

# The Thematic and Imagery Intertextuality in Tao Yuanming and Wordsworth's Poetry

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**Abstract:** The great Chinese poet Tao Yuanming and the Western poet Wordsworth are poets of two different periods in China and the West, but they share the same yearning: to return to nature and to return to the essence. In this paper, we analyze the intertextuality of their poems in terms of theme and imagery, and investigate the causes of their intertextuality. This typical intertextuality provides a reference for the exchange between Chinese and Western cultures.

## 1. Introduction

The concept of intertextuality was first introduced in the 1960s by the French semiotician of Bulgarian origin, Julia Kristeva. Since the birth of the term "intertextuality", the concept of intertextuality has been given different meanings by different scholars on different occasions, and different writers and poets have also used intertextual texts, either intentionally or unintentionally in their works. In this paper, the background of the emergence and development of the concept of intertextuality will be introduced, and various interpretations of intertextuality and its various classifications will be explored. On this basis, we will form the theoretical pivot of Tao Yuanming and Wordsworth's research on theme and imagery intertextuality.

Basically, the "Idyllic Poets" and "Lake Poets" are poets who return to nature. Tao Yuanming, known as the "Idyllic Poet" in China, and Wordsworth, known as the "Lake Poet" in England did not only hold a respect to nature, recover their simplicity and return to the original nature, but become an integral part of nature by getting along with the environment in perfect harmony in their own way. The two poets both employ theme and imagery intertextual texts to express their views and beliefs about the world and life.

## 2. The Theory of Intertextuality

Influenced by Bakhtin, Julia Kristeva formally coined and introduced the term "intertextualite" in two articles *Words, Dialogue and Fiction* (1966) and *Closed Texts* (1967), in the journal *TelQue*. Then, in *Semiotics, a Study of Semantic Analysis* (1969), she defined the concept of intertextuality as "the representation of other texts that appear at cross-purposes in one text". Later, intertextuality was redefined by F. D. Saussure, "Each text relates to several texts, and serves to reread, emphasize, condense, transfer, and deepen these texts."

Western intertextuality is a fluid concept that has undergone various definitions in the course of its use in literary critical discourse. In general, we believe that the concept of Western intertextuality is divided into two parts: one is intertextuality in a broad sense, hold by Kristeva, Barthes, and Riffaterre; the other is intertextuality in a narrow sense, claimed by Gerard Genette, Antonin Compagnon, Laurent Kinney, and Michel Schneider.

Kristeva suggests that intertextuality is the way texts exist, and emphasizes the dialogue between texts that have words, phrases, and so on, and the existence of multiple discourses in each text. In the *Encyclopedia of Textual Theory*, Roland Barthes (1973) suggests that "every text is a reorganization and a re-reference of existing speech" and that "intertextuality is a universal constitution of such things as Paradigm: a set of formulae, subconsciously quoted and unmarked references, from which there is no longer any way to check who said what." Barthes' thought brought the notion of intertextuality closer to reading, and he was the first to consider literary

reception theory on two levels. Michael Riffaterre (1979) turned "intertextuality" into a real concept of reception theory, defining intertextuality as "the reader's apprehension of the relationship between a work and other works, whether the work exists before or after the work."

In 1982, the theory of intertextuality in Genette's interpretation is mainly embodied in Genette's *Hidden Manuscripts*, which also determines the transition from a broad to a narrow conception of intertextuality. The holders of Narrow intertextuality argues that broad intertextuality generalizes too broadly, that intertexts should be seen as a technique of text writing, and traces of signs should be the object of study in intertextuality theory, thus more emphasis should be placed on the fact that one text does appear in another. Genette called "intertextuality" as "transtextuality", and defined it as "the actual appearance of one text in another text". It seems that any text is intertextual, and any text is a "two-dimensional" structure that arises on top of other texts.

### 3. Intertextuality in Poetry

Theme on returning the nature and imagery of "Bird" appeared in the two poets' poetry will be explored specifically.

#### 3.1 Theme on Returning Nature in Intertextuality

Thematic intertextuality refers to the similarity or homogeneous relationship between the text (main text) and other texts (intertexts) in terms of theme and idea. In order to grasp the theme and aesthetic features of the main text more deeply and accurately, reference and comparison between the intertext and the main text will be explored, so as to find the differences or the similarities of the textual meaning, and to obtain a profound emotional experiences.

On the basis of eulogizing nature and yearning for freedom, Tao Yuanming expressed the joy of cultivating pastoral landscape in his idyllic poems. The scenes described in the poems were not only mountains, rivers and seas, strange rocks and pines, but also the usual scenes that everyone was accustomed to "*eight or nine grass huts, chrysanthemums, vegetables by the fields, barking dogs in the alleys, and the South Mountain when looking up* ..... "are the texts which often appeared in his poems. His masterpiece "*Return to the Garden and Countryside*" reflects the sweetness and quietness of the countryside, and his leisure mind after returning to the countryside, which expressed the theme of returning to the nature and praising nature. "*Caged Bird Loves Old Forest, Fish in Pond Misses Old Abyss*" indicate the poet's desire to return to the countryside from the official career; "*Picking Chrysanthemum Under the Eastern Hedge, Leisurely Seeing the Southern Hills*" and "*Morning Rising to Tidy Up the Filth, Returning with Moon Lotus Hoe*" express his carefree mood when first returning to the countryside; "*The Stain on My Clothes Is Not Enough, But I Wish I Hadn't Gone Away*" and "*The Mountains Are Beautiful by Day and Night, and the Birds Are Returning with Me*" show his determination to return to seclusion and his ideal of returning to the basics.

Although Wordsworth lived in a different culture and age from Tao Yuanming, he shares something similar to Tao Yuanming, being good at subjects and creative themes. He inherited the tradition of "returning to nature" and chanting about natural scenes in sentimentalist literature of the late 18th century, and focused on depicting natural scenes, singing praises of nature to express his ideals. In the preface of *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth puts forward the theoretical proposition of using pastoral life as the poetic genre, and employs it into practice in his creation. His landscape poems are tranquil and distant, with a great variety of atmosphere, rich in the spirit of the cosmos, and at the same time have the characteristics of Chinese landscape and pastoral poetry. In the poem "*Yellow Narcissus*," the author compares himself to a lone cloud floating over a valley and a hill, accompanied by melancholy and loneliness. But in a split second, the daffodils swaying in the breeze by the lake attracts the poet, and the poet's worries are swept away. The beauty of nature stirred up joy in the poet's heart through this ordinary flower. From then on, whenever the poet felt bored in his real life, this moment of wonderful feeling became his eternal comfort.

The two poets are in touch with each other and choose to return to the nature and yearn for freedom. In the countryside and lakeside, they find the long-desired freedom and merry life, where

their souls are like angels swimming in their world, and also light up people's souls and spirits. In the Chinese feudal society under the guidance of Confucianism, the self-evaluation standard for scholars was to rule the country and the world. However, in the system of imperial examination and the increasingly corrupt society, many scholars were not rewarded for their ambition and remained depressed all their lives. Therefore, Tao Yuanming's spirit of returning to nature naturally became the spiritual home for the unfulfilled scholars in the past, allowing them to rest their souls instead of being barren. Wordsworth hated the capitalist urban civilization and glorified the rural life under the feudal and patriarchal system in the Middle Ages, so that people who hated capitalism and suffered from the decadence of money could return to their own hearts, wash away the dust outside their bodies and find spiritual sustenance in the prosperous material society.

### 3.2 Imagery Intertextuality

Intertextuality of imagery mainly refers to the recurrence of some imagery in the poetic text, the pre-text and the post-text constitute an intertextual relationship. Due to the historical and cultural flow and the author's subjective experience of the different meanings given to the texts for different reasons, so that when interpreting a textual imagery poets may refer to the same imagery in other texts by other poets, in order to trace its origin and investigate the increase or decrease of the meaning of the texts and grasp more scientific and comprehensive meaning of the texts. "Bird", as an imagery, its symbolic connotation has a deep accumulation, but no matter in the past, present, East or West, it is a nature spirit, the embodiment of freedom, carrying the poet's "flying dream". Both Wordsworth, who roamed by the lake, and Tao Yuanming, who plowed the fields, sang their love for nature and freedom and expressed the joy of "birdsong" after returning to nature through the imagery of "bird".

#### 3.2.1 Imagery of "Birds" in Tao Yuanming's Poems

The contradiction between ideal and reality runs through Tao Yuanming's life, he expresses the repetition between public service and seclusion, and also the bitterness and anguish after seclusion in his poems by resorting to birds. The chanting and singing of "Bird" runs through the whole process of Tao Yuanming's poetic creation. The "birds" under his pen render and support the subjective emotions of the poet, and clearly and completely outline the poet's emotional trajectory and heart course. With the passage of time, the change of social environment, and the experience of being retired to a secluded place, Tao Yuanming's thoughts kept changing, and the image of "birds" in his poems also changed subtly in different periods. The poet, from the age of 29 to the first year of Yi Xi (405), resigned from Peng Ze and retired to seclusion. He had experienced the pains of officialdom and the decadence of the government, so he finally chose the path of seclusion and returned to the embrace of nature that made him reverie. The poem *"Returning to the Birds"* comprehensively depicts the poet's leisurely and complacent state of mind during this period. Tao Yuanming, who no longer had any illusions about reality, finally *"returned to the garden and lived in the fields,"* relieved both physically and spiritually. The "bird" in Tao Yuanming's painting is such an image of letting go of nature. This poem uses the "bird" as a metaphor for his own condition, expressing his own joy of returning to his secluded farming life and the fullness of his idyllic life. Every move of the poem *"Returning Bird"* is consistent with the poet's own encounter. Being like the poet, the Returning Bird once had great ambitions and flew with wings, *"far eight tables, near resting in the clouds"*. The bird is the embodiment of the poet's ego, and is a perfect fit for his journey to seclusion. In the beginning, Tao Yuanming went out to serve as an official in order to realize his lofty aspirations, but in the end he had to go back to the countryside because *"the world was against me"*. Tao Yuanming expressed his deep affection for the countryside through *"Wings and Wings Returning to Birds,"* and he finally found the place of his life---the countryside. The birds in the mountains and forests are just like Tao Yuanming's in the countryside, where the mountains and forests are the nests of birds, and the countryside is the resting place of the poet's life and spirit.

#### 3.2.2 Imagery of "Birds" in Wordsworth's Poems

Wordsworth hates the worldly fads of money and money transactions, and aspires to a life of seclusion, and then describes with all his heart and soul the world he loves: lakes, rivers, meadows, forests, blue skies, and daylight. Nature, which is often anthropomorphized by poets, also occupies a very important place in Wordsworth poems; and the "bird," a joyful elf, flies and sings in the poet's fields, framing a different kind of meaning. In the poem "*To the Cuckoo*", the poet describes a poetic scene: one spring morning, the poet was lying in the meadow, listening to the sound of the cuckoo in the distance, and couldn't help but feel joy in his heart. When he was a child, he was equally excited by the sound: he used to search for the lovely "*O happy guest! I hear / I am so glad to hear you sing. / O cuckoo! Shall I call you a bird? / Or a wandering voice?*" The poet's delight at hearing the cuckoo's song is vividly expressed in a few lines. The last two lines, "*is it a bird?*" or "*a wandering sound*", are naturally reminiscent of the fact that in spring one often hears the sound of cuckoos and rarely sees the shadow of the cuckoo, adding a layer of mystery to the lovely cuckoo bird. "*As I lay in the meadow / I heard your overlapping voices ..... / confiding to me / a dreamy thing.*" In the poet's eyes, the cuckoo is no longer a bird, but "*a voice, a mystery,*" a mystery that haunted the poet when he was young and continues to haunt him. The search for "*one longing, one love*". The poet conceals the blended visual and auditory images, making the cuckoo a shadowless spirit, a formless voice, and a hazy beauty. The implications of cuckoos are profound and intriguing.

#### **4. Reasons for Intertextuality in Their Poems**

##### **4.1 Similar Life Experiences**

Both poets spent their childhood and adolescence in the idyllic countryside with beautiful scenery. Tao Yuanming grew up in Xunyang Chaisang Village near the Yangtze River and Poyang Lushan, and spent his days and nights with the beautiful landscape and countryside; Wordsworth, on the other hand, lived in Lake Elseweth, which was famous for its beautiful scenery---densely packed lakes. They were free to wander around as they pleased, to play in the hills, and to linger in the wondrous natural scenery of the Lake District, and gradually they became more and more admirers of nature. The poet's passion and respect for nature was nurtured by his early life experiences.

##### **4.2 The Influence of Relevant Theories in Their Age**

Influenced by Rousseau's slogan of "back to nature," Wordsworth was disgusted by the rapid changes in English society after the Industrial Revolution and the industrial bourgeois civilization, where nature was the only place untouched by industrial society. Therefore, Wordsworth turned to nature and imagined that by representing ordinary people and things in idyllic life, he would evoke the idea of "nature" in his paintings.

In order to save humanity from the poison of industrial civilization, Tao Yuanming taught the philosophy of "Nature" from Zhuangzi (c. 369 BC-286 BC), a Chinese philosopher and founder of Mohism, and revolted against the society at that time by worshiping nature. Similarly, Tao Yuanming learned from Zhuangzi's philosophy of "reverence for nature" and revolted against the society at that time by revering nature. Therefore, he returned to the fields to stay away from the hustle and bustle.

##### **4.3 Political Encounter**

Wordsworth was terrified of the bloody course of the French Revolution, so he returned to the countryside by a lake to recuperate his soul and concentrate on his work. Similarly, after Tao Yuanming had been appointed as an official several times, he was overwhelmed by his overwhelming official duties, so he worked in the countryside and enjoyed his time. Tao Yuanming and Wordsworth, as representatives of the "Idyllic Poets" or "Secluded Poets" of China and the West, although separated by a thousand years and ten thousand miles in time and space, walked a very similar path of life: withdraw from society to nature. When they found that their ideals conflicted with the dark social phenomena, they retreated to nature to escape from the constraints of

society, pursue spiritual liberation, and maintain psychological balance. Tao Yuanming found poetic tranquility in the dreamy countryside, while Wordsworth found solace in the scenery of lakes and mountains, and they both followed the same path of retreat to nature.

## 5. Conclusion

The great Chinese poet Tao Yuanming and the Western poet Wordsworth, in two different age, employing intertextuality in their poetry in terms of theme and imagery, echoes each other in their respective cultural spheres. In this human cultural sphere, culture and literature and other achievements of human civilization are in a kind of intertextuality, and there are cultural and literary phenomena that are copied, emphasized and transformed among various cultural spheres. The two poets are examples of this intertextuality, which provides a reference for the cultural exchange between China and the West.

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