

# On D.H. Lawrence's Pursuing of Moral Ideals in His Novels

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**Abstract**—This paper examines Lawrence's pursuit of moral ideal in his novels. The moral ideals Lawrence pursues are to remove the oppression of humanity by the hypocritical civilization, seeking the perfect unity of sexual relations and the relationship between the same sex, returning to the natural world and refuting the alienation of human nature caused by the traditional religion with an ideal religion.

**Keywords**—D.H. Lawrence; moral ideals; pursuing

## I. INTRODUCTION

As one of the most personable and controversial important writers in UK in the late 19th century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, D.H. Lawrence shocked the literary world of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century violently, which marked the beginning of the peak-hour of British modernist novels. His novels were once forbidden because of his bold description of sex and his frank attitude towards sex. However, his novels received just evaluation at last in history. The novel *Sons and Lovers* published in 1913 which underwent several revisions by him is an important work which established him as a prominent modern writer. In fact, D.H. Lawrence began to construct his moral ideal and ways to achieve it in this novel by describing the spiritual disorder and moral chaos of his time. As a writer and critic, he deeply realized his moral mission, so he stated his literary idea in his articles entitled *Morality and Novels* and *Why Are the Novels Important*. He thought that the true meaning of life is to realize our innocent relationship with the vivifying world. In his opinion, the standard of judging the morality of a literary work is to see whether the work reveals this true and vigorous relationship. The value of a novel lies in the revelation of this relationship. Lawrence tried to express his outlook on life and his world outlook through his novels in order to explore how to satisfy himself and human life. In his novels, through the description of Paul's relationship with the opposite sex, the same sex and the nature, Lawrence explored the ways of clearing up the oppression of humanity by civilization and realizing the harmony between spirit and body. Lawrence constantly explored on this way, hoping to establish his ideal moral world.

## II. TO REMOVE THE OPPRESSION OF HUMANITY BY THE HYPOCRITICAL CIVILIZATION

The Victorian age was connecting age between the proceeding and the following. In this special age, the multiple social contradictions reached their climax. The industrial capitalism and the machine civilization brought great harms to people's spiritual life. The degeneration of the industrialization is that it excessively rationalizes the interpersonal relationship, such as the relationship between a mother and her son. In our view, the mother looks on her son as her lover, not because she has an Oedipus complex, but because her thought is still limited to the outdated and traditional moral pattern. At the same time, Paul's devotion to his mother is above all other emotions and it control his soul, making him be enclosed by his mother's suffocating love spiritually and emotionally and can not establish a harmonious relationship with the opposite sex. It can be said that the relationship between the mother and his son embodies the oppression of humanity by the hypocritical civilization. Therefore, Lawrence tried to dislodge the oppression and devastation of humanity caused by social civilization. He tried to emancipate humanity from the hypocritical civilization. This is the basis for establishing a harmonious relationship between two sexes and is also the basic way to realize his moral ideals. According to Lawrence, the tragedy of people living in the modern world lies in the too rationalized and mechanized mentality, because those people who are distorted by the mechanized civilization can not establish a kind of truly happy interpersonal relationship. The origin of the oppression of one's instinctive desire is intelligence and civilization. Lawrence realized the evil of the capitalist industrialized civilization: modern males and females lost their balance between the soul and the physical body. This is a morbid phenomenon, which is caused by the hypocritical reason of the modern industrialized civilization strongly opposed by Lawrence. And Lawrence's father is the origin of this kind of thought. In a letter to Taylor, Lawrence described his father as follows: "My father has the claret-colored and giggles. He is a coal miner. He belongs to a sanguine person. He is enthusiastic to others but capricious." Obviously, in Lawrence's eyes, his father is a vigorous and unsophisticated person. However, his mother is the embodiment of capitalist industrialization. In *Nottingham and the Mining Countryside*, he wrote: "the miners have the

instinctive beauty, but their wives don't have." Lawrence hated the reason, especially the hypocritical social civilization. He thought that the reason makes human beings lose their instinct. The understanding from intuition and instinct is the most reliable one. Lawrence's father can be vigorous and enthusiastic because he escaped from the oppression and constraint of reason, whereas the image of Lawrence's mother is an abstract picture which is polluted by the civilization and loses its life authenticity.

In *Sons and Lovers*, besides the mother who is victimized by the social reason, there are two other females who also can not escape from the control of the strong and rigid traditional morality in Victorian age. They are Miriam and Clara who are Paul's lovers. The hypocritical civilization of the capitalist society distorts their psychology and spirit. On the one hand, the Puritanism makes Miriam be like a nun spiritually and lose her instinct desire for life. On the other hand, Clara's hedonism makes her focus only on sensual pleasures and pursue sexual satisfaction. As a result, they all become the victims of hypocritical social civilization. Lawrence strongly opposed the shackles of humanity by the religion and the traditional morality in Victorian age. He denounced the restraint of human thought by the stiff and harsh reason. Paul's behavior is a perfect example. When he lives with the married woman Clara, Paul despises the views of the public and says: "I don't know and I don't care. Does it matter? How would it be if others talk behind my back?" At the same time, he copes friendly with the relationship between him and Clara's husband. All this shows that Paul abandons the shackle of the hypocritical social customs. It also shows that Lawrence is holding a rebellious banner to criticize and overturn the traditional morality in an active posture.

In Lawrence's view, after removing the oppression of social reason, the second step we should take to realize our moral ideals is to adjust the relationship between men and women so that make the sex be free and healthy. By doing this, Britain can escape from the present dispirited status. The principle for adjusting the relationship is the blood consciousness which can make the rational awareness be overshadowed and disappear. After his thought became mature, Lawrence's love and advocating of his father's personality reflects his opinion of consistent publicity of blood consciousness.

Blood consciousness is human beings' nature or the instinctive response to the outside world, which is the most reliable feeling. Not only in his works, Lawrence has also integrated his seeking for natural feeling and authentic life into his true living. His short and vagabond lifetime seems to be a symphony of seeking blood life and displaying blood passion. Therefore, Woolf commented Lawrence as follows: "He disregards the past and doesn't the present unless it influences the future. As a writer, he is greatly influenced by the idea of lack of tradition."

### III. SEEKING THE PERFECT UNITY OF SEXUAL RELATIONS AND THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE SAME SEX

In Lawrence's eyes, the most important relationship for human beings is forever the relationship between males and females. He tried to construct the harmonious sexual relations on order to confront the evils and darkness of the reality. He has affairs with many women in his life, including his long-time love with Chambers, his engagement with Barrow and his elopement with Freda. All these experiences provide him with materials for coping with sexual relations in novels. In his letter to his friend Brewster, he said: "we are oppressed for too long a time and we are too spiritualized." In some degree, Lawrence quite agrees to Foster's opinions: "the only way to save human beings from the corrupted industrialization is to readjust the interpersonal relations." In *Sons and Lovers*, Lawrence further explores the possibility of establishing harmonious relations between two sexes, of which the relationship between the soul and the physical body is the most critical. In the novel, Lawrence begins his exploration through the relationship between Paul and Miriam who represents the soul and Clara who symbolizes the physical body. The soul and the physical body are the two elements of equal importance in love. The soul is the love between males and females, whereas the flesh is instinct of physical body of human beings. Miriam believes in God like a nun. This kind of woman contains her faith in God in her heart. Even her breath contains the smell of her belief in God. They look upon their whole life through the dense fog of belief. As a result, when she is dead determined to consecrate her virgin to Paul, Miriam doesn't regard it as the result of love. She regards it as a sacrifice to God: "she is lying, as if she admits that her misfortune is predetermined by God, and she is ready to sacrifice herself. Her physical body is awaiting him, while the expression in her eyes reveals that she is a beast to be slaughtered, arousing his attention." In Lawrence's opinion, if sex does not come from instinct and it is only the calm devotion controlled by reason, it will extinguish the ardent fire of life. Of course, in his novel, Lawrence not only resists the spiritual lover of Miriam who emphasizes spirit but denies physical desire, but scourges Clara who stresses the physical desire but neglect the spiritual pursuit. In Lawrence's opinion, for men and women, one party constitute the freedom of the other party. The two parties are like the two poles of strength, balancing each other. Each male has the masculinity and the femininity. Similarly, each female also has the femininity and the masculinity. Males and females are complementary. What we need is the integration of the two sexes. This integration is the rule of the Holy Ghost. Lawrence pursues the absolute equality between the two sexes, holding the view that people of both sexes should not only pursue the satisfaction of the desire of his instinct, but also pursue the perfect unity of spirit and physical body. Therefore, only when the genuine sexual relations are advanced and enriched, can the vitality and the natural force be returned to human beings.

Fortunately, Lawrence found such a perfect partner in his real life. She was Freda. The passion is the source of life that this German female gave to Lawrence. It is also the strongest

driving force for Lawrence's creation. The English short stories writer Mansfield, who once lived with the couple of Lawrence, with her female keen insight, talked out the essence of Lawrence's creation: "what makes Lawrence a true writer is his passion. Without passion, a writer is just writing in the air or on the sand of the beaches." She describes the life of Lawrence and Freda as follows: "in a little while they were expressing their ardent love to each other and play with each other. In other while, Lawrence was seizing Freda's hair and said: 'you, a bastard! I will sever your throat.'" From the description of Mansfield, we can see that the life of Lawrence and Freda is filled with irrepressible passion. Therefore, to Lawrence, releasing the repressive passion, returning to the passed natural instinct and coping with the sex with a frank and fresh attitude are the best way out. It can help human beings get rid of the ugliness and hypocrisy in real life and reach the ideal moral kingdom.

Besides pursuing the integration of soul and physical body between two sexes, establishing a sincere relationship between the same sex, especially the relationship between males, is important for Lawrence to realize his moral ideals. Lawrence is an active advocator to establish intimate relationship between males. He held the opinion that all social norms can tolerate this intimate male relationship and this relationship between males is the most creative and constructive activity. Lawrence once said: "I believe that one male can reflect his own images from another male." In his real life, Lawrence established a very good relationship with Chambers's brother. In *Sons and Lovers*, Chambers is replaced by Edgar. Paul spent most of his time with Edgar. "They spent several afternoons in the fields. When it rained, they worked together in scaffold. They chatted together." On the other hand, in the novel, after Dawes learned that Paul has illicit intercourse with his wife, he stroke Paul angrily. However, Dawes still felt ashamed and guilty. He went to see Dawes several times in hospital when Dawes was ill and poor, asking for forgiveness from him. Paul finally returned Clara to Dawes. Paul feels that he has an intangible connection with Clara's husband. "However, there is a special intimacy between them. It seems that they are contiguous in secret." Although they are strained rivals in love with Clara, they are connected with each other by certain reason and they sympathize with each other's encountering.

Lawrence has been exploring the relationship between males all the time. He pointed out that like all other men, he can not be integrated with women truly. "The new world will be established on the basis of the love of copermate. The new, great and vigorous life will be the love between males. The love between males will result in the aspiration for the future." In his following works, he insisted on developing this kind of relations, such as *Women in Love* and *Kangaroo*. In his work *American Classic Literature Studies*, Lawrence wrote: "Having you, I don't need any other people in my life. I don't need to establish intimate relations with others. However, in order to make it become more perfect and happier, I hope that I can establish the permanent integration with a male, which is another type of love." In Lawrence's view, besides the integration of soul and physical body

between men and women, establishing a sincere relationship between same sexes would make this ideal moral world broader and more profound.

On the one hand, Lawrence holds the view that the oppression of instinct violates human beings' nature and the natural living morality of human beings. On the other hand, he has been lamenting and protesting the pollution of natural environment caused by the industrial development. The change of Lawrence's hometown Eastwood took place because of the industrialization. In the eyes of the young Lawrence, the quiet and nice rural scenery and the random erecting mines constituted a clear contrast between beauty and ugliness. He once affectionately described the hometown in his childhood and adolescence: "the east and northeast of the mountain area are Mansfield and Sherwood forest areas. In my eyes, it was once and is still a beautiful mountain area." However, the environment is deteriorating, and the relationship between is also deteriorating. People's heart and the dirty environment interact with each other. Therefore, when he tried to oppose the interference of the traditional rational morality in humanity and proposed to establish the integration of soul and physical body between sexes, Lawrence also proposed to uphold nature and return to the nature in order to establish a harmonious and unified relationship between human beings and the nature. Let us recall how Lawrence describes the destroyed nature in *Sons and Lovers*: "there are mines all over the countryside, some of which have been dug since the time when Charles II was in reign. Two or three miners and donkeys are digging underground like ants' burrowing. The mounds and patches of black lands are scattered here and there on the wheat fields and the grassland." Reading this, we can imagine the scenes at that time: the industrialization not only pollutes the farmlands seriously but also hinders the natural development of the spirit of human beings. Lawrence saw in his own eyes the transformation of the green fluctuating Nottingham mountain areas into the muddy and ugly coal mining areas. The towering chimneys eject heavy smoke. So what is way to self-redemption? From his works, Lawrence tells us that the only choice is to return to the nature and to be integrated with the nature. In *Sons and Lovers*, the description of nature accompanies the increasing bitterness of Paul's experience, but it includes Lawrence's important subject: the complexity of the relations of human beings, especially the complex relationship between the mother and her son and the one between sons and lovers. The natural environment including gardens, streams, stars and the moon which accompanies these relations becomes part of people's life experience. As a modern person, he holds the view that only integrating with the nature and improving and perfecting the relationship between ourselves and animals, trees, lands, the sky, the stars, the sun and the moon can we save our soul. In other words, if the individual wants to grow naturally, he or she should be far away from the corruption and violence represented by the society and live with the nature harmoniously. Lawrence believes that the souls of human beings can communicate freely with the nature. The weather and the natural environment can embody people's emotional change in some degree.

Every blade of grass and tree and every bird and beast in Lawrence's writings has the intelligence of life and exist independently. He worships the nature and respects the plants and trees in the nature like respecting the independent personality of human beings. Because of this, the famous literary theorist Abrams called Lawrence as thinker with extensive primitivism consciousness. When Paul is on the brink of degeneration and dissociation of personality, the vast starlit sky is the source of strength with which he can walk out of the death life and blend in with the nature again, and gain rebirth in the world which they belong to, because the nature is really the source of life which is curious, unknown and mysterious. He seems to have found out the starting point of the birth of human beings, because he believes that life will flow in the universe forever and maintain and renew all the living things. In *Sons and Lovers*, we can easily find that Lawrence is pursuing a kind of exploration and thinking of living harmoniously with the nature. We can also feel his unremitting efforts to reconstruct the harmonious relationship between human beings and the nature.

#### IV. TO REFUTE THE ALIENATION OF HUMAN NATURE CAUSED BY THE TRADITIONAL RELIGION WITH AN IDEAL RELIGION

Lawrence's moral ideas are also demonstrated by his of criticizing the existing religion. Lawrence's natural humanistic morality contradicts the existing religious morality which oppresses human nature. He once said that philosophy, religion and science are busy with immobilize things to obtain a state of stability. The religious morality is like the outer form which encloses human nature and desire and hides everything real which makes human beings false. It makes people have double personality and makes the hypocrites obtain their goals more easily. However, contrasting with the religious morality, the noble soul becomes mediocre and pale. The religion has torn the nature of human beings into mutual fighting factions and has mistakenly placed the spiritual things over the emotional things. It alienates people from the nature and destroys the intelligence. In *Sons and Lovers*, Lawrence expresses this kind of opinion through the portrait of Miriam who is fettered by the religious morality. Lawrence once said: "the more a woman is fettered by old conventions and remains orderly, the more harmful she is." The love tragedy between Miriam and Paul in the novel is the victim of the traditional morality. This is also the artistic reproduction of young Lawrence's love tragedy with his first lover Giesey. Giesey was a very intelligent girl. She had lots of influences on young Lawrence and her love with Lawrence was unsophisticated and sincere. Influenced by her mother's Puritanism from her childhood, she could not help shivering when sex was mentioned. Moreover, when she was with Lawrence, she would always take advantage of the environment and all the ethics and habits to make Lawrence feel ashamed to sex. As a result, Giesey and Lawrence got well with each other spiritually. Although it was Giesey who pushed Lawrence to the literary creation, Lawrence felt that there a religious moral estrangement between him and Giesey, which made him and Giesey can not really possess

each other. He felt guilty in his love with Giesey. He felt that it was not the perfect integration of soul and flesh that he hoped. It was not the real love that he expected. He did not want to deceive his own feelings and Giesey. At last, he parted with Giesey painfully. His parting with Giesey demonstrated his longing for true love and showed that he strongly protested against the religious morality which suffocated human nature. Since the traditional religious morality throttled the sincere love between people, looking for a new and ideal religious morality became an objective that Lawrence diligently strived after. In order to alter the malpractice of the traditional religion and emancipate human nature from the religious society, Lawrence was looking for a primitive and natural morality to replace the degenerating ideology of the European civilization through his works.

#### V. CONCLUSION

Living in a highly developed capitalist society, Lawrence keenly feels the great harm that modern industrialization brought to people spiritually because it deprives the natural instinct of human beings. So throughout his life, he has been strongly attacking and condemning the industrialization and trying to establish his ideal moral kingdom. In *Sons and Lovers*, through the profound probing into the mental disorder and spiritual confusion of the typical character of the protagonist of Paul, Lawrence shows us the interference of social civilization and reason in human nature and the destruction of the nature by the industrialization, and he puts forward his ways to realize his ideal moral kingdom. Undoubtedly, this is why his novels are great and Lawrence and his works are treated justly. In Lawrence's eyes, the highest realm of the Nirvana of human nature is the complete integration with nature, and sexual relations are the most direct and effective way to integrate human beings with the nature. From the exploration of unknown fate by Paul in *Sons and Lovers*, Ursula's glimpse of a rainbow which symbolizes the hope through the window in *Rainbow*, Ursula's final longing for establishing an ideal relationship between human beings in *Women in Love*, and Connie's bold pursuit of happiness in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, we can easily find that Lawrence's unremitting efforts to realize his ideals and his hope to realize it. "Living, as a living man and a complete living man." This is Lawrence's strong belief. Therefore, at the end of the novel of *Sons and Lovers*, we can see that the protagonist Paul constantly amends himself with his firm and tenacious will and strong personality. He advances with big strides towards a brand new future. The nature of his living will changes from a blind struggle to a strong driving force. All this shows that Lawrence is full hopes in his ideal: "Turning sharply, he walked towards the city's gold phosphorescence. His fists were shut, his mouth set fast. He would not take that direction, to the darkness, to follow her. He walked towards the faintly humming, glowing town, quickly." Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that Lawrence denies the necessity of any moral ideas while condemning the capitalist moral ideas. This is not right. Although we can understand the living pressure the writer felt and the spiritual torture the writer experienced under the oppression of the hypocritical capitalist industrialized civilization and social reason, it is unreasonable to discard

any moral principles to maintain the social harmony through extreme actions. Therefore we should have a more objective and soberer understanding than Lawrence had.

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