

# The Despised Pastoral

by H.P. Lovecraft

Among the many and complex tendencies observable in modern poetry, or what answers for poetry in this age, is a decided but unjust scorn of the honest old pastoral, immortalised by Theocritus and Virgil, and revived in our own literature by Spencer.

Nor is this unfavorable attitude confined alone to the formal eclogue whose classical elements are so well described and exemplified by Mr. Pope. Whenever a versifier adorns his song with the pleasing and innocent imagery of this type of composition, or borrows its mild and sweet atmosphere, he is forthwith condemned as an irresponsible pedant and fossil by every little-wit critic in Grub-street.

Modern bards, in their endeavour to display with seriousness and minute verisimilitude the inward operations of the human mind and emotions, have come to look down upon the simple description of ideal beauty, or the straightforward presentation of pleasing images for no other purpose than to delight the fancy. Such themes they deem trivial and artificial, and altogether unworthy of an art whose design they take to be the analysis and reproduction of Nature in all her moods and aspects.

But in this belief, the writer cannot but hold that our contemporaries are misjudging the true province and functions of poesy. It was no starchy classicist, but the exceedingly unconventional Edgar Allen Poe, who roundly denounced the melancholy metaphysicians and maintained that true poetry has for its first object "pleasure, not truth", and "indefinite pleasure instead of definite pleasure," intimating that its concern for the dull or ugly aspects of life is slight indeed. That the American bard and critic was fundamentally just in his deductions, seems well proved by a comparative survey of those poems of all ages which have lived, and those which have fallen into deserved obscurity.

The English pastoral, based upon the best models of antiquity, depicts engaging scenes of Arcadian simplicity, which not only transport the imagination through their intrinsic beauty, but recall to the scholarly mind the choicest remembrances of classical Greece and Rome. Though the combination of rural pursuits with polished sentiments and diction is patently artificial, the beauty is not a whit less; nor do the conventional names, phrases, and images detract in the least from the quaint agreeableness of the whole. The magic of this sort of verse is to any unprejudiced mind irresistible, and capable of evoking a more deliciously placid and refreshing train of pictures in the imagination than may be obtained from any more realistic species of composition. Every untainted fancy begets ideal visions of which the pastoral forms a legitimate and artistically necessary reflection.

It is not impossible that the intellectual upheaval attendant upon the present conflict will bring about a general simplification and rectification of taste, and an appreciation of the value of pure imaginary beauty in a world so full of actual misery, which may combine to restore the despised pastoral to its proper station.

