

On the Ecological Literary Color of *The Mysterious Island*

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Abstract

The *Mysterious Island* was written during the two industrial revolutions, and the Third Republic of France was in the turbulent state at that time. It develops the description against the background of the American Civil War. In *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*, which is another one of Jules Verne's "marine trilogy", there is also the character "Captain Nemo" who opposes the British exploitation and oppression to India and harbors national hatred. All these reflect the collision between society and individuals. Verne witnessed the rapid development of capitalism, created ecological literature images through the combination of ideal and reality, produced various ecological literature contradictions, and expressed the author's concern about the society at that time and the yearning for ecological literature values of harmonious coexistence between man and nature by setting suspense.

Keywords

The *Mysterious Island*; French Literature; Ecological Literature.

1. Preface

Mr. Wang Nuo, one of the pioneers in the research field of ecological literature in China, believes that ecological literature is a literature based on ecological holism and taking the overall interests of ecosystem as the highest value to investigate and express the relationship between nature and man and explore the social root of ecological crisis. By constructing a Utopia of Saint Simon, *The Mysterious Island* shows the contradiction between technological progress, capitalist development and nature, and arouses people's thinking about ecologism. In *Jules Verne: A Dream of Progress*, French writer Jean-Paul Dekiss also praised Verne's ecological literature style as the treasure of the world's ecological literature, which is also the reason why this paper analyzes *The Mysterious Island* from the perspective of ecological literature.

2. Ecological Literary Image

Simply put, ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies. [...] As a critical stance, it has one foot in literature and the other on land; as a theoretical discourse, it negotiates between the human and the nonhuman. [1]While the initial wave of ecocriticism was synchronous with the aims of "earthcare," the second wave was deeply self-critical, and sought to extend the ideas of "nature and environment". [2]A large number of natural images, vivid language and various artistic expressions describe the author's rich and complex psychological feelings. The first five protagonists are the Northerners trapped in the Southern army city. At that time, during the American Civil War, the South was still implementing the plantation black slavery. This image represents the traditional civilization and rural civilization, while the North represents the free capitalist civilization. The plot of the story unfolds on the island, which is related to the marine plot of the French, and it is the

embodiment of the characteristics of French culture. A desert island makes people want to have a sense of control and conquest, The characteristics of sea breeze can reflect the pioneering spirit and enthusiasm in the article (engineer Cyrus Smith, reporter Gideon Spilett, sailor Pencroft, little boy Herbert, servant Nab, pet Top, orangutan Yu Pu found on the island later, and Tom Ayrton who was exiled on Tapo Island for twelve years but finally recovered his good nature). [3]On an undeveloped island, people may die soon because they don't have any ready-made food, tools and other survival materials. They may also use various resources provided by nature to create various necessities of life, have the ability to resist various natural disasters and foreign invasion, and even finally build transportation to return to the embrace of the motherland. At the beginning of the book, the trees were uprooted, the embankment was washed down by towering waves, and the hot-air balloon was swept into the whirlwind... It is these images that create an intense atmosphere and depict the plot of the hero's death in the air with ups and downs. The activity descriptions of farms and pastures further push the article to a simple and cordial rhythm, full of rich flavor of life, which shows the author's desire to get close to nature.

3. Ecological Literary Plot

The book organically combines fantasy and reality. A desert island can be developed into all kinds, just like an unpainted white paper. The islanders worked together to overcome many difficulties, from having nothing at first to having nothing to worry about later. Under the leadership of the engineer, they make fires, soap, clothes, pottery, cut tobacco and pipes, install telegraph devices, make steel and grind them into hammers, nails and other tools, use chemical knowledge to make modern weapons such as ammunitions and shotguns, and hydraulic elevators are also put into use. In addition to renovating two houses ("the Rock Wall" and the luxurious "Cave House"), they also operated farms, pastures and even glass factories, producing several ships, large and small. By destroying pagan animisme, Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects. [4]Verne experienced the Franco-Prussian War, witnessed two industrial revolutions, and faced an unstable new regime. Starting from what he saw and heard, he set the "mysterious island" as a microcosm of society, showing the author's concern and hatred for the excessive transformation of nature in the colonial society. Colonists' dark rule in the local area and instill the wrong culture in the local area will make the people suffer. Excessive transformation of nature will lead to ecological imbalance, which is likely to cause natural and man-made disasters and ruin their life.

Every time the islanders encounter difficulties or dangers, there's a stranger who help them. When the engineer was in trouble and fell into the sea, someone rescued him from the sea to the shore and left a box with everything in it; When the monkeys broke into the "Cave House" and put away the lower half of the rope ladder so that they could not enter, someone shot the monkeys and threw the rope ladder down the threshold; When they want to survey the location and surrounding islands, someone put a note into a drifting bottle to tell them the location of Tapoo Island, so that they have a new companion; When the island was attacked by pirates and bandits and the lives of the islanders were in danger, some people arranged mines to blow up the pirate ship and killed all the bandits ashore with electronic bullets; When Harbert was suffering from malaria and was dying and in urgent need of medical treatment, someone put Sulphate of Quinine on their table and saved Harbert's life... Who is this mysterious man? It arouses the readers' thinking, and the suspense set in the closely linked plot attracts the readers. The final answer - Captain Nemo's appearance is both reasonable and unexpected. Captain Nemo is also the character of *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*. As the captain of the "Nautilus", he leaded a few like-minded people to sail and supported the struggle of the oppressed nation against colonial rule. The connection between the two books makes the

"marine trilogy" truly integrate into a whole, which more deeply expresses his original intention of writing, and calls on everyone to pay attention to the protection of natural ecological environment while developing productive forces.

In addition, the plot setting of the book is full of contradictions, which causes readers to think deeply. First of all, the American Civil War was a struggle between the bourgeoisie in the North who advocated banning slavery in new states and the South who practiced slavery. At that time, farmland and forests were cut down to an alarming extent, various mineral resources were exhausted, and animals were on the verge of extinction. Therefore, nature fought back in its own way, and the soldiers were in a miserable situation. Americans began to understand the fact that there are limits in nature, and determined to restore ecology, which corresponds to the theme of this novel. Secondly, the calm and unhurried character of the engineer is also in contrast to the impatient character of the sailor. Although both sides are brave and kind-hearted to protect the islanders, develop the island in order to live a harmonious and livable life, the engineer is generally not anxious unless he encounters an emergency, and always uses his wisdom to make various tools in an orderly manner to deal with various difficulties; The sailor can't hold his breath when he is in trouble and is reckless, which also gives readers some enlightenment to make rational and scientific use of nature and live in harmony with nature. Finally, the islanders used their existing knowledge and advanced technology to create various tools to occupy and plunder land resources, killed all animals and plants harmful to themselves, and destroyed the original ecological balance. If it continued, human civilization and the natural environment would be in serious opposition, which has triggered readers' reflection on anthropocentrism. [5] Today, people pay more and more attention to meeting their own needs and wantonly cut down trees in order to conquer nature and meet their own interests.

4. Ecological Literary Concept

Particular natural facts are symbols of particular spiritual facts.[6] In Verne's period, the industrial revolution flourished, and most people in society were crazy about capital which was accumulating. Although this promoted the development of productive forces, it also brought serious consequences: the lack of natural resources, ecological imbalance, serious differentiation between the rich and the poor, and excess productivity led to oversupply and unsalable products. Just like the emergence of human beings in the mysterious island who regarded themselves as pioneers destroyed the original perfect and balanced ecosystem on the island. As a passage in the novel said, "This is human nature. The reason why people become the spirit of all is that people have a desire to do a career and a great career that will last forever! Just because of this, talents can dominate the world and become well deserved masters of the world." Ecological criticism attempts to lead people to return to the original ecology of nature through the reading of literary works with the theme of man and nature, so that people can enjoy the primitive and simplicity of nature. [7] The novel achieves the organic interaction between man and nature and is a bridge between literature and ecology. It allows us to extend ecological criticism from environmental text to fictional works, that is, science fiction. Today, with highly developed industry, the ecological environment is facing serious threats. The book reflects the disharmonious relationship between man and nature, and enables the public to carry out ecological criticism and reflect on modern civilization in a new way of environmental imagination. [8] Now the productive level is highly developed, the pace of people's life is speeding up, and the meaning of material utility in society is more intense, so many people dream of rural civilization.

Posthumus proposes to take the "natural contract" theory of French philosopher Michel Searle as the basis of French ecological criticism, in order that French culture can have its own natural concept, its own Ecological Discourse and its own environmental relationship. [9] When Verne

wrote this book, France had just suffered the failure of the Franco-Prussian War and social unrest. Out of concern for national security, after reflection on the failure of the war, at the time of the rapid development of science and technology, he showed the excellent quality of intellectuals at that time through his protagonists, proved the difference between people who worked with brains and some bourgeoisie who took advantage of speculation and perverted the law, and called on everyone to respect labor, which can improve the scientific and technological level of the whole society.

As the founder of science fiction, Verne created an ideal world. Everyone developed the island together and lived happily. Many materials for survival came from scratch. Some people couldn't accept it for a while because of the rapid development of technology, and still stayed in the simple and pure life of the past. As the novel says, "Captain, with all due respect, your mistake is to think that you can reproduce the past and want to resist the inevitable progress. Some people will praise you, but others will condemn you." The author has this mentality, so he set up a desert island to let everyone go back to the past, starting with making tools and making a fire for heating. Captain Nemo also wanted independence and restoration because of the fact that India was colonized by Britain due to the backward development of science and technology at that time. Finally, he chose to live in seclusion at the bottom of the sea because of his failure. However, the lava was about to erupt finally and the island would be destroyed soon, which also proves that the Utopia in people's hearts cannot exist forever. We must recognize and reflect on the reality. There is a mutual relationship between ecological criticism and the community of human destiny. Now, with the intensification of the global ecological crisis, ecological and environmental problems and various spiritual ecological problems existing in social life are the dilemma that the whole mankind must face together. Therefore, we should put the "community of destiny" in the vision of ecological literature.[10]

Like capitalism, the colonialism has also brought profound disasters to some people. The plantation slavery that the US military wanted to abolish in the American Civil War was the product of colonialism. Captain Nemo also sowed the seeds of his hatred for foreign aggressors in the hearts of the Indian people after the cruel oppression and exploitation of India by the British. He traveled all over India to publicize the spirit of saving the country to the people and called on everyone to break free from the yoke of British slavery. Colonialism symbolizes mankind's crazy transformation of nature in the industrial age. The colonists opposed the traditional rural civilization and squeezed the working and peasant classes, which did not conform to the law of social evolution and destroyed the ecological balance. Therefore, although the plot about colonialism appears less in the novel, it also has a strong color of ecological literature.

5. Conclusion

The Mysterious Island is full of the collision between ideal and reality, the collision between technological progress and ecological balance, the collision between mental and physical labor related to scientific and technological knowledge, and the collision between bourgeois behaviors such as colonial expansion and backward slavery. The two sides of these contradictions are both opposite and unified. The book uses its writing technique of ecological literature to convey the concept of ecological literature to readers. On the one hand, people yearned for the development of science and technology and the progress of society. On the other hand, due to the long-term fixed life mode, people's ideas fell behind, some people were impacted, and the natural environment was destroyed. People were afraid of the crazy industrial age. At that time, all kinds of emotions filled in the society were reflected incisively and vividly. The study which is an interpretation of the ecological literature color of *The Mysterious Island* can promote people to better understand the relationship between man and

nature, so as to enhance human attention to nature and achieve the harmonious coexistence between man and nature.

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