

Research on the Ecological Consciousness in D. H. Lawrence's Poetry from the Perspective of Ecocriticism

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ABSTRACT

D. H. Lawrence is regarded as one of the most accomplished writers in the twentieth century. Criticism of Western mechanical civilization is one of the themes in his poetry. The destruction of the environment by mechanical civilization has aroused the author's great concern. In some of his poems, he probes into the destruction of the environment and the suppression of human nature by mechanical civilization. Through such representative poems as "In the Cities", "Lizard", "The Factory Cities", "Leaves of Grass, Flowers of Grass", "The Triumph of the Machine", "Mountain Lion", "Man and Bat" and "Snake", D. H. Lawrence directly or indirectly criticizes the Western mechanical civilization that destroys the ecological environment and reflects on the defects of human civilization. Through the study on Lawrence's poetry from the perspective of ecocriticism, we can have a deeper understanding of his ecological consciousness.

KEYWORDS

D. H. Lawrence; Poetry; Ecological criticism; Ecological consciousness

1 Introduction

Ecological consciousness is a special value concept, which is based on the mutual relationship between all ecology and human activities in nature, including itself. It reflects the new relationship between man and nature—the viewpoint and theory of harmony between man and nature and the sum of emotions. (Gangwar, 2020, pp. 30-51) Eco-criticism is the study of literature from an ecological or environmental perspective, is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. It takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies. The fundamental premise of ecological criticism is that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it. Ecocriticism takes as its subject the inter-connections between nature and culture. As a critical stance it has one foot in literature and the other on land; as a theoretical discourse, it negotiates between the human and nonhuman. The word "ecocriticism" traces back to William Rueckert's 1978 essay "Literature and Ecology: An experiment in ecocriticism". Actually, it was William Rueckert who first coined the term "ecocriticism" as an approach of literary analysis to discover something about the ecology of literature, trying "to find the grounds upon which the two communities—the human, the natural—can coexist, cooperate, and flourish in the biosphere." (Rueckert, 1996, p.107)

Literary theory, in general, examines the relations between writers, texts and the world. In most literary theories, the world "is synonymous with society—the social sphere. Ecocriticism expands the notion of the world" to include the entire ecosphere. As a new school of literary criticism, ecocriticism serves the purpose of analyzing the role that the environment has played in the

creation of literature and the perspective from which we read it. Environmental destruction has aroused much attention to eco-criticism during recent years (approximately since 2000). Eco-criticism is hence a fresh way of analyzing and interpreting literary texts, which brings new dimensions to the field of literary criticism. How environmental issues are related to culture and what attitudes toward nature are presented and analyzed is the core of ecocriticism. *"The modern ecological consciousness has a feeling that the balance between human and the natural world must be maintained. A perfect ecology is one in which plants, animals, bird and human beings live in such harmony that none dominates or destroys the other."* (Frederick, 2012, p.147)

2 Ecological Consciousness in D. H. Lawrence's Poetry

"In the Cities" is a poem in D. H. Lawrence's *Last Poems*. This poem presents the terrifying scene of the city's natural environment being destroyed. In Lawrence's writing, modern cities, whose natural environment has been destroyed and polluted by industrial civilization, are like hell on earth.

*In the cities
there is even no more any weather,
the weather in town is always benzine, or else petrol fumes,
lubricating oil, exhaust gas.
As over some dense marsh, the fumes
thicken, miasma, the fumes of the automobile
densely thicken in the cities.
In ancient Rome, down the thronged streets
no wheels might run, no insolent chariots.
Only the footsteps, footsteps
of people
and the gentle trotting of the litter-bearers.
In Minos, in Mycenae,
in all the cities with lion gates
the dead threaded the air, lingering
lingering in the earth's shadow
and leaning towards the old hearth.
In London, New York, Paris,
in the bursten cities
the dead tread heavily through the muddy air,
through the mire of fumes
heavily, stepping weary on our hearts.* (Lawrence, 1994, pp.590-591)

From the poem "In the Cities", we can see the serious environmental pollution. The air pollution has become so serious that it has even made the cities lose their normal weather. There are no longer blue sky and white clouds. The air is not clean and fresh any longer. It has become muddy. The fumes thicken, miasma and the fumes of the automobile are everywhere in the cities. Compared with the ancient cities which were not polluted, the modern cities have lost their connection with the nature and have been far away from the natural and normal states that cities should have.

"Lawrence is a Romantic poet in his reverence for the natural world, but he sees that world as far more restlessly active than most of the Romantics did. And he extends his sense of the non-human world to include the animal (including bird, fish and insect) kingdom which the Romantics virtually neglected." (Salgado, 2005, p.144)

In his poem titled "Lizard", through the life of lizards, the natural state that life should possess is

depicted lively and vividly. Although the language of this poem is quite simple, yet it contains profound connotation. Lawrence endows the lizard with extraordinary symbolic significance. It becomes a symbol of the true state that life should possess :

*A lizard ran out on a rock and looked up, listening
no doubt to the sounding of the spheres.
And what a dandy fellow! the right toss of a chin for you
and swirl of a tail!
If men were as much men as lizards are lizards
they'd be worth looking at.* (Lawrence, 1994, p.437)

In Lawrence's view, human beings, who have been suppressed by mechanical civilization and lost their natural instincts and alienated, have lost their own value. Thus, mankind is simply not worth looking at. By comparing humans with lizards, this poem leaves a deep impression on readers. It urges people to be alert and reflect on their situation of being detached from natural attributes, reflecting Lawrence's ecological consciousness.

This little poem also expresses Lawrence's expectation that mankind can get rid of the fetters of mechanical civilization and material desire, resume its natural instinct and natural attributes, and act energetically and naturally just like the lizard.

In the poem "The Factory Cities", Lawrence also expresses his deep concern with the destruction of the living environment and his ecological consciousness.

*Oh, over the factory cities there seems to hover a doom
so dark, so dark, the mind is lost in it.
Ah, the industrial masses, with the iron hook through their gills,
when the evil angler has played them long enough,
another little run for their money, a few more turns of the reel
fixing the hook more tightly, getting it more firmly in –
Ah, when he begins to draw the line in tight, to land his fish,
the industrial masses - Ah, what will happen, what will happen?
Hark! the strange noise of millions of fish in panic,
in panic, in rebellion, slithering millions of fish
whistling and seething and pulling the angler down into boiling black death!* (Lawrence, 1994, p.493)

From the poem "The Factory Cities", we can see a horrible phenomenon brought about by the industrial civilization: the masses have been enslaved by the mechanical civilization. They are enveloped by the dark doom created by the industrial civilization. They are just like millions of fish in panic and in rebellion, struggling and trying to find an outlet. Factories make up the cities, which have been branded with industry. And People living in urban factories inevitably suffer from pollution in their living environment and mental state. Their human nature has been twisted. They have lost their natural instinct. They are far away from the natural state that they should possess.

In the poem "Leaves of Grass, Flowers of Grass", Lawrence describes and praises common leaves of grass, "grass in blossom, blossoming grass, risen to its height and its natural pride in its own splendor and its own feathery maleness". Grass grows freely and independently in nature, integrating with it, possessing its own dignity, pride, and glory, blooming its own flowers. The author advocates the concept of harmonious coexistence with nature and ecological ideas through the imagery of grass leaves, grass flowers, and other elements in this poem, and attempts to provide reference for humanity who has been alienated by industrial civilization.

*Leaves of grass, what about leaves of grass?
Grass blossoms, grass has flowers, flowers of grass,
dusty pollen of grass, tall grass in its midsummer maleness,
hay-seed and tiny grain of grass, graminiferae*

*not far from the lily, the considerable lily;
 even the blue-grass blossoms;
 even the bison knew it;
 even the stupidest farmer gathers his hay in bloom, in blossom
 just before it seeds.
 Only the best matters; even the cow knows it;
 grass in blossom, blossoming grass, risen to its height and its natural pride
 in its own splendour and its own feathery maleness
 the grass, the grass.*

Leaves of grass, what are leaves of grass, when at its best grass blossoms? (Lawrence, 1994, p.493)

The healthy and integrated survival state of grass in nature, compared with the survival state of human beings living in factory cities and being far from nature, highlights the fact that under industrial civilization, humans are not only disconnected from nature but also increasingly far away from their own healthy natural instincts, which makes humans who pursue monetary interests and material desires increasingly incompatible with nature. Human beings should reflect on the drawbacks of industrial civilization and their pursuit of wages and money, but losing their natural and healthy living conditions. The author does not directly state this point, but instead uses descriptions of grass in nature to help readers understand the implied meaning between the lines.

In the poem "The Triumph of the Machine", Lawrence describes the process of machines representing mechanical civilization gradually eroding the living environment of humans and other organisms in nature and triumphing:

*Out of the thousands and thousands of centuries of man,
 the unrolling of ferns, white tongues of the acanthus lapping at the sun,
 for one sad century
 machines have triumphed, rolled us hither and thither,
 shaking the lark's nest till the eggs have broken.
 Shaken the marshes till the geese have gone
 and the wild swans flown away singing the swan-song of us.
 ...*

*Then, far beyond the ruin, in the far, in the ultimate, remote places
 the swan will lift up again his flattened, smitten head
 and look round, and rise, and on the great vaults of his wings
 will sweep round and up to greet the sun with a silky glitter of a new day
 and the lark will follow trilling, angerless again,
 and the lambs will bite off the heads of the daisies for friskiness.
 But over the middle of the earth will be the smoky ruin of iron,
 the triumph of the machine.* (Lawrence, 1994, pp.517-518)

Machines have deprived the larks of their place of residence and the marshes where the geese and the wild swans live, have rolled human beings hither and thither, have deprived the prairies that young bulls herd the cows, stripped the daisies among which the lambs frisk. Though the wild swans, larks and lambs can still survive "far beyond the ruin, in the far, in the ultimate, remote places", but "over the middle of the earth", "the smoky ruin of iron" will be seen everywhere, and we have to admit that over the middle of the earth, machines will triumph.

"Snake" is one of the famous poems written by D. H. Lawrence. In the poem *Snake*, Lawrence describes how the protagonist of the poem, due to his education in human civilization, developed a fear and rejection of the snake, which represents a mysterious force in nature. He even picked up a clumsy log and smashed it at the snake, then regretted his actions. This poem also reflects the author's ecological consciousness and prompts reflection on the relationship between humans and

nature, as well as the issue of harmonious coexistence between humans and other life forms in nature.

*I looked round, I put down my pitcher,
I picked up a clumsy log
And threw it at the water-trough with a clatter.
I think it did not hit him,
But suddenly that part of him that was left behind convulsed in undignified haste,
Writhed like lightning and was gone
Into the black hole, the earth-lipped fissure in the wall-front,
At which, in the intense still noon, I stared with fascination.
And immediately I regretted it.
I thought how paltry, how vulgar, what a mean act!
I despised myself and the voices of my accursed human education.
And I thought of the albatross,
And I wished he would come back, my snake.
For he seemed to me again like a king,
Like a king in exile, uncrowned in the underworld,
Now due to be crowned again.
And so, I missed my chance with one of the lords of life.
And I have something to expiate;
A pettiness. (Lawrence, 1994, p.284)*

The protagonist of the poem even thought of the albatross. The literary allusion of the albatross comes from Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner". In the story told in this poem, an albatross is shot and killed by an old sailor, causing the ship to be trapped at sea and suffering a huge disaster.

The use of the allusion "albatross" gives this poem another layer of meaning. The destruction of life in nature is also the destruction of natural ecology, and this act will be retaliated by nature and bring disaster. So integrating into nature, protecting nature, and living in harmony with nature are the right and advisable practices.

In the poem "Mountain Lion", the poet describes a mountain lion killed by men. In this poem, the poet directly calls men "the only animal in the world to fear!" The stupid behavior of men prompts the poet to once again contemplate the problem of harmonious coexistence between humans and other forms of life in nature. From Lawrence's reprimand of the behavior of killing the mountain lion, we can clearly see Lawrence's deep ecological awareness:

*And I think in this empty world there was room for me and a mountain lion.
And I think in the world beyond, how easily we might spare a million or two of humans
And never miss them.
Yet what a gap in the world, the missing white frost-face of that slim yellow
mountain lion! (Lawrence, 1994, p.331)*

The poem "Man and Bat" describes a series of scenes after a bat breaks into a man's room. The man hates bats very much, thinks they are impure things, and wants to drive him out. Yet the bat, fearing the daytime outside, keeps circling back and forth in his room, which puts the man in a dilemma:

*So, a dilemma!
He squatted there like something unclean.
No, he must not squat, nor hang, obscene, in my room!
Yet nothing on earth will give him courage to pass the sweet fire of day.
What then?*

*Hit him and kill him and throw him away?
I didn't create him.
Let the God that created him be responsible for his death.*

...

*Ah death, death
You are no solution! Bats must be bats.
Only life has a way out.*

And the human soul is fated to wide-eyed responsibility In life.(Lawrence, 1994,pp.279-280)

Though the protagonist of this poem dislikes the bat very much, he just wants to drive him out of his room, yet he thinks that the bat has his right to survive. He thinks that he has no right to kill the bat. Finally, he thinks of a way: He picks the bat up in a flannel jacket, and then shakes him out of the window hastily. At the end of this poem, the protagonist of this poem imagines such a scene:

*And now, at evening, as he flickers over the river
Dipping with petty triumphant flight, and tittering over the sun's departure,
I believe he chirps, pipistrello, seeing me here on this terrace writing
There he sits, the long loud one!
But I am greater than he ...
I escaped him ...* (Lawrence, 1994, p.281)

Through this poem, we can see the author's ecological perspective. Even annoying creatures like bats have their own right to survive, and they are also a part of nature as a whole. Humans should also live in harmony with them and not eliminate them. Through this poem, the author further suggests that humans should coexist harmoniously with other life forms in nature, as they are also products of the nature. This poem shows Lawrence's reverence for nature. Human beings should examine their relationship with nature from a new perspective, establish an ecological concept and build up a new humanistic spirit.

3 Conclusion

"Poetry, it is clear, is not cut off from life, but is basically concerned with life— that is, with the lived fullness of the world." (Brooks, 2006, p.9) Through the analysis of some representative poems by D. H. Lawrence, we can see that the ecological environment has played an important role in his poetic creation. The ecological environment is an important constituent of human life. It shouldn't be neglected in poetic creation and in literary analysis. And the ecocriticism perspective from which we read these poems by D. H. Lawrence can make us have a deeper understanding of the themes of his poetry and have a better mastery of his views of the world.

The soundness of ecological environment can exert very important effect on the soundness of the spiritual life of human beings. In Lawrence's writing, the ecological environment in which human beings are living has been polluted and damaged to varying degrees, and human beings can hardly find a place where their spirit can heal. The natural way of life of some natural living things can provide a mirror for human beings, whose humanity has been alienated, to see their own defects. All in all, by conducting research on some of D. H. Lawrence's representative poems from the perspective of ecocriticism, we can detect his ecological consciousness clearly and have a better understanding of the deep themes in his poetry. And in today's world where ecological issues are increasingly valued, Lawrence's ecological consciousness still has important inspirational value.

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