

Artistic Tensions in Wordsworth's *The Brothers, A Pastoral Poem*

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Abstract: William Wordsworth's *The Brothers, a Pastoral Poem* explores themes of nature, memory, and human experience through the narrative of Leonard, a mariner returning to his rural childhood home, and the local Priest. This paper provides a concise analysis of the poem, focusing on narrative techniques and structural devices that underscore the poem's thematic tensions between permanence and transience. The contrast between Leonard's fragmented memories and the Priest's traditionalism reflects the broader conflict between changing rural life and enduring nature. The use of third-person narration, blank verse, and enjambment enriches the emotional depth and realism of the characters, inviting readers to reflect on the human experience within the pastoral landscape and the impact of time on memory and identity.

Keywords: William Wordsworth, *The Brothers, A Pastoral Poem*, artistic tensions

1. Introduction

William Wordsworth, a central figure in the Romantic movement, is renowned for his profound engagement with nature, memory, and the human condition. His poetry often explores the relationship between humanity and the natural world, emphasizing emotional depth and personal reflection. One of his notable poems, *The Brothers, a Pastoral Poem*, delves deeply into these themes through the lens of rural life and familial bonds. This poem, written in 1800, exemplifies Wordsworth's skill in blending narrative and lyrical elements to create a rich, immersive experience.

The Brothers, a Pastoral Poem tells the story of Leonard, a mariner who returns to his childhood village after many years, and the Priest who remains rooted in the community. The poem navigates Leonard's confrontation with his past, his memories of his brother James, and the changes in the village since his departure. Wordsworth uses this narrative to juxtapose the transient nature of individual human lives with the enduring continuity of the natural landscape and communal traditions.

In 1937, the American New Criticism theorist Allen Tate first introduced the theory of tension in his work *Tension in Poetry*. He posited that "the meaning of a poem refers to its tension, that is, the organic whole formed by all the extensions and inclusions we can discover in the poem." The theory of tension is a core concept of New Criticism, similar to "literariness" in Russian Formalism.^[1] Tension encompasses both the phenomenon of the unity of opposing factors within a work and serves as one of the specific analytical methods in New Criticism. Artistic tensions are the strategic employment of contrasting elements within a creative work to evoke a deeper emotional and intellectual response. They are integral to the texture of literature and art, serving to heighten thematic resonance and narrative complexity. These tensions can be thematic, stylistic and narrative, etc.. In essence, artistic tensions are the harnessed conflicts that drive the exploration of human experience, memory, identity, and the passage of time, offering a nuanced and engaging encounter with the work for the audience^[2].

The purpose of this paper is to analyze and interpret the artistic tensions in *The Brothers, a Pastoral Poem*, examining how Wordsworth uses these tensions to enhance the poem's thematic depth and emotional impact. Through close readings of specific passages, this analysis will explore the dualities of perspective, the role of pastoral elements, and the use of poetic techniques that underscore the poem's artistic complexity. Through this endeavor, this paper aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how artistic tension operates within Wordsworth's pastoral narrative to convey profound insights about life, memory, and change.

2. Narrative Perspective and Poetic Structure

In *The Brothers, A Pastoral Poem*, Wordsworth employs a narrative perspective and poetic structure that serve to enhance the thematic depth and emotional resonance of the poem. The poem is narrated in the third person, with dialogues interspersed, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of characters and their inner lives. This approach enables Wordsworth to create a detailed, immersive pastoral scene while addressing broader themes such as memory, loss, and the passage of time.

The narrative perspective in *The Brothers* is primarily third-person omniscient, but it also incorporates direct speech, creating a dynamic interplay between the narrator's observations and the characters' voices^[3]. This technique allows Wordsworth to present multiple viewpoints and deepen the reader's understanding of the characters and their experiences. For instance, the poem begins with the Priest of Ennerdale's reflections on the various types of tourists who visit the village:

These Tourists, Heaven preserve us! needs must live
 A profitable life: some glance along,
 Rapid and gay, as if the earth were air,
 And they were butterflies to wheel about
 Long as their summer lasted; some, as wise,
 Upon the forehead of a jutting crag
 Sit perched with book and pencil on their knee,
 And look and scribble, scribble on and look,
 Until a man might travel twelve stout miles,
 Or reap an acre of his neighbour's corn.

(The Brothers, A Pastoral Poem. 1-10, 1800)

Here, the Priest's observations provide insight into his character and his perspective on the changing world around him. The use of direct speech captures the Priest's tone and personality, adding depth to his character. This narrative technique not only paints a vivid picture of the setting but also establishes a contrast between the transient tourists and the enduring lives of the villagers, setting the stage for the poem's exploration of permanence and change.

As the poem progresses, the focus shifts to Leonard, the returning sailor, and his internal struggle as he grapples with the loss of his brother and his own place in the world. The third-person narration allows the reader to access Leonard's thoughts and emotions, creating a sense of intimacy and empathy^[4]. For example, when Leonard arrives at the churchyard and reflects on the graves, the narrator provides a detailed account of his emotional turmoil:

But, for that moping son of Idleness
 Why can he tarry yonder?—In our church-yard
 Is neither epitaph nor monument,
 Tomb-stone nor name, only the turf we tread,
 And a few natural graves.

(The Brothers, A Pastoral Poem. 11-15, 1800)

This part highlights Leonard's deep connection to his family and his sense of displacement. The use of third-person narration allows Wordsworth to convey the complexity of Leonard's emotions, blending his sorrow with his hope that his brother might still be alive. The narrative perspective thus enhances the poem's emotional depth and underscores the themes of memory and loss.

In terms of poetic structure, *The Brothers, A Pastoral Poem* is written in blank verse, unrhymed iambic pentameter, which gives the poem a rhythmic yet natural flow. This choice of meter mirrors the conversational tone of the dialogues and the reflective nature of the narrative^[5]. The lack of rhyme allows for greater flexibility in expression, enabling Wordsworth to craft lines that are both lyrical and grounded in everyday speech. For instance, consider the following lines from the Priest's dialogue:

For eight-score winters past
 With what I've witnessed, and with what I've heard,
 Perhaps I might, and, on a winter's evening,
 If you were seated at my chimney's nook
 By turning o'er these hillocks one by one,
 We two could travel, Sir, through a strange round,
 Yet all in the broad high-way of the world.

(The Brothers, A Pastoral Poem. 185-191, 1800)

The iambic pentameter lends a musical quality to the Priest's speech, while the lack of rhyme keeps the focus on the natural rhythm of his words. This poetic structure enhances the realism of the dialogue, making the characters' voices more authentic and relatable.

Furthermore, the poem's structure allows for a gradual unfolding of the narrative, creating suspense and emotional buildup. The use of enjambment, where sentences or phrases extend beyond the end of a line, adds to the poem's flowing, conversational quality. For example, in the poem where Leonard contemplates the graves:

He had lost his path,
 As up the vale he came that afternoon,
 Through fields which once had been well known to him.
 And Oh! what joy the recollection now
 Sent to his heart! he lifted up his eyes,
 And looking round he thought that he perceived
 Strange alteration wrought on every side
 Among the woods and fields, and that the rocks,
 And the eternal hills, themselves were changed.

(The Brothers, A Pastoral Poem. 88-96, 1800)

The enjambment here creates a sense of continuity and fluidity, reflecting Leonard's wandering thoughts and the seamless blending of his past and present experiences. This technique draws the reader into Leonard's inner world, enhancing the emotional impact of his reflections.

In conclusion, Wordsworth's use of narrative perspective and poetic structure in *The Brothers, A Pastoral Poem* is integral to the poem's exploration of memory, loss, and the passage of time. The third-person narration, interspersed with direct speech, allows for a rich portrayal of characters and their emotions, while the blank verse and enjambment create a natural, flowing rhythm that enhances the poem's reflective tone. Through these techniques, Wordsworth crafts a poignant and immersive pastoral narrative that resonates with the reader on multiple levels.

3. Dialogue and Characterization

The poem's dialogue further deepens the artistic tension. The Priest, a figure of constancy and tradition, offers a counterpoint to Leonard's restless search for belonging and meaning. Their exchange reveals underlying anxieties about memory, mortality, and the impact of modernity on rural life.

3.1 The Priest as a Figure of Tradition and Constancy

The Priest in Wordsworth's poem represents a figure deeply rooted in the traditions of rural life. His dialogue reflects a steadfast adherence to communal rituals and the cyclical nature of existence:

PRIEST

A child is born or christened, a field ploughed,

A daughter sent to service, a web spun,
 The old house clock is decked with a new face;
 And hence, so far from wanting facts or dates
 To chronicle the time, we all have here
 A pair of diaries, one serving, Sir,
 For the whole dale, and one for each fire-side—
 (*The Brothers, A Pastoral Poem. 156-162, 1800*)

The Priest's words emphasize continuity and ritual within the community. His reference to the diaries suggests a collective memory that spans generations, where personal histories merge with communal traditions. This portrayal highlights his role as a custodian of cultural heritage and stability in contrast to Leonard's more fragmented perspective.

3.2 Leonard's Restlessness and Fragmented Perspective

Leonard, in contrast to the Priest, embodies a sense of restlessness and disconnection from the past. His response to the Priest's remarks reveals a deeper conflict regarding memory and mortality:

LEONARD
 Yet your church-yard
 Seems, if such freedom may be used with you,
 To say that you are heedless of the past.
 Here's neither head nor foot-stone, plate of brass,
 Cross-bones or skull, type of our earthly state
 Or emblem of our hopes: the dead man's home
 Is but a fellow to that pasture field.
 (*The Brothers, A Pastoral Poem. 164-170, 1800*)

Leonard's critique of the churchyard's lack of markers for the dead reflects his struggle to reconcile with the tangible aspects of memory and mortality. His perception contrasts sharply with the Priest's spiritual understanding, emphasizing Leonard's yearning for concrete connections to his past and his discomfort with the changing landscape of memory in the dales^[6].

The dialogue between the Priest and Leonard underscores broader thematic tensions within *The Brothers*. It explores the impact of modernity on rural traditions and the evolving nature of memory in a changing landscape. The Priest's role as a keeper of tradition highlights the community's reliance on established rituals and narratives to maintain continuity amidst societal shifts.

In conclusion, Wordsworth's use of dialogue between the Priest and Leonard in *The Brothers, A Pastoral Poem* serves to deepen the artistic tension by contrasting traditional perspectives with modern uncertainties. Through the Priest's steadfast adherence to communal rituals and Leonard's fragmented critique of memory and mortality, Wordsworth invites readers to contemplate the evolving nature of rural life and the human quest for meaning amidst temporal flux. This analysis demonstrates how Wordsworth intricately weaves together dialogue and characterization to explore themes of memory, tradition, and modernity in his pastoral poem. By examining these aspects with detailed textual analysis and logical coherence, we can better understand how Wordsworth uses dialogue not only to advance the plot but also to enrich thematic exploration and characterization in *The Brothers, A Pastoral Poem*.

4. Structural Devices and Poetic Techniques

4.1 Enjambment and Fluidity

Wordsworth employs various structural devices and poetic techniques to underscore the poem's thematic tensions. The use of enjambment, for instance, creates a sense of continuity and fluidity that mirrors the ongoing cycles of rural life, while also conveying Leonard's emotional turmoil and

fragmented thoughts.

He, thus by feverish passion overcome,
 Even with the organs of his bodily eye,
 Below him, in the bosom of the deep,
 Saw mountains, saw the forms of sheep that grazed
 On verdant hills, with dwellings among trees,
 And Shepherds clad in the same country grey
 Which he himself had worn.

(*The Brothers, A Pastoral Poem. 56-62, 1800*)

The enjambment here propels the reader forward, echoing Leonard's restless mind and his struggle to reconcile past memories with present realities. It intensifies the sense of emotional upheaval and fragmentation, highlighting the poem's exploration of inner conflict amidst external landscapes.

4.2 Imagery and Symbolism

Wordsworth's use of imagery and symbolism enriches the poem's artistic complexity by imbuing natural elements with deeper meaning. In line 59-60 of the poem, "Saw mountains, saw the forms of sheep that grazed / On verdant hills, with dwellings among trees", natural elements like mountains, rocks, and fields symbolize permanence and change. They serve as anchors of stability amidst Leonard's disrupted memories and emotional turmoil. This imagery reflects Leonard's attempt to reconnect with the unchanging aspects of his rural home, even as he grapples with personal upheaval^[7]. In line 61-62 "And Shepherds clad in the same country grey / Which he himself had worn", the shepherds clad in country grey symbolize continuity and tradition in rural life. Leonard's identification with them underscores his longing for a sense of belonging and rootedness. This symbolic imagery contrasts with Leonard's own fragmented sense of identity and displacement, highlighting the tension between past and present.

Through these structural devices and poetic techniques, Wordsworth explores the theme of memory and disorientation. The enjambment reflects Leonard's disjointed thoughts and emotional turmoil, while the imagery and symbolism of natural elements and shepherds underscore the poem's deeper thematic tensions.

In conclusion, Wordsworth's adept use of enjambment, imagery, and symbolism in *The Brothers, A Pastoral Poem* enhances the poem's artistic complexity and thematic depth. These techniques not only convey Leonard's inner conflict and quest for identity but also underscore broader themes of memory, tradition, and the impact of change on rural life. By analyzing these elements with detailed textual evidence and logical coherence, we gain a deeper appreciation of how Wordsworth crafts a nuanced exploration of human experience within the pastoral landscape. This analysis demonstrates how Wordsworth's strategic use of structural devices and poetic techniques enriches *The Brothers, A Pastoral Poem*, inviting readers to contemplate the intricate interplay between personal turmoil and the enduring rhythms of nature and tradition.

5. Pastoral Elements and Thematic Dualities

Wordsworth's use of the pastoral form is not merely decorative but integral to the poem's artistic and thematic concerns. The idyllic countryside, with its unchanging natural features, is juxtaposed against the personal turmoil of Leonard, whose return to his childhood home is fraught with uncertainty and grief. The poem's pastoral elements emphasize the tension between the idealized vision of rural life and the harsh realities faced by its inhabitants and how Leonard's sense of displacement underscores the theme of permanence versus transience.

5.1 Integral Use of Pastoral Form

Wordsworth's use of the pastoral form in *The Brothers, A Pastoral Poem* serves a dual purpose, which establishes the serene backdrop of rural life while also providing a contrast to the inner turmoil experienced by Leonard upon returning home. The pastoral setting becomes a canvas upon which

Wordsworth paints the complexities of human emotions and the passage of time. For instance, the poem opens with:

These Tourists, heaven preserve us! needs must live
 A profitable life: some glance along,
 Rapid and gay, as if the earth were air,
 And they were butterflies to wheel about
 Long as the summer lasted.

(The Brothers, A Pastoral Poem. 1-5, 1800)

Here, Wordsworth introduces the serene landscape against which Leonard's personal journey unfolds. The tourists' fleeting presence highlights the contrast between their superficial engagement with the countryside and Leonard's deeper, more profound connection rooted in memory and personal history.

5.2 Contrast Between Idealized Vision and Harsh Realities

Central to *The Brothers, A Pastoral Poem* is the contrast between the idealized vision of rural life and its harsh realities. Leonard's return home evokes a flood of memories, yet he is confronted with physical changes in the landscape that disrupt his nostalgic reverie:

Strange alteration wrought on every side
 Among the woods and fields, and that the rocks,
 And the eternal hills, themselves were changed.

(The Brothers, A Pastoral Poem. 94-96, 1800)

These lines encapsulate Leonard's realization that the once-familiar landscape has undergone significant transformation. The "eternal hills" that once stood as symbols of permanence now appear altered, mirroring Leonard's own internal struggle with change and loss. This contrast underscores Wordsworth's exploration of how the pastoral ideal intersects with the inevitability of time's passage^[8].

5.3 Memory and Displacement

Leonard's sense of displacement within the pastoral landscape serves as a metaphor for broader themes of memory and identity. His memories of the past are both a source of comfort and anguish, as they contrast sharply with the present reality:

And Oh! what joy the recollection now
 Sent to his heart! he lifted up his eyes,
 And looking round he thought that he perceived
 Strange alteration wrought on every side...

(The Brothers, A Pastoral Poem. 91-94, 1800)

Wordsworth's portrayal of Leonard's emotional turmoil highlights the tension between memory, which seeks to preserve the past unchanged, and reality, which inevitably brings about transformation. Leonard's journey becomes a reflection of the human experience—striving to reconcile the idealized past with the complexities of the present.

5.4 Thematic Exploration of Permanence and Transience

At its core, *The Brothers* is a meditation on the themes of permanence and transience. The pastoral landscape, with its seemingly eternal features, becomes a backdrop against which Leonard's temporal existence unfolds. Wordsworth's choice of language and imagery poignantly captures this tension:

Wordsworth establishes the pastoral landscape of Ennerdale as a symbol of permanence and stability. He describes the natural surroundings with a sense of timelessness, emphasizing their enduring qualities:

Among the woods and fields, and that the rocks,

And the eternal hills, themselves were changed.

(*The Brothers, A Pastoral Poem. 95-96, 1800*)

This passage reflects Leonard's perception of the landscape's altered state, suggesting a contrast between the timeless nature of the natural world and the impermanence experienced by human beings.

Despite the eternal quality of the natural world, Wordsworth juxtaposes it with the transient nature of human experience. Leonard's return to his childhood home brings forth memories that highlight the fleeting nature of youth and the inevitability of change:

And Oh! what joy the recollection now

Sent to his heart! he lifted up his eyes

(*The Brothers, A Pastoral Poem. 91-92, 1800*)

This excerpt illustrates Leonard's emotional response to memories of the past, which are tinged with a sense of loss and nostalgia. It underscores Wordsworth's exploration of how human emotions and experiences evolve over time, contrasting with the unchanging landscape[8].

In conclusion, *The Brothers, A Pastoral Poem* exemplifies Wordsworth's mastery of the pastoral form as a vehicle for exploring profound thematic dualities. Through Leonard's emotional journey and the evocative landscape of Ennerdale, Wordsworth invites readers to contemplate the complexities of memory, the passage of time, and the interplay between idealized visions and harsh realities. By intertwining personal narrative with pastoral imagery, Wordsworth creates a nuanced portrait of human experience that resonates with readers across generations^[9]. By delving into the artistic tensions inherent in Wordsworth's *The Brothers, A Pastoral Poem*, this paper has demonstrated how the poem's pastoral elements serve as more than mere decoration—they form an integral part of its thematic exploration and contribute to its enduring relevance in the canon of English literature.

6. Conclusion

In Wordsworth's *The Brothers, a Pastoral Poem*, the intricate interplay of artistic tensions illuminates profound themes of memory, loss, and the relentless passage of time. Through the contrast between pastoral idealism and the harsh realities faced by its characters, Wordsworth delves into the complexities of human experience within rural settings. The poem's narrative perspectives, from Leonard's fragmented memories to the Priest's steadfast traditionalism, highlight the enduring conflicts between tradition and change. Poetic techniques such as enjambment and vivid imagery further enrich the exploration of these themes, illustrating the fluidity of memory and the immutable nature of the natural world. Ultimately, Wordsworth's work challenges readers to contemplate the delicate balance between permanence and transience, the personal and communal dimensions of memory, and the profound impact of time on individual and collective identity. Through its artistic and thematic intricacies, *The Brothers, A Pastoral Poem* invites us to ponder the enduring truths embedded in the landscape of human experience.

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