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徐显静 著



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AN ECOCRITICAL READING OF TIM WINTON'S FICTION



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摘 要

当代著名澳大利亚作家蒂姆·温顿(Tim Winton)(1960—)是澳大利亚文学史上首位四次“迈尔斯·弗兰克林奖”获得者。因故乡西澳大利亚自然景观在其文本中的重要地位,他被冠以“景观作家”的称号。作家亦作为环保运动的积极参与者和赞助人为人熟知。遗憾的是,尽管作品中的地方主义特色、归属感、非典型男性气质、厌女倾向等重要论题得到了评论界的足够重视,批评者们也关注到了自然景观在其创作中的突出地位,但对其生态意义的解读还不够系统深刻。温顿作品始终关注人与自然环境的关系问题,具有布伊尔所谓的“环境取向的作品”的所有特质,因此利用生态文学批评理论解读该作家可以建立起其作为景观作家和环保主义者身份之间的内在逻辑,具有特殊意义。

生态主题是温顿创作的重要元素之一,体现了以作家本人为代表的后定居者——当代澳大利亚白人对这片土地、海洋及栖息于此万物的全方位的爱恋和生态关怀。细读作家所有作品后,笔者认为尽管作者的生态理念呈现散漫式分布,但仍可勾勒出一个清晰的发展脉络。在相关前期成果不十分丰富的情况下,本书选取温顿生态主题较为突出的几部作品,如《浅滩》《土乐》《洛基·伦纳德,浮渣清除者》《蓝背鱼》《露天泳者》《呼吸》以及短篇小说《荒野》等,对其生态主题进行纵向分析。

笔者经深入分析发现,作家的生态思想遵循着征服、重构和回归的思想轨迹。所谓征服指作品中温顿不遗余力地揭示出在西方文化中人与自然二元对立价值观指导下,白人在两个多世纪里对澳洲土地和海洋资源的恣意掠夺。瓦尔·普拉姆伍德(Val Plumwood)

对二元论的深入分析将为解读这种人与自然的征服与被征服关系提供理论支持。文本中暗示白人罔顾澳洲大陆的自然条件恣意建立田园牧歌似的阿卡迪亚,结果却是过度农业垦殖遗留下土地退化;采矿业造成生态破坏,并进一步造成人自身的异化。温顿对人类征服海洋的揭示则主要集中于捕鲸业造成的人类精神生态失衡,以及少年读物《洛基·伦纳德,浮渣清除者》中作者用夸张笔墨展现的海岸污染严重威胁人之生存。作者构建新型的人与自然,更准确地说是在澳洲白人与这片土地的脐带关系的灵感部分来源于 20 世纪以来西方生态批评的重要成果,如阿尔伯特·施韦泽 (Albert Schweitzer) 的“敬畏生命”、奥尔多·利奥波德 (Aldo Leopold) 的“大地伦理”,同时也来源于澳大利亚土著文化中的“关爱大地”的世界观。三者在本质上并行不悖,共同为解读温顿作品中重构生态和谐的努力提供理论依据。在作者处女作《露天泳者》中,人物在对待陆生的袋鼠、海洋中的鱼时,充分体现出了一种对生命应有的敬畏,《土乐》中暗示出农业文化中理应秉持的环境伦理。其次,温顿积极塑造典型的自然之子/女形象,并使他们成为构建人与自然亲情关系的主要践行者。其中《浅滩》中的昆尼代表了 20 世纪 70 年代末生态意识觉醒的先行者,她不顾丈夫反对投入到一场拯救海洋生物鲸鱼的环保行动中。温顿的生态乌托邦小说《蓝背鱼》则展示了主人公属于海洋、与其和谐共生、终生守望的动人画卷,表达了作者对生态文明美好未来的企盼。回归荒野在温顿的生态思想体系中举足轻重,具有重要的生态和社会意义。回归荒野有利于高度城市化的当代澳洲白人通过与自然亲密互动,产生亲情和归属感,摆脱疏离的“无根”状态实现本土化,从而构建与大地休戚相关的新型民族身份,并且加强人类与自然的纽带关系,培养人类对自然的生态关怀。此外,回归自然也是对社会上普遍存在的发展与消费主义神话的不满与反抗。温顿作品一再证明了浪漫主义之父让·雅克·卢

梭的观点,即被人类社会所累的主人公在荒野中才能恢复纯良本性。如《露天泳者》中杰拉在荒野中经历了水与火的洗礼,净化了心灵,摆脱了负罪感,克服了友情危机、乱伦情欲而得以成长;《土乐》中鲁德·福克斯同样经受住了荒野生存的各种挑战,历经从求死到求生的蜕变,最终实现了自我和解。温顿还暗示,这种和解不仅在于主人公与个人的过往,而且在于种族间和物种间,并最终实现人类与自然间的和解。

总之,蒂姆·温顿的个人生态哲学突出地关注构建澳洲白人与土地的亲情关系,他本人热切希望像其作品中的人物那样,澳大利亚白人可以从荒野自然中获得净化、顿悟、救赎和活力,并感受到他们的个人及民族身份与澳洲大陆血肉相连,从而实现人与自然和谐共生的生态理想。

关键词:蒂姆·温顿;生态批评;征服;重构;回归

Abstract

The contemporary Australian author Tim Winton (1960—) is the only four-time winner of the most prestigious literary prize in Australia—Miles Franklin Award. He is known as a landscape writer on account of his preoccupation with describing the landscapes in Western Australia in his oeuvre. Meanwhile, he is also an avid environmentalist who participates, leads and patronizes many an organization and campaign to keep the primal beauty of wilderness in Australia. Pitifully, although adequate criticism zooms in on such major topics as regionalism, sense of belonging, the non-typical masculinities, the propensity of misogyny and so on, rarely have literary critics noted the link between his being a landscape author and an environmentalist, which prompts me to study his works from the perspective of ecocriticism.

Virtually, the motif of environmentalism has always been an indispensable theme in Tim Winton's works, representing his passionate love for and ecological care towards the land. A close reading of his fiction reveals that his ecological thoughts are scattered yet prevalent in all his works and this research focuses mainly upon such works as *Shallows*, *Dirt Music*, *Scumbuster*, *Blueback*, *An Open Swimmer*, *Breath*, and short story "Wilderness".

This book concludes that Tim Winton's ecosophy mainly includes three components, namely, conquest, reestablishment and retreat. Conquest denotes the depiction of white Australians' wanton plunder of natural resources in the past two centuries on account of the dichotomy of man and nature in western culture. Val Plumwood's argumentation on the

five features of dualism offers the fundamental theoretical support for the exploration into the estranged relationship of conquest. It is implied that the European settlers' dream of building idyllic Arcadia disregarding the wrong natural conditions in Australia inevitably results in land degradation, ecological disruption and the mining industry causes human alienation. The conquest of the sea is vividly embodied in the brutal whaling industry as well as in coastal contamination. *Shallows* discloses that the whaling industry eventually leads to the disequilibrium of people's spiritual ecology prominently embodied in collapsed faith, as well as in minor forms of bully, barbarity, sodomy, aloofness, abandonment, betrayal, and even cannibalism. And *Scumbuster* points out that coastal pollution is the unavoidable consequence of illegal industrial discharge superficially and of the mentality of colonizing nature essentially.

Both western ecocritical theories and Aboriginal eco-wisdom become accessible inspiration for the author to reestablish the umbilical bond between white Australians and the adopted land, the second aspect of Tim Winton's ecosophy. Borrowing ideas from Albert Schweitzer and Aldo Leopold, the author advocates reverence for life in dealing with non-human animals in nature and basic environmental ethics in agricultural development. Succinctly, Winton's ecological care towards animals goes from "reverence for life" (in *An Open Swimmer*) to protection of wildlife (in *Shallows*) and then to a harmonious coexistence with animals (in *Blueback*). Secondly, Tim Winton portrays a new kind of protagonists as nature's children who are ennatured rather than alienated and are voluntarily converted to firm land caretakers in time. Queenie Coupar in *Shallows* involves herself in the environmental campaigns launched by a foreign green organization to prevent whales from extinction, which helps to awaken people's eco-responsibility. The

ecotopia *Blueback* depicts the harmonious symbiosis between humanity and nature in a utopian world where the protagonists claim to belong to the sea, make moderate use of its resources, and in the meantime take pains to protect it in return, the way the Aborigines take care of their country. In a way, *Blueback* implies the author's eco-ideal in its highest form.

Retreating to the wilderness is the third element in Winton's ecosophy. Retreat is of great ecological and communal significance because it brings the highly urbanized modern Australians into intimate contact with nature, cultivating a sense of kinship and belonging and thus indigenizing them in a land that they still feel alien. Retreat to wilderness not only strengthens the bond between man and nature but cultivates ecological care towards nature and furthermore helps to shape a new type of national identity. Jean-Jacque rousseau advocates going back to nature to regain the natural state of human goodness that has been corrupted by human civilization. Hence, withdrawal to wilderness is also an antidote to and a reaction against the myth of development and consumerism prevalent in modern society. It is proved that nature possesses the magical power to tranquilize one and appease one's trauma. Hence, after removing the guilt and uncertainty and experiencing catharsis in the fire and water in the coastal bush, Jerra in *An Open Swimmer* overcomes the crises in growth. Likewise, Luther Fox undergoes an alchemical shift from seeking death to seeking life and becomes a better and more unified man in the wilderness of the unmanned small island.

In brief, Tim Winton's ecosophy concerns with constructing the umbilical bond between his white compatriots and the adopted land of Australia. The author enthusiastically wishes that like his fictional characters they can also acquire catharsis, epiphany, redemption and

vitality from the wilderness and feel that one's identity is tied to immediate nature. Hopefully, reconciliation can be achieved between white Australians and Aboriginal Australians, culture and nature, human and non-human species, and eventually between man and nature.

Key Words: Tim Winton; Ecocriticism; Conquest; Reestablishment; Retreat

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Introduction

In Australia, Tim Winton is known under several titles: literary prodigy, landscape writer, and environmentalist. He began to write and publish at 22 and decided to be a writer at 10. Therefore, he won the name of a writing “prodigy”. His writing career is brilliant because he is the only four-time winner of the most prestigious literary prize in Australia — Miles Franklin Award. He is full of affection for the land that bred him and he wants the world to know that there is such a wonderful region on the western verge of the largest island continent — Australia. He is also known as a landscape writer. In addition, as a Western Australian who lives along the coastal area facing the Indian Ocean and backed by the vast arid or semi-arid area of the continent, Winton is an avid surfer, diver, fisher and even a beachcomber, which naturally leads to another important title for him — the enthusiastic patron of the marine environmental protection.

Winton was born to a working-class family in Karrinyup, Western Australia in 1960. His father was a policeman and his mother a switchboard operator. When he was 12 years old, his family moved to Albany, a major southern port, where he spent three years. Winton grew up largely at Scarborough, a suburb of Perth. The family Christmas holidays that were often spent “in a shack at the mouth of the Greenough River”, four-hour drive north of Perth, had an enormous impact on the author’s future career (Winton, *Land’s Edge* 12). In his memory, there are two distinct childhoods, “the one contained and clothed, between fences” in the suburban area and “the other rambling, windblown, half-naked” in the coastal area. Winton admits that he “lived the coastal life

harder, with more passion”, for the outdoor life on the beach activates every cell in the boy (*Land's Edge* 9). And Winton attributes his becoming an author partly to the summer time spent in the house library “with four walls of books” at Greenough. Besides, his summer holidays are full of “the briny smell of the sea”, which accounts for the author's obsessive interest in the littoral life (*Land's Edge* 14). House library and coastal life initiate him into a writing career as a landscape writer.

Later, Tim Winton had his name enrolled in a course of creative writing under the tutelage of Elizabeth Jolley, the famous Australian novelist, at the WAIT (the West Australia Institute of Technology, now Curtin University), albeit he spent most of his energy writing his virgin work *An Open Swimmer* which won him The Australian Vogel Literary Award.

After marriage, Winton lived for several years in Lancelin, “a hamlet for fishermen, north of Perth, a life away from the city” (Ben-Messahe, *Mind the Country* 4). This “redneck crayfishing town of six hundred people and seven hundred dogs” (Hefner 23), according to Ben-Messahe, is the “haven for the landscape writer” with its “long stretches of white sand beside the Indian Ocean”, which “have certainly provided Winton with a wealth of material” (*Mind the Country* 5). A grant from the Literature Board of the Australia Council permitted him to sojourn in such European countries as France, Greece, Italy and Ireland from 1987 to 1989, during which he embarked upon the writing of *Cloudstreet* (1991). The experiences themselves become the major materials for *The Riders* (1994). Winton is now living at Fremantle, a small town at the mouth of the Swan River with a population of 25,000.

Up to now, Tim Winton has published nine novels, namely *An Open Swimmer* (1982), *Shallows* (1984), *That Eye, that Sky* (1986), *In the Winter Dark* (1988), *Cloudstreet* (1991), *The Riders* (1994), *Dirt Music* (2001), *Breath* (2008) and *Eyrie* (2013), among which *Shallows* and *Cloudstreet* have been translated into Chinese. Winton's

writing career has been accompanied by honors and applauses ever since the publication of his virgin work and almost all his novels have won prizes. Here, I hope to mention the most significant honors since a full list of awards and nominations is found in the appendix attached to this book. Tim Winton sets an unparalleled record as the first and only four-time winner of the most important literary prize in Australia — the Miles Franklin Award, respectively for *Breath* in 2009, *Dirt Music* in 2002, *Cloudstreet* in 1992 and for *Shallows* in 1984. Additionally, Winton was twice short-listed for the Booker prize with *The Riders* in 1995 and *Dirt Music* in 2002. Besides, *Cloudstreet* and *Dirt Music* rated first and fourth respectively among the top 40 Australian books in the poll conducted by the Australian Society of Authors in 2003. In December 2012, *Cloudstreet* topped the list of Top 50 Aussie Books voted by Australian ABC Viewers with *The Riders* coming in the nineteenth. On account of the brilliance achieved by the author, Winton was declared “an Australian National Living Treasure” in 1997 (O’Reilly, “Mind the Country” 359) and listed amongst Western Australia’s 100 most influential people in 2006 (qtd. in Kühlenbeck 57).

Winton is also an excellent short story writer and has three short story collections to his name, i.e. *Scission* (1985), *Minimum of Two* (1987) and *The Turning* (2005), among which *Scission* “won the 1985 Western Australian Council Week Literary Award” (Wilde 822). Two of his short stories “Neighbours” (from *Scission*) and “On her Knees” (from *The Turning*) have been rendered into Chinese. As a professional author since 1981, he also composes seven books for younger readers including *Jesse* (1990), the trilogy *Lockie Leonard* (1990—1997), *The Bugalugs Bum Thief* (1991), *Blueback* (1997) and *The Deep* (2004) and three plays *Rising Water* (2011), *Signs of life* (2012) and *Shrine* (2013).

Given the wide popularity, Winton’s works have been successfully adapted for stage, screen and radio. Some of his books, like *That Eye*,

The Sky and *In the Winter Dark* were turned to movies respectively in 1994 and 1998 while *Lockie Leonard* series and *Cloudstreet* were adapted to TV series in 2007 and 2011. It's interesting to note that the author sometimes gets personally involved in the adaptations of his own works. His prize winners *Cloudstreet*, *Dirt Music* and *The Riders* are all now being converted into movies. On the publication of his novel *Dirt Music*, he collaborated with broadcaster, Lucky Oceans, to produce a compilation CD, *Dirt Music — Music for a Novel*. His plays have achieved equal success on stage. In the non-fiction sector, he has solely or cooperatively published four books including *Smalltown* (2009), *Down to Earth* (1999), *Local Colour: Travels in the Other Australia* (1994), and *Land's Edge* (1993). *Land's Edge* is often taken as his “autobiographical meditations about his obsession with the coast”^① and “his relationship with place” (Wilde 822).

Tim Winton admits that the early literary influences come from American writers such as Mark Twain who teaches him that one can write with the language that one speaks; William Faulkner whose regional writing gives him the very inspiration for depicting Western Australia the way one deals with a character. The author also feels indebted to Nathaniel Hawthorne, Earnest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald and a group of American Southern novelists, with Flannery O'Connor on the top of the list, whose works depend heavily on the regional settings. Among Australian writers who have influence on him, Winton singles out Randolph Stow, Christopher Koch, Helen Garner and Les Murray (Kuhlenbeck 57). The author said that “it was unusual when he was a boy to read about Western Australian places and people in fiction”^② (刘,《外国文学》151). Many Western Australian writers such as

① From the back blurb of the book.

② This and other quotes of the same interview all derive from the English version of the interview offered by the interviewer Yunqiu Liu.

Dorothy Hewett, Elizabeth Jolley, and Randolph Stow, especially the latter, set him good examples by presenting the special place in Western Australia and by employing the vernacular there. Winton adopts his home state as his literary province and further develops the regional writing to a higher degree by describing the indigenous flora and fauna there to impress his readers with the unique natural landscape of the coastal area of Western Australia.

Winton feels akin to Stow also because of their resemblance in the attitude towards nature. Again, as Winton puts it in a recent interview, “I’m more interested in Stow, perhaps because he has a kind of humility towards the landscapes”. Then he further illustrates that “Stow seemed to be putting himself in more ways at the mercy of the natural world, in a kind of humility” (刘,《外国文学》151). To remain humble towards nature is something that recent western culture dearly lacks. Winton intends to cultivate such an attitude towards nature in his fiction to reconstruct a close link between man and nature. He portrays quite a few characters that live in the bush along the coast, far away from city life and in awe of the power of nature. As Bruce Bennett comments:

In his revisiting of this coastline, Winton meets fishermen and beachcombers who are held up as examples for urban sophisticates of stoical, humorous, bloody-minded independents who are, in some respects, the legatees of Henry Lawson’s bush men and women. Winton is keen to show that such characters still exist at land’s edge, though now at the edges of Australian consciousness. (283)

Notwithstanding the trends of urbanization, industrialization, commercialization as well as globalization, Winton stresses that at land’s edge where his hometown lies, there are such natural individuals who are able to survive in wilderness. Such people are “stoical, humorous, and bloody-minded.” They take things from nature just to meet the vital