Two Modes of the Renaissance Pastoral:
*The Shepheard Calender & A Midsummer Night’s Dream*

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Two different modes of the Renaissance pastoral are presented respectively in Edmund Spenser’s *Shepheards Calender* and Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. In *Shepherd’s Calender*, the pastoral shows a strong tendency toward nostalgia, to which the conventions of the shepherd’s complaint, departure from home, song-match, and love-malady are closely related; whereas in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Shakespeare not only successfully maintains the essence of some pastoral conventions, such as escape, and love-malady, but also adds some “deviances” to the pastoral conventions. In so doing, Shakespeare demonstrates another kind of pastoral. In this paper I would like to use the idea of carnivalization to highlight the characteristics of the pastoral in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.

Edmund Spenser’s *Shepheards Calender*, characterized with the pastoral conventions, generally follows Theocritus’ *Idyll* and Virgil’s *Eclogue* in the evidence of his use of concepts such as the shepherd’s complaint, departure from home, song match, love-malady and his use of objects such as shepherds, rustic cottages, flock and piping. However, Spenser, by means of the pastoral poetry, lampoons the Catholic church severely. Thus, the reader perceives a totally different taste added to *Shepheards Calender*, tangentially independent of the taste of the *Idyll* or the *Eclogues*.

By the elapse of time, the definition of a literary genre or mode is always bound to be either revised or redefined without letting go of its essence. The revising or redefining is performed by the writer or the reader in accordance with the social condition. In this respect, whether the literary genre or mode is justified and becomes suitable or not depends on the interplay of the established conventions; as a result, the metaphysic concept act is exclusive of this paper. What is important is that this psychological cognition actually helps explain the content of William Empson’s *Some Versions of Pastoral*, ¹ which is, to a large extent, traditionally and conventionally running against the grain of the definition of the pastoral poetry.

Under Spenser’s hand and the social condition, *Shepheards Calender* undergoes changes as well. But, by reading into its deep structure the reader is able to become aware of the conventions inherent in it. And one of the conventions I’d like to present is the idea of nostalgia. Moreover, I’d point out how the idea of nostalgia becomes a sort of ritual in *Shepheards Calender*.

In its etymology, nostalgia is the mixture of *nostos* as well as *algos; nostos* is a longing for home or homecoming; *algos* is an intense pain. The longing is a kind of desire; any failure of carrying out the desire results in pain, not of a mild one, but an intense pain
A longing for home or homecoming is always a longing for what is absent here and now. Unlike the word house, home is connotative of the sense of a promising security, warmth and happiness. With respect to the homecoming, the longing is thus transformed into an act or a thrust so that the desire will be fulfilled. The act is a returning act. "Return" is primarily thought to go back to where one once belongs or to get back what one once loses; that is, to go back to the origin (home). In addition, nostos implicitly indicates that there is always a departure from the origin before the longing for home or homecoming is produced. Henceforth, we have a general conclusion about nostos; first, a departure from home (origin); second, through space (places) and time; third, the returning act.

In response to the returning act, algos arises. Algōs, is an intense pain, a pain caused by either the deferral of carrying out the returning act or the forever estrangement from the home (origin). However, the returning act is never to be the same as the line, straight or curve, that one originally starts out. In another word, the way that the returning act moves could be a parabola, or a curve other than the original curve so that the forward line and the backward line will never be overlapped (Garber 446). What is the significance, anyway?

Return is re-turn; between "re-" and "turn" there emerges the complex elements of time, space and experiences, which will always detour the return act, thus defers the act. To put it in another way, only can a boy grow into manhood when he spends time, goes through space (places), and gains himself a variety of experiences of life. Once become experienced, the way he carries out his longing is intrinsically not the same as he commences when he is a boy, naive and innocent.

Therefore, it is interesting to read the Shepheards Calender in the way of regarding nostalgia as a ritual by noting that at the end of every month, except July, there is always one of the characters pronouncing "time to go home." Particularly, in September, Diggon Davie complains of the pains that he has gone through and that the property he is deprived of; he is utterly down and out and as a traveller coming back with a ray of hope to sleep in his home again. Out of kindness, Hobbinoll says to Diggon,

Diggon should soone finde favour and ease:
But if to my cotage thou wilt resort,
So as I can I will thee comfort;
There mayst thou ligge in a vetchy bed,
Till fairer Fortune shew forth his head. (Sep. 253–57)²

Typically, the September demonstrates the deferral of returning act, because without Hobbinoll’s offering his “cotage” for Diggon to "resort", the pain of longing for home will be intensified by the fact that Diggon is reduced to materially homeless. So, by providing the “resort”, Hobbinoll unconsciously performs the ritual— a consoling ritual
which is capable of bringing the traveller’s soul home. The ritual of homecoming is thus of especial importance to a down-and-out.

Similarly, in the metaphorical sense, the reader begins to become fully aware of a universal theme of nostalgia except those of literally home images at the end of each month. The first one occurs to one’s mind is the theme of love-malady, an integrity in pastoral convention. Love suggests happiness, security, and warmth, which is closely associated with the metaphor of home. In addition, the shepherd’s love is always presented in the form of passionate love which is a mixture of sexual desire and spiritual feeling, just like Pan’s burning love toward Syrinx. The shepherd’s love either for a pretty young boy or for Rosalind is destined to be doomed conventionally. Nevertheless, Pan, the god of the shepherds, devises a ritual to transform the love-malady into the poetic practice by the dexterity of his hands that produce pipe out of reed and compose beautiful songs which successfully comfort the soul of the shepherd. In the case of the love-malady, the reader can easily see it both in Januarie and June, in which Colin Clout complains of his unrequited passionate love to Rosalind. Here in Januarie, Colin Clout sings his sad song,

“I love thilke Lasse, (alas! Why doe I love?)
And am forlorn, (alas! Why am I lorne?)
She deignes not my good will, but doth reprove,” (61–63)

And in the June, Colin Clout complains,

“And I, whyst youth, and course of carelesse yeeres,
Did let mee walke withouten lincks of love,
In such delights did joy amongst my peeres;” (33–35)

In Januarie, Colin Clout performs the singing ritual to ease his pain; subsequently in June after he complains, Hobbinoll says that “pype and daunce” will help him overcome the sorrow because of Rosalind.

Besides love, _Shepheards Caalendar_ presents another kind of nostalgia by delineating the garden of Eden already unexistent. The image of Eden is separately described in May and in June. Palinode describes the Garden of Eden:

“For thilke same reasons, when all is ycladde
With pleasaunce; the ground with grass, the woods
With greene leaves, the bushes with bloosming buds.” (May 4–6)

And Hobbinoll describes in June:

“The same ayre, the gentle warbling winde.
So calm, so cool, as nowhere else I finde;
The grassie grounde with daintie daysies bright,
The bramble bush, where byrdes of every kinde
To the waters fall their tunes attempt right.” (June 4–8)

The general assertion about the pastoral poetry is that the pastoral is a work “which envisions a withdrawal from ordinary life to a place apart, close to the elemental rhythms of nature, where a man achieves a new perspective on life in the complex social world” (Abrams 128). The land that is full of milk and honey is the promised land. In the promised land, shepherds earn their living by keeping flock, and piping a song every now and then to entertain themselves. In contrast to the complexity of the city life, the rural living of this kind is an inviting to those city dwellers whose tendency of mind and collective consciousness to reduce complexity to simplicity, to embrace peace and serenity in living is arbitrary. The tendency of the mind is closely related to the longing for home, finally a primitive longing back to the mother’s womb, in which the pure innocent embryo feels nothing but warmth, security and happiness. On the other hand, the primitive longing is always a longing for what is absent in the presence; the absence seems simultaneously impalpable and palpable with a constant retreating. Therefore, in the process of approaching the absent home, the longing will temporarily be fulfilled, but subsequently the approaching will succumb to another succeeding longing, for there is always a lack in the fulfillment of the desire. In this way, the chain of longing constitutes the nostos and algos.

But the ritual is capable of easing the desire by means of piping. The piping usually takes place either in the song match or in the ceremony lamenting a recent dead who once is a hero.⁴ Hence, when in November Thenot discloses the death news of a maiden—Dido to Colin Clout, Colin decides to put aside his sorrow and to sing in honor of Dido. Colin Clout sings:

Up, thou, Melpomene! the mournfulst Muse of Nine
Such cause of mourning never hadst afore;
Up, grislie ghostes! and up my rufull rime!
Matter of myrth now shalt thou have no more;
For dead she is, that myrth thee made of yore.
Dido, my deare, alas! is dead,
Dead, and lyeth wrapt in lead.
O heavie nerse! (Nov. 52–59)

Colin provokes the Muse to help him because “such cause of mourning never hadst afore”; and, to Colin, singing is no more a joyful thing to do. In addition, the death of Dido offers an opportunity for the shepherds to get together; the convening is sung by Colin:
Shepheards, that by your flocks of Kentish downes abyde,
Waile ye this woeful waste of Natures warke;
Waile we the wight, whose presence was our pryde;
Waile we the wight, whose absence is our carke; (61–67)

Colin sings to a group of shepherds who shall temporarily lay aside their jobs and come
to lament the death of Dido. The “absence” of Dido is replaced by a poetic practice,
namely Colin’s singing. As a result, the ritual characterized by Colin’s singing here
becomes a way to make up a loss, a seperation, or an absence. In this respect, the ritual
functions to catharsis the fear and sorrow, to communicate with both the shepherds and
the Muse, and to become immune to mortality. Though the longing for Dido’s resurrec-
tion is impossible, the longing for her presence, “our pryde” continues to persist.

Similarly, in August the song match between Willie and Perigot is a meaningful ritual
as well. Before the song contest, Perigot is love-sricken, “Love hath misled both my
younglings and me! I pine forpayne, and they my paine to see” (Aug. 17–18), but
Willie consoles him by saying, “But and if in rymes with me thou dare strive,/ Such fond
fantasies shall soone be put to flight” (21–22). Clearly, by means of this poetic practice
(singing or piping), Perigot thus can conquer the love-malady and reach to a higher level
of bein-- becoming immortal.

Conclusively, nostalgia is a longing, a longing for security, warmth and happiness,
that is, longing for home, for Eden, and for love. The longing is unlikely to be satisfied,
because it always detours and defers. Only through the piping or singing ritual can the
longing be temporarily carried out. However, the longing will always keep one moving,
moving back or closer to a constant retreating home (origin); and it is in the pursuit of
origin that lies human being’s nostalgia. So, at the winter of his life, Colin Clout bids
his adieu to life, to friends, to Rosalind-- a longing that will accompany him forever.

Adieu, Delights that lulled me asleepe;
Adieu, my Deare, whose love I bought so deare;
Adieu, my little Lambs and loved sheepe;
Adieu, ye Woodes, that oft my witnesse were:
Adieu, good Hobbinoll, that was so true,
Tell Rosalind, he Colin bids her adieu. (Dec. 151–56)

Although the characteristics of nostalgia in A Midsummer Night’s Dream is not so
obvious as they are in Sheheed’s Calender, the former, however, psychologically shows
algos (an intense pain) of the lovers; furthermore, as the lovemalady is cured, the lovers’
nostos (longing for homecoming) is immediately achieved. But, the characteristics of
nostalgia are reduced to comparatively minimum in contrast to carnivalization merrily
demonstrated in A Midsummer Night’s Dream.

In A Midsummer Night’s Dream, we find some of the pastoral conventions persisting;
for instance, the contrast between the city Athen and the wood, the escape into the wood, the frustration of love, and the emergence of fairy. However, we also find some "deviances," according to Thomas McFarland, that are not strictly fitting to the pastoral conventions. These "deviances" function, I think, to animate the vitality of the established pastoral conventions. My paper is to show here these "deviances," sonata of the pastoral, have the effect of carnivalization-- a way to prove that the whole play is full of jollity, mirth and love.

Carnivalization means that "hierarchies are turned on their heads (fools become wise, king becomes beggars); opposites are mingled (fact and fantasy, heaven and hell): the sacred is profaned" (Selden 18).

According to the definition above, love juice plays an important part in creating the effect of pastoral carnivalization. First, Oberon orders the juice to be anointed upon the eyelid of Titania so that when Titania opens her eyes, she would dote on any animals that first come into her view. As a result, Titania, the queen of the fairy land, dotes on an ass. A carnivalization thus comes into being. Subsequently, due to the mistake of Puck, and the magical effect of the love juice, the two couples, Lysander and Hermia, Demetrius and Helena, are in a mess in pursuit of one another.

The original condition of the two couples has to be recalled before I can further prove the effect of carnivalization. The requisite love, one of the pastoral conventions, converts into a frustrated love in this play. Lysander's love towards Hermia is frustrated by Egeus, symbol of the reality and office; Demetrius' love towards Hermia is promised by Egeus, yet rejected by Hermia; and the most interesting one is that the love of Helena towards Demetrius is turned down until Demetrius is anointed with the love juice. Now, the love juice works its influence not only upon Demetrius, but also upon Lysander. The two men are primarily in love with Hermia who devotes her heart to Lysander; somehow the affections of the two men turn oppositely towards Helena after they are anointed the love juice by Puck. This is the first carnivalization. Further, Lysander's spell is broken after Puck has applied to his eyelid another kind of juice. Lysander's love towards Hermia is brought back as before. The funny thing is that Demetrius' carnivalization goes on; for the sake of Helena's happiness nobody bothers to remind Oberon or Puck that Demetrius is under the spell-bound of the love juice. This is another carnivalization.

Still, there is another striking carnivalization as soon as the lovers enter into the wood world. When the lovers are all free from the spell of the love juice, Helena dotes on Demetrius desperately. She complains about the calousness of Demetrius, thus:

Ay, in the temple, in the town, the field,  
You do me mischief. Fie, Demetrius!  
Your wrong do set a scandal on my sex.  
We cannot fight for love, as men may do;  
We should be woo'd, and were not made to woo. (II.ii. 238–43)
Helena discloses the natural course of love, that is, that women "should be woo'd!" instead of being "made to woo." She is doting on Demetrius, and dogging him. When she says these words, she feels frustrated, yet courageous by continuing remarking, "I'll follow thee, and make a heaven of hell, to die upon the hand I love so well" (224). Apparently, both in Helena's words and behavior, we see her carnivalizing the natural course of love. This carnivalization results in an effect of jollity and merriments.

To a larger setting, that the two couples achieve thier love in the wood, parallels strikingly to the love between Theseus and Hippolyta. No sooner have they entered the woods than the carnivalization begins. Athen, alone is the symbol of reality and authority, a place seemingly prohibiting Hermia's love and simultaneously threatening Hermia's life. But the prohibition and the threat disappear along with the escape of Hermia, and the Theseus' announcement of merriments. As a matter of fact, the atmosphere of the merriment begins when Theseus announces, "Stir up the Athenian youth to merriments/ Awake the pert and nimble spirit of mirth" (L. 12-13). The announcement of the merriments is made because Theseus is going to marry Hippolyta; it also foretells the succeeding merriments brought by the two couples.

Next, we can see what Bottom and Puck have achieved in view of the effect of carnivalization.

"The most Lamentable Comedy" is presented by Peter Quince, and the other members Bottom, Snout and Starveling etc. Before the play is staged, Bottom worries that the lion in the play might frighten the audience, therefore he suggests that a prologue is necessary to tell the audience the lion is a fake. In contrast to the Wall and the Moonshine, the lion has never had the chance of being so real as to frighten the audience. In this respect, Bottom's suggestion to persuade the audience that the lion on the stage is not a real lion produces a sort of absurdity, and provokes laughter. The Wall and the Moonshine share the same carnival effect with the lion. How to present a wall and moonshine have been bothering the group a lot; but Bottom's suggestion of having Snout as Wall and Starveling as Moonshine solves the problem. Bottom seems to be unable to distinguish between fact and fantasy, yet he tries to solve the problem. Actually, this mixture of fact and fantasy is the highest achievement of carnival. Now, we begin to be aware that Bottom is, in fact, the director of the play, whereas Peter Quince is a nominal director. This kind of "hierarchies are turned on their heads" is best interpreted by Bottom.

From Bottom's aggression, we are quickly reminded of one of the most important characters in the fairy land- Puck. Similar to Bottom, Puck assumes the role of director for a long while by mistaking Lysander for Demetrius. Puck is under the command of Oberon to anoint the love juice upon a "disdainful youth" who puts on the "Athenian garments." Accidentally, Lysander, who happens to have Athenian garments on, is carnivalized by Puck's anointment of the love juice. An even complex situation follows when Puck anoints Demetrius. So the carnivalization among the lovers likewise provokes absurdity and the laughter as well.
Puck directs the carnivalization of love, he doesn't feel sorry; in response to Oberon's reprimand he says, "Then fate o'er-rules, that, one man holding troth,/ A million fail, confounding oath on oath" (III.ii. 92–92). The fate works, not his mistake. The way that Puck refuses to confess his own mistake is very much like Bottom.

Thomas McFarland asserts that the whole play is based upon unreality. The mythic figures of Theseus and Hippolyta, the dream-like woodland, and the fairy land all contribute to make the play full of the atmosphere of unreality -- one of the important elements in pastoral. But unreality also is a necessity in carnival, because the merriment of a carnival depends much upon the effect of topsy-turvy, that is, turn the established relationship upside down. In this respect, we can clearly see the love among Lysander and Hermia, Demetrius and Helena is the carnivalization of the pastoral.

We even find the merriment persisting through the whole play, when the characters walk out of the woods into Athen in which there will be two more couples adding to the merriment of Theseus and Hippolyta's marriage. Theseus announces:

Here comes the lovers, full of joy and mirth.
Joy, gentle friends, joy and fresh days of love
Accompany your hearts! (V.i. 27–29)

The carnivalization of the pastoral thus is completed.

In the light of the idea of nostalgia and of carnivalization, we thus make a much clearer reading of Shepheardes Calender and A Midsummer Night's Dream. However, the reading, which explores the modes of these two renaissance pastorale, is one of the many readings to show the complexity of them. Some other ideas and special efforts are to be applied and made so that some of the other pastorals other than Shepheardes Calender and A Midsummer Night's Dream also can be brought into critical focus and be enjoyed.

Notes

1. William Empson, Some Versions of Pastoral (London: Methuen, 1935); the book expands on the identity of shepherd to the average common people and children, both of whom Empson thinks legitimately endowed with the idea of simplicity, innocence and naive. His choosing of the working people and children is not at odds with the traditional idea of shepherd, since shepherds have been reduced to a few by the enactments of the industrial chimneys. So, it is not surprising to find that in the Some Versions of Pastoral, whose first chapter is devoted to the working people, and in contrast the last chapter is concerned with the children.


3. Pan is in love with Syrinx who, however, doesn't care much about him. As a result, Syrinx is always on the run to avoid the constant pursuit of Pan. In an accident,
Syrinx is transformed into a reed by Appollo. Being incapable of being kept away from Syrinx, Pan takes the reed and dexterously cultivates it into a musical instrument. Thereafter, Pan composes music and becomes the god of the shepherd.

4. Paul Alpers, “Convening and Convention in Pastoral poetry”, (NLH 14, 1983), 281–82; Alpers quotes Virgil’s Eclogue V, in which after the hero Daphnis dies, Mopus, in memory of him, gathers a group of shepherds to a location (umbras means shades) for mourning and singing.

5. Thomas McFarland, “And All Things Shall Be Peace,” Shakespeare’s Pastoral Comedy, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1972, 78–97); in the book McFarland applies “deviances” to Hermia’s defiance of her father Egeus, and Oberon’s quarrel with Titania. My idea of “deviance” is different from that of McFarland; I use it primarily as the sonata of the pastoral so that I am able to elaborate my idea of carnivalization.


Works Cited


