروافد الأساسية الثلاثة للثقافة الأسترالية: السكان الأصليون، الرعوي، والحضري. ركز جزء كبير من شعره على العلاقة بين الريف والحضر وفقًا للثقافة الأسترالية. علاقته الوثيقة بشكل استثنائي بالأرض موصوفة في شعره بشكل واضح ، حيث أن ذكريات طفولته مغمورة بجمال الطبيعة. وذكر ارتباطه بالمكان الطبيعي والحياة البرية.

يتناول هذا البحث قصائد مختارة من السلسلة الشعرية " *شجرة الايلكس"* (١٩٦٥) والسلسلة الشعرية "*الكاتدرائية المواجهة للريح"* (١٩٦٩)، والسلسلة الشعرية " *الراديو العرقي"* (١٩٧٧). في "نهار الحطاب،" تُعطى الحياة العملية للحطاب في القصيدة أهمية أكبر من الغابات ، مما يضع قيمة حياة الإنسان فوق القيمة البيئية. تسلط قصيدة " *وحيداً مساءاً في بونيا*" الضوء على شعور موراي بالانتماء والحيازة القانونية لمنزل عائلة بونيا. كما يعبر عن علاقته القوية بهذا المكان. تحتفل قصيدة "العائدون" بالقدرة على إعادة العلاقات مع أرض المرء.

الكلمات المفتاحية:
رعوي، بدائي، الريف، المدينة، المناظر الطبيعية، الحضارة.

Introduction

There are numerous definitions of pastoral, but very few of them are adequate. Poetry that is pastoral might be thought of as being about shepherds or goatherds and their herds in the countryside (Schur, 1989, p. 2).

The pastoral, according to Cuddon (1991), is a secondary yet essential mode that covers the shepherds lives. This authentic genre has penetrated many classical and modern works in European literature. It is still uncertain whether the genre has much to do with shepherds' everyday life. European countries are acquainted with shepherds in most of its regions especially in countries of agricultural nature. Shepherds tend to write poetry and sing their songs in addition to playing flute. The general view for this kind of literature is that the pastoral seems to romanticize shepherds' life. This kind of life will create an image of quiet and pure ways of life; it is a "pre-lapsarian" realm (p. 686).

Pastoral poem, which is an intricately traditional poem expresses the urban poet's yearn and longing for the tranquility and peaceful life of shepherds and countryside people in a romanticized natural environment. There are certain terms employed interchangeably with pastoral including "idyll," from the title of Theocritus' pastorals; "eclogue" (literally, "a selection"), from the title of Virgil's pastorals; and "bucolic" poetry, borrowed from the Greek word "herdsman" (Abrams, 1988, p. 127).

Pastoral as a term, or bucolic, refers to the poems which are set in the countryside and whose theme is herdsmen and their rural existence (Karakasis, 2011, p. 4). This genre is a reputable and original literary type that related to classical times. It is thought that pastoral's original is based on "Theocritus, the Greek poet of the third century BC" (Mizukosh, 2001, p. 55).

The origin of pastoral poetry can be attributed to the "boukolika" ("ox-herding poems") in the poetry of Theocritus of Syracuse during the mid-third-century BC. For Theocritus, "bucolic" poetry involved the exchange of song, often in a song contest, between herders, whether of oxen, sheep, cows, or goats. Writing in response to increasing urbanization of life and the consequent longing for the simplicity of rural life, Theocritus depicted the Sicily of his carefree childhood from the perspective of the overwrought civilization of the "Alexandria of

Ptolemy II Philadelphus". Humphrey Tonkin observes that Theocritus's decision to use pastoral to talk about poetry is of the utmost importance because it suggests a new way of viewing the pastoral tradition as a means of articulating a metaphor for poetic experience (Potts, 2011, p. 1).

The pastoral tradition has two divisions, "Theocritean and Virgilian." Theocritus "Idylls" introduced elegant and educated audience to beautiful and natural scenery of luxurious summer of Sicily as a source of enjoyment and rejoice. Pastoral poetry, from the very beginning gave a full portrayal of natural aestheticism expressed in its consumption (Mizukoshi, 2001, p. 55).

Nevertheless, Virgil within two centuries designed his Eclogues based on Idylls of Theocritus, where the genre turned to be highly sophisticated and appealing. When someone compares "Idyll V" with "Eclogue III," "which is the closest of all to Theocritus's style," he can see essential differences between those poets. The poems take the mode of songs that will take place in the contest between two shepherds. Though Theocritean shepherds enjoy leisure time to acclaim the country pleasures, Virgilian herdsmen cry over the wasted countryside. During the troubled times, the Eclogues were written in time following the assassination of

"Julius Caesar in 44 BC." At that time, Italy was suffering from civil war. The disorder of war and the subsequent fear of expulsion and property seizure breached the pastoral heaven of Virgil's countryside. Ironically, the political interference of political disorders to Virgil pastoral sanctuary helped to idealize landscape. Theocritus, on the other side, introduced direct portrayals of idyllic nature of Sicily during summer. For Virgil, landscape of countryside is largely eliminated from modern social and political environment into an isolated and remote Arcadia land. Only "Eclogues I and IX" have references to the political disorder of the period. The other "Eclogues" reflect a pacific rural area where Olympian gods populated it with and mythological creatures that gives readers imaginative sanctuary from cruel reality of Virgil. It may be claimed that Virgil "discovered" Arcadia as a poetical scenery (Mizukoshi, 2001, p. 55).

Literary influence of Theocrat was related to the current across the Mediterranean Sea and reaches the Italy of beaches in which Virgil designed his Eclogues on poems of Theocritus, who caught the "Golden Age" core where herdsmen dwelled in idyllic coordination (Auden, 2003, p. 9).

There are several poems in Greece but only limited poems are genuinely pastoral, that are attributed in doubtful manner to two poets, Bion and Moschus (Chaudhuri, 2016, p. xix), where the poems are similar to one another (Cuddon, 1991, p. 686). Moreover, in classical times, Virgil has several followers, who are two minor poets, Calpurnius and Nemesianus (Chaudhuri, 2016, p. xix).

The effect of Virgil on European writings could be related to expansion of Roman Empire, which was part of establishing Roman's strategy. Virgil wrote in Latin vernacular that turned to be part of man's heritage in Europe and England. This language affected greatly the writers and critics of the islands or continents,

who discussed the pastoral. Virgil is renowned in the Middle Ages due to several outstanding stanzas especially in the Fourth Eclogue. These stanzas represented "as a prophecy of the coming of the Messiah, the advent of Christ". Th. This gave pastoral additional rominence since it is related to religious figure, where Christ was regarded the shepherd and people are his herd. Virgil in last centuries has given a great push for pastoral genre to revive and flourish in England and Europe. Cipolla clarified that, "The influence of Vergil upon subsequent ages was understandably very great and it is to him rather than to Theocritus that the long popularity of the pastoral tradition may be traced. His Eclogues were the principal source of inspiration for all later writers of pastoral poetry" (Auden, 2003, pp. 9-10).

The major characteristics of classical pastoral can be seen as follows: poems of pastoral poetry happen in short hexameter poems collections, several poems are with a single narrator and others with several speakers. This literary type focused on herdsmen (usually to certain poetic figures), who during their rest time sing (sometimes they compete with each other). They are related to the pleasures and desires of Eros. The themes of shepherds' songs vary, but they frequently touch on tensions between work and playing, the countryside and the city, man and nature, the real world and a romanticized view of the world, and politics and an unpolitical bucolic setting. However, the herdsman is commonly seen as the hub of the process. Therefore, Leo Marx has referred to early modern pastoral criticism with a maxim "no shepherd, no pastoral". In his modern investigation of pastoral as a genre and a mode, Paul Alpers introduces

an essential definition not nature or the country, but "herdsmen and their lives" (Fredericksen, 2014, p. 19).

By the passing of time, the genre evolved to a significant expression literary mode particularly during the Renaissance in England where poets employed it as a tool to illustrate their attitudes to nature and urbanity, to

examine facets of love in respect of usual shepherd satisfied life, and to discuss indirectly religion and politics (Auden, 2003, p. 10).

From the Renaissance through the eighteenth century, pastoral literature was a popular literary genre in Europe. It also existed in various artistic mediums, particularly in the visual arts, and after it was abandoned as a distinct genre, parts of it continued to be used in twentieth-century art genres like music. With the spread of colonialism of European culture, the pastoral impact expanded over other countries. In recent times, this term has returned into eminence in English literature, not in Great Britain only, but especially in the United State of America and Australia, with the development of writing stimulated by environmental connection with the natural world, landscape in particular. This development led to re-define the term in recent decades. Some Australian poets observed how their writings on nature could connect to, or involve pastoral factors (Taylor, 2015, p. 38).

Poetry played a significant role in establishing Australian literature. Australia was a group of British colonies during its early history, so, its literature and tradition began and related to the wider English literature tradition. It was to some degree postcolonial in its features with topics of estrangement, integration, and alienation. However, in mid of nineteenth century, poets began to describe the people and the country. In 20^{th} century, social awareness began to crystalize that depicted both in thought and literature (Jain, 2015, p. 300).

Les Murray was the only boy of a nurse, whose name was Miriam, and the father was a farmer, whose name Cecil. He was born in Nabiac village far to the north coast of New South Wales, Australia. He was born on 17 October, 1938 and brought up in dairy ranch near Bunyah. He was the Presbyterian's grandson of the immigrant from the borders of Scotland, who migrated to avoid poverty. Murray's mother passed away when he was 12 and spent his childhood with his father till he

won Commonwealth Scholarship to study modern languages at Sydney University (Arana, 2008, pp. 297).

Murray, the author of a distinguishing work collection, discussed the same essential topics during his fifty-year career: Aboriginal heritage of Australia, colonial history; modern technology, and the loss of rural traditions, the milieu and mans' relation with it; and poetry role in modern era (Malay, 2018, p. 160).

Les Murray was broadly considered as the principal Australian poet of his time. He was born and brought up in a dairy farm in new south Wales rural area. A poet and Nobel laureate, Derek Walcott, said about works of Murray, "there is no poetry in English language now so rooted in its sacredness, so broad-leafed in its pleasures and yet so intimate and conversational". Poetry of Murray was defined by a clear and evident sense of family, life of workers, and the relations between man and the land they live on (Brennan, 2015, p. 60).

There are central poetic modes in Murray's poetry: the first, employment of "middle style and sacramental (or ritual) temperament," with a democratic feeling of everyday life as the location of the sanctified. the second, a feeling of human, cultural approximation, or as Murray himself puts it, "an enactment of a longed-for fusion of all three cultures [Aboriginal, country or city], a fusion which, as yet perhaps, can only exist in art, or in blessed moments when power and ideology are absent". The third, propheticism that take both social critic and satirist forms, and as divine messenger (McCredden, 2005, p. 16).

Les Murray saw culture via particularities and communal identity of countryside people. Through discovering the relationship between the person, nature and his/her legacy, Murray pursued to communicate those who chose to live away of soil. (Murray has characterized the divide between rural and urban ways

of perceiving the worlds as either Boeotian or Athenian.) It is not denote that Murray depended wholly on rural surrounding; on the the contrary: his images and topics range broadly through a wide range of resources. Nevertheless, the manner to look at was mainly rural "Australian" and searched to outline definite national identity (Kinsella, 1996, p. 98).

His poem "Noonday Axeman" from volume *The Ilex Tree* (1965) develops a quasi-connection to place. The poet adopts themes of "ancestors and dreaming" via a lexicon of

quietness and stillness which wipes away the forest's natural existence and tries to re-construct an indigenous set of beliefs to rationalize European presence (Jansen, 2009, pp. 49-50):

> "Axe-fall, echo and silence. Noonday silence.
> Two miles from here, it is the twentieth century:
> cars on the bitumen, powerlines vaulting the farms.
> Here, with my axe, I am chopping into the stillness." (Murray, 2006, p. 3)

In "Noonday Axeman", place and people amiable compatibleness is portrayed through the cattle manifestation (Jain, 2015, p. 303):

> "Here, I remember all of a hundred years:
> candle flame, still night, frost and cattle bells,
> the drag wheels' silence final in our ears,
> and the first red cattle spreading through the hills." (Murray, 2006. P. 4)

Although ostensibly altered by modern times and technology, Murray thinks that Australia's rural core (his "Vernacular Republic") is fundamentally identical to earlier periods. The poem "Noonday Axeman" respects the pioneer Murrays' work and determination (Jain, 2015, p. 303):

> "A hundred years of clearing, splitting, sawing
> a hundred years of timbermen, ringbarkers, fencers
> and women in kitchens, stoking loud iron stoves
>
> year in, year out, and singing old songs to their children." (Murray, 2006, p.4)

Murray excels at dramatizing common thoughts and descriptions of animals, machineries or landscape. Social issue are frequently examined by Murray throughout the highlighting of common elements related to the natural domain (Jain, 2015, p. 303).

Murray's quiet forest has the ability of generating "a knowledge that led my forebears/to drink and black rage and wordlessness". The "same silence" controls once the tree has been chopped, "[u]nhuman silence" when he chops "on into the stillness". It is suggested by the poet "that there are always some who could live in the presence/of silence," people "who would die if removed from these unpeopled places," on the contrary of the "noisy city." The forest may have

a "[d]reaming silence" that arouses the poet's remembrance for the ancestors: "axemen, dairymen, horse-breakers,/now coffined in silence" before he "sets off home through the stillness." For the sake of his argument, Murray indicates an aboriginal bond with the land that diminishes cultural agency. A reality unrecognized by him is that aboriginal Australians possess oral conventions as well as beliefs associated with place which date back tens of thousands of years before British colonization (Jansen, 2009, p. 50).

"Noonday Axeman" is one of the most fascinating forestry poems. It has a magnificent carnival of axemen generations that "have worked in the forestry industry," a celebration where Murray's pastoral working classes are being honored. The Australian scholar, "Carmel Gaffney," captures this situation admirably when she comments "Murray espouses values associated with the land, he speaks for those who have learnt peace and community values from their understanding of the land and nature's seasons". The poet, however, mostly writes

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about "rural white working class people" who work in a field where nature is more often referred to as "dominion" than "dwelling". The poem's slow controlled rhythm, the alliteration, the wonderful refrain demand that the poem must be read aloud. However, the poem seems to be based on the supposition that "forests are immediately renewable, as impossible to come to the end of as counting the stars in the heavens". In spite of the decades of logging, the poet believes "that he will be forever coming back here to walk, knee-deep in ferns". He writes (Hall, 2011, p. 77):

> "coming back here on the up-train, peering, leaning
> out of the window to see, on far-off ridges
> the sky between the trees, and over the racket
> of the rails to hear the echo and the silence.
> I shoulder my axe and set off home through the stillness." (Murray, 2006, p. 6)

The axemen's working life is given more importance in the poem than the forests, placing human life value above ecological value. According to Murray, those workers are with "gentle broad hands" who may die if were separated from these uninhabited settings, these natural forests. The axemen, in Murray's opinion are "truly at home in this country." Despite the fact

that the poem is about woods, this love is built on "husbandry not conservation". (Hall, 2011, p. 77).

As issues are interpreted differently, several techniques are developed to address them. Thoughts on the cultural and political aspects of dispossession were occasionally considered in the twentieth century's poetics of place and home, but they were poorly stated. At a period when aboriginal people lacked basic human rights but were nonetheless actively organizing against the on-going brutality of invasion and settlement, the Jindyworobak movement in particular—of which Les Murray claims to be the inheritor—sought a language of place and home by co-

opting aboriginal culture and adopting a few terms. The reader can see this in Murray's Bunyah poems, which strive for spatial and cosmic connection through frameworks of work, defense, and inheritance and establish the pastoral home as the meeting place of the natural and human worlds in his poem "Evening Alone at Bunyah" from his collection *The Weather Cathedral* (1969). The effectiveness with which these poetics can be translated back into standard English establishes the irrelevance of linguistic or spiritual authenticity (Corr, 2019, p. 2):

> "the earth contracts, the planks of the old house creak,
> making one more adjustment, joist to nail,
> nail to roof, roof to the touch of dew.
> Smoke stains, rafters, whitewash rubbed off planks...
> yet this is one house that Jerry build to last:
> when windstorms came, and other houses lost
> roofs and verandahs, this gave just enough
> and went unscathed." (Murray, 2006, p. 13)

The poem highlights Murray's sense of belonging and legal possession of the Bunyah family house, "which the hardships of nature ultimately legitimate with a sense of merit, or benediction" (Corr, 2019, p.3).

The rural New South Wales area of Bunyah is a recurring theme in several of Murray's poetry. In "Evening Alone at Bunyah", the natural world is portrayed as a place where a "Golden Age" has never ended, as unspoiled, abundant, and healing, and as a feminine entity that is both ready to procreate and willing to provide motherly care (Hollier, 2006, pp. 246-247).

Murray talks about being at home while his father attends a dance. He remembers some of his childhood experiences at this home, then talks about the neighborhood, regretting that "Since those moth-grimed streetlamps came", signifying encroaching modernity, my dark is threatened". The location is already shown here as being gloomy and Gothic instead of being sparkling in the dazzling

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light iconized by leading nationalist artists like those of the "Heidelberg school." The poet continues by saying that his family and community were born out of this soil or land. He declares, "this country is my mind," expressing his strong bond with this place. The poem's concluding part emphasizes the lack of human control (and of original, or Aboriginal, human possession), by stating twice that the "country" is dark and referring to this as a wilderness." . It is implied that the "black" land, which, as we recall, is also the poet's "mind", makes the poet lonely: "Sitting alone's a habit of mind with me ... / for which I'll pay in full". However, the gloomy land itself is a source of profound comfort (Hollier, 2006, pp. 247-248):

"Today, having come back, summer was all mirror
tormenting me. I fled down cattle tracks
chest-deep in the earth, and pushed in under twigs
to sit by cool water speeding over rims
of blackened basalt, the tall light reaching me." (Murray, 2006, p. 14)

It is demonstrated that the poet, his family, and their neighborhood not only dwell in perfect harmony with the natural environment but also with the entirety of the world: "Beneath this moon", the poet claims, "an ancient radiance comes / back from far hillsides ..." (Hollier, 2006, p. 248). The poet being the persona of "Evening Alone at Bunyah" studies the moonlit landscape from his childhood bedroom as he feels relieved to be "home again from the cities of the world". More than just a common landscape can be seen by him (Leer, 2001, p. 15):

"This country is my mind. I lift my face
and count my hills and linger over one:
Deer's, steep, bare-topped, where eagles nest below
the summit in scrub pines, and where I take
my city friends to tempt them with my past.
Across the creek and paddock of the moon

four perfect firs stand dark beside a field
lost long ago, which holds a map of rooms.
This was the plot from which we transplants sprang.
The trees grew straight. We burgeoned and spread far." (Murray, 2006, p. 15)

The surrounding landscape seems to be more important to the "experiencing consciousness" than whatever he holds internally in his head.; the surroundings affects the persona's identity: the existing landscape is "mindscape, memoryscape and dreamscape" (Leer, 2001, p. 15).

In "Evening Alone at Bunyah" Murray has returned to his country home to escape from the chaos of the urban world. The story thus centers on a journey back to a place where Murray's speaker somewhat feels he unavoidably belongs . After coming back, the speaker can now see everything clear before him. Over that act of seeing, a kind of ownership has been granted. The seeing, however, can only occur if a very strong mode of habitation has been created - one that would be both tranquil and oriented from a certain, prominent vantage point. On his farm, the speaker is by himself at home, his rightful place, on a cold, seemingly peaceful night as the valley cools off from the sweltering day (Cooke, 2011, p. 233).

In his essay "The Bonnie Disproportionate" (1984), Murray uses the "Gaelic" word "corracagailte" to describe his relationship to his Scottish origins, family, and community. This word refers to the blazing embers left behind from a fire, the concentration of inheritance and sincere meaning that may have a potent passionate quality. A poem like "Evening Alone at Bunyah" that concerns his return to his home in "Bunyah" after visiting places throughout the world, may take hold of the whole passionate contexts of "corracagailte." The poem has a warm yet melancholic atmosphere when there are references to "Murray's father, his own childhood, and the old days", which give the poem autobiographical

relevance to Murray's emotional core and strong bond to his land (Stevens, 2020, p. 72):

"This country is my mind. I lift my face

and count my hills, and linger over one." (Murray, 2006, p. 15)

In writing in the first person, Murray was able to successfully create what may be described as "a mythological quality," which enabled him to convey to the reader his personal relationship with his father and his mystical connection to his land. The pastoral depictions of Murray's familiar landscapes also have a romantic flavor, which shows how deeply connected he is to his land. By encouraging readers to ask questions that have no obvious answers and simply evoke strong feelings, Murray creates mythological imagery (Stevens, 2020, p. 72):

"Beneath the moon, an ancient radiance comes
back from far hillsides
…
lest I should hear
the barking of dogs from a clearing where no house
has ever stood, and, walking down a road
in the wilderness, meet a man who waited there
beside a creek to tell me what I sought." (Murray, 2006, p. 16)

The poet is searching for memories of his father in this pastoral environment described in the lines above, and they leave the reader reflecting. In Murray's interpretation of the "vernacular republic", the mystical sense of place, imagining something familiar yet immaterial, local but indeterminate ,is, paradoxically an ineffable component of the vernacular (Stevens, 2020, p. 73).

In Murray's poem "Evening alone at Bunyah," aloneness, loneliness, the evasive echoes of ghosts fused with the quiddity of place, play against each other. The house becomes more than nexus for social interaction, it becomes one with the land. This is both claim and slippage: the house becomes metaphor, as the elegy

for his dead mother and also for the absence of the father, who remains 'married' to his deceased partner, is woven. The poet, or the poet's persona, "Home again from the cities of the world", is confronting issues of belonging, of loyalty and potential 'betrayal', of the home in a literal and symbolic sense (Kinsella, 2008, p. 144):

"I stand, and turn, and wander through the house,
avoiding those floorboards that I know would creak,
to the other verandah. Here is where I slept,

and here is where, one staring day, I felt
a presence at my back, and whirled in fright
to face my father's suit, hung out to air.” (Murray, 2006, p.15)

Murray goes on in the next stanza to say, “This country is my mind,” and in this sense, the house is a zone of conversation. Through the material structure, the picture is claimed as truth. For settler or invader, the culture, the house, the town, the roads, and telephone lines, become trails and tracks and totemic points of reference. So there is something similar here to the pastoral nexus of the English country manor, and the praise of the house comes from those who occupy it, who write it, but Murray's version differs because of the issue of intrusion, a strong paranoia that arises from an awareness of spiritual 'trespass' (Kinsella, 2008, p. 145):

“the edge of dark country I cannot afford
to walk in at night alone
lest I should hear
the barking dogs from a clearing where no house
has ever stood.” (Murray, 2006, p. 16)

The absence of a house is a vulnerability to what came before, and what is still the spirit of the land. This is a frontier poem of fear. a fear of loss of family, of self, of presence in the landscape, of home. It finishes as (Kinsella, 2008, p. 145):

“Father, come home soon
Come home alive.” (Murray, 2006, p.16)

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The poem "The Returnees" from the volume Ethnic Radio (1977) celebrates the capacity to re-establish ties to one's own land and the ability to put that experience into art. Murray "describes an excursion on the bark-steeped waters of the Myall Lakes in central New South Wales" in "The Returnees." Although he has left Bunyah's heartland, the setting in which he views the lakes is one he is familiar with (Fürstenberg, 2004, pp. 68-77):

“the tanbark-coloured water was
a gruel of pollen: more coming down
hinted strange futures to our cells

the far hills ancient under it
the corn flats black-green under heat
were cut in antique grainy gold.”

(Murray, 2006, p. 254)

This is the same agricultural landscape as before, but it is seen from a distance here. When the 'returnees' land on one of the "slow bush headlines," they look out over the water towards hills. The view is described like this (Fürstenberg, 2004, p. 77):

"the brain-shaped trees
the wrinkling middle gleam, the still
indifferently well-wooded hills."
(Murray, 2006, p. 254)

Despite a slight change from the farms and hills of the Bunyah poems, the vision is essentially the same and unites the past, present, and memory in an unified frame. The boat's passengers observe a snake in the water. (Fürstenberg, 2004, p. 77):

"Where
the milk wharf took the sun
flint-hard on top, dappling below

(remembered children danced up here

spinning their partners, the bright steel cans.
A way of life. But a way of life.)

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The snake rose like a Viking ship
singed mud with a scattering flourish and
was into the wale of potato ground

like a whip withdrawn. We punted it."
(Murray, 2006, p. 256)

This is a historical allusion to the fact that, before to the construction of the railway, milk from the Bunyah region was transported to Newcastle by coastal steamer. Local history lends locations meaning; in this case, the speaker is aware of the previous purpose of the "rotted" structure he observes. The memory image is incorporated into the poem so skillfully that it becomes a real part of the situation being described (Fürstenberg, 2004, p. 77).

The environment stirs up complex emotions in the "returnees." In this poetry, the speaker makes it clear that the scenery is what makes him happy, and he utilizes two similes to describe his emotions. The initial is this (Fürstenberg, 2004, p. 78):

"Such friendliness shone into us, such
dry complex cheer, insouciant calm

out of everything, the brain-shaped trees
the wrinkling middle gleam, the still
indifferently well-wooded hills, it was

like rowing to meet your very best
passionately casual and dead friends
and feast with them on a little island."
(Murray, 2006, pp. 256-257)

By placing these seeming discrepancies in the larger framework of the country-view that informs Murray's early poetry, the apparent contradictions in this section are clarified. The dead are a part of the land as well as the speaker's vision

and experience, and the past and present coexist together in this viewpoint. "Casual" friends are referenced in this verse. Les Murray's focus is always on the commonplace; he favors populated areas over untamed nature, emphasizes marriage above romantic love, and uses unpoetic objects like chainsaws in his

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poetry. "Casual" friendship fits well with both this and the poem's purposefully subdued tone. However, the buddies aren't just "casual," they're "passionately casual." Les Murray's poetry elevates and celebrates the commonplace, occasionally not without irony but always with friendliness and humor. Since the daily and the ordinary are so consistently at the center of his poetry and elicit such strong emotions, especially in the celebration poems, the tension between "casual" and "passionate" poetry is resolved. The use of honour is one way to maintain the casual nature of the impassioned celebration of the ordinary (Fürstenberg, 2004, p. 78).

Another, more "serious" level—in this example, religion—is combined with the seemingly unimportant in the second simile used to express the special enjoyment of this boating expedition (Fürstenberg, 2004, p. 78):

"or [it was like] an angel leaning down to one
queuing o the Day, to ask
what was the best throw that you did?
That note, raised to the pitch of tears:
tower of joking, star of skill,
gate of sardonyx and won gold."
(Murray, 2006,p. 257)

The religious component is given significant consideration in this; the thought of someone having to stand in line for the Second Coming makes one smile, and the question of the angel wraps up the lighthearted little sketch. However, notwithstanding how far-fetched and humorous they may seem, the echoes of a litany in "tower of joking, star of talent" make it tempting to flip the

argument and look for the "quasi-religious component hidden in the shared delight of the boating expedition on the Lakes" (Fürstenberg, 2004, p. 79).

When read in the context of this discussion, "The Returnees" sums up an entire aesthetic philosophy. The speaker makes a statement on his descriptions of the "corn flats" and "far-hills" in the first section, saying that "it was the light of

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Boeotian art," or art that was centered in Boeotia, the country rather than the city. One of the poem's main themes, "lifelong sound / on everything," is introduced in the second section. It is characterized by (Fürstenberg, 2004, p. 80):

> “That low fly-humming
> melismatic untedious endless
> note that a drone-plus-chants or
> (shielding our eyes, roking the river)
> A ballad _ some ballads _ catch, the one
> Some paintings and many yarners summon
> The ground-note here of unsnubbing art
> Cicadas were in it, and that Gothic
> Towering of crystal in the trees
> Jock Neilson cutting a distant log.”
> (Murray, 2006, pp. 245-255)

It is obvious where Boeotian art can be found: in music, a drone-pipe-plus-chants deal is the order of the day. The essence of Boeotia is captured in "some" artworks. No information is provided, but a few paragraphs later, a reference to timber cutters makes the reader thinks of Tom Roberts' paintings. Some ballads also have the Boeotian bass note. Compared to other types of poetry, ballads are better suited to being recited loudly. Only a small percentage of paintings and ballads, but a large percentage of yarners, capture the "lifelong sound / on everything." Of course, knitting is by definition a social activity. The poem claims that Boeotian art is "unsnubbing art," meaning that it doesn't exclude people but rather that it needs a community to succeed. The speaker's use of the pronoun "we" in the poem emphasizes the theoretical point: the

experience of the "ground-note [...] of unsnubbing art" is communal and joyful, not isolated and ecstatic (Fürstenberg, 2004, p. 80).

Conclusion

The term pastoral, often known as bucolic, describes poems that are situated in the countryside and that focus on ranchers and their rural way of life. The intricately traditional poetry "pastoral" portrays the urban poet's wish for the serenity and calm existence of shepherds and country dwellers in a romanticized natural setting.

In "Noonday Axeman," Murray's pastoral working classes are celebrated at this beautiful carnival of axemen generations that have labored in the timber business. Murray also shows the relationship between people and their land. In "Evening Alone at Bunyah," Murray departs from the tumult of the city and heads back to his rural abode. The travel back to the location where Murray's speaker kind of feels like he naturally belongs is what the story is about. The ability to re-establish ties with one's native place and the potential to transform that experience into art are both celebrated in "The Returnees." This poem makes it evident that the speaker derives his or her happiness from the environment. Murray also depicts the deceased as a part of the speaker's view and experience as well as the landscape.

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