

A Study of Ecological Images in Glen Phillips' Poems

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Glen Phillips is not only a famous landscape poet and critic in Western Australia, but also an important figure in Australian landscape study. In his poems, he uses ecological images to express his views on the relationship between man and nature. This paper will analyze the ecological image of "snake" in Glen's poem *Dugite Country* to further analyze his ecological thoughts and the influence of ecology on his poetic creation.

Keywords: landscape, ecological image, snake

Introduction

"Ecological literature is based on ecological holism and takes the overall interests of the ecosystem as the highest value to investigate and express the relationship between nature and human beings and to explore the social roots of ecological crisis" (Wang, 2003, p. 11). Ecological image is one of the most common expressions in ecological literature. The poet uses some objective image and integrates his own thoughts and feelings, which embodies the ecological image. Ecological images generally include the images of natural, native land, animal, plant, people, things, and so on. For example, in many works, "water" is often used as a metaphor for life, and "tree" is often used as a metaphor for a certain spirit.

Many of Glen's works express a strong love for nature and landscapes, and are full of ecological images. In his poem *Windrows Burning*, for example, the dried grass and branches waiting for burning symbolize the foolish behavior of human beings to destroy the ecology. In *Scrub Cities*, the poet criticizes people's colonization of nature and expresses his heartache for the destruction of the beautiful ecological environment. In *Spring Burning*, the poet describes the changes of wheat belt road and land to express human's trampling and indifference to ecology. If this continues for a long time, human will eventually suffer bad consequences (Han, 2019, p. 86). In *Dugite Country*, the poet describes the harmonious coexistence between snakes and nature and the change of people's attitude towards snakes, which implies people's attitude towards nature has changed and the ecology has been destroyed.

This paper will analyze the ecological image of "snake" in *Dugite Country*, to help readers understand this talented poet, and to further explore his ecological thoughts, as well as his love for ecological nature and his sense of responsibility for environmental protection.

The Image and Characteristics of "Snake" in Chinese and Western Culture

In Western Culture

In many cultures, snakes are usually endowed with two different cultural connotations: positive and

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negative. In the traditional western literary works, snake is the symbol of devil, temptation, and evil. For example, in the Bible, the culprit who lured Adam and Eve to sin and led to the expulsion of human ancestors from the Garden of Eden was the serpent. In Greek mythology, Athena was jealous of Medusa's beauty and turned Medusa's hair into countless poisonous snakes (Jiang, 2014, p. 88). But snakes do not entirely represent evil in western culture. In many ancient Egyptian mythologies, the snake is a symbol of God and power. North American Indians also believe that snakes are messengers of the god of rain so they often hold live snakes in their hands when praying for rain. There are some murals that continue to this day which also clearly show the totem worship of snakes, such as the Rainbow Serpent of the Aborigines of Australia. *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* written by Coleridge, a famous English lake poet in the 19th century, is described that the old sailor prayed for the water snake and got the forgiveness of God. Here, the snake is portrayed as a beautiful and sacred role. In *Lamia* written by Keats, the famous English romantic poet, Lamia is the embodiment of snake, which symbolizes the sex appeal and tenacity of women. From all of these we can see that in western culture, snake not only represents the devil, darkness, and evil, but also represents power, holiness, and beauty.

In Chinese Culture

In China, snakes also have a symbol of both good and evil. In the early society, snakes appeared as monsters, and people's belief in snake totem was also very common. In myths and legends, snakes are often respected as gods. Nuwa, a goddess in Chinese mythology, has human face and snake body. The snake is also one of the 12 signs of the Chinese zodiac. In addition, in the *Legend of the White Snake*, a well-known folklore, Bai Suzhen is a white snake, but she is kind and brave. Besides, Guo Pu in the Jin Dynasty wrote many poems praising snakes, all of which expressed the ancients' awe of snakes. However, because of its deadly venom and ferocious appearance, snakes often symbolize greed, wickedness, and ferocity. Except Bai Suzhen, there are more folk stories about snakes and demons killing people. Snakes turn into beauty to seduce men and take people's lives after they are hooked. In the ancient poem *On the Festival of the Moon to Sub-official Zhang*, Han Yu wrote, "I leave my bed, afraid of snakes; I eat, fearing poisons; the air of the lake is putrid, breathing its evil odors" (Song, 2013, p. 38). We can see that the snake is also a good and evil image in Chinese culture. It is greedy, evil, ferocious, frightening, and creepy, but it also has the image of tenacity, goodness, and sanctity.

The Ecological Image and Symbol of "Snake" in Glen's Poetry

Dugite Country is a poem written by Glen about Sydney Nolan's work *Snake*. Sidney Nolan is the greatest Western Australian painter and artist. *Snake* is a giant rainbow snake made by Nolan in the 1970s with 1,620 small paintings. Glen wrote this poem according to Nolan's *Snake*. By describing the change of human attitude towards snakes, the poem implies the change of human attitude towards nature, satirizes human destruction of environment, and warns people to protect natural ecology.

Rainbow snake is revered as the god of water and creator in many parts of Australia. In Sidney Nolan's eyes, the snake is a giant god snake in charge of the rain, and "the dream country's Wagyl snake". It built Swan Lake, Canning River, and other waterways for the benefit of the people. In the poem, Glen writes about climbing the legendary source of Wagyl many times—Boyagin Rock. It shows that in Glen's heart, snakes are indispensable creatures that coexist harmoniously with nature. But in the eyes of other humans, the snake has become an evil, terrible, and everyone yells to kill it. The description of "snake" runs through the whole poem

of *Dugite Country*. Glen not only describes “snake” as a natural ecological image to highlight people’s disgust and fear of snake, but also takes “snake” as a symbol of nature, implying people’s destruction of nature and ecology.

“poking through rocks there
on step gravelly hill slope
that springtime so long ago
among the jarrah and marri trees”

“followed those low lines
of scrub which mark flow
of the creeks and rivers
Dale and Avon to Swan”

The poem is interspersed with descriptions of the snake habitat, “rocks”, “the jarrah and marri trees”. The poem constructs a beautiful ecological picture with simple sentences, which implies the serenity and beauty of the environment, as well as the harmonious coexistence of the snake and nature, all of which show the poet’s love for the beauty of nature and yearning for the ideal ecological environment. However, “a cornered snake” and “they writhed like mottled ropes” depict the helplessness of snakes in the face of human beings. When humans encounter snakes, they are “dancing with his rake upraised and eyes staring out of his head as the dugite died”. “Waiting for diners who salivate” describes people’s hostility and greed to snakes. They completely break this tranquil picture, and everywhere is full of evil and killing.

The harmonious coexistence between man and nature is an important embodiment of ecological consciousness in Glen’s poems. In the poem, snakes appear among “jarrah”, “marri”, and sometimes they can be found in the “water trough”, “velveteen couch”, “bennet”, and “reptile park”. They are just like walking around in their own backyard, and living comfortably. As long as no one appears, they stay quietly all the time. However, with the increasing population, people began to invade the habitat of snakes, and began to have excessive fear of snakes. They beat and scold them and compete with them for the resources of life. Therefore, in the process of the continuous development of human society, snakes have gradually become the enemy of mankind. In order to avoid being poisoned by snakes, human beings always kill snakes before they have any action, stab them with targets, kill them, or even eagerly covet to eat them. In fact, people and snakes are part of nature. Snakes are always harmless to people, which has never changed. What has changed is people’s impression of snakes. With the development of society, their attitude towards snakes naturally began to become fear and disgust.

At the end of the poem, Glen boldly assumes that if snakes have human emotions, whether they will express their feelings like human beings. Although snakes are not as rich in emotions as human beings, compared with human beings, human beings seem to be crueler and more indifference in the face of nature. Human beings enjoy the resources brought by nature, and gradually become greedy and delusional to possess everything. Widening the road, cutting down forests, polluting the environment, and destroying the ecological balance are all challenging the bottom line of nature. They are afraid of nature, but they want to overcome nature. Just as treat snake, they fear snakes so they want to kill snakes.

Conclusion

In the process of social history, snakes have not only beautiful and powerful images, but also evil and dark

images. The beautiful image of the snake in the literary works is also the beauty of the human heart, and the evil side of the snake is also the darkness hidden in human heart (Tao, 2014). In the eyes of Glen, the snake is a beautiful part of the ecological nature, which is a metaphor for the harmonious coexistence of the snake and the nature. However, in the eyes of others, the snake has become the existence of everyone yell to kill it. In the poem, Glen shows people's attitude towards nature through the description of the ecological image of "snake". With meticulous description, he objectively presents the subtle dependence and contradiction between man and snake, man and natural ecology.

The poet emphasizes that the ecological environment has not changed all the time, but what has changed is people's attitude towards the ecological environment. With the rapid development of society, human beings have forgotten how to get along with ecology. Through the change of people's attitude towards snakes, it reflects Glen's grief for people's cruel behavior and the destruction of ecological environment. At the same time, it also reminds people to treat the relationship between man and nature with a rational attitude, and calls on people to protect the ecology, and never destroy our common home for the sake of immediate interests.

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