

Symbolism in the Short Novels of D.H. Lawrence: A Study

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Abstract

D.H. Lawrence is a remarkable modern novelist. He explores very vividly the elements of symbols in his short novels. The use of symbols intensifies his vision. Lawrence in his short novels creates powerful symbolic scenes where hidden unconscious states are revealed in the form of dramatic presentation. His characters never appear like traditional heroes or heroines but behave like symbols.

Key Words: Short novels, Symbolism, Vision, Passion, Realism

David Herbert Lawrence has been internationally acclaimed as a great modern poetic novelist of the twentieth century who revolutionized modern literary world with a psychological truth of the religion of blood.

The short novels of D.H. Lawrence contain several kinds of symbolism. His symbols help in giving resistance to abstraction and prove not a quality of complexity rather a quality of intensity. The use of symbols intensifies his vision. For example, the force of dark power in the Count mesmerizes Lady Daphne in *The Ladybird* to get attached during the darkness but during the brightness of day she turns closer to her husband forgetful of the Count of night. Again, the attraction of Henry towards March in *The Fox* and the infatuation between the gipsy and the virgin with the title *The Virgin and the Gipsy* are symbolic of the dark power of “Phallus.” *The Man Who Died* unfolds the same power of “Phallus” in the background of the resurrection of the Christ. *St. Mawr* is fully a symbolic short novel where the theme of

“religion of blood” has been presented as we find in *The Captain’s Doll*. In *Love Among the Haystacks* D.H. Lawrence uses the same symbolic apparatus to present his theme. These descriptions are not wholly isolated rather they have thematic relevance. The psychic vision of realities ever remains interlinked with the symbols. Neither symbols nor the content can be dropped to have the fuller grasp of his vision.

Lawrence, in his short novels, creates powerful symbolic scenes where hidden unconscious states are revealed in the form of dramatic presentation. For example, let us take a beautiful symbolic scene of *The Ladybird*. While on a night the Count is singing a song for his own satisfaction, Daphne feels herself spell-bound and moves towards the place where the Count is present; in a forceful language the novelist describes:

“So it was in her upper spirit. But underneath was a wild, wild yearning, actually to go, actually to be given. Actually to go, actually to die the

death, actually to cross the border and be gone, to be gone..... To be gone to the call from the beyond: the call. It was the Count calling..... out of herself, out of her world, he was calling her.”

Here ‘the call’ is symbolic of sexual power that makes its wild appeal and hence the movement of Daphne to the Count. For two nights she sat just inside her room having no courage to go out and see the Count. But later on, in a night she feels, “why could she not cross through the closed door?” and the next moment she presents herself in the room of the Count that surprises him, too. They, thus, meet “in the dark” and

“he, too, in the silence, felt the world sinking away from him once more, leaving him once more alone on a darkened earth, with nothing between him and the infinite dark space. Except now her presence. Darkness answering to darkness, and deep answering to deep. And answer, near to him and invisible Two things were struggling in him, the sense of eternal solitude, like space and the rush of the dark flame that would throw him out of his solitude towards her... why not take the soul she offered him.”

And in this way they meet in the darkness, he whispers to her “Now you are mine. In the dark you are mine. And when you die you are mine.” That is total surrender. But “in the day,” as he continues, “you are not mine, because I have no power in the day. In the night, in the dark, and in death, you are mine... you are night-wife of the ladybird, while you live and even when you die.”

In *St. Mawr* also unsatisfied with her husband, Lou Witt sees a wild horse named St. Mawr and “in the inner dark she saw a handsome bay horse with his clean ears pricked like daggers from his named head... The wild, brilliant, alert head of St. Mawr seemed to look at her out of another world. It was as if she had had suddenly melted away, leaving her in a great darkness, in the midst of which the large, brilliant eyes of that horse looked at her with demonic question, while his naked ears stood up like daggers from the naked lines of his inhuman head, and his great body glowed red with power. What was it? Almost like a good looking at her terribly out of everlasting dark... He was some splendid demon, and she must worship him. Here St. Mawr is symbolic of “phallic power” for which the heroine of *St. Mawr* is hungry.

In *The Fox* we find the same symbolic presentation when March suddenly saw the fox. He was looking up at her. Her chin was pressed down, and his eyes were looking up. They meet her eyes. And he knew her. She was spell-bound-she knew he knew her... It was the fox which somehow dominated her unconscious, possessed the blank half of her musing.” His image she finds in the newcomer. Henry, a soldier. Both Henry and the fox appear the bearer of phallic power during darkness.

As W.H. Auden has pointed out ‘Like Blake, Lawrence was interested not in ‘individuals’ but in ‘states’. Thus, the novelist creates verbal structures which attempt to reveal such states in the form of dramatic presentation. For this, animals and reptiles are presented by Lawrence with symbolic overtones. The rabbit is symbolic

of the pure life-force; snakes, cock and tortoise stand for the mystery of the dark life; the horse, the fox stand for the passion to be blown” as we find in *St Mawr* and *The Fox*. Lawrence observes that these animals and reptiles are always the symbols of the strong animal life of man.” The horse and the fox, indeed, symbolize powerful male sensuality. Thus, these symbols of animals, flowers, sun, moon, ladybird, darkness, light, trees etc. are functional and successfully provide objective equivalence to his vision of life. Most of the time the rhythm of the life of the unconscious is evoked and the effect is achieved by insistent symbolic seeming words like dark, burning, obliteration, destroyed etc., and by images of flowers and every kind of fertility symbols.

Moreover, Lawrence’s characters never appear like traditional heroes or heroines but behave like symbols. That is why Lawrence declares:

“You mustn’t look in my novel for the old stable ego-of the character. There is another ego, according to whose action the individual is unrecognizable, and passes through, as it were, allotropic states which it needs a deeper sense than any we’ve been used to exercise, to discover are states of the same single radically unchanged element... don’t look for the development of the novel to follow the lines of certain characters: the characters fall into the form of some rhythmic form, as when one draws a fiddle-bow across a fine tray delicately sanded, the sand takes lines unknown.”

In this way ‘what interests him in his characters’ in the words of Walter Allen “is not the social man, the differentiated individual, but the seven-eighths of the iceberg of personality that is submerged and never seen, the unconscious mind, to which he preaches something like passivity on the part of the conscious. This accounts for the difficulty so many people find when first reading Lawrence. His convention has to be accepted, just as the conventions of any artist must be, if you are to read him with pleasure and profit. It accounts too for so many mannerisms of style that are usually considered blemishes; a Lawrence character ‘dies’ ‘swoons’ is ‘fused into a hard bead’, ‘lacerated’, ‘made perfect’, time and time again. He is, if you like, ‘fumbling’ for words, words with which to describe the strictly indescribable. Yet the language he uses is true to the rhythm of the life of the consciousness.” The symbolic language of Lawrence successfully evokes the rhythm of the unconscious and avoids mystical obscurantism.”

Lawrence’s characters help in presenting his symbolic imagination and provide coherence to his vision of life; for example, the Gipsy and Major Eastwood (*The Virgin and the Gipsy*) the Count (*The Ladybird*), the Fox (*The Fox*) the Horse (St. Mawr) Captain Hepburn and Hannele (*The Captain’s Doll*) Geoffrey and Lydia (*Love Among the Haystacks*) the Prophet, i.e. Christ Risen and the woman of Isis (*The Man Who Died*). So, the characters of Lawrence provide ‘some.... rhythmic form’ for giving shape to his “Pure passionate experience.” However, his characters are not imaginary beings dying on the wind; they are deeply rooted in reality, and Lawrence’s approach to them is not intellectual but based on intuitional reasoning. They are not only seen through the eyes but through the senses. This is the main reason why his characters are symbolic and Lawrence reveals their states of

consciousness, subconscious acts. To sum up, Lawrence's symbols aptly match with the episodes where the external world and

the psychic content are successfully fused into a perfect complete harmony. For him symbolism is a kind of extended metaphor.

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