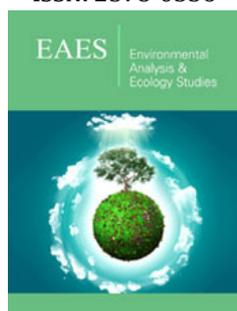


The Ethical and Cultural Appeals of Ecological Literature

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Abstract

The increasingly deteriorative living environment and serious ecological crisis are the primary causes of the appearance of ecological literature. Therefore, ecological literature has an appeal for taking an active part in the reality and inner ethical value. The ecological literature spreads its moral concerns from the humans and humanity to the whole ecosystem and natural life, which is philosophically based on Holmes Ralston's Conservation Value, Schweitzer's theory of Reverence for Life and Leopold's Land Ethic. The ecological culture is not to amplify the differences between different cultures but to transcend those differences and tolerate the diversity, which belongs to the Community Culture of human beings.

Keywords: Ecological crisis; Ecological culture; Ecological ethics

Introduction

Both the ancients' idea that man can conquer nature (Liu Guo, Song Dynasty) and the present thoughts to be the master of nature reflect the constant dream and pursuit of human beings for thousands of years. With the development of the modern science and technology, more and more man's dreams about nature have been turning into reality by the 21st Century. As the modern technology can get close to different limits of nature, human beings haven't worshiped it anymore. The scientific rationality has become the only power to lead the development of the contemporary civilization, and science has also become the biggest achievement of human culture. However, even if the science and technology have made us enter the "post-industrial age" or the "post-modern society", human beings are still not able to avoid more problems, which are called unmanageable worldwide problems, such as land desertification, water pollution, atmospheric contamination, exhausted forest resources, the extinction of the rare animals and plants, acid rain, acid mist, the El Nino and so on. These phenomena have appeared frequently and seriously threatened the existence of human beings, which are the warnings from nature. Although the existing way of human beings is more favorable for humans, if humans still transform "Things-in-themselves" natural laws, as Kant put it, there will appear what Engels has said that the nature has avenged on us for each victory like this. Facing the serious consequences of modernization, some scholars with a strong sense of social responsibility and mission have had a deep introspection on the development patterns of human history and culture, leading to the appearance of ecological literature. At the same time, as a profound and lasting critical and thinking method, the ideological trend of eco-criticism arisen in western countries has brought a brand-new thinking mode and angle of view.

The rise of ecological culture and ecological literature

With the aggravation of ecological crisis, man has finally had to pay attention to the global ecological era of natural environment, starting to reflect on the civilization. Many ideologists have realized that the global ecological crisis doesn't result in the ecosystem itself but our own cultural system, which led to the appearance of ecological culture. Against anthropocentrism and science and technology centered development, ecological culture requests humans be turned from the soul of universe and the paragon of animals by Shakespeare to a member of all things on earth, which starts from saving the humans and the earth, advocates the

harmonious relationship between man and nature, believes in the green way of living and the theory that man is an integral part of nature, and encourages humans to understand, respect and protect nature. The ecological culture is not to amplify the differences between different cultures but to transcend those differences and tolerate the diversity, which belongs to the Community Culture of human beings.

As a trend of literature creation, ecological literature is an active response to the ecological crisis in the area of literature, which reflects human beings' emphasis on eco-cultural spirits and ecological philosophical thoughts. In the book *Ecological Literature of Europe and America*, Wang Nuo of Xiamen University has defined ecological literature as one that is based on ecological holism, considers the overall interests of ecosystem as the highest value, manifests the relation between man and nature, and explores the social roots of ecological crisis. Wang [1] Defining ecological literature as a study on the relationship between literature even whole culture and nature reveals the key factor of this kind of literature. As a way of literature creation, ecological literature has its main task that is to redefine human culture and reflect culturally through literature, in order to explore how humans' thoughts, culture and social development modes influenced or even decided on man's attitude and conduct towards nature and how they led to the deterioration of nature and ecological crisis. The appearance of ecological crisis has brought new power to the endangered modern culture, and reflection on survival and existence has begun to arise in ecological literature and criticism. Natural ethics has been rediscovered and set up, while a new culture type of ecological culture between man and nature is being formed slowly.

In fact, in the history of literature, the human literature has always been the main stream in literature all around the world, the theme of humans developing and changing in different cultures of different nations. Human beings have long been reluctant to admit our-selves to be one part of nature and have tried hard to prove that man is superior to other creatures, so more themes of literary works are about humans' own social and mental activities, while the other things on earth are only an object to conquer in man's eyes. Eventually, in the Industrial Revolution of the 19th Century, after destroying the harmonious ecological world with technology, humans has become the only content for literary description. Just from them on, some scholars began to be doubted about the rationality of the pursuit of material comfort and changes. The rational thinking of human beings encouraged writers and scholars to reconsider the natural world from the angle of literature and to feel the pain and disaster of nature in a more human way. During that period, natural ecology appeared again in litterateurs' writing. In 1936, Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), the American proser, ideologist and poet, subverted the Christian anti-nature tradition and emphasized on merging together between man and nature in an instinct and enlightened way. His holistic conception of nature inspired a new way of thinking, which is to attribute the essence of nature to a life community and then build up an equal and harmonious relationship between nature and man.

In 1854, the famous American writer and ideologist, Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862), published *Walden Lake*, which is seen as the representative of American Ecological Literature. In the book, the writer shows the harmonious relationship between man and nature and the highest norm of life is to live a simple life, which caused huge echo in public. As a matter of fact, Emerson, Thoreau and other writers just started the ecological literary creation, but the real rise of it was from the Second World War. *Silent Spring* was published by the American female writer Rachel Carson in 1962, which gives a shocking portray of the lethal influence on the environment because of the abuse of pesticide and puts forward the idea that human beings should share the earth with other creatures, leading to the fashion of ecological literary creation around America and Britain in 1970s to 1980s. Since 1990s, it has been really popular around the world and had a deep influence on the literary creations in many countries.

Taking nature as its theme, the equal development between man and nature as its starting point, ecological literature has brought literature a new view of point. In ecological literature, the natural biological phenomena and forms have become the soul and spirits of human beings and gained the right to develop together with humans. Though the description of natural ecology, man has rediscovered that nature has its ethic value, which is not given by man and will not die out with the dying-out of human culture. Wastelands, lakes, streams, deserts, canyons, virgin forests, and so on, the places in nature never stepped into by human beings, have become the new God and the new world in people's eyes. In ecological literature, the existence of this kind of wastelands is just the running-away of nature from human beings and the query on human civilization. The writers watch these clean lands with the child's eyes, reflecting the history and future of human beings, the purity of all things, the harmony of life and the greatness of nature. In their writing, all these things have transcended the worldly complication of human beings and got a new form of life for the first time. Human mind is flying freely in this quiet and harmonious world, sensing the self-tinness, interior lowliness, inhumanity of technology and degeneration of humanity.

From the literature of human to the literature of ecology, the limits of human beings have been changed. Getting out from the material gains, human beings have seen that the life of natural ecology is as important as the value of people's life. Ecological literature has led human beings to get the acquaintance of nature again and to learn to respect and recognize the value of the universe. That is to say, the turn from literature of human to ecological literature is a revolution in humans' spirit history. The nature is the living homeland to human beings, and man should search for our spiritual homeland form it, too. The human literature is relevant to the ecological literature. These two different kinds of views of literature agree with each other for the respect for life. The sheer ecological history is independent of human beings, and only the ecological thoughts with human emotion and ethics belong to ecological history. Besides, as a species in the ecosystem, human beings have created a new form of literature, the ecological

literature, in a way of literary writing and cultural creation, which is based on the understanding of natural ecology. The appearance and development of ecological literature has made writers and literature researchers establish the ecological consciousness, the voluntary sense of responsibility for ecology and a harmonious view to judge things, forming a new point of view and a new way of evaluation on people's lifestyles, developing modes and concepts of value.

The ethical and cultural connotation of ecological literature

The ecological world is the one where all the things in people's eyes are living, at the same time, it is a world independent of the world of humans, which doesn't exist because of the existence of human society and civilization, and each ecological group is one organic composition of the natural ethics, living together harmoniously and orderly. Since 1960s, the ecological environment has been on the slide, which has threatened the further development of human beings. Man has gradually realized that the ethical relation shouldn't be limited on human beings our-selves and ethics should be unlimited because life is equal. The life here not only refers to human beings' life but also other species in nature, such as animals, plants, etc. In this way, scholars of ethics extend the range of ethic application to animals and nature, producing animal ethics to protect the rights of animals and ecological ethics to preserve ecological harmony. Ecological ethics is the philosophical foundation of ecological literature, whose basic theories include Holmes Ralston's Conservation Value, Schweitzer's theory of Reverence for Life and Leopold's Land Ethic.

Holmes ralston's conservation value

The American scholar, the professor of the University of Colorado, Holmes Ralston (1933) put forward the theory of "Conservation Value" in his book *Philosophy Gone Wild*, which emphasized the inner value of nature with itself as a measurement. Ralston indicated that human beings have the right to meet our own needs by using or changing the nature, but this kind of right mustn't change the basic order of nature. Nature has its own inner value, the value to be existent, its own characteristics and potential, its own perfect, dignity and greatness. Therefore, human beings are in duty bound to respect the existence of nature and keep the stability of natural laws. He pointed out that we need to consider the respect for the inner value of nature as the source of some ethics. "It is not going to replace the social and interpersonal ethical norms which are functioning normally but to take the field once considered worthless, convenient for and controlled by humans into ethical consideration." Holmes [2] The objective inner value of natural ecosystem established by Ralston has provided a moral basis for the contemporary environmental protection.

Schweitzer's reverence for life

Albert Schweitzer [3], a philosopher, a theologian and a doctor in France in the 20th Century, is the winner of Nobel Prize for Peace and the founder of biological egalitarianism, who has put forward

the theory of Reverence for Life. The basic implication of the theory is to recognize the dignity and value of life and be reverent to all life. In his book *Philosophy of Civilization*, the relation between man and nature is considered to be a kind of cultural relationship, where he says, "all life is sacred, including the low-grade life in man's eyes." He thinks that to be good is to maintain life, promote life and make evolvable life realize its highest value, while to be evil is to destroy life, hurt life and suppress the development of life, which is inevitable, universal and absolute ethics. This is the basic principle for morals (Albert Schweitzer [3]). His theory answers the ancient moral question that in what sense a man can be a man. In Swchweitzer's view, man's ethics is to revere life, to protect and promote all life actively but not passively and see all of these as a perfection of character and the realization of personal worth. The ethics of Reverence for Life has an obvious tendency for philanthropism, which is consistent with Schweitzer's religious emotion.

Leopold's land ethic

The Land Ethic was put forward by the American environmentalist Aldo Leopold (1887-1948) in his book *Land Ethics*. He thinks that the traditional land-using ethics is still controlled by economic private interests Aldo Leopold [4], which only emphasizes the economic utility of the land, and human beings just evaluate the nature through an economic measure and take measures to use and protect the nature economically. However, there are many species lacking in economic value, which is also the characteristics of many biological groups, such as marshes, swarms, wastelands, etc. Although they have no economic value for human beings, they are the indispensable for many wild animals and plants. Destroying them is destroying the basis for the intact function of ecosystem, resulting in the destruction of the stability and integrity of the land system. The Land Ethic has changed the emphasis of morals even the definition of vale from biological identities to biological species and its ecological complex. The basic value and ethic principle of ecological ethics established by Leopold is to turn humans' role of conqueror in the human community into an equal member of the same community, which implies respect for each member and respect for the community itself.

The Land Ethic tells us that anything is right as long as it tends to keep the integrity, stability and beauty of the biological community, or it is not, which overturns the traditional judging norms based on abstract human and makes ecology the most comprehensive ethics, a "religious" belief in life care. Thereupon, the land ethic has personalized the animals. Leopold thinks that in a sense, the determinant factor for morals is all the existent things but not only the smart creatures. Morals will finally surpass the limitation of life and reach the land where morals and humans exist together. His book *A Sand County Almanac* reminds people to consider the earth as a living existence, so it is necessary to understand human beings and the earth from the ethic angle. This kind of environmental holism starts from aesthetics and theology logically and goes deep into literary criticism and cultural criticism.

Holmes Ralston's Conservation Value, Schweitzer's theory of Reverence for Life and Leopold's Land Ethic manifest the philosophical evolution process from the limitation of human center doctrine to life center doctrine, and then to eco-center doctrine, which builds up the philosophical basis for ecological literature and ecological criticism.

The Foundation of Ecological Ethics

Ethics is a part of the social ideology and the total of codes of conduct which adjust the relationship between individuals and between the individual and the society. Today, when human beings face the environmental and ecological crisis, when people reassess the relationship between man and nature, at the same time of realizing that mankind are transforming the nature, the moral obligation and responsibility to preserve the nature should be undertaken by human beings. Therefore, we are supposed to extend the field of ethics and extend the use of traditional ethics from adjusting the relationship between individuals to adjusting the relationship between man and nature.

The construction of ecological environmental ethics marks the improvement and perfection of human ethics, which is a new angle to deal with the environmental and ecological problems. The ecological ethics' aim is to respect and protect the ecological environment and to make sure of human beings' future development. It emphasizes human's self-discipline, the inter-dependence, mutual improvement and coexistence between man and nature. This kind of ecological civilization has something in common with the past agricultural civilization and industrial civilization, which is to develop social productive forces in the process of transformation of the nature and to improve the material cultural living standards of mankind. However, they also have an obvious difference, that is, ecological ethics emphasizes the maintain of the ecological balance, protection and respect for nature rather than quick success or temporary development at the price of the environment. Human beings must change the present lifestyle and the human-centered spiritual cultural type.

Ecological ethics is a kind of historical and realistic reflection of the human civilized process. Human beings have ever deviated from ecological ethics and morality in order to create their own anti-natural cultural spirit and when humans reconsider ecological ethics, the ecological cultural dream have got a better interpretation and promotion in the way of literature. The ethical ideology of human beings and that of the nature have formed the contradictions and conflicts in literary cognition, at the same time, the literature creation has entered into a new field of writing, and the patterns and contents of literary manifestation have got an expansion. Only when human beings go back to the natural ethical state can we get into the back-to-nature writing process and reestablish the aesthetic dimension and spiritual power, which is the ethical starting point of the ecological writing and criticism. In the history of natural ecology, natural ecological ethics has always maintained the balance of ecosystem and the development of populations, and everything in the universe has been equal, mutually respectful, conflicted and co-existent. Thoreau's theory of wildness, Leopold's

land ethic and ecological conscientiousness are all people's pursuit of going back to nature, which is a correction for the human history of deviating from natural ecological circulation. Human beings should go back to our original position and recheck the direction of human cultural spirit through ecological ethics.

The relationship between man and nature was harmonious and peaceful at first, in which, the nature provided man with cohabitant, food to satisfy the hunger and everything for existence. The early literary works reflected man's respect, reverence and automatic preservation for nature, and the whole nature was considered to be alive, people in pursuit of living harmony in nature. Heidegger has set an example of the early Indians in New Mexico who refused to use plows and got the horseshoes off the horse in order to avoid hurting the land breeding everything. By the beginning of the 20th Century, the development of industrial society and technology has caused a destructive influence on nature, and the survival of human beings has also been in a difficult circumstance. The postmodernism was aware of kinds of problems people were facing through the reflection on industrial society, and thereby to challenge and criticize has become the main task for postmodernists. The influence and destruction of civilized process on nature has been thought over in ecological literary works ethically, whose aim is to develop human's ecological conscientiousness to nature, therefore, the works have a deep awareness of unexpected development and strong sense of social responsibility in order to awaken the public ecological awareness through literary works.

For depth, the ecological litterateurs in the 20th Century, mastering the knowledge of natural science and human ecology, have got a more profound insight compared with their predecessors. In the mind of present ecological literature writers, the relationship between man and nature has not been the relationship between "it and me" but the relationship between "You and me". They think that there has not been a simple ego but the ego combined with the existent ecological environment. More than a century ago, to commemorate Thoreau's death Emerson said, "Wherever there is ethics, wherever there is beauty, he (Thoreau) would find his homeland." In the 1980s, Edward Abby applied Emerson's comment on Thoreau to his work *Down the River*, "wherever there are deer and eagles, wherever there is freedom and adventure, wherever there is wasteland and impetuous river, he (Thoreau) would find his homeland." From different comments on Thoreau we can see that the ecological litterateurs' attitude toward the relationship between man and nature has changed a lot, which is a turn from human center into ecology center [5].

Ecological literature awakens people's awareness to be co-existent with ecological environment in a literary way, leading people to form an inner ecological belief. The ecological literary works have considered the influence and destruction of civilized process on nature and led people to develop an ecological conscientiousness to nature. A typical characteristic of the ecological literature works in the end of the 20th Century is to have a rich color of postmodernism, which includes the criticism on technological society and the uncertainty to revere and doubt the nature. This is both a surpass for tradition and the inevitability

of the era. The ecological literary works are different from the description of nature from the scientific and philosophical angle, which has a distinct linguistic feature and writing style, and more of which is about the spiritual communication between the writers' inner feeling and nature. The aim of its creation is to warn people to face their own living space and style, to develop the respect and love for nature and to advocate the green ecological ethics with the harmonious relationship between man and nature through literature. Aesthetically speaking, it shows a fresh and special aesthetic orientation. In reality, it restrain people to adopt a new lifestyle which is not only good for physical and mental health

but also for the descendants. Passed on and developed, all these ecological ideas promote the process of human civilization.

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