

Original Paper

Analyses on the Setting, Plot and Characters in the Novel “the Horse-Dealer’s Daughter” by D.H. Lawrence

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Abstract

As a world-famous writer, D.H. Lawrence was fairly proficient and professional in the descriptions of characters in his works. In this story, through the objective narrations of the story, the vivid image of Mabel was presented before the readers. And this paper tries to have a brief analysis of the story from the perspectives of setting, plot, characters and point of view of the author.

Keywords

D.H. Lawrence, Mabel, social position, depression

1. Brief Introduction of D.H. Lawrence

As a world-class literary craftsman, D.H. Lawrence had done monumental contributions to British literature as well as world literature. Lawrence was not only a novelist, but also a storywriter, critic and painter. At the beginning of 20th century, great changes had take place in almost every aspect of British society. With the rapid development of mechanical technology and modern science, the traditional rural society was inevitably influenced by these changes. People’s inner worlds, view of value, view of life are also changing imperceptibly. The balanced relationship between human and nature had gradually lost. Emotion, desire and instinct of people at that time were distorted. This kind of distortion mainly embodied in the sharp transformation of the relationship between man and woman. The brand new living environment drove them into a tenser and tenser relation web; meanwhile, they also became the victim of the new environment.

Just influenced by the transitional age, Lawrence had put the brand of age on the figures of his works. In a number of works written by him, the relationship between man and women are quite peculiar, sometimes even repressive. These characters often bore a split spirit and transfiguration of personality. Under certain circumstances, the conflict between man and woman would be continuous, never

stopping. Lawrence was rather good at describing the psychological changes. Through the describing of certain characters in his works, Lawrence presented us with a vivid portrait of people's inner world. Exactly speaking, highly symbolized, but involved readers in deeply thinking. The short story "The Horse-Dealer's Daughter" is not an exception.

2. Synopsis of the Short Story

The short story is about the unfortunate destiny of Mabel-the horse dealer's daughter. Mabel was a stubborn, silent, but strong-willed woman. She was cold in appearance, however, warm in heart. The horse dealer, who was Mabel's father and finance pillar, died and left the whole family nothing but large amount of debt and threatening. Among the four children of the family, the three brothers of Mabel were all frightened at the collapse of the family and the sense of disaster in which they were involved left them no inner freedom. They were eager to find way out for themselves without anyone caring about Mabel. What's more, they planned to expel Mabel from the family. Mabel felt desperate and decided to commit suicide in a pond. Fortunately, pity Mabel happened to be saved by Ferguson, a doctor of the village. The depressed girl suddenly found that Dr. Ferguson was the very person she was looking for. At last, when they seemed to be falling in love with each other, however, Mabel was confused by Dr. Ferguson's hesitation and uncertainty of love.

This thesis tries to have a detailed analysis on the short story from the perspectives of setting, plot, character and point of view. With the help of analysis, the predetermined destiny of Mabel and the intention of the author can be better illustrated.

3. Analysis of Setting

The short story began with a question: "Well, Mabel, and what are you going to do with yourself?" asked Joe, with foolish flippancy. The simple question conveyed a kind of tension: questioning and being questioned. From the incisive question and foolish flippancy of Joe, we can more or less infer the unfavorable and secondary status of Mabel in the family. From the story, we can know that Mabel used to live in a rich family: the house was ample, the furniture was luxurious. Ordinary speaking, the whole should have lived in an easy and comfortable life. But Lawrence depicted a different vision: "The dreary dining-room with its heavy mahogany furniture, looked as if it were waiting to be done away with". Lawrence described the dining-room as "dreary", the heavy mahogany furniture as "heavy", "looked as if it were waiting to be done away with". All of these setting transferred us a piece of information, that is, the glorious and sufficient life had been history. Moreover, the setting symbolized the destiny of poor Mabel would be the same as the dining-room and furniture, waiting to be done away with. Although Mabel seemed to be healthy in physical, however, her inner world was as empty as the ample house. She could do nothing to transform the current situation except waiting for the sentence of destiny. When describing Mabel decided to commit suicide, Lawrence had a carefully illustration of the setting: "The night was falling. It was grey, deadened, and wintry, with a slow, moist,

heavy coldness sinking in and deadening all the faculties”. Wintry, grey, night, and here did not indicated the season or time, but creating the atmosphere of death. The setting set up a type of mysterious and horrible atmosphere, providing proper environment for the following plot-the suicide of Mabel. Night had the power of concealing and covering truth. The suicide of Mabel was arranged in such a background to strengthen the tragic destiny of Mabel as well as emphasize the theme of the short story.

Through the carefully design of setting, the author establish a reasonable and proper state for events to come. The expectations of readers will also be aroused. In this short story, more information about Mabel would be better understood. The character of Mabel was more concrete and revealing.

4. Analysis of Plot

The plot of this short story can be said very simple, however, involving people in deep thinking. With the collapse of family, Mabel completely became the ignored role in the family. Her three brothers slanderously nicknamed Mabel as “sulkiest bitch”. She had long been serving for the family but no one understood her and helped her. The only person she loved was her beloved mother. The great contrast between ideal and reality caused her the idea of “joining her mother”. Under this situation, Mabel chose to drown herself to get rid of the endless pains. But she was saved by Dr. Ferguson and the love buried in the bottom of her heart was once again aroused by the kind-hearted doctor. Meanwhile, Dr. Ferguson seemed also fall in love with Mabel. Plot reached here should have come to an end. At this very moment, the hesitant attitudes of Dr. Ferguson made Mabel involve in the uncertainty of her love and life once again. To Mabel, although she had the same demanding like any other women, it seemed that her destiny was always making game of her and never gave her what she craved for. From the beginning to the end, Mabel was always in the marginalized position, also, never got the appreciation of life. She resisted the unfair life with her silence and deeds.

5. Analysis of Characters

As for the characters of the short story, no doubt, Mabel was the central character since all the clues and plots were designed for her. Mabel, the daughter of the horse dealer, was always living in a hostile environment, being cursed by her three brothers as bull dog, the sulkiest bitch that ever trod, etc. However, she did not show fierce reactions but used silence to resist and endure all the insults. When Mabel faced Dr. Ferguson, her repressed love totally broke out. After being saved by Dr. Ferguson, she noticed that it was the doctor who saved her, took off her wet clothes and covered her with a blanket. She instinctively assumed the kind-hearted doctor had fallen in love with her. The love in the bottom of her heart was evoked once again. She requested, even half-begging Dr. Ferguson to make the promise of love: “Do you love me then? She shuffled forward on her knees, and put her arms round him, round his legs, pressed her breasts against his knees and thighs, lunching him with strange, convulsive certainty. You love me. I know you love me”. Maybe she was oppressed too long and too much; this

was the first time that she found there was still someone caring her in this world. So she showed her love with a near-crazy way. These simple words vividly portrayed us another Mabel: yearning for love and being loved, which can be said a thorough outbreak of Mabel. From this scene, Mabel revealed us the firm, brave side of her personality. So was hard to define Mabel's characters in a single aspect. The conflict between her appearance and inner heart decided that Mabel was a woman with mixed characters: cold in appearance, warm in heart; silent, stubborn, sullen to her enemy, but also strong-willed, brave when facing her love.

Ferguson was a kind-hearted doctor with extremely high profession moral. He saved Mabel from drowning and gave her the hope of life. Facing the Mabel's love, he only stood and stared at her, fascinated. His soul seemed to melt. On one hand, he saved Mabel mainly out of the profession intuition of a doctor. Even if facing the naked body of Mabel, he did not get any obscene idea but helped her out of danger. Maybe he never thought of loving Mabel or not before. On the other hand, he was shocked by Mabel's frankness. Ferguson didn't predict Mabel would show love to him. In order not to let her down, Ferguson's inner world started a fierce war: love or not. He hesitated between a doctor and a man. Finally, he kissed Mabel, but the conflict between the social ego and subconscious ego seemed never stopping.

Other characters in the story, although not belonged to the central ones, also played an important role. Without those so-called flat characters, the image and personality of Mabel could not be fully presented. At the first few paragraphs, the author introduced Mabel's three brothers with very concise words, even without describing their clothes or physical appearance. Only by their dialogue with Mabel and tone of speaking, we can infer their characteristics and personalities more or less. Facing the collapse of the family, none of them were willing to take the responsibility to help the family out of the jam. To Mabel, her three brothers were her biggest enemy rather than relatives. All the words and behaviors of them showed us that inexorability, selfishness and cold-blooded are the best modifications of their characters.

6. Analysis of Point of View

Generally speaking, young women like Mabel should be lively, charming, and attractive. They can easily get the admiration of young gentlemen. In this short story, Mabel was an exception. Her destiny was awkward and full of hardships. To Mabel, the suffering on the physical was not so tough to put up with; nevertheless, the heavy pressure on her psychological part seemed to be unconquerable. Without love, without sympathy, without future, life was so cruel that made her like walking clay. From beginning to the end, Lawrence always took a sang-froid, neutral, nonchalant, seeming acquiescent to the fascist treatments and to the fascist ideal of super manhood, glorifying the brute, the callous, the violent, as a statement of man power. In the voice of persona, the writer speaks of his own words, his own. Just influenced by his misogyny, the whole story permeated with the distinguished feature of Lawrence. The description of Lawrence was just like telling us a vivid story without any showing any sympathy or making any private comments. Lawrence gave every one of us full trust on our

appreciation, imagination ability that all of us could understand the essence of the story through his meticulous description. From his objective but skillful depiction, the vivid image of Mabel was presented in front of us.

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