

The Inspiration of the Lake Poetry from the Perspective of Ecological Literature and Art to Postmodern Dilemma: A Homeward Journey from Enlightenment to Enchantment

Bocong Yuan^{1,a,*}

¹*Department of Chinese Language and Literature, Jiangnan University, Wuhan Hubei, China
a. YbcofJhun@stu.jhun.edu.cn*

**corresponding author*

Abstract: Modern technological development has brought about severe natural environmental problems, and the resulting train of global events such as the ecological crisis, nihilism, population problems and the nuclear threat has caused indelible damage to people in modern society. Traditional moral values have been subverted, a wave of capitalism has swept the world, and enlightenment has become a myth to paralyze modern man. Modern art and postmodern thought have failed to save people from sinking under nihilism. Nihilism has re-emerged in the 21st century as the most serious ideological dilemma of the post-modern era, disintegrating people's beliefs like a chronic disease, giving rise to ideas such as money worship and hedonism, causing human beings to hurt and isolate each other, eroding human civilisation and values, and generating anxiety and depression in society. The postmodern, as a splinter of modernity, is unable to face up to the weaknesses of modernity, and the spiritual dilemma of the postmodern seriously haunts everyone. By reviewing the poetry and thought of the Lake Poets during the first industrial revolution, the study unearths their life attitudes in the face of the dual impact of nature and spirituality and explores the solutions to the crisis of postmodern nihilism faced by people in the present society: use contemporary to avoid postmodern.

Keywords: eco-literature, postmodern dilemma, modern, the Lake Poets

1. Introduction

With the development of modern industrial civilization and science and technology, economic power and lifestyle have increased and improved, and ecological problems have often been neglected and intensified. The natural ecological crisis, the social-ecological problems, the spiritual ecological disasters and the cultural ecological challenges have resulted to the destruction of forests, soil erosion, pollution of rivers and seas, retrogression of species, spiritual loss, moral degradation and imbalance of mind, forming an ecological catastrophe that threatens the survival of humankind [1]. The tendency of the ecological crisis to become more serious not only brings about the destruction of the human environment and the imbalance of the natural ecology but also inevitably leads to tangible and intangible anxiety and spiritual crisis in human civilization. At the same time, technological progress has brought about the fruits of enlightenment and the rapid development of human civilization, with reason and freedom bringing innovation to human development. When self-reflection is lost, and the

reason is reduced to a tool, science becomes a replica of myth, once again controlling human thought in a "superstitious" way, bringing about a confused postmodern crisis of thought.

More than two hundred and fifty years ago, the growth of the printing industry reduced literary poetry to a commodity that paralyzed the desire for goodness and beauty, and the smoke of the Industrial Revolution blotted out the skies of London. The Lake poet Wordsworth was born in Cockermouth, Cumberland, in the north of England, and from an early age, he developed a deep and intense love of nature. He was deeply distressed by the destruction of the land and the wreck of the people of his beloved England by industrial development, and in 1795 he returned to the countryside with his sister Dorothy, writing a large number of poems in praise of the lake and the mountains with Coleridge, Southey and other poets with the ideal of a 'return to nature'. As they all lived in the Lake District of Cwmbran in the north of England, they became known as the Lake Poets. The Lake poets used their simple, idyllic landscape poetry to rouse the people's hearts, paralyzed by the printing industry and industrial civilization.

At a time when ecological problems have become a global crisis, how to save our ecological environment from postmodern confusion and indifference and how to divest the fear of nature from the enlightenment of dispelling charm have become important issues of humanistic care. Most of the current studies on the Lake Poets are on its single ideological tendencies, such as the non-passive reclusion under the influence of religion; the poetic interpretation of the return to nature and ecological warning; the expansion of the imagination of the Lakeside School poets by exotic moods ; and the ontological centrality of imagination in poetry [2-5]. Although there is a relevant interdisciplinary vision of research results, there is a gap in the reflection on modernity. The above researches are prepared with a certain humanistic vision but do not consider ecological issues in conjunction with scientific development and lack dialectical thinking about enlightenment. This study analyses the works of the Lakeside School poets through an ecological perspective, interpreting their ecological outlook; at the same time, it introspectively criticizes the cultural industry in the postmodern context of "anti-Enlightenment" and "Re-enchantment", aiming to analyze the environmental and social-ecological problems faced at present and to provide effective solutions.

2. Humanistic Consciousness in the Evolution of a View of Nature

From the sprouting of the first life forms underwater to the giant beasts of the Stone Age, to the first upright walk of man, nature has nurtured man over billions of years of evolution, and man has relied on nature over millions of years of growth. With the maturation of the view of nature, the history of human growth is not only a history of the gradual elevation of man's position in nature but also a history of the gradual 'objectification' and 'demystification' of nature in the vision of man.

Human civilization in the age of ignorance incorporated the knowledge of nature into a myth. From Pan Gu opening up the heavens to Nuwa creating man, from Zeus the thunderer to Prometheus, the fire thief, all things in the world, mountains and rivers, insects and fish, the sun, moon and stars, were all incarnations of divine power. This mythical view of nature was the imagination of humankind in the Age of Ignorance and had a strong pantheistic character. During the period of ignorance, humans were weak and ignorant of nature, and the ancestors relied on nature through their whims, submitting to its power in this indistinguishable relationship of characters. At the same time, although they were limited by the power of nature, they were able to make use of it in order to constantly externalize and ascend human power through divine power. As Karl Marx says: "Any myth is to conquer, dominate and visualize the natural force by imagination or with the help of imagination; and thus, as these forces of nature are actually dominated, the myth disappears" [6].

"Water is the source of all things, and all things ultimately return to water"[7]. Along with the increasing level of human production and understanding of nature, humankind emerged from the period of ignorance into the age of civilization. At the same time, the limited development of the

human mind, which was still at a certain stage of intuitive thinking, led to the development of an organic view of nature. Thales thought that the origin of the world was "water", Anaximander thought it was "Apeiron", and Anaximenes thought it was "air". The creation and change of all things in the universe is the result of the 'concentration' or 'dilution' of the material nature of the original. This philosophy is simple and uncomplicated. Nature is no longer a mysterious and frightening being but a being to which artificial things can be compared, and in the process of knowing nature, humankind tries to imitate it with his own skills and to catch up with it.[8]

In the medieval period, with the expansion of religious power, a religious, theological view of nature dominated people's minds. Under the influence of religious power, nature became God's creation, and at the same time, he was the controller of nature; and man, as God's creation, was God's worker, listening to God's instructions. God instructs man with power, and man is in charge of nature with power. In contrast to the previous view of nature, the status of the forces of nature and man has been reversed on two levels: nature has fallen from the altar and become a creature of God, controlled and manipulated by man; man, in the name of God, has denied the divinity of nature and has become its manager. However, behind the establishment of man's position, the weakening and limitation of his subjective power are revealed. God has placed nature in the hands of humans, who have never crossed the theological fence and, although they have transcended the simple organic view of nature, are unable to stand before it in its fullness.

From the barrel of a rifle to the fireworks in the sky, from mechanical clocks to roaring trains. New dynamics were constantly being created, and even the quiet words of newly printed books contained great changes. The waves of the Renaissance overturned the lonely boats of religion, the torrent of modern physics broke through the barriers of a theological view of nature, and the establishment of a modern mechanical view of nature led to the 'liberation of nature' and the 'discovery of nature'. Through the explorations of Newton, Descartes and others, nature was no longer an alien being, artificiality was now comparable to nature, and man could directly rule nature. Nature was no longer a self-contained organism but a vast machine at the mercy of man, or, as Kepler put it, a 'clockwork device'. Technology becomes a sacred and noble task, and man becomes a mechanic, using his skills to create artifacts that are comparable to nature, or, to put it more boldly: man creates nature.

With the establishment of a mechanical view of nature, nature lost its divinity and became, step by step, an instrument of human reason, and so nature was disenchantment. There is no longer a God or a divine force in the world; there is only the speeding train of science, carrying reason and freedom, guiding people towards another "myth".

3. The Collapse and Disorientation of Natural and Human Ecology

In 1962, the American marine biologist Rachel Carson's work *Silent Spring* showed the world for the first time the damage caused by environmental pollution to humankind. It signified not only the awakening of human environmental awareness but also the complete eruption of the world's environmental problems. The light of science and technology dispelled the darkness of obscurity and brought about an explanation of nature. The disintegration of nature's power system over humankind and the dispelling of myths gave humankind unprecedented confidence; but at the same time, the scientific enlightenment also constructed another power system, and to another extent, the rational, liberal spiritual quest constructed by the enlightenment was also a myth. In the 1940s and 1950s, the full-blown environmental crisis proclaimed the temporary nature of the industrial age and showed that the mechanical view of nature behind the vast system of industrial civilization was the root cause of environmental hazards. In this transformation, science and technology not only destroyed the unique humanity of nature but also abandoned its eternal sanctity. Once this original state of man and nature has dissipated, man loses the eye to observe and is reduced to a state of alienation between man and society, man and himself, and the beauty of nature is gradually destroyed.

At the same time, the traditional modernism aesthetic has undergone a radical change due to the changing relationship between man and nature. Modernity is a quality and a way of being that is distinct from tradition, representing the disintegration of the traditional 'monolithic' and 'centralized' and its replacement by a 'pluralistic' and 'decentralised' mode of thinking. Max Weber called this 'disenchantment' a collapse of traditional 'religious-metaphysical' values. However, while modernity has introduced people into civilized modern society through differentiation and rationalization, it has also led them into another cultural prison, bringing with it new contradictions and dilemmas. Georg Simmel illustrates this consequence stemming from modernity in terms of the dichotomy between life and form. He argues that in modern society, money has become the measure of exchange for everything and that when everything becomes measurable and exchangeable by money, human life will be restricted and threatened by form, and human spiritual culture will be suppressed by material culture, a situation he calls the 'tragedy of culture'. Both Weber's "iron cage" and Simmel's "cultural tragedy" show that modernity has brought people happiness but also many negative consequences. The burden of how to overcome these negative consequences of modernity falls on aesthetic modernity. Aesthetic modernity has a different function and character from cognitive-instrumental rationality and moral-practical rationality in that it uses art as a negative tool to counteract instrumental rationality. In terms of art theory, this is manifested in the 'Defamiliarization' poetics of Russian formalism, the 'Alienation effect' of Bertolt Brecht's plays and Ortega's 'Dehumanization' art theory. In terms of artistic practice, this is reflected in Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs Du Mal* in its pursuit of novelty, eccentricity and ugly intentions, and in Picasso's Cubism in its mockery of the rules and pleasures of plastic art[9].

However, with the gradual institutionalization of modernism, its rebellious nature has faded away and been replaced by its new identity as a defender of social reality. Centralization, the nuclear threat of the atomic bomb, the severe ecological crisis, overpopulation and other problems strongly impacted the old social and moral codes, and modernist forms inevitably became obsolete in the course of their development. By now, there was no longer any absolute truth to rely on, and postmodernism began to sprout. This was followed by Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche's nihilistic crisis. In the second half of the twentieth century, as predicted, a nihilistic crisis ensued, and postmodernist thought and art were born. Postmodernism was not only a continuation of modernism's attempts to be anti-traditional but also a different attempt to abandon its modernist form. "On the one hand, modern art rejects the pressures brought to bear by the needs and attitudes of consumers determined by the market, and thus the false abandonment of art; but on the other hand, it remains an ivory tower beyond the reach of the masses." In the face of Jürgen Habermas's 'crisis of legitimation', postmodernism subverted the elitism of modernist high art by relying on the models of television, film, newspapers, cartoons and popular music in popular culture. With Cage's 'evocation of our present' and Fiedler's 'Überquert die Grenze, schließt den Graben', the 'aestheticization of everyday life' became the way out of the ivory tower of modern art. Existentialism became a powerful weapon to defeat nihilism[9].

However, the postmodern will not continue to walk with such a high profile, even if its reflections are stronger than ever. All the symptomatic topics raised by the postmodern are as ubiquitous as the disease that exposes the ills of modernity. They all answered the question, but they never really solved this problem, nor were they able to face these problems directly, and they could not open the scars and penetrate the lesions like a razor. They merely respond to the "impossible" in a defiant and rebellious way. Nihilism has re-emerged in the 21st century as the most serious ideological dilemma of the postmodern era, disintegrating people's beliefs like a chronic disease, giving rise to ideas such as money worship and hedonism, causing human beings to hurt and isolate each other, eroding human civilization and values, and generating anxiety and depression in society, making the postmodern dilemma an urgent problem in today's society. In the face of the sweeping changes caused by the

rapid development of science and technology in human society and the indelible damage caused to the natural environment, coupled with the spiritual vibration and mental aberration caused by social changes, one cannot help but think of the scenes of the first technological revolution; and the way in which the people during the first technological revolution solved the ecological and spiritual crisis may be worthy of reference and reflection.

4. The Enlightenment of The Lake Poets' View of Nature in Postmodern Context

The Lake poet Wordsworth was born in Cockermouth, Cumberland, in the north of England, in the Lake District, famous for its beautiful mountains and dotted lakes. It was there that Wordsworth spent the best part of his childhood developing a strong love of nature. This idyllic period left a lasting impression on Wordsworth. He felt the extraordinary infection force of the mountains, the rocks and the streams. As a young man, he traveled to France three times to experience the unprecedented and majestic French Revolution and became a radical young man driven by the slogan "Equality, Fraternity, Liberty".

Wordsworth's trajectory and line of thought began with two events of the same period - the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution. The fast-paced, violent overtones and the politics of terror of the French Revolution into its later stages led Wordsworth to contemplate the meaning of life, and he was plunged into an extreme spiritual crisis. "This Revolution began for him with joyful hope and ended with the sinking of his poet's imagination and the loss of his faith in man"[10]. At the same time, the Industrial Revolution, which developed at a fast pace in England, built factory after factory and erected chimney after chimney across the English landscape. Science and technology became the means by which humankind fought against nature, industrial capitalism soared, nature was losing ground to the advance of human technology, and the harmonious relationship between man and nature no longer existed. Saddened by the alienation of man through industrial technology and social change and distressed by the catastrophe of rural life, Wordsworth's thinking gradually shifted from the social to the natural.

"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;[11]"

In the limited perception of human beings, things themselves, including human beings themselves, cannot have objective meaning; meaning can only be given by an outside source. This is why the legend of the creation of man by God is found in various myths and religions, and most religions in the history of man have indeed filled the void of man by having God give him meaning; only in this relationship, is God the subject and man is the object, and man's meaning can only be obtained through God. In 'The Daffodils', on the other hand, Wordsworth treats the existence of the 'I' as the embodiment of self-consciousness, highlighting the subjective meaning of human existence. Wordsworth was aware of the limitations of language, so he was particularly concerned with the expressive nature of words and the thoughtfulness of words themselves in order to provide us with 'a pure, organic pleasure that comes from the line itself'. His choice of language is natural, authentic, pure and unadorned, " often signaling a purely spiritual realm where gravity and breath move freely with the power of thought"[12, 13].

At the same time, influenced by pantheism, Wordsworth formed a view of nature that all things are spiritual, that all natural things are the embodiment of the spirit of the universe, that nature is the unity of divinity, humanity and reason, and it represents the supreme sublimity and majesty, that it combines truth, goodness and beauty in one. Wang Zuoliang believes that the main theme of Wordsworth's poetry is: "The most ordinary and humble things in nature have souls, and they are one with the great soul of the whole universe and more compassionate person.[14]" As in the author's sincere tribute to the fluttering cuckoo in 'To the Cuckoo':

"Thrice welcome, darling of the Spring!/Even yet thou art to me/No bird, but an invisible thing,/A voice, a mystery:[11]"

More than once in the Lucy poems, Wordsworth points to man's way back into nature:

"A violet by a mossy stone/ Half hidden from the eye!/ —Fair as a star, when only one/ Is shining in the sky./ She lived unknown, and few could know When Lucy ceased to be;/ But she is in her grave, and, oh,/ The difference to me![11]"

Wordsworth uses this imagery to position Lucy as part of nature, and she herself represents the tranquil wilderness of the river, the open flower. The existence of a weak woman is closely related to nature. Wordsworth skillfully raised the realm of life to the height of the universe itself and reached the level of harmony and harmony of heaven and man.

At the same time, other Lake Poets also showed humankind the way out of his predicament in their poems about ecology and man. Coleridge, for example, focuses on dreams and visions, admonishing people with mystical overtones, as in the revelation of 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' on the salvation of faith.

The reference to Wordsworth and the other Lake Poets is not intended to be a single vision of the relationship between nature and man; the postmodern dilemma that modern society faces, represented by nihilism, cannot be solved by a single ecological restoration. Postmodernism confronts the symptoms of modernity with an unprecedented attitude, but from its creation to its mission, it has always revolved around modernity, and it cannot really destroy the land of modernity because it is born from this land. The ecological perspective of the Lake Poets, on the other hand, offers a model of ecological and human coexistence for the modern society and hints at the attitude one should take in the face of postmodern discourse to put an end to the void and confusion. When the waves of industrial capitalism swept over the ideal idyllic life of the Lake Poets, they did not write an elegy for the traditional patriarchal idyllic society, nor did they resist the products of industry in a forceful manner but quietly went into the countryside and returned to the Lake District, silently accepting the industrial waves under the baptism of nature and singing the songs of the idyll. In their eyes, everything is a product of the times, just like spring replaces autumn, and man repeats his creation. They only face the tidal wave of the times with the attitude of a watcher, holding on to the ideal of idyllic nature and waiting for the wheels of capitalism to roll by.

We can sum up the attitude of the Lake Poets towards industrial capitalism as "use contemporary to avoid postmodern". When postmodern philosophers talk about big words such as "ecological harmony" and "communism," they always approach them with an attitude of "impossibility". They have been answering the "impossibilities" posed by modernity, but they have never solved them. In the end, it is because they are always products of modernity, and no matter how rebellious they are, they always see modernity as an object of criticism rather than as themselves. Moreover, when they were ready to critique modernity, they could not get around the obstacle of critiquing capitalism. Moreover, when people start to use words like 'contemporary', they are facing the present time with a high spirit, as the Lake Poets did, to embrace the capitalist era. The real task of the individual in the contemporary discourse is to look at the contemporary, and when people are able to avoid the "postmodern" derivative, ecological problems, humanistic anxieties and other intractable problems will no longer be a problem that is "always on the way".

5. Conclusion

When looking at society in such a globalized period of the 21st century, it is always possible to explore why ecological issues are the most problematic and global ones, why nihilism has become an urgent issue of humanistic concern, and more, and all these are exactly the crux of capitalism which is differentiated by the characteristics of postmodern split and anti-system.

To break free from the quagmire of the postmodern, it is important to realize what has led to the postmodern dilemma. The postmodern presents itself as a personality separate from modernity, believing that it negotiates with capitalist modernity. However, it does not have this personality; it is merely a symptom of the fact that the postmodern is nothing more than a split from modernity, not enough to bury modernity as a whole.

Moreover, if the postmodern wants to usher in its own dawn, it must eliminate modernity or die out together with it in order to get out of the dilemma. Today's society treats the postmodern as an artifact, an exhibition, to be played with, and to be fashionable when people discuss Jacques Lacan, Slavoj Žižek, Jacques Derrida, and more. This is the greatest poison of the postmodern discourse - it prevents people from facing up to modernity and itself. The postmodern is always in a phase of fragmentation, non-identity, anti-systemic, anti-centredness, and anti-essentialism. It was doing something that had not been accomplished for over two thousand years, and it did, giving people all over the world a great deal to reflect on. However, the flower of a new world does not bloom in such soil, it burns all the vegetation in a slash-and-burn manner and provides the "new world" with the form of nourishment, and this new world is the "contemporary". In the contemporary context, the "beams" of humanistic and historically rational thought are used to illuminate reality, and an attitude of acceptance and refutation is adopted towards reality. At this time, we will end a false, masked and hidden capital capitalism. Only with this attitude will we be able to confront the postmodern and put an end to the postmodern discourse, and will the postmodern dilemma be truly resolved.

References

- [1] Wang, Y., "The contemporary value of ecological literature and ecological criticism," *Journal of Peking University (Philosophy and Social Sciences edition)*. 46.02, 130-142 (2009).
- [2] He, D., "A Comparative Study of the Chinese Landscape and Pastoral School and the English Lakeside School of Poetry," *Innovative Research on the Development of Foreign Language Education and Translation*. 11, 283-286 (2022).
- [3] Wang, G., and Xiao, Y., "Interpretation of lakeside poetry from an ecological perspective," *Journal of Yunnan Institute of Finance and Trade (Social Science Edition)*. 02, 155-156 (2006).
- [4] Du, P., "The Oriental fantasy of the" lakeside poet," *Journal of China West Normal University (Philosophy and Social Sciences edition)*. 06, 31-34 (2005).
- [5] Delorme, C. D. B., "The meaning of imagination in William Wordsworth," *Ideas Y Valores*. 62(153), 157-178 (2013).
- [6] *Selected Works of Marx and Engels: Volume 2*. (People's Publishing House, Beijing, 1972).
- [7] Russell, B., *History of Western Philosophy* (Taylor and Francis, London, 2004).
- [8] Hoyd, *Religion and the Rise of Modern Science* (People's Publishing House, Chengdu Sichuan, 1999).
- [9] Yan, Y., "On the double reflexivity of aesthetic modernity," *Journal of Baoding College*. 25. 03, 102-105 (2012).
- [10] Wu, H., "les reveries du promeneur solitaire." in Rousseau. (People's Publishing House, Chengdu, Sichuan, 1997), pp. 63.
- [11] Wordsworth, W., *Selected Poems of William Wordsworth*. Trans. by Yang Yude. (Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, Beijing, 2012), pp. 34, 96, 106.
- [12] Wordsworth, W., "Preface to the Second Edition of Lyrical Ballads." in *Critical Theory since Plato*, edited by H. Adams. (Harcourt Brace, NY, 1971), pp. 432-443.
- [13] William, K., "Romanticism and Language." in *The Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism*, edited by S. Curran. (Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, Shanghai, 2001), pp. 109.
- [14] Wang, Z., "A Collection of English Literature Theory," *Foreign Literature Press*. 79 (1980).