

On the Natural Aesthetics of Wordsworth's Poetry

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Abstract—William Wordsworth is a representative poet in 19th century British romantic literature. “Nature” is an important theme of his poetry, on which he formed his “natural view” with different spiritual meanings and humanistic connotations. Based on the interpretation of his poems, this paper analyzes the implication of his view of nature and explores the cultural connotation embodied in it, which is of great significance to the clearer understanding of the characteristics of British romanticism and culture.

Keywords—Wordsworth, Romanticism, poetry, nature

I. INTRODUCTION

Wordsworth is one of the main founders and greatest poets of English romantic poetry in the 19th century. He was called “the singer of nature” by Shelley. His Preface to Lyrical Ballads is known as the Declaration of Romantic Aesthetics. Wordsworth loves nature. His praise of nature is full of sincere emotions. He eulogizes nature's landscape---pastoral countryside full of flowers, trees, birds, sky and streams. He pays attention to the influence of nature on human's hearts. Apart from this, he expresses different philosophies in the form of poetry and his concern and love for the whole mankind by depicting the relationship between nature and childhood, nature and life, nature and society. His view of natural aesthetics has many characteristics.

II. INFLUENCE OF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND PERSONAL EXPERIENCE ON WORDSWORTH'S NATURAL AESTHETICS

Wordsworth lived in the late 18th century to the first half of the 19th century. This period was a major turning point in European history and literature. The French bourgeois revolution that broke out in 1789 destroyed the monarchy in France, promoted the spread of free and democratic ideas, and played an important role in the development of European Enlightenment. Wordsworth was once a fanatical supporter of the French Revolution, but later as Britain and France declared war on each other Wordsworth's ambition to devote him to the French revolution fell through. He became very much disappointed with the French revolution. The boredom of urban civilization and frustration toward life's ups and downs led Wordsworth to turn his attention to the harmonious nature and seek sustenance and comfort in the natural scenery.

Wordsworth was born and brought up in the famous Lake District, which is dotted with beautiful mountains, cliff and rivers. The beautiful nature around gave Wordsworth comfort. He communicated with the nature piously and it was just this kind of communication that healed him and compensated for

his early misfortunes. Wordsworth also saw nature as his spiritual existence. Insects, flowers, stars, mountains, and canyons, etc., all represent a moral or spiritual life for young Wordsworth. They have an affinity for him. So naturally they are both material and spiritual. Wordsworth's view of nature is the foundation of his poetics.

III. THE NATURAL AESTHETICS OF SCENERY IN WORDSWORTH'S POEMS

Among all British romantic poets, Wordsworth is most fond of writing about nature. He has lived in his birthplace most of his life, so most of his poetry is just an intuitive description of the surrounding natural scenery. These scenes are not only numerous, but also rich in variety, shape, and color. For Wordsworth, nature is material. Nature breeds everything on earth --- grass, trees, lakes, rivers, small animals and human being. So Wordsworth naturally creates quite a lot of natural images in his poetry just like these. There is description of the macro environment in Tintern Abbey, in which the scenery and the earth are connected, dynamic description of the sinking moon in Strange Fits of Passion have I known, the tall rock and wreaths of smoke in Tintern Abbey, and “Fluttering and dancing (daffodils) in the breeze” in Daffodils.

Wordsworth not only expresses his praise for nature, he also manages to associate it with something hidden behind it. For example, in his “Lucy” poems, Wordsworth makes Lucy's character clear with the images of roses and other flowers. Lucy's beauty is likened to flowers which are hidden.

At the same time, Wordsworth's love of nature changes from the senses to the heart. The poet is able to explore something deep in human's thought based on these images. He finds the support of pure thought, the inner nanny, the tutor, the Guardian, and the soul of the moral body in nature. For example, in I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud, Wordsworth not only presents the readers with vivid and realistic natural scenes through his rich imagination based on memories of his experiences before, he also further conveys his desire for freedom at the very beginning of the poem---“I wandered lonely as a cloud /That floats on high o'er vales and hills”. This poem shows the poet's unique spiritual pursuit. His satisfaction is spiritual and natural. Through his grasp of the past, present and future, the poet recreates the beauty of nature in a way of memory. He uses the plants in nature as a medicine to soothe the trauma of the soul and obtains from them the self-transcendence over loneliness. Although

daffodils are common, they are a good recipe for the salvation of the lost soul. It reawakened the poet's spiritual life.

Another example, in Tintern Abbey, Wordsworth depicts a picture full of springs, water, trees and mountains, which can remind readers of an image of Garden of Eden. Wordsworth wants to use the natural scenes to express his feelings about nature and construct his poetry and personality.

Anyway, Wordsworth has various plant images in his works, and he uses them to paint a vivid and hopeful world and the home of all the creatures on earth.

IV. THE NATURAL AESTHETICS OF EMOTION

A. *The Natural Expression of True Feelings in Poetry*

Wordsworth emphasizes the natural expression of true feelings. He believes that "All good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" [1]. Emotion, as a clear mark of poetry, is the essence of poetry. There can be no poetry without emotion. The sincere emotion comes from the human mind which has certain inherent and indestructible qualities. It has an influence on the human mind, that is, it has some indestructible power. This uncontrollable power fills a poet's heart.

"For the poet himself, the contact with nature not only makes him recover from the wounds of the world, it keeps him pure and quiet, guides him to see the inner side of life, and makes him a kinder and more compassionate person" [2]. In his famous poem Tintern Abbey, Wordsworth once laments "How often has my spirit turned to thee!" "How oft, in spirit, have I turned to thee" [3]! As has been mentioned above, Wordsworth experienced the extreme lack of affection and material things in his early years, and he became lonely and sensitive. Later when he grew up he experienced the disillusionment of ideals and the frustration of love. But it is the beautiful memories of his childhood in nature that heals his soul. In Wordsworth's view, nature not only nourishes and comforts the human mind, but also gives humans pleasure and education.

To a Skylark writes about the role of lark singing in inspiring the poet's vitality. At the beginning, the poet shouts directly and continuously, asking to fly freely in the air with the lark. Lark's singing sounds from the sky--the melodious echo, which spontaneously arouses an excitement in the poet's heart. Inspired by this spirit, although "my journey, rugged and uneven /Through prickly moors or dusty ways must wind" [4], as long as "I" hear this from the natural world, "my" spirit will be revived. Here, the emotional individual life and willpower have reached the same point, and the poet has regained a harmonious and complete poetic life in the lark's singing.

Wordsworth also has another poem that records the strong temporary feelings of his own. Typical works include *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud*. Here, Wordsworth's strong emotions like a fantasy, a mood, or tension are often recorded in such lyric poems, since he can always relate to nature and life, and inject personal feelings into the universal feelings of human beings.

B. *The Pureness of Children's Hearts*

Many of Wordsworth's poems are written from children's perspectives, that is, the child's vision or child's tone, to be exact. In these poems Wordsworth uses the child's eyes to observe things, the advantage of which is that by narrating in a child's tone he can feel everything around him in a unique way of thinking. And much of the content of poetry is about children's life beyond the emotional expression of ordinary adults.

To a Butterfly shows the infinite beauty of children's heart. "Thou bring'st, gay creature as thou art! / A solemn image to my heart, / My father's family!" Then the poet presents the scene of innocent and lively children running around in the forest, chasing the butterfly. They are surrounded by total happiness, and the butterfly is the very witness of their happy time. At the end of the poem, the author further writes about the special sensitivity of children. Even if he is eager to hunt butterflies, he is afraid to touch the thin powder on the butterfly's wings.

Wordsworth's best poem that describes the hearts of children is *We Are Seven*. The entire poem is structured by "my" dialogue with a little girl, which reflects the children's ignorance and pureness. The innocent mind of the little girl, full of childlike persistence and hope for life can be easily perceived by readers. Wordsworth conveys that children's emotions are the most sensitive, pure and innocent by nature.

V. THE NATURAL AESTHETICS OF LANGUAGE

Wordsworth says in his Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* that "the principal object, then, which I proposed to myself in these Poems was to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them, throughout, as far as was possible, in a selection of language really used by men" [5]. Wordsworth has always strongly opposed the flashy rhetoric of classicism. He believes that the form of poetry should be as natural and direct as talking and chatting.

The natural aesthetics of language lies in that his language is essentially derived from the daily language that people actually use, which is fresh, natural and powerful. Since the language used in people's daily life is the language that is most closely related to nature, it can more easily and clearly express emotions [6]. Wordsworth always displays this unique nature poetry with a language that is simple and not gorgeous. And this simple language can always make people feel the vitality and uniqueness of it. It is not difficult for us to have this kind of experience when we read poems such as *To the Cuckoo*, *Lines Written in Early Spring* and *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud*. Take *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud* as an example. In this poem the words Wordsworth uses are all derived from the most ordinary things, and the expression is also extremely colloquial, no strange vocabulary and flashy rhetoric. From the use of nouns in this poem, we can see signs how human beings originally named things in nature. Wordsworth uses a total of 34 nouns in this poem. The specific material nouns include cloud, vales, hills, daffodils, lake, trees, breeze, stars, milky way, bay, waves, heads, eye, heart, heart, coach. Most of these nouns are natural things or natural phenomena. The specific and non-material nouns are crowd, host, once, line, margin,

thousand, dance, poet, dance, and show. The nouns that represent psychological feelings are glee, good, bliss, solitude, and free. They form a unified whole with the adjectives like lonely, sprightly, gay, jocund, vacant, and pensive in the poem, indicating the natural expression of strong feelings. When such a language appears in poetry, it often offers a brilliant imagery; therefore, the language Wordsworth chooses is a natural language, a real language, a simple and unadorned language.

Wordsworth's purpose of using the common rural living environment as the background, and the plain language in Lyrical Ballads is that he wants to show the touching charm of the subjects that are nonetheless always incompatible with elegant rhetoric [7]. Another example, again in "Lucy" poems, Wordsworth uses the simplest language to describe an ordinary Scottish girl. The image of the country girl is described in a very appropriate way. Although the language of the poem is simple, the lines are permeated with real touching feelings [8].

VI. CONCLUSIONS

In short, among the many romantic poets who describe nature, Wordsworth is the first poet to use simple, realistic and not flashy language to describe the harmony and intimacy of human beings and nature. This true and intense feeling between man and nature, expressed through his poetry, makes

it have a different flavor. Wordsworth does not simply appreciate and praise the beautiful scenery of nature, but regards nature as a good teacher and friend of our human society. It can not only edify people's emotions and enhance people's confidence in living in this nature but it can also even change the value of people's existence and survival.

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