

## *Original Paper*

# Research on the Main Features of D. H. Lawrence's Poetic Language

Dong Wang<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> English Department, Foshan University, Foshan Guangdong 528000, P. R. China

Received: July 22, 2023      Accepted: September 09, 2023      Online Published: September 15, 2023  
doi:10.22158/eltls.v5n4p88      URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/eltls.v5n4p88>

### **Abstract**

*D. H. Lawrence's poetic language needs to become an important research field and arouse researchers' attention. Being able to explain profound things in a simple way and arouse strong resonance of readers and enlighten people is one of the main features of Lawrence's poetic language. Rhyme plays an important role in enhancing the musical effect so as to make a poem impressive. Combining sense of rhythm with musical beauty to make the readers immersed into the feelings that a poem tries to present is an important feature of Lawrence's poetic language. Lawrence wrote many free verse poems. Free verse with hidden rhythms determined by hidden emotional pattern is a distinctive feature of Lawrence's poetic language.*

### **Keywords**

*D. H. Lawrence, poetical language, features, research*

## **1. Introduction**

D. H. Lawrence is one of the most accomplished and controversial writers in the twentieth century. During his short life, he created an astounding number of works. D. H. Lawrence is not only a famous novelist but also a famous poet. He wrote a great many poems in his whole life. The Complete Poems of D.H. Lawrence published by Wordsworth Editions Limited in 1994 contains 781 poems totally. Poetry creation is a very important part of his literary creation. Thus, to conduct research on Lawrence's poetic language is of great importance. This paper intends to illustrate the main features of Lawrence's poetic language.

## **2. The Main Features of D. H. Lawrence's Poetic Language**

According to Verschueren's theory of adaptation, "using language must consist of the continuous making of linguistic choices, consciously or unconsciously, for language-internal or language-external

reasons.” And the choices include the choice of language forms and that of language strategies.

### *2.1 Plainness and Profundity*

British poet T.S. Eliot ever pointed out: Poetry should not deviate too much from the ordinary language we use and hear every day. According to Mr. Zhu Guangqian, a famous literary theorist of China in the twentieth century, “Poetry is valued for its plain imagery, while its meaning is valued for its concealment and profundity.” These words are very reasonable. Yuan Mei, a famous poet in the Qing Dynasty, said in his *Suiyuan Notes on Poetry*, “The Quotations of Manzhai says: The meaning of poetry should be profound, and the words used should be plain. I love such remarks. Every time I write a poem, I often revise it in the following three or five days, or revise it in later days. Why? Seeking its profundity is half the effort; seeking its plainness is also half the effort. No poem can be superior to other poems without being profound, and no poem can be understood by others without being plain.”

A first-class poem is often both profound and plain. How can a poem be called a poem if its readers can’t understand it or even the author can’t understand it or explain it clearly? What a poet needs to pursue is not making poetry unfathomable, but to enable those who can’t write poetry to understand, resonate, and feel the purity and beauty of poetry. So what a poet should do is first to purify his heart. If a poem loses its readers, it will lose its meaning; if poetry is far away from its readers, the readers will surely be far away from poetry. Secondly, poetry creation should be rational, and an obscure poem will not spread for a long time, “for poems are not statements at all, but significant dramatizations of a situation, experiences that are concrete embodiments, not abstractions.”

Many poems of Lawrence possess the features of simplicity and profundity. Just like Robert Frost, Lawrence uses many simple words to convey some theories in life. For instance, the poem *Self-Pity* is very short. It only has one stanza and four lines, and it uses common words from daily life, yet what it can convey is deep and provoking:

**I never saw a wild thing**

**sorry for itself.**

**A small bird will drop frozen dead from a bough**

**without ever having felt sorry for itself.**

This poem implies a comparison between a small bird and human being. The wild bird lives in the nature and has natural instinct. It follows the natural laws. From life to death, it spends its life naturally. It sings when it needs to sing. It never complains about life and fortune, and never feels sorry for itself. Yet, it is hard for a human being to achieve this. Many human beings, especially in modern times, have lost touch and contact with the nature and been enslaved by mechanical civilization to some extent. Moreover, they are too self-centered, focusing on their ego. They have lost their natural instinct and vigor. They have been materialized to some extent.

The *Gazelle Calf* by Lawrence is also a short yet provoking poem, which also uses the simple words from daily life:

**The gazelle calf, O my children  
goes behind its mother across the desert  
goes behind its mother on blithe bare foot  
requiring no shoes, O my children!**

This poem also only has one stanza and four lines, yet this simple-looking poem will surely trigger readers' thoughts and imagination. The gazelle calf also lives a natural life, without being bound by any material desire. It even needs no shoes. The gazelle calf is living a true life. Many greedy and materialized human beings cannot be compared with it.

The Ignorable Procession is also a provoking poem, which presents a scene which, in Lawrence's eyes, is saddening:

**When I see the ignoble procession  
streaming forth from little doorways  
citywards, in little rivers that swell to a great stream,  
of men in bowler hats, hurrying  
and a mingling of wallet-carrying women  
hurrying, hurrying, legs going quick, quick, quick  
in ignoble haste, for fear of being late-  
I am filled with humiliation.  
Their haste  
is so  
humiliating.**

This poem is also characterized by the writing style of plainness and profundity. It presents an unforgettable scene of the masses' going for a fair in the city. Maybe they are the common miners and their wives under Lawrence's writing. What makes the author feel sad? It is the numb state of the masses' being controlled by a kind of invisible force. And that kind of invisible force is the machine. Under the suppression of the machine, the movements of masses are like those of the robots. They work, they go for a fair to buy something to eat or use, and then they go back to labor again. They are farther and farther away from the nature and more and more accustomed to being slaves to wage, money and machine.

Many other poems of Lawrence also possess the features of simplicity and profundity, such as Little Fish, Lizard, Self-Pity, Peacock, The Mosquito Knows, etc.

## *2.2 Sense of Rhythm and Musical Beauty*

The distinctive features of Lawrence's poetic language can also be seen from his rhyming poems. Here, I will take one of Lawrence's rhyming poems A Winter's Tale for example:

**Yesterday the fields were only grey with scattered snow,  
And now the longest grass-leaves hardly emerge;  
Yet her deep footsteps mark the snow, and go  
On towards the pines at the hill's white verge.  
I cannot see her since the mist's pale scarf  
Obscures the dark wood and the dull orange sky;  
But she's waiting, I know, impatient and cold,  
half Sobs struggling into her frosty sigh.  
Why does she come so promptly, when she must know  
She's only the nearer to the inevitable farewell?  
The hill is steep, on the snow my steps are slow-  
Why does she come, when she knows what I have to tell?**

This poem is written in a three-stanza structure. Each stanza is four lines long. Each stanza follows an abab rhyme pattern, the first line rhyming with the third line, the second line rhyming with the fourth line. The combination of sense of rhythm with musical beauty makes readers immersed into the melancholy feelings conveyed by this poem. One can't help sympathizing with the girl who is nervously expecting the coming of her lover. This poem is like a piece of melancholy music, lingering in the ears of the readers. Proper and appropriate rhyme will not only enable readers to enjoy the beauty of music, but also enable readers to integrate into the scene described by the author and experience the emotion expressed by the author.

Some other rhyming poems of Lawrence also have such an effect, such as *Cherry Robbers*, *Twilight*, *Baby Running Barefoot*, *Aware*, *A Pang of Reminiscence*, *A White Blossom* and his famous poem *Piano*, etc.

The poem *Aware* by Lawrence is also very catchy and has a sense of rhythm and musical beauty:

**Slowly the moon is rising out of the ruddy haze,  
Divesting herself of her golden shift, and so  
Emerging white and exquisite; and I in amaze  
See in the sky before me a woman I did not know  
I loved, but there she goes, and her beauty hurts my heart;  
I follow her down the night, begging her not to depart.**

It is a one-stanza, 6-line poem. This poem follows ababcc rhyme pattern, the first line rhyming with the third line, the second line rhyming with the fourth line, the fifth line rhyming with the sixth line. Feminine rhyme is much used in the poem to enhance the artistic effect, such as haze-amaze, so-know, heart-depart. The rhythm and rhyme of this poem can create the beauty of music and add much poetic flavor to it, enabling the readers to picture the scene that the author depicts and sense his feelings. Though the words are simple, they are evocative and effective.

Let's take one more poem for example. In another short poem titled *A White Blossom*, the rhythm and

rhyme are also obvious:

**A tiny moon as small and white as a single jasmine flower**

**Leans all alone above my window, on night's wintry bower**

**Liquid as lime tree blossom, soft as brilliant water or rain**

**She shines, the first white love of my youth, passionless and in vain**

This is a one-stanza, four-line poem, which follows aabb rhyme pattern, the first line rhyming with the second line, the third line rhyming with the fourth line. And the poetic lines are neat and regular. Feminine rhyme is also much used in the poem to enhance the artistic effect, such as flower-bower, rain-vain.

Rhyme plays an important role in enhancing the musical effect so as to make a poem impressive. Rhyming poems often strike a chord in the readers' heart. The sense of rhythm and musical beauty make many rhyming poems of D.H. Lawrence impressive and memorable, achieving great artistic effect.

### *2.3 Free Verse with Hidden Rhythms Determined by Hidden Emotional Pattern*

Free verse is a new form of poetic expression, originally created by Walt Whitman, a famous romantic poet in American literary history. In his representative poetry anthology *Leaves of Grass*, Walt Whitman used a new kind of poetic form—free verse.

Compared to metrical poetry, free verse has made significant breakthroughs. In terms of style, free verse does not require neatness in the number of stanzas, lines, or words. It pursues a free and unrestrained way of expression. It is not bound by rhythm and rhyme, in which it breaks through the inflexible constraints of traditional poetry. In free verse, the tone and rhythm of poetry only seek natural flow in line with the poet's own emotions, and it freely expresses the author's thoughts without any hesitation.

Free verse also stresses the beauty and variation of rhythm, yet it does not seek to achieve this by abiding by fixed creation rules. Instead, it grasps and utilizes the natural and internal rhythms of language itself to achieve the natural beauty of rhythm. It is of great importance and necessity to adapt to the natural music of language itself without being limited to rhyme.

Therefore, free verse has greater art expressiveness and is more suitable for expressing complex social life and unrestrained thoughts and emotions.

The distinctive features of Lawrence's language in poetry can be best presented in his free verse poem "Bat". Essentially, this poem is completely true to the facts of daily life, but in this poem one can clearly see that the usual daily experience is endowed with a mysterious sense through the author's artistic treatment. This is a great achievement that is rarely seen. The bat is a very common one, but in Lawrence's eyes, it embodies a dark and mysterious force:

At evening, sitting on this terrace,  
When the sun from the west, beyond Pisa, beyond the mountains of Carrara  
Departs, and the world is taken by surprise...  
When the tired flower of Florence is in gloom beneath the glowing  
Brown hills surrounding...  
When under the arches of the Ponte Vecchio  
A green light enters against stream, flush from the west,  
Against the current of obscure Arno...  
Look up, and you see things flying  
Between the day and the night;  
Swallows with spools of dark thread sewing the shadows together.  
A circle swoop, and a quick parabola under the bridge arches  
Where light pushes through;  
A sudden turning upon itself of a thing in the air.  
A dip to the water.  
And you think:  
“The swallows are flying so late!”  
Swallows?  
Dark air-life looping  
Yet missing the pure loop...  
A twitch, a twitter, an elastic shudder in flight  
And serrated wings against the sky,  
Like a glove, a black glove thrown up at the light,  
And falling back.  
Never swallows!  
Bats!  
The swallows are gone.  
At a wavering instant the swallows give way to bats  
By the Ponte Vecchio...  
Changing guard.  
Bats, and an uneasy creeping in one’s scalp  
As the bats swoop overhead! Flying madly.  
Pipistrello!  
Black piper on an infinitesimal pipe.  
Little lumps that fly in air and have voices indefinite, wildly vindictive;  
Wings like bits of umbrella.

**Bats!**

**Creatures that hang themselves up like an old rag, to sleep;**

**And disgustingly upside down.**

**Hanging upside down like rows of disgusting old rags**

**And grinning in their sleep.**

**Bats!**

**In China the bat is symbol of happiness.**

**Not for me!**

The style of this poem is quite concise. Its vocabulary comes from colloquialism. The word order is also the same as that of common daily speech. Yet the artistic effect it creates is quite impressive. In this poem the author uses such rhetoric devices as simile, metaphor, personification, parallelism and climax, etc. There is no empty rhetoric and false poetical language in it. There are many novel similes in this poem, which are used to create the image of bats, such as “like an old rag”, “wings like bits of umbrella”, “like a glove, a black glove thrown up at the light”, etc. The metaphors in this poem are also unique, for instance, the author uses such phrases as “black piper on an infinitesimal pipe”, “little lumps that fly in air” and “an elastic shudder in flight” to describe bats. Besides, the author uses such figurative phrases as “changing guard”, “swallows with spools of dark thread sewing the shadows together” and “grinning in their sleep” to personify swallows and bats. In the first three stanzas, the author utilizes parallelism to enhance the artistic expressiveness of the poetic lines. Besides, in the poem the image of bats is described progressively. Together with it, the author’s thoughts are gradually deepened, and the author’s emotions are gradually strengthened. Through various figures of speech, the persuasive and infectious power of language has been greatly enhanced.

This is a free verse poem, yet the reader can clearly sense the hidden rhythm in it. Some rhymes that appear in the poem in an irregular way also play an important role in forming the hidden rhythm. For example, through such rhymes as “swoop” and “loop” that appear in different stanzas, they contribute to the formation of the hidden rhythm in this poem. In this poem the use of end rhyme (swoop/ loop, night/flight/light) and the use of assonance (sleep/ me, bats/rags/ scalp, sky/pipe/surprise, etc.) both play an important role in forming the hidden rhythm of this poem.

In describing the bat’s movement of falling, Lawrence uses quite short poetic lines, while when describing the bat’s movement of hovering, Lawrence uses quite long poetic lines, thus forming a striking contrast and presents a strong visual impact. The reader can see this clearly from the eighth stanza.

The rhythm is changed freely. In the alternation between long and short poetic lines, there is a hidden pattern, by which the poet presents the change of the bat’s movement and that of his own thought and emotion. Through the change of rhythm and the poet’s description, the images of the bats being in motion and in quietness are vividly presented. And the rise and fall of the poet’s thought and emotion clearly presented by the rhythm can also be grasped.

Bat is one of the most impressive English free verse poems. In this poem, the poet's insight is contained in the rhythms, while the rhythms are an inseparable part of the poem's meaning. In this poem, the thought, the emotion, the description, the bats' movement, and the hidden rhythm are all intermingled, constructing an organic whole. At the end of this poem, Lawrence makes a conclusion: The bat is not a mascot at all. It does not symbolize happiness. It is nothing but an ugly dark force.

This is the sole poem in which the word "China" is mentioned by Lawrence. The poetic line "In China the bat is symbol of happiness" shows that Lawrence pays attention to Chinese culture. The ancient Chinese believed that bats represented happiness, good fortune and auspiciousness. Maybe in China the reason why bats are treated as symbol of happiness is that the Chinese pronunciation of "bats" contains the sound of the Chinese words which signify "universal happiness". Chinese traditional customs use the homophonic sound of the corresponding Chinese characters of "bat" and "universal happiness", and combine the arrival of a bat with "calling in happiness", to express the hope that happiness will descend from heaven like a bat.

Through this poem we can see precisely Lawrence's concept of poetry and his creativity in poetic language use. In a letter to Edward Marsh on November 18, 1913, Lawrence elaborated his poetic ideas:

It all depends on the pause—the natural pause, the natural lingering of the voice according to the feeling—it is the hidden emotional pattern that makes poetry, not the obvious form.

### 3. Conclusion

From the foregoing analysis of some of D. H. Lawrence's representative poems, the main features of Lawrence's poetic language can be clearly seen. The poems of D. H. Lawrence can explain profound things in a simple way and can often arouse strong resonance of readers and enlighten people. Plainness and profundity can be said to be a distinctive feature of Lawrence's poetic language. The rhyming poems of D.H. Lawrence have a sense of rhythm and musical beauty, which is a second distinctive feature of Lawrence's poetic language. And the free verse poems of D.H. Lawrence present a third distinctive feature of Lawrence's poetic language: Hidden rhythms determined by hidden emotional pattern. And Lawrence's accomplishment in poetry is closely related to these main features in poetic language.

### References

- Brooks, C. (2006). In *Understanding Poetry* (p. 311). Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.
- Chen, L. Y. (1998). In *Selected Poetics of China in Past Dynasties* (p. 996). Nanchang: Baihuazhou Literature and Art Publishing House.
- Eliot, T. S. (1989). In *The Selected Poetics Works of T. S. Eliot* (p. 178). Beijing: China INTL Culture Press.



- Lawrence, D. H. (1981). In *The Letters of D.H. Lawrence* (Vol. 2, p. 104). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lawrence, D. H. (1994). In *The Complete Poems of D. H. Lawrence* (p. 382). Ware: Wordsworth Editions Limited.
- Verschueren, J. (1999). In *Understanding Pragmatics* (pp. 55-56). London: Arnold.

**About the author**

Dong Wang (1969-04), male, Han, Born place: Zhengzhou City, Henan Province, Title: Lecturer, Master of English Language and Literature, Research Direction: British and American Literature; English language.