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THE SIMILARITIES OF THE THOUGHTS BETWEEN WILLIAM WORDSWORTH AND  
T. S. ELIOT FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF ECO-CRITICISM

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ABSTRACT

In the 1860s, Britain took the lead in carrying out the first industrial revolution. By the early and middle of the 19th century, the second industrial revolution had begun to emerge. In addition to the economic prosperity, industrialization also made people deeply experience the threat of environmental problems to human survival. The literary works in 19th and 20th centuries also reflected the close relationship between ecological ethics and the progress of human civilization.

Although William Wordsworth and T. S. Eliot were in 19th and 20th centuries respectively, through their description of nature, they both revealed that nature is the origin of human beings, the home and destination of human spirit, and the beginning and the end of human spirit. This paper adopts the method of combining literature review and literary criticism to measure the similarities between William Wordsworth and T.S. Eliot from the perspective of Eco-criticism. Ecocriticism itself contains introspection on ecological problems, and its goal is to achieve the harmonious coexistence between man and nature. Therefore, it is very meaningful to compare their similarities from the perspective of ecocriticism, which is also of great significance to the construction of contemporary ecological civilization and the realization of harmony between man and nature.

**Key Words:** Eco-criticism; Similarity; William Wordsworth; T. S. Eliot.

1. Introduction

Although William Wordsworth and T. S. Eliot were in 19th and 20th centuries respectively, through their description of nature, they both revealed that nature is the origin of human beings, the home and destination of human spirit, and the beginning and the end of human spirit. On the one hand, Wordsworth localized the rural life in accordance with the English industrial Revolution, and the pastoral image is the essence of his writing, which reflects the poet's deep thinking on nature, and embodies his natural concept and ecological thought. On the other hand, Eliot's poetry contains the ecological spirit of high value and presents a kind of unique ecological idea. Through the description of social illness at that time, the natural and spiritual ecology of state is deeply analyzed, and the poet's poems are integrated with his own ecological thoughts.

1.1 Literature Review

Scholars have begun to analyze Eliot's works in the 1920s abroad and home.

In China, most of the studies on Eliot were made from the perspectives of the author's life, poetic theory, ecologism, space-time and religion, focusing on the textual analysis of the poet's works, and focusing on the creating techniques and poetic themes. At the same time, there are very few documents that compare Eliot with other writers. The representative articles are as follows. In 2008, Lin Yurong et al. published an article named "A study of the Space-time theme in Eliot's *The Waste Land*" in *Foreign Language Education*, which indicated that the time system in *The Waste Land* has lost its normal functioning and enhanced its representation of the poetic themes about hell and death. In 2013, Yan Kefei published an article named "The Religious Salvation View and Artistic Features of Eliot's *The Waste Land*" in *Journal of University of Science and Technology Beijing* (Social Sciences Edition), which systematically studied the sense of salvation in the Waste Land, through the combination with Eliot's life experience and thought exploration, as well as his conversion to Christianity. In 2019, Huang Haowen published an article named "T.S. Eliot's Interpretation of Ecological Values in the *Waste Land*" in the *Youth Writers*, which analyzed the ecological values and spirit contained in the *Waste Land*. In 2019, Lu Jiani published an article named "A Comparative Study between Eliot's *The Love Song of Prufrock* and Li Shangyin's *Untitled*" in *Litbraturb Bducation*, which compares and analyzed the internal relations and differences between Eliot and Li Shangyin, and got a deeper understanding of the poetical theory put forward by Eliot.

In foreign studies, the journal mainly explored the influence of Eliot's life on literary creation, and focused on the textual analysis of the poet's works, and on the creating techniques. The representative articles are as follows. In 1994, Samarendra Saraf published an article named "T.S. Eliot as an Anthropologist" in *Indian Anthropologist*, which make an attempt to throw some light on Eliot's contribution to anthropology, on one hand, and anthropology's influence on Eliot's creative writings, on the other (1). In 2006, Amanda Jeremin Harris published an article named "T.S. Eliot's Mental Hygiene" in *Journal of Modern Literature*, which analyzed the course of Eliot's literary creation from the perspective of biography. In 2018, Matthew Scully published an article named "Plasticity at the Violet Hour: Tiresias, *The Waste Land*, and Poetic Form", which reconceived the form of *The Waste Land* as that which bears witness to the disordering and excessive force excluded and absented from traditional conceptions of the poem's formal organization (166). In 2019, Ebbatson published an article named "The nature of modernism: ecocritical approaches to the poetry of Edward Thomas, T.S. Eliot, Edith Sitwell and Charlotte Mew" in *Green Letters*, which investigated how the poets under consideration undertake a significant re-evaluation of the meaning of nature in modern society and in art (425).

In China, for researches on Wordsworth, scholars mainly studied ecologism, poetics, ecofeminism and comparative studies, most of which compare Wordsworth with traditional Chinese landscape pastoral poets. In 2011, Zhao Guangxu published an article named "The Deep and Shallow of Wordsworth's Ecological Research and Ecocriticism" in *Shandong Foreign Language Teaching Journal*, which through the study of the ecological significance of English romantic poet Wordsworth, explained the problems existing in the categories of deep ecological criticism and shallow ecological criticism. In 2013, Lu Yang published an article named "Meditation of Cloud and Water: A Comparison of Cloud Images in Wordsworth's and Wang Wei's poems" in *Journal of Language and Literature Studies*, which indicated that the image of cloud in Wordsworth's and Wang Wei's works has similarities. In 2019, Xu Hongxia published an article named "Nature, Books, and Religion: A Study of Wordsworth's (Un) changing Thoughts of Poetic Education" in *Foreign Literatures*, which revealed the changing and unchanging elements of Wordsworth's ideal poetic education and argued that nature, books and religion constitute the core of Wordsworth's poetic education (92). In 2020, Xie Haichang published an article named "'Expressive' or 'Pragmatic': Wordsworth's Poetics Reconsidered" in *Foreign Literatures*, which indicated that William Wordsworth has been persistently pursuing the "pragmatic" notion of reader-orientation in his work, which determines both his strategies of choosing the proper subject matter and language for poetic production and his criterion for judging the value of poetry (32).

In foreign studies, researchers conduct textual analysis of Wordsworth's poems from various theories such as structuralism, ecologism and feminism. In 1979, Gene M. Bernstein published an article named "Lévi-Strauss's 'Totemism' and Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads*" in *Studies in Romanticism*, which analyzed the influence of structuralism on romantic poetry. In 2004, Matthew Teorey published an article named "William

Wordsworth and Leslie Marmon Silko: Toward an Ecofeminist Future" in *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, which indicated that both Wordsworth and Silko reject the oppressive patriarchy and advocate rebuilding the harmony between human and nature. In 2015, Michael Wiley published an article named "Wordsworth's Spots of Time in Space and Time" in *The Wordsworth Circle*, which indicated that Wordsworth's spots are also places where natural or human pleasure or pain has occurred (52). In 2015, Heidi Thomson published an article named "The Importance of Other People and the Transmission of Affect in Wordsworth's Lyric Poetry" in *The Modern Language Review*, which emphasized the importance of the transmission of affect in Wordsworth's poems. In 2016, Lisa Ottum published an article named "On (Not) Hugging Trees: Affect, Emotion, and Ecology in Wordsworth's 'Nutting'" in *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies*, which used the insights of affect studies on William Wordsworth's poems (257).

To sum up, there is no comparison research on Wordsworth and Eliot from the ecological perspective, and the analysis of both, mainly focusing on the analysis of the poet or text. Therefore, this article attempts from the perspective of ecological criticism to interpret these two writers, looking for ecological consciousness, ecological conscience and ecological wisdom in their poems.

## 1.2 Research Method

This paper adopts the method of combining literature review and literary criticism to measure the similarities between William Wordsworth and T.S. Eliot from the perspective of Eco-criticism.

That is to say, based on the works created by the poets and the social environment in which the poets were living, this paper compares the contents, narrative techniques and creation styles of the poet's poems to distinguish and sort out the similarities and authenticity of the poets' ecological thoughts shown in the poems. What's more, from the level of philology to the level of aesthetics, and from the level of evaluation of literary works to the level of aesthetics, the research should be promoted from visible empirical facts to invisible aesthetic inquiry, and the profound guiding significance of the poet's ecological thought for the contemporary era also should be discussed.

## 1.3 Research Feasibility and Significance

In the 1860s, Britain took the lead in carrying out the first industrial revolution. By the early and middle of the 19th century, the second industrial revolution had begun to emerge. In addition to the economic prosperity, industrialization also made people deeply experience the threat of environmental problems to human survival. The literary works in 19th and 20th centuries also reflected the close relationship between ecological ethics and the progress of human civilization.

Although William Wordsworth and T. S. Eliot were in 19th and 20th centuries respectively, through their description of nature, they both revealed that nature is the origin of human beings, the home and destination of human spirit, and the beginning and the end of human spirit. Ecocriticism itself contains introspection on ecological problems, and its goal is to achieve the harmonious coexistence between man and nature. Therefore, it is very meaningful to compare their similarities from the perspective of ecocriticism. This topic can explore the unique connotation and rich value of the ecological thoughts between them, looking for ecological consciousness, ecological conscience and ecological wisdom in their works.

## 2. Similarities between William Wordsworth and T. S. Eliot

In the view of ecocriticism, the so-called "environmental crisis" is not only related to the human experience of contacting with nature, but also related to the daily and social human life. Obviously, both naturality and sociality are the attributes of man. Although naturality is always higher than sociality in the basic sense, the real life world is sociality. Therefore, the ecological problem we are concerned about today is essentially a social problem, or a spiritual problem. What's more, the goal of emphasizing ecological problem is to achieve the harmonious coexistence between human and nature. Consequently, in view of ecocriticism, there are three aspects to analyze the similarities in this paper. One is the natural ecology, another is the spiritual ecology, and the other is the ecological resurrection.

## 2.1 Natural Ecology

Natural ecology is the core content of ecocriticism, that is, ecological literature cares about nature, tries to illustrate the embodiment of nature in literary works, and advocates the harmony between man and nature. The task of ecocriticism is also to conduct literary criticism for the concern of human existence in nature (qtd. in He Jiangsheng 23).

Wordsworth's creation is permeated with conscious ecological consciousness, with the purpose of literary resistance against the mechanization which occupies the dominant position (qtd. in Liu Bei and Li Yanzhu 32), calling for people to get close to nature and advocating harmonious coexistence and interdependence between human and nature. He took nature as the source of his poems, and as the object of emotional expression, showing the interaction and interdependence between human beings and nature, as what he wrote in *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud*:

I wandered lonely as a cloud  
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,  
When all at once I saw a crowd,  
A host, of golden daffodils;  
Besides the lake, beneath the trees,  
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze (Ferguson 801).

The poet injects vitality into all things in nature with the description of anthropomorphism. He does not regard nature as something that is tamed, dominated and utilized by human beings, but as a place where human beings inhabit or the existence of poetic human being's home, showing the inspiration brought by the beauty of nature and the importance of the innocent nature.

T.S. Eliot also paid attention to the natural ecology, whose works showed the natural ecological problems characterized by environmental pollution, barren land and barren plants, etc (qtd. in He Jiangsheng 22). In *The Waste Land*, set in postwar Europe, he described the natural places of human existence, especially the cities, such as London, Paris, Berlin, Vienna, etc. as a wasteland with lack of rain, confused by the problems of barren land, air pollution, and other pollution. Although the tone of this poem is vitriolic and ironic, his revelation about the environmental pollution has the profound value. That is to say, through the exaggerating description and the satirical narration about the ecological problems, people can have a deeper understanding of the seriousness of ecological problems, so as to urge people to take actions to improve this situation. As he wrote in *The Waste Land*:

Unreal City  
Under the brown fog of a winter noon (Ferguson 1350)  
  
The river sweats  
Oil and tar  
The barges drift  
With the turning tide (Ferguson 1351)  
And what he wrote in *The Love Song* :  
The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes,  
The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes.

To sum up, both Wordsworth and Eliot take nature as the object of observation in their works, and through studying the living environment of themselves, they can achieve the purpose of awakening people's ecological consciousness and building a new harmonious relationship between man and nature. Through this kind of description about nature, readers can find themselves living in a system where there is a close relationship between human and nature, and think about the position of human beings in this ecotope. Therefore, in their attitudes towards nature, both of them have an ecological ethic spirit with deep concern for nature.

## 2.2 Spiritual Ecology

Spiritual ecology is another focus of ecocriticism. Ecological literature often goes beyond the text to focus on people, society and people's spiritual state (qtd. in He Jiangsheng 25). Up to now, the progress of human civilization has been achieved at the cost of the destruction of the natural ecology, which leads to the deterioration of the natural environment. The destruction and reduction of living environment will lead to the survival anxiety and competition between animals. Due to the similar survival competition between human-beings, the alienation of mentality also occurs.

Wordsworth lived in the 19th century, when the enlightenment broke the shackles of medieval religious theology and spread rationality and science. However, while promoting social development, it also brought some new problems -- human beings used science as a edge tool to manipulate the natural environment unscrupulously. Nature was regarded as a "resource" only for economic development, and the meaning of life was equal to fighting against nature. In terms of the relationship between man and nature, urbanization and the establishment of large factories have caused a large number of people to leave the countryside and move to the city. People have completely separated themselves from their land and traditions. People and nature were physically and psychologically separated (qtd. in Liu Bei and Li Yanzhu 38). Therefore, in his poems, Wordsworth called on people to truly understand the coordinated role of nature in human spiritual culture, abandon the conceited idea of human beings and anthropocentrism, and establish an ideal world of harmony between man and nature. In the eyes of the poet, human soul depends on nature, nature is a combination of naturality and sociality, as well as a kind of human's spiritual existence. As he wrote in *Lines Written in Early Springs*:

To her fair works did Nature link  
The human soul that through me ran;  
And much it grieved my heart to think  
What man has made of man?

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century when Eliot lived, the high advancement of western industrial civilization, the rapid change of modern society and the development of mechanization directly led to the shaking of human traditional ideas. The original harmonious relationship between man and nature was cut off, and people became estranged and indifferent. The pursuit of material and the desire for power have exhausted people's spiritual sources. People's pursuits in life have been distorted, and human's spiritual ecology and mental health have become precarious. Taking Sibyl the prophet in the preface of *The Waste Land* for instance. Sibyl here was in a state of immortality with pain, disease, and doom, which was far more painful than death. Sibyl's state was just the true portrayal of people in the modern waste land. Modern man's endless pursuit of wealth and power consumed his mind without any pleasure or satisfaction, leaving him with endless greed and empty vanity. The spiritual fulcrum of their own existence has been destroyed, leaving only empty shells and numbness. The poet used this image to highlight the theme of his work, namely, the nothingness of human spirits full of despair and struggle in suffering, which was the alienation of the human spirit.

To sum up, at different periods of Wordsworth and Eliot lived, human body was treated as a biological machine, nature as something completely external, and the naturality was losing. In a word, oppression of

nature and the desolation of human spirits brought by modern industrial civilization, were very obvious in the eras of the two poets.

### 2.3 Ecological Resurrection

Ecocriticism establishes "The Ecological Holism", which emphasizes the idea of whole and the internal connection of the whole. This is against human-centralism --- human is just a component element, which complements with natural environment to form an ecological system that adapts to implementing the living activities.

Wordsworth quested for the concept of wholeness or interdependence, emphasizing human's dependence on nature. Besides, he has a strong desire for human to return to the vast organisms that make up the earth. In Wordsworth's view of nature, nothing is completely self-sufficient. Every object has a duty to another, and on the contrary, another provides conditions for the existence of others. That is to say, individual survival cannot be separated from the entire ecosystem. It is in a circular environment that various objects can complement each other and achieve common achievements. For example, the simplest and ordinary daffodils can make the lonely poet feel pleasure:

"And then my heart with pleasure fills/And dances with the daffodils" (Ferguson 801).

And what Wordsworth wrote in *Lines*:

And what perceive; well pleased to recognize

In nature and the language of the sense

The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,

The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul

Of all my moral being.

By means of ironic description, Eliot stated that when human beings are destroyed and separated from integrity and stability, it would lead to human self-subversion and destruction. He called on people to establish a correct ecological ethics in order to achieve sustainable development. From Eliot's poems, we can understand that nature is an organic whole, and every object is playing its own value and meaning. People need to take more responsibilities and regard nature as the habitat for the soul of human beings. Taking *The Waste Land* as an example, sex is the expression of the vitality of nature. As a link in the ecological chain, human beings, no matter how they evolve, cannot get rid of their natural attributes, which are the basis of human existence. Away from nature, human sexuality is lost. It can also be seen as a breakdown of the human beings. The background of the wasteland is the loss of the Fisher King's sexuality and the subsequent decline of everything, which shows that the mechanical civilization and material civilization of modern industrial society have destroyed the natural humanity. With his poems, Eliot shows the ecological disaster of the society at that time, that is, science and technology conquers nature and eventually conquers human beings themselves, and shows that the natural and organic integrity of the world is losing.

To sum up, although Wordsworth and Eliot adopted different narrative styles, they both emphasized the importance of organic wholeness. Wordsworth emphasizes relying on nature and has a strong desire for human to return to the vast organisms that make up the earth in a positive narrative. While Eliot's ironic narrative of the loss of the wholeness of the world draws attention to the whole ecological environment. In short, both of them emphasize the idea of whole and the internal connection of the whole and against human-centralism, appeal to people to pay attention to the ecological environment, so as to form a harmonious organic whole with all nature.

### 3. Conclusion

On the one hand, both Wordsworth and Eliot take nature as the object of observation in their works, and through studying the living environment of themselves, they can achieve the purpose of awakening

people's ecological consciousness and building a new harmonious relationship between man and nature. On the other hand, at different periods of Wordsworth and Eliot lived, human body was treated as a biological machine, nature as something completely external, and the naturalness was losing. In a word, oppression of nature and the desolation of human spirits brought by modern industrial civilization, were very obvious in the eras of the two poets. Therefore, as they have realized the destruction of mankind and society caused by modern civilization, both of them emphasize the idea of whole and the internal connection of the whole and against human-centralism, appeal to people to pay attention to the ecological environment, so as to form a harmonious organic whole with all nature in their poems.

Although Wordsworth and Eliot lived in different times, they both intended to seek rationality from the organic integrity of nature, so as to readjust the relationship between man and nature alienated by modern industrialism and commercialism, and restore the state of harmony between man and the nature. This provides the basis for the comparison and analysis of similarity between poets. In addition, poetry as a carrier to express the poet's strong feelings can bring spiritual strength. Therefore, this topic can effectively explore the unique connotation and rich value of the ecological thoughts between them, looking for ecological consciousness, ecological conscience and ecological wisdom in their poems, which is of great significance to the construction of contemporary ecological civilization and the realization of harmony between man and nature.

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