

From Blood Intimacy to the Birth of Self-consciousness in *The Rainbow*

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Abstract—The opening chapters of Lawrence’s *The Rainbow* is modeled on the Bible in terms of its narrative discourse and profound implication. The novel begins with a pastoral portrayal of the Marsh Farm where mankind forms a blood-intimate and reciprocal relationship with the natural world. But driven by man’s own eagerness to pursue knowledge and pushed by the development of industrialization, man’s unconscious closeness with nature gradually gives way to the birth of self-consciousness which alienates him from the natural world, thus thrusting him into an ontological existence.

Index Terms—D. H. Lawrence, *The Rainbow*, pastoral, self-consciousness, blood-intimacy

I. INTRODUCTION

In his essay, “Pan in America”, D. H. Lawrence nostalgically comments on the Pre-Christian era: “In the days before man got too much separated off from the universe, he *was* Pan, along with all the rest.” (2000, p.72) Man in those days enjoyed a living relationship with nature which is described by Lawrence as the “Pan relationship.” But with the coming of the Christian era, this living relationship gradually began to disintegrate and human beings, having lost his close ties with nature, cannot return to the primitive life again. This process can best be artistically and symbolically revealed in Lawrence’s *The Rainbow*, which starts with a pastoral depiction of life on the Marsh Farm. Lawrence’s reminiscent portrayal of a primitive relationship between man and nature makes the beginning of the novel resonant with strong pastoral beauty. However, the organic, blood-intimate relationship between man and nature on the farm soon disintegrate; being alienated from the natural world and thrust into the industrial age, man has to construct his own identity and achieve his own self-fulfillment.

II. PASTORAL PORTRAYAL OF THE MARSH FARM

Pastoral as a type of literature originated from the Greek poet Theocritus whose pastoral poems represented the simple and peaceful life of those Sicilian shepherds. In imitation of Theocritus’ pastoral poems, the Roman poet Virgil created *Eclogues*, and from then on pastoral has been established as an important type of literature. Pastoral was at first confined to poetry writing, and later pastoral was also adopted in the creation of drama and fiction. M. H. Abrams (2004, p.202) in *A Glossary of Literary Terms* defines pastoral as “a deliberately conventional poem expressing an urban poet’s nostalgic image of the peace and simplicity of the life of shepherds and other rural folk in an idealized natural setting”. Jonathan Bate points out that “What, then, are the politics of our relationship to nature? For a poet, pastoral is the traditional mode in which that relationship is explored” (Bate, 2000, p.170). Pastoral writing is mainly concerned with describing harmonious life in the countryside, while occasionally it would highlight a contrast between rural life and complicated urban life so as to sing the praises of a harmonious life in the countryside. In pastoral life, man and nature exist in a reciprocal relationship which is characterized by harmony and abundance. More importantly, pastoral life is celebrated for man’s loyalty to his nature. Pastoral works written by modern writers sharply convey people’s nostalgic recollection of the harmonious rural life in the past, and also people’s pursuit of peaceful and harmonious life.

Lawrence’s poetic portrayal of life on the Marsh reveals the author’s strongly nostalgic recollection of the past rural society in England. The Brangwen family has lived on the Marsh Farm for generations and they have formed a reciprocal relationship with the land. There on the farm “intense apprehension of the unity of life” (Leavis, 1955, p.117) is the foremost impression one could catch in the vivid and lyrical language. The idyllic life has never been interrupted till Alfred Brangwen’s age. The Brangwen men lead a peaceful, carefree and self-sufficient life on the farm and they are deeply rooted in the soil of the farm. The whole farm is an organic community. A vigorous relation of blood-intimacy, as Lawrence himself puts it, is formed between men and the place they live in. The living energy flows from the soil, the sun, the trees, etc. to men and vice versa. Differently put, men enjoy a “living relationship” with their circumambient universe as the soil is alive, the tree and the sunshine all alive and the people have an intimate relationship with the natural world. The poetic rhythm of the language contributes a lot to the organic beauty of the Marsh Farm. The farmers work diligently only because of the necessity of life, and the soil produces what they have sowed in abundance. Men and the environment form an organic connection based on reciprocity. When they milk their cows, they could feel the pulse and the blood of the udders sending waves into their own hands. From spring to winter, they could feel their own blood flowing in rapport with the natural rhythm. “The owner and the owned flowed in unison as part of an organic

structure” (Sipple, 1992, p.73). Thus, their limbs and bodies are impregnated with the day, with the energy of cattle, earth, crop and sky, all of which they frequently communicate with in their own way.

The men, in a way, are crude, trusting not the mind or intelligence, “their senses full fed, their faces always turned to the heat of the blood” (p.4). They care only for their own exchange and interchange with earth and sky and beast and green plants. They always “faced inwards to the teeming life of creation, which poured unresolved into their vein” (p.5). Their vision is confined to the living relationship between everything on the farm. They work hard because the blood in their veins produces boundless energy. Lawrence’s obsession with blood and senses in depicting these men’s life goes along with his reputation as “the prophet of the Dark Gods — the partisan of instinct against intelligence, the humane, and the civilized” (Leavis, 1955, p.117). Lawrence, through his emphasis on the blood, tried to naturalize human beings by giving prominence to men’s instinct and senses, which are more close to nature than intelligence. Lawrence advocates in his essay “Nathaniel Hawthorne and *The Scarlet Letter*” that “Blood knowledge, instinct, intuition, all the vast vital flux of knowing that goes on in the dark, antecedent to the mind” (2003, p.82) and “every time you ‘conquer’ the body with the mind...you cause a deeper, more dangerous complex or tension somewhere else” (2003, p.84).

The Brangwen men live their life according to the natural rhythm manifested both in their own heart and in the natural world. In the daytime they are busy with intense life communicating with everything on the farm, while in the evening they sit by the fire, their brain inert, and they seem to indulge in their own mystic communication with their blood. They are one with nature, belonging to nature, and all their activities are just the necessity for a harmonious life. Yet they are not conscious of the reciprocal relationship between men and nature. They take it for granted that this is what life is like and they enjoy it. They remain unconscious of their own self and embrace no individuality.

III. THE BIRTH OF SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS

On the pastoral Marsh Farm, mystically a reminder of the Garden of Eden, the Brangwen men and women, like Adam and Eve in the Old Testament, live a harmonious yet unconscious life quite concordant with the rhythmic pattern of nature. Things, however, are going to change. As the society develops, propelled especially by the occurrence of Industrial Revolution, the gap between cities and rural areas, between the rich and the poor, between the crude and the civilized, begins to widen. Though the Brangwens are not poor, the Brangwen women still perceive something different in the Vicar and the curate, a sort of higher being. The Vicar is elegant and knowledgeable, while their husbands are dull and appear to be inferior to the Vicar. Through the Vicar, the Brangwen women are gradually awakened to vague consciousness of their own identity. What are the differentiating qualities which make the Vicar seem refined and noble? They decide that it is education that makes a higher being in the Vicar, and they are determined to give education to their own children.

Though the Adam-like Brangwen men, so content with their own intense life on the farm, always concentrate their attention on the heat of the blood, the Eve-like Brangwen women strain their eyes to see the far-off world because there is the temptation of a different world and they are easily seduced. Jiang Chengyong (2005, p.7-17) argues that Adam and Eve’s commission of original sin represents human beings’ inherent aspiration to pursue wisdom, culture and civilization, while the culture they create serves not only for the benefit of mankind but also as fetters upon man’s freedom and his healthy relationship with the natural world. Likewise, the Brangwen women’s imagination of the outside world and their determination to give their children education represent human beings’ efforts to gain knowledge and wisdom. This pursuit ruins human’s original intimate relationship with nature because their knowledge makes them realize consciously the objective existence and the function of nature in relevance to mankind. Thus, the separation of man from nature in consciousness gives birth to the anthropocentric vision which places human beings at the centre of the universe. Since nature has been deprived of its original unity with mankind, the central task for man will be how to define his own being.

The development of industrialization further separates human beings from the natural world, as the construction of the canal and the railway brings surprising change to the Marsh Farm and coalmining rather than farming becomes the dominant industry. The construction of the canal is a symbol of the encroachment of the industrial civilization. Modern industry now pushes its invasion forward into this peaceful and pastoral farm. More and more men are employed in the mining industry. In Lawrence’s own words from *The Rainbow*, “the invasion was complete” (p.7). Because of the business of collieries, the town grows rapidly and the Brangwens almost become tradesmen in producing supplies. The harmonious continuity between human beings and nature is gradually being cut off. Though the Marsh Farm remains still remote and original, industrial civilization has encircled the farm and the farm could no longer remain impenetrable to industrialization.

It is at this uproarious age that Tom grows up and becomes new master of the Marsh Farm. His mother determinedly and forcibly sends him to a grammar-school in Derby. But Tom fails to fulfill his mother’s expectation, and like his male ancestors he is quite a sensitive man, ready to experience his emotion and passion, but “helpless when it came to deliberate understanding or deliberate learning” (p.11). He returns to the Marsh after he leaves school. Yet the influence from the outer world and his education prevents him from living the same blood-intimate life as his forebears. Though he is glad of the smell of the land and feels “a very strong root which held him to the Marsh, to his own house and land” (p.19), he dreams of something foreign, something unknown, and wants “something to get hold of, to pull himself out” (p.19). His encounter with a foreigner in a hotel kindles his desire to know the outside world, as he meditates, “There

was a life so different from what he knew it. What was there outside his knowledge, how much?" (p.18). His yearning for knowledge and different experiences results from his awakening consciousness of identity. Tom wants to establish himself in relation to the unknown world, that is to say, he wants to discover himself in light of the other world, rather than the traditional pastoral life on the farm. Unable to get away from the confined life on the farm, he turns to wine for solace, hoping to extinguish his desire and emerging consciousness.

IV. THE NEED FOR SELF-ADJUSTMENT AND SELF-FULFILLMENT

Faced with his awakening consciousness of identity, Tom sees the opportunity of self-fulfillment when he meets a Polish widow, Lydia, the daughter of a Polish landowner, who is completely an embodiment of the unknown, the "foreign", to Tom Brangwen. Tom falls in love with this foreign woman immediately after his first encounter with her. However, their marital life is not in harmony at first. Tom glorifies Lydia because she is the embodiment of the unknown, and she is a lady. And the shadow of the past misfortune still weighs on Lydia, who can not get free totally. So she is not quite competent to receive Tom's strong passion. Thus Tom has to resort to other outlet for his passion and he finds Anna, who can divert some of his passion. Tom gradually forms an intimate relationship with Anna. He unconsciously hopes to find his own identity through the unknown, symbolized in his wife. However, he can not understand and get hold of the reality of the unknown, which makes him painful. Only when he is immersed in nature can he feel comfort and elation, "whether his wife were strange or sad, or whether he craved for her to be with him, it did not matter, the air rang with clear noises, the sky was like crystal, like the bell, and the earth was hard" (p.59).

Tom's vision of the world at the evening when his wife is in labour indicates his shrinking away from individual fulfillment. Tom takes Anna to the barn to quiet her crying and, after feeding the cows, they "sat still listening to the snuffing and breathing of cows feeding in the sheds communicating with this small barn" (p.65). Tom consciously feels the interchange of everything in the barn. At this time, "All outside was still in the rain. He looked down at the silky folds of the paisley shawl. It reminded him of his mother" (p.65). The outside world is still, unchanging. Later in that night Tom "went downstairs, and to the door, outside, lifted his face to the rain, and felt the darkness striking unseen and steadily upon him", and "The swift, unseen threshing of the night upon him silenced him and he was overcome. He turned indoors, humbly. There was the infinite world, eternal, unchanging, as well as the world of life" (p.66). The outside world is not distinguishable, yet still and infinite. It is not easy to grasp the outside world, the unseen, the unknown. So why should he be so persistent in inquiring for the unknown. Lydia, in the birth of the child, "seemed to lose connection with her former self" (p.67), which paves the way for their future reconciliation. Tom also begins to learn to subdue himself, and to divert his desires and passion, though it is painful. Later, through Lydia's positive effort to make a balance between them, Tom gradually achieves a balanced relationship with Lydia. And Tom recognizes that his marriage is the central reality of his life: "What had he known, but the long, marital embrace with his wife! Curious, that this was what his life amounted to! At any rate, it was something, it was eternal...she was still his fulfillment..." (p.106) Tom's perception implies that only his marital relationship matters to him and his search for the unknown is doomed to be a failure. However, this new state of relationship is achieved through a reduction of Tom's self. He puts away his past, for "What was memory after all, but the recording of a number of possibilities which had never been fulfilled?" (p.79). He is unable to learn from the past experiences in order to further his exploration. He "let go his hold on himself. He relinquished himself, and knew the subterranean force of his desire to come to her...to find himself in her" (p.78). He ceases to pursue his individual fulfillment because he thinks that Lydia is his fulfillment. Thus, Tom is often aware of something he has missed, and "he was *not* satisfied" (p.106). Only he does not know clearly what he wants other than his marital life. It is his unformed self or individuality that keeps Tom unsatisfied. He wants to pursue his identity through a "creative life with the girl" (p.107), Anna. He finds that his wife "did not want any more the fight, the control" (p.106), while he still wants to "share the rapid life of the youth" (p.106). But he has no choice but to admit that he has his fulfillment through his wife, then what else should he want. He suspends his pursuit for the unknown, because his relationship with Lydia engenders a state of equilibrium, which makes him secure and reluctant to go any further.

Though not fully satisfied, Tom's marriage with Lydia is nevertheless a harmonious one. They return to pastoral life as Tom's forebears have led. They are at one with the farm, deeply rooted in nature and their small land. Tom still speaks the local dialect as his speech at Anna's wedding suggests. And the Brangwen family is "a curious family, a law unto themselves, separate from the world, isolated, a small republic set in invisible bounds" (p.84). Their secluded life prevents them from active participation in the broad context of the industrialization. Thus, "on the farm with her, he lived through a mystery of life and death and creation, strange, profound ecstasies and incommunicable satisfactions" (p.85) and "He did not want to have things dragged into consciousness" (p.86). He remains content with a blood-intimate relationship with the land and his wife, as his meditation at Anna's wedding shows, "He felt himself tiny, a little, upright figure on a plain circled round with the immense, roaring sky...How rich and splendid his own life was, red and burning and blazing and sporting itself in the dark meshes of his body..." (pp.111-112) Tom continues leading such a pastoral life according to the rhythm of nature till he is drowned when a flood sweeps the Marsh Farm.

An emerging consciousness of identity can be perceived in the first generation, especially Tom. Terry Gifford (2002, p.61) claims that "for those, like Wordsworth, who sought a connectedness with nature, consciousness remained a source of alienation from the rest of nature...However, with consciousness comes conscience and the exercise of choice

to reverse some of our alienating conceptions...” Lawrence also attempts to suggest that the birth of upper mind (man’s self-consciousness) embodied in man’s education is similar to the fall from grace in the Garden of Eden, and for Lawrence the conscience concerning nature is how to strike a balance between nature and man. The actual fall begins with the introduction of the mechanical rhythm in the Erewash Valley and the construction of a canal across the Marsh Farm, as Sipple (1992, p.78) points out, “The Fall is the introduction of the machine which competes with the natural rhythm”. The construction of the canal is a symbol of the encroachment of the industrial civilization. It is this canal that later releases its flood, which sweeps across the Marsh Farm. The canal embankment is torn a huge gap by the rising water and the flood drowns old Tom Brangwen. The flood, through Lawrence’s ingenious contrivance, is compared with the Flood in the Bible. Tom Brangwen is heavily drunk when he drives home in the night and the rain is pouring down. In his drunkenness, Tom talks to the mare:

Oh my heart, what a wetness in the night! There’ll be no volcanoes after this. Hey, Jack, my beautiful young slender feller, which of us is Noah? It seems as though the water-works is bursted. Ducks and aquatic fowl’ll be king o’ the castle at this rate, dove an’ olive branch an’ all. (p.204)

The embankment is an embodiment of the corruption of industrialization. The flood bursts the embankment and inundates the farm. Tom perceives in the heavy rain a biblical world where Noah is stranded in a boat and the dove would come back with an olive branch to announce a new world. The Flood in the Bible is a curse from God to punish the corruption on earth. Tom’s association of the Biblical Flood indicates that the flood on the farm is also a curse upon the corruption of the industrialization and “a symbolic sweeping away of the marks of the Fall” (Sipple, 1992, p.79). The flood, however, does not eliminate the corruption. On the contrary, the development of industrial civilization brings about more corruption, which can be detected in the life of the later generations.

V. CONCLUSION

Under the influence of the industrialization and the education Tom receives, the traditional Brangwen closeness with nature and the blood-intimacy with the Marsh are in the process of disintegration. Man needs to find his self, his identity in order to establish his own being. Tom chooses to project his self through the foreign, or the unknown, the reason of which partly lies in that the world is changing so fast that man always encounters the unfamiliar. They are turned into strangers in their own land and they begin to feel alienated. Tom’s effort to establish his identity does not go far because his union with Lydia attracts his attention from the outside to their marital life.

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