

Research on the Humanistic Theme in D. H. Lawrence's Works

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Abstract

The genuine poets care about the agony and sufferings of the masses. In poetry, fiction and letters, D. H. Lawrence shows his deep sympathy with the life of the common people. He depicts their life, cares about their fate, concerns about their sufferings, feels sad for their numbness, worries about their living conditions and future and craves for their resuming life force. Lawrence attacks the mechanical civilization that causes the alienation of many common people, speaks for the common people and regards himself as one of them. And he tries to arouse the reader's resonance of the sufferings of the common people. From Lawrence's works, the reader can sense Lawrence's kindness and compassion. Sympathy with the masses has become a theme that underlies some of Lawrence's works. This paper intends to conduct research on the humanistic theme in Lawrence's works.

Key words: Research; Humanistic; Theme; D. H. Lawrence; Works

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1. INTRODUCTION

The real writers must be those who do not stick to the ego and personal gains and losses, but care about the sufferings of others, the fate of mankind and the value of their own lives. Their works are filled with sympathy with human sufferings, which embodies their humanistic

idea and compassion. William Shakespeare, William Wordsworth, Emily Dickinson, Charles Dickens and Tagore are all this kind of writers.

The humanistic idea in D. H. Lawrence's works has been neglected by scholars. This paper intends to study the humanistic theme in D. H. Lawrence's works.

2. THE HUMANISTIC IDEAS IN D. H. LAWRENCE'S POETRY

According to Liu Xizai, a litterateur in China's Qing Dynasty, "The realm of poetry is determined by moral standing." (Chen, 1998) According to Wang Guowei, a famous Chinese scholar with international reputation in modern times, "The most important element in a consideration of tz'u is ching-chieh. If a tz'u has ching-chieh, it will naturally achieve a lofty form and naturally possess eminent lines." (Wang, 1998) A poet's character, accomplishment and spiritual strength will surely be melted into his poems. Only the poets with noble character and spirit can create the poetry with great value.

Emily Dickinson, a famous American poetess, writes in her poem "If I Can Stop One Heart from Breaking":

If I can stop one heart from breaking,
I shall not live in vain;
If I can ease one life the aching,
Or cool one pain,
Or help one fainting robin
Unto his nest again,
I shall not live in vain. (Dickinson, 1994)

In an era when morality declines and caring for others' sufferings has become weak in the minds of ordinary people, the author puts forth caring for others' sufferings as a sufficient condition for the value of life.

The research on D. H. Lawrence's poetry has not been focused on by scholars for quite a long time. From D. H. Lawrence's poetry, one can see his great care for and sympathy with the sufferings of the common

people, especially those who have been materialized and merchandised, those who have become slaves to money, wage, capital, and those who have lost their natural instinct and vigor and become robots in mechanical civilization.

In the poems such as "The People", "We Die Together", "What Have They Done to You", "Cry of the Masses", etc., Lawrence expresses his deep sympathy with common labors. In "The People", Lawrence regards himself as one of those common labors, and regards them as "flesh of my flesh". He feels painful for them when he sees them stream past in the working quarters, enslaved and played with by the machine, yet he is unable to cut away the shackles for them:

Ah the people, the people!
surely they are flesh of my flesh!

When, in the streets of the working quarters,
they stream past, stream past, going to work:

then, when I see the iron hooked in their faces,
their poor, their fearful faces,

then I scream in my soul, for I know I cannot
cut the iron hook out of their faces, that makes them so drawn,
nor cut the invisible wires of steel that pull them

back and forth to work,
back and forth, to work

like fearful and corpse-like fishes hooked and being played
by some malignant fisherman on an unseen, safe shore
where he does not choose to land them yet, hooked fishes of the
factory world. (Lawrence, 1994)

In the poem "We Die Together", Lawrence feels very depressed and can't even live on when thinking of millions of industrial workers with a heavy heart. He feels he himself is also living dead, just like them, enslaved by machine. He feels as if he has been wrapped in the living death of his fellow-men. From this poem, one can clearly sense Lawrence's sadness and his sympathy with the common industrial workers in his country:

Oh, when I think of the industrial millions, when I see some of them,
a weight comes over me heavier than leaden linings of coffins
and I almost cease to exist, weighed down to extinction and sunk into
depression that almost blots me out.

Then I say to myself: Am I also dead? is that the truth?
Then I know that with so many dead men in mills
I too am almost dead.
I know the unliving factory-hand, living-dead millions
is unliving me, living-dead me,
I, with them, am living dead, mechanical enslaved at the machine.
And enshrouded in the vast corpse of the industrial millions,
embedded in them, I look out on the sunshine of the South.

And though the pomegranate has red flowers outside the window
and oleander is hot with perfume under the afternoon sun
and I am 'Il Signore' and they love me here,
yet I am a mill-hand in Leeds

and the death of the Black Country is upon me
and I am wrapped in the lead of a coffin-lining, the living death
of my fellow-men. (Lawrence, 1994, pp.522-23)

In the poem "What Have They Done to You", Lawrence repeatedly shouts out his anger towards those so-called saviors who have deprived the industrial labors, the masses, of their natural instincts, stolen their body and passion, and even destructed their intelligence with worse education and worthless information. From this poem, one can strongly sense Lawrence's mercy with the masses in his country:

What have they done to you, men of the masses creeping back
and forth to work?

What have they done to you, the saviours of the people, oh what
have they saved you from, while they pocketed the money?

...

They took away, oh they took away your man's native instincts
and intuitions
and gave a board-school education, newspapers, and cinema.

They stole your body from you, and left you an animated carcass
to work with, and nothing else:

unless goggling eyes, to goggle at the film,
and a board-school brain, stuffed up with the ha'penny press.
Your instincts gone, your intuition gone, your passion dead,
Oh carcass with a board-school mind and a ha'penny-newspaper
intelligence,
what have they done to you, what have they done to you, oh
what have they done to you?

Oh look at my fellow-men, oh look at them
the masses! Oh, what has been done to them? (Lawrence, 1994,
p.523)

The dominant mood of the poem "Cry of the Masses" is anger. This poem gives detailed accounts of the mechanical lives of the masses and expresses their agony. The poem takes the masses as its protagonists and these protagonists directly utter their painful cries. The masses are crying for their freedom. They have been deprived of every bit of vigor and now they have become the walking dead. They have the appearance of the walking dead. They behave like the walking dead. Their astounding cries seem to be reverberating in the world. These cries go through time and space, reach the ears of different generations and strike a chord in their heart:

Give us back, Oh give us back
Our bodies before we die!

Trot, trot, trot, corpse-body, to work.
Chew, chew, chew, corpse-body, at the meal.
Sit, sit, sit, corpse-body, in the car.
Stare, stare, stare, corpse-body, at the film.
Listen, listen, listen, corpse-body, to the wireless.
Talk, talk, talk, corpse-body, newspaper talk.
Sleep, sleep, sleep, corpse-body, factory-hand sleep.
Die, die, die, corpse-body, doesn't matter!

Must we die, must we die
bodiless, as we lived?
Corpse-anatomies with ready-made sensations!
Corpse-anatomies, that can work.

Work, work, work,
tattle, rattle, rattle,
sit, sit, sit,
finished, finished, finished —

Ah no, Ah no! before we finally die
or see ourselves as we are, and go mad,
give us back our bodies, for a day, for a single day,
to stamp the earth and feel the wind, like wakeful men again.

Oh, even to know the last wild wincing of despair,
aware at last that our manhood is utterly lost,
give us back our bodies for one day. (Lawrence, 1994, p.491)

Poetry should not be confined to the poet's own personal life. Through these foregoing poems, one can clearly sense Lawrence's sympathy with the masses, with their destiny and their outlet. And the sincere sympathy with others is a kind of essential quality that a great poet should possess. William Wordsworth, Emily Dickinson and some other great poets all possess this kind of quality. And their impressive poems bring the masses much consolation and make them feel not so alone.

Lawrence's "The Collier's Wife", a poem written in dialect which is always spoken by the lower classes, also contains sincere sympathy with the sufferings of the common people. As a common collier's wife, she has to endure the worries, hardships and misfortune. When hearing her husband's being injured in the pit, she cannot help complaining about the unfairness of fate. Yet life has taught her to get tough. At least she needs to appear tough. Most probably, deep in her heart, she is still a fragile woman, yet she needs to appear tough, or pretend to be tough, for she has a family to support and her duty to shoulder. Her kid looks to her and her husband needs her care. When her child can't help crying when hearing the accident that happens to his father, she prevents it. She cannot show her fragility before her child. Despite her complaints, she still bravely faces the uncertainty of the future and the hardships that come with her husband's being injured. The image of a poor, kind and tough woman leaves a vivid impression on the readers:

...

'Your mester's 'ad a accident
An' they ta'ain' 'im i' th' ambulance
Ter Nottingham.' — Eh dear o' me,
If 'e's not a man for mischance!

Wheer's 'e hurt this time, lad?
— I dunna know,
They on'y tow'd me it wor bad —
It would be so!

Out o' my way, childt! dear o' me, wheer
'Ave I put 'is clean stockin's an' shirt?
Goodness knows if they'll be able
To take off 'is pit-dirt!

An' what a moan 'e'll make! there niver
Was such a man for a fuss

If anything ailed 'im; at any rate
I shan't 'ave 'im to nuss.

I do 'ope as it's not so very bad!
Eh, what a shame it seems
As some should ha'e hardly a smite o' trouble
An' others 'as reams!

...

An' a fork an' a spoon 'e'll want - an' what else?
I s'll never catch that train!
What a traipse it is, if a man gets hurt!
I sh'd think 'e'll get right again. (Lawrence, 1994, pp.11-13)

After reading this poem, one can't help feeling worried for the present conditions and future of the collier's family, concerning about their sufferings and caring about their fate. How will they survive? Under such circumstances, how will they support the child to receive education? And what kind of education can the child receive? These unsolvable questions will inevitably linger in the minds of readers, arousing their sympathy.

Lawrence's sympathizing with the lower classes can also be seen from some other poems of his. In the poem titled "After the Opera", he depicts the barman like this:

But when I meet the weary eyes
The reddened, aching eyes of the bar-man with thin arms,
I am glad to go back to where I came from. (Lawrence, 1994, p.37)

It shows that Lawrence thinks of himself as a member of the lower class. He is willing to stand with the workers at the bottom, unwilling to become a member of the bourgeoisie. This idea of his is also expressed in the poem "Red-Herring". Though he is now "a member of the bourgeoisie", yet he hopes to become intimate with the maid who speaks dialect and brings him his tea, for he treats himself as one of them.

In his poem "Kill Money", Lawrence calls on people to get rid of the fetters of money and not to be slaves of it:

Kill money, put money out of existence.
It is a perverted instinct, a hidden thought
which rots the brain, the blood, the bones, the soul.
(Lawrence, 1994, p.401)

From the foregoing poems illustrated above, readers can clearly sense Lawrence's sympathy with the lower classes and his criticism of mechanical civilization. These poems clearly present his humanistic ideas.

3. THE HUMANISTIC IDEAS IN D. H. LAWRENCE'S FICTION AND LETTERS

Lawrence's poetry is closely related to his fiction. The humanistic ideas shown in Lawrence's poetry can also be detected from much of his fiction.

In some of Lawrence's novels, Lawrence's sympathy with the masses can also be seen clearly. In *The Rainbow*,

Lawrence's sympathy with the common people, the industrial masses, is expressed through Ursula's perspective:

She saw the stiffened bodies of the colliers, which seemed already enclosed in a coffin. She saw their unchanging eyes, the eyes of those who are buried alive... (Lawrence, 2003)

And in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, the images of the common people, the industrial masses, presented through Connie's perspective, are shocking and pathetic:

...the colliers trailing from the pits, grey-black, distorted, one shoulder higher than the other, slurring their heavy ironshod boots. Underground grey faces, whites of eyes rolling, necks cringing from the pit roof, shoulders out of shape. Men! Men! Alas, in some ways patient and good men. In other ways, non-existent. Something that men *should* have been bred and killed out of them. Yet they were men. They begot children. One might bear a child to them. Terrible, terrible thought! They were good and kindly. But they were only half, only the grey half of a human being. As yet, they were "good." But even that was the goodness of their halfness. Supposing the dead in them ever rose up! But no, it was too terrible to think of. Connie was absolutely afraid of the industrial masses. They seemed so *weird* to her. A life with utterly no beauty in it, no intuition, always "in the pit." (Lawrence, 2014)

The short story "Odour of Chrysanthemums" also contains deep sympathy with miners' stratum. Under Lawrence's writing, the images of miners completely destroyed by mechanical civilization are vividly presented to readers:

Miners, single, trailing and in groups, passed like shadows diverging home. (Lawrence, 2011, p.1)

Under Lawrence's writing, the miners are dreary, numb, piteous, like shadows. It is the mechanical civilization that deprives them of their vigor, energy, inspiration and passion for life. Under the destruction of machines, the light of their life becomes dim. Their previous striking personality also becomes dim. They seem to have been welded into a discus and then dissolved into a grey flow, flowing unnoticeably in the industrialized world. What they leave behind is only a grey shadow:

Darkness was settling over the spaces of the railway and trucks: the miners, in grey sombre groups, were still passing home. The winding-engine pulsed hurriedly, with brief pauses. (Lawrence, 2011, p.4)

Different from the miner injured in *Sons and Lovers* and the miner injured in "The Collier's Wife", the hero in "Odour of Chrysanthemums" loses his life in the pit.

Facing his death, his wife has to continue her miserable life in deep loneliness and agony. She has to be strong. She has two kids to foster.

In a letter to Charles Wilson on December 28, 1928, Lawrence expresses his worries about the living conditions of miners and his dissatisfaction and even hatred toward the whole scheme of things of England:

I read with shame of the miners' 'Hampers' and the 'Fund'. It's a nice thing to make them live on charity and crumbs of cake, when what they want is manly independence. The whole scheme of things is unjust and rotten, and money is just a disease upon humanity. It's time there was an *enormous* revolution-not to instal soviets, but to give life itself a chance. What's the good of an industrial system piling up rubbish, while nobody lives. We want a revolution not in the name of money or work or any of that, but of life - and let money and work be as casual in human life as they are in a bird's life, damn it all. Oh, it's time the whole thing was changed, absolutely. And the men will have to do it - you've got to smash money and this beastly possessive spirit. I get more revolutionary every minute, but for life's sake. (Lawrence, 1978, p.173)

In fact, early on December 27, 1915, in a letter to Lady Ottoline Morrell in Ripley, Derbyshire, Lawrence expresses his deep pain and sense of loss when seeing the people damaged by mechanical civilization:

We are here in Ripley - suffering rather. It is a cruel thing to go back into the past; to turn our backs on the future and go back to that which one has been... Altogether the life here is so dark and violent; it all happens in the senses, powerful and rather destructive: no mind nor mental consciousness, unintellectual. These men are passionate enough, sensuous, dark - God, how all my boyhood comes back - so violent, so dark, the mind always dark and without understanding, the senses violently active. It makes me sad beyond words. These men, whom I love so much - and the life has such a power over me - they understand mentally so horribly: only industrialism, only wages and money and machinery. They can't think anything else. All their collective thinking is in those terms only. They are utterly unable to appreciate any pure, ulterior truth: only this industrial - mechanical - wage idea. This they will act from - nothing else. (Lawrence, 1978, pp.93-94)

And in a letter written a little earlier to Lady Cynthia Asquith, Lawrence criticizes people's possessive desire for material wealth and money. It is like a horrible disease. In Lawrence's eyes, this is resulted from people's being poisoned and materialized by the mechanical civilization. Lawrence hopes that this disease can be soon cleaned away:

It is this mass of unclean world that we have superimposed on the clean world that we cannot bear. When I looked back, out of the clearness of the open evening, at this Littlehampton, dark and amorphous like a bad eruption on the edge of the land, I was so sick I felt I could not come back: all these little amorphous houses like an eruption, a disease on the clean earth; and all of them full of such a diseased spirit, every landlady harping on her money, her furniture, every visitor harping on his latitude of escape from money and furniture. The whole thing is like an active disease, fighting out the health. One watches them on the seashore, all the people, and there is something pathetic, almost wistful in them, as if they wished that their lives did not add up to this scaly nullity of possession, but as if they could not escape. It is a dragon that has devoured us all: these obscene, scaly houses, this insatiable struggle and desire to possess, to possess always and in spite of everything, this need to be an

owner, lest one be owned. It is too horrible. One can no longer live with people: it is too hideous and nauseating. Owners and owned, they are like the two sides of a ghastly disease. One feels a sort of madness come over one, as if the world had become hell. But it is only superimposed: it is only a temporary disease. It can be cleaned away... One must destroy the spirit of money, the blind spirit of possession. (Lawrence, 1978, pp.85-86)

In *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, through his mouthpiece Mellors, Lawrence expresses his anger towards the mechanical civilization and his sympathy with the labours who have been enslaved by the machines:

Though it's a shame, what's been done to people these last hundred years: men turned into nothing but labour-insects, and all their manhood taken away, and all their real life. I'd wipe the machines off the face of the earth again, and end the industrial epoch absolutely, like a black mistake. (Lawrence, 2014, pp.16-17)

Despite his anger and disappointment, Lawrence still harbors hope for the future. He craves for a new world. He hopes for the coming of a new life, a new spring, the spring in the souls of people:

It is the new year one wants so badly, let the old die altogether, completely. It is only the new spring I care about, opening the little buds that seem like stone, in the souls of the people. They must open and a new world begins. But first there is the shedding of the old, which is so slow and so difficult, like a sickness. I find it so difficult to let the old life go, and to wait for the new life to take form. But it begins to take form now. It is not any more such a fierce question of shedding away. (Lawrence, 1981)

4. CONCLUSION

From the foregoing illustrations, one can clearly see Lawrence's reprimand of the mechanical civilization and his deep sympathy with the masses, with the common people, whose spirit has been poisoned, polluted and even destructed by machines. And one can also clearly see his deep worries toward the living conditions and the future of mankind. The foregoing poems and the quotations from Lawrence's other kinds of works truthfully present Lawrence's humanistic idea.

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