

Original Paper

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

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Abstract

*The theme of creativity is a common theme in D. H. Lawrence's main novels, including *Sons and Lovers*, *The Rainbow*, *Women in Love* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. *Sons and Lovers* remains blurry in the possibility of true creative fulfillment. In *The Rainbow*, Lawrence begins to ponder over creativity clearly. Lawrence's *Women in Love* handles the theme of creativity in a more dismal and realistic way. The novel *Lady Chatterley's Lover* does not directly portray the realistic societal level within the process of creativity. It only portrays creative self-renewal on a personal level. If seen as the sole means to creative fulfilment, the process of sexual exploration has its great limits.*

Keywords

research, theme, creativity, D. H. Lawrence's works

1. The Definition of Creativity

Creativity involves a continuous quest for greater understanding both of the self and of its relation to others and the surrounding world. It involves also an active, conscious and constant participation in the actual development and transformation of the self and its relations, as well as social structures. Lawrence relates in his essay "*Morality and the Novel*" that "the business of art is to review the relation between man and his circumambient universe, at the living moment...And this perfected relation between man and his circumambient universe is life itself, for mankind" (Lawrence, 2006). According to Lawrence, "our life consists in this achieving of a pure relationship between ourselves and the living universe around us" (Lawrence, 2006, p. 76) and it is this pure relationship between ourselves and the living universe around us "that makes our eternity", and by improving this relationship, a person's soul can be saved.

In the poem *The Work of Creation*, Lawrence elaborates his understanding of the work and process of creation:

The mystery of creation is the divine urge of creation,
but it is a great strange urge, it is not a Mind.
Even an artist knows that his work was never in his mind,
he could never have thought it before it happened.
A strange ache possessed him, and he entered the struggle,
and out of the struggle with his material, in the spell of the urge,
his work took place, it came to pass, it stood up and saluted his mind. (Lawrence, 1994)

For D. H. Lawrence, this struggle toward consummation is the motivation for creativity and the ultimate direction of creativity.

2. The Theme of Creativity in D. H. Lawrence's Works

2.1 Creativity in *Sons and Lovers*

The novel *Sons and Lovers* is mainly about how the individual struggles to escape various restrictions. It mainly focuses on an individual, Paul, and dictates his quest, dilemma, struggle and spiritual crisis from various perspectives, thus leading us to ponder over the problem of personal creative fulfillment. The novel *Sons and Lovers* is mainly written in the style of realism. It is mainly based on Lawrence's own early experiences of life. It has an autobiographical feature.

In a letter of 1913, to A. D. McLeod, Lawrence wrote down such remarks:

I felt you had gone off from me a bit, because of *Sons and Lovers*. But one sheds one's sickness in books—repeats and presents again one's emotions, to be master of them. (Lawrence, 1981)

The "sickness" that Lawrence had shed through writing *Sons and Lovers* was his spiritual dependence on his mother. At the same time, throughout the novel, Lawrence swings between his quest for life and his puzzlement and despair.

Paul's spiritual pillar is his mother. He absorbs vitality mainly from his mother. So, when the spiritual bond between his mother and him is cut off by hand of fate, he cannot stand such a sudden and great strike. Her mother's death naturally causes his loss of hope and great despair. He is even on the verge of giving up his life, drifting together with her toward death:

Paul felt crumpled up and lonely. His mother had really supported his life. He had loved her, they two had, in fact, faced the world together. Now she was gone, and forever behind him was the gap in life, the fear in the veil, through which his life seemed to drift slowly, as if he were drawn towards death. (Lawrence, 1992)

Feeling greatly bewildered and painful, Paul can't help pondering over the meaning of life and existence:

Where was he?—One tiny upright speck of flesh, less than an ear of wheat lost in a field. He could not bear it. On every side, the immense dark silence seemed pressing him, so tiny a spark, into extinction, and yet, almost nothing, he could not be extinct. Night, in which everything was

lost, went reaching out, beyond stars and sun. Stars and sun, a few bright grains, went spinning round for terror, and holding each other in embrace, there is a darkness that outpassed them all, and left them tiny and daunted. (Lawrence, 1992, p. 416)

To readers' relief, Paul does not drift towards death. He clings to a thin thread of hope when such a fainted thought comes into his mind:

and yet, almost nothing, he could not be extinct...so much, and himself, infinitesimal, at the core a nothingness, and yet not nothing. (Lawrence, 1992, p. 416)

What gives Paul the courage to walk back to the world that makes him painful is the bond between his mother and him. It is like an invisible umbilical cord that transmits nutrition and vigor of spirit into sick mind. Ultimately, he pulls himself through her death.

"You've got to keep alive for her sake", said his will in him..."You've got to carry forward her living, and what she had done, go on with it". (Lawrence, 1992, p. 408)

Paul's feelings for his mother are complex. At the level of spirit, he depends on his mother. Meanwhile, he wants to be independent and have his own new life. Paul determines to live on, to face his sufferings directly. Though there are many unknowns awaiting him ahead, at least he wants to have a new start. So, he turns away from the darkness quickly:

But no, he would not give in. 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. (Lawrence, 1992, p. 416)

Being a psychologically damaged individual, Paul still has a long way to go before he finds himself back on account of his losing true belief. This can be clearly seen from his unrelenting attack on the belief of his girlfriend, Mariam.

Sons and Lovers remains blurred in the possibility of true creative fulfillment. Till the end of the story, it is still not clear that Paul is able to solve or surmount his own problems. There is no sign that he has won the ability to truly control his own life. At the end of the story, Paul, who is on the brink of suicide, walks towards the lights. It is more likely that he would make some changes, although it is not yet clear what kind of changes he intends to make. Paul's excessive dependence on his mother and his lack of religious belief as a pillar in his spirit have caused him to lose himself, lose the ability to have mature love, and make a series of wrong choices in his life. He has given up his relationship with Mariam, who has faith and pure kindness. And he has ended an inappropriate relationship with Clara, who is a married woman and still has a marital relationship with her husband. Now that his mother has passed away, and his relationship with the two women has also come to an end, where should he go?

Paul's returning to the town in the end may represent a new determination to say farewell to that old self that dissatisfies him and to try to cope with his life creatively in his later days. Yet it may also represent his returning to his former state of life and refusing to face the darkness boldly and directly,

which symbolizes the new challenge brought about by his mother's death. So, there exists the possibility that his return to the town may be just a kind of escape.

Even if Paul's going back to the town symbolizes that he would like to make some changes, yet if he doesn't recognize his own problems and doesn't first reverse his distorted understanding of the world, what can he do after he goes back? He must reflect on himself, identify his crux and misconceptions, and gradually turn around his mentally distorted self, which requires him to regain faith and break free from the wandering state in the spiritual desert. If he cannot reverse himself from his thoughts and mentality, he will repeat his past mistakes in emptiness, and a creative and valuable life will be impossible to come to him.

In fact, in a letter to Edward Garnett, Lawrence himself indicated that Paul's return to the town is not necessarily a return to life: "He is left in the end naked of everything, with the drift towards death". (Lawrence, 1981, p. 477)

Lawrence called *Sons and Lovers* "a great tragedy" (Lawrence, 1981, p. 477), but as he was completing it, he was already deciding not to write in the same way again (Lawrence, 1981, p. 551) and he was starting to think more in terms of "creative crisis" than of conventional tragedy.

2.2 Creativity in *The Rainbow*

In Lawrence's *The Rainbow*, Lawrence begins to ponder over creativity clearly by means of the perspective of Ursula:

As she grew better, she sat to watch a new creation. As she sat at her window, she saw the people go by in the street below: colliers, women, children, walking each in the husk of an old fruition, but visible through the husk, the swelling and the heaving contour of the new germination. In the still, silenced forms of the colliers she saw a sort of suspense, a waiting in pain for the new liberation; she saw the same in the false hard confidence of the women. The confidence of the women was brittle. It would break quickly to reveal the strength and patient effort of the new germination.

...

She knew that the sordid people who crept hard-scaled and separate on the face of the world's corruption were living still, that the rainbow was arched in their blood and would quiver to life in their spirit, that they would cast off their horny covering of disintegration, that new, clean, naked bodies would issue to a new germination, to a new growth, rising to the light and the wind and the clean rain of heaven. She saw in the rainbow the earth's new architecture, the old, brittle corruption of houses and factories swept away, the world built up in a living fabric of Truth, fitting to the over-arching heaven. (Lawrence, 2003)

From Ursula's words, we can clearly see the expectation that Lawrence harbors towards the future of mankind and its creativity. Though the people have suffered a lot in this corrupted world, yet the vigor of life still exists in their primitive blood. In Lawrence's eyes, the corruption of the mechanical

civilization will be got rid of and a life with creativity is walking towards them.

Judged by the descriptions from the perspective of Ursula, we can detect that Lawrence holds a clear and optimistic attitude toward the possibility of people's transforming themselves and their relation to others and the surrounding world. The ambiguity of creativity embodied by Paul has disappeared.

2.3 Creativity in *Women in Love*

Lawrence's *Women in Love* handles the theme of creativity in a more dismal and realistic way. In particular, the novel relates the actual difficulties of living creatively within an oppressive industrial society. Various social pressures have left a profound imprint on the protagonists of this novel. Thus, the dramatic portrayal and analysis of these individuals, their self-pursuit, and creative development through relationships all contribute to providing a detailed insight of their society. The novel *Women in Love* fully stresses the social dimension of creativity.

All the main characters in *Women in Love*, including Birkin, Ursula, Gerald and Gudrun, have gone through a painful transformation process, which is a must if we want to be creative. We must examine all the defects within ourselves and within our relations with others and try hard to transform them so as to be creative in our life.

In the very beginning, they are all deeply dissatisfied with their lives. Then, they all undergo a journey of discovery through passionate sexual relationship, and all of them have been transformed to some extent:

He found in her an infinite relief. Into her he poured all his pent-up darkness and corrosive death, and he was whole again. It was wonderful, marvellous, it was a miracle...As he drew nearer to her, he plunged deeper into her enveloping soft warmth, a wonderful creative heat that penetrated his veins and gave him life again. He felt himself dissolving and sinking to rest in the bath of her living strength. It seemed as if her heart in her breast were a second unconquerable sun, into the glow and creative strength of which he plunged farther and farther. All his veins, that were murdered and lacerated, healed softly as life came pulsing in, stealing invisibly into him as if it were the all-powerful effluence of the sun. His blood, which seemed to have been drawn back into death, came ebbing on the return, surely, beautifully, powerfully...The lovely creative warmth flooded through him like a sleep of fecundity within the womb. Ah, if only she would grant him the flow of this living effluence, he would be restored, he would be complete again...And his seared, ruined membrane relaxed, softened, that which was seared and stiff and blasted yielded again, became soft and flexible, palpitating with new life. (Lawrence, 1995)

From the above quotation, Gerald seems to have been changed into a new person. Yet, if it were really so, at the end of the story, he would not give up his life. Gerald grows up in a family atmosphere lacking love. And he is corrupted by mechanical civilization, which prevents him from growing up spiritually. Although Gerald is materially wealthy and handsome, yet nothing can relieve his sense of emptiness. He wants comfort from Gudrun to fill his emptiness, but due to his inability to first remove

the shackles brought by mechanical civilization, he is spiritually unattractive. His desire for control over Gudrun makes it even more difficult for the two to get along harmoniously. In the end, Gudrun moves on to another love, while Gerald gives up his life in despair. Gerald's life is a tragedy. His tragedy once again confirms this truth: sex, especially sex that is detached from marital relationships, cannot truly make a person creative. Gerald has been corrupted by mechanical civilization, and he is deeply immersed in it. However, he has never been able to break free from his twisted state of mind. He should first recognize his own problems and strive to change himself, so that he can truly be creative, rather than relying on hope for a relationship or a woman to save him.

By establishing a harmonious relation, Birkin and Ursula begin a happy life and move positively and confidently toward greater creative potentiality, while Gerald and Gudrun move to a tragic end on account of their failing to establish a harmonious relation between the two sexes.

Gudrun feels suffocated in her relationship with Gerald. She detests both Gerald and the mechanical civilization Gerald represents. Meanwhile, she is also insufficient of love and emotion. They share the same strong desire of dominating the opposite side and the same fear of being dominated by the opposite side, thus, contradictions often arise between them. Gerald grows up in a family that is devoid of love, which leads to his lack of love. And the industrial civilization only brings him void:

He was suspended on the edge of a void, writhing. Whatever he thought of, was the abyss—whether it were friends or strangers, or work or play, it all showed him only the same bottomless void, in which his heart swung perishing. (Lawrence, 1995, p. 380)

Birkin wants to establish man-to-man friendship with him, yet he refuses his “offer of alliance, to enter into the bond of pure trust and love with the other man” (Lawrence, 1995, p. 398), for he doesn't want “to be committed”. “He was ready to be doomed. Marriage was like a doom to him. He was willing to condemn himself in marriage...But he would not make any pure relationship with any other soul. He could not”. (Lawrence, 1995, p. 398)

And Gudrun also has great defects:

Cross the threshold, and you found her completely, completely cynical about the social world at its advantages. Once inside the house of her soul, and there was a pungent atmosphere of corrosion, an inflamed darkness of sensation, and a vivid, subtle, critical consciousness, that saw the world distorted, horrific. (Lawrence, 1995, p. 508)

Gerald and Gudrun fail in establishing a truly harmonious and creative relationship, thus, their tragic end is unavoidable.

Even though *Women in Love* certainly sets the tone for Lawrence's next group of novels, the extensive scope and detail of its treatment of the theme of creativity is not reproduced in any of his subsequent works.

2.4 Creativity in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*

Lady Chatterley's Lover is the last important novel of D. H. Lawrence. Compared with *Women in Love*,

the novel *Lady Chatterley's Lover* does not directly portray the realistic societal level within the process of creativity. It only portrays creative self-renewal on a personal level. In this novel, the creative journey for Connie and Mellors becomes almost a matter of sexual exploration. Obviously, Lawrence exaggerates the function of the relationship between the sexes and even takes it to its extreme. It seems that in his eyes, the influence of sexuality has become a determining factor. The negligence of traditional morality and the defiance of social convention convey such a notion of D. H. Lawrence that he tries to supplant the Christian morality with a Lawrentian morality.

From the following description of Connie's psychology in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, the reader can see this clearly:

The supreme pleasure of the mind! And what is that to a woman? What is it, really, to the man either! He becomes merely messy and doggy, even in his mind! It needs sheer sensuality even to purify and quicken the mind. Sheer fiery sensuality, not messiness. (Lawrence, 2014)

When asked by Mellors whether she cares about the future, Connie answers that she cares about it terribly. And then she explains why:

Because when I feel the human world is doomed, has doomed itself by its own mingy beastliness, then I feel the Colonies aren't far enough. The moon wouldn't be far enough, because even there you could look back and see the earth, dirty, beastly, unsavoury among all the stars: made foul by men. Then I feel I've swallowed gall, and it's eating my inside out, and nowhere's far enough away to get away. But when I get a turn, I forget it all again. 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. But since I can't, an' nobody can, I'd better hold my peace, an' try an' live my own life: if I've got one to live, which I rather doubt. (Lawrence, 2014, pp. 216-217)

Though she cares about the future, though she feels for the people deprived of real life, though she is worried about the present state caused by mechanical civilization, she feels she is powerless to do anything. She can only try to live her own life, yet she doubts whether she can take control of her own life.

When asked by Connie about the meaning of existence and about what the future will be like, Mellors also makes the similar answers:

"And what is the point of your existence?"

"I tell you, it's invisible. I don't believe in the world, not in money, nor in advancement, nor in the future of our civilisation. If there's got to be a future for humanity, there'll have to be a very big change from what now is."

"And what will the real future have to be like?"

"God knows! I can feel something inside me, all mixed up with a lot of rage. But what it really

amounts to, I don't know". (Lawrence, 2014, p. 274)

From the foregoing conversations between Connie and Mellors, it can be clearly seen that facing the future, and how live a really meaningful life, they are at a loss, not knowing what to do. It seems that they, together with all the other human beings, have been deserted, drifting like leaves on a storming sea.

It seems that for Connie and Mellors, there is one way left. That is seeking for sensuality. Yet, this way of doing just embodies that they are in spiritual crisis.

But she was not happy in London. The people seemed so spectral and blank. They had no alive happiness, no matter how brisk and good-looking they were. It was all barren. And Connie had a woman's blind craving for happiness, to be assured of happiness. (Lawrence, 2014, p. 251)

Even in feeling sensuality, Connie cannot get satisfaction either. Even sensuality in Paris is mechanical, let alone that in America or London:

In Paris, at any rate she felt a bit of sensuality still. But what a weary, tired, worn-out sensuality. Worn-out for lack of tenderness. Oh! Paris was sad. One of the saddest towns: weary of its now-mechanical sensuality, weary of the tension of money, money, money, weary even of resentment and conceit, just weary to death, and still not sufficiently Americanised or Londonised to hide the weariness under a mechanical jig-jig-jig! (Lawrence, 2014, pp. 251-252)

In his novel *The Rainbow*, Will and Anna Brangwen go through a process of sexual exploration similar to that of Connie and Mellors, but there Lawrence also indicates the limits of that process if seen as the sole means to creative fulfilment. As a tool for passing on the family line, the role of sex should not be exaggerated. And as a human being, one should not indulge in carnal desires.

In Lawrence's eyes, a valuable soul should be free from the obscene ego, should possess sun-awareness, should not be mechanical. According to Longinus, nature "implants in our souls the unconquerable love of whatever is elevated and more divine than we" (Bressler, 2007). In order to be fully creative, one should possess a great mind and a great soul.

3. Conclusion

From the foregoing illustrations, one can clearly see Lawrence's understanding of the work and process of creation, his point of view towards creativity and the theme of creativity in his main novels. Lawrence's main novels such as *Sons and Lovers*, *The Rainbow*, *Women in Love* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* are a series of explorations of creativity, which are closely related to his wishes of understanding, developing and transforming the self and its relation to others and the surrounding world. In Lawrence's eyes, "the novel is the perfect medium for revealing to us the changing rainbow of our living relationship. The novel can help us to live as nothing else can..." (Lawrence, 2006, p. 84) Grasping Lawrence's point of view toward creativity and the common theme of creativity in his main novels is of great importance to the understanding of the creation ideas of his main novels.

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