



Harmonious Concordance of Men, Women and Nature: A Study of Lawrence's Ecological Philosophy in His *Lady Chatterley's Lover*

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Abstract

D. H. Lawrence stands as a talented and unconventional writer in the twentieth century English Literature. *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is his last novel which embodies his mature thought. The novel earns him both great fame and strong criticism. In spite of the controversies over Lawrence's daring description of sexuality, the novel stands the test of time and becomes a classic of literature. The paper intends to reveal Lawrence's ecological philosophy in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. By depicting harmonious nature and harmonious sex relationship, Lawrence presents his ecological philosophy. In the novel, harmonious nature is a silent protest against industrial civilization reflected by the contrast between Wragby and the wood. The harmonious sex relationship in nature is a great liberation of suppressed human nature. The disharmonious relationship between Clifford and Connie is like the deadwood lacking vitality, while the harmonious sex relationship between Mellors and Connie is like intertwining shoots which give mutual supports and vigor. *Lady Chatterley's Lover* reflects Lawrence's far-reaching ecological views and his concern about the whole ecosphere which embodies his strong social responsibility.

Key words: *Lady Chatterley's Lover*; Ecocriticism; Harmonious nature; Harmonious sex

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INTRODUCTION

David Herbert Lawrence is one of the most prolific and important writers in 20th century. In the late 1950s the critic A. Alvarez judged: "The only native English poet of any importance to survive the First World War was D. H. Lawrence." (Greenblatt et al., 2013, p.1266) His birthplace Eastwood, a small town with the environment polluted, cast a shadow over his childhood, so Eastwood became Lawrence's grey memory. However, Hags nearby Eastwood was a farm with idyllic scenery and vitality.¹ He called it "the country of my heart"² which was a setting for many of his novels. Meanwhile, because of his matrimonial dispute and his hatred toward industrial civilization, Lawrence began what he termed his "savage pilgrimage".³ These experiences affected the formation of his ecological thoughts.

Lady Chatterley's Lover is the last novel and also the most disputed work of D. H. Lawrence. The controversy surrounding the novel springs primarily from Lawrence's view of the sexual act as a source

¹ Sagar once described: "In summer, when the foliage is thick enough to shut out the noise of traffic and machinery, and the natural scents hold their own against soot and sulphur, to walk from Eastwood to the Hags Farm is to step abruptly from one world into another, from the ugly urban industrial world into the old agrarian England with forests." See Sagar, Keith. (1979). *D. H. Lawrence: A calendar of his works* (p.7). Manchester: Manchester University Press.

² Letter to Rolf Gardiner, 17 March 1928. Aldous Huxley (ed.) 1932. *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*. London: Heinemann. It was while writing *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, in Florence, in December 1926, that he wrote to Rolf Gardiner, directing him through his past and, in the process, changing the actual physical countryside of Nottinghamshire into the semi-mythical realm of Lawrence country.

³ Savage pilgrimage refers to voluntary exile. He spent much of his life with his wife traveling and living all over the world. From 1912, this wanderlust took him to many countries including Australia, Italy, the United States, Mexico and the south of France until he died abroad. See more information in Carswell, C. (1981). *The Savage Pilgrimage*. Cambridge University Press.

of salvation and renewal (Fjagesund, 1992). In the novel, Lawrence describes a lot of detailed and direct sex scenes. Lawrence wrote the novel three times. The sexual passages in the first two versions are less boldly explicit than in the final version (Ward, 1981, p.303). The third version is the most widely known one. At first, the British government banned it from public circulation. Many years later, the ban was lifted. The novel was initially published in private editions in Florence, Italy. Not until 1960 was an unexpurgated edition published openly in the United States due to the success of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1960).⁴ The publication of unexpurgated *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is considered a turning point in the history of the free expression and open discussion of sex in popular culture, which Lawrence appears to represent the modern ideals of literary integrity fighting against a hypocritical social system, and of openness in releasing the discussion of sex from cultural shame (Baldick, 2001, pp.262-263). After Lawrence dies many years later, the novel reclaims its status as a classic of British literature, which should be read "for its literary artistry—for the effective of its structure, characterization, imagery, allusion, and other technical matter" (Jackson, 1998, p.23). The recognition is a confirmation of the value of true art and a promotion of D. H. Lawrence's position in the 20th century British literature. F. R. Leavis (1955) thinks that Lawrence brings "the insight, the wisdom, the revived and re-educated feeling for health we desperate need as our civilization goes" (p.69). Also, James Hemming comments that "the content of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is an antidote, a positive antidote to the shallow superficial values of sex which are widely current today and which are now corrupting the attitude of young people towards sex" (Baldick, 2001, p.262). Later, many studies have been conducted on Lawrence and *Lady Chatterley's Lover*.

This paper attempts to explore Lawrence's views in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* from the perspective of ecocriticism. In this novel, he not only describes the worsening of ecological environment, but also shapes characters to face the problem by rebuilding harmonious man-and-nature relationship and harmonious sex relationship between men and women. Interpreting his novel from ecocriticism has its realistic meaning and educational significance, for readers can not only

⁴ In 1960, to mark the 30th anniversary of D. H. Lawrence's death, Penguin Books decided to publish seven of his titles including the unexpurgated edition of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. For having published this book, Penguin Books was prosecuted by the Crown Under the Obscene Publications Act 1959. The case of the Crown versus Penguin Books opened on Friday, October 21, 1960. It was a six-day trial at the Old Bailey. On the 2 November 1960, the jury passed a "Not Guilty" verdict. Penguin Books had successfully resisted an attempt by the British Director of Public Prosecutions to prevent them offering an unexpurgated edition to the general public.

dig deep into the abundant ecophilosophy implied in his work, but also get warning so as to develop the ecological consciousness, form a good habit and brainstorm possible solutions to protect our environment.

1. HARMONIOUS NATURE: A SILENT PROTEST AGAINST INDUSTRIAL CIVILIZATION

Lawrence's works represent his hatred for the dehumanizing effects of modernity and industrialization and his longing for the idyllic life. He is a writer severely criticizing the industrial civilization which devitalizes and dehumanizes modern man and he is also an advocate for man's return to nature to gain humanity. In his opinion, it is just because of Industrial Revolution that the beauty of nature disappears. Industrial civilization destroys the flourish forests, human being's beautiful living environment and old harmonious England. Lawrence, as a humanist writer with a strong sense of responsibility, expresses a deep love for the natural world and has unique understanding of man-and-nature relationship. In *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, criticism on industrial civilization is clearly reflected. Industrial Revolution neglects the connection between man and nature. In England, people suffer greatly from the industrial exploitation and mechanical destruction in Lawrence's contemporary time.

In *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, the living place of Connie and Clifford—Wragby is dirty and ugly. It is a mirror reflecting their sorrowful fate. The human failure is almost absorbed in the quivering joy of the earth, the vibration of the non-human world that surrounds them (Hough, 1956, p.70). The exploitation of mine makes the environment polluted and the air is no longer fresh, just like the description in the novel:

Its ugly are unbelievable and not to be thought about. From the rather dismal rooms at Wragby she heard the rattle-rattle of the screens at the pit, the puff of the winding-engine, the clink-clink of shunting trucks, and the horse little whistle of the colliery locomotives. (Lawrence, 1996, p.14)

Connie feels she is living underground. Her world at Wragby is "an enclosed and barren one, a kind of cocoon 'mechanical cleanliness' and 'mechanical order'" (Jae-kyung, 2002, p.196).

In order to pursue money and high-level living standard, human immoderately exploits nature "into the orbit of the mathematical order of world—commerce, industrialization" (Bate, 2000, p.257). The dirty and ugly Wragby highlights the effect of noisy industrial development on the destruction of the quiet and beautiful nature. Human's destruction makes nature in a state of devastation and human lose vitality. In the novel, Lawrence makes readers realize the alienation of industrial

civilization and human nature. Therefore, Lawrence has to sigh sorrowfully:

This is history. One England blots out another. The mines had made the hills wealthy. Now they were blotting them out, as they had already blotted out the cottages. The industrial England blots out the agricultural England. One meaning blots out another. The New England blots out the old England. And the continuity is not organic, but mechanical. (Lawrence, 1996, pp.209-210)

In the eyes of Lawrence, nature is a silent protest against industrial civilization. By showing its opposition to industrial civilization, nature has become a spokesperson for herself and for those who have been silent. In Lawrence's opinion, nature, this magical world, is tranquil and colorful. He regards nature as the Garden of Eden where people can escape from reality and suffering. In Lawrence's childhood, he had tried to escape from his home-Eastwood and find a pure land -Haggs. In *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, the wood symbolizes his love for Haggs and the old England which carries the most significant meaning. It not only refers to the energetic force in it, but also implies a way of life returning to one's instinct. The wood was described as a habitat of natural life and a pure land without mechanized damage. The wood has a kind of silent vitality teeming with natural life and beauty. The wood appeals directly to Connie's senses. In the wood, she finds her tranquility and peace. She often walks to the wood, breathing the fresh air and enjoying the beautifully natural view. By escaping to the wood, Connie eases the suffering of the outer world. Essentially, she escapes into a world of pastoral innocence, a world characterized by seclusion, simplicity, natural beauty, and a rejection of money and power (Ellis & Ornella, 1992, p.115). Connie can reduce her pain and despair by escaping to the world of innocence and simplicity. The wood is a kind of Garden of Eden in which Connie wants to live. It is the garden where she is totally free and forgets the outer world. It is the garden where she prepares herself for her awakening. The wood, the epitome of the natural world, is also the birthplace of the love between Connie and Mellors. They become natural creatures in the wood where they can love instinctively and happily.

The tranquil and beautiful wood contrasts with the noisy and ugly Wragby. Wragby is a world where it is full of money and greed and controlled by the machines while the wood is a world where "the first dandelions make suns, the first daisies so white. Everywhere the bud-knots and the leap of life" (Lawrence, 1996, p.222). The wood is not only the paradise which is full of vitality and hope but also the pure land in the industrial civilization, so it is natural for Connie to go to the wood when she wants to find her existence and save her withered youth. By the contrast between Wragby and the wood, Lawrence expresses his consistent

thought: Only by avoiding the industrial pollution and returning to nature can man restore their vim and vigor.

Lawrence once said: "What we want is to destroy our false, inorganic connections, especially those related to money, and reestablish the living organic connections with the cosmos, the sun and the earth, with mankind and nation and family" (Lawrence, 1974, p.149). He proposes that the industrial civilization damages the beautiful nature, suppresses human being's instinct and destroys the relationship between man and nature. With the development of industrialization, the problems become more and more serious. Only through maintaining harmonious relationship with nature can man get vitality and rebirth. From the natural world, man will be able to recover his life force and regain his vitality. In the opening paragraph, Lawrence states "Ours is a tragic age, so we refuse to take it tragically. The cataclysm has happened, we are among the ruins, we start to build up new little habitats, to have new little hopes" (Lawrence, 1996, p.1).

Lawrence expresses his intention to search for the salvation of the "tragic age" and find salvation for modern man. In the novel, he seeks new hope among the ruins. The novel ends with a letter written from Mellors to Connie. Although Mellors and Connie live through numerous difficulties, the signal of a bright future is reflected in Mellors' letter which contains hope—the return of human nature and the realization of ecological beauty. In the letter, Lawrence wrote

If you could tell them that living and spending is not the same thing! But it is no good. If only they were educated to live instead of earn and spend, they could manage very happily on twenty-five shillings. Then they would not need money. And that is the only way to solve the industrial problem: Train the people to be able to live and live in handsomeness, without needing to spend. (Ibid., p.408)

This is Lawrence's hope expressed by Mellors' letter. At the same time, he understands that it is difficult for all humans to live like that, "You cannot do it. They are all one-track minds nowadays" (Ibid.). Lawrence recognizes that the economy of capitalism restricts their life, but he also suggests that the good hope can be gained. Just like Mellors' love with Connie, Mellors' hope is still alive, "They would be alive and frisky, and acknowledge the great god Pan. He is the only god for the masses, forever" (Ibid., p.409). This is not only the hope of Mellors, the hope of Lawrence, but also the hope of ecological construction and recovery. People cannot change environment, but people can master the law to adapt to the environment. This is Lawrence's yell from the heart in his final time. Lawrence believes nature is the salvation for modern man. Man can regain vitality and get happiness only when he throws off the shackles of modern industrial civilization and returns to the natural world.

2. THE HARMONIOUS SEX RELATIONSHIP IN NATURE: A GREAT LIBERATION OF SUPPRESSED HUMAN NATURE

As a significant human nature, sexuality is an important part of literature. Lawrence insists on boldly describing sexuality as part of the novel. "I want men and women to be able to think sex," D. H. Lawrence once said—"fully, completely, honestly, and cleanly." Lawrence spares no effort to make people realize the loveliness of sex. He wants to change people's attitude toward sex which can be recognized as beautiful and clean, the highest expression of union between male and female. His work *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is a good illustration.⁵ Lawrence stresses the connection between sexual love and nature, and the unity between sexual love and spiritual love. In Lawrence's opinion, the sexual love that is isolated from nature and lack of spiritual union is doomed to be a tragedy like deadwood while only the sexual love that is close to nature and spiritually interlinked is harmonious and consummate like the intertwining shoots. A body's connection to another in mutually sexual tenderness is the only possible vigorous relationship in this highly alienated civilization, which makes people rebirth and gain self-achievement. In short, the description of sex in the novel is by no means a simple pleasure, but is a representation of one's own to sublimation, reflecting the author's implication of the ecology.

In the late 19th century, England was in a transformative period from agricultural society to industrial society. Industrial Revolution with the changes of technology and economy is "a very long term process" (Ashton, 1961, p.1), which changes people's life totally. In the novel, Clifford is not only the spokesperson of industrial society, but also the victim of it. Clifford is forever paralyzed from the hips down due to the war which makes him lose the sexual capacity. Because of the war, he is impotent physically and his whole life is completely changed. He has no life in the novel other than as the symbolic manifestation of the mechanical will (Kilvert, 1984, p.112). Clifford loses his vitality and pursues the "bitch-goddess Success". He is preoccupied with business and social matters, whereas Connie craves love and company. He completely neglects Connie's feelings and suffering. He is selfish and weak in treating his love. Clifford is socially boorish, insensitive to nature, physically impotent and spiritually passionless. Clifford refuses to admit that sex plays an important part in marriage and thinks sex is unnecessary. In Chapter 5, Connie and Clifford have a conversation in the wood.

⁵ As an "essentially philosophical book", it is well illustrated that *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is "a serious attempt to bring them [body and soul, the male and the female] back into a balanced relationship". See Moore, H. T., & Roberts, W. (1988). *D. H. Lawrence* (p.98). London: Thames and Hudson.

He says to Connie that in order to have a son to inherit Wragby she can have a child by another man only if the man belongs to the upper-middle class. He treats Connie coldly in a utilitarian purpose making Connie unpleasant. The relationship between Clifford and Connie is disharmonious like deadwood. Both of them can not get vitality from each other. Even if their emotional life is hollow like deadwood, they maintain the marriage which is not a happy one. As the deadwood is in disharmony with beautiful nature, the relationship between Clifford and Connie is disharmonious which generates disintegrative energy.

From the same perspective, Lawrence describes the relationship between Mellors and his former wife Bertha Coutts, which is also like deadwood. The irony of Bertha's desire for naked body is implied between the lines. Bertha is another form of "self-centered" during the sex relationship, just as Mellors describes: "It was a low kind of self-will in her, a raving sort of self-will, like in a woman who drinks" (Lawrence, 1996, p. 273). Mellors is flooded with her crazy requests and cannot feel his own existence. Mellors and Bertha break the natural harmony and completely lose the spiritual meaning of this process. In the opinion of Lawrence, combining sexuality and spirituality is a symbol of the life force. Unlike Clifford and Connie who have not sex, Mellors and Bertha have sexual relationship. However, their relationship is the same as that of Clifford and Connie which is not harmonious like the deadwood in nature. They are only participants in physical relationship, not the spiritual companions to each other.

Lawrence advocates that a balanced relationship between man and woman can restore humanity and joy to their lives. Man and woman can save each other. Instead of domination and surrender, they can become a part of the other. The relationship between Mellors and Connie is an illustration. Like intertwining shoots, Mellors and Connie do not dominate the other, but give mutual support. They are bonded by the vital and profound sexual relationship. Mellors and Connie are both not living before they came into contact with each other. By their harmonious sexuality, both Connie and Mellors get rebirth and self-achievement.

Like intertwining shoots, Mellors and Connie do not dominate the other, but give mutual support. They are bonded by the vital and profound sexual relationship. "Mellors was not living before he came into contact with Connie any more than she was—they each live from their contact with the other" (Croom, 1993, p.10). By their harmonious sexuality, both Connie and Mellors get rebirth and self-achievement.

Connie is one branch of the intertwining shoots. She is very much a complex character—a combination of strong femininity and insecure vulnerability. Connie had an aesthetically nontraditional breeding. After she marries to Clifford, she feels oppressive and constrained.

She is aware of a growing restlessness. She begins "to abandon Clifford, and lies prone in the bracken. To get away from the house...She must get away from the house and everybody. The wood was her one refuge, her sanctuary" (Lawrence, 1996, p.23). The natural scenery awakens her physical responses and the feeling of freedom. She is in fact self-salvaged in the wood before she meets Mellors and realizes the revival of sensual consciousness. Her attachment to nature makes her know more about male and the sexual experience. After she meets Mellors in the wood, her self-awareness is completely aroused.

Mellors is the other branch of the intertwining shoots. He is the human form of the natural vitality in the wood. He embodies the same qualities that characterize the wood, so Connie's attachment to the wood prepares her for her attachment to Mellors. It is said that Connie is deeply attracted by Mellors' ecological harmony with nature. Many scholars think Connie is a sleeping beauty, and she needs a man to awake her.⁶ Connie's true sense of sexual rebellion is aroused when she sees Mellors washing himself. His body represents a sense of aliveness and power. It attracts Connie which makes her break away from the past life and begins to be reborn. His vitality is associated with a delicate tenderness. The physical tenderness between man and woman is the "beginning of life" (Middleton, 1931, p.342). Tenderness is the premise for man and woman to break the bound imposed by the mechanized and civilized society and build sexual harmony. Mellors' tenderness makes the relationship between Connie and Mellors closer and their rebirth possible. In mutual tenderness, Connie and Mellors both find healing effect and fulfillment.

In the beginning, Connie and Mellors are two separate branches. Connie is desperately lonely, despite her marriage, her social circle and her previous lovers. Mellors who lives by himself is also lonely. Disgusted with Clifford and his hypocritical world, Connie turns once and for all to Mellors. She discovers another world which is totally different from the corrupted world of Clifford. Mellors is the first man who actually listens to her, who cares about her thoughts, feelings and desires. After their tender physical union, they are bonded together like the intertwining shoots. The love between Connie and Mellors is genuine. They are willing to risk losing their place by their refusal to completely hide their feelings. Their sexual attraction to one another is stronger and more important than the formality required by Connie's position in society.

Connie and Mellors build a harmonious relationship which helps them to gain self-achievement. Tenderness is

the catalyst. Their awakening is mainly through the nature and their consummate sexual relationship. Both Connie and Mellors recognize that another self is reborn. Finally, Connie establishes her identity as a real woman and Mellors as a real man.

CONCLUSION

As one of the writers in the twentieth century Western Literature, Lawrence is not only a literary master, but also a visionary prophet with ecological thinking. This paper tries to analyze him and his work—*Lady Chatterley's Lover* from the perspective of ecocriticism.

Lady Chatterley's Lover reflects the degradation of modern civilization and Lawrence's effort at finding out a cure for the deep-rooted social disease of western cultures. During the Industrial Revolution, the natural world is seriously destroyed due to the destructive power of industrial civilization. His criticism of modernity and industrialization has led man to find salvation and hope from harmonious nature and harmonious sex. By his description, Wragby makes contrasts with the wood. Wragby is a symbol of industrial society and an environmentally-destroyed place which are teeming with pollution. However, the wood is a symbol of nature full of vitality. Lawrence asserts that the salvation for modern man exists in the natural world. He illustrates that nature can stimulate man's instinct, so in the natural world, man can live instinctively and happily. Lawrence has unique ideas on ecology. He hopes people will be able to pursue the goodness and joy of human nature, reject being driven by money and profit, and understand the true meaning of life. He also hopes everyone has the ecological thought of pursuing pure human nature. Only in this way can society be harmonious and can people's happiness index ascend. Lawrence describes the inevitable tendency in the end of the novel, penetrating his deep thirst for ecological restoration and return of human nature.

Lawrence also suggests an alternative in building a harmonious relationship between man and woman which is based upon tenderness, physical passion, and mutual respect. Lawrence explores a wide range of different types of relationship. The relationship between Mellors and his wife Bertha is brutal and bullying. Clifford, besieged by the industrial society, is inevitably inclined to become money-oriented and fame-directed. He is indifference to his wife Connie's sexual desire and feelings. His relationship with Connie is barely spiritual and passionate like the deadwood. By the contrast, the relationship between Connie and Mellors is harmonious like the intertwining shoots. In their love, Connie experiences rebirth and is awakened. In the end, Connie abandons those comforts for the vital passion that her life is missing, and finds her independence and her own integrity and wholeness as Dix (1980) presents:

⁶ It is illustrated by the scholar Frank and Claim's description "sometime, Connie is like Ursula and becomes the representative of England to some degree, just like a 'sleeping beauty', only the coming of phallus' strong friction, then can become a real woman" .

Lawrence, to me, treats female sexuality with originality and a sense of excitement that no man has ever brought to it before. Lawrence, to my mind, was the first novelist to show, probably better than any female novelist ever had, the strength and power of a woman's feelings. (p.81)

Man's return to nature and having harmonious sex relationship in nature are two methods that Lawrence advocates to establish his idealism of a harmonious society. Lawrence's ecological ideas can help us know nature, love nature and protect nature. It is important for people in 21st century to reinterpret *Lady Chatterley's Lover* from the perspective of ecocriticism. It not only helps us to penetrate into the profound ideological connotation of Lawrence's works, but also helps us have a reevaluation of the anthropocentrism which has long been the wrong idea in treating the relationship between man and nature. It has a certain practical significance and educational value for us to live in harmony with nature and build a harmonious society.

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