

Beyond Retreat: Reframing Pastoral Literary Criticism Through an Ecocritical Reading of English Georgian Poetry (1911-1926)

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The environmental implications embedded in pastoral poetry (Buell, 1995; Hiltner 2013) and its reliance on the notion of “nature” (Gifford, 1999) allow this genre, in light of the challenges raised by the Anthropocene, to be seen as a first-rate case study for investigating issues concerning the human/nonhuman relationship. Despite this awareness, present-day discussions in the field of pastoral criticism (still) rely on a traditional anthropocentric framework and on rooted dichotomies such as country/city, human/nature, and fictional/real spaces. Now more than ever, binary thinking and dialectic oppositions appear as limited approaches for adequately exploring the complexities of cultural phenomena (Braidotti, 2013). Moreover, the rise of a renovated ecological consciousness on the basis of the current environmental crisis has led to the necessity of reconfiguring traditional assumptions of Western thought connected to the notion of “environment” in a more critical and eco-logical way.

With these issues in mind, my project aims to reframe the concept of pastoral by proposing a non-anthropocentric and non-dualistic understanding of its dominant theoretical domains in order to generate valuable ethical reflections from traditional literary pastoral texts, as a possible response to the current environmental crisis. More specifically, through my dissertation I intend to merge Ecocriticism, Posthuman studies, and stylistic analysis in order to propose an original reading of some literary works related to English Georgian poetry. By offering a critical re-evaluation of pastoral poetry during the English Modernist Period, I wish to establish pastoral poems, many of which have been neglected, as valuable ecological narratives for encouraging the contemporary urge to create more ethical forms of relationality between the human and the non-human.