

An Analysis of John Burroughs' Natural Literature from the Perspective of Ecosemiotics

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Abstract: As a branch of human ecology, the theory of ecosemiotics has taken solving ecological crisis and establishing the relationship between ecology and culture as its own duty since it was put forward. Ecosemiotics refers to the establishment of equal communication and symbiosis between human beings and nature in order to transcend anthropocentrism. As a social phenomenon and a natural phenomenon, landscape contains the interaction between man and nature. Ecosemiotics points out the method and path of how to achieve ecological harmony between human and nature contained in landscape. Ecosemiotics has a strong explanatory power to landscape writing in natural literature. Therefore, the method of ecosemiotics is used to analyze John Burroughs' natural literature works such as *Wake—Robin*, *Winter Sunshine*, *Poet and Bird* and so on. This paper mainly analyses the generation of landscape from physical image to cultural image in these works, the state of “corporeality” in different dimension of nature, and the regulating role of nature in ecological harmony, which provides the possibility for the realization of ecological utopia.

1. Introduction

Ecosemiotics originates from semiotics theory, but it is very different from the theoretical connotation of semiotics. Saussure said, “that thought considered before language, is only a shapeless and indistinct mass,... a vague uncharted nebula.”^[11](Saussure, 1916) According to Saussur's interpretation of semiotics, the existence of nature has no cultural connotation. Semiotics has experienced three stages and four modes .The main research content of semiotics focuses on the nature of symbols, the development and change rules of symbols, the meanings of symbols and the relationship between symbols and various human activities. It was not until 1998 that Winfred Noth's defined ecosemiotics as a discipline studying semiotics of relations between in his article organisms and their environment. ^[8](Winfred Noth's,1998)In 1999 and 2001 North further elaborated on the theory of ecosemiotics , in which he noted that in the field of semiotics at large, ecosemiotics is situated between the semiotics of culture on the one hand and the semiotics of nature on the other. ^[9](Winfred Noth's,1999) In fact, in 1990,North proposed that “There are four main cultural models of a semiotic relationship between humans and their environment, the magical, the mythological, the metaphorical and the pansemiotic model ”.^[6](Winfred Noth's,1990) In the interactions of organism with their environment, the organism experiences its environment no longer in its immediacy as a merely material fact, but interprets the environmental world with reference to a third, a “meaning”, purpose, or goal, which transcends the immediate environmental situation.^[7](Winfred Noth's,1994)North put forward his own views on the definition and purpose of ecosemiotics. And then Kalevi Kull elaborates further on ecological symbols, “ecosemiotics can be defined as the semiotics of the relations between nature and culture” ^[5](Kull,1998)Kull tries to distinguish between ecological symbols and natural symbols. The former emphasizes the interaction between ecological environment and human beings.

Periece, another ecosemiotics scholar, put forward the theory of pansemiotic. He pointed out that the meaning of symbol lies in interpretation, and one semiotic must be used to explain the meaning of other semiotics, forming ternary relationship between representation, object and interpretation

item, gradually blurring the boundary between subject and object. The theory Peirce's pansemiotic includes the whole of the biosphere, breaking the dualism of opposites between human and nature advocated by scholars.^[10](Peirce, 1931-1958) The elements that make up the ternary relationship can be people or other arbitrary beings, and the meaning of symbols is generated in the interaction between different elements. Visible ecological symbol is the combination of natural symbol and cultural symbol. Before ecological semiotics was formally put forward, human beings were always in the subject position in the process of interpreting all semiotics. Ecological semiotics weakens the subject status of human, and emphasizes more on the relationship and cultural significance generated in the interaction of symbols. Indeed, when natural landscape and human landscape exist to form a landscape, it contains a two-way interaction and communication. John Burroughs' prose including a large number of natural landscapes and human landscapes in the form of non-fiction. By using the concept of ecological semiotics to analyse them, we can know the interaction between "corporeality" and multiple nature in the natural texts of non-natural literature. Symbolization and localization of "cultural landscape" and the possibility of realizing ecological utopia.

2. Reinterpretation of Natural Landscape and "Semiotic-self"

First of all, it should be made clear that in the concept of ecosemiotics, the symbolized living body is also a landscape in the natural environment. At this time, the body is not only a symbol, but also a medium, building a bridge for the interaction of memory landscape, natural landscape and humanistic landscape. This "symbolization" of the body is also the re-interpretation of the "semiotic-self". Nobert Wiley once pointed out that the "Semiotic-self" is actually a three-way interaction, in which the present self (I) talks about the past self (me) to the future self (you). From the point of view of ecological semiotics, the interpretation of the "Semiotic-self" of the three-way interaction should be established in the ecosystem. Combined with the theory of Peirce's pansemiotic, everything can be interpreted and explained objects. Through the analysis of John Burroughs' natural literature, we can see the multiple nature that interact with each other as "landscape" and the interaction between "corporeality" and multiple nature.

2.1. The "Landscape" in Different Dimensions of Nature

Multiple nature is the interpretation of different dimensions of nature established by human and nature in the process of symbolization. On the characteristics of nature, Marx once had a detailed discussion, Marx on the basis of mechanical naturalism to emphasize the dialectical unity of man and nature. Marx pointed out that "the natural attribute contained by man" and "the human attribute contained by nature" emphasized the objective dimension, subject dimension, social dimension and ecological dimension of natural existence.^[4](Chengshui, Qi. 2016) From the perspective of ecological semiotics, Kull divided nature into four dimensions, namely zero nature, first nature, second nature and third nature. Zero nature is nature itself. First nature is the nature as we see, identify, describe and interpret it. Second nature is the nature which we have materially interpreted, this is materially translated nature, i.e. a changed nature, a produced nature. Third nature is a virtual nature, as it exists in art and science.^[5] In these four dimensions, no matter which dimension of nature can become a landscape. Past studies on these four dimensions mainly focused on verifying the meaning of nature symbolization and emphasizing the interaction between symbolized man and nature, which is indeed one of the core meanings of ecosemiotics.

The text of natural literature does not deliberately describe the result of the opposition between man and nature, but more reflects the benign interaction between man and nature. It goes deep into nature, observes nature and protects nature, and makes people feel that man and nature are a whole. When Burroughs wrote natural literature, the Industrial Revolution of the United States achieved initial results. People were immersed in the joy brought by the development of science and technology. The naturalists represented by Burroughs were like the rebels of The Times, influencing generations of people to discover the beauty of protecting nature.

For example, in the book of *Wake-Robin*, the author describes the forest kingdom where birds coexist for readers. the author wrote "*the shoots and twigs begin to harden and turn to wood, or the*

grass to lose any of its freshness and succulency. It is this period that marks the return of the birds, ...one or two of the more hardy or half-domesticated species, like the song-sparrow and the bluebird, usually arriving in March."^[2](Burroughs,2017) The birth of leaves in nature is a symbolic sign, which becomes a factor to explain the return of birds, forming the zero degree nature of the mutual landscape. As described in Peirce's pan-semiotics theory, when we interpret symbols, we inevitably use another symbol. The significance of the existence of flowers and plants is no longer to make people happy, should be explained by the return of birds. In Burroughs' description of the natural world, the ecological relations constructed by human and human's subjectivity are deconstructed. When one kind of ecological relationship is structured, another kind of relationship is being constructed. Burroughs' natural literature embodies a new natural relationship: the subjectivity of nature is manifested, and the ecological relationship of mutual subject is established, and the two become a part of the ecological organic whole. The interaction between zero degree nature together constitutes a beautiful landscape picture.

In Burroughs's works, the interaction between different natural fields is described, and this unconscious interaction is part of the ecosystem. When writers write literature with ecological themes, or with preconceived themes, it is more like a composition than a literary work. Although Burroughs' writings belong to natural literature, reading his work is like being warmly embraced by the environment he describes. The multiple natural constructions that complement each other as "landscapes" allow readers to see different levels of natural beauty. The premise of the construction of multiple nature is to place both human and nature in the whole ecosystem. The benign interaction between human and nature creates the possibility of multiple nature. The core idea of the beauty of nature in different dimensions is the joint construction of man and nature. When we use the theory of ecosemiotics to explain the meaning of landscape existence, we can find the multiplicity of the meaning of natural existence, which is no longer only human beings can explain. Tim Ingold has pointed out that "the world is continually formed around its inhabitants, and its diverse components gain meaning by incorporating themselves into the daily patterns of life."^[12](Tim Ingold,2009) This typical anthropocentric view does not contribute substantially to ecological harmony. The significance of the existence of landscape under ecological semiotics is multiple, and the appreciation of human manufacture is only a part of it. Throughout the ecosystem, creatures other than humans are also creative. Birds use natural resources to build nests, and dandelions use the power of wind to spread seeds. These behaviors not only attract people to stop and admire, but also become the sights of other creatures. This communication is based on the premise that other creatures besides humans are capable of feeling emotions. Current scientific research shows that many animals and plants have the ability to perceive emotions. If you say that any other biological emotional perception that the author writes about is related to the author's subjective will and the reader's expectations. Then there are a lot of natural landscapes in Burroughs's works, which have two characteristics: one is to weaken the importance of human existence; Secondly, the natural combination and interaction of different species has become the main reason for the existence of natural landscape. The generation and interaction of multiple natural landscapes provide a way for human beings to approach nature.

2.2. "Corporeality" and Different Dimensions of Nature

"Corporeality" is the substrate of the body and ideas. It can also be understood as the embodiment of the soul and the soul of the body. Many philosophers have defined the meaning of "Corporeality". Soul and body are often seen as a binary pair of being. In the field of ecosemiotics, the soul and body are unified. The body and soul are placed in the whole ecosystem to achieve the inner harmony and unity of body and mind. This state of mind and body harmony is a natural attitude and action in life. "Corporeality" is an expression of human body symbolization. When people are placed in the natural environment, how to choose and survive "Corporeality" is the focus of ecological semiotics. Following this, other creatures in nature are also capable of being "Corporeality". It's just different from the outer form of human existence. It is now clear that the symbol "Corporeality" is a way for man to approach nature. For example, in the book of *Wake-*

Robin: "The dandelion tells me when to look for the swallow, the dog-toothed violet when to expect the wood-thrush, and when I have found the wake-robin in bloom I know the season is fairly inaugurated."^[2](Burroughs,J.2017) And the another example is in the book of *Winter Sunshine*: *"The crows fly high above the earth, as they do only on such days, forms of ebony floating across the azure, and the buzzards look like kingly birds, sailing round and round."*^[2](Burroughs,J.2017)The body's perception depends on natural changes. This perception is not about self-interest but about understanding nature better. Burroughs 'natural text finds one for the" Corporeality" position in the natural environment. Burroughs finds a suitable place in the ecosystem for his body and soul, and offers the reader the possibility of finding that place.

3. The Possibility of Eco-utopia

The birth and development of ecosemiotics are accompanied by the deterioration of ecological environment. The appearance of natural literature is also a warning to the destruction of ecological environment in the process of industrialization. What Burroughs pursued in his natural literature writing was not only the harmony between man and nature, but also the harmony between man and man, between man and society and in nature. The harmonious concept of the dissolving center provides a possibility for the realization of ecological utopia, which draws the distance between Eco-utopia and reality. According to the current social development status, utopia exists in the future world. Therefore, what utopia has been a topic of discussion for a long time, and there are also many questions about the significance of the realization of utopia. In fact, Burroughs's nature literature offers the possibility of an Eco-utopia.

3.1. Landscape Semiotics and Ecological Adjustment across Time and Space

When the natural symbol becomes a landscape, it contains a mechanism of internal communication and aesthetic coexistence. Natural symbols exist not only in the real world, but also in person's memories. This symbol of natural landscape spanning the concept of time and space plays a role in ecological adjustment to a certain extent. This ecological regulation can be divided into internal regulation and external regulation. Internal regulation is mainly the regulation and allocation of all resources between different species, or the replacement of resources between different species provides conditions. External regulation refers to the harmony between man and man, man and nature in the same ecological environment. Burroughs's description of natural landscapes is not only in the real world, but also in his personal memory. For example, in the book of *Birds and Poets*, the author said: *"Once, Paumanok, When the snows had melted, and the Fifth-month grass was growing, Up this seashore, in some briers, Two guests from Alabama--two together, And their nest, and four light green eggs, spotted with brown."*^[3](Burroughs,J.2004)Even in Burroughs' personal memory, the existence of this landscape is subjective. This natural landscape symbol has influenced people's attitudes and choices towards the ecological environment in the past, present and future.

Burroughs' work also expresses the expectation of harmonious relationships between people. In his works, he did not hesitate to praise African American. For example in the book of *Winter Sunshine*, the author said: *"One touch of nature makes all the world akin, and there is certainly a touch of nature about the colored man; indeed, I had almost said, of Anglo-Saxon nature."*^[1](Burroughs,J.2003)Focusing on marginalized groups and eliminating racial discrimination is one of the features of Burroughs 'natural literature text. Burroughs believed that people from different races lived together in nature and should enjoy equal rights and social status, which had a meaning across time and space. In any time and space, nature will give people a warm embrace, and we should pass this warmth on from generation to generation between different races.

3.2. Enlightenment of Poetic Dwelling

From Burroughs' nature literature work we can know that if someone want to realize "poetic dwelling", the first thing to be solved is actually the problem of thinking mode, which is to get rid of the utilitarian thinking, because aesthetic appreciation is a completely non-utilitarian activity. We

should find a balance between beauty and interests. But only beyond the immediate interest, aesthetic can be possible. Burroughs loved nature and, more importantly, was open-minded and peaceful.

Nowadays, with the rapid development of economy, technology and industry, it is impossible for all people living in the city to return to the fields. Poetically dwelling on the earth, it not only represents a kind of survival posture, but also indicates a love of life, a philosophy of life and spiritual aesthetics. Material affluence is only the lowest pursuit. We should find a warm position for our soul, dwell poetically, and get spiritual enrichment there, find true happiness, and pursue a higher realm of life.

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