

## THE ECOLOGICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF THE ECOLOGICAL THEMES IN THE AMERICAN TRANSCENDENTALISM LITERATURE: A CASE STUDY OF PRAY TO WHAT EARTH DOES THIS SWEET COLD BELONG BY HENRY DAVID THOREAU

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze and interpret the ecological themes expressed in the American Transcendentalism Literature, *Pray to What Earth Does This Sweet Cold Belong*, by Henry David Thoreau. Three kinds of analysis: structure analysis, rhetorical devices analysis, and theme analysis, were conducted within the Ecocriticism framework. Componential Analysis (CA) was applied to identify the semantic domain of themes and the ecological themes' network was discovered. It is found that the ecological meanings and themes expressed in the discourse involve the relationship between human beings, animals, plants, and other organisms in the natural environment. Ultimately, most of the themes in the poem are of the nature theme.

**Keywords:** ecological themes, ecological discourse analysis, American transcendentalism literature

### INTRODUCTION

Ecological Discourse Analysis (henceforth EDA) is an ecology-oriented analysis of discourse from the perspective of linguistics based on an ecological philosophy (He and Wei 2018b: 66). EDA focuses on the analysis of language use in discourse that depicts the relationship between humans and the environment. The purpose of EDA is to increase people's ecological awareness, improve people's ecological behavior, and promote the benign development of the ecosystem.

Henry David Thoreau, the father of American nature writing, advocated green civilization with pastoral idyll (Buell, 1995). His writings can be counted as "ecological discourses" as he saw nature as a genuine restorative, healthy influence on man's spiritual well-being, and regarded it as a symbol of spirit (ToMing, 2008). In this study, one of Thoreau's writings, *Pray to What Earth Does This Sweet Cold Belong*, is purposively selected to study the Ecological themes, aiming to interpret the ecological

philosophy themes expressed in the discourse of this poem. The interpretation of the ecological discourse in this poem would enrich the study of EDA in American Transcendentalism Literature, which is ample of the divinity of nature.

### OBJECTIVE

1. To interpret the ecological meanings and themes expressed in *Pray to What Earth Does This Sweet Cold Belong* written by Thoreau.
2. To identify the Ecological themes' network in *Pray to What Earth Does This Sweet Cold Belong* written by Thoreau.

### METHODOLOGY

#### 1. Research Questions

This study aims to answer the following questions:

- 1). How to apply the Theoretical Framework of the Ecological Discourse Analysis to interpret the ecological meaning expressed in American Transcendentalism Literature?
- 2). What are the Ecological philosophy themes for the ecological discourse analysis on American Transcendentalism Literature?

#### 2. Research Process

There are 4 steps under the framework of Ecocriticism: 1) Collect the data from the poem *Pray to What Earth Does This Sweet Cold Belong*, 2) Analyze the data with three kinds of analysis: structure analysis, rhetorical devices analysis, and theme analysis (Halliday 1994), 3) Analyze the ecological themes by CA (Katz and Fodor 1963), and 4) Conclude the ecological themes' network.

#### 3. Research Method

This study has adopted the qualitative approach with EDA.

#### 4. Research Instrument

The Microsoft Excel spreadsheet was used to collect ecological discourses and analyze them.

#### 5. Research Scope

One of American Transcendentalism Literature, *Pray to What Earth Does This Sweet Cold Belong* by Henry David Thoreau, is purposively selected as the data.

### RESULT

#### 1. The Interpretation of the Ecological Meanings and Themes in the Poem

To study the ecological meaning expressed in the discourse of the poem *Pray to What Earth Does This Sweet Cold Belong*, written by Thoreau, three kinds of analysis were conducted within the ecocriticism philosophy that emphasizes the importance of all living things in the environment and human attitudes toward environmental expressions in literary writings, that is structure analysis, rhetorical devices analysis, and theme analysis.

### 1.1 Structure Analysis

This poem has 17 lines in total, it can be divided into three stanzas, they are the introduction, main body part, and conclusion. The first 2 lines are grouped into the first stanza, in which Thoreau adopts rhetorical questions, to emphasize the beauty of nature in cold winter.

Since Thoreau did not give a title for this poem, the first line works as its title. The second stanza starts from line 3 to line 13, serving as the main body of the poem. In this part, Thoreau vividly depicts natural objects to present a lively and vibrant spectacle in cold winter. The third stanza lies in the last 4 lines as a conclusion to show the harmony between humans and nature. The structure of the poem *Pray to What Earth Does This Sweet Cold Belong* is shown in Table 1.

Stanza	Line No.	Structure	Brief Analysis
1	1-2	Introduction	General introduction to the beauty of nature in cold winter.
2	3-13	Main body	The detailed description of the natural objects such as the moon, the stars, the fields and the snow, the titmice, and the bee.
3	14-17	Conclusion	Harmonious coexistence between humans and nature

Table 1: The structure of the poem *Pray to What Earth Does This Sweet Cold Belong*.

In sum, there are three stanzas, showing the introduction, main body, and conclusion of the poem. The content of this poem emphasizes the harmony between humans and nature.

### 1.2 Rhetorical Devices Analysis

Thoreau employs three kinds of rhetorical devices, which are personification, rhetorical question, and metaphor, to depict his understanding of the relationship between humans and nature in the world.

- Personification: It gives human characteristics to nonhuman things or inanimate objects, which is the most frequent rhetorical device adopted in this poem. For example, in line 5, Thoreau chooses the personal pronoun “her” instead of “it” to refer to the moon, uses the personal pronoun “him” to refer to bees in line 13, and uses “his” to refer to winter in line 17. The usage of personal pronouns shows that he recognizes the natural images as humans.

- Rhetorical Question: A rhetorical question is adopted to describe the main theme of the poem in the first two opening lines. Normally, winter coldness makes “land” unbearable in extremely cold winters, but the question mark at the beginning of this poem expresses Thoreau’s contrasting idea that the winter cold is so sweet and intoxicating as he marvels at whether this cold belongs to the land or not.

- Metaphor: Thoreau applied metaphor as a figure of speech to make a comparison to explain his idea of nature. For example, in line 16, when describing the ice crystals, Thoreau compares the crystallization process to the “shoot” of a plant, which entitles the winter coldness to a plant property, showing the poet’s love for plants and nature.

The rhetorical devices in the poem

*Pray to What Earth Does This Sweet Cold Belong* are shown in Table 2.

Rhetorical Devices	Poem lines	Explanation
<b>Personification</b>	1-2	Personifying the environmental image of “land”
	3	The moon goes up by leaps, her cheerful path
	5	Stars shine begot her way
	13	When evening overtakes him with his load
	17	Increase his rule by gentlest summer means
<b>Rhetorical question</b>	1-2	Pray to what earth does this sweet cold belong, which asks no duties and no conscience?
<b>Metaphor</b>	9	Under the hedge, where drift banks are their screen
	16	The crystals shoot and form, and winter slow.

Table 2: The rhetorical devices in the poem *Pray to What Earth Does This Sweet Cold Belong*.

In sum, there are three kinds of rhetorical techniques: personification, rhetorical question, and metaphor, that Thoreau chose to portray the harmony between humans and nature.

### 1.3 Themes Analysis

Based on the theme-rheme analysis and the thematic progression proposed by Halliday (1994), there are 27 themes in the poem *Pray to What Earth Does This Sweet Cold Belong*. Halliday (1994) defines the theme as the starting point of a clause, that is what the clause is about, and the remainder of the clause is the rheme. Furthermore, he proposes that theme and rheme can be chained into thematic progression to make texts coherent (Halliday, 1994). All 27 themes are the participant role theme and the thematic progression which are the derived themes, as shown in Table 3.

No.	Theme	Line
1	Earth	1, 2
2	Cold	1
3	The moon	3
4	Summer	4, 11, 17
5	Sky	4, 6
6	The star	5
7	The fields	6
8	Gleam	6
9	The shrubs	7
10	The snow dust	8
11	Silver light	8
12	Hedge	9
13	Banks	9
14	Screen	9
15	The titmice	10
16	Dreams	10
17	Night	11,14
18	The bee	12
19	Flower	12

20	Evening	13
21	Load	13
22	Brooksides	14
23	Adventure	15
24	The crystals	16
25	Winter	16
26	Rule	17
27	Means	17

Table 3: The themes in the poem *Pray to What Earth Does This Sweet Cold Belong*.

The above themes can be identified with 7 semantic domains by CA as follows:

**1. Nature:** The first semantic domain in this poem is the “nature” domain which comprises the environment sub-domain. This sub-domain can be divided further into another 7 sub-domains, which are:

**1.1 Animate:** titmice, bee.

**1.2 plant:** shrubs, flowers, hedge.

**1.3 celestial:** moon, star, sky.

**1.4 solid:**

**1.4.1 particle:** snow dust, crystal.

**1.4.2 land:** field, earth, brooksides, banks.

**1.5 season:** winter, summer.

**1.6 weather:** cold.

**1.7 light:** gleam, silver light.

**2. A flat panel:** There is 1 sub-domain, which is the screen.

**3. Experience:** There are 2 sub-domains, which are adventure and dream.

**4. Time:** There are 2 sub-domains, which are evening and night.

**5. Regulation:** There is 1 sub-domain, which is the rule.

**6. Method:** There is 1 sub-domain, which is the means.

**7. A heavy thing:** There is 1 sub-domain, which is load.

As for three kinds of analysis, structure analysis, rhetorical analysis, and theme analysis, it can be concluded that the ecological meaning expressed in the discourse of this poem involves the relationship between human beings, animals, plants, and other organisms in the natural environment, and most of the themes in the poem are of the nature theme.

## 2. The Network of Ecological Themes in this Poem.

From the componential analysis, we can draw the ecological philosophy themes’ network diagram of the ecological discourse in *Pray to What Earth Does This Sweet Cold Belong* written by Henry David Thoreau as in Table 4.

Ecological Themes	Semantic Domain	Sub-Domain	Sub-Domain	Expression	
Nature	Environment	Animate		Titmice, bee	
		Plant		Shrubs, flowers, hedge	
		Celestial		Moon, star, sky	
		Solid	Particle		Snow dust, crystal
			Land		Field, earth, brooksides, banks
		Season		Winter, summer	
		Weather		Cold	
Light		Gleam, silver light			

Table 4: The network of ecological themes in Pray to What Earth Does This Sweet Cold Belong

From Table 3, the network of ecological themes in this poem falls under the same semantic domain, which is the nature domain. Thoreau utilizes these themes to express the ecological meaning throughout his poem.

### Conclusion and Discussion

This study analyzed and interpreted the ecological themes expressed in the American Transcendentalism Literature, Pray to What Earth Does This Sweet Cold Belong, by Henry David Thoreau. It was found that the ecological meaning expressed in the discourse of this poem involves the harmonious relationship between humans and nature, and the prominent theme is the nature theme, which depicts the ecological meaning of the harmonious coexistence between humans and nature.

The nature theme that was found in the ecological discourses of Thoreau's poem, Pray to What Earth Does This Sweet Cold Belong, is in line with the findings of other ecological discourses of his poems. Sheng Jia's (2021) analysis of another of Thoreau's poems, Walden, from a Systemic Functional Perspective, has shown that Thoreau has expressed his equal attitude towards animals, plants, and non-human living beings while adopting a negative attitude to denounce human beings' blind material pursuit.

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