

Reinterpretation of Wordsworth's *Tintern Abbey* from the Perspective of Ecological Consciousness

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Abstract: As a poet of "Lakeside School", Wordsworth has been expressing his praise and love for nature in his poems all his life. Wordsworth depicted nature in a detailed way in *Tintern Abbey*—the last writing of his lyric ballads by adding a lot of subjective thoughts and using plain language to express the ecological view of the harmony between man and nature which makes the whole poem full of natural scenes and philosophy. The natural environment, economy, politics and social factors in the poet's life cast Wordsworth's poetic style, and also made him go through the process of "getting to know nature for the first time"—"getting away from nature"—"returning to nature"—"transcending nature". In today's ecological literary criticism research, Wordsworth's ecological consciousness and sense of hardship increasingly highlight its diachronic and practical significance. From the perspective of ecogism, based on previous studies, this paper analyzes the content and background of the poem, deeply interprets the connotation of ecogism in the poem, reflects on the reconstruction of the relationship between social development and natural ecology, and tries to find the philosophical ideas that guide us to face the dilemma of life and the current ecological problems.

Keywords: Wordsworth; *Tintern Abbey*; balance; harmony; ecological consciousness

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction to Wordsworth

Wordsworth is the most influential of the early romanticism's exponents, which include three well-known poets from the Lakeland school: Coleridge, Southey, and Wordsworth. In 1843, William Wordsworth (1770–1855) received the title of "poet laureate." The majority of Wordsworth's poems were included in the collection of lyric ballads that Coleridge and Wordsworth published in 1798.

Wordsworth lived in a time before the industrial revolution, when people might enjoy the guilt-free peaceful coexistence of man and environment. However, a crisis had struck and a storm was on its way. Wordsworth's "ecological community consciousness" in his poetry is a reflection of his deep wisdom, moral principles, and foresight. It has great illumination for us in the present, in addition to having an impact in his environmental background.

1.2 Introduction to *Tintern Abbey*

Wordsworth discusses his changing opinions about nature, his comprehension of it from childhood to maturity, and the importance of nature in his upbringing in *Tintern Abbey*. This suggests his ideological perspective on the interplay between "nature" and "man." Wordsworth offers a value-based interpretation of nature in *Tintern Abbey* that centers on the human being. The "soul" of man is said to reside in nature, where it finds solace, love, and strength.

In the summer of 1793, Wordsworth made his first visit to the temple. Five years later, he revisited his hometown with his sister Dorothy. He advocated that man and nature should live in harmony, because he regarded nature as a part of man's life, the home of the spirit and soul, and nature can cleanse the dirt of the human heart and purify the human soul. The poet portrayed the landscape and his complicated emotions after fleeing the abnormal city life and returning to nature to alleviate his inner anguish. It is unfortunate, though, that he was unable to use this return to resolve his real-life learning challenge and that he ultimately expected his sister to learn from nature. Therefore, Wordsworth's view of nature is concerned with the influence of nature on his soul, and the relationship between man and nature in his view is based on the realization of man's subjective value.

2. Related Research on William Wordsworth and Tintern Abbey

2.1 Study of Wordsworth in China

The study of Wordsworth in China started nearly a century later than that in western academic circles, and it was only in the 1990s that it became mature.

Hu Shi and Chen Shouzhong are the first scholars to pay attention to Wordsworth's Poetics in China. In Hu Shi's essay *On New Poetry*, he cites Wordsworth's anti classical view of language to guide the Chinese literary revolution^[1](Hu 294). In 1947, as the first professional book about Wordsworth, Li Qi's *Wordsworth and His Prelude* introduces Wordsworth's life in detail, discusses the composition and significance of Wordsworth's natural poetry^[2]. The researches about Wordsworth before 1949 are incomplete and inconstant, but their overall grasp and positive acceptance of Wordsworth's representative poetry's natural theme also provides much experience for the research in the late 20th century.

Before 1949, the study of Wordsworth in China should be synchronized with that in English speaking countries. But from 1949 to 1978, Chinese people think that unlike Shelley and Byron, Wordsworth lived in seclusion in the lake area of England and focused on life and personal feelings. Even in his later years, he preached religious ideas which naturally turned him into an escapist. The reflection on modern civilization, the concern about the state of human mind and the adjustment of the relationship between human and nature in his poems were far from the living conditions of the Chinese people at that time.

In November 1978, Yang Zhouhan's speech at the National Conference on Foreign Literature Studies marked a new understanding of foreign literature in the academic world. At the meeting, he deliberately proposed that Wordsworth should be divided into two, realistic evaluation, should not be completely denied his contribution to the literary world^[3](Yang 64-78). At that time, the in-depth study, objective evaluation and text interpretation of Wordsworth by Wang Zuoliang and Zheng Min, the great masters of British and American literature, implicitly led the positive development of the study of Wordsworth in China, and affirmed the status of Wordsworth in the history of English literature and even the world literature.

Since 1990s, domestic research has become mature. Zhang Yan has written a treatise on the tendency of self-negation in Wordsworth Poetry, which makes people realize that it is the contradiction of his ideal and hope that makes the poet a romantic poet with a sense of worry and pursuit of human progress^[4](Zhang 36-45). Since the beginning of the 20th century, Chinese scholars have been paying attention to the study of poetic thoughts and natural themes. During this period, the research has been developed systematically, presenting research results in the form of monographs or doctoral dissertations. Zhang Xiumei's *Resistance to Modernity: a Study of Wordsworth from the Perspective of Ecological Postmodernism* interprets Wordsworth's poems from the perspective of ecological postmodernism, and shows Wordsworth's diversified ecological consciousness by discussing Wordsworth's four resistances to industrial society, space mechanical model, modern ideology and single causality^[5]. The research in the 1990s was influenced by the western trend. Feminism, narratology and space theory, philosophy of life, post-colonialism and new historicism and other western theories and philosophical ideas have become the support of studying Wordsworth's works. The research on urban research and educational ideas that western scholars are keen on also promotes the domestic scholars. In addition, the study of poetics and natural themes has also achieved a high level of development.

It should be admitted that there are also some problems. First of all, with the help of western theories, some researchers unconsciously follow the theory-oriented criticism. The way to solve this problem is not to abandon the theory, but to strengthen the theoretical construction, improve the theoretical cultivation, improve the ability of thinking and the level of analysis and argumentation. At the same time, we should treat the theory in an appropriate way, strengthen the consciousness of problems, and pay attention to the close reading of the text^[6](Jiang 154-164). Secondly, there is a repetition in the research results. Take more than 40 papers on CNKI with the themes of "Wordsworth", "nature" and "Tintern Abbey" as examples, some follow the ideas and narrative patterns of foreign scholars, and even have Europeanization of language and grammatical and logical loopholes. Finally, the whole research needs to be strengthened. The existing research results are relatively independent. Few people connect poetics and nature, or only regard nature as one aspect of Wordsworth's poetics, and interpret it in isolation, without exploring the potential ecological value that nature has always been

throughout Wordsworth poetics.

2.2 Study of Wordsworth in Foreign

As the founder of the great romantic poetry in England, Wordsworth's poetry has been established as a classic of English literature when he was alive. As a result, Wordsworth research abroad started and developed rapidly. But by 1950, his time seemed to be over. At the centennial celebration of Wordsworth's death, American critics Leond Trilling concluded the perspectives about Wordsworth at that time: "Wordsworth is not attractive, and has no potential value in intelligence^[7](Gill 2003:14)." Levinson came to the conclusion that "Wordsworth's thought has retreated to the conservative state of focusing on his heart, avoiding social reality, hoping to return to the so-called good "childhood" before the two major social revolutions (i.e. the industrial revolution and the French Revolution^[8](Levinson 1986:242)". However, since 1950, the attention to intelligence has made romanticism a new focus. Wordsworth has once again come into people's view and become a comprehensive character with great potential value in "intelligence". Nowadays, Wordsworth's research has been covered by poetry, prose, biography, critical history and other cultural fields and its influence has been more immense. Then some poems published by Wordsworth have been found in academic comments. The works were once promoted by the critics to the core of the reputation of the great poet of Wordsworth. Today, Wordsworth's ecological criticism meets the needs of the times. Victorians, for example, were comforted by their "prophet of nature" and some ardent Wordsworth fans claimed that they carried Bibles and poetry with them. However, at present, based on the division of ecological aesthetics and environmental aesthetics, many critics are reconsidering the relationship between the natural world and human nature in Wordsworth's works. Coleridge believes that the special ability of Wordsworth's poetry lies in that it can nourish us, arouse people's attention to customs, and make us see the loveliness and beauty of the world in front of us^[9]. This is an inexhaustible treasure. Adenauer also believes that Wordsworth's natural poetry can teach us how to feel and has an extraordinary healing ability. As shown in Ralph Pite's *Wordsworth and the natural world*, our contemporary ecological critics have come back to Wordsworth for the source power after nearly two centuries^[10]. Contemporary Wordsworth's academic research activities are full of vitality, because it maintains continuity with the past, but also fully aware of the historical distance. In this respect, what is worthy of respect is actually the primary power of a poet's own creativity, the possibility of opening the meaning of poetry and the necessity of reinterpretation. The power of Wordsworth's Poetics and poetry to explain the natural environment is also the significance of the times that Wordsworth's poetry enlightens us.

3. Emotional and Objective Foundations

3.1 Emotional Foundations of Ecological Consciousness

Nature is natural as seen with natural eyes. Wordsworth is such a person see nature through poetic natural vision. This is due to his growth experience which provides many chances to have an intimate relationship with nature. On the emotional side, nature sets the stage for his ecological consciousness. William Wordsworth (1770-1850) spent his childhood in the beautiful Cockerthorpe in the north of England. He was friends with nature, and rivers and mountains accompanied him. He had five brothers and sisters and he was the second son of his family. Dorothy, his younger sister, played a very significant role in his life even though she was only a year older than him. When he was eight years old, his mother passed away. But her mother's influences didn't disappear. His mother's generosity had a profound impact on his thinking and temperament. Without any traditional and formal education, he is not a good son in the common meaning of the word. Having received a classical education at Hawkshead School, he saw his father's library as a liberating paradise. He had an opportunity of meeting renowned writers like Spencer, Shakespeare, and Milton before reaching thirteen years old. He has been anxious to come home since his father passed away when he was 13, which has made him feel more isolated and has increased the need for a new source of assurance. He persisted in his studies in class, receiving support from instructor Taylor. At this point, Wordsworth's lyrical ability also became noticeable by his teachers and classmates.

After that, he bid farewell to the youth period when he spent half of his time running wildly in the mountains^[11]" (Mahoney 1997:14) and left for Cambridge, where he would further his education. The poet is frequently drawn to and relies on nature when he feel lost in the bad world or hard time, when there is no happiness in the day, or when the mortals brings pointless problems into the world. The healing power of nature is unexplainable and inexplicable. The only thing the poet can recourse to amid

the gloomy and oppressive days of his industrial and urban life is nature; it is the one thing that can both soothe him and restore his happiness. The poet has attained a state of merging with nature and everything around them.

Nature is no longer just an external thing. It is Wordsworth's close friend, providing answers to his emotional and practical dilemmas, and like a mother who cares for and listens to him. In short, he is one with nature.

3.2 Objective Foundations of Ecological Consciousness

In addition to a natural affection for nature, the views of some outside characters and his educational experiences had an essential function. Wordsworth was deeply influenced by Rousseau, the French Enlightenment thinker and deist at that time. In Yang Haiyan's *The Voice of Nature on the Romantic Origin of Ecological Criticism*, Wordsworth, the representative of romantic poets, responded to Rousseau's idea of "returning to nature"^[12](Yang 2007)". Rousseau is the father of French romanticism, and deepened Wordsworth's understanding of nature. He believes that returning to nature, contacting with nature, having philosophical thinking in nature, and finding spiritual comfort can make people free from the world's troubles and re-enter into the harmonious relationship between man and nature, so as to make people's hearts pure and quiet.

Wordsworth went to France twice before and after graduating from university in 1790 and 1791. He was inspired by the slogans of freedom, equality and fraternity of the French Revolution. However, his revolutionary ideal was frustrated in violent revolution and terrorist politics, and his dream was finally disillusioned.

The five years from 1793 to 1798 can be said to be the emotional adjustment period of Wordsworth. After painful and rational thinking, Wordsworth regained his belief in human nature and the divinity of nature, and began to think about the relationship between man and man, man and nature, man and society. At the same time, Wordsworth grew rapidly in the communication with nature. *Tintern Abbey* is Wordsworth's long poem of this period, which is poetic and far-reaching. The original title is long: "Revisit the Banks of the Wai River on the Journey, and Write Several Miles Upstream of the *Tintern Abbey*". The nature in the poem is full of human nature and filled with divinity. In the poet's eyes, nature is emotional and spiritual. Nature can cultivate the soul, enhance morality and restore the perfect human nature.

4. Interpretation of Tintern Abbey from the Perspective of Ecological Consciousness

In the 18th century Britain, the development of industry and commerce not only brought great wealth to people, but also brought pollution to the environment and harm to people's mind, such as waste gas, sewage and a lot of industrial waste. During the period of industrial revolution, most people did not pay attention to the disadvantages of rapid development but only care about economy. There is still some memories about the vast and deep sky, green water, lush forests and high mountains in human beings' mind. If these memories gradually disappear, it will be a real tragedy. Fortunately, Wordsworth, who spent his childhood in the countryside, left these beautiful impressions and follow-up thoughts in his mind to the readers of later generations through beautiful and quiet poems, and let us feel the magical tenderness, comfort, generosity and selflessness of nature again.

4.1 Lost Beauty of Nature

In 1548, with the development of industry, the British government launched the enclosure movement. It is a process through which farmland shared in common for communal grazing and agriculture or marginal land such as fens and moors were fenced off for private use, typically pasturage for wool production. The enclosure movement dramatically altered English way of life. But at the meantime, it caused private owner own much land, and farmlands were destroyed. Nesbitt describes it like this:

Natural beauty disappeared when the Movement leveled the field, straightened the streams or shut them off, cleared the thin—scattered bushes, hanged the much loved mole, cut down the trees, and generally civilized and utilized this wild old neglected common, moor health^[13](Nesbitt 1970: 89).

Driven by huge interests, human beings began to use natural resources excessively, the discharge of waste and the gas from factories has damaged people's health, and the high-intensity factory work has

also brought harm to people's body and spirit. The railway also began to be built, occupying farmers' land, leaving them without a source of livelihood. Urbanization has mercilessly separated man from nature. The process of industrialization drove people from the countryside to the crowded city. Noise and impatience are the main melody of city life. The rich people became richer gradually, in contrast, poor people became poorer. And the unbalance become larger and larger between rich people and poor people. Furthermore, those poor people have to work hard in factories day and night, otherwise they would be starved to death. They have not enough time to accompany with their family. Some poor family even let the child work to support family. And some children were sold to factories. They lead a miserable life. There is no mention of the *Tintern Abbey* by the Wye River in this whole poem. Some scholars think that the reason is that the abbey was filled with a large number of unemployed people and has become a prosperous center under the impact of the industrial revolution. Numerous commercial ships are shuttling along the Wye River, which has been seriously polluted. Wordsworth felt restricted. He not only saw the adverse impacts of Industrialization on nature, but also noticed the harm on society.

4.2 Reflecting on Humanity and Nature

At every stage of historical development, human beings have always been concerned about how to realize the harmonious coexistence of man and nature and other species, and how to use natural resources reasonably and fairly for the next generations. Generally speaking, the ecological ethics is a positive composite ecosystem composed of the interrelationship of man, nature and society to guide to build a new world. In the poet's eyes, man and nature are a community and nature has an important position. However, as some commentators have pointed out, "nature can not only be regarded as the embodiment of the poet's pursuit of a sincere and harmonious society, but also as the poet himself." When we read the poem carefully, we will find that the main part of the poem is not description of the natural scenery in detail, but the poet's subjective feelings. Whether the poet talks about philosophy in his recollection or describes the three different stages of his reaction to nature, people feel more and more that nature is no longer an object existing outside the subject, but has evolved into another subject. Wordsworth thinks that nature has three meanings, which are the unity of human nature, reason and divinity. Nature is the teacher, friend and spiritual comforter of human beings. It is full of humanity. Nature is also the symbol of real rationality. Compared with the impetuous and turbulent modern society, the harmony and stability of nature show admirable rationality. Man and nature are bond together, so the destruction of nature is his own destruction. In the poet's eyes, nature is no longer just a silent background, but a strong power which boost people to be kind, pure, happy and harmonious.

4.3 The Influence and Function of Nature in Tintern Abbey

4.3.1 Deep Intimacy and Paramount Harmony with Nature

Wordsworth is a natural poet. Almost all the elements in his poems, such as the background, characters, scenery, language, emotion, philosophy and so on, are designed under the grace, enlightenment and guidance of nature. *On the Ecological Thought Contained in Wordsworth's Poems*, written by Wei Beibei, also believes that Wordsworth's description of nature is to protest against the environmental pollution caused by the development of industrial civilization in the 18th century. His view of nature directly reflects his disgust for modern industrial civilization and his boredom with urban marketization and vulgar life^[14](Wei 330-331). Marxist view of nature points out that man and nature are an organic whole. First of all, human is the product of the development of nature to a certain stage, is the result of the evolution of nature, human itself is a natural existence, is a part of nature. Secondly, human beings depend on nature for survival, which is the basis of human activities. Not only people's material life is inseparable from nature, but also people's spiritual life is inseparable from nature. Nature not only provides a home for people's life, but also constructs a home for people's spirit; nature not only nurtures people's life, but also edifies people's soul. In Marx's view, after the birth of man, nature is no longer an abstract existence, but became the object of man's practical activities^[15]. People are becoming more conscious of the requirement and significance of building an ecological civilization as a result of the advancement of contemporary civilization. The ecological knowledge found in Wordsworth's writings is consistent with the historical concept of human society promoting the development of an ecological civilization. Therefore, the natural ecological concept in Wordsworth's poems has encouraged people to consciously understand their own living conditions and adjust the relationship between man and nature, which shows the social value of literary works. The result has happened from the start of the British Industrial Revolution to the construction of ecological

civilization and the sustainable development of beautiful China.

4.3.2 The Healing Effect of Nature

Wordsworth sought the "origin" and "grace" of nature; this "natural origin" has the power to magically heal. It is the equilibrium of all things. Apart from conveying his admiration and reverence for the natural world, the poet also attempts to resolve practical issues arising from the natural world and seeks solutions for contemporary life's challenges. Wordsworth's portrayal of the role and impact of nature in various stages of his own development demonstrates the close and harmonious relationship that exists between man and nature during childhood. Human nature is warped when adults leave nature and enter society, particularly in the anti-natural city life, and the social environment also disturbs the pure intellect. Anxiety, unease, and loneliness are common among humans. The link between "self" and "nature" is out of balance right now. Wordsworth has turned into one of those uncommon individuals from that era who upholds ecological ethics. With heavy heart, the poet went back to nature, where he found freedom, kindness, and sincerity. He also saw hope for the future—the application of ecologically sound moral principles. He was ecstatic and thought that society's corruption and hypocrisy would gradually fade away.

The poem begins with "Five years have past; five summers, with the length Of five long winters!". The author repeats "five" twice, reflecting the long separation and deep nostalgia for nature. Then, in the memory of the natural beauty, the author's heart was healed. "The day is come when I again repose Here, under this dark sycamore, and view These plots of cottage-ground, these orchard-tufts, Which at this season, with their unripe fruits...Or of some Hermit's cave, where by his fire The Hermit sits alone(L9-22)." "Sycamore", "Cottage", "orchard", "hedge", "smoke" and "hermit", the poet used these common things to depict a beautiful picture of the connection between man and nature. After five years, the poet still has not forgotten the charm of nature. During the five years, the poet felt lonely in the deep clamor. The roaring sound of machines disturbed the poet's quiet and pure thought. In front of nature, the poet's heart was purified again. The joy and joy forgotten in youth are recovered because of the subtle influence of nature, which purifies human impetuosity and sublimates human soul. Bate points out that the logical route of the poem is "Love of nature leads to love of man", and it's not reverse ^[16](Garrard 2004: 121). In the following stanza, Wordsworth continues to explain his connection with nature by describing how nature plays an important role in all stages of his life. Closing to nature plays an important role in the poet's future : "at in this moment there is life and future years"(L64—65). Wordsworth realized that his memories of the past would continue to provide pleasure for his future, even as he grew older. He deeply believed that nature is beneficial to the lasting ability of human thought, and that human imagination is necessary to make beautiful nature full of vitality.

Nor, perchance If I Should be where I no more can hear Thy voice, nor catch from thy wild eyes these gleams...We stood together; and that I, so long A worshipper of Nature, hither came Unwearied in that service; rather say With warmer love-oh! with far deeper zeal of holier love.

At the end of the poem, the poet turns his point of view from the past to the present, and now he turns his attention from considering the relationship between himself and nature to his sister in the valley. Wordsworth hopes that this beautiful scenery can leave precious memories for his sister, and he hopes his sister can be a worshipper of nature and have a more ardent love and a deeper passion towards nature to help her overcome fear and loneliness in the long years to come which expressed his endless and profound feelings for his sister. Wordsworth believes that only by returning to the nature can we continue the relationship between man and nature and restore good human nature. When he told his sister this, he was also telling all human beings that only when human beings are integrated into nature can they live harmoniously with nature, and can they get philosophy of life from nature, and then lead themselves to a new stage of life.

5. Conclusion

Since Wordsworth, romantic poets have made nature appreciation the central focus of their poems, ushering in a new era in the composition of poetry. *Tintern Abbey* contains a very deep ecological consciousness. It can be seen that what the author is infatuated with not only the natural beauty, but the nature itself. At that time, it can be said that it is very forward-looking. Even in contemporary times, Wordsworth's thinking on the reconstruction of the relationship between man and nature has great reference significance for China's ecological construction and facing the common ecological crisis of mankind. In the first decade of the 21st century, we immediately put into action to prevent

environmental pollution and promote ecological balance. In order to survive and develop sustainably, we must protect the landscape, forest, field and lake, and ensure the sustainable survival of other organisms. Some people criticize Wordsworth's thinking as negative nostalgia. Levinson believes that Wordsworth's thought has retreated to a kind of conservative state of focusing on his heart, avoiding social reality, hoping to return to the so-called good 'childhood' before the two major social revolutions (i.e. the industrial revolution and the French Revolution) but this is not the case^[17](Hu 134-135). F.R. Leavis and Denis Thompson, British cultural critics in the 20th century, hold that it is unrealistic to restore the old order, but remembering the old order can provide the direction and power for the new order^[18](Collins 180). If we forget the old order, we will not succeed in opening a new one.

As a matter of fact, it is not only the article *Tintern Abbey*, but also the potential ecological value throughout Wordsworth's poetics. Wordsworth's poetry will always be recited, because it is not only the song of nature, but also the song of soul. Wordsworth belongs to the world and the future.

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