

North American Indian Ecological Traditions Reflected in Animal Dreams

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Abstract: Keeping harmony with nature is the essence of the native American Indian culture. This analysis underscores the North American Indian ecological traditions and mainly focuses on how the North American Indian people maintain a harmonious and balanced relationship with nature by efforts as reflected in *Animal Dreams*, Kingsolver's novel.

Keywords: North American Indian; Ecological tradition; Animal Dreams

Preface

Kingsolver is faithful to North American Indians' ecological ideas, so in her novel *Animal Dreams*, wise ecological traditions are reflected and shown extremely. Balance and harmony are North American Indian keys to the state of getting along well with nature. Followed by the introduction to North American Indians' ecological ideas, the paper mainly analyzes the harmonious relations between the North American Indians and nature.

1. North American Indians' ecological ideas

In *Animal Dreams*, people in Grace and other surrounding reservations try to obey the rule and keep a harmonious relationship with nature. They know well their position in whole nature community. In North American Indians' eyes, human is the guests of God, people should be polite enough, just behave well. If people can not cherish what have the nature give them, the nature will draw back what she had given.

First, North American Indians think they are permanent guests of nature. "We are on our own. The spirits have been good enough to let us live, here and use the utilities, and we're saying: we know how nice you are being. We appreciate the rain, we appreciate the sun, we appreciate the deer we took. Sorry if we messed up anything. You've gone to a lot of trouble, and we'll try to be good guests". Second, towards nature, North American Indian keeps a heartfelt gratitude. "Exactly like that. 'Thanks for letting me sleep on your coach. I took some beer out of the refrigerator, and I broke a coffee cup. Sorry, I hope it wasn't your favorite one'". Third, their traditional ecological ideas are intelligent. Loyd is a North American Indian who grew up on the nearby Reservation, he teaches Codi about North American Indian Cultures. With the explanation of Loyd, the readers can understand the traditional thoughts on nature of North American Indian. "I laughed because I understood 'in balance.' I would have called it 'keeping the peace,' or maybe 'remembering your place'"^[1].

2. Harmony with the nature

From the North American Indians' point of view, the world is fashioned from the chaos of nature — from nothingness, confusion, imbalance, and disarray. Traditional North American Indian sorties dramatize the movement from chaos to harmony, and in which, nature plays an important role in establishing the order and harmonious order and balance can be maintained only when one is very close to the nature.

2.1 Harmony with land and river

First, North American Indians viewed land as an essential part of the interrelated universe. The land is the source of all substance, including human beings and other creatures. Therefore, the maintenance of the harmonious relationship with the landscape is of essential importance to the Grace people in *Animal Dreams*. Kingsolver addresses her readers that the Native people consider themselves as an inseparable part or from ancestral land. Consequently, when home no longer exists, the self is incomplete. While in North American Indian's point of view, land is an important thing that is worth to die for, the reason is only that they have to live on land, they have to raise their family and make their community last go on. Land is not the symbol of property. In *Animal Dreams*, Loyd is a typical North American Indian, he nodded when Codi said that "people can't live without crops." We know that crops can not grow without the land, that it to say, the native people think the land is very important. People can plant all kinds of plants for their living. They know how to make the land environment recycle well: they love land, for land can provide them with crops, while crops provide nutrition for land after death.

Second, The setting of *Animal Dreams* is a rural and agricultural area, Grace. The ecological concerns come easily for the readers. The people of Grace depend on the land to live. The effects of river pollution are devastatingly visible in the fruit dropping, un-ripened, from the branches. The Grace women paid so many efforts just for one thing: to stop the river pollutions of Black Mine Company, so they can live. A river to a piece of land, it is just like the blood of one's body. Kingsolver states in *Animal Dreams* "The freckled ground was threaded with thin, branches lines of creeks, like veins in the back of a hand".

2.2 Harmony with animals

Barbara Kingsolver tells her readers the traditional ecological thoughts of North American Indians in *Animal Dreams*. People in Grace have a very harmonious relationship with animals. North American Indians never observe themselves as superior being, and pose animals under the yoke of subjugation. Moreover, they respect animals to such an extent that North American Indian idealize animals as their gods.

First, in *Animal Dreams*, the North American Indians' attitudes towards dogs can illustrate their respect and friendliness to animals. They think dogs have the same position with people. Kingsolver shows us this by the main character in his novel, Loyd, who is a typical North American Indian. When Codi has the doubt that if a dog could have an imagination, like a person or not, Loyd said: "it's the same with people. There's nothing sad about it. People dream about what they do when they're awake. God, when I used to work for Tia sorting the pecans I'd go to bed and dream about pecans, pecans, pecans." Here Loyd made a comparison between dog and himself, it shows dogs has the same position with human in this North American Indian's mind. Human and animals are equal, they have no any difference.

Second, peacock's role in North American Indian Indian's world is important. According to the story, the Gracela sisters brought their peacocks with them from Spain when they first came to the valley that was eventually named after them. Like the Gracela sisters, the peacocks thrived in Grace. They stand as the symbolic reminders of the Gracela sisters, the uniqueness of Grace, and the connections between its inhabitants. Also, thanks to the peacocks, the Stitch and Bitch Club succeeds in publicizing the plight of Grace. It is the feather of peacock that the grace women use to make some handicrafts decorations to sell for money, at the same time, to advertise in them. The peacocks also symbolize the importance of making use of the past in order to preserve the future. A dust-colored peafowl hopped onto the courtyard wall and then into the fig, rustling the leaves and warning off with a throaty, chirruping sound. She was awkward and heavy-bodied, no more flight-worthy than a helicopter. The inhabitants in Grace even have a holy eye towards peacock... for peacocks is pavo real, 'royal turkey'

2.3 Harmony with plants

Kingsolver uses her writing to draw the readers' attention to the plants. "I stood at the window looking out at the grove of trees that ran the length of the canyon. Plum, pear, apple. And quince, "The sky had faded from orange to pale pink, and the courtyard was dusky under the fig trees. Every night as it got dark, the vegetation around the house seemed to draw itself in closer, hugging the whitewashed walls, growing dense as a jungle." Readers can know that plants are rich. Not only the kinds of plants in Grace are various and rich, the people's love for plants is also well shown in this novel. They love plants so much to a extent that they think there are some plants seeds are kissed by God. It's also one kind of respect to nature, the same with human, plants are the parts of nature.

North American Indians hold a belief that plants are the source of food chain. While animals, lives depend on plants, humans depend on both animals and plants. After animals die, their bodies buried in earth become nutrition of plants. In North American Indian ecosphere, plants have an invisible power with natural surroundings. An ultimate democracy is operated in some North American Indians' villages in the southern part of American Continent. In those villages plants are treated as human where they even have right to speak and vote while villages are discussing human issues. Plants in those villages express their wills through ceremonies of dancing and religious rituals^[2].

3. Conclusion

Animal Dreams is a novel which contains description of nature beauty, ecological thoughts of North American Indians, harmonious relationship between people and nature, which is highly praised in North American Indian's ecosophy. By considering the present environmental crisis and frequent natural disasters, the author uses a real place named Grace in Arizona as an illustration. What we can learn from *Animal Dreams* is that people should keep a close and harmonious relation to nature, be polite to nature, although most people live in cities now. Actually cities are part of nature, too. As long as humans share their lofty conscience and concern to other living creatures, natural equality would not beyond reach. "Knowledge was inherent in all things. The world was a library and its books were the stones, leaves, grass, brooks, and the birds and animals that shared, alike with us, the storms and blessings of earth"

References:

[1] Barbara Kingsolver. *Animal Dreams*. New York: Harper Collins Publisher Inc.2003

[2] Kent Nerburn. *He Wisdom of the Native Icans*. Publishers Group West,1999